

**DICO-DI-NO (per dire di sì)**  
**DisCOrsi d'oDlo e culture giovaNili *On line*.**

Intervenire a scuola per prevenire l'intolleranza e la discriminazione religiosa  
e per educare ad un uso consapevole dei new media.

**I Say No (To Say Yes)**  
**Hate speech and youth cultures online**

Intervening at school level to prevent intolerance and religious discrimination,  
and to educate in the responsible use of new media



**Final Project Report**  
**FBK-ISR**  
**June 2019**

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# THE PROJECT

The impact of religions, to be considered in the plural and in an a-confessional key, on society is at the centre of the research and action work carried out by the Centre for Religious Sciences of the Bruno Kessler Foundation (FBK-ISR). In particular, the Centre's Mission, adopted in 2016, is dedicated to the study of the multifaceted forms of the **relationship between religion and innovation**<sup>1</sup>. In continuity with this mission, FBK-ISR researchers (philosophers, historians, sociologists, anthropologists and jurists) investigate religion as a factor that can both trigger and mitigate the latter according to innovative forms of relationship and dialogue. Within this line of research, ISR promotes initiatives in the field of education and schools, studying solutions for the transmission of knowledge about religions and for education in respect, tolerance and openness to diversity.

Ranging from large-scale systematic violence to tensions within communities and families, the interaction between conflict and religion is multi-faceted and complex. One of the outcomes of this relationship are expressions of intolerance and verbal violence against people and groups identified on the basis of belonging to a cultural and religious group (but also, potentially, on the basis of gender identity or other status and personal characteristics), to define which the English expression *hate speech* is used.

In continuity with the international project Dangerous Speech ([dangerousspeech.org](http://dangerousspeech.org)), FBK-ISR moves from considering some discourses more "*dangerous*" than others, because they are able to induce "fear of diversity" and forms of closure, and from the conviction that the educational sphere represents the privileged field of intervention to prevent the risk that such forms of expression induce people, and specifically young people, to commit or share forms of argumentative violence against specific religious minorities and/or their members.

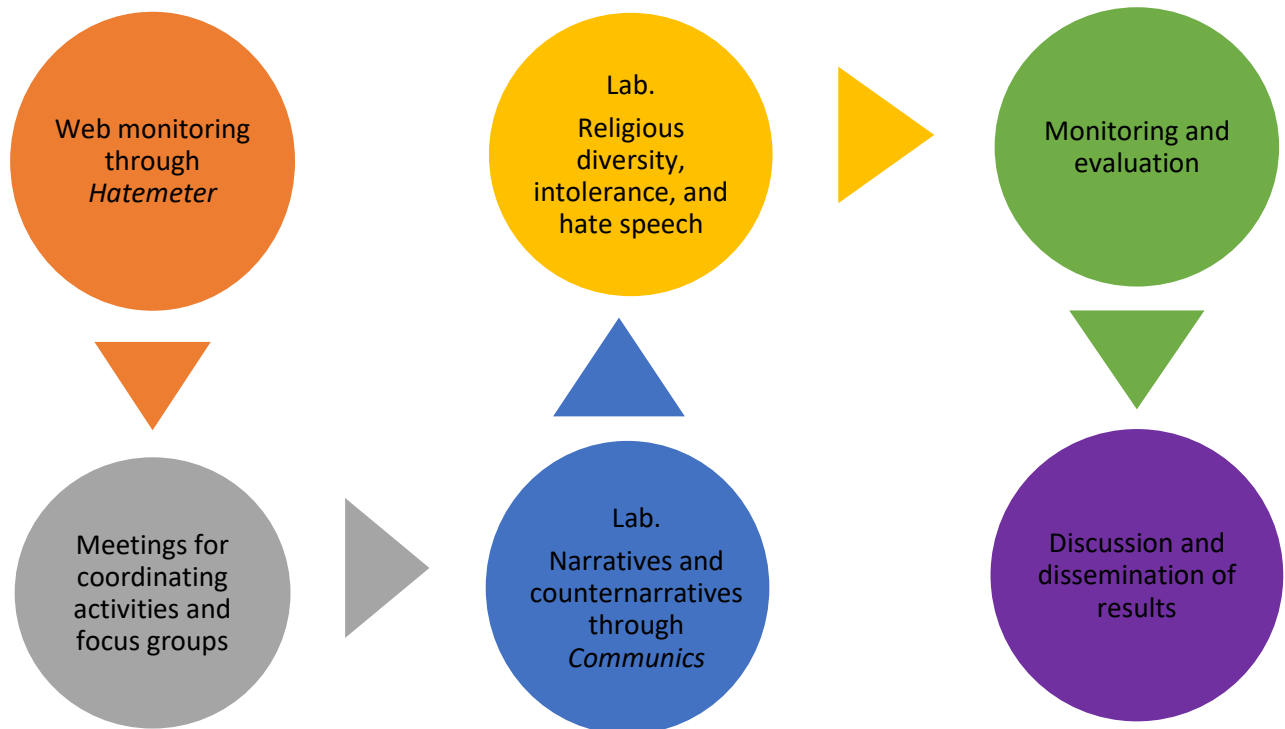
*DICO-DI-NO* is a project proposed by FBK-ISR, in collaboration with the *Research and Innovation Unit for Schools and the Smart Cities and Communities* area of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Centre of FBK, which is aimed at high school students with the aim of promoting reflection on stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination and verbal violence against religious minorities, with particular attention to the analysis of *hate speech* disseminated through the web, social networks and the media in general. "Say no" to closure and intolerance to "say yes" to knowledge, encounter and dialogue.

The research-action programme represents the extension of a first pilot project, *Tell another story!*, carried out by FBK-ISR with secondary schools in Trento and its province in the school year 2017-18. Starting from this experience, *DICO-DI-NO* proposes to a new series of schools a participatory theoretical-practical path, which will see the researchers engaged together with the teachers and students themselves in achieving the following objectives: a) the sharing of correct information about religious diversity and the situation of minorities in Italy; b) the strengthening of analytical and critical skills with regard to intolerant/violent arguments and media use; c) the development of argumentative skills useful for the deconstruction of hate speech and the production of *counter-narratives*.

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the Position Paper recently published by FBK-ISR for an analysis of the areas where this report is addressed: <https://isr.fbk.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Position-Paper.pdf>.

## PROJECT ITINERARY: 6 PHASES



The website of the project (in Italian): <https://isr.fbk.eu/en/projects/detail/dico-di-no/>

## PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS



**Trento**  
**Headmaster:** Laura Zoller  
**Responsible teacher:** Sandra Fusco



**Trento**  
**Headmaster:** Boccardi Maria Silvia  
**Responsible teacher:** Emanuela Anzelini



**Rovereto (TN)**  
**Headmaster:** Laura Scalfi  
**Responsible teacher:** Rocco Zanoni



**Rome, presso la succursale "Elsa Morante"**  
**Headmaster:** Cristina Tonelli  
**Responsible teacher:** Alberto Capone



**Rome**  
**Headmaster:** Patrizia Marini  
**Responsible teacher:** Monica Vagnucci



**Rome**  
**Headmaster:** Elena Zacchilli  
**Responsible teacher:** Antonella Di Scanno e Angela Di Gesaro

# RESEARCH ACTIONS AND FINDINGS

## 1. MONITORING THE WEB WITH HATEMETER

June – October 2018

In order to reconstruct and give back to the students a **mapping of the phenomenon of the spread of hate speech on the web**, the computer tool Hatemeter, developed by the Smart Cities and Communities unit of FBK-ICT, was used, which produced a first data collection on hate speech appeared on Twitter and Facebook. The project proposed an attempt at classification that tries to identify some constants in the behaviors of digital haters, tracing different roles, depending on the way they adopt to disseminate their hate speech online. The platform also highlighted that, as far as social media is concerned, hate speech is also spread on other social media, such as YouTube. In fact, although there are specific policies that censor YouTube videos containing hate messages, the same constraints do not apply to comments on videos.

