

# Anticipating and Managing the Risks of Online Harassment

Research, Reports, Guides and  
Recommendations

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# IDA

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This report brings together information garnered from research and reports related to online harassment. It also discusses guides and handbooks that have been compiled in relation to harassment in diverse contexts, for use in later research.

Chapter 1 presents the most common forms, situations and targets of online harassment. Research has shown that some of the professions particularly prone to harassment are journalists, politicians and researchers. Research, guides and instructions pertaining to these professions are considered in Chapter 2. Because the tactics for managing harassment and the guides and instructions directed at various audiences are similar, to a great extent, they are jointly discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 looks at the employer's responsibility in harassment cases through diverse guides, handbooks and research studies. Additionally, the report provides a summary of the best tactics and advice for preventing and managing harassment, for both individuals and employers, based on the guidelines and instructions that are most often repeated in research, reports and guides (Appendices 2 and 3).

The report does not cover the judicial or political aspects of online harassment prevention in any detail, but information on these can be found in many of the studies mentioned in this report (cf. e.g. Illman 2020; Knuutila et al. 2019; Mäkinen 2019; Van Der Wilk 2018; Henrichsen, Betz & Lisosky 2015; Filion 2016; Tandon 2015).

# 1. Online Harassment as a Phenomenon and its Prevalence

## 1.1. Various forms of harassment

Online harassment takes diverse forms, the definitions of which overlap in many cases. From the perspective of preventing harassment and taking action in various harassment situations, it is important to recognize the phenomenon at hand at each time. The following summary collates the most common terminology and definitions related to online harassment, based on a variety of research, reports and guides.

**Online harassment:** Online harassment refers to abusive and offensive behaviour that appears online in the form of comments, pictures or videos whose aim is to insult, humiliate or silence the target of harassment. Forms of online harassment include hate speech, abusive messaging, sexual harassment, threats and intimidation. (Cf. e.g. Van de Wilk 2018.)

**Cyberhate:** Cyberhate or online hate is a kind of umbrella term for many forms of hate speech and harassment. Broadly defined, it includes the distribution of abusive materials, racism, antisemitism, religious fanaticism, homophobia, disability abuse, political hate, misogyny, non-consensual pornography, promoting terrorism, cyberbullying, rumour propagation, harassment and stalking, speech directed at silencing counterarguments and stigmatization of various groups, among other tactics. (Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013, 19; cf. also Barlow & Awan 2016, 2.)

**Hate speech:** Hate speech is a type of speech that targets a person or a group, disseminating, encouraging or promoting hatred based on their skin colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or faith, gender, sexual

identity or any other personal characteristic or station.<sup>1</sup> Hate speech is a form of communication whose aim is to exclude a certain group or to create an image of the persons belonging to that group as suspicious, untrustworthy or inferior. There is no legal definition of hate speech in Finland, nor does Finland's legislation mention it as a specific type of crime. Hate speech is a crime even in Finland, however, when it fulfils the statutory definition of an offence or crime, for example incitement to ethnic or racial hatred or breach of the sanctity of religion. (Mäkinen 2019, 15–16.) Hate speech is not always visibly angry or aggressive; even dispassionate and well-argued speech may be hateful or incite to hatred. It is defined by its content. (Pöyhkäri, Haara & Raittila 2013, 19.)

**Doxxing:** Doxxing or doxing refers to searching for, collecting, misappropriating and/or publishing private, often sensitive information about an individual on the internet.

**Hacking:** Hacking refers to utilizing technology to appropriate or modify an individual's personal data, or to defame someone. This includes gaining unauthorized access to databases, websites or private accounts or devices, as well as the installation of malware or spyware.

**Revenge porn and sexual harassment:** Forms of online sexual harassment include for example sending or sharing images and messages of a sexual nature without the receiving party's consent, and making threats of a sexual nature. So-called revenge porn or non-consensual pornography refers to publishing online, without permission, intimate pictures or videos that were previously consensually and confidentially shared, or that have been stolen or were made secretly, with the intention of humiliating the victim and ruining their reputation. Revenge porn may also be linked to extortion and intimidation.

**Online shaming and mass attacks:** Online shaming refers to a form of targeting that takes place online, particularly on social media, by encouraging several people to attack a certain individual. As a consequence of online shaming, the individual may be subjected to mass attacks, i.e. large quantities of malicious messages or harassment carried out by as many as hundreds of people at a time. The intention may be to silence the victim or, for example, to deprive them of work opportunities. Online shaming may include contacting the victim's employer or business partners.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on Combating Hate Speech, issued in December 2015 <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-general-policy-recommendation-no-15-on-combating-hate-speech/16808b5b01> (accessed 24/11/2020)

<sup>2</sup> As regards online shaming and Finnish legislation, cf. Illman 2020. *Järjestelmällinen häirintä ja maalittaminen – Lainsäädännön arviointia*. Valtioneuvoston selvitys 2020:3. <http://um.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2020120399312> (accessed 7/12/2020)

**Trolling:** The definition of trolling is broad, including many things from serious hate speech to more playful distribution of memes and messages. Most commonly, trolling is understood to mean the repeated distribution of abusive, offensive or otherwise questionable messages on social media or diverse discussion forums, with the aim of provoking reactions. Trolling may also be systematic, professionally organized and/or politically motivated.

**Fake accounts and online impersonation:** Online impersonation means appearing as someone else on online platforms. This might include creating fake accounts in the individual's name on social media and, through these, publishing statements and opinions that are detrimental to the victim and their reputation. Impersonation may also be used as a means of obtaining personal and sensitive information.

**Cyberbullying:** Cyberbullying or online bullying refers to repeated and malicious harassment taking place online with the aim of insulting, humiliating or intimidating the victim. This takes the form of repeated offensive comments, rumour propagation or threats, for example.<sup>3</sup>

**Cyberstalking:** Cyberstalking is a form of systematic harassment and stalking of an individual through social media, messaging applications or email, for example.<sup>4</sup> It also refers to utilizing the internet or technology to spy on or monitor an individual, or to gather private information (cf. e.g. Tandon 2015, 22).

## 1.2. Places where harassment occurs

Many studies have found social media to be the most common site of online harassment and hate speech (cf. e.g. Fillion 2016). The most popular social media platforms are also the most common harassment sites. According to research, in many countries Facebook is the most common site of harassment (Keipi et al. 2017; Binns 2017; Knuutila et al. 2019), although it is also rife on other social media platforms, particularly Twitter, YouTube and Instagram (Keipi et al. 2017, Chadha et al. 2020). Based on suspected hate crimes logged by the police, the most problematic platforms in Finland appear to be Facebook, YouTube and the Ylilauta.org discussion forum (Mäkinen 2019, 24). Harassment often takes the form of public messages on the internet, but malicious messaging can also be private (Knuutila et al. 2019, 23–24).

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. <https://cyberbullying.org/> (accessed 24/11/2020)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pandasecurity.com/en/mediacenter/panda-security/how-to-handle-online-harassment/> (accessed 24/11/2020)

There has been a lot of discussion in recent years on the responsibility of social media service providers in eradicating harassment and hate speech. Online platforms play a significant role in fighting hate speech because they determine what content their users see (Barboni et al. 2018, 47). In 2016, the European Commission partnered with information technology giants Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Microsoft to publish a joint Code of Conduct for countering illegal hate speech online. In it, the companies committed to continuing actions against hate speech. They also committed to improving their internal procedures and training personnel to ensure that the majority of relevant requests concerning the removal of illegal hate speech are reviewed in less than 24 hours and that the content is removed or blocked if necessary. (Mäkinen 2019, 42–43.)

There are many ways to monitor or moderate discussions taking place on social media platforms. On many sites, users themselves can report content or accounts that they consider to be abusive or illegal. The report goes to an employee tasked with moderating, who reviews the content of the message and decides whether it should be removed. The process is not entirely unproblematic, however: messages may, for example, be unduly removed. (Gerrard 2020, 749.) Artificial intelligence is also often used for identifying and removing illegal or abusive material. Automated, algorithm-based moderation is a somewhat viable method for weeding out malicious and illegal content, but it cannot be blindly relied upon: algorithms make mistakes, for instance because they fail to take into account the context of conversations. This is why AI-intercepted messages and users' reports of illegal content must also be evaluated by a human. (Mäkinen 2019, 43; Gerrard 2020, 749.) According to Knuutila et al. (2019, 95), companies such as Twitter and Facebook are still not systematic about enforcing their own rules or preventing individuals from breaking them. Other studies have also pinpointed Twitter and Facebook as online platforms that have been unsuccessful in preventing hate speech and where administrators rarely remove abusive messages (cf. e.g. Antunovic 2019, 433). The transparency of moderation practices and statistics should be further increased to make them easier to assess.

A certain quantity of harassment also takes place via blogs (Eckert 2018), online gaming platforms (Fox & Tang 2017; Cote 2017), email (Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring 2016, 884), discussion forums and private messaging, e.g. WhatsApp (Knuutila et al. 2019, 23–24). Diverse far-right hate sites and fake media have also been connected with the increasing prevalence of hate speech (Hiltunen 2018, 12; Waisbord 2016, 1,035). Abusive and malicious comments are also fairly common in the comment fields of online news, and the responsibility of the media in moderating these discussions has been highlighted (cf. e.g. Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013; Wintterlin et al. 2020).



### 1.3. Who encounters harassment?

Statistics published in 2020 by Statistics Finland on the Finnish population's use of information and communication technology<sup>5</sup> reveal that 7% of the population have at some point been subjected to harassment on the internet, 13% have been inappropriately approached, and 39% have witnessed abusive and derogatory messages directed at groups of people on social media in the preceding three months. Women are subjected to more harassment and inappropriate approaches than men, and also witness more abusive messages. Young people (aged 16 to 24) and young adults (25 to 34) encounter by far the most abusive messages online, and are also subjected to more harassment and inappropriate approaches than other age groups.

Hate speech in general has been studied more widely than online harassment. In Finland, as elsewhere, increasing hate speech has been taken seriously as a phenomenon that restricts people's freedom of speech and expression, which plays its part in increasing intolerance, polarization of opinion and extremist beliefs (cf. e.g. Mäkinen 2019; Korhonen et al. 2016). The role of the internet in the propagation of hate speech has also been recognized (cf. e.g. Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013).

Harassment can be encountered online by anyone. However, numerous studies on online hate and harassment show that it is a highly gendered phenomenon, being directed especially at women (Mogensen & Holding Rand 2020; Nadim & Fladmoe 2019; Sobieraj 2018; Van Der Wilk 2018; Tandon 2015; Jane 2014a & 2014b). The internet and social media have both reinforced existing forms of violence against women and created new harassment methods and mechanisms (Van Der Wilk 2018, 10).

On the other hand, many studies concerning experiences of online harassment (e.g. Nadim & Fladmoe 2019; Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring 2016) have found that men face more harassment and abusive comments than women. However, women's experiences of online harassment are often more negative than those of men. The harassment encountered by women is more often related to the individual's gender, identity or appearance, whereas men are more often criticized for their opinions. Additionally, the cyberhate directed at women is more likely to be sexualized. Sexual harassment and rape threats or wishes are very common in harassment encountered

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<sup>5</sup> Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT): Väestön tieto- ja viestintätekniikan käyttö [online publication]. ISSN=2341-8699. 2020, Appendix 29. Vihamielisten viestien näkeminen, häirinnän kokeminen ja epäasiallisen lähestymisen kohteeksi joutuminen sosiaalisessa mediassa 2020, %-osuus väestöstä ["Exposure to hostile messages, experiences of harassment and receiving inappropriate contacts on social media 2020, % of population"]. Helsinki: Statistics Finland. [http://www.stat.fi/til/sutivi/2020/sutivi\\_2020\\_2020-11-10\\_tau\\_029\\_fi.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/sutivi/2020/sutivi_2020_2020-11-10_tau_029_fi.html) (accessed 16/12/2020)

by women. (Hiltunen & Suuronen 2020; Lewis, Zamith & Coddington 2020; Nadim & Fladmoe 2019; Binns 2017.)

Statistics also corroborate the blossoming of online misogyny: an EU-28 report indicates that 18% of European women have experienced a form of online violence after the age of 15 (Tandon 2015, 16). In 2020, the children's rights organization Plan International published a report<sup>6</sup> on its survey of online harassment experienced by girls and young women in 22 countries. The Finnish branch of the organization also conducted a separate national survey. According to the report, 58% of girls worldwide and 42% in Finland have experienced harassment on the internet. It also indicated that girls belonging to minorities experienced more online harassment than their peers.

Indeed, marginalized groups, such as religious, ethnic, national and sexual minorities are more likely to be subjected to cyberhate than other groups (cf. e.g. Pöyhkäri, Haara & Raittila 2013; Knuutila et al. 2019). Often, online harassment and hate speech correlate with other forms of discrimination and hate crime (Van Der Wilk 2018 30–31). Online hate speech and harassment directed at minorities have been researched less than those directed at women (nevertheless, cf. Barlow & Awan 2016).

On social media, harassment is most often experienced by those who use it a lot and regularly take part in public discussions (Lewis, Rowe & Wiper 2016, 1,469). In line with women and minority groups receiving more online harassment than others, also those who defend the rights of these groups are highly exposed (Mogensen & Holding Rand 2020; Eckert 2018; Lewis, Rowe & Wiper 2016). Many guides and handbooks have been written for feminists and activists, in particular, advising them how to behave online, minimize the risks of harassment and respond when harassment occurs. More information on these can be found in Chapter 3 and Appendix 1. It is important to note, however, that online harassment is not restricted to proponents of certain political parties or forms of activism: anyone can be targeted by various forms of harassment for their political opinions, for example.

Experiences from Finns in various professions and roles as victims of online harassment and hate campaigns can be found for example in the graphic journalism book *Vihan ja inhon internet (The Internet of Hate and Loathing)*, Kosmos 2017) by Johanna Vehkoo and Emmi Nieminen, and in *Kansa raivostui* (Kustannusosakeyhtiö Hai 2018) by Mikko Sovijärvi and Ilona Pajari.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://plan.fi/sites/default/files/plan\\_images/verkkohairintasuomessa\\_raportti2020.pdf](https://plan.fi/sites/default/files/plan_images/verkkohairintasuomessa_raportti2020.pdf) (accessed 13/11/2020)

## 2. Online Harassment by Profession

The internet and social media make up an increasing proportion of the work of professionals in many fields. Social media makes it possible to form more open and interactive relationships with people and communities, but also exposes users to harassment. In many fields, employers encourage or even obligate employees to be active on social media, but very few instructions are offered as to how to act online and control the ensuing risks.

The risk of harassment is particularly high in fields where publicity and interaction with large audiences is common. These professions include journalism and politics in particular. Researchers are also increasingly encouraged to communicate about their work on social media. This increases the openness of academic work, but also exposes individual researchers to various forms of harassment.

The following chapters examine the hate speech and online harassment experienced by journalists, politicians and researchers in the light of diverse studies and reports, and presents some of the guides and handbooks written for these professions in relation to minimizing and controlling the risks of harassment.

### 2.1. Journalists

Journalists have always faced harassment in their work. With the advent of the internet, however, and, particularly, social media, the harassment has become more common and taken new forms. These days social media is an increasingly significant part of journalists' work, both in searching for topics and increasing their visibility. For many journalists, social media platforms offer an important work environment and tool, which is used for reaching audiences and building their professional brands (Hiltunen 2020, 192). Many employers also encourage journalists to be openly present on social media. For some journalists, social media has meant a new obligation, coming purely from the employer's side, on top of an already significant workload. (Vainikka et al. 2013, 7–8.)

Social media has increased people's ability to take part in public discourse and opinion exchanges. The flipside has been an increase in abusive language and aggressive behaviour on online platforms. Working online exposes journalists to a variety of hazards, including hate speech, stalking, hate campaigns and gender-based harassment (Hiltunen & Suuronen 2020, 2). Harassment is an everyday occurrence for many journalists, and its increasing frequency is specifically associated with the online environment and the greater public visibility of the profession (Hiltunen 2018, 12). Journalists encounter harassment on numerous platforms, from email to social media and from private messaging to widely available online publications (Waisbord 2020, 1,030).

The online harassment of journalists has been extensively researched, both as a general phenomenon (Waisbord 2020; Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring 2016; Binns 2017) and a gender-based phenomenon directed at women (Chen et al. 2020; Miller & Lewis 2020; Stahel & Schoen 2020; Antunovic 2019; Adams 2018). In Finland, online harassment has been studied, among other things, as one of the forms of hate speech (Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013) and as part of the external influencing and pressuring tactics encountered by journalists (Hiltunen 2018; Hiltunen & Suuronen 2020). Diverse journalists' associations and unions have also taken a stand against the harassment experienced by journalists – women journalists in particular – around the world (cf. e.g. Barton & Storm 2014; Ferrier 2018; Mijatović 2016; Reporters Without Borders 2018).

Responses to a survey conducted in 2019 by the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation (YLE) on influencing and pressuring attempts (Hiltunen & Suuronen 2019) show that of all the tactics included in the survey, the ones which YLE's journalists and content providers had faced the most were slander and verbal abuse. One in seven respondents reported experiencing offensive claims, rumours or private details being maliciously spread online. Nearly one in four had been the target of systematic feedback campaigns and nearly one in seven had been threatened with violence. (Ibid. 115.) A survey of all Finnish journalists in 2018 (Hiltunen 2018) similarly found that verbal abuse via diverse communication channels was the most common influencing tactic. According to an intimidation survey published by the professional journal *Journalisti* in 2017<sup>7</sup>, 17% of journalists had experienced verbal intimidation once a year or less frequently, while 8% had experienced it at least once every six months.

Certain journalistic topics are more likely to attract abusive feedback than others, particularly ones that arouse strong feelings and opinions, such as immigration,

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<sup>7</sup> Honkonen, Marja, "Painostuksen monet muodot". *Journalisti* 26/5/2017 <https://www.journalisti.fi/artikkelit/2017/7/painostuksen-monet-muodot/> (accessed 24/11/2020)

refugeeism, racism, politics, politicians, elections, right-wing populism and the far right (cf. e.g. Chen et al. 2020; Hiltunen & Suuronen 2019; Waisbord 2016). Women journalists also receive harassment when writing about topics generally viewed as masculine, such as technology (Adams 2018) and sports (Antunovic 2019; Everbach 2018). Feminism and gender equality are similarly harassment-prone topics (Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring 2016, 888; Adams 2018, 857). Harassment against journalists is a serious threat to journalistic autonomy and freedom of the press. Harassment and threats can cause fear and self-censorship and may influence what topics are covered and in what tone. (Hiltunen 2018, 15–16; Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013, 134–135; Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring 2016, 887.) In some cases, harassment can cause journalists to abandon the profession altogether (Hiltunen 2020, 201; cf. also Stahel & Schoen 2020; Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring 2016).

As we have stated above, online harassment is a strongly gendered phenomenon. Generally speaking, women experience more online harassment than men (Chen et al. 2020, 880). Despite this, many studies examining the online harassment of journalists have found no significant differences between the genders in this respect (cf. e.g. Hiltunen & Suuronen 2019 & 2020; Lewis, Zamith & Coddington 2020; Binns 2017). The nature of the harassment may differ, however: the harassment encountered by women is gender-based and contains more appearance-related insults, belittling, sexual harassment and threats of sexual violence (Binns 2017, 5). Women also report harassment more often and have a more negative response to it than men (Hiltunen & Suuronen 2020, 13, Binns 2017, 5–6; Lewis, Zamith & Coddington 2020, 1,050).

