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UNITED – Policy recommendations for the prevention of hate speech in schools

Introduction and general reflections

This document was developed within the project UNITED, as a synthesis of a broader work carried out by high school students in Osijek (HR), Verona (IT) and Warsaw (PL). The groups of students in each country reflected and worked on the topic of "hate speeches" with particular attention to those of an anti-Semitic and racial nature in general. The work began with collecting the photographs of hate speech writings or drawings in their city and a subsequent processing of the material in class. The teacher-led discussions culminated in the #itswrong social media campaign, a two-week social initiative in which groups of students shared their reflections on the topic with peers and stakeholders. At the end of this process, all the classes found themselves in an online focus group to share experiences and launch their own "recommendations to policy makers", which were collected in this document by Glocal Factory, partner of the UNITED project. More than 100 students and teachers from the three schools participated in the international focus group: Technical school and Natural Sciences School Ruđer Bošković (HR), IIS Ferraris Fermi (IT) and Boleslaw Limanowski High School nr 1 in Warsaw (PL); and representatives of the partner organizations Center of Jewish Culture Heritage Synagogue Maribor (SL), Warsaw Centre for Socio-Educational Innovation and Training, (PL) and the lead partner, Nansen Dialogue Center in Osijek (HR).

This document presents the students' input shared during the focus group, as stimuli and "recommendations" for policy makers of all the countries involved - Croatia, Slovenia, Italy and Poland - at local, national and international level.

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Recommendations

The students and teachers designed an educational tool that enables the developing and strengthening of self-awareness on the diffusion and severity of hate speeches in their communities, which they have shared on two levels: with their peers and stakeholders through the social media campaign and with policy makers through these recommendations. In the final part of the international focus group, the students were invited to share their personal thoughts and suggestions to policy makers, whereby they have highlighted the following key points:

1. Listening to students' needs
2. Education and prevention
3. Stricter punishments

A fundamental aspect to take into account when reading and interpreting these key points are the emotions and sensations felt by the students during the course undertaken which, very clearly, highlighted the feelings of frustration, sadness, disappointment, fear and anger in becoming aware of the widespread violent social reality.

The best antidote to these negative sensations was the process undertaken with classmates and teachers which allowed them/us to overcome the phase of discouragement resulting from the awareness and move through the phase of collective empowerment and desire for mobilization and active participation. The students said that after implementing the activities in response to hate speech, they felt proud, happy, empowered and helpful, which shows the need for their involvement in such actions in the future.

Considering all of this, we provide the following recommendations:

1. **Communication** - There needs to be an easy and accessible way for the students to report hate speech in their environment. We recommend putting anonymous boxes in the schools for this purpose. After hate speech is reported the instance should be promptly investigated and appropriate action taken.
2. **Education** - Students need to be informed about hate speech and its dangers. We recommend that once a year there is a workshop organized by the school or host psychologist or other appropriate experts in each class.
3. **Disciplining** - The usage of hate speech in schools should be strictly sanctioned. We recommend introducing appropriate measures for persons using hate speech in schools (in accordance with the national law) and making sure that all the students are aware of the consequences.



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