



# **ANTIGYPSYIST INCIDENTS IN GERMANY 2023**

**Second Annual Report of the Reporting  
and Information Centre on Antigypsyism –  
MIA**



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## Introduction

The Reporting and Information Center on Antigypsyism (MIA) is a civil society organization that has been set up in October 2021 and is funded by the German government. Until August 2023, MIA was as project under the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma. However, the project has since been transferred to a newly established independent association (Melde- und Informationsstelle Antiziganismus e.V.). The core of our work focuses on the systematic recording, documentation, and analysis of antigypsyist incidents in Germany. These incidents are documented anonymously and evaluated annually. Additionally, we are building a network for referral counseling. Individuals affected by antigypsyism who report incidents to MIA are referred to qualified counseling centers if needed, such as social counseling centers, anti-discrimination offices, self-organized advisory centers, or support services for victims of right-wing and racist violence. Another area of focus includes awareness-raising and training opportunities for civil society and state actors, aimed at improving the recognition of antigypsyism and addressing the needs of affected individuals. MIA consists of a main office in Berlin and six regional reporting centers. MIA is the first organisation recording and documenting antigypsyist incidents at national level in Europe. .

In 2023, the Reporting and Information Centre on Antigypsyism (MIA) and its five regional reporting centres in Bavaria, Berlin, Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saxony recorded **1,233 antigypsyist incidents** nationwide and documented them in their second annual report. This is a significant increase compared to the previous year (621 incidents). This figure is not due to an increase in antigypsyism. The higher figures are mainly due to the growing awareness of MIA and the establishment of two new regional reporting centres in Bavaria and Hesse. In addition, MIA was able to expand its networking with local organisations of Sinti and Roma as well as with counselling centres nationwide. It can be assumed that there is still a large shadow zone of antigypsyist incidents, on which light can be shed only gradually in the coming years.

### 1. Types of incidents: violence, attacks, damage to property, threats, discrimination, stereotyping

The recorded incidents can be categorised into six *incident types*. In addition to 10 cases of *extreme violence*, 40 *assaults*, 27 cases of *damage to property*, 46 *threats* and 502 cases of *discrimination*, 600 cases of *verbal stereotyping* were recorded. 170 cases in the latter category were verbal attacks, 119 were antigypsyist propaganda, 16 were „positive“ stereotyping, 8 were mass mailing and 287 were other verbal stereotyping.

Verbal attacks are directly addressed defamations and insults. The majority (101) were directed against Sinti and Roma and their local organisations. In far fewer cases, the defamation and insults were directed at people who do not belong to the minority, such as football players or fans of the opposing team who were subjected to antigypsyist insults in the stadium.

*Verbal stereotyping* was also documented. Although not directly associated with discriminatory actions, it was used to spread antigypsyist discourse and narratives in public. MIA notes with concern that antigypsyist statements at gatherings and major events, such as football matches in stadiums, and antigypsyist propaganda, especially by right-wing parties, are further poisoning the social climate and inciting people to violence against Sinti and Roma. Antigypsyist propaganda is particularly present on the internet and was often shared on online channels (91 incidents) in 2023. In the cases of other verbal stereotyping, those mostly spread were antigypsyist stereotypes, and antigypsyist terms were used with no potential targets around.

State institutions were responsible for approximately a quarter of the 502 cases of *antigypsyist discrimination*. This shows that institutional antigypsyism continues to be a blatant problem. The incidents reported to MIA highlight institutional antigypsyism within the police, job centres, youth welfare offices, immigration authorities, municipal administrations and the education sector.

