



THE ONLINE HATE PREVENTION INSTITUTE

Empowering communities, organisations and agencies in the fight against hate.

ONLINE HATE PREVENTION INSTITUTE SUBMISSION

NATIONAL ANTI-RACISM FRAMEWORK



SUBMISSION TO
AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

4 FEBRUARY 2022

ABOUT THE ONLINE HATE PREVENTION INSTITUTE

The Online Hate Prevention Institute (OHPI) is Australia's only harm prevention charity dedicated to tackling all forms of online hate and extremism. We have now been doing so for over ten years and are internationally recognised for our work.

Our work has tackled racism targeting Indigenous Australians, the Jewish community, African communities, Asian communities, Middle Eastern communities, and other forms of racism. Our work also extends into other forms of online hate such as misogyny, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, hate directed military veterans, and the trolling and cyberbullying of individuals. Our work on extremism has involved efforts to reduce the spread of terrorist material inciting race motivated violence. We also do a significant amount of work related to combating Holocaust denial and distortion, which is itself tied to combating both antisemitism and racism in general.

Our aim is to empower communities, organisations, and agencies in the fight against online hate.

- We support the work of the Australia Delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) with our CEO serving as an expert member of Australia's delegation and on IHRA's Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial.
- We serve on a committee of civil society organisations that meet regularly with Facebook's Australian office and provide them with advice in relation to harmful content including racist content.
- We are currently working in partnership with Facebook and the Australian Human Rights Commission on a project tackling anti-Asian hate on Facebook and Instagram.
- We will also soon be commencing work in partnership with the Executive Council of Australian Jewry in relation online antisemitism.
- We've worked with the Council of Christians and Jews on a project funded by the Victorian Government to produce and deliver educational material tackling online racism and other hate¹
- The Victorian Government has accepted a recommendation from a Parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections to work with us "to develop a strategy to reduce and prevent vilification online".²
- Along with the Australian Human Rights Commission and VicHealth, we were a partner in the Cyber-Racism and Community Resilience ARC funded research project.
- We contributed to book "Cyber Racism and Community Resilience: Strategies for Combating Online Race Hate".³ The book also discussed our early work in some detail.

¹ <https://ohpi.org.au/tackling-hate-speech-training-with-ccj-vic/>

² <https://ohpi.org.au/ohpi-welcomes-victorian-government-response-on-anti-vilification-protections/>

³ <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-64388-5>

Online Hate Prevention Institute Submission

- The United Nations and its agencies rely on our expertise. UNESCO have praised our work,⁴ we've presented for the UN Alliance of Civilisations,⁵ and to the UN Forum on Minority Issues.⁶
- We provided expert support to the Government of Sweden for the Malmo Forum in 2021

Our work involves:

- Developing and maintaining "Fight Against Hate" the cutting-edge tool for public reporting of online racism, and "CSI-CHAT" the advanced analysis platform to support analysis of this data
- Providing our tools to different communities to help them tackle online racism and centrally deposit evidence of reported content to improve transparency and platform accountability⁷
- Finding and documenting online racism
- Working with platforms to get racist content removed
- Working with platforms, governments, and other stakeholders to improve recognition of types of racist expression that are being missed by automated process and manual reviews by staff
- Publishing material that highlights the sort of racist content found online and debunks it
- Providing educational workshops to improve understanding of racism, particularly as it is expressed online
- Providing advice to community organisations, government agencies, all levels of government, technology companies, and other stakeholders on emerging challenges and best practice
- Engaging in public policy discussions around online racism
- Engage internationally in conferences, meetings and forums to tackling online racism⁸

⁴ <https://ohpi.org.au/ohpi-in-unesco-report-on-freedom-of-expression/>; <https://ohpi.org.au/ohpi-quoted-in-a-unesco-report-on-online-hate/>

⁵ <https://ohpi.org.au/unaoc/>

⁶ <https://ohpi.org.au/address-to-the-united-nations/>

⁷ <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/mcs/article/view/6035/6475>

⁸ <https://tech-forum.computer.org/mitigating-societal-harms>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR ANDRE OBOLER

Dr Andre Oboler is the CEO & Managing Director of the Online Hate Prevention Institute. He is an Honorary Associate at La Trobe Law School, a global Vice President of the IEEE Computer Society, a member of the Global Public Policy Committee of the IEEE, an expert member of the Australian Government's Delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, and a consultant to governments, civil society organisations and companies.

