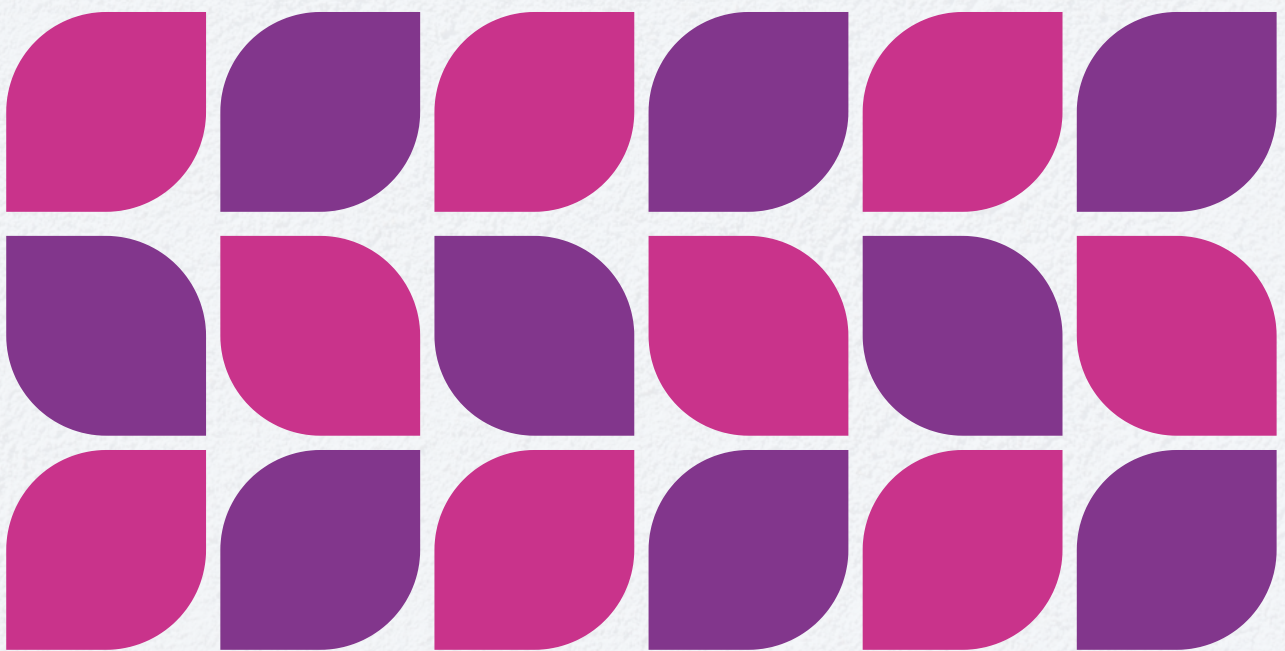


# BROWSING THROUGH HATE





# ABOUT THE PROJECT

THE RESPONSES PROJECT AIMS TO COUNTER THE GROWING ONLINE HATE SPEECH AND DISINFORMATION TARGETING LGBTI+ PEOPLE IN BULGARIA BY CREATING NEW TOOLS, NETWORKS, AND KNOWLEDGE. THE PROJECT IS IMPLEMENTED DURING THE PERIOD JUNE 2025 – MAY 2027, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S CERV-2024-CHAR-LITI PROGRAMME. THE PROJECT COORDINATOR IS THE GLAS FOUNDATION, AND THE PARTNERS ARE THE BILITIS RESOURCE CENTER FOUNDATION, THE ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN JOURNALISTS – BULGARIA (AEJ BULGARIA), AND THE BULGARIAN SOCIETY FOR PSYCHOANALYSIS AND GROUP ANALYTIC PSYCHOTHERAPY (BOPGA).

The views and opinions expressed are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the funding authority can be held responsible for them.



БЪЛГАРСКО ОБЩЕСТВО  
ПО ПСИХОАНАЛИЗА  
И ГРУПОВА АНАЛИЗА





# INTRODUCTION

This resource was created within the framework of the project **RESPONSES - Responses to Online Hate Speech Against LGBTIQ+ People in Bulgaria**, which aims to strengthen the capacity of civil society, the media, and the LGBTIQ+ community to respond more effectively to online hate speech and to reduce its negative consequences on people's well-being and rights. The project is implemented by a partnership between **GLAS Foundation, Bilitis Resource Center, the Association of European Journalists – Bulgaria (AEJ), and Kabinet.bg – emergency psychotherapy and emotional support of the Bulgarian Society of Psychoanalysis and Group Analysis.**

The authors of this informational resource are Bilitis Foundation, Kabinet.bg, and AEJ. It combines three complementary perspectives:

- the experience of activists who work daily with the most vulnerable members of the LGBTIQ+ community;
- the expertise of mental health specialists supporting people affected by online aggression;
- and the journalistic view of the risks the internet poses, including the spread of disinformation and coordinated hate campaigns.

More than 30 LGBTIQ+ individuals actively contributed to this resource by participating in an online survey and sharing personal views, having a vital role in shaping the content.

“Browsing through hate” aims to provide different methods through which we can use online spaces while prioritizing our own mental health. These spaces in themselves can be overwhelming, but for LGBTIQ+ people and many other marginalized groups they often also turn into a battlefield, in which they have to avoid online hate speech, threats, and negative stereotypes.

Here you will find specific recommendations for creating and maintaining online spaces that make us feel safe. Spaces that support the building of communities and connection with other people, provide access to services, and create a sense of togetherness instead of division.

## **The resource includes:**

- Information about warning signs of emotional overload
- First steps and ways to prioritize oneself
- When and where to seek support

### **This resource is not:**

- A substitute for psychological counseling

Psychotherapeutic support can be an important part of improving mental health. This resource focuses on practical advice for improving our relationship with online spaces. At the end of the document you can find up-to-date resources for psychological support.

- “One size fits all”

This resource provides initial guidelines and advice and does not claim to provide every possible solution. Take what is useful for you.

- A catalogue of all possible responses when encountering hate speech

“Browsing through hate” focuses on our online existence and the actions we can take.

If you need to report your experience or are interested in the legal framework and other possibilities, you can turn to the [“Catalogue of responses to online hate speech against LGBTI+ people”](#).



# NAVIGATING ONLINE SPACES: SELF-CARE IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

The online spaces in which we spend a significant part of our daily life - social networks, news platforms, and forums - are not neutral terrains. They are environments deliberately designed to shape not only what information reaches us but also how we experience it. The algorithms and design of most platforms are built around one main goal: to keep our attention for as long as possible. For this purpose, they systematically push forward content that provokes strong emotions - anger, fear, outrage, and panic.

In such an environment, quiet, complex, and balanced voices sink, while extreme and conflict-driven messages receive disproportionately high visibility. This happens not because they are more truthful or more important, but because they more easily turn into clicks, shares, and longer retention of attention on social media - and this means more revenue for the platforms. The emotional harm they cause is not a side effect, but part of the price we pay in an economy built on our attention.

Hate speech is deeply embedded in this dynamic. For us, LGBTIQ+ people, this is not an abstract problem, but an everyday reality with real consequences. We encounter content that undermines our dignity or questions our very right to exist - often without having sought it, simply because algorithms bring it into our field of view. Sometimes this violence is disguised as “opinion”, “debate”, or “joke”, but its effect remains the same: chronic tension, a feeling of insecurity, and deep emotional exhaustion in spaces that are supposedly part of our normal everyday life.

**It is important to say it clearly:** when the online environment crushes us, this is not a personal failure, weakness, or lack of “resilience”. The nervous system is not designed to endure a constant flow of violence, conflicts, opinions, and other creature’s pain. The fact that so many people feel anxious, exhausted, overwhelmed, or want to withdraw does not mean that this is “normal” - it means that it is a widespread phenomenon in an environment that systematically drains our attention, emotions, and energy.

These are understandable and human reactions to a toxic digital reality, but they are not a state we should accept. Our goal is not to break ourselves so that we can “endure more”, but to reclaim our right to choose - to set boundaries, to withdraw, to protect ourselves, and to decide how, when, and to what extent we want to be present online.