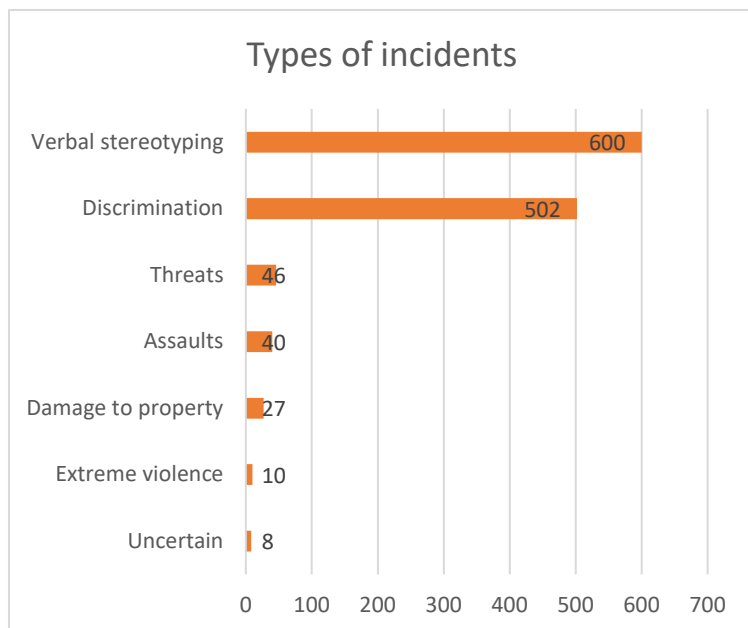
Institutional and individual discrimination cannot always be clearly distinguished from each other, and they are very often intertwined. Those affected are often discriminated against directly by persons representing an authority or another public institution. In some cases, it is not possible to reconstruct the extent to which the discrimination is attributable to either institutional practices or to individual thoughts and actions. To account for the cases which cannot be clearly categorised, a category of individual and institutional discrimination has been created.

The entanglement between individual and institutional discrimination is often evident in the unequal treatment of Ukrainian Roma refugees. As early as 2022, MIA was able to demonstrate unequal institutional treatment of Ukrainian Roma compared to their compatriots who had fled their homeland to Germany to escape the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine based on how local authorities treated them. For example, in many accommodation centres for refugees, Ukrainian Roma received worse care than Ukrainians, who are perceived as „white“. Such cases were also documented in 2023.

For Ukrainian Roma who fled to Germany in 2023, it has become more difficult to obtain the status under paragraph 24 of the Residence Act, contrary to their Ukrainian compatriots who are perceived as „white“. This status gives them access to education, housing, the labour market and social benefits in Germany. Thousands of Roma were and are suspected by the German authorities of concealing their Ukrainian-Hungarian dual citizenship or entering Germany with forged Ukrainian passports. In some cases, Roma families who fled the war were pressurised by the authorities to leave Germany and return to their homeland, the Ukrainian war zone.

These measures are not only discriminatory, but also completely disproportionate, as research by MIA has shown. An enquiry by MIA to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) has revealed that a total of 5,794 suspected cases had been checked by the Hungarian authorities by 8 May 2024. Hungarian citizenship was confirmed in 414 cases at this time. This corresponds to a rate of just around 7%.

Structural discrimination is another type of discrimination that is more difficult to prove but occurs in large numbers. It takes place when social structures reproduce unequal treatment through hidden rules and mechanisms. Structural antigypsyist discrimination can be seen, for example, in the fact that disadvantaged children and young people from the Sinti and Roma minority often live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and attend schools that are poorly equipped.



Sinti and Roma also experience individual discrimination in many other areas, for example on the labour market. They are dismissed or denied a job if their membership of the minority is known or suspected. Antigypsyist discrimination also often occurs in the service sector. This includes, for example, false accusations of being responsible for theft in the supermarket.

*Extreme antigypsyist violence* is defined as a physical attack that can result in serious bodily harm or even death of those affected. Of the ten documented incidents in this category, half were committed in the residential environment of those affected. These included shelters for homeless people and an accommodation centre for refugees. MIA also recorded cases of extreme violence at railway stations and schools.

The numerous incidents reported to MIA suggest that the cases recorded by the police - the police crime statistics show 171 antigypsyist offences for 2023 - only reflect part of the reality. Many of those affected do not report crimes because they do not trust the police due to decades of stigmatisation and persecution, especially during the Nazi era. In addition, criminal offences are often not classified by the police as antigypsyist, even though there are indications that they are. MIA has also received reports of cases in which police officers refused to initiate an investigation.

In contrast to *extreme violence*, *assaults* do not result in life-threatening or serious physical injuries. The antigypsyist attacks recorded by MIA are particularly psychologically stressful for those affected. They often make those affected no longer feel safe in their environment.