Summarizing briefly the first phase of data collection, Hatemeter recorded an increase in hate speech throughout the country. Religious minorities, such as Muslims and Jews, are the most sensitive targets of these speeches. Islamophobia, in particular, registers the most alarming results, especially because it is reinforced by populist and extreme right-wing political propaganda. The Hatemeter has highlighted, in fact, that the speeches of hatred against the Moslems are often concentrated under certain popular tags, such as: #Islamization; #Musulmerda; #Afro-Islamic; #NOIslamization; #NoIslam; #NoMoschee; #STOPIslam; #StopMuslim; #NoAllaMoschea; #IonononMuslim; #EuropaChristianamaiMuslim; etc.; and in combinations of keywords and hashtags, which in many cases affect political parties, or their leaders, such as: #SalviniPremier; #SalviniPremier; #SalviniNonMollare; #Lega; #casapound; #centrodestra; #fratelliditalia.

The data were then reused in the second didactic workshops, where some examples of the dangerous connections that can be triggered between hate stories, social media and religious/ethnic minorities were given to the children.

## 2. PREPARATORY MEETINGS AND EXPLORATORY FOCUS GROUPS

October 2018

The opening event of the project was held on November 8, 2018 and involved a **videoconference**, organized at the headquarters of the Center of Religious Sciences by the Bruno Kessler Foundation, where the students of the Trentino schools went, while the participating Roman classes were simultaneously connected online.

Subsequently, **8 exploratory focus groups** were organized:

- 2 with representatives and operators of territorial organizations, Roman and Trentino, active in the field of integration and the fight against discrimination on ethnic/religious grounds.
- 6 with students at each of the schools participating in the project.

The exploratory focus groups collected opinions and experiences on the central themes of the project.

With respect to focus groups with organisations and associations active in anti-discrimination programmes, the following points should be highlighted:

- Growth in recent years in the demand by school staff for the integration of the educational offer through interventions and projects aimed at diversity education.
- Serious lack of information of young people reached in school contexts regarding cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in Italy and in the territories.
- Particular recurrence in recent years of cases of hatred and discrimination in the territory but also in the school context, implemented not only by students but also by school staff. However, knowledge of these episodes does not always spread among the actors and bodies involved.
- Dearth of virtuous and systematic collaborations between organizations and between these and the school world, prevalence of extemporaneous ways of coordination.
- Lack of coordination and communication between the realities that similarly deal with these issues on the territory.

With respect to the focus groups with young people reached in the six schools, the following evidence emerged for the main thematic areas explored, necessarily in synthetic form:

**Religiousness.** The majority of young people are divided between a weak identification with Catholicism and the lack of importance attributed to religion and spirituality in their own lives; a certain proportion of adolescents, however, oscillates between less defined positions (for example, those related to "believing without belonging" or "belonging without believing"). Finally, a minority profess religions other than Christian-Catholic; among these, there is a prevalence of Muslims and Orthodox.

**Orientations towards religious diversity.** Generally understood as a value by the majority of young people encountered (especially in high schools, therefore by young people with a medium-high socio-cultural background), religious diversity is a phenomenon little or not at all known, in its sociological characteristics, by the students reached. Faced with the lack of information transmitted by the school (except in the case of some IRC courses particularly oriented in this direction also in the schools involved in this study), the role played by the family context and the media in contributing to the representation of the phenomenon is robust. With greater frequency in technical and professional institutes we find the spread of prejudices, mainly negative, against specific religious groups. This is the case, above all, of Islam (for which there are recurrent overlaps with the questions of violent radicalism, terrorism and the lack of respect for human rights), but not only (the judgement associated with Jehovah's Witnesses, often labeled as "sect", is emblematic). At the same time, students tend to be interested in learning by attributing to the school the role of the main space devoted to the transmission of this information.

