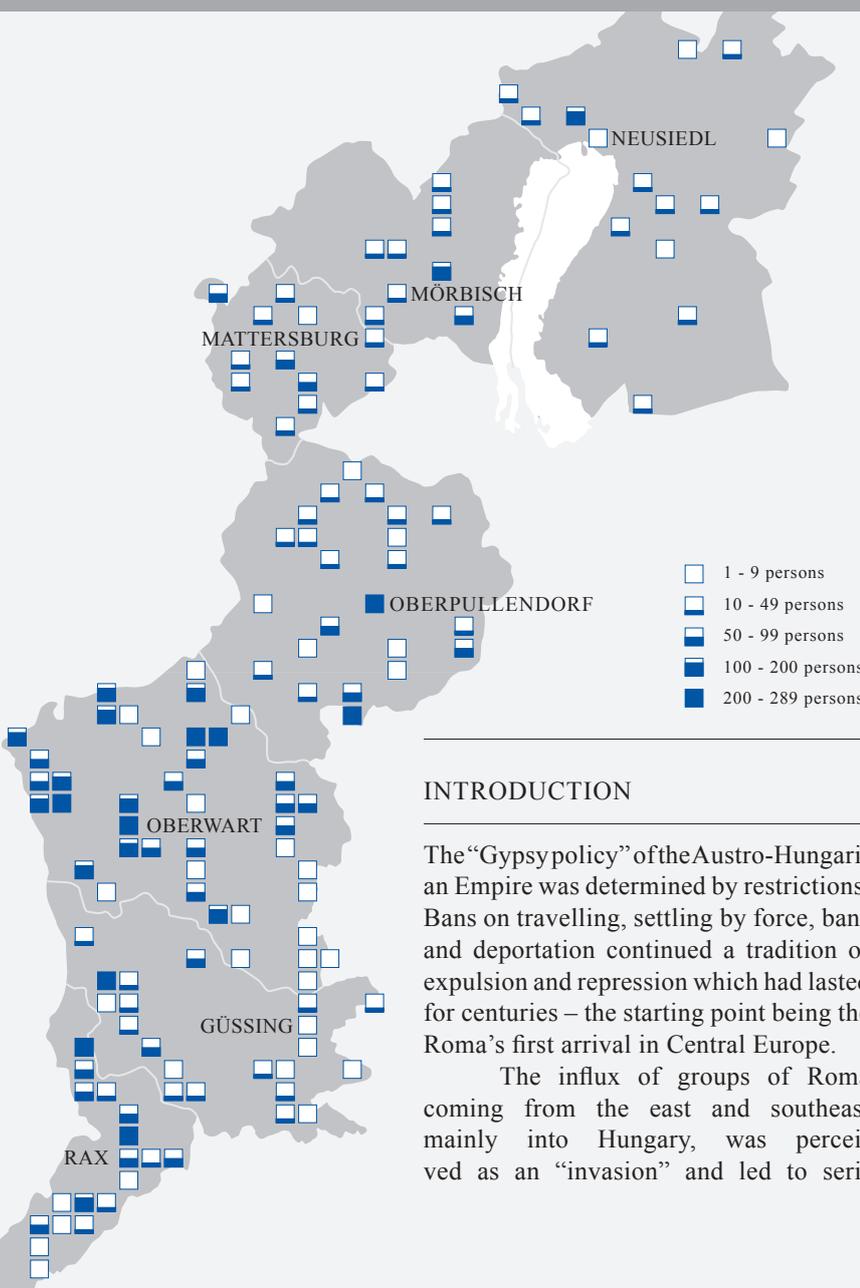


# Austria and Hungary 1850 - 1938

compiled by the editors

Austro-Hungarian Empire | Austria | Hungary

➤ *More and more regulations within the monarchy restricted the Roma's opportunities to earn a living. Bans on travelling were followed by settling by force, large-scale registration and bans on certain professions. Economic difficulties and National Socialist propaganda aggravated the situation, and finally "forced labour, deportation and sterilisation" were to solve the "Gypsy question" with a "National Socialist solution".*



ROMA POPULATION  
IN BURGENLAND IN 1927

*The rigorous census allowed for a continuous, close watch of virtually every single person of Roma ethnicity.*

III. 1 (based upon Mayerhofer 1988, p. 40)



## INTRODUCTION

The "Gypsypolicy" of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was determined by restrictions. Bans on travelling, settling by force, bans and deportation continued a tradition of expulsion and repression which had lasted for centuries – the starting point being the Roma's first arrival in Central Europe.

The influx of groups of Roma coming from the east and southeast mainly into Hungary, was perceived as an "invasion" and led to seri-

ous problems between Roma and non-Roma. When the Austrian government closed the Hungarian border to the Roma, many Roma settled in the very poor parts of Western Hungary, known today as Burgenland. Thus, conflicts were pre-programmed in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was marked by poverty and war. The "Gypsies" were seen as a "plague" by the majority population, and finally as a "question" to which only one "solution" was possible in the 1930s, strongly marked by National Socialism.



III. 2 (from Mayerhofer 1988, p. 177)

III. 2

*“Putri” with wooden door, window and chimney, St. Margarethen, Burgenland, between the wars.*

III. 3

*The homes of the Roma were registered in Burgenland in the 1920s. This hut bears the number “28” above the left window. The photo was taken approximately in 1926.*

III. 4

*Settlement in Mattersburg, Burgenland, between the wars. The picture shows the three different designs of dwellings that existed then: left, a plastered and whitewashed house of clay bricks, in the middle a “putri”, a hut half dug in the earth, half made of wood, branches and clay, right, a clay-filled, half-timbered building.*



III. 3 (from Mayerhofer 1988, p. 37)



III. 4 (from Mayerhofer 1988, p. 184)

## AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN EMPIRE

From the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Roma groups such as the Lovara, who had originally come from the Danubian Principalities and were now mainly working as horse dealers, came into Hungary from the east. The more nomadic groups appeared, the more complaints were registered in the “comitatases” (the Hungarian counties). “Repeated law-breaking” and the lack of laws helping to deal with this “public nuisance” led to complaints. From the point of view of the Hungarian population, the Roma’s immigration was an “invasion”.

Another reason for complaints were those regulations of the Hungarian district laws which obliged the municipalities to find accommodation and supplies for the Roma. In view of the many

immigrations, these regulations were a growing burden for the towns.

In 1907, 28 districts demanded a standardised way of dealing with the Roma; the parliament, however, was not able to find a political solution. Instead, the problem was transferred to an administrative level. The decisions that were taken, such as the ban on begging and forced repatriation to the original country of residence, were in line with the existing “Gypsy policy”, based on repression and threats.

This Hungarian policy, valid until 1918, aimed at forcing the Roma to settle. The economic structures and means, however, were not sufficient, and so failure was pre-ordained. The towns could not offer the Roma the necessary means for their daily survival, so that they had to keep up their “Gypsy” way of life in order to ensure their existence. At the same time, the prejudices of the majority population and a tendency towards

criminalising the Roma increased, not least because of publications about Hungarian law. State and society were not able or not willing to take purposeful measures with respect to the Roma. This led to dramatic changes in the Western Hungarian districts (today’s Burgenland): the Austrian government had tightened the immigration laws in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to stop the Roma’s immigration. At the same time, it decreed the deportation of all Hungarian Roma found in Austria. In combination with the Hungarian prohibition to leave the country, decreed in Hungary in 1870, this led to a massive rise in the number of Roma living in the border districts. These districts did not have or did not want to give accommodation to the Roma, so the latter were given worthless plots of land to settle. This is how the infamous “Gypsy colonies” came into being on the towns’ outskirts. [Ills. 2-4]



III. 5 (from Mayerhofer 1988, p. 184)

III. 5  
Family of an itinerant craftsman in front of the tent, between the wars.



III. 6 (from Mayerhofer 1988, p. 178)

III. 6  
A Rom getting arrested, St. Margarethen, Burgenland, 1934.

III. 7  
List of male Roma of the village Spitzzicken in Burgenland who were deported to labour camps mainly in Styria, 1942.

*Zigeuner der Gemeinde Spitzzicken*

Walter	an Arbeitslager Steiermark vermittelt
Haus Nr 84	Ernst Karoly Arbeitslager Kobenz
85	Viktor " "
99	Peter Horvath " Friedlandorf
92	Karl " " "
83	Peter Karoly Arbeitsl. Hinterberg bei Lobau
97	Julius " " " "
98	Josef " " " "
85	Ernst " " " "
101	Frau " " " "
84	Peter Karoly Arbeitslager St. Lambrecht
84	Helmut " " " "
92	Frau " " " "
92	Adolf " " " "
86	Adolf " " " "
88	Michael " " " "
87	Ludwig " " " "
89	Julius Karoly Arbeitslager Lackenbach (Friedberg)
100	Frau " " " Wien
99	Frau " auf unbekanntem Arbeits-Lager

III. 7 (from Baumgartner 1995, p. 140)

## AUSTRIA

The big number of Roma and the economic backwardness of the Western Hungarian region made integration impossible. In view of the difficult economic situation, the conflict between the Roma and non-Roma became more and more pronounced.

During World War I, many Roma served in the army. Women and unfit men were enlisted to do various works as decreed by the "Kriegsleistungsgesetz" (army service law). In 1916, all draught animals and wagons were taken away from the travelling Roma, and given to the army. Horses, mules and donkeys could only be bought with a police permit. With the annexation of the Burgenland area in 1921, several thousand Roma came into the newly-founded Republic of Austria. Thus, the Roma could not be deported anymore, and drastic measures were taken. Already in 1922, Burgenland's

provincial government decreed that all Roma had to stay in the district they were living in, and had to be prevented from travelling. In order to stop new immigration, censuses were carried out and "Gypsy dwellings" were registered.

In 1926, the finger prints of all Roma over 14, living in Burgenland, were taken and later supplemented by a photo. From 1928 onwards, the police of Eisenstadt had a so-called "Zigeunerkartothek" ("Gypsy" card file), which included entries about 8,000 Roma (names and finger prints). [III. 1]

Due to the emerging economic crisis many Roma, who had worked as unskilled labourers and travelling craftsmen, got into a situation which made their daily survival almost impossible. They had no sources of income anymore, had to beg and – much to the dislike of the non-Roma – had to rely on district welfare.

This economic crisis also led to theft and petty crimes, which in turn ag-

gravated the situation between the Roma and the rural population. A climate of escalating hostility was the result.

One of the main reasons for the rising number of crimes committed by "Gypsies" were – with similarities to Germany – the new, restrictive regulations. Many records resulted from offences against the strict registration laws and other administrative offences. This connection, however, was not taken into account, as crime rose among the Roma. [III. 6]

On the contrary: police statistics were used to prove the "Gypsy" 's "anti-social" behaviour. Their settlements were perceived as a "cultural shame", particularly by the media in Burgenland, who, using a more and more radical language, fostered hostile behaviour towards the Roma and demanded that the Burgenland should quickly be freed from this "plague", warning about their "terrifying reproduction". Several assemblies were held on how to achieve this. During one of them,



III. 8 (Detail)

Some rules from the memorandum “Die Zigeunerfrage. Denkschrift des Landeshauptmanns für das Burgenland” (The Gypsy Question. Memorandum by the Head of Government of the Province Burgenland) by Thobias Portschy (Eisenstadt, 1938):

1. “Sexual intercourse between Gypsies and Germans constitutes an offence of racial disgrace.
  2. Gypsies are not allowed to attend the general primary school.
  3. Sterilising Gypsies should stop their reproduction.
  4. Searchings of houses and individuals have to be conducted regularly.
  5. Gypsy huts (a cultural disgrace) are to be pulled down, and the Gypsies lodged in labour camp shacks.
  6. In the labour camps, the Gypsies work as closed group.
  7. Exercising private professions outside the labour camp is prohibited.
  8. Gypsies are not allowed to bear weapons.
  9. Voluntary emigration is promoted.”
- (translated from Mayerhofer 1988, p. 43f.)

which took place in Oberwart on January 15, 1933, it was suggested that they “take them to an island in the Silent Ocean” or “castrate” them.

Also in Austria the foundation for the later extermination of the Roma

had been laid in the years and decades before. The NSDAP’s demand, “having a Gypsy-free Burgenland”, was nothing new. Contrary to other politicians of his time, however, Burgenland’s illegal National Socialist “Gauleiter” (district lea-

der) Thobias Portschy was determined to put his plan, “eradicating the Gypsy” through forced labour, deportation and sterilisation, into practise, thus finding a “national socialist solution” for the “problem”. [III. 8]

## HUNGARY

In Hungary we cannot really talk about a “Gypsy policy” after the break-down of the empire. The revolutionary transitional government, following Horthy’s regime, did not really pay attention to the Roma. The sparse regulations which were passed during this time mainly aimed at the Roma’s surveillance and were

justified by the rising crime rates. Registering travelling Roma, as decreed in 1928, and simultaneous raids in several districts were a novelty.

The second “Strafrechtsnovelle” (criminal law amendments), in 1928, included specific measures against so-called “incorrigible criminals”, for instance transferring such people to labour camps. These amendments were undoubtedly aimed at the Roma, whose life, however, was not different from that of other under-

privileged people. In 1931, the Minister of the Interior decreed that the travelling professions were almost exclusively forbidden, and that a work permit was only valid in the district of residence – and tied to the consent of the district council. These regulations took away many of the Roma’s sources of livelihood. A decree passed in 1938, according to which every Rom had to be regarded as possibly “suspect”, laid the foundation for persecution and deportation.

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