



Mannréttinda- og ofbeldisvarnarráð

Hate, Social Inclusion and Society - Conference Report September 2022

Meðfylgjandi er skýrsla um ráðstefnuna Hate, Social Inclusion and Society, sem fram fór þann 2. júní 2022. Ráðstefnan var haldinn af mannréttinda- og lýðræðisskrifstofu í samstarfi við Nordic Safe Cities (NSC).

Skýrslan er send mannréttinda- og ofbeldisvarnarráði til upplýsingar.

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“Hate, Social Inclusion and Society“

Conference Report

Introduction

On the 2nd of June 2022 the Human Rights and Democracy Office of Reykjavík City organised a closed conference in collaboration with Nordic Safe Cities titled: „Hate, Social Inclusion and Society“.

The City of Reykjavik has been a member of Nordic Safe Cities (NSC) since 2017 and approved its first action plan working against hate and extremism in 2021. The City of Reykjavik, like other Scandinavian municipalities that are members of NSC, works closely with the Icelandic Police, several municipal departments and smaller organisations and NGOs to achieve its goals listed in the action plan.

Participants were selected based on their knowledge, field of work and connection to one another. The aim was to build stronger working relationships between key players and to keep a strong focus on the themes of the conference. The key players invited to the conference were:

- Ríkislögreglustjóri (The Icelandic National Police Commissioner)
- Lögreglan á höfuðborgarsvæðinu (The Reykjavík Metropolitan Police)
- Mannréttinda- og lýðræðisskrifstofa (The Human Rights and Democracy Office)
- Nordic Safe Cities
- Skóla- og frístundasvið (The Department of Education and Recreation)
- Velferðarsvið (The Department of Welfare)
- Menningar og ferðamálasvið (The Department of Culture and Tourism)
- Íþrótt- og tómstundasvið Reykjavíkur (The Department of Sport and Leisure)
- The Queer Recreation Center (Hinsegin félagsmiðstöð Tjarnarinnar og S78)
- Miðja máls og læsis (The Center of Language and Literacy)
- Einurð – Project Leaders of Know Your Rights
- The Human Rights Office of Iceland
- Suðurmiðstöð (City Service Center – South)
- Almannavarnir (The Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management of Iceland)
- Fjölmenningarsetur (The Multicultural Information Center)

Other key players and invitees included academics from the University of Iceland the University of Akureyri, along with activists and specialists in the field of human rights.

The Conference

The conference was held at Veröld Vigdísar from 11am – 5pm and included eight speakers, followed by workshops. The conference was concluded with a closed debriefing that included select participants. The speakers as well as a summary of their main points are listed below.

Jeppe Albers, Executive Director of Nordic Safe Cities

Jeppe Albers discussed NSC's role in Scandinavia and how it works as a network platform providing guidance for member cities in terms of:

- Standing against polarization
- Creating robust and resilient communities
- Safeguarding citizens from extremism and hate
- Advancing the Nordics as a global pioneer region for creating safer cities

Dr. María Rún Bjarnadóttir – Project Manager Against Aigital Violence at the Icelandic National Police

Dr María Rún Bjarnadóttir presented a statistical comparison between causes of hate-speech in Iceland and in Norway, which showed that Iceland is lacking behind in the prevention of online hate-speech compared to Norway. In all instances, people in Iceland experienced more online abuse than people in Norway. In the information María provided, it was clear that younger people and men in Iceland were more often victims of online abuse and hate than older people and women. Maria also explained that women participate less in online discussions due to the possibility of harassment and hate, which she described as a very serious trend of silencing.

Eyrún Eypórsdóttir, Assistant Professor of Police Studies at the University of Akureyri

Eyrún Eypórsdóttir argued that the perpetrators of hate-crime often feel that their victims are pushing boundaries and changing the structure of the society. Hate crime, Eyrún argued, is embedded in a structural and cultural context based on interaction between individuals from different cultural background.

Victims who have been exposed to hate crime such as threats or physical violence, have higher tendencies of experiencing fear daily. Hate crimes can be physical attacks, threats,

and murder. Eypórsdóttir argued that a minority of hate crime cases are serious offences, with the majority being minor offences, including incidents that do not reach the threshold of being classified as an offence. In many cases, perpetrators have some connection to their victims (e.g., neighbours, colleagues, people that share communal spaces). Eypórsdóttir explained that hate is often expressed through vandalism (such as vandalism to private property).

