

## Young Activists Take Legal Action Against Anti-Roma Online Hate in Slovakia



**Bratislava, Brussels, 20 September 2023:** The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and the Forum for Human Rights (FORUM) have lodged six criminal complaints against individuals who have posted anti-Roma hate speech on social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube in Slovakia. The complaints are all against individuals who have posted racist statements calling for violence against Roma and were based on evidence gathered by young volunteers and law students known on social media as [ROMAntici](#). The complaints were filed with the Police Presidium on 20 September 2023.

*“Since the beginning of the project we have managed to document hundreds of hate speech posts and comments. We have focused on those that incite hatred. Some of them are outrageous, others are even more serious and aim at the extermination of Roma. In some cases, the haters may have committed criminal acts. We have therefore decided to forward selected comments to law enforcement authorities to deal with them,”* said Diana Repiščáková, volunteer coordinator and lawyer at the [Forum for Human Rights](#).

Six criminal complaints were prepared against online posts that contained hateful, violent, and inciteful remarks against the Romani community on various social media platforms. The comments include promoting the genocide against the Roma, sympathising with Nazi ideology, and directly inciting hate and violence against Roma and people with disabilities. The organisations argue that the individuals' online statements violate Section 423 (defamation of nation, race, or beliefs), Section 424 (incitement to national, racial, or ethnic hatred), and Section 360 (dangerous threats) of the Slovak Criminal Code (Act No. 300/2005 Coll).

The evidence supporting these legal actions was gathered by young volunteers working with FORUM within the EU funded international project [Challenging online and offline Roma discrimination in Europe \(COORDE\)](#). These activities are part of the ERRC's *Challenging Digital Antigypsyism* project, currently operating in six countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia). The projects aim to challenge hate speech online through volunteer-led action, as well as bring legal complaints to tackle hate speech in the online sphere

directly. The organisations urge social media platforms, the Slovak Media Council, and criminal justice authorities to take a more proactive role in combating hate speech, as it has no place in our society. The volunteers involved in the project called on the public to stand with them in condemning hate speech and supporting the Romani community.

*“Although our primary focus, together with ROMAntics, is on reporting hate speech against the Roma community, countless harmful and offensive comments flow through the internet every day, so we are trying to report other groups of hate comments as well, and thus contribute to making the internet a safer place for everyone. Reporting hate speech in this way might seem like a simple matter, but in practice it is not. We encounter hatred, insults and even threats of violence on a daily basis. Therefore, in our project we also take care to think positively and always keep in mind the goal for which we are doing this reporting activity. Therefore, each of you, when you see a hateful comment on social media, you can report it yourself or contact our group and we will take the necessary steps to remove it,”* said Ema Krkošová, a law student and volunteer with the ROMAntici group.

*“There is a large amount of hate speech on social media directed at the Roma community. These are spread much faster on the Internet than in everyday life, which often causes a certain 'labelling of Roma'. This is one of the many reasons why I am monitoring these manifestations. Someone needs to do this for better and safer social networks for all Roma,”* stressed Zdenko Farkaš, a Romani activist and volunteer in the ROMAntici group.

*“I am happy to be part of a group of volunteers who are involved in activities that have a real impact on society. It is astonishing that today many people still do not realise that they are responsible for hateful statements on the internet,”* said Dávid Duda, a volunteer in the ROMAntici group.

The ERRC and FORUM have brought similar criminal complaints in the Czech Republic [earlier this year](#), as well as in [October 2022](#). These are currently under investigation by the Czech Police. The six criminal complaints in Slovakia are the first to be taken in the country under this project. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) highlighted last year that [racism and hate speech are persistent in Slovakia](#), after a submission from the ERRC.

The ERRC and Forum for Human Rights will closely monitor the next steps taken by the Slovak Police in the criminal complaints. At the same time, this project will continue to explore other legal and non-legal avenues to ensure digital antigypsyism is effectively challenged online.

This press release is also available in Slovak.

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