

PREVALENCE OF HATE CRIMES AND HATE INCIDENTS IN MUNICIPALITIES IN NORTH MACEDONIA

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The chapter aims to explore the potential correlation between specific types of hate crimes and their occurrence in various municipalities throughout the Republic of North Macedonia. Geovisualisation techniques are employed to map these hate crimes and analyse their characteristics based on various factors. The results showed that hate crimes are a critical issue in North Macedonia, affecting various regions in the country. The Skopje Region records the highest number of hate crimes based on ethnicity and political beliefs, indicating a dire need for law enforcement to play a more preventive role. Meanwhile, cities near the border primarily experience hate crimes based on migrant status, which calls for increased police patrols in “hotspots” to prevent potential attacks. The high rate of ethnic-based hate crimes in municipalities with significant ethnic representation and political-based hate crimes during election periods also require proactive policing measures.

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RAZŠIRJENOST ZLOČINOV IN INCIDENTOV IZ SOVRAŠTVA V OBČINAH V SEVERNI MAKEDONIJI

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Namen poglavja je raziskati morebitno povezavo med posebnimi vrstami zločinov iz sovraštva in njihovim pojavljanjem v različnih občinah v Republiki Severni Makedoniji. Uporabljene so bile tehnike geovizualizacije za preslikavo zločinov iz sovraštva in analiza njihovih značilnosti na podlagi različnih dejavnikov. Rezultati so pokazali, da zločini iz sovraštva predstavljajo kritični problem v Severni Makedoniji, ki vpliva na različne regije v državi. Regija Skopje beleži največje število zločinov iz sovraštva na podlagi etnične pripadnosti in političnih prepričanj, kar kaže na nujnost preventivne vloge organov kazenskega pregona. V mestih blizu meje se dogajajo predvsem zločini iz sovraštva na podlagi migrantskega statusa, kar zahteva povečano prisotnost policijskih patrolj na žariščih, z namenom preprečiti morebitne napade. Visoka stopnja kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva na podlagi etnične pripadnosti v občinah s precejšnjo etnično zastopanostjo in kaznivih dejanj iz sovraštva na podlagi politične pripadnosti med volilnimi obdobji zahtevata proaktivne policijske ukrepe.



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1 Introduction

According to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, “sustainable development cannot be realised without peace and security for everyone; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development” (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). The United Nations has a long-standing history of mobilising the global community against all forms of hatred to defend human rights and promote the rule of law. Hate crimes impact various areas of focus for the United Nations, from protecting human rights to maintaining peace and security. Academic research has been addressing how to prevent and counter hate crimes driven by intolerance or discrimination and the role of criminal justice systems in fostering sustainable development, which could be instrumental in achieving lasting peace and security (Perry, 2001; Walters, 2014).

Hate crime is a social construct. It emerges from a complex network of events, structures, and underlying processes and, as such, can be constructed according to different actors’ perceptions, whether they are scholars, law enforcers, or victims (Chakraborti & Garland, 2015). Every criminal act may or may not appear as an act of hate, depending on whether it is motivated by hatred, bias, or the discrimination of the victim as a member of a certain social group. Therefore, hate crimes are criminal acts motivated by bias or prejudice towards groups of people, comprising two elements: a criminal offence and a bias motivation (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [OSCE/ODIHR], 2014). These crimes “involve acts of violence and intimidation, usually directed towards [already] stigmatised and marginalised groups. As such, it is a mechanism of power and oppression, intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterise a given social order” (Perry, 2001).

The response of local communities to hate crimes can vary widely, ranging from acts of solidarity and support to indifference or complicity. Understanding how specific communities react to hate crimes and the mechanisms they employ to address or mitigate such incidents is crucial for developing effective prevention strategies (Boeckmann & Turpin-Petrosino, 2002). Research by Iganski and Lagou (2017) highlights the importance of community-based interventions and public initiatives in combating hate crimes and fostering social cohesion.

