



# Understanding Hate Crimes



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# Understanding Hate Crimes

## INTRODUCTION

Hate crimes are crimes based on prejudice. They happen everywhere; no society is immune to the effects of prejudice and intolerance. Individual hate crimes carry the seeds of potential conflicts, as they can escalate both in terms of numbers and levels of violence. If this is understood and firm measures taken, the cycle of violence can be stopped.

This booklet aims to help police and prosecutors, legislators, local authorities and NGOs better understand the problem of hate crimes. It explains the significance of hate crimes and suggests how authorities and communities can prevent and better respond to hate crimes.

This booklet has been prepared by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in conjunction with the OSCE Mission to Skopje. It is not a comprehensive guide to hate crimes. For those seeking further information, ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Information System (<http://tandis.odihr.pl/>) offers a number of tools and specialized guides in various languages.

## What is a HATE CRIME?

Crimes motivated by intolerance towards certain groups in society are described as hate crimes.

Hate crimes consist of two elements:

- *The act must first be a crime under the Criminal Code.*
- *The crime must have been committed with a bias motivation.*

“Bias motivation” means that the perpetrator chose the *target* of the crime based on some *protected characteristic*.

- *The target may be a person, people or property associated with a group that shares a protected characteristic.*
- *A protected characteristic is a fundamental or core characteristic shared by a group, such as “race”, religion, ethnicity, language or sexual orientation.*

Crime + bias motivation = HATE CRIME

A hate crime does not require that the perpetrator feels hate. Instead, it requires only that the crime is committed out of bias motivation. Bias means that a person holds prejudiced ideas about a person or a group. Since hate crimes are committed because of what the targeted person, people or property represent, the perpetrator may have no feelings at all about an individual victim.

### Case Example:

*Villagers sprayed graffiti with religious and ethnic insults on places of worship and desecrated graveyards of a neighboring village with a different religious affiliation. There was visible damage to the religious property.*

This is a hate crime. The graffiti is evidence of bias motivation, even though the perpetrators’ hatred is not targeted at any specific person.

### Case Example:

*During a bus ride to school, a group of high school students use ethnic insults and physically attack another group because they are of a different ethnicity.*

The ethnic insults that preceded the attack are an indication of bias motivation. Prior to the incident, there were no other disagreements or quarrels between the two groups, further indicating that bias motivation was the reason for the attack.

## HATE CRIMES LAWS IN THE COUNTRY

The Criminal Code contains a sentencing provision that allows more severe punishment to be imposed for any crime that is committed with a bias motivation.<sup>1</sup> This means that those convicted for crimes that involve, for example, bodily injury or property damage, can receive an increased sentence from the judge if it was determined to be motivated by bias.

There is also a provision that prohibits conduct that incites national, racial or religious hate, discord or intolerance.<sup>2</sup>

### *The victims of hate crime*

Anyone can be a victim of a hate crime, although members of minority communities are the most frequent victims. Hate crimes also target property belonging to or associated with a community, such as places of worship.

All hate crimes must be treated with equal seriousness, regardless of who is the victim and who the perpetrator.

## POSSIBLE VICTIMS OF HATE CRIMES IN THE COUNTRY

Hate crimes in the country often target:

- *Members of different ethnic communities.*
- *Religious and sacred objects, such as churches, mosques and graveyards, as well as private property belonging to members of ethnic or religious communities.*
- *Roma.*
- *Members of sexual minorities. In all countries, the members of this group are extremely vulnerable to hate crimes; attacks frequently occur in public places.*
- *Internally displaced persons, who are often isolated and vulnerable. Hate crimes against these communities send strong messages of intolerance and create high levels of fear.*

<sup>1</sup> Criminal Code Article 39, paragraph 5 of the Criminal Code states: "During the sentence determination the court in particular will take into consideration whether the criminal act is committed against a person or a group, directly or indirectly due to their national and social background, political and religious belief, property and social status, sex, race and colour of skin."

<sup>2</sup> Criminal Code, Article 319.



## Why should **HATE CRIMES** be treated differently than other crimes?

***Hate crimes tend to increase:*** Because perpetrators feel they are acting on behalf of their community, they feel morally justified in their acts. If that community does not effectively punish and repudiate hate crimes, these and other potential perpetrators are encouraged to continue their activities, and the number of hate crimes will increase.

