



CHALLENGING DIGITAL ANTIGYPSYISM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC



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Author: **Gwendolyn Albert**

Editors: **Jonathan Lee and Hannah Crane**

Graphic Design: **Sophio Datishvili**

Layout: **Dzavit Berisha**

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Address: Avenue de Cortenbergh 71, 4th floor, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

E-mail: office@errc.org

www.errc.org

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INTRODUCTION

This project was launched by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), the Human Rights Forum (FORUM), and the ROMEA organisation with the aim of actively intervening against hate speech online in the Czech Republic. The project involved a group of 20 Romani student volunteers who are ROMEA scholarship recipients looking for hate speech online, mainly on social media platforms, and accumulating evidence of such crimes that could then be used as a basis for legal action. As a result of the volunteers' efforts, criminal complaints were filed by FORUM lawyers against 10 different suspects for multiple instances of hate speech.

The project was based on the ERRC's previous experience working with volunteers to combat

online hate speech as part of the ERRC's Challenging Digital Antigypsyism project, which aims to proactively address the online culture of hatred against Romani people. Through this project the ERRC and its dedicated volunteers have been fighting online antigypsyism in Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Slovakia, Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine, embodying the central idea of the project that it isn't enough to just be not racist, you have to be anti-racist to effectively challenge hate. The results of this volunteer work in Albania, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine can be found in our report: *Challenging Digital Antigypsyism*.¹ The ERRC hopes that over time this work will contribute to building a digital activist community committed to fighting dangerous online rhetoric about Roma.



Every day on Facebook I see hate speech against Romani people. Those people think that if they hide behind the computer, they don't have to face the consequences. I believe that in the future there will be more effective ways to punish those people, that's the reason why I'm involved in this project as a volunteer in ROMEA. We need to focus on the hate speech and try to fight it in every possible way we can.

František Némec
Project Volunteer and a student of Artificial Intelligence at the Czech Technical University in Prague.



1 ERRC, *Challenging Digital Antigypsyism: Albania, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine*, 17 May 2023. Available [here](#).

METHODOLOGY

Defining Hate Speech

A working definition of hate speech was developed for the purpose of this project based on a preliminary analysis of the type of content appearing on Czech-language social media networks. Existing ‘Community Standards’ on such networks were found to not always capture the range of hate speech that surfaces on these networks and were not useful as the only

guidelines for identifying hate speech (particularly when considering a criminal threshold for legal complaints). It was also not possible to understand the totality of how these standards are enforced, as the social media platforms do not publicise what kinds of content never make it online or are removed from circulation as soon as they come to the attention of administrators.

The working definition of hate speech used for this project was:

Public incitement of either discrimination, hatred, or violence against a group or its individual members already protected under the law as particularly vulnerable (due to their ability, their ethnicity, their gender, their religion, their sexual orientation, or their skin colour), where such incitement involves dehumanising language, or statements about the group’s supposed inferiority, or slurs that are taboo.

Data Collection

Twenty Romani volunteers were recruited from students receiving scholarships through the ROMEA organisation. Over the course of eight different sessions, from January through October 2022, they were trained in how to identify hate speech online, with an emphasis on speech targeting Roma, and were coached on how to save links and screenshots of this content as evidence that the human rights law organisation, the Forum for Human Rights (FORUM), could use to support criminal complaints. The training materials were based on those used for the ERRC’s previous volunteer-based projects, and the ERRC’s Volunteer Coordinator and Advocacy and Communications Director provided guidance on how to best implement the training and create a working methodology. The trainings were held both online and in person, during which the students discussed the instances of hate speech

they had found and were given feedback by the project manager to ensure they could recognise speech with the potential for prosecution.

One of the trainings featured the academic Selma Muhic of Charles University, who also runs the International Network against Cyber Hate. Due to her previous experience monitoring social media for the European Commission, she was able to inform the students about a wide range of Czech language public groups on Facebook in particular that could be monitored for more extreme manifestations of hate speech.

The students undertook this search between the spring of 2022 and the summer of 2023, in Czech, searching both news portals online and social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter. The identified

content could include text posts, including the use of emoticons, or the posting of images, memes, or video. It could be shared on a user's own profile, posted to other pages through a social media platform, or be part of a comment on a discussion thread underneath a personal or news outlet's post. The volunteers also developed a list of keywords to search for as they progressed.

The volunteers saved links and took screenshots of the content and forwarded it

to the project manager for classification. Since this project aimed to take legal action against the hate speech identified, the volunteers did not report the content to the social media companies because to do so might result in its removal and the disappearance of the evidence. They also received feedback from legal partners FORUM that content phrased passively or subjunctively (e.g. "It would be a good idea if..."), however racist it might be, was not likely to be successfully prosecuted.

Processing Data

The hate speech content uncovered by volunteers was then analysed by the project manager to identify clusters of content, to assess the severity of the hate expressed, and to determine any instances of prosecutable speech. Many of the posts expressed hate against more than one target, which complicated the processing in numerical terms.

Context plays a huge part in determining whether hate speech meets the threshold for prosecution, but basic elements to look out for include: who makes the statement, the wording of the statement, the real intention of the statement, the context in which the statement was made, and whether there is the potential for statements to lead to harmful consequences (for example, violence or escalation of conflict).

Much of the content the volunteers reported was discriminatory, stereotypical language about Roma which did not express an intent to commit violence against them. This included many tropes of antigypsyism about Roma being on welfare, not working, committing crime, etc.

An equivalent amount of material was of a higher degree of seriousness because it called for actions against Roma or for Roma to do (or not do) certain things themselves; for example, "they should go back where they came from". This kind of material often specifically mentioned skin colour and exoticized Romani people.

The rarest type of content found was that which expressed the most violent hate speech: calls for genocide against Roma, expressions of support for Nazi ideology and a desire to continue it, or threats to harm or murder Romani people. The degree of seriousness of this type of hate speech meant criminal complaints could be filed against such instances, as well as against some of the clearer examples of incitement to hatred.

For a more in-depth analysis of the legal landscape regarding hate speech in the Czech Republic, please see our companion report: *Prosecuting Digital Antigypsyism: A Policy Guide for the Czech Republic*.

Limitations of the Project

The main limitation of the project was that a lot of time was spent on the trial-and-error process of mostly inexperienced volunteers attempting to find the right kind of hate speech to report. Additionally, the nature of volunteering means the volunteers were doing this work in their free time, so engagement with the project naturally waxed and waned.

The conclusions about the clustered content which have been drawn by the project manager are mostly qualitative, which in large part is related to the nature of what was discovered. As can be seen from some of the examples listed below in the section on criminal

complaints, Roma were sometimes targeted as part of a wider list of other hated groups, seemingly depending on what provoked the hate speech, which could be inferred from media outputs either shared or referenced or commented on by the suspected perpetrators.

The final limitation was the need to ensure comments were preserved online in their original setting for the purposes of filing criminal complaints at a later stage. This means the volunteers did not attempt to track the performance of the social media companies in responding to reported content, but just saved the links to the content and screenshots of it to better support legal action.

ONLINE HATE SPEECH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

As recently as 2022, no less an authority than the Czech Constitutional Court has confirmed that it is necessary to prevent hate speech from making its way into the online environment and to punish those who spread it when it does appear. The court made that statement when rejecting a complaint from an Internet user who had been convicted and sentenced for posting hateful commentary underneath an online local news article featuring the photographs of the new first-grade classes in the town of Teplice; the class he commented on included Romani and other non-white children, and his words implied they should be gassed to death.²

The plaintiff claimed his comment had been intended as a commentary, a “joke”, and a statement of political disagreement that was protected by the right to freedom of speech, but the court disagreed. In a previous finding from 2019, the Constitutional Court had already opined that such comments posted to online

discussion forums or social media represent a “*technically specific way to do political battle that is inadmissible and easily comparable to the instruments used by previous totalitarian ideologies*”.³ While freedom of speech is guaranteed by Article 17 of the Czech Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, the case law is clear that **not all speech enjoys protection**.

Hate speech online can also involve the posting of video content in order to wage online “war” against those considered undesirable (e.g., immigrants or Romani people), including faked content produced for the purpose of discrediting or maligning individuals or groups in the eyes of the public. The social media site Facebook has been a particular venue for hate speech for decades now; a recent review of several years of first-instance court decisions on such crimes by the Office of the Public Defender of Rights (the ombudsman) revealed that 83% of them had been committed on Facebook.⁴



83%

In 2020, the ombudsman reported that just one-third of the first-instance courts in the country had handled cases of online hate speech, even though instances of such

speech have been increasing, and that most prosecutions were only being brought because the speech came to the attention of the media. There is a way to report such crimes

2 Czech News Agency, Romea.cz, “Czech Constitutional Court rules against hatred on the Internet in case involving threats against children”, 4 January 2022. Available [here](#); accessed 5 September 2023.

3 Constitutional Court finding dated 2 April 2019, sp. zn. III. ÚS 3439/17.

4 Press Release, Office of the Public Defender of Rights, Czech Republic, “Veřejný ochránce práv přezkoumává judikaturu týkající se nenávistných projevů na internetu”, 22 May 2020. Available [here](#); accessed 5 September 2023.

online through the government-run Citizens' Portal (*Portál občana*), but people rarely do so.⁵ Former ombudswoman Anna Šabatová had paid particular attention to the issue, which she considered exceptionally grave, since 2016, and her successor said he believed the COVID-19 pandemic was creating fertile ground for people to abuse the online space to commit the crime of hate speech and, concerningly, to prepare to commit this crime offline as well.⁶

The Office of the Public Defender of Rights reviewed 47 first-instance decisions about online hate from January 2016 to June 2019 and found that 94% of such speech was perpetrated by men who are not members of any minority and that 91% had no prior criminal record. Where cases were brought, 91% of them ended

in convictions. The most frequent punishments handed down were suspended prison sentences (of 10 months, on average) during a probation period (of 2 years, on average) as well as fines. The courts also confiscated computers and ordered perpetrators to do community service. The crime that was most frequently committed fell under Section 356 of the Penal Code; that of **inciting hatred against a group or inciting limitations on the rights and freedoms of a group**, with almost half of the verdicts (49%) being handed down for those offences.⁷

In January 2020, then-ombudswoman Anna Šabatová made recommendations for addressing hate speech online to various ministries, the police, the courts, prosecutors, and the Czech Republic's agencies for funding scientific research.

These recommendations included:

- unifying various databases on criminal activity;
- analysing misdemeanour instances of such speech;
- analysing case law on such crimes;
- ensuring the Penal Code includes protections for vulnerable groups victimised by hate crimes of all kinds;
- campaigning against hate online among children and youth;
- training criminal justice authorities on the issue of hate crime generally;
- including this subject in the research performed by the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention;
- supporting the development of instruments to track hate speech on social media;
- promoting the online filing of reports of such crime through the Citizens' Portal, and;
- updating the Interior Ministry's own online content regarding bias crime and extremism to include hate speech online as a phenomenon.⁸

⁵ See: <https://obcan.portal.gov.cz/prihlaseni>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

EXISTING EFFORTS TO COMBAT HATE SPEECH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

In addition to the underused portal mentioned above, there is another online option: Operation STOPonline.cz.⁹ Members of the public can report instances of unlawful online content on this website, including crimes falling under Section 356 of the Penal Code, where the key point is that the incitement takes place publicly. This includes the virtual realm as well as print, film, radio, or television.¹⁰

As well as online reporting, there are offline efforts to fight hate speech. Hate Free Culture¹¹ is an initiative, funded by Norway Grants and implemented by the section of the Minister for Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Legislation at the Office of the Czech Government¹², that endeavours to promote a culture of compassion, tolerance, and understanding. The project has undertaken research into Internet use and reports on victimised communities and their struggles.¹³

