

HUMAN RIGHTS MONTHLY OVERVIEW

MARCH

20

25

MONTHLY OVERVIEW ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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Финансирано од
Европска Унија



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INTRODUCTION

On March 8, in honor of the International Day for Economic, Political, and Social Equality of Women, a march organized by the Platform for Gender Equality and independent women's rights activists occurred in Skopje. The march emphasized several key demands, with the foremost being justice for all women who have lost their lives due to systemic neglect and femicide.

In the aftermath of the Kochani fire tragedy, North Macedonia confronted a two-fold challenge: seeking genuine accountability for the lost lives while addressing the troubling increase in hate speech, particularly on social media and in certain media platforms. Rather than fostering respectful discourse and solidarity in the quest for justice, the situation devolved into insults, political blame, hate speech, and incitements to violence, culminating in a perilous online campaign.

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights cautioned that such attacks might severely impact freedom of expression and citizen safety, reiterating that hate speech and calls for violence are criminal offenses. The Committee urged public figures, politicians, and all social media users to exercise responsibility in their public discourse.

INTRODUCTION

It specifically pointed out that peaceful student assemblies were subjected to insults and speculation, underlining that the right to peaceful assembly is a constitutionally and internationally protected human right. The Helsinki Committee remarked that it is not unexpected for young people to demand a vigorous response to corruption and systemic injustices, particularly concerning the tragic victims in Kochani, and urged authorities not to silence their voices. Additionally, the Committee stated it would monitor the protests and offer free legal aid in case of any police authority overreach.

At the same time, the Platform of Civil Society Organizations for the Fight against Corruption extended heartfelt condolences for the tragic loss of life in the Kochani fire and wished a swift recovery for those injured. The Platform noted that this incident exemplifies how corruption leads to loss of life, echoing past tragedies in Laskarci with "Besa Trans" and at the modular hospital in Tetovo. It underscored that systemic corruption, present for decades, continues to exact a heavy toll on human lives.

INTRODUCTION

The platform urged for a complete, thorough, and impartial investigation into the fire, to be conducted transparently and held accountable by the appropriate authorities. It emphasized the importance of accountability, insisting that no individual should be exempt from responsibility, regardless of their party, religious or ethnic background, or if they are current or former officials. The platform also reminded that it has been advocating for systemic changes for over a decade, which, if implemented, could have averted such tragedies.

The platform pointed out that in the context of the tragedy in Kochani, urgent steps were needed: a complete reform of the penal policy for corruption; accountability of institutions and companies for failing to fulfill their obligations; field inspections and not just administrative controls; checks on the property status and interests of officials who decide on licenses and permits; strengthening the staff and depoliticizing the inspection bodies; revising the permit issuance procedures; and urgent action on the findings of anti-corruption and audit bodies.

INTRODUCTION

Simultaneously, the Platform emphasized that legal changes should not serve as a justification for previous shortcomings, insisting on the necessity of vertical accountability within institutions. It called for a halt to the pressure on civil society organizations, movements, and the media, which frequently act as the initial whistleblowers regarding systemic issues.

The Helsinki Committee and the Platform cautioned that unless there is a comprehensive investigation, impartial justice, and genuine systemic reforms, tragedies will keep occurring, leading to lasting damage to citizens' trust in institutions.

THE SITUATION WITH HATE SPEECH IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025

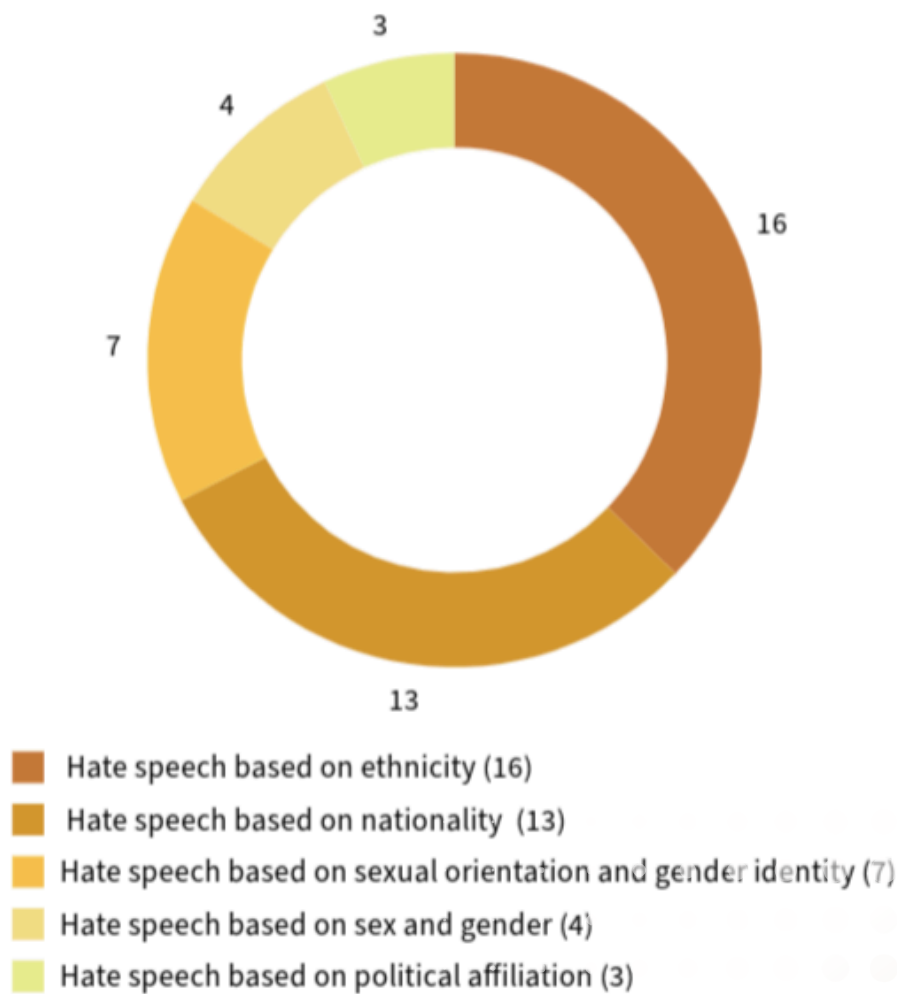
In March, the web platform www.govornaomraza.mk registered 33 cases involving elements of hate speech, incitement, and encouragement of discrimination and harassment on various grounds.

