

HUMAN RIGHTS MONTHLY OVERVIEW

APRIL

20

25

MONTHLY OVERVIEW ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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Финансирано од
Европска Унија



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INTRODUCTION

In early April, the Gender Equality Platform and the Network for Protection against Discrimination strongly criticized the amendments and additions to the Law on Primary Education and the Law on Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Education. These changes legalize discrimination and violence, while also removing crucial topics related to sexual and reproductive health and gender equality. These legal amendments were passed without consulting young people or the professional community, contradicting the needs of the youth. The Gender Equality Platform and the Network for Protection against Discrimination urged the President not to endorse these laws and called on the Government and Parliament to reassess the education laws that negatively impact young people's health. Furthermore, they requested an oversight hearing to address the challenges in enforcing the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination before the Permanent Inquiry Commission for the Protection of Citizens' Freedoms and Rights.

INTRODUCTION

They also emphasized the need for an extensive dialogue that includes young people, youth organizations, and health professional groups working to protect the rights of marginalized communities, alongside the development of amendments to the education laws based on evidence and science, in alignment with international human rights standards. This effort seeks to demonstrate genuine concern for youth and the urgent implementation of regulations to protect children from violence and discrimination in educational settings.

Despite these amendments being passed by Parliament, the Platform for Gender Equality and the Network for Protection against Discrimination publicly urged the President not to sign the decrees that amended the Law on Primary Education and the Law on Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Education. However, she proceeded to sign the decrees without initiating a debate.

INTRODUCTION

On February 4, 2025, the 24th session of the Committee on Elections and Appointments took place in the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia. During this session, a draft decision was approved for the election of a member to the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, less than 24 hours following a public debate session. The Committee suggested Vecko Zdraveski to the Assembly as a future commissioner for a five-year term. However, he is a party official and does not fulfill the selection criteria. The Network for Protection against Discrimination called on the Assembly to dismiss this proposal and not vote for Zdraveski as a future CPPD member.

The Network for Protection against Discrimination stresses that electing this candidate to the CPPD neither serves human rights nor promotes equality and non-discrimination, but rather harms them. The candidate's interview, presentation, and particularly the responses to audience questions were deemed unsatisfactory by all standards expected for a member of the equality body. It was evident in the interview that the candidate lacked confidence in articulating certain grounds for discrimination, such as "sexual orientation" and "trans-woman."

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This attitude reflects a profound disregard for marginalized communities, which are among the most frequently discriminated against, raising genuine concerns about the candidate's ability to act impartially and professionally toward all citizens if elected to the CPPD. Additionally, it remains unclear how the Commission concluded that the candidate meets the legal criteria and possesses expertise in preventing and protecting against discrimination, especially given that fewer than 10% of Assembly members were present at the session and his biography shows no indication of relevant expertise or even interest.

INTRODUCTION

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April 8 marked International Roma Day, but according to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, there has been no progress in the fight against discrimination towards Roma in the country. The Helsinki Committee records hate speech and harassment against members of the Roma community nearly every month. Roma face significant discrimination, which is particularly evident in the attitudes of institutions toward them and in the treatment they receive from society at large. Roma continue to be the most endangered and economically vulnerable community in the country, with the phenomenon of stigmatization and prejudice also alarmingly prevalent.

In April, the Gender Equality Platform and the Network for Protection against Discrimination strongly opposed the enactment of the third consecutive detrimental law in education: the Law on Secondary Education. The amendments to these laws institutionalize violence and discrimination against children, depriving young individuals of access to evidence-based health education. Despite the civil society's appeals, the President proceeded to sign the decree amending the Law on Secondary Education.

INTRODUCTION

The Platform for Gender Equality, following the trial against 36-year-old Vangelica from Kratovo, who is a victim of domestic violence and whom the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office is prosecuting for the crime of "intentional murder," requested the Public Prosecutor's Office in Kumanovo to reclassify the crime as "self-defense".

They also urged the Court to act with due diligence in this case, to review all decisive facts, and to consider the principles established by the acquittal decision in the case of Pale Iliovska from Veles.

In April, the Network for Protection against Discrimination called for the Government to revoke its decision to appoint Petar Bogoeski as Director of the National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility. This demand arose from his remarks, which included offensive language, insults, and hate speech, along with actions that contradict European values.

The Platform of Civil Society Organizations for the Fight against Corruption is addressing the recommendations of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) in the context of the anti-corruption review of the Law on Free Access to Public Information.

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Instead of promoting greater transparency, accountability, and the fight against corruption, the SCPC, through its alleged indications of “regulatory risks,” sends concerning signals for the closure of institutions and creates opportunities to limit the public’s right to know. The Platform believes that such recommendations not only undermine the SCPC’s role as a vital institution for preventing corruption but also directly create space for new corrupt abuses, particularly in the area of public procurement.