*Threats* of violence against individuals, groups or objects or indirect or non-verbal threats of violence were documented under the category of *threats*. Antigypsyist *threats* are often accompanied by incidents of *discrimination* or *assaults*. These two categories are treated as more important than *threats*. Most *threats* were recorded in educational institutions and in the living environment of those affected.

The *damage to property* was mostly directed against memorials or exhibitions dedicated to the history of the Holocaust against the Sinti and Roma in Nazi-occupied Europe, as well as against graves of members of the minority. Damage to personal property was also documented if it was selected due to the perceived connection to people affected by antigypsyism.

## 2. Antigypsyism in the police

As police officers were frequently involved in cases of *discrimination* and disproportionate use of force occurred, MIA also focussed on the topic of antigypsyism in the police in the 2023 annual report. This can be seen in measures such as unlawful racial profiling, stigmatisation of Sinti and Roma communities in external communications and continued „special registration" of members of the minority by the police.

In 2023 MIA recorded 83 cases of antigypsyism in which police officers were involved in various ways, including 3 incidents of *extreme violence*. All the cases were motivated by an antigypsyist assumption that Sinti and Roma are prone to crime. In everyday police work, this assumption can be described as a generalised attitude of suspicion or at least as a greater tendency to suspect members of minorities on the part of police forces.

The majority of the incidents reported to MIA fall into the category of excessive everyday police behaviour, ranging from racial profiling to disproportionate use of force or police violence. Particularly damning and frequently reported manifestations of this police suspicion were cases in which police forces did not take Sinti or Roma seriously as victims of crime, trivialised crimes with antigypsyist content or, in the worst case, even interrogated the reporting Sinti and Roma instead of the suspects.

Young male Sinti and Roma were particularly victims of racial profiling and questioned about their family relationships. This is an indication that the checks are merely a police tool to exert pressure on the local communities and to collect police information about those affected without a stated reason. The investigation of family relationships can particularly be seen as a clear indication of antigypsyist police data collection. The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma criticised this practice shortly after it was introduced as a continuation of National Socialist data collection practices. The measure is demonstrably still being used today to monitor alleged criminal family structures of Sinti or Roma. In recent years, this type of procedure has once again been increasingly focussed on as a means of combating so-called „clan criminality".

This also became clear on 26 June 2023, when the Lower Saxony Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Justice presented the „Clan Crime Situation Report 2022 in Lower Saxony" at a press conference. The joint presentation listed „clan proceedings by the central office of the Hildesheim public prosecutor's office" and explicitly referred to „mass offences in the area of property and asset crime by an extended family from the Roma ethnic group in the Hanover district". It is not clear from the presentation why, in this case, a reference was made to an entire „extended family" of suspects belonging to a national minority.

Also in 2023, a Saxon chief inspector emphasised in an interview with the *Freie Presse* that Roma families based in Poland, which he subsequently referred to as „clans", controlled a certain modus operandi. Here, too, it remains unclear what purpose the reference to the suspects' alleged „Roma" affiliation is supposed to serve if it is not intended to tie in with the socially and police-established stereotype of „criminal gypsies". The investigator thus also revealed the principle of ethnicising certain offences or forms of offence for 2023, which are thus directly perceived by the police and, consequently, the public as „Roma offences". These are two of a number of cases, in which an institutionally anchored antigypsyism in the police is directly visible.

Particularly in the light of the German police's responsibility for the National Socialist genocide of Sinti and Roma and the continuities in indicating perpetrators, and use of concepts and practices, it must be emphasised also with regard to 2023 that decisive, active and transparent action is necessary in order to effectively counter this traditional institutional antigypsyism. German police authorities are currently a long way from achieving this.

### **3. Locations of incidents: Antigypsyism in the residential context, in educational institutions and authorities**

MIA uses the *incident location* category to record the specific location of the documented incidents. The incidents recorded in 2023 show that antigypsyism is commonplace for those affected and occurs in almost all areas of life. More than 17% of the cases (212) occurred in *educational institutions*, primarily in schools. Children and young people were the most directly affected.