# HOW CAN WE RECOGNISE THAT THE DIGITAL WORLD IS WEIGHING ON US?

Digital exhaustion rarely appears suddenly. More often, it accumulates slowly and unnoticed until it becomes a constant state. This is especially true when online spaces are closely intertwined with our work, social life, or activism. That is why recognizing early signals is not a whim, but an act of self-preservation - a way to listen to our bodies and minds when the environment is already harming us.



## PHYSICAL SIGNALS

- tension and stiffness in the shoulders, neck, or jaw;
- accelerated breathing or shortness of breath;
- tightness in the chest and heart palpitations;
- chronic fatigue, headaches, or disturbed sleep;
- a feeling of “freezing” or difficulty leaving the device and disconnecting from the screen.



## EMOTIONAL SIGNALS

- constant irritability, anger, or a feeling of helplessness;
- anxiety, fear, and heightened vigilance, as if we are constantly on alert;
- sadness, apathy, and emotional exhaustion, often accompanied by a desire for complete withdrawal;
- shame and internal self-blame.



## COGNITIVE SIGNALS

- intrusive “reopening” of offensive or provoking comments or posts;
- tense anticipation of the next attack or negative reaction;
- pessimistic generalizations such as “everything is like this” or “there is no point”;
- difficulty maintaining attention on other activities that are important to us.



## BEHAVIORAL SIGNALS

- spending much more time scrolling than we intended (doomscrolling)
- compulsively checking platforms for new notifications;
- beginning to avoid topics or spaces that previously gave us meaning;
- postponing rest, meetings, or activities that bring us joy;
- feeling that we cannot rest without constant digital stimulation - we scroll out of habit while doing other activities.

In our conversations with the community, many people share that they recognise these signals, but do not seek support. Often, the reason is that we are conditioned to perceive this exhaustion as “normal” or an inevitable price of our presence online.

**Important reminder:** none of these signals is proof of weakness or “inability to cope”. They are completely human reactions to an intense, conflictual, and systematically emotionally burdening environment. To recognise them in time means allowing ourselves to slow down, to take care of ourselves, and to set boundaries in the name of our own and our collective well-being.

## HOW CAN WE NAVIGATE THE INTERNET IN A SAFER AND MORE GENTLE WAY?

Navigating digital spaces is not a test of endurance, nor proof of a “strong character”. It is a personal and ever-changing process. At different moments in our lives, we need different strategies - sometimes to remain visible, but with clearly defined boundaries, and at other times to withdraw completely in order to protect our peace. Both choices are legitimate and necessary.

In conversations with the community, we often hear a feeling of being lost in the flow of hostility. The following suggestions are not rules, but tools - ways to regain a sense of control and autonomy online.

### CHOOSE OUR LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Not every provocation deserves our energy. In an environment that insists on immediate reaction, the choice not to engage is an act of self-protection. It is normal to feel guilt when we do not respond, or fear that we are “not doing enough”. But when our resources are exhausted, we cannot be a support for anybody. Taking care of ourselves is not a withdrawal from the community - it is a condition for remaining in it. It is possible to be informed without becoming a target or entering exhausting conflicts.

#### **Options for protection include:**

- quiet presence - reading without participating in comments and disputes;
- information hygiene - limiting ourselves to topics and sources that do not destabilize us;
- measured participation - engaging only when we have the resources and desire;
- temporary absence - complete withdrawal when we feel that the environment becomes suffocating.



## MANAGE WHAT REACHES US

Although platforms try to manage our attention, we have the right to arrange our digital space according to our own needs. Small technical choices are real protective barriers:

- active filtering - mute, block, and filtering of keywords without guilt;
- silence by choice - turning off notifications from overwhelming accounts or topics;
- selection of sources - a few reliable voices instead of constant noise;
- closing the door - avoiding comment sections that are often structured to fuel conflict, not dialogue.



## BUILD A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Online presence is not only about defending. It can also be a place for connection:

- follow people, collectives, and organizations that affirm your existence and make you feel connected, accepted, and heard;
- seek and participate in safer LGBTIQ+ spaces, where care is a priority;
- choose content that brings you joy, calm, and meaning beyond the constant struggle.



## SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES IN TIME

Exhaustion often comes not only from the content but also from the prolonged strain on the nervous system. It is useful to introduce practices that bring us back to the body and the present:

- setting specific hours for social networks;
- conscious pauses for “cleansing” after encountering overwhelming content;
- replacing time in front of the screen with activities that ground the body - movement, silence, or real human touch.



## HOW TO REPLACE TIME SPENT ONLINE?

### **Replace according to need, not according to habit**

Reducing time online is rarely a matter of willpower. The internet often fills real and deep needs - for soothing, stimulation, or a sense of connection. When we simply try to “stop”, these needs remain unmet, and the body logically reaches again for the screen.

Ask yourself: “What am I trying to give myself through the phone at this moment?”

1. Scrolling often promises distraction, but in reality further overstimulates the nervous system. Instead, try low-stimulation activities:
  - short breathing practices, stretching, or a warm compress;
  - offline activities such as coloring, knitting, or assembling a puzzle;
  - time with a loved one in silence (“body doubling”) - simply being present in one room without expectations).
2. When you are seeking stimulation and inspiration: If the phone is a way to escape boredom, replace it with tactile sensations:
  - cooking, playing an instrument, or sports;
  - working with the hands - clay, drawing, working with paper;
  - music and intentionally “uncoordinated” movement, in order to release stagnant energy.
3. When you are seeking human connection, social networks give the illusion of closeness but often leave us lonely. Seek authentic connection:
  - voice messages or long emails;
  - walks and meetings with people in front of whom you do not need to be “productive” or interesting.
4. When you are simply “killing time”: Turn these automatic moments into conscious doing-nothing:
  - observing the environment around you;
  - listening to music (a whole album, without skipping);
  - a list of “small joys for 10 minutes” which you have at hand - Tetris, Sudoku, crossword.

### **Tools for support**

When the internal resource is not enough, external help is not weakness, but care for our boundaries:

- applications for blocking websites;
- black-and-white screen mode, so that it becomes less stimulating;
- physical distancing of devices at certain hours.

### **Important principle for sustainability:**

Never remove a habit without offering another in its place. Returning to old patterns is not failure, but a signal that a need of yours is seeking its path. Our goal is not to live in isolation, but to build sustainability in a digital environment that often forgets that behind the profiles stand living, feeling, and fragile human beings.



# WHEN WE ENCOUNTER HATE SPEECH

Encountering hate speech online is real violence, which can provoke a wide spectrum of reactions - from an angry desire for immediate response and defense, through confusion and paralyzing exhaustion, to the need to disappear from the digital space. There is no “correct” or “incorrect” reaction. The way we respond depends on the context, on the moment, and, most of all, on the resources we have at our disposal.

## **Possible responses and reactions**

When we are faced with hate, different paths open before us: to report the content, to seek solidarity and support, to respond with a counter-narrative, or to consciously choose not to engage.

These options are examined in detail in the [“Catalogue of responses to online hate speech against LGBTI+ people”](#), a resource created not to obligate us, but to give us guidance for an informed choice that preserves our dignity. Reporting is one of the tools for limiting harm, but it is never an obligation. You are not required to be moderators, educators, or “digital police”, especially when this exhausts you.

## **FIRST - SELF-CARE**

Regardless of whether you choose to respond, to report, or to withdraw, caring for yourself is the foundation of every choice. Often our inner critic convinces us that we must be on the “front line” in every conflict. But preserving our energy is not an escape - it is a strategy for survival.

To choose yourself means to choose the chance to be part of the community tomorrow as well. If encountering online aggression has shaken you, give yourself permission first to ground yourself - through a pause, a conversation with a trusted person, or techniques for regulating the nervous system.

Your well-being is not secondary. In an environment that often exhausts by design, taking care of yourself is a form of quiet, but deeply radical sustainability.



# CARE FOR OUR MENTAL HEALTH

Our internal resources, mental strengths, and defenses help us cope in difficult situations. Sometimes, however, reality - including the virtual one - is more challenging than we can endure.

When our body hurts, we go to a doctor. When our soul hurts, it is okay to seek psychotherapeutic help.



