Identifying evidence-based methods to effectively combat discrimination of the Roma in the changing political climate of Europe

Comparative report of WP2

Work Package 2: Cross-country comparisons of the connection between political discourse, intergroup attitudes, and collective action

Executive summary

- Based on representative surveys in five countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, France, Ireland) we found that antigypsyism encompasses negative stereotypes, the idea of Roma receiving undeserved benefits, and the absence of cultural recognition.
- Antigypsyism is acceptable to most Hungarian, Slovak and Romanian people, however indifference rather than hatred is the most typical reaction.
- Patterns of engagement in favour of or against the Roma are very low across countries.
- In the absence of antigypsyism, pro-Roma political discourse is more acceptable, which translates into willingness to engage in action to offer material help and to stand up for the rights of the Roma.
- In the presence of antigypsyism, the acceptance of hostile political discourse is higher, which in turn predicts willingness to engage in anti-Roma action.
- Antigypsyism predicted acceptance of different political discourses above demographic and ideological variables.
- Pro- and anti-Roma action intentions were predicted by the acceptance of different political discourses above antigypsyism (i.e. the way politicians talk about the Roma matters).
- There is no clear distinction between paternalistic and ally political discourse, they both predict willingness to offer material help and engage in pro-Roma political actions.
- Empathy and sympathy are the most important predictors of positive behavioral tendencies, however, these positive emotional responses are low in all countries.
- Feeling threatened is a source of hostile intentions toward the Roma, however such intentions are not widespread in any of the countries.

Aim of the Work Package

The aim of the work package was to establish how prejudice against Roma people and Travellers (i.e. antigypsyism) predicts acceptance of current political discourses, and intentions to join anti-Roma movements as well as intentions to join social movements benefiting Roma people either in the form of material help or standing up for their rights.

Method

Using survey method, we collected data in five countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, France, Ireland) with the help of opinion poll companies aiming for 1000 participants in each country. The samples are demographically similar to the population in terms of age, gender, settlement type, but somewhat more highly educated than the average population.

Data

Data was collected between April and July, 2019 in all countries. The five databases are uploaded to the website of the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io) so that it is publicly accessible for future research. It can be viewed using this link: https://osf.io/hjcd6/?view_only=031ec426b8384b23b9989c74dc6e4318

	HU	SK	RO	FR	IE (Traveller out-group)
N	1039	1033	1044	975	1000
Gender (men)	47%	47%	50%	45%	49%
Age (M, SD)	48 (15) years	44 (16) years	42 (17) years	42 (13) years	45 (16) years
Education	Primary: 3% Secondary: 57% University: 40%	Primary: 8% Secondary: 72% University: 19%	Primary: 0.5% Secondary: 33% University: 62%	Primary: 5.2% Secondary: 44% University: 49%	Primary+VET: 10% Secondary: 27% Post-secondary: 25% University: 38%
Settlement	Capital: 17% Other city: 53% Village: 30%	Large city: 14% City: 27% Smaller town: 28% Village: 14%	Urban: 66% Rural: 33%	N/A	Village: 30% Small town: 21% Suburban: 21% City: 28%
Roma participants (removed from analysis)	0.3%	0.8%	1.5%	0%	0%

Results

Although statements connected to antigypsyism are more acceptable in Hungary, Slovakia and Romania than in Ireland and France, the majority of respondents tend to give answers that reflect undecidedness and the lack of strong opinions about the Roma, choosing answers around the midpoint regarding negative stereotypes, the idea of Roma people receiving too much undeserved benefits, and regarding the cultural recognition of Roma people. A similarly large group is undecided about whether openly hostile political discourse is acceptable for them or not. Together with the relatively low level of empathy across the countries, we can conclude that indifference is the predominant attitude among the majority populations with a small percentage of people who clearly reject antigypsyism or clearly endorse it. For mean scores on the main variables of the study see Figure 1.
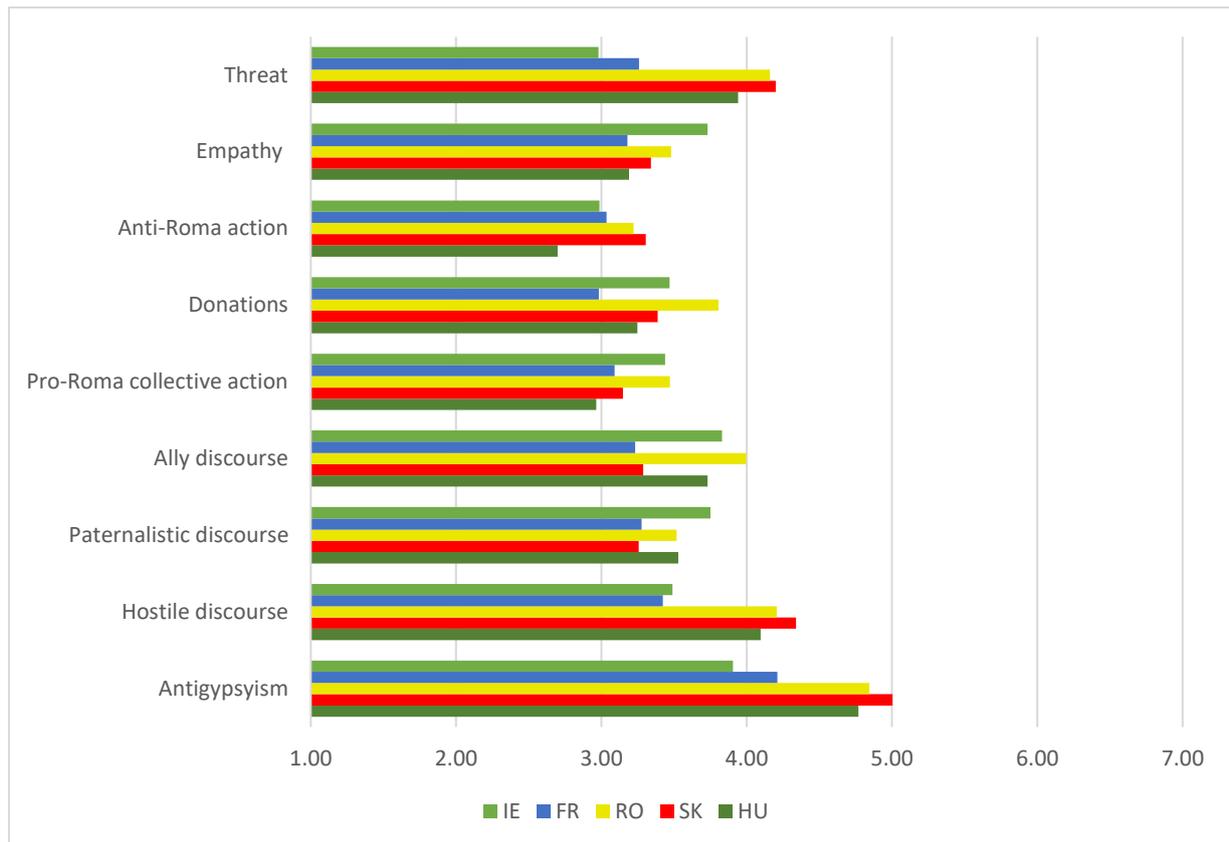
Figure 1. Mean scores of the main variables of the study on a 7-point scale (1=completely disagree, 7=completely agree).

We compared the acceptance of three types of political discourses: (1) Hostile political discourse, emphasizing commonly held negative stereotypes about Roma people; (2) paternalistic political discourse, emphasizing the need to help Roma people, but also stressing their lack of agency; (3) ally political discourse, suggesting that non-Roma citizens need to stand up against discrimination together with the Roma. We expected and found that acceptance of these different discourses would be predicted by the level of antigypsyism of the individual, and the first discourse accepted more by more highly prejudiced individuals, and the latter two by less prejudiced individuals. Furthermore, we expected and found evidence that the effect of antigypsyism was stronger than other ideological (as political orientation, national identity) and demographic variables.

Our main analysis focused on predictors of people's tendencies to act in a helpful way toward the Roma, to stand up for their rights as allies and to act against them in a hostile and aggressive way. We focused on the effect of antigypsyism, acceptance of hostile, paternalistic or ally political discourse and emotions (empathy vs. threat).

Both intentions to engage in action as allies or offer donations and material help was very low in all countries, with the exception of Romania where around 20% of respondents indicated a willingness to engage in both types of actions. In other countries this rate was 5-10%. We found that the most important predictor for action overall was the presence of empathy, followed by an openness to political discourse that either emphasizes that Roma people are in need of help (paternalistic) or they need majority allies. Additionally, the absence of blatant negative prejudice in the three East-

Central European countries, and the absence of the idea that Roma people receive undeserved benefits in France and Ireland were also predictors of action intentions.

*Intentions for engagement as allies of Roma people*
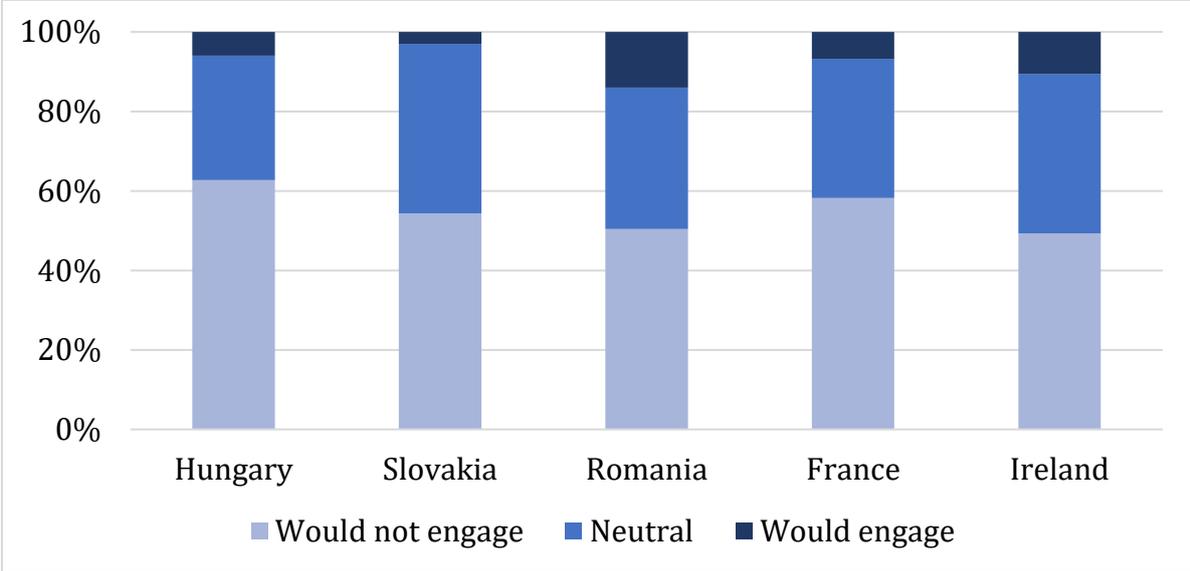
Predictors of engagement as allies

	Hungary	Slovakia	Romania	France	Ireland
1.	Empathy	Empathy	Acceptance of ally discourse	Empathy	Empathy
2.	AG: Blatant negative stereotyping	Acceptance of ally discourse	AG: Blatant negative stereotyping	Acceptance of paternalistic discourse	Acceptance of ally discourse
3.	Acceptance of paternalistic discourse	Acceptance of paternalistic discourse	Empathy	Acceptance of ally discourse	AG: Cultural recognition
4.	Threat	AG: Blatant negative stereotyping	AG: Cultural recognition	AG: Undeserved benefits	AG: Undeserved benefits
5.	Acceptance of ally discourse		Acceptance of paternalistic discourse	AG: Blatant negative stereotyping	Threat
6.			Acceptance of hostile discourse	AG: Cultural recognition	

Notes. The order of the variables indicates their strength. Blue indicates positive relationship, red indicates negative relationship. AG: antigypsyism.

*Intentions to offer donations and material help for Roma people*
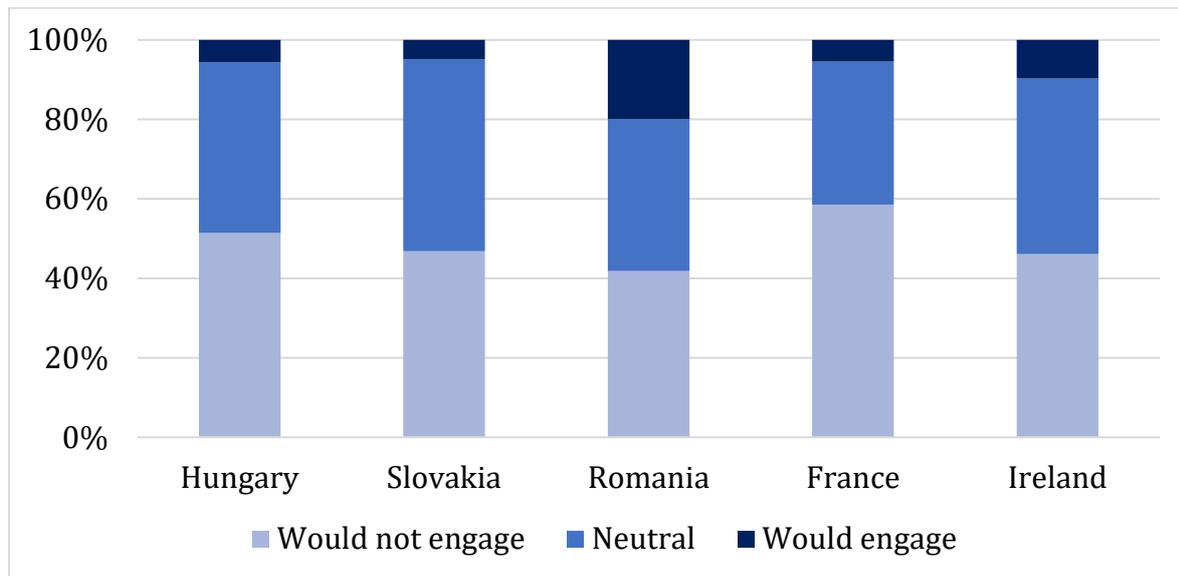
Predictors of intentions to offer donations and material help

	Hungary	Slovakia	Romania	France	Ireland
1.	Empathy	Empathy	Empathy	Empathy	Empathy
2.	AG: Blatant negative stereotyping	Acceptance of paternalistic discourse	Acceptance of paternalistic discourse	Acceptance of paternalistic discourse	Acceptance of ally discourse
3.	Acceptance of paternalistic discourse	Acceptance of ally discourse	Acceptance of ally discourse	AG: Blatant negative stereotyping	AG: Cultural recognition
4.	AG: Cultural recognition	AG: Cultural recognition	AG: Cultural recognition	AG: Undeserved benefits	AG: Undeserved benefits
5.		AG: Blatant negative stereotyping	AG: Blatant negative stereotyping	Acceptance of ally discourse	Acceptance of paternalistic discourse
6.		AG: Undeserved benefits	Threat		Threat
7.			Acceptance of hostile discourse		

Notes. The order of the variables indicates their strength. Blue indicates positive relationship, red indicates negative relationship. AG: antigypsyism.

Similarly to positive, pro-social intentions toward the Roma, the intentions to engage in openly hostile action against the Roma were also low, even lower than pro-social action, ranging between 3 to 7%. In all countries, the perception of threat connected to Roma people was an important predictor, as well as the acceptance of hostile political discourse. We also see that agreement with blatant negative stereotypes about the Roma can predict such intentions. Unexpectedly, in France and Ireland, and more weakly in Slovakia, the presence of empathy was also a predictor of higher intentions for hostile action. We can only speculate that this finding is the result of the very low presence of both emotions and action intentions. Therefore, the connection between the absence of action and the absence of emotion is the reason for the positive connection between these variables.

Intentions to engage in hostile action against Roma people
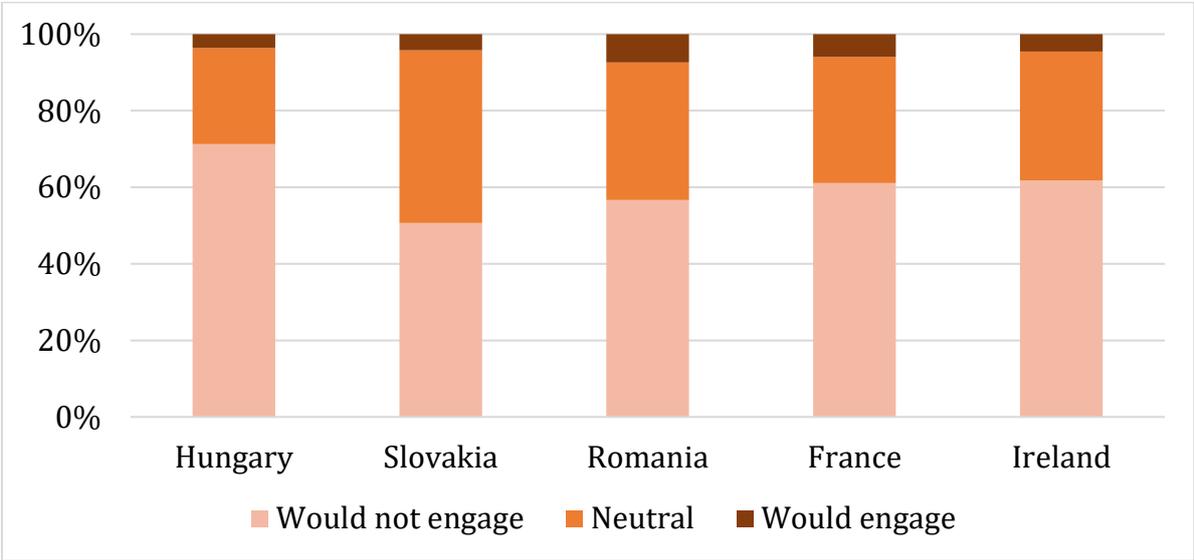
Predictors of intentions to engage in hostile action against Roma people

