The media monitors within the Get the Trolls Out! (GTTO) project officially began to work observing the media landscape in several European countries. Their goal is the same as GTTO’s – to spot and counter any discrimination, religious hate speech and incidents against Muslims, Jewish and Christian communities in Europe.

Gathering participants from 6 European countries, the Media Diversity Institute (MDI) hosted a workshop for the GTTO media monitors on 10 – 12 January in London. The lead trainer Dr Verica Rupar from the Auckland University of Technology says that running a workshop ahead of the monitoring is crucial for the success of the project mainly because “it is a chance to do pilot monitoring getting consistency of coding”.
“The Get The Trolls Out project starts from the premise that mainstream media reach the largest audience, have influence on the decision makers, and are the most important in shaping the public opinion. The online dangerous speech becomes more powerful when intertwined with the mainstream media coverage and this has been discussed bringing examples from the UK, France, Belgium, Greece, Germany and Hungary. One might think different social and political context would make it hard to make comparisons, but that is not the case when it comes to the hate speech. Although the legal boundaries and media landscapes differ, Islamophobia and antisemitism enter the media using the same tools of stereotypes, prejudices and othering in all countries involved,” Rupar explains.

During the workshop in London, the participants were equipped with practical skills in media monitoring. They also discussed the news outlets each participant would monitor in their country. These sessions were particularly useful to those with no media monitoring experience, as the participants went through the process of identifying and reporting cases of religious intolerance in the media.

For one of the media monitors who participated at the workshop, Ouafa Lakhal from the European Forum of Muslim Women, the MDI training was very beneficial. “I learned a lot. All trainers and speakers taught me a lot. I was also given an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss different topics and uncertainties in regards to our work,” Lakhal says.
Get The Trolls Out! Workshop for Media Monitors

On the first day of the MDI workshop Dr. Edmundo Bracho from the University of Westminster, presented an introduction to Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. He explained that, since the focus of the GTTO project is on religious intolerance, it is important to know the basics behind different religions. Providing context and knowledge on different religions can help contextualize hate speech and the overall media monitoring experience. Stefanos Katsoulis, who will be monitoring the Greek media for project partner Symbiosis, reiterates this point: “I think that it was very useful to listen to the theoretical background of different religions, in order to understand where, for example, the anti-Muslim sentiment comes from.” Dr. Bracho and the participants also analysed the Rotherham child abuse scandal and how the media reported on it. They identified potential religious intolerance and hate speech that appeared in some media.

Rosanna Rafel-Rix, from the Community Security Trust, gave an in-depth look at antisemitism online. Fiyaz Mughal, from Tell Mama and Faith Matters, talked about Islamophobia online, and looked at the trend in recent years in the UK of rising number of anti-Muslim incidents and hate speech. Nika Jelendorf, MDI’s social media campaigner, also gave a presentation on hate speech online, and the different ways to counter it.

The small group dynamic fostered a lot of discussions between the media monitors, which was not only insightful but also beneficial to the project. Participants brought examples from their own countries and through sharing these, they were all able to get a larger picture of religious intolerance and discrimination worldwide.

“For me as a trainer, it was fantastic to see how representatives of partner organizations and their monitors work well together and complement each other in unpacking intolerance and xenophobia. An outstanding team of monitors indeed.”

To keep up to date with the Get The Trolls Out! project and its activities, follow them on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the website.