

# Hurtful words, destructive deeds

A guide to action against  
hate acts locally



**Author:** Johanna Korhonen

**Graphic design:** Inka Kosonen

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# Preface

A good society is one in which people can live in peace and be accepted as they are. In a good municipality, city, village or residential area, no one has to fear, hide, or be anxious about what will happen next.

Action is needed to create and maintain a good atmosphere. Negative phenomena and trends must be identified in order to address them in time. This guide is intended for local actors: municipalities, organisations and anyone who wants tools for identifying risks and preventing hate acts.

The background material for the guide is the report Phenomena and sources of information related to the prevention and identification of hate incidents, which has been prepared by a working group assigned by the Ministry of Justice. The working group worked as part of the Facts Against Hate project coordinated by the Ministry of Justice (1 December 2019–30 November 2021). The project aimed for more effective work against hate crimes and hate speech. Municipal representatives from Asikkala, Oulu, Lieksa, Vantaa and Vaasa have been consulted in planning the content of the guide.



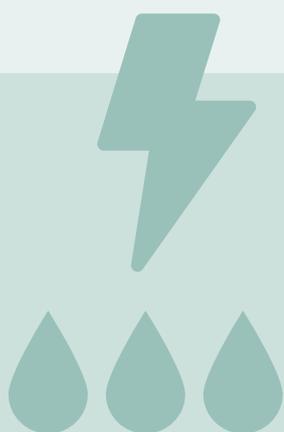
# Why must hate acts be taken seriously?

Recognition of hate acts is not always simple. What is the line between normal criticism and hate speech? How can the motives of the actor be assessed? When is an individual act a sign of a wider tension or a setting waiting to explode?

The scale of hate acts varies from small everyday deeds to hate crimes. This guide focuses on everyday life close to everyone: how to gather information about the situation at the local level and identify potential threats, how to organise work so that it is continuous and systematic, and how to monitor the results of the work.

Over time, a hostile atmosphere is likely to damage the activities of both individuals and society as a whole. It restricts the lives and opportunities of its subjects, damages health and paralyses people. At worst, a climate of hatred leads to constant fear and violent conflicts. Therefore, early and adequate intervention is always important. Lack of intervention and looking the other way allow more time and space for acts motivated by hatred.

Work against hate acts is an obligation of the authorities. In addition to civil servants and employees, it is important to include shop stewards, non-governmental organisations, residents, neighbours and family members. Everyone should look around in their work and tasks, train themselves to notice problematic developments and intervene in them.



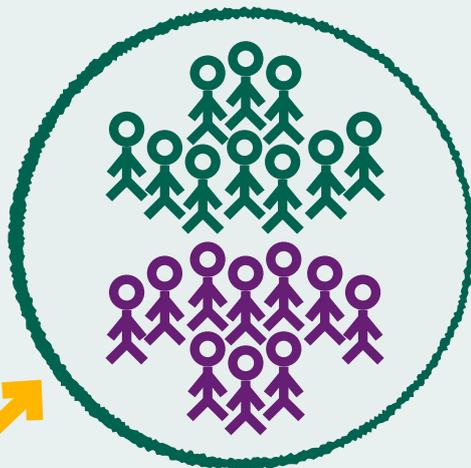
# From one act to a wide conflict – the effects of hate acts spread



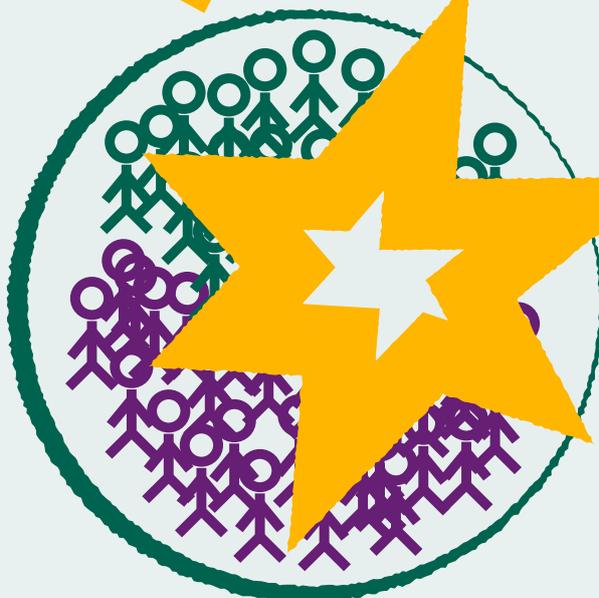
A person assaults another person.



As the persons belong to different reference groups, the event is framed as a conflict between the groups.



Discussion starts on social media on what happened. Increasing numbers of people participate, who do not have much information about the original case. Rumours and interpretations grow stronger. The new participants spice things up: in addition to or instead of what was originally happening, it was something quite different. The parties are strongly divided and disagree over everything.



The situation exacerbates, the atmosphere is very inflamed, the risk of wider violent conflicts increases.



# Glossary

**EQUALITY.** All persons are equal regardless of their gender, age, ethnic or national origin, nationality, language, religion or belief, opinion, disability, state of health, sexual orientation or any other personal characteristics. In the Constitution of Finland, the principle of equality refers both to the prohibition of discrimination and to equality of people before the law. The Non-discrimination Act contains provisions on promoting equality and preventing discrimination. The Act on Equality between Women and Men contains provisions on the prohibition of discrimination based on gender and the promotion of gender equality.

**PREJUDICE.** Often a subconscious understanding based on incorrect and inflexible generalisation. Prejudices may lead to degrading, discriminatory or hostile behaviour, attitudes or beliefs that target a group or individuals considered outsiders.

**HATE SPEECH.** Speech or writing motivated by prejudice or hostility towards the victim's presumed or actual ethnic or national background, religious belief or worldview, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression or, for example, disability.

Hate speech is communication that demeans its subject or aims to restrict the subject's rights. Its purpose is to put the subject at a disadvantage or to strengthen prejudices or negative attitudes towards the subject or their reference group. Hate speech is a crime when it fulfils the definition of a specific offence. It may also constitute discrimination under the Non-discrimination Act and Act on Equality between Women and Men. In practice, hate speech does not always meet the characteristics of a crime or it cannot be verified as illegal, but it may still be harmful.