	Hungary	Slovakia	Romania	France	Ireland
1.	Threat	Threat	Threat	Empathy	Empathy
2.	Acceptance of hostile discourse	Empathy	AG: Undeserved benefits	Threat	Threat
3.	Empathy	Acceptance of hostile discourse	Acceptance of hostile discourse	Acceptance of hostile discourse	Acceptance of hostile discourse
4.	AG: Cultural recognition	AG: Blatant negative stereotyping		AG: Blatant negative stereotyping	AG: Cultural recognition
5.		Acceptance of ally discourse		AG: Undeserved benefits	AG: Blatant negative stereotyping

6.					AG: Undeserved benefits

Notes. The order of the variables indicates their strength. Blue indicates positive relationship, red indicates negative relationship. AG: antigypsyism.

Analysing the social psychological predictors allowed us to identify the primary importance of the emotional response to Roma people in predicting the collective action intentions: empathy for pro-social action intentions, and threat for anti-Roma action intentions. It also allowed us to see that openness for different types of political discourse is extremely important. Furthermore, antigypsyism remains an obstacle to engaging in action as allies or engaging in material donations and it is a facilitator of hostile action. However, we must note that these connections are valid in the overall context in which empathy is rather low, as most people show indifference toward the Roma. This explains why positive intentions remain low across the samples. In contrast, threat perceptions are somewhat higher, especially in Romania and Slovakia, explaining why people are attracted to groups that are hostile toward the Roma and oppose Roma integration.

As a supplementary analysis, we also tried to reveal how different beliefs about the Roma are organized in people's minds in different countries. For that purpose, we applied cognitive network analysis, a method which can show us the pattern of relationships between different sorts of anti-Roma beliefs by setting up a so-called cognitive network based on the correlations between the measured beliefs. One of the main advantages of this method is that it identifies which specific belief or attitude can have the biggest potential to change other beliefs. From a practical point of view, intervention programs targeting these central beliefs can achieve the highest impact, since by changing these specific beliefs can potentially change the most other (more peripheral) beliefs.

In the case of each country, we took the items of our survey measuring positive and negative stereotypes about the Roma, positive and negative behavioral intentions, and intergroup emotions, and based on these items, we set up a cognitive network for each country. Centrality measures showed that *empathy* in Hungary, perceived *threat* in Romania, and *sympathy* in Slovakia, France, and Ireland were the most central elements of the network. Notably, all central elements were affective aspects of antigypsyism. This suggests that interventions may induce most favorable impact if they focus on affective rather than cognitive components (stereotypes for example) of the social perception of the Roma.

Policy suggestions

Although survey data is not suitable to make direct suggestions about interventions, our results draw attentions to the following:

- Antigypsyism both on an individual level and as a social norm may be the greatest obstacle to accept discourse that can facilitate the engagement of non-Roma people in Roma issues.

- The distinction between social change orientation (ally collective action) versus pro-social tendencies without social change intention (donations and material help) is less pronounced in connection with Roma people than previous research regarding other minority groups suggested. Therefore, even low threshold positive tendencies can be important stepping-stones.
- Policies regarding the Roma need to get people emotionally more involved, that is, sensitivity and perspective taking training that can facilitate empathy and sympathy have the highest potential to achieve change and lead to prosocial behavior towards the Roma.
- Reduction of threat perceptions through intergroup contact can have the highest potential to reduce hostility toward the Roma.
- Politicians, public figures and the media must realize the responsibility of how issues related to Roma people are presented. Reference to allyship and reference to the needs of Roma people can be equally valuable in facilitating positive engagement, however the use of hostile language can contribute to people's intentions to join hostile groups threatening Roma people.

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