The comment sections and possible discussion forums related to news media are places where hate speech and harassment are directed at both journalists and others, such as fellow commenters or the persons interviewed in the article. As such, media houses should assume responsibility for their employees' safety and for maintaining a proper atmosphere for online discussions. Online publications such as periodicals should always have an editor-in-chief to manage and oversee journalistic work (Mäkinen 2019, 27). A common practice adopted by Finnish media to reduce abusive commenting is pre-moderation of comments. Many media houses lack established practices or guidelines for such moderation, however. In most Finnish media, the moderation of news-related discussions is carried out in the editorial room by reporters, editors or separate moderators. Few small and medium-sized houses have the resources to hire separate moderators, so it is common for journalists or editors themselves to take care of the task. The psychological burden of continuously having to read hate speech and abusive comments directed at oneself or one's colleagues is seldom sufficiently considered. (Pöyhtäri, Haara & Raittila 2013, 176–177, 180; Trionfi & Luque 2020, 12–13, 16.) On the other hand, there have recently been efforts to

clarify and homogenize moderation practices. The Finnish News Agency (STT) has been offering moderation services for its media customers since 2019.<sup>8</sup> Its current moderation customers are Ilta-Sanomat, Helsingin Sanomat and YLE. The moderation is not carried out by STT's newsroom but by a group of professional moderators, and it is based on STT's own moderation principles.<sup>9</sup>

It is common for employers and managers to downplay the impact of online harassment on the work and psychological well-being of journalists. Many journalists feel that they are left alone to cope with harassment because it is not taken seriously enough (Trionfi & Luque 2020, 21; cf. also Eberspacher 2019). Especially women journalists often feel that they receive insufficient support in cases of harassment (Adams 2018, 860). Journalists do not always know how they should act in harassment situations or whom to report them to (Chen et al. 2020, 888). Chen et al. (2020, 891) call for increased training for journalists, as well as better support from their employers. Because many workplaces now require use of social media, journalists should be instructed in how to cope with harassment. As Hiltunen and Suuronen (2019, 119–121) state in the YLE harassment and intimidation survey report, media houses should provide employees with clear and concise instructions on how to act in cases of harassment and whom to report them to. Preemptive steps should also be taken against harassment. When writing any controversial subject, the journalistic process should include a separate risk analysis.

These support functions should also cover freelancers and workers who are employed only as needed. (Ibid. 121.) Although according to Hiltunen and Suuronen (2020, 9) freelance and self-employed journalists encounter less harassment than permanently employed journalists, these groups are more liable to suffer from the negative impacts of harassment due to the lack of security offered by a permanent employment contract and a workplace community (Trionfi & Luque 2020, 22). Freelance journalists display less trust in their employers' ability to resist external influencing attempts, such as harassment, than their permanently employed peers (Hiltunen & Suuronen 2020, 15).

In 2020, *Journalisti* investigated how seven large media houses were prepared against harassment and inappropriate feedback.<sup>10</sup> The survey demonstrated that the instructions provided by the employers varied greatly, although all were prepared with some level of guidance and training. Journalists are instructed to inform their superiors of all cases of harassment and intimidation directed at the editorial staff and other employees. They are also advised to take serious threats and abuse to the police.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://stt.fi/tyylikirja/moderointi/> (accessed 7/12/2020)

<sup>9</sup> <https://stt.fi/tyylikirja/moderointi/moderointiperiaatteet/> (accessed 7/12/2020)

<sup>10</sup> Harvia, Tiina & Naskali, Laura, "Mediatilat ohjeistavat työntekijöitä häirinnän kohtaamiseen vaihtelevasti – Yle jakoi ohjeensa kaikille". *Journalisti* 28/5/2020. <https://www.journalisti.fi/artikkelit/2020/5/mediatalot-ohjeistavat-tyntekijit-hirinnn-kohtaamiseen-vaihtelevasti-yle/> (accessed 17/11/2020)

YLE is one of the media houses that has formulated detailed written guidelines for countering harassment. It includes instructions for how to recognize harassment and whom to contact when necessary. A more abridged, publicly available version was also produced.<sup>11</sup>

Diverse guides and handbooks have been published outside of media houses in both Finland and abroad. In 2019, the Finnish Ministry of Justice published the guide *Journalists and Hate Speech*, intended for reporters and their employers.<sup>12</sup> The guide forms a part of the Against Hate project, coordinated by the ministry between 2017 and 2019, whose aim was to develop efforts against hate crime and hate speech. It includes information about hate speech and its punishability, as well as instructions for how to report harassment and find legal assistance. The guide emphasizes the employer's responsibility in supporting journalists and processing cases.

Journalist and non-fiction author Johanna Vehkoo has also published advice on how to handle hate speech and hate campaigns. Published in *Journalisti* in 2018,<sup>13</sup> it is a concise and clear summary of the best courses of action for targets of harassment, their colleagues and their superiors. Vehkoo has also produced a work of graphic journalism about cyberhate in Finland together with comic artist Emmi Nieminen, entitled *Vihan ja Inhon Internet (The Internet of Hate and Loathing, Kosmos 2017)*, with information on the most common forms of online harassment and practical advice on how to cope with diverse situations. This advice is not directed purely at journalists but at any internet and social media user.

Various international bodies and other organizations have created handbooks for journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists, an organization that promotes press freedom internationally, maintains a regularly updated digital safety kit<sup>14</sup> for reporters on its website, which collects concise instructions on dealing with harassment and protecting one's data online. Similarly, PEN America, which operates internationally, maintains the Online Harassment Field Manual,<sup>15</sup> which is a comprehensive information package on online harassment encountered by journalists and others who write for a living. The manual comprises an extensive and clear set of instructions both

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<sup>11</sup> <https://yle.fi/aihe/sivu/yleisradio/ylen-turvallisemman-vuorovaikutuksen-ohje> (accessed 17/11/2020)

<sup>12</sup> <https://yhdenvertaisuus.fi/documents/5232670/13949561/Journalistit+ja+vihapuhe/a9dc9f9b-9e4f-0b32-ce98-7bb0e9d4ac51/Journalistit+ja+vihapuhe.pdf> (accessed 17/11/2020)

<sup>13</sup> Vehkoo, Johanna, "Vihakampanja käynnistyy, toimi näin". *Journalisti* 9/11/2018.

<https://www.journalisti.fi/artikkelit/2018/13/vihakampanja-kyynnistyy-toimi-nin/> (accessed 17/11/2020)

<sup>14</sup> <https://cpj.org/2020/05/digital-safety-protecting-against-targeted-online-attacks/> (accessed 17/11/2020)

<sup>15</sup> <https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/> (accessed 17/11/2020)



for targets of harassment and their employers. The Rory Peck Trust maintains an online guide for freelance journalists<sup>16</sup>, with tips on maintaining digital security.

The International Press Institute, which defends journalistic freedom of speech and expression has published an extensive and comprehensive report (Trionfi & Luque 2020) on the actions against online harassment taken by various countries (including Finland), as well as a more abridged guide<sup>17</sup> for media houses on how to address harassment and protect journalists. The instructions in the guide range from reporting practices to managing risks and supporting journalists, and it includes information on the roles and responsibilities of various parties.

A UNESCO report from 2015 (Henrichsen, Betz & Lisosky 2015) on digital risks related to journalism provides recommended actions for dealing with online harassment and minimizing its risks, directed at journalists, their employers and diverse organizations, even governments. The report includes a comprehensive list of various bodies that offer support and resources for coping with cyberharassment.

The TrollBusters website<sup>18</sup> is a support network aimed particularly at women journalists, which victims of harassment can contact. It offers help and support in dealing with various situations and advises on data protection issues. It can also help with reporting abusive social media accounts. TrollBusters has also published easy-to-understand infographics on harassment.

## 2.2. Politicians

The role of the internet, particularly social media, has grown in politics, especially in the last decade. Today, various digital spaces form a crucial part of the work of politicians. (Cf. e.g. Strandberg & Borg 2020.) Election campaigning and related debates are to a great extent conducted on social media (Knuutila & Laaksonen 2020, 94). Having a public and visible job, politicians are on the receiving end of a lot of hostile feedback, online as well as elsewhere. A report commissioned by the British government in 2017<sup>19</sup> concludes that with increasing use of the internet and social media, people's opportunities for participating in public discourse have improved, but at the same time the harassment faced by those in public life has increased and the

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<sup>16</sup> <https://rorypecktrust.org/freelance-resources/digital-security/> (accessed 17/11/2020)

<sup>17</sup> [https://newsrooms-ontheline.ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IPI\\_newsrooms\\_protocol\\_address\\_online\\_harassment\\_ok\\_022020.pdf](https://newsrooms-ontheline.ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IPI_newsrooms_protocol_address_online_harassment_ok_022020.pdf) (accessed 17/11/2020)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.troll-busters.com/> (accessed 25/11/2020)

<sup>19</sup> [Committee on Standards in Public Life 2017. \*Intimidation in Public Life\*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/666927/6\\_3637\\_CO\\_v6\\_061217\\_Web3.1\\_2\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666927/6_3637_CO_v6_061217_Web3.1_2_.pdf) (accessed 17/11/2020)



discourse itself has taken on more negative and aggressive tones. There has been plenty of debate, both in public life and in research, on the role of social media in promoting hate and political polarization. (Knuutila & Laaksonen 2020, 394). Knuutila and Laaksonen (2020) have found that the algorithms used by social media, particularly Facebook, seem to favour hostile political communication and sharing of messages that provoke strong feelings. Like Facebook, Twitter is a communication channel that is especially used by politicians, which is rife with harassment and hate speech (cf. e.g. Knuutila et al. 2019; Gorrell et al. 2020).

