What is hate crime

Crimes motivated by prejudice, also known as hate crimes or bias-motivated crimes, affect the security of individuals, their communities and societies as a whole. Effective responses to hate crimes are necessary to prevent them from posing a serious security challenge. In extreme situations, they can lead to wars within and across national borders.

Hate crimes are criminal acts motivated by bias or prejudice towards particular groups of people. To be considered a hate crime, the offence must meet two criteria: First, the act must constitute an offence under criminal law; second, the act must have been motivated by bias.

Bias motivations can be broadly defined as preconceived negative opinions, stereotypical assumptions, intolerance or hatred directed to a particular group that shares a common characteristic, such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, gender or any other fundamental characteristic. People with disabilities may also be victims of hate crimes.

Hate crimes can include threats, property damage, assault, murder or any other criminal offence committed with a bias motivation. Hate crimes don't only affect individuals from specific groups. People or property merely associated with – or even perceived to be a member of – a group that shares a protected characteristic, such as human rights defenders, community centres or places of worship, can also be targets of hate crimes.

This website does not present information about discrimination or hate speech because there is no consensus in the OSCE region about whether these acts should be criminalized.

Why is OSCE/ODIHR involved?

“Hate crimes affect the security of individuals, their communities and societies as a whole. We must send a clear message that these crimes will not be tolerated.”

ODIHR Director Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has given particular attention to hate crimes on the grounds that they are among the most serious manifestations of intolerance. The OSCE’s Ministerial Council has repeatedly reaffirmed the threat hate crimes pose to the security of individuals and to social cohesion, as well as their potential to lead to conflict and violence on a wider scale.

Find out more about OSCE/ODIHR's work on hate crime

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