



Article

Antigypsyism in Portugal: Expressions of Hate and Racism in Social Networks

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Abstract: Portuguese Roma/Ciganos face different forms of negative reactions; they are marginalized, live in precarious socio-economic conditions, and are the poorest in Portugal and in the European Union (EU), as shown by the reports of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). Despite national and European strategies, these situations continue, with the proliferation of racist demonstrations and hate crimes, and the growth of extreme right-wing parties. In 2022, the publication of a report by the FRA, regarding the situation of Roma in 10 EU countries (including Portugal), revealed the impact of antigypsyism in the areas of employment, education, health, and housing; these data triggered hate speech on social networks, which happens whenever something about Ciganos is published. A content analysis of the news disseminated by the main Portuguese media (press, TV, Radio) and of the comments on this news was conducted, through qualitative methodology. The results reveal racist hegemonic perspectives towards Ciganos: they depend upon the minimum income, do not contribute economically to the state accounts, and boast luxury goods.

Keywords: antigypsyism; Ciganos/Roma; hate crimes; hate speech; social media



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1. Introduction

Historically victims of persecution and expulsion, Ciganos¹ continue to be victims of hate crimes and xenophobia in contemporary Portuguese society. Although the situation is not new, it has worsened with the emergence of an extreme right-wing political party this has exacerbated hate speech against Ciganos, which permeates social networks and manifests itself in racist comments, whenever there is any news about the situation of poverty and social exclusion, in which many of these people find themselves. This is not a new phenomenon, but the severity of the discourses has increased, as well as their visibility in social networks. In this article, we've analyzed the content of antigypsyism on social networks, regarding the dissemination, by the media, of a report about Roma in 10 European Union countries, including Portugal (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, [FRA \(2022\)](#)). According to this report, Portuguese Ciganos are facing several forms of discrimination when accessing jobs, training and scholar opportunities, when looking for a place to live, or when they need to attend the public health system.

1.1. Antigypsyism: From Historical Intolerance to Current Discrimination

Historically, Ciganos have been the target of hostile doctrines and attitudes in Portugal ([Bastos 2012](#)) and in other countries ([Bancroft 2005](#)), which assumes discriminatory contours and are contrary to their interests, needs, and rights ([Stauber and Vago 2007](#)). For centuries, they have faced several anti-Roma policies—designed by non-Roma majority societies embodied in slavery, imprisonment, severe physical punishment and forced work, deportation, isolation, compulsory assimilation, ethnocide, and physical extermination or genocide. In the case of Portugal, they were condemned to exile and forced work in galleys

(Costa 1995), in Romania they were enslaved for centuries and forced to work as prisoners, and condemned to genocide during the Second World War by Nazism, among with other serious forms of annihilation and extermination attempts (Fonseca 1996; Fraser 1997; Kenrick 1998; Auzias 2001).

In the contemporary world, some forms of antigypsyism have erupted under the banner of “Gypsy ‘menace’” (Stewart 2012). The post-EU enlargement, the post-Brexit period, and the wider migration in Europe, have brought greater differential treatment, expulsion, harassment, segregation, and ghettoization of Roma (Powell and Lever 2017, p. 681). As noted by Magazzini and Piemontese (2019, p. 3), “Migration from Central and Eastern Europe triggered policies towards Roma at the EU level and raised the issue to the international agenda more than any poverty level or discrimination that the Roma might suffer could have done”. Despite significant academic and public discussions, “(. . .) there is not much ground for optimism if we consider the impact of the various societal changes and developments on the quality of life of many Roma, and particularly the poorest and most marginalized among them. For them, daily realities are still bleak and often characterized by miserable future prospects” (Van Baar and Kóczé 2020, p. 9).

Indeed, whether we focus on the past (when they were seen as outlaws, thieves, vagrants, impure), or on the present (when they are seen as corrupt, liars, parasites) (Silva 2014), Roma still face prejudice and discriminatory practices. As stated by Gay Y Blasco and Fotta (2023, p. 6), “The history of modern European antigypsyism is also a history of continued isolation, exclusion, and confinement of Romanies within specific places—slums, state-built ghettos, designated rural settlements, mahalas, orphanages, special schools—often through deliberate planning and forceful relocation”.

The controversial term “Antigypsyism”, first used by Roma activists in the 1920s/1930s and rediscovered by European academics and activists in the 1980s, has been defined as a specific form of racism, fueled by historical discrimination that is expressed by violence and hate speech. According to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, “ECRI is concerned to learn that the Roma community is subject to prejudice, particularly by the civil society and some local and administrative authorities. The persistence of these prejudices leads to numerous forms of discrimination in everyday life” (ECRI 2022, p. 23).² Antigypsyism is an existing/persistent feature of structural discrimination against Roma, widely accepted in majority societies, and remains a barrier to effective Roma inclusion: “The scourge of Antigypsyism has proven to be a notable obstacle to the efforts taken to improve the opportunities and living conditions of Roma, with many facing discrimination, harassment and hate crimes due to their ethnic origin. As a result, a significant proportion of Roma populations continue to struggle with challenges that we would like to believe no longer exist in the European Union” (FRA 2018, p. 3). Antigypsyist practices can be found in different areas (school, health services, workplaces, public policies, internet). In many cases, “(. . .) anti-Gypsyism is trained and taught at home from an early age, when children in majority society are told stories that an ‘old Roma man or woman is coming to take them away if they don’t behave well” (Kyuchukov 2012, p. 5). In fact, even though racial hierarchization has been mainly excluded from the dominant public discourse, racism was not extinguished; it persists in many “legitimized” and “naturalized” statements, that emphasize cultural differences.

1.2. Antigypsyism in Portugal

Antigypsyism in Portugal is a reality that cannot be denied, placed in a wider range of racist practices. However, the Portuguese state constantly denies the existence of racism in our country, presenting it as tolerant and non-racist. According to Maeso (2019, p. 2060), “(. . .) the denial of racism is at the same time an affirmation of the nation as point of departure and arrival of an essentially non-racist white national identity that is essentially non-racist. (Anti-) racism is encapsulated in the ontic, in a quality of being—the idiosyncrasy of being Portuguese—and outside of power relations, the materiality of political economy/political rights (. . .) Portugueseeness is defined by its ethnic-racial homogeneity, a whiteness which, however, unlike others, would have given itself to the world—it “gave worlds to the world”.

People of Cigano origins have been persecuted (Bastos 2012) several strategies were used to repress their actions or practices and to prevent them from wandering around in national territory. Since their arrival, about five centuries ago, they have been seen in a pejorative and negative way. Their eradication was (continues to be) proposed, and so many times attempted, and “surveillance measures” were ordered to these people, seen as “strangers”, foreigners, and nomads (Magano and Mendes 2021). Though several changes have been marking the living conditions and cultural practices of Ciganos (Magano 2010), there are still great differences, comparing to non-Ciganos. The study conducted by Mendes et al. (2014) made evident that antigypsyism is very present, both at an individual and a collective level, and is not necessarily related with contexts of exclusion or poverty; the authors refer, as an example, what happens in the field of education where, sometimes, “(. . .) there is the stereotype of Cigano children not having rules of good manners, of going to school dirty, of being problematic” (p. 124). As Magano (2017) notes, “Even when they are not poor, many are still stigmatized, due to the fact that stigmatization is a form of symbolic exclusion (. . .)” (p. 45). Intolerance towards Ciganos assumes forms of excessive homogenization, crystallization, and essentialization, hiding that “(. . .) among Ciganos we find a diversity of economic and social situations and that they do not always fit into the generalist and stereotypical visions that predominate in scientific discourses, political agents, social interveners and the media” (Mendes et al. 2019, p. 82). Even when this antigypsyism operates at a more “veiled” level³ (Pettigrew and Meertens 1995), a “negative and hierarchizing evaluation, associated with an orientation towards discrimination of the other” persists (Magano 2010, p. 35). As Silva et al. (2008) emphasize, Portuguese non-Ciganos view Ciganos in a negative way, overvaluing their (perceived) negative aspects, pointing them out as “(. . .) very aggressive, very false/lying, malicious and dishonest, lazy, non-working, unwilling to work, without civism or education, who do everything to receive state support”; the situation of Ciganos is constantly compared to that of non-Ciganos, and even “the national identity—being “son of the motherland”—and citizenship—are invoked to include (the majority) and exclude (Ciganos)” (p. 13). Furthermore, Ciganos are often blamed for the most precarious situations they may experience, “(. . .) due to a biased association, linking them to drug trafficking, with Ciganos being accused of using unclear and illegal life schemes, which easily becomes widespread stereotypes” (Magano and Mendes 2014, p. 17). In general, antigypsyism in Portugal continues to be expressed through socially accepted beliefs, that accentuate cultural differences, in a way that emphasizes segregation or destruction: “(. . .) Cigano communities are confronted with racist manifestations of the differentialist type” (Marques 2012, p. 152)—they are seen as a threat and do not have a place in the social system.

1.3. National Public Policies to Combat Antigypsyism

Public policies are essential for Ciganos to emerge from a place of invisibility or stigmatization: “Making Roma voices audible and their struggles visible in current debates are necessary first steps towards challenging the multiple forms of exclusion with which substantial parts of Europe’s Romani minorities are confronted” (Van Baar 2011, p. 210). According to the Portuguese Council of Ministers Resolution no. 25/2013 (CMR), “The European Union has asked the Member States to draw up national strategies for the integration of Roma communities, which respond to situations of exclusion that are not compatible with social values or the European economic model”. In this context, the Portuguese National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities (ENICC)⁴ was built on four main areas (housing, education, health, and employment). This document states that it is necessary to overcome the feeling of mutual distrust that exists between the majority community and the Ciganos minority, seeking “(. . .) to promote the improvement of well-being and integration indicators of Ciganos, mutual knowledge, positive interaction and deconstruction of stereotypes” (ENICC, 2013–2020).⁵ It is true that it has been a concern of the Portuguese state, largely under the recommendations of the European Union, to create strategies that combat antigypsyism.⁶

However, as Mendes et al. (2019, p. 53) clarify, “(. . .) problems of exclusion and poverty persist among Ciganos, being among them the poorest, those with worse housing conditions, less

educated and the main target of racism and discrimination". This statement is reinforced by data from the FRA report (FRA 2022), which makes clear the situation of serious deprivation in which Roma live, in the ten countries studied (including Portugal).⁷

1.4. Representations of Roma in the Media and Social Networks

In this "global village" world, we tend to see Internet and social media, as tools for the dissemination of information, essential to promote equality between citizens; we often hope that they will help consolidate democratic practices and greater involvement of civil societies (Jenkins and Thorburn 2003). However, they can also contribute to the normalization of nationalist discourses (Caiani and Parenti 2013, p. 1), and become dangerous, when used by extreme right-wing groups, to strengthen contacts and spread their ideologies. Kende et al. (2017, p. 13) state that *"There is evidence that anti-Roma prejudice is expressed in overt and explicit ways in public discourse, in the media, in policy decisions, and in institutional practices all over Europe"*. Stigma and surveillance persists, even when disguised by the concept of integration: *"While the vocabulary employed in policy discourses aimed at minorities in contemporary Europe celebrates diversity and rejects assimilation, the assumptions behind the new concept of 'integration' are still rooted in an assimilationist idea of what it means to belong to a given community"* (Magazzini 2020, p. 43).

Bauman considered that social networks can be a trap, given that *"Many people use them not to unite, not to broaden their horizons, but on the contrary, to close themselves in what I call comfort zones, where the only sound they hear is the echo of their own voices, where the only thing they see are the reflections of their own faces"*.⁸ Some news reproduce distorted social constructions about Roma, based on active interpretations of what it is to "be Roma", legitimizing power issues: *"Gypsies and Travellers are defined according to social norms and then kept under surveillance through a social discourse that controls and redefines the group according to new subjective realities. This subjective reality is then taken as the new objective reality and so the definition and redefinition, through discourse, continues"* (Richardson 2006, p. 11). Thus, not only the representations of Roma in media are hegemonic, one-sided, and derogatory, but they can also become normalized and embedded in wider practices of persistently negative and racialized speeches. As Tremlett et al. (2017, p. 646) note, *"Roma are embedded in European discourses of 'otherness'—Roma are seen as (non)irregular citizens, problematic nomads, passives or parasites"*. Collective beliefs about Roma, regarding poverty, unemployment, supposed characteristics of lack of civilization, bad hygiene habits, inability to adapt, aggressiveness and criminality, are rooted in popular discourse and public opinion. According to the report *"Antigypsyism on the Internet"* (Hamelmann 2018),⁹ written with the contribution of the sCAN consortium (founded by the European Union and coordinated by Licra, the International League against Racism and Antisemitism), *"The main narratives of online antigypsyism mirror the historical stereotypes and narratives that have been used for the discrimination and persecution of Roma or other communities perceived as 'Gypsies' over the centuries (...). The dehumanization expressed in many comments on social platforms and in online media often leads to calls for violence and even genocide"* (p. 17). Interestingly, while we know that antigypsyism is a reality across Europe, and that social media/networks can reflect or reinforce collective discriminatory beliefs, little attention has been paid to how this reflection/reinforcement takes place. In a study conducted by Kroon et al. (2016), aiming to understand how Roma are portrayed by the news in different European countries, the authors concluded that Roma are mentioned, negatively, in collective terms, related to criminality and violence, with emphasis on their *"ethnicity"*, presented as a cause of *"social unrest"* and a *"threat to society"*; believing that media portrayals influence attitudes and beliefs towards Roma, this finding can be *"(... viewed with concern"* (p. 389). Additionally, Tremlett et al. reinforce how much the media problematizes Roma, spreading notions of otherness, that lead to exclusion: *"The socio-economic positioning of Roma is often distorted by the media to create the image of poverty and marginalization as something they construct for themselves (...) this idea of Roma as creators of their own poverty and, as such, being parasites on social protection systems is endemic"* (Tremlett et al. 2017, p. 645).

