

The Normative Stability of Anti-Gypsyism: Political and Lay Discourses in Slovakia

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Despite extensive research measuring anti-Roma prejudice and discrimination, we still lack a systematic understanding of how the broader normative climate sustains and legitimizes anti-Gypsyism as a socially acceptable and unusually stable form of exclusion. This paper examines how anti-Gypsyism operates as a normatively stabilized and socially acceptable form of racism in Slovakia. Drawing on three complementary qualitative studies (2020–2025), we argue that discrimination against Roma is sustained not merely by individual prejudice but by a broader normative climate that legitimizes exclusion and renders it morally intelligible.

Study 1 theoretically examined barriers to Roma collective action and intergroup solidarity. We show how individual and institutional anti-Roma racism, denial of recognition, structural deprivation, and majority prejudice create a normative climate in which anti-Roma—rather than pro-Roma—positions are socially sanctioned, constraining politicized identities and authentic alliance formation.

Study 2 analyzed political legitimization of the militarized quarantine of Roma settlements during COVID-19. Through discourse analysis of official communication, we identified interpretative repertoires (control, epidemiology, military management) that framed discriminatory measures as rational and protective. Denials of prejudice coexisted with essentializing constructions of Roma as sanitary threats. Institutional racism was thus discursively normalized within an already permissive normative climate.

Study 3 draws on vignette-based focus groups (N = 90) conducted across Slovak regions in 2025. Participants discussed hostility toward a Roma couple, Ukrainian refugees, and an LGBTQ+ pair. While norms regarding refugees and LGBTQ+ people were described as shifting and responsive to public signals, constructions of Roma were strikingly static. Roma were framed as a long-standing and “understandable” problem. Among participants high in right-wing authoritarianism, exclusion was justified through references to unwritten local norms and deservingness. Unlike other minority-related norms, anti-Roma norms appeared rigid and weakly responsive to institutional cues.

Together, these studies demonstrate that anti-Gypsyism in Slovakia operates within a uniquely stable normative framework. Qualitative research—particularly discourse analysis and vignette-based focus groups—reveals how discrimination is legitimized through everyday reasoning, ideological dilemmas, and appeals to “common sense.” Anti-discrimination efforts must address normative climates, not only attitudes. Clear counter-normative institutional signaling, challenging deservingness frames, and strengthening Roma collective agency are essential to destabilize the moral legitimacy of exclusion.

Acknowledgement: The work of Barbara Láštiová on this study was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the Contract no. APVV-23-0119.