

ROMA SHIELD

Gender- and Identity-Based Disinformation Towards Romani People In Poland



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Introduction

This report was created as a part of the project “*Roma Shield—Protecting Romani Women And Men From Disinformation*”, funded by the Artemis Alliance coalition. The goal of this report is to identify the phenomenon of gender-based disinformation targeting women and men of Romani descent in Poland. It is the second such publication in Europe. In 2022 Rosalina Todorova and Dr. Lilia Yakova published “*Care For Truth Against Fake News And Anti-Roma Disinformation*”, analysing the issue of disinformation surrounding the Romani community in Bulgaria.

Disinformation is being discussed more frequently and more extensively in relation to individuals, whole communities, and specific events. In recent years we have been faced with numerous cases of disinformation—a case in point being the context of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic or escalation of Russian attacks on Ukraine. In Poland this problem has also affected the LGBTQ+ community and economic migrants, and war refugees coming to Europe. Disinformation and its products, such as fake news, commonly arise during crises and gain traction online. It often amplifies negative perceptions of the events and people it targets. Disinformation is especially damaging when it preys upon the most vulnerable populations prone to social exclusion who struggle to oppose it. The Romani people are one such group, widely considered the most heavily persecuted ethnic minority in the European Union.

In this report we focused mainly on identifying gender – and identity-based disinformation (GIBD) in Polish public discourse. Our study analyzes the content of selected media publications from the past five years along with their public reception, as expressed in the comments section under the articles in question or on the respective media outlets’ Facebook page. This encompasses online commentary from both male and female politicians engaging in social media discussions about Romani people, who have proven to be highly influential in driving this public discourse.

This report is the first global study to investigate Roma-related disinformation by drawing a clear line between the false narratives aimed at Romani women and those targeting Romani men. The purpose of this distinction is to illustrate the complexity of the research topic thereby providing more precise strategies for combating disinformation targeting this community. Such efforts are critical, considering centuries of stereotyping, discrimination, and other – often dangerous – exclusionary practices directed at the Romani community.

In this report, we define disinformation—with a specific focus on gender- and identity-based disinformation—and present the underlying research methodology. As background to the study, we provide an overview of the Romani minority in Poland and the difficulties they face. We also present the research results and conclusions which, unfortunately, highlight the harsh reality of the problem. Disinformation, which reinforces age-old stereotypes about Romani men and women, is deeply rooted and pervasive in Polish public debate.

The guidelines presented in this report are primarily intended for Polish journalists covering political, social, or cultural issues. The report serves both newcomers to Romani culture and those with existing background knowledge. We believe our work will help build resilience against this phenomenon by helping readers to recognize gender- and identity-based disinformation, and ultimately preventing the creation and spread of harmful narratives.

Research Methodology

“ROMA SHIELD—Protecting Romani Women and Men from Disinformation” is an innovative research project aimed at a critical analysis of disinformation targeting Romani women and men. This is the first such initiative in Poland. However, Bulgarian researchers Rosalina Todorova and Dr. Lilia Yakova previously explored similar ground addressing false narratives about the Romani community in their qualitative study “*Care for Truth Against Fake News and Anti-Roma Disinformation.*”

This research is grounded in the spirit of Critical Disinformation Studies (Marwick, Kuo, Cameron & Weigel, 2021). This approach stems from Critical Race Theory (CRT) which conceptualizes “race” not as a biological fact, but as a socio-political construct. Consequently, “race” generates power relations, such as the systemic racism that underpins Western modernity (Mills, 1997, 2007, see also Baker, 2018 in the context of our region).

The concept of **Critical Disinformation Studies** has four pillars:

1. **Holistic contextualization;**
2. Identifying and understanding the role of **systemic inequality in disinformation;**
3. Identifying the influence of **structures and institutions** (cultural, social, economic or, technological) that **support disinformation** either directly or indirectly;
4. **Acting for change.**

Following these established guidelines we conducted our research and analyzed the gathered data. The initial step involved **identifying the sources of disinformation and collecting research material** from the Polish-language internet. We began this process by conducting targeted web and social media (Facebook) searches for the following keywords: “Romowie” (Roma), “Rom” (Romani man), “Romka” (Romani woman), “Cygan” (Gypsy), “Cyganka” (Gypsy woman), “Cyganie” (Gypsies).

According to the core principles of the holistic approach and the focus on systemic inequalities essential to critical disinformation theory, we concentrated on materials created during **moments of crisis, conflict or turning points** that took place over the last five years. Disinformation often originates in political circles and appear most often in turbulent circumstances. Social researchers and historians demonstrate that violence against minorities and the stigmatized frequently erupts during periods of heightened social tension (e.g., Stoler 2021 about colonialism, Zaremba 2012 about the post-war period in Poland, Tokarska-Bakir 2012, Gross 2008, Zawadzka 2023 about antisemitic attacks, Caban 2008, Kościańska

& Petryk 2022, Mirga 1997, 1998 about violence toward the Romani people, Girard 1991 about the mechanics of violence in times of crisis). We were particularly drawn to (1) **the COVID-19 pandemic** between 2020 and 2022, (2) **the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine** in February 2022 when Poland welcomed a large number of war refugees, and (3) the period of the **Polish Sejm and Senate elections** in 2023. Additionally we also analyzed collateral materials, such as those detailing regional or local crises, that were not directly linked to the aforementioned events. Our research also identified key sources of disinformation, mapping their possible ties (direct or indirect) to authority figures as well as social groups and actors across the spectrum of privilege.

After gathering the research material, we **analyzed the links**, which enabled us to establish political connections with other forms of disinformation (e.g., targeting LGBT people, or foreign men and women). Then, we conducted an **audience analysis**. As demonstrated by Jarkovská (2020:139), disinformation is designed to be attractive to specific groups, who can then use it for their own purposes (e.g., political).

Another stage of the research involved **analyzing the readers' responses**, which meant taking into consideration the gender of the online commenters. We were interested in who comments and on what subjects; therefore, we analyzed the relationship between gender, the topic, and the number of comments.

The next step was a **content analysis** that went beyond the scope of the discourse analysis conducted by Rosalina Todorova and Dr. Lilia Yakova (2022) in their report on disinformation in Bulgaria. We broadened the analysis by adding elements of **multimodal analysis** developed for disinformation research by Anna Wilson and colleagues (Wilson, Wilkes, Teramoto & Hale, 2023). Multimodal analysis examines not only text, but also, for comparison, other forms of **communication**, such as audiovisual materials containing images, audio tracks, videos and non-verbal signals. Due to project constraints, we focused solely on the analysis of photos accompanying articles or Facebook posts. Thanks to this multimodal approach, our team was able to identify the most vital elements of disinformation, which include: (1) visuals that distort the image of Romani men and women, aiming to stigmatize the Romani community; (2) mockery; and (3) fake news, or authentic news presented in a stigmatizing way (cf. the report on Bulgaria in Todorova & Yakova, 2022: 9). Additionally, we checked whether articles in media outlets or posts on social media were subject to content moderation in the case of negative comments, such as hate speech.

The last element of our analysis was **contextualization**, which involved situating the gathered research data within the context of Polish beliefs

about the Romani community (identified on the basis of existing literature, see e.g., Mirga & Mróz 1994, Talewicz-Kwiatkowska 2020, Kościańska & Petryk 2022, and the previous research experience of our team). These stereotypes include strong, prevalent beliefs about: (1) the hyperfertility and lewd sexuality of Romani women; (2) an inborn aggression (including sexual aggression) among Romani men; (3) the social maladjustment of the Romani people, including criminal tendencies; (4) a lack of formal education; and (5) a widely shared musical talent among both men and women. Such contextualization of our research outcomes will enable us to discuss pre-existing stereotypes and traditional forms of disinformation surrounding the Romani community in Poland (such as rumors, see Okley 1983). This will facilitate a better understanding of both local and global specificity of false information about Romani men and women, allowing for the precise identification of factors reinforcing disinformation. To establish a benchmark, we also analyzed situations involving positive comments on Romani men and women. We were curious whether these occurred primarily in the context of proliferating “positive stereotypes”, such as “all Romani women dance beautifully”.

The conclusions from this research will be used to foster changes in the perception of the Romani community in Poland and globally, providing practical guidance to combat disinformation in accordance with the principles of Critical Disinformation Studies and socially engaged research (Lassiter, 2010). We hope that, thanks to the team’s deep connections within the Romani community and the experience gained from the anti-discriminatory initiatives of the Dom Na Granicy Foundation, this research will help to halt the spread of false information harming the Romani people, as well as strengthen the Romani voice in Polish public and scientific communities (Fiałkowska, Garapich, & Mirga-Wójtowicz, 2018).

Romani Men And Women In Poland

Romani men and women are one of four ethnic minorities recorded as living in Poland as far back as the early 15th century AD. (Mróz, 2007: 88). During the last national census, Roma heritage was declared by 13,303 people (GUS Statistical Office, 2023: 113). However, other estimates say that there are between 25,000 and 30,000 people of Romani descent in our country (Roma Civil Monitor, 2022). Romani men and women currently live most commonly in the Lesser Poland, Silesian and Lower Silesian voivodships (GUS Statistical Office, 2011: 47).

Conventional classifications usually mention four main groups within the Romani community in Poland: the Polska Roma, Bergitka Roma, Kalderash, and Lovari (Mirga & Mróz, 1994: 108). Despite many similarities, these groups differ from each other. An important determinant of this diversity is the dialects of the Romani language they use and the ways they relate to *Romanipen*, the Romani customary law. This set of customary laws contains the most important rules that must be obeyed by an individual to be considered a member of the Romani people (Koper, 2020: 87-90). It mainly applies to formerly traveling Roma communities; however, today, among some people from sedentary groups, it is playing a more and more important role in the context of identification with the Romani community.

Differences among the various groups are also connected to their former life style. After World War II about 75% of the Romani people in Poland led a nomadic lifestyle (Bartosz, 1996: 5). In the 1960s and 1970s of the XX century this changed radically. Due to a “productivization” campaign started by the government in the 1950s, the whole Romani community settled down. This program included the sedentary group, the Bergitka Roma, who lived in the Low Beskids, Beskid Sadecki, the Gorce Mountains, the Tatra Foothills, and the Polish Spisz and Orava regions. As a consequence, an internal migration within the Romani groups took place, with people migrating for work to newly emerging production centers such as Nowa Huta in Krakow or the Upper Silesian Industrial Region (Mróz, 2007: 214–215).

The policy of the Polish government at the time permanently changed the lives of the Romani people, heavily influencing their relationship with the rest of the Polish nation. These relations had already been strained, and an compulsory settlement program only made them worse. The traditionally nomadic life style, which involved frequent changes of residence, had maintained a fundamental ethnic distance between the Romani minority and the Polish majority (Mróz, 1978). Compulsory settlement caused

hostilities to escalate, resulting in a series of anti-Romani pogroms, such as those in Konin and Oświęcim in 1981, or in Mława in 1991 (Kwadrans, 2004: 27).

After 1989, the question of status and rights of minority groups became one of the priorities for the newly formed government of the Third Polish Republic, particularly in the context of the accession process to the EU. Even before 2004, there were support initiatives, such as the Pilot Government Programme for the Roma Community in Lesser Poland for the period 2001-2003. Ethnic minority status is guaranteed to the Romani community by the Act of 6 January 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Languages (J. of L. No 17, item 141 as amended).

An important issue after 1989 became the international migration of Polish Romani men and women, usually to Western Europe, which sustains the transnational character of Romani communities in Europe (Fiałkowska, Garapich & Mirga-Wójtowicz, 2018). Simultaneously, a constant flow of Romani migration from Romania is significant for Polish Romani communities (Kościańska & Petryk: 2022). It influences changes within the community itself as well as relations with the rest of the Polish society. Furthermore, events such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the escalation of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 affect this community. Unfortunately, we still lack in-depth research that would enable us to comprehensively assess the current situation of Romani men and women in Poland.

However, there are governmental and non-governmental sources of information that fill this gap. During the pandemic, the issue of the digital exclusion of Romani children was addressed, and aid for the most destitute families was increased (Public Information Bulletin of the Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020). What is more, among the people who came to Poland from Ukraine after 24 February 2022, there were also members of the Ukrainian Romani community. It is estimated that in between 15,000 and 20,000 thousand people of Romani descent found refuge Poland (IOM, 2024: 7).

Unfortunately, reports from international NGOs mention cases of discrimination against Ukrainian Romani refugees at reception centers, offices and other public places (Amnesty International, 2022, IOM, 2024). As is the case with Polish Romani people, Ukrainian Romani men and women have been discriminated against and have become targets of information war that accompanies our eastern neighbor's armed conflict. Examples of this disinformation are presented in the subsequent parts of this report.

The sources of prejudice and discrimination against Romani people in Poland are often the popular opinions held about them. These have been

circulated for centuries and are well established as widespread stereotypes, heavily influencing the way this minority is commonly perceived today (Gerlich & Krzyżanowski, 2019: 25-26). Among the most common images of Romani men and women are that they are “lazy” or “loafers” and, consequently, that they exploit social welfare programs (Gerlich & Krzyżanowski, 2019: 34). Other opinions about the Romani people that are well established in Polish society concern criminality. As much as 67% of respondents believe that thievery and deceitfulness are common within the community (Bilewicz, Marchlewska, Soral & Winiewski, 2014).

It is worth mentioning that “positive” stereotypes¹, which we describe in detail in subsequent parts of this report, play a huge role in the process of developing an image of the Romani community. Despite their existence, the Romani community is the third least liked ethnic group, according to public opinion surveys conducted on ethnic Poles (Public Opinion Research Center CBOS, 2024). This situation not only facilitates the discrimination of this minority but also the uncritical acceptance of disinformation targeting them.

Despite the hundreds of years of the Romani community has spent in Poland, basic knowledge about them remains rather scarce. It is also often based on false information and stereotypes that have no basis in reality. What is more, many descriptions of the Romani community are antagonistic, focusing on the differences between ethnic Polish men and women and their Romani fellow citizens. This historical outline serves as an introduction to the report, which aims to shed light on the contemporary prejudices, stereotypes, and disinformation surrounding the Romani community present in Polish public discourse.

1 In this report the term “positive stereotypes” is placed in quotation marks since we share the opinion of anti-discrimination trainers that every stereotype is a simplification that generalizes reality and, consequently, leads to a false image of people and communities. For further reading, see: *Edukacja Antydyskryminacyjna. Podręcznik trenerski (Anti-discrimination Education. Trainers' Handbook)*, edited by M. Branka and D. Cieślukowska, Warsaw-Kraków: „Never Again” Association, 2023, p. 41-42.

What Is Disinformation?

The word “disinformation” comes from Russian, where it was created by adding a negative prefix “dis-“ to the word “information”. (dezinformatsiya). The word was most probably used before 1925 in the verb form “disinform”, to describe the act of deliberately giving someone misleading information. In Soviet Russia, this concept appeared in the context of secret police actions and later, after World War II, in reference to the Okhrana—the Tsarist institution responsible for tracking down political adversaries and organizing provocations. In Poland, the first definition of disinformation was printed in 1929 in an instruction manual for the Polish Army (Pepłoński, 2011: 335). In English, the word “disinformation” (as a translation from Russian) appeared in the American press thanks to a Soviet defector, Walter Krivitsky, a military intelligence officer who fled to the West in 1937. He mentioned disinformation, among other tactics, in his book *In Stalin's Secret Service*, first published in 1939. From his perspective, the primary role of disinformation was to undermine “the opponent’s moral state” (Krzywicki, 1998: 194).

The dynamic scientific and economic development in the 20th century, along with subsequent social changes, broadened the definition of disinformation, particularly thanks to the emergence of mass media. Disinformation is not merely a military term but also a tool used by governments, criminal groups, and businesses, including big corporations such as the ExxonMobil Corporation or major tobacco companies. According to a report by the World Economic Forum, one of the biggest risks in the coming years will be disinformation and its byproduct, so-called fake news or false information. According to the authors of the report, the most severe effects of disinformation will be deeper societal polarization, an increase in ideology- and worldview-based violence, and a rise in political repression (Global Risks Report, 2024).

In recent years, disinformation has been analyzed mostly from the point of view of artificial intelligence (AI). The development of AI and its growing availability have flooded the internet, and especially social media, with AI generated content (see Chen, Xiao & Kumar, 2023) frequently in the context of information wars. According to sociologist Lucie Jarkovská “disinformation is a part of what we call information war—a strategy aiming at producing an alternative reality within which the truth is subject to relativization and news can be trusted” (2020:139).

For the purposes of this report we use the definition of disinformation provided by the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA),

which claims that disinformation is “**false or misleading content that is disseminated with the intention of deceiving or seeking economic or political gains**” (European Commission, 2018).

Disinformation Against Minorities And Marginalized Groups

During the pandemic, there was a noticeable increase in the number of disinformation cases in Poland, and the same has been happening since the escalation of Russo-Ukrainian War. As a result of these events, numerous historical patterns of disinformation have been revived, including the scapegoat mechanism on which social tensions tend to focus. Scapegoating is crucial in times of tension, crisis, and conflict, as well as during election periods. In the face of danger, a community chooses a victim (a person or a group) who becomes the object of a group attack. The attackers believe the scapegoat is responsible for the difficult situation, and in order to fix it, believe they need to neutralize them. These neutralizing acts may include exclusion from social life, driving the scapegoat out, or lynching, which may cost the victims their lives. Historically, the role of a scapegoat was attributed to minorities—ethnic, national, religious, and sexual—and other discriminated or marginalized communities. In situations of heightened social tension and a general sense of danger, the scapegoat mechanism can be triggered rapidly, leaving minorities especially at risk of discrimination and violence. (see e.g., Stoler 2021 about colonialism, Zaremba 2012 about the post-war period in Poland, Tokarska-Bakir 2012, Gross 2008, and Zawadzka 2023 about antisemitic violence, Caban 2008, Kościańska & Petryk 2022, Mirga 1997, 1998 about anti-Roma violence, Girard 1991 about the mechanisms of violence in times of crisis).

A relevant case of disinformation from the past, which is still applicable, is the false information about the **Jewish community**. During the outbreak of the plague that decimated Europe in the 16th century, it was a popular belief that Jews were poisoning sources of drinking water. This belief led to a series of anti-Jewish pogroms (W. Laqueur, 2006).

In the case of the corona virus (COVID-19), there was prejudice against Asians (K. Dhanani & H. Franz, 2020). The most tragic case of disinformation in the 20th century was the policy of Nazi Germany against **Jews and other minorities**. Germans, humiliated by losing World War I and the subsequent hyperinflation crisis, found their scapegoats in the Romani people, among others. During World War II, the **Romani Holocaust** (Porajmos) took place. According to different sources, around 50 to 80% of the Romani population in Europe was murdered.

Before the Nazis began the mass murder of the European Jewish and Romani minorities, they carried out an Operation Aktion T4, which was

a campaign of involuntary euthanasia targeting people with physical and mental disabilities. The media played a key role in the process of dehumanizing the disabled, which was essential to gaining social acceptance for this program. Nazi propaganda systematically portrayed these people as “burden” for the society, suggesting that their existence served no purpose and their costs of living were too high. Aktion T4 is regarded as a trial stage that helped to perfect the “technology” of mass murder later used in concentration camps (Burleigh, 1994).

Another prime example of disinformation includes the myths surrounding **Black people**. In the USA, these include a supposed genetic predisposition to violence, which has been unfairly attributed to African Americans. False information targeting Black people has been, and still is, circulated by the media and some political groups. One of the best-known cases is a disinformation campaign from the 1990s in which the media and politicians spread a narrative about Black “superpredators”-juvenile Black criminals who were supposed to be especially brutal and dangerous. These false claims were used as an argument to advocate for stricter criminal laws and “tough-on-crime” youth policies, which led to a rise in the number of convicted and incarcerated individuals (Kochis, 2021). Other false claims asserted that Black people stole identities on a massive scale or that they were the main perpetrators of financial fraud. Such disinformation was used to build unjustified fear and prejudice against the Black minority (Kotlowitz, 1991). Some sources at that time falsely claimed that policies promoting racial equality and minority rights fueled the rise in criminality. These narratives were used to weaken support for anti-discriminatory policies and social assistance programs (Alexander, 2010). Recent research shows a considerable similarity between the situation of the Romani community in Europe and the Black minority in the USA (see e.g., Chang & Rucker-Chang, 2020; Imre, 2005; Rucker-Chang, 2021; West Ohueri, 2016; for a broader discussion, see: Kościańska & Petryk, 2022).

An example of a rumors that led to an escalation of violence against the Romani community in Poland was the case of Mława. In 1991, a young man of Romani descent caused a fatal car collision. The boy fled the scene, and although he later turned himself in, some Mława citizens decided that the justice system would not punish him appropriately. They decided to take revenge on the local Romani community² (Kościańska & Petryk, 2022; Mirga, 1997).

Another example involves the activities of certain Polish media outlets. In 2011, *The Kraków Gazette (Gazeta Krakowska)* published an article titled

2 For a broader discussion on the mechanisms of discrimination from words to violence, see Dąbrowska, Grabowska, & Kościańska (2015).

Kraków: Romowie rozbili obóz. Żywią się łabędziami? (Kraków: Roma Set Up Camp. Feeding On Swans?) (Agaciak, 2011). The author “suggested” that Romani children and adults were hunting and feeding on waterfowl, such as swans and ducks. The information about feeding on swans was never confirmed; police and municipal police patrols that checked the camp found no evidence supporting the claims of poaching. Despite this, the article was not removed, the false information was not corrected, and the clickbait title remained. Interestingly, similar rumors were also spread about Poles and Lithuanians in the UK. As a result, local communities organized vigilante patrols aimed at protecting local fowl against “barbarian” migrants. Such narratives about migrant communities from Central and Eastern Europe were spread regularly in the pre-Brexit period and reflected, perhaps partly fueled, anti-EU sentiment.

One of the most important modern examples is disinformation targeting **Muslim communities**. False information slandering Muslim men and women flooded the public debate after the Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in the USA and the UK in the early 2000s. The Muslim community became the victim of a deluge of false information as a result of the “war on terror” declared by Western powers. There were numerous attacks not only on Muslims but also on people with darker complexions and hair colors in the first decade of the 2000s, all as a result of social and media hostility. False information was spread by far right extremists and foreign agents whose intention was to polarize society (Lean, 2017). Likewise, since the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic was established in China, there have been many cases of prejudice, stigmatization, and violence against **Asian minorities** all over the world (Dhanani & Franz, 2020).

When Russia intensified its aggression against Ukraine in 2020, Poland also faced a migrant crisis on the border with Belarus. In the wake of the new refugee crisis connected with the war in Ukraine, Poland was flooded with a wave of misinformation about migrants and refugees, as well as the Romani community.

Gender- and Identity-Based Disinformation

Gendered disinformation is a specific form of disinformation in which false, misleading, or manipulated content specifically targets distinct gender categories, often aiming to reinforce gender inequalities or perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes. It is a phenomenon that combines aspects of both disinformation and gender-based hate speech. As with other forms, it occurs frequently online. Women are targeted particularly often by instances of gendered disinformation, especially those who actively participate in public life (U.S. Department of State, 2023). A prime example is the period leading up to the 2016 United States presidential election, when Hillary Clinton was running for office. False information circulating about her suggested she was involved in criminal activity (including the so-called “Pizzagate”). The content of these narratives frequently referenced the candidate’s gender, attempting to undermine her credibility by emphasizing a weakness that allegedly stemmed from the fact that she is a woman.

Gendered disinformation does not only target individuals; it also erodes trust in entire social groups. It creates a public debate space where women’s voices are less audible and less accepted. The consequences of such actions are long-term, leading to the exclusion of women from decision-making roles and the reinforcement of patriarchal social structures (Wardle, Derakhshan, Council of Europe, 2017, p. 37). Although gendered disinformation most commonly affects women, men can also fall victim to it. In these cases, the disinformation often targets traditional concepts of masculinity, manipulating public opinion about men in specific professions, social roles, or political positions. French President Emmanuel Macron was the target of disinformation campaigns that questioned his masculinity due to the age of his wife, Brigitte, who is significantly older than him. These narratives often relied on insinuations regarding his sexual orientation, suggesting he was “too soft” or “insufficiently masculine” to be a leader, which was intended to undermine his authority and damage his public image (Wardle, Derakhshan, 2017).

Until now, gender has not been taken into account in analyses of disinformation regarding the Roma community. The media portrayal of this community has been analyzed repeatedly by treating it as a whole, without looking at the differences between narratives concerning Roma men and those concerning Roma women. This is a significant gap, as

gendered disinformation plays a major role in the marginalization of the Roma community. As we demonstrate in this report, much of the false information appearing about its members is directly linked to gender.

Being A Minority—What Does It Mean? The Cost Of Stigma

When it comes to diversity, Poland is often described as a homogeneous country. However, taking into account the growing number of people who migrate here for work, to flee wars or due to a changing climate, this demographic landscape has been slowly evolving. The Romani minority is one of four ethnic minorities in Poland and is the largest among them. According to international research, almost half of the Romani and Traveller³ respondents experienced hate-motivated harassment (FRA, 2020). A particular kind of exclusion directed toward the Romani people is called **antigypsyism** (IHRA, 2020), whereas **Romaphobia** relates primarily to prejudices that can lead to discrimination. These two terms are often used interchangeably.

It should be emphasized that people from Romani communities are also at risk of intersectional, or multiple, discrimination. This can be based not only on ethnicity, but also on gender, disability or sexual orientation. For instance, during recent aid activities following the conflict escalation in Ukraine, Ukrainian Romani communities experienced exclusion in Poland due to both their Romani descent and their Ukrainian nationality.

In the 1950s psychology professor Gordon Allport noted that there is a special set of features in people from minorities who have been subject to persecution. In 2003 Ilan Meyer published an article in which he defined minority stress as chronic, cumulative stress connected with stigmatization caused by objective events, prejudice and discrimination, as well as the reaction to them, such as internalized shame. Chronic stress can result in serious health issues (Meyer, 2003). And although Meyer's article was mainly concerned with non-heteronormative individuals, the mechanism of chronic tension driven by social exclusion is the same for all people who are subject to discrimination.

It has been confirmed that Romani people experience chronic stress, which leads to depression and anxiety (Orton et al., 2019). An interesting proposed description of the emotions experienced by Romani men and women is the concept of Romani anxiety, or *Romani Dar*. This term was proposed by two researchers of Romani descent—Sonia Styrkacz and Monika Szewczyk. It is a peculiar kind of anxiety that causes Romani people to live in a state of hypervigilance, constantly trying to predict

3 A people of Irish origin living mainly in the British Isles, leading a nomadic lifestyle. In many international documents, they are mentioned alongside the Roma due to a similar social situation and the risk of social exclusion. In the past, some Roma groups in Europe also led a very similar, wandering lifestyle.

and prevent potential problems and hazards (Fiałkowska, Józwiak, Mirga-Wójtowicz, Styrkacz & Szewczyk, 2024).

Minority stress can be caused or deepened by false news and various forms of **hate speech**, such as for example negative comments on internet forums or in social media. The concept of hate speech includes different forms of statements propagating or justifying racial hatred, xenophobia, Islamophobia, antisemitism and other forms of hatred based on prejudice against specific social groups (Council Of Europe, 1997). Since 2000, the Council of Europe has been paying special attention to hate speech on the internet and the connected rise in cybercrime based on racist and xenophobic threats (Council of Europe, 2000). Researchers point out that hate speech considerably influences the level of social exclusion of minority groups (Mullen & Rice 2003). What is more, it can be a traumatizing experience for those who are targeted by it (Leets & Giles, 1997).

One of the latest examples of the difficult situation faced by the Romani minority in Poland is the story of the fear of a pogrom experienced by two young Romani women in 2020. When a member of the Romani community caused a serious car accident, they were anxious about their safety and the safety of their families. It was not only their personal experience that caused their fear of lynching, but also a possible smear campaign that could lead to hateful attacks on the Romani community. The Polish Council of Media Ethics clearly states, that information on the nationality or ethnicity of perpetrators should not be made public if it is not relevant to the reported case (REM, 2020), since that would lead to discrimination against the given group. Despite this, media coverage that specifies the origin of perpetrators, including members of the Romani community, still appears. In their report on disinformation against Romani community in Bulgaria, Rosalina Todorova and Dr. Lilia Yakova emphasized that the Romani community must be made aware of the dangers that come with negative and false media rhetoric, and the majority must be mindful of the consequences that follow false media information (Todorova & Yakova, 2022).

Examples Of Gender- and Identity-Based Disinformation Against The Romani People

1. “Row between Poles and Romani: one person detained” [LATEST FACTS, VIDEO, PHOTO], Article on *Hej.Mielec.pl*

In June 2021, in the city of Mielec, an altercation occurred involving members of the Romani community. Its catalyst was a brawl between two teenage boys (non-Romani and one Romani) that had taken place at the beginning of that month, during which the Romani boy knocked out two of the non-Romani boy's teeth. While the case was brought before the family court, derogatory graffiti against the Romani minority started surfacing on the walls of buildings all around the city. At the end of that month, 27 June, the mother of the beaten boy brought an unknown number of armed people of non-Romani descent to the Miasteczko Młodego Robotnika (MMR) residential area, where Romani families resided. At that time, the family court had not yet issued a ruling in the case. An altercation ensued between the Romani and non-Romani residents, with the non-Romani group demanding that the Romani boy be handed over to them for mob justice. The Romani community began to defend themselves, resulting in a brawl involving a group of approximately 200 people. About 10 police cars arrived at the scene. A Romani driver, fleeing the violence, drove into a crowd of non-Romani Mielec residents blocking the street, but no one was injured.

After the police arrived at the scene, the situation de-escalated. The Romani driver provided a statement to the police about his dangerous maneuver, explaining that he was terrified and that there was a child in his car whom he was trying rescue from the street fight. The woman who brought the group of non-Romani men to the MMR residential area was later recognized by one of the residents, taken to the police station, interrogated, arrested, and charged. A spokesperson for the Mielec Police reported, that the people who accompanied the woman to the MMR residential area were not identified.

The author of the article on the local outlet *Hej.Mielec.pl*, who reported on the situation, suggested that it was the Romani people who appeared “armed” with bats in their residential area. The article failed to mention whether and how the non-Romani individuals were armed, which led the readers to believe that the Romani men were the sole aggressors. The lead

omitted the fact that the non-Romani group came to deliver mob justice, which is critical information in the whole story:

“A clash between a group of Poles and Roma took place on Sunday evening in the MMR residential area in Mielec. During the incident, several people were deliberately hit by a car. A group of several dozen Roma armed themselves with bats, and the situation was brought under control after the police arrived. The Roma claimed they were attacked by armed Poles.”

In this extract it is clearly visible how the author misleads the reader with false chronology of the events. He describes the dangerous car maneuver as if it were deliberate, misrepresenting the situation and putting the blame on the Romani man, who was not the aggressor in the incident. When the author refers to the source of the conflict-namely, the fight in a local park-he mentioned that: *“At the time, our journalists found out that the teenage brawl might not have been a single such incident in the Park Leśny. Officially, no one confirms such reports.”* By publishing unverified information, the author insinuated inherent aggression by the Romani community, creating further disinformation. Nowhere does the article specify who was involved in the other incidents at the park. It is unclear whether this is significant to the main story, but the author built tension by suggesting Park Leśny could be dangerous because aggressive Romani teenagers frequented the place.

Later in the text, the author mentions permanent police patrols in the Romani neighborhood. At this stage, the narrative has been spun so heavily that the reader will naturally assume the Romani residents were so aggressive that the police needs to keep a close eye on them. The author summarized the incident with a statement from a representative of the Mielec County Police Headquarters reporting that no one was injured.

The author shared a featured video sent by a reader showing the Romani driver’s dangerous maneuver. He then wrote that the MMR residents had allegedly identified the driver as Romani. He mentioned that the driver’s ethnicity had been confirmed and that, to date, no one had come forward as injured in the incident.

The following edits were likely made after critical readers had reported inaccuracies in the report: *“Readers of hej.mielec.pl indicate today that it was the Roma who were attacked by a group of Poles. The Roma themselves stated that the attackers were also armed. They were allegedly led to the MMR residential area by a woman who was identified by the locals. Pending official confirmation, she has been detained at the police station for ongoing investigation.”* The author added the woman’s alleged threats against the Roma community.

The author has ignored these reader corrections, leaving the erroneous narrative intact that the Romani people were the aggressors. Manipulation is also evident also throughout the photo gallery. There are numerous

images of police interactions with the Roma community while photos of non-Roma aggressors were carefully curated.



Fig.1 The article gallery

The gallery features mainly Romani men and women, responding police officers, and onlookers, while omitting the attackers or the woman who called for mob justice. It also includes video stills allegedly capturing the Romani man running people over.

By framing the Romani residents as the aggressors, the author ignores the reality of the situation: they were defending their homes against ongoing attacks by a non-Romani group in Mielec. He writes that the police “*did not allow them [the Roma] to leave the MMR residential area*”, further suggesting that it was the Romani residents who were the aggressors. He does this even though the attached video clearly shows the non-Romani group acting aggressively (e.g., throwing objects at the police and the Romani residents). The article features photographs that frame the Romani men as aggressors by prominently pairing them with law enforcement officers. Analysis of the article’s photo selection reveals that the presence of non-Romani attackers was omitted from the coverage of the incident. Moreover, the author’s final emphasis on the ‘Polish’ residents’ fear of the Romani people distorts the dynamics of the conflict.

This whole article is a prime example of deliberate misleading, fact manipulation and the spreading of disinformation. Unfortunately, national media outlets further republished this misleading coverage, adding unverified sensationalist narratives and further fueling ongoing tensions between the Romani and non-Romani communities in Mielec by failing to objectively report the facts or question the suggested timeline of events. Notably, the Mielec conflict followed a pattern of escalation similar to earlier pogroms against the Roma community, including the 1981 incidents in Konin and Oświęcim and the 1991 events in Mława.

SOURCES:

https://hej.mielec.pl/pl/473_na-sygnale/63604_awantura-pomiedzy-lakami-i-romami-jedna-osoba-zatrzymana-najnowsze-fakty-wideo-foto-.html – 27.06.2021, update: 29.06.2021, D.W <https://x.com/mekorro/status/1409246064583004167> – 27.06.2021, mekorro

2. Młody Cygan staranował pięć aut. A marzył o prawie jazdy (Young Gypsy Rams Five Cars. There goes his dream about a driver's licence).

An anonymous author in *Gazeta Wrocławska* (GW) reported on a 19-year-old unlicensed driver of Romani descent who damaged five parked cars in Wrocław.

By using the word 'ram' in the headline, the article framed the vehicle damage as intentional and driven by a malicious desire to destroy property. Later in the article, the GW reporter spoke with the 19-year-old responsible for the crash. Described as proud and completely lacking remorse, he told the journalist, "Please write that my Mercedes has 200 horsepower. This car has rear-wheel drive, and the road was slippery. The worst part is that I don't know if I'll be able to get my driver's license now, because I haven't had time to do it yet".

Based on this exchange, the reporter concluded that the young Romani man lacked "even a shred of remorse", dismissing the perpetrator's subsequent attempts to explain the circumstances of the accident. By making the man's ethnicity the central focus, the author relied on lazy reporting to perpetuate damaging stereotypes of Romani men as inherently aggressive, impulsive, and irresponsible.

The second half of the article reveals a stark contrast in the author's vocabulary. When describing how a non-Romani driver subsequently damaged the 19-year-old's Mercedes, the journalist used a word like "bruised," which implies a minor, accidental offense. This minimizes the non-Romani driver's guilt, whereas the language used for the Romani driver actively exaggerates the offense.

Moreover, the photo gallery features 14 images that thoroughly document the extent of the damage to the vehicles. One photograph also captures bystanders of Romani origin, presumably family members, being interviewed by officers.



Jarosław Jakubczak

**Photo 1.**

A gallery featuring 14 photos that highlight the extensive scale of destruction

**Photo 2.**

A conversation with the police, attempting to depict the perpetrator alongside his family or friends in the company of a police officer

The author withheld their full name, publishing instead under their initials.

SOURCE:

<https://gazetawroclawska.pl/mlody-cygan-staranowal-piec-aut-a-marzylo-prawie-jazdy/ar/c1-14777566> – 10.02.2020, jj

3. Unverified Reports of the Alleged Tank Theft by Ukrainian Romani Individuals

Allegations that Ukrainian Romani had stolen a Russian tank appeared in the Polish media on 27 February 2022, tracing back to reports by Ukraine's Channel 24. That same day, the Polish website *Kresy.pl* published an article titled "Gypsies allegedly stole a tank from Russians near Kherson."

Although the author, Adam Szabelak, openly questioned the story's veracity, the anecdote went viral, driven largely by its humorous tone. According to the fact-checking investigation by the Stowarzyszenie Pravda (Pravda Association), there is no evidence that this event actually occurred. Videos circulating on X (formerly Twitter) are inconsistent and unverified, featuring unrelated people, times, and locations. For example, a tank purportedly being towed by a tractor in one video was, in reality, a completely different type of armored vehicle.



Photo 1.

A still from a video of the alleged tank theft, which turned out to be a different type of armored vehicle. The time and location of the footage were impossible to verify (according to an analysis by Stowarzyszenie Pravda).

Source (video): https://x.com/kgb_files/status/1498022629814456324

Moreover, none of the sources cited for this story confirm the ethnicity of the central figures.

The narrative of Ukrainian Roma hijacking a Russian tank relies on unverified claims. This anecdote—along with similar applications of Romani stereotypes—**functioned both a morale booster in a war-torn country** and as a tool for information warfare. The viral story aimed to ridicule the enemy's incompetence while, paradoxically, highlighting how the invasion inadvertently united the Ukrainian majority and the Roma minority against a common threat. This narrative subverts the deeply

ingrained prejudice that “all Romani people steal” by reframing the theft of enemy equipment as a patriotic act. Ukrainian media have highlighted this situational cooperation to symbolize national unity against Russian aggression. For instance, the news outlet 24tv.ua reported: “In Ukrainian cities, Ukrainians continue to push back the Russians. This time, even the Roma have joined in, in the Kherson region”.

“Stolen,” “seized,” or “confiscated”? **Media outlets often use these terms interchangeably.** In the article by *Kresy.pl*, the author categorizes the event as an “alleged theft.” By using phrases like “information was reportedly received” and noting that “the details are difficult to verify,” the author casts doubt on the story’s reliability. Furthermore, the cited Ukrainian source reported the event vaguely, with no evidence that its journalists attempted to verify the facts.

This rumor was subsequently amplified even by Polish President Andrzej Duda, whose post on X (formerly Twitter) generated massive engagement (3.5k comments, 3.2k shares, and 20.3k likes). The President linked to the Ukrainian portal 24tv.ua, which illustrated its article with a file photo of unrelated Romani adults and children. These individuals had no involvement in the reported tank theft; nevertheless, this disinformation exploits and reinforces harmful stereotypes of Roma people.



Photo 2.

Channel 24 caption: “Kherson Roma stole a tank from the Russians.” Fact-check: The illustrative photo does not depict Kherson Roma. It is an archival image dating back to circa 2007 that shows a Roma group in Lviv.

This disinformation case achieved the highest reach in the Polish media among all the content analyzed. **The unverified claims of the tank theft were widely disseminated by mainstream outlets and repeatedly cited in subsequent fabricated reports of military equipment “thefts”.** Analyses of these publications underscore that the dissemination disinformation is a deliberate information warfare strategy employed in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

SOURCES:

<https://www.rp.pl/kraj/art35792371-marek-kozubal-cyganie-ukradli-czolgczyli-operacja-informacyjna> – 02.03.2022, 20:25, Marek Kozubal

<https://pravda.org.pl/czy-romowie-z-ukrainy-naprawde-ukradli-rosyjs-kiczolg/> – 1 marca 2022, Stowarzyszenie Pravda, Andrzej Tkacz

https://24tv.ua/ru/pod-kahovkoj-ukrainskie-cygane-ukrali-u-rossi-jan-tankmestnye_n1881615 – Роман Стек, 27 февраля 2022

<https://kresy.pl/wydarzenia/cyganie-mieli-kolo-chersoniaukrasc-ros-janom-czolg/> 27.02.2022, Adam Szabelak

<https://x.com/AndrzejDuda/status/1497899381697257475?s=20&t=0H1AEN7qzPETtKdqcxjGUA> – 27.02.2022, Andrzej Duda

4. Disinformation about “organized groups from Ukraine who come just for social benefits” aimed mainly at Romani women travelling with children in 2022.

A primary vector of the identified disinformation was the Facebook profile of Marcin Kowalski (then a Przemyśl councilor) and Wojciech Bakun (Kukiz’15), the Mayor of Przemyśl. In his post, Kowalski claimed: “Recently, it caught my eye, and I’m not the only one, that so-called ‘hordes’ of Ukrainian Roma have begun visiting Przemyśl...” The use of the dehumanizing term “hordes” exploits xenophobic tropes and targets displaced Romani women and children. This messaging was reinforced by five attached photographs (presented below) that employ targeted visual framing to portray the refugees in a negative light.

The photos lack any corroborating evidence to verify that the depicted Romani women committed the alleged offenses. Furthermore, the politician amplified the targeting by sharing images of Romani children in the comment section. This behavior incited a barrage of xenophobic and violently hateful discourse. Unchecked statements in the thread dehumanized the group as “animals” and “filthy people,” expressing their emotions in statements such as “you can’t stand these vile people, shocking”[sic] while other commenters directly asked, “was hitler wrong? polacks are insane,”[sic] and “what are those wogs even doing here?”[sic] As of this report’s publication, neither the politician nor the hosting social media platform had removed these comments.

Marcin Kowalski - Przewodniczący Rady Miejskiej w Przemyślu – 😞
 poirytowany(a).
 24 czerwca 2022 · 🌐

W ostatnim czasie rzuciło mi się w oczy, ale chyba nie tylko mi, że zaczęły odwiedzać Przemyśl tzw. "hordy" Romów ukraińskich...

Proceder polega na tym, że Romowie, większości kobiety z małutkimi dziećmi są przywożone do Polski w jednym celu, aby uzyskać nr PESEL, który służy żeby otrzymać wszystkie przyznawane przez Polski rząd świadczenia, 300zł MOPS, 500+ ZUS na każde dziecko, 700 zł KOR (zakupy)

Po załatwieniu wszystkich formalności Romowie opuszczają nasz kraj wracając na Ukrainie i czekają spokojnie na fundusze z Polski, które przychodzą na konto założone wcześniej podczas załatwiania tzw. formalności...

Chciałbym zwrócić się do rządzących naszym krajem z zapytaniem, czy wogóle Ci co pisali na "kolanie" ustawę z formą pomocy dla ludności ukraińskiej przewidzieli możliwy proceder wyłudzeń lub kontroli nad tą całą "niby" pomocą w Polsce!

Oczywiście jestem za pomocą dla ludności ukraińskiej, bo sam od wybuchu wojny w Ukrainie pomagałem ile mogłem, ale nie mogę się patrzeć jak nasz kraj jest bity po tyłku przez ludzi, którzy sprytnie wykorzystują lukę w prawie organizując oficjalnie wycieczki do Polski po pieniądze, po nasze pieniądze!

Najbardziej mi szkoda tych małutkich dzieci, które są wykorzystywane w tym całym procederze śpiąc po dworcach lub różnych innych miejscach... 😞

[SuperNowości24](#)
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[Radio RM FM](#)
[Radio ZET](#)
[Mateusz Morawiecki](#)
[Marcin Warchoń](#)
[Grzegorz Braun](#)
[Paweł Kukiz](#)
[Paweł Szramka](#)
[Marek Kuchciński](#)
[Joanna Frydrych](#)
[TVN UWAGA!](#)
[Stanisław Tyszką](#)
[Konrad Berkowicz](#)



👍👎🗨️ 681

393 komentarze 793 udostępnienia

Picture 1

A Przemyśl city councilor's social media post condemning a perceived "horde" of Ukrainian Roma. The official repeatedly highlighted the ethnicity of individuals seeking state aid, falsely claiming that benefit fraud is predominantly committed by Romani women. To substantiate these allegations, he posted unconsented photos of women and children in public, using them as a tool to dehumanize the marginalized group.

The contents of the post:

Recently, I've noticed – and I'm probably not the only one – that so-called "hordes" of Ukrainian Roma have begun visiting Przemyśl... The procedure involves bringing Roma, mostly women with small children, to Poland for the sole purpose of obtaining a PESEL number, which is used to receive all the benefits granted by the Polish government: PLN 300 from MOPS (Social Welfare Center), PLN 500+ from ZUS (Social Insurance Institution) for each child, and PLN 700 from KOR (shopping). After completing all the formalities, the Roma leave our country, returning to Ukraine, and quietly wait for the funds from Poland, which are transferred to the account they established earlier during the so-called formalities... I would like to ask our country's government whether those who rushed through the bill providing aid to the Ukrainian population even anticipated the potential fraud, or control over all this "supposed" aid in Poland! Of course, I support helping the Ukrainian people, as I've been helping as much as I could since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, but I can't stand to watch our country being beaten in the ass by people who cleverly exploit a loophole in the law by organizing official trips to Poland for money – for our money! I feel most sorry for the little children who are being exploited in this whole process, sleeping in train stations or various other places...

Without specifying their background, Wojciech Bakun's post features photos of women and children who resemble Romani stereotypes. By sharing recognizable images of their faces, the author compromised their anonymity, placing their safety and privacy at immediate risk.



It remains unclear whether the photos actually depict individuals receiving financial assistance, as claimed by the Mayor of Przemyśl, or if they are simply random Romani people photographed to validate the author's narrative and stoke public fear over an influx of 'outsiders.' In his post, Mayor Wojciech Bakun alleges that "these individuals line

Photo 2.

A post in which Wojciech Bakun makes accusations that the Polish social welfare system is being drained of resources. Romani women are not explicitly mentioned here. Instead, to support his claim, he posted a photo of Romani women and children in public spaces.

The contents of the post:

Wojciech Bakun
26 September 2022

I'm posting this Monday morning on a topic that has already been discussed but hasn't generated any response. I want to emphasize that it's not directed against anyone; it merely presents an objective assessment of the situation and what we face as a border town.

Since the end of February, Przemyśl has become the first refugee aid point. Residents of our city, joined by volunteers from across Poland and the world, have been working day and night, seven days a week, to help those fleeing the war. To date, in cooperation with the Polish Red Cross, the Humanitarian Aid Center on Lwowska Street has been operational, with the mission of providing assistance to those affected by the war. Such individuals continue to come to us and receive all the assistance they need.

However, it's impossible to ignore a practice that has been going on for some time, and which is periodically intensifying. It's impossible to ignore the organized transports of women with children, who hold pieces of paper with a list of procedures they must follow to receive material and financial assistance. These individuals line up daily in front of the City Hall, then go to the Social Welfare Center (MOPS) and the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) to submit applications for benefits. They then return to Ukraine by organized transport. Humanitarian aid organizations have already become aware of this and have suspended assistance to such individuals. The question is, why hasn't our legislature yet

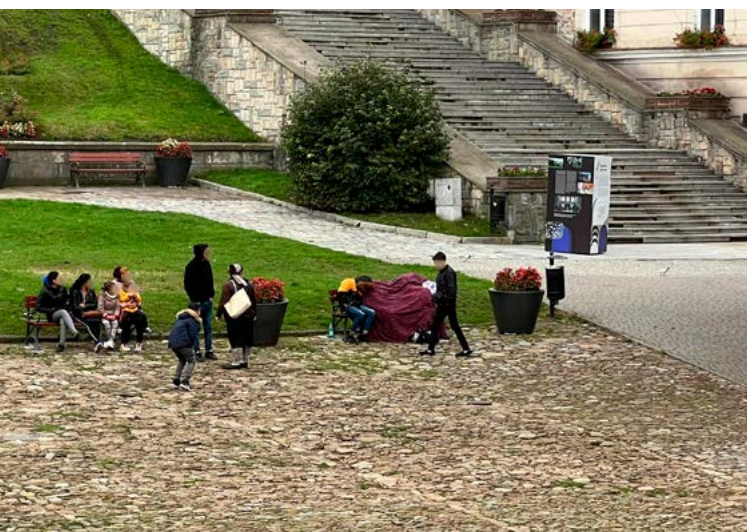
up in front of the City Hall every day, then go to the ZUS and MOPS offices to submit applications for benefits. They then return to Ukraine by organized transport”. However, Bakun provided no sources or additional evidence to substantiate his claims.

Amid a major crisis, such as the influx of Ukrainian refugees, narratives often emerge that exploit the fear of “outsiders.” Right-wing media and politicians frequently targeted these “organized groups,” falsely accusing them of exploiting Poland’s social welfare system. While the Mayor of Przemyśl avoided the term “ethnic minority” in his post to skirt accusations of racism, the accompanying photo clearly depicted Romani women and children—a fact not lost on his audience. The unverified claims in his post were rapidly amplified by the press, severely exacerbating disinformation targeting the Romani community in Poland.

recognized the drain on the Polish social welfare system?

I’m all for providing aid, but in the case of helping refugees fleeing war, is the idea supposed to be for entire communities to switch to our social welfare system? That’s not the way to go! From the very beginning, we’ve tried to provide aid as wisely as possible, hence my appeal to MPs, senators, and ministers to address this practice, because as local governments, we have no instruments to prevent it. We can only legally register these individuals in the PESEL system, which opens the way to a wide range of support instruments.

Today, I will be writing to MPs, senators, and ministers, appealing for tightening of the aid system and the prevention of this drain on the system!



Rather than verifying Bakun’s claims, the journalists who quoted his posts simply amplified them. Despite the alleged widespread nature of this phenomenon, investigators could not find a single refugee who possessed the social assistance instructions the Mayor had described. By failing to interview the subjects of their reports—Romani refugees from Ukraine—the Polish media missed a vital opportunity to verify accusations regarding the organization and purpose of their travel. Instead, this journalistic negligence fueled societal tensions, aggression, and harmful stereotypes. Non-governmental organizations

Photos 3. and 4.

Photos showing Romani women and children sitting on benches and in the square. The view does not depict controversial scenes, but it confirms the prejudice that every Roma woman with children is an “outsider” in the urban space.

point out that Ukrainian Romani individuals were frequently excluded from broader public aid programs, penalized by the deeply ingrained stereotype of Romani women as extortionists.

Our interviews with Ukrainian Romani refugee women revealed they received only baseline assistance—such as guidance on material and financial aid—from Polish volunteers. We found no evidence to support claims that organized networks brought “hordes of fraudsters” into Poland. Furthermore, the recurring cross-border trips proposed by the Mayor of Przemyśl would incur substantial expenses, casting significant doubt on their actual occurrence. Testimonies confirmed that the women and their families financed and arranged their own travel, relying on personal vehicles or public transit. Finally, our investigation indicates that official data tracking whether these individuals regularly return to Ukraine after claiming Polish government benefits does not exist.

Politicians Marcin Kowalski and Wojciech Bakun have actively promoted a narrative framing Romani women and children as a threat to the Polish social welfare system. Amid high inflation, Russian aggression against Ukraine, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukrainian Romani community has served as a scapegoat to channel public frustration over the influx of foreigners. The inflammatory nature of Kowalski’s and Bakun’s rhetoric generated a surge of highly toxic commentary online. However, this does not come as a surprise considering this hostility aligns with the openly anti-immigrant stance maintained by the Kukiz’15 movement.

SOURCES:

Post shared by Marcin Kowalski 24 June 2022

www.facebook.com/WspolnieDlaPrzemysla/posts/pfbido2hQ8CojeVDEh-LySWPfxVyfUBknNywsw9MgSJYoHSLDqUJsJP65AC4HHFb4JVDYQgPl

Post shared by Wojciech Bakun 25 September 2022

www.facebook.com/BakunWojciech/posts/pfbido2aP6ffA7MLhjAU qy-RYNsT3296YmyN7AknMXkHKwCPmiSJxPbjzhEtw4aAaz5N6sqkl

Shared by the media:

Dzieje się na Podkarpaciu (*Happening on Subcarpathia*; a regional newspaper)
<https://dziejesienapodkarpaciu.pl/romowie-przyjezdza-ja-z-ukrainy-do-przemysla-wyludzac-swiadczenia-video/>

Wyborcza.pl Rzeszow (a regional outlet of a major national news provider)
<https://rzeszow.wyborcza.pl/rzeszow/7,34962,28956657,wojciech-bakun-prezydent-przemysla-apeluje-o-uszczelnienie.html>

Kresy.pl (a regional online news provider)

<https://kresy.pl/wydarzenia/polska/radny-przemysla-alarmuje-o-wycieczkach-romow-z-ukrainy-po-500/>

5. Disinformation about Romani women and men in the Facebook group: Obywatelska Inicjatywa Zerwania z Uprzywilejowaniem Romów w Puławach (Civic Initiative to End Roma Privilege in Puławy), founded by the Mayor of Puławy, Paweł Maj.

The group shares graphic and audiovisual content—including derogatory memes—designed to humiliate and ridicule Romani men and women. This material relies on harmful stereotypes, frequently mocking the low socioeconomic status of this community's members.



[Dehumanizing content and photos of Romani women and men (including children) on Paweł Maj's Facebook group named Obywatelska Inicjatywa Zerwania z Uprzywilejowaniem Romów w Puławach www.facebook.com/groups/1921871751371998/?hoisted_section_header_type=recently_seen&multi_permalink=3702827709943051

Photo 1.

Beata Wolska
28 February 2022

(rhyming with Polish-Romani folk song popularized by Krzysztof Krawczyk that glorifies travelling life of the Romani people)
Ore, ore ... - I'll nick a Russian tank today]

The profile features also media coverage focused on crimes committed by individuals of Roma origin. Additionally, the publication of official documents—such as those detailing city debts—publicly targets Roma residents. This content serves to activate and reinforce preexisting societal stereotypes that associate Romani individuals with lack of morality, depravity, and a tendency toward delinquency and fraud.

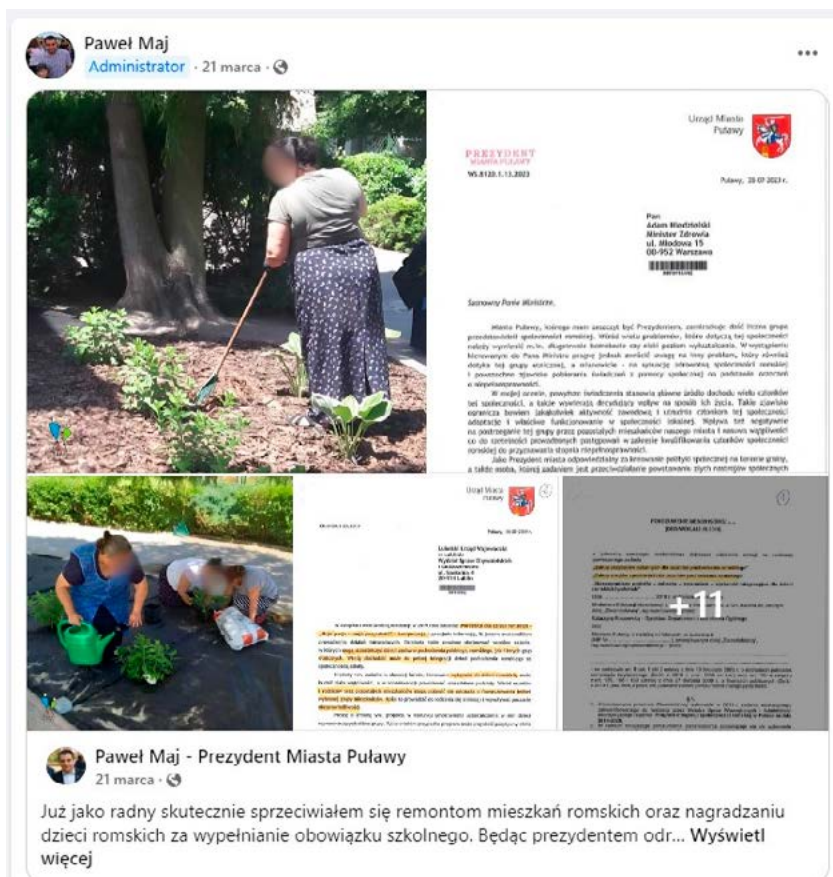
**Photo 2.**

Pi Pierre
5 August

When dad comes from work? He probably won't

[When dad comes from work... we will go to a Gypsy Aquapark!]

In a March 2024 social media post, Paweł Maj published photographs depicting Romani women performing community service to offset municipal housing rent arrears. The visual framing—exclusively featuring Romani women working on their knees—presents multiple risks of misrepresentation. First, it risks implying that rent debt is exclusive to the Romani community, thereby ignoring affected non-Romani residents in Puławy. Second, by exclusively highlighting women, the imagery reinforces gendered stereotypes regarding who fulfills community service obligations. Finally, the failure to obscure the face of one Romani woman compromises her privacy.



The contents of the post:

The post features working Romani women. The carefully curated message for this group's (non-Romani) audience aims to promote appreciation for the "effectiveness" of political actions directed toward the Romani community in Puławy. Showing Romani women on their knees also carries a symbolic meaning in this case.

The referenced post and the associated online group are integral to the political activities of Mayor Paweł Maj, which revolve around the local Romani community. The political strategy relies on demonizing this minority group, utilizing the public ‘combating’ of alleged Romani transgressions to validate his political performance. By focusing on a small, marginalized minority within a city of approximately 45,000 residents, the mayor’s messaging functions as political scapegoating.

In posts published on his personal Facebook group, Puławy Mayor Paweł Maj has advanced a narrative that misrepresents the city's financial challenges. He directs attention exclusively to Romów Street—a localized area with a prominent Romani population—claiming that its residents are the primary drivers of municipal debt. This targeted messaging has sparked significant outrage within the local Romani community in Puławy.

In his commentary, Paweł Maj provided data breaking down municipal debt by address. The figures show that non-Romani residents owe PLN 3.856 million, compared to PLN 2.452 million owed by Roma residents. Despite non-Roma residents owing a larger share of the total debt, public and political attention remains disproportionately focused on the Romani community on Romow Street.

Stan zadłużenia poszczególnych komunalnych budynków mieszkalnych ogółem
wg stanu na 31.12.2023 r.

	Adres budynku	Zaległość główna (bieżąca + sądowa)	Odsetki i koszty sądowe	Ogółem	Średnie zadłużenie na jedno mieszkanie
1	Norblina	179 252,37	208 620,61	387 872,98	11 082,09
2	Norblina	222 658,34	253 439,36	476 097,70	23 804,89
3	Norblina	207 985,27	154 116,75	362 102,02	10 058,39
4	Romów	1 399 834,22	1 052 695,60	2 452 529,82	31 442,69
5	Wólka Profecka	314 333,83	219 048,31	533 382,14	24 244,64
6	Wólka Profecka	294 433,93	188 626,81	483 060,74	21 957,31
7	Wólka Profecka	372 597,80	163 766,72	536 364,52	14 899,01
8	Wólka Profecka	407 083,77	215 415,24	622 499,01	17 785,69
9	Wólka Profecka	326 304,98	128 499,72	454 804,70	13 376,61
	Razem	3 724 484,51	2 584 229,12	6 308 713,63	19 838,72*

*Średnie zadłużenie na mieszkanie w w/w budynkach

Jak wynika z powyższej tabeli najbardziej zadłużonym komunalnym budynkiem mieszkalnym w Puławach jest budynek przy ul. Romów. Według stanu na dzień 31.12.2023 r. zadłużenie ogółem na tym budynku wynosi 2 452 529,82 zł, co daje średnio na jeden lokal kwotę zadłużenia w wysokości 31 442,69 zł.

The Chart is entitled: Total debt of individual municipal residential buildings as of December 31, 2023

Column A is Address, Column B: Main arrears (current + court), Column C: interests and litigation costs, Column D is total, Column E is average debt per apartment
Caption:

A table showing the debt of Romani and non-Romani residents, which was used to spread disinformation about Romani women.]

Our findings indicate that the group's narrative becomes increasingly hostile in the lead-up to local elections.

SOURCE:

www.facebook.com/groups/1921871751371998/?hoisted_section_header_type=recently_seen&multi_permalink=4528659764026504

Further Narratives And Findings

1. “Us” and “Them”

The Romani community in Poland faces significant underrepresentation across national, regional, and local media. The few existing Romani-run outlets cater primarily to an insular audience of academics, activists, and those already invested in Romani issues. Consequently, mainstream media coverage remains scarce. When Romani individuals do appear in the broader public eye, they are typically pigeonholed into specific roles, such as musicians, educators, or NGO representatives, rather than being integrated into general public discourse.

Our analysis reveals that media narratives surrounding the Romani minority frequently rely on an “us versus them” dichotomy. By using headlines like “Why Poles Don’t Like Roma” or “Fighting On a Pizzeria Patio. Tensions Between Poles and Roma,” the media consistently other Romani people and deny them a shared Polish identity. Furthermore, reporting on crimes or conflicts disproportionately highlights a Romani individual’s ethnic background when they are cast as the negative actor—even though Romani communities have been an integral part of Polish society for generations.

When Romani individuals are victims of crime, media outlets typically strip the event of its ethnic context. Unless the incident explicitly involves racism, assault, or hate speech, the victims’ ethnicities are omitted. This contrasts sharply with general crime reporting—such as for property damage, theft, or car accidents—where the ethnicity of Romani victims and non-Romani perpetrators is consistently overlooked. Journalists would not typically write, for example, that “Poles destroyed a Romani monument” or that “A Romani-owned shop was burgled by Poles”.

Our research highlights that narratives surrounding the Romani community are often shaped by gender and identity-based disinformation. The Polish media standardize emphasizing differences over similarities between Romani and non-Romani men and women—a framing that, until recently, was also perpetuated within scientific literature.

Media representations frequently reduce Romani individuals to a monolithic ethnic identity, often at the expense of intersectional markers such as their Polish nationality. This narrow framing limits the public narrative to homogenized portrayals of gender roles within the Romani community, drawing a stark dichotomy between Romani and non-Roma Polish citizens.

Consequently, this essentialization strips individuals of their personal complexity. By continuously reinforcing these stereotypes, media narratives pressure Romani community members to navigate their daily lives and major life decisions in reaction to societal expectations, effectively forcing them to conform to external prejudices.

2. Stereotyping and exoticization in the Context of Gender- and Identity-Based Disinformation

Polish media frequently stereotype and exoticize the Romani minority, particularly regarding rituals such as weddings, funerals, and annual holidays, as well as their customary law. Our analysis reveals that media coverage often sensationalizes Romani culture to elicit curiosity or emphasize its divergence from the mainstream. A prominent example of this distortion is the frequently reported, yet nonexistent, practice of pouring vodka over ancestors' gravestones. This misinterpretation stems from an actual tradition among the Polska Roma, which involves symbolically drinking a shot of vodka for the soul of the deceased, a ritual sometimes performed at the gravesite.

Media framing of *Romanipen* (Romani customary law) further illustrates this pattern of exoticization. A notable report⁴ cited strict parental surveillance, claiming the code mandates monitoring girls' online interactions and forbidding them from liking posts by married men. By framing a single family's highly atypical practices as universal, the author distorts public perception of both *Romanipen* and the broader Romani community.

Media representations also tend to homogenize the Romani population, systematically ignoring the cultural nuances among different subgroups. A prominent manifestation of this reductionism is the media's overreliance on titles like "Roma king" or "Roma princess." This flattening of identity misrepresents traditional governance structures; whereas the Polska Roma recognize a singular authority figure in the *Sero Roma* ("Head of the Roma"), subgroups like the Kalderash and Lovari traditionally look to elders for leadership. Moreover, employing the term "Roma king" in this context serves as a narrative device to emphasize the archaic and exotic nature of Romani culture. Crucially, this process of exoticization yields mutual benefits: it generates engagement for the media while allowing certain community members to directly monetize public fascination with their culture. Nevertheless, the majority of journalists covering these topics lack both fundamental cultural literacy and direct relationships with Romani

4 Turlej, E. (2020) Mało komu ze świata zależy na romskich dziewczynkach [Few People In The World Care About Romani Girls], Newsweek Polska, www.newsweek.pl/polska/spoleczenstwo/nastoletnie-cyganki-jak-zyja-romskie-dziewczynki/kbqhmd8

representatives. Without proactive self-education or consultation with experts, media content will inevitably perpetuate unreliable, inaccurate, and ultimately harmful narratives about the Romani community.

Numerous stereotypical narratives emerged within the disinformation materials and other content analyzed during our study. These include the following characterization:

Representations of Romani women: irresponsible mothers; mothers who exploit children to extort money; mothers who neglect their children; mothers who do not care about the well-being of their children; calculating women; demoralized women; women capable of participating in criminal structures (e.g., the “mushroom mafia”); women oppressed by Romani tradition; witches, fortune tellers; fraudsters; excessively fertile women; individuals lacking dignity (who engage in begging); cunning women; mysterious women; dangerous women; greedy women; people with an innate talent for dancing, music, or singing; princesses; leeches living off benefit fraud; thieves; entitled and conflict-prone individuals; Romani women like animals; enslaved women.

Representations of Romani men: kings, princes; irresponsible fathers, irresponsible men; aggressive men; demoralized, lazy men; men with criminal tendencies, cheaters, thieves, troublemakers; unemployed people; wealthy swindlers; people consuming alcohol in cemeteries (demoralization); public menace; mafia members; people reduced to an innate talent for dancing, music, and singing; entitled people; careless people, people abandoning their families, and spendthrift.

3. Superficial Objectivity and Unverified Sources

Our analysis of Facebook content reveals a prevalent practice among certain news portals of publishing “clickbait” posts, where a sensational tone was deliberately utilized to maximize reader engagement and content sharing. This material typically presented biased, unverified information as objective fact, instances of which are examined throughout this report.

Within the analyzed sample, the publication of unverified information was remarkably widespread, particularly regarding conflicts between the Romani individuals and the majority population. This dynamic became especially pronounced during the refugee crisis following the escalation of the war in Ukraine, which saw widespread accusations of benefit fraud directed at Ukrainian Romani women, as well as cases of crimes or offenses involving Romani individuals. The findings indicate that in such high-tension scenarios, journalists exhibit a lower willingness to verify facts by directly contacting representatives of the involved Romani community. The underlying causes of this reluctance to engage with Romani sources

remain difficult to discern. This communication gap is particularly striking given that in the majority of analyzed cases, no language barrier existed to restrict contact, as the subjects were Polish citizens of Romani origin. Furthermore, even in instances involving Romani refugees from Ukraine, access to interpretation services was relatively straightforward.

4. Author Unknown

A common practice among numerous editorial offices is the overreliance on author anonymization in press articles concerning the Romani community. Within our sample of 150 examined materials, this occurred in 37.5% of cases. It remains difficult to determine whether this pattern reflects a broader contemporary media trend or is a distinct characteristic specific to reporting on Romani topics.

5. Hate Speech and Online Comments

Our analysis of comments beneath publications on news portals and their associated Facebook pages revealed that the majority of accounts generating negative content—including **hate speech and incitement to violence or crime**—belonged to individuals who apparently utilized their real names. Based on this observation, we conclude that a pervasive sense of impunity exists among the authors of these comments, despite the fact that publishing such illicit content online is legally punishable.

6. Comment Moderation Under Publications

The scale of gendered disinformation targeting the Romani community—specifically the high volume of negative comments beneath articles—indicates that internal moderation against disinformation and hate speech on news portals and their Facebook pages is either nonexistent, severely limited, or entirely ineffective. Because the Romani population remains one of the most disliked social groups in Poland, Polish media outlets cannot rely solely on the grassroots initiatives of readers reporting inappropriate content. Instead, systemic, top-down content moderation must be enforced under articles concerning this community to protect the minority from online hate.

7. Editorial Strategies for Comment Sections

As part of our study of user comments beneath online press articles and Facebook posts, we identified four distinct strategies utilized by Polish editorial offices:

1. Enabling the comment section on both the news portal's website and its Facebook page;

2. Disabling the comment section on the portal's website while allowing comments under the corresponding Facebook post;
3. Enabling the comment section on the portal's website while refraining from sharing the article on its Facebook page;
4. Disabling the comment section on the portal's website and publishing only selected articles on Facebook (with the comment section enabled).

The second and fourth strategies are particularly notable, as they involve disabling comments on the news portal's native site while simultaneously publishing materials with open comment sections on Facebook. In the context of hate speech and incitement to crime, we interpret this practice as an attempt by news portals to evade legal and ethical liability for failing to moderate user-generated content. By employing this method, editorial offices shift the responsibility for policing user content onto Meta, despite being fully aware of the platform's historical ineffectiveness in combating online hate speech.

8. Graphics and Images

Illustrative Photos

The selection of photos and imagery for media articles represents a critical issue in the portrayal of Romani men and women. Due to a widespread lack of cultural literacy regarding this social group and its internal diversity, media professionals—whether consciously or unconsciously—frequently use inappropriate and stereotypical illustrations. Consequently, articles entirely unrelated to performing arts, music, or singing are often accompanied by photos of women dancing in richly embellished, ruffled dresses. Another prevalent issue is the practice of supplementing photo galleries in articles about the Polish Romani community with stock images of Romani populations from other nations. Many of these photographs depict individuals living in systemic poverty in locations such as the Lunik settlement in Slovakia or the (Šuto Orizari) Šutka district in North Macedonia. These images typically feature “genre scenes” of destitution, showing laundry lines hanging over unkempt yards filled with mud and debris, alongside neglected housing, barracks, and livestock. Such imagery falsely associates the entire Romani community with extreme poverty, despite the fact that the economic situation across different subgroups varies significantly.

Using photographs of caravans in articles about contemporary Romani individuals further highlights a profound misunderstanding of their culture. Such imagery exploits tropes of a romanticized, nomadic past, fueling enduring stereotypes about this community. Mythologizing the Roma as ‘colorful, free birds’ creates a false image of a people without needs

or obligations, living under the open sky. This bias shapes official policy: believing in a 'wandering nature,' authorities often relegate Romani families into low-standard social housing, ghettoizing them onto single streets.

Meanwhile, Romani individuals who challenge this stereotype through their appearance, lifestyle, or economic success are completely erased from the media and denied representation.

Gender- and Identity-Based Disinformation in Media Imagery

Defamation and negative framing are manipulative techniques designed to damage the reputation of individuals or groups by selectively placing them in a derogatory light. These practices are particularly damaging to marginalized communities, as they reinforce existing prejudices and deepen social exclusion by perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Defamation refers to the deliberate destruction of a person's or group's reputation through the propagation of negative, often exaggerated or manipulated information. This practice is frequently based on insinuations and a biased presentation of facts. In the case of marginalized groups, such as the Roma, LGBTQ+ people, or refugees, displaying negative stories or images serves to incite social fear and reinforce existing stereotypes.

Negative framing involves the deliberate portrayal of a given person, group, or phenomenon in a way that evokes negative associations. Many studies examine this issue within the context of ethnic and minority groups, demonstrating how the media depicts them, primarily by referencing the social problems they face or their economic status. For example, numerous research projects have highlighted the media's portrayal of Muslims following the September 11, 2001, attacks. These publications demonstrate that such repeated framings and narratives have reinforced social prejudices and fear of the Muslim community. Similarly, Polish media coverage of the Roma often focuses on poverty, crime, or a lack of education, which increases intercultural tensions and contributes to negative perceptions of this group.

For example, in the case of disinformation directed against Romani women in Przemyśl, photos of Romani women and children were used to reinforce the narrative about Ukrainian Romani refugee women fraudulently obtaining social assistance. The accompanying illustrations were likely intended to amplify the message of the press releases, thereby using images to raise suspicions about this community, even though no evidence was provided of the suggested abuse of aid programs. It is also unclear whether the photos depict the actual individuals 'suspected' of fraud or a random group of people who were identified as Roma and consequently photographed and published.

In the case of disinformation directed against Romani men, prominent examples include articles about the Mielec conflict or the car accident in Wrocław. These pieces were accompanied by photo galleries filled with negative images of “threatening”-looking, random Romani men who are completely unconnected to the events described. Alternatively, if the photos do depict individuals actually involved, they exaggerate and dramatize the scale of the destruction resulting from the accident.

