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## **PECAO project against online anti-Roma hate speech**

### International background

According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, one in three Roma is a victim of harassment in their lifetime, and 20 per cent of non-Roma do not want a Roma as a colleague. As stated in the European Parliament resolution on the mid-term review of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies (2017), anti-Roma sentiment goes beyond the legal concept of discrimination. In essence, anti-Roma sentiment is the root cause of Roma exclusion. It has many different dimensions and manifestations, including hate speech from the public, media and political representatives, stereotypes, hate crimes, school discrimination, employment, health and housing, and structural anti-Roma sentiment.

Hate speech, as a manifestation of anti-Roma sentiment, requires special attention due to its multiplier effect: it influences public opinion, fuels tension, and paves the way for discrimination and hate crimes. Online media plays a special role in spreading and inciting hate speech. It reinforces stereotypes, uses offensive language, denies or downplays anti-Roma sentiment. Through social media, hate speech reaches millions of people and allows perpetrators to incite hatred and violence anonymously.

### PECAO project

The project aims to reach at least 2,000 young people in Spain, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Italy, France, northern Macedonia and Albania through peer education activities to raise awareness among these young people of the harmful effects of anti-Roma hate speech and enable them to recognize and report the hateful content.

It provides training and support to a total of 50 Roma youth in 10 countries on how to monitor online hate speech and how to report related cases to IT companies, national equal opportunities authorities and other competent public institutions, thus helping to enforce equal opportunities rules more effectively.

The project also aims to reach national and EU decision-makers responsible for public equality policies in order to take anti-Roma motives into account in online hate speech as a special form of motivation for prejudice.

### Definitions and legal environment

There is no universal concept of hate speech, we find different categories and concepts in international law and national regulations, such as criminal law, civil law, and even the media law.

The broad concept of hate speech includes speeches or written communications that can have potentially detrimental effects in a given context, on a particular individual or group, based on one of their characteristics.



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In Hungary judicial practice interprets hate speech as extremely narrow. There have been attempts in the past to change this narrow standard, but this has several times failed in the Constitutional Court.

In case hate speech appears on radio, television, in the print or on the Internet a complaint can be lodged with the National Media and Communications Authority (NMHH). Unfortunately, the practice of NMHH in recent years also shows that hate speech is interpreted very narrowly by the authority. In the case of Internet content that does not qualify as a press product, an appeal can be made on the Internet Hotline operated by NMHH.

### Situation in Hungary

According to a report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), in addition to law enforcement problems, the situation is further exacerbated by the fact that state action against anti-Roma hate speech is not only lacking in Hungary, but open anti-Roma hate speech is not limited to extremist parties and groups.

According to the findings of the Minority Rights Group for Hungary, about 60 percent of hate speech cases reported to the authorities are directed against Roma. Hate speech is mostly voiced by “average” citizens, but far-right and xenophobic groups have also become increasingly visible in recent years.

### Project's domestic experience so far

As part of the project, five Roma young people in Hungary took part in training on online hate speech against Roma and started monitoring activities at Romaversitas Foundation in October 2020. In the first four months, a total of more than a hundred anti-Roma content were found on Facebook, which were recorded in an online database. Nearly half of the cases were also reported to the service provider, but only a fraction of these were eventually removed.

Based on our experience so far, we can say that:

- If news of a violent crime appears on Facebook, commenters are almost always associated with the fact that the perpetrators are certainly Roma.
- Hate speech against Roma is widespread on the sides of extremist political forces and their representatives.
- The more limited the visibility of a comment (for example, it appears in a closed group), the more open the hate speech.
- In a significant proportion of cases, contributors have a false profile, which may also suggest that racist comments become “not trendy” over time.
- In many cases, in order to hide hateful content, commentators use other, “joking” terms instead of Roma, such as “I think he was Swedish. There is always something wrong with them.”

### Round table discussion

On January 28, 2021, a roundtable discussion on the topic was organized jointly by Romaversitas Foundation and Ame Panzh, which was followed by a large number of interested people via TV Baxtale’s webcast.



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Joci Márton, Nikolett Suha, Laci Farkas and Judit Ignácz, moderated by Boglárka Fedorkó, discussed several concrete examples of where freedom of opinion ends and where hate speech begins, and the role of social media platforms in spreading or preventing hate speech and whether the reaction of tech companies is enough or not.

Judit Ignácz emphasized that a small number of cases of incitement against a community are being prosecuted and that the perpetrator is being prosecuted in only a fraction of those cases. And Joci Márton reminded the audience that hate speech and incitement can indeed exit - and unfortunately sometimes exit - from the online space and lead to violence. To this day, far-right parties and organizations have not acknowledged their responsibility for the 2008-2009 Roma killings.

#### Concrete proposals based on the experience so far

Authorities could also make greater use of incitement provisions to properly prosecute and punish hate speech.

As recommended by ECRI, the ratification of the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime, concerning the criminalization of racist and xenophobic acts using computer systems, would help to combat online hate speech.

Leaders of all political parties should stand firm and open against all manifestations of anti-Roma hate speech and respond with much stronger anti-hate speech messages in case of incitement to hatred by political actors.

There would be a need for more public-initiated and public-sponsored public awareness and awareness-raising initiatives and educational programs aimed at combating hate speech and eradicating anti-Roma sentiment.

#### Further steps, collaborations

In addition to exploring the current situation, we consider it essential to take concrete steps towards change:

- That is why we joined the Do One Brave Thing project implemented in Hungary by Political Capital and the Budapest Center, in the framework of which several Instagram campaigns have been launched to change negative narratives against Roma.
- In March 2021, a meeting will take place between PECAO project fellows and representatives of the National Media and Communications Authority Internet Hotline to share their experiences so far.
- From April 2021, as a founding member, we will join the work of the One Hungary Commission, the aim of which is to establish a civic cooperation to reduce hate speech, discrimination and racism in public life.
- In the spring of 2021, Romaversitas Foundation scholars will hold information sessions on the topic more than twenty times all over the country, involving more than 200 young people.



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If you want to do something about hate speech and prejudice, you can do it in many ways. We've gathered some options for you:

You can act by the means of law. The [HCLU here](#) tells you how.

If you see or hear a hateful program you can complain to [to the National Media and Communications Authority](#).

If you come across racist, inciting content made available on a website or in an email, you can report it to NMHH [Internet Hontline](#).

You can also report anti-Roma hate speech on social media. You can find more information about how to report here:

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[YouTube](#)

[TikTok](#)

*If you want to find out more about reducing prejudice against Roma, here are some tips:*

The [Independent Theater](#) offers a huge range of lectures and workshops to start a dialogue on social issues that affect us all, and you can even get answers to what you can do yourself to improve the situation.

Following the work of [ldetartozunk Association](#) you can learn about important social issues affecting the Roma and even participate in their work as volunteers.

At [Phiren Amenca](#) you can take action against social prejudices through international volunteering.

[Rác Gyöngyi Community House](#) also offers plenty of programs and at the same time you can visit the exceptional Újpest Gypsy Local History Collection.

[UCCU Informal Education Foundation](#) provides an opportunity for students to meet and talk with Roma youth in order to break down prejudices. [On their city walk](#) you can also participate in social dialogue.

We just wanted to give you a few examples, but you can get more recommendations by contacting us or the organizations listed.

**Remember, you can do a lot against hatred too! Protest, raise your voice against incitement to hatred.**



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