

NORDIC YOUNG STRATEGIES AGAINST HATE ON THE INTERNET



INTRODUCTION

On November 1, 2017, the Nordic Youth Council and the Finnish Youth Cooperation – Allianssi organized a seminar on Nordic Young Strategies Against Hate on the Internet. The seminar was made possible by the support from the Nordic Council of Ministers' grant programme The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK).

The aim of the seminar was to share experiences of hate speech on the Internet and come up with strategic solutions and strategies to prevent hate speech online. This report focuses on the discussion and conclusions of the working groups.

The workshop was divided into two parts. First, the participants shared their experiences on hate speech online. Secondly, the participants aimed to come up with concrete solutions aiming to prevent hate speech on the Internet. A summary of the discussions is presented in this report.

The issue of hate speech on the internet was discussed from four different perspectives, hate based on; Ethnical background, Gender, Racial and Sexual orientation. The four different working groups consisted of around six to ten young people. In total, 30 young people from all Nordic countries participated in the seminar and workshop.

Part of the objective of the seminar was to give the participants inspiration and general info about hate speech and the main methodology for that was a panel discussion. However, the key note speech by Panda Eriksson (Finland) on personal reflections to hate speech opened the seminar and set the tone. Four Nordic experts participated in the panel discussion: Project Officer at the European Wergeland Centre Ingrid Aspelund (Norway), Director for the Swedish Media Council Ewa Thorslund (Sweden), Project Planner for a non-discriminating project for Helsinki City Riikka Kaukinen (Finland) and Visual Artist Emmi Nieminen (Finland). The debate was moderated by Noora Löfström, representing the Finnish Youth Cooperation – Allianssi.

Throughout the day, but especially during the lunch break, the individual participants could leave comments on their personal experiences of hate on the Internet and solutions to countering hate on the Internet with the seminar film team. The comments and solutions were later compiled into four thematic videos, to be broadcasted on social media through the networks of the two organizations arranging the seminar. In this manner, participants took an active stand to countering hate where they have experienced it – on the Internet.



HATE SPEECH ON THE INTERNET BASED ON ETHNICAL BACKGROUND

WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE OF HATE SPEECH ONLINE?

Hate speech towards a group or individual?

Participants stated that they have experiences ethnically based hate speech towards both individuals and groups. Hate speech can also be practiced by either groups or individuals. As an example, one of the participant's stated that he had witnessed masculine hate towards young people with a migrant background. Masculine hate is usually caused by group pressure. It is when boys are competing to say the worst things possible and calling other young people names such as Muslim or terrorist, to boost their standing in their own group.

Social media

Several of the participants emphasized the fact that they had seen or experienced hate speech through social media. The participants' experiences consisted of using social media as a tool to spread negative and stereotypic images of different ethnicities and culture. Twitter and Facebook were given as examples of social media forums used by people to spread hate speech based on ethnicity. A common emerging trend seems to be the creation of closed Facebook groups to engage people in spreading hate speech, often in the name of defending Nordic culture. Social media is also used to normalize discriminating words linked to skin color or ethnicity by sharing comments in different discussion forums. In addition, participants pointed out the fact that many right-wing politicians has not

taken responsibility for their comments on social media, such as on Facebook, has legitimized social media as a place where it is okay to spread hate.

Structural hate, a social problem?

Participants also pointed out the fact that ethnically based hate speech often takes the form of structural hate and has the character of a social problem. Structural hate is rooted in the underlying structures and values of society. Structural hate is often used to legitimize ethnically based hate speech. The participants discussed how negative stereotypes in society about certain ethnic groups can have an influence on a certain individual. There are often stereotypic images of especially foreigners in society. One of the participants had witnessed the influence of structural hate and negative stereotypes in society. The participant's friend was not able to get a job because of her last name, but when she didn't tell her last name, she got a job. In addition, the issue of intersectionality was brought up in the discussions. In a society characterized by negative, discriminatory, and stereotypic attitudes of individuals with different ethnical backgrounds, there is usually a lack of knowledge and understanding. This lack of knowledge and understanding can lead to structures where religion and ethnicity, as well as social class and ethnicity get mixed up. As a result, once people start mixing up all these elements mentioned above, hate speech based on ethnicity might be the result.



WHAT'S POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO HATE SPEECH ONLINE?

Promote education on human rights in kindergartens and schools

All people working with children should be educated in human rights, and how to prevent hate speech and discrimination. Schools should increase their teaching in human rights education to prevent hate speech. The human rights education should be more practical and provide students with tools on their rights. Classes on Internet usage should also be included in the curricula. The use of Internet in early education should be included in the teaching. This education should include more than teaching kids how to use search engines. It should provide pupils with the skills to be critical of sources on the Internet. There should also be educational courses for parents on how to guide your children on the Internet.

Use digitalization as a tool to prevent and abolish hate speech based on ethnical background

Technology has a lot of potential to be used and developed into tools preventing and abolishing hate speech. Different online forums should be used to create advocacy groups for reporting fake news. Online forums should also be created to gather and

mobilize people to support victims of hate speech. It is important to build up people's courage to speak up and report any action of ethnically based hate speech. To do this, people could be offered online courses on how to report hate speech and how to support victims of hate speech. Chat services and phone lines especially for young people that has been exposed to hate speech should be created.

Targeted social media campaigns

Social media campaigns could be used as a tool to create dialogue and understanding on why ethnically based hate speech takes place and what effect it has on the victim(s). To create these campaigns Facebook could be used as a tool to bring awareness and educate people. Young people should also be involved in creating the campaigns. The campaigns could aim to create empowerment groups on social media aiming to mobilize youth and youth organizations to combat hate speech and to support the victims of hate speech. Moreover, social media could also be a tool for lobbying prominent politicians, who directly or indirectly legitimize hate speech.



HATE SPEECH ON THE INTERNET BASED ON GENDER

WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE OF GENDER BASED ¹HATE SPEECH ONLINE?

Women are targets

First, the participants identified that hate speech targeted at women is often of sexual nature; such as threats of sexual violence, outright rape or sexualized name-calling. Women experience a significant amount of belittling, disrespect of intelligence and underestimation of skills and/or knowledge based on gender and/or age. Women experience hate speech based on their physical appearance, weight, clothes and other external factors.

Gender minorities

Secondly, the participants identified that hate speech targeted at gender minorities and persons outside the binary gender division are often targets of severe trans- and

homophobia. The gender minorities and persons outside the binary division receive threats of sexual or otherwise physical violence and/or the pure denial of their right to self-determination and life. Hate speech against them is also based on their physical appearance.

Hate against men

Third, men also experience gender-based hate speech. Hate speech targeted at men is mostly based on their gender expression and behavior, rather than physical appearance. This specific type of hate speech is mostly targeted at men rather than persons of non-male gender identity. Men often experience threats of physical violence or are made targets through homophobic slurs or name-calling.

¹ The nature of the hate speech- depends on the assumed gender of the targeted person.

WHAT'S POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO HATE SPEECH ONLINE?

The root causes of hate speech based on gender are deeply rooted in our society, specifically in cases of hate speech against other genders than men. Patriarchal structures, as well as structures that are favorable to men, make for fertile soil for discrimination of persons in lesser positions of power, such as women and other genders than cis-men. Cis-men have greater access to political participation and are more included within the societal structures, whilst other genders are excluded and have lesser or even no access to decision-making and societal structures.

Despite the deeply rooted and often overwhelming challenges, the group could identify a variety of solutions to battle and decrease hate speech based on gender, varying from concrete actions to long-term solutions.

Societal changes and will-power

Combatting gender-based hate speech on the Internet requires significant societal changes, feministic structures and will-power to address the root causes of gender-based hate speech on the Internet. These are slow, yet long-term changes, with no quick fix solutions, but addressing inequality overall in the society will also help in combatting gender-based hate speech as a phenomenon.

Know your rights and responsibilities online

Additionally, an increased understanding of rights is essential to ensure that every Internet user is aware of their rights and responsibilities. More concrete actions could include body positive-campaigns, where a person's weight, looks or other appearances would be less subjected to discrimination. Furthermore, online norms of personal space, integrity and immunity should be developed, in the same manner as offline.

Support for victims and increase awareness

Also, increased support for individuals targeted by hate speech online is necessary, including increased awareness tools to identify hate speech and skills to respond against hate speech in a safe way. For example, establishing an advice one-stop-shop website and viral marketing videos could be useful to better equip Internet users in combatting hate speech.

Respectful behavior and manners also online

Finally, a return to basic respectful behavior and manners is needed. Realization that online reality is the very same as offline reality is key in combating hate speech on the Internet. Investing time and capital in educating media skills, literacy and online manners to younger and especially adult generations will accumulate results in the long-term.

HATE SPEECH ON THE INTERNET BASED ON RACIAL BACKGROUND

WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL BASED HATE SPEECH ONLINE?

Certain groups face more hate than others

In racial hate speech, certain groups are targeted. Certain minorities face more hate speech than others. This is highly damaging to the whole society. Hate speech can silence the victims, and limit their contribution to discussions and society. For example, in hateful rhetoric certain racial and religious minorities can be presented as a threat to gender equality and minority rights. Especially refugees can experience a lot of damaging hate. Fighting racial hate is also important in relation to the adaptation to a new home country.

Attacking the individual

Across the world, there have been targeted efforts to hurt and silence certain individuals. Personal information of certain individuals can be leaked to internet, to silence them or scare them. Leaking personal data or shaming individuals can lead to cyber-stalking, phone calls or other problems for the victims, of which some of the workshop participants had personal experiences.

Sometimes not using social media is offered as a solution to victims of hate speech on the Internet. However, for most this is not an option. Even if it would be possible, avoiding activities on the Internet will just give a sense of victory and more space to those committing hate speech.

WHAT'S POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO HATE SPEECH ONLINE?

Legislation

The participants in the group discussed many solutions against hate speech that are related to legislation. Legislative measures, especially legislation on the Internet, should be updated. This means defining hate speech strictly, and proceeding to legal process accordingly when hate speech is committed. Monitoring online commenting and banning illegal hate threads is important both in public online platforms and discussion threads of individuals. The participants noticed that the legislation on this matter varies between the Nordic countries.

The workshop group emphasized that people, who commit hate crimes should be convicted, especially when these people are in powerful positions. Hate speech can go from being an online phenomenon to an offline phenomenon. When public figures, such as politicians, commit hate speech, and urge people to take violent action on certain minority groups, this can lead to real-life violence and even life-threatening injuries.

Action plan to combat hate speech

The group had an interesting idea of creating state-wide action plans to combat hate speech in cooperation between officials, minorities and experts. Discussion on counter-strategies to hate speech should be continued in many different levels, including cross-sector and international cooperation. Further research is needed to find out the

background of hate speech, and how to best prevent it. In this work, school institutions and universities can play a major role.

Education and information about hate speech

Education is a core element in preventing hate speech both online and offline. Source criticism should be a core part of education. Critical thinking is especially important in the Internet world. Zero-tolerance on bullying in schools could advance hate speech prevention. Empathy should be present in education. We can start a societal change by sharing perspectives and thinking about other's feelings, starting from a young age.

Discussion on jurisdiction, ethics and norms is needed in education institutions, workplaces and organizations. Alternative narratives can be used as a counter-strategy to combat hate speech - with our own action, and in our everyday lives, we can also support each other and make changes in our emotional surroundings.

The individual can contribute

The individual can react and act in several ways when the individual sees hate speech online. Confronting people who take part in hate speech, and calling out harmful actions takes a lot of courage from the individual, but it can be useful to point out and debate problematic action patterns. If possible, you can support victims of hate speech, for example by liking their comments or send them individual messages of support.



