



The crucial role of motive

Recognise prejudices behind hate-motivated acts

To the reader

No one should have to fear being discriminated against or being the target of harassment or violence. Nevertheless, hate-motivated acts are a reality in Finland.

No precise data is available on the extent of the phenomenon, as only a fraction of hate-motivated acts come to the knowledge of the authorities. According to studies, many victims of hate crime choose not to report the offence to the police. Reasons for this include a distrust of the authorities, fear of inappropriate treatment and the belief that reporting the offence will not change anything. If the target does not consider the act an offence, it is even less likely that they will report it.

The victims of hate-motivated acts are not chosen at random but based on their individual or presumed characteristic. The motive for the act is crucial. Just like hate crime and hate speech, hate acts are motivated by hate but it is unclear whether the acts fulfil the constituent elements of an offence.

Hate-motivated acts and hate crime can occur anywhere – on the street, at hobbies, at work, online or at school. Hate-motivated acts lead to an increased sense of fear and insecurity. They also erode confidence in the authorities.

All authorities, employers and education providers must react to discrimination and hate-motivated acts and promote equality. It is important to identify attitudes and phenomena that cause discrimination so that they can be addressed in time. Early intervention protects individuals, communities and society at large.

This publication offers support to anyone who in their work meets victims of hate-motivated acts or hate crimes or people at risk of being targeted by hate-motivated acts.

Key concepts

Hate-motivated act

A hate-motivated act is a hurtful and harmful act motivated by prejudice or hostility towards the victim's real or perceived ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, gender identity or disability. Examples of hate-motivated acts include inappropriate, insulting or disparaging speech or threats, vandalism against property or obstruction of events.

Hate-motivated act

Hate crime

Hate speech

A hate-motivated act does not necessarily constitute an offence but is in itself harmful, because it affects a person's sense of security and mental wellbeing, for example. If the act fulfils the constituent elements of an offence, it is referred to as a hate crime.

Insulting comments on social media platforms concerning people of colour, foreign-born people, LGBTIQ+ people, disabled people, religious or linguistic minorities or other groups and individuals are typical examples of hate-motivated acts.

Read more about concepts related to this theme:

[Hurtful words, destructive deeds – A guide to action against hate acts locally \(MoJ 2021\)](#)

[An Equal Finland: Government Action Plan for Combating Racism and Promoting Good Relations between Population Groups \(MoJ 2021\)](#)

Hate-motivated acts motivated by prejudices or hostility towards

- Perceived or real ethnic or national background
- Religious belief or worldview
- Sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or gender expression
- Disability

Hate speech

Hate speech is communication that spreads or incites hatred against one person or a population group. In addition to speech, it may come across as gestures, writing, images, symbols, music, drawings and video.

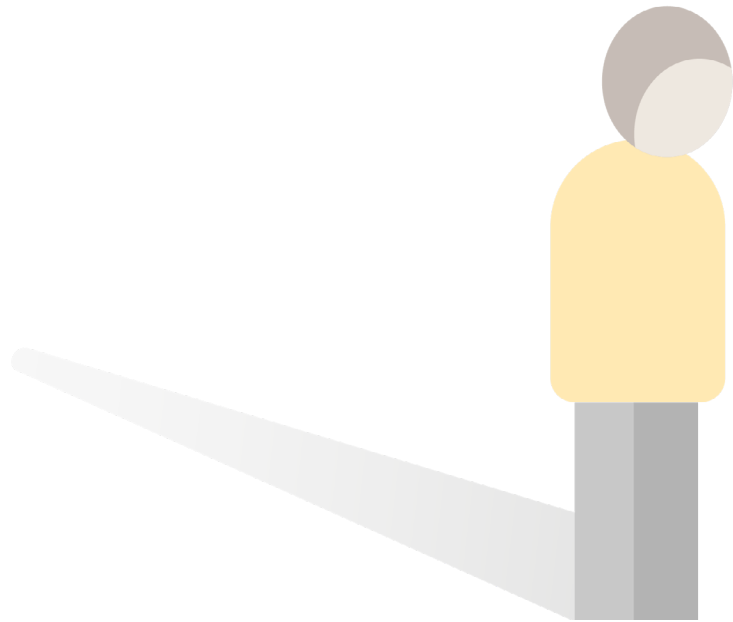
Some hate speech is punishable. Working at different stages of the process, the police, prosecutor and judge assess whether the acts constitute an offence.

Hate speech may also be discrimination prohibited by the Non-Discrimination Act or the Equality Act.



The following may be signs of hate speech:

- Using expressions that threaten, insult or slander a population group.
- Approving violence or discrimination against a population group.
- Comparing people to animals or parasites.
- Creating a disparaging, intimidating, threatening, hostile or aggressive atmosphere based on prohibited grounds of discrimination such as sexual orientation or disability.



Hate crime

Any act constituting an offence under Finnish legislation, such as assault, unlawful threat, discrimination or criminal damage, can be a hate crime. The motive for the crime is the crucial factor. A hate crime is motivated by prejudice or hostility towards the victim's real or perceived ethnic or national origin, religion or worldview, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or disability. Hate as a motive may be considered an aggravating factor increasing the sentence.

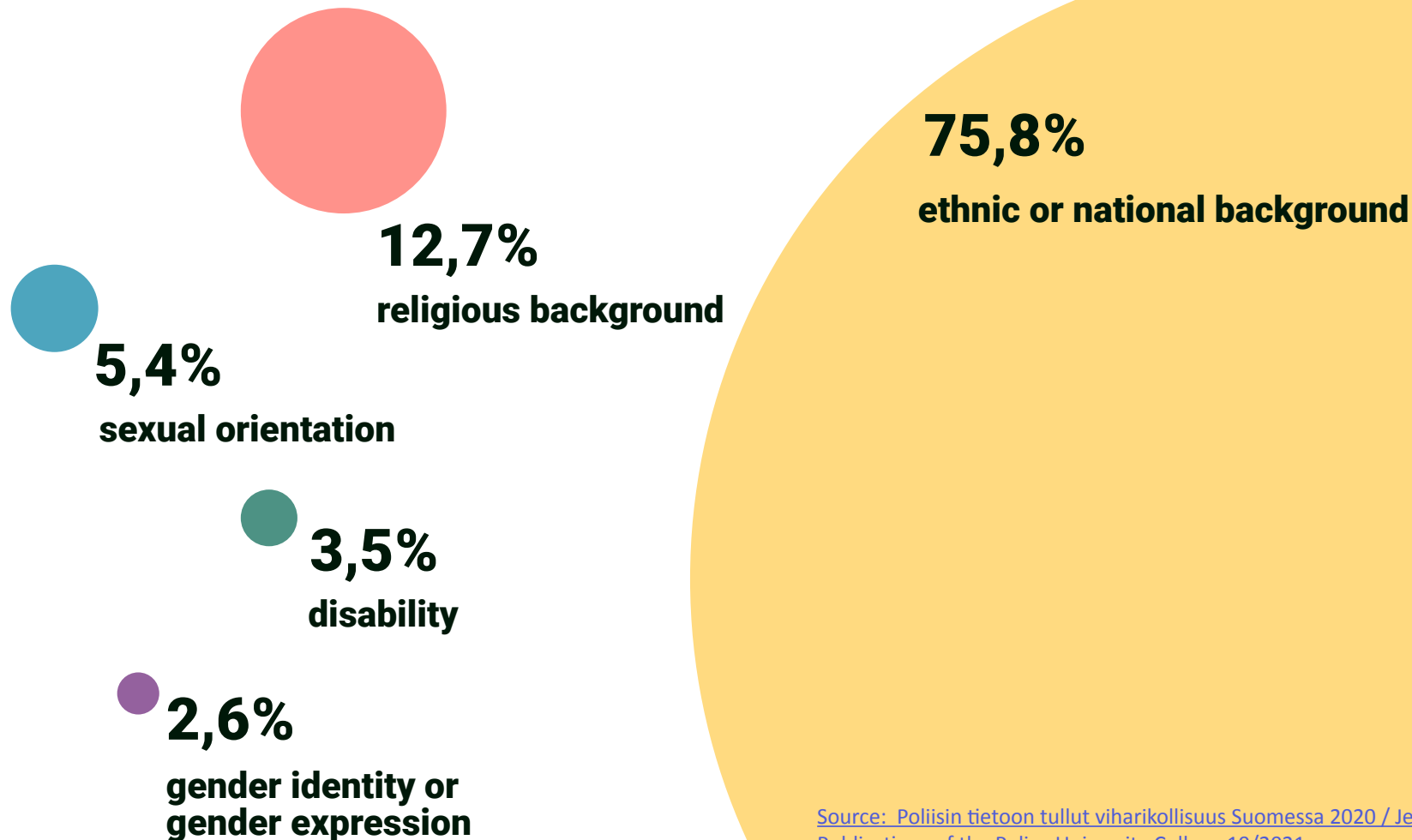
Examples of suspected hate crimes:

- The plaintiff was called insulting names because of their gender identity in a public Facebook group. The offender is suspected of defamation.
- Text urging white people to fight other ethnic groups had been scribbled on the school wall. The offender remains unknown, but the text suggests a link to a right-wing extremist group. The offender is suspected of incitement to hatred.
- The plaintiff received a death threat because of their conversion to Christianity. The offender is suspected of unlawful threatening.
- A neighbour punched the plaintiff in the face and told the plaintiff to leave Finland and return to their homeland. The offender is suspected of assault.

