

"Kick them back into the sea"

Online hate speech against refugees

Report by the International Network  
Against Cyber Hate (INACH)

IN@CH

## Imprint

International Network Against Cyber Hate (INACH)

Bataviastraat 24 – 0.08

1095 ET Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

Tel. +31-20-6927266

secretariat@inach.net

www.inach.net

### Concept

Ronald Eissens, Dr. Steffen Eisentraut

### Authors

Dina Malandi, Claudia Schäfer (Austria); Astrid Eichstädt, Kwinten Van de Veire (Belgium); Camille Lhopitault (France); Flemming Ipsen, Christiane Schneider (Germany); Tamas Berecz, Charlotte Devinat (The Netherlands); Valentín González (Spain)

### Editing

Dr. Steffen Eisentraut

### Translation

Jennifer Lopes

### Layout

Charlotte von Braunschweig

### Print

Pretty Print, Mainz

The *International Network Against Cyber Hate (INACH)* unites organizations around the world. Incorporating different cultural backgrounds and speaking many languages, INACH has a diverse perspective, allowing the network to counter and address all forms of online discrimination. INACH adds value to the Internet and brings the online in line with Human Rights

We would like to thank all those who contributed to this report:

**Austria:** Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit (ZARA), **Belgium:** Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (Unia), **France:** International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA), **Germany:** jugendschutz.net, **The Netherlands:** Complaints Bureau for Discrimination on the internet (MDI), **Spain:** Movement against Intolerance (MCI)

Other sources:

ICARE Hate Crime News, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google.

This publication and the underlying research carried out within a project of jugendschutz.net were financed by the German Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung/bpb).

© Copyright 2016 INACH

## Contents

1.	Growing problem of online hate speech .....	5
	Analyze hate against refugees at transnational level	
2.	Austria: Hate against refugees accompanied with revival of Nazi-phantasies .....	8
	Examples for hate speech against refugees in Facebook comments	
3.	Belgium: Fake stories about asylum seekers incite to hatred.....	11
	Examples for hate speech against refugees in the social media	
4.	France: New dimension of cyber hate since the terror attacks .....	15
	Examples for hate speech against refugees in the social media	
5.	Germany: The "refugee crisis" as catalyst for right-wing extremist propaganda.....	20
	Examples for hate speech against refugees in the social media	
6.	The Netherlands: Online hate leads to offline violence.....	25
	Example for the connection of online hate speech and real violence	
7.	Spain: Prominent people agitate against refugees .	28
	Examples for hate speech against refugees on the internet	
8.	Hate speech against refugees tells a typical story...	32
9.	How can we combat hate speech on the internet? .	35

## 1. Growing problem of online hate speech

The amount of hate speech on the internet has increased significantly over the last years – this is what experts from different countries concerned with this phenomenon say. As Andre Oboler, chief executive of the Australian *Online Hate Prevention Institute* pointed out: "2015 saw a greater normalization of hate speech in society than in previous years. Where previously a person might make a vague negative allusion to race, religion, gender or sexuality, by the end of 2015, the comments in social media services were blatant and overt."<sup>1</sup> The UK-based think tank Demos backs this qualitative evaluation with concrete figures: Researchers looked closely at the content of tweets and found out that there was a 4800 percent increase in racial slurs from 2012 to 2015.<sup>2</sup> jugendschutz.net, the competence centre for the protection of minors on the internet in Germany, has followed the developments online for more than 10 years and also states a steady increase of hate messages specifically since the evolution of the social media.

In terms of the so-called "refugee crisis"<sup>3</sup>, cyber hate is drastically on the rise especially in Europe: The situation in Germany for instance, where many refugees from Syria arrived in 2015, reflects very clearly an increasing heated atmosphere. Whereas most of the German people welcome the refugees and see it as their humanitarian duty to help them, neo-Nazis use the internet to promote xen-

---

<sup>1</sup> Mike Wendling (2015): 2015: The year that angry won the internet. Online: <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-35111707>.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Miller (2015): Social Media is driving the rise of hate crime, but it can also stop it. Online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uk-news/crime/11925950/Social-media-is-driving-the-rise-of-hate-crime-but-it-can-also-stop-it.html>.

<sup>3</sup> According to the authors, the term is normatively charged, because it suggests that refugees themselves are problematic or that welcoming refugees per se is critical. However, in our understanding, "refugee crisis" addresses the highly confrontational public debates, the increasing 'scandalization' of migration and the hate filled atmosphere towards refugees.

ophobia and spread hate against refugees and all Muslims; this in return stirs up xenophobic feelings of resentments in the general public.

Even though the number of asylum seekers in many European countries has decreased in the course of 2016, we are still seeing a vast amount of hateful postings, comments and tweets against refugees. The normalization of online hate speech is not a temporary problem and clearly no regional phenomenon but a long-term challenge for all democratic societies.

### **ANALYZE HATE AGAINST REFUGEES AT TRANSNATIONAL LEVEL**

The daily work of the *International Network Against Cyber Hate (INACH)* is about enforcing respect for human rights and combating discrimination on the internet. To achieve this, the partner organizations have analyzed a variety of phenomena of online hate for years and have pointed out counter strategies. On the occasion of the current developments, INACH uses this report to take a look at the extent of online hate speech against refugees specifically from a European perspective.

