

Resilient against online hate

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1. Introduction

Online harassment is not normal

As a spokesperson, opinion maker, or activist, you participate in the (online) public debate. This means that you may encounter intimidating, offensive, or even threatening comments on social media. The impact this can have on your motivation and well-being can be significant. Some people even stop their work because of online harassment. Also, the barriers to participate in the public debate are getting higher, especially for women, people living with disabilities, people with a migration background, or members of the LGBTQ+ community.

In this guide, you will find more information about online hate and practical tips to better protect and empower yourself or your organisation. This text was compiled based on various experiences and research. Trainers from Stroomversnellers have helped dozens of social organisations build resilience against online hate in recent years. Stem op een Vrouw has done extensive work on online hate targeting politicians, and insights from that work are included here. This guide also incorporates in-depth conversations with people who have been targets of online hate, conducted by Stroomversnellers and De Goede Zaak, as well as journalist and academic research on the topic.



What we mean by online harassment

Online harassment refers to hurtful, discriminatory, or threatening statements made on social media, by email, or through other online communication channels. Sometimes this behaviour is legally punishable, but most of the time it is not. Even when it is not a criminal offence, it still has an impact on the recipient. In general, the attacks are aimed at the person rather than the content of what they say.

The same patterns keep emerging when it comes to who is targeted. Online harassment disproportionately (but not exclusively) affects women, people from the LGBTQ+ community, people of colour, and people living with visible disabilities. This is clear from the stories our trainers hear from people who have been targets of online hate during our trainings, and it is confirmed by various studies on online hate (see the background chapter) that focus on journalists, local councillors, and female politicians, among others.

What the perpetrators want

If you want to build resilience against online hate, it helps to understand the intentions of those who spread it. Numerous examples of online hate targeting politicians, journalists, and others involved in the public debate show that perpetrators generally have no interest in rational political discussion. Instead, they aim to discourage you from participating in the public debate, either because of your opinions or because of who you are, or to disrupt the debate altogether. Perpetrators sometimes act alone, but often they are organized, operating a large number of fake accounts that pretend to be ordinary citizens. Such coordinated attacks can suddenly overwhelm you with hateful messages. Sometimes, online hate escalates into threats in the offline world. It often happens in response to a media appearance or another moment when you are visible in the public eye.

Social media

Social media platforms play a central role in the spreading and impact of online hate. Algorithms on these platforms often fuel polarisation by amplifying content that triggers strong emotions. Research shows that users who spread hateful content tend to organize in clusters, which helps their messages spread further, faster, and more widely.

For more background information, see the final chapter of this guide.



2. Resilient against hate as an individual

The five fingers of resilience against online hate

To grow resilient against online hate yourself and for the people around you there are five important things you can do. We summarise them here as the “five fingers of resilience against online hate”. We will then explain them one by one.



1. Be prepared

Discuss how to deal with online intimidation with your friends or colleagues. Understand where it comes from and at what moments there is most risk and who in your organisation hold the most risk of becoming a target.

Be aware of how online hate affects you and what kind of support you need. Moreover, think about how it affects the people in your organisation who can become targeted. Follow a training with your team for resilience against online hate from Stroomversnellers.

2. Protection

Protect your online accounts. Use strong and unique passwords and two-factor-authentication. Be aware of what information about you and your private life is available online. Make a distinct choice about what information you want to share publicly. It is important that people cannot find out where you live; unwanted mail, threats or even visits and damaging your house would be a risk if they do know.



Are you an entrepreneur? The KvK has an option to keep your visitors address secret. You would need a postal address, which the KvK will show instead. Make a conscious choice about the settings of your social media accounts. Who can see your posts, who can react to your posts etc. You can also change your settings temporarily when you are attacked, or when you suspect that this might happen. For more information look at the chapter safety and protection for your own social media accounts.

3. Support

Make it easier to discuss online hate within your organisation and take care of each other. It is not something that 'is just part of it and you should be able to handle'. Online hate is destructive and meant to silence you. Do not wait for the one who is targeted to make the first move, because online hate could cause unresponsiveness.

Organize support

Online hate can be destructive, thus it helps to ask someone you trust if they want to be your buddy before you experience it. That makes it easier to discuss it if you do experience something hurtful online. That person can listen to you and help to calm you and assist you with practical things if necessary. For example, by managing your social media account. Make agreements for support within your organisation. For example, about sharing support posts publicly. This is not only hartwarming for the victim, but also shows everyone who reads it, that the target is not alone and that this behaviour is not normal.

4. React consciously

It can be unwise to react because it increases the engagement with the account by naming it or reacting to it. Sometimes you want to block haters or limit who can react to your message. And in some cases you cannot ignore the online hate and you will have to react. Determining which choice is the best one differs for each situation and is dependent on the type of commenter and the post. It is difficult to make that choice in the heat of the moment, when you receive many messages in a short period of time. Therefore, you can make decisions concerning to whom you will and will not react upfront. If you know that a media performance will result in a lot of reactions, write standard reactions in which you convey your central message beforehand. You do not have to react contentual to someone who offends you, but you should react to the other people who read it.



In short there are three ways of reacting:

A. **De-escalate**: Make sure as little attention as possible goes to the trolls so the hate tsunami will easily die;

B. Use the hate comments to centralise your message. **Make a screenshot** of the comment you want to reply to. And add you reply. That does not generate a link to the specific “hate-account” and prevents the offender getting more visibility;

C. Call for **supportive comments** to drown hateful comments, for example through a large-scale solidarity action. It helps to have agreements in place with allies before an incident happens, and to have a draft call to action ready in advance.

For more information, see the communication advice.

5. File a report and press charges

Take screenshots of the hate comments. Take a screenshot of the account that posted the hate comment. Also register the relevant URLs. You need this information for the following steps.

After that you can report the hate comment at the relevant social media platform because reporting it can result in the post or account being deleted and with that, the evidence.

Press charges at the police when it is a criminal offense, For example:

- a concrete threat;
- specific discriminatory comments;
- call for violence;
- lies spread about you (defamation);
- publishing your address and contact details.

Warning: Online hate is generally not a criminal offence. Ask for advice within your organisation, or with a lawyer or police if you are thinking of pressing charges. When in doubt, press charges. Also check out the chapter on monitoring, documentation and filing a report.



Do you want to report specific discrimination, for example based on ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation?

[The Dutch Institute for Human Rights](#)

<https://meld.onlinediscriminatie.nl/> (in Dutch)

Do you specifically want to have something removed from social media as quickly as possible, or do you want a particular user who spreads hateful content to be taken offline immediately? Then meld.onlinediscriminatie.nl is your best option. This reporting centre has a special relationship with social media platforms: they are a so-called *trusted flagger*. This means that a report coming from them is handled quickly and taken seriously, often faster and better than if you do this yourself.



3. Safety and protection for your own social media accounts

There is multiple technical possibilities to increase your online safety and resilience against online hate. Online hate sometimes goes together with attacks on social media accounts or the misuse of the information that is on it. Here are a few tips to prevent that.

1. Passwords

Do you use passwords that are easy to guess? Or do you (usually) have the same password for multiple accounts? Then you are vulnerable online. The moment your password leaks, all your accounts are in danger. Variations in your password are not enough to prevent this; hackers can easily come up with these variations. If you want to prevent this it is highly recommended to use a unique password for everything, one that is difficult to guess. Of course then it will not be remember them but luckily there is a solution for that: a password manager!

