

COPASAH EUROPE Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 2024



**COPASAH
EUROPE
NETWORK**

COPASAHEURO
PE@COPASAHE
UROPE.ORG

+389 2 3298 295

COPASAH EUROPE Newsletter

◆
SEPTEMBER 2024

WELCOME TO THE SEPTEMBER EDITION OF THE COPASAH EUROPE NEWSLETTER!

In this issue, we learn about how the Association for Emancipation, Solidarity, and Equality of Women (ESE) has monitored and fought against the setbacks in planning and accountability in the cervical cancer screening in North Macedonia for a decade now. We stay in North Macedonia and learn about the latest projects of LET STATION, a grass-roots organization focused on legal empowerment and access to justice for marginalized communities: “The planet calls you”, “Youth together for peace building, inter-ethnic tolerance and conflict management” and the creative action “Pinocchio in kindergarten children at home”.

We then move to Montenegro and discover how Juventas enhances social cohesion and human rights protection, and we get inspired by their best practice example: the Direct Assistance Program.

Human Rights in Democracy Centre (HRDC) tells us how they prevent domestic violence and provide support services for victims/survivors of domestic violence in Albania and we rejoice alongside them as they share their success in being included in the electronic registry of CSOs in the Parliament of Republic of Albania in March 2024 for their contribution to the advancement of human rights.

Lastly, we move to Romania and learn how ROMAJUST uses strategic litigation in defending human rights and about their latest project STOP HATE SPEECH! in high-schools, teaching youth how to identify and fight discrimination and hate speech.

Read on and be inspired!

**COPASAH
EUROPE
NETWORK**

COPASAHEURO
PE@COPASAHE
UROPE.ORG

+389 2 3298 295

COPASAH EUROPE Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 2024



About COPASAH Europe

COPASAH Europe was established in 2021 and represents the regional sub-network to the Global COPASAH network established in 2011. The Global COPASAH network in addition to Europe unites practitioners from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. COPASAH Europe is a community where practitioners who share an interest and passion for the field of community monitoring for accountability in health interact regularly and engage in exchanging experiences and lessons; sharing resources, capacities, and methods; in the production and dissemination of conceptual, methodological and practical outputs towards strengthening the field; in networking and capacity building among member organizations; and joint advocacy.

OUR VISION

Communities are actively engaged in promoting accountability and transforming health systems towards the realization of social justice

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to nurture, strengthen and promote collective knowledge, skills, and capacity of community-oriented organizations and health activists in Europe who are- working in the field of accountability and social action in health, promoting active citizenship to make health systems responsive, equitable and people-centered.

**COPASAH
EUROPE
NETWORK**

COPASAHEURO
PE@COPASAHE
UROPE.ORG

+389 2 3298 295

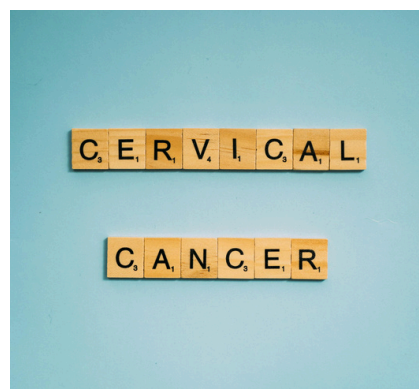
NORTH MACEDONIA ASSOCIATION FOR EMANCIPATION, SOLIDARITY, AND EQUALITY OF WOMEN (ESE)

CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING IN NORTH MACEDONIA: SETBACKS IN PLANNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Background: A Decade of Cervical Cancer Screening in North Macedonia

Since 2012, North Macedonia has implemented a national cervical cancer screening program under the Ministry of Health, as part of a broader Program for the early detection of malignant diseases. The program aims to provide free gynecological exams and PAP tests every three years for women aged 21 to 59, with the state covering all associated costs. However, despite over a decade of existence, the cervical cancer screening program remains underperforming. Only 30% of the target population participates in the screenings within the recommended three-year cycle, far below the necessary 70% coverage for effective prevention and early detection.

Through continuous monitoring since the program's inception, ESE has identified several reasons for this underperformance, including insufficient funding, a shortage of gynecologists in primary health care, poor coordination among involved institutions, and the absence of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms within the Ministry of Health. ESE has been advocating for program improvements, publishing regular reports and recommendations, and engaging in media advocacy and national-level policy discussions to raise awareness and push for reforms. All of our findings and recommendations are publicly available on our website: www.esem.mk.

