

## 1-pager for EPDF:

### The power of culture and media initiatives to counter hate-speech in European cities

#### Hate speech and how it affects in cities

Hate speech spreads widely and rapidly on and offline, posing a fundamental threat to societal values and human rights.<sup>1</sup> A complex problem, not easily tackled, and difficult to define hate speech<sup>2</sup> (1) targets a group or an individual as a member of a group; (2) expresses a message of hatred; (3) causes harm; (4) incites malicious actions beyond the speech itself; (5) is issued in public or directed at a member of the group; whereby (6) the speaker intends harm; (7) the context makes violence possible and (8) the speech has no redeeming purpose.<sup>3</sup> Always damaging, hate speech has great consequences in urban environments which are generally diverse, yet often still segregated. Hate speech exacerbates existing divides and can further marginalise minority communities, including refugees and migrants. Countering hate speech and addressing both its roots and consequences requires not only an understanding of what hate speech is but also whom to engage to develop impactful initiatives more effectively. The involvement of diverse actors is critical in effectively addressing hate speech.

#### Engaging media and cultural institutions

Often blamed for spreading hate speech, many media institutions including social media ensure that hate speech and incitement to violence are removed and actively encourage nuanced and accurate reporting. Beyond journalism ethics, the media offers great potential to counter hate speech with its ability to shape societal opinions. Engaging media can reach more people within a society and strengthen positive messages that help social cohesion.

Similarly, cultural institutions are able to reach the wider general audience needed to effectively counter hate speech. European cities' prevalence of cultural institutions creates creative opportunities for engaging with a city's inhabitants to foster social inclusion. Cultural campaigns in cities have raised the visibility of the problem of hate speech and encourage reflection and empathy among religious and cultural groups.

At the urban level, local media and cultural institutions can tailor messages in a way that is best received by the local audience and better shape attitudes that support social cohesion. Successful initiatives by and with the media and cultural institutions already exist that can serve as examples for future opportunities.

#### Amplifying efforts with the inclusion of faith

Media and cultural institutions have the potential to explore and address the causes and effects of hate speech in creative ways that reach a wider audience, provide introspective reflection and reinforce positive societal values. There is much to be learned from their experience. Engaging these institutions offers opportunities to amplify positive initiatives. Involving religious actors in initiatives with cultural and media institutions helps better connect with refugee and migrant communities. When religious actors speak out against hate speech, address its roots and stand together with other religious actors, this can reinforce social inclusion. Such messages can have greater impact when disseminated in media, on social media or are represented in cultural events and initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (2019). <https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/un-strategy-and-plan-of-action-on-hate-speech>

<sup>2</sup> Mieth, F. (2022). Religious Actors and Countering Hate Speech in Europe. KAICIID Europe Region Research Paper #2, pp. 6-7. Available at: <https://www.kaiciid.org/publications-resources/research-paper-religious-actors-and-countering-hate-speech-europe>

<sup>3</sup> Sellars, A. F. (2016). Defining Hate Speech. Research Publication No. 2016-20. Available at: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2882244](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2882244)