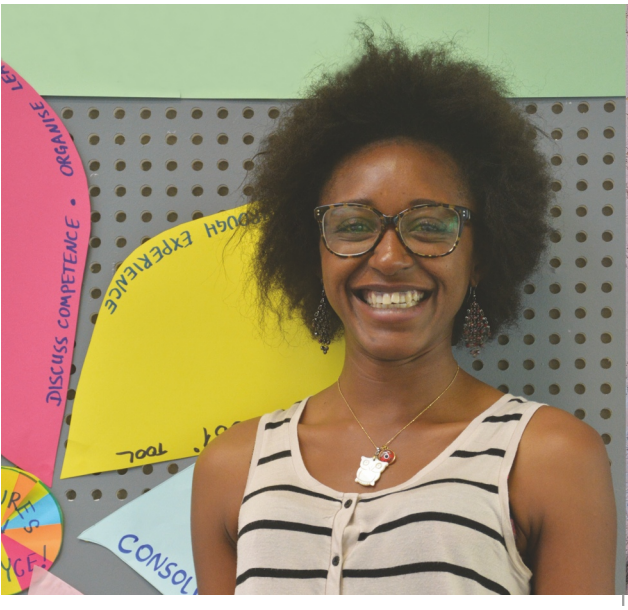
WE CAN!

Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives



Revised edition
2017

NO HATE SPEECH MOVEMENT

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

WE CAN!

Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives

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PREFACE

In today's Europe, hate speech is one of the most prolific forms of intolerance and xenophobia. This is especially the case online: the internet is frequently abused by those wishing to spread propaganda and vilify different groups or individuals. More and more, in mainstream political discourse, we see a toxic mixture of hate speech, fake news and "alternative facts" posing a serious threat to freedom and democracy.

These trends stand in stark contrast to the values and aims of the Council of Europe, which is dedicated to the spread of human rights across the continent. Our Organisation has taken a leading role in defining hate speech and helping ensure that those who use it are held to account. We place a great emphasis on education as the surest antidote to hate, working with our member States to teach young citizens the value of tolerant, democratic culture. Our No Hate Speech Movement has mobilised young people from throughout Europe to expose prejudice wherever they find it, working together for a more respectful digital space.

WE CAN! is the latest addition to our toolbox against hate. The most damaging examples of hate speech are often grounded in simple stories, which are repeated over and over again in different forms. The migrants "taking our jobs" narrative, for example. Or the consistent claim, made by radicals, that Islam is "under attack". Such narratives often remain unchallenged, either because they have become commonplace, or because they are delivered in sophisticated ways.

This manual will therefore help young people and educators confront, dismantle and replace hateful narratives. There are no short-cuts: the reader will not find in these pages a single statement, slogan, meme or caricature to counter all hate speech. You will, however, be guided in identifying the dangerous story-telling that chips away at our communities. Even more importantly, you will find tried and tested methods to propose powerful alternatives. Not simply telling different stories, but building and deploying more truthful accounts of the world around us which encourage others to challenge prejudice and think critically, and which deepen our knowledge and understanding of one and other.

The manual is a timely and much needed contribution and I wish you every success in putting it to good use.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who contributed to this manual, in particular:

- Those organisations and individuals sharing their good practices, experiences and insights, especially the Belgian French Community campaign for testing a draft version of the manual, and to Marius Jitea for his contribution to the collection of good practices.
- Salvador Sala (Ad Hoc expert group on Competences for Democratic Culture), Gavan Titley (National University of Ireland), Anca-Ruxandra Pandea (educational advisor at the European Youth Centre Budapest) and all the participants in the working group on the scope of this manual.
- Participants and trainers in the training course 'We CAN!' held in March 2017 at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg, and László Földi, online community manager of the campaign, for their feedback on the first version of the manual.

