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SUMMER SCHOOL

GENOA 24-28 JULY 2023

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Ethnic rumors: sociological dimension and measures to combat them

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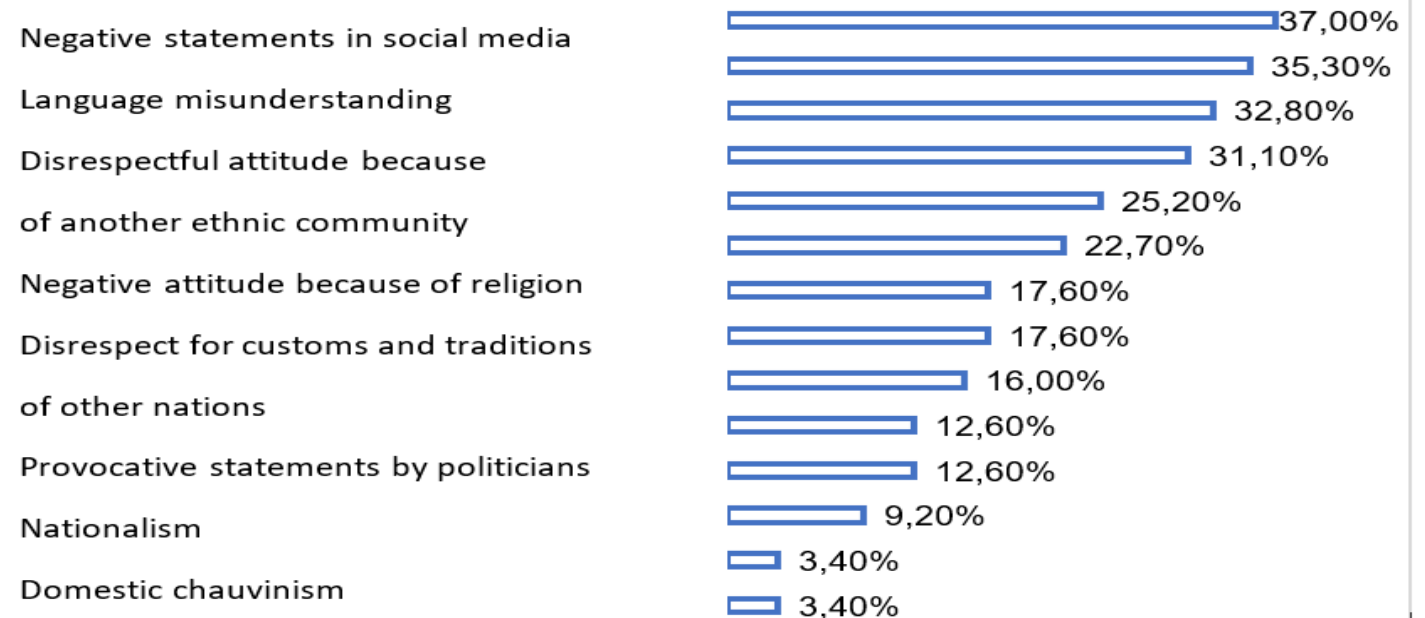
Within the framework of the project "Fighting Rumors" with the support of the Intercultural Cities Program (ICC) of the Council of Europe (CoE), in cooperation with the Center for Sociological Research of Melitopol State Pedagogical University, among residents of the Ukrainian Network of Intercultural Cities (ICC-Ukraine) members – **Vinnytsia, Lutsk, Melitopol, Pavlohrad, Odesa, Sumy** - to classify existing rumors and prejudices related to cultural diversity.



In the course of the survey, respondents confirmed the existence of issues related to cultural diversity or cohabitation of different ethnicities and national communities in cities.

The following are highlighted among the five most important:

What, in your opinion, are the main issues related to cultural diversity or cohabitation of different ethnicities and national communities in your city?





The survey found that only 18% of respondents agreed that these issues are not related to specific groups of people, while more than half of the respondents (51%) were undecided, and 30% believed that these issues are directly related to specific groups.

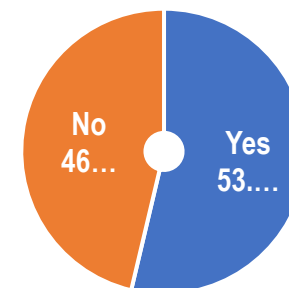
To support their opinion, they cite the following examples of statements:

1. *"Roma are thieves and idlers", "Roma cheat and beg", "People of Roma nationality, Caucasian peoples, are often considered ignorant", "Roma are negatively covered in the media, often treated with disdain in educational institutions";*
2. *"The Ukrainian language is for serfs",*
3. *"Jews are hired for positions, and Jews run politics."*
4. *" Internally displaced persons go back to where you came from and don't take up space. Go back to your home", "Oh, what a good man, even though he is an internally displaced persons"*

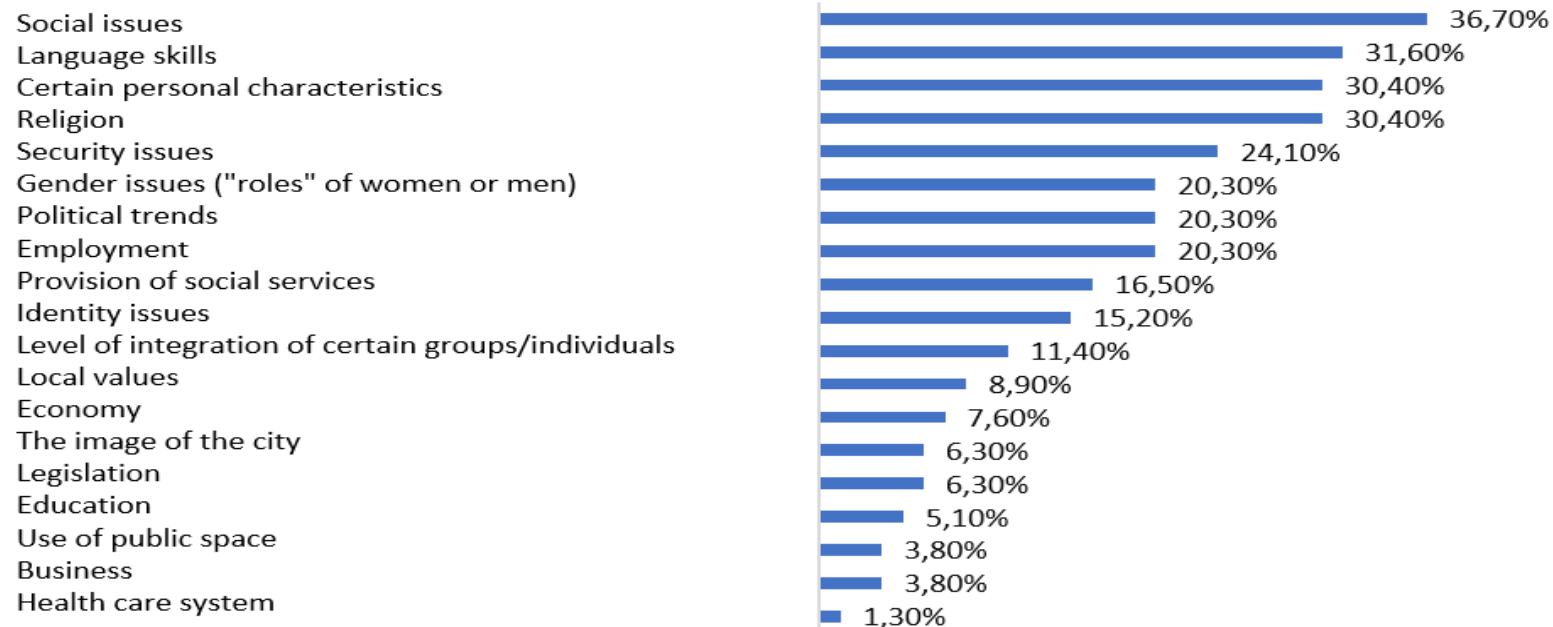


To the question "Are there any rumors about migrants, refugees, ethnicities, national communities or other groups in your city?" more than half (54%) of city residents said that such rumors do occur, and 73% of them indicated that these rumors are mostly negative, while the rest indicated that they are positive.

Are there rumors in your city about migrants, refugees, ethnicities, national communities or other groups?



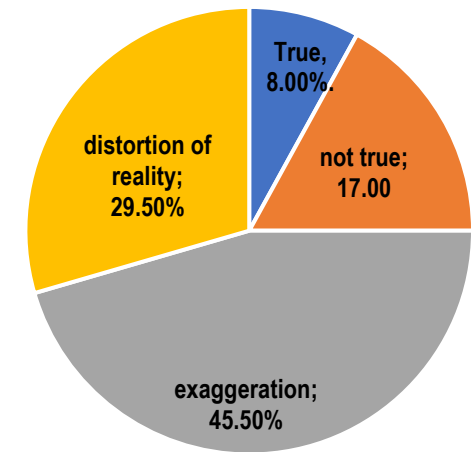
If so, are these rumors related to?





Interestingly, the majority of respondents believe that these rumors are "exaggerated" (46%), 30% believe that the rumors are "distortions of reality," and 17% say they are false. Only 8% of respondents believe these rumors to be true.

What is your opinion on these rumors?



Residents of cities who consider these rumors to be exaggerations, distortions of reality, or untrue, in support of their opinion, cite arguments that are mainly related to the lack of complete information, incomplete understanding of it, or "distortion," or a low level of critical thinking



Here are some quotes:

1. *"People who spread such rumors do not understand what they are talking about and usually do not try to understand. After all, it is easier to pick up a simple "black" or "white" judgment than to comprehend something and form your own opinion. In addition, in a distorted reality, it is easier to hide your own shortcomings by shifting responsibility to someone else."*
2. *"Rumors are mostly information taken out of context and exaggerated."*
3. *"Everything comes from ignorance of the culture of the other"*
4. *"Rumors are based on single negative examples, and negative information is spread by the press more than good news and events"*
5. *"Rumors are spread by people who do not know the situation and do not have complete knowledge"*
6. *"Referring to existing stereotypes, rumor-mongers do not try to understand the essence of the case", "These are stereotypes without real personal experience of communicating with these people"*
7. *"These are stereotypical opinions and impressions. Absolutely everything depends on a particular person and their actions, not on their nationality and religion."*
8. *"This is a political manipulation".*



Respondents are convinced that rumors can be refuted by specific facts. Some of them try to refute rumors by asking people: **"Where did you get this information from? Are you sure about your beliefs?"**

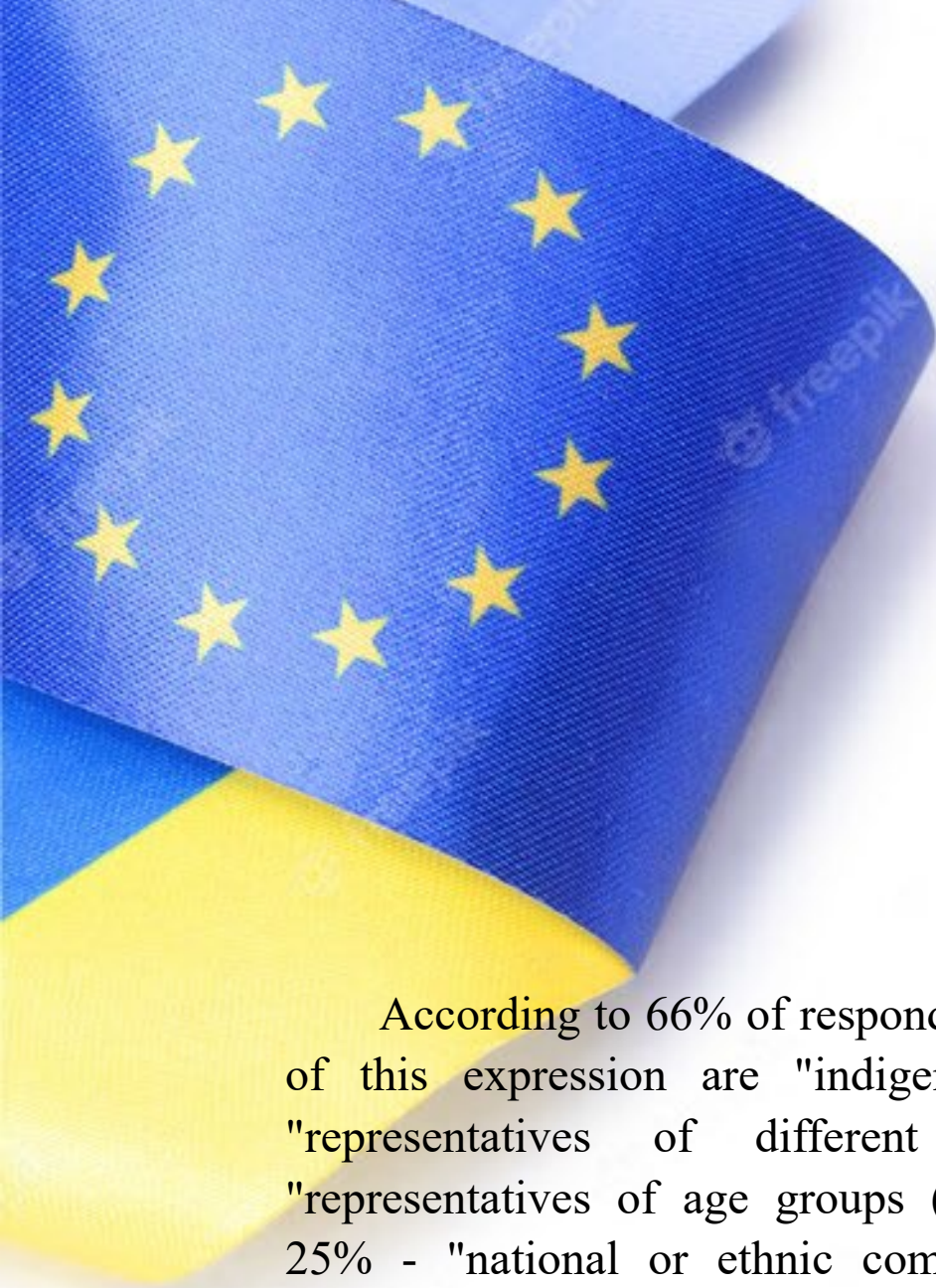
Respondents who believe these rumors to be true provide facts (video, photo and audio materials, examples from the lives of victims of people of other nationalities, "media publications prove it") and examples from their own experience:

"I live next to such people..."

"Often Roma illegally get money from local residents and live in public parks, which creates unsanitary conditions and discomfort"

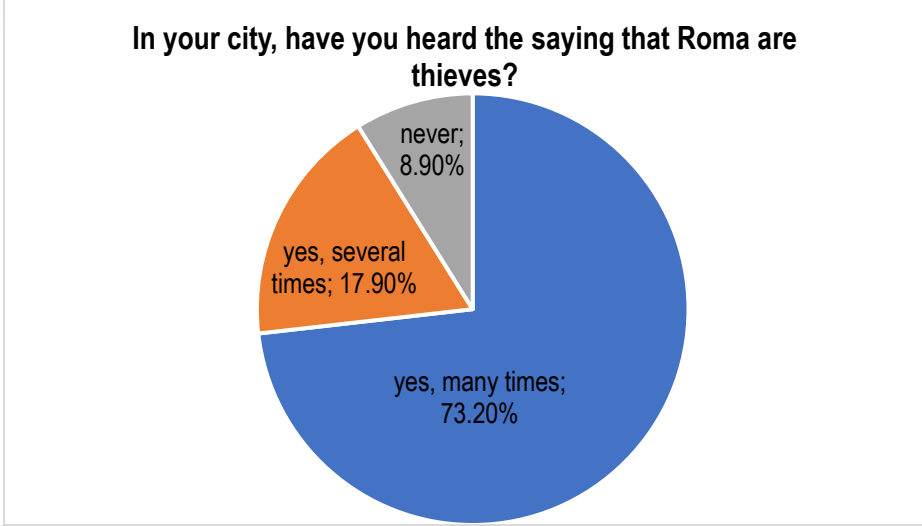
"If we continue the topic of Roma, some of them really lead an antisocial lifestyle. But not all of them"

"In our city, for the most part, people of Roma nationality allow themselves to deceive people, steal personal belongings or goods at the market, and attack others in a large group. Also, representatives of the Caucasian peoples can show similar robbery behavior".

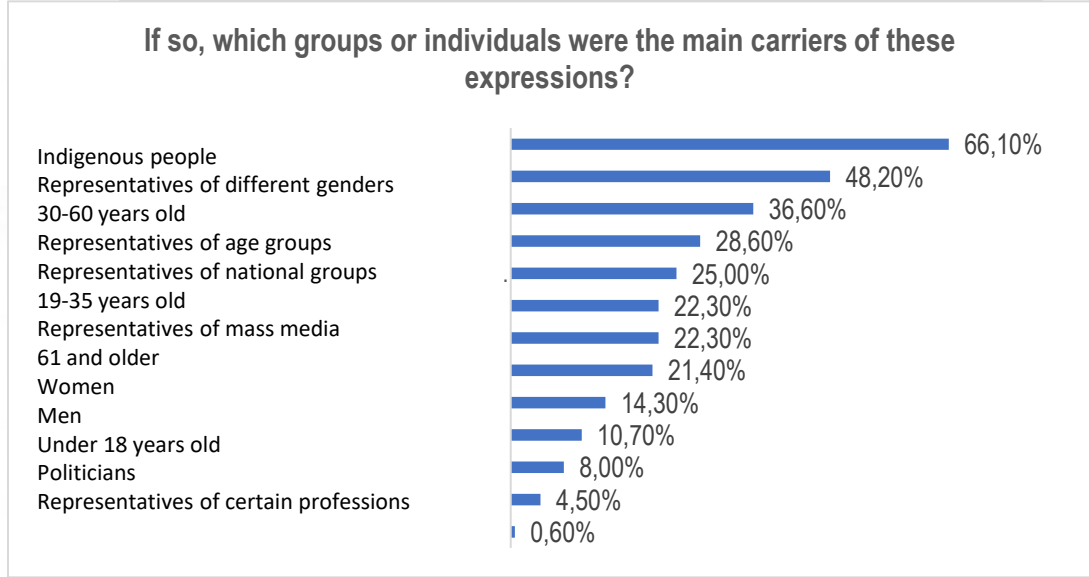


The first place in the ranking is occupied by rumors about Roma.
One of the most common negative stereotypes about Roma is "Roma are thieves».

This is confirmed by the results of the survey, according to which 73% of respondents have heard this expression "many times", 18% - "several times", 9% - "never".



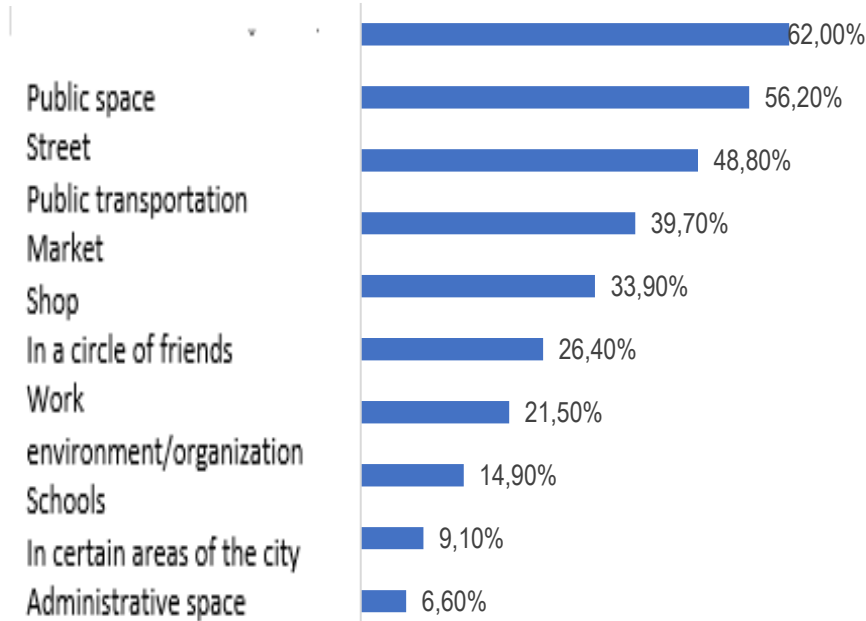
According to 66% of respondents, the disseminators of this expression are "indigenous people," 48% - "representatives of different genders," 29% - "representatives of age groups (19 years and older)," 25% - "national or ethnic communities," 22% - the media, 5% - "politicians," and 1% - "representatives of certain professions".



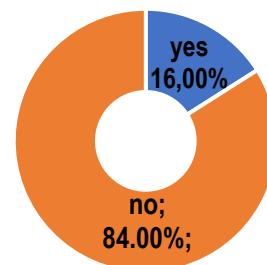


According to 62% of respondents, this expression-rumor is most often heard in "public space", 56% - on the street, 49% - in "public transport", 40% - in the "market", 34% - in the "store", 26% - in the "circle of friends", 22% - in the "work environment/organization", 15% - in the "school", 9% - in "certain areas of the city", 7% - in the "administrative space", 9% - in "certain areas of the city", 7% - in the "administrative space".

In what spheres of life or activity can you most often hear this expression-rumor?




Have you ever tried to challenge such statements?



Only 16% of respondents tried to challenge such statements using the following arguments: *"There are good and bad people. And belonging to any group does not matter"*, *"People are different, we cannot equalize everyone"*, *"Representatives of all population groups can be thieves"*, *"There are many talented and decent people among Roma, and thieves exist in all nations. Thieves have no nationality"*.



The polar positions of awareness of the rumor (more than 90%) and willingness to deny it (16%) revealed both a certain indifference of the majority of respondents to this rumor (habit) and the weakest arguments in opposition (most often, the desire to avoid generalizations), which clearly shows insufficient preparation for opposition, given the openly accusatory and discriminatory content of the statement. At the same time, it is obvious that the impact of this rumor in a certain situation (in particular, in a child's environment) can lead to significant long-term moral and physical negative consequences for their targets.



The second position according to the rating is occupied by the rumor that **"Ukrainians are cheap Western European labor."** This was confirmed by 87% of respondents.

The carriers of this expression are mostly "indigenous people" (48% of respondents), "representatives of different genders" (41%), "representatives of age groups (mostly 36-60 years old)" (20%), "media" (20%), "politicians" (18%), "representatives of national or ethnic communities" (4%), and "certain professions" (1%). The most common places to hear this expression-rumor are in "public space" (53% of respondents), "on the street" (46%), "public transport" (39%), "market" (27%), "work environment/organization" (19%), "shop" (18%), "circle of friends" (18%), "school" (7%), "administrative space" (6%), and "certain city districts" (5%).

The rumor about "Ukrainians as cheap labor force" prompted a response from 41% (out of 87% of those who are aware of it), which indicates a strong social and moral basis for the content of this statement for most Ukrainians, using the following arguments: *"Aren't those who work in Ukraine for a penny cheap labor?"*, *"The only argument I can think of is that everything depends on a particular person and his or her actions, not on nationality or religion"*, *"Everyone has the right to choose their own life path, regardless of race, gender or religion. People are equal and differ only in moral qualities and life principles"*, *"People still work in Europe for higher wages than in Ukraine and go primarily to help their families"*, *"She gave examples of Ukrainians who have successfully settled abroad and have wages at the level of indigenous citizens"*, *"Ours are valued"*, *"Working abroad for many Ukrainians is an opportunity to improve their economic situation"*, *"Good specialists earn good money abroad"*. However, of those respondents who tried to challenge the statement that "Ukrainians are cheap labor," only less than half (31%) believe that their arguments were influential.



Since the level of public position of Ukrainians in challenging this rumor is directly related to the level of personal involvement of the survey participants in its socially important context, such activity is quite predictable. Social networks and regional media play a significant role in the "popularization" of this statement. The signs of disrespectful attitude towards the nation present in this rumor are primarily the result of current and unresolved social issues for Ukraine, such as economic security, employment, political trends, etc.

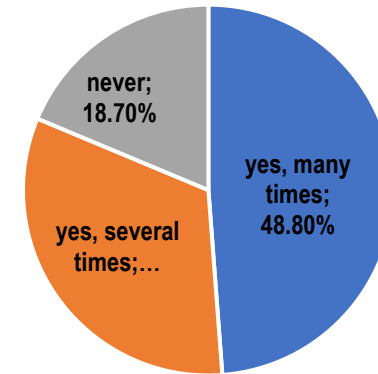
Therefore, overcoming the negative impact of this rumor directly depends on raising the self-esteem of citizens, primarily through the realization of their potential and activity. Strategic directions of efforts to overcome the consequences of this rumor are to ensure high-quality competitive education and a balanced attitude of the media to the presentation of information.



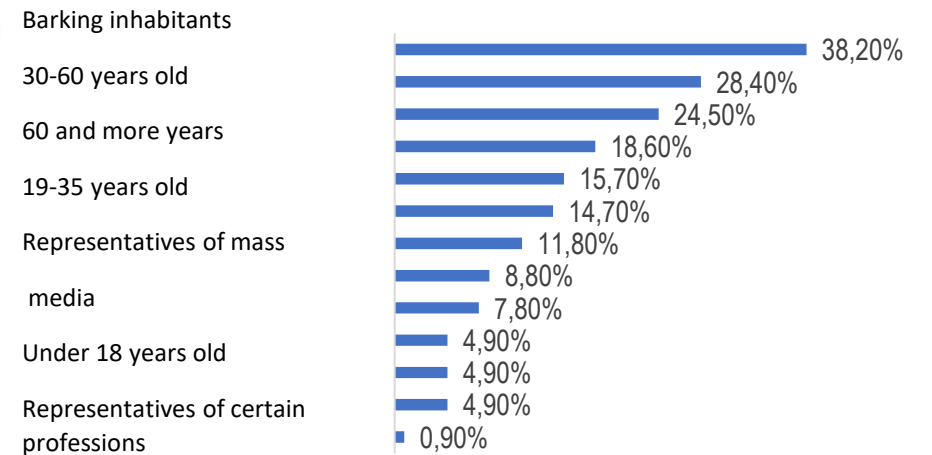
The third position according to the rating is occupied by the rumor "Jews are self-serving." It was mentioned by 85% of respondents.

According to 38% of respondents, this expression is mostly used by "natives" of the city, 28% - by "representatives of different genders" (with men using it more than women), 19% - by "age groups" (mostly 36 years and older), 15% - by "national or ethnic communities", 8% - by the media, 4.9% - by politicians, 1% - by representatives of certain professions.

In your city, have you heard expressions that Jews are self-serving?

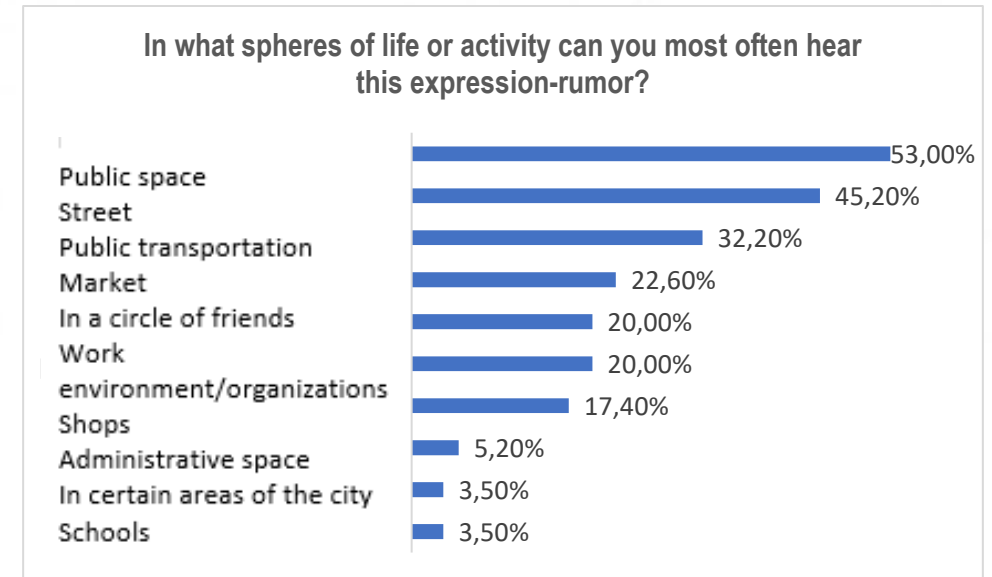
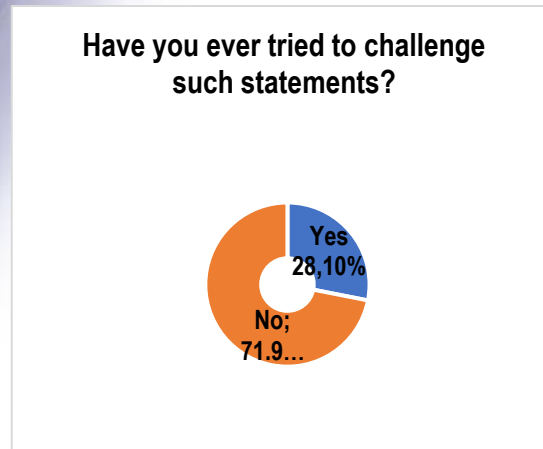


Which groups or individuals were the main carriers of these expressions?





According to 53% of respondents, this expression-rumor is most often heard in "public space", 45% - on the street, 32% - in "public transport", 23% - in the market, 21% - in "work environment/organization", 20% - in "circle of friends", 17% - in "shop", 5% - in "administrative space", 4% - in "school", 4% - in "certain areas of the city".



Of those respondents who have heard this statement, 72% have never "tried" to challenge it. The 28% who have "tried" to do so used the following arguments: *"All people are equal, and it all depends on the individual"*, *"They are smart and pragmatic"*, *"Jews are a very wonderful and intelligent nation, they are the pride of the city"*, *"All nationalities have different people"*, *"Character traits do not depend on nationality. This is a stereotype and can be said about individuals, but not about the ethnic group as a whole."*



Among those respondents who disputed this statement, 52% do not know whether their argument was influential, 27% are sure that it was, and 21% are not.

Obviously, strategies for overcoming the negative connotations of this expression will be further determined by the trends in the formation of the psychology of a private owner in the Ukrainian socio-cultural space - a thrifty and far-sighted owner, a citizen of a free state and a creator of his or her own new history, the nature and pace of small business development in Ukraine. To maintain this trend, further constructive and balanced media coverage of the history of the Jewish people and the significant role of the Jewish community in the social and economic life of Ukraine and the region is needed.



The fourth position according to the rating is occupied by the rumor that internally displaced persons do not want to work ("live off state aid").

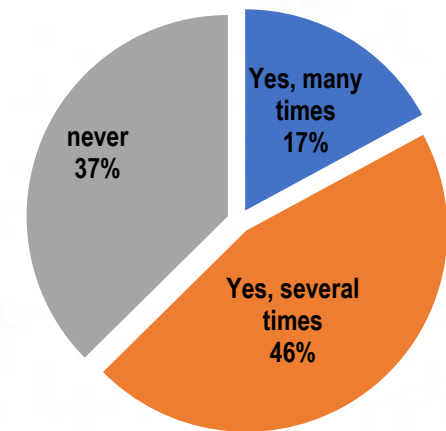
This is a fairly widespread negative stereotype in the areas where a large number of newcomers live.