Based on six countries, the report highlights the many facets of the problem and provides practical examples. The INACH member organizations from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain, who are currently cooperating within the EU-project *Research – Report – Remove: Countering Cyber Hate Phenomena*, have contributed to this report. They looked at the latest internet trends, analyzed contributions to the refugee debate like memes, comments and videos and found narratives shedding light on common recurrent hate speech patterns.

The networking experts have observed an ongoing decreasing popularity and relevance of websites and blogs in recent years and, instead, a shift to the social web as

the main distribution channel to spread hate propaganda. Online hate speech against refugees can be found on Facebook profiles of right-wing extremist organizations and movements, but also on pages of users who bear no direct relation to organized extremist groups. Widespread hashtags on Twitter like #refugees, once created with a benevolent or neutral intention, can meanwhile be found in thousands of tweets against refugees. On YouTube, users post daunting or defamatory videos on this subject creating fear and a hostile climate; corresponding comments are used for hate filled statements. In other words, the social media offer numerous channels and ways to express cyber hate towards refugees. That is why this report focuses on hate speech in the social media.

The goal of this report is not to provide a systematic comparison and is by no means exhaustive. However, within the framework of the EU-project *Research – Report – Remove: Countering Cyber Hate Phenomena*, co-funded by the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung/bpb) and the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs (BMFSFJ), an extensive report on different forms of cyber hate shall be created.

Nevertheless, the following overview sheds some light on the problem and dimension of hate speech against refugees and gives an impression of the seriousness of the situation that becomes more and more critical every day – online as well as offline. The findings of the report shall be a call to policymakers, civil society, authorities and internet services to stand up for an internet without discriminating and racist content.

## 2. Austria: Hate against refugees accompanied with revival of Nazi-phantasies

The Austrian INACH member *Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit (ZARA)* states that especially comments and posts against refugees have been substantially on the rise since summer 2015. The number of reports ZARA received on hate content on the internet has increased significantly compared to the previous year and the upward trend continues. Since then, almost all reports received concerned hate speech against refugees, followed by Muslims who also become the target of hostility and discrimination. Very often, refugees and Muslims are being lumped together, and some social network sites have turned into *the place*, where hate, lies and death threats against refugees, Muslims and their helpers have been exchanged. In some posts, Nazi-phantasies seem to have resurrected, for example when posters demanded the re-opening of the concentration camp Mauthausen and suggested to send the refugees there.

The fact that content becomes increasingly widespread and a broader public in Austria is more and more aware of the topic of cyber hate, may be a reason for the increased number of reports. For example, some cases in which Facebook users posted hate comments on their profiles and got into trouble with their employers, caught the media's attention. Here, specifically the example of a Porsche trainee became well-known; he commented on a Facebook photo of a Syrian girl playing under a stream of water from a fire hose, saying: "Flamethrowers would be a better solution". This and the reaction of Porsche – dismissal of their employee – caused quite a stir on social media, sparked heated debates and are symbolic of the discussions about a reasonable response to online hate speech.

The overall public awareness has increased, but forwarding cases to the abuse teams of social network site-pro-



viders and to the relevant authorities still shows shortcomings. In many cases, hateful postings and comments are not being removed, even when they are clearly against the law. Whenever ZARA assesses posts as illegal under criminal law, the case goes to the authorities – however, usually there is no feedback on whether criminal charges were pressed or not.

Until the beginning of 2016, another difficulty for the work of ZARA stemmed from the legal situation: According to the Austrian criminal code and its strict interpretation, "incitement to hatred" only protected groups on grounds of "race", skin color, language, religion, ideology, citizenship, descent or national or ethnical origin. Refugees did not fall within any of these groups and were therefore basically not protected from discrimination. Offenders can be prosecuted if – in a clear manner and under the provision that certain criteria are fulfilled – they incite against religious groups, e.g. Muslims, deny, trivialize or glorify neo-Nazi crimes or if they incite others to commit criminal acts. However, until 2016 incitement to hatred against refugees was not regarded as a criminal offence. The amendment of the criminal code, which came into effect in 2016, seems to have closed this legal vacuum. To date, it still remains to be seen whether the law enforcement authorities will take action against incitement to hatred more effectively.

The given examples have been assessed by ZARA as illegal; however, neither the authorities nor the social network-site providers took any action.