Many consider that because they hold positions of power, politicians are obliged to cope with more criticism than others, however harsh, seeing harassment as an inevitable drawback of the profession (Krook & Sanín 2019, 745). Hate speech and harassment can, however, have a serious impact on democracy and political processes. The objective of producers of hate speech may be, for example, to influence policymaking by hampering certain individuals' political activity, or to affect specific political decisions. Personal experience of harassment is not always needed for a person to be silenced, as the simple threat of it may have a silencing effect (Knuutila et al. 2019, 14; Filion 2016, 7). Online harassment and hate speech can negatively impact individuals' political activity, reputation, career choices and mental health (Wagner 2020, 21). Therefore, harassment must always be taken seriously.

Political violence as a phenomenon is a growing threat to democracy, which is directed especially at women (Bardall 2019, 379). Gender-based violence is one of the greatest threats to women's opportunities to engage in political decision-making (Bardall 2013, 1), which is why it has been extensively researched in recent years (cf. e.g. Krook 2020; Bardall, Bjarnegård & Piscopo 2020; Krook & Sanín 2019). Many international organizations have also issued statements on the violence and harassment experienced by women in politics (cf. e.g. UN Women 2018; National Democratic Institute 2016). Young women and minority women run a particular risk of being subjected to harassment and violence. The intersectional dimensions of violence and harassment should be taken more carefully into account when examining political violence against women. (Cf. e.g. Kuperberg 2018.) Diverse efforts are made to try to silence or intimidate women out of politics. The violence may be physical, sexual, psychological, financial, verbal or symbolic (Bardall, Bjarnegård & Piscopo 2020, 921). Nor is online harassment a separate phenomenon from other forms of violence against women. The various forms of gender-based political violence are evident in the online environment. Technology and the internet have remodelled the political violence encountered by women and brought new challenges and threats to equality in politics (Bardall 2013, 8). Our various online environments form a central part of people's lives and political activity, and they cannot reasonably be separated from so-called real life when speaking about violence. Online harassment and

violence significantly hamper politicians' work and may drive women, in particular, out of politics. This is an extensively recognized threat to gender equality and representation in democracy. (Filion 2016; cf. also Barboni et al. 2018.)

A publication of the Finnish government entitled *Viha vallassa: Vihapuheen vaikutukset yhteiskunnalliseen päätöksentekoon* ["Hate in Power: Effects of Hate Speech on Policymaking"] (Knuutila et al. 2019) examines the scale of hate speech directed at policymakers, its effects and how respondents had acted when coming across it. Based on the survey conducted for the study, around one third of municipal decision-makers in Finland had experienced hate speech or harassment related to their official duties. It was even more common among members of parliament and their aides, 45% of whom had experienced hate speech. The greater the responsibility and more visible the position, the more likely the experience was. The most common forms of hate speech were defamation and slander. Additionally there was harassment in the form of intimidation or threatening behaviour, as well as hatred against specific groups. The significance of social media as a channel for harassment and hate speech was emphasized; more than one half of those who had received hate speech had done so online. The causes mentioned by respondents for the hate speech included working on controversial decisions or topics, belonging to a certain party or group, mistrust or frustration in decision-makers, and visibility in the media or in online discourse. Hate speech is often markedly racist in nature and directed at racialized candidates and policymakers. Gender was also named as a specific cause for harassment.

Some studies have found men receiving more harassment and hate speech online than women (cf. e.g. Gorrell et al. 2020; Rheault, Rayment & Musulan 2019). This was true for example in a Twitter tracking study carried out by Knuutila et al. On the other hand, this deviated from the results of Knuutila et al.'s wider survey, according to which more hate speech was directed at women than men. One possible explanation of this is that men are more active on Twitter than women. (Knuutila et al. 2019, 83.) Some studies have observed that the amount of harassment correlates with the individual's public visibility: women in higher positions encounter more harassment than their male colleagues (Rheault, Rayment & Musulan 2019, 6). According to a study published by *The Guardian*<sup>20</sup>, for example, Hillary Clinton received twice as many hostile comments as her opponent Bernie Sanders during the US presidential race.

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<sup>20</sup> Hunt, Elle, Evershed, Nick & Liu, Ri, "From Julia Gillard To Hillary Clinton: Online Abuse of Politicians Around the World". *The Guardian* 27/6/2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/datablog/ng-interactive/2016/jun/27/from-julia-gillard-to-hillary-clinton-online-abuse-of-politicians-around-the-world> (accessed 17/11/2020)

As with journalists, among decision-makers the impact of harassment seems to be stronger on women, especially when it comes to public engagement. This may be because the harassment encountered by women is often more serious in nature. Harassment of women politicians occasionally includes an element of sexual violence, and the hate speech they receive is often looks-oriented and sexualized. (Knuutila et al. 2019, 25-26, 48; Barboni et al. 2018, 30.) The types of harassment to which women politicians are subjected include, for example, death and rape threats, sexual harassment and sexist language (Krook & Sanín 2019, 744; Filion 2016, 6). Often the objective of harassment against women is to question their political competence and their ability to work as decision-makers, due specifically to their gender (Bardall 2020, 381; Barboni et al. 2018, 33). At its worst, gender-based harassment can reduce women politicians' willingness to take part in politics later on (Wagner 2020, 12).

A fear of hate speech and being singled out for harassment often leads to policymakers wanting to separate their private and public lives. In the survey by Knuutila et al., Finnish policymakers said that they carefully considered what information they make publicly available. They might have removed contact details from public view and carefully curate what they reveal about their lives and friends and families on social media. (Knuutila et al. 2019, 53; cf. also Barboni et al. 2018, 34.) Some react to hate speech with self-censorship, avoiding mentions of certain topics or modifying their messages to minimize the likelihood of hostile reactions (Knuutila et al. 2019, 57; Wagner 2020, 12). They might avoid or at least closely consider public appearances, and some withdraw entirely from social media or public discourse. Harassment may affect politicians' campaigning or public engagement, or even cause some to consider leaving politics entirely. (Knuutila et al. 2019, 58–61; Filion 2016, 7.)

Public condemnation of hate speech has been mentioned as a useful action in reducing harassment. The problem must be made visible in order to make it possible to address. Hate speech directed at policymakers should be recognized as a weighty issue to be taken seriously. (Knuutila et al. 2019, 67; cf. also Barboni et al. 2018.) The responsibility of party and government leadership in supporting politicians and eradicating harassment should be stressed. Anti-harassment actions should not be solely the responsibility of the victims of harassment.

Employers are responsible for upholding the safety and health of their employees. If hate speech causes harm to an employee, the employer must offer support. However, when it comes to municipal councillors or parliamentary candidates, for example, the responsibilities and methods for organizing support may be unclear. Candidates and persons holding positions of trust are not in a contractual employment relationship, so the stipulations of occupational safety and health legislation do not apply to them. There is no distinct body in place that looks after the well-being of politicians in

decision-making roles. Many politicians do feel that they have not received sufficient support in harassment situations, even after reporting them (Knuutila et al. 2019, 10, 65, 71; Committee on Standards in Public Life 2017, 44–45). They have also found issues when trying to report cases to the police, who might have played down the situations or failed to complete inquiries. This has reduced politicians' willingness to report the harassment they have experienced. (Knuutila et al. 2019, 69; Fillion 2016, 7.) Political parties should refine the guidelines and means they offer their candidates against hate speech and harassment. Low-threshold harassment-related services should be provided for politicians and candidates which are easy to contact and offer assistance even in cases where the victims are unsure of their rights or where the harassment does not fulfil the characteristics of a criminal offence. (Knuutila et al. 2019, 95.) It is particularly important to make it clear whom to contact when necessary.

Respondents considered the guides and instructions provided by parties, the parliament and municipal councils useful tools in encountering harassment. Preparing politicians against harassment, informing them of its various forms and providing clear guidelines for how to act in cases of harassment are particularly important and welcome concrete means of support. (Knuutila et al. 2019, 75; Barboni et al. 2018, 50–51; Committee on Standards in Public Life 2017, 53.)

In Finland almost every parliamentary party has some sort of public guideline for using social media.<sup>21</sup> The importance of social media in campaigning is recognized and candidates are encouraged to be active on social media. The guidelines are especially intended for party candidates to use in campaigning. Usually they are very generic and focus on functional, appropriate communication, but almost all of them at least mention the possibility of harassment.

In Finland, the Centre Party has taken possible harassment cases into account in a harassment information poster<sup>22</sup> found on the party's website. It comprises fairly brief instructions for responding to and preventing harassment in organizational activities. It includes guidelines both for appropriate communications and for responding to cases of harassment. The recommendation for these cases is to be in touch with the district or party harassment contact person and, if necessary, the police. The poster

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<sup>21</sup> When writing this report, I contacted representatives of Finland's largest political parties by email, asking about possible guidelines related to online harassment. I received responses from the Left Alliance, the Social Democrats, the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats. I had already requested the Green Women's harassment guide on a prior occasion. For the other parties, the information herein is based on materials publicly available on their websites.

<sup>22</sup> <https://keskusta.fi/jarjestoaineisto/> (accessed 10/12/2020)

emphasizes the importance of proper data protection, but provides no further instructions for this.

The election guide for candidates<sup>23</sup> of the National Coalition Party briefly mentions campaigning on social media, but makes no mention of potential harassment. The party has also published a small online communication handbook<sup>24</sup>. It includes information on diverse social media channels, influencing methods and proper communications. Online harassment is not separately mentioned in the handbook.

The Christian Democrats offer instructions for using social media in campaign work.<sup>25</sup> They focus on creating content on diverse social media platforms and do not separately mention online harassment. The party's handbook for candidates<sup>26</sup>, on the other hand, includes brief information on online harassment and hate speech. It emphasizes the importance of data protection and provides brief instructions for it. Candidates are encouraged to inform both the police and their department's election chief of any harassment. There are no more concrete instructions for preventing or responding to harassment cases, however.

The Finns Party's municipal election handbook<sup>27</sup> only makes brief mention of the role of social media in election campaigning. The handbook mentions the Finns' party guide and a municipal election handbook for candidates, which give more advice for using social media, but which are only available for party members. Additionally, the Finns Party's media and culture policy programme<sup>28</sup> states: "*The Finns Party does not approve of opinion censorship nor of discussions being silenced by accusations of hate speech or shaming. We strongly stand for the inviolable right of freedom of speech.*"

No corresponding handbooks on the internet and social media could be found on the website of the Swedish People's Party of Finland. It is possible that they are available to party members, however.

The Social Democratic Party (SDP) website includes various guides on social media use for politicians and candidates. The handbook *Eduskuntavaaliedokas somessa*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.kokoomus.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/KANSIO-ehdokkaan-vaaliopas.pdf> (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>24</sup> [https://issuu.com/kokoomus/docs/opas\\_verkkoviestint\\_n\\_181014](https://issuu.com/kokoomus/docs/opas_verkkoviestint_n_181014) (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.kd.fi/files/2015/01/Valmennuspaiva\\_Sosiaalinen-media-KD-puoluettyossa.pdf](https://www.kd.fi/files/2015/01/Valmennuspaiva_Sosiaalinen-media-KD-puoluettyossa.pdf) (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.kdpuolue.fi/kd/files/2020/12/KDn\\_ehdokasopas2021\\_web.pdf](https://www.kdpuolue.fi/kd/files/2020/12/KDn_ehdokasopas2021_web.pdf) (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>27</sup> [https://rovaniemi.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/sites/163/2020/09/Kuntavaaliopas\\_FIN\\_2021.pdf](https://rovaniemi.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/sites/163/2020/09/Kuntavaaliopas_FIN_2021.pdf) (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Media-ja-kulttuuripoliittinen-ohjelma\\_29.1.2020.pdf](https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Media-ja-kulttuuripoliittinen-ohjelma_29.1.2020.pdf) (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>29</sup> <https://sdp.fi/fi/blog/lataa-some-opas/> (accessed 10/12/2020)

[“The Parliamentary Candidate on Social Media”] has tips and instructions for campaigning on social media. It takes into account potential social media controversies and harassment cases. It briefly advises as to the best courses of action when encountering harassment. In cases of continuing harassment, candidates are recommended to contact their party unit and, if necessary, the party office. The handbook also encourages victims to report incidents to the police. SDP’s communications handbook<sup>30</sup> and campaign handbook<sup>31</sup> also cover various social media platforms. The communications handbook briefly mentions the possibility of harassment, but offers no instructions as such for dealing with it. On its website, SDP also provides advice for improved data protection<sup>32</sup>, utilizing guidelines from the Finnish National Cyber Security Centre<sup>33</sup> and Facebook<sup>34</sup>. Before elections, SDP also emails instructions to all of its candidates. They include brief guidelines on campaign data security and harassment situations.<sup>35</sup>

The Left Alliance provides its candidates with a handbook on advertising on social media.<sup>36</sup> It considers various social media platforms and campaigning on them. It only briefly mentions social media controversies and harassment, encouraging candidates to contact the party office and the police in cases of abuse. The Left Alliance’s website<sup>37</sup> also includes a handbook for safe campaigning directed at candidates. It has information on online harassment and its various forms, how to respond to it, and data protection issues. It separately mentions racism, sexism, transphobia and homophobia. The handbook specifies whom to contact within and outside of the party in cases of harassment.

The Green League’s website provides guidelines for candidates in relation to both online communications<sup>38</sup> and online safety and security<sup>39</sup>. Candidates are encouraged to contact both their electoral district’s executive director and the police in threatening situations. The guidelines briefly explain how to respond to various harassment situations and remind readers of data protection practices. Additionally, the Green Women’s Association has published a guide for its members, directed at victims of online violence.<sup>40</sup> It has information on the various forms of online violence, harassment-related legislation and how to act in cases of harassment. It also includes

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<sup>30</sup> <https://sdp.fi/fi/blog/viestintaopas-2/> (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>31</sup> <https://sdp.fi/fi/blog/lataa-ehdokkaan-kampanjaopas/> (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>32</sup> <https://sdp.fi/fi/blog/oppaita-tietoturvasta/> (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>33</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EkMHTvLmkBUrtT1Cj-ViOP6rJhPP1uA/view> (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>34</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UsXCBrrudBpLPYxeo9Lg\\_-enwGLxjMx/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UsXCBrrudBpLPYxeo9Lg_-enwGLxjMx/view) (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>35</sup> Kujanpää, Katri, municipal election campaign worker for SDP. Email to Suvi Vepsä on 11/12/2020.

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.ksl.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Ehdokkaan-opas-somemainontaan-printattava.pdf> (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>37</sup> <https://vaikutavasesemmistossa.fi/kuntavaalit/turvallinen-kampanjointi/> (accessed 14/12/2020)

<sup>38</sup> <https://ehdokkaat.vihreat.fi/ehdokasopas/abc/ehdokkaan-verkkoviestinta/> (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>39</sup> <https://ehdokkaat.vihreat.fi/ehdokasopas/abc/turvallisuusohje-ehdokkaille/> (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.vihreatnaiset.fi/blog/2020/02/28/vihreilta-naisilta-opas-verkkovakivallan-kohteeksi-joutuneille/> (accessed 24/11/2020)

the names and contact details of bodies that can provide assistance, including the party's responsible contact persons.

Even though many political parties have fairly extensive instructions on social media use for their candidates, at least their public documentation includes relatively little information on online harassment. It would be important for every party to offer its members and candidates clear guidelines and a toolkit to safeguard democracy and the well-being and safety of their politicians.

### 2.3. Researchers and experts

The internet and social media also form an important part of the work of researchers and other experts from various fields. Academic and science communication is important from the perspective of the transparency and impact of science. Researchers are increasingly encouraged to be active on social media and otherwise also to have a public presence. Social media allows for more open and interactive communication between experts and the public, as it offers more people the opportunity to participate in discourse and debates. Visibility in public and on social media exposes researchers and experts to diverse forms of harassment and hate speech, however.

Abusive feedback received by researchers may come in verbal or written form, or may be found in diverse media (electronic or otherwise) or on social media (Kysely tutkijoiden saamasta yleisöpalautteesta [“Survey of Feedback from the Public Received by Researchers”]. TJNK 2015). Controversial topics can sometimes kindle very hostile reactions, for example ones related to minorities and marginalized groups, for example (cf. e.g. Vera-Gray 2017; Barlow & Awan 2016; Carter Olson & LaPoe 2018). Researchers belonging to various minorities and women researchers are often more likely to be harassed (cf. e.g. Marwick, Blackwell & Lo 2016; Barlow & Awan 2016; Kavanagh & Brown 2020). The objective of harassment and hate speech is often to silence unwanted opinions and discussions (Barlow & Awan 2016, 7).

There has not been much research on harassment and hate speech encountered online by researchers. It has been looked at particularly as a gender-based phenomenon against women (cf. Veletsianos et al. 2018; Kavanagh & Brown 2020). Some feminist researchers have brought to light their own experiences as victims of cyberhate (cf. Lloro-Bidart 2018; Vera-Gray 2017; Barlow & Awan 2016). In Finland, researchers have shared their experiences facing online harassment in the journal



*Politiikasta*, published by the Finnish Political Science Association.<sup>41</sup> The Finnish Committee for Public Information conducted a survey in 2015<sup>42</sup> of feedback received by researchers from the public after appearing as experts in public. These appearances referred to publishing a non-fiction book, holding seminars, giving interviews, or writing in the press, blogs or on social media, for example. The purpose of the survey was to collect information on the platforms on which researchers appear, and on the quality and quantity of abusive feedback.

According to the survey, most of the feedback received was positive or at least relevant in nature. Most respondents said they had received abusive feedback “infrequently” (41%) or “never” (29%). Of all the respondents, 24% had experienced harassment “occasionally”; of them, 66% were women and 31 % men. Three per cent had experienced it “often”; of them, three individuals were women and seven, men. Most respondents felt that inappropriate and abusive feedback was an old phenomenon that had recently grown or at least was more frequently discussed. The most common form of abusive feedback was irrelevant criticism made solely for the purpose of causing offence. The next most common forms were defamation and slander, as well as threats to ruin their reputation by calling their expertise into question. Some respondents had also experienced some degree of hate speech, gender-based defamation, threats and threatening behaviour. While 38% of respondents stated that abusive feedback had not affected their public activities as experts in any way, 25% said that they still appear in public as experts but increasingly carefully consider what channel and context to do it in. Most respondents had not contacted anyone in relation to the abusive feedback they had received. Some had contacted their own superiors or a representative of their employer, while 8% did not know whom to contact in this respect. Only 5% said they had reported abuse to the authorities.

