

SHEDDING LIGHT ON HATE SPEECH



Centrale des syndicats
du Québec

Hate speech has now become a cause for concern in our societies. Its rise, particularly online, fans the flames of polarization, undermines social cohesion and impacts the dynamics of radicalization observed both here in Quebec and internationally.

In our workplaces and public spaces, the increased circulation of degrading or discriminatory comments contributes to creating environments marked by fear, exclusion and violence. Given this reality, which affects both individuals and communities, it has become imperative to speak out.

It is against this backdrop that the CSQ has decided to focus on this issue. As part of its *Together we see clearly. Let's act against violence.* campaign, it sheds light on hate speech and, most importantly, suggests ways of tackling this issue.



RECOGNIZING HATE SPEECH

Hate speech is defined as any kind of communication or behaviour that uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of their identity (origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, social status, etc.).

This deliberately broad definition from the United Nations recognizes that hate can be expressed explicitly or in more subtle ways, with the aim of humiliating, dehumanizing or inciting violence and discrimination. The *Criminal Code* of Canada prohibits any speech, directed against an “identifiable group”, which incites violence or hostility.

Hate speech is not always explicit: it can be coded or implied, and present itself under the guise of humour, opinion or free speech. It can be shared through images, symbols or memes.

It is nevertheless based on **common mechanisms**:

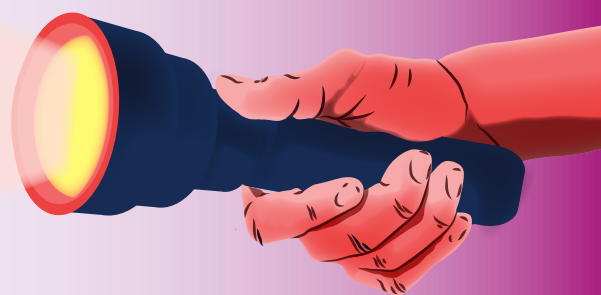
- Dehumanization;
- Exaggeration of differences;
- Perpetuation of stereotypes;
- Use of fear or contempt.

One of the objectives of this type of rhetoric is to isolate a group, to make it appear less legitimate or less human in the eyes of the public.

Form of hate speech	Example
Direct incitement to violence	→ Direct threat → Abuse (offensive or extreme language) → Mockery → Inciting violence or discrimination
Hate propaganda	→ Demonization of a group → False accusation (false allegation) → Misinformation (exaggerated account of an actual or fictitious crime) → Use of dehumanizing stereotypical images
Cyberstalking or bullying	→ Threat → Insult (offensive or extreme language) → Mockery → Exclusion → Coordinated harassment campaigns
Coded language (dog whistling)	→ Concealed expression that seems innocuous but is insulting without being overtly offensive
Hate incident, non-criminal, but discriminatory	→ Veiled threat → Use of racist, xenophobic, or innocuous language → Offensive joke → Disrespectful gesture (obscene or derogatory)

There are other signs that can help identify hate speech, such as:

- The repeated use of stereotypes targeting certain groups (women, immigrants, people from cultural minorities, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, First Nations or Inuit people, people with disabilities, etc.);
- The use of conspiracy theories;
- Calls to “hunt down”, “punish” or “neutralize” a group;
- The deliberate disclosure of personal information (doxing).



The rise of online hate

Online hate is especially concerning. Digital platforms allow for the rapid, anonymous and widespread dissemination of hostile messages, which are often amplified by algorithms. These spaces become echo chambers where misogyny, homophobia, racism and conspiracy theories are amplified, sometimes under the influence of far-right groups or influencers promoting toxic masculinity.

In Canada, legislative initiatives seek to provide a clearer framework for such online speech, reflecting the growing challenges associated with its dissemination in digital spaces.

For more information, see *Shedding light on cyberviolence*.



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS

Hate speech affects us all. It provides a breeding ground for acts of individual violence, hate crimes and certain forms of radicalization.

Individual impacts

Hate speech can lead its victims to:

- isolate themselves socially;
- experience psychological distress;
- self-censor;
- withdraw from public life;
- be at greater risk of physical violence.

Women, racialized people, young people, and anyone who is already marginalized or vulnerable are particularly affected.