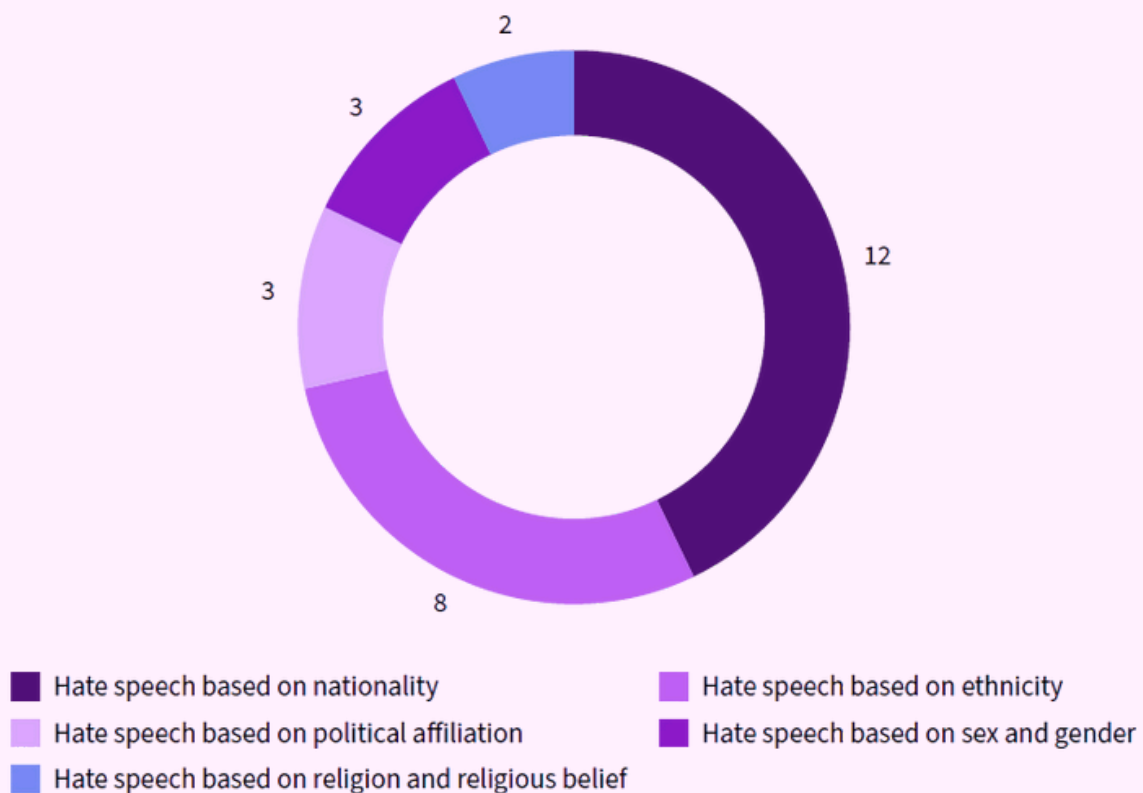
THE SITUATION WITH HATE SPEECH IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, MONTHLY REPORT - APRIL 2025

In April, the web platform www.govornaomraza.mk registered 19 cases involving elements of hate speech, incitement, and encouragement of discrimination and harassment on various grounds.

This month there were 12 cases (43%) of hate speech based on nationality, 8 cases (29%) based on ethnicity, 3 cases (11%) based on political affiliation, 3 cases (11%) based on sex and gender, and 2 cases (7%) based on religion and religious belief. The concerning trend of a growing number of reports related to national and ethnic affiliation persisted in April.

On social media, offensive and derogatory content directed at various ethnic communities was observed, often set against a broader socio-political backdrop. This type of hate speech fuels the creation of a hostile and polarized public atmosphere.

GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION ON THE SITUATION OF HATE SPEECH IN APRIL 2025



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

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

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The continuation of this trend underscores the need for a coordinated and decisive response from all relevant stakeholders - institutions, civil society organizations, media, and the general public - to protect social cohesion.

Recommendation: Enhanced institutional monitoring of these phenomena is necessary, along with a more active role for all stakeholders. Additionally, we recommend implementing public campaigns to educate and promote intercultural dialogue and understanding, with a special emphasis on young people.

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

During April 2025, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights registered 9 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 3 potential incidents based on ethnicity and 5 incidents based on religious belief and 1 incident based on national origin. In terms of the type of violence, 3 of the incidents contain violence, while 6 contain desecration 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.

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

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 - APRIL 2025

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions:

1. There is a recurring pattern of incidents driven by bias, predominantly motivated by ethnicity, involving minors and high school students as either victims or perpetrators.
2. These incidents take place in areas that have been previously identified as high-risk locations, such as ethnically diverse neighborhoods, schools, and public transportation, highlighting the need for focused attention in these regions.

Recommendations:

- It is necessary to strengthen preventive programs and educational activities in schools and diverse communities to foster intercultural dialogue, tolerance, and non-violent communication among youth.
- Establish improved mechanisms for monitoring and rapid intervention in at-risk areas by enhancing cooperation among police, schools, local government, and civil society organizations.

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

Throughout the month, two domestic violence victims contacted the Helsinki Committee about issues concerning parental rights and ensuring the child's best interests are protected.

In the first case, the father requested a significant extension of his visitation schedule with his child, proposing multi-day and extended stays beyond the previously set dates. The mother, who has custody of the child, argued that the new visitation schedule negatively affects the child's emotional growth and development, particularly at such a young age. She also raised concerns about the effects of separation from her and pointed out the father's lack of active involvement in caring for the child during visitations.