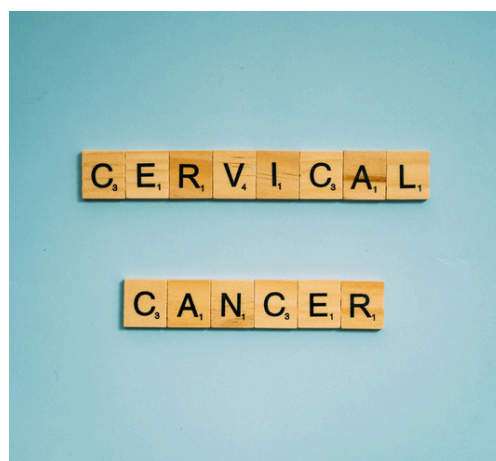


Key Issues: Transparency and Accountability Concerns in 2024

In 2023, the Ministry of Health expanded the eligibility for screening, lowering the minimum age from 24 to 21. This was viewed as a positive step, as cervical cancer has increasingly been detected at later stages among younger women. However, in 2024, our monitoring revealed a significant regression in the transparency, planning, and accountability of the program.

The 2024 program does not specify how many women are expected to be screened, nor does it provide detailed budget information as in previous years. Crucially, the total amount allocated for cervical cancer screening is not disclosed, which severely hampers our ability to monitor the success of the program and evaluate whether funds are being properly allocated.

In addition, the Ministry has failed to produce key implementation reports. These reports, required annually, include data on the number of women screened, the results of the screenings, and recommendations for improving the program. The last report published by the Institute of Public Health dates back to 2021, and no implementation reports for 2022 or 2023 are available despite requests for access to public information. Similarly, the National Committee for Screening and Early Detection of Cervical Cancer, under the Ministry of health, has not published budgetary and programmatic reports for the Program since 2020. This lack of transparency and accountability marks a concerning deterioration in the Ministry's commitment to ensuring the program's success and continuous improvement.



ESE's Response: Advocacy for Improvements and Next Steps

Given these findings, ESE is preparing to take decisive action. We will be meeting with the newly appointed Minister of Health and other key officials to present our findings and advocate for urgent improvements. These meetings are particularly important, as 2024 has brought changes in government and leadership within the Ministry of Health.

Our advocacy will focus on the need for improved program planning, transparent budget allocation, and the development of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework. We will also call for an inclusive approach to future program planning, ensuring that civil society organizations, relevant stakeholders, and women from marginalized communities are actively involved. Tailoring the program to meet the needs of underserved women is critical for increasing coverage and ensuring that no one is left behind in the fight against cervical cancer.

In conclusion, our ongoing efforts aim to strengthen the cervical cancer screening program in North Macedonia, holding the Ministry of Health accountable to the women it serves. We believe that through collective action and sustained advocacy, we can bring about the necessary changes to improve women's reproductive health in our country.



COPASAH EUROPE

Newsletter

ISSUE #4

NORTH MACEDONIA

THE ASSOCIATION LET STATION

The association LET STATION is a grass-roots organization focused on legal empowerment and access to justice for marginalized communities, especially the Roma and rural communities in North Macedonia. In our work, we use a community-based approach to empower citizens in realizing their rights, particularly focusing on health and social rights, as well as housing, environment, citizen participation in democratic processes at the local level, transparency and accountability of institutions etc.

As such, we provide legal and paralegal assistance and legal education, facilitate field activities, community mobilization and advocacy to address the most pressing issues our target groups face. Our team consists of lawyers, paralegals and community health promoters who work together and mutually advance their knowledge and practice. As a grass-roots organization, we carry out our activities in the office of the organization located in the town of Prilep, but also through a mobile office that travels through three rural areas (Mariovo, Krivogashtani and Dolneni) as well as through online/telephone communication. In this way, annually we provide about 1200 services and engage more than 100 representatives from communities, various groups and institutions in field activities.

stanicapet@gmail.com

stanicapet.org.mk



COPASAH EUROPE

Newsletter

ISSUE #4

The planet calls you

To better understand the impacts of social and economic determinants on the environment a focus group was held on the exposure and influence of environmental risks to health and the living environment. In the focus group participated representative from the Environmental Protection Department from the municipality of Prilep, representative of the urban communities, representative of the Center for Public Health, representatives of local NGOs, as well as representatives from the pollsters involved in conducting field research.

Subsequently there were documented results regarding the impact of socioeconomic determinants and environmental conditions on the marginalized communities, through the Photo-voice methodology. The final result Photo-voice exhibition was realized on April 2 - Earth Day! The products were presented by organizing one public event-exhibition in the center of Prilep under the name "The planet calls you". With this action we wanted to bring the attention and remind that our planet, rivers, roads and open areas are not places for waste exhibition!



Youth together for peace building, inter-ethnic tolerance and conflict management

On 18-19 April 2024 was organized two-day artistic workshop where 22 young people from diverse communities expressed their views and ideas on what reconciliation and peacebuilding mean to them. At the workshop, young people have the opportunity to learn about the topics of peace, reconciliation, tolerance, inter-ethnic understanding and conflict resolution, and through peer games they are actively involved in the development and development of access to knowledge.

On the second day, the young people through artistic expression (drawing, creating quotes, making a collage, etc.) successfully completed the module and ensuring participation for the final part of the activities – an exhibition where their works will be made. With this public exhibition, we sent a clear message to present the artistic work before a broader population and share messages through art.

<https://stanicapet.org.mk/en/youth-together-for-peace-building-inter-ethnic-tolerance-and-conflict-management/>

<https://stanicapet.org.mk/en/public-exhibition-youth-together-for-reconciliation-tolerance-and-building-trust/>

Creative action: “Pinocchio in kindergarten children at home”

In June was organized Creative action: “Pinocchio in Kindergarten, Children at Home”, in which the heroes of the stories and cartoons help the children in their efforts to make started to work the kindergarten in the Točila neighbourhood. The idea of this creative action was to alert the local and the entire public in North Macedonia about the lack of public childcare facilities in Prilep. What is particularly important is that this kindergarten is especially important for citizens from vulnerable categories and families with minimal incomes, because they cannot afford private institutions for the accommodation of children, and the impossibility of accepting them in another public institution for childcare it limits parents in providing work engagements, and thus the families livelihood.

Through this action in which Pinocchio was not actually lying but telling the truth, we wanted to remind you that on many occasions was promised the completion of the construction and putting into use of the kindergarten in the Točila neighborhood, of which the construction began in April 2021 with the promise that it would start with work in 2022.

Unfortunately, we are already halfway through 2024, and although the kindergarten has been built and, according to reports, all the interior work has been completed, it has not yet been put into use, and there is no official confirmation that the children will be able to start this fall in this kindergarten. We hope that this event, citizen and media support will speed up the solution of this burning problem of more than 200 children and families from Prilep.

<https://stanicapet.org.mk/en/creative-action-pinocchio-in-kindergarten-children-at-home/>

Activity towards better health for the citizens

As an Association that works to protect and promote the rights of citizens for a safe and healthy environment, LET Station submitted a report to several institutions for the previous inaction of the competent institutions in connection with the observed long-term environmental pollution that was spreading throughout most of the city of Prilep and presented a danger to the health of the citizens. Namely, a large number of citizens from different settlements of the city of Prilep, and most of them from the settlement of Chachorica and the surrounding settlements, in the past period, reacted to the presence of an unbearable smell of burning or melting of dangerous substances such as resin or plastic, which occurs every day in the evening hours, ie after 9 p.m., and on non-working days and throughout the day.

Citizens have been reacting individually to this situation for several weeks with oral and written reports to the Crisis Management Center (via telephone number 112) and to the Municipality of Prilep, i.e. the Department for Urbanism and Environmental Protection, but at that point, for none of these reports have been acted upon, that is, the institutions do not take into account the reports and the situation was not only not improving, but every day was getting more intense. In connection with the problem, citizens also shared numerous reactions on social networks.

With the application, and in accordance with the existing legal regulation, the competent inspection authority was requested to urgently carry out an extraordinary inspection of the reported situation, to determine the origin and the cause of the dangerous smell and to issue appropriate measures for sanctioning it and removing the danger. The Ombudsman was also requested to investigate the failure to take action by the above-mentioned authorities of the state administration (Crisis Management Center) as well as

COPASAH EUROPE

Newsletter

ISSUE #4

the authority of the local self-government unit (Municipality of Prilep - Department of Urban Planning and Environmental Protection) and to take appropriate actions in accordance with its competences to protect the right of citizens to a healthy and safe living environment.

After the report was submitted, LET Station fully supported the civil protest on at which, with a large presence of the residents of the municipality of Prilep, as well as media support, the competent institutions were asked to determine the origin and the cause of the dangerous smell, to pronounce appropriate measures for sanctioning him and removing the danger, but also to investigate the failure to take action by the state administration bodies despite the numerous reports submitted by the citizens. The banners of the citizens more clearly reflected the real situation regarding the problem and emphasized: "Breathing here is dangerous to life!", "Health before profit", "Wake up, they are poisoning us!", "Gentlemen poisoners!" I also protest for your health!"

During that period, LET Station received answers from all the competent institutions regarding the submitted application, except from the Municipality of Prilep, in which they make judgments regarding the allegations in the application. LET Station is continuing to support the right to a healthy living environment of the citizens of the Municipality of Prilep. The right to safety and a safe environment is inviolable and no one must compromise it for any interest, bigger business or political!

*Инфокомпас

*Сител ТВ

<https://stanicapet.org.mk/en/stop-the-poisoning-environmental-justice-for-the-citizens-of-prilep/>



MONTENEGRO JUVENTAS

ENHANCING SOCIAL COHESION AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION

NGO Juventas, founded in 1996 in Podgorica, Montenegro, operates on both national and regional levels to improve social cohesion through innovative service provision and advocacy. For more than 25 years, Juventas continuously implemented projects aiming to increase the quality of lives of young people, people at risk of social exclusion and socially excluded people and improving practice and human rights protection and promotion. Juventas provides direct assistance, contributes to improvement of services' quality, produces and advocates proposals of public policies amendments, develops capacities of decision-makers and service providers, as well as target groups they work with.

Juventas implements its activities within the framework of three programs:

- The direct assistance program for persons in risk of social exclusion and socially excluded
1. Department for working with people who use/inject drugs, people who provide sex or sex related services, people in prison, former prisoners;
 2. Department for working with the GMT community.
 - Program for capacity building, research and advocacy
 - Department for financial, legal and general affairs



BEST PRACTICES USED BY OUR MEMBERS

Direct Assistance Program: was established with the aim of providing direct confidential and informed professional and peer support to the target groups with whom Juventas works. The activities implemented within this program include: assessment of target groups' needs, provision of direct support to clients, which is reflected in various types of good quality, responsible, culturally and gender-sensitive services, empowerment of clients for self-care, strengthening of different client target groups' capacities for joint action and active participation, as well as continuous monitoring and improvement of support services synchronized with target communities' needs.

As part of this program, Juventas provides outreach services, but also has three specialized offices (Drop in centers) within which services are provided, defined in accordance with the needs of the clients. As a part of the Direct Assistance Program the following departments are active and functioning:

1. Outreach work is based on open access and communication with hard-to-reach groups in order to provide them with the necessary support and necessary information. Often the users themselves, i.e. representatives of the target groups, are recruited in this work. Outreach work includes:
 - distribution of condoms and lubricants;
 - distribution and exchange of safe injection equipment (clean syringes, needles, cookers, medical alcohol, elastic tourniquets, distilled water...);
 - collection of discarded equipment;
 - referral to HIV (and other STIs) testing;
 - referral to the services we provide within our daily centers as well as available services within the social and health care system;
 - informing target groups about sexually and blood transmissible infections;
 - safe and proper use of the materials we share;
 - informing target groups about the ways to reduce harm, addiction treatments as well as opioid agonist treatments available in Montenegro.



COPASAH EUROPE

Newsletter

ISSUE #4

The main goals that are sought to be achieved in outreach work are: making contact with people in the communities Juventas work with and preventing health and social consequences of risky behavior.

2. Drop in centres - All Juventas' drop in centers (Drop in center for people who use/inject drugs, Drop in center for people who provide sex and sex related services and LGBTIQ drop in center) are safe and accessible places with a relaxed atmosphere or the so-called "tendentious informality". They foster an environment that respects the autonomy, individuality of each person and mutual respect. Over coffee or tea, visitors can talk, exchange ideas, expand the network of social support, and get useful information about health and healthy lifestyles. In all Drop in centers, certain (defined) services are provided without an appointment, and the arrival itself is on a voluntary basis. All employees are governed by the principles of confidentiality, ethics and the obligation of lifelong learning.

Drop in centers include provision of the following free of charge stationary services:

- distribution of condoms and lubricants;
- distribution and exchange of safe injection equipment (clean syringes, needles, cookers, medical alcohol, elastic tourniquets, distilled water...);
- collection of discarded equipment;
- referral to HIV (and other STIs) testing;
- referral to available services within the social and health care system;
- informing target groups about sexually and blood transmissible infections; safe and proper use of the materials we share;
- informing target groups about the ways to reduce harm, addiction treatments as well as opioid agonist treatments available in Montenegro;
- peer counseling, psychological counseling, medical counseling, legal counseling, counseling with a social worker;
- clothes' washing and drying;
- donation of various types of clothing garments;
- shower;
- hair dresser services.



COPASAH EUROPE

Newsletter

ISSUE #4

Through stationary services, post-penal support is provided to former prisoners, and regular counseling and consultative support is also provided within the prison, particularly in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention.

Juventas provides services to approximately 2,000 unique clients annually, ensuring their active participation in service creation and delivery.

Licensed Services: Juventas is a licensed provider of two services within the social and child protection system: counseling services and community based service - drop-in. Juventas holds ISO 9001 certification ensuring high-quality service delivery to socially excluded individuals.

Through the Program for capacity building, research and advocacy, Juventas carries out activities that include: improving the skills and knowledge of target groups with whom Juventas works for joint action and independent functioning, enhancing the knowledge and skills of service providers and professionals in the civil sector, institutions, and the media in relation to the human rights and needs of target groups, improving the knowledge and skills of the media in reporting on topics related to these groups, as well as the continuous enhancement of the team's knowledge and skills.

Other activities include monitoring and documenting human rights violations, conducting research of interest to the target groups, tracking, analyzing, and creating public policies, and advocating for social change based on the identified needs of the user groups.



COPASAH EUROPE Newsletter

ISSUE #4

Looking Forward

Looking ahead, Juventas remain dedicated to their mission of enhancing social cohesion by creating inclusive communities through the promotion of active youth participation, the development of public policies and advocacy, innovative and sustainable support services for the socially excluded, as well as empowering key actors in this process.

For more information or to support Juventas work, please visit their website or contact them directly.

Stay connected with Juventas:

Website: <https://juventas.me/en/>

Email: info@juventas.me

Phone: +382 20 657 098

Follow them on social media for updates and opportunities to get involved.

<https://www.facebook.com/nvo.juventas.3>

<https://www.instagram.com/nvo.juventas?igsh=MXBjcjBsMXJlcHZ4ag==>



ALBANIA

HUMAN RIGHTS IN DEMOCRACY CENTRE (HRDC)

Human Rights in Democracy Centre (HRDC) is a non-profit and non-religious organization whose mission is to work for the protection and promotion of fundamental human rights and freedoms in Albania and to raise the awareness of the Albanian society on the state of human rights, with a special focus on the most vulnerable groups in society, such as women / girls, minors, minorities, etc.

One of the **objectives of HRDC** is to prevent domestic violence and to provide support services for victims/survivors of domestic violence. HRDC has continuously contributed to the capacity building of the responsible institutions for the implementation of legislation against gender-based violence and domestic violence through trainings with police officers, doctors, teachers, local officials, bailiffs etc.

The Center monitors the implementation of laws in practice and undertakes initiatives to improve legislation in the field of human rights protection, with a special focus on gender equality, domestic violence and gender-based violence. HRDC is an lobbyist organization accredited by the Parliament of Republic of Albania and has contributed to the amendment of Law "On measures against domestic violence", bylaws for its implementation, Law no. 10221/2010 "On protection from discrimination", Law no. 111/2017 "On legal aid guaranteed by the state", Law no. 22/2018 "On Social Housing", the Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 334/2011 regarding the functioning of the Coordinated Referral Mechanism, Strategies, Action Plans on gender based violence, Protocols and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).

HRDC has signed collaboration agreement with public and independent institutions like Ombudsman, Commissioner Against Discrimination, General Directory of Police, General Directory of Prisons, Coordinated Referral Mechanisms in several Municipalities of Albania etc.



COPASAH EUROPE

Newsletter

ISSUE #4

HRDC has prepared also some Stakeholder and shadow reports for different Committees like GREVIO, CEDAW, UPR, CERD, Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, EU progress Reports of Albania etc.

Since 2015, the Center has monitored the decisions of Tirana District Court regarding issues related to the rights of victims of gender based violence and domestic violence in the civil and criminal court procedures. In this context HRDC has prepared three Studies.

Recent work of the organization

In March 2024, HRDC was included in the electronic registry of CSOs in the Parliament of Republic of Albania, as an organization that has continuously contributed to the improvement of the legal framework in the field of human rights with a special focus on victims of gender based violence and domestic violence.

Since 2019, HRDC is part of the electronic register of lobbyists. In these conditions, we expressed our willingness to put all our experience and expertise into the function of improving local legislation with a special focus on gender-based violence and domestic violence.

During 2024 HRDC has completed CSO questionnaire for drafting the National Report on the implementation of the Declaration and Platform for Action, Beijing +30. HRDC presented in this report the most important achievements, challenges and obstacles related to progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment, in Albania, during the last five years.

In this context, HRDC has also taken part in the civil society consultation for the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration for Action .Furthermore, in the lead-up to the Regional Review Meeting, UN Women ECARO has organized this consultations with a broad range of stakeholders, including civil society and young people, to prepare for and inform the Beijing+30 review process with key milestones. HRDC has given its inputs in this activity.



COPASAH EUROPE

Newsletter

ISSUE #4

HRDC has also made some **concrete recommendations on General Recommendation No. 40: "Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems", of CEDAW Committee.**

This general recommendation provides guidance to States parties on legislative, policy, programmatic, and other relevant measures to ensure the implementation of their obligations in relation to the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems. This general recommendation provides guidance to States parties on legislative, policy, programmatic, and other relevant measures to ensure the implementation of their obligations in relation to the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems.

During this year HRDC has been part of some different activities on psychological and online violence against women and girls (round tables, working groups , meetings with officials of Directorate of Police of Tirana-Cyber Crime Sector, conferences) organized by the General Rapporteur on violence against women in EU, the Alliance of Women Deputies in Albania, Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence (EU level). During this months in Albania is discussed in different levels, national and EU level (Conference on countering psychological and online violence against women) the possibility of drafting a civil and criminal regulatory framework for psychological violence and online violence. HRDC has been part of this activities giving its contribution in verbal and written form. HRDC will continue to follow this issue with concrete recommendations.

We want to mention also the contribution of HRDC to Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) report. Albania has sent to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination the thirteenth and fourteenth periodic report on February 2022. This state party report was discussed in 112 Session of CERD in April 2024. HRDC has prepared the CERD report in January 2023 and sent it the Committee. In 23 May 2024 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has prepared the "Concluding observations on the combined thirteenth and fourteenth periodic reports of Albania."



Some of HRDC recommendations are included in CERD Concluding observations. We can mention here:

- The Committee recommends that the State party redouble its efforts to raise awareness and knowledge of the provisions of the Convention and its justiciability among judges, lawyers and public officials, enabling them to apply the Convention in relevant cases, and to extend those efforts to the members of the parliament and the local authorities. The Committee also recommends that the State party conduct public campaigns, particularly among groups that are the most vulnerable to racial discrimination, to raise awareness of the provisions of the Convention and the remedies available.
- The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation and urges the State party to expedite the adoption of the three remaining bylaws in order to ensure the full and effective implementation of Law No. 96/2017 on the Protection of National Minorities and all pending bylaws for the implementation of legislation that have an important impact on the enjoyment of the rights of minorities, in particular Roma and Egyptians, especially those on the implementation of legislation related to social housing.
- The Committee recommends that the State party continue its efforts to guarantee, in practice, that Roma and Egyptian children have access to education without discrimination and to ensure the effective implementation of measures adopted to increase the enrolment and attendance of Roma and Egyptian children in compulsory education.
- The Committee recommends that the State party adopt appropriate and effective measures in order to provide access to adequate housing and to improve living conditions for Roma and Egyptians, with the genuine consultation and participation of the affected communities and individuals concerned.



- The Committee recommends that the State party continue to adopt all measures necessary to ensure the accessibility, availability, quality and cultural acceptability of health-care services for Roma and Egyptians, including by guaranteeing the allocation of sufficient financial, human and technical resources to that end. The Committee also recommends that the State party take the measures necessary to ensure that women belonging to ethnic minorities have access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, facilities and information.
- The Committee recommends that the State party continue its efforts to ensure access to birth registration and identity documents for Roma, Egyptians and members of other minority groups, to Albanians returning from abroad and to migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, in order to prevent statelessness and ensure that they have access to the rights enshrined in the Convention. The Committee also recommends that the State party adopt the measures necessary to narrow the digital divide for the benefit of Roma and Egyptians, including by providing them with increased access to the Internet and training in its use.
- The Committee recommends that the State party adopt appropriate and effective measures to ensure that all victims of racial discrimination have access to effective legal remedies, adequate reparations, and legal aid services;

During this year HRDC was part of the online event for the Victims' Rights Communicators Network titled 'Strategic Victims' Rights Advocacy in 2025 - The Year of Victim Support', in 12 July 2024.

2025 marks a significant milestone as Victim Support Europe initiates "The Year of Victim Support", a year-long endeavour aimed at advancing victims' rights through universality, progress, and engagement. Moreover, 2025 marks the 35th anniversary of Victim Support Europe (VSE), an esteemed network committed to ensuring that victims of crime receive the rights and support they deserve, regardless of their circumstances or location within Europe. VSE will organize a campaign on victims right during 2025 and also will prepare and launch of VSE Strategy for 2026-2030. HRDC will continue to participate in these events.



Sharing some positive example from the work among vulnerable communities

During this period, in implementation of the latest Decision of the High Judicial Council no. 254 dated 09.05.2024, "On the Calendar of Review of Cases in the Court of Appeal", the Court of Appeal has assisted some of HRDC cases after drafting of requests for the acceleration of judicial processes.

According to this decision, issues of a specific nature and category must be examined within a shorter period of time.

Matters of a specific nature and category are those matters, where the lack of their examination within a reasonable period according to article 399/2 of the Code of Civil Procedure and/or according to this article in relation to article 109, point 4, of Law no. 38/2017, dated 30.3.2017, after it brings serious consequences for the parties in the process and for the administration of justice.

Based on these requests, HRDC clients have been able to resolve their cases in the Court of Appeals within a reasonable time, avoiding the usual procedures where the appeal review of cases due to overload goes over two years.

Recent developments in our country with impact on access to health or human rights of the vulnerable groups

The law no. 9970 date 24.07.2008 "For gender equality in society" is in the process of changing. This law is expected to bring important changes and expansion of the protection and improvement of the position of women in society through the concrete and effective measures that this law is expected to establish.

HRDC has participated in the first consultation meeting for the review of the Gender Equality Law. With representatives of civil society, were discussed the draft legal changes prepared by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, with technical support from UN Women. Although this law has played an important role in advancing gender equality in Albania, revisions are necessary to bring it fully in line with current international standards, which is particularly important in the context of Albania's accession to the European Union. HRDC has sent its recommendations in a written form.



Other useful information related to work on accountability, transparency and right to health and human rights of the vulnerable groups.

During this year the Institution of the People's Advocate, in cooperation with UN Women, has taken 'Observatory of Femicide' initiative.

The first of its kind, this initiative will collect and analyse data in order to improve policies and mechanisms to prevent the killing of women and girls.

This initiative Aims to a comprehensive discussion on the issues of femicide in Albania and the need to improve inter-institutional cooperation in order to prevent and take effective measures.

This initiative is taken, first to guarantee the definition of "femicide" as a criminal offense, to identify a clear definition and to include it in the new Criminal Code. On the other hand, we must be clear that only by collecting accurate and comparable data on a particular crime we will be able to fully understand the causes and reasons why it happened, how it happened and what we can do about it. The creation of femicide observatories in other countries of the entire United Nations arena but also in some countries of the Council of Europe has been a push forward for the identification of problems but also for addressing these problems.

The most important challenges that we can mention are these:

- The lack of diversified services for all vulnerable groups identified;
- The limited number of personnel of local units working for the management of cases and the high number of cases in need of services makes this personnel mainly manage emergencies, without having the necessary time to work on proactive way in the field;
- The lack of due cooperation and coordination between service providers;
- Many families in need of social protection are still facing difficulties in accessing it. Discrimination against the most vulnerable groups prevents many of them from benefiting and receiving the services that are considered their right.
- Difficulties in accessing services due to lack of information or bureaucratic procedures;
- Lack of some services especially for rehabilitation of victims of domestic violence and perpetrators;



ROMANIA

THE ASSOCIATION OF ROMA LAWYERS -ROMAJUST

USING STRATEGIC LITIGATION TO FIGHT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The **Association of Roma Lawyers ROMAJUST** is the first organization dedicated to Roma lawyers in Romania. The association was founded in 2016 by young Roma lawyers and aims to facilitate access to justice for disadvantaged communities in Romania, access to quality health services, access to social services in general and keeping the national authorities accountable for respecting the fundamental rights and the freedoms of the citizens.

One of the major goals of **ROMAJUST**, since its foundation in 2016, has been Strategic Litigation. ROMAJUST managed to take over the most visible cases in Romania and provided assistance to victims of abuse and discrimination of any kind.

In our projects, we approached strategic litigation as a short, medium and long term solution, but especially in the long term. Our limited resources did not always allow us to take over individual cases, but we managed to take over the strategic ones that affected communities (mass eviction complaints for 88 people from Focșani – in seven months we received three positive discrimination decisions from the National Council for Combating Discriminations against the City Hall and the Mayor of Focșani) or the whole Roma minority and vulnerable categories (we petitioned the National Council for Combating Discriminations against the Mayor in Urziceni and he was found guilty of discrimination and fined and we pressed penal charges against the mayor and the hospital in Urziceni for denying a Roma deaf woman the right to medical services as she gave birth on the pavement in front of the hospital).

We stand against police brutality and we pressed charges against police officers in several cases in Romania, the most visible being the murder of a Roma man in Arad (The 33-year-old Roma man named Muszunye Mircea Visan (known as Visinel) was murdered in a police station in Arad- the police officer was arrested).

From the collaborations with the authorities and state institutions in at least 4 projects, we reached conclusions such as:

- Litigation in Romania takes a very long time as a process.
- Lawyers, prosecutors and judges do not use European Community law as a priority over national law.
- In addition, they do not use the aggravating criteria based on prejudice.
- Although Romania has signed all European treaties in the field of Human Rights, they are sufficiently known and followed.
- We need more training for people who enforce the law. They need to be more aware of hate crime, hate speech and human rights.

Since the organisation's inception, we have aimed to organise groups to fight for human rights in general, creating networks of human rights monitors and implementing innovative systems to strengthen the capacity and skills of human rights specialists. The main innovative tools used are the Legal Incubators, where we empower the Roma community of law school students and graduates to become legal experts, continuously promoting the right to justice by providing pro-bono services.

Our first objective (as stipulated in our Statutes is referral to public authorities and initiation of litigation in cases of human rights violations; Provision and/or financing of legal, psychological, management, financial assistance and consultancy services, including representation before national and international courts and other decision-making bodies through own representatives or hiring lawyers and/or experts, for Roma and other victims of antigypsism whose human rights have been violated and/or who have suffered discrimination, abuse, etc. in all areas of life including: access to justice; health; education; sexual and gender violence; human traffick; domestic violence; housing; culture; traditions; employment; gender equality; access to social services; etc.

STRATEGIC LITIGATION

ROMAJUST has extensive experience in strategic litigation for vulnerable groups and has a network of lawyers actively engaged in lawsuits in 10 cities concerning the rights of the Roma, dealing with issues such as access to services, access to education, police brutality, forced evictions (with 50 active cases involving more than 500 families), etc.

Notable examples of successful strategic cases they undertook include the mass eviction of 88 people from Focșani and a case against the mayor and hospital in Urziceni for denying the right to medical services to a deaf Roma woman. ROMAJUST has also implemented projects where strategic litigation was a strong component. This includes two CERV-funded projects, (1) "Challenging online and offline Roma Discrimination in Europe" (COORDE EC 2022/1.04.2022-31.03.2024) and (2) "Roma Inclusion and Support Effort" (RISE, Project no. 101144516 CERV-2023-EQUAL).

The organisation also works alongside the European Roma Rights Centre and receives ongoing grants for human rights cases in court or petitions to the National Council for Combating Discrimination. Other recently implemented projects by ROMAJUST funded by the Active Citizens Fund Romania through EEA Grants, in which strategic litigation was used and Roma and vulnerable communities were provided free legal aid, include "The Network to Combat Discrimination in Vulnerable Communities" and the "Equal Rights for Refugees (Drepturi Egale pentru Refugiați) projects. Additional projects with a strategic litigation and legal aid component include the "Caravan of the Right to Health for Roma women" project funded by the Norwegian Fund (EEA Grants), and the "Empowered women, empowered communities" project financially supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Romania through the Human Rights Fund.

Additionally, ROMAJUST also had several projects funded by CCDF Terre Solidaire – with activities including the innovative 'Legal Caravan' where four lawyers and four jurists provide direct and mobile access to justice for Romani people, vulnerable people and Ukrainian refugees, and the training of Roma students to graduate and pass the Bar Exam to become lawyers through the 'Legal Incubator.'

STOP HATE SPEECH! PROJECT IN HIGH SCHOOLS

ROMAJUST implements the **project STOP HATE-SPEECH!** with the financial support of the National Agency for Roma - Romanian Government through the program "Roma for Romania".

Project results:

- 200 young people over the age of 14 selected and involved in project activities
- 50 camp participants (40 students and 10 education instructors)
- 1 Stop Hate-Speech! campaign with 3 events and 150 participants
- 3 seminars organized with relevant actors in the fight against discrimination, hate-speech, hate-crimes
- 1 research study Contribution of Roma culture in Romanian society
- 1 audio spot realized and broadcasted at county/national level
- 60 education instructors involved in the project activities



Aim of the project

The aim of the project is to encourage the respect and promotion of cultural diversity through activities and initiatives aimed at valorizing the cultural heritage of the Roma communities, promoting intercultural dialogue and fighting against stereotypes and discrimination in order to strengthen social cohesion and mutual understanding between different ethnic groups in Romania.

COPASAH EUROPE Newsletter

ISSUE #4



COPASAH EUROPE Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 2024



**COPASAH
EUROPE
NETWORK**

COPASAHEURO
PE@COPASAHE
UROPE.ORG

+389 2 3298 295