**HATE ACT.** A deed causing damage or harm motivated by prejudice or hostility, for example, towards the subject's presumed or actual ethnic or national background, religious belief or worldview, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression or disability. In hate acts, the victim is not selected randomly, but because of their personal characteristics.

The most common hate act is insulting speech, hate speech. Hate acts may also include physical violence, vandalism, harassment or obstruction.

In practice, almost all hate acts do not fulfil the definition of a criminal offence laid down in the Criminal Code, but they may still be harmful. An individual deed acts as a message to the entire reference group to which the victim belongs or which the victim represents.

**HATE CRIME.** A deed defined as a crime in the Criminal Code, motivated by prejudice or hostility, for example towards the victim's presumed or actual ethnic or national background, religious belief or worldview, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or disability.

Any act defined as an offence in the Criminal Code may in principle constitute a hate crime if it is based on a motive of hate. Hate as a motive is grounds for increasing the punishment. A hate crime may affect a person, group, property, institution or their representatives.

**ONLINE TARGETING AND SHAMING.** Organised, planned activities in which a group of people target one person with threats or violations, usually using information technology (messages, e-mail, social media channels). For example, information about the subject's private life, or false or degrading information, can be disseminated.

The information may also be related to a person's work, public service or work in a position of trust. The broader goal of online targeting and shaming may also be to undermine trust in the structures and institutions of society.

**POLARISATION.** "Us against them." A situation in which people are strongly divided into two contrasting groups, and the groups have a negative attitude towards each other.

**DISCRIMINATION.** Placing a person at a disadvantage on the basis of one of the grounds for discrimination referred to in legislation. Both direct and indirect discrimination are prohibited by law. Indirect discrimination means that an act or standard seems neutral but, in fact and without an acceptable reason referred to in the law, leads to discrimination. Discrimination also includes sexual or other harassment, instructions or orders to discriminate and, for example, not making reasonable accommodation for the benefit of a person with disabilities that would enable equal treatment.

Violent radicalisation. A process in which individuals end up using violence or threatening to do so, encouraging or justifying violence by justifying their actions with their ideology or convictions.



# What is a hate act?

A hate act can in principle be any act motivated by prejudices or hostility to the background, reference group or personal characteristics of the subject.

A hate act may be directly aimed at the target, but may also be directed at another person or institution that is involved with the target in one way or another – for example, working for them or defending them in a debate. Thus, hate acts may be directed at, for example, an authority or an organisation representative or a person who participates in public debate.

Hate acts can target people for a variety of reasons.

## **GROUNDS FOR DISCRIMINATION**

**PROHIBITED BY LAW.** *Under the Non-discrimination Act, no one may be put in a position worse than another on the basis of age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, state of health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics.*

*Under the Act on Equality between Women and Men, no one may be put in a position worse than another based on gender, gender identity or gender expression, pregnancy, childbirth, parenthood or obligation to provide for a family. The act also prohibits indirect discrimination. Sexual or gender-based harassment and an order or instruction to discriminate are also prohibited.*



A hate act may be speech intended as inappropriate, insulting and degrading, or vandalism on the premises or property of a community. It can also be threats against individuals or groups, or harassment of events.

Hate acts related to gender, gender expression or gender identity can be, for example, misogyny, misandry, hatred against non-binary or transgender people, or aggression towards what a person looks like.

For example, a hate act related to disability can be hostile attitudes and inappropriate behaviour towards a housing service unit for disabled people planned for a neighbourhood. Hate acts related to political activity may include the destruction of an election advertisement or harassment of the domestic peace of a politician.

Often the purpose of hate acts is to raise fear and make the subject feel threatened. Hate acts affect not only the individual but also their group: their intent is to communicate that other people are threatened in addition to the target.

**OFFENSIVE DEBATE AND FALSE ALLEGATIONS AS HATE ACTS.**

*Contempt and/or incorrect claims on social media platforms, for example regarding people with a foreign background, LGBTI people, religious or linguistic minorities, or other groups or individuals, are typical hate acts.*

**HARASSMENT OF AN EVENT AS A HATE ACT.**

*The Pride week was celebrated in Oulu, and the city's youth services also participated in the events. During the Pride week, a group of people appeared in front of the youth service facilities in the mornings to sign religious hymns and pray. They also distributed the message "Jesus saves from homosexuality."*

*The activities could be interpreted as a hate act against an event of sexual and gender minorities. The activities also disrupted the youth services staff, who on several occasions had to ensure that the group left the premises used by young people before the young people using the premises would have to deal with the group.*

**OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE AS A HATE**

**ACT.** *In Asikkala, there was public debate about the new location of two specialised care units. The placement of units for disability and mental health rehabilitation near a school was opposed partly with inappropriate and offensive arguments. Since then, the situation has calmed down.*



**VANDALISM AS A HATE ACT.** *Swastikas and aggressive messages painted near refugee reception centres have been seen at several localities.*

**TARGETING AND SHAMING AN AUTHORITY AS A HATE ACT.** *Sexual harassment and exploitation of minors took place in Oulu, where asylum seekers were the perpetrators. As one of the city's many actions, the Safe Oulu project produced a video aimed at young people in 2019, which discussed the boundaries of their own body and the right to sexual self-determination. Some municipal politicians at the time targeted the video, produced a disparaging variant of it and began to spread a message in social media that Oulu does nothing to protect girls but a video of this kind. These municipal politicians also included other materials collected from the project webpages as targets of distortion and image manipulation. The theme spread rapidly to Finnish media, and materials translated into English were also distributed abroad.*

*The result was an extensive online shaming and targeting campaign against the employees who produced and appeared in the video. A large number of adults also gave hateful feedback to young people, some of whom tried to defend a named employee.*

*This was a political hate act: some politicians wanted to spread their own anti-immigration message, this time by attacking the city's officials and project workers.*

**CROWD PHENOMENA AS HATE ACTS.** *In Vantaa, five schoolchildren aged 12 to 13 assaulted an 11-year-old schoolchild in the yard. The assaulters shared a video of their actions on social media. The video spread quickly on social media, and the news media also got interested. Soon, the case was framed on social media as a conflict between ethnic groups. Large numbers of people participated in the discussion with inadequate information, based on rumours and assumptions. The principal became a target of hateful e-mails and targeting and shaming.*