## WHEN SHOULD WE SEEK HELP FROM A PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOTHERAPIST?

- When we experience psychological pain that we cannot explain.
- When we experience fear, insecurity, and anxiety and do not understand their cause.
- When we are confused, lonely, angry, and cannot cope with our feelings.
- When we are experiencing difficulties, and our familiar ways of coping do not work.
- When we feel in a dead end and do not find the meaning to continue.
- When nothing is as before, we do not cope in everyday life; we are not able to work and love.
- When we want to understand more about ourselves, to explain what is happening.
- When we need change.



## WHY SHOULD WE TURN TO A PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOTHERAPIST?

- At a certain stage of life we experience anxiety, a feeling of meaninglessness, exhaustion, and emptiness, and we are unable to work and to maintain fulfilling contact with other people. "Pull yourself together", "you take everything too personally", and pills do not help.
- Psychotherapy is a personal experience. It happens in the space between two people: therapist and patient, in a situation of acceptance, trust, and empathy. A place where we share our feelings and experiences. In the therapeutic space, we explore the topics that make us struggle without the risk of minimisation or judgment.
- The professional psychotherapist is specially trained to work with psychological processes. They follow confidentiality, an ethical code, and principles of work, and in this way help us reach our full personal potential. This influences our relationships in everyday life, work, enjoyment of life, creativity, and spontaneity.
- The psychotherapist is neutral, outside our everyday circle of close people and acquaintances. It is easier to share and be understood by someone outside our family and friends, who will not judge us for whatever we share.
- The psychotherapist has undergone personal therapy and training, knows how to use their own feelings, and can listen to and understand us.
- The psychotherapist is someone on our side.



## HOW CAN WE FIND A PSYCHOTHERAPIST WHO IS SUITABLE FOR US?

In Bulgaria, psychotherapy is not legally regulated. It is important to note that the **Bulgarian Association for Psychotherapy (BAP)** is the only professional umbrella organisation for psychotherapists in the country. Its members - individual and group members - can serve as an initial reference list of therapists and professional psychotherapeutic modalities recognized in the country, which we can trust. BAP maintains a Register of Psychotherapists in Bulgaria. It is the only legitimate register in the country. It includes registered psychotherapists who are certified and have met the training standards and criteria of the European Association for Psychotherapy (EAP) and BAP. There are also certified therapists outside this Register. They may be individual members of BAP who have not yet registered in the Register, or their registration is on its way. They may be individual members of one of the organisations that are BAP group members. It requires special caution when working with therapists who are not members of any of the organisations, are not group members, and are not individual members of BAP.

**[Kabinet.bg](#) - emergency psychotherapy and emotional support - is a trusted partner of the LGBTIQ+ organizations GLAS and Bilitis.**

The platform was created by the **Bulgarian Society of Psychoanalysis and Group Analysis (BOPGA)**. **[Kabinet](#)** has a team of 25 professional psychotherapists - trained, certified, and practicing according to the highest international standards and ethical norms. BOPGA is a member of BAP, EAP, as well as the European Confederation for Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Psychotherapies (ECPDP). In its training programs, BOPGA partners with Sigmund Freud University in Vienna.

It is good to know that the psychotherapists in the Kabinet team are most often trained and certified in more than one psychotherapeutic modality, such as psychoanalysis, group analysis, psychodrama, sociometry, and group therapy, the systemic approach, and others. They have also undergone academic training in psycho-social work and crisis interventions, are competent, and have professional experience in a wide spectrum of issues: anxiety-depressive states (depression, phobias, panic attacks, intrusive thoughts), traumatic experiences and losses, issues of gender and sexual orientation, eating disorders, addictions, child and adolescent behavioral problems, and others.

When you submit a request on [Kabinet.bg](#), the first point of contact by phone or email will be a professional, certified therapist. After submitting a request, you will be directed to the most suitable therapist on the team based on the topics and problems you specify, the one who can be most helpful to you at the moment.

**How to submit a request to Kabinet and other possibilities for support - see in the RESOURCES section below.**



## WHO IS THE SUITABLE PSYCHOTHERAPIST FOR US?

The decision to seek psychotherapeutic support is often an important and courageous step. Therapy requires commitment and dedication. It is good to have preliminary readiness and attitude for this.

