1. HOW TO DEAL WITH ONLINE HARASSMENT?

Online harassment is an unfortunate aspect of public life today, especially in the realm of social media. It affects public and private individuals alike.

Simply appearing in the public does not necessarily lead to online harassment. Still, acknowledging the risks is the key to minimizing them. This guide provides information on what to do if you or someone in your community becomes a target of harassment, and how to prevent risks.

1.1.   WHAT IS ONLINE HARASSMENT?

Typically, online harassment consists of messages on social media, but disruptive or threatening emails, calls, text messages, or letters are also possible.

The goal of harassment is often to silence the target through intimidation, pressure, threats, mockery, or humiliation. Online harassment restricts democracy and public discourse, even though freedom of speech is often used to justify it. Women and minorities are disproportionately targeted by harassment.

Sometimes, someone may encourage a large number of people to send hateful messages to a specific person or group in large numbers. This is referred to as online targeting. Harassment may also include doxxing. Doxxing refers to the digging up and publishing of the victim's personal information on social media or media outlets posing as credible sources. Both doxxing and targeted harassment can be distressing experiences for the victim, akin to emotional abuse.

1.2.   IF YOU BECOME A TARGET OF HARASSMENT

- **Reach out for support**. Seek support from a trusted one. If you are harassed due to your work, inform your supervisor, occupational safety representative and harassment contact person. Ask for help: for example, ask a close one to remove unpleasant content from your email if reading the messages feels distressing.
- **Seek out professional support.** Online harassment can be a distressing experience and undermine the victim's sense of safety. It is normal to experience difficult emotions.
- **Remember that your situation is not unique:** targeted harassment is a wide phenomenon that affects a range of public figures. Harassers attack based on the group, ideology, or organization that you represent, rather than you specifically. Try not to take it personally, even though the insults may get very personal. You have done nothing wrong.
- **Don't stop taking up public space.** Let's not allow harassers control public discourse. They achieve their goals if they succeed in limiting their victim's freedom of expression.

- **File a criminal report.** In some cases, online harassment may classify as a crime. Possible criminal offenses may include illegal threats, unauthorized disclosure of personal information, spreading privacy-invading information, or defamation. It's okay if you don't know the exact criminal offense – the police will determine the appropriate classification for the case if an investigation is opened. **If you are unsure, file a report.**
- **Document the hostile communication or false claims about you.** This documentation may be useful when filing a criminal report. You can take screenshots of hateful messages or ask someone close to you to do so. You may also save the page where hateful content appears as a file on your computer. This way, you can view the page as it was at the time of saving, even if harassers edit it later. You can save the page by right-clicking on the page and selecting "Save As."

1.3. IF SOMEONE IN YOUR COMMUNITY IS TARGETED BY ONLINE HARASSMENT

- **Offer your support**. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. Ask the target what kind of support they would like. Listen to the victim and take their feelings seriously. Online harassment is a problem for the entire community, not just the individual.
- **Do not respond to the disturbing messages or visit any dubious sites spreading false claims.** Any interaction with harassing messages or visits to sites spreading false claims enhances their visibility. Do not share or comment the content, even if your intention is to support the victim.
- **Do not share information about online harassment with outsiders without the target's permission.** Distorted or sensitive information about the victim may have been published. Do not share information about harassment or links to fake news outlets without the victim's consent.

1.4. HOW TO DEAL WITH HARASSERS?

- **Do not respond to online haters.** You do not owe them your time or attention. Responding often provokes online bullies further.
- **Block troublesome users**.
- **Mute disturbing conversations in which you are tagged.**
- **Report and delete offensive messages.** You have the right to moderate your social media space.
- **If you receive a harassing phone call, do not continue the conversation**. According to Journalisti magazine, in Sweden some harassers have recorded calls, edited them, and published the modified recordings. This phenomenon has now also been encountered in Finland.

1.5.   HOW TO PREVENT ONLINE HARASSMENT?

Being aware of the risks and possibility of online harassment can reduce shock if you become a victim. However, you do not need to stop appearing in public: the key is to be aware of the risks and be prepared for them.

There are some easy steps you can take to prevent the spread of personal information by strengthening your cybersecurity.

- **Encrypt your personal phone number.** Check if your personal phone number is available online. If you wish, you may encrypt your personal phone number through your service provider.
- **Remove your home address from the internet.** If you have your own business or trade name, and your home address can be easily found, consider removing your home address from publicly available information. In harassment situations, offensive or threatening letters, for example, are possible. You can prevent this by removing your home address from online sources.
- **Apply for a data disclosure prohibition.** You can request a data disclosure prohibition Digital and Population Data Services Agency (DVV). In this case, DVV cannot disclose your personal information to anyone inquiring about it.
- **Request your phone number private at your workplace.** You can request that it be hidden from your organization's website and prohibit the number from being disclosed to those inquiring about it.
- **Enable two-factor authentication on your online accounts.** This is wise for general cybersecurity as well.
- **Use strong passwords.** Change your passwords regularly and do not store your account username and password information in the same place.
- **Do not share sensitive information online or on messaging apps.** Consider what information you publicly disclose on the internet. Essential information such as passwords or personal details should not be shared on messaging apps.
- **Apply for a non-disclosure.** Non-disclosure is a temporary measure applied through DVV. Under non-disclosure, your address information can only be shared with authorities who are authorized to handle information subject to non-disclosure. However, non-disclosure can complicate activities such as strong authentication and using online banking, so use this option carefully.

Being a target of online harassment is unfortunately a common but usually quickly passing experience. Although online hate can be taxing, preventive measures can reduce the chances for unwelcome communication from harassers.

It is important to raise the issue in public conversation, so we can promote a safer online environment for experts, journalists, officials, researchers, artists, and all netizens of the internet.