We have made every possible effort to trace references of texts and activities to their authors and give them the necessary credits. We apologise for any omissions or inaccuracies and will be pleased to correct them in the next edition.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 6 – PREPARING FOR ACTION

CHAPTER 7 – DOING IT STEP-BY-STEP

APPENDICES

CHAPTER 1

THE MANUAL

This manual offers guidance to develop counter and alternative narratives to combat hate speech and promote human rights, especially in online environments. The manual proposes a set of online and offline communication and educational approaches, and tools to undermine narratives, which sustain and legitimise hate speech. It aims to strengthen the toolboxes of youth workers, educators and activists already engaged in human rights work and education or willing to be engaged. It is designed for and within the context of the No Hate Speech Movement, a Council of Europe youth campaign for human rights online.

This introductory chapter explains the reasons for a manual on counter and alternative narratives as tools to address hate speech, especially with a human rights education approach. The chapter also describes the objectives of the manual, its intended users and how the manual contributes to the work of the No Hate Speech Movement. It also offers basic definitions of the main terms used: hate speech, narrative, counter and alternative narratives, which are explained in more detail in subsequent chapters. Finally, the chapter explains how the manual is organised.

1.1 | INTRODUCING BASIC CONCEPTS

HATE SPEECH IN BRIEF

Hate speech, as defined by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, covers all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, Antisemitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, as well as discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.

For the No Hate Speech Movement campaign, other forms of discrimination and prejudice, such as antigypsyism, christianophobia, islamophobia, misogyny, sexism and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, fall clearly within the scope of hate speech.

HATE SPEECH ONLINE

Hate speech online is a phenomenon of special concern. The Internet has created new spaces of communication and interaction but with fewer constraints: users can hide behind anonymity and distance to express hate to others. Moreover, hate can be spread and shared easily, for example, via comments or re-posts, taking a life of their own beyond the original post. The effects can be devastating on the intended target of hate speech but also affect society as a whole.[1]

A BASIC DEFINITION OF NARRATIVE

Narrative in the English language comes from the Latin "narratio" or "narrationis" as is also the case for other Latin-influenced languages such as Spanish "narrativa" or Romanian "narativ". Narrative appears in these language dictionaries as a rather formal term for a story or to refer to literary genres such as novels or prose. To narrate is to tell a story, to give an account of events or experiences, whether true or fictional.

Both terms, narrative and story, are used interchangeably when they share the same general meaning: developing a narrative or telling a story implies creating characters and a plot. This means creating the people and the roles they will play in the story as well as the sequence of events or actions. Narratives often combine real and fictional elements so that they resonate as plausible, interesting and convincing. For example, it is usual in children's books for stories to have two main characters: a princess and a prince. The typical plot is that the princess is kidnapped and a prince rescues her, they marry and live happily ever after.

Stories often relate to predominant understandings and ideas present in society about how reality should work, and about what is considered possible and normal. For example, stories of princes and the princesses relate to the "bigger stories" or narratives of gender and power relations in society. A story of a princess presented as weak and helpless saved by a prince portrayed as strong and wise reinforces a narrative of unequal gender relations, strengthening a certain social expectation of gender roles. This is not always the case, however; other traditional stories show female characters as strong and they relate to the prince in a different way. There can be many stories with the same underlying narrative. At the same time, there can be many stories with different narratives, by altering the characters, the plot and the context.

A FAIRY TALE

Aurora is a beautiful young princess who lives in a castle. A witch curses her so that she will one day prick her finger on a spindle of a spinning wheel and sleep for many years. When she is 16 she pricks her finger on a spindle and falls asleep. After 100 years, a brave prince finds her, falls in love with her and kisses her, breaking the spell. They marry and live happily ever after.

Narratives

Narratives related to gender: princesses are rescued by brave princes. Women and men marry and live happily ever after.

Narratives related to political organisation: countries are ruled by wise and noble kings and queens who inherit power from their parents (monarchy).

