

# M4 Worksheet “Press release issued by Central Council of German Sinti and Roma”

## ‘Stolen children’?

Public vilification of Roma in Europe and the media’s responsibility

The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma is deeply concerned about the effects of national and international media reporting on alleged cases of ‘abduction of blond children’ by Roma people in Greece and Ireland. Police raids, first in Greece, subsequently in Ireland, led to children being removed from their parents or carers and placed in state care.

The Central Council is of the view that the actions of the police in th[ese] case[s] were based solely on pseudo-ethnic criteria, namely that blond children found with Romani parents or carers constitute grounds for police suspicion of illegal activity. Subsequently to these events, media speculation produced supposed connections between the raids and all sorts of criminal activity, from child abduction and abuse and forced marriage to alleged trading in human organs. Some media reports created original versions of the events and evidently inaccurate images of a supposedly ‘traumatised child abducted by Roma’ which were subsequently projected onto the entire Roma minority in Germany and similarly worldwide. Once the details of the cases had emerged, it was only some media outlets that admitted to having been influenced in their reporting by old antigypsyist prejudices and animosities.

It is entirely understandable that the hundreds of parents whose children are missing responded to these reports with new hope that their children may be alive and living with their Roma abductors. Yet this response effectively turns all Sinti and Roma people into potential child-stealers. The impact on the Sinti and Roma communities in Germany has already been severe. Sinti in Germany have told the Central Council of being made to feel shame and humiliation in their interactions with neighbours and work colleagues. Children from Sinti and Roma families have been asked by schoolmates if they steal children or were stolen themselves.

In this way, across Europe and beyond, the entire Romani minority has suffered stigmatisation and criminalisation, and has fallen under suspicion worldwide of keeping missing children from their true parents. Skinheads attacked a Roma family with a blond child in Serbia; in Ireland, children were removed from their parents in highly disproportionate police raids on the sole basis of so-called ‘observations reported by the public’ and of the children’s blond colouring. Subsequent DNA tests proved that these children had been separated from their biological parents.

The Central Council welcomes the appeals made by Irish human rights organisations to the government of Ireland to conduct a detailed investigation into the circumstances of these unjustified police raids and to apologise to [Ireland’s Roma] minority.

The manner in which these police operations were conducted, and the subsequent media reporting with its exclusive focus on the ‘white’ and ‘blond’ appearance of the children in question, were essentially founded on racist assumptions which are now exerting a severe impact on the entire minority in Germany and across Europe.

The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma wishes to emphasise its awareness that it is the task of the police and state authorities to take action against every case of human trafficking and illegal adoption. However, we consider it inappropriate and illegitimate to generate images in the public consciousness that reactivate and reinforce racist prejudices. The Central Council therefore calls upon the newly constituted Bundestag to appoint a panel of experts to document and quantify hostility and animosity towards Sinti and Roma people in Germany and report back to the {1}Bundestag{/1} once in each parliamentary term. We consider such action essential in view of Germany’s history and the murderous effects of the National Socialist racial ideology which systematically ascribed negative characteristics to the [Roma] minority in order to legitimise the genocide committed in Nazi-occupied Europe.

Romani Rose  
Chair, Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

**Source:**

Press release issued by Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, 5 November 2013.  
<http://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/wp-content/uploads/presse/294.pdf>

# Tasks

1. Which criticisms does the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma make of media reporting on the case of 'Maria'?

2. Give your views on these criticisms.



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