This month, there were 16 cases (37%) of hate speech based on ethnicity, 13 cases (30%) based on nationality, 7 cases (16%) based on sexual orientation, 4 cases (8%) based on sex and gender, and 3 cases (6%) based on political affiliation.

During March, the trend of an increasing number of reports related to nationality and ethnicity, along with a discourse that shifted from criticism of current events in the country to hate speech, continued. In addition to mutual insults and belittling, the violation of the one-minute silence to pay tribute to the victims of Kochani by the fan group "Balisti" at the beginning of the Shkendija-Brera football match in Tetovo also contributed to the rise in hate speech. The Helsinki Committee filed a criminal complaint with the Ministry of Internal Affairs for inciting hatred based on ethnicity regarding this event.

This month, unsettling remarks surfaced on social networks concerning political affiliation aimed at activists from the civil movement "Who's Next" during announcements of public gatherings and protests commemorating the tragedy in Kochani, where 59 people lost their lives.

GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF THE SITUATION ON HATE SPEECH - MARCH 2025



***33 original cases of hate speech were registered on the platform - in some cases, more than one protective characteristic was registered.**

THE SITUATION WITH HATE SPEECH IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions:

The largest number of cases of hate speech relate to ethnicity and national affiliation, indicating deep ethnic tensions in society, especially during sensitive events such as the tragedy in Kochani.

Hate speech easily transitions from political or social criticism into discriminatory and harassing expressions, reflecting insufficient public awareness and a lack of effective mechanisms to prevent such phenomena on social networks and at public gatherings.

THE SITUATION WITH HATE SPEECH IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations:

Mechanisms for preventing and sanctioning hate speech must be strengthened, particularly through swifter and more efficient actions by institutions (such as the police and the prosecution) following reports of hate speech. It is vital to organize campaigns that raise public awareness, focusing on education about the harmfulness of hate speech and promoting a culture of dialogue, especially in the context of tragic events that can easily be exploited to spread hatred.

THE SITUATION WITH HATE CRIMES IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025

During March 2025, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights registered four potential incidents with a biased motive, most of which, in accordance with other indicators (location, method of commission, involvement of minors and high school students, etc.), present a reasonable belief that they were committed due to the ethnicity of the victim, i.e., the perpetrator.

Specifically, there are two potential incidents based on ethnicity and one incident based on religious belief. In terms of the type of violence, the incidents involve violence and the destruction of symbols. In two of the cases, minors appear as victims or perpetrators.

Potential incidents are included in the Report because they pertain to situations where, based on various indicators, there is reason to believe that these incidents were biasedly motivated. Among these biased indicators are: victim/witness perception; on-site commentary; ethnic differences between victim and perpetrator; patterns or frequency of previous incidents; nature of the violence; lack of other motives; and place and time. Specifically, potential incidents are included in this Report due to information received about the location (for example: an ethnically mixed neighborhood or school, bus routes utilized by members of different ethnic communities, locations where hate crimes have occurred in the past),

THE SITUATION WITH HATE CRIMES IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025

the type (for example: a larger group of juveniles attacking one or more victims without provocation, group fights, assaults on buses or at bus stops), the time (for example: after previous fights as a form of revenge, after school, or during and after a sports match), and the property damaged during the incident (for example: places of religious ceremonies).

THE SITUATION WITH HATE CRIMES IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions:

In March 2025, three potential bias-motivated incidents were registered, of which two were ethnically motivated and one was religiously motivated.

Minors were involved in more than half of the incidents, and the violence occurred in public places.

Recommendations:

Enhancing the detection of bias motives in hate incidents.

