



Status quo on reconciliation and no hate speech in North Macedonia

Tools and resources available.

Organisation name and Country: Youth Cultural Center-Bitola, North Macedonia



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

This document is a product of the Erasmus+ funded project “Walking the path of reconciliation-empowering communities for a peaceful society”, implemented by BBA and partners during 2019-2022. The European Commission’s support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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Many reports and studies about the Macedonian model of multiculturalism are indicating that although it promotes positive ideas for integration, it is still not functional enough. Discrimination on ethnic basis is evident, perceptions about members of other ethnic groups are slowly changing in positive direction, formal educational system is not supporting enough integration among dominant ethnic communities.

Physical attacks among minors from different ethnic origin are more frequent during the pre-election periods or in times of political crises, and most often that is a happening in the backyards of the schools and in the public transport in Skopje where students are traveling to their high schools. These incidents most often take place between children of Macedonian and Albanian ethnic origin, while the other communities are very rarely involved in such incidents.

The regular **Progress Reports on North Macedonia by European Commission** are pointing the facts about continuing separation along ethnic lines in education.

The latest report (May 2019) notes that the quality of education is a concern at all levels and the system remains vulnerable to political influence and corruption. “There has not been any reduction in the number of schools where students are separated and barriers to integration remain significant”¹

Also, in the same report, another problem related with education of vulnerable groups is emphasized. According to their estimates, “10% of children from Roma communities do not regularly attend primary school and their dropout rates remain high”. Furthermore, “children and students with disabilities and those from Roma communities continue to face barriers to regular and quality education and training”.

The latest **Annual Report of Ombudsman** concludes that except in education, there is no significant improvement in the situation of Roma in the areas of health, housing and employment.² This was confirmed by the Ombudsman’s research on the topic “Roma inclusion after the end of the Roma Decade 2005-2015 – the current situation and challenges”.

One of the most reliable sources of information about the cases of discrimination³ in the country are the regular reports from Macedonian **Helsinki Committee for Human Rights** that are available on their web site mhc.org.mk. They cover cases of hate incidents, including those committed due to ethnic background and due to political affiliation.

This organization is very recognizable in public with their evidence based advocacy toward state institutions to enhance preventative measures, by reflecting remembrance in human rights education, history curricula and relevant training, taking steps to educate the public, especially minors and young

¹ European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document, North Macedonia 2019 Report, Brussels, 29.5.2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf>

² Republic of North Macedonia, Ombudsman, Annual Report on the Degree of Provision, Respect, Advancement and Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms, 2018, Skopje, March 2019

³ Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination was adopted in 2010 as first legal regulation in the country to ensure protection against discrimination, and came into force on 1 January 2011



people on the values of cultural diversity and inclusion, and aiming for all sectors of society to have a role in combating such intolerance.

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights is managing the platform www.govornaomraza.mk where people can make reports of hate speech on the social networks/media. Some 40 reports on the average per month are registered, and many of them are related to hate speech due to ethnic background, as well as to sexual orientation or gender identity.

They publish, in cooperation with Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), the **Annual Report on Hate Crime**, based on monitoring the national printed and electronic media with different ideological leanings and political affiliation, provide free legal aid to victims of hate crimes and monitoring the trials of selected cases of hate crimes on different protected characteristics.

Ethnicity (79 incidents) and political affiliation (31 incidents) constituted the main grounds on which hate crimes committed in 2018 were based. The trend of committing this kind of hate crime was particularly striking before and during the elections or some significant political happening in the country.

Another important source of data and analysis about the state of reconciliation and about the results of the efforts to overcome the ethnic and religious stereotypes is the **Mission of OSCE in Skopje** and their publications can be found on their web site www.osce.org.mk.

In all their surveys political affiliation is the most frequent ground of discrimination, both in situations when respondents have experienced discrimination and when they have witnessed discrimination. The second most frequent ground for personally experienced discrimination is ethnicity. According to the public perception, three factors are predominant in leading to unequal treatment in employment: political affiliation, age of candidates and their ethnicity.