***Hate crimes tend to escalate:*** Offenders who start by committing minor crimes often go on to commit increasingly violent acts if they are not caught and stopped. Therefore, even minor offences committed with bias motivation are dangerous and require firm responses.

***Hate crimes tend to spiral:*** If victims and their communities feel unsafe and unprotected by state authorities, they are likely to retaliate against members of the community that is blamed for attacking them. This can lead to further attacks, creating a spiral of violence that leads to serious social breakdown. In countries with a history of ethnic conflict, this is a particularly prominent phenomenon.

## How to identify a **HATE CRIME?**

Bias indicators are one or more facts that suggest that a crime may have been committed with a bias motivation. They provide objective criteria by which to judge the probable motive, but do not necessarily prove that an offender's actions were motivated by bias. Bias indicators should be used to decide whether to investigate further the views and motives of the perpetrator.

Bias indicators are useful for police, prosecutors and NGOs to analyse whether a reported crime might be a hate crime. Many countries and organizations have compiled their own sets of bias indicators. A non-exhaustive list of bias indicators follows:

### ***Victim/Witness Perception***

→ *Does the victim or witnesses perceive that the incident was motivated by bias?*

### ***Comments, Written Statements, Gestures or Graffiti***

→ *Did the suspect make comments, written statements or gestures regarding the victim's community?*

→ *Were drawings, markings, symbols or graffiti left at the scene of the incident?*

→ *If the target was property, was it an object or place with religious or cultural significance, such as a historical monument or a cemetery?*

### ***Racial, Ethnic, Gender, and Cultural Differences***

- *Do the suspect and victim differ in terms of their racial, religious or ethnic/national background or sexual orientation?*
- *Is there a history of animosity between the victim's group and the suspect's group?*
- *Is the victim a member of a group that is overwhelmingly outnumbered by members of another group in the area where the incident occurred?*
- *Was the victim engaged in activities promoting his/her group at the time of the incident?*
- *Did the incident occur on a date of particular significance (e.g. a religious holiday or national day?)*

### ***Organized Hate Groups***

- *Were objects or items left at the scene that suggest the crime was the work of a paramilitary or extremist organization?*
- *Is there evidence that such a group is active in the neighborhood (e.g., posters, graffiti or leaflets?)*

### ***Previous Bias Crimes/Incidents***

- *Have there been similar incidents in the same area? Who were the victims?*
- *Has the victim received harassing mail or phone calls or been the victim of verbal abuse based on his/her affiliation or membership of a targeted group?*
- *Was the victim in or near an area or place commonly associated with or frequented by a particular group (e.g., a community centre or mosque, church or other place of worship).*

## **WAR CRIMES AND HATE CRIMES**

War crimes are often crimes with a bias motivation. However, because war crimes are violations of international law and of concern to the international community as a whole, they do not fall under the rubric of hate crimes. War crimes are often prosecuted by international or special tribunals.

Another distinguishing factor is that certain war crimes require proof of a special intent (genocide, for example, requires proof of intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the target group) beyond the proof of bias required for hate crimes.

## Law Enforcement and Justice Agencies' Responses

In most cases, proving motive in a crime is not necessary. Since motive is a complex issue and there are limits to the kind of evidence that can be used to prove it, hate crime cases demand a different approach from police, prosecutors and judges than other crimes.

### THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The European Court of Human Rights has held that states have positive obligations to thoroughly investigate potential racial motivation behind crimes. It stated, in the case of *Šečić v Croatia*:

*"...State authorities have the additional duty to take all reasonable steps to unmask any racist motive and to establish whether or not ethnic hatred or prejudice may have played a role in the events. Failing to do so and treating racially induced violence and brutality on an equal footing with cases that have no racist overtones would be to turn a blind eye to the specific nature of acts that are particularly destructive of fundamental rights."*

#### ***Police:***

In order to effectively investigate hate crimes and collect data, police must be able to identify hate crimes; bias indicators are an essential tool. When interviewing perpetrators, motive should be explored – many perpetrators openly admit their motivation, as they feel their behaviour is justified and approved of by the rest of the community.

