

MONTHLY OVERVIEW ON HUMAN RIGHTS

FEBRUARY

20

25

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Финансирано од
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INTRODUCTION

In February 2025, concerns regarding human rights were publicly addressed.

The National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, along with the Platform for Gender Equality and the Network for Protection against Discrimination, have raised significant concerns regarding the proposed amendments to the Law on Police. These amendments represent a setback in protecting victims of gender-based and domestic violence and are in contradiction to both the Istanbul Convention and local laws.

The main revisions foresee taking away a police officer's service weapon only after an internal process within the Ministry of Interior, rather than right after a violence report, and eliminating the requirement for mandatory psychological and psychiatric evaluations for officers charged with violence.

These amendments pose a serious risk to victim safety, particularly when the offender is a police officer. Consequently, due to the backlash from civil society, the Government and the Ministry of Interior decided to retract the amendments.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the month, the Platform for Gender Equality addressed a rise in incidents of misogyny and gender-based hate speech in the public sphere, particularly aimed at female journalists and politicians. These attacks originated from public figures, including journalists and officials, amplifying their impact and severity.

These developments signify a concerning trend towards a regression to patriarchal and oppressive models that jeopardize gender equality and human rights. It is imperative to establish a clear institutional response, including the sanctioning of hate speech and the provision of enhanced support for women in the public sphere required.

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

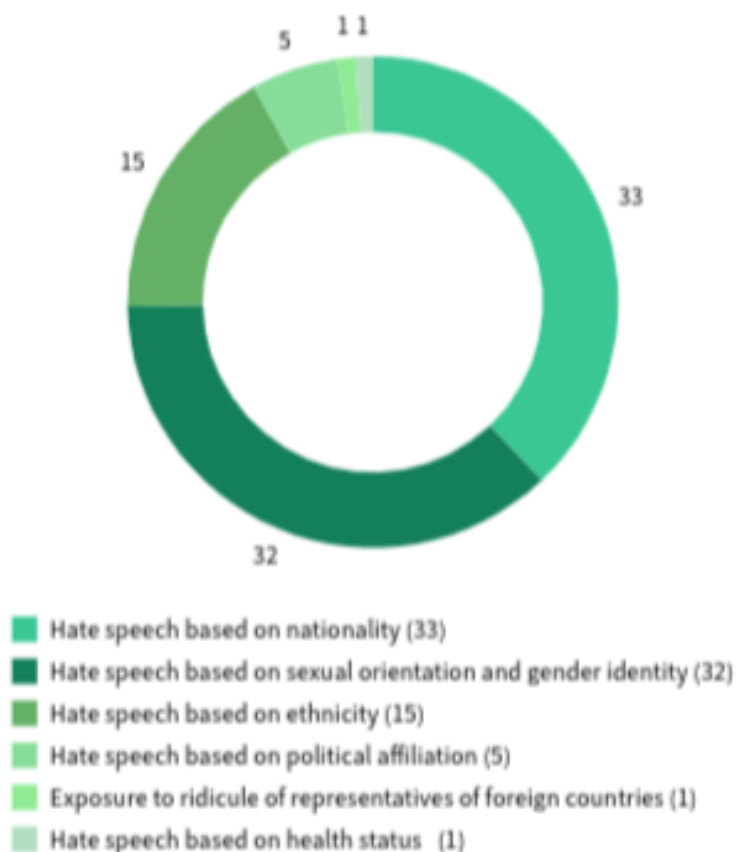
In February, the web platform www.govornaomraza.mk registered 74 cases involving elements of hate speech, incitement, and encouragement of discrimination and harassment on various grounds.

This month, 33 cases (38%) of hate speech were based on nationality, 32 cases (37%) based on sexual orientation and gender identity, 15 cases (17%) based on ethnicity, and 5 cases (6%) based on political affiliation.

During February, the trend of increasing national affiliation reports persisted, with offensive and threatening messages aimed at communities from the Western Balkan countries.

This month has also seen an increase in hate speech and harassment targeting the LGBTQ+ community, which analysts believe is linked to President Trump's policies and statements. Additionally, toward the end of the month, there was a rise in homophobic hate speech following announcements that changes to the Hungarian Constitution could allow a ban on Pride Parades.

GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF THE SITUATION ON HATE SPEECH - FEBRUARY 2025



***74 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 - FEBRUARY 2025

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions:

1. The majority of reports (38%) relate to hate speech based on nationality, indicating ongoing tension and intolerance towards certain national groups, particularly from the Western Balkans.

2. The high percentage (37%) of cases related to sexual orientation and gender identity suggests a rise in homophobia and transphobia, often fueled by political narratives and international events.

3. Although less common, cases based on ethnicity (17%) and political affiliation (6%) were also reported, reflecting widespread hatred stemming from diversity.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations:

1. Competent institutions should actively monitor hate speech on digital platforms and respond appropriately and promptly to reports.
2. The LGBTIQ+ community, along with ethnic and national minorities, should receive increased institutional and societal support, particularly regarding their safety and public representation.
3. Politicians and public figures should avoid making statements that could incite hate speech to prevent motivating intolerant narratives in the public.

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

During February 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, one incident based on religion, and one incident based on nationality. 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 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 - FEBRUARY 2025

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions:

1. Most potential incidents are linked to the ethnicity of the victim or perpetrator. This indicates the ongoing presence of inter-ethnic intolerance, particularly in areas where different communities interact daily.

2. In two of the recorded incidents, minors were involved as victims or perpetrators. This points to the early exposure of children and youth to violent and biased behaviors, as well as inadequate education and prevention in educational and family contexts.

3. Incidents occur in locations and times already recognized as risky (mixed neighborhoods, schools, bus lines), highlighting the need for prevention.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations:

1.Implementation of educational programs for youth, emphasizing intercultural education, non-violent conflict resolution, and respect for diversity, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and educational institutions.

2.Increasing the visibility of security services and police presence in sensitive areas, especially during periods of heightened tension (sports competitions, religious holidays, school breaks), to prevent potential incidents.

3.Developing and enhancing mechanisms for timely reporting, monitoring, and analysis of incidents with biased motives through institutional support and partnerships with the civil society sector and local communities.

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

1. Reaction to the proposed amendments to the Law on Police

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, through the National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, the Platform for Gender Equality, and the Network for Protection against Discrimination (of which it is a member), voiced serious concerns regarding the proposed amendments to the Law on Police. These changes represent a significant regression in safeguarding victims of domestic violence and other abuses against women. As per the proposed amendments, a police officer accused of domestic violence would not have their weapon confiscated immediately; instead, this would hinge on the internal review procedures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Such a measure diminishes the safety of victims and complicates their protection by imposing additional hurdles and uncertainties. Additionally, the amendments remove the requirements for psychological and psychiatric evaluations of police officers accused of perpetrating violence. Consequently, these amendments may escalate violence and foster increased distrust of institutional responses among victims. Given these concerns, an urgent request for the withdrawal of the amendments was submitted. In response to the feedback from civil society associations, the Ministry of Interior reconsidered the proposals and subsequently withdrew the amendments to the Law.

2. Attacks on female journalists and increased risk of gender-based violence

In February 2025, there were significant misogynistic attacks against women, particularly female journalists, who faced discrimination, violence, and gender-based hate speech. Notably, public figures, including journalist Dragan Pavlovich-Latas, targeted journalists Sashka Cvetkovska and Denica Chadikovska. These incidents pose serious risks to the safety of female journalists and directly threaten media freedom. Furthermore, journalists Snezana Lupevska Sozen and Marija Mitevska experienced digital gender-based violence, while journalist Rita Behadini received life threats on social media. These occurrences highlight the ongoing issue of violence and discrimination against women in the media sector, alongside the inadequate response from the relevant authorities.

3. Hate speech by public figures and institutional responsibility

The Minister of Finance, Gordana Dimitrieska-Kochoska, used gender-discriminatory language directed at MP Slavjanka Petrovska. This statement confirms the prevalence of gender discrimination and the danger of its normalization in the public sphere, especially when it comes from institutional figures. The Minister attempted to reduce women to their reproductive functions, ignoring serious social problems affecting women, such as poverty and the lack of social infrastructure. These statements further worsen the position of women in society, particularly regarding their representation in politics and public office.