Claudia Ashanie Wilson, Human Rights Lawyer and Activist

Claudia Ashanie Wilson advocated that the significant increase of immigrants in Iceland (a projection of reaching 20% of the general population between 2022 – 2024) justifies the need of more focus on immigrant matters, especially among governmental institutions. She argued that it is important for the police to focus on minority groups, and presented them with the following questions connected to the challenges the police face:

1. Do Icelanders/immigrants of visible foreign background trust the police, and do they feel safe?
2. Where do we stand as a society on issues of prejudice and discrimination, on issues of racial profiling?
3. Are issues of diversity and inclusion adequately addressed within the police both within its rank and its interaction with residence of minority origin?

Claudia went on to describe an incident in which her son, a teenager and person of colour, was mistaken for a suspect wanted by the police. Her son was arrested twice. The description of the suspect contradicted her son's description such as in dress, age, and physical appearance other than similar skin colour. Following her son being arrested twice, there was a wide and hectic discussion about racial profiling within the police force (and wider society). Claudia explained that in general black boys are often viewed as older, are not perceived to retain the same image of innocence as their white peers by law enforcement and are more often seen as guilty.

Hrefna Þórarinsdóttir and Gunnlaugur Víðir Guðmundsson, Project Managers at Tjörnin Recreation Centre

Hrefna Þórarinsdóttir, project manager of The Queer Recreation Centre and Gunnlaugur Víðir Guðmundsson, project manager of Gleðibankinn Recreation Centre, discussed prejudice against LGBT+ children and youth in Reykjavik. Hrefna mentioned that the Queer Recreation Centre has grown exponentially in recent years with 120 – 180 LGBT+ youth showing up every week. Both presented that the aim of the centres was to create a safe place and provide youth with shelter and support, giving them the opportunity to meet

other youth with shelter and support – and with similar backgrounds with the goal of creating a community.

Hrefna and Gunnlaugur reported that hate speech, prejudice, and harassment against LGBT+ children and youth had increased after COVID-19. This applied equally to behaviour on social media as well as in person. The youth of the Queer Recreation Centre were specifically targeted by a group of youth in Reykjavik, where they were harassed as they attended the centre and online. Hrefna and Gunnlaugur sought to contact the parents of the offending group, while devising a specific group activity for boys within that group. The activity was held at the same time as the Queer Centre was open and was based on feminism and exploring privilege within the frame of fun activities. Gunnlaugur, who ran the group, said that he has great faith in an informal education like this; “We teach them that they are a part of the society where they are responsible and can make difference. I would be surprised if these guys would behave like that again”. However, they could unfortunately not reach all the offending youth.

Kasper Fisker, Head of Office for Crime Prevention in Albertslund, Denmark

Kasper Fisker reflected on governance, cooperation, and civil empowerment. Fisker mentioned that (1) polarization, (2) prejudice, and (3) general mistrust can potentially occur in any society which is rationalized within basic human nature to in – or outgroup a stranger. The problem occurs when polarization, prejudice and general mistrust develop into a societal problem like gang violence, radicalization, and terrorism. Fisker said that police forces therefore need to build trust among the citizens, since prejudice and profiling is self-fulfilling. The police need to show:

1. Disciplinary sanctions (show level of acceptance)
2. Efficient registration practice (to ask and identify)
3. Investigation and punishment (that the police must take any offences seriously)
4. Bridge-builders (help and support individuals and networks provided by police through civil professionals)

This also requires a good cooperation with the municipality, so the municipality can coordinate the police in terms of guidelines and responsibilities.

Antirasistarnir (anti-racist activists - Anna, Kristín, Jóhanna og Vala)

Antirasistarnir, who received the Nordic Safe Cities Pioneer Prize in 2021, focussed on the school system and argued that it can be challenging to be brought up in a predominantly white society; especially when the educational system lacks representation of people of colour. They argued that the first step in fighting racism and white supremacy is to acknowledge that racism is a problem in Iceland. They focused on the word “thoughtlessness” with the reflection that

institutions do not ensure that their regulations consider the different attitudes, behaviours, and demeanours that minorities face. It is the role of Antirasistarnir to change this.

