

SYSTEMIC RESPONSE TO HATE SPEECH BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY



POLICY BRIEF

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Systemic Response to Hate Speech Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights

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POLICY BRIEF SUMMARY

Hate speech based on sexual orientation and gender identity remains one of the most widespread forms of hate speech in the Republic of North Macedonia. Despite continuous reporting by civil society organizations, such cases rarely result in effective prosecutorial proceedings. This document highlights the key trends for the period 2019–2023, identifies the consequences of impunity for hate speech, and proposes concrete measures for proactive action by law enforcement bodies.

KEY FINDINGS:

- High percentage of reports: between 18% and 33% of all hate speech reports in the past four years were related to sexual orientation and gender identity.
 - Increased visibility – increased risk: following the first Pride Parade in 2019, a surge in hate speech has been recorded, particularly in June, Pride Month.
 - No indictments: despite regular reporting to the Ministry of Interior and the Public Prosecutor's Office, no indictments have been initiated in such cases.
 - Risk of escalation: impunity may encourage perpetrators and lead to more serious hate crimes.
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Problem description

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights systematically collects and analyzes hate speech data through the platform www.govornaomraza.mk:

- 2019: out of 538 reports – 30% related to sexual orientation and gender identity
- 2020: out of 1233 reports – 18%
- 2021: out of 577 reports – 33%
- 2022: out of 150 reports – 22%
- January–April 2023: 59 reports – 21%

These figures confirm the continuous exposure of the LGBTI community to hate and discrimination. Increased visibility of this community also increases its vulnerability, especially during Pride Month, when hate speech peaks.

Analysis and Implications

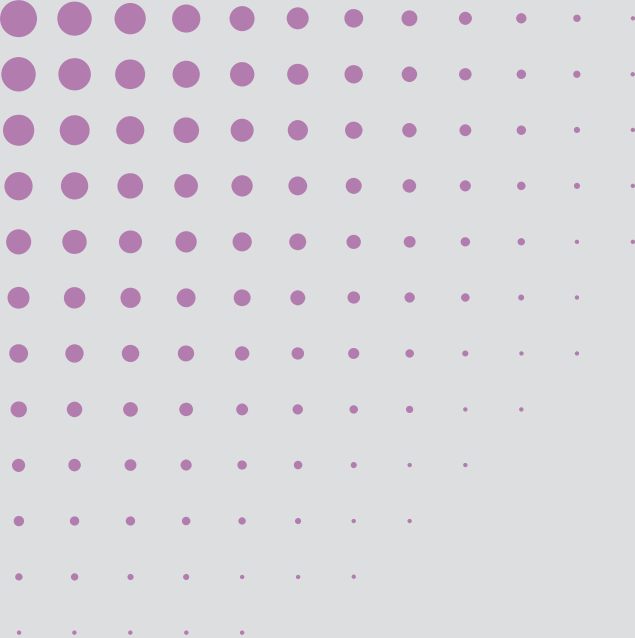
The lack of prosecutorial proceedings creates a sense of impunity. This situation erodes the community's trust in institutions and discourages future reporting. Moreover, unpunished hate speech carries the risk of escalation into physical violence and more serious criminal acts. Active action by the prosecution serves a dual function: preventive (sending a clear message that such speech will not be tolerated) and protective (ensuring the protection of marginalized groups and equality before the law).

Conclusion

Hate speech against the LGBTI community represents a serious societal issue with the potential to disturb public order and jeopardize citizens' safety. The absence of prosecutorial action deepens the marginalization of the community and undermines the rule of law. Proactive and coordinated institutional action is necessary to break this cycle of impunity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Proactive action by law enforcement bodies: systematic monitoring and initiation of proceedings ex officio.
- Public communication: regular informing of the public about measures taken and prosecutorial decisions to build community trust.
- Inter-institutional cooperation: improved coordination between the prosecution, the Ministry of Interior, and civil society organizations for faster and more efficient response.
- Specialized training: continuous education for public prosecutors and police officers on European standards and best practices in tackling hate speech.



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