



Policy Recommendations

During the past two years, the sCAN partners have worked together closely to analyse and monitor hate speech online and to develop online and offline trainings. We made our insights available to the larger public and contributed to building capacities in civil society to combat hate speech together. During our activities we gathered valuable experiences and collected ideas for improvement. All stakeholder groups are called upon to intensify their efforts to ensure an online environment that is respectful and inclusive for all users.

We would like to share our experiences and provide recommendations for the institutions of the European Union, national authorities and public institutions, politicians and public figures, social media companies, media and journalists as well as civil society organisations and individual internet users on how to better combat all forms of hate speech online.

Recommendations to the European Union

Monitoring exercises are important to analyse transnational trends regarding cyber hate and to provide an understanding of how the monitored IT companies implement the European Union's Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online¹.

We therefore encourage the European Union to **encourage more social media companies to join the Code of Conduct and to pay attention to smaller platforms** that may be considered 'safe havens' for promoting intolerance and hate speech online.

In order to paint an accurate picture, it is important to test the performance of IT companies under "everyday" conditions. The experiences of the sCAN partners show that IT companies are often aware of the timing of the monitoring exercises and the participating organisations. In order to improve the validity of the monitoring exercises, we recommend **conducting "silent" monitoring exercises, during which the IT companies are not aware of the dates and the participating organisations.**

IT companies are responsible for removing illegal hate speech content posted by individuals. Research conducted during the sCAN project shows that hate speech disseminated and/or facilitated by politicians and other public figures with high visibility can have detrimental effects on the culture of online communication. "Hate influencers" use similar communication methods as classical influencers, but actively promote hate speech on their channels and sometimes even incite different forms of online hatred and violence.

We recommend **amending the methodology of the monitoring exercises to place more emphasis on groups and individual accounts that constantly disseminate hate speech to a significant audience or act as a catalyst for illegal hate speech.**

¹ See: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-code-conduct-countering-illegal-hate-speech-online_en (last accessed 07.04.2020)



Recommendations to national authorities and public institutions

Governments should **design national action plans to combat hate speech**, identifying areas of priority in the respective societies and paying special attention to trends on the internet and social media. The national action plans should contain indicators, provide for regular evaluation of the measures implemented and allocate adequate resources to the implementation of the measures.

National authorities should **establish or refine their national data collection systems for hate speech**, in order to **ensure effective records** of criminal as well as misdemeanour offences.

Furthermore, governments should put in place **strong consultation mechanisms with a broad range of diverse stakeholders** to improve policy making in order to make it as inclusive as possible. Moreover, government departments should **enshrine the principle of intersectionality in all equality policies**, to avoid overlooking the experiences of those confronted with multiple discrimination.

Authorities and public institutions are called upon to **adequately prosecute illegal hate speech in a timely manner**, as this has a chilling effect on society in general.

Furthermore, authorities and public institutions must **ensure full independence of the media (self-) regulators and other independent institutions** and refrain from exerting any political pressure on these bodies.

Law enforcement authorities should strengthen their cooperation with minority groups and communities in order to better understand the nature and dynamics of hate speech targeting these communities.

Recommendations to Politicians and Public Figures

Our research shows that politicians and other public figures have a special responsibility as they set the tone in online debates. A culture of online communication in which hate speech appears to be accepted (or even encouraged) can lead to poisoned political debates and violent threats against those perceived as political “enemies”, and can even turn violent.

We therefore urge politicians and other public figures to **accept this Political Social Responsibility** and to **refrain from spreading or facilitating hate speech online**. The commitment to do so could be expressed by a **voluntary Code of Conduct to foster respectful and inclusive online communications**.

Furthermore, public figures, politicians and high-ranking officials of public authorities must **clearly condemn hate speech and promote counter-speech**. All **political parties** should also condemn hate speech and **call on their members and followers to abstain from spreading online hate**.

The owners of public social media channels should **adopt a “netiquette” or similar set of communication rules and enforce them**. Those rules should be directed towards combating hate speech and respecting freedom of expression.

Politicians and public figures should accept their responsibility to moderate their social networking pages and comment sections and to remove hateful comments. **Especially for channels with a wide reach and a large audience, identifiable and consistent moderation is key**.

All the above-mentioned parties should **publicly declare their support for and acknowledge the rights of disadvantaged groups targeted by hate speech online**.



Recommendations to Social Media Platforms

Apart from **removing manifestly illegal content** from their platforms, social media companies should take greater efforts to **enforce their community guidelines effectively** and **encourage respectful online communication**.

This is especially important when hate speech is being disseminated or encouraged by influential public figures. Due to its large impact on society, **hate speech disseminated by politicians or other public figures should be clearly labelled as such and sanctioned according to the companies' community standards**.

Furthermore, to tackle hate speech effectively, **stronger action is needed towards profiles and pages used to regularly disseminate hate speech to a large following**.

Moreover, the sCAN partners urge **all social media platforms**, regardless of their size, **to join the EU Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online**. **All social media platforms should increase their efforts to remove illegal content notified to them in a timely manner and engage in direct and continuous communication with individual users as well as trusted flaggers**.

Additionally, social media companies are called upon to **invest more resources into scientific research on, and data analysis of, hate speech phenomena** in order to increase the understanding of trends in this field. Appointing a team specifically focused on dealing with online hate speech could help with this task.

Recommendations to Journalists and the Media

Media should take care to provide **unbiased reporting about disadvantaged communities**. Media outlets should **reinforce cooperation with NGOs** working in the field of human rights protection **and representatives of disadvantaged communities** in order to **raise awareness among journalists** of the stereotypes and hate speech narratives these communities commonly face online.

Media utilising online platforms like Facebook or YouTube to disseminate their news should **accept responsibility for moderating the comment sections beneath their articles and videos**. To do so, they must **adopt clear rules of acceptable communications** on their channels and **enforce them consistently**. **Reliable moderation** is crucial in order to prevent hateful content from reproducing hostilities and dominating the discussions.

Media (self-) regulators must take **firm action in all cases of hate speech and impose appropriate fines** to punish, as well as to discourage, the dissemination of all expressions of intolerance.

Recommendations to Civil Society and Internet Users

All internet users can help curb hate speech by **showing solidarity with the people and communities targeted by online hate**.

Users can also **challenge hateful expressions with counter-speech, deconstruct hateful stereotypes, and debunk fake news and manipulation**.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should **develop new ways to combat hate speech online** that go beyond notifying the IT companies of manifestly illegal hate speech. This can include **new types of**



counter-actions targeting the business models of hate speech websites or social media pages, as proposed by the Sleeping Giants initiative.²

CSOs should further step up their cooperation efforts and **establish working groups on certain hate types or social media platforms to coordinate concerted efforts** against influential pages that generate profit from routinely disseminating hate speech to many followers.

While most CSOs tend to focus on specific types of hate speech such as racism, antisemitism or anti-Muslim hate speech, **it is important to also include other types of hate speech (e.g., misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, interphobia, ableism, ageism) in their analyses and action campaigns.** Furthermore, CSOs should strengthen their efforts to **report and counter intersectional hate speech.**

Additionally, the research of the sCAN project shows that actions combatting hate speech should not be limited to big social media platforms. **CSOs should therefore broaden their focus to analyse hate speech on alternative platforms** such as Telegram, VK or Gab.ai and include them in their campaigns.

Conclusion

The experiences of the sCAN project show that while there are already promising initiatives implemented to combat cyber hate, more needs to be done. Apart from the individual recommendations presented in this paper, **closer cooperation between CSOs, members of affected communities, the media, the internet industry and public authorities is necessary** to effectively curb the spread of hate speech online. As the internet is not limited by national borders, **more transnational cooperation is needed among all stakeholder groups** to find a joint approach to this problem.

The sCAN Partnership will take stock of the lessons learned and its research findings of the past two years with the aim of planning follow-up initiatives aiming at improving and increasing its contribution to the monitoring, analysis, training and advocacy efforts carried out against all forms of online hate speech.

² For more information on the Sleeping Giants campaign visit https://twitter.com/slpng_giants (last accessed 30.03.2020).



The sCAN project

Coordinated by the French organization LICRA (International League against Racism and Antisemitism), the sCAN project involves 10 different European partners: ZARA – Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit from Austria, CEJI-A Jewish contribution to an inclusive Europe from Belgium, Human Rights House Zagreb from Croatia, ROMEA from the Czech Republic, Respect Zone from France, jugend-schutz.net from Germany, CESIE from Italy, Latvian Centre For Human Rights from Latvia and the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences from Slovenia. The project aims at gathering expertise, tools, methodology and knowledge on cyber hate and developing transnational comprehensive practices for identifying, analysing, reporting and counteracting online hate speech.

For more information please visit: www.scan-project.eu



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