HATE SPEECH ON THE INTERNET BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION

WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE ON HATE SPEECH ONLINE BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

Shared accounts and roots of hate speech against sexual minorities

The shared accounts included examples of homophobic and transphobic comments online, both within the public discussion forums as well as via private messaging in Facebook. Participants in this workshop shared experiences of having been members of online groups or discussions on the Internet in which homophobic comments were written, however, the workshop participants had decided not to act or interfere at the time. Participants also had received personal hate speech messages via e-mail and Facebook.

Spreading false information about the LGBTI+ community

Furthermore, the participants shared stories of individuals spreading false information of the LGBTI+ community on the Internet, with the intention to suppress the LGBTI+ community and silence vocal supporters. At times these actions were a product of a lack of knowledge regarding LGBTI+ issues and/or intentional objectives.

Multiple forms of online hate speech

The group also defined multiple forms of online hate speech during their discussions ranging from online outing, public shaming and stigmatization of LGBTI+ individuals. The group also acknowledged that online hate speech about sexual minorities doesn't merely impact LGBTI+ peoples but also their allies. For example, one of the participants in the group shared a story about acting in defense for a transgender friend on an online platform, which ended in a hate speech campaign against the person who tried to defend its friend.

Attacks from anonymous persons and organized groups

The participants had experienced and had multiple examples of attacks from anonymous users, private persons, public figures and even from organized groups. The group agreed that hate speech is at its most harmful when used in a strategic way. This behavior can be found in attacks from public figures and organized groups, who use long-term hate speech as a tool to silence LGBTI+ issues within the political sphere. This kind of politicization of hate speech was considered as especially dangerous. To tackle this issue, we need to be able to identify the people or groups and let them bare responsibility and be held accountable.



WHAT'S POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO HATE SPEECH ONLINE?

Politicians and public persons have responsibilities

It is hard to define who is responsible for Internet content, thus the context must be drawn from the surrounding society. Politicians and decisionmakers must be held accountable for public statements. The message they send out has a high impact on shaping culture in respective countries. The group also discussed the harmfulness of radical views, which are at times expressed by politicians. These homophobic and transphobic statements are shared online and validate hate speech against LGBTI+ individuals. Furthermore, they are used as tools to prevent legislative progression and broadening of rights to LGBTI+ individuals.

Media's role in the public debate

The media is another responsible actor in the public debate. The workshop group believed that the media has an important role in creating a narrative within the society and holds responsibility as a moderator of discussion forums. Guidelines on free speech and hate speech should be more clearly defined.

Clear guidelines

The participants felt that there's a lack of information on how to tackle hate speech online and that hate speech

should be more clearly defined. This could help the persons who have been made victims of online hate speech. LGBTI+ individuals need extensive support and tools to tackle hateful speech.

The Nordic governments could invest more financial resources in research in the field of online hate speech. This would give a clear signal to society at large and give better insight in the realities of this important matter.

Legislation

Legislation against online hate speech should be broader and clearer. Hate speech against LGBTI+ youth should always be regarded as violence against children and young people.

Education about diversity and inclusivity

The education at young age plays a significant role, therefore, the participants felt that more focus should be put on formal and informal education. Children and young people need to receive education at a young age about diversity and the need for use of inclusive language.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We owe deep gratitude to the Nordic Council of Ministers' grant programme The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK), for showing interest in our project and providing funding to make this seminar possible.

We would also like to thank our five experts who contributed to the seminar with interesting inputs and expertise; Panda Eriksson, Ingrid Aspelund, Ewa Thorslund, Riikka Kaukinen and Emmi Nieminen.

Finally, we would like to thank all the participants who participated in the seminar and workshops and contributed to this report with their thoughts and experiences.

Thank you!



Contact information:
Ungdomens Nordiska Råd
Fredrikinkatu 61 A 11
00100 Helsinki, Finland
unginorden@org