Tore Björge, Professor at the University of Oslo

Tore Björge argued that hate crimes are acts of crime motivated by bias or hatred against certain categories of people, such as religious, racial, or sexual minorities or people with disabilities.

Tore presented general principles of crime prevention, that may also work against hate crimes. He mentioned his theoretical explanation of prevention mechanism, that is, how a measure is causing an effect, in this case, reducing hate crimes. This mechanism can be mental, such as normative barriers or deterrence, or physical and observable. Measures, Björge mentions, is what is done; the corresponding mechanism is how it works. A measure of arresting someone e.g., can activate different mechanism, or other unintended mechanism such as negative side-effects. Hate crimes can also cause severe mental health problems, especially when their traumas have not been treated. Victim support groups as well as family and social networks can have important roles in reducing harm from hate crimes.

In his idea of the holistic approach, that aims to work against hate speech and hate crime, following key points shall be considered:

- Building normative barriers against hate crime
- Reducing recruitment to hate groups and activities
- Deterring hate crimes
- Disrupting hate crimes
- Incapacitation
- Protecting vulnerable targets of hate crime
- Reducing harm from hate crime
- Reducing rewards from hate crime
- Exit and rehabilitation from hate crime

Workshops

Following the speakers, the conference guests were invited to take part in workshops to discuss and evaluate the conference and explore possible future solutions. The guests were organised into three different workshops ensuring a good mix of knowledge and various backgrounds within each workshop.

The workshop topics were:

1. Social inclusion and discrimination
2. Community building and increasing trust
3. Digital trust

Each workshop was constructed in the following way:

- a. Problem (what is the problem?)
- b. Implementation (how is it possible?)
- c. Solution (how can it be done?)

Social inclusion and discrimination	
Problem (what is the problem?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing knowledge (cultural sensitivity/literacy) • Societal attitudes • Lack of sense of responsibility for a more inclusive society/lack of accountability • The common rhetoric of equality already having been achieved • Recognition of discrimination • Lack of representation • All departments are missing an action plan
Implementation (how is it possible?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report – Education for all who work and will work for the police • Presence of the police in online platform to cover marginalized groups • Build trust between minorities and the police • University of Iceland – a world café where general students receive a consultation forum so that they can talk about their experiences and solution to their challenges • Cooperation of institutions • School and recreation department – education to children/parents/teachers • Cooperation with the police, health department etc. • Education and prevention work in leisure activities • Discrimination is also at the top of the list of institutions finances • Education on discrimination at the primary school level • Increased funding to work with diverse community groups • Give coloured people and other minorities a chance • The police need to form a consultative group, anthropologists to find the best way to tackle Nazism in the society.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relationship between discrimination and the public health • Awareness in education/studies • Role models • Stop cooperation with countries where situation is worse

Solution (what can be done?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map the problem – what is the root of the problem? Where is the discrimination? who uses violence? define what kind of violence • Do real research on the experiences of people in the Icelandic society • Sharing personal stories and bringing them into the community discussion • Procedures/action plans against violence, discrimination and hate speech
Community building and increasing trust	
Problem (what is the problem?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trust among Icelandic people • Fast cultural changes • Education on diversity • Lack of integration • More social initiative needed • Lack of positive role-models • Dehumanization • Human tendency to categorize /judge • Difficulty engaging staff in education relating to inclusion
Implementation (how is it possible?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get people together • Space for events • Activate positive role models for kids • More budget for cultural competency • Cross-sector discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) political decisions b) individual decisions – to use and teach Icelandic
Solution (what can be done?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaption plans • Use the language as an inclusive power • Arts (theatre, cinema, music, visual arts) • Curriculum for diversity • Update what it is to be Icelandic! • Support families by having a friend family • Helping organizations in contact with immigrant groups • Peer to peer learning about racism • Free language education during workday • Increase Icelandic courses in free of charge
Digital action	
Problem (what is the problem?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different generation – parents do not understand the virtual reality • Another social norm on the internet • Reprobation is none in the virtual reality • Lack of prioritization and authority within system • Lack of education and awareness building about racism • Increased violence and polarization • Racial profiling • Unwillingness to recognize your own prejudice
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased lobbyism within governance • Simultaneous developing changes in different institutions • Co-operation of different parties • Training of trainers to educate on the subject • Development of material

