

Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation

Contribution from the Council of Europe Youth Department, to the IGF Call for Public Input: Policy Options for Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion – Phase II

Through its youth policies and programmes, the Council of Europe's youth sector aims to ensure that young people, ie girls and boys, young women and young men, are provided with **equal opportunities** to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to **play a full part in all aspects of society** ([Agenda 2020](#)). It plays a leading role in Europe in setting standards for human rights education, education for democratic citizenship and youth participation. Amongst other things, the Youth Department promotes the implementation of the Council of Europe's [Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education](#) by its 47 member States.

Expressions of hate, discrimination and intolerance online, in the form of hate speech, undermine the safety of those they target and limit their possibilities to express their thoughts, participate and be a full member of the global Internet community. Hate speech undermines the values of human rights, democracy and inclusion of everybody in our European society.

In view of the growing integration of the Internet and social media into the daily lives of young people, the No Hate Speech Movement Campaign was launched in 2013. It developed from an original idea of the youth representatives who are members of the Joint Council on Youth, the co-managed statutory committee of the Council of Europe's youth sector.

The Campaign aims to promote freedom of expression and human rights online and combat the unchallenged spread of hate speech. The Campaign has been prolonged till 2017 as part of the Council of Europe Action Plan on the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism. It also contributes to the Council of Europe Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies (2016-2019). It is implemented through national campaigns which are being run in over 43 countries across Europe, as well as in Morocco, Mexico and Canada, by a community of online activists and Campaign partners who are mainly regional and international NGOs.

Response to SDG 4, Education:

- National governments and civil society organisations should ensure education in media and Internet literacy addresses human rights and democratic citizenship online. Educational curricula should also cover safe behaviour and concerns for privacy online. Existing practices and structures in the field of human rights education should be taken into account;

- The Council of Europe youth sector has published ['Bookmarks, a manual on combatting hate speech through human rights education'](#). The manual integrates the Council of Europe's guide to ['Human Rights for Internet Users'](#) and has been translated into twelve languages, more translations are under way. A manual on developing alternative narratives to hate speech to support educators and youth workers to empower young people to promote human rights online is being drafted.

Response to SDG 16: promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, and access to justice for all:

- The user policy guidelines and report systems for irregular behaviour of services provided by Internet companies need to be easy for end-users to understand and in conformity with the UN's and Council of Europe's conventions and recommendations on human rights, freedom of expression, hate speech and discrimination online;
- National legislation needs to implement UN and Council of Europe conventions and recommendations on human rights, freedom of expression, hate speech and discrimination online. Law enforcement agencies and the judiciary need to be trained and enabled to investigate properly and prosecute perpetrators of hate speech with due regard to their rights and privacy as with those of the victims.
- The No Hate Speech Movement community has found that discrimination and intolerance, expressed through hate speech, spreads widely, aggressively and perpetually through the Internet, target groups and individuals. Hate speech tends to target members of discriminated and vulnerable communities. The real or perceived threats disempower targeted persons who then refrain from using Internet tools thus depriving them of a voice and opportunity to become full members of the Internet community and to participate directly in their own societies. Indeed, the Internet has given young people the possibility to connect beyond borders without being limited by financial and visa restrictions, creating a sense of belonging to a global society. Young people enjoy their right to express their views, form associations or assemble online. But these possibilities are not enjoyed equally by those targeted by hate speech and therefore the essential values of democratic participation and human rights for all are undermined.
- Internet users wishing to reclaim their Internet space from hate speech are discouraged by the lack of follow-up given to reported incidences of hate speech by Internet companies and social media providers. The lack of a pro-active approach to removing hate speech, let alone transparent and understandable social media platforms' user policies, hinder their arguments for the removal of the hate speech. Serious expressions of hate speech, constituting discrimination or incitement to violence, are also reported to national authorities. National law enforcement agencies however too often lack the expertise or capacity to follow up these reports. In addition, national legislation is not always up-to-date enough and does not allow for effective remedies for hate speech.
- The young people involved in the No Hate Speech Movement judge that the experience they have gained of combating hate speech through creative expressions of human rights narratives online and through education can make a meaningful contribution to the work of the Internet Governance Forum, and indeed other fora dealing with Internet governance, and therefore wish to be included in these processes.