**DISCRIMINATION AND INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR AS HATE ACTS.** *A survey was conducted in Vaasa to determine whether the residents felt that they had been discriminated against or treated inappropriately. It turned out that 20% of the respondents felt this way. Open-ended responses revealed, among other things, that health care had not in all cases succeeded in serving residents on an equal basis. For example, same-sex parents had experienced discrimination in the care of their child, as the non-biological parent had been ignored. Speakers of Finnish and Swedish and other languages had all experienced linguistic discrimination. Lack of language skills had led to treatment that appeared rude even in situations where this was not anyone's intention.*

# What is the difference between a hate act and a hate crime?

It is not always easy to draw a line between many types of bad behaviour, hate acts and hate crime. Clumsy language use or an unsuccessful choice of words can hurt even if the speaker had good intent. On the other hand, criticism presented appropriately can also be perceived as offensive. Indeed, an act cannot be defined on the basis of the reactions it causes, but rather on the basis of the act itself and its motive.

Hate crime is an act defined as a criminal offence in the Criminal Code. Crime motivated by hate can be speech or writing, but also violence, vandalism or any other activity that fulfils the definition of a crime.

Acts ruled as hate crimes are hate acts, but far from all hate acts are hate crimes. Crimes do not, for example, include bad behaviour or acts that do not fulfil the criteria of any crime. However, these acts are also damaging.

The processing of hate crimes falls to the police and the judiciary. All persons and entities involved are responsible for dealing with other hate acts. The promotion of equality is a statutory task for the authorities. In unclear cases, one should always contact the police.

## **A REFUGEE RECEPTION CENTRE SUFFERED FROM HATE CRIMES AND ACTS.**

*A reception centre was established in Asikkala in 2015. Some of the residents welcomed the centre, some opposed. In a small municipality, the largish reception centre was a prominent case.*

*The atmosphere tensed up: there was vandalism of the reception centre and, among other things, the outdoor stairs used by the residents were broken down. Someone tried to set the reception centre on fire, and asylum seekers and those who worked for them were threatened. Outdoor aggressions towards “foreign-looking” people occurred to the extent that the parents of brown-skinned Asikkala children were concerned about the safety of their children on their way to school.*

*The events included hate crimes and other hate acts. Vandalism, attempted arson, threats and other crimes were dealt with legally. Some of the other hate acts were discussed, but some were left to gnaw on the social relations of the community for a longer time.*



# What is allowed to be spoken?

The most common hate act is insulting speech, hate speech. Where are the boundaries – what may one say or write in Finland?

According to the constitution, “Everyone has the freedom of expression. Freedom of expression entails the right to express, disseminate and receive information, opinions and other communications without prior prevention by anyone.”

According to the law, everyone can disseminate their messages “without prior prevention by anyone”, but at the same time the use of freedom of expression includes the responsibility for the content of the messages.

Hate speech is a crime when it fulfils the definition of a specific offence. “Verbal” crimes include, for example, incitement to hatred, defamation or illegal threats.

Hate speech may also include discrimination prohibited by the Non-Discrimination Act or the Equality Act. It has its own legal consequences.

Most hate speech does not fulfil the characteristics of an offence and will never be dealt with in a court of law. In general speech, (non-criminal) hate speech refers to harmful expression that negatively affects people’s well-being and sense of security and relationships between groups of people. In this case, hate speech refers to communication that aims to exclude a group and create a picture of people in the group as being suspicious, unreliable, inferior or inhuman.

Even where hate speech does not fulfil the definition of a crime, it can still be very harmful. In the fight against hate acts at the local level, it is not always necessary to focus primarily on whether some offensive expression exceeds the criminal threshold – such an assessment is the task of the police and the judiciary. All speech that defames other people is harmful, and attempts must be made to influence it.

Combating hate speech against people does not mean, for example, that there is no right to discuss different kinds of problems. Debate on matters – including difficult and controversial ones – is necessary, acceptable and needed in a democratic society. However, this debate must take place with respect for the dignity and rights of everyone and on the basis of facts.



# What kind of actions are not hate acts?

Not all acts that appear to be hate acts at a glance are hate acts as referred to in this guide. For example, the fact that the doer is angry does not yet constitute a hate act. Expressing anger, irritation, rage or other negative feelings in connection with an act does not make it a hate act.

Critical and factual assessment or commenting on a person's activities – be it targeted at anyone's activities – is not in itself a hate act.

The key assessment criterion is the motive of the perpetrator: if the act does not involve prejudice or hostility on the grounds referred to in the law (such as nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion, conviction, political activity, family relations, disability, sexual orientation, gender or gender expression, other personal reason), it is not a hate act.



# Why do people do acts of hate?

Why do some people start building hostile settings and expressing their negative feelings toward people they think are “others”?

Researcher Erwin Staub has investigated the factors behind group conflicts that become violent. Society is constantly changing. Changes and crises affect different people in different ways. The deterioration of living conditions – or the fear that this will happen – not only affects livelihoods but also has extensive psychological, social and cultural effects.

When a person’s situation deteriorates and they have to tolerate uncertainty in their own life or in society more extensively, they will start looking for an explanation for what has happened. The basic psychological mechanisms, based on which people organise the world, provide the simplest structure for explaining crisis times.

These basic models include the tendency to perceive reality on the basis of a “Us vs. the others” setting and to prioritise us over the “others”. It is tempting to interpret one’s own setbacks as being caused by external factors, while the potential poor position of “others” is their own fault.

Naming the person guilty, or scapegoat thinking, also produces an easy explanation model for problem situations. According to Erwin Staub, the identification of a scapegoat creates psychological order for humans and strengthens the sense of security undermined by a crisis or change.