del Río Pedraza (2011), after analyzing a series of elements of the Spanish local and state press (Diario de Jerez, Información Jerez and El País, El Mundo) to understand how Roma were represented, concluded that “(. . .) *the lexicon used is pejorative, the chosen theme situates the Gitanos in socially marginal frameworks, the underlying syntactical structures indicate either passivity or a negative charge in the actions of which they are active subjects, and in the images that accompany the news (through the situation, size, lights and shadows, etc.), there is a certain ideological bias about the concept of being “Gitano”*” (p. 200). Brasil and Bonomo (2021), when analyzing how Roma have been portrayed in Brazilian and Portuguese newspapers, concluded that these representations “(. . .) *generally carry violence of different orders, supported by justifications that draws on cultural products, stamped throughout several generational waves*” (p. 166). Additionally, Pasta (2019, p. 49) states that, “(. . .) *Roma people are described as having ‘totally different values’, ‘an uncivilized way of life’ and are accused of ‘not taking good care of their children’ . Many stereotypes emphasize their opportunistic behaviour, their deformed bodies, their negative attitudes towards minors, who are neglected and badly treated; Roma people are seen as having no sense of economy and throw away money, steal, are dirty, kidnap children, refuse to integrate, are lazy, indolent, and unable to make serious commitments. A new stereotype has emerged in the last decade: the Roma are seen as a privileged community, which receives more resources than other citizens (. . .)*”. Given that social media and social networks have a wide reach, it is worth considering how much of a primary source of information, opinion, and attitudes about Roma they are, as well as their impact in reinforcing their exclusion.

2. Materials and Methods

In 2020, FRA launched a survey on Roma in 8 EU member states (Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania, and Spain) and 2 other countries (Northern Macedonia and Serbia). In parallel, it supported national data collection in Bulgaria and Slovakia.¹⁰ In this article, we will focus on the work developed in Portugal, where 568 interviews of 1439 household members were conducted, considering that the data gathered in the other countries followed the same principles.

The survey results were organized under seven headings: 1. Manifestations of Anti-gypsyism: discrimination, harassment, and violence. 2. Poverty and social exclusion. 3. Reporting discrimination, awareness of rights, and trust in public institutions. 4. Education. 5. Employment. 6. Health. 7. Discrimination when trying to find a home.

With regard to the first axis, which integrates three parameters (discrimination, harassment, and physical violence), of all the countries studied, Portugal ranks first in relation to respondents who refer that, in the previous 12 months, they have experienced discrimination in the main areas of their lives because they are Roma (62%); 28% refer that they have experienced a form of harassment motivated by hatred because they are Roma (the only country in which there was an increase, comparing to the 2016 results),¹¹ and 1% refer physical attacks because they are Roma (equal to the total European result).

Regarding the second axis, composed of 4 parameters (at risk of poverty, children at risk of poverty, severe material deprivation, and children in severe material deprivation), Portugal ranks second (after Spain and Italy), since 96% of respondents referred that in the previous 12 months, they were at risk of poverty (considering that what they receive is 60% lower than the average income of the country); this value increased one percentage point for the item “children at risk of poverty” (97%); 59% of respondents answered having lived in severe material deprivation (which corresponds to an increase of 6%, compared to 2016), a value that rose to 63% in the question “children living in severe material deprivation”.

In relation to the third axis, consisting of 5 parameters (reporting discrimination, not reporting harassment, knowledge of human rights institutions, trust in public institutions and police, and trust in the legal system), Portugal has, together with Romania, the lowest percentage of reports of discrimination (2%), and occupies the third place, along with Spain, regarding respondents who did not report the most recent incident of harassment because they are Roma (95%). Additionally, it ranks third on the item “knowledge of human rights

institutions" (48%), and 27% say they tend to trust the police, whilst 17% tend to trust the legal system.

The fourth axis includes 4 parameters (children aged 3–5 years attending educational facilities, people aged 20–24 years who have completed at least secondary education, segregation in education, and discrimination in education). Portugal is the third country with the lowest percentage of children in that age group attending educational facilities (29% corresponding to a decrease, compared to 2016) and, together with Croatia, Serbia, and Italy, is one of the countries where the largest differences are found when comparing Roma with the general population. Portugal, Greece, Czechia, and Romania are the countries with the lowest school attendance by young people aged 20–24 and, together with Greece, our country has the largest gap between Roma and the general population (10%). Regarding segregation in education, that is, the concentration of children from one socio-economic, ethnic, or cultural group in specific schools or classes, 2% of Roma children aged between 6 and 15 years old experience this situation (Portugal presents the lowest percentage, quite distant from other countries). Regarding respondents (parents/guardians/students) who claim to have experienced discrimination for being Roma when contacting school authorities, Portugal ranks first (34%, equivalent to 32% more, compared to 2016), with, as in Chechia and Serbia, one-fourth of respondents reporting harassment or bullying.