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

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions:

1. The proposed amendments to the Law on Police reduce the protection of victims of violence, introducing additional hurdles and uncertainties.
2. Attacks on female journalists and gender-based hate speech present a serious risk to the safety and freedom of the media.
3. Gender discrimination by institutional figures, such as the minister's statements, exacerbates inequality and humiliates women.

Recommendations:

- Withdrawal of amendments to the Law on Police aimed at protecting victims of violence.
- Strengthening the protection of journalists and sanctioning attacks against them.
- Zero tolerance for gender discrimination by public figures, with explicit sanctions and public condemnation.

THE SITUATION WITH CLOSED INSTITUTIONS, MONTHLY REPORT - FEBRUARY 2025

General overview of activities:

During February 2025, the Helsinki Committee provided free legal aid to convicted persons in four cases.

- **Two cases: Conditional release with protective supervision.**
- **Two cases: 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 - FEBRUARY 2025

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions and recommendations:

- **Promoting increased use of conditional release with protective supervision by fostering better collaboration between judicial authorities and the probation service.**
- **Guaranteeing adequate medical staff, access to quality health care, and availability of medicines and therapy.**
- **Enhancing oversight and accountability systems in correctional facilities to foster human rights and access to justice for those convicted.**

FREE LEGAL AID, MONTHLY REPORT - FEBRUARY 2025 STATISTICAL DATA

PLA	29	
SLA	0	
Total	29	
	Number	Percentages
Gender		
Men	15	51.5
Women	14	48.5
Ethnicity		
Macedonians	16	55.5
Albanians	6	20.5
Roma	6	20.5
Turks	1	3.5
Serbs	/	/
Geographicalregions		
Skopje Region	19	66
Vardar Region	/	/
Polog Region	2	7
Pelagonia Region	4	13.5
Southwest Region	/	/
Northeast Region	1	3.5
Eastern Region	3	10
Southeast Region	/	/

FREE LEGAL AID, MONTHLY REPORT - FEBRUARY 2025 STATISTICAL DATA

Legal areas	Number	Percentages
Property law	2	7
Social protection and insurance	4	13.5
Child protection	/	/
Pension and disability insurance	1	3.5
Health insurance and protection	/	/
Labor relations	3	10.5
Gender-based and domestic violence	7	24
Status issues	3	10.5
Protection of human rights	7	24
Others	2	7

CASE STUDY - MINIMUM WAGE INCOME - A BARRIER TO JUDICIAL PROTECTION OF LABOR RIGHTS

In February 2024, an employee reached out to the Helsinki Committee for free legal aid concerning a decision to terminate their employment contract without notice. As part of the initial legal aid, the employee received guidance to swiftly undertake all necessary actions in the prior internal process with the employer, including filing an objection to the termination decision.

Within the brief 15-day period for filing a lawsuit—starting from the date of submitting the complaint—the Free Legal Aid Department of the Helsinki Committee undertook several actions. Initially, the applicant was asked about their income to assess their financial status, revealing that their income marginally surpassed the family income limit for eligibility for secondary legal aid (a free lawyer).

CASE STUDY - MINIMUM WAGE INCOME - A BARRIER TO JUDICIAL PROTECTION OF LABOR RIGHTS

Recognizing that the case's complexities necessitated legal representation for the pending labor dispute lawsuit at the Basic Court of Prilep, which was set to be filed in just days, and understanding that covering lawyer and court expenses would further strain their finances—given that they are the only employed member of a family that had recently lost its job—the Helsinki Committee reached out to the SUTKOZ trade union, of which the employee is a member. This was after confirming from the union's website that they have a fund for providing free legal representation to their members.

Thus, in mid-February 2025, the employee notified our legal advisor of a first-instance judgment upholding the plaintiff's claim that the dismissal should be annulled and the employee should be reinstated to the same position.

CASE STUDY - MINIMUM WAGE INCOME - A BARRIER TO JUDICIAL PROTECTION OF LABOR RIGHTS

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This case highlights the extremely low family income threshold for obtaining SLA approval, which is tied to minimum wage levels. It also factors in inflation and the rising cost of living, along with statistical data showing that most working families have one member earning below the average salary. Additionally, given that many workers in Macedonia, especially in the private sector, are not unionized, it becomes evident that amendments to the Law on Free Legal Aid are essential to loosen the financial criteria for secondary legal aid approval.