Harassment, hate speech and hate campaigns can cause major damages to victims, both personally and at work. Often the purpose of hate campaigns is to damage the victim’s reputation and thereby to affect their future employment prospects. (Veletsianos et al. 2018, 4,692.) Vera-Gray (2017, 73) points out that reacting to online harassment and managing its risks requires a lot of work from researchers, which is not usually taken into account. Looking after one’s own and others’ safety takes a lot of additional time and energy away from their actual research work. Being

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<sup>41</sup> Raatikainen, Panu, “Vihapostia filosofille”. *Politiikasta* 10/1/2019. [https://politiikasta.fi/vihapostia-filosofille/Silvennoinen,Oula,“Kunhistorioitsija\\_kohtaa\\_vihaa”](https://politiikasta.fi/vihapostia-filosofille/Silvennoinen,Oula,“Kunhistorioitsija_kohtaa_vihaa”). *Politiikasta* 10/1/2019. [https://politiikasta.fi/kunhistorioitsija\\_kohtaa\\_vihaa/](https://politiikasta.fi/kunhistorioitsija_kohtaa_vihaa/)

Saaremaa, Tuija, “Naistutkijat netissä nyrkin ja hellan väliin”. *Politiikasta* 10/1/2019. <https://politiikasta.fi/naistutkijat-netissa-nyrkin-ja-hellan-valiin/> (all accessed 24/11/2020)

<sup>42</sup> “Kysely tutkijoiden saamasta yleisöpalautteesta” [“Survey of feedback received from the public by researchers”]. TJNK 2015. [https://www.tjnk.fi/sites/tjnk.fi/files/TJNK-kysely-palautteesta\\_tulosityhteenveto-22122015.pdf](https://www.tjnk.fi/sites/tjnk.fi/files/TJNK-kysely-palautteesta_tulosityhteenveto-22122015.pdf) (accessed 24/11/2020)



subjected to harassment can also lead to self-censorship and researchers reducing their public appearances. Some victims withdraw entirely from social media and public discourse, for example. (Veletsianos et al. 2018, 4,692.)

Universities are not always able to support their researchers as necessary, and some victims of harassment feel they have been left to cope with the situation alone (cf. e.g. Marwick, Blackwell & Lo 2016).<sup>43</sup> Academic institutions should offer their employees more systematic, structural support against online harassment. Many universities and researchers are ill prepared for possible harassment and hate speech, which makes it difficult for them to react to situations. It would be important to consider in advance what kinds of research topics typically attract inappropriate feedback and harassment, and thereby to anticipate situations. Researchers should be better informed of the possibility of abusive feedback and the various forms it takes online, particularly on social media. Ready-made operating models should be in place and known to all. Researchers should be instructed in the safe use of the internet. (Lloro-Bidart 2018, 282; Veletsianos et al. 2018, 4,702.) Because researchers are often encouraged or even obligated to use social media in their work, there should also be sufficient instructions and support functions. The objective of online harassment is often to cause reputational damage to the researcher and call into question their expertise or the importance of their research topic. Therefore, it is important that the organization behind the researcher is prepared to defend them in public (Lloro-Bidart 2018, 282).

Many universities have generalized guidelines for employees concerning the use of social media for work purposes. The University of Helsinki's social media guidelines<sup>44</sup> have brief information on online harassment and instructions for responding to it. They also advise whom to contact in threatening situations. Similarly, the websites of the University of Eastern Finland<sup>45</sup> and the University of Jyväskylä<sup>46</sup> provide recommendations and instructions for using social media. The University of Turku's intranet has guidelines for using social media, encountering harassment and hate speech, and responding to various situations.<sup>47</sup> They are mostly directed at victims of harassment; there are no separate guidelines for their managers, for example.

The Finnish website Häiritsevä palaute ["Abusive Feedback"]<sup>48</sup> offers advice for experts facing inappropriate feedback or hate speech, as well as for their superiors

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. also: Huovinen, Annamari, "Kuka auttaa vihapuheen uhria?". *Politiikasta* 25/9/2018.

<https://politiikasta.fi/kuka-auttaa-vihapuheen-uhria/> (accessed 25/11/2020)

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.helsinki.fi/fi/yliopisto/tutustu-helsingin-yliopistoon/helsingin-yliopisto-sosiaalisessa-mediassa/helsingin-yliopiston-some-suositukset#section-88327> (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>45</sup> <https://wiki.uef.fi/pages/viewpage.action?pagelD=36321123> (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.jyu.fi/digipalvelut/fi/ohjeet/tietoturva/some> (accessed 10/12/2020)

<sup>47</sup> Similar guides are probably found in many other universities as well, but they are often internal and not publicly available.

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.hairitsevapalaute.fi/> (accessed 18/11/2020)

and work colleagues. The website's materials were produced as part of a project related to abusive feedback at work, in collaboration with the Responsible Research initiative of the Committee for Public Information (TJNK) and the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). It offers advice and tips for responding to harassment, for experts as well as their superiors and work colleagues. Additionally, it contains basic information on the diverse forms of harassment and case studies of harassment experienced by experts and researchers from various fields.

The Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers (FUURT) has guidelines on its website for how to proceed in cases of harassment.<sup>49</sup> They pertain more generally to harassment encountered in working life, as well as specifically to harassment on social media. They comprise a summary of the main actions to remember when being harassed. The site also provides information on the most common forms of online harassment, and on related legislation. There are no separate instructions for employers.

The Data & Society Research Institute's website contains a handbook entitled Best Practices for Conducting Risky Research and Protecting Yourself from Online Harassment (Marwick, Blackwell & Lo 2016) intended for researchers and their institutions, as well as a shorter information package for distribution to universities.<sup>50</sup> The handbook provides advice on preparing for and reacting to harassment situations, directed at universities, faculties, management and researchers. It contains instructions for protecting one's data online, as well as links to sites with further information.

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<sup>49</sup> <https://tieteentekijat.fi/tieteentekijan-arki/ohje-hairintatilanteessa/> (accessed 18/11/2020)

<sup>50</sup> [https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Online\\_Harassment\\_Information\\_Sheet-Oct-2016.pdf](https://datasociety.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Online_Harassment_Information_Sheet-Oct-2016.pdf) (accessed 18/11/2020)

# 3. Encountering, Anticipating and Managing Harassment

## 3.1. Diverse methods for managing online harassment

Individuals react and respond in various ways when facing harassment. The possible or best ways to react usually depend on the situation, the nature and duration of the harassment, and the victim's mental strength.

Blocking or muting abusive commenters is often a convenient way of preventing online harassment from continuing, and it is commonly used (cf. e.g. Chadha et al. 2020, 247, Binns 2017, 10). Avoiding abusive comments and messages in other ways is also a common strategy. Some people, especially if they have experienced a lot of harassment, stop reading comments altogether. One common way of doing this is outsourcing the reading of comments to someone else, such as a friend or colleague. Sometimes abusive comments are deleted immediately. (Stahel & Schoen 2020, 1,854; Binns 2017, 10; Veletsianos et al. 2018, 4,698; Reunanen & Harju 2012, 183.) Continuously reading hostile and threatening comments is mentally taxing, so avoiding messages can be an essential coping strategy. However, from the perspective of preventing harassment, it can be problematic to delete comments directly, because this also removes the evidence for a potential criminal investigation. Therefore, it is better to store abusive private messages and save social media comments as screenshots before removing them.

Often, people are alerted by harassment cases to pay closer attention to the information they make available online. Many do their best to remove as much personal data as possible from the internet, or to limit its visibility. Some of the common methods of protecting one's data are to tighten the privacy settings on a social media account or avoid certain platforms altogether. (Binns 2017, 12; Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring 2016, 887; Veletsianos et al. 2018, 4,698.) Limiting contacts and

hiding personal data may work well in preventing harassment, but they can also make life more difficult for journalists, for example, as potential sources then lack ways of contacting them directly (Hiltunen 2020, 192). It can also be problematic in the realm of politics, in terms of maintaining the dialogue that lies at the heart of democracy (Knuutila et al. 2019, 72).

While harassment causes some to fall silent and withdraw, others react by standing up to harassment even more staunchly. Many of the interviewees in the study by Veletsianos et al. (2018, 4,699-4,700), for example, refused to ignore harassment. Common strategies among them included increased participation in discourse and voicing of their opinions, as well as attempts at creating dialogue. According to Post and Kepplinger (2019, 2,428), resistance to and visible opposition of abusers were also common models for some journalists.

Research indicates that reporting harassment to social media service providers or, in criminal cases, to the authorities, is not very common. A survey by Binns (2017) found that police reports were the least common means of harassment control. Meanwhile, in a survey by Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring (2016) of harassment experienced by Swedish journalists, approximately one third of respondents had reported their harassment to the police. Some consider online harassment and hate speech to be a phenomenon typical of the platform in question, which does not warrant serious action (Chadha et al. 2020, 248–249; Lewis, Rowe & Wiper 2017, 1,473–1,474). People may have low expectations of their actual chances of affecting the harassment and would rather concentrate on controlling their own negative emotions and changing their own behaviour than make a report (Obenmaier, Hobauer & Renemann 2018, 518). They may already have negative experiences of reporting harassment (Barton & Storm 2014, 13). In Finland, for example, many journalists have considered it pointless to report harassment to the police, because such reports rarely even lead to preliminary investigations (Trionfi & Luque 2020, 19). The anti-harassment actions and support offered by the social media companies themselves are also seen as insufficient, which reduces the incentive to report incidents (Jhaver et al. 2018, 8). Most people go to their friends and colleagues for support, rather than following official channels (Lewis, Rowe & Wiper 2016, 1,475). Many Finnish political parties, for example, have diverse peer support groups for victims of harassment (Knuutila et al. 2019, 65, 73).

Many targets of harassment will seek to change their own online behaviour instead of reporting incidents; women, in particular, may avoid certain topics and carefully consider what they can post on social media (Chadha et al. 2020, 247). Self-accusations, apologizing for one's actions and downplaying experiences of harassment are also fairly common (Veletsianos et al. 2018, 4,701). Some do their

best to completely ignore or deny the harassment and its effects on themselves (Chadha et al. 2020, 247).

### 3.2. Guides and instructions

As the preceding chapter on harassment of specific professions indicated, quite a few handbooks and guides exist for individuals concerning responses to harassment. Besides the profession-specific ones, there are a few more generic handbooks and instructions online, especially relating to managing data and protecting one's personal information. Many internet users lack sufficient information or understanding of the kind of information that can be gathered about them online. There are various websites aiming to offer easily understandable advice for users to improve their data protection.

Many of these are maintained by diverse associations, individuals and groups focusing on social influence and activism. Indeed, there are particularly many guides and handbooks for feminists and activists. Their objectives include, among others, to stand for freedom of speech and expression, promoting a safer online environment, and eradicating hate speech and harassment. Their websites and projects offer easily accessible and understandable information on online harassment, its nature and forms, and advice for minimizing the risks of harassment and responding to incidents. Usually their primary purpose is to support and assist victims of harassment and cyberhate. Below is an introduction to some of the harassment-related websites that are available for diverse groups. A more comprehensive list can be found at the end of this report (Appendix 1).

Some sites offer concrete, low-threshold help for coping with harassment incidents. The Hollaback!<sup>51</sup> movement's HeartMob project, for example, which aims to end harassment, offers help and support for victims of online harassment. Users can report their experiences of harassment, and persons registered as "allies" will then show them support, for example by sending encouraging messages or reporting abusive messages and accounts on social media. The site also provides instructions for improving data protection and acting on social media. In Finland, the Someturva ["Social Media Security"] app<sup>52</sup> provides assistance in online harassment cases, for a fee. The app offers safety guides for the most popular social media services. The app can be used to anonymously report diverse harassment incidents, after which the person making the report receives a suggested solution written by experts from the

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<sup>51</sup> <https://iheartmob.org/> (accessed 23/11/2020)

<sup>52</sup> <https://someturva.fi/> (accessed 23/11/2020)

service. The suggestion includes legal advice, psychological support and tools for resolving the situation.

Some sites give advice for coping with harassment incidents, as well as information on the various forms of harassment and how to minimize the risks of harassment in advance. The Crash Override network's website<sup>53</sup> offers comprehensive information on online abuse, how to respond to it, and how to improve one's data protection. Jacklyn Friedman, Anita Sarkeesian and Renee Bracey Sherman have created a data protection handbook directed especially at people and groups in marginalized positions<sup>54</sup>, which includes a lot of concrete advice on protecting one's information and dealing with harassment. Similarly, the PeopleACT site<sup>55</sup> offers advice and instructions for coping with abuse.

Many guides are written specifically for social media influencers and activists, who run a particular risk of being harassed. The European Women's Lobby (EWL) has published a toolkit<sup>56</sup> for ending online violence against women and girls in Europe. It includes recommended policies for preventing online harassment and violence, as well as an online safety pack for activists. The toolkit contains information on the most common forms of online harassment, as well as recommended actions for harassment situations. Specific instructions for activists can also be found on the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) website.<sup>57</sup>

There is no single best practice for minimizing and controlling the risks of online harassment. Each person must act according to their own resources, feelings and experiences. Harassment can be very taxing for its victims, even traumatic, and no one should be left to cope alone. It is very important for people to know how to protect their data and use the internet safely, as well as how one can deal with harassment and where to turn to for assistance. A list in Appendix 2 to this report collates some of the most common instructions and advice for minimizing harassment risks and coping with online abuse situations, gathered from the research and handbooks mentioned herein.

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.crashoverridenetwork.com/index.html> (accessed 23/11/2020)

<sup>54</sup> <https://onlinesafety.feministfrequency.com/en/> (accessed 23/11/2020)

<sup>55</sup> <https://mcchr.org/cyber-harassment-survivorskit> (accessed 23/11/2020)

<sup>56</sup> [https://womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/\\_hernetherrights\\_resource\\_pack\\_-\\_finnish.pdf](https://womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/_hernetherrights_resource_pack_-_finnish.pdf) (accessed 23/11/2020)

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.apc.org/en/irhr/digital-security-first-aid-kit> (accessed 23/11/2020)

# 4. The Employer's Responsibility in Cases of Harassment

Employers are legally bound to monitor the work environment and workplace conditions, and to look after the safety of employees. Employers must keep an eye on the safety of the work environment and work methods, and recognize the hazards related to their employees' work. These hazards include the various forms of hate speech and harassment. (Knuutila et al. 2019, 10; Ministry of Justice 2019: *Journalists and Hate Speech*.) Reporting harassment incidents is the employee's responsibility but the legal responsibility for the situation remains with their superiors or other representatives of the employer. Any employer who receives information on inappropriate behaviour or undue burdening of an individual must take action to resolve the situation. Employees must not be left to resolve and ponder the situation alone. (Työturvallisuuskeskus 2014: *Sosiaalisen median työkäyttö*; "Häiritsevä palaute" website.) Existing legislation and occupational safety and health instructions do not yet properly consider social media as an occupational hazard, but they can be utilized when formulating workplace-specific social media guidelines. The potential threats and burdens caused by social media should be considered as a part of workplace risk assessments, and employees should be offered opportunities for discussing their experiences of threats. (Työturvallisuuskeskus 2014: *Sosiaalisen median työkäyttö*.)

In many professions, employers are not prepared for the threats of hate speech and harassment (Knuutila et al. 2019, 10). Many studies have found that employees in various fields feel they are left alone when facing harassment. Guidelines and instructions may have been inadequate or entirely lacking. Some employees are afraid to report harassment to their superiors or employers, sometimes due to prior bad experiences when dealing with harassment. Often, employees wish that employers would take concrete actions and provide specific instructions for anticipating and responding to harassment. Sometimes just the knowledge that support exists in the workplace is enough. (Cf. e.g. Trionfi & Luque 2020; Eberspacher 2019; Knuutila et al. 2019; Marwick, Blackwell & Lo 2016.)

Many guides related to preventing and coping with harassment emphasize the individual's responsibility. Some guides have been written from the perspective of employers and managers, however, indicating that the employer's responsibility in these situations is recognized – at least in principle.

The Centre for Occupational Safety in Finland has written a guide<sup>58</sup> for using social media at work, from the perspective of occupational safety and health. It includes instructions for posting and interacting on social media, as well as information on the related hazards. It also has advice for employers concerning issues related to the use of social media, such as dealing with online harassment. The text briefly discusses the roles and responsibilities of the employer and manager when problems arise, particularly from the perspective of the Finnish Occupational Safety and Health Act. Many of the other guides mentioned in this report, directed at various professional fields, also consider the role of employers. Additionally, instructions for employers and managers can be found, among others, on the websites of the Hollaback!<sup>59</sup> organization's anti-harassment project HeartMob, and of the Crash Override<sup>60</sup> network.

The summary in Appendix 3 herein provides brief instructions for employers and managers to prepare for and deal with harassment, based on a multitude of research and handbooks. These instructions are generic and cover the needs of many different sectors.

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<sup>58</sup> [https://ttk.fi/oppaat\\_ja\\_ohjeet/digijulkaisut/sosiaalisen\\_median\\_tyokaytto\\_-\\_tyosuojelunakokulma](https://ttk.fi/oppaat_ja_ohjeet/digijulkaisut/sosiaalisen_median_tyokaytto_-_tyosuojelunakokulma) (accessed 20/11/2020)

<sup>59</sup> <https://iheartmob.org/> (accessed 20/11/2020)

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.crashoverridenetwork.com/> (accessed 20/11/2020)



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Van Der Wilk, Adriane 2018. *Cyber violence and hate speech online against women.* European Union: Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604979/IPOL\\_STU\(2018\)604979\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604979/IPOL_STU(2018)604979_EN.pdf) (accessed 23/11/2020)

Veletsianos, George et al. 2018. “Women Scholars’ Experiences with Online Harassment and Abuse: Self-Protection, Resistance, Acceptance, and Self-Blame”. *New Media & Society* 20:12, 4,689–4,708.

Vera-Gray, F. 2017. “‘Talk About a Cunt with Too Much Idle Time’: Trolling Feminist Research”. *Feminist Review* 115/2017, 61–78.

Wintterlin, Florian et al. 2020. “How to Cope with Dark Participation: Moderation Practices in German Newsrooms”. *Digital Journalism* 8:7, 904–924.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Information About Online Harassment; Guides and Instructions

### General guides and instructions

- Digital Security First Aid Kit for Human Rights Defenders (Second Edition). Association for Progressive Communications.  
<https://www.apc.org/en/irhr/digital-security-first-aid-kit>
- European Women's Lobby 2017. #HerNetHerRights. A toolkit for ending violence against women and girls in Europe.  
[https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherights\\_resource\\_pack\\_2017\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherights_resource_pack_2017_web_version.pdf)
- Steps Towards Surviving Cyber-Harassment (S-K-I-P-S). PeopleACT.  
<https://mcchr.org/cyber-harassment-survivorskit>
- Rauramo, Päivi, Kiiskinen, Janne, Lehtoranta, Harjanne, Kerttuli & Schrooten, Heidi 18.8.2014. *Sosiaalisen median työkäyttö – Työsuojelunäkökulma*. Työturvallisuuskeskus, digijulkaisut.  
[https://ttk.fi/oppaat\\_ja\\_ohjeet/digijulkaisut/sosiaalisen\\_median\\_tyokaytto\\_-\\_tyosuojelunakokulma](https://ttk.fi/oppaat_ja_ohjeet/digijulkaisut/sosiaalisen_median_tyokaytto_-_tyosuojelunakokulma)
- Online Harassment Resources. HeartMob. <https://iheartmob.org/resources>



## Guides for journalists

- International Press Institute 2020. Protocol for newsrooms to support journalists targeted with online harassment. [https://newsrooms-ontheline.ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IPI\\_newsrooms\\_protocol\\_address\\_online\\_harassment\\_ok\\_022020.pdf](https://newsrooms-ontheline.ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IPI_newsrooms_protocol_address_online_harassment_ok_022020.pdf)
- Finnish Ministry of Justice 2019. *Journalists and Hate Speech*. [https://api.hankeikkuna.fi/asiakirjat/80ac0a59-5434-4983-b89e-e2ab0013ba21/9530109f-44df-4879-b387-54c645c0a657/MUISTIO\\_20190909100438.pdf](https://api.hankeikkuna.fi/asiakirjat/80ac0a59-5434-4983-b89e-e2ab0013ba21/9530109f-44df-4879-b387-54c645c0a657/MUISTIO_20190909100438.pdf)
- Online Harassment Field Manual. PEN America. <https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/>
- Digital Safety: Protecting against targeted online attacks. Committee to Protect Journalists 21/5/2020. <https://cpj.org/?p=37654>
- Vehkoo, Johanna, “Vihakampanja käynnistyy, toimi näin”. *Journalisti* 9/11/2018. <https://www.journalisti.fi/artikkelit/2018/13/vihakampanja-kynnistyy-toimi-nin/>
- Ylen turvallisemman vuorovaikutuksen ohje [“YLE Guide for Safer Interaction”]. <https://yle.fi/aihe/sivu/yleisradio/ylen-turvallisemman-vuorovaikutuksen-ohje>
- <http://www.troll-busters.com/>

## Guides for researchers and experts

- <https://www.häiritseväpalaute.fi/>
- Marwick, Alice, Blackwell, Lindsay & Lo, Katherine 2016. *Best Practices for Conducting Risky Research and Protecting Yourself from Online Harassment (Data & Society Guide)*. New York: Data & Society Research Institute. <https://datasociety.net/library/best-practices-for-conducting-risky-research/>

- [“How to act when you face harassment in working life”. Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers \(FUURT\).](https://tieteentekijat.fi/en/support-of-working-life/harassment-in-working-life/)  
<https://tieteentekijat.fi/en/support-of-working-life/harassment-in-working-life/>

## Other useful sites

*These websites offer diverse data protection tips and advice on dealing with various harassment situations, among other things.*

<https://onlinesafety.feministfrequency.com/en/>

<http://www.crashoverridenetwork.com/resources.html>

<https://yoursosteam.wordpress.com/digital-hygiene-course/>

<https://hackblossom.org/cybersecurity/>

[https://gendersec.tacticaltech.org/wiki/index.php/Complete\\_manual](https://gendersec.tacticaltech.org/wiki/index.php/Complete_manual)

[https://ourdataourselves.tacticaltech.org/posts/23\\_guide\\_social\\_media/](https://ourdataourselves.tacticaltech.org/posts/23_guide_social_media/)

<https://datadetoxkit.org/en/home>

<https://chayn.gitbook.io/diy-online-safety/>

<https://securityinabox.org/en/>

<https://rorypecktrust.org/freelance-resources/digital-security/>

[https://geekfeminism.wikia.org/wiki/Mitigating\\_internet\\_trollstorms](https://geekfeminism.wikia.org/wiki/Mitigating_internet_trollstorms)

<https://www.womensmediacenter.com/speech-project/online-abuse-101>

## Appendix 2: Instructions for Those Facing Harassment

These instructions have been gathered from the research, reports and online guides and handbooks presented in this report, based on which tried and tested methods and tactics are most often repeated. The instructions are generic and apply to many different target groups.

### Instructions for dealing with harassment and minimizing its risks

#### **Recognize the situation**

When encountering harassment it is good to determine what kind of harassment it is, in order to respond in the best possible way. Is it a crowdsourced hate campaign or an individual abuser? Is the harassment a threat to your privacy or safety? Does the abusive feedback relate to your work or to you as a person? Read up about the most common tactics of online harassment.

#### **You are not alone**

Being targeted by harassment and hate speech can be very tough. Remember to ask for support when you feel you need it. Even if you don't, it is good to report the harassment to someone you can trust.

If the harassment is work-related, inform your line manager. It is their responsibility to assist you in threatening situations related to your work.

If the abusive or threatening messages are regular or continuous, you should ask a friend or colleague to read your accounts or emails on your behalf.

### **Save the messages**

Save all the possible evidence related to the incident. Immediately take a screenshot of any content including hate speech or harassment. Store emails and private messages. Also keep records of possible abusive phone calls. This evidence will be important if you end up having to report the harassment as a crime. The best way to save messages is so that they include a time stamp and the sender's information.

If saving the messages is too taxing, ask a friend or colleague to help.

### **Report and block the sender**

Social media platforms allow you to report abusive accounts. Once you have saved the abusive messages, demand that the administrator remove them.

In addition to reporting the abusive account, you should block it. After that they can no longer see your profile or posts.

### **Consider whether to answer**

Responding to messages can be a good tactic in countering harassment. It is worth considering carefully, however, because sometimes it can aggravate the harassment. You are not obliged to respond to all the messages you receive.

### **Look after your safety**

It is important to protect your data.

Ensure your passwords are strong enough. Don't use the same password for lots of different services. If there is a threatening situation, change your passwords immediately.

Adopting two-step authentication is an effective way to prevent hacking of your accounts in various services and apps.

Turn off location sharing on your smartphone and computer. Some social media platforms might share your location automatically as part of your posts, so check that, too.

Ensure no one can access your private computer or other electronic devices. Lock your devices and think carefully to whom you grant access.

If you suspect that your phone is infected with spyware, don't try to remove it yourself but hand it in to the police.

### **Check who can access your contact details**

Is your personal telephone number or address publicly available? Consider when and how you share your contact details. In certain situations it is necessary to limit the availability of contact details.

If necessary, you can prohibit the disclosure of your personal information or request a non-disclosure for personal safety reasons from the Digital and Population Data Services Agency.

### **Check what information is available on you online**

Check your social media accounts' privacy settings. Google your name and, if necessary, request that your data be removed from public websites or registers.

Google Alerts can provide you with alerts every time someone mentions your name, address, phone number or other information of your choice online.

### **Consider what you share on social media and with whom**

Think carefully what social media platforms you use and for what purposes. Protect your personal social media accounts so that your information and posts cannot be seen by strangers. It is worth making a separate profile or page for work purposes and other public communications, where you do not share personal information.

### **Report the incidents to the police if necessary**

If you suspect that the situation involves a criminal offence or the threat of one, contact the police.

### **Look after your mental well-being and coping ability**

If a situation is too heavy to cope with, take a step back. Do things you enjoy. Ask for help if necessary. Remember that harassment is never the victim's fault.

## Appendix 3: Instructions for Employers and Managers

**These instructions have been gathered from the research, reports and online guides and handbooks presented in this report, based on which tried and tested methods and tactics are most often repeated. The instructions are generic and apply to many different target groups.**

## Being prepared against harassment

### **Employers have the legal obligation to look after the occupational safety of their employees**

The organization must ensure that it properly looks after its legal responsibilities in occupational safety and health. Ensure that managers are aware of their responsibilities in this respect.

### **Create an action plan for harassment incidents**

Each organization should have instructions and action plans for diverse harassment situations. These should take into account the specific needs of the workplace. Ensure that they are kept up to date and are easily accessible for all employees. Regularly remind employees of their existence.

It is important that employees know how to act in threatening situations and whom to report harassment when necessary. Some situations may be particularly delicate and require a sensitive approach. Specific coordinators should be appointed and trained for diverse harassment situations.

The workplace atmosphere should be such that employees can speak freely about uncomfortable situations. Encourage your employees to be open.

### **Offer safety training**

Offer your employees data protection and safety training to help prevent harassment.

### **Formulate an interaction plan for work-related social media use**

Making an online interaction plan and formulating related training together with employees forms a part of harassment prevention. How does one respond to criticism and who should do it? Unsuccessful crisis communications are a threat to the whole organization's reputation.

### **Protect your employees' privacy**

What information is it possible to obtain about your employees via the organization? Is this information essential in terms of their work? Never disclose your employees' personal data without their consent.

## **Responding to harassment situations**

### **Understand the severity of the situation**

If an employee faces harassment, threats or hate speech online, it is important to clearly indicate that you understand the severity of the situation. Online harassment is a real problem that can cause significant harm to the employee and the whole organization. Don't try to downplay your employee's experiences.

### **Offer support**

The employee must not be left to cope alone. Ask how you can help and ponder solutions together. Many people end up doubting or blaming themselves for harassment. Assure them that they have done nothing wrong.

### **Remind them of your occupational health services**

Remind your employee of the availability of occupational health and psychological support.

### **Investigate the situation**

Find out what has happened and what actions are needed. Examine the scope of the issue and whom it affects. What is the nature of the harassment and how long has it been going on? Do your employees know how to handle such situations?



### **Make a risk assessment**

Assess the safety of the situation. Is an employee or someone else at risk? Is there a risk of physical violence? Is there a risk of the harassment shifting from the online environment into real life? Should it be reported to the police?

### **If necessary, show your support publicly**

In some circumstances, it may be necessary to demonstrate public support for your employee. Discuss this with the victim of harassment.

Publicly condemning harassment and making a visible intervention may help to prevent future harassment. It also increases trust and demonstrates to employees that the organization will stand by them, even in hard times.

### **Do your best to minimize the victim's exposure to further abuse**

It is important to save comments and messages containing abuse and hate speech, in case they are needed for a future police report. Collecting these materials can be very tough on the victim, however, and will take their time away from actual work. It is worth asking persons who are not involved in the harassment to help with the collection, and these persons should be named in advance. If the situation continues, agree together how future messages will be processed.

### **If you suspect a crime, contact the police**

If you suspect that the situation involves a criminal offence or the threat of one, contact the police. The employer can do this on the employee's behalf, if the employee so wishes.