



NORTH MACEDONIA

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

Civil society groups continued to support those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis and who were left without state support - mostly trans people, and particularly trans sex workers.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Hate speech remained a serious issue, with little response from the authorities. Nevertheless, the Commission for the Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination established that the anti-gender Coalition for the Protection of Children's statements amounted to online hate speech on two occasions. The cases were sent to the Commission by LGBTI organisations.

The basic civil court ruled: the organisation "Od nas za nas", member of the anti-democratic coalition, is responsible for defamation committed against HERA

The anti-gender movement continued to gain ground, and their backlash has in part contributed to the stalling of the legal gender recognition law reform (see under *Legal Gender Recognition*). Coalitions Margins published 'Who is afraid of gender?', an analytical study of anti-gender posts and content online, highlighting that misinformation is the key tactic applied.

The Helsinki Committee recorded 36 cases of anti-LGBT hate speech, 22% of all documented hate speech incidents in 2022.

Coalition Margins documented and reported six anti-LGBT hate speech cases this year.

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 four gender based/ domestic anti-LGBT hate crimes.

On 28 November, the Primary Court of Strumica sentenced a man to six months in prison for physically assaulting an LGBTI activist. The court

found that the attack was motivated by hatred for the activist's sexual orientation, and is a positive step in tackling hate crimes against the LGBTI community in the country.

On 1 December, after a preliminary procedure was carried out, the Public Prosecution in Skopje filed an indictment against the person who attacked a group of LGBTI activists in 2019 after Skopje Pride. The person is charged with the crime of "violence" with the motivation of hatred based on sexual orientation and belonging to the LGBTI community.

BODILY INTEGRITY

The results of a survey on so-called 'conversion therapies' were published in September, finding that LGBTI people have undergone this harmful practice in medical settings and also at the hands of religious practitioners and family members.

EDUCATION

Bullying and violence against LGBTI students remained a serious issue this year.

A rainbow-coloured bench in a primary school sparked hate speech against a podcaster who often covers queer topics. Following questioning, the school said the bench had nothing to do with LGBTI rights.

No progress was made on the implementation of the 2021 Law on Prevention of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, which envisioned sex education in schools and violence prevention. In September, CSOs and 15 professional associations signed the Declaration 'With Sex Education in Schools to a Healthier and Safer Youth' and urged the government to make progress.

HERA's evaluation of the pilot program for sex education in public primary schools was presented. HERA started working on a strategy for the implementation of sex education in schools.

In October, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended North Macedonia conduct research on peer violence against LGBT children and introduce comprehensive sex education.



Coalition Margins started providing teachers training on preventing and reporting anti-LGBTI violence in primary schools, in partnership with the Bureau for Development of Education.

The Ministry of Education and Science formed a Commission with the mandate to make a proposal to withdraw the use of a sociology textbook for the second year of high school education, which the activists and the Ombudsman claimed contained numerous discriminatory contents.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The new Gender Equality Strategy was adopted in July, which includes addressing gender stereotypes and non-discrimination based on sex, gender, and gender identity, as a general objective. SOGI are not mentioned in any of the specific objectives.

The new Equality and Anti-discrimination Strategy was adopted in May. The Strategy mentions LGBTI people once, in the section on preventing hate speech, violence and other forms of discrimination.

Coalition Margins registered one case of discrimination against a trans male person in the area of labour rights.

FOREIGN POLICY

In May the European Parliament adopted its report on North Macedonia which called for the adoption of LGR based on self-determination, adoption of inclusive education laws and proper investigation of hate crime and death threats against LGBTI people which have starkly increased.

The EU voted to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia this year, but with conditions to be met before the talks can begin.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Skopje Pride Weekend was celebrated for the tenth time this year and featured discussions, exhibitions, performances, and parties. The event had two parts, one between 2-11 June and another between 15-17 September.

The third Skopje Pride march was held on 25 June and was attended by thousands, including several ministers, and politicians. President Pendarovski attended a pre-Pride community event and issued a statement in support of Pride. No incidents were recorded. This year's motto was 'Come Out for Love! Dignity. Equality. Justice'.

HEALTH

The Ministry for Health cut the National Program against HIV budget by 40%, which civil society firmly criticised.

HERA held a public debate on LGBTI youth's trust in healthcare professionals.

HOUSING

Housing remained challenging for LGBTI people during the prolonged COVID-19 and economic crises. Many LGBTI people had to move back to unsafe families and/or faced a heightened risk of homelessness. In 2022, the Safe House shelter provided housing to ten LGBTI persons: five gay men, one lesbian and four trans people.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

LGBTI and SRHR organisations continue to be targeted by hate speech and misinformation spread by anti-gender groups and the far-right political party Levica. The Coalition for the Protection of Children, an anti-gender group coalition, publicly named and mocked LGBTI activists on their website, spreading misinformation (see more under *Bias-motivated Speech*).

Bekim Asani, President of LGBT United Tetovo, was attacked three times this year, in Tetovo, Strumica and Skopje. The assaults in Skopje and Strumica have been investigated, with the assailant in Strumica receiving a six-year prison sentence (see under *Bias-motivated Violence*). So far there has been no investigation regarding the attack in Tetovo. LGBT United Tetovo decided to move its offices to Skopje in September after the activists received various death threats and vandalism. When they requested police support to move their office items with protection, the police did not respond.



INTERSECTIONALITY

In June, the interparty group on LGBTI rights held an event on LGBTI people's access to social and health services, where the situation of Roma LGBTI people was discussed in detail.

Coalition Margins and the Parliament's Intergroup on Roma and Intergroup on LGBTI people's rights held an event on the situation of Roma LGBTI people in October.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

In March, the government abruptly withdrew the draft Civil Registry Law, which would have made legal gender recognition significantly easier for trans people. The law would have provided LGR to citizens; over 18, with full legal capacity; and those unmarried. Civil society and the EU LGBTI Intergroup firmly criticised the regressive move, which also signals North Macedonia's failure to implement the 2019 European Court of Human Rights judgement in X v. FYROM. In September, the new working group held its first meeting. The Ministry of Justice plans to start the entire drafting process from scratch. Coalition Margins and the Helsinki Committee are advocating within the working group for the LGR chapter to remain unchanged and to be adopted sooner.

Ten trans people changed their gender markers, five of them on the basis of self-determination. Other cases are pending.

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