A narrative is a logical, internally coherent report and interpretation of connected events or pieces of information that makes sense to the reader / listener. In the example of the prince and the princess, there are two levels of interpretation of what happened. One is that the prince is brave and saved the princess. But there is a bigger story and interpretation of gender relations within the story. A "small" story or fairy tale contains and conveys a value system, that is, ideas of what is considered good and normal behaviour.

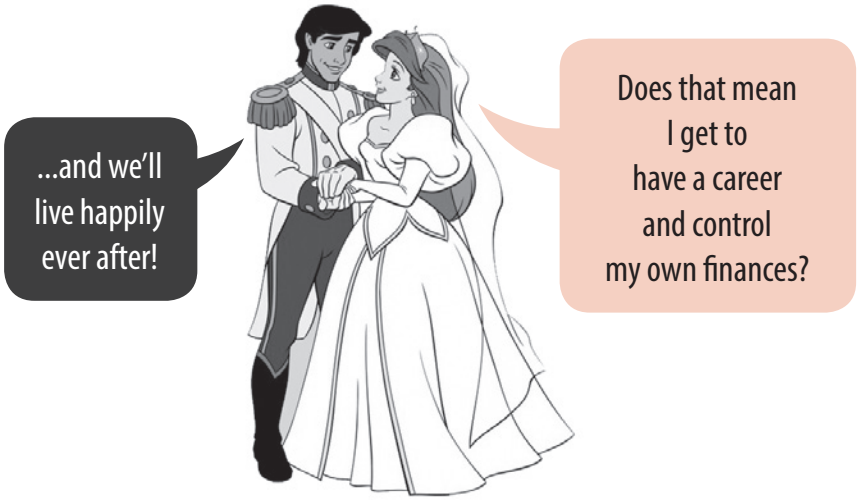
The problem arises when all "small" stories tell the same "big" story and this is presented as the only narrative. For example, in many contexts unmarried women or same-sex couples suffer discrimination as they do not conform to the dominant understandings of how gender roles and relations should be. When one narrative is presented as the only right or normal one, denying alternatives or, in extreme cases, inciting violence against anyone who questions it, the fundamentals of a pluralistic and diverse society are at stake, starting with the right to freedom of thought, freedom of religion and belief, and so on. The problem becomes more serious in the case of violent and extremist narratives, including hate speech.

- What are the terms used in your language to refer to hate speech, narratives or stories?
- What do they mean?
- Are they different from or similar to the basic definitions offered here?

A BASIC DEFINITION OF COUNTER AND ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES

Speaking of counter and alternative narratives only makes sense in relation to what they are countering or being an alternative to. This manual focuses on narratives, which counter and propose alternatives to hate speech and the violence and discrimination it seeks to propagate, justify or disseminate.

Counter and alternative narratives combat hate speech by discrediting and deconstructing the narratives on which they are based. They also propose (alternative) narratives based on human rights and democratic values, such as openness, respect for difference, freedom and equality. They may do so by providing alternative and accurate information, by using humour and appealing to emotions on the issues involved, and by accounting for different perspectives and views. For example, an alternative narrative to prevailing narratives of gender inequality using humour can be found in the picture below where the princess character expresses she is confident and empowered to demand equality in the access to opportunities and resources.



Based on a meme by The Social Cinema[2]

The term 'counter narratives' is often used in short especially within work against violent extremism and terrorism, and emphasises the need to de-construct and weaken violent narratives that may seem attractive, especially to young people. The use of the term 'alternative narratives' stresses the importance of putting forward different accounts, and emphasises positive alternatives that are not just the negative image of the narratives they seek to counter and do not reinforce or accredit them by focussing on them.

The division between the two terms is often blurred in practice as a counter narrative presupposes or implicitly refers to an alternative narrative. In this manual both terms are used, counter and alternative narratives or one of them in short, depending on the emphasis. However, the manual departs from the idea that it is not enough to oppose, denounce and deconstruct a violent narrative. It is important to propose, develop and disseminate non-exclusionary human rights based alternative narratives.

This manual, as with the No Hate Speech Movement campaign, makes a conscious choice for a human rights-based approach. Any counter or alternative narrative should be based on two central ideas:

- Human rights are the basis of narratives combating hate speech.
- Human rights-based narratives play an important role in emancipatory and transformative strategies for young people, even more so for those who have been direct targets, or agents of hate speech.

- In what contexts did you first hear of narratives, counter and alternative narratives?
- What are common important narratives in your context?
- What do they tell you about power relations in your social context?

1.2 | THE NEED FOR THIS MANUAL

This manual was created with the convergence of several paths: firstly, the needs and experiences of the No Hate Speech Movement campaign to respond to hate speech; secondly, the current challenges posed to a culture of democracy and human rights and the efforts to address them; thirdly, the need to find appropriate tools to respond to violent extremism and terrorism, especially online, yet building on past experiences. This has obviously impacted on the manual's objectives and the approaches it advocates for.

TAKING STOCK OF THE NO HATE SPEECH MOVEMENT CAMPAIGN

Participants and organisers of the No Hate Speech Movement campaign engaged in an evaluation process and reflected on the methods and impacts of the campaign (2013-2015). One of the reflections was that campaigners had often focused on addressing the causes and general motivations of hate speech. For example, they combated hate speech through human rights education and awareness raising. They also focused on the medium of hate speech, for example, removing or reporting hateful content. Finally, they engaged the subject / sender of hate speech, for example, by starting judicial actions or discrediting anonymity.

However, fewer actions had focused on the content of hate speech. Counter narratives therefore seemed particularly useful and necessary for addressing and neutralising the text or content of the hateful messages. Hateful content would be neutralised by the emergence and development of other stories and interpretations of reality besides the one presented.

These reflections were taken into consideration when planning the Campaign's second phase. The strategy adopted by the Joint Council on Youth for the Campaign in the period 2015-2017 called for complementing existing reporting and educational tools with the use of counter narratives. An easy-to-use online tool should help campaigners to use counter and alternative narratives to respond more effectively to hate speech.

In February 2016, in response to these expectations, a group of experts reviewed the opportunities and challenges of developing this manual and using counter narratives as a strategic tool in the Campaign. The group, composed of youth and human rights workers, educators, academics and media experts, proposed the parameters, guidelines and identified the main contents of this manual. The manual was drafted collectively by group members who embellished its texts with examples of practices from national campaigns and partners.

The reflections on the Campaign's impact and follow-up took place in a context where Europe faced important challenges: the impact of austerity measures, the consequences of terrorist attacks and the increase of xenophobia and Islamophobia, to name a few. The complexities of the issues at stake and the questions arising from them are daunting for all, for political leaders, educators and young people feeling the need to address these questions. Answers are neither simple nor easy, and should not be avoided for that reason. Current challenges should be approached as opportunities for reflection and constructive action.

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S MISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

At an institutional level, there has been a reinvigorated effort to promote and safeguard human rights values with the European Convention of Human Rights. New human rights standards such as those of the Istanbul Convention[3] (preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence) and the Lanzarote Convention[4] (protecting children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse) are evidence of a shared consensus among the 47 member states to extend and improve human rights for all.

These achievements are put into question by the terrorist attacks on European cities, which have directly impacted on thousands of victims. The Council of Europe has responded with an action plan that seeks to preserve human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the fight against terrorism in measures to prevent it, notably through the Action Plan on the Fight Against Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism (2015-2017)[5], adopted by the Committee of Ministers in May 2015. One of its main objectives is the prevention and fight of violent radicalisation through educational and social measures. The Action Plan highlights the importance of education and youth work:

> *Action is needed to prevent violent radicalisation and increase the capacity of our societies to reject all forms of extremism. Formal and informal education, youth activities and training of key actors (including in the media, political fields and social sectors) have a crucial role in this respect.*

