



NORTH MACEDONIA

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

Trans people, and particularly trans sex workers, continued to be severely impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and without state support. Local trans group, Coalition Margins provided food packages to trans people most in need.

ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

In July, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) found that the MOTO Club Pelister's policy denying access to LGBT people, was discriminatory. The club was ordered to change its policy to provide access to all without discrimination.

In the same month, the CPPD established that the Viola Pharmacy violated a trans woman's access to goods and services when she wanted to purchase hormones prescribed to her, but was required to present extra medical documents and was outed in front of other customers.

ASYLUM

At least one trans person and one lesbian left the country and got international protection in an EU country.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Hate speech remained a serious issue. The Helsinki Committee recorded 216 cases of anti-LGBT hate speech, 42% of all hate speech incidents in 2020. Hate speech cases spiked in April after LGBTI activists appeared on the program of the National Radio-TV to talk about Skopje Pride.

Of 41 criminal complaints launched by Subversive Front, the Public Prosecutor responded to only 14, thus failing to recognise the severity of anti-LGBTI threats and violence. Subversive Front filed complaints to the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office, after the Public Prosecutor dropped criminal charges in several cases.

Coalition Margins documented and reported 15 anti-LGBT hate speech cases this year, and two based on gender and SOGI, but no action has been taken since.

Hate speech remained common by politicians, and complaints have been left unanswered. In June, the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy

Arjanit Hoxha, member of BESA, one of the governing parties, called LGBTI people as "immoral" and "unhealthy".

MP Ivanka Vasilevska and former MP Dimitar Stevanandzija made hateful statements concerning the ongoing education reforms (see below). Both are/were members of the opposition party VMRO-DPMNE and are university professors.

The VMRO-DPMNE official statement about Skopje Pride condemned the government's support for LGBTI people.

In August, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services found that Alpha TV violated its professional duties when using discriminatory language about HERA's sex education program in primary schools. Alpha TV publicly apologised.

HERA was targeted by hate speech throughout the year for providing sex education. Parents were highly vocal about their stance against sex education and the inclusion of LGBTI issues. Anti-gender groups were also active.

The State Education Inspectorate found that a teacher's anti-LGBT posts were discriminatory and ordered him to attend educational workshops.

This year's *Eurovision song contest* contestant Vasil Garvanliev, came out as gay and was regularly targeted by homophobic speech.

In October, the CPDD ordered a public apology and the removal of a hateful article from three websites. The CPDD also ordered journalist Milenko Nedelkovski to remove a hateful Twitter post calling for medical treatment for LGBTI people, and to apologise.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

The implementation of the hate crime law continued to be seriously flawed, with ineffective responses from the police and judiciary.

Coalition Margins documented eight anti-LGBT hate crimes, five of which were domestic violence incidents.

The victim of a homophobic hate crime after Skopje Pride, turned to the Helsinki Committee for legal support, but did not pursue the case in the end. The police arrested the two perpetrators, but released them on the same day.



EDUCATION

94 CSOs welcomed the government's plans to reform primary education in February, including by prioritising gender equality and efforts to combat discrimination and violence in school. The Ministry for Science and Education adopted the new Concept note on primary education in March. Nevertheless, several draft laws were withdrawn due to high public pressure and the influence of the growing anti-gender movement (see above).

The new Law on Prevention of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was adopted in January, envisioning sex education in schools and violence prevention.

HERA's pilot program for comprehensive sex education continued in three schools at 9th grade level, but with ample backlash (see under **Bias Motivated Speech**).

Coalition Margins signed a memorandum of collaboration with the Bureau for Development of Education, to provide teacher training on preventing and reporting anti-LGBTI violence in primary schools.

HERA's report 'Peer Violence and the Role of Professional Services' found that over a third of high school students in Skopje were aware of anti-LGBT violence against another student and that only one in four victims reported cases to a professional.

EMPLOYMENT

Coalition Margins documented a case where an openly lesbian employee was harassed at work.

In December, the CPPD found that an employer discriminated when firing their trans employee.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The CPPD was established at the beginning of 2021. Despite technical and administrative issues, it has issued several opinions.

The new draft Law on Gender Equality is expected to be tabled in early 2022.

FAMILY

Civil society reported that the Ministry for Labour and Social Policy planned to change the draft National LGBTI Action Plan (2021-2025) by removing plans to legally recognise same-sex partnerships or marriage. No developments have taken place since.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Skopje Pride Weekend was celebrated for the ninth time, and held in-person this year.

The second Skopje Pride march was held on 26 June and was attended by thousands, including President Pendarovski, several Ministers, and politicians.

HEALTH

The working group, set up by the Ministry of Health in 2019 to improve trans healthcare, continued to postpone its activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Subversive Front launched the Skopje Queer Centre in March, to provide free counseling and social care support to LGBTI people. In its first year, the Centre provided 287 psychotherapy sessions.

The National LGBTI+ Helpline provided support in over 130 calls this year.

HOUSING

The Helsinki Committee's annual report highlighted that many LGBTI people had to move back to unsafe families and/or faced heightened risk of homelessness. The Safe House Shelter Centre shared in its annual report that it provided housing to six gay men and two trans people in 2020.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

LGBTI human rights defenders continued to be targeted by hate speech, harassment, and threats.

On 19 November, LGBT United Tetovo's office was vandalised - three weeks after the radical national party won the local elections and activists received hundreds of death threats.



'Community (self)organising of transgender movement in Western Balkans region' features a chapter on the trans movement in North Macedonia.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Subversive Front received 6,000 euro state funding for the National LGBTI+ Helpline. The cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy continued and resulted in the opening of the Skopje Queer Center (see under *Health*).

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

The process of putting in place a legal gender recognition (LGR) law has been stalled since June, when the draft Civil Registry Law was passed by one of the parliamentary committees.

The draft law limits access to LGR to citizens; over 18; with full legal capacity; and those unmarried. This means that divorce will be a mandatory requirement. The draft does not mention alternative gender markers.

Following the 2019 European Court of Human Rights judgement in X v. FYROM, four trans people were able to change their legal gender in 2021. Ten other cases are pending at administrative bodies or courts.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Medical abortion (not surgical) is now available in Skopje.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Network for Protection against Discrimination published Human rights of marginalised communities during COVID-19, highlighting the government's failure to support those most marginalised.



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