In the second case, a child with a significant health issue received surgery at a private hospital in our country. The mother told us that the father prevented prompt treatment and obstructed hospitalization due to financial concerns, while simultaneously denying the child suitable therapy. Although doctors advised that the child required direct care from the mother post-surgery, the father disagreed and delegated the child's care to other family members.

In both cases, parental disputes and institutional decisions directly impact the psychological and physical well-being of children. It is crucial to strictly uphold the principle of the child's best interests during these decision-making processes.

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

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions:

1. A more thorough evaluation of children's psychological and emotional developmental needs is essential when assessing their personal relationships with parents.
2. Institutions often struggle to balance parental rights with the child's best interests during visitation procedures, particularly in cases involving health and developmental factors.

Recommendations:

- When deciding on visits, social work centers should conduct a comprehensive multidisciplinary assessment, engaging experts in pediatrics, psychology, and developmental treatment.
- Continuous training for professional services is essential to ensure the application of standards for assessing the best interests of the child, particularly in sensitive and complex cases.

THE SITUATION WITH CLOSED INSTITUTIONS APRIL 2025

General overview of activities

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

Two cases: Conditional release with protective supervision

One case: Torture and inhumane treatment

One case: House arrest

One case: Prison visit

Two cases: Health protection and safety of a convicted person

Brief overview of legal services provided

- Review of the legislation and legal advice provided to convicted persons and their families.**
- Submitted requests for free access to information to the competent institutions.**
- Provided legal information and advice to clients.**

THE SITUATION WITH CLOSED INSTITUTIONS APRIL 2025

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions and Recommendations:

- It is essential to consider the specific needs of each inmate, particularly when making decisions regarding conditional release with protective supervision as a positive measure to alleviate prison overcrowding.
- It is important to enhance medical care conditions by ensuring qualified medical staff, conducting regular health check-ups, and establishing efficient mechanisms for reporting and addressing health issues.
- It is crucial to strengthen oversight and accountability mechanisms in correctional facilities to promote respect for human rights and ensure access to justice for incarcerated individuals.

FREE LEGAL AID, MONTHLY REPORT - APRIL 2025 STATISTICAL DATA

FLA	32	
SLA	1	
Total	33	
	Number	Percentages
Gender		
Men	18	54.5
Women	15	45.5
Ethnicity		
Macedonians	27	82
Albanians	6	18
Roma	0	0
Other	0	0
Geographical regions		
Skopje Region	24	73
Vardar Region	1	3
Polog Region	0	0
Pelagonia Region	1	3
Southwest Region	2	6
Northeast Region	2	6
Eastern Region	2	6
Southeast Region	1	3

FREE LEGAL AID, MONTHLY REPORT - APRIL 2025 STATISTICAL DATA

Legal areas	Number	Percentages
Property law	4	12
Social protection and insurance	2	6
Child protection	2	6
Pension and disability insurance	0	0
Health insurance and protection	1	3
Labor relations	3	9
Gender-based and domestic violence	3	9
Status questions	3	9
Protection of human rights	10	30.5
Others	5	15.5

CASE STUDY ON APPROVAL OF SLA - ADMINISTRATIVE DISPUTE IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

A resident of Skopje had their application for social security for the elderly denied by the Center for Social Work due to vehicle ownership. Seeking assistance, they reached out to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights for free legal aid. Notably, the administrative procedure for this claim had been initiated much earlier (in 2022), as the second-instance body had previously accepted the appeal and reversed the original decision made by the Center for Social Work - Skopje. Since the acceptance of the appeal, it was established through relevant articles of the Rulebook that a registered passenger vehicle is not classified as property when used for transporting a person with a disability. To this day, the situation remains unchanged; the applicant relies on the vehicle for transporting their son, who has infantile cerebral palsy. Unfortunately, this same vehicle was the sole reason for the rejection of the request for social security for the elderly, without the necessary justification as mandated by Article 88 of the Law on General and Administrative Procedure. Consequently, the Helsinki Committee has formally requested SLA's approval to appoint a lawyer to represent the applicant in the upcoming main public hearing before the Administrative Court.

CASE STUDY ON APPROVAL OF SLA - ADMINISTRATIVE DISPUTE IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the realm of social protection rights, there is a critical need for consistency and promptness in decision-making within the general administrative procedure.

Regarding consistency, it is essential to note that the first-instance body, in this case, the Center for Social Work, failed to incorporate the instructions from the second-instance body, the State Commission for Second-Instance Decision-Making, when rendering a new decision after the applicant's appeal was accepted.

Regarding promptness, it is essential to acknowledge that claimants of social protection rights are individuals facing significant social risks. Therefore, it is crucial for state institutions, particularly in these situations, to operate within the legally mandated timelines. The issue of delay in resolving cases usually arises with the first-instance authorities, which often do not respond within the legally defined timeframe when the case is sent back to them for re-decision, regardless of whether the return is due to an accepted appeal in the general administrative procedure or an accepted lawsuit in the administrative dispute.