## IDENTIFYING ROOT CAUSES IS IMPORTANT.

*The reasons for hate acts have been considered in the Vaasa security cooperation group and the overall security work of the Regional State Administrative Agency for Western and Inland Finland. One of them is experience of lack of participation or injustice: for example, if a person feels that applying for different types of subsidies or other official services is difficult or unsuccessful, they may feel bitter when they hear that those who come from abroad get help in the same matters.*

*Bitterness can be expressed as hostile speech about how others “can easily get everything readymade for them, while the Finnish poor people are told to go online to fill in the forms themselves”. Not everyone knows or is able, for various reasons, to apply for subsidies to which they would be entitled under the law, whereby authorities estimate that subsidies are left completely unapplied for. At worst, bitterness arising from one’s own bad experiences, combined with false information and misinterpretations, is a fuel for many types of hate acts.*



# Individual acts with broader background

## Background factors

concern  
non-participation  
about the future  
offensive speech  
uncertainty  
prejudices  
fear of change  
tensions  
rumours and misinformation  
stereotypes  
lack of connections  
stigmatising



**Acts**



**Consequences**

fear  
insecurity  
group-forming  
concern about the future  
protection  
aggression  
new dividing lines  
isolation  
anxiety  
defence

*A hate act is done by an individual or a small group, but there is always a bigger picture in the background. The impacts are also often more widespread than their immediate target.*

852

**DURING THE YEAR, THE POLICE RECORDED 852 REPORTS OF SUSPECTED HATE CRIMES.** In most of the reports, the motive for hatred was related to the victim's ethnic or national background. Religious background was involved in slightly less than 13% of the cases, sexual orientation in less than 5.4% of the cases and disability in 3.5% of the cases. (Hate crimes reported to the police in Finland 2020)

41 %

**41% OF MEN AND 37% OF WOMEN OF FOREIGN BACKGROUND HAD EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION DURING THE PRECEDING YEAR.** (FinMonik 2018–2019)

1/3

**ALMOST ONE THIRD OF ELDERLY LGBT PEOPLE HAD LEFT SOCIAL WELFARE AND HEALTH CARE SERVICES UNUSED ONCE OR MORE BECAUSE OF INAPPROPRIATE TREATMENT** or fear of discrimination (Jalava 2013).

1/3

**ONE THIRD OF MUNICIPAL DECISION-MAKERS HAVE BEEN SUBJECT TO HATE SPEECH DUE TO THEIR WORK.** Two-thirds of decision-makers estimate that hate speech has increased in recent years. 28 percent of municipal decision-makers who had experienced hate speech reported that their inclination to participate in decision-making had decreased. (Viha vallassa [Impact of hate speech on public decision-making], Government 2019)

+ - 0

**THE LANGUAGE ATMOSPHERE BETWEEN FINNISH AND SWEDISH SPEAKERS HAS NOT BECOME WORSE IN THE 2016–2020 PERIOD, BUT IT HAS NOT IMPROVED, EITHER.** (Language Barometer 2020)

60–70 %

**60%–70% OF THE INHABITANTS OF LOCALITIES WITH RECEPTION CENTRES NAME ETHNIC GROUPS THAT THEY WOULD NOT LIKE TO BE NEIGHBOURS OF,** which reveals strong prejudices. (How are we doing? Ministry of Justice 2017)

**35 %**

**ONLY 35 PERCENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED HATE SPEECH OR HARASSMENT REPORTED THEIR EXPERIENCES TO SOMEONE.**

(“I often find myself thinking how I should be or where I shouldn’t go”, Ministry of Justice 2016)

**17 %**

**17% OF THE ENTIRE POPULATION SAY THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED DISRESPECTFUL TREATMENT.**

29% of people with disabilities have experienced this. (Fundamental Rights Barometer 2021)

**1/20**

**ONE IN TWENTY UPPER COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL PUPILS EXPERIENCES BULLYING EVERY WEEK.**

(School Health Promotion Survey 2021)

**50 %**

**ALMOST ONE IN TWO FEMALE TEENAGERS HAS EXPERIENCED HARASSMENT AND HARASSING SEXUAL SUGGESTIONS.**

(School Health Promotion Survey 2021)

**27 %**

**BELONGING TO A MINORITY EXPOSES WOMEN IN PARTICULAR TO HATE SPEECH.**

27% of women who define themselves as members of a minority have experienced hate speech, compared to 14% of other women. Nine percent of minority men and seven percent of other men have experienced hate speech. (Fundamental Rights Barometer 2017)

**>**

**ARABIC-SPEAKING MEN HAVE MORE EXPERIENCE OF HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE THAN OTHERS.**

(Fundamental Rights Barometer 2021)

# What can we do to prevent hate acts?

People living in society perceive themselves and each other through different groups. The identity of each individual is typically a combination of a variety of things: for example, a person can identify as a Jyväskylä resident, a man, a father, a member of a religion, a health care professional, an active recreational group member and a member of an ethnic minority group.

When members of society look at each other from further apart, group identities are emphasised. When we do not know each other as individuals, we are sensitive to viewing one another as representatives of a group.

Good relations between different population groups are a factor that influences societal activities and trust between people, through which the activities that influence nearly all people's daily lives can be examined. The background for work to promote good relations between different population groups is the British model, according to which good relations consist of participation, interaction, safety and attitudes. Shortcomings in these areas may be reflected in poor demographic relations. Interaction creates inclusion and thus security, and these factors create positive attitudes.

Combating hate acts at a local level involves promoting security and equality, supporting positive interaction and supporting the participation of different population groups.



# How is work organised?

Work aimed at preventing hate acts at a local level should be incorporated into existing structures. The responsible authority and, at the same time, the most natural coordinator at the local level is the municipality, but the party organising the cooperation may also be, for example, a non-governmental organisation.

In a municipality, work against hate acts may, for example, be part of security or equality planning. There are also connections with welfare reports submitted to the municipal council and to the municipality's vitality work.

A feasible framework for the work is the national guidelines for security planning report, based on a government resolution (Ministry of the Interior 2019). One of the elements of the document concerns the development of demographic relations.

The municipality can organise work in many different ways. When planning the work, it

is important to invite those familiar with the topic from outside the planning organisation, as well. Local organisations, representatives of religious communities or individual experts bring valuable expertise to the whole.

A link with the local police – organised in one way or another – is an important part of the work to prevent hate acts.

From municipal actors, expertise of several sectors should be invited to join the work. In addition to teaching and education, social services and youth work, it should be remembered that land use and land use planning as well as the administration of public spaces play an important role in planning and maintaining the safety of municipal residents.