Promoting prevention and education to decrease violence, particularly among young people.

THE SITUATION WITH GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025

In March 2025, eight women who were victims of gender-based and domestic violence approached the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights; field associates provided paralegal aid in 23 cases. These cases were reported in various municipalities, including Tetovo, Strumica, Shtip, and Skopje.

For the most part, women faced physical, psychological, and economic violence, as well as issues with divorce, child support, and property division. Victims often find themselves in situations where institutional support is unavailable or they do not feel encouraged to report violence. Some are older women who have lived for decades under control and humiliation, while others are young mothers trying to protect their children from an abusive parent. There were also cases where victims were unable to secure the status of their children due to unresolved marital relationships, further marginalizing these women and their children.

Through fieldwork, basic legal information was provided, along with support in collecting documentation, preparation for submitting requests for protection, and referral to relevant institutions and organizations for psychological and social support.

THE SITUATION WITH GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions:

There continues to be a need for a field approach because some victims live in socially isolated environments and lack access to institutions.

Gender-based violence often goes unreported due to fear, distrust in the system, and economic dependence on the perpetrators.

Recommendations:

Strengthening the capacities of local institutions (such as CSW, police, legal aid) with a focus on raising awareness about gender-based violence.

Organizing educational and supportive activities in rural and marginalized communities, engaging the community in recognizing and preventing violence.

THE SITUATION WITH CLOSED INSTITUTIONS, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025

PGeneral overview of activities

In March 2025, the Helsinki Committee provided free legal aid to convicted individuals in four cases.

- **Two cases: Suspension of sentence.**
- **One case: Conditional release with protective supervision.**
- **One case: Transfer to another correctional facility.**
- **One case: Health protection due to inadequate provision of medical care in a penal institution.**

Overview of Legal Services Offered

- **Analyzed legislation and offered legal counsel regarding conditional release with protective supervision.**
- **Filed requests for complimentary access to information from the relevant institutions.**
- **Delivered legal information and guidance to clients.**

THE SITUATION WITH CLOSED INSTITUTIONS, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions and recommendations:

Developing individual rehabilitation plans that consider the specific needs of each prisoner, particularly for conditional release cases involving protective supervision and relocation.

Enhancing medical care conditions by providing qualified personnel, conducting regular health check-ups, and establishing efficient mechanisms for reporting and resolving health issues.

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Strengthening oversight and accountability measures in penal institutions to promote respect for human rights and ensure access to justice for convicted individuals.

FREE LEGAL AID, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025 STATISTICAL DATA

PLA	30	
SLA	0	Përqindja
Total	30	
	Number	Percentages
Gender		
Men	23	76.5
Women	7	23.5
Ethnicity		
Macedonians	21	70
Albanians	3	10
Roma	5	16.5
Bosniaks	1	3.5
Geographicalregions		
Skopje Region	20	67
Vardar Region	2	6.5
Polog Region	1	3.5
Pelagonia Region	2	6.5
Southwest Region	2	6.5
Northeast Region	2	6.5
Eastern Region	1	3.5
Southeast Region	0	0

FREE LEGAL AID, MONTHLY REPORT - MARCH 2025 STATISTICAL DATA

Legal areas	Number	Percentages
Property law	6	20
Social protection and insurance	2	6.5
Child protection	1	3.5
Pension and disability insurance	0	0
Health insurance and protection	0	0
Labor relations	5	16
Gender-based and domestic violence	1	3.5
Status questions	1	3.5
Protection of human rights	7	23.5
Others	7	23.5

CASE STUDY - IRREGULARITIES IN ENFORCEMENT PROCEEDINGS AGAINST DEBTORS WITH INCOME BELOW THE AVERAGE SALARY

In March 2024, two individuals facing debt collection by separate enforcement agents sought free legal aid from the Helsinki Committee. According to the issued orders and bank statements, despite their income being closer to minimum wage, one-third of their earnings was still being withheld. This action by the enforcement agents violates Article 117 of the Enforcement Law (entitled: limitation of enforcement), which states that for debtors earning a salary or pension below the average, enforcement must only withhold one-fifth of their salary or pension. By month's end, one enforcement agent informed the Helsinki Committee of a mistake, indicating that a correction had been made to the order; however, no notification had been received from the other enforcement agent yet.

CASE STUDY - IRREGULARITIES IN ENFORCEMENT PROCEEDINGS AGAINST DEBTORS WITH INCOME BELOW THE *AVERAGE SALARY*

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Citizens earning near the minimum wage are classified as poor and receive additional protection from amendments to the Law that restrict enforcement actions based on income levels. However, due to either creditor pressure for faster debt collection or negligence from enforcement agents, enforcement orders are often issued and acted upon in violation of *Article 117* of the Enforcement Law. Such behavior is intolerable and takes advantage of citizens' lack of legal knowledge, as many are unaware of enforcement limitations and do not seek free legal aid. Given the extent of this issue, if other citizens report similar problems, the Helsinki Committee will lodge a complaint with the Chamber of Enforcement Agents.