The employment axis comprises 4 parameters: percentage of paid work, gender gap, NEET (not in education, employment, or training), and discrimination in job search. In Portugal 31% of the respondents, aged 20–64, declared that their main activity is "paid work" (which makes it the second worst, after Spain; in fact, it is also in Portugal that we have the biggest gap, compared to the general population). The gender gap is 27% (four percentage points less than the total European), and the percentage of young people, aged 16–24, whose main activity is "not in education, employment or training" is 45% (whereby Portugal occupies the second-best position). In the discrimination in job search parameter, Portugal ranks first again, with 81% of respondents reporting that in the previous 12 months, they experienced discrimination in job search because they are Roma (34% more than in 2016, and 48% more than the total European result).

In the health axis, we find the parameters: average life expectancy, discrimination in access to health services, and health insurance coverage. In Portugal, there is a difference of 10 years less (for women) and 8.5 years less (for men), compared with the general population, in average life expectancy. Our country ranks first in the percentage of respondents who felt discriminated against for being Roma in access to health services; 94% of respondents report having health insurance coverage.¹²

The seventh axis includes the parameters: housing deprivation, overcrowding, access to drinking water, and discrimination in the search for a home. Portugal ranks third in terms of housing deprivation (66%); 83% of respondents reported living in a space/house that does not have the minimum number of bedrooms, according to Eurostat's definition of overcrowding,¹³ 13% said they did not have access to drinking water, and 77% said they felt discriminated because they were Roma, when looking for a house, in the last 5 years, (which again places Portugal in first place).

The authors of this report suggest caution in interpreting the results, given that survey interviews covered only a sample of the total population (therefore all results presented are estimates, underlying statistical variation), and that the timing of their application coincided with restrictive measures, due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19; these measures may have influenced the responses, particularly in relation to the areas of education (since there was tele-schooling in some countries) and employment (fewer opportunities). Recently, some authors have noted that "*Under COVID-19, long-established forms of punitive containment of Romanies across areas as diverse as housing, health management, education, and employment have combined with new measures aimed at controlling the virus, some targeted at the whole of society but others at Romani groups specifically. Even before European states started to impose lockdown measures during the spring of 2020, in many areas Romanies as a collective were singled out as potential vectors of infection*" (Gay Y Blasco and Fotta 2023, p. 6).

In Portugal, on 25 October 2022, the results of the FRA report “Roma in 10 European Countries”, were released by the main media (press, TV, and radio) and shared on social networks. In this paper, we examined the social media reactions to this study, published in news by Expresso¹⁴ (under the title “Poverty affects Portuguese Roma: 96% live below the poverty line”) and Público¹⁵ (entitled “Poverty affects 96% of Portuguese Roma”)¹⁶ using the qualitative methodology, content analysis, through the MaxQda software. In addition, we explored three social networks: on Twitter, the reactions to a tweet from a Portuguese woman (Tweet: “Poverty affects 96% of Roma. I repeat, poverty affects 96% of Portuguese Roma. One by one, dismantle the lies of the extreme right. One by one, dismantle the extreme right’s hate speech. And fight. Fight against poverty and fight to end gypsophobia”),¹⁷ on Reddit (“More than 95% of Ciganos in Portugal live below the poverty line” (rtp.pt) and (“Poverty affects 96% of Ciganos”) (Publico.pt)—published by subreddits: r/Portugal, r/portugueses and r (Portugal News)),¹⁸ and on Facebook (Post on the page “Fala Portugal”: “More than 95% of Portuguese Ciganos live in poverty. The conclusion is in the report of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights”).¹⁹ Overall, we have analyzed 230 comments to the Expresso’s publication, 229 to Público’s publication, 189 comments to the publication of the page “Fala Portugal” (Facebook), 97 to the Portuguese woman’s tweet (Twitter), and 39 to the news shared on Reddit, in a total of 784 comments. We proceeded to the general treatment of the information and to the definition of categorization dimensions, based on the text segments, in four major axes: unwillingness to work (f = 247), existence of external signs of wealth (f = 181), dependence on state subsidies and support (f = 133), and lack of income declaration (f = 122). The quotes were selected according to their representation within each axis.

3. Results

The major dimensions found have a common base, considering that all sources refer to the high percentage of Ciganos living in poverty: blaming them for their precarious situation. The analysis of each dimension showed the interconnection of the contents.

The first axis focuses on the lack of the capacity to work, of willingness to work, or: laziness (one of the characteristics attributed to Ciganos by elements of the dominant society). “*They like poverty, there’s no way of working*” (Facebook comment).²⁰ Ciganos are accused of not being employed due to their own (lack of) will: they don’t work because they do not want to, since they do not like to have schedules or duties or bosses. Despite this unwillingness, they are wealthy, due to illicit businesses and activities, such as theft, drug trafficking, and the sale of counterfeit material:

“They should work like everyone else. Not to go around begging. Some have better cars than mine”. (Facebook comment)

“Most of them don’t like to work, their culture is trafficking and stealing (...) THEY ARE Dirty PEOPLE INSIDE THE HOUSE AND OUTSIDE THE HOUSE! (...)” (Facebook comment)

“The problem with gypsies is that they belong to an ethnic group that abhors work! They live their way, which is: to live as much as possible at the expense of others and based on shady or skewed deals!”. (Twitter comment)

The second axis is based on the accusation of evident external signs of wealth, that contradicts the situation of poverty experienced by Roma demonstrated by the study; (the study’s validity is questioned).

“Look at the shacks, satellite TV, and Mercedes at the door...this is typical of poor people????...only of the poor minded...”. (Facebook comment)

Ciganos are accused of being rich and of bearing symbols of that wealth (namely, cars of specific brands, such as Mercedes, BMW, Audi, Ferrari, gold, clothes, spending in pastry shops and restaurants),

“In Portugal they have Mercedes and BMW and they have great lunches, good mobile phones, they are well dressed and smelly! I don’t know what these numbers mean! I can’t remember the last time I saw gypsies living in shacks here in the area—they all live in council, rented or owned houses. This study should be more individualized. It’s not accurate”. (Facebook comment)

The criticism of this (alleged) wealth often flows into a differentialist racism, which emphasizes practices of rejection, estrangement, and expulsion.

“So, you see, the poor gypsies have BMW’s, I see the old people surviving on 300 euros. Poor gypsies, who were born allergic to work. Why don’t they do as millions of other Portuguese, immigrate in search of a better life”. (Twitter comment)

In the third axis, we find one of the most widespread stereotypes regarding Ciganos: that they depend on subsidies and state support, namely the social integration income (SII) and social housing.

“I am appalled by this news. . .decades giving subsidies for nothing. . .and the rats remain rats. . .these people are a cancer in the world society. . .and it continues the same fate, more decades giving money to people who are like rats. . .”. (Facebook comment)

The SII is a support aimed at protecting people who find themselves in a situation of extreme poverty, constituted by a monetary benefit and an insertion program. According to statistical data on this benefit, in February 2023, the average SII value per family is EUR 289.06, and the average value per beneficiary is EUR 136.02; the average family size is 2.1. The Ministerial Order no. 32/2023 of 20 January updated the SII value for 2023 to EUR 209.11: holder receives 100% of this value, the other major members receive 70%, and children/young people receive 50%; the sum of the monthly incomes of all members of the household is considered for calculation purposes. Still, Ciganos are accused of receiving exorbitant amounts, and even of having children to benefit from a higher amount, as in the case of one comment, stating that “[Ciganos] Have €3000€ . . . of minimum income” (Facebook comment), which is impossible.

“For those who only want to live off government subsidies and bring many children into the world to receive even more, no wonder they live in poverty”. (Facebook comment)

This comments emphasize the “parasitic way of life” of the Ciganos/Roma, characterized as people who live on subsidies, depend on the state, practice begging, and who only know how to claim rights instead of taking on duties, consuming social security funds.

“On the other hand, they come crying that they need money, and some people give them away, taking it away from other fathers and mothers of families who work, produce and help to develop the country and are often badly treated by the Ciganos!”. (Expresso comment)

In the fourth axis, Ciganos are accused of not declaring incomes, not paying taxes nor social security contributions; it is argued that if they did, they would no longer be in poverty.

“They don’t pay taxes or take discounts, but their high-powered car is parked outside their shack. I don’t feel sorry for their poverty”. (Reddit comment)

According to these social media publishers, Roma omit the existence of additional income that comes from illegal and criminal activities, reinforcing the idea that Ciganos are criminal, dishonest, and incapable of respecting the norms of the majority society.

“They’re so poor, so poor, that when they’re selling counterfeit products at the fair (which is a crime), they don’t declare this income, nor do they issue invoices, which is also a crime. And then they arrive at the end of the month with no income and are subsidized by everyone. A tremendous logic. . .”. (Twitter comment)

“I regret the front page of the newspaper, anyone who wants to see them at the fairs, doing business, does not believe it. I ask the journalist who wrote the news to visit a jail and you will see that most of the detainees are gypsies for trafficking. . .”. (Público comment)

The remaining comments can be distributed by three secondary axes: unwillingness to integrate into the majority society, hate speech and unwillingness toward education. The first one (f = 40), beholds several stereotypes about culture and ways of living.

“...and outside Lisbon it's the same, they live closed in their community, with their medieval customs and traditions, they do successful fair (ZERO taxes) and the ones who don't work are dealers or burglars”. (Twitter comment)

The second (Hate speech, f = 37), makes evident the existence of people that advocate the expulsion, elimination and, in the last instance, extermination of Ciganos.

“Some say that many years ago there was a gentleman with a lot of power who tried to eradicate the Jewish population and only then he remembered the Ciganos. . .he was a bit of a fool but he was wrong in his decision, the decision making should have prioritized the gypsies, because they were a pest population and they do nothing (. . .). Nowadays it is no longer possible to do the same, but we can force them to leave the country. Maybe with force, of course, since they don't lack sawed-off shotguns”. (Reddit comment)

“All in a boat and leave them on the high seas”. (Facebook comment)

Finally, under the axis “Unwillingness toward education (f = 24)”, there are those who blame Ciganos for their precarious situation.

“If they studied, for sure the poverty in the Ciganos ethnic group would be equal to the rest of the population. As they deliberately don't study and are still defended in this (sad) tradition by a lot of brainless people, all that's left for them is subsidies and marginalization. It's a shame”. (Twitter comment)

Common to all axes is the underlying notion that one's personal model of life is more accurate, from an ethnocentric perspective of the world and other people.

4. Discussion

Antigypsyism, is based on a history of intolerance, and reinforces a negative discourse of otherness (Fraser 1997). The results of this analysis comments confirm this perception of racism against the Ciganos/Roma in Portugal. They are the target of an enormous violence and hate speech towards Portuguese Ciganos. If these speeches are to be repeated, whenever there is a publication about Ciganos/Roma, they will strengthen (2014) negative perceptions, prejudiced attitudes, and practices of discrimination, expressed in transversal and hegemonic ways. There is this general idea that Roma are parasites of society, who rather live on subsidies and state support. This categorization of “the other”—as Vala et al. (1999, p. 167) note, “(. . .) based on cultural differentiation, are governed, like racial categorization, by the same principles of social distinctiveness of the endogroup and legitimize, therefore, social inequalities”. Although Ciganos are Portuguese citizens, they are still seen as foreigners and “strangers” by the main society (Magano and Mendes 2021). Another much-emphasized aspect is the idea that “work”, will solve the situation of poverty, and that Ciganos do not work because they don't want to. The truth is that it is not easy for them to access the labor market because no opportunities are offered (Pereira 2016), and because, at job centers, there are no adequate training offers for Ciganos. Usually, the “real” work has to be paid and, formally performed, excluding the activities in which Ciganos were traditionally engaged and ignoring that “(. . .) poverty is mainly rooted in structural, macroeconomic and macrosocial aspects, in which individual factors have little relevance” (Diogo 1993, p. 22). As Magano (2015, p. 240) states, “From this point of view, Ciganos are perceived as an internal threat that must be removed, being systematically hindered and ignored the access to a decent place in the social system”. The results show a persistent comparison between the “I” (representative of the majority society) and the “Other” (in this case, Ciganos), from an ethnocentric perspective. As Castro (2021) underlines, “We are faced with the dichotomy of the deserving poor and the undeserving poor, which manifests itself through the self-image and the image of the other: I, the “deserving”, who make an effort, who want to work, who use the money to help my family, for the essentials. He, the ‘non-earner’, the rascal, subsidy-dependent, who spends his money on coffee, who lives off the

State". Victims of historical persecution, Ciganos continue to be seen as a threat that must be driven away and exterminated. For Magano (2015, p. 241), "The most widespread images and social representations about individuals of Cigano origin continue to be extremely negative. They are rooted in the collective mentality, and it is difficult to bring about changes in these conceptions (...)". In fact, common sense thinking continues to be structured by racial typologies, as well as the rejection and/or attempt at exclusion of Ciganos. As Cabecinhas (2008, p. 172) notes, the so-called "ethnic groups" continue to be "(...) seen as possessing intrinsic, immutable and very marked characteristics, which distinguish them from the majority or the dominant culture and which are justifications of power asymmetries". Indeed, Ciganos continue to be seen as "foreigners", and are treated with aversion and hostility, ignoring the fact that, "When someone applies the term 'Roma', it actually means 'people I call Roma', and almost always has implicit a set of negative assumptions about how these people behave, their beliefs and values, and what they are capable of achieving in life" (Keen 2022, p. 28). The results also show that "Contrary to what happens in other societies, in Portugal the stereotypes that weigh on Ciganos are almost exclusively negative, which has a significant effect on the identity withdrawal that is observable today" (Marques 2007, p. 162); the differences between "the self" and "the others", "the us" and "the others" are emphasized, especially with the accusation that Roma live under state support. This exacerbates expressions of repudiation and Antigypsyist feelings, with the reproduction of stereotyped and homogenous perspectives on Ciganos/Roma in Portugal (Magano and Mendes 2021).