Contextual Analysis—Quantitative Data

For this report, we analyzed 150 press articles and statements by public figures posted on Facebook. Our analysis revealed that 40 of them contained false information or other types of disinformation about individuals of Roma origin. Of these, 13 concerned only women, 19 focused on men, and 8 involved both genders. Disinformation about the Romani community therefore appeared in nearly every fourth article analyzed. Below are the percentages representing the results of our analysis on *gender- and identity-based disinformation*.

An important element in interpreting the results was the analysis of the audience of the selected content—specifically, the people commenting on the disinformation articles and posts.

Pie chart 4 shows the gender of the individuals leaving negative comments. A negative comment is defined as one containing offensive content against the Roma community, hate speech, or even incitement to commit hate crimes. The final chart illustrates the gender of the authors behind the articles and content featuring *gendered disinformation*.

Fig. 1. Gender and Identity Based Disinformation in the analyzed content

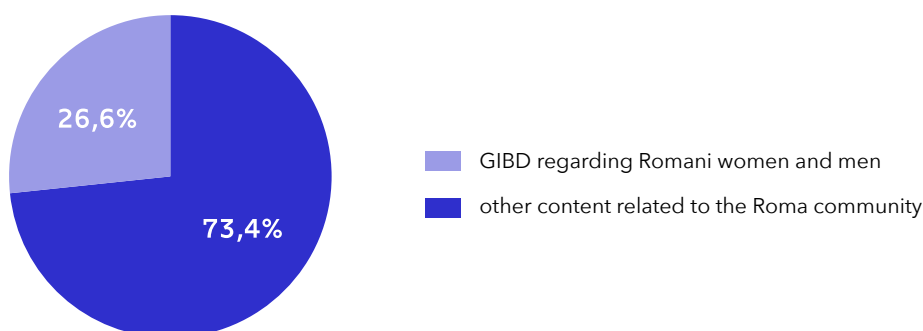


Fig. 2. Who is affected by gendered disinformation in the analyzed content?

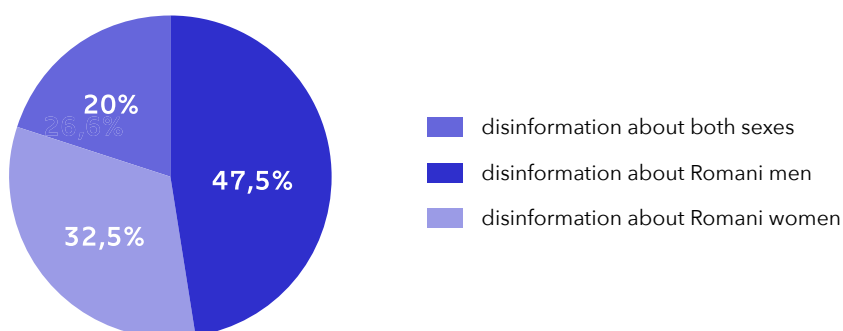


Fig. 3. Number of negative comments containing disinformation about individuals of Roma origin

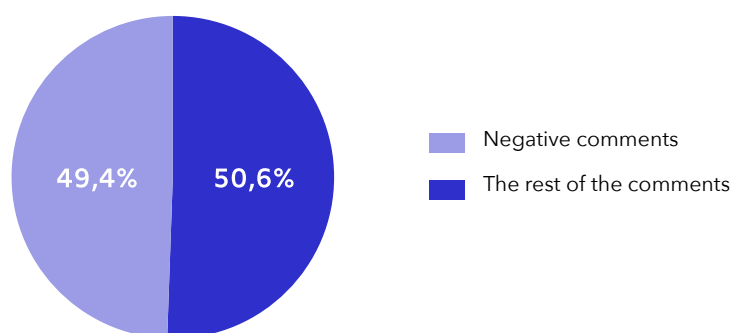


Fig. 4. Audience analysis—gender of individuals leaving negative comments on disinformation about people of Roma origin

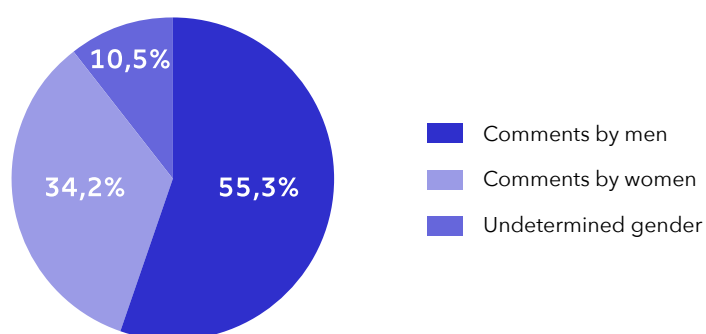
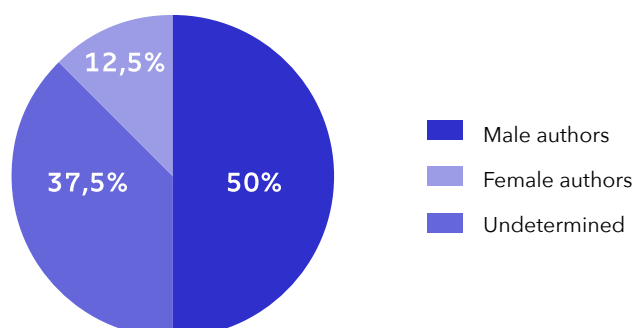


Fig. 5. Authors of gendered disinformation in articles and content, by gender



Guidelines for Media

1. Avoiding Stereotypes About the Romani Community

Media outlets must avoid perpetuating harmful tropes by consciously selecting language that does not stigmatize or dehumanize the individuals being described. To achieve this, journalists should first reflect on their own biases and understand the prevalent stereotypes that shape the public perception of Romani men and women. Recognizing these biases and committing to neutral, factual reporting is essential to breaking these cycles of misinformation. Additionally, media creators are reminded to use the correct ethnonym 'Roma' (*Rom/Romka*) rather than the exonym 'Gypsy' (*Cyganka/Cygan*). Avoiding evaluative language that subjectively judges different aspects of Romani culture must become standard editorial practice.

2. Presenting the Diversity of Roma Communities, and the Attitudes and Perspectives of Romani men and Women

Media coverage should broaden readers' awareness of the diversity within Romani communities, both in Poland and worldwide. The correct approach requires avoiding the simplification of Romani culture as a monolithic social phenomenon and refraining from portraying a single, uniform ethnic identity. There are numerous distinct Roma groups, and even within individual communities, views and customs differ as significantly as they do in any other society. We therefore recommend avoiding generalizing statements about Romani men and women, and presenting instead the unique, individual attitudes and perspectives of members of this community.

3. Discontinuing the Practice of Contrasting the Roma Minority with the Polish Majority

Individuals belonging to the Romani minority in Poland are also Polish citizens. We recommend discontinuing media narratives that contrast Roma groups with the majority population, or pit Romani and non-Romani individuals against one another.

4. Education for Newsroom Staff

It is essential that journalists have the opportunity to understand the cultural and social context of Romani men and women, and to educate themselves on diversity, inclusion, and anti-discrimination. This training will foster a more informed approach when reporting on minority groups.

5. Balanced Narrative

Press articles should present the full picture of any situation, avoiding the exaggeration of negative aspects simply to create artificial sensationalism. Journalists must refrain from selective bias that hyper-focuses disproportionately on the negative attributes of a given group, women, or men. Instead, they should strive for a reliable description that captures the true complexity of various phenomena and events.

6. Critical Approach To Sources

It is essential to verify all sources of information and avoid relying on unverified opinions that may contain bias or false information.

7. Consulting with Experts on Roma Culture

To ensure accuracy, it is highly recommended to seek consultation from specialists in Romani culture. However, it is crucial to remember that being of Romani descent does not automatically qualify an individual as an expert capable of commenting adequately on complex social, cultural, or political phenomena.

Concurrently, not every general specialist in these academic fields will possess the specific expertise required to comment on the Roma community. Therefore, selecting the right experts is crucial.

8. Including Minority Voices

It is essential to ensure that press materials include direct statements from experts within (or closely associated with) the minority community in question. This practice significantly enhances the authenticity of the coverage and directly reflects the perspectives of those personally impacted by the issue.

9. Careful Selection of Illustrations and Headlines in Media Publications

Headlines and illustrations are crucial to public perception. Therefore, visual content and titles must be selected carefully to ensure they do not reinforce stereotypes or prejudices against the Romani community. Imagery should be directly related to the specific event being described, rather than reflecting stereotypical perceptions of the community—such as stock photos of members in colorful clothing against the backdrop of a camp. Finally, the use of generic illustrative images should be avoided if they do not accurately reflect reality.

10. Developing Ethical Editorial Guidelines

Editorial boards, in consultation with relevant experts, should establish internal guidelines for reporting on minority groups. These frameworks must actively prevent stereotyping, discriminatory framing, and all forms of disinformation, including gender- and identity-based manipulation. Such protocols will guide journalists in their daily reporting while institutionalizing an ethical approach to media coverage.

11. Periodic Evaluation of Published Content

Regular editorial audits of published material are essential to identify and rectify biased, stereotypical, or discriminatory content. This proactive review process serves as an effective mechanism to counteract **systemic and gender- and identity-based disinformation**.

12. Specialization in Minority Reporting

Journalists regularly covering ethnic minorities must pursue ongoing education to deepen their subject-matter expertise. Integrating specialists in Romani affairs into the editorial process is highly recommended to enhance coverage quality. Furthermore, media outlets should refrain from assigning Romani-related topics to unvetted reporters who lack intercultural competence, objective crisis-reporting experience, or demonstrated impartiality.

13. Establishing Fact-Checking Collaborations

Newsrooms should establish formal partnerships with Romani translators and community specialists to fact-check coverage of sensitive events. This specialized verification process is essential to prevent reporting that leads to the social stigmatization of the Romani community.

14. Comment Section Moderation

Media outlets must actively safeguard comment sections on all publications regarding the Roma minority. This requires continuous optimization of automated moderation tools and the suspension of reactive post-moderation if content moderators lack specialized training in identifying hate speech, incitement to violence, or Romaphobic rhetoric. Deleted comments that violated the regulations should be presented to the authors in the comments section with explicit notices detailing the specific community guidelines or legal provisions they breached, while maintaining the right to preserve evidence for potential legal proceedings. Finally, if a publication is highly sensitive and likely to provoke intense public reaction, the comment section on both editorial websites and social media channels must be disabled entirely unless overseen by qualified moderators or robust automated filters.

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