## EXAMPLES FOR HATE SPEECH AGAINST REFUGEES IN FACEBOOK COMMENTS

*If it were up to me, I would give every Muslim a three months "period of grace" in Austria and if they're not gone by then, off to the KZ (concentration camp).*

*We didn't invite these goatherds! Why do some of them throw away their passports??? Only to hide their criminal past at home!*

*Back into the sea and push them off, that's the trash from Africa and Syria.*

*Refugees are all sons of bitches.*

*Many people here say the best thing to do to be able to cope with all the refugees is to reopen the concentration camps; there they could "enjoy" enough room. Examples: Auschwitz, Dachau, Mauthausen.*

*[Reply to this comment:] But then put them back into operation again, please.*

*[Reply to this comment:] I can provide gas for the showers.*

*I hope these scumbag refugees freeze to death, I hope the temperatures will drop to minus 30 degrees.*

*All Muslim vermin must be pushed off or shot dead. Freedom for all Austrians!*

*[Comment on an article about busses as short-term housing for refugees as an emergency measure:]*

*And as a good suggestion for a short trip I suggest the following coordinates: 48 15 24.13 N, 14 30 6.31 E [coordinates of Mauthausen].*

### 3. Belgium: Fake stories about asylum seekers incite to hatred

Since the "refugee crisis" started in August 2015, the Belgian INACH member *Unia* has noticed a significant increase in individual reports concerning hate speech. While Unia received 10 individual reports from July until mid-August, about 60 reports were submitted during the period spanning from mid-August until the end of September, 51 of which were directly related to the refugee situation. Since October, even though the overall amount of reports came back to normal, peaks have been witnessed around terrorist attacks or other events related by the media. Most of the hate messages target refugees as a whole, followed by Muslims who are often mentioned in the same breath.

What stood out were the many pages on social media that were created to protest against local reception centres for asylum seekers. The page "Petition against asylum seekers in Sijsele" for example got over 2000 likes and spread false information about the rights of asylum seekers, presuming that they receive way more benefits at their arrival Belgium than they actually do. This stirred up the dissatisfaction of asylum opponents.

With the rise of extreme right and anti-Islam groups – such as PEGIDA, Vlaamse Verdedigingsliga or the political party Vlaams Belang – these groups' Facebook pages have received a great deal of attention and were literally flooded with hate speech. The page of the Vlaamse Verdedigingsliga reached over 25.000 likes and continuously incited hatred against asylum seekers and Muslims. In August 2016, a media storm arose after an article questioning the "Flemishness" of a 15-year old Belgian born boy of Moroccan origin who died in an accident had received extremely despicable comments. Unia had already filed a complaint with the authorities about this page back in April 2015. However, with this new evidence, Unia

decided to sue the administrators of the page. Shortly after, one of the administrators deleted the page.

Many reports received by Unia concerned user comments on articles about the "refugee crisis". Whereas most of the content was accurate despite of the hateful tone, we noticed publications that were spreading fake stories and misinformation in attempt to mislead the readers into following their pattern of thought about refugees.

When dealing with reports regarding hateful online messages, Unia examines whether the limits of freedom of speech are exceeded. The Belgian antidiscrimination and antiracism legislation prohibits any publication or statement which intentionally incites others to hatred, discrimination or violence against a person or group of persons protected by the criteria mentioned in the law (national origin, religion or belief, disability, etc). Around 90% of the reports Unia receives concern content that is deemed within the borders of freedom of speech. This freedom is applicable to statements or ideas that "offend, shock or disturb" and is considered as a corner stone of a democratic society. In these cases, we inform the reporters about the Belgian legislation and their right to file a complaint with the police.

For the other 10% the publications were found as inciting to hatred, discrimination, or violence; in such cases Unia takes the following actions:

- Notice and takedown: ask the author, moderator, or network to delete the publication.
- Legal action: gathering of facts, filing of complaints with the authorities, and acting as civil party before court. This line of action is only adopted by Unia when it comes to statements made by officials, extremist groups (e.g. *Sharia4Belgium*) or their members, that directly involve hate crime (vandalism, violence, etc.) or strong statements inciting people to commit such crimes.

Unia reported the examples below through the form that is implemented by Facebook. The answer was the same for all of them: "We reviewed the comment you reported for containing hate speech or symbols and found it doesn't violate our Community Standards". Unia decided to engage into a dialogue with Facebook about comments which clearly violate Belgian law but are not considered contrary to Facebook's Community Standards.

## EXAMPLES FOR HATE SPEECH AGAINST REFUGEES IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA

**€125/dag,  
da's €3750/mnd.**

**Beste kinderen  
Studeer niet voor dokter, ingenieur,  
informaticus, maar wordt**

**ASIELZOEKER.**

**Pettite tegen asielzoekers sijele**  
Like This Page · December 13, 2015 · 6

Like Comment Share

123 Chronological

130 shares 13 Comments

View 0 more comments

**EEN GROTE SCHANDAAL!!! IK NA 43 JAAR FL DIEDIGERIK & waaierd werk tellen 2022 21 nedmae voor mijn pensioen dit zijn premies zeggen de. En die arme Belg maar blijven zwiegen**  
Like Reply 4 · December 13, 2015 at 1:52pm  
1 Reply

Dus, in Vlaanderen ook zijn er valse geruchten! buurlijk krijgen asielzoekers geen 126€/dag.  
Like Reply 3 · December 13, 2015 at 4:12pm

Ze krijgen dit in eien versnarming zaligeld en onderdak. Dup de regering moet er 125euro per dag voor uitgeven.  
Like Reply · December 14, 2015 at 9:48am

Heer goe gedacht da brengt  
Like Reply · December 14, 2015 at 11:30am

Write a comment

Post on Facebook: "125€/day, that's 3750€/month. Dear children don't study to be a doctor, engineer, computer scientist, but become an ASYLUM SEEKER." (Source: Facebook)

Der grat over, die schijten nog niet plat ...