Collective impacts

History shows that hatred, combined with misinformation, leads to stigmatization, discrimination and, at times, large-scale violence. It is important to bear in mind that genocides and mass atrocities often begin with words before turning into actions.

The rise of extremist rhetoric:

- exacerbates social polarization;
- widens already deep divisions;
- encourages the emergence of organized and sometimes armed groups that advocate exclusion or identity-based superiority;
- undermines democracy by reducing civic participation, silencing marginalized voices and fostering a climate of mistrust.

The rise in far-right activity and the increase in verbal, physical and online hate crimes in Quebec are now well documented. Cultural and religious minorities, women, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, journalists and progressive groups are among the main targets. These dynamics are exacerbated by the circulation of hostile political rhetoric and the trivialization of prejudice in the public sphere.

TAKING ACTION AGAINST HATE SPEECH

To effectively stamp out hate speech, a comprehensive approach is needed, one that involves our institutions, communities and workplaces, but also each and every one of us.

What should you do if you witness something?

If you witness hate speech, it is important to take action, even if the situation does not concern you directly. Your action can help change the course of events.

Here are a few things you can do and some that you should avoid:

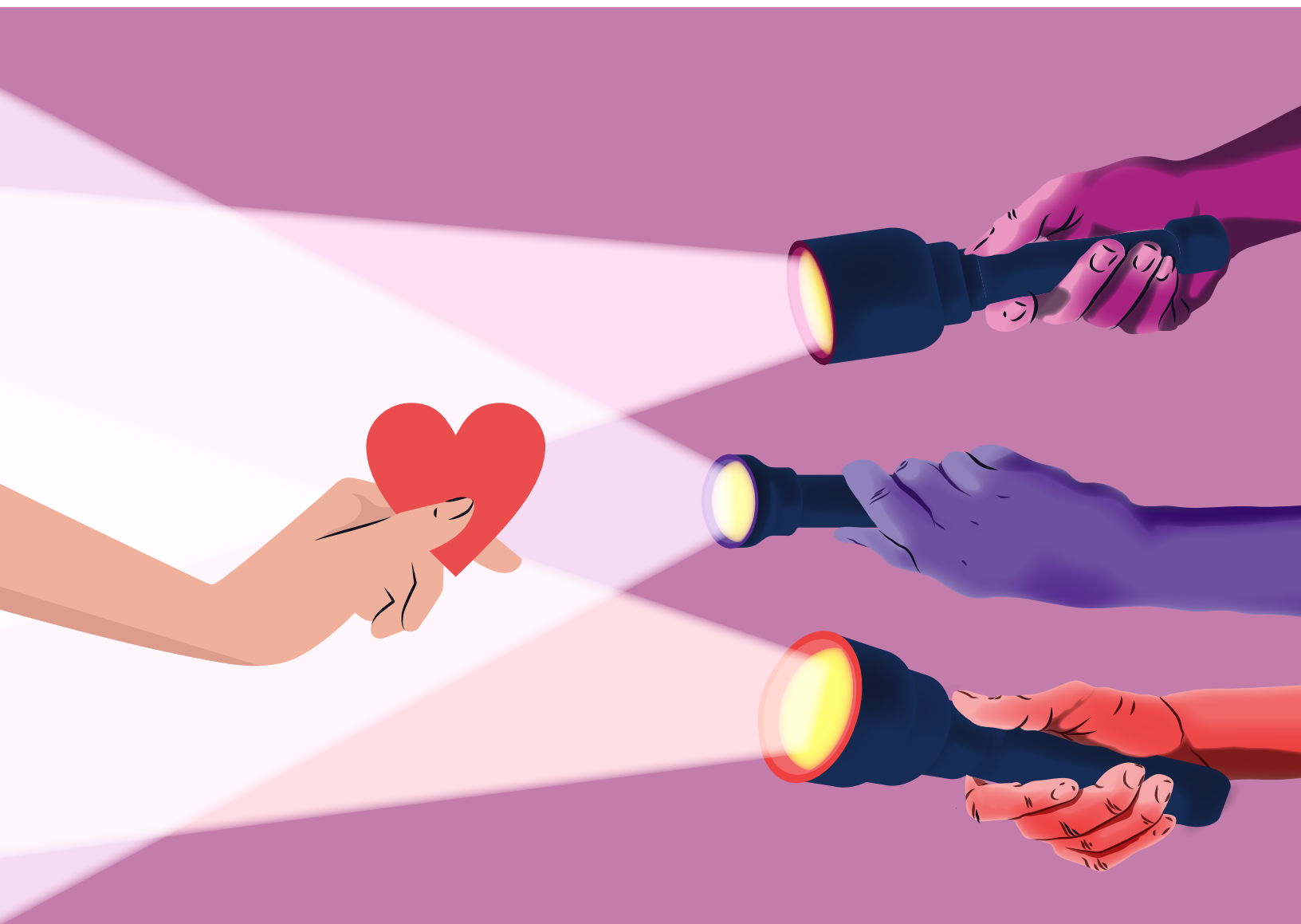
	→ Check the source and reliability of any content before sharing it, to help avoid spreading misinformation → Calmly and respectfully call out hate speech and publicly support those being targeted → Report hateful content to the relevant digital platforms → Counter hate with positive messages that promote tolerance, equality and truth, to reduce the impact of harmful speech	→ Share educational resources and engage in conversations to raise awareness about the social impact of hate speech → Participate in advocacy efforts to call for better regulation of digital platforms and their algorithms from governing bodies → Contact the police department in the event of a criminal threat
	→ Share or comment on hateful content, even with the intention of denouncing it (this helps to amplify said violence)	→ Downplay the situation or the distress of victims