Implementation (how is it possible?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research on causes of hate-speech • Peer education • Discussion with media about agenda and presentation of news • Closing comment section • Increased surveillance and regulation on hate speech • Study the root of this mindset • Bridge builders in the police
Solution (what can be done?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early education and prevention - • Building trust and outreach • Increased governmental focus and strategic planning • Fundings for monitoring online • Diversity and multiculturalism being part of curriculum • Adult education

Common themes

The outcome of the workshops presented clear themes, which all three topics had in common.

Education was one of the main themes of the workshops. The participants argued that education in schools and in universities should include more diversity and teaching methods should reflect more on interculturalism in Iceland. The importance of interculturalism should be emphasized in schools and communicated between teachers, parents, and children. This kind of education should start at a younger age.

The existence of hate-speech in the Icelandic society should be discussed and enlightened more with students. This also involves the discussion of risk factors relating to information, material etc., that students can be exposed to and that could motivate them to 'hate' or to promote 'hate'. Students should be educated in how to deal with seeing, witnessing, or being exposed to discrimination, or with information that promote hate towards groups in the society.

The Icelandic Police and policing in general was also a main theme in the workshops with a focus on educating the police on interculturalism, diversity, discrimination, and hate. That includes hate in virtual spheres such as social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok. The police should be able to build bridges with minority groups in Iceland. That both increases the possibility for outreach and trust. This justifies the police presence in online virtual platforms, which is necessary to protect marginalized groups. Arguably, there should be more funding for online monitoring, as most hate speech happens behind the screen on various social media platforms.

Workshop participants also argued that the police should cooperate more with municipalities and educational institutions to form a consultative group with academics that aims to work against far-right tendencies.

Research is fundamental in the enlightenment of the existing hate speech and hate crime in Iceland according to the participants, since research around these matters are seemingly limited. There should be more emphasis on research on the experiences of people in the Icelandic context both based on micro and macro research.

Cooperation between various institutions in Reykjavik such as with the police, health departments, schools, universities, municipalities etc., is strongly needed to work against tendencies of hate according to the participants. The participants argued that there should be more space and emphasis on events with the aim of getting people together and to share information (and experiences) about hate in the Icelandic society. Furthermore, there should be more space and emphasis on arts such as theatres, cinema, visual arts etc, that aims to increase visibility of minorities and diversity.

Governmental institutions have the role of mapping hate according to the participants. They need to find out the root of hate in Iceland, who uses violence and where does the discrimination occur.

The media also has a role in preventing hate in the society according to the participants. The way in which hate, and dangerous discourses are presented in the media and news play a major role in shaping the general discourse around women, minorities, diversity, and hate.

De-briefing

The participants of the de-briefing session were selected based on their direct involvement of the topics presented in the conference. Those included:

1. Anna Krístinsdóttir (Director of the Human Rights and Democracy Office of Reykjavik)
2. Jeppe Albers (Executive Director of Nordic Safe Cities)
3. Zina Matouk (Project Manager at Nordic Safe Cities)
4. Jasmina Vajcovic Crnac (Director of the International Team of the Welfare Department)
5. Eiríkur Valberg (Police Representative of the Reykjavik Metropolitan Police)
6. Muhammed Emin Kizilkaya (Project Manager in Immigration Matters at the Human Rights and Democracy Office of Reykjavik)
7. María Rún Bjarnadóttir (Project Manager against digital violence at the National Police)
8. Dagbjört Ásbjörnsdóttir (Project Manager in Interculturalism in Elementary Schools in Reykjavik) – Dagbjört was unable to participate.

Discussions centred around the current situation in Reykjavik, and how to work together in the future i.e. the next steps, and also how to continue working on the main themes of the conference. In the de-briefing, the importance of mobilization and future cooperation was emphasized. It was argued that the upcoming Nordic Safe Cities summit (October 24th – 25th, 2022) would allow member cities in Scandinavia, including Reykjavik, to gain more input from other each other.

Participants agreed that conducting regular meetings discussing the themes of the conference was important as they could provide an opportunity to carry the work forward.

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