**The direct experience of religious diversity.** This is a point that can be distinguished from the previous one by the consideration that the multiculturalism present in classes and youth networks in Italy is a fact that increasingly involves young people reached. Our interlocutors have in fact in many cases - especially in professional and technical institutes, where the presence of students with a migrant background thickens as we know - a direct experience of religious diversity through classmates or companions, schools or informal networks that profess "other" religions or that make it seem like a cultural and family context linked to them. In the majority of cases, however, the young people met during the focus groups admit that in these relational experiences they have not deepened the deeper aspects - or even the more difficult ones, capable of fuelling controversy - of this "otherness". The same young people belonging to religious minorities tend to confirm that contents and practices linked to their own tradition are not the object of comparison in relations between peers. It seems, therefore, that the opportunity of the *mixité* in the social and friendly

sphere is not sufficient to make young people fully aware of the implications of religious diversity in social and individual life.

**Concepts of secularity.** With respect to the idea of secularism, explored mainly with regard to the position that schools should take with respect to religion and religious diversity, the young people encountered are quite clearly divided between the favour given to the priority to be given to the Catholic religion, seen in terms of identity (i.e., a legitimate part of national culture), and the rejection of any recognition of religion by this educational institution as public and secular (an idea of neutrality that can therefore be placed side by side with the strictly French idea of secularism). Significantly, the positions in favour of an inclusive secularism, which recognizes and admits in an egalitarian way contents and symbols referable to the different religions in the school context, appears to be completely minority. In addition, a large number of students are evidently not aware of and/or not interested in the subject.

**Offense and hatred.** The discussions in the focus groups have revealed the overexposure of young people to the debates and the often offensive tones through which the media usually deal with issues related to diversity and religious minorities. In particular, young people witness media narratives and representations often based on negative prejudices that often produce erroneous overlaps, as in the case of the Muslim/migrant association, or Islam/terrorism. In general, moreover, there is a certain normalisation of hatred, in affinity with various other international research on the subject, which raises the level of tolerability of certain hostile contents and styles of communication diffused on the web and social networks. In many cases, students have shown to face the phenomenon with a certain "lightness", indicating the inevitability of the circulation of hostile messages, the absence of reaction or the use of a disenchanted and ironic attitude in the face of hatred.

**The direct experience of hate speech.** Compared to the direct experience of hate and hate speech in peer relations or in the use of social media, the young people met return a scenario in which these hostile or violent communications occur more in the context of peer conflicts related to personal and relational issues and much more rarely concern conflicts related to political opinions or ethical visions on current issues or issues of collective interest. To a large extent, they indicate the participation in the latter type of conflict on the web as more widespread among the adult generations, who confront each other using social networks such as Facebook or Twitter for this purpose.

**The dilemma of freedom of expression versus web regulation against hate speech.** Individual freedom to express one's opinions seems to count more than the idea of the need to intervene to limit hostile or violent content on the web. This should be interpreted considering the overall priority given by young people - but also by adults - to the immediately individual sphere in contemporary societies, as well as considering that there is little awareness of the effects that hate speech can have on victims in terms of discrimination and social exclusion.

**Dialogue as communicative practice.** On the whole, dialogue, as a method and as an instrument of comparison, both online and offline, appears to be 'the great absentee'. In most cases, the students say that they find it difficult to sustain controversial debates, testifying to the absence of spaces dedicated to guided, informed and respectful dialogue in the school context. the guided, informed and respectful dialogue in the school context.





### 3. LAB: NARRATIVES AND COUNTERNARRATIVES THROUGH *COMMUNICS*

November – December 2018

In each school a class group of about 25 students was activated and was involved in both the first and second cycle of workshops.

During the first cycle (consisting of 2 meetings of about 2 hours each) students worked, in small groups, on computer-mediated exercises aimed at testing and developing skills related to the deconstruction of intolerant and/or hate speech and the construction of counter-narratives. In particular, a tool (*Communicis*) developed by FBK's Smart cities and communities researchers and already tested in previous peace education projects was used.



