



## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

In most European countries today the vast majority of people remain totally unaware of the National Socialist genocide of the Roma and Sinti minority which claimed some 500,000 victims during the Second World War. As a consequence of the failure to overcome this ignorance the racist clichés and stereotypes about the Roma and Sinti, which were heavily influenced by Nazi propaganda, persist until the present day. These prejudices, passed down the generations, are among the main reasons for the perpetual wave of racially motivated crimes of violence which are still being committed against the Roma and Sinti in Europe today. Roma and Sinti suffer discrimination and prejudice in all social strata: a disadvantaged minority numbering some 10 million.

Against this backdrop, the exhibition seeks to impart a greater appreciation of the past in an attempt to help dissolve current situations of conflict. In focussing on the Holocaust against the Roma and Sinti and its European dimension, the main aim is to expose a crime against humanity which to this day eludes all historical comparison and remains unimaginable in its enormity. Like the Jews, the Roma and Sinti were rounded up, disenfranchised, ghettoised and finally deported to the extermination camps, all in the name of National Socialist racial ideology. With no respect for persons and individuals, National Socialism subjected infants and the elderly alike to the same de-humanising treatment. The National Socialists denied these people the right to exist, collectively and definitively, merely because they had been born Sinti, Roma or Jews.

As regards content, the exhibition is subdivided into four areas. The first part documents the beginning disenfranchisement of the German Roma and Sinti following the National Socialist accession to power up to the outbreak of the Second World War and the first deportations to occupied Poland. The second part of the exhibition covers the genocide of the Roma and Sinti in Nazi-occupied Europe. The exhibition seeks to highlight the distinctive features of the persecution in the different occupied and allied states, against the backdrop of the overarching themes common to the National Socialist extermination policy. The third major area documents the systematic homicide of Sinti and Roma from virtually every European country in the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp.

Finally, the fourth part of the exhibition picks out the main developments since 1945 in Europe, turning the spotlight on the public avoidance to confront and acknowledge the Nazi genocide against the Roma and Sinti and on the emergence of the civil rights movement in the Federal Republic. One particular emphasis is on current forms of discrimination against the national Roma and Sinti minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. Using selected examples, the exhibition demonstrates that Roma and Sinti are increasingly subject to open and violent racism and continued social prejudice.

The layout and design of the exhibition is meant to compare and contrast the terror and organised persecution of the Nazi regime with the normality of everyday life of the Roma and Sinti. Personal testimonies and family photographs take centre stage in the exhibition in a bid to unveil the victims and show the individuals behind each unique story. In putting faces to the victims, the exhibition seeks to dispel the myth of the "gypsy image" passed down through the centuries and used by the Nazis for their criminal ends.

The act of remembering the Sinti and Roma slain during the Second World War entails an implicit mandate that each European nation state ought to examine more closely its own role during the German occupation. In many cases the government agencies of the occupied countries or those allied with Hitler's Germany were party to the crimes of genocide against the Jews and the Roma and Sinti. Scheduled to tour various Eastern and South-East European countries after its opening in Strasbourg, the mobile exhibition is an attempt to initiate historical analysis and allow the societies in Eastern and South-East Europe to come to terms with this dark chapter in their own history.

The exhibition is lead-managed by the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma in collaboration with numerous national Roma organisations. With an overall budget of almost € 150,000 the exhibition project was helped to fruition by the sponsorship of the DaimlerChrysler AG, the European Commission, German Federal Cultural Foundation, the German Federal Foreign Office, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Hermann Niermann Foundation. In terms of dimensions the mobile exhibition extends some 70 metres in length and comprises 84 boards measuring 2 metres in height and 0.6 to 1 metre in width.

After its official opening to the public at the European Parliament in Strasbourg the exhibition has been presented in various European countries, among them Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland, and is going to be shown at further European destinations in the next few years.