

# HATEFUL DISCRIMINATORY DISCOURSE ONLINE IN BULGARIA

## Annual Report 2024

### LIFE Project

November 2024

## Disclaimer

# HATEFUL DISCRIMINATORY DISCOURSE ONLINE IN BULGARIA

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**LIFE** is a transnational action supported by Erasmus+CBY and implemented by a consortium of 5 (five) organizations – **AMAD** (in Albania), **KOM018** (in Serbia), **YES** (in Bulgaria), **Beyond Borders** (in Italy), and **Euromed Eve Tunisia** (in Tunisia).

**LIFE-Living Safely in a Digital World** Project aims to increase the resilience of the young generation on facing the risks of the digitalization and its impact in their everyday life through empowering youth organizations to be involved in policy dialogue and use non-formal learning in their work with the young people.

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## Table of contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Key Highlights .....	3
Introduction.....	5
Scope .....	6
Methodology.....	6
Data and Analysis .....	8
Survey.....	8
Focus Group Discussion.....	17
Quantitative Data: Summary of Data Collected from Focus Groups .....	23
Qualitative Insights: Summary of Qualitative Findings from Focus Groups.....	24
Impact and Outcomes .....	25
Impact .....	25
Outcomes .....	25

## Executive Summary

### Overview

This report presents the findings from a focus group discussion and a survey conducted as part of the LIFE project, aimed at researching online hate speech. The focus group discussion explored participants' experiences, the impact of hate speech, reporting mechanisms, and potential solutions. The survey collected data on the frequency, types, and impact of hate speech on social media and online platforms.

Page | 3

### Key Highlights

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#### *Focus Group Discussion:*

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- ❑ **Experiences with Hate Speech:** Participants frequently encountered hate speech online, including racial, gender-based, and religious discrimination. This led to feelings of frustration, helplessness, and isolation.
- ❑ **Impact:** The emotional and psychological toll was significant, with participants reporting anxiety, anger, and a sense of powerlessness. Hate speech also affected offline interactions and community dynamics.
- ❑ **Reporting Mechanisms:** There was widespread dissatisfaction with current reporting mechanisms, which were seen as cumbersome and ineffective. Participants suggested improvements such as better communication and more user-friendly processes.
- ❑ **Recommendations:** Participants emphasized the need for education and awareness campaigns, stricter platform policies, and community support. They also highlighted the importance of consistent policy enforcement and better moderation tools.

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#### *Survey Analysis:*

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- ❑ **Demographics:** The survey included 50 respondents from various age groups, genders, and educational backgrounds, predominantly from Bulgaria.
- ❑ **Social Media Usage:** Most respondents used social media several times a day, with Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube being the most popular platforms.
- ❑ **Encountering Hate Speech:** Many respondents encountered hate speech daily or weekly, with common forms including racism, sexism, homophobia/transphobia, and religious intolerance.
- ❑ **Impact:** Respondents reported feeling upset, angry, or powerless. Common reactions included ignoring the content, blocking the user, or reporting the hate speech.
- ❑ **Effectiveness of Reporting:** Responses were mixed regarding the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms, with some content being removed and others seeing no action taken.

- **Perception of Hate Speech:** The majority of respondents viewed hate speech as a growing problem online and expressed high levels of concern.
- **Suggested Solutions:** Respondents recommended user education, stricter platform policies, legal measures, and support for victims as key strategies to combat hate speech.

### Recommendations

Page | 4

1. **Education and Awareness:** Implement comprehensive education and awareness campaigns to inform users about the impact of hate speech and promote respectful online interactions.
2. **Stricter Policies:** Develop and enforce stricter platform policies to deter hate speech, including better moderation tools and training for moderators.
3. **Improved Reporting Mechanisms:** Simplify the reporting process and ensure better communication and follow-up to make users feel supported.
4. **Community Support:** Foster community support networks to provide emotional support and resources for individuals targeted by hate speech.
5. **Legal Measures:** Advocate for stronger legal actions against perpetrators of hate speech to enhance accountability.

These findings underscore the need for a multi-faceted approach to effectively address online hate speech, involving education, policy enforcement, and community support.

## Introduction

The aim of LIFE project, proposed by this consortium is to increase the resilience of the young generation on facing the risks of the digitalization and its impact in their everyday life through empowering youth organizations to be involved in policy dialogue and use non-formal learning in their work with the young people. The objectives of LIFE are:

1. Enabling youth organizations to cooperate in inter/national level and “speak up” on behalf of young people, advocating to decision-makers for a safe internet that impacts their lives
2. Empowering youth workers with the necessary skills to support the young generation on their struggles to the digitalization of life through non-formal learning
3. Raising awareness on the impact of digitalization in the young people’s lives and how to work toward increased resilience

The project contributes to the following thematic areas/specific objectives of the call:

- Political participation, civic engagement and dialogue with decision-makers
- Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities
- Antidiscrimination and gender equality
- Digital and entrepreneurial skills

The purpose of this report is to present the findings from a focus group discussion and a survey conducted as part of the LIFE project, which aims to research and address online hate speech. The report seeks to:

1. **Understand Experiences:** Explore the experiences of individuals with online hate speech, including the types of hate speech encountered and the emotional and psychological impact on victims.
2. **Evaluate Reporting Mechanisms:** Assess the effectiveness of current reporting mechanisms on social media platforms and identify areas for improvement.
3. **Identify Solutions:** Gather recommendations from participants on how to combat hate speech, including educational initiatives, policy changes, and community support strategies.
4. **Inform Policy and Strategy:** Provide data and insights to inform the development of strategies and policies aimed at reducing hate speech and supporting affected individuals.
5. **Raise Awareness:** Highlight the prevalence and impact of online hate speech to raise awareness among stakeholders, including social media platforms, policymakers, and the general public.

By achieving these objectives, the report aims to contribute to a safer and more respectful online environment.

## Scope

The scope of this report encompasses the following areas:

Page | 6

1. **Geographical Coverage:** The research focuses on online hate speech within Bulgaria, with comparative insights from partner countries involved in the LIFE project.
2. **Demographic Coverage:** The study includes diverse demographic groups, covering various age ranges, genders, and educational backgrounds.
3. **Platforms Analyzed:** The research examines hate speech across multiple social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.
4. **Types of Hate Speech:** The study investigates different forms of hate speech, such as racism, sexism, homophobia/transphobia, and religious intolerance.
5. **Impact Assessment:** The report evaluates the emotional and psychological impact of hate speech on individuals and communities.
6. **Reporting Mechanisms:** The effectiveness of current reporting mechanisms on social media platforms is assessed.
7. **Recommendations:** The report provides recommendations for combating hate speech, including educational initiatives, policy changes, and community support strategies.

## Methodology

The methodology for this report includes both qualitative and quantitative research methods:

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### Focus Group Discussions:

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- **Participants:** A diverse group of 10 participants
- **Structure:** The discussions were structured around four main topics: experiences with hate speech, impact of hate speech, reporting mechanisms, and recommendations for solutions.
- **Data Collection:** The discussions were audio/video recorded with participants' consent, and a designated note-taker documented key points and non-verbal cues.
- **Analysis:** Transcripts were analyzed to identify common themes, patterns, and insights. Responses were compared across different demographic groups to identify significant differences in experiences or perceptions.

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*Survey:*

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- **Participants:** The survey included 50 respondents from various age groups, genders, and educational backgrounds.
- **Data Collection:** The survey collected data on the frequency, types, and impact of hate speech on social media and online platforms.
- **Analysis:** Quantitative data was summarized to highlight key trends and patterns. Segment analysis was conducted to understand differences across age groups, genders, and education levels. Sentiment analysis was performed to gauge the emotional impact of hate speech on respondents.

Page | 7

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*Triangulation:*

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- **Approach:** The focus group data was triangulated with survey results and other data sources to ensure the validity and comprehensiveness of the findings.
- **Purpose:** This multi-faceted approach provided a robust understanding of the issues discussed and helped to corroborate the insights obtained from different methods.

By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, the report offers a comprehensive analysis of online hate speech, its impact, and potential solutions.

## Data and Analysis

### Survey

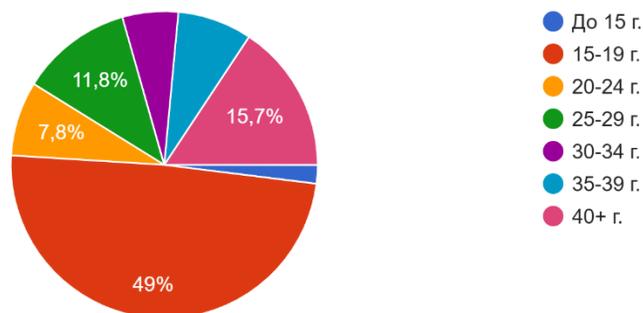
The survey is part of the LIFE project and is aimed at researching online hate speech. It has been conducted since September 2024 and is ongoing. The survey is national and takes place in Bulgaria, with the same survey being conducted in partner countries. The goal of the survey is to collect data on the frequency, types, and impact of hate speech on social media and online platforms. The results will be used to develop strategies and policies to combat hate speech and support affected individuals. Currently, the analysis is based on 50 responses.

### Summary of Survey Responses

#### 1. Demographics:

- **Age Groups:** Respondents range from under 15 to over 40 years old.

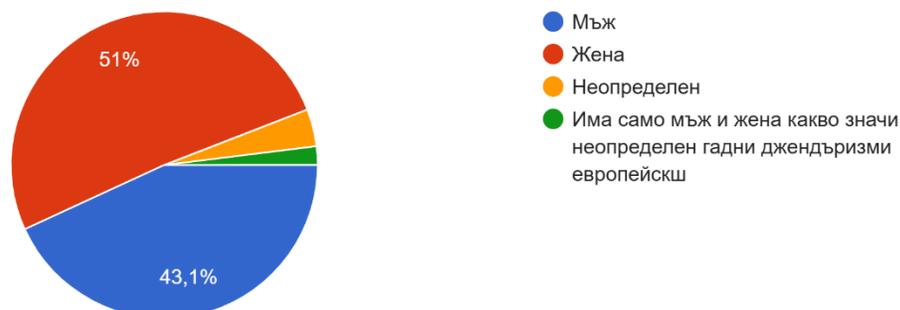
1. Възраст  
51 отговора



- **Gender:** Both male and female respondents, with a few indicating "unspecified."

## 2. Пол

51 отговора

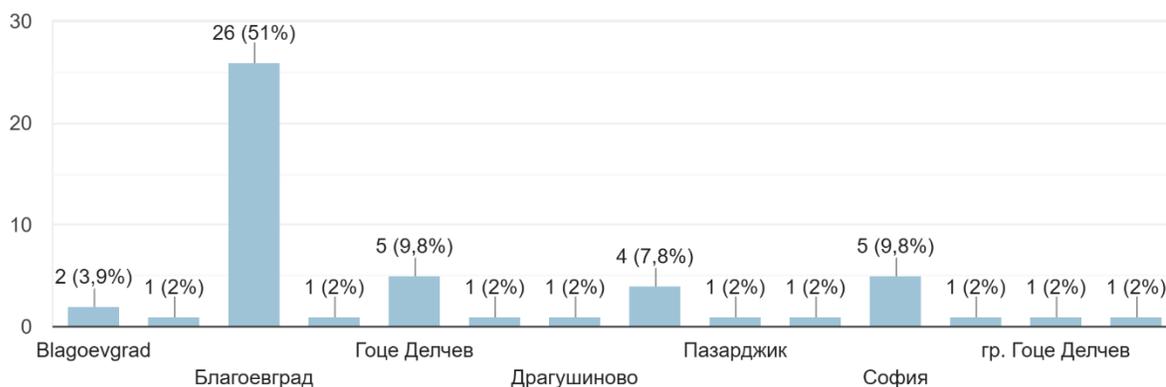


Page | 9

- **Locations:** Predominantly from Blagoevgrad, with some from other cities like Sofia and Goce Delchev.

## 3. Град/село

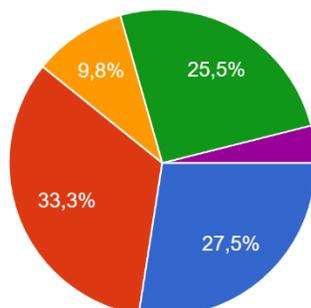
51 отговора



- **Education Levels:** Vary from primary education to postgraduate qualifications.

#### 4. Образование (завършено)

51 отговора



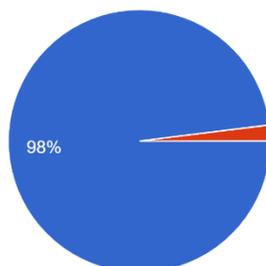
- Основно образование
- Средно образование
- Бакалавър
- Магистър
- Следдипломна квалификация

## 2. Social Media Usage:

- **Frequency:** Most respondents use social media several times a day.

#### 5. Колко често използвате социалните медии?

51 отговора

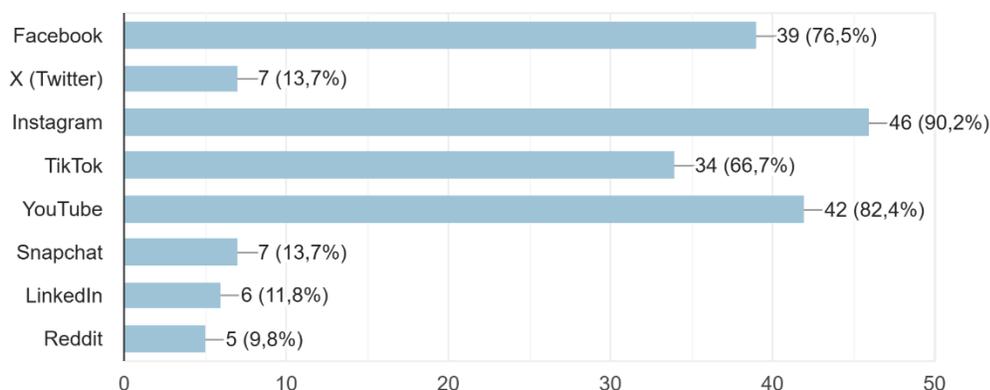


- Няколко пъти на ден
- Веднъж на ден
- Няколко пъти седмично
- Веднъж седмично
- Рядко
- Никога

- **Platforms:** Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are the most commonly used platforms.

6. Кои социални медийни платформи използвате най-често? (Изберете всички приложими)

51 отговора

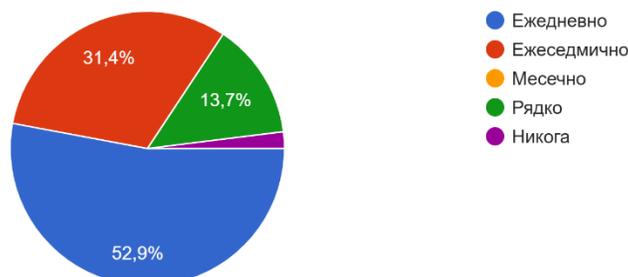


3. Encountering Hate Speech:

- **Frequency:** Many respondents encounter hate speech daily or weekly.

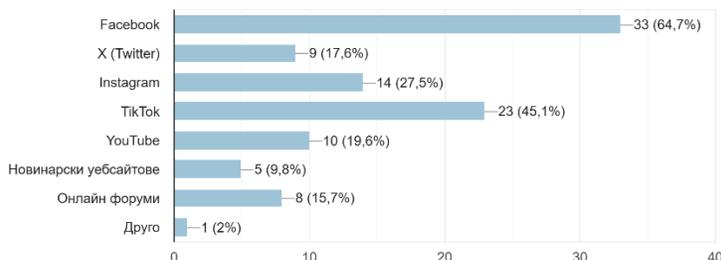
10. Ако да, колко често се натъквате на реч на омразата онлайн?

51 отговора



- **Platforms:** Facebook and TikTok are frequently mentioned as platforms where hate speech is encountered.

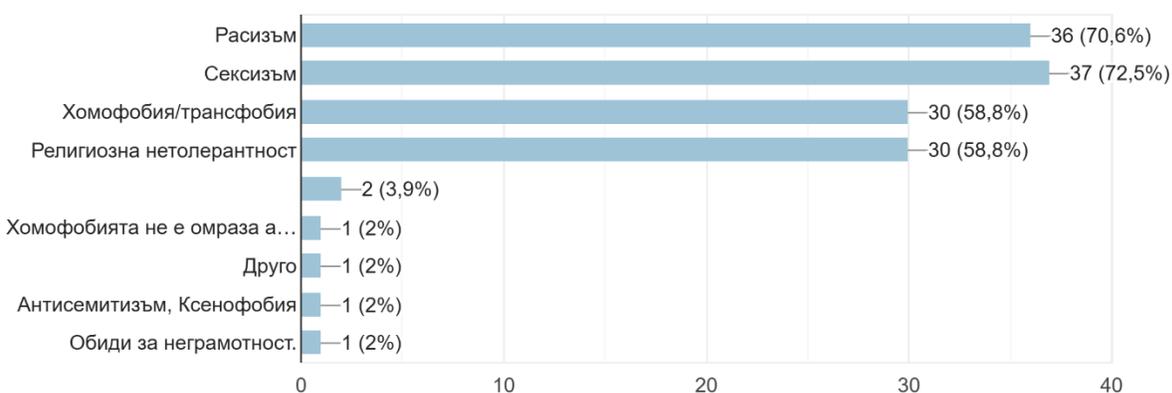
12. В кои платформи най-често срещате език на омразата? (Изберете всички приложими)  
51 отговора



#### 4. Types of Hate Speech:

- Common forms include racism, sexism, homophobia/transphobia, and religious intolerance.

11. Какви форми на реч на омразата сте срещали онлайн? (Изберете всички приложими)  
51 отговора

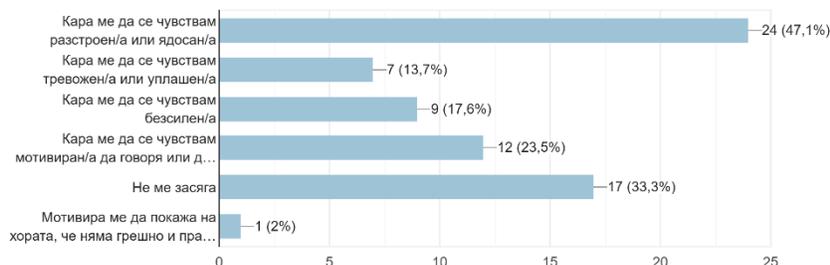


#### 5. Impact of Hate Speech:

- Emotional Impact:** Respondents report feeling upset, angry, or powerless.

13. Как бихте описали въздействието на речта на омразата върху вас лично? (Изберете всички приложими)

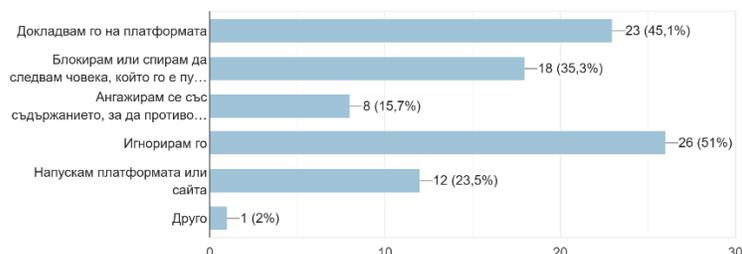
51 отговора



- **Reactions:** Common reactions include ignoring the content, blocking the user, or reporting the hate speech to the platform.

14. Как обикновено реагирате, когато срещнете реч на омразата онлайн? (Изберете всички приложими)

51 отговора

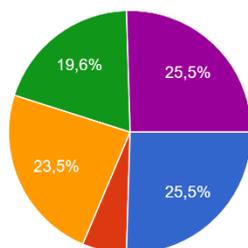


## 6. Effectiveness of Reporting:

- Mixed responses on the effectiveness of reporting hate speech, with some content being removed and others seeing no action taken.

15. Ако сте докладвали реч на омразата онлайн, какъв е бил резултатът?

51 отговора



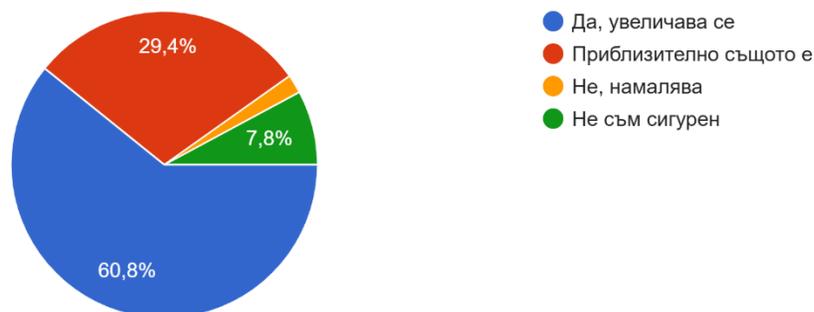
- Съдържанието беше премахнато
- Акаунтът е спрян или забранен
- Не са предприети никакви действия
- Не съм сигурен/а
- Никога не съм докладвал/а реч на омразата

## 7. Perception of Hate Speech as a Problem:

- Majority believe that hate speech is a growing problem online.

17. Вярвате ли, че речта на омразата е нарастващ проблем онлайн?

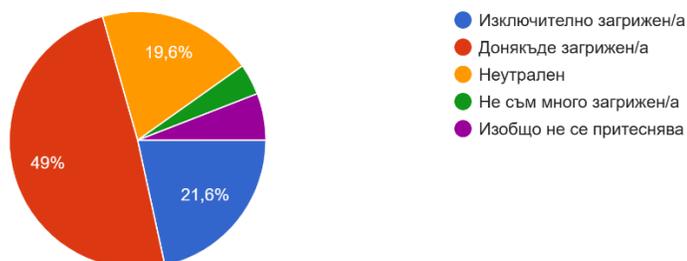
51 отговора



- Levels of concern vary, with some respondents feeling extremely concerned.

18. Доколко сте загрижени за речта на омразата онлайн?

51 отговора

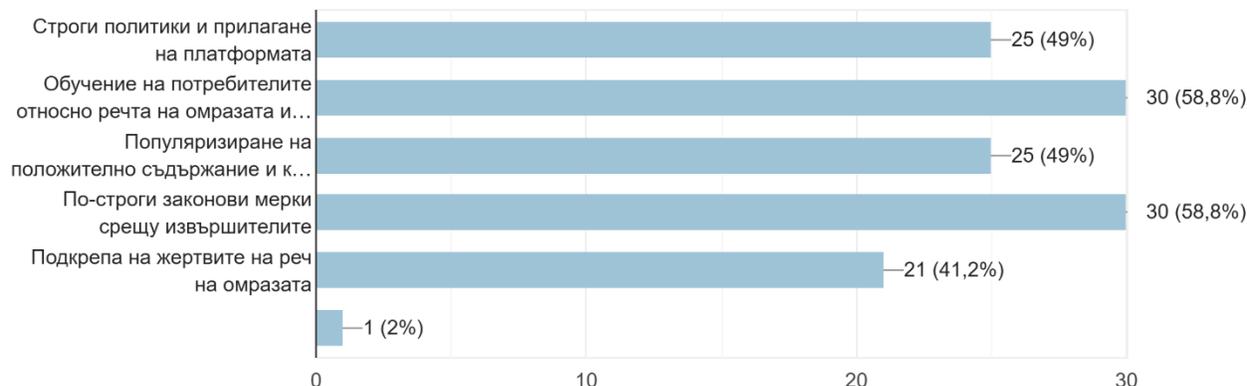


## 8. Suggested Solutions:

- Education:** Training users about hate speech and its consequences.
- Stricter Policies:** Implementing and enforcing stricter platform policies.
- Legal Measures:** Stronger legal actions against perpetrators.
- Support for Victims:** Providing support to those affected by hate speech.

19. Кои според вас са най-ефективните начини за борба с речта на омразата онлайн?  
(Изберете всички приложими)

51 отговора



## Analysis

The survey responses highlight a significant concern about the prevalence and impact of hate speech online. Social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok are frequently mentioned as hotspots for such content. The emotional toll on users is evident, with many feeling distressed or powerless when encountering hate speech.

Respondents suggest a multi-faceted approach to combat hate speech, emphasizing the need for user education, stricter platform policies, legal measures, and support for victims. The mixed effectiveness of reporting mechanisms indicates a need for platforms to improve their response to hate speech reports.

## Segment Analysis

### Age Groups

- ❑ **15-19 years:** This group frequently encounters hate speech, primarily on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. They often feel upset or angry and tend to ignore or block the content.
- ❑ **20-24 years:** Similar to the younger group, they encounter hate speech regularly, with Facebook and Instagram being common platforms. They report mixed effectiveness in handling hate speech.
- ❑ **25-29 years:** This group uses a variety of platforms and encounters hate speech daily. They often report the content but see varying results in terms of action taken.
- ❑ **30-34 years:** They encounter hate speech less frequently but still report significant emotional impact. They suggest stricter policies and user education as solutions.

- ❑ **35-39 years:** This group is highly concerned about hate speech and often engages with the content to counteract it. They also report the content but see mixed results.
- ❑ **40+ years:** They encounter hate speech daily, primarily on Facebook. They feel upset or anxious and often block or ignore the content.

## Gender

- ❑ **Male:** Males report encountering hate speech frequently and often feel upset or angry. They tend to report the content but see mixed effectiveness.
- ❑ **Female:** Females also encounter hate speech regularly and report feeling upset or powerless. They often block or ignore the content and suggest stricter policies and user education.
- ❑ **Unspecified:** This group encounters hate speech daily and feels anxious or upset. They report the content and suggest stricter platform policies and support for victims.

## Education Levels

- ❑ **Primary Education:** This group encounters hate speech frequently and feels upset or angry. They often block or ignore the content.
- ❑ **Secondary Education:** They encounter hate speech daily and feel upset or powerless. They suggest stricter policies and user education.
- ❑ **Bachelor's Degree:** This group encounters hate speech regularly and feels motivated to take action. They report the content and suggest stricter policies and support for victims.
- ❑ **Master's Degree:** They encounter hate speech daily and feel anxious or upset. They suggest stricter policies, user education, and support for victims.
- ❑ **Postgraduate Qualification:** This group encounters hate speech less frequently but still reports significant emotional impact. They suggest stricter policies and user education.

## Sentiment Analysis

The overall sentiment of the responses indicates a high level of concern about hate speech online. Common emotions include:

- ❑ **Upset/Angry:** Many respondents feel upset or angry when encountering hate speech.
- ❑ **Powerless:** Some respondents feel powerless or anxious.
- ❑ **Motivated:** A few respondents feel motivated to take action against hate speech.

## Trend Analysis

## Emerging Trends

- ❑ **Platforms:** Facebook and TikTok are frequently mentioned as platforms where hate speech is encountered.
- ❑ **Types of Hate Speech:** Common forms include racism, sexism, homophobia/transphobia, and religious intolerance.
- ❑ **Emotional Impact:** The emotional toll on users is significant, with many feeling distressed or powerless.
- ❑ **Reporting Effectiveness:** Mixed responses on the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms, with some content being removed and others seeing no action taken.
- ❑ **Suggested Solutions:** Respondents emphasize the need for user education, stricter platform policies, legal measures, and support for victims.

## Conclusion

The survey responses highlight the pervasive nature of hate speech online and its significant emotional impact on users. There is a clear need for a multi-faceted approach to combat hate speech, including user education, stricter platform policies, legal measures, and support for victims.

### Focus Group Discussion

#### 1. Introductions

The focus group began with the facilitator welcoming the participants and explaining the purpose of the discussion. Participants were informed about the topics to be covered, including hate speech, online hate speech, cyberbullying, and media literacy. The facilitator emphasized the importance of the participants' contributions to the research and assured them that their responses would be kept confidential. Ground rules were established to ensure a respectful and open discussion, including respecting each other's opinions, avoiding interruptions, and maintaining confidentiality. Participants signed consent forms, acknowledging their understanding of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. This initial phase helped to create a comfortable and trusting environment for the participants.



## 2. Main Discussion

The main discussion was divided into four topics, each designed to explore different aspects of the participants' experiences and perceptions.

**Topic 1: Experiences with Hateful Discriminatory Discourse Online** Participants shared various experiences with hate speech encountered online. They discussed the frequency of encountering such content on social media and online platforms. The nature of the hate speech varied, including racial, gender-based, and religious discrimination.

Page | 18

- **Nikola:** Frequently encountered racist comments on social media, especially related to current events. Nikola usually reported these comments but felt that nothing happened as a result. This led to feelings of frustration and helplessness.
- **Ivan:** Experienced gender-based hate speech in gaming communities. Ivan often tried to call out the behavior but found that it often led to more harassment. She expressed feeling isolated and unsupported by the community.
- **Lyubomir:** Encountered religious hate speech, particularly during certain holidays or political events. Lyubomir tended to ignore it to avoid escalating the situation, but this often left him feeling powerless and disheartened.
- **Mihaela:** Noted frequent sexist remarks on social media, especially in comment sections of popular posts. Mihaela reported these incidents but felt that the platforms did not take adequate action, leading to a sense of discouragement.

**Topic 2: Impact of Online Hateful Discriminatory Discourse** The discussion then moved to the emotional and psychological impact of encountering hate speech. Participants reported feelings of anxiety, anger, and frustration. They also discussed the broader impact on the community, expressing concerns about the normalization of hate and its effect on offline interactions.

- **Jordan:** Felt anxious and unsafe online, leading her to avoid certain platforms. This avoidance behavior impacted her social interactions and access to information.
- **Zlatan** Experienced anger and frustration, feeling that there was no accountability for such actions. This led to a sense of disillusionment with social media platforms.
- **Daniel:** Noted that hate speech created a toxic environment and normalized hate, affecting offline interactions as well. He observed changes in her behavior, becoming more cautious and reserved in both online and offline settings.
- **Petya:** Mentioned feeling depressed and isolated after encountering hate speech, which affected his mental health and willingness to engage online.

Participants also discussed changes in their behavior or online activity as a result of encountering hate speech.

- **Ivan:** Limited her social media use, which affected her ability to stay connected with friends and family.

- **Daniel:** Became more cautious about what he posted and who he interacted with, leading to a more guarded online presence.
- **Boris:** Tried to educate others about the impact of hate speech, engaging in discussions and sharing resources to raise awareness.
- **Atanas:** Reduced his participation in online forums and groups, feeling that it was safer to stay silent.

**Topic 3: Reporting Mechanisms** Participants shared their experiences with reporting hate speech online. They discussed the process and the barriers they encountered. Many were dissatisfied with the current reporting mechanisms, finding them cumbersome and feeling that platforms did not take their reports seriously.

- **Boris:** Reported hate speech several times but found the process cumbersome and felt that nothing happened as a result. This lack of action led to feelings of frustration and discouragement.
- **Ivan:** Reported a few incidents but never received any feedback from the platform. This lack of communication made her feel that her concerns were not valued.
- **Mihaela:** Found the reporting mechanisms not user-friendly and felt that platforms did not take the issue seriously. She suggested that the complexity of the process deterred many users from reporting incidents.
- **Nikola:** Noted that the reporting process was time-consuming and often led to no visible action, which discouraged his from reporting future incidents.

Participants suggested improvements to the reporting mechanisms, such as better communication and follow-up, and more user-friendly processes.

- **Lyumobir:** Suggested that platforms need to be more transparent about their actions and provide regular updates on the status of reports.
- **Ivan:** Recommended better communication and follow-up from platforms to ensure that users feel heard and supported.
- **Daniel:** Called for a simplified reporting process and quicker responses to make it easier for users to report incidents and see results.
- **Zlatan:** Proposed that platforms should implement automated systems to acknowledge reports and provide immediate feedback.

**Topic 4: Recommendations and Solutions** The final topic focused on brainstorming effective ways to combat hate speech online. Participants suggested education and awareness campaigns, stricter platform policies, and community support as potential solutions.

- **Mihaela:** Emphasized the importance of education and awareness campaigns to change mindsets and reduce ignorance. She believed that educating users about the impact of hate speech could lead to more respectful online interactions.

- **Georgi:** Suggested that platforms should have stricter policies and enforce them consistently to deter hate speech. He also recommended that platforms invest in better moderation tools and training for moderators.
- **Petya:** Highlighted the importance of community support in standing up for each other. She suggested creating support networks and resources for individuals targeted by hate speech.
- **Ivn:** Proposed that schools and community organizations should collaborate to educate young people about the consequences of hate speech and promote digital literacy.

Participants also discussed the role of education in changing mindsets and reducing ignorance, and the importance of community support for individuals targeted by hate speech.

- **Atanas:** Believed that education could change mindsets and reduce ignorance, leading to a more inclusive online environment.
- **Jordan:** Felt that awareness campaigns could highlight the consequences of hate speech and encourage users to think before they post.
- **Nikola:** Stressed the importance of community support in providing emotional support and resources for those affected, suggesting that communities could organize workshops and support groups.
- **Daniel:** Suggested that peer-led initiatives could be effective in reaching young people and fostering a culture of respect and empathy online.



### 3. Conclusion

The facilitator summarized the key points from the discussion, highlighting the main themes and insights. Participants were invited to share any final thoughts or comments. The facilitator thanked the participants for their contributions and provided information on resources for emotional support. This closing phase helped to reinforce the importance of the participants' contributions and ensured that they felt valued and supported.

Page | 21

### 4. Data Collection and Recording

The discussion was audio/video recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate capture of the conversation.

### 5. Data Analysis

Transcripts from the focus groups were analyzed to identify common themes, patterns, and insights related to experiences, impacts, and reporting of hate speech. Responses from different demographic groups (e.g., gender, age) were compared to identify significant differences in experiences or perceptions. The focus group data was triangulated with survey results and other data sources to ensure the validity and comprehensiveness of the findings. This multi-faceted approach to data analysis provided a robust understanding of the issues discussed.



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## Analysis

### Experiences with Hateful Discriminatory Discourse Online

Participants shared a range of experiences with hate speech, highlighting its prevalence across different platforms. The nature of the hate speech varied, including racial, gender-based, and religious discrimination. Participants often felt disheartened, frustrated, and anxious, indicating the significant emotional toll of such encounters. The frequency and nature of these experiences underscored the pervasive nature of online hate speech.

Page | 22

### Impact of Online Hateful Discriminatory Discourse

The emotional and psychological impact of hate speech was profound. Participants reported feelings of anxiety, anger, and frustration. The broader impact on the community was also noted, with participants expressing concerns about the normalization of hate and its effect on offline interactions. The discussion revealed that hate speech not only affects individuals but also contributes to a toxic online environment that can spill over into real-world interactions.

### Reporting Mechanisms

Participants were generally dissatisfied with the current reporting mechanisms. They found the process cumbersome and felt that platforms did not take their reports seriously. The lack of feedback and transparency from platforms further exacerbated their frustration. The discussion highlighted the need for more effective and user-friendly reporting mechanisms to ensure that users feel supported and that their concerns are addressed.

### Recommendations and Solutions

Participants suggested several ways to combat hate speech, including education and awareness campaigns, stricter platform policies, and community support. They emphasized the need for platforms to enforce policies consistently and provide better communication and follow-up on reports. The discussion underscored the importance of a multi-faceted approach to combating hate speech, involving education, policy enforcement, and community support.

### Challenges During Discussion

Throughout the discussion, participants faced challenges such as hesitancy to share personal experiences, emotional responses, and difficulty in thinking of concrete solutions. The facilitator played a crucial role in encouraging participation, providing reassurance, and guiding the discussion. These challenges highlighted the sensitive nature of the topics discussed and the importance of creating a supportive environment for participants.

### Conclusion

The focus group provided valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of young people regarding hate speech, online hate speech, cyberbullying, and media literacy. The findings highlight the need for improved reporting mechanisms, education, and community support to effectively address these

issues. The discussion also emphasized the importance of a comprehensive approach to combating hate speech, involving multiple stakeholders and strategies.

