



EQUAL
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ANTI-ROMA SPEECH ON FACEBOOK BEFORE ELECTIONS AND DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

ANALYSIS:
THE CASE OF
BULGARIA





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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the last official census (2011), the Roma in Bulgaria make up a little over 4%. According to independent research by Bulgarian and international agencies, their number is about 12%, which is the largest relative share among EU countries. The Roma are the most marginalized and at the same time the most discriminated ethnic group in the country. They are the most frequent object of hate speech, including in the media, as well as by political leaders, who use hate speech as a motivation for the vote of a nationalist society.

A significant part of the Roma in Bulgaria live in conditions of extreme poverty, in poor housing, located in segregated neighborhoods which lack basic infrastructure, public and health services. Roma have a relatively lower level of education, with a large proportion of Roma children attending segregated, all-Roma schools, where the level of education offered is relatively lower. As a result, they remain without or with low professional qualifications, which leads to high levels of unemployment among the Roma community. The state of health among the Roma is also relatively worse than among the Bulgarian population, most of them are uninsured and this leads to a relatively lower life expectancy of the Roma compared to the population of Bulgarian ethnic origin.

The periods of elections and pre-election campaigns in Bulgaria are of particular importance in terms of the intensity of anti-Roma speech. Even disinterested observers can easily see an increase in the intensity of anti-Roma speech in society, in the media and especially on social media. Nationalist-leaning political groups use negative stereotypes and prejudices against Roma, widespread in Bulgarian society, to “color” their election campaigns. In their pre-election statements, they easily and with impunity blame the Roma for the poor social situation in which people in Bulgaria live. In their political platforms, they refer to the Roma as uneducated, unemployed, lazy, perpetrators of criminal acts, irresponsible parents and users of social services and benefits. It is widely believed that due to their marginality, low education, poverty and lack of interest in public life and political processes in the country, Roma are easily manipulated as voters by “selling their votes” for small amounts. This instills the prejudice that the Roma have a negative influence on the political processes in the country. Statements are being promoted pointing out that due to their large numbers the Roma, as most uneducated and disinterested part of society, are crucial to the election results and in practice distort them. This rhetoric is also popularized by the media, for which this is one of the main topics in the pre-election and election periods. In turn, this leads to the strengthening of anti-Roma sentiments and prejudices in society and becomes a “unifying theme” and a motivation to increase the intensity of anti-Roma speech. These processes are most visible on social media, where the level of relative anonymity is higher and therefore authors of posts and comments feel freer to share opinions and statements that are even outright racist.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY WITH KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

According to recent surveys, just over 45% of the country's population uses Facebook. Undoubtedly, the social network has a significant role in shaping the public discourse and attitudes influencing the image of the Roma community in the country. The media presentation of the Roma in most of the online media is through negative stereotypes. The topic of "Roma" is very popular on the social network, both before and during the election campaign. Politicians from the far right have blamed the Roma for many social problems.

This report examines both the pre-election period and the time of the active election campaigns in Bulgaria in 2021, in order to determine whether there is a change in the discourse regarding the Roma in order to consolidate the electoral vote by politicians.

The results of the survey show a remarkable lack of sensitivity on the topic of "Speech against the Roma on Facebook" by the social network; or lack of understanding of words and expressions typical of the Bulgarian context. Many of the posts reported during the hate speech monitoring remained un-removed by Facebook. The monitoring found more active removal of reported publications in the pre-election period than in the election period.

WHO DID WHAT:



In 2019, the EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVE ASSOCIATION launched the implementation of the LEGAL INCUBATOR program in Bulgaria. The LEGAL INCUBATOR programs were created on the idea of the American lawyer Fred Rooney. They aim to provide continuing practical training and create career opportunities for young lawyers. The Bulgarian program creates a network of young lawyers tempted by social justice, who provide legal assistance to vulnerable groups in society, such as the Roma.



In 2020, the JUSTICE INITIATIVE PROGRAM of the OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION supported the Legal Incubator program for the development of the project "Monitoring discrimination on social media: The case of racist online content in Bulgaria". The project aimed to monitor the content of anti-Roma speech on the social network Facebook, focusing on the period of the Parliamentary elections in Bulgaria in 2021; preparation of an analytical report on the results of the monitoring and recommendations for improvement of the situation identified.



In 2020, experts from EQUALITY LABS trained the lawyers from the LEGAL INCUBATOR in specific technical methods and tools for combating speech against the Roma, distributed on the social platform Facebook. EQUALITY LABS is a full-fledged civil rights organization focused on building progressive power through community research, cultural and political organization, public education and digital security to combat the oppression of castes caused by apartheid, Islamophobia, the theory of white supremacy and religious intolerance.



YOUNG LAWYERS from LEGAL INCUBATOR program proved to be a suitable resource for active monitoring. For 6 months, they collected information on the social network for posts containing anti-Roma speech and reported posts identified to the Community leadership as a content, which violates Community Standards.

The monitoring aimed to study the anti-Roma speech on the social network Facebook and to identify if there is a change in the discourse during the elections compared to the pre-election period. Monitors reported posts they deemed as violating Facebook's Community Standards, using the reporting option for *hate speech* based on race or ethnicity.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

1. Posts containing anti-Roma speech are mostly from real authors - 86% and only 14% - from "troll profiles". This leads to the conclusion that people stand by their own names and profiles, including when their posts are clearly racist and incite discrimination and aggression. These facts demonstrate that there is a strong sense of impunity among Facebook users regarding the anti-Roma speech used on social media.

2. Of the 225 publications reported during the whole monitoring 179 are reported in the first monitoring period and 46 in the second. 23% of the publications reported in the first period are removed and only 9% of the publications reported in the second period. The rest remain considered by Facebook management to be inconsistent with the definitions of hate speech based on race or ethnicity provided within the Community Standards.

3. During the elections, the Roma are significantly more talked about in the context of political and criminal issues - almost 10% more than in the period before the election campaign. Explicit racism is rising by about 10-15% as a ratio of Facebook users' posts to Roma, and incitement to discrimination remains the main content with almost the same trend before and during the election campaign.

4. Prior to the election campaign period, Facebook users published posts with anti-Roma content combined with a shared post, most often from an external media site reporting on the ethnic Roma origin of those convicted of crime. Thus Roma are established

and stereotyped as criminals. During the election campaign, posts containing anti-Roma speech without being provoked by certain media publication prevailed. Rather, the reasons for publishing posts with anti-Roma content during the election campaign were provoked by events connected to the upcoming elections. In such a situation, Roma have traditionally been stigmatized as participants in election corruption and are constantly accused of paid voting. The reaction of anti-Roma speech is primary, instantaneous and spontaneous, not based on a thorough understanding of the arguments in support or against such opinions.

5. There is a significant lack of sensitivity on the topic of anti-Roma speech demonstrated by the Facebook management. It refers specifically to the lack of understanding of certain words and expressions specific to the Bulgarian language and the Bulgarian context. Facebook reacted more to posts with overt racism during the first monitored period. The posts profiled as “overt racism” during the second monitored period have been 70%. During this period, 91% of all reported posts were not removed.

6. Facebook does not recognize covert “new racism”, which has the same consequences as overt racism. It applies to posts where ethnicity of a suspect/perpetrator of a crime is revealed without this being essential for the meaning of the information. The revealed ethnicity leads the audience to conclude that it is common for all Roma to commit crimes. For the purposes of the present report such posts are profiled as “hidden, new racism”. In most cases, only very blatant and sharp insults to the Roma are considered *hate speech* by the Facebook management. It includes posts containing words as: “mongooses”, “gypsies”, “dirty”, “lower”, “primates”, etc. Often, when racist posts are published, these also remain unremoved by the Facebook management. In rare cases, words like “brazier” are not considered hate speech and continue to spread on Facebook, despite being reported as violating Community Standards.

7. The posts show intolerance towards vulnerable social and economic situation of the Roma and towards Roma themselves. Hatred and rejection prevail in the posts regarding Roma thus establishing negative stereotypes regarding Roma community. Roma are presented as a threat and a burden to society. Irony and ridicule accompany many posts regarding Roma. This leads to deepening social distances between Roma and other ethnic groups in the country. The trend also increases the risk of discrimination against Roma.

8. The additional monitoring related to the period between the regular and extraordinary Parliamentary elections (April - July 2021), identified 78 posts and comments containing anti-Roma speech. The posts and comments containing anti-Roma speech were oriented mainly in two directions: A) the Roma are illiterate and this will reduce the Roma vote, due to the machine voting established for the extraordinary elections; B) Increased police actions against the paid vote will reduce the Roma vote as Roma sell their votes. Out of the reported posts in this period only 9 were removed. Violations identified within Facebook posts and reported to the Central Electoral Commission were not addressed with the argument that social networks are not a media product.

9. Bulgarian legislation does not consider social networks as media products. Therefore, posts on social networks containing violations are not sanctioned by the

institutions regulating the conduct of elections in the country. They are considered to be an expression of freedom of expression.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Facebook management to consider the introduction of an additional option in reporting - *Mentioning of ethnicity*, in cases of posting information regarding a crime and when it does not contribute to a full understanding of the information in the publication. This new option can be added to the *"What kind of hate speech"* section, which is available when "Hate speech" is selected as a possible issue when reporting.

2. Facebook management to include in its monitoring teams persons with knowledge of Bulgarian as a mother tongue. Such individuals could more authentically and credibly evaluate certain posts and respond more adequately to the need for hate speech to be understood and removed when reported.