Municipal decision-makers and office-holding management should commit to work against hate acts at all stages. A body with the overall responsibility may be a municipal executive board that reports on the situation and its development to the council. Based on the discussion, the council may make the necessary decisions on, for example, allocating resources.



# Safety and equality planning as tools

The aim of municipal safety planning is to reduce the number of crimes, disturbances and accidents and the resulting damage. A further aim is to maintain safety and a sense of security.

The *national guidelines for security planning* report, based on a government resolution, also contains indicators that help monitor the situation.

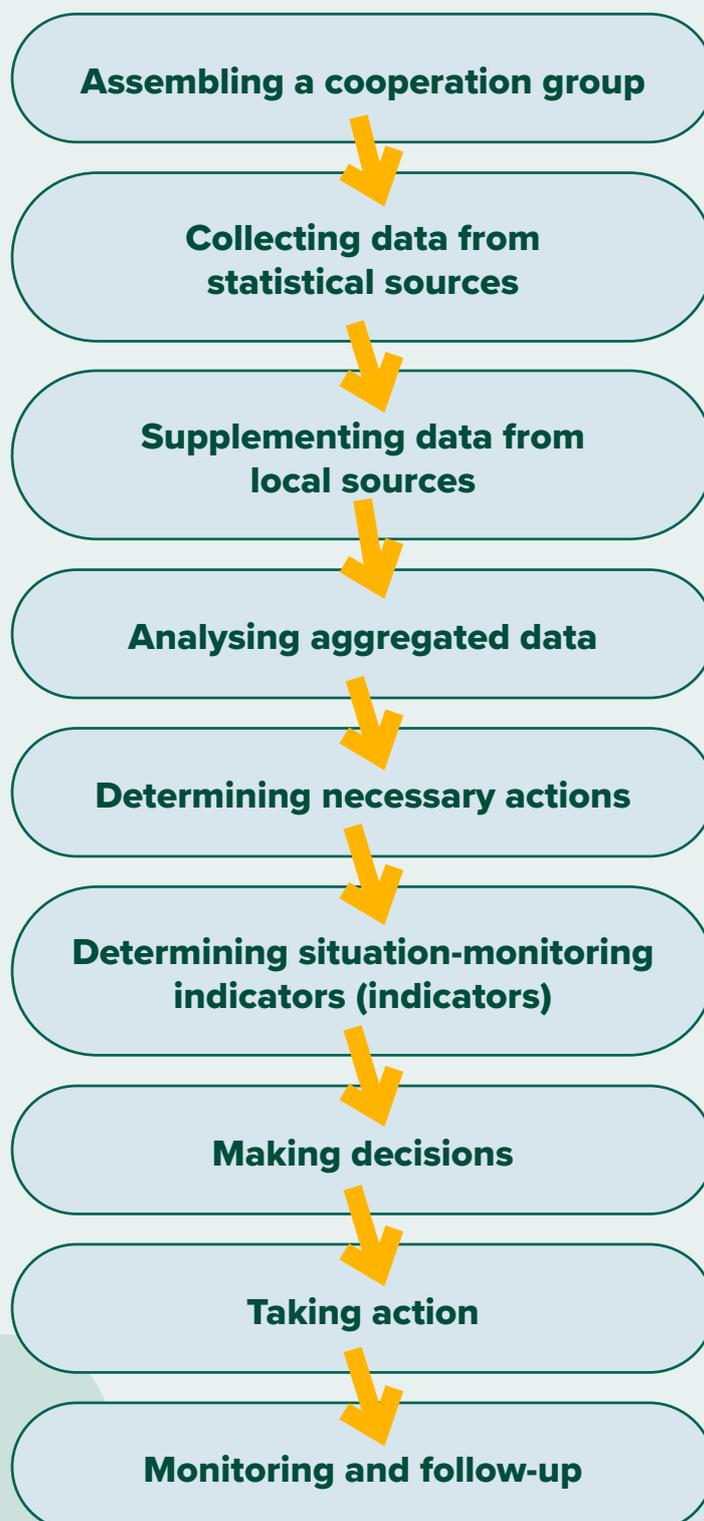
The National Council for Crime Prevention has created a *self-assessment tool for local safety work*, which helps identify both issues that are in order and areas for improvement.

A safety survey prepared by the National Council for Crime Prevention, both online and on paper, is a good tool for complementing existing data and compiling entirely new data. A survey with the same questions produces comparable monitoring data.

Promoting equality helps to prevent hate acts at the same time. The promotion of non-discrimination is a statutory duty of the authorities. Drawing up an operative *equality plan* is also a good tool in the fight against hate acts.



# How to proceed



# How do we chart the situation in our region?

The work against hate acts starts with knowledge. What information exists and is available on the situation in one's own municipality, what should be obtained separately?

A key source of information is the police's annual report "Hate crimes reported to the police". The data collected for the hate crime report also contains information by municipality. The report does not publish all the collected information, but it is also possible to request information from the Police University College of Finland.

The hate crime report deals with reports of offences to the police. Some of them have led to legal proceedings and judgments.

When you apply the information in the hate crime report to your local assessment of your situation, consider which variables you actually want to examine. Statistics look different depending on whether the regional distribution of hate crimes is examined, whether the number of crimes is made proportional to the population of the region or, for example, whether it is made proportional to the number of foreign nationals living in the area.



The **POLICE BAROMETER** is a long-term follow-up study. It shows, among other things,

- to what extent hate crimes concern the respondents
- how serious a problem the respondents find crime in their immediate surroundings
- how the respondents assess that the police are dealing with people from different cultures
- how much the respondents trust in the activities of different authorities and parties.

The **NATIONAL CRIMINAL VICTIM STUDY** of the Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy produces information on crime experienced by citizens and on fear of crime. Among other things, it asks,

- whether the respondent has experienced violence or threats
- whether the respondent had to fear violence outside the home, at work or from a family member.

Information on young people's lives can be obtained from the **YOUTH CRIME SURVEY**. It asks, among other things, whether the respondent has been subjected to a hate crime or threats.

The National Institute for Health and Welfare produces a lot of information that helps in planning the fight against hate acts. The **SCHOOL HEALTH PROMOTION STUDY** (THL) shows, by municipality,

- whether the municipality's schoolchildren feel that they are an important part of the school and classroom community
- whether they feel they belong to a community that is important to them
- whether they experience bullying, discrimination or sexual harassment.