[Bits of Freedom](#), the Dutch organisation for the right to privacy online, recommends Bitwarden. You can add [Bitwarden](#) to your internet browser and install it as an app on your phone. With one password manager you only need to remember one password. The rest is easily made with a tool. Existing passwords can be changed using the tool.

To do:

1. Install a password manager on your computer, laptop and phone (tip: Bitwarden);
2. Set up unique passwords for every account. The password manager can help with this;
3. Change your passwords once a year.

Tip: Check [here](#) if one of your passwords has ever been leaked. Want to read more on installing a password manager? Bits of Freedom explains more [here](#) (in Dutch).



2. two-factor-authentication

two-factor-authentication means you will not login with just a password but there will be a second check to make sure it is you. For example by sending a code via SMS or email to check if it really is you that is trying to login. It is smart to install this whenever it is possible. Why is this a good idea? If someone guesses your password or your password fell in the hands of the wrong person via a data leak, this person can try to break into your accounts. If you use two-factor-authentication you raise an extra wall for them to prevent them from getting in.

To do:

- Are you making a new account somewhere? Choose two-factor-authentication;
- Install two-factor-authentication for existing accounts. Especially for your email and social media.

You can also install two-factor-authentication via an authentication app. There is a lot of those. Examples for authentication apps are [FreeOTP](#) and [Authy](#).



3. Know what is public about you

Do you know what information is online about you? Do an online search and find out. Try finding yourself on search engines and make sure to check out your old social media accounts. Think of old photos on Facebook or Instagram and X and do not forget old accounts you do not use anymore.

Especially privacy sensitive information like photos, birth days and who your family members are, is important information to personalise. You would not be the first person to hear online that “they know where your kids go to school”. So make sure that this information is not easily found from online information.



To do:

- Search for yourself in search engines, on your own laptop as well as someone else's. In a normal browser as well as an incognito browser, the results can be different. Did you find information that you do not want online (anymore)? You can do something about that;
- Use multiple keywords like your name, your name in combination with your work and old work, and your name in combination with your location;
- Check "regular" search results as well as articles and photos;
- Delete old photos on your social media;
- Change your Facebook settings so people cannot see who your family members are;
- Check out the website of your employer. What information do people see about you? Discuss with your employer if there is anything you do not want online;
- Consider a Google Alert with your name or another keyword that is connected to you. Every time your name pops up on the internet you will get a notification. That way you know when you get publicity and possibly expect online hate. Setting up Google Alerts can be done [here](#).

4. Shield your address

It is important people cannot easily find out where you live. If your address is easily found you can get unwanted mail or even threats, in person visits or damage at your address. Also if your address is not online it is important to be aware of what you share on social media. Are you sharing a photo of your neighbourhood? Do not include a location and prevent street names from being visible. Do you have a partner or someone living with you? It is worth to check if your address is public through them.

To do:

- Search on the internet for your name in combination with your location and address. Do you have a hit? Then you know where to shield it if possible.
- Are you an entrepreneur? The Chamber of Commerce (CoC) offers the possibility to shield your address. You do need a mailbox address. [More information on this from their website](#). Warning: In the "history" of your organisation it is possible your old addresses are visible. Anyone can request this information for a small price. This is not possible to shield unless there is an exceptional situation like a police report with a clear threat;



- Are you not an entrepreneur but your partner or roommate is? Keep in mind you might be easy to find through them and discuss this together.
- Request the municipality to not forward your personal data from the Dutch Personal Records Database (BRP). For most municipalities this can be done online.

5. Be aware of the settings of your social media accounts

Below you can find important tips to secure your account for each social media platform. We discuss: X (Twitter), Instagram and LinkedIn. Do you use more social media like, Pixelfed, TikTok, or BlueSky? Make sure to also check your (security and privacy) settings there.



X (Twitter)

Security on this platform is under pressure because of changes from the company. So it is possible that some of the things mentioned below are not possible anymore. The relevant settings can be found in the menu of X (Twitter) under 'settings and support' → 'settings and privacy'. All settings relevant for your security and privacy are under 'Security and account access' and 'Privacy and safety'. Go through all the settings here and choose what you are most comfortable with!



We advise the following:

→ Security and account access

- Set two-factor-authentication (under 'Security');
- Set additional password protection (under 'Security').

→ Privacy and safety

Every setting here is relevant! Go through all options. You can for example:

- Choose who can tag you and to whom your tweets are visible (under 'Target group, media and tags');
- Choose who can send you a private message (under 'Private messages').

Instagram

In the menu under 'Settings and privacy' you can find a lot of settings for security. Go through all the options! Our tips:

→ Accounts centre → Password and security

- Set two-factor-authentication;
- Do the 'Security Checkup'.

→ Account privacy

- Here you can choose if your account is public (everyone can see your content) or if people need to send you a request before they can see your content.

→ Messages and story replies

Here you choose:

- Who can send you a private message and who can reply to your stories;
- Who can add you to groups.



→ Tags and mentions

- Here you choose who can 'tag' you in a post or story. Tip: go for the option that only people you follow can tag you. Or go for the option 'Manually approve tags'. That way you stay in control over who can tag you;
- The same goes for mentions.

→ Comments

- Here you choose who can comment on your Instagram content.

LinkedIn

Below your profile picture you can find a dropdown menu with 'Settings and Privacy'.

→ Sign in & security

- Set two-factor-authentication.

→ Visibility

- Choose who can find your profile via Google, if you can be found based on your email, phone or address, if your connections are visible and if you can get tagged by others.

→ Data privacy

- Choose who can send you a message or connection request.

More up to date information can be found here:

[Fix Je Privacy](#) (Dutch)

[Your Platform Rights](#)



4. Organisations resilient against online hate

Online abusive behaviour targeting civil society organisations is increasing and is negatively affecting the functioning of democracy. Employees and volunteers withdraw from their roles, take sick leave, limit their participation in public debate, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to find people who are willing to speak out publicly in support of your ideals.

Organisations can play an important role in reversing this negative trend and strengthening their resilience, and that of their team, against online hate.

In our own conversations with activists and NGO team members, in the stories we hear during our trainings, and in research by academics and journalists on online hate, we see that many people tend to view the impact of online hate as a personal issue. We want to emphasise that online hate is a collective problem that requires an organisation-wide response.

It is a collective problem because online hate negatively affects how our organisations function. It also influences how public debate takes place and who participates in it. Within organisations, spokespersons, webcare staff, and receptionists are often the most affected. An organisation is only truly resilient when those who are not directly targeted also understand what online hate is, what it does to people, and how they can offer support.

In addition, there are numerous measures an organisation can take that cannot reasonably be expected from an individual. These measures are described in this appendix. The appendix for individual employees and volunteers of civil society organisations complements the information below.

In the step-by-step plan below, we outline the interventions organisations can implement during the prevention phase, the crisis phase, and the aftercare phase. This plan is explicitly intended as a guideline. The steps that can be taken will vary significantly from one organisation to another. Our training helps organisations determine what an effective strategy against online hate should look like.



Step 4: Develop a policy plan that clearly defines roles and responsibilities in the prevention phase, during an incident, and in the aftercare phase.