3. Facebook management to specify its assessment of reports containing "hate speech", stating in more detail the reasons for refusing to remove a reported post. We recommend that Facebook increase the competencies of the team that deals with hate reports applicable to various forms of anti-Roma sentiment. Facebook should rethink its criteria for freedom of expression and incorporate into its restrictions those established by international law at European level in the criteria of the Community Standards. Facebook should not allow for violation of dignity and honour of citizens on the basis of ethnicity, accepting that freedom of speech ends where the rights of non-discrimination and equality begin.

4. The Bulgarian legislator to rethink and redefine the concept of "media" and "media product", especially in the context of elections. Although Facebook is not included in the legal definitions of "media" and "media service" in the Electoral Code of the Republic of Bulgaria, it is a productive field for agitation, influence and manipulation of the audience's mind when exercising the right to vote. It turns out that voting can indeed be manipulated through publications that thematically affect elections and aim to ignore one group of citizens or activate another. In this sense, the neglect of the social network as a place to express attempts to manipulate and influence the electoral vote by law is an omission and does not take into account the consequences that users may cause with their publications during elections. For the purpose of exercising un-manipulated, but free by internal conviction and conscience vote, Facebook should be seen as a possible field for illegal campaigns and attempts to influence during elections. To this end, the legislator must rethink the definition in § 1, item 15 of the Additional Provisions of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Bulgaria and henceforth treat Facebook as a platform equated to the media.

3. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. OBJECTIVES AND TASKS OF THE MONITORING

The present report has two main objectives: to study the anti-Roma speech on the social network Facebook and to monitor whether it changes during elections period. The report aims to analyze anti-Roma content published on Facebook and provide understanding on how it could be used in time of elections. Also the monitoring of the social network aimed to report to the Facebook management the posts identified as containing anti-Roma speech and seek removal of these posts. A recent GWI study (Global Web Index) shows¹ that this social media is the largest and most widely used, with over 1 billion active users. Bulgaria makes no exception to this statistic. Just over 45% of the country's population (3.3 million people) uses Facebook, according to a report by Profit.bg.² More than half of them use the social network through their mobile phones. This allows greater access to social media and enhances the opportunity to share opinions, messages and news. The latter also facilitates the access of the Roma community to the social network, thus making Roma witnesses to the widespread anti-Roma speech and negatively affecting their self-esteem as equal members of society and their self-esteem. Undoubtedly, in the last few years this social network has been actively used by politicians and political parties, public figures, companies and others. Most of the media in Bulgaria create official profile on Facebook, where they publish messages, news and other materials related to public life. It is a fact that Facebook is an influential communication channel, attracting a diverse audience as a tool for providing alternative points of view.

The above prompted the authors to explore the language used in relation to Roma people on social media, as it undeniably plays a significant role in shaping public discourse and attitudes influencing the image of the Roma community in the country. Based on the notion that the media presentation of the Roma people in most of the online media is through negative stereotypes, the authors **paid special attention to the stereotypical**³

¹ https://www.globalwebindex.com/hubfs/Downloads/Social%20Media%20Report%20-%20GWI.pdf?utm_campaign=210329%20Social%20flagship%20report%7C&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=118473500&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--a_SJ_SxT0ow2fe9zuDZm5AfXZnoDM-qR53kpBhkvxKA7cNwEd2mxWSQbADf4rb__ASv0pVAUdrL9spU75VZSsA29O5A&utm_content=118473500&utm_source=hs_automation

² <https://profit.bg/tehnologii/kolko-balgari-polzvat-facebook/>

³ For the purposes of the present report "stereotype" means any generalizations about a group, cognitive structure, configuration of knowledge and beliefs about the typical features of the representatives of a group. The definition was used by Prof. Ilona Tomova - BAS in the study of the Integro Association "The image of the Roma in six electronic media", https://integrobg.org/files/Report_hate_speech.pdf

and biased⁴ presentation of the Roma community. As one of the main goals of the initiative was to report to Facebook the posts defined as containing anti-Roma speech, the authors mainly focused on posts that have a profile of overt racism and those containing covert racism, also known as “new racism”⁵. The authors followed how the period around the elections affects the anti-Roma speech in the most popular social network in Bulgaria. As the anti-Roma speech is widely used by politicians, political parties, groups, media and public figures with far-right political orientation to mobilize the nationalist vote and increase the electoral activity of targeted parts of the population the report aimed to analyze if the election period intensifies the use of anti-Roma speech on the social network Facebook.

4 Nelson proposes the following definition of “prejudice”, which we take as a working definition in the present analysis: “a biased assessment of a group based on real or imagined characteristics of the members of that group” (Nelson2002).

5 The new racism (Barker 1981) wants to be democratic and respected and therefore denies that it is racism. True racism, in this framework of thought, exists only among the right wing. According to New Racism, minorities are not biologically inferior, but different.

3.2. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY OF MONITORING⁶

Prior to the monitoring, the monitors undertook special training, provided by Equality Labs. The training acquainted the monitors⁷ with the definitions of anti-Roma speech in international regulations. The trainees summarize the definitions of anti-Roma speech or other phenomena close to this concept - as regulated and understood by the Bulgarian legislation. The trainees also summarized the practice of the institutions competent to prevent and sanction anti-Roma speech on the basis of ethnicity. The trainers from Equality Labs introduced the trainees to the related terminology and provided them with a useful in terms of identifying posts with specific content tool, namely CrowdTangle. It is a search engine which uses specific criteria for identification of different types of information published on social networks through keywords, posting time, post location, and the category of the account that created or shared certain posts. The monitors were trained to easily find up-to-date posts with anti-Roma content. In the rules for selection of posts, which will be object of the report, it was decided to enter the endonym "*Roma*" or the exonym "*Gypsies*" in the search engine; as well as the word "*mangal*"⁸ and the euphemisms "*dark brown*", "*cousins*", "*minority*"⁹.

The data collection (results of the monitoring) has been implemented in two main stages:

1) First monitoring period included the time before April 2021 election campaign (November 2020 – March 2021). In this period posts published from 2014 to February 2021 have been identified and collected¹⁰.

2) Second monitoring period included the time of the April 2021 election campaign and the Election Day (March 2021 and to April 3rd 2021).

Posts identified in the course of the monitoring have been collected in online-based table. Detailed information has been collected for each of the posts identified, including date of reporting of anti-Roma posts before the Facebook management and the result of the reporting.

As a result of the specific situation, which arose in Bulgaria after the regular April 2021 Parliamentary elections (as the elected Parliament failed to form a Government and new elections have been scheduled for July 2021), the monitors continued to observe

⁶ Details on the methodology are provided as an Annex to the present report

⁷ For the purposes of the present report "*Monitors*" should be understood as those who participated in the monitoring process by observing, reporting and registering posts containing hate speech against the Roma.

⁸ Extremely offensive way to address a person of Roma origin popular in Bulgaria.

⁹ Words frequently use to address Roma in Bulgaria

¹⁰ The idea behind registering, reporting and analyzing older publications was to remove them from the Facebook space, because even though they were published a long time ago, they continued to influence anti-Roma sentiment.

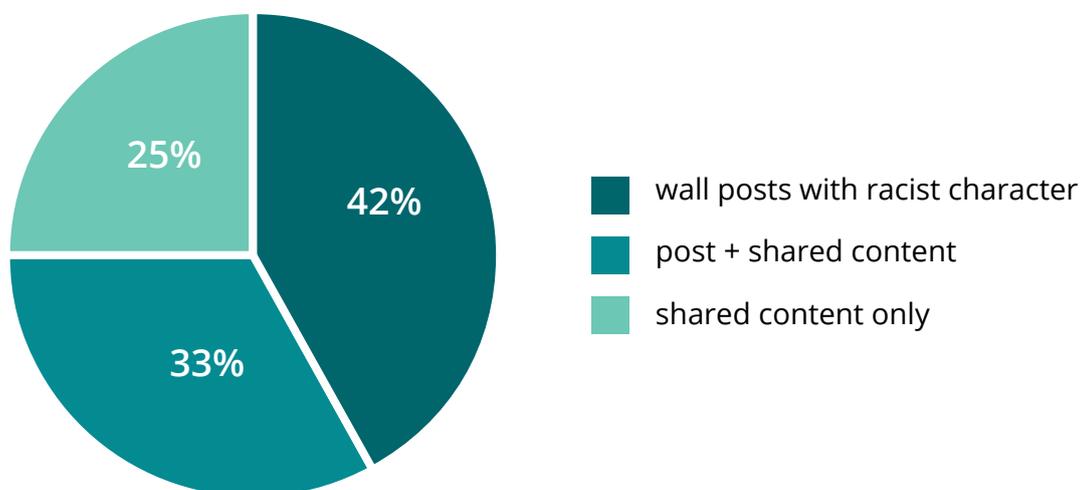
Facebook during an additional period, which covered the time between the regular and the extraordinary elections.