One of their surveys is “Barometer of Equal Opportunities”, which was conducted in 2009, 2013 and 2018 by Brima Gallup International. A comparative analysis of the results of the three surveys provides an insight into the direction and intensity of changes of perceptions, attitudes, knowledge and awareness of discrimination and inequality in the country in the period from 2009 to 2018. According to the latest survey, most of the respondents who say that they would seek protection if they were victims of discrimination would turn to the police, which is considered as a relevant institution, competent for protection against discrimination, and in smaller numbers they would turn to courts, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, the Ombudsman Institution, lawyers and civil society organizations. The structure of these answers points to the conclusion that a large part of citizens do not recognize the relevant antidiscrimination institutions.⁴

According to the latest “**Youth Study of North Macedonia 2018/2019**”, in the past the dominant ground for inequality was the social and racial belonging, based on which political mobilization was conducted, but nowadays it manifests via the cultural belonging, if we are to include in this notion the racial, ethnic, religious and language social groups.⁵

⁴ Barometer of Equal Opportunities, <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-skopje/439679>

⁵ Youth Study North Macedonia 2018/2019, Topuzovska, Laktovich M., Borota Popovska, M., Serafimovska, E. Cekich, A. Starova, N. (2019), Friedrich Ebert Foundation - Skopje, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15266.pdf>



The study further notes that the most frequent ground of discrimination is the political belief (12,9%), and ethnic origin (9%), while the sexual orientation and language used by youth is the least cause for discrimination.

Within these phenomena of discrimination, there is another form which is becoming more rampant and is present precisely among young people. It is the intolerance on social networks, that arises from the intolerance between the majority and other minorities leading to the creation of public space where any difference that deviates from the generally accepted norms is discriminated against.

CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES

There are many examples of civil society in North Macedonia that are making initiatives for peaceful resolutions of ethnic crises and are implementing projects with the aim of reconciliation between ethnic communities who were involved in the conflict in 2001. In fact, many important peaceful initiatives from the period of greatest inter-ethnic hostilities at the end of 1990s and beginning of 2000s developed in becoming associations of citizens and successful civil society organizations that are still advocating for peace, tolerance, democracy, justice and integration at local, national and regional level. Macedonian civil society, which at the beginning of the state independence in 1990s was also divided on ethnic basis, was actually one of the leaders of the interethnic cooperation in last two decades⁶.

Most of the renowned civic organizations and networks that are now leading the most significant processes of engaging in monitoring, advocating and initiating the democratic practices are multiethnic. It is almost taken for granted that civil society actor, if it wants to be seriously considered as relevant for any kind of active engagement in society, should have members from at least two largest ethnic communities in the state. And there are many cases where most representative members of some organization or coalitions are coming from three or more different ethnic communities.

The civil society has a crucial role in monitoring, protection and promotion of new solutions in the fight against discrimination, advocacy for social justice, combating ethnocentrism and segregation in education, promoting the positive/affirmative action of the state as an indispensable element in combating the consequences of previous continuous discrimination.⁷

Having in mind that text books and other education materials in the primary and secondary public schools on Macedonian and Albanian language contribute toward developing ethnic nationalism, many civic organizations and non-formal educational initiatives try to engage students from different ethnic background in training events with more interaction among participants. They insist on participants to hear and learn about the stories of the other community and initiate discussions and working inclusively in smaller groups.

⁶ Multicultural connections in the Civil Sector in the Republic of Macedonia, Liljana Popovska, Publisher: Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, 2017

⁷ Manual on the Elimination of Ethnicity-Based Discrimination, Mirjana Najcevska, Sasko Todorovski, Publisher: Foundation Open Society Institute – Macedonia, 2009, <https://fosm.mk/wp-content/uploads/publications/priracnik-eliminiranje-na-diskriminacija-angliski.pdf>



Peace Action <http://mirovnaakcija.org/> was formed in 2001 by many informal groups of pacifists and antimilitarists. They promote peace and culture of non-violence. Their regional program on antidiscrimination is focused on work with youth for recognition and reaction on different types of discrimination, and they cooperate with youth organizations from Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Croatia and Macedonia. Another program is “Dealing with the past”, which started from 2008, focused on collecting stories from life during the war in 2001. They publish books, journals and collect many materials related with this war, and organize trainings for peace building with participants who were victims or direct participants in the war activities, from both sides. Some of their books are collected stories from women, from displaced persons/refugees and from minorities.

Nansen Dialogue Center Skopje <https://ndc.org.mk/> is non-governmental dedicated to reducing the ethnic based segregation in schools and promotion of interculturalism in the educational system. NDC Skopje is profiled as an intercultural resource centre, which continuously creates and develops innovative intercultural upbringing and education strategies, approaches and resources, supporting teachers, students and parents in creating new and successful intercultural school practices.

In 2017 they prepared first ever children’s illustrated Macedonian-Albanian/Albanian-Macedonian dictionary for primary schools as an important tool for policies aimed at overcoming segregation in schools and in wider society as a whole. The dictionary is also available for free online⁸ and as an app for android and iOS devices. These versions are enriched with audio recordings of pronunciations.

Currently, NDC Skopje is implementing its Nansen model for intercultural education in 10 primary and secondary schools in 8 municipalities. Another 11 schools have implemented this model previously. This model enables successful integration of students, parents and teachers from different ethnic communities through a modern upbringing and educational process.

Macedonian Civic Education Center (<https://www.mcgo.org.mk/>) was founded in 2004 with a mission to develop educational programs and provide services to educational and other public institutions, local communities, the non-governmental sector, the business sector and citizens, in order to contribute to the continuous development of the civil society. They implemented many projects directly related with integrated education, cooperating with national and local government institutions with competences in educations. Their project for interethnic integration in education secured a long term support from USAID.

Forum ZDF (Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst - Macedonia Program) is one of the organizations that are visible in the public sphere thanks to their efforts to connect people with different ethnic background and to support the development of new narratives and discourses in Balkan societies. They are organizing workshops for high school students dedicated to the youth peace activism, trainings for teachers of history and sociology.

The importance of these and many other civic initiatives for engaging students in interethnic activities in the non-formal education process is extraordinary. However, there is a risk that if such activities are targeting only most active students and leave the other students, who possibly hold the negative stereotypes toward other communities, to not participate in these trainings.

⁸ <https://hcnm-ndc.org/>



GOOD EXAMPLES FROM MEDIA

In 2014 Macedonian Parliament adopted law articles that forbid spreading and promoting hate speech, discrimination content via internet. These articles didn't improved significantly the situation with the hate rhetoric and discriminatory content at Macedonian online media, and many calls to violence and hate toward some communities have been registered. According to the Article 319 from the Criminal Code, the sentence for imprisonment of one to five years shall be the punishment for causing hatred, discord or intolerance on grounds of gender, race, color of the skin, membership in marginalized group, ethnic membership, language, nationality, social background, religious belief etc.

Radio MOF is one of the few online media (also broadcasting platform) that is promoting responsibility regarding the published content online and is making efforts to promote media literacy and help the citizens to recognize the hate speech. Under their hashtag #Dehejtizacija ("Dehatesation") they published around 40 stories⁹ related with analyzing forms of hate speech or unethical reporting in traditional and social media.

Another valuable source of information and analysis related with hate speech in N. Macedonia is the academic blog **ResPublica**, founded by the Institute for Communication Studies in Skopje. This platform is a professional network of academic community, professors, analysts, researchers, journalists, civic activists, students etc., which analyses many topic of public interest and regularly publishes opinions related with media literacy, civic values, rule of law, fight against propaganda and fake news, hate speech, discrimination etc.¹⁰

In the framework of this platform there are many manuals, studies and policy documents related with media literacy, freedom of speech, media situation in the country, fake news, and one of them is the document "Freedom of Speech Versus Hate Speech in Media in Macedonia"¹¹, published in 2018, with review on European and Macedonian legislation regarding this topic, case studies and recommendations for effective and systematic handling with the hate speech.

OUTPUT FROM THE GOVERNMENT

As a result of abovementioned and many other civil initiatives, in recent times some positive changes were initiated on national governing level to return the topic of reconciliation on the agenda to reverse separation trends and initiate new spirit in the integrative policies. There was a significant progress on national level regarding the investment in the future of interethnic relations in last three years, and one of the documents that reflects that development is the creation of one important document.

The **National Strategy for development of the "One Society For All" Concept and Interculturalism** is a document created by the Government of North Macedonia in 2019 as a response on the division of the society on many levels, and with the aim to initiate activities and strengthen the processes of

⁹ <https://www.radiomof.mk/dehejtizacija/>

¹⁰ <https://respublica.edu.mk/>

¹¹ <https://respublica.edu.mk/attach/Govor-na-omraza-vo-mediumite-vo-Makedonija-rezime.pdf>



communication and cooperation between communities, with the aim of developing a society where every person shall feel as a member of “one society”. The main objective of the strategy is to depart from a divided society and arrive at a society which is fair and just and which makes citizens more equal and equitable.

The strategy was created with substantial participation of civic organizations in whole process of preparation of the document through working groups and public consultations. It aims to further develop intercultural communication in the Republic of North Macedonia between its diverse cultures and communities, and to apply it as a tool for implementing the recommendations of the international bodies of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Commission and of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The strategy notes that although multicultural legal framework was guaranteed with the Ohrid Agreement and the Constitutional changes in 2001, with the aim to facilitate the multiethnic character of the society, that was not enough for securing the social cohesion or integration in the society.¹²

This concept of One Society includes:

- Recognition of all diversities,
- Guaranteeing and ensuring the equality, social justice, fairness, equal opportunities, inclusion and participation of citizens in the decision making ,
- Achievement of social cohesion.

Also, there is another example of adopting strategic document related with the efforts for reconciliation by the public institutions. **The Strategy for Inter-ethnic Integration in the Education and Civic Participation of the City of Skopje (2019-2024)** has a goal to create “one” school for all students, regardless of their ethnic identity, and initiating and development of civic participation of the students in high schools from the City of Skopje.¹³

Some of the activities planned in this strategy are support for joint classes for high schools students with different learning language and support for joint out of the school activities (multicultural workshops, art performances, excursions, civic initiatives and actions etc.).

¹² Strategy for the development of Concept for One Society and Interculturalism, Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2019,

https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/strategii/strategija_ednoopshtestvo_29.10.2019.pdf

¹³ Strategy for Inter-ethnic Integration in the Education and Civic Participation of the City of Skopje 2019-2024,

<https://skopje.gov.mk/media/4493/%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%93%D1%83%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%B8-%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%93%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%BB%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4-%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BF%D1%98%D0%B5.pdf>



The **National Youth Strategy** (2016-2025)¹⁴ lays down the main principles and directions for action of all stakeholders in the society which can help to improve the social and economic position of youth and create environment that would enable young people exercise their rights, needs and interest. One of the key values and determinations grounded in the strategy is multiculturalism, although compared with the previous strategy (2005-2015) it is far less focused on the cultural integration of youth.

For example, one of the planned target interventions in the National Youth Strategy 2005-2015 was social integration of youth through and during the process of education, with the objectives to build active, democratically oriented and responsible citizens; to promote ethics of peace, tolerance and coexistence among youth, elimination of the segregation of young people from different socio-cultural background in the schools¹⁵. Proposed strategies for this intervention were:

1. Introducing continuous and standardized civil education for young people, from elementary to the end of the secondary education, identical for high schools and vocation schools, with a special emphasis on civil rights, freedoms and responsibilities.
2. Opening schools to civil programs offered by CSOs;
3. Introducing programs for inter-cultural education of school and university students, to include:
 - introduction of integrative extra-curricular activities in ethnically mixed schools;
 - inter-school exchanges of students and reciprocal visits as part of schools extracurricular activities, with a special emphasis on inter-ethnic cooperation, expansion to rural communities and gender equality of participants;
 - inter-school sports activities and contests at inter-municipality and national level, with a special emphasis on inter-ethnic cooperation, expansion to rural communities and participants' gender equality.