In addition to antigypsyist bullying by teachers and fellow pupils, the pupils also experienced institutional antigypsyism because of segregation in the education system. This is based on stereotypical ideas, that Sinti and Roma are generally poor learners and supposedly not interested in educational success.

It is particularly common for Roma EU citizens and Roma refugees to be denied the right to attend school for a long period. One reason for this is the attitude of school authorities, who believe that Roma are not interested in education and thus do not undertake all efforts for providing these children with a school place; Another reason is the lack of counselling or information regarding compulsory schooling and the possibilities of schooling.

The attacks documented by MIA show that in these cases schools were not secure spaces for young people affected by antigypsyism. One case of *extreme violence* and 16 antigypsyist *assaults* in *educational institutions* were recorded.

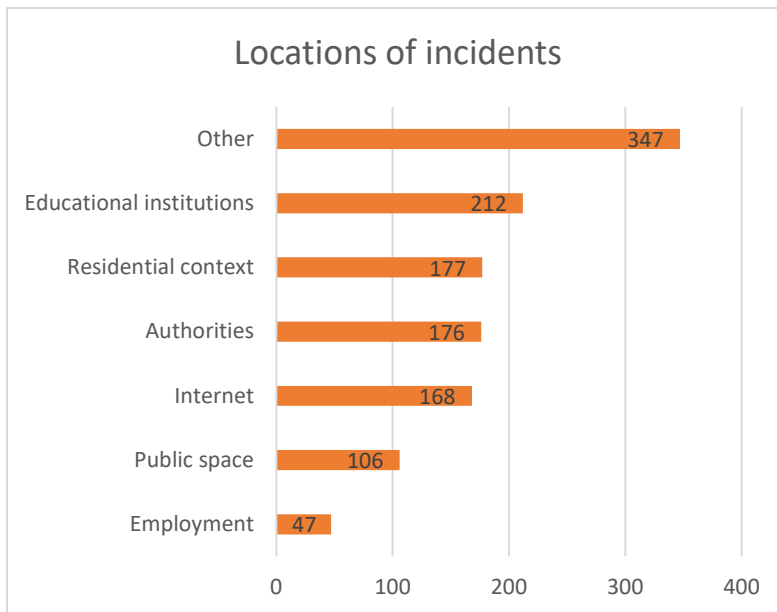
Incidents of this kind were often trivialised by teachers or school administrators. In other cases, the victims of antigypsyism were blamed for such attacks. In individual situations, teachers were abusive towards pupils belonging to the Sinti and Roma minority.

A strikingly high number of cases (177) were also recorded in the *residential context*. MIA received reports of Sinti and Roma being systematically insulted in an antigypsyist manner by their neighbours and in some cases physically threatened. Those affected were forced to move as a result.

Sinti and Roma are also discriminated against when looking for accommodation. This applies to German citizens as well as EU migrants and Roma refugees. They are often denied housing if property owners attribute their minority status to them.

Especially socially disadvantaged Sinti and Roma live often in indecent housing conditions paying often a very high rent for this. Members of the minority who fled to Germany from their Ukrainian homeland to escape the Russian full-scale invasion remain in inhumane accommodation for particularly long periods.





MIA recorded 58 antigypsyist incidents in refugee accommodation centres. These concerned both the poor conditions under which Roma refugees had to live in these shelters and antigypsyist behaviour by staff and other refugees. If the subcategory of social space is also considered as a part of the physical crime scene, it becomes clear which other groups of actors are involved: police officers and social workers, volunteers, shelter managers and security personnel also use discriminatory and sometimes violent discourses and practices.

Roma people who have become homeless have to live in overcrowded accommodations, in poor hygienic conditions or in improvised shantytowns and tent settlements. It can be assumed that the number of such dwellings is increasing in many German cities, as the total number of homeless people in Germany is also rising significantly.

As regards antigypsyist incidents recorded in the case of *authorities* (176 cases), job centres with 53 incidents stood out in particular, and 23 incidents were recorded in the case of immigration authorities. Systematic discrimination, especially against Roma from Southeast Europe, has been observed in benefit authorities for years. Discriminatory, disproportionate and unjustified measures as well as direct refusal of benefits occur. The basis for this is possibly the work aid for official use entitled „Combating gang-related abuse of benefits in the specific context of EU freedom of movement“. In February 2021, the Federal Employment Agency issued the fourth version of this work aid for employment agencies and job centres. It states, among others, that the eligibility of EU citizens for benefits should be checked particularly carefully. Many Roma are affected by these discriminatory measures.

