

#RacistEU trend analysis

An assessment of key narratives propagated
using the #RacistEU.

03 2022

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Glossary

Detailed descriptions and explanations of terms and abbreviations relevant to this report are listed below. These serve to clarify how such abbreviations and terms are used in our report and are not intended to be authoritative.

Term	Description
ANCIR	African Network of Centres for Investigative Reporting
CAR	Central African Republic
UN	United Nations
EU	European Union
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

Executive summary: What's the story?

The investigation documents how #RacistEU was used by key Kenyan online influencers, in an attempt to put a spotlight on racism in Ukraine against African citizens.

An in depth analysis of the #RacistEU revealed that the racist treatment of African refugees escaping Ukraine has cemented much of this apathy on a number of social media users, and anathema in others.

Key narratives that were identified included:

1. Black lives matter - using the hashtag #Blacklives matter to share sentiments about the treatment of Africans in Ukraine.
2. Russia stands with Africa, unlike EU, NATO and America - which included claims that Russia has always been a strong supporter of Africa and its people while NATO, the EU and America never had Africa's best interests, having invaded several African countries such as Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Libya.
3. Hypocrisy and racists claims in western media - which included claims that Western & EU based media were propagating racism and were hypocritical in their coverage of the situation in Ukraine and were amplifying anti-Russian/ pro-western disinformation or propaganda and therefore should not be trusted.
4. Expression of solidarity with Russia - using the hashtags #IStandWithRussia and #IStandWithPutin to justify and support the invasion of Ukraine.

A number of seemingly inauthentic accounts were used to amplify the hashtag.

The authors

[Code for Africa](#) (CfA) is the continent's largest network of non-profit independent civic technology and open data laboratories, with a multidisciplinary team of more than 80 full-time technologists and analysts in 18 African countries. CfA's laboratories build digital democracy solutions that give citizens unfettered access to actionable information to improve their ability to make informed decisions, and to strengthen civic engagement for improved public governance and accountability.

The [African Network of Centres for Investigative Reporting](#) (ANCIR) is a CfA initiative that brings together the continent's best investigative newsrooms, ranging from large traditional mainstream media to smaller specialist units. ANCIR member newsrooms investigate crooked politicians, organised crime and big business. The iLAB is ANCIR's in-house digital forensic team of data scientists and investigative specialists who spearhead investigations that individual newsrooms cannot tackle alone. This includes forensic analysis of suspected digital disinformation campaigns aimed at misleading citizens or triggering social discord; polarisation using hate speech; radicalisation, or other techniques.

The iLAB subscribes to CfA's guiding principles:

1. *We show what's possible.* Digital democracy can be expensive. We seek to be a catalyst by lowering the political risk of experimentation by creating successful proofs-of-concept for liberating civic data, for building enabling technologies and for pioneering sustainable revenue models. We also seek to lower the financial costs for technology experimentation by creating and managing 'shared' backbone civic technology and by providing resources for rapid innovation.
2. *We empower citizens.* This is central to our theory of change. Strong democracies rely on engaged citizens who have actionable information and easy-to-use channels for making their will known. We therefore work primarily with citizen organisations and civic watchdogs, including the media. We also support government and social enterprises to develop their capacity to meaningfully respond to and effectively collaborate with citizens.
3. *We are action oriented.* African societies are asymmetric. The balance of power rests with governments and corporate institutions, at the expense of citizens. Citizens are treated as passive recipients of consultation or services. We seek to change this by focusing on actionable data and action-orientated tools that give 'agency' to citizens.
4. *We operate in public.* We promote openness in our work and in our partners' work. All of our digital tools are open source and all our information is open data. We actively

encourage documentation, sharing, collaboration, and reuse of both our own tools, programmes, and processes, as well as those of our partners.

5. *We help build ecosystems.* We actively marshal resources to support the growth of a pan-African ecosystem of civic technologists. Whenever possible, we reuse existing tools, standards and platforms, encouraging integration and extension. We operate as a pan-African federation of organisations who are active members of a global community, leveraging each other's knowledge and resources. All of our work is better if we are all connected.

This report was authored by the iLAB's team, consisting of investigative manager **Allan Cheboi** and data technologist **Robin Kiplangat**. The report was approved for publication by CEO **Justin Arenstein**.

