Toolkit for developing
human rights-based narratives
Step-by-step guide

In this guide you will be taken step-by-step thorough explanations on how to develop human rights-based counter and alternative narratives to hate speech. It presents sets of **reflection questions helping analyse, conclude, formulate, and reformulate your messages** and think about what you want to convey. At the end of the tool you can also find hints and ideas on what a message could include to make it as rights-based, as possible.

This tool aims to help anyone who would like to train in developing human rights-based narratives to do so by:

- going through a set of **reflective questions**
- on the way getting some inputs on things to keep in mind in making **choices of messages**
- looking at definitions of various **types of narratives**
- looking at concrete **examples** of hate speech messages and narratives, and getting ideas on how to counter them or propose an alternative to them
- developing alternative narratives to **promote human rights, diversity, and equality**

By the end of this guide, you will be able to **consciously develop your message,** knowing how it can be drafted in a constructive, effective, impactful way to **promote a culture of human rights.**

The tool consists of **5 steps** that start with **personal reactions and emotions** and build up to a human rights-based message development. Each step provides an explanation of how to work through them and a set of reflective questions.

Step 1   Identify your reactions, emotions, and values

Step 2   Recognising, analysing hate speech and understanding the narrative

Step 3   Deciding and defining what you want to transfer: human rights-based
                counter, alternative narratives

Step 4   Human rights-based narrative and messaging proofing

Step 5   Developing a Human Rights-based message. Try to construct the message now.

We encourage you to **take your time** and go through the exercises answering the questions and reflecting on all the aspects they touch on, but it is not essential to answer every single question.

Starting point

So, once you have decided that you would like to use this step-by-step guide to train in developing human rights-based messages and promoting those narratives, there are various scenarios in which you could find yourself.

To start the work, **look through the 3 options below** and choose the one which is closest to your situation, fits you best, based on your interest, proficiency in the topic, level of knowledge, etc.

Scenario 1

You have **come across a hate message** and you want to develop a human rights-based response using a counter or alternative narrative to it. You have not yet have a developed message. Let's take the hateful message you came across and step-by-step develop your message.

Scenario 2

You **already have a counter or alternative narrative** to a hate message, and you want to check if that narrative is a human rights-based one. If so, you can skip the first 3 steps, and go directly to step 4 and 5 to pass your message through the reflective questions, human rights-based message filters and define how far the message you have developed can be seen as a human rights-based.

Scenario 3

You do **not have any particular message** you would like to address, but you would like to learn more about hate speech and train your skills in responding to it through human rights-based narratives. You are invited to use one of the several examples of hateful messages and try to learn by preparing a human rights-based response following the steps below.[1]

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[1] **List of hateful messages found on social media that can be used as an example to work through the tool:** "Get out! Roma should all be banned from Europe. (Roma)", "Start packing and go back to your homes." (Refugees/migrants), "You are all one bunch of terrorists." (Muslim population). "Hitler was right when he put Jews in camps" (Jewish population), "Homosexuals are sick and should all go through mental institutions." (LGBTI).

Step 1   Identify your reactions, emotions, and values

Explanatory text

When you come across a disturbing, hateful message, there are many thoughts, emotions, reactions that suddenly appear. These can range from **rage and anger, to frustration, shame, immobilisation.** These reactions tend to drive our choices and decisions about our actions. They also tell a lot about our **own moral compass.**

The anger or other emotions result from a feeling of injustice, or fear etc, and this can help you identify with human principles and human dignity you feel is violated. Sometimes they are spontaneous, not well reflected, and analysed. When you come across hateful comments and messages, it is important to **take a moment to self-identify** and understand what is happening to us and why it is happening.

Questions for reflection

- What is your first reaction to what you read?

- Why do you react in that way?

- What makes you decide to react or not to react?

- What did you feel when you came across a hate speech, hateful message?

- What is your first thought? First reaction?

- What makes me unhappy about the message?

- What triggers your reactions and feelings?

- Can you remember a real-life situation similar to this?