When it comes to legal action, the In IUSTITIA nonprofit organisation¹⁴ is the main entity in the Czech Republic litigating and providing legal and social aid to hate crime victims.¹⁵ Importantly, In IUSTITIA tracks incidents which may

never be reported to police, creating a bank of information which is more extensive than police records. A trend noted by In IUSTITIA is that police tend not to pursue charges against the perpetrators of hate crimes of all kinds, including hate speech, unless pushed to do so by victims who can afford the energy and the time that it takes. This was highlighted by the case of Romani singer Radek Banga, who was subjected to a deluge of hate online in 2017 after he expressed his disagreement with a band known for hateful and xenophobic lyrics receiving a popular music award.¹⁶

Through its work, In IUSTITIA has noted a reluctance from many people targeted by hate speech to contact the police in the Czech Republic. This is often because they do not believe the police can help them with their situation, but also because they fear revenge from the perpetrator, distrust the police and criminal legal system, or do not have enough information about the process of reporting a crime. In In IUSTITIA's experience, criminal justice authorities frequently minimise the seriousness of hate speech and threats leading to **a lack of trust in the system on the part of the victims.**¹⁷

9 See: <http://www.internet-hotline.cz/>.

10 People in Need, "Co víte o projevech nenávisť v online prostoru?", 1 March 2016. Available [here](#); accessed 5 September 2023.

11 See: <https://www.hatefree.cz/>.

12 This position has not been a cabinet-level post since 2016. The findings of the survey are discussed [here](#).

13 See: <https://www.hatefree.cz/o-hatefree>.

14 See: <https://in-ius.cz/>.

15 People in Need, "Co víte o projevech nenávisť v online prostoru?", 1 March 2016. Available [here](#); accessed 5 September 2023.

16 František Bikár, Romea.cz, "Czech civil society prize goes to Romani musician Radek Banga for protesting music award to neo-Nazi band", 12 April 2017. Available [here](#); accessed 5 September 2023.

17 ROMEA, Romea.cz, "Hate violence and Romani people in the Czech Republic", 4 July 2014. Available [here](#); accessed 5 September 2023.

At the governmental level, the Czech Interior Ministry has developed a Concept for Combating Extremism and Prejudicial Hatred for 2021-2026 which includes among its aims the ongoing prevention of extremists from infiltrating the armed forces and police.¹⁸ That concept notes among the risks to the successful implementation of its mission that its various aspects could end up being implemented just formally and superficially. In the spring of 2020 there was a special “training of trainers” session at the Office of the Prosecutor General, led by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on “Hate Crime” in general, attended by representatives of the Supreme Court, the Interior Ministry, the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, the General Inspectorate

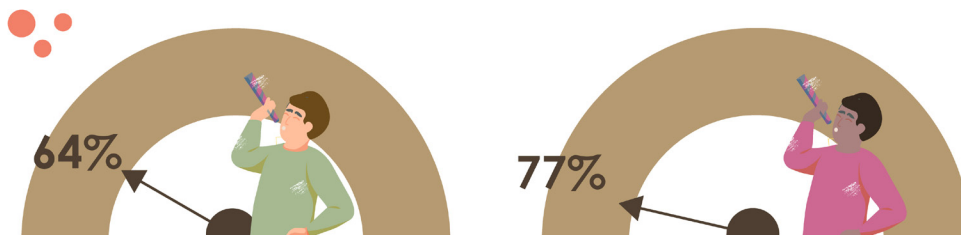
of the Security Forces, the National Headquarters against Organized Crime, the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, InIUSTITIA, and the Faculty of Social Sciences at Masaryk University. The trainers were to be supplied with a methodology, instructional materials, and assessment instruments for undertaking such trainings with others at a further four follow-up seminars that year, but only one was realised for prosecutors working for the Prague City Office of the Prosecutor and the Prague Regional Office of the Prosecutor. The other three were held in March 2021 for judges, prosecutors, and their assistants. An online seminar was also held about “Hate Speech on the Internet”, focusing on that evermore prevalent issue as well as on “revenge porn”, with content covering civil lawsuits, criminal cases, current law, evidentiary issues, and criminal liability.

Previous Findings on Online Hate Speech Against Roma

In 2014, a representative poll of 1,000 young people between the ages of 15 and 25 was conducted by the MEDIAN agency for the Hate Free Culture initiative.¹⁹ The poll about their experience of hate online found that more than half of the young people considered the hate speech they saw online to be so commonplace that there was no point in responding to it.

The poll also found that these Internet users held Romani people to a higher standard

than they did others, a fact that was tested by using questions randomly mentioning Romani ethnicity half of the time. When answering a hypothetical question about young people being noisy on a bus, 64% of the respondents said the situation would bother them, but when the question was asked about Romani youth behaving in such a way the number jumped up to 77%.



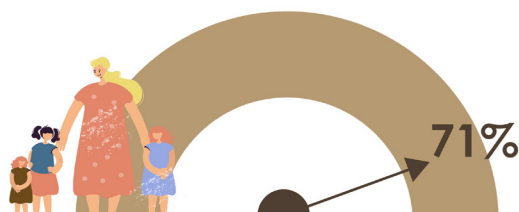
18 Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, *Koncepce boje extremismu a předsudečné nenávisti 2021-2026*, Praha: květen May 2021, schválena usnesením vlády č. 563 ze dne 21. června 2021 [Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, Concept for Combating Extremism and Prejudiced Hatred 2021-2026, Prague: May 2021, approved by Government Resolution no. 563, 21 June 2021].

19 Hate Free Culture, “*Všjekum: Mladí neměří Romům stejným metrem*”, 11 February 2015. Available [here](#); accessed 31 October 2023.

EXISTING EFFORTS TO COMBAT HATE SPEECH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Similarly, when asked if an impoverished mother of triplets deserves welfare, 71% of respondents said yes, but when asked if

an impoverished Romani mother of triplets deserves welfare that number fell to only 40% of respondents.



These responses differed with regard to visual imagery as well. An image of a stereotypically non-Romani worker was considered to show him “taking a break”, but a stereotypically Romani person in the same pose was more likely to be considered an image of a worker “slacking”. Likewise, an image of a girl being slapped on the street by an older man was considered an image of assault when the people were not stereotypically Romani, but if they were stereotypically Romani in appearance respondents were more likely to say the woman was being reprimanded by her husband.