 **Karinthië: 20 asielzoekers gaan in hongerstaking – ze eisen € 2000,- netto per maand**  
 (Vertaling: E.J. Bron) De vluchtelingen crisis heeft veel gezichten. Een bijzonder hatelijk gezicht krijgen op dit...  
 EJBRON.WORDPRESS.COM

Vind ik leuk · Reactie · Delen

2 personen vinden dit leuk.

1 keer gedeeld

 Geloof die onzin toch niet! [http://nl.hoax.wikia.com/wiki/E.J.\\_Bron](http://nl.hoax.wikia.com/wiki/E.J._Bron)

**E.J. Bron**  
 E.J. Bron is een paranoïde en radicale haatblog gehost op de Wordpress.com website. De inhoud van hun artikels focust voornamelijk op extreemrechtse onderwerpen zoals vreemdelingenhaat, islamofobie en eurofobie, maar ook op een overdreven nadruk op "vrijheid". Verder publiceert de website paranoïde...  
 NL.HOAX.WIKIA.COM

Vind ik leuk · Beantwoorden · Voorbeeld verwijderen · 1 · 16 uur

 Steek er uwe tijd niet in in dit geval.  
 Vind ik leuk · Beantwoorden · 3 uur

 Schrijf een antwoord...

 Mensen die zulk een onzin op Facebook zetten horen niet thuis in mijn vrienden-lijst...  
 Vind ik leuk · Beantwoorden · 1 · 9 uur

 Daze die is in de gaaskamer steken gelijk WO2..tzal rap gedaan zijn!  
 Vind ik leuk · Beantwoorden · 4 uur

Headline posted on Facebook: "Carinthia: 20 asylum seekers go on hunger strike – they are asking € 2000 net per month." The respective article was written by the website [ejbron.wordpress.com](http://ejbron.wordpress.com), where many fake news about refugees can be found. One of the comments states "They should put them in the gas chamber like in WW2..it will be over soon!" (Source: Facebook)

#### 4. France: New dimension of cyber hate since the terror attacks

The French INACH member *International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA)* reports a radicalization of online debates about refugees caused by various influencing factors. First, there is the ongoing tense situation in Calais often referred to. Here, thousands of people waiting and hoping for a chance to get to Britain have been camping for several years. Second, there is the Front National having a strong impact on the public discussion about refugees in France; the socially conservative, nationalist party adopts a clearly anti-migration and anti-Islam position. And, there are the terrorist attacks by members of the Islamic State (IS): The attacks on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and the Jewish supermarket in January 2015, the massacre in the Bataclan Theater and the streets of Paris in November 2015 as well as the truck rampage of Nice in July 2016.

The attacks sharpened the tone in the discussions of refugee issues on the internet. At the same time, next to the well-known narratives of refugees being a burden on social system, economy and public order, a new narrative found its way in the social media: Refugees from Syria and Iraq – a specifically IS active region – are stigmatized and criminalized as IS members and potential terrorists who could pose a danger to life and limb at any time.

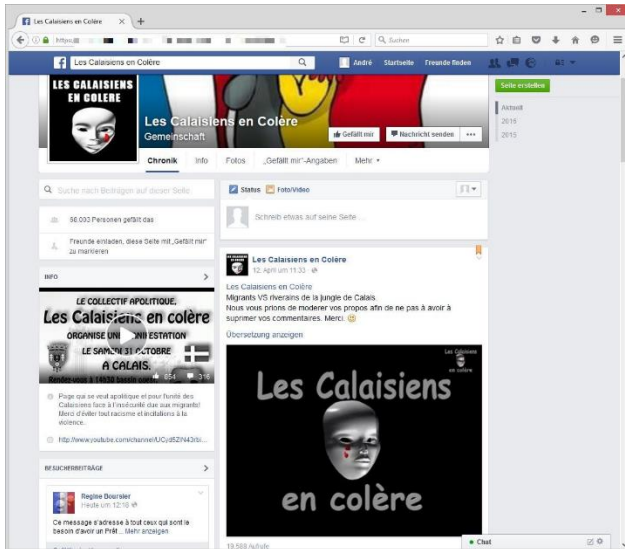
According to the French criminal code, xenophobia towards certain groups of people is considered "incitement to racial hatred" provided certain criteria were fulfilled. For example, the hate expressed must produce negative feelings like hostility or rejection towards a group of people on grounds of their actual or supposed national or ethnic origin or religion. Other criteria to assess whether an offence has been committed include the person himself or his background and the context of the statement. However, in most cases, hate speech against refugees remains below the limit of being punishable under criminal

law in France. Terms like "migrants" or "refugees" are – other than "Muslims" or "Syrians" – regarded as generic terms where origin or religion play no part and therefore cannot be discriminating. For example, a comment like "refugees out!" would probably not, but "Arabs and Africans out!" would be sanctioned by court. Court rulings concerning hate speech against refugees led to a prosecution in only one single case.

