



The Anti-rumours Approach

The Anti-rumours Approach



From principles to action

The Anti-rumours Approach is more than a communication technique or an awareness-raising campaign. It is a systemic framework for designing initiatives that seek to prevent prejudice, misinformation, disinformation, discriminatory narratives and hate speech by addressing their underlying causes and promoting sustained social and institutional change.

Anti-rumours initiatives recognise that discrimination often operates through intersecting factors and therefore require context-sensitive responses.

The approach was originally developed in the city of Barcelona and then expanded to the rest of Europe and beyond in the context of the Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme of the Council of Europe, to address discrimination related to cultural diversity and migration. It has since proven adaptable to many other forms of discrimination, including those relating to LGBTIQ people, acknowledging that experiences of discrimination differ across and within LGBTIQ communities depending on multiple social factors.

Regardless of the specific topic, all anti-rumours initiatives share the same methodological foundations: they are evidence-based, preventive, participatory, collaborative and oriented towards social transformation rather than simply reacting to harmful speech.

Applying the approach does not necessarily require creating a new initiative. In many cases, it involves strengthening, connecting or adapting existing projects and activities so that they address more explicitly the role of prejudice, misinformation, disinformation, discriminatory narratives and the interpretative frameworks through which people understand social reality.

An anti-rumours initiative is defined not by the type of actions, but by the way they are designed. A training course, theatre performance, communication campaign, educational programme, community dialogue or institutional policy can all become anti-rumours initiatives when they are developed in line with the principles and methodology of the Anti-rumours Approach.

The same approach can be applied at different levels:

- **An Anti-rumours action**, addressing a specific challenge or target group through one or more activities.

- **An Anti-rumours project**, combining several complementary actions over a longer period to achieve broader objectives.
- **An Anti-rumours Strategy (ARS)**, embedding the approach into public policy through long-term planning, cross-sectoral governance and collaboration between institutions and civil society.

Although these initiatives differ in scale, they all follow the same methodological logic.

The Anti-rumours methodological cycle

The Anti-rumours Approach follows a continuous cycle of understanding, action, learning and improvement, whichever ground of discrimination it is applied to. Rather than offering predetermined solutions, it provides a framework for designing initiatives adapted to each local context.

1. Understanding the context before acting

Every Anti-rumours initiative begins with understanding the specific context in which it will operate.

Rather than assuming what the problem is, the approach starts by exploring the local reality through assessments that identify existing prejudices, misinformation, disinformation, discriminatory narratives, hate speech, institutional barriers, protective factors, assets and opportunities for change. It also analyses the social, emotional, cognitive and structural dimensions that shape these narratives, together with the voices and experiences of the people most directly exposed to discrimination.

However, an anti-rumours diagnosis should not focus only on problems and deficits. It should also identify:

- existing actions, projects, policies and networks.
- practices that are already contributing to inclusion, recognition and equal rights.
- trusted actors and potential allies.
- spaces for interaction, participation and dialogue.
- positive narratives, role models and protective factors.
- opportunities for connecting or strengthening existing work.

Many initiatives may already contribute to anti-rumours objectives without using that name. Identifying and connecting these initiatives helps avoid duplication, makes better use of existing knowledge and resources, and creates a stronger foundation for action.

The diagnosis should also identify approaches that are ineffective, inconsistent with the anti-rumours principles or liable to reproduce stereotypes, polarisation or harmful narratives. These practices should be reviewed and adapted.

Evidence is therefore the starting point not only for defining what needs to change and what should be prioritised, but also for recognising what already works and determining how it can be reinforced.

2. Defining the change to be achieved

Anti-rumours initiatives do not simply aim to disseminate information, increase visibility or celebrate diversity. Their purpose is to generate changes in how people interpret reality, relate to one another, participate in society and exercise their rights.

Depending on the context, initiatives may seek to:

- reducing prejudice, disinformation and misinformation.
- strengthening critical thinking.
- transforming discriminatory narratives and interpretative frameworks.
- promoting recognition, equality and shared values.
- increasing opportunities for positive interaction
- strengthening institutional practices and responses.
- creating safer and more inclusive environments.
- increasing participation and a sense of belonging

Clearly defining the intended change makes it possible to select appropriate audiences, methodologies, partnerships and indicators.

The objectives should be based on the assessment and connected to existing policies, projects and community processes wherever possible

3. Design interventions that create the conditions for change

The Anti-rumours Approach moves beyond reactive responses that merely contradict misinformation or condemn discriminatory speech.

Instead, it seeks to create the conditions that enable people to critically reflect on their own assumptions, reconsider stereotypes and construct new ways of interpreting reality.

Although methodologies vary depending on the objectives and target groups, anti-rumours initiatives generally share several common characteristics:

- they address the underlying causes of prejudice rather than only its visible manifestations.
- they promote critical thinking and an understanding of misinformation, disinformation, manipulation and cognitive biases.
- they avoid unnecessarily amplifying harmful narratives.
- they create alternative narratives based on human rights, equality, dignity and democratic values.
- they create opportunities for dialogue, interaction and mutual recognition.
- they ensure the meaningful participation of people affected by discrimination and incorporate their contributions.
- they combine preventive, proactive and constructive approaches.
- they define expected changes and include evaluation from the outset.

The choice of activity is therefore less important than the methodological coherence behind its design.

