



NORTH MACEDONIA

ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

In February, a trans woman was harassed at a pharmacy and denied hormones, which had been prescribed by her doctor. NGO Coalition Margins reported the case to the Pharmaceutical Chamber, the Ombudsperson, the Ministry of Health and the State Health Inspectorate. None of the authorities found discrimination to date.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

The increase in LGBTI visibility and hate speech went hand-in-hand this year. NGOs documented 216 cases this year, 73 during Pride weekend. A number of criminal complaints were filed, but were either dismissed or are pending. The authorities did not condemn any of the cases.

Following the Minister of Health's announcement in June, that trans healthcare will be covered by public insurance (see under **Health**), several transphobic articles were shared on social media. Following public pressure, the Ministry withdrew the decision.

Prime Minister Zoran Zaev received harsh public criticism for calling the detained businessman Bojan Jovanovski, a "faggot". Zaev apologised.

As part of the UPR, North Macedonia accepted recommendations to investigate and prosecute anti-LGBTI hate crimes.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

The SOGI-inclusive Criminal Code was inefficient in addressing hate crimes this year. The police and prosecution failed to recognise and pursue these cases. NGOs documented numerous hate crimes, including physical violence (40), verbal and psychological violence (16), and domestic violence (3).

EDUCATION

In July, the Parliament adopted the new Law on Primary Education, providing protection against discrimination and violence on grounds of SOGI and making it mandatory for schools to report cases, imposing a fine if this is not done. Civil society welcomed the law.

Some schools showed willingness to improve the situation, but systemic change is lacking. NGOs remained the only actors to address bullying.

North Macedonia accepted UPR recommendations to remove school textbooks that stigmatise LGBTI people.

EMPLOYMENT

The Commission for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) and the State Labour Inspectorate failed to establish discrimination in a case where a trans man was subjected to harassment during a job interview in 2018. The interviewer said, "even the animals do not live like that," and asked transphobic questions.

A gay man living with HIV was fired, his dismissal letter saying that his status was a threat to the workplace environment and colleagues. The victim did not report the case to the authorities.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

North Macedonia received 14 UPR recommendations on SOGIESC issues and accepted all of them.

On 11 March, the long awaited Law on Protection and Prevention against Discrimination was adopted, including SOGI as protected grounds. The 'Network against homophobia and transphobia' and other NGOs and activists, held a demonstration outside the Parliament in the morning, calling for adoption. The law was previously stalled in the Parliament for 11 months, due to hostile attitudes of some of the key leaders in the process, such as the President of the Parliamentary Commission for Labor and Social Policy and several MPs. In January, the Deputy Prime Minister (DUI) said that the law has some "disputable categories", like LGBT. The law entered into force on 22 May.

The old CPD was dismissed in August, and the new Commission remains to be established. A public call for new members was announced in June, but further information on the procedure was not shared since then. NGOs are concerned no Commission will be in place until the 2020 elections, leaving North Macedonia without an equality body for more than a year.



North Macedonia hosted a national LGBTI conference “Advancement of the Rights of the LGBTI Community in North Macedonia” between 27-28 June, sharing good regional practices.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The first Skopje Pride took place on 29 June, with nearly 2,000 participants. A few hundred counter-protesters gathered outside an Orthodox Christian cathedral and a violent mob attacked activists (see more under **Human rights defenders**). The counter-protesters chanted hateful slogans and were joined by organisations for “the protection of family values” and priests.

The Pride Weekend and the March for Visibility of Trans people took place without incidents.

HEALTH

In May, the Ministry of Health set up a working group to improve trans healthcare. In June, the Minister of Health made a public announcement during a conference that the costs of trans healthcare will be covered by public insurance (see under **Bias-motivated speech**). His statements sparked public criticism and the decision was later withdrawn.

Subversive Front documented two incidents where gay men living with HIV faced discrimination in healthcare. The victims did not report them to the authorities.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Bekim Asani, chair of the LGBT United Tetovo Macedonia, and six other activists were attacked by a group of 20 after Skopje Pride. They were dragged from taxis, beaten, and threatened with murder and rape. Three police officers were also attacked when trying to intervene. Thanks to the intervention of more police officers, the activists sustained only minor injuries and the assailants were eventually arrested, a criminal investigation was opened. The investigation is ongoing and court proceedings are expected.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

On 19 January, the European Court of Human Rights published its judgment in the X v. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

case, establishing that the lack of a clear legal framework on legal gender recognition (LGR) violates trans people’s right to private and family life. In lack of trans specific healthcare services in Macedonia, Person X had started hormonal therapy and undergone mastectomy in Serbia. He then changed his name in Macedonia, but was unable to change his gender marker and gendered personal ID number. The Court did not rule on the requirement of sterility, which the authorities claimed would be necessary for legal transition, as it already established a violation. The Court also stated, that Macedonia had no clear position on the sterility requirement. The case of Person X was documented in a video in February, which attracted over 15,000 views, contributing to the increasing visibility of trans people in the country. The judgment has not been implemented and Person X’s documents remain unchanged.

Previously in 2018, the Minister for Labour and Social Policy confirmed that introducing a law on LGR would be a priority issue. The working group, set up in 2018, was very active this year and prepared the draft section on LGR in the Law on birth registration. NGO members of the working group advocated for a quick and transparent process, based on self-determination.

PUBLIC OPINION

According to the findings of two public opinion polls by the Institute for Human Rights, 80 per cent of respondents thought that ‘homosexuality’ was a disease.