

[ODIHR launches user-friendly Hate Crime Reporting website](#) [1]

17 June 2014 Warsaw, Poland

In combatting intolerance and discrimination, information is a vital weapon, but only if it can be accessed quickly and easily.



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All too often, it hasn't been, because it has been buried deep within a document the size of a doorstep.

"I frequently have to spend an hour ploughing through some huge report before I eventually find what I'm looking for tucked away in a footnote on page 120," complains Jiří Komínek, a Czech-Canadian journalist who covers hate crime-related security matters.

"It's frustrating. There has to be a better way."

Showpiece report "difficult to navigate"

Hate crime specialists at the Warsaw-based OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) understand that Komínek is not alone.

Activists from across the OSCE region routinely scratch their heads over the hate crimes report

compiled and published annually by ODIHR.

The report, *Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region – incidents and responses*, serves to fulfil ODIHR’s primary mandate in this area: to detail the prevalence of hate crimes and the good practices that participating States and civil society have adopted to tackle them.

“The only problem is, many readers find it quite difficult to navigate,” said Floriane Hohenberg, Head of the Tolerance and Non-discrimination department at ODIHR.

Online format “cuts to the chase”

But Hohenberg and her team at ODIHR are aiming to put that right.

On 17 June, the Office launched [the Hate Crime Reporting website](#) [2], which replaces the printed and CD editions of the report.

Designed to complement the ODIHR section of the OSCE website, the new platform divides hate crime data collected from various sources across the OSCE region into digestible chunks of information that are country- and issue-specific, and will be constantly updated.

“The idea is to guide website visitors to the material that they are seeking without making them jump through too many hoops,” explains Hohenberg.

“Experts needn’t worry – the detailed stuff will still be there for those who need it: If you want the full text of this or that piece of hate crime legislation, we can direct you there; if you need to download our training and professional guides, you can find them on the new site.

“But if you just want to go straight to the data, you can.”

“Real-time” reporting

In the meantime, ODIHR staff look forward to the new opportunities for searching and using hate crime reporting data the new site makes possible; opportunities the “old media” report format did not offer.

“I see it as a great tool for advocacy, because it immediately puts the broader hate crime picture into perspective,” said Azra Junuzovic, Deputy Head of the Tolerance and Non-discrimination department.

“For example, campaigners in an OSCE participating State that doesn’t collect or make public extensive official data on a particular concern – or at all – can easily use the website to point to difficulties or shortcomings in the data-collection methods employed by that country,” Junuzovic said. “They can identify better practices in other countries and say to their government: ‘Look what these people are doing – shouldn’t we be doing something similar?’”

ODIHR is using the evolving “real time” nature of the whole website to help OSCE participating States improve practices in collecting data on hate crimes.

For instance, at the end of each particular country section on the website, ODIHR makes explicit “observations” about areas where the OSCE participating State in question can improve its data-collection practices.

“In a number of cases we observe that, for example, countries have not reported information on prosecuted hate crime cases,” notes Hohenberg. “But we can amend these observations immediately if the participating State in question takes the appropriate action.”

Just as important, say ODIHR’s partners across the OSCE region, is the potential to familiarize non-specialists about a problem that, if left unaddressed, poses a threat to security and stability for entire countries, and the region itself.

“People ask me all the time: Why is someone being assaulted because of their race or religion philosophically different from being assaulted in a barroom fight?” says Danuta Głowacka-Mazur, Director of the Department of Control, Complaints and Petitions at Poland’s Interior Ministry and ODIHR’s national point of contact in the country on hate crimes. “They don’t understand that this can become a threat to everyone’s security – a threat that the OSCE has an obligation to address and to counter.”

“If the new website can eliminate confusion and prompt laypersons to educate others, then that can only be a good thing.”

- *By James Drake*

Recording hate crimes

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