

HELP
Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals
Council of Europe

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COMBATING HATE CRIME

HELP ONLINE COURSE

Duration: 6 hours

Available for free on the CoE HELP e-learning platform

Statement of Accomplishment

START COURSE

Council of Europe
Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) Programme
2026

Background and key concepts

Hate crimes represent a severe violation of human rights and human dignity, leaving profound impacts not only on individual victims but also on entire communities and social cohesion. Addressing them effectively requires a comprehensive, victim-centred approach grounded in international and European human rights standards.

The Council of Europe has established critical benchmarks, including the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Articles 2 (right to life), 3 (prohibition of torture), 8 (right to respect for private and family life), and 14 (prohibition of discrimination) oblige states to effectively investigate hate elements/bias motives, unmask discriminatory intent, and protect targeted groups. This framework is complemented by the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)4 on combating hate crime and the General Policy Recommendations from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI).

At the European Union level, standards are anchored in Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights alongside specific instruments such as the EU Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating racism and xenophobia, the Racial Equality Directive, and the Victims' Rights Directive. Additional guidance and capacity-building frameworks are provided across the OSCE/ODIHR region and the United Nations system.

To successfully counter hate crime, justice systems must accurately distinguish hate crimes from related phenomena like hate speech, criminal discrimination, extremism, and terrorism. Doing so requires robust criminal legislation, systematic application of objective bias indicators, active multi-agency collaboration, and dedicated support structures for victims.

About the HELP course

The HELP course on Combating Hate Crime is designed to guide legal and justice professionals through the comprehensive legal frameworks, case law, and practical tools developed at the Council of Europe, European Union, and international levels. Throughout the course, participants explore foundational concepts of hate crime, legal models for addressing bias motivation, key principles developed by the European Court of Human Rights, evidence-gathering through bias indicators, and victim-centred investigation and prosecution strategies.

Originally developed in 2015, the course underwent updates in 2020 and again in 2026 under the auspices of the Council of Europe's Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) Programme, the Hate Speech, Hate Crime and Artificial Intelligence Unit of the Council of Europe

and the Roma and Travellers Division of the Council of Europe, with specialised input from the Registry of the European Court of Human Rights, the European Commission, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and OSCE/ODIHR. The most recent update was made possible through the framework of the EU-CoE HELP in the EU IV Project.

Target audience

This free online module is primarily addressed to **legal professionals**:

- judges
- prosecutors
- lawyers
- court staff

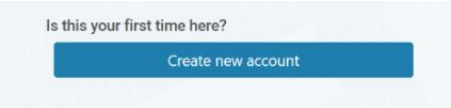
It will also be of particular value to law enforcement officers, victim support structures, human rights professionals, and members of national human rights institutions and civil society organisations. Additionally, the course is suitable for university students and anyone interested in learning how to counter hate crime.

Course outline

The course has an introductory module and four substantive modules:

1	Understanding hate crime • Foreword (welcome video, for whom and by whom, course objectives, resources, course structure) • Introduction • What is hate crime? • International legal framework • Understanding the unique impact of hate crimes • Concepts related to hate crime • Key points and knowledge check
2	Addressing hate crime: criminal law responses and beyond • Introduction • Hate Crimes as Criminal Offences • Legal Approaches to Addressing Hate Crimes • Institutional Hate Crime Responses • Building a Holistic Framework Against Hate Crime • How to recognise hate crime using bias indicators • Key points and knowledge check
3	Case law of the European Court of Human Rights • Introduction • The duty to investigate without prejudice and stereotypes • The duty to unmask bias motivation • The duty to conduct an effective investigation • Hate crime, hate speech and the duty to ensure effective protection • Key points and knowledge check
4	Investigating, prosecuting and sentencing hate crime • Introduction • Reporting hate crime • Investigating hate crime • Prosecuting hate crime • Sentencing • Practical Case Application • Good practices in investigating, prosecuting and sentencing hate crime • Key points and knowledge check

How to access the HELP online module



This short course is freely available in self-learning format on the CoE HELP e-learning platform. It has a total length of **6 hours** and participants who complete it in self-learning format can obtain an electronic '**Statement of accomplishment**'. To access the course, you need to have a HELP account. If you haven't created one yet, you can sign up **here** - it only takes a few minutes.