The Action Plan specifically mentions the need to provide counter narratives for the misuse of religion and the importance of reclaiming online media space as a place for civic engagement and democratic citizenship:

> *A clearer understanding is required of the way social media and internet are used as a vehicle for radicalisation and greater emphasis must be placed on both preventing the spread of extremist views and the recruitment of terrorist fighters through new communication networks. An important part of the response will be to develop a convincing counter-narrative, drawing on grassroots initiatives, spread through the same communication networks.*

The Action Plan includes the extension and enhancement of the No Hate Speech Movement (2015-2017) providing:

> *practical tools to national authorities wishing to train educators, youth and social workers and law enforcement staff, and in the production and wide dissemination of distribution items to children, young people, parents, and other adults through schools, universities, youth clubs and youth organisations.*

The development of this manual is part of this plan of action. It follows the long-standing commitment of the Council of Europe's youth sector to provide practical tools firmly based on a human rights framework to address all forms of hate speech, intolerance and discrimination. This follows in the footsteps of the All Different – All Equal youth campaigns against racism, antisemitism, xenophobia and intolerance and on the achievements of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme, notably the Compass and Compasito manuals.

NEW TOOLS, YET BUILDING ON PAST EXPERIENCES

Though the term 'counter narrative' has become more known in the context of the work against radicalisation and violent extremism, using narratives, which aim to prevent violence and oppression, has a long-standing tradition in several disciplines and professional fields. For example, counter narratives as a method has been used in social work, psychology, political science, mediation and journalism. Peace scholar Johan Galtung (1996) coined the term 'cultural violence' to explain how any aspect of a culture or idea, such as stories, songs or language, can be used to legitimise direct or structural violence understood as structures that cause and perpetuate injustice.

Historically, oppression and injustice have been challenged discursively by appealing to common ideals of respect for human dignity as evidenced in the history of human rights movements. Narratives have been used by many organisations and social movements working to counter negative stereotypes and ideas that incite or legitimate violence. One example is the Anti-Defamation League, founded in 1913 in the US "to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all". A second example is the work of the Anne Frank Foundation in Amsterdam. It has pioneered the use of narratives in its educational programmes since 1957. Anne Frank's story and her book 'The Diary of a Young Girl' has been inspirational for many and widely used as an educational resource. More recently, in 2016 the Radicalisation Awareness Network[6] produced counter narratives to radicalisation and extremism in the form of, among other ways, video stories.[7]

This manual builds on these experiences and contributes to the development of the use of counter and alternative narratives with an explicit and central human rights education dimension.

- What do you need to learn to address hate speech in your context?
- What do the young people that you work with need (to learn) to take action?

1.3 | USING NARRATIVES TO ADDRESS HATE SPEECH

HATE SPEECH IS BASED ON PREJUDICE AND NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

Prejudicial views are very difficult to change; the power of prejudice usually resists the test of reality as exemplified by countless conspiracy theories. For deniers of the presence of man on the moon, pictures of Neil Armstrong stepping on the moon could have been fabricated as there is no picture of the person taking the picture. Yet, prejudice cannot be fought with prejudice; it needs to be countered or balanced by facts and strategies which invite and motivate people to see other facets of the same reality and, hopefully, to interpret them otherwise.

NARRATIVES REPRODUCE PREJUDICE AND STEREOTYPES

We often assume and believe that stories are true, especially if they seem credible and come from people we trust or people who are entrusted with political, social, economic or cultural forms of power. Many people seem to know someone who knows someone who met someone else who cheated to get social benefits. Even if statistics provide evidence that such fraudulent behaviour is irrelevant for the sustainability of social security, some people will continue believing that it is poor people or immigrants who put social welfare systems at risk.

NARRATIVES ARE POWERFUL ONLINE

Narratives shape the way we think and understand the world; they obviously also circulate and proliferate online. Commonly, narratives online take a new life because comments can be made anonymously and under the assumption of impunity. They are influential because of their outreach and mobility across multiple platforms and online spaces. They are powerful as they contribute to defining what is perceived as normal and socially acceptable, for example, in the forms of jokes or videos shared when socialising online. Young people are easily influenced online due to peer pressure and over-exposure and reliance on online socialisation and communication tools. The impact of this is amplified if they are not Internet literate or media-aware. Without mediation, online narratives can seem credible and, in any case, impact young people's perception of the world, even if they seem exaggerated or artificial.

Narratives are also used to justify and incite to violence. Extremist propaganda uses narratives based on violent and exclusionary ideologies by presenting polarised views of the world ("them" against "us") and appealing to feelings of fear, anger and resentment. Extremists use personalised tactics, which take young people's needs and emotions into consideration. Communication online is made to be felt as direct and friendly, creating a sense of belonging and being part of something bigger and heroic. Research shows that negative stereotypes and extremist narratives contribute greatly to making violence acceptable and precipitating violent behaviour. Violent behaviour cannot be explained only by the presence of a hateful narrative but it is an important factor.

NARRATIVES PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS ONLINE

Narratives promoting human rights have also occupied online space. Individuals and communities of activists use the Internet to spread and develop narratives of hope and human rights. Multiple examples of inspirational emancipatory narratives can be found in recent history such as the online campaign HeforShe[8] about gender equality or the No Hate Speech Movement, of which this manual is a part. In both cases, through online actions young people promote narratives based on human rights and democratic values of respect for difference, freedom and equality.

IS IT ALL ABOUT LOVE AND JUSTICE?

The attraction of hate speech narratives is also that they are often based on ideals of love and justice: love for the nation, for the family, for God. Standing up against the majority and the almighty powerful and self-righteous people, whether they are state authorities, media, or intellectual elites, is attractive because it feels just, and justice is about undoing wrongs. The stories and myths of Robin Hood, Aladdin, or Zorro are archetypes of bravery, justice, and protecting the oppressed against the powerful or against the majority. Hate speech narratives cling to these feelings and ideals: the need to protect "our" women from invasive foreigners, to defend "our" traditions against cultural globalisation or to make justice for the innocent victims of a drone attack.

The thirst for love and justice can be appeased with similar stories of love and justice, which do not involve hate speech and violence. They may not necessarily appeal to the same people but they are nonetheless crucial to securing alternative views of life and the world.

1.4 | OBJECTIVES OF THE MANUAL

This manual supports the goals of the Council of Europe youth policy: to provide young people with equal opportunities and experience which enable them to develop the knowledge, skills and competences to play a full part in all aspects of society, including the opportunity of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. In this sense, this manual aims to put young people, and those working with them in the driving seat of social action.

The manual complements Bookmarks as a resource to combat hate speech through human rights education and aims to contribute to the overall objective of the No Hate Speech Movement campaign of mobilising national and European partners to prevent and counter hate speech and intolerance, online and offline.

In this context, the main objective of this manual is to strengthen responses to hate speech, by countering, neutralising and preventing hate speech and occupying the online media space with positive narratives and examples of civil courage. This general objective can also be stated in the following specific objectives:

- To improve and scale up actions against hate speech using counter and alternative narratives as a tool
- To occupy the online space with alternative human rights-based narratives
- To stimulate analysis of the role of narratives both in contributing to the spread of hate speech and in strengthening human rights initiatives in the online space
- To share good practices of the use of counter and alternative narratives, especially from European contexts, and adopting a human rights education approach and involving young people.

This manual does not provide ready-made counter and alternative narratives to hate speech for obvious reasons: online hate speech has many instances and any response has to take into account several factors, including text and context and, of course, the language. This would not only be unfeasible in practice but also undesirable: human rights and campaign activists need to have autonomy and self-confidence to develop their own counter narratives, not necessarily to reproduce somebody else's – even if they are from the Council of Europe.