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Addressing hate speech: educational responses

Discussion paper

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INTRODUCTION

While the number of incidents of intolerance, racism, antisemitism and violence has steadily risen around the world, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has sharpened an already alarming increase of fear- and hate-based disinformation, including hate speech¹. Although international law prohibits incitement (a form of speech explicitly aimed at triggering discrimination, hostility and violence), it does not prohibit hate speech that does not meet these criteria. Even when hate speech does not meet the legal criteria of incitement, it is certainly not benign. Hate speech can erode respect for diversity, inclusion, tolerance and social cohesion. It can fuel mistrust, populist narratives and violent extremist ideologies.

On 18 June 2019, the United Nations launched the Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, which recognizes hate speech as a “precursor to atrocity crimes, including genocide” and aims to enhance a system-wide response to this global phenomenon. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres noted, “hate speech, including online, has become one of the most frequent methods for spreading divisive and discriminatory messages and ideologies.”²

Defining hate speech

Hate speech has no international legal definition, and the characterization of what is “hateful” is controversial and disputed. The United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech defines hate speech as “any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.” (United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, 2019)

Hate speech is especially virulent online, with significant consequences. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America alone, hate speech has risen by 20% since the outbreak of the pandemic.³ Meanwhile, internal documentation of Facebook has revealed that the social media company faces significant challenges in the monitoring and moderation of hate speech across the Arabic-speaking world.⁴ As is its offline counterpart, hate speech in the digital sphere is linked to the escalation of violent acts worldwide. For example, in Germany, researchers identified a connection between increases in anti-refugee Facebook posts and upticks in related hate crimes.⁵ In the United States of America, the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue shooter engaged with white supremacists on a social media network before killing 11 worshippers at a Shabbat service. Military leaders and Buddhist nationalists in Myanmar used social media to dehumanize the Rohingya Muslim minority before and during the outbreak of violence in 2017.⁶

Addressing the global rise in hate speech is complex and complicated and requires a multifaceted approach. Comprehensive countermeasures are needed to respond to hate speech and mitigate its harmful consequences for individuals and the whole of society. Persistent and even rising levels of hate speech reveal significant gaps in existing counterstrategies employed by governments and social media companies. Monitoring, content moderation and legal responses must be supplemented with long-term preventive efforts that strengthen awareness and build resilience against hate speech. Education can fill this gap.

¹ United Nations. 2020. *United Nations Guidance Note on Addressing and Countering COVID-19 related Hate Speech*. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Guidance%20on%20COVID-19%20related%20Hate%20Speech.pdf>

² United Nations. 2020. *United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, Detailed Guidance on Implementation for United Nations Field Presences*. https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20PoA%20on%20Hate%20Speech_Guidance%20on%20Addressing%20in%20field.pdf

³ Baggs, M. 2021. *Online hate speech rose by 20% during pandemic: 'We've normalized it'*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-59292509>

⁴ Scott, M. 2021. *Facebook did little to moderate posts in the world's most violent countries*. Politico. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/10/25/facebook-moderate-posts-violent-countries-517050>

⁵ Müller, K. and Schwarz, C. 2018. *Fanning the Flames of Hate: Social Media and Hate Crime*. University of Warwick, UK. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/research/centres/cage/manage/publications/373-2018_schwarz.pdf

⁶ Laub, Z. 2019. *Hate Speech on Social Media: Global Comparisons*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/hate-speech-social-media-global-comparisons>

WHY EDUCATION?

Hate speech does not exist in a vacuum. It is informed and accelerated by exclusionary thinking, prejudice, anger and, in some cases, a fear of “the other”. These patterns of thinking are learned. They are shaped by political discourses and social and cultural contexts, are embedded in power structures and are reinforced by systemic discrimination. Being exposed to these enabling conditions of hate speech does not automatically make one a purveyor of hate speech. Strategies to address and reject hate speech can be taught and learned. Education can be a powerful tool for addressing hate speech at its root. It can serve to expose prejudice and stereotypes and help learners and teachers alike to unpack bias. It can strengthen awareness of the harm caused by and consequences of hate speech and help develop capacities to recognize and reject hateful discourses and related manipulation techniques through, for example, critical thinking and media and information literacy.

