The Romani Diaspora

Source: dnaconsultants.com

The Roma and Sinti are an Indo-Aryan people who migrated out of India in several waves between the years 500-1100 CE, at least partly in response to invasions and wars against the non-unified Indian states. Many Hindu people were taken out of the area as prisoners of war and sold as slaves into Persia (now Iran). Later, as the Crusades expanded across the Middle East, many of these Hindu people were captured and sent to the Byzantine Empire as slaves.
Map showing Indian subgroups most closely genetically related to the Roma, and some Romani subgroups in Europe as they branched from the main migration group.

Source: A team from the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology studied Y-chromosome DNA samples from around 10,000 males, including 7,000 samples from #India’s 214 indigenous groups. They found a high concentration of Y-haplogroup H1a1a-M82 amongst European Gypsies. Nearly all modern members of haplogroup H, which was founded 30,000-40,000 years ago, live or originate in the Indian subcontinent, and Gypsies are the main source of haplogroup H in western Europe (outside of recent post-war migration).

See also: “A New Look at Our Romani Origins and Diaspora” by Ronald Lee.
Where did the Roma become Roma?

- Our ancestors left India around the years 900-1100 A.D., possibly in several waves, and probably as prisoners of war with their families and camp followers. (Some smaller groups may have left earlier and may have been the ancestors of groups such as the Dom of the Middle East.)
- Roma are composed of multiple groups of Hindus with similar languages who came together to resist invasions from the armies of the Ghaznavid empire, which made up current-day Afghanistan and Iran (Persia).
- The ancestors of the Roma were incorporated into their captors’ armies and brought into Persia (present-day Iran) and Anatolia (present-day Turkey) in the 11th century, as forced conscripts, entertainers, and slaves.
- Roma were displaced again by the Crusades in the late 13th century and then moved into Europe, where they were met by laws outlawing their settlement.

Where Most Roma Live Today

Source: The Council on Europe figures

For a good population chart, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romani_diaspora
A Brief Timeline of Romani History

CA 900-CA1026: The people now known as the Roma/Romani/Romanies begin to leave northern India, headed west through Persia, many carried westward by their captors. The last migration begins in 1192.

1347: Due to plagues and wars, Romanies begin to move west again, through Armenia and Asia Minor.

1385: The first recorded transaction of Romani slaves is recorded in Romania.

1416-1504: The Roma are expelled from Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, and France.

1510: Switzerland imposes the death penalty for Roma within their borders.

1512-1538: The Roma are expelled from Catalonia, Bavaria, Portugal, Sweden, England, Wales, and Denmark.

1538: Portugal deports Romanies to the Colonies.

1544: England deports Romanies to Norway.

1589: Denmark imposes the death penalty to all Roma within their borders.

1637: Sweden imposes the death penalty to all Roma.

1721: Emperor Karl VI orders the extermination of all Roma in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

1728: Last living Romanies hunted down in Holland.

1547-1749: The Roma are expelled from Norway, Bohemia, Poland, Lithuania, Scotland, Denmark(again), Norway (again), Belarus, and Sweden (again).

1758: Empress Maria Theresa begins a program to assimilate all Roma by force.

1783: Some legislation against the Roma is repealed.

1812: Nomadic Romanies in Finland are confined to workhouses.

1822: Turnpike Act is introduced. All Roma camping along the roadside are fined.

1830: Germany begins a program of removing Romani children from their homes to be fostered with non-Roma families.

1848: Transylvania frees the Roma from 500 years of slavery, followed by Moldavia in 1855 and Wallachia in 1856.
1849: Denmark allows Romanies back into the country.

1868: Richard Liebich coins the phrase “lives unworthy of life.” This is later used by the Nazis to destroy the Roma alongside the Jews in the Holocaust.

1872 – 1899: Roma are expelled from Belgium, Denmark (again), and Germany.

1884: A Romni, Dr. Kavalasky, is appointed Professor of Mathematics at Stockholm University. She is the first female professor in Scandinavia.

1890: Germany organizes a conference on “The Gypsy Scum.” The “Central Office for Fighting the Gypsy Nuisance” gets its start there.

1906: France hands out identity cards to all Roma.

1920s: In the Weimar Republic, Roma were forbidden to use parks or public baths and required to register with police. In 1922, Germany begins a program to fingerprint and photograph all Romani. Professor Hans F. Gunther blames the Roma for introducing foreign blood into Europe.

1933–34: Hitler comes to power in Germany. Romani musicians are barred from the State Cultural Chamber, forced sterilizations begin of all Romanies, Sinto boxer Johann Trollman is stripped of his title as lightweight champion, and “Beggars Week” means thousands of Roma are arrested. Romani people who can’t prove German citizenship are expelled.

1935–38: In Germany, all Romanies become subjected to the Nuremburg Laws for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor. Roma in Germany lose the right to vote, the internment camp in Marzahn is opened, Hitler issues the General Decree for Fighting the Gypsy Menace, and the Racial Hygiene and Population Biological Unit of the Health Office opens. By 1938, all Roma in Germany are declared anti-social, arrested, and sent into forced labor to build the concentration camps. In Russia, Stalin bans the Romani language and culture.

1940: The first mass genocidal action of the Holocaust takes place in Buchenwald, where 250 Romani children are used as guinea pigs to test the Zyklon-B gas crystals.

1941–44: In Germany, in July, Himmler orders the Einsatzkommandos to “kill all Jews, Gypsies, and mental patients.” In 1944, the 1,400 Roma at Auschwitz still deemed fit for work are sent to Buchenwald. The remaining 2,900 Roma attempt to defend themselves using rocks and sticks, but they are defeated and later taken to the gas chambers.

1945: World War II ends, though it is still illegal to be Roma in much of post-war Europe.

1962: The courts in the German Federal Republic declare that the Roma were persecuted in the Holocaust for racial reasons. Romani survivors do not share in the millions of dollars of reparations given to other survivors of the Holocaust.

1966: The Gypsy Council is set up in Great Britain.


1971: First Romani Congress held in London, England, adopting “Gelem, Gelem” as the national anthem, as well as a national flag, based on the flag of India. Other considerations include a Romani alphabet, the protection of the language and culture, and human rights issues.

1972: Czech Republic begins to sterilize Romani women. The government claims the process ended in 2007, but reports of sterilization are still being investigated and the government has refused to pay reparations to the affected women.

1977: A UN sub-committee makes a resolution on the protection of Roma.

1979: The Romani Union is recognized by the UN's Economic and Social Council.

1981: Yugoslavia grants the Roma national status.

1987: The United States Holocaust Memorial Council appoints its first Romani member, Dr. Ian Hancock, seven years after the Council was created.

1989: Germany deports foreign Romanies.

1990: Fourth World Romani Congress adopts an alphabet for the Romani language.

1991: The Roma gain equal rights in Macedonia.

1996: The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) is founded, inspired by the success of the U.S. civil rights movement. This center has taken on cases of Roma rights involving housing, jobs, immigration, and police brutality. It takes cases often to the European Court for Human Rights and other entities.

1960-1999: The Roma face persecution and death from attack by both civilians and governments across Europe. Periodic altercations continue, especially in Eastern Europe, where Romani children are relegated to back rows and special education, often beaten and ostracized by students and some teachers.

1997: Neo-Nazi street gangs beat and kill Roma with impunity in Serbia.

1997: U.S. President Bill Clinton appoints to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council Dr. Ian Hancock, an internationally recognized linguist of Romani Romanichal origin. Dr. Hancock was also Representative to the UN (ECO-SOC/NGO Category II) and to UNICEF for the Romani people.

1998-99: In the Kosovo Conflict, Romani communities are targeted by all sides.

2008-9: Parts of a Romani settlement near Naples are burned by a mob. Italian authorities destroy another settlement, moving Roma to temporary quarters that lack water and electricity. The Prime
Minister gives local authorities powers to carry out evictions and to fingerprint people, including children. A widespread outcry ensues, but the European Commission does not ask Prime Minister Berlusconi to end the fingerprint provisions. Romanies from other EU countries are deported without individual appeal.

2009-11: Neo-Nazis intimidate and harass Romani communities in Hungary and the Czech Republic. Repeated violence, discrimination in employment and housing, and continued harassment from authorities continues across Eastern Europe, forcing many Roma to flee to Western Europe.

2010-11: French police shoot and kill a young Rom at a checkpoint in the Loire Valley, resulting in riots. In response, French President Sarkozy orders the dismantling of some 300 Romani settlements, declaring the illegal camps sources of crime, and deporting Roma, most to Eastern Europe. Caught up in the police roundups are some Roma who are French citizens. Deportations do not allow for asylum or appeals. EU Commissioner Vivian Reding declares the expulsions violate EU provisions on freedom of movement, but eventually Sarkozy's deportations are allowed to continue.

2011: In Kosovo, thousands of Romani refugees whose homes were destroyed in the War remain in refugee camps without appropriate hygiene facilities, located near or on top of rubbish heaps, which leach harmful substances into the water and soil, while other refugee groups have been given housing. One remaining camp populated by Roma in Mitrovica sits atop a heavy metal mine, leading to lead poisoning in the population.

2013: Dr. Ethel Brooks, of Romanichal Romani ancestry, a professor of sociology and gender studies at Rutgers University, gives a widely-hailed address to the United National Holocaust Memorial Day, focusing not only on the murders of up to a million Romani and Sinti people by the Nazis, but on cooperation and collaborations of Romanies and Jews in pre- and postwar Europe.

2017: The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) is founded, a joint venture of the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations, and the Roma Leaders’ initiative – the Alliance for the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture. This Institute tries “to decrease negative prejudice of the majority population towards the Roma by means of arts, culture, history, and media.”

2017: ERRC launches a campaign following a damning report published by the Human Rights Advisory Panel in April 2016. This panel called on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to publicly acknowledge its abject failure to comply with applicable human rights standards and apologize to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) placed in lead contaminated camps, and to compensate victims for material and moral damage.

2023: It is discovered that Romani children are still being segregated in Macedonian schools.

And so it goes. This is a compact list, created to help readers understand the history of the Romani in Europe and the United States.
For further reading, we suggest:

**SOURCES**


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Social Organization Among Roma/Sinti

Vitsae (also called at times rasa, natsia)
Defined by
Occupation
Aurári (gold washers)
Rudari (miners)
Ursari (bear leaders)
Lingurari (spoon makers)
Kirpači (basket makers)
Kovači (blacksmiths),
Čurari (sieve makers)
Lovara (horse dealers)
Kalderása/Kalderash (coppersmiths)

By place and/or dialect
Vlach or Vlax (Walachian or Danubian, also Russia, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria),
Romanichal (Great Britain, there often called Travellers, and, with the unrelated Scottish
Travelers and Irish Travellers, referred to as “Gypsies”)
Cale or Gitano (Spain and Southern France)
Kaale (Finland)
Sinti (Germany)
Lalleri (Austria)
Gurbeti (from the Turkish gurbet, “emigrant”; formerly from Cyprus and Greece, often
now in the former Yugoslavia, Serbia, and Crimea; most came to those areas as
emigrant workers at one time)

Other social units of the Roma/Sinti

Familia (Family)

Tsera (from Tserba for tent)

Kumpania—can be made up of Roma from a number of clans and families who have
joined together for a common economic or other purpose; in earlier times, a group
traveling together