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## Quantitative Data: Summary of Data Collected from Focus Groups

Page | 23

### Participant Demographics

- Total Participants:** 10
- Gender Distribution:**
  - Male: 8
  - Female: 2
- Age Range:**
  - 16-21 years: 7
  - 22-30 years: 3
- Ethnic Background:**
  - Bulgarian: 10
- Social Media Usage:**
  - Daily: 9
  - Weekly: 1

### Frequency of Encountering Hate Speech

- Daily:** 5 participants
- Weekly:** 3 participants
- Monthly:** 2 participants

### Reporting Hate Speech

- Have Reported:** 8 participants
- Have Not Reported:** 2 participants

### Satisfaction with Reporting Mechanisms

- Satisfied:** 2 participants
- Dissatisfied:** 6 participants
- Neutral:** 2 participants

### **Experiences with Hateful Discriminatory Discourse Online**

Participants shared diverse experiences with hate speech, highlighting its prevalence across various platforms. The nature of the hate speech included racial, gender-based, and religious discrimination. Many participants felt disheartened, frustrated, and anxious due to these encounters.

### **Impact of Online Hateful Discriminatory Discourse**

The emotional and psychological impact of hate speech was significant. Participants reported feelings of anxiety, anger, and frustration.

### **Reporting Mechanisms**

Participants were generally dissatisfied with the current reporting mechanisms. They found the process cumbersome and felt that platforms did not take their reports seriously. Emil reported hate speech several times but felt that nothing happened as a result, leading to frustration. For example one of them found the reporting mechanisms not user-friendly, and Petya noted that the process was time-consuming and often led to no visible action.

### **Recommendations and Solutions**

Participants suggested several ways to combat hate speech, including education and awareness campaigns, stricter platform policies, and community support. They emphasized the importance of education to change mindsets and reduce ignorance. There are suggestions that platforms should enforce stricter policies consistently and invest in better moderation tools. They highlighted the importance of community support, suggesting the creation of support networks and resources for those targeted by hate speech. There was proposing for collaboration between schools and community organizations to educate young people about the consequences of hate speech and promote digital literacy.

These insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding hate speech, online hate speech, cyberbullying, and media literacy. The findings highlight the need for improved reporting mechanisms, education, and community support to effectively address these issues.

## Impact and Outcomes

### Impact

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#### *Focus Group Discussion:*

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- ❑ **Emotional and Psychological Toll:** Participants reported significant emotional and psychological impacts from encountering hate speech online. Common feelings included anxiety, anger, frustration, and a sense of powerlessness. These negative emotions often led to changes in behavior, such as avoiding certain platforms or becoming more cautious about online interactions.
- ❑ **Community Dynamics:** The normalization of hate speech was a major concern, with participants noting that it contributed to a toxic online environment. This toxicity not only affected individuals but also had broader implications for community interactions, both online and offline.
- ❑ **Behavioral Changes:** Many participants altered their online behavior in response to hate speech. Some reduced their social media usage, while others became more guarded in their online presence. A few participants actively engaged in educating others about the impact of hate speech.

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#### *Survey Analysis:*

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- ❑ **Prevalence of Hate Speech:** The survey highlighted the widespread nature of hate speech on social media platforms, with many respondents encountering it daily or weekly. Platforms like Facebook and TikTok were frequently mentioned as hotspots for such content.
- ❑ **Emotional Impact:** Respondents reported feeling upset, angry, or powerless when encountering hate speech. These emotional responses were consistent across different demographic groups, indicating a pervasive impact.
- ❑ **Mixed Effectiveness of Reporting Mechanisms:** The survey revealed mixed responses regarding the effectiveness of reporting hate speech. While some content was removed following reports, many respondents felt that their reports were not taken seriously, leading to frustration and discouragement.

### Outcomes

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#### *Focus Group Discussion:*

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- ❑ **Insights on Reporting Mechanisms:** The discussion provided valuable insights into the shortcomings of current reporting mechanisms. Participants found them cumbersome and ineffective, highlighting the need for more user-friendly and transparent processes.
- ❑ **Recommendations for Solutions:** Participants suggested several strategies to combat hate speech, including education and awareness campaigns, stricter platform policies, and community support. These recommendations emphasized a multi-faceted approach involving various stakeholders.
- ❑ **Community Support:** The importance of community support was underscored, with participants advocating for support networks and resources for individuals targeted by hate speech.

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### *Survey Analysis:*

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- ❑ **Data-Driven Insights:** The survey provided quantitative data on the frequency, types, and impact of hate speech, which can be used to inform strategies and policies. The data highlighted the need for comprehensive measures to address the issue.
- ❑ **Segment Analysis:** The analysis of different demographic segments revealed specific trends and concerns, such as the high frequency of hate speech encountered by younger age groups and the significant emotional impact on all respondents.
- ❑ **Suggested Solutions:** Respondents emphasized the need for user education, stricter platform policies, legal measures, and support for victims. These suggestions align with the recommendations from the focus group discussion, reinforcing the need for a holistic approach.

Overall, the findings from both the focus group discussion and the survey underscore the urgent need to address online hate speech through a combination of education, policy enforcement, and community support. The insights gained from this research can guide the development of effective strategies to combat hate speech and support affected individuals.