This poll also confirmed previous research which found that non-Romani Czechs who have immediate, personal experience of Romani people assess such situations in a less stereotypical way than those who have never actually met anybody who is Romani. It also confirmed previous findings that young people who chiefly get their information from electronic communications with their family and friends and from social media are more likely to fall for hateful hoaxes and to be more critical of different groups, especially Romani people.

The analysis also revealed that the spread of hate and misleading information through social media was being facilitated by user passivity in the face of insulting content. More than

half of the respondents said they ignored such speech because they felt there was no point in reacting to it (55%); 35% of respondents even said they were afraid to go against mainstream opinion by reacting critically to such speech. Interestingly, respondents frequently said if they knew the correct counterargument to use then they would comment on hateful material, but they did not know how to go about it.

Sociologist Daniel Prokop also noted at the time that the comprehension of what constitutes a hate crime or racially motivated crime was quite variable among the respondents, bordering on total misunderstanding of this concept. Some said they believed a Romani person robbing a non-Romani taxi driver was an example of a “hate crime”, and they were more likely to say that Romani people are racist against non-Roma and that non-Roma are not racist. Those who could tell the difference between crimes motivated by financial gain and crimes motivated by hate said they believed both non-Roma and Roma are equally racist.²⁰

The survey was carried out again in 2021, and the results were compared with those from the 2014 survey. In general, the target group displayed a “positive shift in awareness regarding racism and awareness of hate violence”.²¹ Particular improvements could be seen in the respondents’

20 See: <https://www.vlada.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=126685&tmplid=50>.

21 Hate Free Culture, “Výzkum postojů mladých Čechů k lidským právům a právům obrožovaných menšin”, 18 October 2021. Available [here](#); accessed 31 October 2023.

awareness of what constitutes hate violence and response to offensive humour, however overall

responses continued to show a general trend of prejudice towards Romani people.

Cultural Longevity of Antigypsyist Stereotypes

Stereotypical views of Romani people have persisted for centuries in Europe and predate the development of the now-discredited theories about “race” that developed in the 19th and 20th centuries. These culturally engrained stereotypes are the building blocks of the hate that exists today and result in serious consequences, including the social exclusion of Romani people and their being targeted for violent attacks that can have fatal repercussions.

As such, antigypsyism is a current societal threat in Europe, as was underscored by an analytical, comparative study undertaken in 2020 by the Remember and ACT! (Re-ACT) Project of the International Network against Cyber Hate together with the LICRA organisation of France, the ROMEA organisation of the Czech Republic, and the SYNYO organisation of Austria. That study analysed online hate speech and demonstrated the strong ties between such output today and the practices that were once customary for Nazi propaganda. Ancient half-truths, myths, and stereotypes about Roma are now being recycled through mechanisms, reviving these culturally engrained attitudes.²²

The Re-ACT report found that antigypsyism online is on the rise and that the normalisation of hate speech against Romani people persists. Tropes that would only ever have been used by ultra-right groups on the fringe of society 30 years ago are now being used by ordinary people online, as well as by mainstream politicians. Fabricated allegations, hoaxes, and manipulative content all rely on the recipients already knowing cultural

stereotypes about Roma. Young social media users are also attracted to “humorous” racism; a mixture of humiliation, irony and mockery based on antigypsyist stereotypes. This includes the trend of denying or relativising facts about the genocide of Romani people during the Second World War.

The most prevalent stereotypes involve allegations that Romani people have an inborn predisposition to commit crime, or that they are being given unearned advantages compared to the rest of the population. Hoaxes about Romani people allegedly receiving medicines free of charge which non-Roma have to pay for, or drawing higher welfare benefits than non-Roma, are regularly recirculated online, including through chain e-mails. These attitudes are becoming part of a shared mainstream identity among non-Romani people and serve as a “lightning rod” for the frustrations these people feel about problems in Czech society, mainly those of an economic nature to which they see no solution.²³

The bigger-picture problem is that the Czech public still has minimal awareness of what human rights and non-discrimination entail, 33 years after the transition to democracy. Even public broadcast media does a sloppy job of explaining the difference, for example, between the Council of Europe and the European Commission to the public. While the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg is better known, and has helped dozens of people in the Czech Republic, even the media confuse it with the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg. Bodies such as the Council of Europe’s European Commission on Racism

22 Selma Muhic Dizdarevic, ROMEA, *Comparative report on the phenomena of online antigypsyism*, 2021, INACH, Re-ACT project. Available [here](#); accessed 26 October 23.

23 *Ibid.*

and Intolerance, which issued its General Recommendation on Combating Antigypsyism and Discrimination against Roma in 2011 and revised it in 2020, remain obscure to the Czech public; these expert bodies' recommendations to the Government are not taken seriously in

the public discourse and the public does not identify with them. This has made it easy for those promoting anti-EU rhetoric to imply that “human rights-ism”, as one former Czech President terms it, is an ideology coming from “the West” that is alien and deserves repudiation.

From Online to Offline Hate

In June 2023, a young Romani man died of injuries sustained during a street brawl in Brno, Czech Republic. Police apprehended a suspect whom they have only identified as a “foreign national”, but media outlets reported the suspect is Ukrainian. This sparked a huge amount of racist, xenophobic hate speech against Ukrainians by Romani social media users and was followed by further incidents during the summer including a riot in Krupka.²⁴ This led to some Romani social media users, including live streamers, broadcasting disinformation on sites such as Facebook. Police have begun investigations into, and prosecutions against, some of this hate speech.

Since Russia's fully fledged invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, an initial rush of sympathy for Ukrainians seeking temporary protection has transformed into aggressive dislike of such people among some sections of the population, including Romani people. The situation is

complex, however the link between online hate and real world violence is clear and not specific to this particular clash. The opportunity for extremist movements and populist groups to misuse situations such as this to spread disinformation and agendas via online platforms is huge, and there is a real risk of it transforming into wider, and more extreme, violent expression.²⁵

The Czech Interior Ministry's report on extremism for the first half of 2023 notes that anti-system movements have become the most prevalent threat in the country, and that social media is the main way they are organising and recruiting.²⁶ In this wider context, it is more important than ever to prevent online spaces harbouring racist, discriminatory content which can be posted and shared without impunity. If racists online become emboldened to spread and incite violence online, the risk increases that this will eventually be mirrored by real world hate crimes.²⁷

24 Romea.cz, ‘Czech Police investigating riot in Bílina, video from Brno of Roma “hunting” Ukrainians and shouting anti-Ukrainian slogans at night, and footage from the Krupka protest’, 19 July 2023. Available [here](#).

