

Combating hate speech online

Online hate speech is not merely the perpetuation of racist discourses. It goes beyond the words expressed, and can have ripple effects on the attitudes and behaviours in society. On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination marked a few days ago, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) recalls that hate speech runs counter to the promotion of equality, inclusion, and diversity. At individual level, hate speech discriminates individuals and strips them of their dignity whilst at societal level, hate speech jeopardises everyone's human rights.

Over the years, the Council of Europe has worked to combat hate speech. In fact, a Recommendation was adopted by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on the subject in 2015 defining 'hate speech' as *"the advocacy, promotion or incitement, in any form, of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well as any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat in respect of such a person or group of persons"* on various grounds including race and ethnic origin.

The increasing online hate speech is a vivid example of how technologies with a transformative potential, such as the internet, bring with them both opportunities and challenges. Studies show that hateful messages disseminated online are increasingly common and that the majority of cases of hate speech are based on race or ethnicity.

Racist discourses have harmful effects on the targeted groups and individuals, including the perpetuation of an "us" and "them" attitude which is divisive; isolating acts; as well as the amplification of discrimination, hate crime and violence. Furthermore, online hate speech may be long-lasting in different formats across multiple platforms, thus inflicting more harm on victims and society in general.

Media and information literacy are crucial to encourage social media users to evaluate and interpret specific media texts and to recognise their social influence and the harm that can be done to various individuals/groups through hate speech. The development of critical skills and the ethically-reflective use of social media are thus the starting points to combat hate speech online. These media and information competencies can enhance the ability to identify and question hateful content online, understand some of its assumptions, biases and prejudices, and encourage the elaboration of arguments to confront it.

Hence, all social media users play a crucial role in preventing and combating hate speech. Responsible use of the internet, creating and sustaining links with different communities, avoiding misinformation and negative portrayals and respecting diversity are shared commitments towards equality and inclusion. Moreover, constructive reactions to what is being disseminated entail combating cyberbullying and putting forward alternative narratives to online hate speech.



Intercultural dialogue involving open and respectful exchange of views contributes to reinforce pluralism and democracy in society. In the context of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, NCPE considers that social media are truly an opportunity for us to become agents of change to prevent and combat online hate speech. Social media are thus a powerful tool to enable us to embrace diversity and promote mutual respect and inclusion for the benefit of everyone.

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