These features make education an indispensable component of any effort to address and counter hate speech, be it online or offline. Hate speech will not disappear through responses and reactions alone; it needs to be proactively anticipated and addressed. Effective mitigation requires the enabling and support of a social climate in which hatred cannot thrive. It requires the development of knowledge, attitudes and skills that favour open-mindedness, respect for human rights and an appreciation of diversity. Through well-placed educational interventions and policies, this can be achieved.

International frameworks

The United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech places specific emphasis on the role of education as a tool for addressing and countering hate speech. Strengthening educational responses to build the resilience of learners to exclusionary rhetoric and hate speech also lies at the core of the Education 2030 Agenda, and more specifically, target 4.7 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which touches on the social, ethical, and humanistic purposes of education.

HOW CAN WE HARNESS THE POWER OF EDUCATION TO ADDRESS HATE SPEECH?

This paper will discuss the challenges and opportunities of addressing both online and offline hate speech through education and recommend comprehensive approaches for effective educational strategies. Incorporating context-based teaching and learning practices that promote responsible global citizenship are important first steps that must be accompanied by a whole school- and community-based approach to creating civic spaces that embrace different perspectives and opinions, respect difference and work towards a shared sense of belonging.

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CHALLENGES FACED WHEN ADDRESSING HATE SPEECH THROUGH EDUCATION

Addressing hate speech and the beliefs and assumptions that underlie it presents challenges. These challenges range from defining hate speech to struggling to distinguish hate speech from freedom of expression, as well as concerns about the impact of drawing attention to hateful rhetoric. While overtly hateful comments may be easily identified, fear-, blame- or hate-based narratives – cloaked in irony, humour and misinterpreted facts – can be hard to recognize and dismantle.⁷ Owing to their limited accountability and their access to a sizeable audience, perpetrators of online hate may receive reinforcement from like-minded people, making hatred seem normal or even socially acceptable.⁸ The relative anonymity of the Internet further amplifies these harmful effects by creating a sense of distance, lack of responsibility and drop in empathy. Tackling implicit bias and online hate speech is a new area of responsibility for educators, for which targeted pedagogies, training and resources are required.

PREVENTING HATE VERSUS PROMOTING HATE

Policymakers and educators need to understand, recognize and address the root causes of hate in order to be part of a strategy to counter its proliferation. This requires an openness to the complex role of education in perpetuating or challenging the ideas at the root of hate, both in and through formal and informal education.

On the one hand, education can serve to promote inclusion, social cohesion and an appreciation for diversity while contributing to and inspiring the physical and mental well-being and development of young citizens.⁹ It can address prejudice and intolerance and build resistance to the hateful discourses and ideologies that drive hate speech. On the other hand, education can contribute to division by validating or justifying forms of exclusion and the persistence of inequalities in society¹⁰ through hidden and explicit curricula and education practices.

These forms of marginalization, along with actual or perceived historical and socioeconomic injustices, can “push” people towards hateful rhetoric. “Pull” factors that attract young people to more extremist thinking arise at the individual level and may include feelings of acceptance and belonging as well as a sense of community and purpose.¹¹ Considering the complex, context-based and often sensitive nature of working to prevent hatred and violence, programmatic attention is needed to uncover the potential risks for schools, educators and learners and to safeguard against them. When addressing hate speech, any attempt that lacks contextual knowledge, understanding or nuance, could, unintentionally, lead to further stigmatization, stereotyping or ethnic divide.¹²

⁷ Media Smarts. n.d. Deconstructing Online Hate. Media Smarts. <https://mediasmarts.ca/online-hate/deconstructing-online-hate>