Andre was formerly a Senior Lecturer in Cyber Security at the La Trobe Law School, intercultural liaison for the Victorian Education Department's independent inquiry into antisemitism, co-chair of the Online Antisemitism working group of the Global Forum to Combat Antisemitism, an expert member of the Inter-Parliamentary Coalition to Combatting Antisemitism and served for two terms with the board of the UK's higher education regulator the QAA. His research interests include online regulation, hate speech and extremism in social media, and the impacts of technology on society.

He holds a PhD in Computer Science from Lancaster University, and a B. Comp. Sci. (Hons) & LLM(Juris Doctor) from Monash University. He is a Senior Member of the IEEE, a member of the IEEE Computer Society's Golden Core, a Graduate Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and a Member of the Victorian Society of Computers & Law.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES/AREAS ON WHICH THE FRAMEWORK CAN BEST PROVIDE GUIDANCE?

It is abundantly clear that the online world is significantly contributing to the problem of racism in society. This is the problem of “hate 2.0”,⁹ a generalisation of the problem of “antisemitism 2.0”,¹⁰ a term first coined in 2008. Concept explains how hate can be normalized in online spaces, negatively influence people’s sense of what is acceptable, and then see that change in values (a tolerance for racism) reflected in the real world. It doesn’t mean everyone becomes racism, but it does significantly undermine our ability to prevent racism.

Given the role of this problem as a negative catalyst, is it appropriate that it be specifically addressed in the strategy. At present the only mention is that “The media (including social media) commits to countering and preventing racism and racial discrimination through their operations.” There have been multiple parliamentary inquiries looking at the fact that self-regulation by social media companies to prevent societal harms is not enough. We see this quite clearly in Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth), though it doesn’t address racism specifically.

The UK’s Online Harms white paper notes that “Hate crimes include crimes demonstrating hostility on the grounds of an individual’s actual or perceived race...”, that “the government has made clear that offending online is just as serious as that occurring offline and perpetrators of hateful attacks should be held accountable for their actions” and that “MHCLG and the Home Office also support and engage with third party organisations such as the Community Security Trust, Tell MAMA and Stop Hate UK, who have Trusted Flagger status with social media platforms to provide greater support to users to report experiences of hate crime online. We support the continued close cooperation of these organisations with government and social media platforms”.¹¹ This passage highlights the importance of addressing online racism, the need for civil society engagement, and the importance of government support (including but not limited to funding) to make this possible.

Key additional issues for the framework in relation to online hate are:

- Ensuring platforms provide transparency reports specific to Australia and which disaggregate based on different types of racism: (a) the number of reports made by Australian users, (b) the percent of those report which were upheld, (c) the number of items of content posted from Australia which were removed for being racist (either due to a user report, or due to automated detection).

⁹ Andre Oboler, “Aboriginal Memes and Online Hate”, Online Hate Prevention Institute, 11 October 2012 (<https://ohpi.org.au/aboriginal-memes-and-online-hate/>).

¹⁰ Andre Oboler, “Online Antisemitism 2.0. ‘Social Antisemitism’ on the ‘Social Web’”, Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, 1 April 2008 (<https://jcpa.org/article/online-antisemitism-2-0-social-antisemitism-on-the-social-web/>).

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/online-harms-white-paper> see section 7.16

- Ensuring there is independent data collected of online racist content visible in Australia. This data should look at the sort of racism report, whether action was taken by the platforms, and whether (if the content was not removed) an independent assessment agrees the content was racist. This independent mechanism helps verify the quality of reports from the platforms, but also addresses gaps in relation to platforms that will not provide the required reports.
- Ensuring there is research into how racism is manifesting online to Australian audiences and public education to explain and address the negative messages.
- Ensuring there is education on how to recognise and respond to online racism in a safe manner that does not put the up-stander at risk.

As we recently explained to the Federal Parliament,¹² a large part of the work of dealing with online hate, including cyber-racism, in Australia is done by the Online Hate Prevention Institute. We are recognised as international experts in this space, but funding to support this work is almost non-existent. We can, if funding is available, provide a service to address the above goals. We have expertise it would just be a matter of scaling up what we currently do.

We note the Victorian Parliament's recommended, and the Victorian Government's acceptance of the recommendation, that the Victorian Government should work with the Online Hate Prevention Institute "to develop a strategy to reduce and prevent vilification online".¹³ We need this at the national level, including a partnership with the Australian Human Rights Commission under this framework. Alternatively the commission itself may wish to take over the work we do, though that would likely be far more expensive.

ARE THERE BEST PRACTICE STORIES OF ANTI-RACISM, SOCIAL INCLUSION, SOCIAL COHESION, AND DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION INITIATIVES TO SHARE?

The Online Hate Prevention Institute is often used as an example of best practice. This applies both to our work gathering and reporting on data, and the way we operate across all forms of online hate – including all forms of racism. We are a regular case study in books, reports from bodies such as UNESCO, and project funding proposals in Europe. We have contributed to a paper looking at some of our work and how different stakeholders can work together in a best practice manner to tackle racism and improve community resilience.¹⁴

We have many proposals, ideas, completed pilots, etc. Some are referred to in the "About" section at the start of this submission. We would welcome the opportunity to further develop such strategies with the Australian Human Rights Commission. The significant level of expertise we have built up over the past decade cannot be shared without significant work. We are not currently resourced to an extent to be able to provide that comprehensively, though much of it can be seen by review our work.

¹² <https://ohpi.org.au/presenting-to-parliament-on-social-media/>

¹³ <https://ohpi.org.au/ohpi-welcomes-victorian-government-response-on-anti-vilification-protections/>

¹⁴ <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/mcs/article/view/6035/6475>

The one area we will mention is our Fight Against Hate online reporting tool. This is an online tool which can be configured to take reports for any type of racism and its sub-types (denoting different types of racist narratives). We are using it in a project in partnership with the Australian Human Rights Commission to tackle anti-Asian racism. The reporting schema in this case is as follows:

1. Incitement to violence against Asians	
	1.1 Inciting violence against a specific Asian person / business / organisation
	1.2 Inciting violence against Asian businesses in general
	1.3 Inciting violence against Asian people generally
2. Demonising / dehumanising Asians	
	2.1 Yellow Peril / Yellow Terror / Yellow Specter
	2.2 Presenting Asians as spreaders of sickness
	2.3 Presenting Asians as animals or non-human
	2.4 Presenting Asians as violent / criminals
	2.5 Nazi analogies
3. Attacking Asian because of their culture (e.g. food)	
	3.1 Food related attack on culture
	3.2 Negative views of the value of Asian culture
	3.3 Negative views about Asian people blaming their culture
4. Other xenophobia against Asians / Asian heritage (i.e. separating them from mainstream society)	

	4.1 Statements of exclusion e.g. that they don't belong here
	4.2 Statements telling people to go back where they came from
	4.3 Statements telling people to give up their culture
5. Other forms of anti-Asian racism	

A reporting portal is set up for anti-Asian hate, the user submits a link to the content they wish to report, they then select one of the 5 primary categories (the colours) then if it is item 1 to 4, they select from the provided sub-categories. The portal can be placed on as many websites as required, and in each case, it can also be configured to operate in any given language. All the data is sent to a central data store. Each portal allows its host to see a summary of how many items in each category are being reported to them. All the data is available via our “CSI-CHAT” analysis tool which multiple different organisations of expert users (once approved) can use to filter, categorise, process, and report on the data.

This project will use the portals in collaboration with community organisations to gather data, discuss it with the impacted communities, address it with the platforms, and provide empirical public data on the scale of the problem and the specific nature of hate. This will facilitate better anti-racism strategies.

HOW CAN WE EMBED EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK?

We must gather reports of racism of all types and track how this changes over time. The annual antisemitism report of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry provides a model for this. In the case of online content, work by the Online Hate Prevention Institute on antisemitism and Islamophobia provides examples.¹⁵ See later comments about data collection. Ultimately the aim is to reduce instances of racism and this can only be evaluated if we measure the level of racist incidents. Measures of perceived level of racism or racist attitudes are also possible, but less accurate if the goal is to reduce actual racism.

WHAT PRINCIPLES SHOULD GUIDE THE FRAMEWORK?

¹⁵ Andre Oboler, “Measuring the Hate: The State of Antisemitism in Social Media”, 3 February 2016 (<https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/AntiSemitism/Pages/Measuring-the-Hate-Antisemitism-in-Social-Media.aspx>); Andre Oboler, “Anti-Muslim Internet Hate: Interim Report”, Online Hate Prevention Institute, 10 December 2015 (<http://ohpi.org.au/anti-muslim-hate-interim-report/>).

We strongly support first proposed guiding principle, “Acknowledge and recognise Australia’s Indigenous peoples, celebrate their cultures and histories, and champion their rights.”

When it comes to online hate, many of the decisions responding to reports of this racism against Indigenous Australians will be made offshore by staff of various technology companies. They often lack the local knowledge needed to understand such racism. We have experienced this during in person discussion over racist Aboriginal memes with senior executives from major technology companies.

Because the nature of this content is specific to Australia, unlike other forms of hate, we cannot rely on action from governments or civil society overseas to help address this problem. In the online content with its international dimension, we have a significant national obligation to respond to this racism.

We would recommend an additional principle be added on combating antisemitism. While antisemitism is clearly within the scope of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth), and indeed our obligations under the International Covenant Against All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) which it seeks to put into domestic law, it is also a unique form of racism discrimination. The problem can be seen in the recent high-profile media storm around Whoopi Goldberg’s comments on the view. She expressed a common (in the US at least) view that racism is about skin colour alone and that therefore “The Holocaust isn’t about race” as “these are two groups of white people”. She apologised after numerous experts explained how racism was at the core of Nazi antisemitism and the Holocaust was precisely about racism as the Nazis viewed Jews as a separate and inferior race they wished to wipe out.¹⁶ A similar problem has arising in Australia with the Bolt case which involved racism against light skinned Indigenous Australians. The Indigenous point is sufficiently covered by the first principle, but antisemitism could be better covered by explicit inclusion.

We also recommend making a specific principle in relation to the online world. As AHRC has noted, Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy 2019-22 said that “combatting online hate and the collection of data and evidence were identified as activities to progress the Strategy”.¹⁷ In our strategy this should be elevated to the level of a principle such as, “Ensure the online world, as seen from Australia, is not an exception to the normal expectations of Australian society.”

WHAT OUTCOMES AND STRATEGIES ARE NECESSARY FOR THE FRAMEWORK TO CREATE CHANGE?

Civil society must be engaged. This cannot be limited to peak community bodies representing different communities. While they are important, there is a need for civil society organisations that work across

¹⁶ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-02/whoopi-goldberg-apologises-for-saying-holocaust-was-not-about-ra/100798070>

¹⁷ Concept Paper for a National Anti-Racism Strategy, pg 18—19

all communities, particularly when it comes to addressing racism in specific domains when expert knowledge is required, e.g. online, in the justice system, in schools, etc.

Civil society must be appropriately support by government (including financially) in order to enable them to engage.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE, EQUAL AND HARMONIOUS FUTURE IN AUSTRALIA?

We strongly endorse the statement in the UK online harms white paper shared above. The online world is currently a large part of the problem. This must be addressed. It must be addressed with the engagement of technology companies and civil society. It must be addressed by measuring the scale of the problem including the volume of racism impacting on each community and the prevalence of specific narratives of racism, and how effective platforms are at addressing the problem.

In our vision we would see Fight Against Hate being used across a wide range of community organisations with the collected data being pooled and made available via CSI-CHAT to the Australian Human Rights Commission, with certain categories of reported content being made immediately available to police (e.g. racist threats of violence / terrorism).

We would like to see eSafety empowered to act on a referral from the Race Discrimination Commissioner to order the removal of racist content after efforts to report the content to the relevant company fail, or in cases where immediate removal is needed to protection public safety (for example content inciting violence).