Step 2 Recognising, analysing hate speech and understanding the narrative

Explanatory text

When you come across a message that provokes various reactions, it is important after recognising the emotions and reactions it creates, to **look at it analytically and try to understand its core**. This includes trying to see the underlying contexts and reasons for its existence, as this will help not only to react to the effects of it, or the outside, surface manifestation, but to **go down to the reasons and try to tackle the root of the problem**, and not only the effects. After this analysis, you can still decide that you want to counter or react to the effects, stop it, demystify it, but in order to make a conscious decision, the analysis is an important step to take.

Questions for reflection

- What makes this comment hate speech?

- How is hate speech defined in your context?

- Underlying narrative: what is in the core of this message, what does it "really" say? What emotion does it intend to evoke in the audience?

- Which stereotypes, prejudices is it based on?

- Who is concerned?

- Which is the current reality, context that is making it possible for this kind of narratives to exist?

- What links are made between the "facts"?

- What image of the concerned people it gives?

- What are labels and terms used in the message? What is the connotation meaning they have, what associations do they provoke?

- How does this narrative affect you and others' lives?

- What does this comment want to make you think, feel, do?

- How and which human rights are concerned in this message and which ones are being violated?

Step 3 Deciding and defining what you want to transfer: human rights-based counter, alternative narratives

Counter-Reaction

Counter messages are a **short and direct reaction** to hateful messages. They are a form of counter narrative, which can be used to directly de-construct, discredit and demystify violent extremist messages. They are often used as an instrument to block or to challenge concrete expressions of hate. Sometimes they confront another narrative in a rather direct way by referring to it and offering counter arguments and facts.

Counter narratives aim to reach those who may or already sympathise with extremist views, preventing their further involvement, those who already hold extremist views, supporting individuals in changing their views and behaviour. Threat posed by populist, nationalist, racist, and homophobic groups needs a direct answer, a strategy to address the underlying root causes of hate speech, such as negative stereotypes and inequality, and also proposals.

Alternative Narrative

Alternative narratives do not focus so much on the reaction to single events, but rather work to build an **alternative mind-set to sustain the change** they want to bring into society. Another important goal is to occupy public space by letting an alternative (coherent and structured) position be heard in public discourse.

Alternative narratives strengthen positive, inclusive and constructive ideas and aim to reach the whole population, including producers of hate speech who may be able to become acquainted with a new narrative altogether. Alternative narratives are actions which aim to undercut hate speech narratives by focusing on what we are "for" rather than what we are "against". Alternative narratives may not challenge or refer to extremism directly, but instead attempt to influence political debates by proposing alternative proposals and ways of looking into social issues or problems, hence changing the frame of the discussion.

Explanatory text

Often when we see a hateful message the first reaction is wanting to show that it is not true, it is non-logical, it is wrong, it does not make sense, there are generalisations, a lie, it is manipulative, needs to be challenged, etc. There is **a risk that we might reply to hate with**

hate, even with the best of intentions. In this case they are repeated, reinforced. What you might want to do is to fill the discourse, the space with a different narrative and messages.

So, here is where you need to **breathe out, count to** ten and decide on what your message will be. For a try you can write down all the first reaction messages and take a moment to have a look at them and ask yourself a few questions around them. The discussion around the questions will impact the core content of your message.

In your alternative narrative it is important to show a wider spectrum of people who would need to be supported. It is important to show that **many people/groups have a similar urgency for new narratives**. It is important to formulate the new narrative that can be more inclusive, thus building more proactivity. This message could strive to protect anyone from being targeted. This message can also call for solidarity with the people usually targeted and try to **build more allies**.

It is always a good idea to **speak to people who have experienced hate speech** and could share with you what they would like to see in alternative narratives and these people can help you choose the write format, the right messages, the to the point ones. It is also important to **mind our language.** There are terms, expressions, words that we should try to avoid or be very careful while communicating. It is worth making sure you **do not reproduce stereotypical and aggressive terms**. It is also important to be mindful of the images/sound/video and music used in your messaging. Make sure the images are also following human rights-based narratives and do not contradict your cause.

Questions for reflection

- What do you want to do with your message (stop the hater, shut them up, show a different picture, challenge the view, show it is irrational, protect people, hold accountable, questions, show what it can create, etc…).

- What do you want to happen after your message is communicated? Who do you want to target, reach, address your message to (general public, the haters, the extremist groups, the community, your acquaintances, people close to you…)?

- What language do you need to use?