The stories created by the three pairs of schools have allowed us to identify the themes and narratives that reflect the students' imaginations, questions and opinions on religious diversity and forms of discrimination.

Among the themes that have emerged most frequently:

- the condition of submission of women within the Muslim culture/religion, closely related to the use of the veil. This problem that clearly emerges in discussions about the possibility for Muslim women to wear the veil in Italy: ambivalence of the veil as an object, contrasting meanings (identity, submission),
- The criminalization of immigrants, normally associated with Muslim culture/religion and automatically associated with Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.
- The “invasion” of Muslim immigrants is threatening the existence of Christian values in Europe.

Other problems, although less recurrent, have highlighted the progressive departure of children from the Catholic faith, as a protest against some personal and public positions taken by clerics and against the excessive presence of the Catholic religion in the public sphere (school, politics, etc.) and personal (family) of the children.

## 4. LAB: RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY, INTOLERANCE, AND HATE SPEECH

January – March 2019

Based on the data that emerged from the focus groups and the *Communics* stories, in the second part of the workshop with the same groups of students, activities for **knowledge transmission and reflection on the link between religious diversity, stereotypes and discrimination** was started, involving the classes in the analysis of intolerant discursive practices related to religions and religious diversity. This second cycle of workshops has pursued **two research objectives**:

- a. To deepen the analysis of young people's difficulties, and the consequent educational needs, related to **argumentation and dialogue on controversial topics of intercultural character**.
- b. To deepen the analysis of young people's difficulties and educational needs more specifically related to the **use and creation of online content, particularly concerning the expression of dissent in a non-offensive manner and respectful of the dignity of the other person** to whom they are addressed

Our aim was to: 1.) **provide students with knowledge about cultural and religious plurality** with specific attention to the territorial context in which they live, aimed at overcoming the negative stereotypes associated with ethnic communities and specific religions (in particular, Islam); 2.) **increase awareness of the complexity of issues related to the use of the web, social media and the production of journalistic information**, with specific attention to risks and resources with respect to religious freedom and tolerance; 3. ) **to increase the ability to identify the risks of escalation of conflicts and violence contained in *dangerous speech*** and the explicit verbal violence of which *hate speech* is an expression through the analysis of the content disseminated on information media, social network platforms and in common language; 4.) **to solicit guided reflections on the spaces and methods of dialogue from different perspectives on complex issues of social life and current controversial topics**; 5.) **To build/strengthen strategies and tools to counter hate speech** by the younger generations through the production of counter-narratives.



During the workshops our observation confirmed how the themes (the points of view but also the questions) emerged in the focus groups - therefore with students other than those involved in this phase - are widespread and emblematic with respect to this generation.

Despite the homogeneity of the themes that emerged, the didactic workshops, however, were constructed taking into account the specific characteristics linked not only to territoriality, but also to the socio-economic context in which the schools were inserted. In fact, the interventions required the continuous modulation of the tools and languages that would be used in the different classes, requiring, therefore, not a standardized intervention, but a constant attention and evaluation of the most suitable methodologies to be used to arouse the interest and participation of all students from Trento to Rome.

This tension between reflection and construction of the educational intervention allowed us to gather the full appreciation of both the teachers and the students, who were always very receptive in the moments of unconventional training that we proposed.

## 5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Since November 2018

The development of the intervention research work was accompanied by weekly meetings of the research group and by a constant comparison with the teachers responsible for the 6 schools involved. This monitoring made it possible to calibrate the intervention in the way most responsive to the challenges and emerging needs in progress.

The DICO DI NO project is currently included in the Impact Assessment plan that FBK has launched internally in order to assess the quality of some research projects of high interest, thanks to the collaboration between the Research Assessment Unit (Head Bruno Caprile) and the Institute for Public Policy Evaluation Research (FBK-

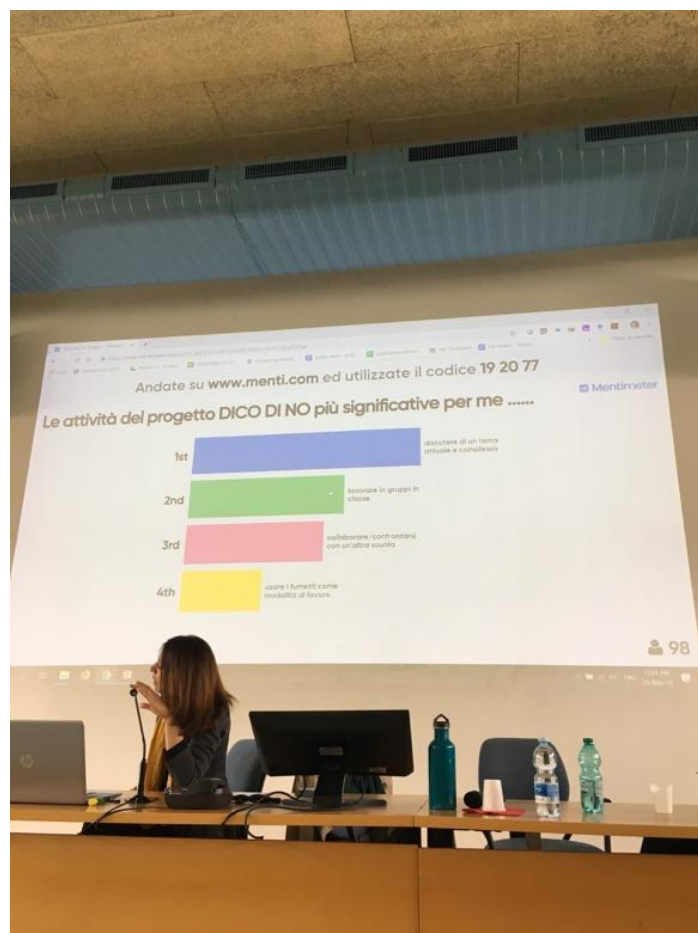
IRVAPP, Director Andrea Bonaccorsi). The results will of course be made known to Fondazione Intercultura as soon as they are available.

The participation and collaboration shown by both school staff - managers and teachers - and students throughout the project can be considered an indicator of interest in the issues addressed and the success of the activities carried out. In this sense, it is worth reporting the outcome of some questions submitted by **questionnaire to students in the Trentino area** during the final meeting on: a) the topics of greatest interest dealt with in the workshops; b) the most significant activities.

Regarding the first point, we have seen a strongly balanced distribution between the modes of response:

social media and hate messages (3.6%), data and information on religious diversity (3.2%), the construction of stereotypes and prejudices (3.5%), current debates concerning diversity (3.5%). We interpret this data as in favour of the good integration of the contents conceived and proposed during the project.

With respect to the second question, it should be pointed out that the overall preference given to the first mode of response - "to discuss a current and complex issue" -, which has been chosen by 74 students, may reflect the need to intervene on issues that the girls and boys reached consider urgent and not sufficiently addressed at school. Subsequently, the responses indicated as more significant activities "working in groups in the classroom", "collaborating with another school" and finally "using comics as a way of working".





## 6. DISCUSSION AND DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

May – June 2019

The students were also actively involved in the return phase of the training course carried out, through the creation of **original products**, which were incorporated into events held on the national territory. In particular, the students and teachers involved contributed to the creation of **thematic bookmarks** which were distributed, through the loan system, within the national library circuit and in a more widespread way within the libraries of Trentino as an initiative to raise awareness of the project's themes.



The initiative came about as a result of collaboration with AIB (Italian Libraries Association) and the Office for the Trentino Library System and Cultural Participation of the Autonomous Province of Trento, which promotes the **Rights and Duties Campaign** on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948).



In addition, students were invited to take part in the creation of multimedia materials (a video presentation of the entire project) which was presented at the Human Rights Festival, held at MaXXI in Rome on May 11, 2019.



