



WORKING OUR WAY TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED MESSAGES

Filled in example

This handout is prepared for you featuring all the reflection questions from the step-by-step tool. It will help you to summarise and record your thoughts during the message building process and will give you a chance to focus on key points, come back to them when needed, share and discuss with friends and colleagues.

This handout can also be used by trainers and youth workers in their educational activities guiding the counter and alternative messages to hate speech building process.

Step 0 Pick your subject

So, to get started, choose the hateful message/narrative that you wish to start working with

“These dirty refugees and migrants have flooded our good old Europe stealing our jobs. Get them out of here”.

Step 1 Identify your reactions, emotions, and values

What was your first reaction to what you read or saw in the hate message? What were your emotions when you came across the hate speech message? What were your first thoughts? What provokes and triggers these reactions? Does reading or seeing this hate speech message make you want to respond? If so, how?

I have a strong physical reaction, my heart starts beating quicker, my blood raises up to my head, and a big pressure on my chest makes breathing harder. I feel anger, frustration, fear, despair, want to curse.

The first thought in my head is "what the hell, how can someone be so ignorant, heartless, unconscious, arrogant to say something stupid like this". All the images of people having to leave their countries for various reasons, war, refugees trying to save their lives, children and women, horrible stories of their journeys come in front of my eyes. And again, a thought of how hostile we can be, how can we turn a blind eye on personal stories of people in despair. The political manipulations, how in 21st century we can be so close-minded, and so easily manipulated into anything.

I suddenly think I should ask the person who posted this message to imagine what it would be like to have to flee and end up in a place, where people could call you dirty, bunch of terrorists, or anything like that.

Step 2 Analyse hate speech and understand the narrative

What is in the core of this message, what does it “really” say? What meanings and associations does it provoke? What image is presented of the people or groups discussed in the message? What stereotypes, labels and terms are used in the message? Who is the audience of the message? What emotions and actions it intends to evoke in the audience? What is presented as “facts”, and are the “facts” accurate and from reliable sources? What is the current reality, context, beliefs which are feeding these narratives? How does this narrative affect you and others’ lives?

Most importantly: *How and which human rights are concerned in this message and which ones are being violated?*

Basically, this message and the choice of words implies that the migrants are some other species, dirty, that they bring disease with them, they have low standards of culture and hygiene. It also implies they do not belong here, they are not like us, if they leave next to us, we will also get dirty. Their dirty thoughts are no good, not up to our values, morals and beliefs, they are a threat to our moral, and the kind, beautiful, pure Europe. Finally, the message implies they, the refugees, and migrants, come to steal what we have. This message also puts refugees, migrants into one big group labelled ‘them’, without differentiation, without trying to understand who is who, who has what status, what plans for future, wishes to return, without considering first, second generations of migrants, not considering the fact that many migrants have long been citizens of the countries they came to.

Of course, in these generalisations it is easier to manipulate. For example, ‘Because of them we (Europeans) do not have enough jobs and have to suffer in our own country’. Their message manipulates to trigger a fear of losing economic security and therefore anger. Because the message speaks of the refugees and migrants as one bunch, no individuals, no faces, no personal stories, simply a group they can be presented as a flood. A flood that comes and destroy. This refers to natural disasters and fear to lose everything we have, like water floods destroys houses and bridges. So, we are triggered to be afraid of that group, and whatever we are afraid of we want to keep away or push away so to protect what is important to us from being destroyed.”

This message is intending to create a negative reaction and make believe that that the problems of employment for example, are because of the migrants, even though there is no evidence and no direct link between the migrants and refugees coming into the country and the level of unemployment. The presentation of statistics about migrant, refugees and unemployment are presented in such a way that it gives an impression of a link. This manipulation is possible, because in the reality of present economic, political crisis, there is an urge to find an explanation. Instead of challenging economic and social policies and their failures, a scapegoat is used as distraction and make believe that simply getting them out of the country, will solve the issues. The words used are not neutral, for example stealing is done by thieves, so the refugees and migrants are portrayed as having gained employment falsely or undeserved. This creates a serious tension in the society, where it becomes dangerous to be different, to come from a different place, where no one cares what you have been through and that at any moment another group can become a scapegoat and be targeted.

The rights of these group of people (refugees and migrants) for peace, security, dignity, equality, mobility, decent life, and work are at risk of being violated, let alone the fact, that the message can trigger violence.

Step 3 Work your way to the message and narrative you want to construct

What do you want to do/achieve (counter the hate, or stop the hater: e.g. challenge the view, show it is irrational, protect people, hold accountable, show the consequences of the hate, etc, or provide alternatives: show a different picture, call for inclusion and solidarity in difficult times, appeal to human rights principles and human dignity, promote critical thinking about complex situations, replace a stereotype with a positive image of the 'other').

Who is your target audience (are you replying to a hater, or do you want to address someone else (peers, friends, the victim(s) general public?). What do you want people reading your message to do?

How do you want to help those who are being /or have been targeted by the hateful message? What do you know about the group that is targeted, and how do you want to portray them in your message? What arguments, data, research, and facts already exist to help you develop and challenge the generalisations and messages? What tone and language do you need to use to achieve that?

I know that I want to challenge this message, and want people reading it to stop believing blindly in what they hear or read. People need to see the illogical construction and reasoning in the message, and I want them to open up for information, which might not be so comfortable and different to what we know or believe, so they can make up their own critical mind. IN other words, I would like people to look deeper into the situations.

I hope people will see behind the labels and words, and start having an internal dialogue, challenging what they hear, and find compassion for situation of others.

I know it is harder to talk to haters, so I would prefer that I talk to people who are somewhere in the middle, often they might be simple observers. That is my target audience the bystander whom I hope will stop passively observing and take a stand, see what is happening around, realize that this concern all of us.

So, there are several options to respond to a message like that.

If I want to try to counter this specific message and show a different viewpoint I could possibly write "The refugees are taking the jobs which many Europeans do not want and will not take. So, you should be thankful, that people have arrived and are willing to take them.". "Good old Europe has flooded so many of the countries the refugees are coming from in the past, that it is high time to open the doors now and welcome them.", "If getting a job is so easy, that a refugee, who just arrived fleeing from death due to war, can so easily "steal" it, why did you not take the job in the first place?", "Refugee can be administrative status, but is not a medical diagnosis". ,.

The question is do they serve a wider purpose I have, are they not reproducing stereotype, hate, blame, mocking, anger? They address this one specific issue of hate towards the refugees and migrants, but what I want is that all the people who are usually targeted by hate are protected and make the context different. I might want to provide an alternative instead, in that case I might better write: "many of the refugees who have come to Europe in the past 5 years are highly qualified professionals, fleeing persecution and death in their countries of origin", "My friend Amir from Syria, is a talented young pottery maker, who has created his small workshop and employs 2 local youngsters from disadvantaged families teaching them the craft."

I should go through the responses I made and analyse them before choosing the most fitting one. Before choosing the one I want to use, it is important to go to the next step, and understand what the message and the narrative is I want to pass through.

Step 4 Define the Human rights-based narrative

In this step, you will draft a short paragraph 'your narrative', in other words 'your story' that you wish to tell about the issue targeted by the hate speech. Reflect on:

What is in the core of the narrative (your story) you want to develop, what do you want to tell people with it? How does this narrative affect your and others' lives? What does this narrative intend for the reader to think, feel, do? Which human rights does it celebrate, explain, and promote? How does your narrative contribute to the culture of human rights?

Who does this narrative support and how? (e.g. the victims of hate speech, or persons in vulnerable position). Is it positive, how does it explain their rights and membership of the community, etc.?

What are you saying about other groups? (e.g. are you mentioning haters, and if so how? Remember don't attack, ridicule, or patronise - break the cycle of hate). Does the narrative respond to reality, and fit the context of the audience?

The narrative I want to put out is one that includes valuing of each life, value of each person and their experience, their life path and journey. I believe in rights to live in dignity, security and equality and non-discrimination. It is therefore important to address our fears, and trust in human relationships, equality, value of caring and understanding. This requires us to have rationality and critical mind, open heart, and open mind. People are to be treated equal and with compassion, I want to stress that in the times of turbulences, it is important not to lose sight of the individual human, to nurture feelings of solidarity, need of supporting each other to rise up again after we fall. I also do not believe in a "us" and "them" divide. I learn a lot from being around other people, and I think diversity enriches my life and our society. Of course, it is a challenge at times, but with good will there is enough space and prosperity for everyone to share in.

Step 5 Develop the message based on your human rights-based narrative

So, take your narrative from step 4, highlight the key word or words, and think creatively about how you can communicate that word to others. You can try to find synonyms to the words, find a word play, complete the sentence 'Imagine the world without [word], it would be...' or different variations on that sentence, find images that express the key words (Remember the saying: one picture can say a thousand words!).

The key words I underline from my human rights narrative above are: equality and non-discrimination; dignity and security; trust in human relationships; diversity enriches; enough space and prosperity for everyone.

Here are a few examples of possible messages, prompted at the end of this journey.

- You can always choose to build bridges instead of walls.
- Living in peace is not a privilege, but a right.
- Hearts and minds do not have a colour, neither citizenship.
- If even one person has their rights violated, next one can be me.
- Each flower brings its fragrance and beauty to the bouquet.
- We are all different, but all equal in our need for dignity.
- Universal... Inalienable... Indivisible... and this is translated to 89 languages
- A bundle of belongings isn't the only thing a refugee brings to the host country – as the refugee Albert Einstein once said.