The next question is where to begin and how to choose a suitable therapist. Finding a person with whom to work calmly and with trust may take some time. This process requires and deserves an informed search.

One of the ways is to ask a close person. A recommendation from a friend or acquaintance is often valuable because it comes from personal experience. At the same time, it is important to ask ourselves whether we feel comfortable sharing with this person that we are seeking therapy. Sometimes there may also be hesitation about whether we would want to visit a therapist that an acquaintance already attends.

Another commonly used way is searching online. On the internet we can find websites of specialists, profiles of therapists, or lists of psychotherapeutic organizations.



## WHAT QUESTIONS CAN WE ASK AT THE FIRST CONTACT?

Often the first step is a short conversation with the therapist - by phone, online, or by email. During this initial contact, if we have the need, we may ask questions about the way of working, the therapist's experience, and how the therapeutic process unfolds.

Before the beginning or during the first meeting, we have the opportunity and the right to ask for more information, if needed. The first conversation gives us the opportunity to ask about the therapist's education and training, the therapeutic approach they use, and their experience with topics similar to those that concern us.

It is useful to know how the therapeutic process unfolds, how often the meetings are held, and what their duration is. Practical questions are also important - for example, what is the price of the sessions, what is the policy in case of cancellation of a meeting, and others similar.

Besides the information we receive, it also matters how we feel in the conversation. The feeling of respect, calmness, and understanding is often an indicator of whether the therapist is suitable for us.

Trust is key to the success of therapy. The feelings we experience may be rooted in our history and previous experiences. It is good to address and discuss with the therapist our experiences and sensations during our meetings, to work with them, and not to give up.



## **WHEN MIGHT THE THERAPIST NOT BE SUITABLE FOR US?**

When choosing a therapist, it is necessary to follow trusted, verified recommendations. If we feel homophobic or transphobic reactions, it is good to seek another therapist. We should not see more than one therapist at a time. This carries serious risks for our mental health.

If we feel unheard or misunderstood, that our experiences are minimised, or judged and criticised, this may be a sign that we do not feel sufficiently safe.

In therapy, we experience complex emotional states. What is essential is having a sense of respect and safety. Safety and trust require time and are built gradually as the therapeutic process and relationship deepen. It is good to discuss everything we think, feel, and worry about, to give ourselves and the therapeutic relationship a chance.



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



## LGBTIQ+ FRIENDLY SPACES

If you need a place where you can relax and meet people like you in a safer environment.



### SOFIA

Rainbow Hub  
Magnit  
Menta Space  
The Steps



### POLOVDIV

Community Center “Pogled”



### VARNA

The Social Teahouse



### ONLINE

[The Bilitis Discord Community Server](#)

Visiting supportive spaces and seeking community contact is a way to improve your mental health.



## ORGANIZATIONS

These organizations offer community, additional resources, as well as referral to specialists and support in cases of online and offline hate speech and other forms of violence.

- Bilitis Resource Center Foundation
- GLAS Foundation
- LGBT Deystvie
- Single Step
- Lespectra
- Kikimora
- Pogled Foundation - city of Plovdiv
- Queer Varna Foundation - city of Varna



## RESOURCES

If hate speech affects you emotionally or psychologically, you are not alone. Here are several ways in which you can access support when you need it:

### Available services:

- Free sessions with a professional psychotherapist-consultant from Kabinet.bg.

You can benefit from 3 free sessions with a professional psychotherapist. Book your session - in person, online, by phone, or by email:

- Through the online request form, 24/7
- By email at info@kabinet.bg, 24/7
- On the free telephone line 0800 20 202, every working day from 10 to 16 hours

- Online chat on the website of Bilitis Foundation

Works from 18:00 to 22:00 every weekday

Can be found at the bottom-right of the organization's website.

- Online chat of Single Step

Works from 20:00 to 23:00 every day

Can be found at the bottom-right of the organisation's website.

- National telephone line for children (applies to people up to 18 years of age, as well as people around them who need advice or support)

National 24-hour telephone line — 116 111

Online chat - every day from 13:00 to 18:00

- Platform for psychological support OneClickAway.

They offer free psychological support to young people up to 25 years of age





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Фондация



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