

Freedom unlimited?

Discuss where freedom of expression meets the rights and safety of others

Read each case. Decide whether content should be removed, explain your reasons and consider other possible responses. Be prepared to compare your judgement with those of others.

CASE 1

A group called “Reclaim our nation” sets up a website proclaiming “traditional values”. Many of the posts are racist. The site attracts a large number of comments and a heated discussion. Some of the discussion contains very abusive language, but there is a large community of commenters who object to the racist ideology of the site.

Should anything be taken offline? If so, how much and why?

If not, what else could be done?

CASE 2

Nikolay, a politician, uses his personal website to call for the eviction of a Roma community in his constituency, blaming them for high crime levels. Following his calls, there are a number of attacks on Roma around the country. Much of the media begins printing stories which feature crimes committed by Roma—but not the crimes committed against them.

Should anything be taken offline? If so, how much and why?

If not, why not? What else could be done?

Cases for discussion

Consider context, reach, harm, responsibility and possible alternatives

CASE 3

On a personal blog, Rory posts a cartoon showing a well-known politician with blood dripping from his fingers and dead bodies all around. Many people comment, mostly supporting the cartoon.

Should anything be taken offline? If so, how much and why?

If not, why not? What else could be done?

CASE 4

Ella posts a video on her public profile which makes fun of disabled people, portraying them as incompetent “alien” beings. Site statistics show that almost no-one has viewed the video, and there are no comments from visitors.

Should anything be taken offline? If so, how much and why?

If not, why not? What else could be done?

Cases for discussion

Apply the same principles consistently across different situations

CASE 5

A journalist sees the video in case 4 and starts a campaign to have Ella's profile removed from the social media site. As a result, the video gets thousands of hits. People start commenting that this is "the best video ever", "we should start being realistic about disabled people", and so on.

Should anything be taken offline? If so, how much and why?

If not, why not? What else could be done?

CASE 6

Ditta, a well-known celebrity, posts an article on an online news site claiming that transgender women are "an abuse against humanity". A website is set up to "bring down Ditta" with details about her personal life. She starts receiving hundreds of personally abusive emails and tweets. Some include threats.

Should anything be taken offline? If so, how much and why?

If not, why not? What else could be done?

Source: Bookmarks – A manual for combating hate speech online through human rights education. Council of Europe, 2020, p. 69 ff. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/no-hate-campaign/bookmarks-connexions>

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Co-funded by
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