The current national strategy (2016-2025) did not proposed some specific measures related with multicultural values or inter-ethnic cooperation, and it rather treats those issues as less important than the question of sexual education in the process of formal and non-formal education.¹⁶

Other important official documents regarding the youth policies are few **municipal strategies for youth**. Currently, only Kicevo (2017-2022), Strumica (2015-2020)¹⁷, Centar (2015-2020)¹⁸ and Struga (2015-

¹⁴ National Youth Strategy 2016-2025,

http://www.ams.gov.mk/images/dokumenti/mladi/National_Youth_Strategy_2016-2025_eng.pdf

¹⁵ National Youth Strategy 2005-2015, <http://www.ams.gov.mk/images/dokumenti/mladi/nacionalna-strategija-zam-ladi.pdf>

¹⁶ National Youth Strategy 2016-2025, page 21

http://www.ams.gov.mk/images/dokumenti/mladi/National_Youth_Strategy_2016-2025_eng.pdf

¹⁷ Youth Strategy of Municipality of Strumica 2015-2020,

<https://strumica.gov.mk/downloads/publikacii/Strategija-Mladi-Strumica.pdf>

¹⁸ Youth Strategy of Municipality of Centar 2015-2020,

https://www.centar.gov.mk/doc/JavniDejnosti/Strategija_MLADI_centar.pdf



2020)¹⁹ have the strategies, and City of Skopje (2014-2018), Tetovo (2011-2015), Bitola (2014-2019), had such strategies, but have not made new after their previous expired.

Youth strategies of Strumica, Centar and Struga are made simultaneously by the same consultants and are similar in structure. All of them are noting that multiculturalism (defined as respect of differences in all fields, tolerance, intercultural dialogue among young people) is one of their guiding principles and values. And only Struga, having in mind that it is recognizable multiethnic municipality, has in its document few sentences more about tradition of coexistence and mutual help among communities, as well as the conclusion that the rise of ethnic exclusivity and inter-ethnic intolerance in the country is a menace for the youth development in Struga. Consequently, one of the priorities listed in the Youth Strategy of Municipality of Struga is enhancement of inclusion of youth in the implementation of multicultural projects.

Youth Strategy of the Municipality of Kicevo 2017 - 2022 recognizes that multi-ethnic integration is an issue that is very important in an environment of the Municipality of Kicevo, but also for the youth who live in this municipality and spend their time together every day. Therefore, this issue has a special place in the Strategy as the activities in this area concern all young people. In this document it is recognized that although the most of young people in this town have friends from different communities, there is a worrying trend of increased hate speech on ethnic basis among the youth.

Conclusions

- International and domestic monitoring organizations, civil society and media are continuously registering hate speech and hate incidents, including those committed due to ethnic background and due to political affiliation, and most of them are making efforts to advocate for introducing preventive measures, including education about democratic political systems, human rights and raising public awareness, especially among young people.
- There is an increase of the public perception that the most widespread discrimination in North Macedonia is on grounds of political affiliation and ethnicity.
- A large part of citizens do not recognize the relevant antidiscrimination institutions, including the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, the Ombudsman, courts and civil society organizations.
- There is a lack of civic engagement among young people related with fight against discrimination and against hate speech, especially on areas where they are spending most of their free time - social networks.
- The quality of interactions among students of different ethnicities in formal and non-formal education is still insufficient, having in mind that there is no systematic engagement of national and local authorities responsible for education policies, school management, teachers and all

¹⁹ Youth Strategy of Municipality of Struga 2015-2020, <https://ccstruga.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Strategija-Mladi-Struga-MK.pdf>



students in interethnic activities, including those who hold negative perception of other ethnic communities.

- Hate speech used by politicians during public debates and political campaigns, results in hate crimes committed by their supporters.

Recommendations

- Public institutions should allow prompt and effective investigation and prosecution of hate crimes, and should publish data on hate crimes, including the number of such incidents reported by the public and registered by law enforcement authorities and the number of convictions.
- Greater public promotion is needed about the competences of institutions involved in the fight against discrimination, especially the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, the Ombudsman Institution and courts.
- Civic participation and youth engagement should be supported in formal education with encouraging the use of available resources and expertise of civic sector. Models of education that put greater emphasis on cooperation, tolerance, understanding and knowledge of other cultures, social groups and political views need to be promoted.
- All contributors in education process need to include all students in interethnic activities, and to encourage young people for participation in educational exchange programs.
- It is necessary for political parties to make a more serious effort to reduce party-based discrimination and ethnic hatred in order to create a new political culture based on dialogue and cooperation, respect between people from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, constructiveness when handling conflicts.