LICRA states that authorities generally do not take sufficient action when it comes to cyber hate against refugees. Such is also the case with social media providers; they rarely delete hate content reported to them. They basically conform to French court rulings: If hate speech is classified as clearly racist, it is deleted. All "unclear" content remains online.



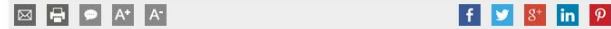
## EXAMPLES FOR HATE SPEECH AGAINST REFUGEES IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA



Facebook profile "The angry people from Calais": "This site is dedicated to the exchange of information for fighting the presence of the large number of refugees in Calais. Here, a collection of videos, photos and court rulings shall prove that refugees pose a threat to the citizens of Calais". (Source: Facebook)

## Les migrants : la vidéo qui fait scandale

Actualités, Contre la désinformation, International - le 17 septembre 2015 - par Nadine Indik.



Alors que le monde focalise sur ces migrants, "réfugiés" pour certains ,voici une vidéo qui a été prise sur les quais d'une gare de Hongrie.

Apparemment ils ne sont ni assoiffés ni affamés, et encore moins affaiblis

En tout cas si cette vidéo est authentique, attendons nous a être envahis plutôt qu'a devoir les accueillir

"Migrants: The scandal video", September 2015. A journalist comments: "Apparently, they are neither thirsty nor hungry, and even less so, weakened. If this video is authentic, we will probably more be victims of invasion than welcome them". (Source: alliancefr.com)

**AVIS AUX MIGRANTS CLANDESTINS**

**VOUS DITES AVOIR FUI UN PAYS EN GUERRE  
J'AI UN SCOOP POUR VOUS...**

**LA FRANCE EST EN GUERRE !!!**

**LES PATRIOTES EN COLERE**

**VOUS ENCOURAGENT À FAIRE CE QUE  
VOUS FAITES DE MIEUX...**

**FUYEZ LA FRANCE !!!**

Like Comment

La P'tite Française Se Rebelle  
Avis aux migrants: nous sommes en guerre, fuyez la France comme vous avez fui la Syrie!

Album: Timeline Photos  
Shared with: Public

Like Comment Share December 6

102 people like this. Chronological

65 shares

Open Photo Viewer  
Download  
Embed Post

Comment on the Facebook profile of "France in revolt":  
 "Notice to all illegal migrants: You say you left your countries because of the war. I have a headline for you...France is at war, too!!! The patriots are furious. So do what you can do best: Flee France!!!" (Source: Facebook)

## 5. Germany: The "refugee crisis" as catalyst for right-wing extremist propaganda

The German INACH member *jugendschutz.net* reports that the refugee debate is currently the number one topic right-wing extremists pick up to send their messages. From the perspective of youth protection, lowered inhibitions and more and more radical agitation are specifically problematic. On Facebook, for example, a "culture" of hateful discussions and communication is meanwhile well established, not only on clearly right-wing extremist pages: Foreigners, Muslims, Jews or Sinti and Roma are, as a matter of course, made responsible for social grievances revealing the well-known scapegoat mechanism. Right-wing extremists exploit this climate in order to light up the dynamics with their propaganda.

Prejudices and stereotypes of refugees definitely reach the general public in Germany. In a survey performed by TNS Forschung<sup>4</sup> in December 2015, 84 % of the respondents said that the large number of refugees will result in "lasting changes". 54 % estimate that the current refugee situation will increase the risk of terrorist attacks; this is why 51 % believe that the crime rates will rise and 43 % worry about an increase in unemployment. The results of the survey reveal the opinions and fears, also partly reflected in online hate speech. In the cases assessed, *jugendschutz.net* also found the narrative of an economic burden (e.g. threat of unemployment) and of refugees posing a terrorist or criminal threat.

*jugendschutz.net*, which work is funded within the programme "Live Democracy!" of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, has also noticed a rise in reports from internet users. Alone in terms of hate content on Facebook, the number of reports

---

<sup>4</sup> Spiegel Online (2015): Refugee crisis: Majority of the German population worries about a serious threat to internal security. Online: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/fluechtlinge-deutsche-sehen-hoeheres-risiko-von-terroranschlaegen-a-1067329.html>.

tripled during the second half of 2015 (more than 300 reports compared to nearly 100 reports during the first half of the year). Many users seemed to feel anonymous and safe from prosecution, are not afraid to post racist content and incite to violence. For example, jugendschutz.net recorded posts calling for "heating the ovens" once again, shooting "foreigners" or burning down refugee shelters.

Hate comments often convey an anti-democratic attitude and aim at persons in politics and civil society engaged in the humanitarian aid to refugees<sup>5</sup>. Right-wing extremist organizations, right-wing populist parties and movements like AfD and PEGIDA, but also people not participating in politics disseminate such comments. Anti-democratic slogans and open agitation towards politicians or people engaged in supporting refugees have long left the right-wing extremist circles and seem socially acceptable online. A radicalization of the discourse about refugees and immigration can be detected within the right-wing protagonists and society in general.