[Source: Poliisin tietoon tullut viharikollisuus Suomessa 2020 / Jenita Rauta Publications of the Police University College 19/2021](#)

Grounds of the hate motive

In 2020, the police recorded 852 criminal complaints concerning suspected hate crimes.



Identify a motive of hate

■ Factors related to the victim

Does the victim belong to a minority group?
Is the victim an active promoter of the rights of minorities?

■ The victim's understanding of the motive

Does the target or witness of the act suspect that the act was motivated by hate towards a specific group of people or towards a person's characteristics?

■ The offender's behaviour and communication

Did the offender make comments, publish writings or make gestures related to a hate motive?

■ Previous actions of the suspect

Has the offender previously committed similar acts or been suspected of such acts?

■ Nature of the act

Did the act involve disparaging treatment?
If property was involved, was it damaged with disparaging symbols, for example?

■ Building as the target

If the act targeted a building, did the building house an organisation maintained by a minority group or was it used for religious purposes? For example, is the property used as a club by a specific ethnic group or as the offices of an organisation defending the rights of LGBTIQ+ people?

■ Time and place of the act

Was the act committed on a day carrying special significance, such as a religious holiday, Sámi National Day, Pride week or the Transgender Day of Remembrance.

Statistics on general attitudes

Out of young people, discrimination is most commonly experienced by people who belong to more than one minority. **One out of six** of them had experienced discrimination from a service provider. (Youth Barometer 2020)

As many as **67 per cent** of those with an African background have experienced discrimination or harassment in education based on their skin colour. The results correspond to other Finnish studies concerning racism in the school environment, which repeatedly indicate that racism is very much present in Finnish schools. (Survey of the discrimination experienced by people from an African background, Non-Discrimination Ombudsman 2020)

40 per cent of LGBTI people have experienced harassment because of their identity in the past 12 months (A long way to go for LGBTI equality / Euroopan perusoikeusvirasto 2020)

60 per cent of people from an African background who are employed or have sought employment had experienced discrimination. The respondents had experienced discrimination by their employer, co-workers and customers, in both the private and the public sector. (Survey of the discrimination experienced by people from an African background, Non-Discrimination Ombudsman 2020)

29 per cent of disabled people have experienced disrespectful treatment. (Fundamental Rights Barometer 2021)

Nearly **40 per cent** of the foreign-born population had experienced discrimination in the past 12 months. Of those who reported discrimination, one in four experienced it at least once a week. (FinMonik 2018-2019)

Nearly **one in two** teenage girls has experienced harassment and unwanted sexual propositions. (School Health Promotion Study 2021)

Impacts of hate-motivated acts

Hate-motivated acts occur everywhere: on the streets and in parks, in social media channels and online discussion forums, at schools and workplaces, in cafés and restaurants and on public transport.