For children, even more detailed information is provided by the **FINLAPSET** material. It contains information, for example, about bullying at home, in treatment or during leisure time.



Several National Institute for Health and Welfare studies have produced information on the health and well-being of people of foreign background in Finland. For example, the Survey on Well-Being among Foreign Born Population (**FINMONIK**, 2018–2019) shows:

- whether the respondents feel safe in public transport, parks, shopping centres, local streets and public events
- the satisfaction of the respondents with their residential area
- the extent to which the respondents participate in the activities of their own language or cultural background and in sports and physical activity activities intended for all
- which areas (such as the municipality of residence) or groups the respondents feel they belong to
- whether the respondents have friends in Finland.

The National Institute for Health and Welfare's Migrant Health and Wellbeing Study (**MAAMU**, 2010–2012) asked, among other things, whether the respondent had to avoid some places due to their foreign background.

The **FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS BAROMETER**, coordinated by the Ministry of Justice, monitors the experiences of persons with disabilities and different language minorities in the realisation of their rights. The Fundamental Rights Barometer shows, among other things,

- how much the respondents interact with different people in relation to their own reference group
- whether the respondents have experienced unfair or disrespectful treatment in their dealings with the police, Kela ([the Social Insurance Institution of Finland](#)), social and health services or **EMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS SERVICES**
- whether the respondents had to do something because of fear of physical or sexual violence.

Relations between Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking residents are mapped by the **LANGUAGE BAROMETER**. Relations between Finnish and Sámi speakers are followed by the **SÁMI BAROMETER**. The relationship between sign language users and speakers of other languages and their experiences of such matters as prejudices are surveyed in the **SIGN LANGUAGE BAROMETER**.



# Questions to help your planning

**WHAT POPULATION GROUPS** (such as ethnic, linguistic, religious, defined on other grounds) exist in our municipality?

**WHICH MINORITY GROUPS BASED ON INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS** (such as LGBT people, persons with disabilities) do we identify in our municipality?

**HOW WILL THE EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF THESE IDENTIFIED GROUPS BE HEARD IN OUR PROCESSES?** Do the members of the groups know something that would benefit others in their work against hate acts?

**DOES EVERYONE FEEL WELCOME IN PUBLIC SPACES AND MUNICIPAL ACTIVITIES?**

**WHO FEELS OR MAY FEEL UNSAFE IN THE MUNICIPALITY?** Why?

**DOES THE MUNICIPALITY HAVE RESIDENTIAL AREAS THAT SOME RESIDENTS FEEL HAVE A BAD REPUTATION?** Why?

**DOES THE MUNICIPALITY HAVE PUBLIC PLACES AND BUILDINGS WHERE NOT EVERYONE DARES OR CAN GO** (safety, accessibility)?

**DOES EVERYDAY SPEECH SHOW STEREOTYPES OR PREJUDICES RELATED TO POPULATION GROUPS?** What kind of discussions are there on social media?



# What information do we already have?

The municipality already has information that is useful in combating hate acts. Check what useful material there is in

- the data collected for the municipal security plan and the equality plan
- the data collected for the municipal welfare report
- the materials for the preparation of decision-making by the municipal executive board and council. For example, background materials related to welfare and health services, education, safety and land use planning may contain information that also helps to identify and prevent phenomena related to hate acts.

The municipality may have received customer service feedback or complaints containing relevant information.

Municipal officials and employees as well as employees of associations have a lot of information to help in the fight against hate acts. Ask, for example, principals, teachers, youth services staff, real estate services, sports facilities supervisors, social and health services, cultural actors and NGO activists what kind of information and experiences they have.

## **RECOVER EVEN THE TINIEST PIECE OF INFORMATION.**

*In Oulu, a city safety specialist works at the grassroots level. Among other things, they visit schools to train staff to identify even small signals that may indicate compromised safety in one way or another. In connection with these training sessions, the trainees often inform the instructor about their own knowledge and experiences. The safety expert records all observations that have been reported to them and takes them forward in the organisation to the city safety team.*

*The Oulu safety group considers it important to take into account and record even minor matters and to ensure that the information goes in both directions and is saved so that it can be used later if necessary.*



# What information are we missing?

Once you have examined what information is available in national and local statistics, you will also recognise what kind of information you would like.

The **LOCAL POLICE** know also about hate acts that are not crimes. The police have a good idea of local sore spots and tensions. The information flow between the police and the municipality should be made systematic.

Specific questions about necessary topics can be added to **SURVEYS** carried out in connection with, for example, a safety plan or a welfare plan. Very detailed questions can be asked about local issues. On the other hand, if you use the same questions as the national surveys, you can compare the local situation with the national figures.

It is a good idea to draw support from previous surveys in the preparation of the questions. For example, the publication *How are we doing?* A survey of good relations between population groups in Finland, with a focus on municipalities with reception centres for asylum-seekers has an example of setting good questions. The Ministry of Justice report “I often find myself thinking how I should be or where I shouldn’t go” – Survey on hate speech and harassment and their influence on different minority groups provides questions specifically about speech as hate acts.

**WORKSHOPS** could be organised if the lack of information concerns a group

that can be reached and invited to share its views. The **HEARINGS** of municipal residents, which are organised for other reasons, can be combined with data collection on demographic relations or local issues that are bothering local residents.

**CUSTOMER FEEDBACK** on health and social services and also other municipal services may have significant aspects.

**COMPLAINTS**, both official and unofficial, received by the authorities (both the municipality and the state) may contain information worth attention in the fight against hate acts. Good sources of information may also include annual reports by authorities and compliance-monitoring reports. The **NON-DISCRIMINATION OMBUDSMAN** provides information on the issues that citizens have turned to the ombudsman about. **STATISTICS ON MEDIATION** show what has been resolved by mediation.

Local **MEDIA** often have both published information and “hunches” on local conflicts and possible sources of social conflicts. The **SOCIAL MEDIA** of the locality is an important source of information. Monitoring social media discussions reasonably regularly can produce information that is not available elsewhere.