Step 5: Establish a reporting point where employees and volunteers can report incidents and upload evidence (such as screenshots, emails, and chat messages). This reporting point should also offer advice and a listening ear. Use it to systematically document incidents of online hate.

Step 6: Implement automated monitoring of public social media channels for online abusive behaviour directed at the organisation, and establish policy agreements regarding monitoring, documentation, and reporting to the authorities.

Step 7: Develop internal agreements and a decision-making framework outlining how and when the organisation will, or will not, respond publicly to online hate, and who is responsible for making that decision. For example, this may include publicly supporting someone who has been targeted and articulating behavioural norms in the public debate. (See also the communication guidelines.)

Step 8: Integrate the approach to addressing online abusive behaviour into other internal policies, such as HR policies, codes of conduct, and aggression protocols. Provide resilience training on dealing with online hate.

Step 9: Put measures in place to prevent overload, particularly among webcare and reception staff, caused by prolonged exposure to online hate. Create schedules that allow staff to rotate after a few hours and ensure they have rest breaks.

Step 10: Protect the private data of employees and volunteers from third parties.

Step 11: Conduct risk assessments and develop scenarios to determine the potential source of coordinated online hate attacks, and map out risks and mitigation options. This includes assessing the risk that online threats may escalate into physical aggression.



During an incident

Act quickly and appropriately. Speed matters, both in supporting the target and in responding to the perpetrator.

Step 1: Contact the person targeted and ask an open question about how they would like to be supported.

Step 2: Before reporting the content, take screenshots, record URLs, and document what is happening even if the behaviour does not (yet) constitute a criminal offence.

Step 3: As an organisation, report the incident to the relevant social media platform and support the victim in doing so as well.

Step 4: Consider temporarily limiting commenting options to followers only, or disabling comments altogether. If the incident concerns a private account, consult the account owner about the steps to take.

Step 5: If the organisation chooses to respond publicly, consider doing so via a screenshot and a separate post. Directly replying to or tagging the account involved may trigger the algorithm to increase that account's visibility.

Step 6: Inform targets about the possibility of filing a police report and offer to do so on behalf of the organisation.

Step 7: Decide which tasks or activities should be put on hold in order to create space and calm to respond effectively and process the impact.

After an incident

Step 1: Ask the targeted person whether aftercare is needed and whether they have support within their own network. In the weeks following a serious incident, check in several times to see how they are doing. Stress is a natural response but if stress symptoms persist, professional support is advised.

Step 2: Analyse and document the incident. Where relevant, investigate the perpetrators. Evaluate whether your plan to address online hate was effective or needs to be adjusted.



5. Monitoring, documentation and filing a report

The importance of documentation and case building

In order to file a police report, and also to take action through reporting mechanisms on social media platforms or by other means, systematically documenting incidents of online hate and building case files on perpetrators can be extremely helpful.

Filing a police report or submitting a platform complaint is more likely to succeed when evidence has been collected in advance. Although **evidence** can sometimes still be retrieved afterwards, prior documentation of online hate significantly speeds up the process. An organisation's counter-strategy against online hate also benefits from gaining better insight into perpetrators and incidents. Both require a **systematic** and **integrated approach**. We recommend assigning responsibility for incident documentation to a central point within the organisation. This should explicitly include online hate incidents that are not (yet) criminal offences. Doing so enables follow-up actions to make swift and effective use of the available data.

All incidents of online hate should be reported internally, in the same way as other forms of aggression and intimidation. Use the same methodology and, where appropriate, integrate this approach into your existing aggression or misconduct protocol.

1. Establish a **reporting point**. Ask individuals who are targeted to forward evidence of online intimidation, via email, chat, or closed social media channels, to this reporting point. Ensure that this is not an anonymous mailbox, but a designated person who offers a listening ear and can think along with the target about next steps. This reporting point should also function as a coordinator, ensuring that relevant parties, such as management, the communications department, or HR, are involved when necessary and that organisational decisions can be made promptly.
2. Record online intimidation in a structured and systematic way. Document incidents using a fixed **protocol**, including cases of online intimidation that are not (yet) criminal offences, for the purpose of case building. An example of such a protocol:
 - Take a screenshot of the hateful message (or save the email, message or other medium).
 - Take a screenshot of the account that posted the hateful message.
 - Record the URLs of the specific posts.
 - Note the date and time.



3. Agree on the circumstances under which managers within the organisation must also be informed, and give the reporting person a voice in determining the follow-up steps.

4. The reporting point should document reports systematically and record the follow-up actions taken. This creates a comprehensive overview of incidents and perpetrators, enabling better analysis of attacks. Reporting incidents provides insight into the nature, form, and possible increase or decrease of incidents within the organisation and forms the basis for preventive measures. Proper documentation is also important in the event that a police report is filed at a later stage.

5. Make a standard reporting form available and ensure that digital evidence can be attached.

6. Even if a person is unsure whether the behaviour constitutes misconduct or inappropriate behaviour, they should always be able to contact the reporting point. After contact is made, it can be assessed whether action is needed and what form that action should take.

7. In the case of a large-scale attack, a physical threat, or reputational damage to the organisation, a protocol should be in place to enable crisis decision-making. This protocol should specify who must be involved in which scenarios and who is authorised to make emergency decisions. In most organisations, this will include the executive director, head of communications, and head of HR. Emergency decisions may include issuing a press release, engaging security services, or temporarily suspending activities to allow overburdened employees time to recover.



Reporting online hate externally

Incidents involving discrimination, for example on the basis of ethnicity, skin colour, religion, disability, or sexual orientation, can be reported to the following (Dutch) organisations:

[Het College voor de Rechten van de Mens](#)

[Meld.Onlinediscriminatie.nl](#)

If you want specific content removed from social media as quickly as possible, or if you want a user who is spreading hateful content to be taken offline swiftly, meld.onlinediscriminatie.nl is your best option. This organisation has a special relationship with social media platforms; it acts as a so-called trusted flagger. This means that reports submitted by them are handled quickly and taken seriously, often more quickly and effectively than reports submitted by individuals.

Reporting on social media platforms

In addition to legal frameworks, social media companies have their own community guidelines defining what is and is not permitted on their platforms. Reporting mechanisms have expanded significantly in recent years, and the way platforms handle complaints is under increasing scrutiny. Experiences with platform responses vary and differ from one platform to another. **The Digital Services Act (EU)** promises improvements in responsiveness and accountability. We advise that, in addition to other steps, organisations also report harmful statements or accounts directly through the platform itself. The appropriate reporting category may differ depending on the platform, so it is important to select the correct category carefully. Reviewing abusive messages can be psychologically taxing. Therefore, offer support to the targeted individual and rotate webcare staff every few hours if they are required to review such content.

Important points when filing a report

First, register and preserve all evidence in case a police report may be filed later. Take screenshots, both of the hateful content itself and of the account posting it. Save links to the content when possible. Do this before submitting a report, as reporting may result in posts or accounts being removed, potentially causing evidence to disappear.



Filing a police report

When online aggression and intimidation are a criminal offence

Not all forms of online aggression and intimidation are criminal offences. Perpetrators often know exactly where the legal boundary lies between punishable and non-punishable behaviour. **When in doubt, file a police report** (See also the appendix on relevant legislation). If the targeted person is employed by the organisation or has a volunteer agreement, the organisation will in many cases be able to file a report on their behalf.