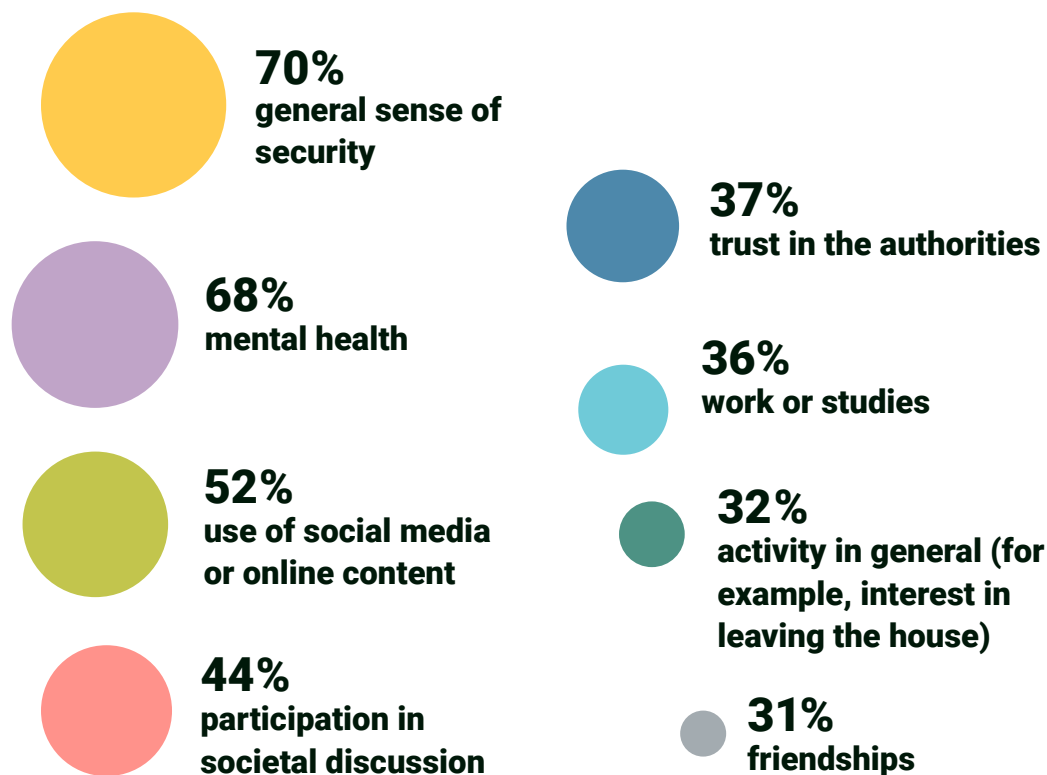
Hate crime and hate-motivated acts affect victims in various ways and often have long-term impacts. The negative impacts of hate-motivated acts do not target the individual alone but a larger group of people to which the victim belongs or is perceived to belong.

Among minorities, 64% say they avoid certain places out of fear of being harassed or being targeted by hate speech.

In a previous survey published in 2016, this figure was 56%.

Hate-motivated acts are particularly damaging because an individual act serves as a message to the entire group targeted by it. The victims of hate-motivated acts are not chosen at random but based on their individual or presumed characteristic. This adds to the victim's fear of ending up a victim repeatedly. Because of this, hate crime and hate speech have profound impacts. They affect the general sense of security, mental wellbeing and participation in societal discussion, for example.

Hate speech and harassment have had the strongest impact on individuals:



Source: "Että puututtaisiin konkreettisesti" Seurantaselvitys vihapuheesta ja häirinnästä ja niiden vaikutuksista eri vähemmistöryhmiin, MoJ 2022

Ways to address hate-motivated acts

It can sometimes be difficult to determine whether insulting and inappropriate behaviour constitutes a hate-motivated act or an offence. It is the duty of the authorities handling the criminal procedure to draw the line.

Working at different stages of the procedure, the police, prosecutor and judge assess whether the events constitute an offence. Every act of hatred must be taken seriously even if it does not fulfil the constituent elements of an offence. Hate-motivated acts are always harmful, and their impacts must be made visible. We must not become desensitised to hate-motivated acts. It is vitally important to confront such acts.

Promote equality

Influence attitudes

Reinforce the culture or intervention

What can you do?

- Clear procedures must be in place for addressing discrimination and harassment.
- Employees' and young people's awareness of diversity and respect for it must be increased and supported through equality planning.
- Equality planning must be emphasised in different organisations. Organisations should make themes related to equality part of their processes in order to identify the competence needs and further training of professional groups.
- People must be encouraged to intervene in discrimination, harassment and hate speech.

Reporting hate-motivated acts

- The most important thing is to tell someone about the incident.
- If you believe the act may constitute an offence, report it to the police. You can file a police report even if you do not know whether the act is an offence. It is important to mention the hate motive, because the court can increase the sentence in the case of a hate crime.
[Read more about filing a police report at https://poliisi.fi/en/report-a-crime](https://poliisi.fi/en/report-a-crime)
- [Victim Support Finland \(RIKU\)](#) offers support and guidance services to victims of crime and their families, as well as to people who suspect they may be victims of crime.
- [The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman](#) is a low-threshold legal protection body that provides help and guidance in cases involving discrimination prohibited in the Non-discrimination Act.
- [The Ombudsman for Equality](#) offers advice and instructions in discrimination cases related to gender, gender identity and gender expression.
- Other low-threshold support and guidance services also help in situations where the experienced hate-motivated act does not necessarily constitute a criminal offence. Such services are provided by helplines and occupational health care, for example.

It is important to report hate-motivated acts to help authorities understand the scope of the phenomenon.



30%

According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Justice, **30%** of those who had experienced harassment or hate speech reported it. Positive development has been seen in this respect: in the survey conducted in 2016, the figure was **21%**.



21%



MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
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