The context

When Russia began its all-out invasion of Ukraine on February 24, news of the violence visited upon the people in Ukraine spread quickly across the world. European countries took swift action to offer refuge [allowing entry to all](#) people fleeing the war in Ukraine on humanitarian grounds. But while the hospitality has been applauded, it has also [highlighted stark differences](#) in treatment given to migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa.

Several media organisations and on social media posts have reported on African students stranded in Ukraine. Some have reported their hostile treatment by both Ukrainian security services and those of neighbouring countries. [Disturbing reports](#) state that African citizens in Ukraine are being discriminated against at the border amid the raging conflict in the country.

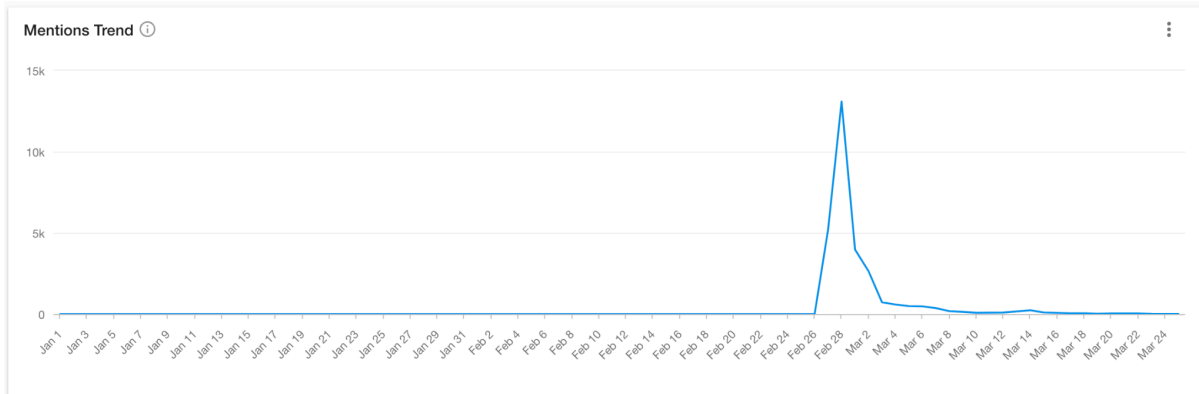
Representatives of Kenya, Ghana, and Gabon at the UN Security Council [condemned reports of discrimination](#) against African citizens at the Ukrainian border during a meeting at the UN HQ in New York City. The Kenyan Ambassador to the UN Martin Kimani, said in a statement, "The mistreatment of African peoples on Europe's borders needs to cease immediately, whether to the Africans fleeing Ukraine or to those crossing the Mediterranean,"



Statement of the African Union on the reported ill treatment of Africans trying to leave Ukraine (source: [AU](#))

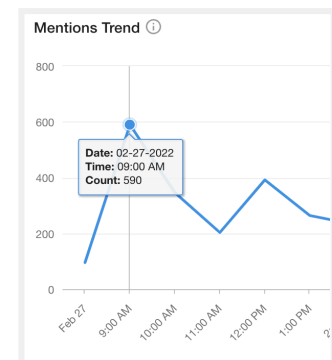
The hashtag

The hashtag started trending on 27 February 2022, just three days after the start of the Russia Ukraine war and garnered a total of approximately 27,130 tweets as at 01 March 2022.



Using Meltwater, a social media monitoring and analysis tool, the iLAB collected all the tweets mentioning the #RacistEU hashtag, in an effort to understand the key issues, traits, narratives and actors who spearheaded the trend.