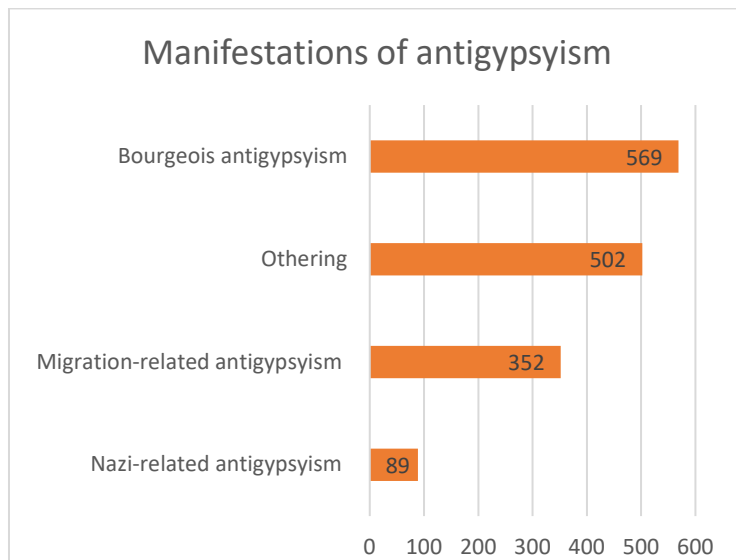
In 2023 MIA recorded fewer cases on the *internet* (168). This comparatively low number mainly stems from the fact that the Antigypsyism Reporting and Information Centre does not actively and systematically research antigypsyist incidents on social media. MIA only documents incidents that are reported when a person is insulted in an antigypsyist way via the internet, for example, or when emails with antigypsyist content are sent to organisations of Sinti and Roma or other human rights organisations. Cases are also recorded if a public figure makes antigypsyist comments on the internet or if antigypsyist content is conveyed via press releases on the websites of political parties or companies on internet platforms.

#### 4. Manifestations of antigypsyism

The *manifestations of antigypsyism* category describes the diverse ways in which antigypsyism occurs. Most incidents documented by MIA can be assigned to a specific form of antigypsyism, and in some cases to several interlinked forms.

Most of the incidents documented by MIA (569 cases) can be categorised as *bourgeois antigypsyism*. *Bourgeois antigypsyism* can be divided into four sub-categories: social antigypsyism, cultural antigypsyism, romanticising antigypsyism and religious antigypsyism. These sub-categories are intertwined in numerous incidents. For example, it is possible for certain cases to exhibit characteristics of both social antigypsyism and cultural antigypsyism.

Social antigypsyism (477 cases) includes the generalised accusation that Sinti and Roma are prone to crime, for example fraud, particularly in relation to social benefits, and to bad motherhood. This is particularly evident in the numerous cases of children being taken into care by the youth welfare office without justification.



Cultural antigypsyism (231 cases) spreads and reproduces the prejudice that Sinti and Roma are inferior in terms of the level of their cultural development and that unpredictable lifestyle is their cultural characteristic, instead of linking this to centuries of persecution and exclusion from society.

Romanticising antigypsyism (30 cases) functions as a cliché for „freedom-loving and travelling people" who lead an unbridled and carefree life. It serves as a projection of desires that are not compatible with bourgeois society.

The fourth sub-category of *bourgeois antigypsyism* is religious antigypsyism (4 cases), which can manifest itself in the claim that Sinti and Roma practise pagan-magical cults, among others.

Next come the cases of *antigypsyist othering* (502 incidents), whereby people are stigmatised as „strangers" who allegedly do not belong to German society. In some cases, *othering* was the basis for *threats, assaults or extreme violence* against those affected.

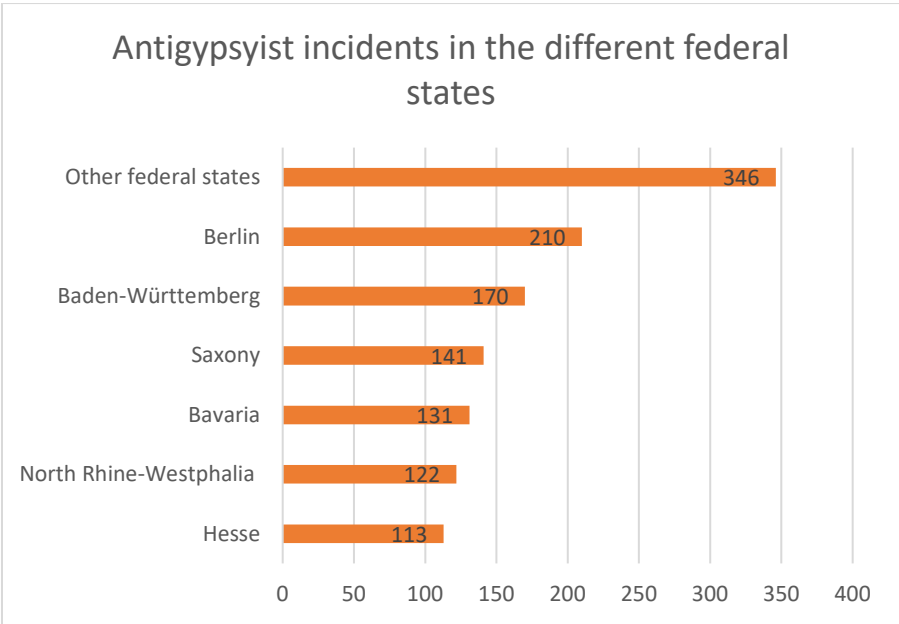
*Migration-related antigypsyism* (352 cases) is linked to the prejudice that Roma refugees or immigrants are staying in Germany illegally and only want to take advantage of the welfare state in this country. Not only Ukrainian Roma who have fled the war, but also members of the minority from the Western Balkans, many of whom have been living in Germany for years with uncertain residence status, and Roma who have fled the Republic of Moldova are affected by *migration-related antigypsyism* as well.

This also applies to immigrant EU citizens, particularly from Bulgaria and Romania, who are either Roma or are labelled as migrant Roma due to their nationality or appearance.

*Nazi-related antigypsyism* was evident in 89 cases. Those affected were threatened or subjected to coercion, attacks or incitement to hatred. The Hitler salute was shown. Walls and stairwells in apartment blocks, cemeteries, monuments and schools were smeared with right-wing propaganda, including Nazi swastikas and double sig runes. Perpetrators trivialised or glorified the Nazi genocide of Sinti and Roma. In numerous cases of *Nazi-related antigypsyism*, links to anti-Semitism could be recognised too.

**5. Where, how and by whom antigypsyism occurs**

The number of recorded antigypsyist incidents in the different federal states varies greatly. This is partly due to the size of the federal states and how well MIA and its regional reporting centres are already networked there. As in 2022, also in 2023 MIA documented the most incidents in Berlin, where the regional reporting centre DOSTA has been recording antigypsyist incidents since 2014. This is followed by Baden-Württemberg, Saxony, Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia and Hessen. With the establishment of regional reporting centres in other federal states, even more incidents may be recorded in the coming years.



Antigypsyist behaviour or antigypsyist content were mostly conveyed offline, primarily face-to-face (697 incidents), in direct contact between those responsible and those affected. Those were, in particular, acts of violence, insults and experiences of *discrimination*. In addition to those cases, there were also graffiti and antigypsyist propaganda recorded at events such as matches at football stadiums, at other mass gatherings or on posters. Antigypsyist content was also disseminated through public documents, for example by public authorities, or in private letters sent by post.

Around 20 percent of the documented cases took place on the *internet* or on other media and digital channels. 808 cases were directed against an individual or a group of individuals, with children and young people (also) affected in approximately 25 percent. This applies both to institutional antigypsyism (exclusion from the education system, allocation to special schools) and to individual antigypsyism in everyday lives of those affected in educational institutions, residential homes, accommodation centres for refugees or at playgrounds.