- How do you want to help the ones who it is targeting or who has been targeted by the hateful message?

- What do you want people reading your message to do?

Questions that can help you construct a counter or alternative message

- What do I know, hear about this group of people often?

- What personal stories about the people I know, which are different from what is usually pictured?

- How can you show the person behind the stereotypes?

- What arguments, data, research and facts already exist to help you develop and challenge the generalisations and messages?

- How can you highlight the irrationality, faults, manipulations, misleading logic in the messages?

Step 4   Human rights-based narrative and messaging proofing

Human rights-based narratives and messages

The primary goal of human rights-based narratives is to **build alternative ways of thinking of and living in a society in order to challenge the mainstream public discourse**. One rule for building a human rights-based counter-narrative is always to promote respect for human dignity and solidarity among groups and individuals.

A narrative aimed at countering hate is that it shall **not include any form of hate speech or discrimination** itself, and especially not reinforce schemes of hate and scapegoating. its aim is to promote, protect and increase the rights and opportunities for all, not for a single group or individual. does not define an 'ingroup' and an 'outgroup', nor does it speak in terms of divisions between "us" and "they", or between 'superiors' and 'inferiors'. A **human rights-based narrative speaks the language of universality of human rights.**

Explanatory text

In this step it is important to bring in the theme/narrative of human rights and promote the culture of human rights. This means that **messages will highlight, call, promote, focus on values, principles, actions, approaches, sentiments related to human rights**. Messages focusing on human lives, spotlighting common humanity, human dignity, equality, respect, valuing each one. Messages appealing to fundamentals of human rights, using **concepts of acceptance, dialogue, cooperation, non-discrimination, empowering for unity, empowering solidarity**. Messages can have a concrete call for actions supporting the cause.

Reflection questions

- Underlying narrative: what is in the core of the message you want to develop?

- What new narrative do you want to create with it?

- Who and how does this support?

- What is the context in which this message can thrive and exist?

- How does this narrative affect your and others' lives?

- What does this comment intend the reader to think, feel, do?

- Which human rights does it celebrate and tackle?

- How does your message contribute to the culture of human rights?

Step 5   Developing a Human Rights-based message

Try to construct your message now

Explanatory text

Once you have answered the reflection questions, you should be ready now to construct your own human rights-based message. Responding through human rights means that any action undertaken should be guided by and reflect the values and principles of human rights.

Moreover, below you can find several aspects, phrases, concepts, ideas that can make your message a human rights-based one.

Human rights-based messages can …

Support, empower, and celebrate…

- Promote positive view/image
- Celebrate contribution to cultural heritage
- Highlight universality of human rights
- Support human rights culture
- Feature human rights values and principles
- Feature positive actions/examples
- Supporting /building capacity to see hate speech/narratives
- Celebrate critical thinking and awareness
- Enriching public dialogue with human rights issues
- Empowering to know one's rights
- Invitation to be part of protection of own rights access facilitating policy making
- Empower duty-bearers to fulfill their obligations
- Empower right-holders to speak up
- Show new perspectives of a status quo
- Empower for equality to pursue personal goals
- Featuring of the principles of human rights
- Support people who claim their rights
- Support for people who find remedy for violations

Call for action..

- Call for respect of human rights
- Call for respect of human dignity

- Call for non-discrimination
- Call for equality
- Call for responsibility to respect and protect
- Call to celebrate diversity
- Call for inclusion
- Call to generate equal opportunities\support non-discrimination
- Calling for public support for human rights
- Call to change status quo
- Calling for public support for human rights
- Call to change status quo
- Call for dialogue and understanding
- Call for peace and coexistence in dignity
- Call for accountability of duty-bearers to protect
- Call for justice
- Call for human rights to be central in decision-making

Combat inequality, intolerance, and racism…

- Demand equal opportunities/access to rights
- Combat stereotypes
- Break down/overcome prejudices
- Combat exclusion
- Combat discrimination, denigration, dehumanisation…
- Break down structural exclusion, discrimination, violence
- Break down barriers for access to equality/rights/social rights
- Changing discriminatory paradigm
- Challenge the power relations
- Combatting normalisation of abusive narratives

What else would you add here…?

- Feel free to expand the list with your own human rights-based message