4. Adapting and strengthening existing initiatives

Applying the Anti-rumours Approach does not always mean designing a completely new action, project or strategy.

Existing initiatives may already promote inclusion, participation, equal rights, community interaction or critical thinking, but may not explicitly consider how prejudice, misinformation, disinformation, and discriminatory narratives affect their objectives or participants.

In such cases, an anti-rumours initiative may consist of reviewing and strengthening an existing initiative by:

- incorporating an analysis of prevalent prejudices and narratives.
- adapting its messages to avoid reproducing or amplifying harmful frames.
- integrating critical-thinking components.
- creating spaces for dialogue and positive interaction.
- increasing the participation of people directly affected.
- connecting it with other relevant initiatives and actors.
- introducing alternative and transformative narratives.
- defining more specific change objectives and evaluation indicators.

This can be more effective and sustainable than creating isolated actions, particularly when the existing initiative already has legitimacy, established relationships and access to priority audiences.

The methodology therefore encourages practitioners to connect what is already being done well, reinforce its contribution to the objectives of the Anti-rumours Approach and transform those aspects that are not producing the intended results.

5. Building collaboration and shared responsibility

Lasting social change cannot be achieved by one institution or organisation acting alone. The Anti-rumours Approach promotes collaboration between public authorities, civil society organisations, educational institutions, cultural agents, researchers, media professionals, community organisations and people with lived experience of discrimination.

The identification of key actors and potential allies should begin during the assessment and continue throughout the design and implementation process. Partnerships should be based on a clear understanding of the contribution, influence and responsibilities of each actor.

Those directly exposed to discrimination should not be engaged solely as beneficiaries but also as active contributors to the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives, while ensuring that their participation is safe and does not become tokenistic or exploitative.

This collaborative ecosystem makes it possible to:

- combining complementary knowledge and resources.

- reaching different audiences.
- reinforcing existing initiatives.
- increasing legitimacy and impact.
- promoting institutional shared responsibility.
- creating more sustainable ecosystems of action.

6. Evaluating, learning and adapting

Evaluation is not considered the final stage of an initiative but an integral part of its design and implementation. From the outset, anti-rumours initiatives should identify the changes they seek to achieve and define indicators to measure progress towards those outcomes.

Evaluation may examine changes in:

- knowledge and understanding.
- attitudes and perceptions.
- narratives and interpretative frameworks.
- behaviours and interaction.
- participation and a sense of belonging.
- institutional policies and practices.
- collaboration among stakeholders.
- perceptions of safety, recognition and legitimacy.

Evaluation should also examine whether existing initiatives have been effectively connected, whether practices have been adapted and whether the initiative has generated new capacities and alliances.

Learning from both achievements and limitations enables initiatives to evolve and strengthens the evidence base of the Anti-rumours Approach.

7. Sustaining and scaling up change

Individual actions can evolve into broader projects and successful projects can become part of institutional policies and long-term Anti-rumours Strategies.

Sustainability and scaling up may involve:

- integrating an initiative into existing plans or services.
- adapting it for use in other contexts.
- transferring its methodology to other organisations.
- consolidating partnerships and networks.
- incorporating anti-rumours criteria into ongoing programmes.
- allocating stable institutional resources.
- using evaluation findings to improve or expand the initiative .

An Anti-rumours Strategy therefore does not represent a different methodology. Rather, it is the long-term and systemic application of the same methodological principles through public policy, cross-sectoral governance, continuous learning and sustained collaboration between institutions and civil society.

What makes an initiative genuinely anti-rumours?

Whatever its scale, an initiative can be considered genuinely anti-rumours when it:

- is based on an understanding of the local context rather than assumptions.
- seeks to generate sustainable social and institutional change rather than isolated awareness.
- addresses the root causes of prejudice, misinformation, disinformation, and discriminatory narratives.
- combines critical thinking, alternative narratives, dialogue and participation.
- actively involves those exposed to discrimination.
- builds partnerships and shared responsibility.
- incorporates evaluation, learning and continuous improvement.

The practical tools included in this toolkit are organised according to this methodological framework. Together, they support practitioners, institutions and organisations in applying the Anti-rumours Approach to the prevention of prejudice, discriminatory narratives and hate speech affecting LGBTIQ people, whether they are adapting an existing activity, designing a new project or developing a comprehensive Anti-rumours Strategy

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author(s). Views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union or the Council of Europe.

This document was drafted in the framework of the EU/CoE joint project “Combating anti-LGBTIQ violence and hate speech and strengthening awareness raising and fact-based narratives about LGBTIQ persons”.

The reproduction of extracts (up to 500 words) is authorised, except for commercial purposes, as long as the integrity of the text is preserved, the excerpt is not used out of context, does not provide incomplete information or does not otherwise mislead the reader as to the nature, scope or content of the text.

The source text must always be acknowledged as follows “© Council of Europe, 2026. All rights reserved. Licensed to the European Union under conditions”. All other requests concerning the reproduction/translation of all or part of the document should be addressed to the Publications and Visual Identity Division, Council of Europe (F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex or publishing@coe.int).

All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics Unit of the Council of Europe’s Equal rights and Hate Prevention Division, Council of Europe, F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, E-mail: sogi@coe.int

This publication has not been copyedited by the PVID Editorial Unit to correct typographical and grammatical errors.

Cover and layout: Diversit

© Council of Europe, October 2026. All rights reserved. Licensed to the European Union under conditions.”