# What is done with the aggregated data?

Once you have compiled statistics and other information, views and suggestions concerning the municipality or region, it is time to analyse the data. Collect the significant and relevant information, and think about what it says. Select priorities: which observations require the most urgent action, which can be addressed later.

Prepare a clear action plan. Set goals and designate responsible parties.

When analysing statistics, note that, especially when talking about small groups, it is not the numbers that are crucial, but the phenomena themselves that have been identified.

If, in a small municipality, something is mentioned about “more than half of women with disabilities” or “one third of the members of ethnic minority/religion X”, the group of people discussed is not large, but the issue is still worth paying attention to.

Every hate act or threat thereof is too much. That is why we should also take seemingly small phenomena seriously.

## **IT IS NOT ENOUGH FOR THE MAJORITY TO BE SATISFIED.**

*A survey carried out among Vaasa residents showed that 80% of urban residents are satisfied; this large majority has not experienced discrimination or inappropriate behaviour. However, 20% had their own experiences of inappropriate treatment. The authorities of the city consider it important to pay particular attention to those who report their bad experiences. What were the experiences, and what can be done to improve the situation? The City of Vaasa has a happiness strategy, but it can only be implemented properly when it applies to everyone. For example, a person using a wheelchair must be able to move freely, different people and families must receive equal treatment in services, and the atmosphere must be safe for everyone. The survey is carried out every four years, and the results are monitored.*



# How are the results of the work monitored?

Work aimed at preventing hate acts at the local level is a goal-oriented activity of the authorities and civic actors. Its objectives and operating methods and the parties responsible are clearly designated so that the results of the work can also be monitored successfully.

Once you have selected the main objectives of your work, specify the actions to be taken on the selected issues and how their implementation and results will be monitored.

The best objectives are concrete ones. What are the hate acts you want to push to zero? How will you do this? In what time frame is the target realistic? How can the achievement of the results be observed and measured?

Objectives can also be derived from surveys, for example. If it becomes apparent that “x% of the respondents find X to be a problem” or “feel insecure for reason Y”, the goal can be set as correcting these issues so that the number of dissatisfied people and those experiencing insecurity decreases significantly.

Active communication should be provided on the objectives and the means to achieve them. Visible commitment by the management to a safe municipality is in itself a gesture that affects the atmosphere.

When the results of the work are regularly reported to the municipal council, either separately or, for example, in connection with a safety or well-being report, the political decision-makers receive feedback and suggestions, on the basis of which work against hate acts can be further developed.



# Practical ideas and suggestions

## **MAKE USE OF MEDIATION AS A MEANS TO RESOLVE AND DETER HATE ACTS.**

In Vaasa, it has been found to be a good practice for the police to provide the mediation office with information on reports of hate acts in which mediation could, at the discretion of the police, be a good tool.

In the view of the police, the majority of reports submitted for mediation are offences, but there are also reports that have not fulfilled the essential elements of an offence in the preliminary investigation or pre-trial investigation. However, the cases are such that the police believe they should be settled by mediation.

The staff of the mediation office will contact the parties and propose mediation. The process is voluntary.

Suitable cases have typically been name-calling, shouting, harassment or minor vandalism. In mediation, both or all parties get heard and commit to a jointly decided solution. In mediation, subsequent steps are often also prepared: how should we act to prevent the conflict from recurring? If necessary, an interpreter is used for mediation.

Sometimes it happens that an act interpreted as a hate act turns out in mediation to be something else. This information can also be relieving for the subject and their reference group.

## **USE NEUTRAL BUT EXPRESSIVE**

**LANGUAGE.** The party committing the hate act may, for example, wish to be seen as a supporter of a political orientation, but the authorities should always remain as neutral and minimalistic as possible in their use of language. For example, the Oulu safety group has discussed the fact that a teenager in a group of young people who commits acts of vandalism “should not be called with the word they wish, that describes the political orientation, unless one wants them to grow in the direction of that word”.



**DO NOT LEAVE THE VICTIM OF THE HATE ACT ALONE.** The object of a hate act is a person, a community or, for example, a person working for an authority. They are helped by the support of the others. It is a good idea to actively express it. Managers and elected persons must communicate that no hate acts are allowed in the municipality or organisation.

Colleagues, school friends, neighbours or other people can express their support for the target in many ways. Tell both the target and each other that you do not accept hate acts, that you want them to end and the perpetrators to take responsibility for them.

If the target of a hate act is a person employed by an authority or in another work role, the employer must, on the basis of its occupational safety and health obligation, arrange for the necessary support, even if the person is personally the injured party in the legal process.

**CURB RUMOURS WITH OPENNESS. RUMOURS ABOUT** social security benefits are a common. Incorrect stories of benefits received by some (immigrants, persons with disabilities, single parents, etc.) spread rapidly on social media. Envy and bitterness are then likely to create a hostile atmosphere. According to the experiences of the City of Lieksa, rumours and “nonsense talk” can best be prevented through open, proactive and anticipating communication. It is a good idea for the authorities to explain what the different benefits are, on what basis they are paid and to whom. This communication should be timed as early as possible before stories take on a life of their own. Correcting a false rumour is many times more laborious than producing correct information in time.

**PREPARE FOR COMMUNICATION, SECURE PEACE OF WORK.** Unlike usually, public communications concerning an assault at a Vantaa school were concentrated on the director of education, rather than the principal, in order to safeguard the peace of work of the school and the principal. The handling of the incident between the pupils, their families, the police and other authorities was done in a normal manner and protected from publicity.



**ESTABLISH SYSTEMATIC COOPERATION RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MUNICIPALITY AND THE POLICE.**

In Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, there is a contact person for the city and the police, a police coordinator. The coordinator is a police officer who uses most of their working time to cooperate with the city. The activities are based on a cooperation agreement between cities and the police. The police coordinator carries out preventive safety work and acts as an information mediator in both directions. In Vantaa, for example, the information provided by the city staff on potential threats is sent to the police via the coordinator. The coordinator sends information to the city on issues that have come to the attention of the police when the information is not of a police-only nature.

**TAKE CARE OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE AUTHORITIES IN ADVANCE.**

At the beginning of the 2010s, a significant group of immigrants arrived in Lieksa, and their reception had to be organised quickly. Out of these experiences, the city learned the value of anticipation and planning. These skills were useful when a reception centre was set up in the city in 2015.