4. PRESENTATION OF THE MONITORING RESULTS

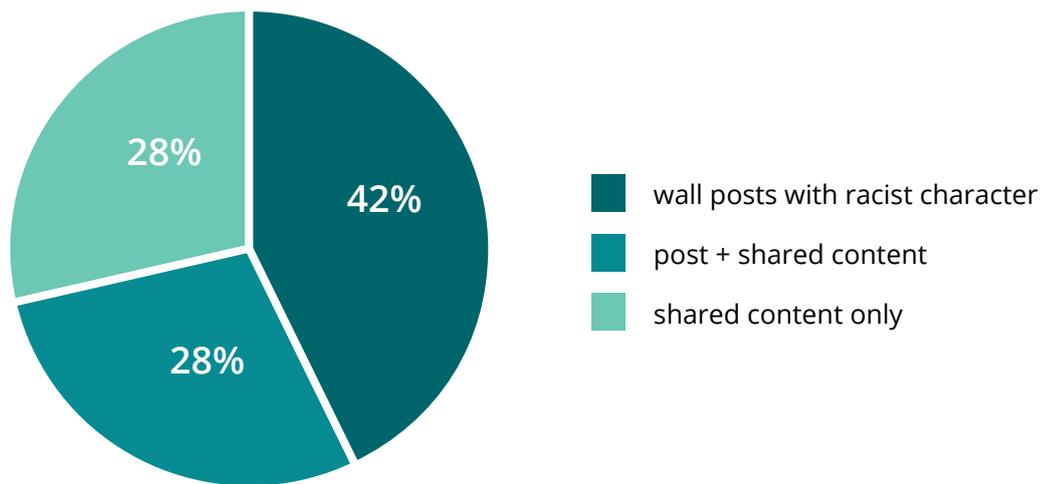
A total of 225 posts with anti-Roma content are identified during the monitoring period (179 in the first period and 46 in the second period). For the purposes of smooth data collection the monitors categorize these in three groups: 1) wall post with racist character; 2) post complemented by shared content (video, picture or electronic media article), shared on Facebook; 3) shared post.

Among the identified, most frequent are wall posts with racist anti-Roma character - 76, or 42% for the first period and 20 or 44% for the second period, (example here <https://www.facebook.com/206860356026909/posts/3184548358258079>) followed by posts complemented by shared content - 59, or 33% for the first period and 13 or 28% for the second period (example here <https://m.facebook.com/OZBG2014/posts/1583393545177052>). Fewer posts are shared content only - 44, or 25% for the first period and 13 or 28 % for the second period (example here <https://www.facebook.com/Chovekk/posts/1089900471484623>).

This qualification is important as it proves that before elections, users are more likely to resort to expressing their personal position without the need to support it with any shared content. Posts concerning Roma are proved popular and commented with intensity.



Graphic № 1, First period, Type



Graphic 2, Second period, Type

Analysis of the data collected refers to the findings within the three categories defined above. The analysis is focused on four issues:

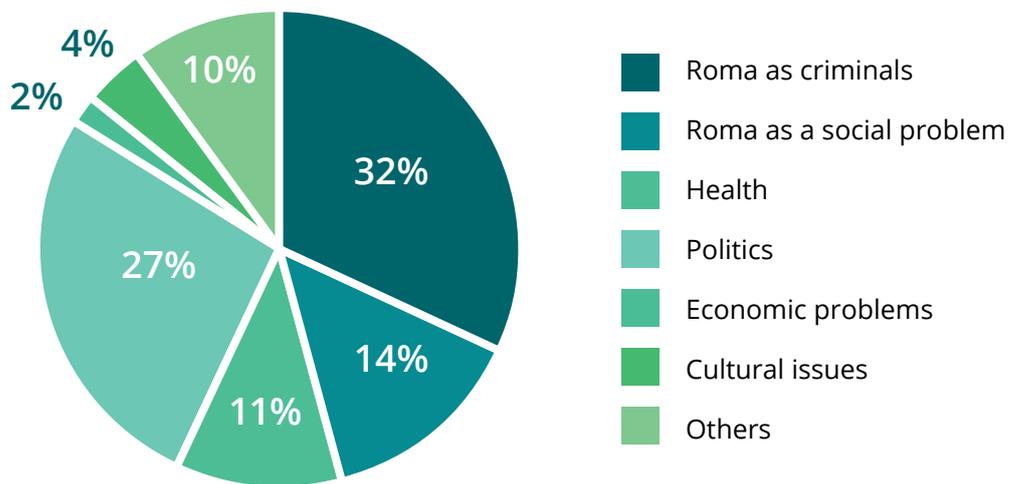
- ▶ Topics of the posts. The monitoring identifies that the posts collected are focused on six topics: politics, Roma as criminals, Roma as “social problem”, health, economic problems and cultural issues.
- ▶ Degree of racism. The report studies profiles of the posts, categorizing them as five groups: overt racism, hidden racism, mocking/offensive, fake news and ambivalent.
- ▶ Authorship. The report categorizes the posts identified as to whether these are created by real users or by inauthentic (trolls) and in terms of authorship defines four categories: individual user, Facebook page, politician and public figure.
- ▶ Removal of content. As all of the posts identified have been reported to the Facebook management as violating Community Standards, the report studies if and to what extent the reported posts have been removed.

4.1. TOPICS OF THE POSTS

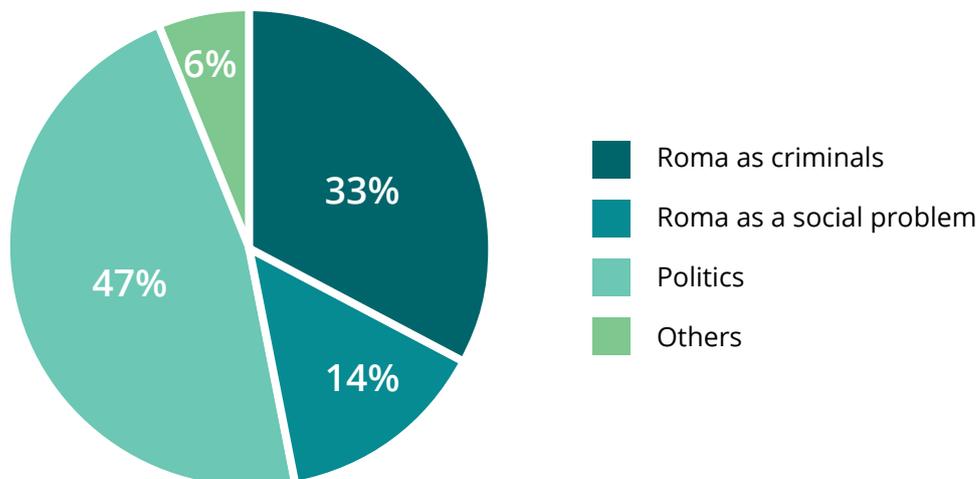
In the first monitoring period “Roma as criminals” is identified as the most popular topic (found in 63 posts), closely followed by “politics” (55), and further “Roma as social problem” (28), health (22), cultural issues (7) and economic problem (4).

In the second period the posts identified are narrowed to three topic categories: “Roma as criminals” (16), politics (23) and “Roma as social problem” (7).

A comparison between the results of the two surveyed periods shows that as Election Day approaches, the posts focus on issues related to Roma participation in the election process. On the first place, the share of posts related to politics increases significantly, and in addition to this, posts on crime and social issues are also related to the upcoming elections. The crimes associated with the Roma are primarily related to vote trading, and social issues focus on the fact that the marginalization and poverty of the Roma prompts them to accept small sums in exchange for voting for a particular political party.



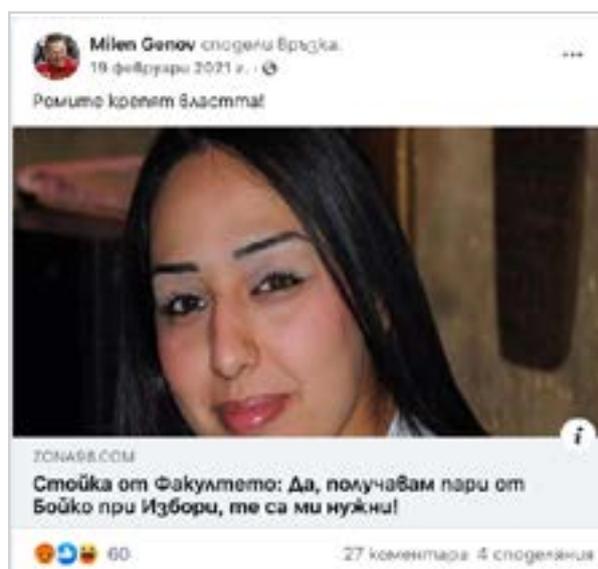
Graphic 3, First period, Topic



Graphic 4, Second period, Topic

The posts related to the topic “politics” include some illustrative examples showing the wide spread prejudice that Roma trade their votes. Disappointment with the latest government has turned into accusations against Roma that they will once again support the ruling party, as it leaves them unpunished in exchange for support during elections. It is obvious from the graphics that the topic of “Politics” is a favourable ground for the revival of anti-Roma attitudes in the public space. When all pressing issues in the country are discussed during the election campaign, the Roma find themselves in dire straits and are being used as a traditional excuse by the governing organs for having many insurmountable problems.

The following illustrative example clearly denounces Roma as corrupt voters. It is a post complemented with shared content (an article titled “Stoyka¹¹ from Fakulteta¹²”) and it reads: “Yes, I receive money from Boiko Borisov¹³, I need it!” (Post from the first monitoring period)



Link to the post: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2598160913759342/permalink/2954195531489210/>

Other post reminds that in the past Roma have been restricted from voting, and calls for similar measure to be endorsed. The post reads: “Petko Karavelov’s government forbids gypsies to vote. The motive - their votes are the easiest to buy. On February 20, 1901, a new government came into power, headed by Prime Minister Petko Karavelov. The first task of the new cabinet was to draft a law amending the Election Code. It contains an amendment banning gypsies from voting. The motive - their votes are the easiest to buy. With minor amendments, this restriction has been in force in our country for 35 years.”

Such information however, along with the topic of the upcoming elections, did not accurately reflect what was said. It neither provided evidence for allegations of electoral corruption, nor gave reliable identification of sources of information. The information is quite short, unexplained and fragmentary. (Post from the first monitoring period)

11 Interviewed person

12 Biggest Roma ghetto in Sofia

13 The prime minister



Link to the post: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=955780638290489&id=424485594753332

In the first monitoring period politicians from the opposition developed the idea that Roma will vote for the ruling Government, as the administration intentionally leaves them to do “what they want” expecting that this will motivate Roma to support the ruling party on the elections. The latter is well visible in the following post (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1023593121444197/permalink/1174595243010650/>), which reads: “Gypsy PR, elections are coming”, and on his Facebook page the politician Alexander Sidi shared a video with a guest in a publicist show (<https://m.facebook.com/alexandarsidi/posts/830594054159059>) commenting: “The big parties in Bulgaria have no interest in the integration of the gypsies. We will see this on April 4, when the big parties enter the ghettos and “persuade” these Bulgarian citizens of Gypsy origin to vote for them. For 30 years we have been pouring hundreds of millions for the integration of the gypsies and nothing is happening. Why aren’t we talking about the integration of Jews or Armenians in Bulgaria? Gypsies cannot continue to live above the law and build illegal houses. All sorts of NGOs explain to them that they are unpunishable.”

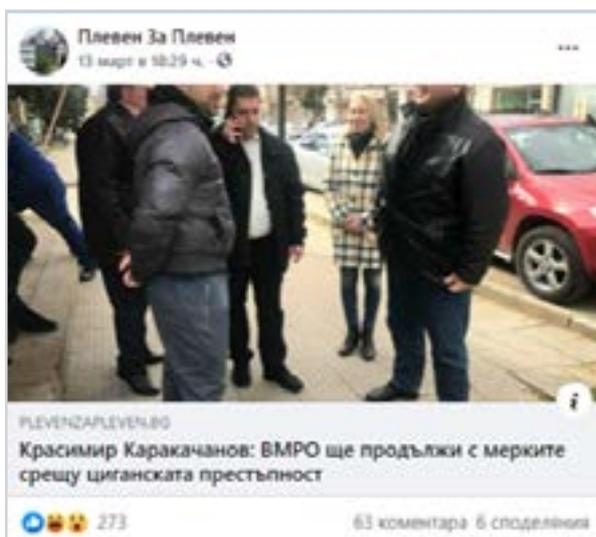
It is precisely because of this alleged escape from punishment that Facebook users see a reason for the Roma to continue to support and maintain the current government.

An example of a post with political context with already established stereotypes about the Roma are the allegations of vote buying involving Roma, available on the link below: <https://m.facebook.com/martinkarbovskiofficial/posts/4415041471844349> (Post from the first monitoring period).

In the text we read an accusation of a pre-election corruption: “GERB has promised 70,000 votes to VMRO. In the gypsy neighbourhoods you pay between 150 - 300 levs... These things happen in the dark and under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs... VMRO is not a patriotic formation, but a work of the State Security. This was said to BNR by the leader of the “Ataka” party Volen Siderov and he added that the new triple coalition is GERB, MRF and VMRO.” A prominent leader of a nationalist party accuses the Roma of selling their votes for BGN 150. In the text, the topic actually looks like a mixture of two thematic areas - crime

and politics. The pre-election situation, however, is the main focus on the context and the publication mostly reflects how the participation of Roma in the upcoming elections is presented online.

The next example shows a leader of a prominent nationalist party and Minister of Defence on election meeting. The title of the post reads: *“Krasimir Karakachanov says the party will continue to pursue the measures against Gypsy criminality”*



<https://m.facebook.com/PlevenZaPleven/posts/4163534173658246>

The posts relating to Roma as criminals topic describe them as gangsters, beggars, prostitutes, suggesting that criminality is the Roma way of living. Very often such posts provoke negative comments from other users who agree, approve with, share, comment and repost these. Comments to one of the posts identified read: *“Nobody can touch them...”; “Hitler’s the real deal, WAKE UP BULGARIANS!”* (Post from the first monitoring period)

The posts within the “Roma as criminals” category present the Roma as a privileged group that commits crimes without carrying criminal liability. An example of this is the following post, which reads: *“The “mangali” are in the red book, they are untouchable, and they are the electorate.”* This post is created by a Facebook user whose car was broken allegedly after he made a remark to Roma, complaining from loud music:

Link to the post: <https://www.facebook.com/sevacar/posts/10219615360316799> (Post from the first monitoring period)



Other post presenting Roma as privileged group of criminals authored by “Organization for the Protection of Bulgarian Citizens” (OPBS) reads: *“In connection to the house that burned down in Sopot, for which we blame the neighbouring gypsies, OPBC has submitted complaints to 4 institutions to carry out various inspections. At the moment, local institutions*

are not very responsive, but we will encourage them. We will not let corrupt institutions and impudent gypsies harass Bulgarians. We will do what we can to ensure that justice prevails!"
(Post from the first monitoring period)



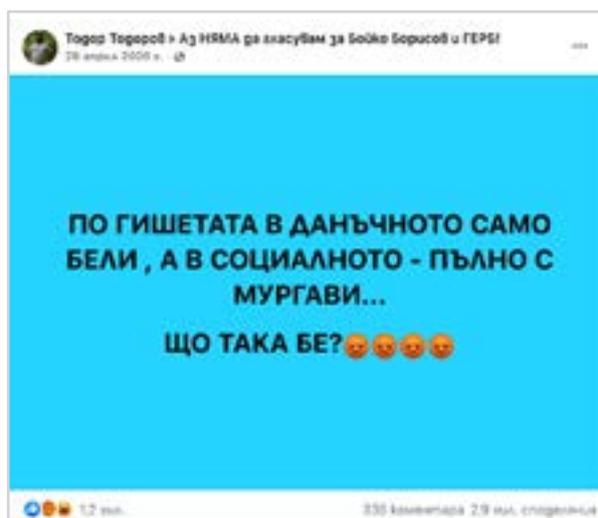
Link to the post: <https://m.facebook.com/OZBG2014/posts/1583393545177052>

It is constantly emphasized that crime is a major part of the Roma way of life; that this is how “they” behave socially. The daily reiteration that “some gypsies commit crimes” is generalized to “the vast majority of gypsies systemically commit crimes” and thus reinforces the stereotype of Roma as criminals.

The posts relating to “Roma as social problem” topic characterize Roma as lazy people who stay unemployed to receive social benefits; where at the same time the “hard working Bulgarians” are forced to support gypsies and their children. These posts are intensively commented and shared. One of the posts identified generated 17,000 reactions, 6,100 comments and 6,400 shares (Link to the post: <https://www.facebook.com/OldBulgaria/posts/1127304381039386>). The comments generally express anger, indignation and hatred towards the Roma.

Other post in this category reads: *“At the tax payment offices there is only white people, and in the social assistance agency - full of gypsies... I wonder why that is?”* (Post from the first monitoring period)

Link to the post: <https://www.facebook.com/206860356026909/posts/3184548358258079>



The posts related to health topic are mainly focused on the Covid-19 pandemic.

The context is mainly that Roma do not comply with the anti-Covid measures. Ideas to close Roma ghettos are encouraged in the posts identified, as Roma are deemed as

disease spreaders. Politicians and public figures are found to post very actively on this topic. The MPE Angel Djambazki created a post, which reads: *“Mortality is much higher in communities with zero hygiene, zero discipline, and an abundance of chronic diseases that haven’t been treated, systemic incest that affects generations, zero immunization memory and no vaccines. In Bulgaria these are the ghettos. As early as March 18, I demanded that the ghettos be isolated and closed.”* (Post from the first monitoring period)

Link to the post: <https://m.facebook.com/Djambazki.VMRO/posts/2285475534888464>

Other post created by the same author reads: *“I’m sorry, but we were right. The ghettos should have been closed long ago. Look at the way the gypsies behave. A raging crowd, screaming, shouting, lies, panic, hysteria, provocations. Ghettos must be closed, and parks, gardens and mountains should start to slowly reopen, adhering to anti-epidemic measures. The idea is simple - blockade for the irresponsible, freedom for the conscientious”* (Post from the first monitoring period)

Link to the post: <https://www.facebook.com/Djambazki.VMRO/posts/2336170826485601>



At the beginning of the declaration of a state of emergency in our country, the authorities and the media branded the Roma community a major spreader of the infection. In a clear discriminatory way, the authorities imposed the first lockdowns mainly in the Roma neighbourhoods. This seemed to satisfy the public and the institutional need to find a buffer for the difficult management of the health crisis. The Roma were publicly and legitimately branded for having low culture and hygiene. When mostly Roma neighbourhoods were closed at the beginning of the pandemic, this somehow satisfied the public, and anti-Roma publications in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic significantly decreased. Attempts to encourage hostility towards the Roma in the context of these events were met only with distorted facts and fake news¹⁴, such as the following available on the link provided: <https://www.facebook.com/times.bg/posts/3377876058994461/> (Post from the first monitoring period)



The fake news was confirmed by media that are authoritative and trusted by society, although before the credible facts were clarified, the news was spread and commented on the Bulgarian Public Television without being well verified. The young boys seen in the video are participants in a clinical trial of a drug, not coronavirus patients.

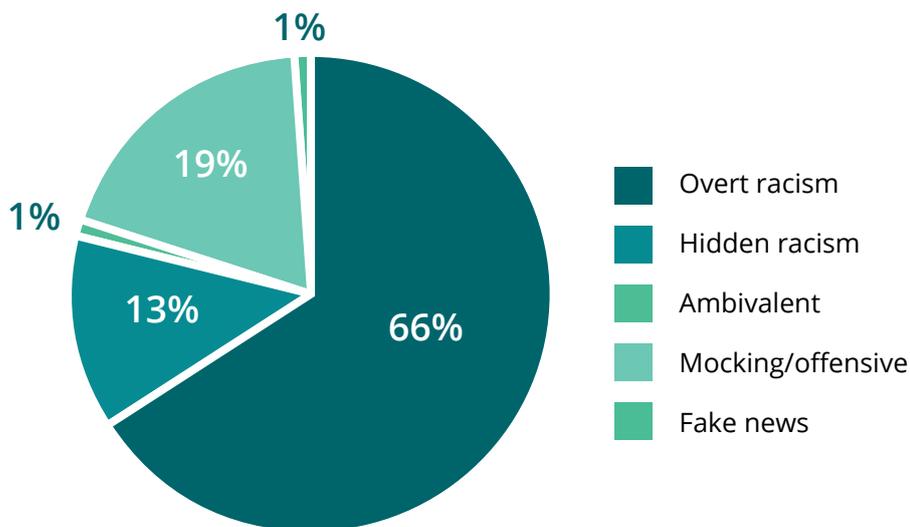
¹⁴ <https://www.mediapool.bg/tantsuvashite-kyuchek-v-bolnitsa-sa-uchastnitsi-v-klinichno-prouchvane-news314143.html>

4.2. DEGREE OF RACISM

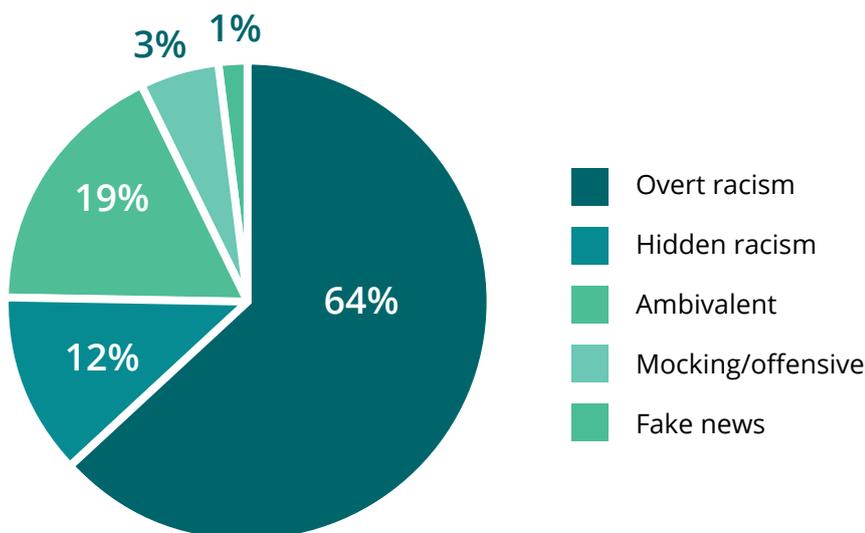
For the purposes of the monitoring and analysis and to measure the degree of racism the posts identified are categorized in five categories as to their profiles: Overt racism, hidden racism, fake news, mocking/offensive post and ambivalent.

In the first period of the monitoring 66 % of the posts are categorized as overt racism, 19% as mocking/offensive posts, 13% as hidden racism and 1% as ambivalent.

In the second period of the monitoring the figures read: 70 % overt racism, and 7,5% for each one of the rest four categories.



Graphic 5, First period, Profile of the post



Graphic 6, Second period, Profile of the posts

As the figures presented clearly shows, the overt racism prevails significantly over the rest forms. It is also visible that the overt racism increases in the time of the election campaign.

For the purposes of the present report overt racism post are defined as posts, which openly express hatred and intolerance towards Roma. These involve discriminatory or insulting statements against Roma, based on their alleged “inferiority”. These posts attribute specific negative characteristics to the Roma community. They emphasize their non-Bulgarian affiliation and often suggest that Roma isolation and less favourable treatment.

Here is an illustrative example of post which contains overt racism:

*All “mangals” to be used for making soap*¹⁵ (Post from the first monitoring period)

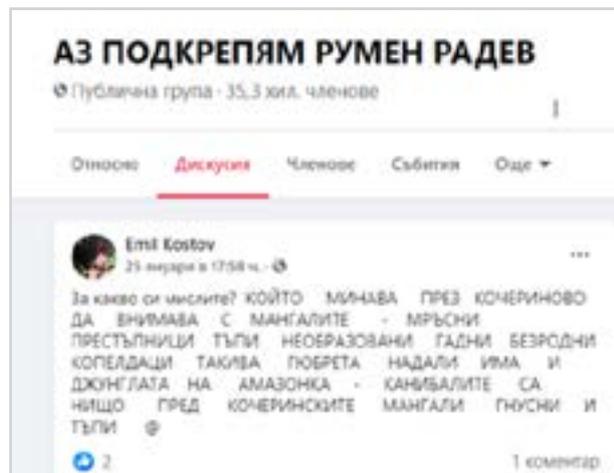
Other example of overt racism is given bellow: <https://archive.ph/6oydS>

Above we read the following: *“Out of 200,000 returnees, 180,000 are “mangals”, Europe refuses to pay their insurance and the parasites come back here and expect us to pay them to do nothing all day and to beat up and rob old people in the villages.”*

Such statements are most recognizable by Facebook as violating Community Standards, and as soon as they are reported, removal follows. (Post from the first monitoring period)

Mocking/offensive posts refer to Roma as dirty; greasy; low; disgusting; dumb and others.

Example: The post reads: *“Whoever passes through Kocherinovo needs to be careful with the “mangals” - dirty criminals, dumb, uneducated, nasty bastards; there is no such garbage even in the Amazon jungle - cannibals are nothing compared to the “mangals” from Kocherinovo, disgusting and dumb”*. (Post from the first monitoring period)



¹⁵ There is a popular rumors within the Bulgarian society that Nazis used human fat from the corpses in concentration camps during the Second World Was to produce soap.

Hidden racism posts often contrast the Roma with other ethnic group, and the comparison is never in favour of the Roma.

Example: One of the posts identified reads: *"In Canada they give three hundred euros per child, in the USA five hundred and in Bulgaria they give money only to gypsies."*

Link to this post: <https://www.facebook.com/206860356026909/posts/3119794451400137>



These posts have the same effect as overt racism - they incite to discrimination. The above example post is commented 658 times. The comments are mostly discriminatory, and connected with the upcoming elections:

"They are BB's favourite electorate !!!"¹⁶;

"Without the gypsies, can morons be elected to come to power?";

"Of course, it is common in Bulgaria to give benefits only to gypsies";

"Good work, yet gypsy work."; "BECAUSE WE ARE A GYPSY STATE."

This post has 1600 shares. (Post from the first monitoring period)

Example of a post with a hidden racist nature is identified here: <https://m.facebook.com/Djambazki.VMRO/posts/2285475534888464>

It supports a link to the external site of the post https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/kupon-po-vreme-na-pandemija-klip-ot-romskata-mahala-v-sliven-skandalizira-socialnite-mrezhi.html?fbclid=IwAR2UOU3YPeaeSrkd4_PUdSCmlvdXwPpwSDyQbE5G-U3KfM14G600nnlxk2k.

The exemplary publication mentions an illegal gathering in the form of a private party during a pandemic. The media reported this fact without making obvious racist statements but put emphasis on the fact that this was happening in a Roma neighbourhood. The endonym "Roma" is generally accepted for naming the Roma ethnic group, but the emphasis on the ethnically distinct location in no way contributes to the nature of the information, but only achieves public stigmatization of the Roma. It describes them as perpetrators of illegal acts as if it is innate to the Roma ethnic group to violate public order. (Post from the first monitoring period).

Hidden racism is also found in the following publication: <https://www.facebook.com/dunavmost/posts/5140905322617199>

16 Boyko Borisov, the prime minister

This example of hidden racism does not directly address the Roma, but attributes qualities described as innate to the Roma, giving them as an example of a negative phenomenon and showing them as flawed - as if the Roma are permanent bearers of the emblematically bad and retrograde.

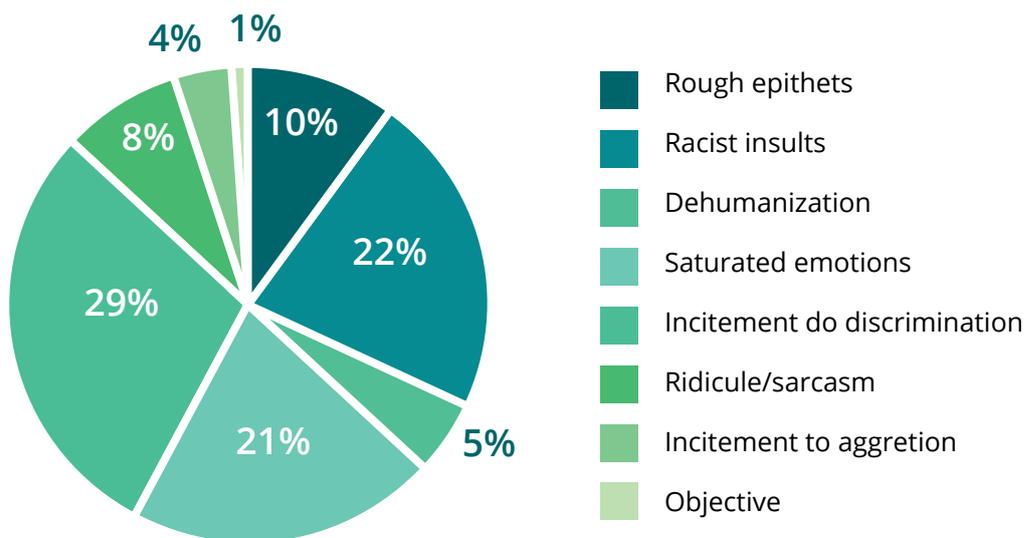
The title uses an insulting name for the Roma – Gypsies. It is considered habitual; it is suggested that it is innate to the Roma community to only party without working. The Defence minister and a prominent patriotic leader talked about a policy concept he offensively called “Gypsy strategy.” (Post from the first monitoring period).



An example of fake news on which an opinion is based is a post with the following text: “The pathetic truth about Bulgaria: Pensioners with a pension of BGN 200, mothers with child benefits of BGN 40, and Roma minors who have children with BGN 1,400 each!” There is no basis on which is it acceptable to make such a statement, as no reliable data are cited. (Post from the first monitoring period)

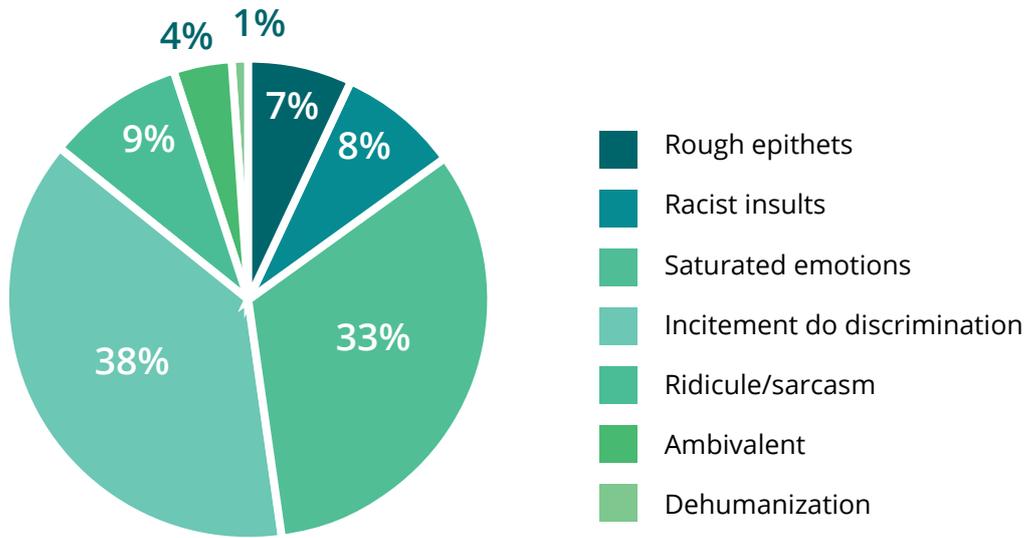
To measure the degree of racism on the basis of the posts content the following markers have been introduced: rough epithets; racist insults; dehumanizing statements; saturated emotions (anger, resentment, hostility); incitement to discrimination; ridicule and sarcasm; incitement to aggression, objective.

In the first monitoring period the following results are shown:



Graphic 7, First period, Content of the post

In the second monitoring period the following results are shown:



Graphic 8, Second period, Content of the post

As the graphics from both period shows, posts containing incitement to discrimination increases in the second period.

Illustrative example of publications with prevailing saturated emotions, which boost the instillation of hatred and hostility towards the Roma in a very extreme way is shown below:

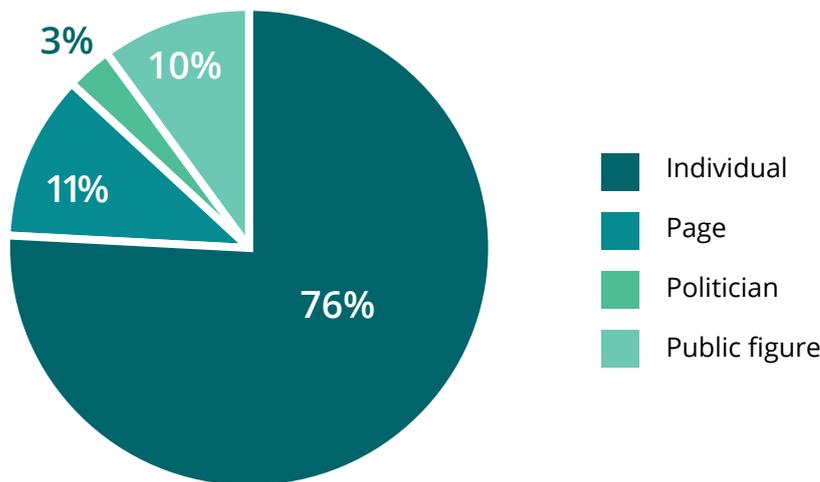
<https://www.facebook.com/Sofia7dni/posts/3730015867079063>

In the article we read: *“How long? Isn’t anybody going to finally take action? Citizens of the capitol are raging: Minor gypsies attack people at bus stops. | 7 Days Sofia”* (Example from the first monitoring period)



4.3. AUTORS OF THE POSTS

For the purposes of the analysis four types of authors are defined: individuals, pages, politicians and public figures. The results from the first and the second period of the monitoring are relatively similar. In 76% of the post the author is an individual user. In 11% posts are posted by a Facebook page, 10% of the posts and 3% are created by politicians.

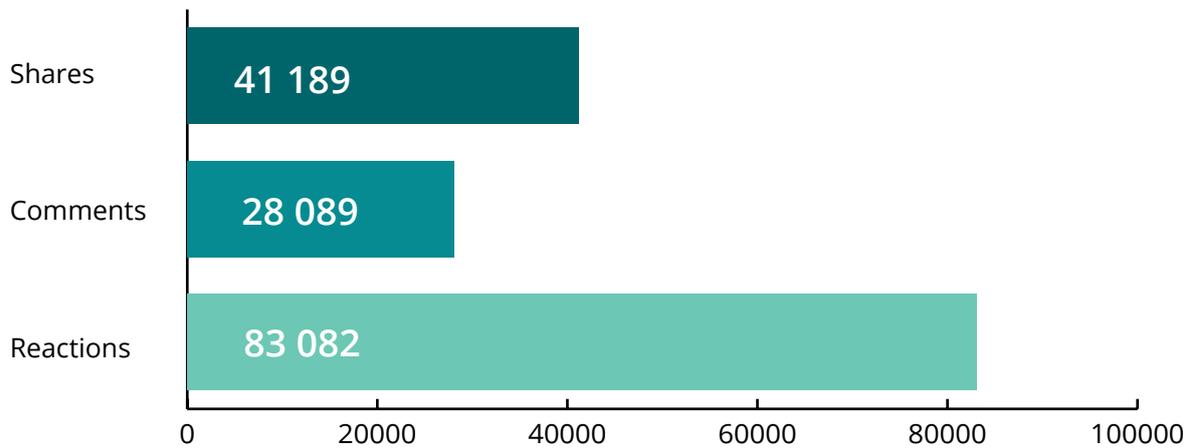


Graphic 9, Entire period, Author

The fact is that neither politicians nor public figures have become more active in anti-Roma speech during the election period. In a better world, this could mean that they have become more careful, but the sad fact is that anti-Roma talk before the last elections in Bulgaria increased its intensity long before the elections, so the official campaign did not change.

To the extent the monitors succeeded to identify as to whether the post is published by a real user or by inauthentic, the results show the following: In the first monitoring period 84% of the posts are created by real users and 16% by inauthentic; in the second period 85% are created by real users and 15% by inauthentic.

Popularity of analyzed posts containing anti-Roma speech



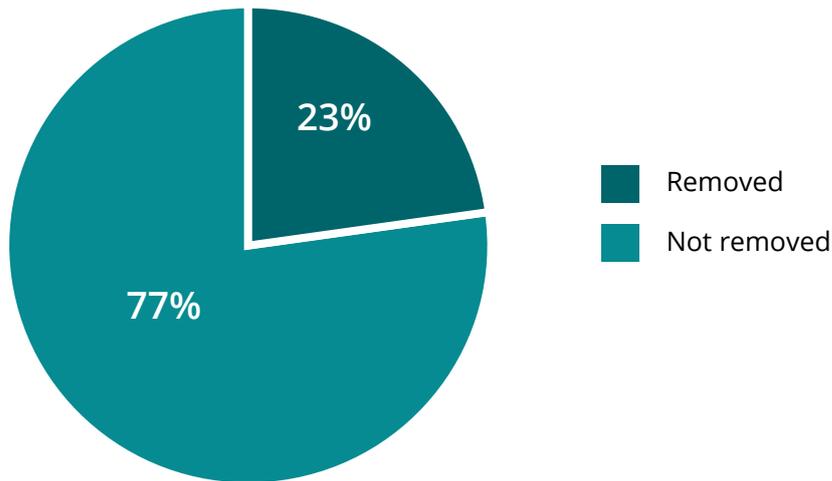
Graphic 10, First period, Posts of individual users

As it is seen on the graphic above the anti-Roma wall posts identified in the first period, which were 76, received a total of 83,082 reactions, in the form of likes, emoticons for love, concern and rage. On average, this is about 1093 reactions for each of the posts. The posts received 28,089 comments, which is an average of about 369 comments for each opinion. They have been shared 41 189 times, which is an average of about 542 shares for each opinion.

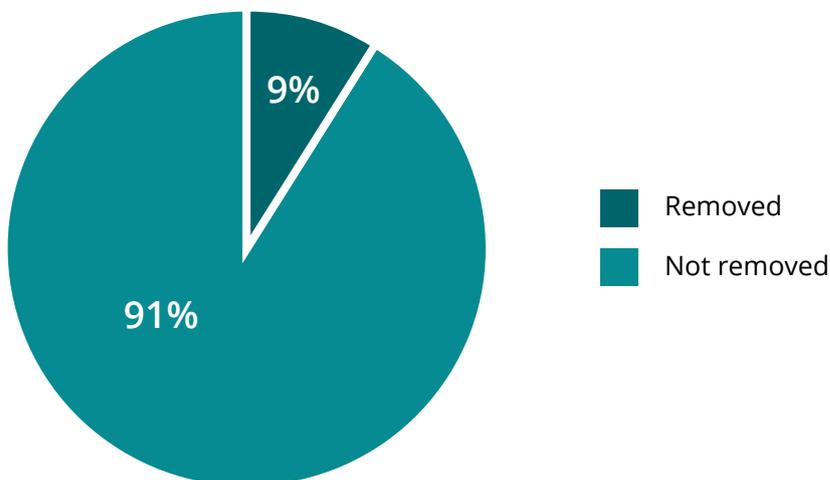
The above leads to the conclusion that the “Roma” topic is among the most popular in the Facebook space. In addition, when talking about Roma people in a negative aspect, Facebook users are largely willing to respond to such posts through the options available on the social network.

4.4. REMOVAL OF CONTENT REPORTED

Data for the first monitoring period shows that 77% of reported posts have not been removed from Facebook. In response to the reports submitted, the monitors received a message that these publications did not violate Community Standards. In 23% the publications were removed. It is noteworthy that Facebook mainly removes posts that we have profiled as “overt racism”.



Graphic 11, First period



Graphic 12, Second period

The report does not provide information on how long it took for Facebook to remove posts reported for being in violation of the Community Standards, as the methodology used did not plan for such analysis. However, unofficial information can be provided, based on data collected by the monitors. According to this data, in cases where Facebook removed posts, this usually takes 24 hours. Notification of whether the post has been removed or not is usually also received by the sender within 24 hours.

The information collected on the removal rate indicates a significant lack of sensitivity towards anti-Roma speech by the Facebook management or a lack of understanding of specific words and expressions in Bulgarian. It could be illustrated by the following example: *“All ‘mangal’ to be made into soap”*, which was removed only after the three report sent by two different users. Facebook tends to react more to opinions with overt racism. It does not recognize the hidden, *“new racism”* that has the same consequences as overt racism. In rare cases, words like *“mangal”* are not considered anti-Roma speech and remain circulating on Facebook, despite them being reported. In most cases, only very blatant and sharp insults to the Roma are considered anti-Roma speech. These are: *mangusti, dirty gypsies, low, primates, etc.* Often, when racist opinions are shared, they are also not removed from Facebook.

It is also visible that the level of removal decreased during the election campaign. In fact in the second monitoring period it is extremely low. The data presented in this way are worrying. They prove that much of the anti-Roma speech on the world’s most popular social network remains unrecognizable. Possible reasons for this can be found in the specifics of the linguistic environment, typical of the Bulgarian context, as well as in a too *“narrow”* understanding of *anti-Roma speech* and too *“broad” - on freedom of speech*. We will present a more detailed analysis of the collision of the two concepts in the Community Standards and beyond, as well as recommendations based on the present study.

4.5. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FIRST AND THE SECOND MONITORING PERIODS

As can be seen from the information presented in the report, anti-Roma speech is widespread in society, which is reflected in the studied social network. This is true for both study periods. However, the information gathered shows some differences, which indicate an increase in the intensity of anti-Roma speech during the election campaign in connection with the upcoming elections.

For example, the proportion of posts identifying anti-Roma speeches related to politics has increased significantly. The share of posts discussing the affiliation of Roma with crimes is also growing, with an emphasis on crimes against the electoral system, such as vote-buying. The above also leads to an increase in the share of posts defined as outright racism. The share of posts whose content is „incitement to discrimination“ also increased during the second monitoring period. In addition, there has been a decrease in the share of removed publications containing anti-Roma speech. According to the authors, this is due to the mobilization of users who use anti-Roma speech, who are heavily reporting posts to users who would report their posts and thus achieve their blocking.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION № 1: The topic of the “Roma” is very popular on the social network both before and during the election campaign. It largely provokes interest among users who actively respond to such posts. During the election campaign, Roma are accused of more crimes than usual.

CONCLUSION № 2: There is an intolerant attitude in the posts regarding the condition of the Roma and the Roma themselves. Hatred and rejection are imposed. Negative stereotypes about the Roma community are being established. Roma are presented as a threat and a burden to society. The shared articles show a shallow look at the Roma community and the reasons that keep them in this state. Irony and ridicule accompany many posts about the Roma. This leads to a deepening of the social distances between the Roma and the other ethnic groups in the country. It also increases the risk of discrimination against the Roma.

CONCLUSION № 3: During the elections, the Roma are significantly more talked about in the context of political and criminal issues - almost 10% more than in the period before the election campaign. Explicit racism is rising by about 10-15% as a ratio of Facebook users’ statements to Roma, and incitement to discrimination remains the main content with almost the same trend before and during the election campaign.

CONCLUSION № 4: There is a strong sense of impunity among Facebook users regarding the anti-Roma speech used in social media. Many users are not ashamed to openly demonstrate their hatred towards the Roma.

CONCLUSION № 5: There is a noticeable lack of sensitivity on the topic of “anti-Roma speech” on Facebook or a lack of understanding of words and expressions specific to the country. Facebook reacted more to posts with overt racism during the first monitoring period. The posts profiled as “overt racism” during the second monitoring period were 75%. During this period, as many as 91% of all reported posts were not removed.

CONCLUSION № 6: Facebook does not recognize the hidden, “new racism” that leads to the same consequences as overt racism. In rare cases, words like “mangal” are not considered anti-Roma speech and remain circulating on Facebook, despite their reporting. In most cases, only very blatant insults to the Roma are considered anti-Roma speech. These are: “mangusti”, “gypsies”, “dirty”, “low”, “primates”, etc. Often, when racist opinions are shared, they are also not removed from Facebook.

CONCLUSION № 7: There was a low degree of removal of reported posts containing anti-Roma speech. We noticed that some of the posts containing anti-Roma speech were removed from Facebook only after the second or third reporting by at least two different users.

CONCLUSION № 8: Bulgarian legislation does not consider social networks as media products. Therefore, posts on social networks containing violations are not sanctioned by the institutions regulating the conduct of elections in the country. They are considered to be an expression of freedom of expression.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONCERNING COMMUNITY STANDARDS

Facebook defines its rules for allowing or not allowing certain content to be made public in the following way¹⁷: “We understand the importance of Facebook being a place where people feel free to communicate, and we take seriously our role in keeping abuses outside our service. That’s why we’ve developed a set of Community Standards that state what’s allowed and what’s not allowed on Facebook.” Community standards must first be governed and guided by normative understandings of the limits of freedom of speech and the prohibition on distribution of discriminatory speech. They are laid down as norms at the international but also at the national level. Facebook’s management must take into account the officially adopted and effective laws in the field of limits of freedom of speech not only at the international level, but also at the regional level. Only in this way will the platform be able to take into account the specifics and peculiarities of the local context in different countries, continents and regions of the world. Some regional European legislation, such as the *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*¹⁸, on the conflict between the right to freedom of speech and the right to the protection of the rights of others, states the following:

Freedom of speech

Article 10 of the ECHR:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/>

¹⁸ https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf

protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

Article 17 of the ECHR:

Nothing in this Convention may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein or at their limitation to a greater extent than is provided for in the Convention.

The Convention sets the limits in the exercise of freedom of speech end where the prohibition to infringe and affect the rights of other citizens begins; other citizens must not be humiliated, discriminated against, nor should hatred towards an ethnically distinct group or population be publicly promoted. The management should consider the situations where ethnicity has been mentioned when reporting crimes precisely through the prism of this normative restriction of freedom of speech. It is of urgent necessity to realize that the mention of ethnicity in reporting crimes leads to stigmatization, unfair generalization of the community in a negative way and the birth or establishment of stereotypes. In this report, we have profiled such posts as covert, “new” racism. Posts which emphasize the ethnicity in the context of committed crimes are extremely dangerous because they accuse an entire ethnic community, suggesting to the audience that the responsibility for illegal acts is not personal but communal.

In relation to this:

RECOMMENDATION № 1: We recommend that the Facebook management consider the introduction of an additional option - “Mention of ethnicity” when it comes to a crime and when it does not contribute to the information in the post. This new option can be added to the “What kind of anti-Roma speech” section available when selecting “Anti-Roma speech” as a possible reporting issue.

Facebook’s management then needs to consider their understanding of situations in which certain words or racist epithets sound harmless and do not qualify as anti-Roma speech. At the linguistic and cultural level, the management better its understanding of the language, cultural expression and the specifics of the local context. In this regard:

RECOMMENDATION № 2: We recommend that Facebook’s management includes in its monitoring teams persons with Bulgarian as their mother tongue. In this way, these persons could authentically assess certain posts and respond more adequately to the need for anti-Roma speech to be understood and prevented when it is reported.

If such persons are already included in the team, then we recommend that their role in the process of evaluation and review of posts with a Bulgarian author or distributor be intensified. An argument for this recommendation is that Facebook itself has realized to

some extent the importance of the specifics of each cultural and linguistic environment for the different countries in which the social network is used. In one of the paragraphs in the Community Standards the following is mentioned: “We recognize that these words mean different things or affect people differently depending on their communities, languages or personal experience.” However, this awareness by the management remains recorded only in the Standards of the Community, but in practice – it has not been implemented in the Bulgarian context.

RECOMMENDATION № 3: We recommend that the Facebook management specifies its assessment regarding reports containing “anti-Roma speech”. We recommend that Facebook enhances the competencies of the staff dealing with anti-Roma speech reports applicable to the various forms of anti-Roma sentiment. Facebook needs to rethink its criteria for freedom of speech and align its limits - such as those mentioned by the international legal acts at a European level in the analysis of the Community Standards. It must not allow the violation of the dignity and honour of citizens on the basis of ethnicity by allowing too much freedom for users to express an opinion. In fact, freedom of speech ends where the rights of non-discrimination and equality begin.

International legal acts, even those with a universal and not a regional scope, such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, proclaim these considerations, as it states in Article 29 (2): *“In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.”*

In this sense, what is stated in the Introduction to the Community Standards: *“In some cases, we allow content for public awareness purposes that otherwise violates our Community Standards if it has journalistic value and is in the public interest. We do this only after weighing the value of the public interest against the risk of harm and reviewing human rights standards, as reflected in our Corporate Human Rights Policy, in order to make these assessments”* we consider to be inadequately implemented in terms of the legislation concerning freedom of speech. However, achieving the goal set out in the Community Standards should not be allowed at the cost of ethnic stereotyping and stigmatization, even more so when emphasizing the ethnicity of potential or proven perpetrators does not contribute to the meaning and significance of the information.

RECOMMENDATION № 4: The Bulgarian legislator to rethink and redefine the concept of “media” and “media product”, especially in the context of elections. Although Facebook is not included in the legal definitions of “media” and “media service” in the Electoral Code of the Republic of Bulgaria, it is a productive field for agitation, influence and manipulation of the audience’s mind when exercising the right to vote. It turns out that voting can indeed be manipulated through publications that thematically affect elections and aim to ignore one group of citizens or activate another. In this sense, the neglect of the social network as a place to express attempts to manipulate and influence the electoral vote by law is an omission and does not take into account the consequences that users may cause with their publications during elections. For the

purpose of exercising un-manipulated, but free by internal conviction and conscience vote, Facebook should be seen as a possible field for illegal campaigns and attempts to influence during elections. To this end, the legislator must rethink the definition in § 1, item 15 of the Additional Provisions of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Bulgaria and henceforth treat Facebook as a platform equated to the media.

ANNEX 1 FULL METHODOLOGY

Two groups took part in the initiative – trainers and trainees. Prior to start of the monitoring the group of trainees underwent online training under a special methodology created for the training purposes. The training has been proved by experts from **EQUALITY LABS**.

EQUALITY LABS¹⁹ is a **Dalit** civil rights organization that focuses on building progressive power through community research, cultural and political organization, popular education, and digital security to combat caste oppression, caused by **apartheid** (apartheid is a policy of segregation and discrimination in South Africa), Islamophobia, **white supremacy** and religious intolerance.

Experts from **EQUALITY LABS** shared experience from their practices in combating various forms of racism and discrimination. They introduced the trainees to specific technical methods and means to address anti-Roma speech spread on the social platform Facebook.

For the trainees: The trained monitors are young lawyers - graduates or already working, who are part of the **LEGAL INCUBATOR**²⁰ program. The Legal Incubator program was created by the American lawyer Fred Rooney. This program aims to create a united network of young lawyers who provide legal assistance to vulnerable groups in the society, such as Roma. The program is part of the activities of the non-profit organization - "**EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVE ASSOCIATION**"²¹. The lawyers were excellent resource for monitoring, expedient and collection of information and, most of all, recognition of hate speech against Roma people.

About the methods and methodology of the project: The training program took approximately 24 astronomical hours. It was divided into sessions within 6 days, each lasting 3 astronomical hours. The first batch of training sessions was held in the period 17 - 22 October 2020, and the meetings were held online - through the Zoom program. The introductory training acquainted the future monitors²² with the definitions of hate speech in international regulations. The trainers addressed the future monitors with the task to summarize the definitions of hate speech or other phenomena close to this concept - as regulated and understood by the Bulgarian legislation. The trainees also summarized the practice of the institutions competent to prevent and sanction hate speech on the basis of ethnicity. In the form of Power Point presentations, the trainers from Equality Labs introduced the monitors to the terms "misinformation" and "fake news". Through fake news and misinformation in the lightest and most populist way, anti-Roma sentiments

19 <https://www.equalitylabs.org/>

20 <https://www.facebook.com/lawincubator>

21 <https://www.equalopportunities.eu/bg/>

22 "Monitors" should be understood as those who participated in the monitoring by observing, reporting and registering posts containing hate speech against the Roma.

reach the largest possible audience and attract attention with their unpretentiousness and shallowness of information. For a wide range of consumers, it becomes easily digestible, primarily affects and simply provokes, unhinderedly fulfilling its only goal - to generate hostility and promote discrimination against the Roma. Fake news and misinformation have proved to be a commonly used approach in stigmatizing the Roma community as extremely dangerous and harmful to society, and most often - as a whole criminal and unlawful - as if all its members contribute to criminal acts and are almost genetically linked to them.

About the style of work: The training introduced us to the working methods needed to gather information and follow up on anti-Roma statements in the public space. A special platform was presented, which serves as search engine with specific criteria for a certain type of information to be identified on social networks. **CrowdTangle**²³ platform has become a major tool for finding the posts containing anti-Roma hate speech. Through keywords, posting time, post location, and the category of the account that created or shared the post; the monitors were trained to easily find up-to-date posts with racist content. The platform proved to have a number of advantages over the traditionally known keyword search in social media search engines. It not only found the posts, but it also summarized the trends of their occurrence, presented a diagram illustrating the trends of distribution of a certain type of posts and provided the opportunity to create and maintain a list of profiles that we consider the main generators of anti-Roma content. It was also able to send information about new posts with relevant content daily to personal email addresses. Thus, through CrowdTangle, the monitors could search, find and collect information about anti-Roma content on a daily basis.

The training organization suggested that the already found posts be structurally registered and described and put into a **Google spreadsheet**.²⁴ Information about them was described and marked in separate columns according to set criteria. These criteria clarified various aspects of the content of the post. Among the set criteria the trainers had included:

1. Link to the post;
2. Link to the account from which this post originates;
3. Account name;
4. Essential parts from the post alongside their English translation;
5. Screenshot of the post;
6. Special column for marking possible hashtags - if any;
7. A special column for a video downloaded from Facebook, in case it is also present in the post;

²³ <https://www.crowdtangle.com/>

²⁴ https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1hQSS3bd7QYRbBzlw6NMg8jKjslrU1TPKOIS2jXUijQE/edit?fbclid=IwAR3PffHRg68iGh3ajjW_1NeFSvj0A66z-xT85v1szNZ1H-m2iRMMKMoHojk#gid=385832520

8. A place to mark **the archiving of the post** - by placing a link that leads to the archived post – this was done for each post in a **special platform with the Internet address www.archive.ph**.²⁵ **This proved to be an extremely useful and practical approach to long-term storage of information, especially in cases where after reporting to Facebook the post was removed and access to it on the social platform was impossible;**

9. A column in which the monitors noted whether they had reported the post to Facebook. Reporting enables the rapporteur to indicate what problem they see in the relevant post and the criteria according to which it does not comply with Community Standards. Among the possible set criteria, Facebook offers **“Hate speech”**, and among the possible grounds for hate speech Facebook offers **“Race or ethnicity”**. **Specifying these categories is enough for the monitor to fill in the reporting form correctly and send a signal to the social platform.**

10. The result was filled in a separate column of the table, after the Management has notified **whether the post is removed or not** through an individual notification in the profile of each monitor;

11. In a different column, the reason for the respective result was described, and two almost standard reasons set according to the Community Standards are possible - **contradicts or does not contradict to the standards;**

12. In the penultimate column, the monitors had the opportunity to briefly share their views on the post. For this purpose, they could comment on both its content and its influence and distribution. Also, they could point out in their opinion what makes the publication non-compliant with the Community Standards;

This method proved to be practical and convenient for monitors. Through it, all participants had access to the necessary information in real time. Trainers could make edits at the same time.

In addition to CrowdTangle, the monitors could search for discriminatory material in the familiar traditional way - through the social network search engine using keywords, examples of which were mentioned above.

In the second stage of the training, the monitors had the opportunity to hear and learn about the last module of the project concept - **“Advocacy”**. It was crucial for the intended results of this endeavor. The monitors learned about its definition, tools and goals and committed to make it happen. In addition to monitoring, Advocacy includes activities aimed at equality bodies and the IT Company Facebook. Activities include making recommendations and referring hate speech to the competent institutions.

25 <https://archive.ph/>

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AND DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

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