In ca. 28 per cent of cases, there were no direct addressees of antigypsyism. Antigypsyist statements or actions were directed against the Sinti and Roma minority in general or against a construct for which a racist term is used in the majority society, with no actual targets around.

It is striking that in 596 cases those responsible for the antigypsyist statements or actions were not acting as private individuals, but in a specific role or official function - for example as police officers, hospital staff, clerks at job centres or youth welfare offices, security staff in refugee accommodation centres or supermarkets, people in political offices such as mayors or other elected officials.

## **6. Successes in the fight against antigypsyism**

The fight against antigypsyism is a challenge for society as a whole and must be fought in all areas of life. One of the reasons why victims and witnesses often do not report antigypsyist incidents to the police, other authorities or decision-makers is that they fear it will not help. With its work, MIA wants to emphasise that every stand against antigypsyism is worthwhile and important for strengthening democracy, the rule of law and coexistence in a diverse society. Hence MIA's motto: „Every report counts!". Here are some successful examples from 2023 that demonstrate exactly this:

1. The following incident occurred at a school in southern Germany in October 2023: A pupil chanted right-wing extremist slogans and sent photos with extreme right wing and forbidden content to fellow pupils. Apart from the headmaster asking all pupils to delete the material, there were initially no further consequences. There was an open argument between the Sinti pupils and the boy in question after the boy threatened the Sinti pupils with the words: "I'll carve a swastika into your foreheads." There were still no consequences for the perpetrator. Instead, all Sinti, including those who were not involved in the fight, were briefly suspended from school. The father of one of the boys involved contacted the police. The police officer did not take the case seriously, placed the Sinti under general suspicion and tried to intimidate the family. Those affected took the case to the regional representation of German Sinti and Roma, which forwarded the incident to MIA. Together, the case was publicised via social media channels. The publicising of the case received a lot of response and a few days after the publication, MIA received an enquiry from the police headquarters of the city in which the incident had taken place. They asked for more information in order to clarify the case with the police officer responsible.
2. How socially acceptable antigypsyism can also be seen in the frequent use of racist terms. In December 2023, the Federal Government Commissioner against Antigypsyism and for the Life of Sinti and Roma in Germany, Dr Mehmet Daimagüler, wrote to the Douglas perfumery chain. He demanded the renaming of an eyeshadow palette that had a racist term in its name. The product was immediately renamed in the online shop - and an English-language racist term was used instead. Dr Daimagüler has made it clear in his letter to Douglas that this was not an acceptable solution either. The product has now been renamed again and is being offered under a neutral name.
3. In January 2023, a man was convicted of antigypsyist hate speech. The man had sent several hate messages to the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma between October 2020 and July 2021. In his emails, the convicted man accused the Sinti and Roma of living at the expense of the state and of being responsible for gang rapes and gang thefts. He talked about „gas chambers", and also made it clear that he considered the persecution of the Sinti and Roma during the National Socialist era to be legitimate and appropriate and that he would also be in favour of such persecution in the present day.

4. In December 2023, there was a success in the context of resolving the case of the crimes committed against the Sinti and Roma during National Socialism and after 1945, which resulted from the decades-long struggle of local organisations of Sinti and Roma and the tireless advocacy for their rights. Following an extensive lobbying of the local organisations, on 14 December 2023, for the first time in its history, the Bundestag passed a cross-party motion that takes a self-critical look at the German history of antigypsyism. The motion takes up the recommendations for action of the Independent Commission on Antigypsyism and makes important demands of the Federal Government.

**MIA derives four recommendations for action from the documented antigypsyist incidents for the year 2023:**

1. Ministries of the interior and police authorities should take far-reaching measures at all levels to counter antigypsyism in the police.
2. The segregation of Ukrainian Roma in terms of access to housing, social services, schools and local support structures must end immediately.
3. Counselling structures with a focus on antigypsyism must be established nationwide - with the involvement of experts from the minority and from local organisations - and get equipped with appropriate resources.
4. The first MIA funding period ends at the end of December 2024. The work of the federal office of MIA must be financially secured for the future, and the federal states must contribute financially to the establishment and expansion of regional Antigypsyism Reporting and Information Centres.



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