5. Conclusions

The publication of data on the undignified living conditions of Roma in 10 European Union countries has ignited hate speeches of prejudice and hatred in social networks, blaming Roma people for their situation of poverty and exclusion. Roma people are widely seen as thieves, dirty, savages, criminals, and abusers of state benefits, a kind of "minority of privilege". Despite national policies and increased attention to racism against Roma, especially after the 2013 national strategy, results in accessing and exercising citizenship rights are still incipient. How can we explain that these forms of discrimination and racism are still so present in Portuguese society? How can we justify that, despite programs, projects, and calls to achieve equal treatment for all people, there is still so much hatred towards Ciganos? It will be necessary to combat structural racism and to invest even more in actions targeting Roma, promoting empowerment, combating antigypsyism, and rethinking the national strategies, so that effective integration is achieved. Portuguese Ciganos continue to be excluded, persecuted, and targeted for oppression, which places them in situations of inequality. In this study, it became clear that comments on published news about the poverty that affects these citizens reproduce stereotypes of a collective imaginary that is significantly negative. These representations give continuity on historical processes of exclusion, and amplify the poverty in which many Ciganos find themselves. Persecutory hate discourses exclude Ciganos from the possibility of fully exercising their citizenship, and living a dignified life.

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Notes

- 1 We maintain the term in Portuguese when we refer to the Portuguese Roma because it is still recognized and used by the Portuguese Ciganos themselves, without a negative connotation. In international contexts, the term can be understood similarly as Portuguese Roma or Romani people.
- 2 Available online: <https://rm.coe.int/second-report-on-portugal-portuguese-translation-/16808b59bf> (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- 3 Following the differentiation of racism scalped by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995).
- 4 Available online: https://www.acm.gov.pt/documents/10181/52642/Publicac%C3%A7%C3%A3o+ENICC_PT_bx.pdf/b20a9b54-a021-4524-87df-57a0a740057c (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- 5 On 29 November 2018, CMR 154/2018 revised the ENICC and extended its validity until 2022, with the aim of adjusting its objectives and targets and, consequently, boosting its impact on improving the living conditions of Roma people and communities. On 3 May 2023, the period of validity was extended until 31 December 2023, by the CMR 36/2023.
- 6 In the areas of education and vocational training, there are several examples, like Projects of Intercultural Education—PEI, the Educational Territories of Priority Intervention—TEIP, the New Opportunities Program—PNO (in the meantime replaced by the Qualifica Program), the Choices Program, and the Program of Support to Education and Training—PIEF (recently changed to Integrated Program of Education and Training—PAQUIEF) (Magano and Mendes 2014). Regarding social protection measures, it is consensual that the Social Integration Income (SSI) “(. . .), was the measure that had more impact on increasing the levels of schooling and reducing the high dropout and failure rates” (Mendes 2015, p. 36).
- 7 The main results of “Roma in 10 European Countries”, published by the FRA, are available online: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/roma-survey-findings> (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- 8 Interview given to El País, published on 9 January 2016 and available online: https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2015/12/30/cultura/1451504427_675885.html (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- 9 Full report available online: <http://scan-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/scan-antigypsyism.pdf> (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- 10 The countries covered (together with Bulgaria and Slovakia), represent 87% of the (estimated) “Roma populations” in the European Union (53% in Europe). The survey covered 8461 respondents, living in private households, who self-identify as Roma, are 16 years of age or older, and have lived in the selected countries for at least the 12 months prior to its implementation. The fieldwork took place between February and August 2021, and consisted on face-to-face interviews, conducted in the official language of each country. The survey included questions on experiences of discrimination in various areas of life: experiences of police stops and criminal victimization, including hate crimes; awareness of rights and participation/integration in society. Respondents provided information on basic socio-demographic characteristics, in relation to all household members and were encouraged to add personal comments or experiences at the end of the interviews. The survey was designed to ensure the representativeness of the “Romani populations” in each country and respected cultural and ethical aspects; it included Romani people in its design, preparation, and implementation: interviewers with a Romani background, working as mediators or with strong links to the “Romani communities” were recruited and trained.
- 11 The main results of the “Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey—Roma—selected findings”, are available online: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/second-european-union-minorities-and-discrimination-survey-roma-selected-findings> (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- 12 In the case of Portugal, respondents are covered by the National Health System.
- 13 Eurostat: Statistical Office of the European Union, responsible for publishing high-quality statistics and indicators at European level that allow for comparison between regions and countries.
- 14 It is the most widely read Portuguese weekly newspaper. The new analysed is available online: <https://expresso.pt/revista-de-imprensa/2022-10-25-Pobreza-afeta-portugueses-ciganos-96-vivem-abaixo-do-limiar-de-pobreza-4af88496> (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- 15 Daily newspaper.
- 16 Available online: <https://www.publico.pt/2022/10/25/sociedade/noticia/pobreza-afecta-96-portugueses-ciganos-2025192> (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- 17 Available online: <https://twitter.com/inesmorsantos/status/1584844237224361984> (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- 18 Available online: https://www.reddit.com/r/portugal/comments/ycybb3/mais_de_95_da_etnia_cigana_em_portugal_vive/ (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- 19 Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=516971933775710>, video also available on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/XTli6d-9AXk> (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- 20 Full transcription of the way the text was written, by the people who commented.

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