



DISINFORMATION TARGETING THE ROMA COMMUNITY IN POLAND – a report

This policy brief presents the findings of the world's first study on gender-based disinformation targeting the Roma community.

An analysis of 150 press articles and social media posts from 2019 to 2024 revealed that as many as 26.6 per cent of them contained disinformation. The study reveals a fundamental gender divide in the narratives:

- Women are deliberately portrayed through the prism of social benefit fraud and child neglect.
- Men are systematically criminalised and portrayed as a direct threat and a source of aggression.

Local and national politicians play a key role in the escalation of harmful messaging, whilst the lack of proper moderation in digital media exacerbates hate speech.

Context and methodology

The Roma community in Poland has for years faced a low level of social acceptance, a situation which intensified following the influx of Roma refugees from Ukraine after 2022.

Research methodology:

- Research sample: 150 press articles and Facebook posts from the last 5 years.
- Crisis periods examined: The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2021), the escalation of the war in Ukraine (from 2022) and the campaign ahead of the parliamentary elections in Poland (2023).

Key indicator: 40 out of the 150 messages analysed (26.6 per cent) were classified as disinformation.



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Key findings and analysis of narratives

GENDER-BASED DISINFORMATION

WOMEN

- Child neglect
- Fraudulently claiming 500+/800+ benefits

MEN

- Threats and aggression
- Crime

Segregation of disinformation narratives by gender

- Portrayal of women: Stereotyping centred on alleged abuse of social benefits, fraudulently claiming financial assistance and inadequate childcare (key case: the events in Przemyśl in 2022).
- Portrayal of men: Portraying them as a physical threat, linking them to organised crime and depicting them as prone to violence (key cases: Mielec 2021, Wrocław 2020).

Rhetorical and visual mechanisms

- **Labelling and ethnicisation of crimes: Emphasising ethnic origin exclusively in the context of negative events and employing an ‘us versus them’ dichotomy.**
- **Visual manipulation: Widespread use of archival, exoticising stock photographs (e.g. of Roma caravans) unrelated to the content of the articles.**
- **Profile of authors and commenters: A clear predominance of men amongst those spreading fake news and authors of hateful comments.**



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The role of the political elite and the media

Local and national politicians have repeatedly shared unverified claims, thereby lending them legitimacy (e.g. the situation in Puławy or the viral piece of disinformation about a 'stolen tank', which reached as far as the Office of the President of the Republic of Poland). This phenomenon is exacerbated by the complete absence or extreme ineffectiveness of moderation in the comments sections on Facebook and news websites.

You can find the full report and a short video clip at
fundacjadownapograniczu.pl/en/roma-shield-report/

Should you have any further questions, we remain at your disposal and would be happy to provide advice – either by email or during a brief online meeting.

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