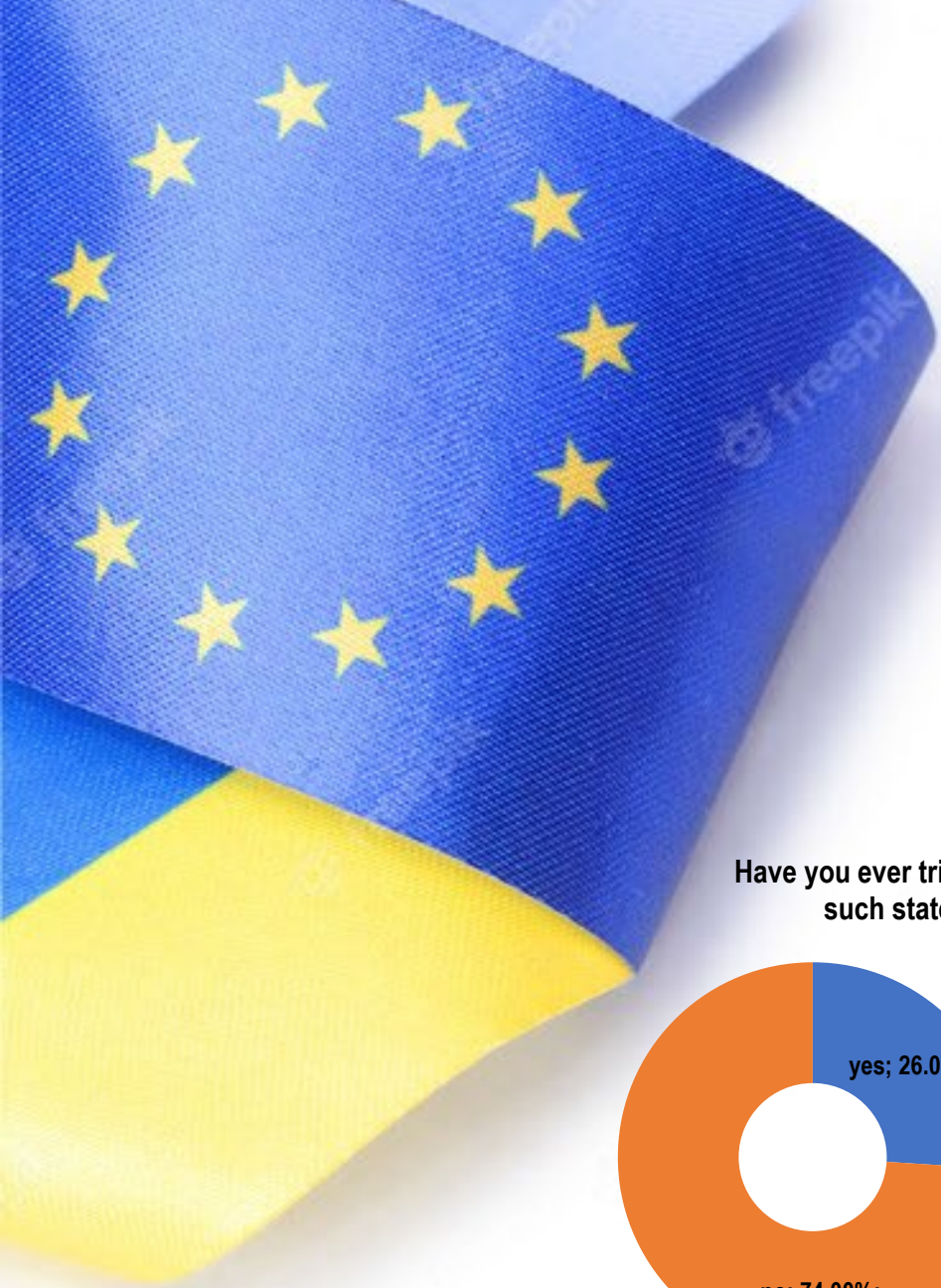
Part of the reason for this rumor is that wealthy IDPs of the first waves had enough money to take their time with employment and the final choice of a place of further permanent residence. However, most often this statement is associated with significant problems of finding a job in their specialty in the context of high regional unemployment rates.

This is confirmed by the survey results, which show that 64% of respondents have heard this expression in their city.

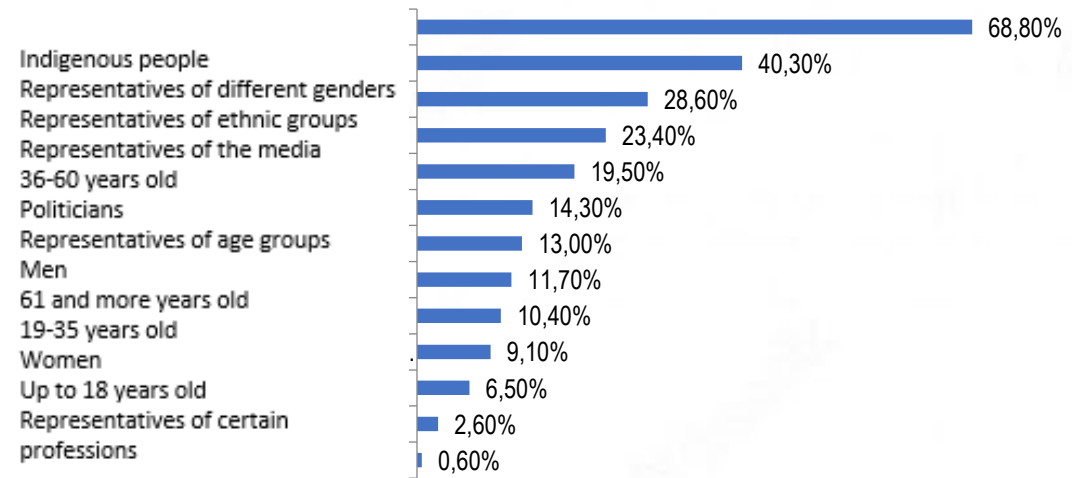
According to 69% of respondents, the main disseminators of this expression are "indigenous people," 40% - "representatives of different genders," 23% - the media, 20% - "politicians," 14% - "representatives of age groups (mostly 36-60 years old), 9% - "national or ethnic communities," and 1% - "certain professions".

In your city, have you heard statements that internally displaced persons do not want to work (they live on state aid)?

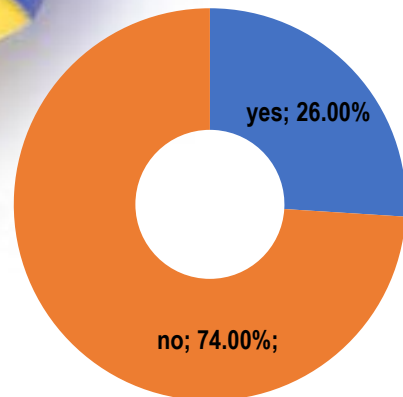




If so, which groups or individuals were the main carriers of these expressions?



Have you ever tried to challenge such statements?



Among those respondents who had heard this statement, only 26% tried to challenge it using the following arguments: *"It's hard to be on their side", "They are city residents like us", "You can't really live on state aid of this size", "She gave examples of internally displaced people who work. I asked to give specific examples of their statements to understand whether their opinion is misleading", "Almost all IDPs of working age are trying to find a job", "I gave examples of people who are already working and integrated into the community, advised to refer to statistics, but in general I make every effort not to take these attacks personally. My own mental health is more important to me than the opinions of ordinary people."*



The survey found that out of the 55% of respondents who challenged this statement, only 16% believe that it was influential. The low percentage of confidence in the influence of their arguments on opponents among those who are ready to defend IDPs from unfair accusations demonstrates the importance and urgency of the need to inform the residents of host regions as widely as possible about the scale and depth of social and psychological problems of this group of citizens, and to work on the adaptation of new residents in the region in a phased, long-term manner.

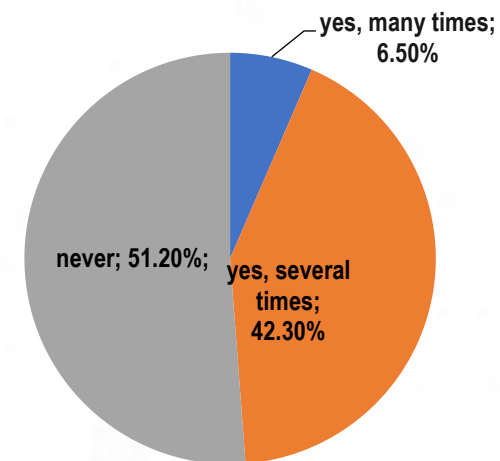


The fifth position in the ranking is occupied by the rumor that "Muslims are terrorists and we should stay away from them".

This statement has historical roots in the global information space and is relevant today due to the growing level of terrorism in the world. This increases the possibility of an uncritical attitude of Ukrainians to both world and domestic news and can be seen as a latent source of interethnic tension.

This is confirmed by the survey results, which show that half (52%) of respondents in all cities have never heard this expression.

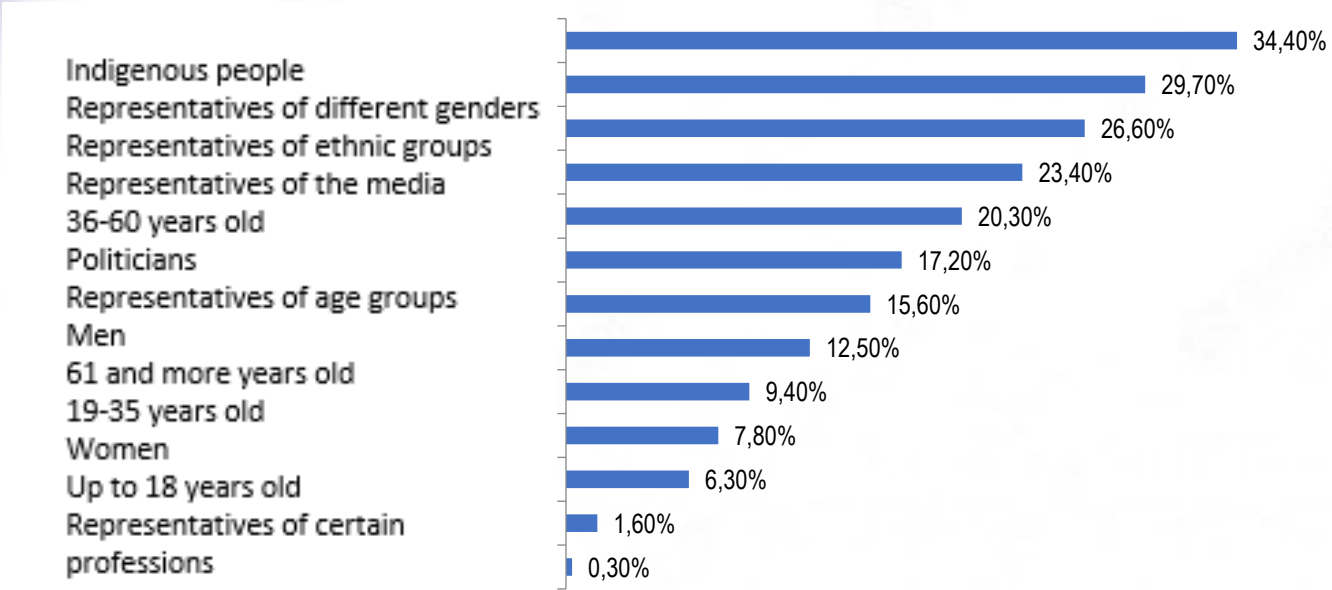
In your city, have you heard statements that Muslims are terrorists and you should stay away from them?





According to 34% of respondents, the disseminators of this expression are "indigenous people," 30% - "representatives of different genders," 27% - "national or ethnic communities," 23% - the media, 17% - "politicians," 16% - "representatives of age groups" (mostly 36-60 years old).media, 17% - "politicians," 16% - "representatives of age groups" (mostly 36-60 years old).

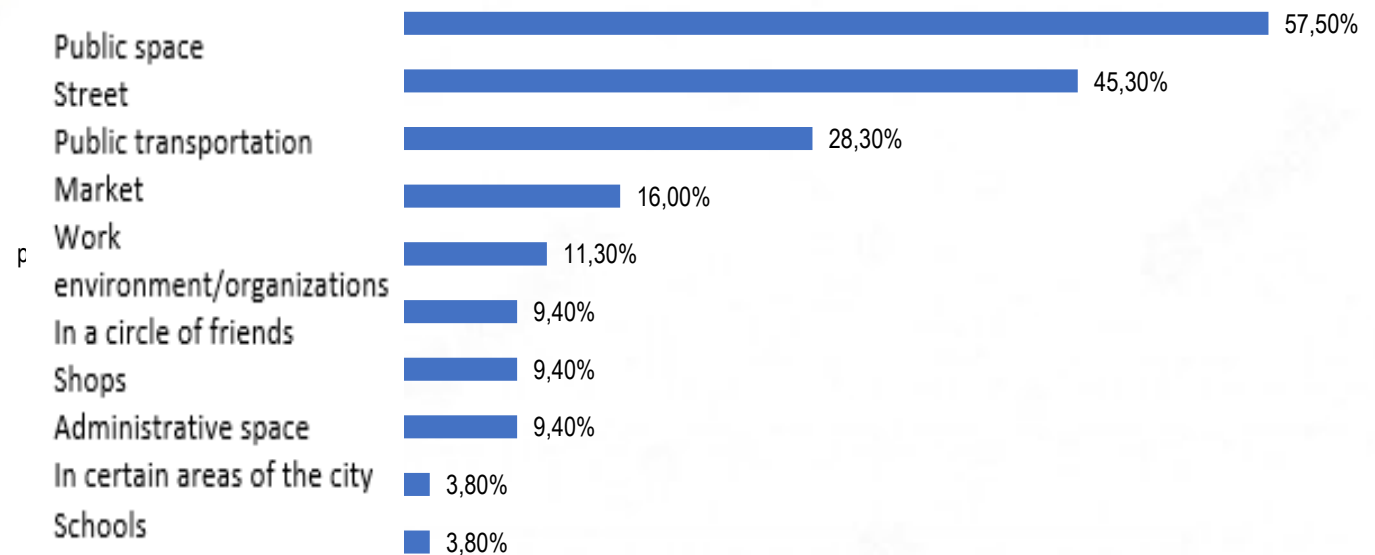
If so, which groups or individuals were the main carriers of these expressions?





According to 58% of respondents, this expression-rumor is most often heard in "public space", 45% - on the street, 28% - in "public transport", 16% - in the "market", 11% - in the "work environment/organization", 10% - in a store, 10% - in the "administrative space", 10% - in a circle of friends, 4% - in school, 4% - in "certain areas of the city".

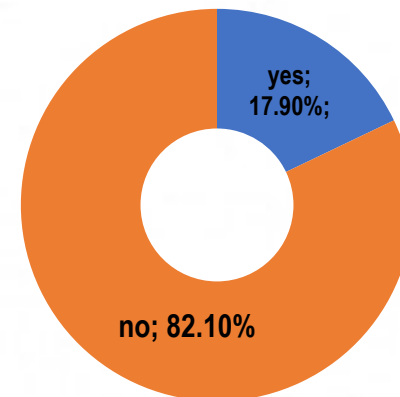
In what spheres of life or activity can you most often hear this expression-rumor?





Among all respondents who have heard this statement, the vast majority (82%) "did not try to challenge" it, and among those respondents (18%) who did, the following arguments were given: *"There are many more significant problems in Muslim customs, and the so-called Taliban can hardly be found on our territory", "I do not argue, I defend Tatars", "Not all Muslims are terrorists and there are many good people who suffer from these rumors. In general, terrorism is a global problem", "A terrorist can be a representative of any nationality. Terrorism does not depend on religion."* But people do not always listen to them. Only 18% of respondents believe that their arguments were convincing.

Have you ever tried to challenge such statements?

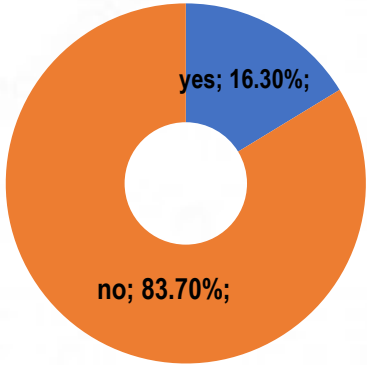




The low readiness (18%) to oppose the least widespread of the rumors offered for evaluation (only 48% had heard the phrase "Muslim terrorists"), despite its relative personalized vagueness, indicates a serious underestimation by respondents of the negative consequences of its spread.

The survey revealed that the majority (84%) of respondents had not been subject to the above rumors or stereotypes. Nevertheless, 16% of them state that they have some personal experience of being the object of rumors or stereotypes.

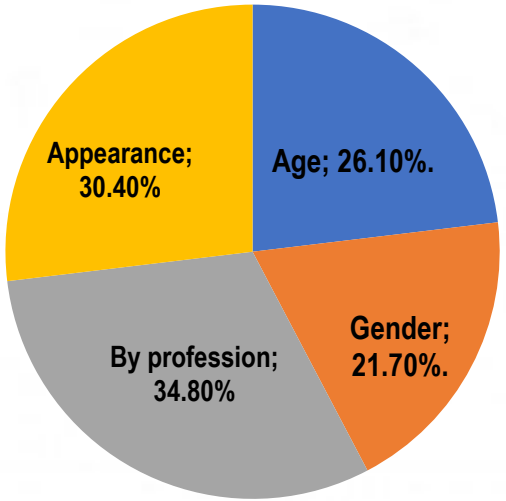
Have you personally been the subject of the above or other rumors or stereotypes?





It is generally recognized that most rumors are associated with the peculiarities of personal life experience, age, social status, and occupation of the respondents themselves. Those respondents who have been personally subject to the above-mentioned or other rumors or stereotypes note that they were related to "profession" (35%), "appearance" (30%), "age" (26%), and "gender" (22%).stereotypes note that they were related to "profession" (35%), "appearance" (30%), "age" (26%),and "gender" (22%).

If so, what were these rumors or stereotypes about? 3:





Proposals for communities and actors to counteract the spread of destructive rumors in intercultural communities:

Based on the analysis of the materials of focus group discussions and questionnaire surveys, taking into account qualitative assessments of the forms, directions, means, content and impact of active citizens' counteraction to the spread of rumors, the following measures are proposed as priority measures to prevent the negative consequences of the spread and impact of destructive rumors on community residents:

- In order to combat rumors, overcome hate speech and establish dialogue as an effective tool for mutual understanding and harmony, it is necessary to build bridges and partnerships with actors of different levels of influence and competence, such as the European Network of ECC Cities, the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Human Rights, the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, European Associations of Cities, political parties, media, social and cultural organizations, universities, companies, etc.

- Create a system to identify and monitor rumors that pose a potential threat to the well-being of community members.

- Establish an "Anti-Rumor Agency" consisting of representatives of academics, lawyers, formal and informal community leaders, NGOs, national communities and self-governments of intercultural cities to objectively analyze the nature, nature, specific causes, motives and leading sources of socially dangerous rumors in the region.



- Conducting a series of training sessions and workshops for the Agency's members on combating rumors, using successful IMS practices and methods of combating rumors based on the Council of Europe's IMS Program's "ANTI-RUMOR Guide to Countering Rumors".
- Developing a system of awareness-raising activities involving active community members to inform problem groups about the risks of spreading destructive rumors in the public space, forms and means of responding to them, and observing optimal rules of behavior in conflict situations.
- Establishment of centers for psychological and legal assistance to citizens who have suffered moral, economic or physical damage as a result of rumors.
- Implementation of a system of administrative, legal and public response mechanisms to the spread of rumors that pose a potential threat to the well-being of intercultural communities, in particular, rumors about Crimean Tatars in the territory of the Russian-occupied Crimea.
- Implementation of a regional system of urgent communication between citizens and law enforcement agencies in the event of force majeure situations related to the spread of socially harmful rumors.
- Establishing networks to inform community members, provide counseling on specific issues, and ensure effective feedback on countering destructive rumors in the region.



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