25 English.radio.cz, ‘Why have Ukrainian and Roma minorities been clashing’, 8 January 2023. Available [here](#).

26 Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, Security Policy Department. Prague, 1.8.2023, Manifestations of Extremism and Prejudiced Hatred, Summary Situation Report, First Half of 2023.

27 ERRC, *Challenging Digital Antigypsyism*, 13 April 2023. See [here](#).

HATE SPEECH FINDINGS

A total of **245 online comments and social media posts** were reported by Romani volunteers to the project manager which rose to

the level of hate speech. Some examples were graver than others, and not all of them were unequivocally criminal.

The working definition of hate speech used for this project was:

Public incitement of either discrimination, hatred, or violence against a group or its individual members already protected under the law as particularly vulnerable (due to their ability, their ethnicity, their gender, their religion, their sexual orientation, or their skin colour), where such incitement involves dehumanising language, or statements about the group's supposed inferiority, or slurs that are taboo.

The volunteers searched on the following words most often on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter:



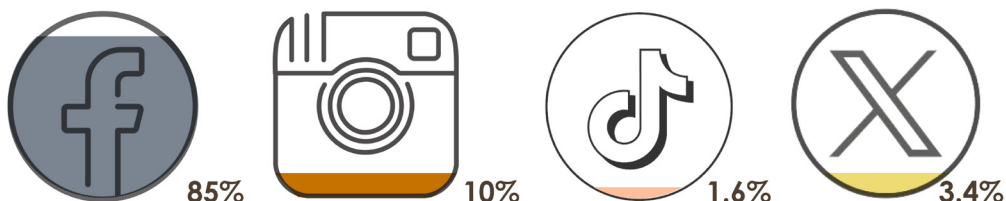
The following “dog whistle” terms were also observed as being used by racists to avoid censorship by administrators or to avoid possible prosecution when sharing their views about Roma and others, especially the socially marginalised:

- *Kofola* is a brand name for a traditional Czech soda drink which is like a cola and therefore dark brown in colour, and it has also become a slang phrase for Romani people.
- The most-used term is that of “inadaptables” (*nepřizpůsobivé*), which dates back to the influence of Nazi pseudo-science on Czech speakers and is even used by the mainstream media.

HATE SPEECH FINDINGS

- Another such term is *morgoš*, an intentionally distorted version of the more recognisable slang term *cižoš* (“gyppo”).

The vast majority of this hate speech (approximately 90%) was monitored through Facebook, which is the most-used social media platform in the Czech Republic. A great deal of activity there can be hidden in the “closed groups” used by many people to express their frustrations. Instagram came in second place, followed by Twitter and TikTok. The volunteers did not search on any other social media platforms. The volunteers also followed discussions on Czech daily news sites and other web pages.



The **245 examples** break down as follows in terms of content clusters:

- **88** hateful comments circulating **anti-Romani stereotypes** (Roma are all on welfare, Roma don't work, Roma have as many as 10 children, Roma are criminals, etc.);



In this example, the user Dagmar Paskova says Romani people are “not human beings” because they are work-shy, they do not want to work, and all they want is welfare. She then says they should “go back where they came from”. Somebody with a non-Czech surname responds that she should “go back where she came from” and a third person responds to tell the second person to “go back to Ukraine”.

- **43** hateful comments focusing on refugees and on Romani people. In these comments, people compared the Roma to non-white refugees, or insulted refugees in general, or insulted Romani Ukrainian refugees specifically (for example, “Those black fucks should all go back where they came from...”);



The user Libor Jahoda says “Gypsies” should be deported to Russia, where they will “know what to do with them”. He is sharing an article in which activists are calling on the Romani minority in the Czech Republic to aid with housing Romani Ukrainians seeking temporary protection. This is one of the comments that the project filed a criminal complaint about.

- 42 hateful comments targeting Romani people in the context of the Second World War (comments about annihilating Roma, denying that the Holocaust of the Roma happened, or expressing sympathy with the Nazis);

All of these comments are about the Holocaust, Jews, and Roma. The **first comment** is complaining that the Theresienstadt memorial is allegedly being neglected in favour of memorials to places where Romani people were in concentration camps, asking rhetorically: “Who will visit a memorial to the gypsies? Nobody, least of all the gypsies themselves.”



The **second comment** alleges that the place being called a concentration camp was in fact “just” a labour camp and that this could only happen in the Czech Republic, adding that “The Gypsies can get away with anything, they basically already have communism.”

The **final comment** says “If the jews weren’t such beasts, it would never have occurred to anybody to build extermination camps and the gypsies would have lived. It’s terrible where the hunt for the evil jews got to. Most of the ‘Jews’ killed on the lists were just jews according to the Nuremberg Laws. Disgusting.” The use of the lower case is probably intentional.



This comment is about the concentration camp at Lety u Písku, where Romani people were imprisoned, and the user has tagged the Czech Government

Human Rights Commissioner, the Czech Government and ROMEA: “It was a labour camp, not a concentration camp. I get it, though, for the gypsies, work is the same as death.”

- **26** hateful comments focussing on the use of the term “Gypsy” (in Czech, *Cigán*, in Slovak, *Cigán*) vs. the term “Roma”. *Cigán* is a racial slur. The main shared idea was that these people derided the word “Roma” and pointed the finger at “Gypsies”, whom they understood to be criminals, drug users, etc. A key topic was that the word “Gypsy” is the correct term to use, in their view. Intentional use of the lower case is a sign of disrespect for the idea that these people are their own ethnic or national group;

Odpověď uživateli @CT24žive

Měla říct, že to je prostě vtíp.
Mimo to, cikán krade od pradávna - věděli jste třeba, že v dřívějších dobách měli v kmenu povolání zloděj koní? Dělá se z toho moc velké haló. Já třeba zbožňuju černý humor a ten je mnohdy mnohem horší, než tenhle čajíčkový fór...