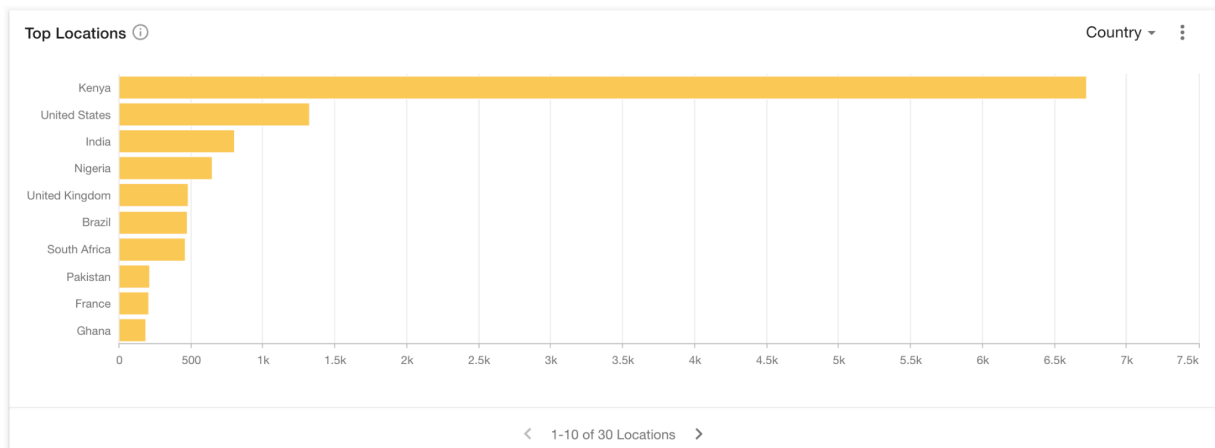
We observed that the trend was started by a [tweet](#) from one of Kenya's top online influencers @RobertAlai, claiming that people with 'black' and 'brown' skin were being blocked from leaving Ukraine amid the Russian invasion. This tweet immediately started being retweeted by several users on Twitter garnering a total of about 590 retweets and quoted tweets within the first one hour.



The image shows a grid of five tweets. The top-left tweet is the original tweet by Robert Alai (@RobertAlai) at 8:35 AM on Feb 27, 2022. It has 329 retweets, 14 quote tweets, and 1,287 likes. The text of the tweet is: "EU countries are allowing WHITE people from Ukraine with their cats, dogs and other animals while blocking those with BLACK or BROWN skin. It's very appalling to see that EU is coming out as very RACIST. We must stop #RacistEU from blocking black. Even in war? Sad!". The other four tweets are retweets of this original tweet, each with a different reach and a 'Negative' sentiment indicator.

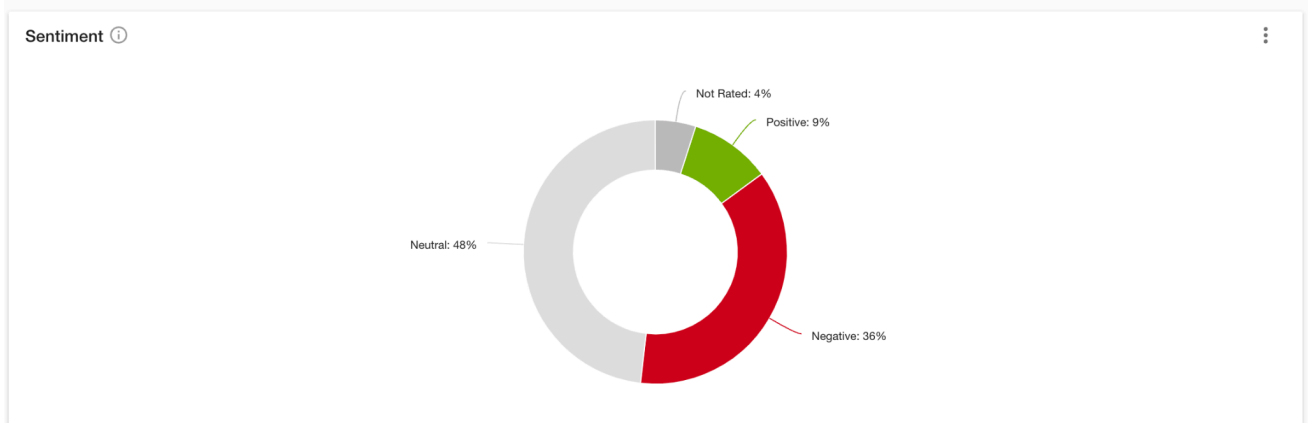
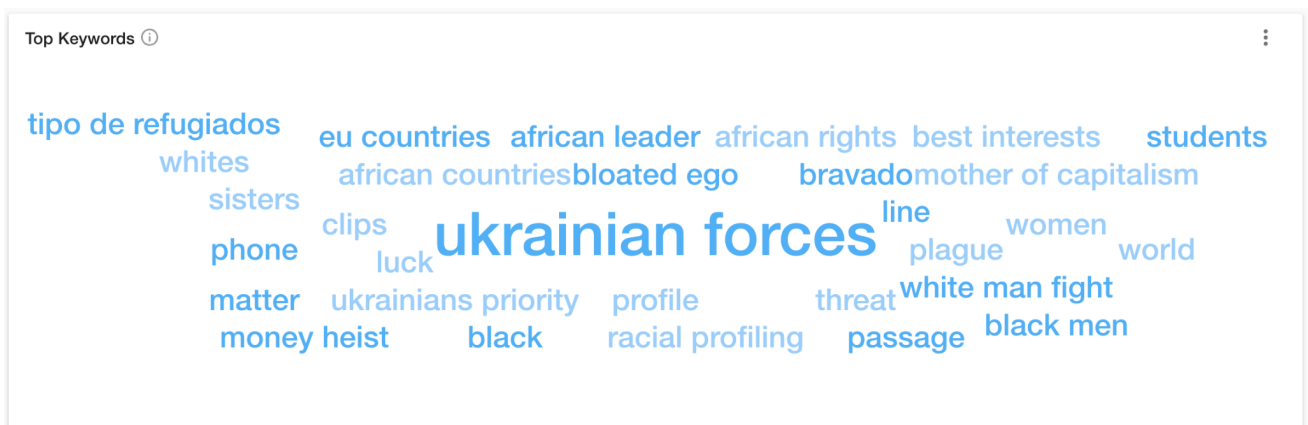
Trend in the first one hour, patient zero tweet and retweets from the original tweet (top, [left](#), [top centre](#), [bottom centre](#), [top right](#), [bottom right](#)) (Source: Twitter/ CFA)

We further noted that 45% of tweets from geo-tagged users originated from Kenya, which represented a significant level of interest in the issue.



Top locations of tweets from geo-tagged user accounts (Source: Meltwater/ CfA)

A word cloud generated from the Twitter dataset shows that the majority of the users mentioned the 'Ukrainian forces' indicating that the conversation was centred on the actions of the Ukrainian police or military. 'Students' was also a highly mentioned keyword, indicating that some of the victims were possibly students in Ukraine.



Word Clouds showing top keywords (top) and sentiment (bottom), (Meltwater / CfA)

The tweet with the highest level of engagement was from @brayson53233089, containing a 21-second video allegedly showing a black girl being restricted from boarding a train by Ukrainian police. The video itself had been viewed 228.8k times as at the time of this analysis. A tweet with a ‘cartoon’ depiction of ‘whites’ being allowed through the border as ‘blacks’ were being restricted, was the second highest engaged tweet while an anti-Western/ pro-Russian tweet from @RobertAlai who posted the first tweet using the hashtag was the third highest engaged tweet.



Tweets with the highest level of engagement using the #RacistEU (left, centre, right) (Source: Twitter/ Cfa)

A social network visualisation of the hashtag using gephi, a visualisation tool, revealed how users engaged with the cluster of tweets mentioned above.



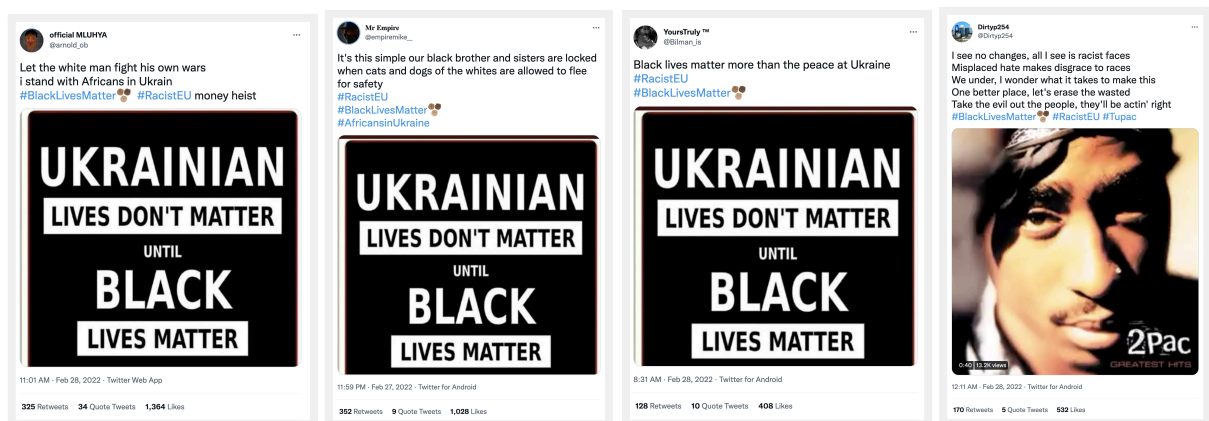
Twitter network showing posts with the highest number of retweets (Source: Gephi/Cfa)/ Cfa)

Key narratives

A number of key narratives could be identified from an in depth assessment of the posts using the hashtag.

Black lives matter (#Blacklivesmatter)

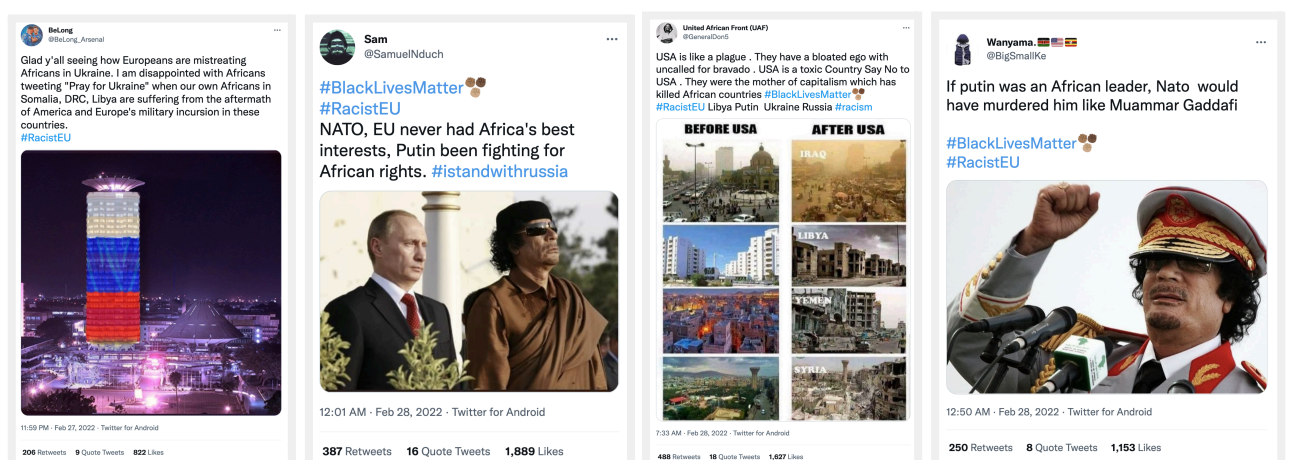
This narrative used the #Blacklives matter together with the #RacistEU to share sentiments about the treatment of Africans in Ukraine. Several users claimed support to the Russian invasion until the discrimination of Africans in Ukraine stops.



Sample posts using the #Blacklivesmatter and #RacistUkraine (left, centre left, centre right, right) (Source: Twitter/ Cfa)

Russia stands with Africa, unlike EU, NATO and America

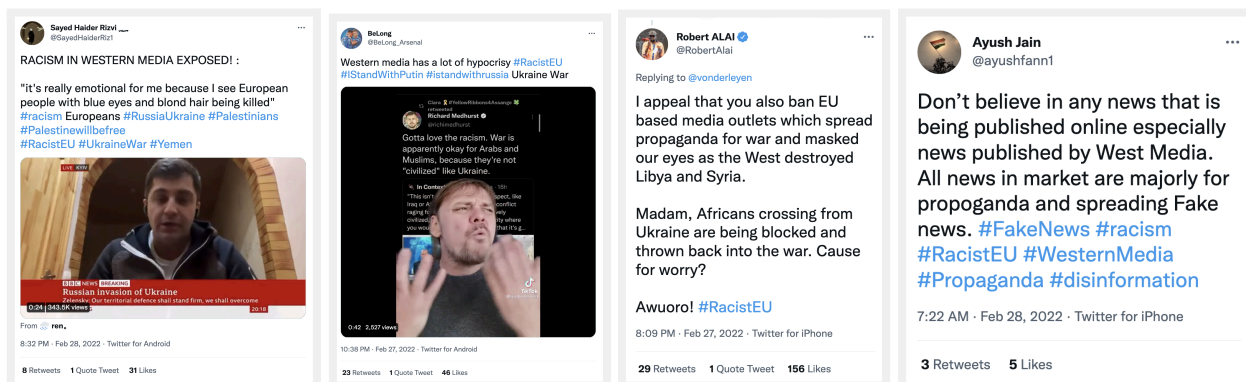
This narrative contained tweets that claimed that Russia has always been a strong supporter of Africa and its people. The tweets further claimed that the Russian government had provided significant assistance to African countries in the form of development aid, humanitarian relief, and military support. Additionally, some of the users claimed that NATO, the EU and America never had Africa's best interests, having invaded several African countries such as Somalia, DRC and Libya.



Sample of tweets with claims showing that Russia stands with Africa (left, centre left, centre right, right) (Source: Twitter/ Cfa)

Racists claims in western media

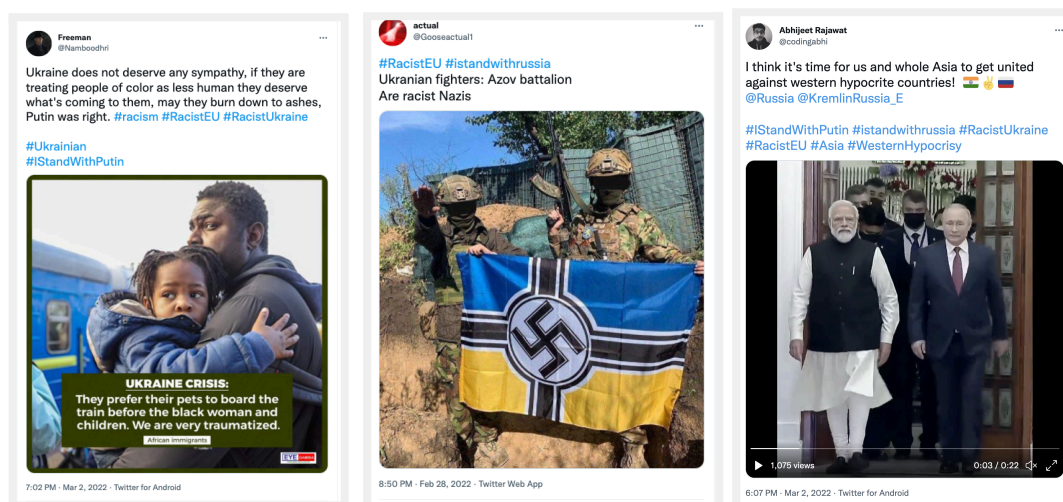
This narrative contained tweets with claims that Western & EU based media were propagating racism and were hypocritical in their coverage of the situation in Ukraine. Further, the tweets claimed that these media were amplifying anti-Russian/ pro-western disinformation or propaganda and therefore should not be trusted.



Sample posts with claims on media hypocrisy or racism ([left](#), [centre left](#), [centre right](#), [right](#)) (Source: [Twitter](#)/ Cfa)

In solidarity with Russia (#IStandWithRussia or #IStandWithPutin)

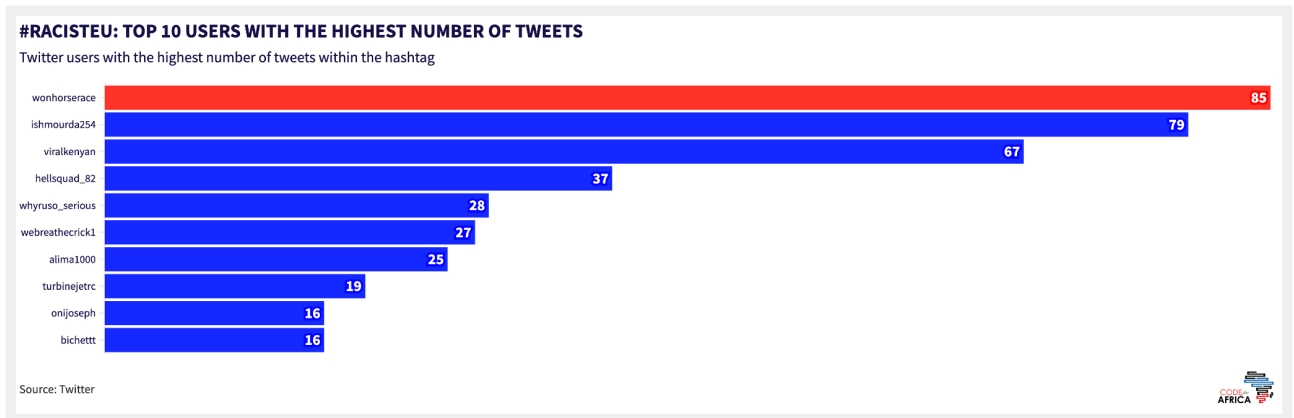
This narrative contained tweets that predominantly referred to Western countries as hypocrites for the manner in which they dealt with the refugee crisis while at the same time justifying and supporting the invasion of Ukraine. The tweets amplifying this narrative frequently used additional hashtags such as #IStandWithRussia or #IStandWithPutin.



Sample tweets using the hashtag #RacistEU and #IStandWithRussia or #IStandWithPutin ([left](#), [centre](#), [right](#)) (Source: [Twitter](#)/ Cfa)

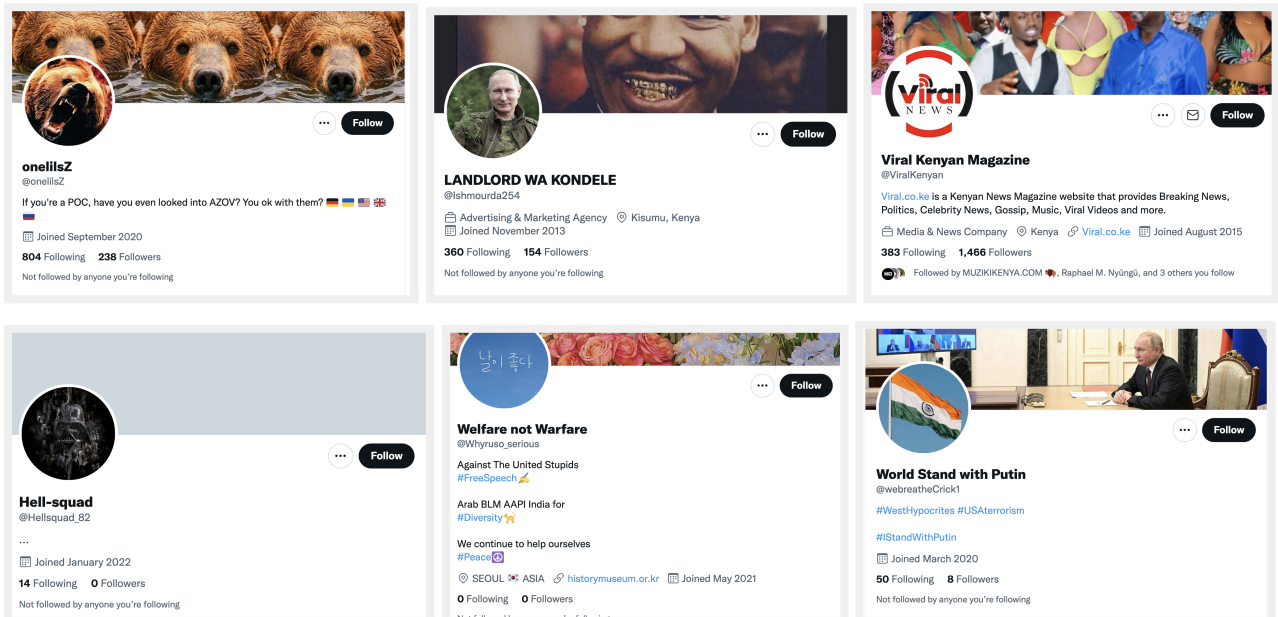
The amplifiers

To check for potential artificial amplification of the hashtag, our analysis revealed that the trend was particularly amplified by a number of marketing and pro-Russian/ anti-West accounts that posted the highest number of tweets using the hashtag.



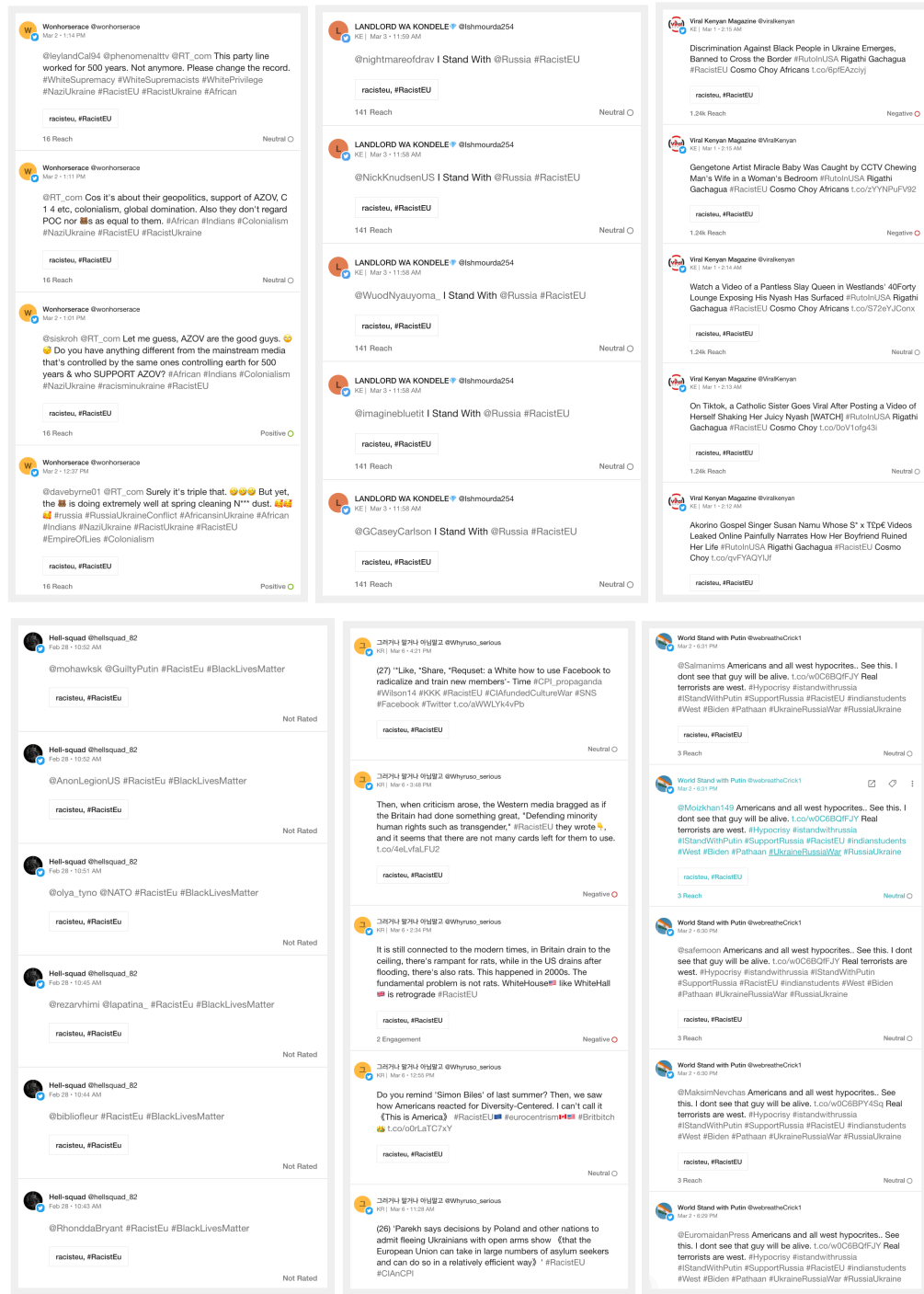
Visualisation showing the top 10 accounts with the highest number of tweets under the #RacistEU (Source: Cfa)

An assessment of the top six profiles showed that five out of the top six accounts were accounts that either frequently commented and amplified pro-Russian sentiment, or were critical of the United States, NATO and the EU. The account with the highest number of tweets has since changed its name from @wonhorserace to @onelilsz. Three of the accounts were not geo-tagged while two were run from Kenya and Asia. One of the accounts @viralkenyan was run from Kenya and used the hashtags to amplify content from its website that were not related to the hashtag.



Screegrab of profiles of the top six accounts ([top right](#), [bottom right](#), [top centre](#), [bottom centre](#), [top right](#), [bottom right](#)) (Source: Twitter/ Cfa)

Further, we determined that accounts such as @ishmourda254 @hellsquad_82 and @webbreathecrick1 repeatedly tagged several users using a repeated message in an effort to amplify the hashtag. Accounts such as @wonhorserace and @whyruso_serious mainly posted [anti-US/ anti-Ukraine/ pro-Russian](#) posts and frequently commented on news articles while using the hashtag #RacistEU in their posts.



Screegrab of tweets from the top six accounts with highest number of tweets (Source: Twitter/ Cfa)

Conclusion

This investigation revealed that the *#RacistEU* revealed that the racist treatment of African refugees escaping Ukraine had cemented much of this apathy on a number of social media users, and anathema in others. The coverage was mainly driven from Kenya and amplified by key influential accounts. The accounts pushed several claims of racist treatment of Africans in Ukraine, but also included pro-Russian, anti-EU, anti-US, anti-NATO, anti-Western narratives. A number of key accounts that amplified the narrative appear to be part of a network that frequently support Russian sentiments and are critical of the EU and the West.