As I just finished my master thesis in regards to hate crime, I've had the opportunity to interview some victims of hate crime. Even though my research focussed primarily on the 'real life' hate crimes and less on the online aspect, online hate speech was often mentioned. Not only by the victims that I interviewed, but also by the professionals. More and more are people aware that a violent hate crime is not situated at the beginning in the journey of the offender. It is often predated by researching hate groups, involvement in those groups and online hate speech. As is mentioned in the PowerPoint there is a hate pyramid that describes the evolution of hate towards people, with bias and prejudice at the beginning, followed by discrimination, violence and genocide. If I think back at the interviews with my respondents, I can clearly account for the different stages of the pyramid.

Since I am living in Belgium I would like to mention two fairly recent events that highlight the need for online counter hate speech sensitization and training. The first event is right-wing youth group 'Schild en Vrienden'. This group became widely known when a television reporting exposed their online group which was full of racist memes, texts, photos and even inciting violence (2018). Especially certain memes where the topic of discussion. Some people thought of those memes as an expression of free speech, as a form of humour. Other people were completely appalled by the images used. This group still exists, but the case against their leader is still being researched by the indictment chamber (I do not know if this is the correct translation of the body; 'De Kamer van Inbeschuldigingsteling' is a body within the Belgian justice system that, simply explains, supervises the course of the judicial investigation). The second event is the recent discovery of the secret hate group on Facebook 'Thin Blue Lines' that incited racism and violence (2020). This group had more than 6,700 active members, all of them active or retired police officers. I, personally without looking up any academic research on the topic, think that this discovery of this Facebook group has to be seen in the larger story of ethnic profiling and excessive use of force within the police department. As said above, discriminatory and violent behaviour is not a starting point, it is not located at the bottom of the pyramid. Prejudice is located at the start. When those prejudices keep being reinforced by like-minded people, as happens in hate groups, there will be a shift in the group consensus to the extremity. People in hate groups keep reinforcing each other with arguments that support their thinking, and they do not hear any arguments that don't condone such thinking, speaking and behaviour.

Even though these are the two examples that popped into my head when I read the PowerPoint, there are countless of others. I think it is therefore important to be able to recognize hate speech and have the appropriate tools to counter it. Not only for the police or service providers, but for the whole society to have these tools.