8:59 dop. · 5. 3. 2021 · Twitter for Android

This comment says, in part, “the gypsy has stolen since time immemorial, did you know, for example, that in the old days they had the profession of horse thief in their tribe?”

- **26** of the hateful comments were about different controversies which have been publicised involving Romani people (the 2021 case of the police killing of Stanislav Tomáš, the case of interethnic violence between Czech people and Roma at a swimming pool in Dubí in 2022, cases of (alleged) Ukrainian nationals assaulting Romani people in 2023).

This reaction is to an article in the tabloid *Blesk* about the killing of Romani man Stanislav Tomáš. The first comment questions whether the death was a result of the police intervention against him. The third comment does the same and adds:

joun: On zemřel po zákroku policie? To už takto rozhodl soud? Pokud ano, potom by název článku odpovídal, ale pokud ne, tak je to zpráva zavádějící a stejně podněčující jako v USA senátorka Watersová.

(24. 07. 2021 17:22) reagovat

fromodyn: Autor příspěvku dlouhodobě nerespektoval pravidla diskuse...

(25. 07. 2021 07:14) reagovat

Anonym: "..., který zemřel po zásahu policie". Proc porad vytahujete tuhle lez. Fetak se predavkoval a ted se za tim hleda buh vi col. Delaji z nej svatouska jen proto, ze to byl cigos. Tenhle byl, stejne jako ten cernossekej recidivista a fetak, problem pro spolecnost a bez nich bude svet hezci. A jeste by me zajimalo, jestli nekdo z tech jeho pribuznych co ho tak oslavujou, zaplati majitelum tu rozflakany auta.

(24. 07. 2021 16:25) reagovat

“Why do you keep recycling this lie? A drug addict overdosed and now everybody is looking for God knows what behind it. They’re making him a saint just because he was a gyppo. He was a problem to society just like that black recidivist and drug addict [*this is a reference to George Floyd in the US*] and the world is better without either of them. What I want to know if is if the relatives of [Tomáš] who are celebrating him will pay the owners of the cars he damaged.”

- **20** of these hateful comments were about the case of burn victim Natálka Kudriková and the early release from prison in 2023 of two of the four neo-Nazi arsonists who set her family’s home on fire in 2009.²⁸ Their release sparked an enormous wave of emotion on social media and Natálka was the target of a great deal of hate speech.

²⁸ Radio Prague International, 16 May 2023, “Arsonists guilty of firebomb attack on Roma home get early release”. Available at: <https://english.radio.cz/arsonists-guilty-firebomb-attack-roma-home-get-early-release-8783171>, accessed 5 September 2023.



This is a comment reacting to the news that two of the four neo-Nazi arsonists responsible for committing arson and maiming Natálie Kudriková for life have been paroled. The user posts “I don’t get why they were imprisoned at all if they just wanted to give their suntanned fellow-citizens another dose of treatment...”

None of the hate speech identified by volunteers was reported to those administering the sites where it was found or to the social media companies as violating community standards. This is because when such speech is removed, evidence of it disappears and so evidence for legal action also disappears. Just one of the criminal cases made it to a phase of prosecution in which the perpetrator was required to delete his posts and did in fact do so (the “Guru Smok” case described below).

Criminal Complaints Filed

Out of all the identified hate speech, criminal complaints were filed against **10 individuals** for multiple instances of hate speech online. Although hateful comments were abundant, they were frequently expressed as personal opinions using passively voiced language and often did not rise to the level of speech that can be criminally prosecuted.

These complaints have so far resulted in:

- ONE** prosecution resulting in conviction and a suspended prison sentence.
- ONE** investigation resulting in a misdemeanour proceeding and fine.
- ONE** investigation resulting in no charges filed at any level.
- SEVEN** prosecutions still underway as of the time of writing.

Nine of the complaints were in relation to instances of hate speech found on Facebook and one was found on TikTok. More than one post was used as evidence for most of the complaints, and those posts can be broken down as follows:

- 8 responses to mainstream (not tabloid) media content
- 3 responses to content shared by SPD chair Tomio Okamura

HATE SPEECH FINDINGS

- 3 responses to other Facebook users
- 2 suspects responding to their own post
- 4 posts with no links to any online content
- 1 post on a TikTok page sharing media
- 1 post sharing content from a fringe website page that translates as “No Political Correctness”
- 1 post sharing content from a fringe website page that translates as “Beautiful World”
- 1 post sharing content from a website page called novinkov.cz, which is designed to be mistaken for the mainstream media outlet novinky.cz
- 1 post to the Facebook page of a local police department
- 1 post to the Facebook page of the Blesk tabloid






Perpetrators subject to criminal complaints

Guru Smok: This Facebook profile attacks not just Romani people, but refugees of any kind, including Ukrainians. The criminal complaint against him was filed on the basis of more than one instance of hate speech:

3 February 2021	 <p>So let's start shooting them already !!! Then those smokes won't come here anymore.</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on a post shared by the chair of the fascist SPD political movement, Tomio Okamura on Facebook.
28 January 2022	 <p>He's afraid to say let's shit on the gypsies and send them the gas chambers? Let's put Auschwitz back into operation and we'll find these fuckers there !!!! Death to all gypsies.</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on a post shared by Okamura on Facebook.
21 April 2022	 <p>They should shoot those black swine dead!!!! Death to all gypsies.</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on an online reportage published by the CNN Prima News server on Facebook.
7 May 2022	 <p>We have to shoot them all and torture this idiot to death.</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on a post shared by Okamura on Facebook.
	 <p>I'd know how to shoot those repugnant smokes!!!</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on a post shared by CNN Prima News on Facebook.
30 May 2022	 <p>Kill all Ukrainians!!! Let Ukraine burn!!! Death to the filth.</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on another Facebook user's post.
31 May 2022	 <p>Fucking Ukrainian fuck off!!! I swear on everything that is sacred to me that I will personally start killing you all from now on!!! Death to Ukraine, death to the leeches!!!! Die already.</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on another Facebook user's post

The criminal complaint against Guru Smok made it to the prosecutor. The prosecution resulted in: “conditional suspension of the filing of a petition for punishment against the suspect, by order of the public prosecutor of 12 January 2023, which entered into force on 3 February 2023, whereby the suspect was placed on probation for a period of 8 months.”






