Smart for Democracy and Diversity

Online educational tools for awareness raising on hate speech and discrimination

Introduction

At the beginning of 21st century, Europe still has a problem with discrimination and racism. Although the continent is home to so many different people of all skin colours, sexual orientations, genders, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds, not everyone enjoys equal opportunities, and, most importantly, not everyone is treated equally. According to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, in 2019, 7,278 hate crime attacks were reported in the EU, with almost half of them (3,026) being related to racism and xenophobia. As most of these attacks did not happen to famous people, most of them did not make it to the front pages of European mainstream media. They did not even make the headlines of local media. In fact, the above numbers are misleading because most hate speech attacks do not even make it to the authorities to be counted as statistics as they are never reported. However, they do take place and are an everyday occurrence for thousands of European inhabitants.

Project approach

In 2020 coordinator ISIS Sozialforschung (Frankfurt, Germany) initiated the SDD-project. Smart for Democracy and Diversity, an Erasmus+ project in the field of Adult Education, Strategic Partnerships. Partners are: AGE Platform Europe (Brussels, Belgium), AFEdemy, Academy on age-friendly environments in Europe BV (Gouda, The Netherlands), Bildungsstätte Anne Frank (Frankfurt, Germany), Charles University (Prague, Czech Republic), Lunaria (Rome, Italy) and SHINE 2Europe (Coimbra, Portugal). The results of the SDD-project were built on four pillars:

- Compendium on Experiencing Hate Speech
- Online educational game
- Workshop methodology and self-learning
- Policy recommendations

Compendium on Experiencing Hate Speech

European and national legislations use two main approaches to define and prosecute hate speech and crime. One approach focuses on who is targeted and consequently differentiates between terms such as bullying (targeting individuals) or discrimination (targeting groups). By contrast, the other approach is based on the content of the speech itself (incitement to violence or hatred). As a result, in most cases hate speech and hate crime are defined by the combination of the two, i.e., who the victim is (ethnic origin, gender, etc. being the reason at the basis of the hatred) and what is being said/done (incitement or acts of violence).

In the wider expert and media debate, hate speech and hate crime are often defined or perceived differently based on the context where they occur. While in some cases hate speech is mainly associated with online speech, in others it points towards racist and discriminatory discourse in offline environments. Various terms used by both experts and state and local authorities such as hate speech, verbal hate crime, online hate, cyberbullying, etc. lead to confusing differences in terminology and ultimately obscure the core of the problem – the fact that, regardless of the words we use to describe it, the phenomenon itself manifests on an everyday basis, both online and offline, verbally and non-verbally. That is why we consider the perspective of people affected by hate speech and hate crime the most important aspect in the debate around definitions. Yet, their voice is mostly missing from this

debate. For the Compendium we interviewed 40 victims and experts and consulted literature and online resources.

In the Compendium, we take into account all the above categories, i.e., who are targeted (applicability of the group identity criteria), how (content) and where (contexts) they are targeted. However, we complement them by considering these acts' impact on those affected by them. From this perspective, for example, making a distinction between online and offline contexts is not meaningful because frequent online hateful comments will have an impact on how the target behaves offline i.e., when s/he leaves home, how s/he moves in a city, how alert s/he is in public places, etc. Furthermore, one person can also be affected differently in different contexts based on a particular role: someone can be attacked because of their religion, ethnicity, or gender or for not fitting into the beauty standards of a particular society. One circumstance is usually not separable from the other, so the second important perspective we use here is the intersectional one.

The SDD Compendium is based on six national reports from the project partners' countries. It tells the stories of people affected by discrimination, with detailed explanations about target groups, intersectionality, contexts when and where, and online and offline hate speech.

The compendium further focuses on responses and coping strategies. Immediate responses vary greatly depending on the context, the specific situation, and the personal situation and feelings of the people affected by discrimination. Most people affected by hate speech describe its immediate effect similarly: anger, stress, and sadness. Many of our respondents do not mention fear but rather helplessness which, in the long run, can lead to changes in their behaviour. Typically, their willingness to explain some of the circumstances in which they are subjected to attacks may diminish, meaning they gradually withdraw into themselves.

Finally, the Compendium focuses on interventions and support by bystanders and institutions, such as local authorities, police and courts, and civil society actors. One of the most striking outcomes of the research and interviews was the tragedy of non-intervention: "The worst thing is the silence when they look away. That also makes the moment and the difference. The victim realises that they are actually very much alone."

Further reading:

https://sdd-game.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/SDD_Compendium_EN_with_license.pdf

SDD online game

Who intends to steal the famous painting from the museum? This is the question that the player has to answer during the game and that provides the frame story for the learning game. The game links the frame story with the exploration of the topic of racism and discrimination. The game starts with the introduction of Mrs. Libeau, the museum director. She hires the player as a detective and arranges for the player the companionship with Nuseyba, the support and side-kick the player. During the full-play mode, the player and Nuseyba meet several people on the street and in surrounding buildings. While talking to them, the player and Nuseyba try to figure out what is happening and who is behind the robbery. In the meantime, the player and Nuseyba are confronted with different kinds of racism and discrimination. Depending on the given answers by the player, the player received feedback and background information about characteristics, features and backgrounds of racism and discrimination.

The online game can be played in full-game, topical self-learning, and workshop modes. In the self-learning and workshop modes, players can choose between learning more about sexism, racism, queerphobia or transphobia, antisemitism, anti-Muslim racism and anti-Roma racism. https://sdd-game.eu/game/

SDD Game Trainer mode

A separate SDD Game Trainer mode is available for trainers, teachers or coaches. https://sdd-game.eu/workshop/#Learning_materials. On this page, the user can find learning materials (Compendium and the Trainer Manual), choose learning topics, and generate codes for using the game in a workshop setting.

SDD Self-learning

In this section (https://sdd-game.eu/self-learning-en/) individuals can answer questions for self-reflection and their own understanding of the topic of discrimination.

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