⁸ Saha, K., Chandrasekharan, E. and De Choudhury, M. 2019. Prevalence and psychological effects of hateful speech in online college communities. *Proc ACM Web Sci Conf* (doi: 10.1145/3292522.3326032). pp. 255–64. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7500692/>

⁹ UNESCO. 2020. Global Education Monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means All. <http://bit.ly/2020gemreport>

¹⁰ UNICEF and Innocenti Insight. 2000. *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*. Bush, K. D. and D. Saltarelli (eds). Siena, Italy, Arti Grafiche Ticci. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/insight4.pdf>

¹¹ UNESCO. 2017. *Preventing violent extremism through education: a guide for policy-makers*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247764>

¹² UNICEF and Innocenti Insight. 2000. *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*. Bush, K. D. and D. Saltarelli (eds). Siena, Italy, Arti Grafiche Ticci. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/insight4.pdf>

PROTECTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION WHILE ADDRESSING HATE SPEECH

Any initiatives to address hate speech must take a human rights-based approach that respects and promotes freedom of expression and access to information. Learning about the fundamental right to freely seek, receive and impart information should be considered an essential component of educational efforts to counter and prevent hate speech. This encourages critical thinking and media and information literacy instead of stereotyping and censorship. Education needs to allow conflicting and competing ideas while providing space for the strengthening of skills and capacities to navigate related discussions with respect. This includes reflecting on the nexus of addressing hate speech and upholding freedom of expression, in addition to raising awareness of how illegitimate violations differ from legally permitted limitations. Indeed, hate speech itself is often an attack on the human rights of the groups targeted, seeking to limit their freedom of expression.

International law and principles

In the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the right to freedom of expression is provided for in Article 19. This is qualified by a prohibition of any advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence in Article 20. Articles 19 and 20 also place limitations on restricting freedom of expression – these can “only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) for respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) for the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.”

In addition, the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence offers a “six-part threshold test” to justify restrictions on freedom of expression, taking into account the sociopolitical context, the status of the speaker, the intent to incite antagonism, the content of the speech, the extent of its dissemination and the likelihood of harm.

The principles outlined in international law offer guidelines that must be respected in national legal provisions related to hate speech. However, given that laws and legal systems differ from one State to another, it is clearly challenging to address hate speech while upholding freedom of expression. This difficulty further highlights the importance of addressing hate speech through methods that lie beyond the scope of legal measures. Wider education on human rights and on rule of law policies and strategies is therefore key to addressing this complex interplay.

LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENTS AND RESOURCES

A sense of inclusion and belonging cannot be fostered unless education institutions are intentional about providing spaces and curricula that are inclusive and that encourage equality and respect for diversity.¹³ Every aspect of the teaching resources involved needs to be free of stereotypes and biases, embrace multiple perspectives and pluralism and promote a sense of belonging in order to eliminate hate and intolerance, both within and outside educational settings. Unfortunately, the content and pedagogy that build resistance to the root causes of hate speech and that enable learners to counter it – such as global citizenship education, including media and information literacy, human rights education and social and emotional learning – are often given lower priority by institutions than standardization, competition, funding and the improvement of test scores. Educational institutions need to adopt more humanistic approaches that help to develop skills that are central to well-being and social and emotional learning, including curiosity, empathy and open-mindedness, and foster critical thinking in addition to civic commitment. These approaches need to be prioritized and embedded into the wider institutional structure. This will allow learners to embrace diversity and will provide support to anyone who is excluded or targeted. Research has shown that well-integrated whole-school approaches have a more sustainable and positive impact than stand-alone programmes.¹⁴

¹³ UNESCO. 2017. A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254>

¹⁴ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Cefai, C., Caravita, S. and Simões, C. 2021. A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU: Executive Summary. Luxembourg, European Union, p. 11. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/bc0d1b05-227b-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

LACK OF TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS

In order to be allies in the fight against hate, educational institutions and educators need to serve as role models, “a reference point against which young people are able to find inspiration and guidance.”¹⁵ This requires that educators first become aware of their own implicit biases and assumptions and how these might impact their behaviour towards their learners. Teacher education has not traditionally stressed the type of self-reflection, knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with critical thinking or cultivating capacities for curiosity, empathy and open-mindedness. A recent United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) global survey found that 15% of teachers do not feel prepared to explain the history of racism and discrimination to their students. One in four teachers do not feel ready to teach human rights and gender equality.¹⁶ Educators are also rarely trained to teach about and understand hate speech, disinformation and conspiracy theories or to engage in related discussions with learners, colleagues and parents. This is accompanied by a lack of resources and access to teaching materials. The same UNESCO survey found that only one-fifth of teachers have available education resources on how to teach skills that support students’ understanding of global citizenship education and related topics.¹⁷ Adequate preparation and support are needed to build the confidence and skills of educators to engage in these often-challenging conversations.

¹⁵ UNESCO and MGIEP. 2020. Rethinking Learning: A Review of Social and Emotional Learning for Education Systems. Singh, N. C. and Duraiappah, A. (eds). New Delhi, India, MGIEP. <https://mgiep.unesco.org/rethinking-learning>

¹⁶ UNESCO and Education International. 2021. Teachers have their say: Motivations, skills and opportunities to teach education for sustainable development and global citizenship. Paris, UNESCO, p.27. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379914>

¹⁷ UNESCO and Education International. 2021. Teachers have their say: Motivations, skills and opportunities to teach education for sustainable development and global citizenship. Paris, UNESCO, p.47. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379914>

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RECOMMENDATIONS: STRENGTHENING EDUCATION SYSTEMS TO ADDRESS HATE SPEECH

Policy approaches that aim to address hate speech need to recognize the responsibility of society as a whole in preventing and countering hate speech and harness the power of education as an impactful means of strengthening resistance to hateful ideologies and discrimination. The recommendations below identify key approaches for supporting the development of effective educational strategies and policies that contribute to the long-term mitigation and prevention of both online and offline hate speech.

1. Foster global citizenship education and strengthen awareness for human rights and civil responsibilities

In order to address the root causes and to counter the “push” and “pull” factors that drive a person to hate, as well as to build resistance to the simplicity and appeal of fear- and hate-based narratives, learners of all ages must be made aware of the impact of hate and made to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to become active promoters of more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable societies. These outcomes are in line with UNESCO’s global citizenship education programme, which seeks to nurture a sense of belonging to a group sharing a common humanity by promoting the development of values, attitudes and skills that are based on and instil respect for human rights, gender equality and social justice.¹⁸ Likewise, learners need to be taught about their rights and have access to adequate information to allow them to differentiate between legally permissible limitations of free speech and illegitimate restrictions.

WHAT POLICYMAKERS SHOULD DO

- Integrate global citizenship education within national teaching and learning curricula to address the root causes of hate speech and invest in context-relevant targeted educational programmes to prevent violent extremism in addition to racism, antisemitism and other forms of intolerance.
- Promote education on human rights and the rule of law in order to address the complex nexus of addressing hate speech and upholding freedom of expression, raising awareness of how illegitimate violations differ from legally permitted limitations.

2. Build understanding about the causes and consequences of hate speech

In order to build empathy and understanding, the impact and consequences of hate speech should be made real and concrete. The associated discussions should be integrated into history, civics and citizenship curricula and include context-specific examples of how hate speech and discrimination have served as the precursors of genocide and violent extremism. In particular, studying the Holocaust (or Shoah, the genocide of the Jewish people by Nazi Germany and its allies and collaborators) can be used to demonstrate how hate speech has been normalized and institutionalized to justify discrimination, exclusion, dehumanization and eventually continental-scale genocide. This can create a forum in which to examine the evolution of antisemitism, the use of State-

¹⁸ UNESCO. n.d. Global Citizenship Education. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced>

sponsored propaganda and the role of hate speech in promoting hateful and divisive ideologies. Similarly, teaching about other cases of genocide, such as the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and local violent pasts can help to place the lessons learned into wider international and local contexts. Learners can use these lessons to identify the conditions that erode democratic structures and threaten the realization of human rights and to reflect on their own role, and that of political and social institutions, in either perpetuating or countering the fear- and hate-based narratives that have served as warning signs of atrocities around the world.¹⁹

WHAT POLICYMAKERS SHOULD DO

- Develop and integrate into national curricula educational programmes that raise awareness of the causes and consequences of hate speech, and prepare learners to identify and reject hateful and violent extremist ideologies. Such programmes should be accompanied by training for educators and could touch upon topics such as the history of the Holocaust, other cases of genocide and atrocity crimes, and local violent pasts.
- Provide resources and training for civil society organizations, documentation and information centres and museums that promote education about violent pasts and the origins of violence and hate. Provide schools and universities with resources and training on how to work with such institutions to strengthen opportunities for extracurricular learning about hate speech and its harmful consequences.²⁰

3. Incorporate multiple perspectives and promote pluralism and critical thinking to counter hate and prejudice

Embracing pluralism and integrating multiple perspectives into content and teaching practices in order to encourage, and not restrict, speech are critical to building learning environments that support diverse viewpoints and mutual understanding. Aspects of the curriculum and of learning materials that contribute to marginalization include the perpetuation of stereotypes and the outright exclusion of certain events, groups and experiences. To foster the belonging of all learners, learning materials and curricula should move beyond the biased promotion of a single dominant narrative. Education should serve to develop critical-thinking skills, allow space for competing and conflicting ideas and promote human rights, taking into account underrepresented viewpoints as much as mainstream discourses. Related educational efforts should contribute to constructing a sense of unity and of belonging to a group sharing a common humanity that recognizes and embraces differences, acknowledges and addresses past and present power structures and dynamics that contribute to marginalization and oppression, and fosters an appreciation for the shared values associated with respect, human rights and democracy.

While incorporating multiple perspectives can be an effective way to broaden learners' thinking and includes voices from outside the dominant narrative, the inclusion of different viewpoints without sufficient attention to power, intent and privilege can reinforce existing power dynamics. Dialogue should not only be a tool for exploring and understanding different perspectives, but also a space within which to question privilege.²¹

WHAT POLICYMAKERS SHOULD DO

- Review curricula and teaching materials to ensure that they are free of stereotypes and biased language and include diverse perspectives. Teaching materials should emphasize shared values and human rights to foster a sense of unity while embracing diversity.

¹⁹ UNESCO. 2017. Education about the Holocaust and Preventing Genocide: A Policy Guide. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248071>

²⁰ For example, in 2021, the Ministry of Education of Argentina published, with the support of UNESCO, a guide for teachers on how to work with memorial sites and museums (available at <http://www.bnm.me.gov.ar/giga1/libros/los-sitios-de-memoria-como-desafio-pedagogico.pdf>)

²¹ Nagda, B., Gurin, P., Sorensen, N. and Zuniga, X. 2009. Evaluating intergroup dialogue: Engaging diversity for personal and social responsibility. *Diversity & Democracy*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 4–6. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312771261_Evaluating_intergroup_dialogue_Engaging_diversity_for_personal_and_social_responsibility

- Support the development of inclusive and relevant materials and pedagogies that incorporate ethnic, linguistic and religious differences, ensuring that education supports students' identity-building and feelings of belonging to a group sharing a common humanity.
- Ensure that education systems and institutions uphold freedom of expression with respect for conflicting and competing ideas and opinions.

4. Advance equity and social inclusion through social and emotional learning

Building the emotional competencies associated with attention regulation through mindfulness and emotional resiliency – which build positive peer relationships and foster compassion – has been shown to regulate and reduce aggression and violence and to promote peaceful and prosocial behaviour.²² In tandem, the development of social competencies such as empathy, cooperation and conflict resolution skills can help to establish and maintain supportive interpersonal relationships and to empower young people to promote social justice and equity.²³ Referred to as social and emotional learning (SEL), this approach aims to build resilience in young people so that they can identify a positive purpose and have the capacity to contribute to the common good.

These social skills have the added benefit of building competencies essential to recognizing and resisting hate speech, particularly when contextualized in relation to broader structural and cultural drivers of hate, such as racism, colonialism and other past violent policies, and misogyny.²⁴ By contextualizing SEL within greater historical, demographic, technological and institutional structures, education can help students to develop the transversal social and emotional skills to counter hate and work towards social inclusion.

SEL is particularly effective when attuned to the social and cultural context of learners and when it addresses their needs in meaningful, inclusive and equitable ways.²⁵ By supporting diverse learners so that they can develop the self-efficacy and authentic voice central to their social and emotional well-being, education can simultaneously foster freedom of expression as a crucial component of any educational effort to address hate speech.

WHAT POLICYMAKERS SHOULD DO

- Invest in the advancement and integration of SEL into national education curricula and the development of teacher training to strengthen key competences needed to resist and not reproduce hateful narratives and promote tolerance and acceptance among learners.

5. Promote media and information literacy and digital citizenship education to address hate speech online

In the face of pervasive online hate speech, educational strategies that seek to build resistance to hate speech must empower individuals by providing them with the knowledge and skills they need to respond to perceived hate speech in a more immediate way.²⁶ According to the Media Awareness Network, the most effective way to help online users deal with hate speech is to prepare them for it.²⁷

²² UNESCO and MGIEP. 2020. Rethinking Learning: A Review of Social and Emotional Learning for Education Systems. Singh, N. C. and Duraiappah, A. (eds). New Delhi, India, MGIEP. <https://mgiep.unesco.org/rethinking-learning>

²³ Greenberg, M.T. et al. 2003. Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning. *American Psychologist*, Vol. 58(6/7), p. 466.

²⁴ Jagers, R., Rivas-Drake, D. and Williams, B. 2019. Transformative social and emotional learning (SEL): Toward SEL in service of educational equity and excellence. *Educational Psychologist*, Vol. 54(3), pp. 162-184.

²⁵ UNESCO and MGIEP. 2020. Rethinking Learning: A Review of Social and Emotional Learning for Education Systems. Singh, N. C. and Duraiappah, A. (eds). New Delhi, India, MGIEP. <https://bit.ly/3GAq5ht>

²⁶ UNESCO. 2015. Countering Online Hate Speech. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233231?1=null&queryId=34bbaa3a-71e7-4413-b5ba-a39107e3c34b>

²⁷ Media Awareness Network. 2012. Responding to Online Hate. http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/guides/responding_online_hate_guide.pdf

Online users need to learn to think critically about the media products they consume so that they can recognize hate, even in its subtlest forms. They equally need to be aware of their responsibilities online and the real-life consequences of their virtual interactions. Teaching online users about how hate groups communicate their messages and attempt to manipulate their audience's thinking, for example, will help online users recognize and be resistant to hate speech. Such resistance includes understanding the manipulation techniques and rhetoric used to spread misinformation and disinformation, including conspiracy theories.

Building resistance to online hate speech requires more targeted approaches than promoting safety with guidelines on how to create a strong password or how to protect personal information online. It requires online users to become informed digital citizens that are media and information literate. Media and information literacy (MIL) can equip learners with the knowledge, skills and attitude they need to understand the social context of media and digital platforms, to critically evaluate their content, and to make informed decisions as users and producers of content.²⁸

Furthermore, learners require skills for using digital tools to creatively and actively participate in digital communities and movements that seek to counter hate speech and related global challenges, such as racism and other forms of intolerance and discrimination. Applying a global citizenship education lens to the online environment is essential to helping individuals understand the underlying power dynamics of online hate speech, demonstrate socially responsible attitudes in their interactions with others and participate in inclusive digital communities.

Building learners' capacity for responsible digital citizenship, as well as their resistance to online hate speech, requires integrating selected components of media and information literacy and global citizenship education. Digital citizenship education means teaching learners to find, access, use and create information effectively and to navigate the online and ICT (information and communications technology) environment safely and responsibly; it also means teaching learners to engage with other users and with content in an active, critical, sensitive and ethical manner and to be aware of their own rights.²⁹

Media and information literacy and digital citizenship skills should be taught incrementally and integrated systematically in formal, non-formal and informal education programmes. This requires the mobilization of a range of actors, from decision-makers, curriculum developers, technology developers, content providers and school leaders to teachers, parents, pupils and the community. Once learners have demonstrated their critical capacity and resilience, they can progress to more advanced learning that encourages online users to assume positions of leadership that involve the ability to use social media for positive ends, including participating in democratic processes, campaigning for causes and educating their peers.³⁰ Given the essential role that online spaces play in knowledge acquisition and civic engagement, media and information literacy education and digital citizenship education need to be part of formal school curricula and be considered to have the same value as the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

WHAT POLICYMAKERS SHOULD DO

- Develop national media and information literacy policies and strategies in order to help learners critically evaluate and fact-check information and media, as well as recognize hateful narratives, guided by UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy Policy and Strategy Guidelines.

²⁸ UNESCO. 2021. Media and Information Literate Citizens: Think Critically, Click Wisely!. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377068>

²⁹ UNESCO. 2015. Countering Online Hate Speech. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233231?1=null&queryId=34bbaa3a-71e7-4413-b5ba-a39107e3c34b>

³⁰ Reynolds, L. and Parker, L. 2018. Digital Resilience: Stronger Citizens Online. https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Digital_Resilience_Project_Report.pdf

- Invest in digital citizenship education to teach learners about their rights and responsibilities online and help them engage with other users in an active, sensitive and ethical manner, as well as to encourage them to participate in digital communities and movements that seek to counter hate speech online and offline.
- Work with a range of actors, from curriculum developers, technology developers and school leaders to teachers, parents, pupils and the community, in order to prepare more informed and accountable digital citizens, including through whole-school policies on digital citizenship education and extracurricular activities, such as media and information literacy clubs.

6. Build educators' capacity to address hate speech and its root causes

Teachers need professional development opportunities that build their capacity to provide learning environments that allow for respectful disagreement and in which the social and political issues that affect their students can be discussed openly, while maintaining the delicate balance between freedom of opinion and freedom from harm. Dialogue-based pedagogies are fundamental to addressing and countering hate speech through engagement with different points of view. Research has shown that positive contact with members of a perceived outgroup can favour intergroup relations, reduce prejudice and mitigate negative perceptions.³¹

WHAT POLICYMAKERS SHOULD DO

- Support teacher training institutions in developing pre-service and in-service teacher training to help educators to address hate speech in and through education, including through raising awareness about hate speech, as well as through classroom interventions and pedagogies that strengthen learners' resistance to related narratives. This includes integrating media and information literacy in formal teacher training curricula as standard policy and practice.
- Strengthen the capacity of directors and managers of educational institutions to establish anti-discrimination policies, mentoring and support programmes and assessment tools for addressing and preventing hate speech, including through whole community approaches that reach beyond their institutions.

