

From the trivialisation of *verbal violence* to *hate speech*.

Deciphering, taking better action to restore the social bond

MARIE-CLAUDE PICARDAT AND SOUÂD BELHADDAD

While verbal violence has always existed, its trivialisation in public spaces and debates is unprecedented: insults, denigration, threats, contempt... are spreading on public transport, in schools, in the world of work, in public services, on social networks, in the media and even among politicians. It affects us all – from children to adults, from professionals to elected representatives – and is eroding respect for the equal dignity of every individual.

Generally centered around issues of racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, homophobia, etc., this verbal violence can be categorised as hate speech according to the Council of Europe. Recently, new figures have also emerged as victims of this hate speech: environmental activists, people living in poverty, representatives of human rights associations, etc.

This verbal violence and hate speech have concrete effects on individuals and on the unity of our country:



1 in 5
women

closes their social media accounts following cyberbullying, thus depriving themselves of a democratic voice

Source: Feminists against cyberbullying



84%

of care workers say they regularly suffer physical and verbal aggression

Source: MNH – Odoxa 2022

- **On health:** physical symptoms (pain, sleep, appetite or digestion problems), emotional (anxiety, sadness, etc.) and intellectual (concentration problems, etc.) symptoms in victims, which can lead to depression and even suicide, such as in cases of school bullying or cyberbullying.
- **On social cohesion:** the disintegration and destruction of social ties between individuals, weakening the unity of society and its ability to collectively meet social, economic and environmental challenges
- **On democracy:** public debate of declining quality, stigmatising sections of the population, dividing rather than uniting, and having a detrimental effect on the willingness of citizens who are victims to participate in public life
- **On the economy and the labour market:** verbal abuse affecting the private and public sectors, with impacts on economic development and an increase in absenteeism, staff turnover, workplace accidents...

This verbal abuse and hate speech therefore have an impact on all of us, in our personal and professional lives, in our minds as well as in our bodies. For all these reasons, it is an absolutely major issue for society that must be the subject of ambitious public policies.

How can the social bond be restored?

OPINION

1 UNDERSTANDING, IDENTIFYING AND PREVENTING

→ **A. By entrusting the Public Statistical Service (SSP) with the production of data on verbal abuse and hate speech and by promoting a research program to evaluate them throughout the country, including overseas territories.**

→ *Why?* There are no global statistics on this phenomenon. In order to understand and prevent it, it is necessary to be able to measure and evaluate it.

→ **B. By raising awareness about verbal abuse and hate speech and their effects through communication campaigns.**

→ *Why?* The phenomenon is suffered and sometimes propagated by each and every one of us. We are often unaware of its concrete effects. Restoring the social bond will be achieved through a collective that is aware of and convinced of the need to act.

→ **C. By supporting parents in their educational role through a public policy of support for parenthood.**

→ *Why?* The family is the primary place of socialisation for children: by training and supporting parents in the prevention of and fight against verbal violence, they will prepare their children even more effectively to become citizens who respect others.

2 RESPONDING AND REPAIRING

→ **A. By recommending to magistrates, under the general instruction of the Keeper of the Seals, to request a sentence of ineligibility against any public or political figure who is guilty of acts relating to hatred and violence.**

→ *Why?* The ESEC considers that political and public officials wishing to accede to elective office must set an example and cannot disregard republican values.

→ **B. By creating an independent organisation under the aegis of Arcom dedicated to the fight against online hate speech.**

→ *Why?* Tens of thousands of violent posts are reported every day on social networks. An independent organisation would ensure that digital platforms comply with their obligations and impose financial penalties in the event of misconduct.

→ **C. By recommending that sports federations and professional leagues, particularly football, systematically declare an immediate 15-minute interruption of the competition and a total stoppage in the event of a repeat offence, in the event of a racist insult by a sportsman, referee or spectator.**

→ *Why?* Sport is an important factor for cohesion in France. Protecting competitions from verbal abuse and hate speech would help preserve social cohesion and encourage supporters and clubs to take action against such behavior.

REPORTERS

Souâd Belhaddad

01 44 43 64 04 • souad.belhaddad@lecese.fr

EESC member and adviser to the Associations group, she is the founder and representative of Citoyenneté Possible, journalist and consultant in collective intelligence.

Marie-Claude Picardat

01 44 43 64 33 • marie-claude.picardat@lecese.fr

EESC advisor and member of the Families group, she represents the Association des parents et futurs parents gays et lesbiens (APGL) and works as a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst.