

HUMAN RIGHTS MONTHLY OVERVIEW

OCTOBER

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MONTHLY OVERVIEW ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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CONTENTS

01

Introduction

02

Hate speech

03

Hate crimes

04

Closed institutions

05

**Free legal
assistance**

06

**Improving conditions in
the women's ward -
Tetovo**

INTRODUCTION

During the month of the first round of Local Elections in the Republic of North Macedonia, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights launched the "Fair Elections - Strong Democracy" within which a total of ten posts were published on social networks calling on citizens to report hate speech during the election campaign and the 2025 local elections.

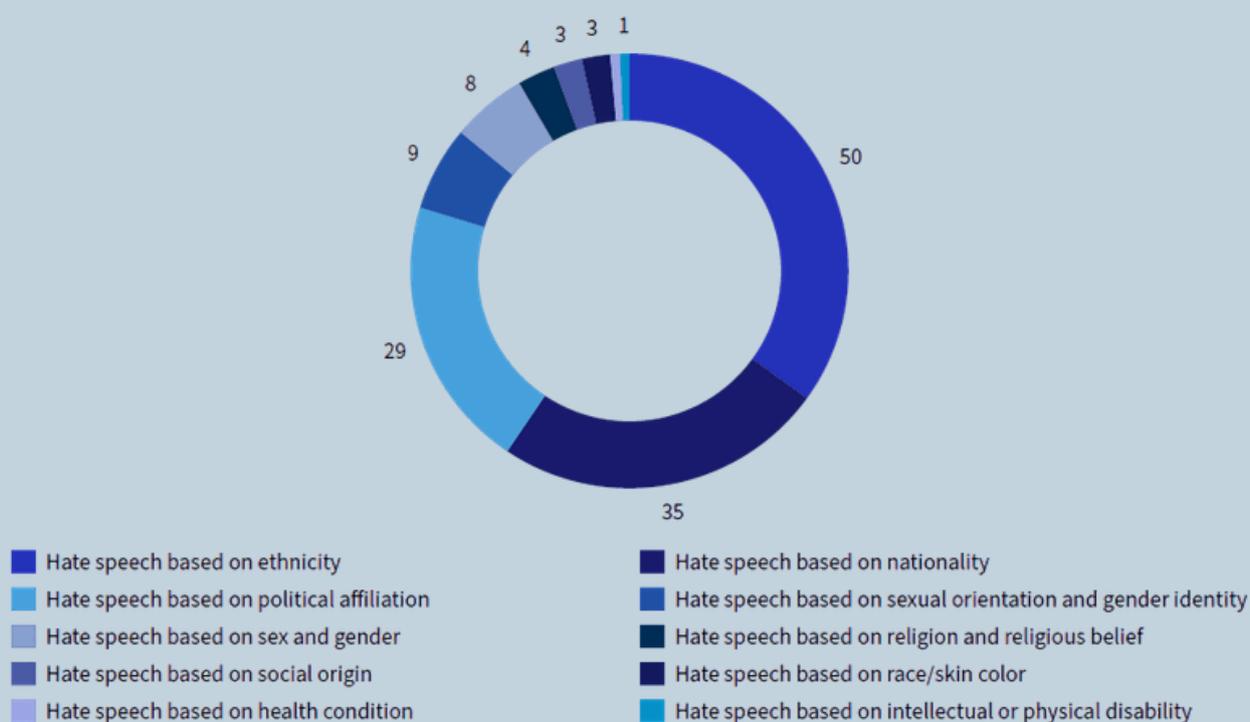
The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights observed the rise in hate speech in public spaces and on social networks during the lead-up to the local elections in North Macedonia.

The Helsinki Committee issued a press release emphasizing that hate speech is not an expression of the democratic right to free speech - it poses a serious threat to human rights, social cohesion, and the democratic process. Particularly concerning is the trend of political actors and public figures using or tolerating this type of rhetoric for political mobilization, which directly incites tensions between different communities.

INTRODUCTION

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights strongly criticized the increasing cases of child and minor abuse in political activities as the upcoming local elections approach. Before the official election campaign ended, numerous photos and videos showing children being exploited for political gain by candidates and their supporters appeared on social media.

THE SITUATION WITH HATE SPEECH - MONTHLY REPORT FOR OCTOBER



In October 2025, a total of 107 cases were reported on the website www.govornaomraza.mk, of which 50 (35%) were related to ethnicity, 35 cases (24%) were based on national origin, 29 cases (20%) involved political affiliation, 9 (6%) were due to sexual orientation and gender identity, and 8 cases (6%) involved sex and gender with elements of hate speech, incitement and invocation of discrimination and harassment.

THE SITUATION WITH HATE SPEECH - MONTHLY REPORT FOR OCTOBER

During the month when the first and second rounds of local elections took place, there was more than a twofold rise in hate speech compared to earlier. This surge was especially noticeable between the two largest ethnic groups—Macedonian and Albanian—as well as directed at the Roma community. Societal polarization was also evident in the frequent use of labels like “traitors” and “patriots,” which further fueled political hate speech.

In October, the fan group “Balisti” celebrated their victory after the Albanian national football team beat Serbia by spreading hate speech based on ethnicity and nationality. The Helsinki Committee then filed a report with the Ministry of Interior.

THE SITUATION WITH HATE SPEECH - MONTHLY REPORT FOR OCTOBER

CONCLUSIONS

- 1. Drastic increase in hate speech**
- 2. During the month of local elections, hate speech more than doubled compared to the previous period, highlighting the significant influence of the election process on both online and offline communication.**
- 3. Ethnic polarization remains prominent. Most hate speech occurs between the Macedonian and Albanian communities, with a rise in attacks on the Roma community. This highlights the high sensitivity of interethnic relations during times of political mobilization.**
- 4. Sporting events as a catalyst for nationalist statements. The case of the fan group "Ballists" demonstrates that sporting events are often used to spread offensive and nationalist messages, with the potential to cause additional tensions.**
- 5. The institutional response is crucial and necessary. The report submitted by the Helsinki Committee highlights the need for an active institutional approach to prevent and punish hate speech.**

THE SITUATION WITH HATE SPEECH - MONTHLY REPORT FOR OCTOBER

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.Enhanced monitoring during electoral processes**
- 2.Election periods are high-risk and demand increased monitoring of the online space by civil society groups and institutions.**
- 3.Proactive campaigns to reduce interethnic tensions**
- 4.Public campaigns to promote tolerance and unity are essential, especially targeting youth, fan groups, and online communities.**
- 5.Stronger institutional reaction**
- 6.The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Public Prosecutor's Office should respond more quickly and efficiently to reports of hate speech, while maintaining public transparency about their procedures.**
- 7.Inclusive programs for working with fan groups**
- 8.Developing programs to promote sports culture, encourage non-violent cheering, and foster positive fan messages to reduce the risk of nationalistic outbursts.**

THE SITUATION WITH HATE CRIMES - MONTHLY REPORT FOR OCTOBER

During October 2025, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights registered 5 potential incidents with a biased motive, for the most part 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. Namely, this involves one potential incident related to ethnicity and another where the victim has a migrant status. According to the type, both incidents contain violence. In three cases, minors appear as victims and perpetrators. One criminal charge was filed due to the existence of grounds for suspicion of a crime of "violence", where there are potential biased indicators based on ethnicity.

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 - MONTHLY REPORT FOR OCTOBER

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 - MONTHLY REPORT FOR OCTOBER

CONCLUSIONS

- 1. The growing number of incidents involving minors as both victims and perpetrators shows increasing tensions among youth, especially in ethnically diverse areas. This trend needs immediate attention and a coordinated effort among schools, parents, and authorities.**
- 2. Based on the analyzed cases, factors like the ethnic diversity of the participants, the location and timing of the incidents, patterns from previous events, and on-site comments provide reasonable grounds to suspect that some incidents are biased. This emphasizes the need for systematic monitoring, timely response, and institutional acknowledgment of hate crimes.**

THE SITUATION WITH HATE CRIMES - MONTHLY REPORT FOR OCTOBER

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Given that many incidents still happen in schools and public transportation, increasing the presence of school psychologists, pedagogues, teachers on duty, and regular patrols by the Ministry of Internal Affairs at key locations and bus routes is advised. This would help in early detection of dangerous situations and allow quick response to prevent escalation.**
- **It is advised that training be given to teachers, police, and the local community to better identify biased indicators, report them correctly, and handle potential hate crimes appropriately. This training should also include techniques for working with minors, mediating conflicts, and de-escalation.**

THE SITUATION WITH CLOSED INSTITUTIONS

In October 2025, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, as part of the free legal aid program and the project "Strengthening Human Rights and Services for Children and Vulnerable Persons at Risk in Closed Institutions," funded by the European Union, provided:

- Free legal aid for a child in conflict with the law;**
- Free legal aid for three convicted persons;**
- Visits to the Public Institution for Child Care with Educational and Social Problems and Disorderly Conduct - Skopje;**
- Visits to the Special Institution Demir Kapija and the housing units.**

1. Brief overview of legal services provided

Free legal assistance

- Review of legislation and legal advice provided;**
- Submitted requests for free access to information to the competent institutions;**
- Provided legal information, advice and referrals to clients.**

Project activities at the Institution for Child Care with Educational and Social Problems and Disorderly Conduct

- We visited three organizational units that care for children and youth with educational and social problems and behavioral disorders.**
- We held meetings with professional services and educators in order to identify the main challenges and needs of the children.**

THE SITUATION WITH CLOSED INSTITUTIONS

Special Institution Demir Kapija and the residential units

- **We visited eight housing units in Demir Kapija and four housing units in Negotino.**
- **A visit was also made to the central institution - the Special Institute.**
- **Additionally, we held meetings with the medical staff, the professional services, and the institution's director, where needs for improving accessibility, support services, and the quality of care were documented.**

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Visits to the residential units of the Special Institution Demir Kapija and Negotino revealed the true condition of the facilities. While the residential units offer adequate conditions and care for the residents, the Special Institution is in poor shape, especially ward "C," which restricts the quality of care for the beneficiaries.

To ensure dignified and safe living, as well as ongoing professional care for the residents of Demir Kapija and Negotino, it is recommended:

- **Ongoing process of deinstitutionalization and relocating beneficiaries from the Special Institution to new, functional, and safe facilities.**
- **Increasing the number of professional staff—such as special education teachers, physiotherapists, and child psychologists—to ensure continuous care and support for children and young people.**
- **Regular health and psychiatric care—including medication reviews and routine check-ups by a child psychiatrist—to ensure timely monitoring of beneficiaries' needs.**
- **Establishing inter-institutional cooperation for community services between housing units and local health and social services to ensure ongoing support for residents and promote their social integration.**

THE SITUATION WITH CLOSED INSTITUTIONS

Visits to the children's organizational units in Skopje revealed that the conditions are generally acceptable, with well-equipped facilities and enough space for basic activities. However, some houses could still improve their premises to enhance functionality and comfort for the children. The staff are committed and professional, but some show signs of "burnout" due to a high workload. To better manage these challenges, especially when working with children who use drugs or exhibit risky behavior, it is recommended:

- Increasing the workforce to lower workload and provide continuous care for each child.
- Training staff to handle children who use drugs and engage in risky behavior, aiming to enhance their expertise and psychological support skills.
- Renovation of specific units to enhance living conditions and activities for children.
- Adjusting children's allowance to match inflation and rising costs helps provide sufficient financial support and foster a sense of independence for children.

These measures will enable improvement of living conditions, support for employees, and provision of greater care and quality everyday life for children.

FLA STATISTICAL DATA FOR OCTOBER 2025

FLA	26	
SLA	/	
Total	26	
	Number	Percentages
Gender		
Men	9	35%
Women	17	65%
Ethnicity		
Macedonians	18	70%
Albanians	4	15%
Roma	1	4%
Foreigners	1	4%
Geographical regions		
Skopje Region	18	69%
Vardar Region	0	0
Polog Region	1	4%
Pelagonia Region	1	4%
Southwest Region	0	0
Northeast Region	0	0
Eastern Region	2	8%
Southeast Region	0	0

FLA STATISTICAL DATA FOR OCTOBER 2025

Legal areas	Number	Percentages
Property law	1	4%
Social protection and insurance	2	8%
Child protection	4	15%
Pension and disability	0	0
Health insurance and protection	0	0
Labor relations	4	15%
Gender-based and domestic	4	15%
Status questions	4	15%
Protection of human rights	5	19%
Others	1	4%

IMPROVING CONDITIONS IN THE WOMEN'S WARD - TETOVO

Under the project "Strengthening Human Rights and Services for Children and Vulnerable Persons at Risk in Closed Institutions," funded by the European Union, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights took steps to enhance conditions in the women's ward of the Tetovo Correctional Institution. The ward received new furniture, essential equipment, recreational amenities, and extra resources to foster a safer, more dignified, and engaging environment for women undergoing educational and correctional measures.

The improvements directly enhanced daily living quality and broadened personal development opportunities. The only current beneficiary confirmed the positive effects of the intervention, highlighting that the conditions are notably better than before, with increased freedom of movement, access to activities, and well-decorated common areas.

This activity supports wider efforts to enhance conditions, safeguard human rights, and assist children and other vulnerable groups in closed institutions nationwide.