Libor Jahoda: This Facebook user commented chiefly on the daily news, sharing articles on social media and expressing his opinions about them. His vocabulary was very racist and he used language full of stereotypes about Roma, refugees, and Ukrainians as well as multiple emojis. He was easily identifiable as residing in Ostrava and working as a concierge and security guard for the DEFENDIT agency.

2 April 2022	 <p>Well yeah, the gyppos are afraid for their welfare! 🤔</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on a post shared by the idnes.cz news server on Facebook.
15 April 2022	 <p>Deport the Gypsies to Russia. They know how to deal with them there. 🇷🇺🇷🇺🇷🇺🇷🇺🇷🇺</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on a post shared by the idnes.cz news server on Facebook.
23 May 2022	 <p>Send them back to Hungary or Ukraine! All they want is welfare!!! 🇮🇪🇮🇪🇮🇪🇮🇪</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on a post shared by the news server novinky.cz on Facebook.
24 May 2022	 <p>Well finally somebody has started to do something with these leeches taking the piss!!! It's not our government though!!! 🇮🇪🇮🇪🇮🇪🇮🇪</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on a post shared by the idnes.cz news server on Facebook.
2 June 2022	 <p>Well of course. Those lazy gypsies taking the piss again!!!</p> <p>Like • Reply • Message • 10m</p>	Comment on a post shared by the news server novinky.cz on Facebook.

This user was not prosecuted for a crime, but was fined through a misdemeanour proceeding. The amount of this fine is still unknown at the time of writing.


HATE SPEECH FINDINGS

Mirek Opava: The user Mirek Opava publishes opinions about dark-skinned inhabitants of the Czech Republic, Roma, and Ukrainians to his Facebook profile. He resides in Prague.

18 November 2020		The Table is Set [tv program] (smilers) is a retard contest once more!!! A Ukrainian, a gyppo, a Slovak and a Mongolian with the most drugged-out presenter in the world!!! The Ukrainian says homemade noodles?? I'm puking! Execute them!!! Like • Reply • Message • 10m	Post on Facebook.
5 May 2022		Gypsies from UA are complaining about all they get for free?? Execute them!!! Like • Reply • Message • 10m	Post on Facebook.
5 May 2022		Exactly!!! Syphilitic fuckers, pussy eaters!!! Filth factory. Sons of whores, trash, exterminate them!!! Like • Reply • Message • 10m	Reply to a comment on the above post.
11 May 2022		Fuck off black gypsy fuckers, UA. Like • Reply • Message • 10m	Post on Facebook.
2 June 2022		Stinking gypsies from Ukraine!!! Execute them!!! Dirty sons of whores!!! They need to die!!! Like • Reply • Message • 10m	Post on Facebook.

In the case of this user the prosecution was discontinued because, as the police wrote, “no facts justifying the initiation of a criminal prosecution could be established.”

FILEE: The user calling himself FILEE responded to a TikTok post on the ROMEA organisation’s account. The original post was about using modern technology to depict what it was like at the WWII-era concentration camp for Roma in Lety u Písku. The video describes cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment as well as the torture of the concentration camp prisoners, most of whom were Romani, based on actual historical events.

20 May 2023		Super, too bad it's not still happening today... Like • Reply • Message • 10m	Reply to ROMEA's TikTok post.
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In order to retain evidence of this crime, the administrators of the account have no choice but to leave the post up. As this prosecution is still underway, there is no further information to report as of the time of writing.

Krtek Diktátor: A user who calls himself Krtek Diktátor (“The Dictator Mole”) commented on a public Facebook post shared from the Facebook page of news server Extra.cz. The post shared an article about the conditional early release of the Vítkov arsonists, who are the perpetrators of a racially-motivated arson attack on a Romani family in Vítkov, Opava district in 2009, during which a two-year-old girl, Natálka, suffered burns over 80% of her body.

16 May 2023

And how many animals did those brown golden ones kill, how many dogs and cats did they turn into lard, and nobody does anything, how many of them did they torture? These monsters from Pakistan deserve nothing good, I don't care about some Natálka...

Like • Reply • Message • 10m

Comment on a post by news server Extra.cz on Facebook.

As this prosecution is still underway, there is no further information to report as of the time of writing.

Michal Aris: The user Michal Aris posted several defamatory posts against Roma on his Facebook profile, according to which he lives in Frýdek-Místek.

Aris publicly commented on a Facebook post by the *Mimoňové* page, which shared an article from the daily newspaper Extra.cz informing the public that burn victim Natálka is afraid of the arsonists who have been released because they caused her serious, lifelong health problems through their criminal deed. The Facebook page copied the headline of the article, which was “Burn victim N. is afraid of the arsonists who were released: Her mother says she is taking antidepressants and refusing to leave her room” and attached a photograph of the family.

At issue was the conditional early release of the perpetrators of the racially motivated arson against a Romani family in Vítkov, Opava district in 2009, during which Natálka, as a two-year-old, suffered burns over 80% of her body and who now suffers from health repercussions that will last the rest of her life.

12 May 2023

I'm not surprised she's afraid, after all, they bungled it.

Like • Reply • Message • 10m

Comment on a post on the Mimoňové Facebook page

As this prosecution is still underway, there is no further information to report as of the time of writing.

Michal Krčma: This user shared an article from the *Bezpolitickékorektnosti.cz* website entitled; “Gypsies are able to afford almost anything; the system discriminates against decent people, senior citizens and children” and comments on it, publicly calling for Roma to be sent to the gas chambers and therefore be annihilated or murdered.