Reporting behaviour, whether criminal or not, that undermines human dignity and social cohesion helps to break the cycle of violence and foster safe, inclusive and respectful spaces.

How to prevent hate speech and take action

We can take action against hate speech. Here is a non-exhaustive list that could inspire tangible actions in your workplace and community:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Provide members with training that promotes empathy, understanding and the prevention of online hate and violence.→ Create spaces for dialogue and develop tools tailored to your workplaces, for instance an awareness campaign.→ Encourage the reporting of problematic situations to foster a safe and respectful organizational culture. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Collaborate with schools on awareness-raising campaigns offering activities for students and families, such as taking part in the <u>Violence and Bullying Prevention in Schools Week</u>.→ Celebrate <u>International Day for Countering Hate Speech</u> (June 18) in your workplaces. |
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USEFUL RESOURCES

Here are some useful resources to better understand, prevent or take action against hate speech:

À cœur d'homme (acoeurdhomme.com)

A resource website (in French only) for men and their loved ones that provides information to help them break the cycle of violence.

Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (info-radical.org/en/)

An organization that carries out educational, awareness-raising and prevention activities to combat radicalization, and offers, among other things, educational resources, training and specialist support.

Telephone: 1 877 687-7141
Email: [online form](#)

Éducaloi (educaloi.qc.ca/en/)

An organization with expertise in both legal communication and legal education. It offers information on various topics including [cyberbullying](#), [sharing intimate images online](#) as well as our [legal responsibilities when using social media](#).

Email: [online form](#)

Campagne On s'écoute (onsecoute.com)

An initiative of Concordia University's Centre for the Study of Learning and Performance which aims to raise awareness and inform the public about sexual violence and which includes, among other things, a section on [masculinist discourse](#) (videos, educational resources, prevention guide, etc.).

Rainbow Action Hub – Egale Canada (egale.ca)

A resource website that offers information and tools to help understand and combat hatred towards 2SLGBTQI individuals.

Canadian Race Relations Foundation (crrf-fcrr.ca/)

An organization that, among other things, provides a [toolkit](#) to identify, document and report hate crimes both in Quebec and in Canada.

Telephone: 1 888 240-4936
Email: [online form](#)

Department of Justice of Canada (justice.gc.ca/eng)

The Department provides information on the proposed [legislative amendments](#) to the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the *Criminal Code* regarding the fight against hate speech and hate crimes.

Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (quebec.ca/en/education)

The [Violence and Bullying Prevention in Schools Week](#) is held each spring. As part of this initiative, the Ministère de l'Éducation provides educational activities, guides and a range of resources for elementary and secondary schools.

UNESCO (unesco.org)

An international organization that provides information on hate speech and offers [educational guides and resources to counter online hate](#).