Forms of intimidation that are, in any case, criminal offences include:

1. The dissemination of private information (address, place of residence, family details, relationships, etc.);
2. Concrete threats of violence;
3. Explicit discrimination or racism;
4. Incitement to violence or to public disorder;
5. The spreading of false statements (“defamation and slander”);
6. Sending unsolicited sexually explicit messages.

Police reports must be filed with the **police**. You may wish to use one of the reporting mechanisms mentioned above first in order to build a stronger case before going to the police. If you are unsure whether a police report can be filed, seek advice from a lawyer or consult the police directly. Be aware, however, that reports are not always handled adequately, sometimes due to capacity shortages, and sometimes because officers, based on their own biases, may not take the report seriously or may discourage filing one. You always have the right to file a police report. If necessary, consider engaging a lawyer to support the process.

Options the Public Prosecution Service (OM) and the police have

1. If a perpetrator can be identified and a criminal offence has been committed, a criminal investigation may be initiated.
2. The police may also visit the perpetrator for a verbal warning.



6. Laws and regulations

Discrimination is punishable under Dutch law. Related provisions can be found in Articles 137c to 137e of the Criminal Code, which cover:

- 137c – **group insult**;
- 137d – **incitement to hatred, discrimination, or violence**;
- 137e – **dissemination of group insults**.

A group **insult** occurs when someone publicly, verbally, in writing, or through images, deliberately expresses insulting statements about a group of people based on their:

- Ethnicity or skin colour;
- Religion or belief system;
- Sexual orientation;
- Physical, psychological, or intellectual disability.

Other related articles in the Criminal Code are connected to these provisions.

Note: Group insults based on gender are currently not punishable. This does not make it impossible to report or file a complaint, but it does make obtaining a conviction more difficult. At present, Bill 36510 is introduced to the House of Representatives, which proposes amending Articles 137c and 137e of the Criminal Code to add “gender” to the grounds for discrimination.

Then there is slander and defamation, set out in Article 261 of the Criminal Code, which are special forms of insult. **Slander** involves deliberately saying harmful things about someone with the intention that others will hear about it. For example, slander occurs when someone is accused of something where it is not easily verifiable whether the accusation is true or not. Even telling the truth can be punishable if it harms someone’s honour and reputation.

Defamation is slander in which a statement is made that one knows to be untrue, and in this way someone is accused of false facts.



Finally, there is legislation on **threats**, set out in Article 285 of the Criminal Code. A clear explanation can be found on the website of Van Gessel Advocaten:

1. Not every threat is punishable. It must involve a threat of death, serious assault, rape, sexual assault, arson, public violence, violence against an internationally protected person or their property, or a threat involving a crime that endangers the general safety of people, property, or the provision of services. In addition, threats involving terrorist crimes are separately criminalised. Most cases, however, involve threats of death or serious assault.

2. Whether a threat is considered punishable depends on the circumstances. The threat must be of such a nature and under such circumstances that it could **reasonably** create fear that the crime would actually be committed. It is not necessary for the person being threatened to actually feel afraid. What matters is that the threat, in its nature and context, could reasonably have caused fear in a general sense. The threat must have reached the person being threatened.

3. General statements do not constitute a threat under the law. For example, the statement “Those f***ing cops, those bastards should all be taken out” is not considered a threat because it is too general.



ARTICLES OF LAW

Article 137c (Group defamation)

1. Anyone who, in public, verbally or in writing or by means of images, deliberately makes offensive remarks about a group of people on the grounds of their ethnicity, religion or beliefs, their heterosexual or homosexual orientation or their physical, mental or intellectual disability, shall be punished with a prison sentence of up to one year or a third category fine.
2. If the offence is committed by a person who makes a profession or habit of it, or by two or more persons acting in union, they shall be punished with imprisonment of up to two years or a fourth category fine.

Article 137d (Inciting hatred, discrimination or violence)

1. Anyone who publicly, verbally or in writing or by means of images, incites hatred or discrimination against people or violent action against persons or property on the grounds of their ethnicity, religion or beliefs, gender, their heterosexual or homosexual orientation, or their physical, mental or intellectual disability, shall be punished with imprisonment of up to one year or a third category fine.
2. If the offence is committed by a person who makes a profession or habit of it, or by two or more persons acting in union, imprisonment of up to two years or a fourth category fine shall be imposed.



ARTICLES OF LAW

Article 137e (Offence of disseminating group defamation)

1. Any person who, other than for the purpose of business reporting:

- a. Makes a statement public which, to his knowledge or as he should reasonably suspect, is offensive to a group of people on account of their race, religion or belief, their heterosexual or homosexual orientation, or their physical, mental or intellectual disability, or incites hatred or discrimination against people or violent action against persons or property on the grounds of their race, religion or belief, gender, heterosexual or homosexual orientation, or physical, mental or intellectual disability;
- b. sends, distributes or stocks for publication or distribution an item which, to his knowledge or reasonable belief, contains such a statement, to someone other than at their request;

shall be punished with imprisonment of up to six months or a third category fine.

2. If the offence is committed by a person who makes a profession or habit of it, or by two or more persons acting in union, a prison sentence of up to one year or a fourth category fine shall be imposed.

Article 261 (Defamation and slander)

- 1. Anyone who deliberately attacks someone's honour or good name by imputing a specific fact, with the apparent aim of publicising it, shall be punished as guilty of defamation with a prison sentence of up to six months or a third category fine.
- 2. If this is done by means of writings or images, distributed, publicly displayed or posted, or by writings whose content is publicly read aloud, the perpetrator shall be punished for libel with a maximum imprisonment of one year or a third category fine.
- 3. Neither defamation nor libel shall exist insofar as the perpetrator has acted in necessary defence, or could in good faith assume that the accusation was true and that the public interest demanded the accusation.



ARTICLES OF LAW

Article 285 (Threats)

1. Threats to commit violence in public against persons or property, violence against an internationally protected person or their protected property, any offence that endangers the general safety of persons or property or the provision of services, rape, actual indecent assault, any crime against life, hostage-taking, serious assault or arson, shall be punished with imprisonment of up to two years or a fourth category fine.
2. If this threat is made in writing and under certain conditions, it shall be punished with imprisonment of up to four years or a fourth category fine.
3. Threats of a terrorist offence shall be punished with a maximum prison sentence of six years or a fifth category fine.
4. If the offence described in the first, second or third paragraph is committed with the intention of preparing or facilitating a terrorist offence, the prison sentence imposed for the offence shall be increased by one third.

See also Article 285a, b en c [here](#) (in Dutch).

Since January 1 2024, doxing has also been covered by Article 285 of the Criminal Code.

Doxing is the collection or disclosure of another person's personal data with the aim of frightening or harassing that person. For example, by posting their home address or telephone number online. Doxing is therefore a criminal offence.



ARTICLES OF LAW

The Digital Services Act and online hate

The Digital Services Act, adopted in 2023, is European legislation for large digital platforms, which deals with issues such as reporting online hate, illegal content and moderation. The Dutch government is still in the process of implementing this law.

If you have a dispute with an online platform, you can take it to an out-of-court dispute resolution body. The decision of this organisation is not binding. There are currently no out-of-court dispute resolution bodies designated in the Netherlands.

You can always go to court if you disagree with a platform's decision.

You can submit a complaint to your national Digital Services Coordinator (in the Netherlands, the Authority for Consumers and Markets) if a platform does not comply with the DSA rules. The coordinator can then forward the complaint to another country and/or another competent authority and/or send advice. The report can be made [here](#).



7. Communication advice

“The best thing to do is to ignore online hate”. This is cheap and harmful communication advice that some communication experts still give. We don't believe it's that simple. If Geert Wilders insults you on X and then the media repeats his narrative, you have little choice but to respond. If it is an anonymous account with three followers, it might be good advice. If you do have to respond, the question is: how?

Stroomversnellers is not an expert in crisis communication, but we do think we can explain a number of basic principles about responding to online hate.

Decision-making framework

When your social media accounts are flooded with hate messages, you no longer have time to make a considered decision about how to respond. You want to have an assessment framework in place beforehand. And that assessment framework starts with the question: what do you want to achieve with communication via social media, and who do you want to reach on social media? That goal and that target group should remain central, even when you are under fire.

The next question is: who is the sender of online hate? Is it an anonymous person with three followers, or someone with a million followers? It is better to ignore the former. The latter, perhaps not.

Then consider who you want to reach with your response. Is it an opponent with whom discussion may still be possible? Or is it a hardened extremist who is not interested in debate, but only in disrupting the debate? Or do you want to reach the readers?

Understanding your own reactions to stress can be helpful here. We work with flight, fight, freeze and friend responses. Using RAIN, “recognise, acknowledge, investigate, accept (nurture)”, you can explore what you are feeling.

Another option is to go through the different words of the question “Should I do this now?”, so that you do not just react out of automatic stress, but consider alternative options.

Our advice: write down a number of possible scenarios now, while you are not yet targeted, and decide together how you will respond to them. Use this as a guide if you become the target of online hate.



Who decides on crisis communication

Anyone who has ever experienced an organised online hate campaign knows that it can leave an organisation distraught and disoriented. Suddenly you are a trending topic, accounts with enormous reach adopt a negative frame, and your DMs and inbox are flooded with hurtful messages. It is not only important what your assessment framework is, but also who is allowed to make crisis decisions in your organisation. Is it the spokesperson who is the target? The director of your organisation? The communications department? In fact, it does not matter who decides, as long as it is clear how decision-making works in a crisis situation. In general, it is advisable that crisis decisions are made by as few people as possible, and that they have the mandate to make decisions. An evaluation will follow afterwards, but in a crisis there is no time for a lengthy meeting.

Do not abandon people

If someone from your organisation is the target of an organised online hate campaign from, for example, the far right, you should remain in solidarity with the target. Even if that person has just made a statement that may be unfortunate. Publicly criticising someone is harmful to the well-being of the person who is the target, reinforces the chilling effect on others and encourages hatemongers to look for their next target. A good conversation about an awkward statement can also take place a few days later.

Do not feed the algorithm

Be aware of the effect of responding to hate messages. The algorithm will reward a message that receives a lot of responses with more visibility. By mentioning or tagging an account or comment, you give hatemongers more attention and reach. You can do this deliberately, because it also increases your own reach. Do not want to boost the reach of hatemongers? Then take a screenshot of the message you want to respond to. And add your response to it. This does not generate an online link to the “hate account” itself and therefore does not give the perpetrator extra visibility.

Another way to dampen an online hate attack is to temporarily adjust your social media settings. For example, by temporarily restricting or disabling comments, or temporarily changing the name of your account so that tags no longer work. This also slows down the algorithm.



Why would you respond?

There are good reasons to respond to online hate. Not responding normalises online hate and gives the impression that offensive messages are permitted. Repeating certain frames in large numbers normalises them, thereby shifting the overton window. We have seen it happen: in recent years, public debate has become vastly more aggressive and shifted towards the radical right. Responding can communicate a norm: we do not accept online hate.

Another reason to respond is reputation management. Constantly repeating insults or disinformation about your organisation or yourself damages your reputation. Especially if that frame is taken up by the media. You will have to respond to correct that image.

In addition, online hate attacks not only target your organisation or spokesperson, but also everyone who feels connected to them. By responding, you give them moral support. Responding will probably not change your attacker's opinion. Nor does it need to. You will, however, reach all those other people who read your response. Can you convince them?

Create standard responses

Most online hate is not particularly original. It is always the same false frames and insults. So you can write your response in advance when you have a quiet moment. And keep using it. Have them ready and copy and paste your response. This increases the speed with which you can respond and reduces the time and energy you spend on it. It also gives you the option of letting your supporters respond as well. Give them access to your list of responses and ask them to respond too.

Remind people of the standards for open debate

Set conditions for how people can communicate on your social media channels. An open debate benefits from frameworks such as respect for each other, no swearing, no racism, sexism or other forms of discrimination, and responding to the content, not the person. Make your standards transparent and easy to find. Remind people of these standards when you post something that is likely to generate a lot of responses. And then hold people to those standards. You have every right to remove anyone who refuses to adhere to these standards from the discussion.



Different ways to respond

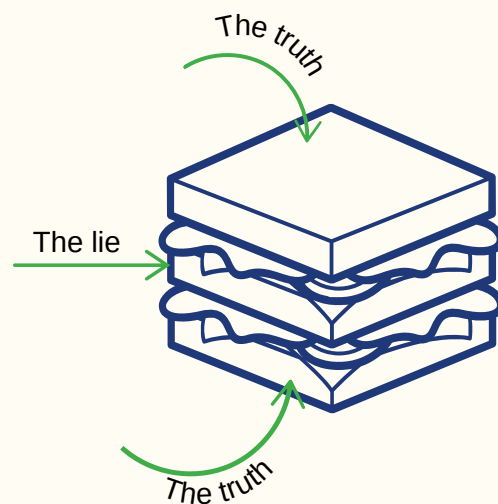
If you decide to respond, there are numerous communication strategies that can be useful. Which ones are useful in your case? If you decide to respond, make sure you focus on your message. Formulate your response with your message in mind, so that you can draw attention to what is really important and do not get carried away by the negative framing of the hateful responses. This not only helps to clarify your own position, but also strengthens your position towards the hatemongers.

The Truth Sandwich

Communication expert George Lakoff devised the [Truth Sandwich](#) as a method for responding to disinformation. Put simply, his motto is: never respond with a denial. That draws attention to your opponent's frame. Respond in three layers. 1. Respond with your own message. 2. Expose the lie in your own words. 3. End with your own story.

Overwhelm hateful comments with support

Call for solidarity and supportive responses to overwhelm the hateful comments. This can be done, for example, by organizing a large-scale solidarity campaign. You can do this publicly or by gathering volunteers in advance in a Signal channel specifically for this purpose. It helps to have a draft appeal ready when an incident occurs. By mobilising the support of others, you can reduce the negative impact of hateful comments. Similarly, you can have volunteers set the tone under a post that you know will attract a lot of hate. Make sure the first ten comments are positive.



Humor

"I promise to never wear nail polish again once Shell stops oil extraction", was the reaction of Dutch XR activist Hannah Prins after countless comments on her looks. Reacting with humor can unmask the hatemongers and give yourself and your community a moral boost.

Cuddle them to death

A thank you for a compliment in response to hate? Yes, never stoop to their level. Show that you do not take them seriously.

Judo with online hate

Use online hate against the spreaders. Show how unreasonable, rude and aggressive they are. Take a screenshot and repost it, explaining what is happening. The effect of this can be that more and more people do not want to be associated with these people and their opinions. A good example of this is the public debate surrounding Black Pete. Kick Out Zwarte Piet managed to use the online hate (and physical aggression) towards their activists against radical right-wing supporters. No one wanted to be compared to these aggressive people anymore, and the social debate shifted.

The meta discussion

Expose online hate campaigns and show your supporters who is behind them and what they want to achieve. Rutgers, together with journalists from Pointer and researchers from Trollensic, managed to reveal which organisations were behind the smear campaign against the [Week van de Lentekriebels](#) (in Dutch), this was reported on the news. This contradicted the narrative that there was "social unrest about sex education in schools".



Race class narrative

A lot of online hate is based on the scapegoat mechanism. Other people who have less power than we do are blamed for a problem, thereby diverting attention from the real issue. Furthermore, “dog whistles” can form a problem. Implicit, often racist comments that refer to stereotypes without explicitly naming them. For example, calling an asylum seekers' centre in a residential area a danger to children and women refers to the prejudice that young men of colour are always guilty of sexual assault, without saying so out loud. Knowing that the public will fill in the blanks. In the US, a narrative has been developed to respond to this.

This race class narrative explicitly states that, although we are all different, we also have a lot in common. And that we share values, and name those shared values. Racism pits us against each other so that certain people and companies can profit from it. We deserve a society in which everyone is cared for, rather than prosperity being concentrated in the hands of a small group. And this can only be achieved if we work together. Research shows that 60 percent of Americans are receptive to political messages that include this narrative. More background information can be found [here](#).

Block or ignore

Yes, you have every right to block, mute or ignore those who spread online hate. Clearly explain on your social media channels what standards and values you expect participants in the debate to adhere to. Anyone who violates these standards deserves to be blocked.



8. Background information about online hate

Definition

Online hate refers to inappropriate behaviour on social media, email and other online channels, ranging from hurtful comments to discriminatory and threatening statements. Sometimes this is punishable by law, but usually it is not. However, even when it is not punishable, it still has an impact on the recipient. Stroomversnellers uses the following definition of online hate:

1. Verbal aggression mainly involves swearing, shouting, hurting or making negative or discriminatory comments;
2. A threat is a concrete expression of intent to harm someone or their loved ones;
3. Intimidation is often less concrete and/or indirect and mainly evokes a feeling of insecurity in the victim;
4. Threats and intimidation can take various forms: pressuring, provoking, blackmailing, stalking, sexual harassment, sending threatening letters. Via email, social media or a messaging app.

Online boundary-crossing behaviour affects women, people from the LGBTI+ community, people of colour and people with visible disabilities more often than average (but not exclusively).

Context of online hate for civil society organisations

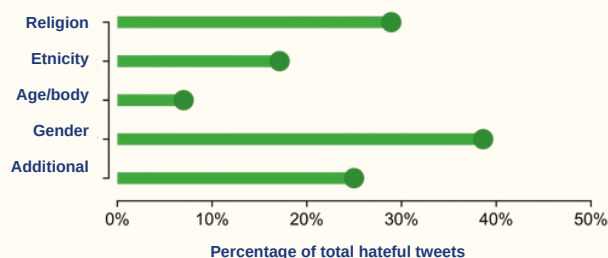
Due to their dependence on social media as a platform for public debate and mobilising people, civil society organisations and their spokespersons communicate on social media more than average. Although this increases their reach, the online platform also provides space for hate and aggression. Various studies show that opinion makers are more often confronted with verbal aggression, intimidation and threats online than in person. Targets of online hate are often told that “it is just part of the job” or “you have to have a thick skin”.¹ Such statements are unhelpful and normalise behaviour that is not normal.

¹AT5, 2024, 13th of Oktober: [Raadsleden gaan gebukt onder bedreigingen en intimidatie](#). (Dutch article)



Verbal aggression, intimidation and threats serve as powerful political weapons here. Researchers have reported time and again in recent years that politicians, journalists and other participants in public debate receive a lot of online hate, but women, people of colour, queer people and people with visible disabilities receive disproportionately and noticeably more personal attacks. Various aspects of a person's identity, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, class, disability and sexual preference, combine to form a unique mix that influences the risk of online hate and can increase it when it deviates from the prevailing norm.¹

What is the focus of the hatred towards female politicians?²



In addition, political (party) affiliation appears to contribute to the amount of aggression and intimidation. Forty-six per cent of politicians from progressive parties have experienced aggression, a percentage that is significantly higher than that of officials from centrist and other parties (32%) and conservative parties (37%).³ Based on our own experience, we believe we see the same trend among civil society organisations.

¹ van de Ven, C, & Saris, K. (2021, 3rd of March). [Misogynie als politiek wapen](#).

² Atria. (2022). Het online Plafond.

³ MIV24 <https://www.kennisopenbaarbestuur.nl/documenten/rapporten/2024/12/12/index>



Perpetrators and their motives

Research on online hate directed at politicians, journalists and other participants in public debate shows that perpetrators are generally not interested in rational political debate.⁴

Perpetrators sometimes operate individually, but generally in organized groups, often using fake accounts that pretend to be ordinary Dutch citizens. They are sometimes supported by troll factories that are hired or controlled by foreign governments. These organised groups can suddenly intensify an online hate attack, thereby drawing many individuals who adopt their framing and behaviour into an online hate campaign. This often happens in response to a media appearance or at another moment when someone is visible in the public debate. These expressions of hate can be a stepping stone to physical threats.

Research into various incidents and data research into the political nature of disinformation and online hate shows that the perpetrators of online hate predominantly (but not exclusively) have a radical right-wing or socially hierarchical worldview.⁵ They view some participants in the public debate as inferior and want to silence them. Research into specific organised campaigns also points predominantly to organisations or governments with a radical right-wing or strictly conservative signature.

Social media platforms play a central role in the spread and impact of online hate. Algorithms on these platforms reinforce polarisation and online hate,⁶ connecting users with like-minded individuals and amplifying mutual hateful expressions. Research shows that hateful users organise themselves into clusters, causing messages from these users to spread further, faster and more widely.⁷

⁴ De Goede Zaak (2020) [onderzoek naar online haat richting maatschappelijke veranderaars](https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/social-psychology/articles/10.3389/frsps.2024.1389437/full).⁵ <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/social-psychology/articles/10.3389/frsps.2024.1389437/full>

⁶ <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/two-studies-social-media-algorithms-fuel-online-hate>

⁷ <https://www.trollrensics.com/our-work/> <https://pointer.kro-ncrv.nl/hoer-misinformatie-de-online-haatmachine-tegen-de-week-van-de-lentekriebels-op-gang-trok>

<https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/10.5771/2192-4007-2020-4-540.pdf> <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/48873>

<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2408.01257>



What does an organised online hate attack look like?

Many people think that online hate perpetrators are lonely individuals who spread hate anonymously and out of frustration from behind their computers. Sometimes that is indeed the case. Strikingly often, however, these are organised campaigns. A number of organised attacks have been thoroughly investigated, but it is unknown how structurally this occurs. Here are three examples.

1. The week of the 'Lentekriebels' (birds and the bees) of Rutgers

The data researchers of [Trollrensic](#) and the Dutch [televisionshow Pointer](#) investigated the online hate campaign against sex education in schools, which was set up by the radical right-wing action group Gezin in gevaar (Family in Danger) in collaboration with people associated with the political party Forum voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy). A large number of real and fake accounts spread offensive messages and misinformation. They were quickly followed by conservative or "anti-woke" influencers and many followers. This was followed by threats against staff and the office. The media also picked up on it, framing it as 'controversial week of the Lentekriebels' (birds and the bees). Research shows that the conservative Catholic organisation Gezin in Gevaar organised this attack.

2. [RTL investigation](#) (in Dutch) into online hate on their Instagram channel. We know from RTL's investigation that this involved a small number of perpetrators who spread an above-average number of offensive comments and posts. RTL responded with TV commercials about online hate, featuring Humberto Tan, among others.

3. Vizier op Links

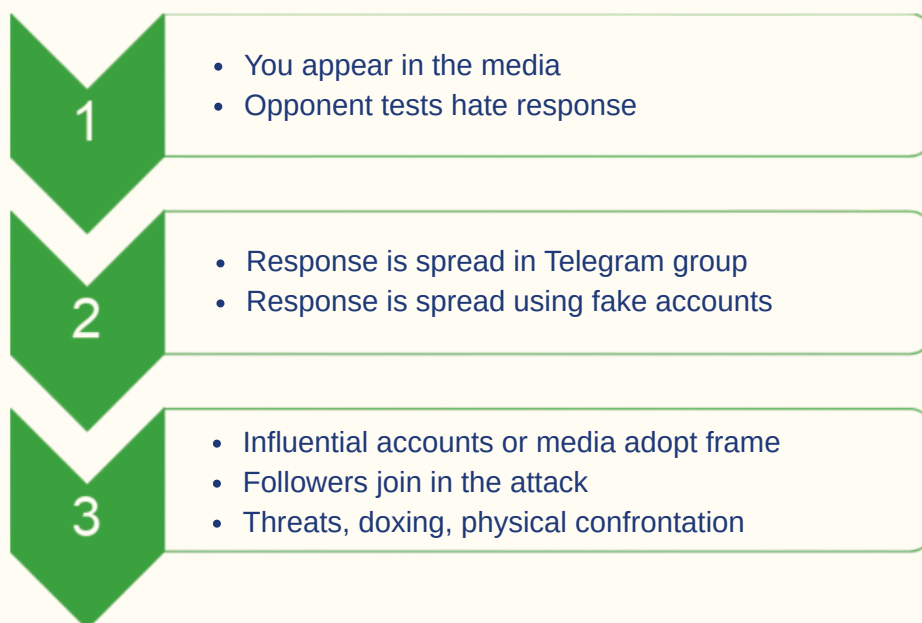
A few years ago, an extreme right-wing group called [Vizier op Links \(Dutch source\)](#) targeted trade union members and people from the anti-racism movement in an online intimidation campaign. Their Twitter account was supported by a number of fake accounts, which meant that the algorithm gave them a lot of visibility. Their reach grew to 10,000 followers, including many journalists. They also sold stickers that appeared on the front doors of prominent left-wing activists. Left-wing activists' X (Twitter) accounts were attacked with hacking attempts. After a storm of criticism, the Public Prosecution Service launched a criminal investigation, the internet provider took the website offline and X deactivated the account.



The aim of these types of campaigns seems to be to silence certain voices in the public debate and to “normalise” hateful language and ideology.

An attack often follows a similar pattern

1. Your spokesperson makes an appearance in the mainstream media. This makes them a potential target. Opponents respond on social media. They appear to be testing which narrative resonates with their own supporters. Sometimes, they search for private information about the spokesperson.
2. The attack is coordinated. Sometimes this involves WhatsApp or Telegram groups where people discuss which frame to attack with. Often, it involves spreading disinformation or hate through a network of fake accounts operated by just a few activists.
3. Influential accounts with many followers adopt the frame. Or repost online hate. This gives the message an ever-increasing reach. This is also aided by algorithms that give extra visibility to messages that elicit a lot of emotional responses. Sometimes a message is then picked up by the mainstream media (‘there is unrest on social media about...’) which gives the message even greater reach. This means that an ever-larger group of followers is reached. And those followers also respond with online hate, threats, attempts to hack accounts or dox a spokesperson. Increasingly, a wave of online hate then spills over into threats in the physical world, nasty letters or phone calls.



Consequences of online hate

Deterrent effect and changes in behaviour and communication

Online hate has far-reaching consequences for social organisations and their spokespersons. It not only has a negative impact on a personal level for those who are affected by it, but also has a broader effect. The risk of being confronted with aggression influences the (online) behaviour of organisations and spokespersons. It leads to spokespersons and communication staff having to (temporarily) step down from their positions.

Online hate has a deterrent effect: even people who have not been exposed to it themselves say that it influences their (social media) behaviour. This can lead to *spirals of silence*, whereby the voices of already underrepresented groups in the public debate are increasingly pushed into the background. The deterrent effect of online hate also influences people who know they are at above-average risk as aspiring spokespersons, leading some to decide to be less visible or active, or even to opt for a role behind the scenes.⁸

The ongoing aggression also influences the online behaviour of organisations and their spokespersons. Employees who have experienced online hate adjust their behaviour by being more cautious on social media or even withdrawing completely.

Impact on democracy

Online hate strikes at the heart of our democratic society by threatening free, safe, public debate. When people and organisations no longer dare to express their opinions, tend to withdraw from public life, and/or modify their online expressions, this affects representative democracy and creates a culture of self-censorship and insecurity. Reducing this hate is essential to allow democracy to function to its full potential and to guarantee the freedom and safety of participants in public debate.

⁸ Politica. (2023). Wie wil er nog de politiek in?.

Atria, & Ipsos I&O. (2024). "Ga aardappelen schillen of zoiets".



Resilient against online hate

In this context, it is becoming increasingly important to take effective measures to strengthen the online safety of civil society organisations. Preventive training and **awareness programmes** such as those offered by Stroomversnellers can help make their employees and volunteers more resilient, while **accessible reporting systems** are necessary for a coordinated and supportive response to incidents of online hate. Furthermore, organisations must make clear agreements about the limits of tolerated behaviour on social media. A cultural change must be initiated in which online hate is no longer accepted. It is not normal. Online hate threatens the core values of our democratic society by creating feelings of insecurity and imposing self-censorship. Protecting freedom of expression and ensuring a safe environment for political participation is essential for a healthy democracy. Governments and social media platforms must also take more decisive action against online hate, so that everyone feels protected and democracy can continue to function to its full potential. The reality is that in the current political climate, it is unlikely that they will take on that responsibility.

Resilient against online hate, but how do we protect open public debate?

The broader problem of online hate requires a joint, structural approach that goes beyond what can be done within an organisation. It touches on larger social issues that affect activists, journalists, scientists, politicians and other groups. Tackling online hate requires a joint effort by multiple parties; only then can we make public debate a safe space for everyone to contribute.



