In the observation period from January to May, the Human Rights organization YUCOM identified that infringements concerning the prohibition of discrimination predominantly manifested as hate speech via social networks.

These offenses were most commonly rooted in nationality (25%), followed by sexual orientation (18%), gender (15%), and towards journalists (10%). Hate speech directed towards human rights defenders (HRD) accounted for 9%, while discrimination against the Roma community and based on disability both constituted 8%. Lastly, hate speech stemming from religious prejudice represented 7% of the observed violations.
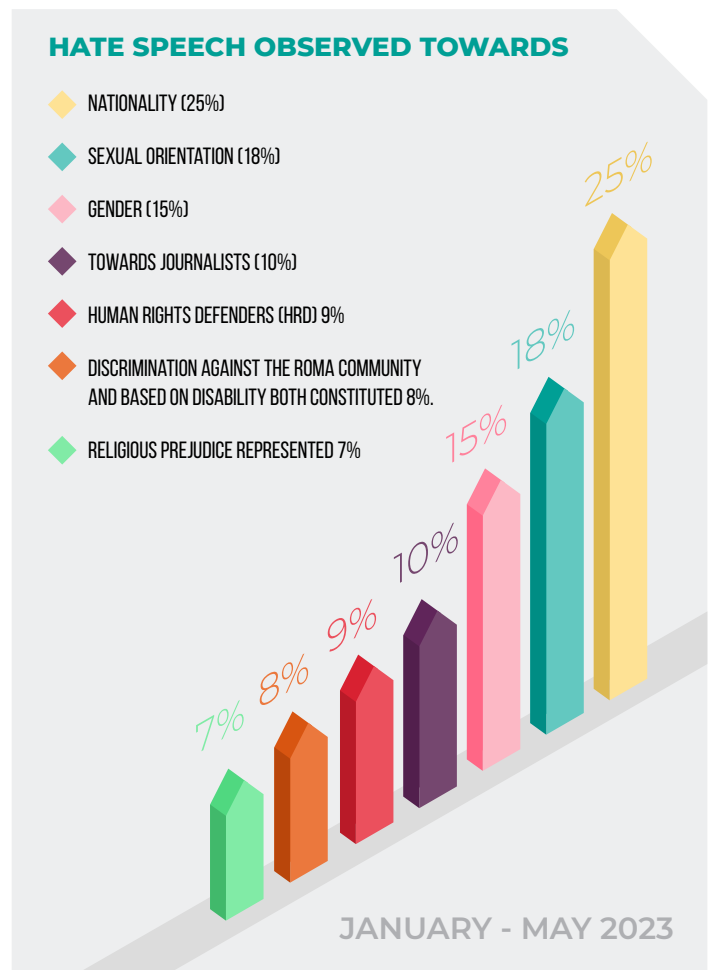
Notable social media giants such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are yet to make substantial headway in developing mechanisms to effectively prohibit and eliminate hate speech in Serbian and other regional languages. Even after being flagged, a considerable amount of this objectionable content continues to exist on these platforms. Serbia boasts a strong legal framework designed to combat hate speech, complemented by the presence of autonomous institutions and regulatory bodies, both government-imposed and self-imposed. However, penalties for hate speech, whether manifested online or in traditional media, are infrequently implemented.

Serbia, being a predominantly conventional society with budding democratic traditions, unfortunately often overlooks hate speech, and accountability for those spreading these harmful narratives is rarely demanded. Women, ethnic minorities, and other regional ethnic groups are commonly the prime victims of such hate speech, which typically share common traits - they are generally founded on stereotypes, misinformation, and are recurrently reiterated.

Prejudiced and hateful narratives are deeply rooted in Serbian society, infiltrating nearly every social layer. Monitoring has revealed that the media, state officials, politicians, and other public figures are the main perpetrators of hate speech. In shaping and disseminating societal narratives, these entities hold considerable influence, which is frequently misused to leverage their platforms to propagate hate speech.

Irene Khan, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, emphasized that Serbia urgently needs to implement substantial and effectual actions to counteract the destructive and divisive language prevalent in public discourse, which instigates societal violence. Khan underscored that multitudes of individuals have rallied in the streets demanding accountability for the crimes perpetrated, stronger regulation of firearms, and decisive measures against the propagation of "hate speech" and incitement of hatred and violence in sensationalist media outlets.

HATE SPEECH OBSERVED TOWARDS

- NATIONALITY (25%)
- SEXUAL ORIENTATION (18%)
- GENDER (15%)
- TOWARDS JOURNALISTS (10%)
- HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (HRD) 9%
- DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE ROMA COMMUNITY AND BASED ON DISABILITY BOTH CONSTITUTED 8%.
- RELIGIOUS PREJUDICE REPRESENTED 7%

7% 8% 9% 10% 15% 18% 25%

JANUARY - MAY 2023

SIGNIFICANT CASES OF HATE SPEECH THAT WERE OBSERVED DURING THE YEAR 2023 INCLUDE:

HATEFUL NARRATIVES AGAINST GENDER

Serbia is currently embroiled in a significant debate concerning a recently passed law on gender equality, which endorses the application of gender-sensitive language. Numerous conservative associations in Serbia, including the Serbian Orthodox Church, are voicing opposition to this legislative change. In a video surfacing on social networks, Patriarch Porfirije is seen discussing the issue of "sensitive language". He pointedly refers to those women who declare that their gender is under threat, labeling them as "unfortunate" and characterizing them as a "pitiful group".

ETHNIC HATE NARRATIVES

Ethnic hate narratives, unfortunately, are quite pervasive in Serbia. These narratives manifest in a variety of ways, incorporating expressions, portrayals, or discourse that provoke, endorse, or justify animosity, discrimination, or hostility towards individuals or groups based on their ethnic origins. Jelena Karleusa, a highly influential Serbian pop star known for her public support of the ruling government and President Vucic, has been reported to engage in this harmful rhetoric. She has allegedly made numerous offensive comments on Instagram regarding the ethnic background of Marinika Tepic, a prominent representative of the Serbian opposition.

HATE NARRATIVES AGAINST ROMA PEOPLE

In Serbia, the hateful rhetoric towards Roma people, often classified as anti-Romanyism, is an alarming problem. It consists of an array of discriminatory and racist mindsets, negative stereotyping, and acts of prejudice aimed at the Romani population. These detrimental narratives play a significant role in facilitating social isolation, marginalization, and conspicuous imbalances in sectors such as education, employment, healthcare, and housing for the Roma community. These narratives further instigate widespread discrimination and can escalate into violence against Romani individuals and communities. Throughout the reported period, there has been a concerning surge of derogatory narratives about Roma people circulating on numerous social networks.

HATEFUL NARRATIVES AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Hate speech targeted at journalists is a constant issue in Serbia, with those reporting on contentious subjects particularly vulnerable. A prominent example is the journalist from Nova.rs, Pero Jovović, who has received threats via Twitter. An appeal has been made to the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime to launch investigations against not only this perpetrator but all individuals who have issued threats against him in the past. An anonymous individual from a Twitter account suggested that Jovović should "without a second thought, put a gun to his forehead and pull the trigger". Following this threat, Jovović noted on Twitter that this was a matter for the prosecution. The aforementioned individual responded with an even more disturbing statement, advocating for the public execution of all members of the LGBT community.

CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENDERS

YUCOM Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights