ANNUAL REPORT

Lorem ipsum

for 2024

Institute for Human Rights



Institute for Human Rights

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INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Human Rights is a civil society organization that advocates for the promotion, advancement, and protection of human rights and freedoms through its work. The Institute achieves its objectives through continuous education, analysis, research, advocacy, and the organization of expert discussions within the legal profession, as well as public debates for the general public.

In 2024, the Institute for Human Rights marked its 15th anniversary—15 years of protecting human rights and freedoms and promoting the rule of law. Through the publication of a monograph and the organization of a commemorative event, we reflected on our work since 2009 and our commitment to successfully implementing projects and numerous activities, once again demonstrating that we are a credible and recognizable actor in the promotion, advancement, and protection of human rights and freedoms.

In 2024, our strategic priorities remained focused on the judiciary and human rights, legal certainty, the promotion of human rights and freedoms, equality and non-discrimination, the fight against corruption, and participation in the negotiation process for accession to the European Union. Monitoring the work of the Constitutional Court, the Judicial Council, the Council of Public Prosecutors, the Administrative Court, and other state institutions continued to be a key focus of the Institute's work.

Within its strategic commitments and beliefs, the Institute works in several key areas:

- It monitors the state of human rights and freedoms through observation and analysis of all relevant processes in the country;
- It raises awareness among relevant institutions, organizations, and other stakeholders about the need to establish and develop effective mechanisms for the promotion, guarantee, and protection of human rights and freedoms;
- It informs citizens about their rights in cases related to discrimination;
- It initiates discussions on relevant issues and problems that directly affect the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and freedoms in the Republic of North Macedonia, both among experts and the general public.

This annual report covers the work of the Institute for Human Rights throughout the past year, during which it tirelessly worked to improve the state of human rights, promote equality and non-discrimination, identify corruption, and improve the transparency and accountability of state institutions and bodies whose work the Institute continuously monitors. The report aims to present the activities of the Institute through the implementation of individual project activities, the provision of free legal aid, its contribution to the promotion of academia through the publication of the professional journal Legal Dialogue, the release of educational courses on the IHR e-learning Academy, and its practical contribution through participation in working groups and coordination bodies on topics related to human rights.

MANAGEMENT BOARD OF THE INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (IHR)

The President of the Institute for Human Rights is Margarita Caca Nikolovska.

The Management Board consists of 7 members:

Margarita Caca Nikolovska President of IHR
Agim Miftari Vice President of IHR
Vera Koco | Member
Vanja Mihajlova | Member
Igor Spirovski | Member
Momir Maricic | Member
Filip Medarski | Member

ADVISORY BOARD OF IHR

The Advisory Board of the Institute for Human Rights consists of 13 members:

• Margarita Caca Nikolovska • Agim Miftari • Vera Koco • Vanja Mihajlova • Mersel Biljali •

Milojka Kalkashlieva • Konstantin Hadzi Lega • Irena Cuculoska • Sase Dimovski •

Macedonian Young Lawyers Association • Zarko Hadzi Zafirov

• Tatijana Temelkoska • Slavica Dimitrievska

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF IHR

In 2024, the Executive Office of the Institute for Human Rights was composed of 6 members who successfully implemented the planned activities of all projects in constant communication with the Management Board. In addition to managing projects, they actively participated in working groups and coordination bodies, as well as in conferences, debates, focus groups, and similar events both in the Republic of North Macedonia and abroad.

In 2024, the Institute for Human Rights continued its tradition of cooperation, support, and development through its internship program. The program aims to familiarize young people with the Institute's work through education, training, and research in the field of human rights protection and the rule of law. Interns gain new knowledge and have the opportunity to closely observe the work of the Institute so that they may become future advocates for the promotion and respect of human rights. In 2024, 2 interns were involved in the work of IHR and made an active contribution to the Institute's daily activities. As part of their tasks, the interns participated in the free legal aid program, attended sessions of the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors, and conducted research on topics related to human rights.

THE INSTITUTE IN NUMBERS



6 Successfully implemented projects



6 Publications



4 Monitoring reports



1 Published online course on the IHR Academy



22 Workshops, trainings, and focus groups



1 Participation in legislative working groups



30 Articles published in Legal Dialogu



4 Conferences and events



1 Video



9 Infographics



2 Contests for secondary school students



4 Small grants awarded to CSOs



10 Blog posts published on the Human Rights Platform



4 Participation in events abroad

ANNIVERSARY – 15 YEARS OF THE INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

In 2024, we marked an important anniversary – 15 years since the founding of the Institute for Human Rights. To commemorate this occasion, we dedicated the anniversary to promoting the results achieved within the Institute's strategic priorities and organized a special event. The event was attended by representatives of civil society organizations, institutions, and other partners, where we discussed how the civil sector can continue to be a driving force for social change in the Republic of North Macedonia.



Additionally, we prepared a monograph that offers a retrospective of our work since 2009 and our commitment to the successful implementation of projects and numerous activities through which we once again demonstrated and proved that we are a credible and recognized actor in advancing, promoting, improving, and protecting human rights and freedoms.

The monograph provides an overview of the results achieved within our strategic priorities, namely:

JUDICIARY AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

- Increased transparency, accountability, and effectiveness of the Judicial Council through regular monitoring of its sessions, preparation of monitoring reports, and analyses of current developments;
- Strengthened joint commitment through active participation in achieving better results in the judiciary, as well as enhancing the cooperation and capacity of judicial professionals for a more effective, accountable, and transparent judiciary;
- Establishment of a Judiciary Advisory Group and holding of seven meetings;

- Conducted a public opinion survey regarding citizens' perceptions of the efficiency and effectiveness of the judicial administration with 1.200 citizens (from different ethnic communities, regions, and rural and urban areas in North Macedonia);
- Increased transparency of the Council of Public Prosecutors;
- Initiated a discussion with 35 representatives from public prosecutor's offices on the implementation of the Law on the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Law on the Council of Public Prosecutors;
- Participation in a working group for amendments to the Law on the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia;
- Monitored over 250 hearings before the Administrative Court related to social rights and identified problems and challenges in accessing justice;
- Provided more than 350 legal consultations and general legal information to citizens on issues across all areas of law.

PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- Promoted effective protection of the freedoms and rights of citizens and analyzed the problems and challenges in the lustration process;
- Published academic papers in the professional journal Legal Dialogue reflecting theoretical and practical aspects related to human rights and the rule of law;
- Raised awareness of women's rights through training sessions, the promotion of the film Equal, and other promotional events;
- Created the IHR Human Rights Academy and published 13 courses on various topics related to human rights and the rule of law;
- Developed the Human Rights Platform as a comprehensive approach to human rights, containing relevant information on how human rights can be protected;
- Prepared a guide and three methodologies on the implementation of the HRBA (Human Rights-Based Approach), and conducted training sessions;
- Raised the issue of combatting gender stereotypes in primary education and strengthened the capacities of educational institutions;
- Increased competitiveness of women-owned microenterprises and promoted women's entrepreneurship by establishing a Service for Women-Owned Microenterprises in the cross-border region, focusing on the Polog and Elbasan regions. Trainings and workshops were held with 215 participants who acquired skills for running their own business;
- Conducted training sessions and mentoring meetings with teachers to promote effective practices and approaches for teaching and learning and initiated discussions on controversial issues in the school curriculum;
- Promoted investigative journalism by organizing training for journalists and journalism students, as well as training on the application of the HRPA from a journalistic perspective;
- Improved respect for the rights of smaller communities by developing a program to strengthen the competencies and capacities of civil society organizations representing the interests of these communities;
- Held training sessions to strengthen the capacities of grantees and promote professional standards among journalists from local media;

- Organized forums and workshops with over 100 high school students from four schools in Skopje, Tetovo, or Kumanovo, where students had the opportunity to critically reflect on the advantages and challenges of learning in a multiethnic environment and to share their ideas for initiatives or activities that would improve diversity and inclusion in the educational system;
- Conducted trainings with ninth-grade students in four primary schools and with first-year students in four secondary schools on the topic of recognizing and reporting all forms of peer violence; and
- Held workshops with parents and representatives of teaching and non-teaching staff from four selected primary and secondary schools on measures that can be taken and how to work with children to prevent peer violence.

APPLICATION OF THE EU ACQUIS AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- Monitoring the implementation of EU law in relation to the rule of law and fundamental rights;
- Providing comments on draft laws or amendments to legislation and its harmonization with the EU acquis;
- Analyzing the European Union's progress reports on our country and the opinions issued by the Venice Commission on specific laws;
- Initiating public debates on certain laws and continuously monitoring them through the ENER platform;
- Educating and raising awareness among legal practitioners about the standards and rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and analyzing ECtHR judgments;
- Monitoring the enforcement of ECtHR decisions and proposing measures and activities for the execution of specific judgments concerning violations of human rights guaranteed by the ECHR.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

- An advocacy program was established for cases where clear discrimination against marginalized groups of citizens was identified, and two lawsuits were filed for discrimination against Roma students in schools in Štip and Bitola;
- Lobbying was undertaken to amend the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, with active participation in working groups and discussions on the law's revision;
- Awareness was raised about discrimination and segregation of Roma in the education process through conducted research and prepared analyses;
- Awareness was raised about sexual orientation and gender identity as grounds for discrimination through trainings, caravans, and a summer camp;
- The IHR Academy for Human Rights was created, offering courses on various human rights and freedoms;
- Research was conducted and courses prepared for teachers and students on identifying discrimination, bullying, and hate speech;
- A survey was conducted and focus groups and workshops held with high school students to develop discussions on bullying and cyberbullying targeting girls in schools;
- Employees in state administration and local government were trained on topics related to equality and non-discrimination.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT AS A GUARANTOR OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION

- Raised awareness about the work and competences of the Constitutional Court;
- Collected and analyzed data through continuous monitoring and analysis of the work of the Constitutional Court;
- Prepared analyses on the functional and organizational structure of the Constitutional Court, as well as analyses of decisions and rulings on submitted requests for protection of freedoms and rights;
- Gained insights into the functioning of the constitutional complaint mechanism and the handling of such cases by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia during a study visit to Slovenia;
- Informed the public about the available mechanisms for the protection of constitutionality and legality of laws and legal acts, as well as constitutionally guaranteed human rights before the Constitutional Court.

FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

- Monitored more than 200 court hearings in which the State Attorney's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia was involved, while also monitoring the work of all 15 regional offices of the State Attorney's Office across the country through requests for access to information;
- Monitored the work of the Government and the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption regarding the implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy and the Government's Action Plan 21;
- Monitored the implementation of the National Strategy for Preventing Corruption and Conflict of Interest 2020-2024;
- Prepared conclusions and recommendations identifying legislative and practical deficiencies in the implementation of the legal framework in the field of anti-corruption;
- Civil society organizations and the media have become “watchdogs” or controllers of the work of state institutions to ensure lawful and transparent execution of duties and to prevent risks of corruption and abuse of office;
- Raised awareness about corruption issues and corrupt practices.

INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF IHR

- Improved systems and procedures for the successful functioning of IHR;
- Strengthened the capacity of IHR in the form of writing research analyses and policy documents on current human rights issues;
- Strengthened advocacy to achieve IHR's strategic priorities and develop further potential;
- Conducted training to invest in capacity building and development of IHR's potential;
- Strengthened IHR's position in the region and networked with similar organizations;
- Participated in events abroad and shared experiences and best practices with foreign organizations that share a similar mission and vision to improve IHR’s functioning and implement positive examples in our country;
- Continuous training of Executive Office members;
- Prepared and implemented advocacy plans, as well as monitoring and evaluating the implemented activities.

HUMAN RIGHTS ACADEMY

The concept of creating the Human Rights Academy stems from the vision of the Institute for Human Rights for education aimed at promoting and protecting human rights. Since education is crucial for ensuring, promoting, advancing, and protecting human rights, the Academy offers free courses on various topics that will help registered users enrich their knowledge in the field of human rights. The Human Rights Academy is a tool designed to educate its users on various issues related to human rights in a safe and simple way. Each course available at the Academy is divided into chapters and lessons, after which the user answers questions to proceed to the next chapter. In this way, users not only acquire specific knowledge, but also have the opportunity to check and consolidate their understanding through questions at the end of each chapter.

In 2024, the IHR Academy continued to publish courses related to human rights protection. The following course was published on the IHR Academy:

- **Course on the protection and realization of workers' rights.**

  This course was prepared within the framework of the program "Access to Justice for All – Annual Work Program 2024," financially supported by the European Union. The goal of this course is to familiarize readers with the concept of employment relationships and its distinction from other forms of work that are not conducted within the framework of an employment relationship. Such an introductory distinction of the mentioned concepts, on one hand, will help in determining the scope of individuals who are subject to and enjoy full protection under labor legislation (and social insurance) compared to those who are fully or partially excluded from labor rights. On the other hand, it will serve to define informal employment, including measures to prevent and protect against certain forms in which it most commonly occurs, such as undeclared employment and concealed employment relationships. The course presents various non-standard forms of work, with a special focus on three of them: fixed-term employment, part-time employment, and temporary agency employment. The course concludes with the presentation of the key characteristics and stages of the employment contract: from its conclusion, through its content, to the termination of its validity.

HUMAN RIGHTS PLATFORM

The Human Rights Platform takes a comprehensive approach to human rights and contains information on how human rights can be protected. The platform is divided into 6 segments that offer different types of information useful to visitors of the website of the Institute for Human Rights.

The first segment of the platform is called Human Rights and Their Protection. This section provides information on how human rights can be protected, where violations can be reported, the authorities that protect human rights at national and international levels, as well as relevant laws and international documents.

The second segment focuses on the Human Rights-Based Approach, explaining what it encompasses, the standards and principles on which it is based, its key characteristics, and the values it adds to developmental concepts and processes.

Online training makes up the third segment of the Human Rights Platform, listing bodies and platforms that offer visitors access to various training related to human rights.

"How well do you know your rights?" is a quiz within the Human Rights Platform, designed for those who want to test their knowledge in the field of human rights.

One of the most important segments of the platform is the Blog, which aims to provide space for various authors to express their opinions on current topics related to human rights.

The final segment of the platform is Documents, where visitors can find a variety of reports, manuals, and guides addressing the state of human rights in the Republic of North Macedonia.

FREE LEGAL AID

In 2024, the Institute for Human Rights, as a registered association for providing primary legal aid, continued offering primary legal aid to all interested citizens.

According to the Law on Free Legal Aid, the Institute for Human Rights, as an authorized association, provides primary legal aid, which includes:

- initial legal advice on the right to free legal aid,
- general legal information,
- general legal advice,
- assistance in completing applications for secondary legal aid,
- assistance in filling out forms issued by administrative bodies in administrative procedures related to social protection and the protection of children's rights; pension, disability, and health insurance; protection of victims of gender-based and domestic violence; registration procedures in the civil registry; obtaining personal identification documents and citizenship, and
- drafting complaints to the Commission for Protection from Discrimination and the Ombudsman, and requests for the protection of freedoms and rights to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The goal of the free legal assistance program is to provide primary legal aid to all citizens in the Republic of North Macedonia, promote equal access to justice for all without discrimination, and primarily help marginalized groups of citizens, enabling them to understand their rights and how to exercise them before state institutions.

The practice shows that the positive trend from 2023 continues, with a reduction in inquiries related to the scope of free legal aid and what it entails. This indicates that citizens are more familiar with free legal aid and how to access it, with questions only remaining about the areas where it can be applied and issues arising from citizens' daily problems.

In the past period, the Institute for Human Rights provided primary legal aid in 69 cases, offering general legal information or general legal advice. The majority of questions directed to the Institute concerned the realization of social rights, including health and pension insurance rights, the achievement of old-age and disability pensions, guaranteed minimum assistance, assistance and care from another person, recognition of pension service, and similar issues. There were also questions related to the protection of freedoms and rights before the European Court of Human Rights.

Analysis of other issues submitted to the Institute for Human Rights reveals that a significant number of them pertain to requests for general legal information and/or legal advice in property-related disputes, such as physical division, ownership determination, and disputing sale and lifetime maintenance contracts. This year, there was an increase in inquiries related to the protection of human freedoms and rights and matters related to filing complaints before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

LEGAL DIALOGUE

The societal function of the journal "Legal Dialogue" is to open topics, debates, and new approaches aimed at developing, advancing, and exchanging legal thought between theorists and practitioners in the fields of rule of law and human rights, making them more accessible to the broader academic and professional community. To this end, the journal publishes:

Academic papers reflecting the theoretical aspects of issues related to human rights and the rule of law concerning the Republic of North Macedonia, or other countries in Europe and beyond, and

Academic papers focusing on the practical analysis of specific rulings by the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights.

In 2024, the professional journal "Legal Dialogue" continued to be published within the framework of the program "Access to Justice for All" funded by the European Union. To promote issues related to environmental justice and the protection of the environment, authors were encouraged to write on these topics, with this environmental section becoming an integral part of the journal in 2024.

In 2024, the editorial board of "Legal Dialogue" continued to function successfully with the same composition, consisting of 5 members:

- Mancho Mitevki – Editor-in-Chief
- Vesna Stefanovska – Deputy Editor-in-Chief
- Mersel Biljali – Member
- Slavica Dimitrievska – Member
- Angelina Stanojoska – Member

The goal of the editorial board is to ensure that each issue covers various topics written by a broad profile of experts in their fields. This year continues the tradition of publishing papers from master's and doctoral students on topics related to human rights and the rule of law, further establishing the journal as recognizable to young students and researchers.

In 2024, two issues of "Legal Dialogue" were published: Issue 29 in June and Issue 30 in December. These two issues, like the previous ones, continue the tradition of the journal being known for analyzing topics related to human rights and the rule of law. The published papers were written by current and former judges of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court, professors, assistant professors, postgraduate students, PhD candidates, and experts from civil society organizations. We are especially pleased that papers dealing with environmental protection have become an inseparable part of the journal, with seven papers on this subject published in the two issues of 2024. In total, 30 papers prepared by 34 authors were published in the two issues of "Legal Dialogue," representing a significant increase in the number of published papers compared to 2023.

PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED IN 2024

COMBATING CYBERBULLYING AGAINST GIRLS

Donor: Canadian Embassy in Belgrade

Duration: November 28, 2023 – February 28, 2024

The overall goal of the project was to reduce and prevent bullying and cyberbullying against girls in North Macedonia through youth education.

The following activities were implemented within the project:

- Gender-based analysis of posts shared on social media.
- A survey conducted among high school students on bullying and cyberbullying.
- Two focus groups with girls sharing their experiences with bullying and cyberbullying.
- Three anti-bullying workshops with high school students in Skopje to educate them on preventing bullying and cyberbullying against girls.
- An online awareness campaign on bullying and cyberbullying among high school students.

In January and February 2024, two focus groups were conducted with high school girls from SUGS "Josip Broz Tito" in Bitola and SOU "Slavcho Stojmenski" in Stip. More than 40 female students from first to fourth year participated. The focus groups aimed to gain insight into how familiar the students are with online violence, their experiences, and their opinions on whether girls are more likely to be victims of online violence and why.

In February 2024, three educational workshops were conducted with more than 70 students from SEPUGS "Vasil Antevski Dren" Skopje, SUGS "Orce Nikolov" Skopje, and SUGS "Nikola Karev" Skopje. Through discussions with students, terms such as peer violence/bullying and cyberbullying were defined using real-life examples. The topic of whether girls are more often targets of online violence and its consequences for both the victim and the perpetrator was discussed. Finally, prevention methods were explained, along with where bullying and cyberbullying can be reported.

As part of this project, a "Gender-Based Analysis of Online Peer Violence (Cyberbullying)" was prepared. Using a quantitative-qualitative methodological approach, the analysis focuses on individual cases of online peer violence against girls, as well as specific examples of online peer violence against boys. The analysis showed that the narrative against girls is mainly sexually charged, with misogynistic and sexist comments, while the narrative against boys is mostly focused deviations from the commonly accepted norms of heteronormativity and culturally and socially rooted unwritten rules of femininity and masculinity. The analysis concluded that greater regulation, or self-regulation of online media, preventive and intervention programs in schools, ongoing awareness campaigns, and regular, comprehensive training to increase media and digital literacy are needed.

The Institute conducted a survey with high school students from 18 schools across the country on the topic "Online Peer Violence (Cyberbullying) in High Schools in North Macedonia." The main data and results from the survey are summarized in the "Survey Report: Online Peer Violence (Cyberbullying) in High Schools in North Macedonia." This document presents the findings regarding students' attitudes, perceptions, and the existence of online peer violence among high school students throughout North Macedonia.

The project concluded with a final event on "Combating Online Peer Violence Against Girls," held on March 6, 2024. The purpose of the event was to present the activities implemented by the Institute, providing detailed insights into the state of online peer violence among high school students, as well as their views and perceptions on the topic.

Visualizations:

Infographic with conclusions from educational workshops

Infographic with conclusions from focus groups

Infographic with conclusions from monitoring social media posts

Infographic with conclusions from the survey on online peer violence

ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL – ANNUAL WORK PROGRAM 2024

Donor: Delegation of the European Union

Duration: January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024

The aim of the program was to improve access to justice for all, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups of citizens in North Macedonia.

The following specific objectives have been implemented within the program:

- Facilitating protection against discrimination for marginalized groups through the provision of free legal aid;
- Raising awareness and promoting education on human rights-related issues;
- Improving citizens' access to justice by monitoring relevant institutions with the help of evidence-based analysis; and
- Advocating for appropriate legislation and policies regarding the protection of human rights and the rule of law in accordance with EU law.

The Institute for Human Rights prepared a shadow report for the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review for the Republic of North Macedonia. The report provided information on judicial reforms, access to justice, discrimination, political participation of persons with disabilities, and the provision of free legal aid for marginalized and vulnerable groups.

In February 2024, we launched a call for submissions of academic papers for the upcoming 29th edition of the journal Legal Dialogue.

On May 31, 2024, we organized an event titled "Civil Sector – A Driver for the Protection of Human Rights and the Rule of Law," aimed at marking the 15th anniversary of the Institute for Human Rights and also stimulating a discussion on the role of civil society organizations in promoting, advancing, and protecting human rights and freedoms. The event presented the organization's goals and priorities for future efforts in advocating for human rights while encouraging attendees to share potential ideas for collaboration to enhance human rights and the rule of law in various fields.

In June 2024, we published the 29th edition of the journal Legal Dialogue, which analyzes topics from international, constitutional, civil, and criminal law. This edition covers various themes, such as the concept of the civil forum, the death penalty, the right to life, and the expulsion of foreigners, analyzed through the practice of the European Court of Human Rights. The environmental section has become an essential part of the journal, and in this edition, it analyzed the implementation of European Union legislation on waste management and ecocide as a new criminal offense within environmental crime.

In August 2024, we published the Semi-Annual Report on the work of the Administrative Court regarding cases related to social rights. Through regular monitoring of public hearings before the Administrative Court in cases related to social rights, we analyzed access to administrative justice for all citizens, with a particular focus on marginalized and vulnerable groups (beneficiaries of social assistance, persons with disabilities, Roma, single parents, elderly citizens, etc.). The report concerns the observed public

hearings during the first half of 2024. It contains detailed data on the cases monitored during the reporting period, the most common defendant entities, and the detailed findings noted during the observation.

In August 2024, we published the Monitoring Report on the Work of the Judicial Council of North Macedonia for the period January-July 2024. The Institute for Human Rights, through attendance at all open sessions, regularly monitors the work of the Judicial Council. The purpose of this activity is to objectively observe its work, note challenges and progress, and contribute with conclusions and evidence-based recommendations for improving the situation in the judiciary. The report is divided into three main parts: transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency of the Judicial Council.

In September 2024, we announced the call for scientific papers for the 30th edition of Legal Dialogue, which was published in December 2024.

On October 9, 2024, we organized an event titled "The Judicial Council of North Macedonia – Challenges and Recommendations for Ensuring Judicial Independence," aimed at reviewing the progress and challenges faced by the Judicial Council in implementing the recommendations of the EU Assessment Mission, one year after their publication. The main discussion topics included proposed amendments to the Law on the Judicial Council, practical challenges in ensuring judicial independence and impartiality, and ways to overcome these obstacles to increase public trust in the judiciary.

In December 2024, we published the 30th edition of the journal Legal Dialogue, which addresses topics such as the balance between cybercrime investigations and the protection of human rights, the right to life as a fundamental human right defined in the Constitution of North Macedonia, and the right to a fair trial within a reasonable time as a procedural legal remedy under the European Convention on Human Rights. The edition includes a comparative analysis and a critical-creative reflection on the report of the EU Assessment Mission for the Judicial Council, and raises a sensitive topic for debate and reflection—whether we should consider criminalizing a new offense: politically-organized crime.

In December 2024, we published the Annual Report on the Work of the Administrative Court regarding cases related to social rights. This report summarizes the findings from monitoring public hearings and analyzing judicial decisions related to issues such as old-age pensions, parental allowances, and the right to assistance and care from another person. The report highlights the challenges faced by vulnerable categories of citizens, including persons with disabilities, single parents, and the elderly, in exercising their rights. The analysis shows that significant obstacles exist, such as delays in proceedings, insufficient transparency, and ineffective coordination between institutions, all of which impact the legal certainty of citizens.

In December 2024, we published the Monitoring Report on the Work of the Judicial Council of North Macedonia for the period August-December 2024. The report focuses on the transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency of the Judicial Council and also contains conclusions and recommendations for improving the situation.

Visualizations:

Infographic: Conclusions from monitoring the work of the Administrative Court of North Macedonia in 2024

Infographic: Key findings from monitoring administrative procedures in the field of social rights

Video: 15 Years of the Institute for Human Rights

Infographic: Conclusions and recommendations from monitoring the work of the Administrative Court of North Macedonia

JUSTICE FOR ALL – CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FOR AN INDEPENDENT AND EFFECTIVE JUDICIARY

Donor: Open Society Foundation – Macedonia

Duration: January 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

The general objective of the project was to increase the influence of civil society organizations in the judicial reform process as a prerequisite for the protection of human rights and the provision of social justice.

Within the project, the following activities were planned:

- Monitoring and evaluation of the development process and content of the Judicial Reform Strategy 2023 – 2027, contributing to the development of a methodology for monitoring the implementation of the Strategy and monitoring the implementation of the Strategy and publishing the findings;
- Working meetings for coordination and collaboration with thematic networks and platforms, as well as with civil society organizations in order to identify specific problems and challenges and plan joint advocacy activities;
- Participation in working groups for drafting laws and other regulations arising from or foreseen in the strategic documents in the field of justice;
- Monitoring the current conditions in the judiciary;
- Conducting watchdog activities, exposing negative conditions, and securing commitments from key actors to overcome them;
- Conducting activities for the screening process related to the 'Fundamentals' cluster/Chapter 23;
- Preparing a working document for identifying gaps in domestic legislation, policies, and practices, as well as the problems and challenges that the country may face in the further alignment process concerning Chapter 23;
- A final conference for presenting the findings.

During the implementation period of the project, the Blueprint Group also issued reactions regarding the current conditions in the judiciary, prepared, and presented publications on topics that address the conditions in the judiciary, including:

- Reaction – The Blueprint Group for judicial reform welcomes the decision of the Administrative Court to annul the decision for the dismissal of the then-President of the Judicial Council of North Macedonia.
- Access to administrative justice
- Jurors in criminal proceedings
- Unified judicial practice – a guarantee for legal certainty: systemic problems and shortcomings
- Report on the process of preparation and adoption of the Judicial Reform Strategy
- Reaction – Concern over the decision of the Board of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors to conduct the election of the Director of the Academy via secret ballot
- The situation and challenges with the implementation of the Law on monetary compensation
- How to ensure access to experts for beneficiaries of the right to free legal aid
- How to restore citizens' trust in the Judicial Council of North Macedonia?

TOGETHER FOR BETTER LOCAL JOURNALISM

Donor: European Union Delegation

Duration: January 3, 2023 – January 3, 2025

This project was implemented by the Center for Media Development in Communities "MEDIUM" in partnership with the Institute for Human Rights. The goal of the project was to strengthen the capacity and promote the professional standards of local journalists. The following specific objectives were realized within the project:

- To strengthen the capacity of local journalists, especially from ethnic minorities, to practice investigative journalism, digital and media literacy, as well as human rights standards in their work;
- To strengthen the capacity of journalism students for professional development and creative expression in the media; and
- To improve the influence and cooperation between local civil society organizations and local media to promote the rights of journalists, encourage the fight against and response to all forms of violence against journalists, promote professional standards, and freedom of speech.

In 2023, the following activities were carried out by the Institute for Human Rights:

1. Development of a Guide for applying a human rights-based approach in media work; and
2. Training for local journalists on the application of a human rights-based approach in media work.

In 2024, the implementation of the project continued with new activities. The Institute for Human Rights, together with MEDIUM, launched a call for grants for civil society organizations. The call was published on the websites and social media of the Institute for Human Rights and MEDIUM on May 13, 2024. The goal of this call was to provide support for four (4) local civil society organizations working towards strengthening the capacity and promoting the professional standards of journalists from local media. Additionally, an online informational session was organized on May 30, 2024, for all interested candidates from the project municipalities: Gostivar, Tetovo, Debar, Kichevo, Kumanovo, Ohrid, Struga, and Shutovo. The session presented the project goals, participation conditions for the grant scheme, the selection process, and the methodology for implementing the awarded grants.

As part of this call, four small grants were awarded, each with a maximum amount of 3,000 euros per grant, including:

"Youth and the Media vs. Gender-Sensitive Disinformation" implemented by Rural Coalition – Kichevo;

"Roma and Media Literacy" implemented by ESMA Association of Roma Women – Shuto Orizari;

"Local Journalism: The Next Generation" implemented by the Association European Center for Development, Tolerance, and Cooperation – Gostivar; and

"Participation of Local Media from Debar in Negotiations for North Macedonia's EU Membership" implemented by the Association Center for Sustainable Community Development – Debar.

All grants were implemented in collaboration with a local media outlet (television, radio, internet portal).

On September 2, 2024, the Institute for Human Rights conducted a training to strengthen the capacity of the grantees and promote the professional standards of journalists from local media. The training aimed to enhance the capacities of the participants, with a focus on the smooth implementation of project activities and improving reporting. The participants also learned important advocacy techniques to achieve better results in local journalism. All participants had the opportunity to learn from experts, exchange experiences, and gain useful tools for successfully implementing their projects.

YOUTH ACTIVISM FOR AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

Donor: Grant within the project "EU Support for Confidence Building in the Western Balkans", financed by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

Duration: December 1, 2023 – November 30, 2024

The goal of the project was to raise awareness and engage youth in developing a dialogue to promote a multiethnic society for all. This goal was achieved by involving students in the development of a multiethnic dialogue and raising awareness about respecting and advancing the different identity markers of communities with the aim of creating a multiethnic society.

As part of the project, seminars and workshops on multiethnic education and society were held, alongside two creative contests, a blog-writing call, the preparation of a report based on the implemented activities, and a final conference to present the project results.

In April, May, and June, before the end of the 2023/2024 school year, seminars and workshops were organized with high school students from four schools in Skopje, Tetovo and Kumanovo where students attend classes in different languages – SUGS "Dimitar Vlahov" Skopje (classes in Macedonian, Albanian, and Turkish), SMUGS "Dr. Panche Karagjozov" Skopje (classes in Macedonian and Albanian), SOU "Pero Nakov" Kumanovo (classes in Macedonian and Albanian), and OSMU "Nikola Shtein" Tetovo (classes in Macedonian, Albanian, and Turkish).

Within the schools, four seminars were held in the form of interactive discussions. The goal of the seminars was to motivate students to think critically about the advantages and challenges of learning in a multiethnic environment and share their ideas for initiatives or activities that would improve diversity and inclusion in the educational system. A total of 103 students from all four schools participated in the seminars.

- SUGS "Dimitar Vlahov" Skopje
- SMUGS "Dr. Panche Karagjozov" Skopje
- SOU "Pero Nakov" Kumanovo
- OSMU "Nikola Shtein" Tetovo

Three workshops (one in Skopje, one in Tetovo, and one in Kumanovo) were held in the format of a film night and discussion, taking place outside the schools to provide students with an informal environment for discussion and socialization. The goal was to encourage young people to actively engage through creativity, which is why a creative competition was announced before the workshops, aimed at raising awareness and promoting dialogue on the importance of inclusivity, diversity, and equality through the artistic expression of students.

At the beginning of the new school year 2024/2025, a photo contest for high school students was announced under the theme "My Culture through the Camera Lens." The photo contest received 53 student applications with over 70 photographs, and the top three winners received awards and their photos were published on the IHR website and social media.

A public call for writing blog posts was also announced in the new school year. The main theme of the call was the promotion of a multiethnic society and the advancement of multiculturalism in our country, open to high school students. A total of 42 applications were received from high school students from various cities written in Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, and Romani languages. The top eight texts were published on IHR's Human Rights Platform.

Based on the project activities, a report titled "The Voice of Youth: Recommendations for Improving Interethnic Dialogue and Creating an Inclusive Society" was prepared, containing conclusions and recommendations for improving interethnic dialogue and emphasizing the role of youth in creating a multiethnic society.

A closing event was organized on November 26, 2024, where the results of the project were presented. The project "Youth Activism for an Inclusive Society" clearly demonstrated that young people in North Macedonia are ready and motivated to play an active role in creating an inclusive and harmonious society. Through their participation in the seminars and workshops, they showed initiative and interest in overcoming existing ethnic divisions and building a shared identity based on mutual respect and cultural exchange. However, despite this enthusiasm, the project also highlighted the significant structural challenges that must be overcome for these efforts to be successful in the long term.

YOUTH AGAINST PEER VIOLENCE

Donor: U.S. Embassy in Skopje

Duration: September 30, 2024 – September 30, 2025

The overall goal of the project was to reduce peer violence among young people.

Within the general goal, two specific objectives are outlined: (1) to reduce incidents of peer violence among young people in targeted environments, particularly in areas where peer violence based on ethnicity is present, and (2) to raise awareness among parents and teachers about the importance of preventing peer violence.

On November 14, 2024, a training was held with first-year students from the High School "Gostivar" and ninth-grade students from the Primary School "Goce Delchev" in Gostivar, focusing on the prevention, recognition, and sanctioning of peer violence. On the same day, a workshop was held with parents, teaching and non-teaching staff from both schools and a discussion was developed on the measures to be taken and how to work with children to prevent peer violence, and where to report cases of peer violence.

On November 21, 2024, a training was held with first-year students from the High School "Arseni Jovkov" in Skopje, where public prosecutors discussed the rights of students, their responsibilities, and the penalties outlined by the Juvenile Justice Law for acts of peer violence. A psychologist successfully motivated students through interactive communication to share their views on what peer violence is, whether they can recognize it, and where to seek help. A workshop was also held with parents, teaching and non-teaching staff from the school, which focused on creating a safe school environment.

On December 4, 2024, a training was conducted with ninth-grade students from the Primary School "Vlado Tasevski" in Skopje on the topic of prevention, recognition, and sanctioning of peer violence. On the same day, a workshop was held with parents, teaching and non-teaching staff from the school, which focused on measures to be taken and how to work with children to prevent peer violence, and how parents should talk to their children about prevention and reporting peer violence.

On December 12, 2024, a training was held with ninth-grade students from the Primary School "Dimitar Pop Georgiev-Berovski" in Skopje, discussing whether students can recognize and report peer violence, the consequences for the victim, and the legal consequences for the perpetrator. A workshop was also held with parents, teaching and non-teaching staff, focusing on how to work with children to prevent peer violence, the approach to be chosen, and where to report cases of peer violence.

To raise awareness about the existence of peer violence and its prevention, a pamphlet in Macedonian and Albanian was prepared. The pamphlet contains information about the forms of peer violence, its consequences on victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, and whether criminal legal consequences may arise from committing peer violence.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Participation in Training Organized by DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

In 2024, two training sessions organized by DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance – were held, with participation from Jelena Kadric, Vesna Stefanovska, and Martin Sopronov. The training focused on monitoring and implementing indicators for the effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of the intelligence and security sector, as well as on formal and informal civil oversight of the security sector from an international law perspective.

Additionally, in 2024, DCAF began organizing Training of Trainers (ToT) courses to build capacities for knowledge transfer and sustainable oversight. Jelena Kadrić, Vesna Stefanovska, and Martin Sopronov participated in three such training sessions organized in 2024. The ToT courses will continue into 2025.

Participation in the Project "Quality Education for All – North Macedonia" Implemented by the Council of Europe Office in Skopje

The project "Quality Education for All – North Macedonia," implemented by the Council of Europe Programme Office in Skopje and funded by Germany, aims to promote democracy and human rights in and through education and equip young people with the competences to live in a multicultural society. Margarita Caca Nikoloska, the President of the Institute for Human Rights (IHR), and Marija Chekredji, Program Coordinator at IHR, are involved in the implementation of this project as external consultants. They are engaged in two project activities: developing measures and actions to implement the judgment in the case of Elmazova and Others v. North Macedonia at the community level and conducting a comprehensive training and mentoring program for 25 pilot schools aimed at improving their inclusive and democratic learning environments.

In 2024, Marija Chekredji continued the training and mentoring program with six pilot schools (three in Skopje and three in Kumanovo, two of which are primary schools and four are secondary schools). Each pilot school participated in the training sessions with a core school team (consisting of the school director, two teachers, and one representative of the professional service, such as a psychologist, pedagogue, or social pedagogue), and in the mentoring meetings with an expanded school team (composed of the core team, two students, one parent, two additional teachers, and one community member). In 2024, four training sessions and two mentoring meetings were held with the pilot schools. The following topics were covered during the training:

- **School Culture** – developing competencies for democratic culture, the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), the values we promote, knowledge and critical understanding/skills, attitudes we promote;
- **School Development Plan and Action Plan;**
- **How to integrate RFCDC into various school practices, fostering interculturalism, our school system, controversial issues we face, integrative thinking;**
- **Why to talk about controversial topics, teaching methods, and teaching styles.**

In 2025, two more training sessions, one mentoring meeting, and a final event will be held, where good school practices and results achieved within the project will be presented.

Participation in the Liverpool Summer School in the Law of the Council of Europe

In July 2024, Marija Chekređi – Program Coordinator at the Institute for Human Rights (IHR) – participated in The Second Liverpool Summer School in the Law of the Council of Europe, titled "Council of Europe at 75: Protecting Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law in the Rapidly Changing World." The summer school was organized by the School of Law and Social Justice at the University of Liverpool, in cooperation with OCEAN (The Open Council of Europe Academic Networks) and other partners.

The summer school focused on addressing certain contemporary challenges, discussing the role that the Council of Europe can play in the era of the digital revolution and new technologies. These new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and neurotechnology, offer opportunities and could even have a positive impact on human rights. However, they also pose risks that could undermine the enjoyment of fundamental human rights. The discussions centered around whether the Council of Europe and international human rights law are adequately prepared to protect against these new threats.

Additionally, the school explored how various bodies of the Council of Europe contribute to the organization's core goals, as well as the history and effectiveness of the Council of Europe as a whole, and specific mechanisms, treaties, and bodies, such as the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), the European Committee of Social Rights, the Venice Commission, the European Court of Human Rights, and many others.

Speakers at the summer school included representatives from various bodies and departments of the Council of Europe, professors, government officials, lawyers, representatives from the UN Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, academics, and researchers. Notable speakers included Theodoros Roussopoulos – President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Despina Hadjivassiliou-Tsovilis – Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the first woman to hold this position since the Assembly's founding in 1949, the President of the European Court of Human Rights, other judges of the European Court of Human Rights, representatives from the CPT, the Committee on Social Rights, and the Venice Commission.

PARTICIPATION IN WORKING GROUPS AND COORDINATING BODIES

National Coordinating Body for Free Legal Aid

In 2024, the National Coordinating Body held regular meetings to discuss challenges related to the implementation of the Law on Free Legal Aid, as well as the ongoing issues faced by civil society organizations and regional offices of the Ministry of Justice as primary legal aid providers. The Institute for Human Rights (IHR), through its representatives, participated in the event marking International Human Rights Day and the European Day of Justice.

These meetings were organized with the support of the Council of Europe, within the framework of the action "Towards a Consolidated and More Efficient Free Legal Aid (FLA) System. This action is implemented within the joint programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe "Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye" running from January 2023 until December 2026.

IHR contributed to the discussions by sharing challenges related to providing primary legal aid, as well as dilemmas regarding the completion of applications for secondary legal aid.

Membership in the Platform of Civil Society Organizations in the Fight against Corruption

The Institute for Human Rights is a member of the Platform of Civil Society Organizations in the Fight against Corruption, which aims to foster a proactive, dynamic, and empowered civil society that respects, promotes, and advocates for the principles of good governance. The Platform connects civil society organizations and serves as an open space for cooperation, networking, and democratic debate, with the goal of strengthening the role of civil society organizations in the fight against corruption in North Macedonia.

In 2024, the Platform issued statements on various topics related to anti-corruption, the judiciary, and human rights. These included reactions to the absence of a consultative process in the adoption of amendments to the systemic Law on the Organization of Government Bodies, commentary on the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption's assessment of the work of the previous commission, support for proposed amendments to the Urban Planning Law submitted by the O2 Initiative, and reactions to urgent amendments concerning the termination of mandates of independent state commissions. The Platform also called for halting the initiative to amend the Public Procurement Law through an expedited procedure.

From June 5–7, 2024, the Platform's Assembly was held, with Vesna Stefanovska from IHR participating as a delegate. During the Assembly, a workshop was organized to discuss anti-corruption resolutions, while the general discussion focused on the Platform's work and its future direction.

Membership in the Blueprint Group for Judicial Reforms

The Blueprint Group for Judicial Reforms is an informal network of civil society organizations that have been engaged in justice sector reforms for several years. Jelena Kadric represents the Institute for Human Rights (IHR) within this group and has actively contributed to its work, closely following the judicial reform process.

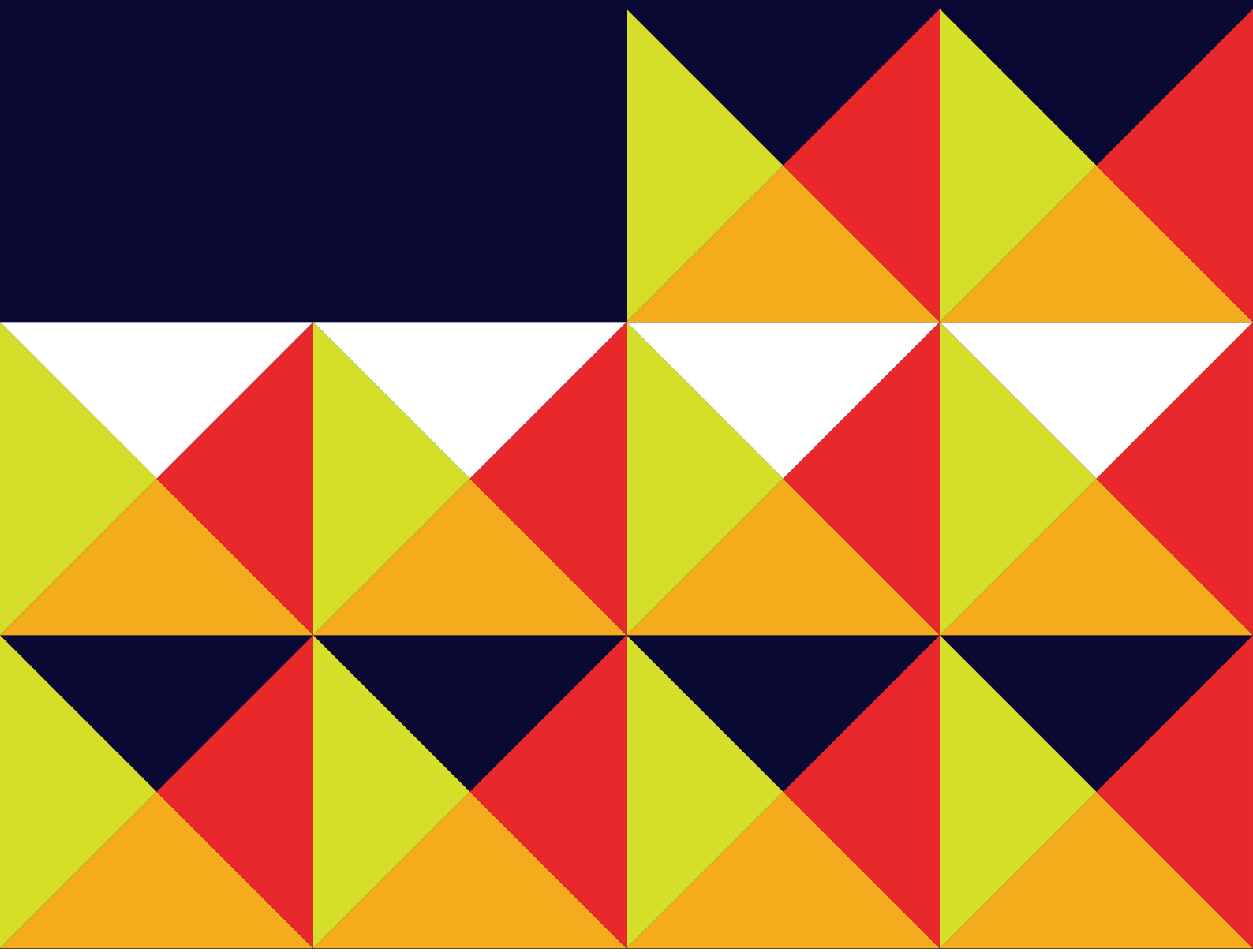
In cooperation with the European Policy Institute, the Coalition All For Fair Trials, the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, the Center for Legal Research and Analysis, and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, IHR participated in the development of publications on key issues and issued statements regarding the current state of the judiciary in 2024.

The group's activities culminated in a conference that focused on judicial reforms, particularly the independence and efficiency of the judiciary.

Membership in the Steering Committee of the Project for Promoting Diversity and Equality in North Macedonia, Implemented by the Council of Europe and the European Union

The Institute for Human Rights (IHR) is a member of the Steering Committee of the "Combating Hatred and Intolerance in North Macedonia" project, which is part of the "Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye" - a joint initiative of the European Union and the Council of Europe. The project aims to strengthen the capacity of national and local actors to better address issues of anti-discrimination, hate speech, and protection of the rights of LGBTI individuals in line with Council of Europe standards and recommendations.

The Steering Committee is tasked with monitoring the project's implementation and providing guidance for its activities. Representatives of IHR attended the Steering Committee meetings held in 2024.



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