Collecting data on hate crimes is a key law enforcement tool. This enables authorities to detect where trouble is building up, which locations may require greater protection to prevent future crimes, and which communities need extra reassurance. Data collection provides improved intelligence and enables resources to be properly allocated.

#### ***Prosecutors:***

Prosecutors should pursue indictments under hate crimes provisions in criminal codes, where possible. In every case, however minor, prosecutors should treat the offence as aggravated if the motive is present. This should result in gathering and presenting evidence of motive to the court, even if no aggravated form of the crime is contained in the code. In the absence of admissions, a prosecutor can consider other forms of evidence:

- *Hate crimes are often accompanied by verbal insults or graffiti at the scene of the crime - crucial evidence of motive.*
- *If the perpetrator's music, literature, websites or web-postings, clothing, jewellery or tattoos show membership in or support for extremist groups, this is relevant evidence of his/her general views.*
- *There may have been previous similar conduct by the perpetrator, whether against this victim or others.*

***Courts:***

Where a hate crime is proven, the punishment should be increased to reflect the motivation and the potential impact of the crime on the community, beyond the victim, according to Article 39 paragraph 5 of the Criminal Code. To maximize the impact of this, judges should state in open court and in the written verdict that the motive has resulted in an increased sentence.

**Angelova and Iliev v Bulgaria (2005)**

In 1996, Mr. Angel Iliev died after being beaten and stabbed by a group of teenagers. The attackers were arrested within hours; they admitted that they had been looking for Roma to attack and expressed their hatred of Roma and other minorities. Five of the attackers were indicted for “hooliganism of exceptional cynicism and impudence” but, for nine years, nothing further was done to bring them to justice. The European Court of Human Rights held that Bulgaria was in breach of its obligations and that it was “completely unacceptable” that, being aware of the racist motives of the perpetrators, there had been a failure to bring the case to justice promptly.

**Local Authorities’ responses**

Government authorities do not collect data on hate crimes. However, information from monitors, media and civil society organizations shows that there is a problem that is not being detected and addressed by the authorities.

**There are many benefits to improving responses to hate crimes:**

***Early warning:***

Serious violent unrest is often sparked by one, small, bias-motivated incident, catching authorities by surprise. Recognizing and tracking hate crimes allows law enforcement agencies to anticipate the eruption of serious incidents.

***Stronger communities:***

The identification and punishment of hate crimes raises the confidence of affected communities, as trust in the criminal justice system increases and communities feel safer.

***Enhanced intelligence:***

As confidence in police increases, so does information and co-operation received from those communities affected by hate crimes. Improved community relations lead to more investigations being successful, not only in cases of hate crime but also in other matters in which police require community assistance.

## RESPONDING TO HATE CRIMES

**There are a number of good practices that local authorities can adopt:**

- *Quickly removing offensive graffiti. This is a small but important step to improving community confidence.*
- *Creating community partnership panels to enable municipalities and local law enforcement agencies to meet with civil society and religious community representatives to exchange information and concerns.*
- *When suspected bias-motivated incidents occur, ensuring that mayors and local politicians can reassure the community that a thorough investigation will take place and make positive public statements. It is important to recognize community concerns and explain what action is being taken. Such statements are taken more seriously if there is a record of listening to and working with community organizations.*
- *Promoting school projects to educate students about hate crimes and to combat possible bias-motivated bullying. This can form a component of civic education classes, such as in “twinning” with other schools locally or in a more ethnically diverse area to organize joint activities to explore mutual prejudices and experiences.*
- *Systematically educating all students about prejudice and intolerance. This can be achieved if education authorities ensure that the subject is mainstreamed into school curricula and teacher-training faculties.*

## International and Regional Standards

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There is a comprehensive body of international and regional instruments that impose clear duties on states to respond to hate crimes.

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination requires states to implement laws punishing crimes motivated by racism, The European Union's Framework Decision on Racist and Xenophobic Crime is also of relevance to all countries within the EU or seeking membership. The Framework Decision, adopted in 2008, aims to establish a common criminal law approach to hate crimes, including aggravated penalties for bias motivation.

In relation to law enforcement, the European Court of Human Rights has held that states have a duty to properly investigate potential racial motivations of crimes. OSCE participating States have committed to ensuring their legislation is adequate, collecting statistics, ensuring that hate crimes are thoroughly investigated and prosecuted, and implementing training where necessary.





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