Since the responsibilities and division of labour between the authorities had been specified in advance, the residents did not have the impression that the situation “is not under the control of the authorities either”. Quite the contrary: open and unambiguous communication by the authorities about their actions creates security and trust. A calm and controlled atmosphere prevents all forms of hate acts.

**ACQUIRE AND DISSEMINATE INFORMATION.**

Training has been implemented in Vantaa to combat violent extremism, radicalisation and polarisation. Officials, elected officials and representatives of stakeholders, such as religious communities, have participated in training arranged mostly online. The training has provided basic information on how to identify “us against them” settings and to resolve confrontations at an early stage. According to feedback from the participants, the training has provided tools for identifying phenomena and for acquiring the courage and practical means to intervene in them.



**IDENTIFY THE FACTS WITHOUT GENERALISING.** It must be possible to openly establish and discuss the facts of various problems. For example, crimes committed by persons belonging to a minority group must be discussed on the same grounds as crimes committed by others. At the same time, it is important to note that it is always only the perpetrator of an offence that is responsible, and no generalisations or conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the actions of one person regarding other persons belonging to the same group.

**COMBINE. DO NOT ISOLATE!** Instead of different groups of people studying and spending free time in their own bubbles, it should always be attempted to combine groups so that people get to know each other. Lieksa has good experiences of football, for example: when people engage in a hobby together, genuine interactive relationships and familiarisation are created. Preconceptions are reduced and the atmosphere is calmed down.

**PREPARE AS EMPLOYERS.** Employers must be prepared for one or some of the employees or office holders or an entire unit of authorities being subjected to hate acts. The employer is responsible for occupational safety. Knowledge and competence will be helpful in new situations. Proactive safety planning is important, as is providing psychosocial and legal support to an employee who has been the victim of a hate act in their duties. Occupational health care must also have expertise in phenomena related to hate acts.

**DESIGNATE HARASSMENT CONTACT PERSONS.** A harassment contact person is a person that can be contacted if one has experienced harassment, discrimination or inappropriate behaviour or has been the victim of a hate act. For example, a municipality, educational institution or any organisation can designate a harassment contact person.

The task of the contact person is twofold. They help and support the victim and advise them from that point on. On the other hand, they provide their background organisation with information on the situation and atmosphere so that these can be addressed. Active communication about the existence of a harassment contact person also indicates that the organisation takes bullying, harassment and other hate acts seriously.



# Checklist

**1** Investigate which existing structures are also suitable as a platform for work against hate acts: safety planning, equality planning, well-being report. Use them.

**2** Keep the equality plan up to date.

**3** Invite those concerned to join the work.

**4** Also observe small issues in statistics.

**5** Identify what you do not know, and get answers to your questions.

**6** Communicate your work actively.

# Useful reading

## **Inappropriate behaviour in representative bodies**

The guide Epäasiallisen käytöksen käsitteleminen luottamuselimissä (Prevention of inappropriate behaviour in representative bodies). Municipal group of the Centre for Occupational Safety 2021.

## **Examples of hate speech and crimes**

Tietoa ja tapausesimerkkejä vihapuheesta ja viharikoksista – käsikirja lainkäyttäjille (Information and case examples of hate speech and hate crime – Guide for administrators of justice). Ministry of Justice 2019.

## **Online targeting and shaming**

**Mika Illman:** Järjestelmällinen häirintä ja maalittaminen (Systematic harassment and targeting). Lainsäädännön arviointia (Assessment of legislation). Government 2020.

## **Gender-based hatred**

Nordic research report on online communities promoting misogyny.

[Report: The prevalence of men who use internet forums characterised by misogyny | Nordic co-operation \(norden.org\)](#)

## **Sexual and gender minorities**

Tilaa moninaisuudelle! Opas seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöjen yhdenvertaisuuden edistämiseen (Space for diversity! A guide to promoting the equality of sexual and gender minorities). European Commission and Ministry of Justice 2019.

## **Safety planning**

<https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161278> Turvallisuutta kaikkialla - paikallisen ja alueellisen turvallisuus-

suunnittelun kansalliset linjaukset (Safety everywhere – National guidelines for local and regional safety planning)

Paikallisen turvallisuussuunnittelun itsearviointityökalu (Self-assessment tool for local safety planning), National Council for Crime Prevention rikoksentorjunta.fi

## **Hate speech and decision-making** **The impact of hate speech on public decision-making (in Finnish with English abstract). Government 2019.**

“I often find myself thinking how I should be or where I shouldn’t go” – Survey on hate speech and harassment and their influence on different minority groups. Ministry of Justice 2016.

## **Background of hate acts**

**Staub, Erwin:** The roots of evil. The origins of genocide and other group violence. Cambridge University Press 1989.

## **Population relations**

Kartoitus väestösuhteiden tilasta Suomessa – painopisteenä vastaanotokeskuspaikkakunnat (How are we doing? A survey of good relations between population groups in Finland, with focus on municipalities with reception centres for asylum seekers). Government 2017.

## **Equality planning**

<http://yhdenvertaisuus.finlex.fi/en/> Tool for the assessment of equality

<https://yhdenvertaisuus.fi/opaat-yhdenvertaisuussuunnitteluun> Oppaita yhdenvertaisuussuunnitteluun (Guides for equality planning)

# Sources of statistical data

FinLapset, THL

Jenni Jalava: Sukupuoli- ja seksuaalivähemmistöjen toiveet ja tarpeet yhdenvertaiseen vanhuuteen. Satakunnan AMK 2013.

National Crime Victim Study, Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy

Language Barometer, Ministry of Justice

School Health Promotion Study, THL

Migrant Health and Wellbeing Study (Maamu), THL

Youth Crime Study, Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy

Fundamental Rights Barometer, Ministry of Justice

Police Barometer, Police College of Finland

Hate crimes reported to the police in Finland, Police College

Sámi Barometer, Ministry of Justice

Survey on Well-Being among Foreign Born Population (FinMonik), THL

Sign Language Barometer, Ministry of Justice

FACTS TIEDOLLA FAKTA CINJENICE  
AGAINST VIHAA MOT PROTIV  
HATE VASTAAN HAT MRZNJE



OIKEUSMINISTERIÖ  
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