Numerous posts and comments in the social media make use of violent images or videos depicting terrorist atrocities like beheading scenes to fuel and create fear of a potential "Islamization" of Germany through immigration. They are supposed to prove the alleged "terrorist propensity" of Muslim refugees. This is also the case with the discussions following the sex attacks on women at Cologne's central station on New Year's Eve 2015. Refugees and Muslims are now generally stigmatized as rapists – a stereotype specifically disseminated under the hashtag #rapefugees, for example.

Not only right-wing extremists but also many non-affiliated users call for violence against refugees. They believe that the German government "import" refugees willingly so they cannot count on the state to defend their families

---

<sup>5</sup> The comments often specifically refer to 'Germany's welcome' to refugees as the media call it, being too friendly with refugees and a too liberal refugee policy.

and Germany as a whole against the "invasion of brutal barbarians". Commentators call for vigilante justice and post their fantasies of violence like cutting refugees into pieces or throw them out of a plane online.

### EXAMPLES FOR HATE SPEECH AGAINST REFUGEES IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA



Openly expressed threat of violence against refugees in a Facebook post "I have a bullet for every refugee". (Source: Facebook; Original not pixelated)



The youth organization of the right-wing extremist party NPD equates refugees with terrorists and condemns those who welcome refugees. (Source: Facebook; Original not pixelated)

 **Deutschland DECKT AUF**  
18. April · 🌐

TEILEN !!!!!!!  
"Flüchtlinge" aus Afrika ...  
Refugees Welcome ----- nee



770.808 Aufrufe

The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook post. At the top, there is a profile picture of a German flag and the name 'Deutschland DECKT AUF' with a location tag '18. April · 🌐'. Below this, the text reads 'TEILEN !!!!!!!', '"Flüchtlinge" aus Afrika ...', and 'Refugees Welcome ----- nee'. The main content is a video player. The video frame shows a person lying on a light-colored floor, being stepped on by the feet of several other people. The video player interface includes a play button, a progress bar, a timestamp of '-0:30', and icons for volume, settings, and share. Below the video player, it says '770.808 Aufrufe'.

"SHARE!!! 'Refugees' from Africa... Refugees welcome – no". Even though the video stems from the USA, the shocking depiction of violence is used to incite hatred against refugees in Germany. (Source: Facebook)



## 6. The Netherlands: Online hate leads to offline violence

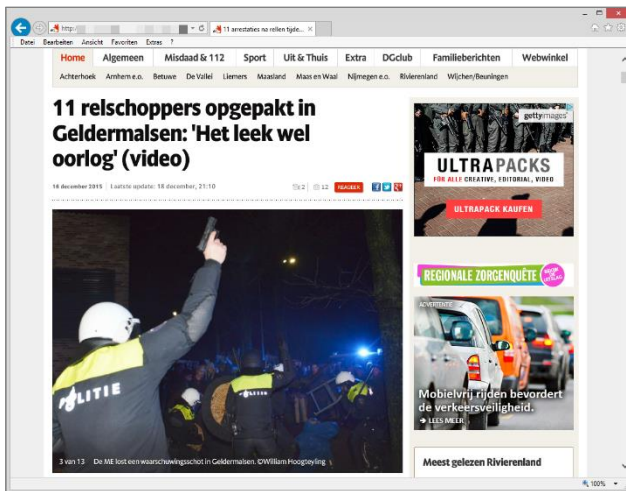
The Dutch INACH member *Meldpunt Discriminatie Internet (MDI)* received 43 reports in 2015 revealing 125 comments against refugees. This is a significant increase compared to the previous year with only 8 reported cases on hate content. Most of the hate speech was posted on Facebook and Twitter.

Hostile feelings and anti-refugee sentiments are often caused and fueled by stereotypes and myths, for example, in the form of memes – cultural symbols in the form of an image, video, phrase, etc. – that are spread via the social media. Often, the story is told of "ungrateful refugees" who undermine the social welfare system and have come to steal or to bring into the country the same violence they have fled from. Fake images of alleged refugees attacking the police or otherwise behaving in conspicuous ways quickly go viral. This also fuels online debates of right-wing populist actors like Geert Wilders and his Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) or the Dutch PEGIDA movement (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) permanently warning of the "Islamization" of the Netherlands.

The MDI notes an overlap of the concepts "refugee", "Muslim" and "migrant". These are used nearly interchangeably when talking about an "economic migrant" or a "profiteer". Furthermore, concerns of an "Islamic takeover plot" are raised on the internet and the fear of terrorists hiding among refugees to reach the Netherlands and commit attacks is very present. These fears are not always expressed as hate speech, but they still lead to an atmosphere of hysteria and rejection and partly result in accusing Muslims or refugees of generally being anti-Semitic and homophobic. Pretending to be open to the world outside and accepting pluralism and democracy, calls for tolerance all too often turn into a generalized stigmatization of refugees and to defamatory hate speech.