7. Strengthen schools as hubs for social cohesion

Given the often central role that schools play in the lives of young people and their families, they are well positioned to serve as hubs for social cohesion. Schools should model the principles they promote and enable respect, transparency and participation in decision-making and foster non-violence and gender equality. All aspects of school life should integrate these principles and be aimed at continuously improving the interactions between educators and learners, involving learners in the search for solutions. Educators can work as a bridge between schools, families and the broader community to establish a shared strategy to identify, reach and support young people who seem to be excluded and are either at risk of being drawn into hate groups or are targets of hate speech. Communities should use schools as safe learning spaces in which members can respectfully discuss different perspectives. Schools can provide both physical and digital spaces in which to bring together people of different ethnicities, from different cultures and with different ideologies in order to engage them in work that supports the well-being of the community and its youth; they can do this by introducing learners to community service, for example.³² This approach also includes physical education, arts education and related extracurricular activities that stimulate team-building, social and emotional learning and creativity that can contribute to personal and collective well-being. Arts education in particular fosters a positive public perception of the arts and cultural heritage, which play a key role in preserving and sustaining social cohesion.

³¹ Bruneau, E. et al. 2020. Intergroup contact reduces dehumanization and meta-dehumanization: Cross-sectional, longitudinal and quasi-experimental evidence from 16 samples in 5 countries. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 47, No. 10. 1177/0146167220949004

³² INEE. 2017. Preventing Violent Extremism: An Introduction to Education and Preventing Violent Extremism. Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/INEE_ThematicPaper_PVE_ENG.pdf

WHAT POLICYMAKERS SHOULD DO

- Create supportive structures and guidance for establishing a whole-school approach to fostering tolerance, inclusion and opportunities for dialogue and exchange, outside formal learning, in order to strengthen resistance to hate and prejudice. This includes extracurricular activities, such as sports, artistic and cultural activities, and community service.

8. Support community programming and youth engagement, online and offline

Any strategy to reduce the spread and impact of hate speech must include informal and lifelong learning. Policies must reach beyond formal education to effect full participation in society and address all ages. Companies and community-based and civil society organizations can build programming that makes individuals less susceptible to hateful rhetoric by raising awareness and providing positive and relevant alternatives and education opportunities. Stakeholders should include the individuals and entities most likely to encounter vulnerable and excluded groups outside educational settings. These individuals and entities include police, social workers, religious and community leaders, members of youth-focused organizations and sports clubs, the media, arts and cultural institutions, and social media companies, which should incorporate educational strategies and approaches to contribute to the long-term prevention of hate speech. It is critical that young people play a significant role in co-creating such educational programming. Young people should be provided with opportunities to participate at all stages of intervention in order to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs and concerns are understood.

WHAT POLICYMAKERS SHOULD DO

- Provide resources and financial support to civil society organizations engaged in addressing and countering hate speech.
- Encourage the development of educational preventive strategies against hate speech in national hate-speech action plans and guidelines addressed to non-State actors, including civil society and the private sector.
- Strengthen synergies between government, civil society and the private sector when developing mitigation strategies against hate speech, including educational initiatives.
- Ensure youth participation in related consultations and implementation.
- Help youth organizations to integrate media and information literacy into their policies and strategies as a standard part of their operations, and empower young people as co-leaders and peer educators in media and information literacy online and offline.

4

CONCLUSION

Education can play a pivotal role in either amplifying existing tensions or replacing them with inclusive narratives and conceptions of media and information literacy and global citizenship. Education must therefore play a central role in reducing the impact of hate speech and should be employed as a long-term preventive mechanism. Education alone will not eliminate hate speech; however, an effective antidote to hate speech is the enabling of environments in which people are informed about its root causes and consequences and are empowered to express their views, think critically and engage with society – and their own communities.

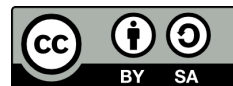
This paper is part of a collection of discussion papers, commissioned and produced by UNESCO and the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG). The papers are a direct contribution to the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action and are published in the context of the Multistakeholder Forum and Ministerial Conference on Addressing Hate Speech through Education in September and October 2021.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the pertinence of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action, generating a wave of hate speech across the world –further exacerbating intolerance and discrimination towards particular groups and destabilizing societies and political systems. The discussion papers seek to unpack key issues related to this global challenge and propose possible responses and recommendations.

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