



# North Macedonia

## ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many trans people, and particularly trans sex workers, lost their income and have been at risk of homelessness and lack of food. No state support was available. Local trans group TransFormA, and Coalition Margins, provided food, disinfectant, and other essentials to those most in need, on a monthly basis.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

The Helsinki Committee recorded 172 cases of hate speech this year, but fear that the number is even higher. The government did not condemn any of these cases.

On 29 August, MP Dimitar Apasiev from the Levica party used the word “faggot” to discredit an opponent in parliament. A criminal proceeding was launched. Hate speech was also part of the pre-election period, used for instance, by Janko Bachev of the ‘Never North, Only Macedonia’ coalition.

Of 83 criminal complaints launched by Subversive Front, the Public Prosecutor responded to five and argued that the social media platforms concerned were registered in the US, and are protected under freedom of speech. Civil society is deeply concerned about this approach.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In August, LGBTI activist Bekim Asani was physically attacked and later received death threats online. The EU Delegation in Skopje condemned the attack, and called for a prompt investigation, prioritisation of the anti-discrimination law.

The implementation of the hate crime law continued to be seriously flawed. Past hate crimes cases remained unresolved by the police and the judiciary and the police continued to fail classifying anti-LGBTI attacks as hate crimes.

Coalition Margins documented several anti-LGBT hate crimes this year.

## DIVERSITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Subversive Front continued working with LGBTI Roma persons in Bitola and Strumica, documenting several cases of multiple and intersectional discrimination, and finding that many lacked support from both the Roma and the LGBTI community. The majority were afraid to be open about their identity, and many engage in sex work to make ends meet. The COVID-19 pandemic hit the community very hard - several NGOs provided support.

## EDUCATION

In July, the Ministry of Education and Science adopted “Guidelines for preventing and combating violence in primary schools”, developed in cooperation with civil society.

The Ministry of Education confirmed that HERA can continue implementing its sexual education pilot program in primary schools.

Coalition Margins documented transphobic bullying in a high school.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In May, the Constitutional Court of North Macedonia repealed the 2019 Law on Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination (LPPD), due to procedural issues. President Stevo Pendarovski committed to prioritising the LPPD on the parliament’s agenda. Following the July elections, the LPPD was tabled again in parliament and successfully adopted in October.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The second Skopje Pride was held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a meeting with the organisers, President Pendarovski commended the Pride events and pledged his support for a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation (see under **Equality and non-discrimination**). MPs and government representatives also took part in online events. Skopje Pride Weekend was successfully organised for the eighth time with physical and online events, without any incidents.

## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

New communities, gatherings and events took place outside Skopje this year. In Strumica, a new community hub gathered over 40 LGBTI participants each month.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

A number of new social media pages were set up for LGBTI youth this year.

## HEALTH

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

Subversive Front documented a doubling of requests for mental health support during the COVID-19 pandemic. In lack of state

funding, they had to raise funds to hire more service providers. In August, the organisation [launched](#) the National LGBTI Helpline, providing free counselling services for LGBTI persons, their family members, and those working with them in education, healthcare, and other key areas. The helpline is funded by the Council of Europe and the EU, and supported by the government.

Coalition Margins documented two discrimination cases - refusal of healthcare to a gay man living with HIV and harassment against a trans woman by her family doctor.

## HOUSING

The COVID-19 pandemic seriously affected LGBTI people. The sudden loss of income forced many to move back to their hometowns or family homes, where they experienced increased violence and discrimination. Many contacted NGOs for mental health support or safe housing. The LGBTI Support Centre has had a difficult time meeting the demand, and its overall existence has been in danger due to the loss of state funding during the early elections.

## LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Following the 2019 European Court of Human Rights decision of [X v. North Macedonia](#), the Civil Registry Office changed X's gender marker in October 2020. The government also has to ensure that all trans people can access LGR in the future, not just person X.

The working group, set up in 2018, continued its work this year to propose a legal gender recognition (LGR) procedure that is quick, accessible and transparent. The most recent draft law introduces a model, whereby someone wanting to have their legal gender to be changed has to sign a statement with the notary, and request the change in the Registry Office. It is positive that a simple administrative procedure is planned in the draft. However, only unmarried trans people can proceed with LGR. The final draft of the law is expected to be adopted in 2021.

Meanwhile, more than 10 LGR cases are pending at different levels before administrative bodies or courts, due to the Registry Office's refusal to process them.

## POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Coalition Margins, in partnership with the Ministry of Interior, conducted three training events for police officers on working with LGBTI people, sex workers, and people who use drugs.

## PUBLIC OPINION AND ATTITUDES

Subversive Front's surveys conducted during 17 trainings for 325 civil servants [found](#) that awareness and understanding of anti-LGBTI violence and discrimination was much lower than in the case of racial and ethnic minorities, religious affiliation or political belief. 36% also thought that LGBTI people wanted "special rights".

In October, a poll by the Institute for Human Rights [found](#) that 76% of the citizens of North Macedonia said they had never met an LGBTI person; two-thirds would not want to have an LGBTI colleague; two-thirds would not want same-sex couples to hold hands in public.



[NORTH MACEDONIA WEB PAGE](#)

[MORE INFORMATION ON WWW.RAINBOW-EUROPE.ORG](#)