Facebook groups masqueraded as "concerned citizens" targeting shelters for refugees are an example for the impact of hate on the internet in terms of racially motivated riots. The groups gave rise to attacks during information sessions on refugee issues, local politicians received death threats, potential event venues were destroyed, and existing shelters had to be placed under police protection. In December, a debate about plans to build a refugee centre took place in the small town of Geldermalsen. Crowds of rioters tried to storm the city hall throwing stones and fireworks; eventually, the meeting was closed and the participants had to be escorted by police. In the run-up to the debate, the Facebook group "Concerned Geldermalsen" called on their members and encouraged them to protest against the plans. Many of these groups have meanwhile dropped their disguise, display their racist attitude towards refugees and Muslims and openly incite to violence.

## EXAMPLE FOR THE CONNECTION OF ONLINE HATE SPEECH AND REAL VIOLENCE



Police firing warning shots to disperse rioters of a violent Facebook group protesting against plans to build a centre for refugees in Geldermalsen. (Source: gelderlander.nl)

## 7. Spain: Prominent people agitate against refugees

The Spanish INACH member *Movement Against Intolerance (MCI)* found out in their research of hate speech on the internet that a substantial part of the content clearly refers to an alleged link between refugees and terrorists. This story is not only told by right-wing extremist actors, but also sometimes even by prominent personalities who are not politically active.

For example, the well-known journalist and writer Arturo Pérez-Reverte said the Roman Empire fell because of weak politicians and their "good will" attitude and something similar could happen to Europe. Pérez-Reverte also assumed that the fall of the Roman Empire was part of a conspiracy and that a similar plan would enable refugees to take over Europe.

The Archbishop of Valencia, Cardinal Antonio Cañizares, also commented on the current refugee situation questioning the idea to welcome refugees in Spain (see example below). "What's happening in Europe?" he asked. "This invasion of immigrants... are they completely trustworthy? Where will this leave Spain in a few years' time?" Cañizares calls for "clarity" to see "who is behind it all". "We must be clear headed and not let everyone in. Because today, it could be someone who gets along very well, but who could turn out to be a Trojan horse for European societies and specifically Spain." Saying this as a leading figure of the Catholic Church, he stimulated mistrust and intolerance towards refugees.

His statements made in a panel discussion were taken up by many newspapers and disseminated in the news, and the social media services and the comments sections of digital newspapers were full of hate speech against refugees. Even some politicians participated in the online debates; however, at the end of the day it was mostly the

"normal" people who celebrated the archbishop for saying these words and posted hate speech against refugees at the same time.

MCI also recorded blatant hate speech against refugees clearly coming from organizations belonging to the far right spectrum. For example, the right-wing extremist party *Alianza Nacional* and the neo-Nazi party *Golden Dawn* originally founded in Greece, but with a Spanish branch since 2014. These organizations have numerous followers in the social media and openly incite against refugees via their Twitter accounts and Facebook profiles using particularly radical images and statements in order to promote intolerance, e.g. drastic "photographic proof" of terrorists with beheaded victims indicating that the perpetrators are likely refugees.

In Spain, hate speech is defined by the criminal code, revised in 2015 following the EU Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia. According to Article 510, discrimination, incitement to hatred and hate speech is now prohibited. One of the recent improvements in terms of combating hate speech is the involvement of prosecutors with expert knowledge of hate crimes and discrimination in all 52 districts, coordinated by one responsible Supreme Court prosecutor. Cooperation with social media services, however, could be further optimized – hate content MCI reported to the platform operators was not removed.

## EXAMPLES FOR HATE SPEECH AGAINST REFUGEES ON THE INTERNET

Sociedad

### El cardenal Cañizares: «¿Esta invasión de emigrantes y de refugiados es trigo limpio?»

» El arzobispo de Valencia considera que estos movimientos de población son «un caballo de Troya dentro de las sociedades europeas»

369 Comparte: Compartido 5.5k veces



NOTICIAS RELACIONADAS

- > La Iglesia se pronuncia ante el Z7-S: «No hay justificación moral para la secesión»
- > El cardenal Cañizares: «Hay un plan diabólico para masacrar a los cristianos»
- > El callejón sin salida de los refugiados sirios que sobreviven en Madrid

El purpurado durante su intervención de hoy en el Fórum Europa Tribuna Mediterránea.

Cardinal Cañizares, Archbishop of Valencia, talks about a "refugee invasion". (Source: abc.es)

Examples for users' comments on the article:

"Well said, Mister Cañizares! Thank you for saying what the citizens think about the Muslim threat. You are the Spanish Orban! Too bad you can't make any political decisions in this Muslim invasion of Europe".

"The battle starts now; we must stop this massive influx of refugees and illegal immigrants. This is not xenophobia and not racism".



Alianza Nacional @AN\_LosTuyos · 15. Nov. 2015

El gobierno dice que no confundamos a los refugiados con terroristas. ¿No?