HATE SPEECH FINDINGS

9 December 2019

Send them to the gas chambers, every last one.

Like • Reply • Message • 10m

Right now!!!

Like • Reply • Message • 10m

A post on Facebook sharing an article from Bezpolitickekorektnosti.cz titled: "Gypsies are able to afford almost anything; the system discriminates against decent people, senior citizens and children".

Comment on his own post.

As this prosecution is still underway, there is no further information to report as of the time of writing.

Petr Szweda: This user from Karviná commented on a publicly accessible and visible status update on the Facebook profile of the Karviná Municipal Police. The post regarded a monitoring operation in one of the city's municipal departments with photographs attached from which it was clear that the persons photographed were Roma.

20 June 2023

It takes a civil war, like in Yugoslavia. We should murder this filth!!!

Like • Reply • Message • 10m

Comment on a post on the Karviná Municipal Police's Facebook page.

As this prosecution is still underway, there is no further information to report as of the time of writing.

Yemi Tofuk [*Translator's Note: This is a joke identity meaning "I Don't Care" in Czech*]: This user posted a racialised comment beneath a publicly available post by the Blesk.cz tabloid's Facebook profile. The original post to which the suspect was reacting was an article about the Vítkov arsonists, as described above, being released after serving just two-thirds of their sentences.

12 May 2023

I don't get why they were imprisoned at all if they just wanted to give their untanned fellow-citizens another dose of treatment...

Like • Reply • Message • 10m

Comment on a post on the Mimoňové Facebook page

As this prosecution is still underway, there is no further information to report as of the time of writing.

Vigo Karpatský: This user posted a call for Romani people to be murdered and defamed them as an ethnic group by comparing them to insects (cockroaches) beneath a status update on the Facebook page “*Krásně je na světě*” [Beautiful World] of an article about the Romani burn victim Natálka.

The article beneath which the discussion was held on that Facebook page was published on 14 January 2023 on the novinkov.cz portal with the headline “*Mother of burn victim Natálka does not want arsonist to leave prison. She is afraid and can't get a good night's rest*”. The article responded to information about the opportunity for conditional early release of the perpetrators of the racially motivated arson attack on a Romani family in Vítkov (Opava district) in 2009. Beneath this post expressing sympathy with the family a discussion developed to which the suspect contributed his remarks.

15 February 2023

No, they weren't even legal occupants of that house, the old man was avoiding doing time in prison, so he was a wanted man and according to witnesses, they first brought their things out of the house during the fire and only then that little chicory [gypsy] once she'd been nicely baked.

Like • Reply • Message • 10m

when exterminating cockroaches one also does not wait until they're mature.

Like • Reply • Message • 10m

Comment on a post on Facebook.

Reply to the following comment on the above post: "What does any of that have to do with the horror Natálka experienced, she was a tiny baby? Many people have no compassion today".

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

For detailed recommendations, please see our companion report: *Prosecuting Digital Antigypsyism: A Policy Guide for the Czech Republic*.

This project aimed to actively address hate speech online in the Czech Republic, primarily through documenting and prosecuting that content where possible. From all of the hate speech identified by the Romani volunteers, a number of the most egregious examples were deemed suitable to pursue legal action against. As a result of the project activities, criminal complaints were identified and filed against **10 individuals** for posting hate speech online.

As of the publication of this report, one of those criminal complaints had made it to the prosecutor and the perpetrator was forced to remove the content and was placed on probation for eight months. Another was classed as a misdemeanour offense and was fined; one was dismissed; while the rest remain outstanding. It is not exactly clear why different prosecutors declined to prosecute some of this speech or recommended it be classified just as misdemeanour offenses.

The content in these cases was largely posted by people who used nicknames online in an effort to hide their real identities. From their language use and names, including the nicknames, it seems they are all male or want to appear male. Many included Roma in a list of several other groups whom they found objectionable because of their appearance or origin; they were motivated by general racism and xenophobia as well as antigypsyism more specifically.

Facebook was the social media of choice for 90% of the users, with one hateful post even posted on the Facebook page of a local police

department. Much of the hate speech seems to have been an immediate response to media content that sparked a reaction. Notably, 20 instances of hate speech against Romani people were prompted by news of the conditional early release of two neo-Nazi arsonists with whom the social media users seemingly identify. The fact that their calls for more violence against Romani people in this context were allowed to be published without the social media companies themselves flagging them is concerning. Four of the seven suspects whose prosecutions are still pending posted this kind of content.

While this project focused primarily on identifying instances of online hate speech that met the threshold for legal action, the Romani volunteers also unearthed a plethora of hate speech and discriminatory content which did not directly incite violence but which is still damaging to society. The majority of the content identified was not violent, but sharing discriminatory language and opinions creates a toxic, racist online environment with the potential for that hate to spill into the real world. The ERRC has been exposing the link between online hate speech and real world violence for a number of years, and has seen repeatedly how a lack of consequences emboldens racist users to share hate speech online and, ultimately, offline. By documenting the various types of hate speech and the ways in which users take advantage of the apparent anonymity of online spaces, as well as by addressing it through all available channels, projects such as this can begin to fight back against the overwhelming racism online.

None of the evidence could have been found or criminal complaints filed without the work of the Romani volunteers who undertook the search through such hateful and confronting content online. It is always difficult to evaluate how people are actually impacted by doing work of this kind, which exposes them to hate targeting a group of which they are a member. Most of the Romani student

volunteers were already accustomed to racist stereotypes before the project began, much like their peers from the research from 2014 who found such language so common that they considered it a waste of time to respond to it. Importantly, the Romani volunteers believe in the value of undertaking this kind of work despite the plethora of online antigypsyism and are willing to do so.

”

I think that this project is really important because it shows how dangerous the internet can be. I'm really surprised that there is so much hate speech against Romani people, especially now when Roma refugees from Ukraine are coming to Czech Republic. Sometimes I feel that the cruelty of those people who post hate speech on Facebook is coming from the frustration of their own life. It needs to be reported more and it needs to be controlled more from those social sites. I think there need to be more projects like this one.

Veronika Banová
Project Volunteer and Law student at the University of West Bohemia.





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