On May 15, the final meeting of the project was also held in Trento, at the Aula Magna of ITT m. Buonarroti, which involved other schools in the area.

Dissemination of the project results through the participation of the researchers involved in **seminars and conferences** is underway and in preparation. To date, Valeria Fabretti presented the results of the project at the First International Conference of the Rivista Scuola Democratica, *Education and Post-Democracy* (6/7 June, Cagliari) and Alessandra Vitullo presented the project at the Festival *Informatici Senza Frontiere* in Rovereto, and *the Smart Cities Week* in Trento.

Based on the results of the project, a **training module for teachers** in each discipline of secondary schools has been developed and positively received by the Provincial Institute for Educational Research and Experimentation – IPRAE. The module will be included in the programme starting with September 2019.

In terms of As FBK editorial products, in collaboration with Fondazione Intercultura, we should mention the release in October 2019 of the third issue of FBK's series **Quaderni di scuola**<sup>2</sup>, which will be entirely dedicated to the DICO DI NO project. The Notebook will be **open access** and will therefore be easily accessible to school communities and citizens in general. Finally, a **book** is currently being realised, edited by Valeria Fabretti and Alessandra Vitullo and published by FBK Press, which will contain contributions from the researchers involved in the project on the various stages, themes and results of the work carried out.

## CONCLUSION: TOWARDS NEW ACTION-RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Regarding the current availability of data related to the study of the presence of online hate speech, it is necessary to diversify the mapping of the web, including analyses that observe in more detail which are the social networks through which young people communicate, using which languages, and which are the most discussed topics. Moreover, in the light of the path taken, it is necessary to extend the research, through a quantitative methodology based on the administration of questionnaires, to verify the validity of the results, but also the working hypotheses that have emerged.

With respect to the target group of teachers, during the DICO DI NO project there was a need to provide teachers of all subjects with the theoretical and practical tools needed to address the issues identified so far in the classroom, even outside the project framework. The aim is to provide, through training courses, **contents and methodologies able to integrate the regular didactic plans with the necessary tools to understand and adequately manage conflictual situations**, which young people live in their daily experiences, either in first person, or passively through indirect stories, or media.

It is therefore important to confirm the following objectives:

- To increase knowledge and skills concerning ethnic and religious diversity
- To raise awareness about the exposure of the most vulnerable young people to the risks brought about by the consumption/creation of intolerant and violent content on the web and social media.
- To support the identification of effective educational strategies for conflict management, in general and related to diversity and ethnic and religious minorities in particular.
- To develop capacities to guide young people in building effective counter-narratives to counter argumentative violence against ethnic and religious diversity.

The training module for teachers that we have submitted to IPRASE (Provincial Institute for Educational Research and Experimentation) is a first step in this direction. However, equally urgent is the need to build training paths for those who actively work in the field of **non-formal and inclusive education**, as in the fight against **juvenile educational poverty**. The two focus groups carried out with territorial organizations, which were preparatory to the launch of the DICO DI NO project in its first edition, have in fact highlighted the sphere of non-formal education as central to the possibility of intervening in processes of social inclusion. Given the heterogeneity of the practices that emerged, and the lack of integrated visions able to guide the work of educators and social workers in the common intent to **prevent or combat intolerance**, there is crucial need to

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<sup>2</sup> Please visit the following link for further information: <https://books.fbk.eu/publicazioni/collane/quaderni-di-scuola/>



- to contribute to a reflection that has as its object not only the complexity of intercultural issues but also the specificity of the religious variable, which is more difficult to focus on and address;
- to support educators and operators in contact with adolescents in effectively addressing the **dimension of the web** and its use by young people, considering both the resources offered by the web and the risks associated with it.

In this direction, the new project proposal foresees that, thanks to the collaboration with some NGOs of national importance, it will be possible to reach about 60 educators and operators involved in services for minors and adolescents in the territories of Rome and Trento.

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have supported and helped to spread our work.**