Online hate: the problem and the implications

Online hate includes hate speech, discrimination, threats and intimidation and targets individuals, but is also often intended to harm underlying groups. These expressions can range from hurtful comments to threatening messages and open hatred, which often remain visible in the public sphere and thus have a disturbing influence on both the person and their official position. Research shows that women, people of colour, queer people, people with visible physical disabilities, or anyone who deviates from the white male norm, are disproportionately often victims of online hate.⁹ At Stroomversnellers, we also see this pattern reflected in the social organisations we support.

The problem of online hate and threats goes beyond individual vulnerability: it has far-reaching consequences for political culture and democratic processes. More and more people say that the constant stream of negative messages and threats makes them feel less safe to participate in public debate. This can prevent them from participating fully in the public arena, leading some of them to decide to be less visible or active, or even to choose a role behind the scenes.¹⁰

This guide to combating online hate provides an overview of the problem and concrete steps to mitigate the impact of online hate. However, the challenge of online hate extends beyond individual actions at the local level. There are broader, urgent issues that must be addressed simultaneously at the national and international levels in order to reinforce the effectiveness of these steps. That is why we emphasise three essential points that, in addition to the dissemination of this guide, require a joint approach.

⁹ van de Ven, C., & Saris, K. (2021, 3 maart). *Misogynie als politiek wapen*.

Atria. (2022). *Het online Plafond*.

Politica. (2023). *Wie wil er nog de politiek in?*

Atria, & Ipsos I&O. (2024). *"Ga aardappelen schillen of zoiets"*.

¹⁰Politica. (2023). *Wie wil er nog de politiek in?*



Three challenges in tackling online hate

1. Legislation and regulations

A major legal challenge in the fight against online hate is that not everything that is hurtful and threatening is also punishable by law. Take, for example, group insults based on gender. This means that hateful or offensive statements directed at women as a group are not covered by the same legal protection as, for example, hate speech based on ethnicity or religion. European legislation such as the Digital Services Act makes it easier to combat online hate, but this legislation is under pressure from powerful social media platforms in the US.

2. Limited effect of reporting

At Stroomversnellers, we often hear that reporting online hate has a limited effect. Online hate is often treated as a low-priority issue, which means that reports are not adequately followed up and perpetrators are rarely prosecuted. This leads to frustration and can discourage victims from reporting future hate incidents. Another problem is the structural racism, sexism and transphobia within the police force, which means that in some cases, who you are determines how seriously your complaint is treated. It takes perseverance and sometimes legal support to be able to report an incident.

Reporting online hate on platforms also seems to be having less and less effect. Complaints are often not followed up or are responded to with the statement that the platform's guidelines have not been violated. The recent change of course by X and META to moderate even less is a sign of further breakdown.

3. Insufficient resilience and aftercare within organisations

Many social organisations lack adequate support in dealing with online hate. This applies both to the development of personal resilience and perspectives for action, and to aftercare following an incident. Organisations often do not offer systematic help in dealing with online hate. This makes victims feel isolated and insufficiently supported. This is further reinforced by managers or communication experts advising victims to ignore online hate or to act as if "it's just part of the job".



Better research

In order to better understand the extent and nature of online hate, in-depth knowledge is required. Although data is available and good research is being done, we also see gaps. For example, there is a lot of research into online misogyny. But there is still insufficient research into online hate based on ethnic or religious background, sexuality, sexual preference, disability, skin colour or physical characteristics. Research and our own experience with workshops indicate that people who deviate from the white male norm, such as women, members of the LGBTI+ community, people of colour or people with a visible physical disability, experience a disproportionate amount of online hate. Adding specific questions about this to research can provide better insight into the nature and impact of online hate on these groups and its effects and influence. This helps in developing targeted interventions.

More research is also needed into the perpetrators. Who are they, what motivates their behaviour, do they work individually or in an organized context, and how often are automated social media accounts involved? A number of organized attacks have been thoroughly investigated, but it is unknown how structurally this occurs. We know from research by Trollensic and the television programme Pointer, among others, that the online hate campaign against sex education in schools was set up by the radical right-wing action group Gezin in gevaar (Family in Danger).¹¹ We know from RTL's investigation into online hate on their own social media channels that it involved a small number of perpetrators who spread an above-average number of offensive comments and posts.¹² In some cases, they control multiple accounts. The online hate directed at Dutch politician Kauthar Bouchallikht also appeared to be organized by a PR agency on behalf of the United Arab Emirates.¹³ And there are strong indications that foreign actors use organized online hate campaigns for political purposes.¹⁴

We are not aware of any structural research into the link between online hate spread by individuals and organized campaigns, or into the quantitative differences between individual and organized online hate spreaders.

¹¹ <https://pointer.kro-ncrv.nl/hoe-misinformatie-de-online-haatmachine-tegen-de-week-van-de-lentekriebels-op-gang-trok>

¹² <https://www.rtl.nl/nieuws/artikel/5471750/rtl-onderzoek-online-haat-comments-sociale-media>

¹³ <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2023/07/07/dit-schimmige-bedrijf-vernietigde-met-succes-de-reputaties-van-europese-moslims-a4169074>

¹⁴ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240702-exposed-tech-entrepreneur-behind-pro-israel-hate-network-targeting-palestinians/> en <https://www.csis.org/analysis/beyond-bullets-and-bombs-rising-tide-information-war-international-affairs>



8. Recommended research and background information

[Study Finds Persistent Spike in Hate Speech on X](#)

[The new analysis contradicts the social media platform's claims that exposure to hate speech and bot-like activity decreased during Elon Musk's tenure.](#)

[February 13, 2025](#)

[Monitor Integriteit en Veiligheid. Ministerie Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties.](#)

[December 12, 2024](#) (Dutch)

[Online haat is genetwerkte intimidatie: hoe 'veelgevolgde netwerkknooppunten' de democratie bedreigen. Linda Duits. August 30, 2024.](#) (Dutch)

[Ideological attitudes predicting online hate speech: the differential effects of right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation. July 2, 2024](#)

[Communicating During Contentious Times: Dos and Don'ts to Rise Above the Noise. November 2023. OverZero](#)

[FIMI targeting LGBTQ+ people: Well-informed analysis to protect human rights and diversity. Oktober 23, 2023 European Union.](#)

[KifKif: Online haat, racisme, seksisme en queerfobie mogen geen politiek wapen of verdienmodel zijn. September 19, 2023](#) (Dutch)

[Pointer KRNO NCRV. Hoe misinformatie de online haat machine tegen de week van de lentekriebels op gang trok. March 23, 2023](#) (Dutch)



Concerning online safety of public political officials

[Kwalitatief onderzoek naar de impact van online haat op politieke ambtsdragers bij het invullen van hun ambt. March, 2023 DeGoedeZaak.](#) (Dutch)

[The Use of Mis- and Disinformation in Online Harassment Campaigns](#)
[June 23, 2022 / CDT](#)

[Onderzoek Alt-light en alt-right domineren Nederlands Twitter August 28, 2019, Groene Amsterdammer.](#) (Dutch)

[Atria Kennisinstituut voor emancipatie en vrouwengeschiedenis. Online haat tegen vrouwen.](#) (Dutch)

Practical information about online hate and safety

[Movisie over Online Polarisatie.](#) (Dutch)

[Eerste Hulp bij Online Haat. DeGoedeZaak.](#) (Dutch)

[FixJePrivacy / Bits of Freedom](#) (Dutch)

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