

The report "[*Stronger Together Against Online Hate and Discrimination*](#)" (2025) presents the results of a project aimed at strengthening young people's ability to respond to online hate and discrimination. The project focuses on young people aged 16 to 24, a group that frequently encounters harmful online behavior ranging from seemingly harmless jokes to explicit discrimination and even extremism. These experiences can negatively affect their mental health, sense of safety, and trust in society. At the same time, many young people feel that intervening is either pointless or risky, which contributes to the persistence and normalization of harmful behavior online.

To address this issue, the project developed an approach called the Social Cleanup. This approach was co-created with young people themselves and is based on the idea that meaningful change requires collective action rather than placing responsibility on individuals alone. The Social Cleanup combines training sessions, action-oriented events called Social Cleanup Days, and a youth-led social media campaign on Instagram. A key strength of the approach lies in peer-to-peer learning, youth ownership, and collaboration with professionals, municipalities, and social organizations. In addition, the project emphasized building a broader network in which stakeholders share knowledge, collaborate, and develop a shared vision for tackling online hate.

The report explains that online hate and discrimination exist on a spectrum, starting with negative or sarcastic comments and escalating to bullying, structural discrimination, and extremist content. These forms of behavior often overlap and can reinforce one another. Online hate can target individuals, groups, or institutions, and its impact varies depending on the context and the vulnerability of those involved. Certain groups, such as young people with migrant backgrounds, LGBTQ+ youth, and young women, are disproportionately affected. A key mechanism behind the increase in online hate is the normalization of such behavior. Factors like social media dynamics, algorithms, anonymity, and inconsistent moderation contribute to making harmful content seem more acceptable over time.

The report also highlights the different roles people play in online environments. Instead of labeling individuals as perpetrators or victims, the project uses the terms "spreaders," "targets," and "bystanders." Spreaders may act out of frustration, ignorance, or intentional harm, while targets often experience serious emotional and psychological consequences, including anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. Bystanders play a crucial role because their reactions can either reinforce or challenge harmful behavior. Encouraging bystanders to become "upstanders," in a safe way that fits their personal motivation, who actively intervene or report harmful content, is seen as a key strategy in reducing online hate and shaping positive social norms.

In terms of impact, the report shows that online hate can have both short-term and long-term effects on young people. In the short term, it can cause emotional distress such as anger, sadness, and frustration. Over time, it can lead to more serious issues such as depression, feelings of powerlessness, and changes in behavior, including withdrawing from online spaces or limiting self-expression. Many young people express a need for better education, stronger support from others, clearer regulation by platforms, and positive campaigns that promote empathy and awareness.

The project also examined what makes interventions effective. It found that successful approaches go beyond raising awareness and instead focus on building empathy, teaching practical skills, and empowering young people to act. Interventions should connect to young people's lived experiences and provide concrete tools for recognizing and responding to harmful behavior. Involving young people directly in the design and implementation of interventions is especially important, as it increases relevance and impact. Approaches that rely solely on information or that unintentionally reinforce stereotypes are less effective.

The Social Cleanup intervention was tested through pilot sessions and a social media campaign. During the Social Cleanup Days, participants engaged in discussions, reflected on personal experiences, and practiced responding to online hate in a safe environment. The results show that participants gained knowledge, developed skills, and felt more confident in taking action. Some participants reported that they had started to respond to or report harmful content after the sessions, indicating a shift in behavior. The peer-to-peer aspect and the opportunity to share experiences were particularly valuable.

At the same time, the report acknowledges important limitations. The intervention appears to be most effective for young people who are already motivated to address online hate. For those who are less engaged, the approach needs to focus more on awareness and reflection before encouraging action. Fear of negative consequences, such as backlash or becoming a target of hate, remains a significant barrier to participation. The report also emphasizes that young people cannot be expected to solve the problem alone. A broader effort involving social media platforms, policymakers, educators, and communities is necessary to create meaningful change.

The evaluation of the project, supported by academic insights, suggests that the Social Cleanup contributes to key factors that influence behavior: knowledge, skills, motivation, and opportunity. Participants reported improved understanding of online hate, greater confidence in responding, and a stronger sense of belonging to a group that supports positive action. These factors together can lead to increased digital resilience and more active responses to harmful online behavior.

In conclusion, the report argues that tackling online hate and discrimination requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. The Social Cleanup demonstrates that involving young people as co-creators and empowering them through practical tools and supportive networks can lead to meaningful progress. However, lasting impact depends on continued collaboration across sectors and a shared commitment to fostering a safer and more inclusive online environment.