← ↻ 317 ❤️ 145 ⋮

Tweet of the Alianza Nacional clearly relating to a linkage between refugees and terrorism: "The Government says we shouldn't put refugees and terrorists on the same level. But shouldn't we?" (Source: Twitter; Original not pixelated)

## 8. Hate speech against refugees tells a typical story

The reports of the INACH members in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain convey an impression of the hostile attitudes towards refugees that can be sensed in many places and forms in the social media. The "refugee crisis" has a significant impact on the posts taking an upward trend and becoming more and more intense and radical.

In terms of content, there is a strong overlap between cyber hate against refugees and cyber hate against Muslims. As a large religious group among the refugees, Muslims are often the "main objective" of defamation and hostility. Here, different narratives can be identified which a high number of the cases analyzed refer back to.

- The presently most popular narrative is putting refugees and (potential) terrorists resp. jihadists on the same level saying that they are making their way to Europe to commit terrorist attacks in the name of IS or other Islamist organizations. This pattern of argumentation is specifically used after the terror attacks in Paris, Brussels and Nice – by concerned citizens as well as by right-wing extremist and populist actors who exploit people's fears for their own ends.



- Since the sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015, this incident increasingly occurs in the narrative of refugees as (potential) rapists and criminals – specifically in Germany, but also in other countries. Here too, mainly Muslims are the targets of hate speech assuming that they are born with a natural "propensity" for sexual and other crimes. Refugees are stigmatized as troublemakers, thieves and fraudsters notoriously breaking the laws.
- This goes along with other general characteristics, depicting Muslims e.g. as anti-Semitic, sexist, and homophobic and therefore as enemies who do not share in the values of freedom and democracy.
- Also the long known narrative of refugees or migrants being an economic burden or "economic refugees" exploiting the social welfare system is still widespread.
- Last but not least, there are conspiracy theories interpreting the people migrating resp. fleeing to Europe as an anti-Western or anti-European strategy to destabilize the region. Accordingly, the "infiltration" of Europe through people from non-European countries pursues a long-term plan made by "hostile" forces. These narratives often express anti-Semitic stereotypes.

A large part of racist and misanthropic propaganda on the internet is user-generated; created by users with no direct relation to right-wing extremist or populist organizations and political parties. They are often driven by public fears and concerns about the increase in violence or the economic decline, and post hate filled or discriminating comments expressing indignation. The examples in this report show that even prominent personalities who have a strong influence on specific parts of the population and whose voices are heard, sometimes encourage hate speech instead of saying where the limits are.

Sharing videos, images and memes makes disseminating hate content easier than ever. Specifically visual messages have a powerful impact. Other than articles or comments that have to be read first, the "message" in an image or meme is understood right away. This is how hate speech reaches a wide audience in a matter of seconds.

The rapid spread of online hate speech brings along another problem: Increasingly, fear and anger is not only expressed online but turns into open violence against refugees. The incidents showcased in this report are sad examples, as well as the 1600 crimes against refugees registered by the German police in 2015 – almost doubling compared to the previous year (895 registered crimes).

## 9. How can we combat hate speech on the internet?

Considering the dynamics of online hate speech as a self-reinforcing phenomenon, specifically operators of platforms that are used to disseminate hate content are also challenged to take action. They must quickly remove illegal content and provide for a safe online environment. Here, the *Task Force against illegal online hate speech* set up by the German Federal Ministry of Justice, is a good example on how to involve internet industry and call upon them to take their responsibility. In the end of 2015, the global players who signed up to this task force have committed themselves to remove content that is illegal according to German laws within 24 hours. Progress on a transnational level has been made with the *Code of Conduct on illegal online hate speech* which was signed in May 2016 between the European Commission and Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube.

Another important step for successfully combating cyber hate is to raise social awareness of the problem. Very often, data and facts can prove the motives for expressing hate speech against refugees wrong: No matter if it is the fear of the economic burden, the terrorist danger or the Islamization of the Western world.

Counter speech is one potential approach for users to respond to hate online. It can tackle the problem of social exclusion and show their solidarity with the victims of hate speech. Additionally, counter speech offers the possibility of disrupting and questioning existing narratives on refugees. In order to contradict inhuman and anti-democratic content we have to encourage and promote critical thinking specifically among young people.

The EU-project *Research – Report – Remove: Countering Cyber Hate Phenomena* (2016–2017), developed by the International Network Against Cyber Hate (INACH), aims to provide a solid basis to draw sound conclusions on the concept of cyber hate. Systemic knowledge about the phenomenon, its origins and sources, as well as forms and influences will be gathered through comparative research. By this cooperation, the project partners will jointly gather evidence about current trends in cyber hate and subsequently identify EU wide dynamics. Furthermore, the project aims at developing standards to document and analyse cyber hate and to improve takedown procedures. This will be done by establishing guidelines for Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and social network sites as well as by providing support and advice to the political, legal and educational communities. Establishing a central contact point will help to develop a sustainable and effective cross-border online complaint mechanism available worldwide to all users from their home or mobile device. Regularly undertaken monitoring activities shall furthermore help developing an early warning system by continuously observing and analysing hateful content on the internet. The project partners will particularly focus on the monitoring of anti-Semitism, hate against Roma and Sinti, hate against Muslims and homophobia.

The project is co-funded by the German Federal Agency for Civic Education/bpb and the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ).