

COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONY MARKING THE 83rd ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEPORTATION OF ROMANI AND SINTI PEOPLE FROM PRAGUE TO AUSCHWITZ II – BIRKENAU

The Municipal Department of Prague 6-Ruzyně commemorates the events of March 1943, when hundreds of Romani and Sinti people were deported from Ruzyně to the Auschwitz II – Birkenau.

In partnership with:

Prague Center for Romani Histories, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague
Museum of Romani Culture, a state-sponsored organization

Memorial in Ruzyně © Petr Zewlakk Vrabc



In early 1943, on the premises of the local forced labor camp in Prague-Ruzyně, a collection and internment point was set up for the Romani and Sinti people from Bohemia who were to be deported to the Auschwitz II – Birkenau Extermination Camp. Entire families waited for the transport there in undignified conditions. Lists of the men, women, and children designated for deportation were compiled by Czech gendarmes under the supervision of German security forces. The train with at least 642 of the Romani and Sinti people who were interned in Ruzyně arrived at Auschwitz II – Birkenau on 11 March, where the vast majority of them died, either as a result of inhumane conditions and slave labor, or as a result of being murdered in the gas chambers. About 120 other Romani people had been taken from Ruzyně to other concentration camps as early as 1942.

Our knowledge of how places such as the forced labor site in Ruzyně worked is based primarily on the preserved official/police records, from the German authorities' regulations, to the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia's regulations, to registration lists, prison registers, gendarmerie reports, and correspondence between components of the occupying administration. All these sources make it possible to reconstruct the institutional framework of the internment of these Romani and Sinti people and their deportation to the Auschwitz II - Birkenau Extermination Camp, but they do so purely from the perspective of the administration and its apparatus of repression.

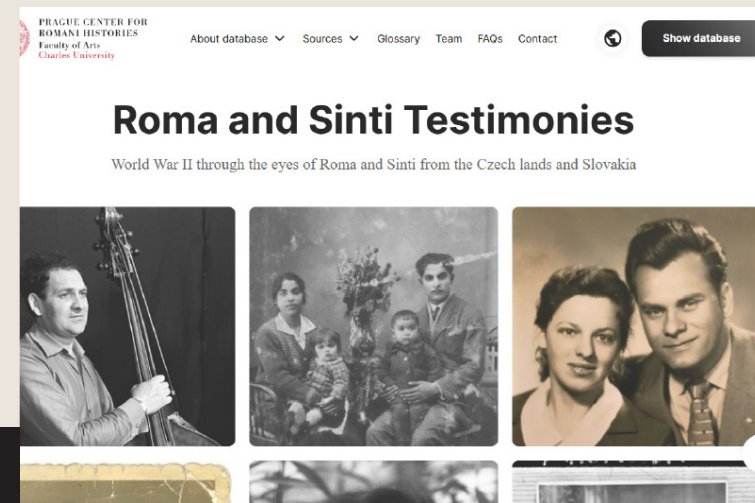
However, such documents and the stark numbers recorded by the perpetrators have been augmented in an essential way by eyewitness statements and the memories of the individuals involved, specific human stories telling of the disruption of family ties and their experiences of fear, separation, and uncertainty. It is individual testimonies which allow us to understand what really happened in the everyday reality of the interned people.

On the occasion of this year's commemoration of the events of March 1943, we would like to introduce our recently-updated, unique database, Roma and Sinti Testimonies, with the subtitle World War II through the eyes of Roma and Sinti from the Czech lands and Slovakia (www.svedectviromu.org / www.romatestimonies.org).

The project, unique in its focus and scope, including in the international context, offers detailed abstracts of eyewitness testimonies describing experiences of the Nazi persecution and genocide here. The main partner of the project is the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno, which provided a number of valuable photographs from its collections for the database. The first version of the database was published in August 2023.

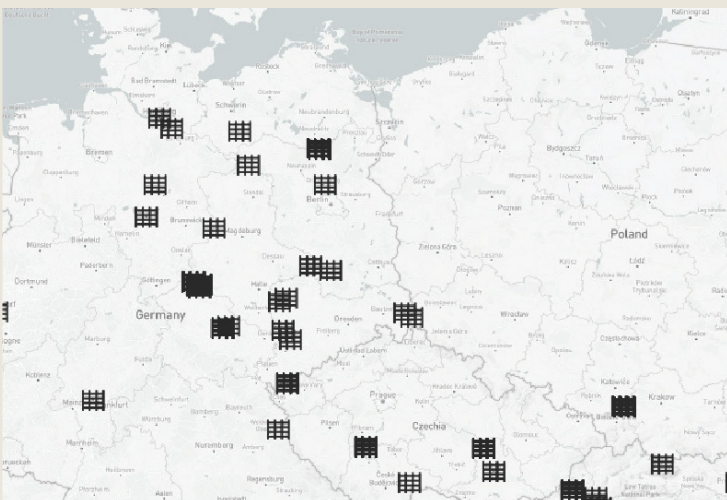
On 27 January 2026, we published an updated version of the database in a new graphic design, enriched with about 60 new testimonies, to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The database of the Prague Center for Romani Histories at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, has therefore become the richest source of information of this kind for the families of Romani and Sinti witnesses, as well as for academics and the lay public.

www.svedectviromu.org
www.romatestimonies.org



Our project now includes almost 200 narratives about the fates of specific women and men which interested parties can read in both Czech and English; a version in Romani is also planned. While in the database, users can search for the places mentioned on maps and display their locations to visually complement the eyewitness accounts.

Places of internment of Czech and Slovak Roma and Sinti during the Second World War (detail from a map of Europe).



Source: Database of testimonies of Roma and Sinti, www.romatestimonies.org

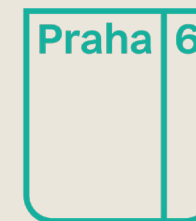
Users therefore receive illustrative, visually clear information about various aspects of Romani and Sinti life during wartime and answers to questions such as: Where was the witness interned, specifically? Where did families hide from the Hlinka Guard and the Nazis? Where did Romani people join the armed resistance? In which municipalities did they lose their homes, and where exactly were entire groups of Romani people murdered? This new layer of information will certainly be appreciated not just by schools, but also by other interested parties - among other reasons, because the database suddenly, unexpectedly, situates these Romani and Sinti stories in places familiar to users in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, frequently near their own homes in Czech and Slovak municipalities today.

The database also presents the memoirs of Karolína Kozáková, née Růžičková, the only known eyewitness account of the internment of Romani people in the Ruzyně forced labor camp. Her testimony is an exceptionally unique, valuable historical source because it authentically captures the atmosphere of this place from which Romani and Sinti people were deported to the Auschwitz II – Birkenau Extermination Camp. Kozáková recalls how, as a child, she and her family members were forcibly arrested at night, said goodbye to her pregnant mother, and were taken to the police station, after which they were separated from each other in the Ruzyně compound. She describes the omnipresent fear, helplessness, and uncertainty when they did not know what was in store for them. It is the detailed, personal perspective of a child who witnessed the breakup of her family and their persecution, perpetrated systematically, that makes this testimony a unique document on the functioning of the Ruzyně camp and, at the same time, a fundamental contribution to the understanding of the genocide of Romani and Sinti people in the Czech lands during the Second World War.

Learn more about the story of Karolína Kozáková via QR code below.



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