This chapter seeks to determine whether certain types of hate crimes, such as xenophobia, hate violence, and racial violence, are consistently associated with specific types of municipalities. Understanding this potential association is crucial for identifying patterns in hate crimes. To achieve this, the chapter employs geovisualisation techniques to map hate crimes and their characteristics, potentially informing localised prevention efforts. Geovisualisation could reveal spatial clustering influenced by local and regional socio-political factors, which is vital for prevention efforts (e.g., Herbert, 2020). If patterns linking hate crimes to specific geographic locations emerge, they could inform the development of strategic prevention plans.

2 Literature Review

Hate crimes are a significant challenge for societies across the globe, involving a complex interplay of social, cultural, and structural factors. Existing research suggests that hate crimes are not randomly distributed but tend to cluster in specific geographic areas or communities. Brimicombe et al. (2001) suggest that certain types of neighbourhoods, characterised by specific ethnic demographics, may experience higher rates of racially motivated incidents compared to others. A study conducted by Brimicombe et al. (2001) suggests that the ethnic composition of an area has a significant impact on the rate of such incidents. Specifically, incidents of racial harassment and hate crimes tend to be significantly higher in areas where there is a large white majority and smaller groups of other ethnicities. Furthermore, a study by McDevitt et al. (2002) found that hate crimes are more likely to occur in areas with higher levels of social disorganisation, economic deprivation, and intergroup tensions.

By clarifying the relationship between specific local communities and hate crimes, we can better understand community dynamics and hate crimes, seek policy interventions, and promote social justice and equality. Based on the results of their studies, scholars can inform the development of targeted policies and interventions aimed at reducing prejudice, promoting tolerance, and enhancing community resilience. For example, a study by Perry et al. (2020) underscored the importance of implementing hate crime legislation and providing support services for victims within affected communities.

In addition, examining the relationship between specific local communities and hate crimes based on grounds allows for an intersectional analysis that recognises the intersecting identities and vulnerabilities of individuals within these communities. For example, research by Chakraborti and Garland (2009) emphasises the need for an intersectional approach to understanding hate crimes and addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalised groups.

2.1 Society-Level Factors

However, one more risk factor must be considered in the context of the Macedonian response to hate crimes. Namely, according to the report from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in 2023, civil society representatives have pointed out that if violent interactions continue without appropriate responses, it may pose a significant threat to the country's societal cohesion and ethnic tolerance in the future. They allege that the authorities usually consider some of the hate crime incidents as mere juvenile hooliganism rather than expressions of inter-ethnic tensions and hate-motivated violence. According to some of ECRI's civil society interlocutors, the police refrain from acting in this regard also because of worries that arresting ethnic Macedonians or ethnic Albanians in this conflictual setting could add fuel to the fire and escalate the already tense situation (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance [ECRI], 2023).

Furthermore, the report notes that a hands-off approach towards conflicts may seem like an easy solution, but it can have serious consequences in the long run. Allowing existing resentments to fester can lead to a dangerous cycle of perpetual hatred and low-intensity violence. This, over time, can become increasingly difficult to control and may spiral out of hand. Therefore, ECRI believes that hate-motivated violence between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians is a significant problem that requires immediate attention.' ECRI recommends that the relevant authorities take this issue seriously and respond appropriately by conducting thorough investigations into such incidents and holding the perpetrators accountable. Otherwise, this non-punishment practice could represent an additional risk factor for the occurrence of hate crimes (ECRI, 2023).

2.2 Community-Level Factors

Structural factors, such as social disorganisation, economic deprivation, and marginalisation, have been identified as risk factors for hate crimes as well and these factors are best described as ‘dominance over difference’, resulting in the ‘othering’ of certain minority individuals (Perry, 2001). The analysis of hate crimes and their association with specific communities is guided by social disorganisation theory. Social disorganisation theory, developed by Shaw and McKay in 1942, focuses on how changing environments and community structures affect different demographic groups (Shaw & McKay, 1942). This theory is focused on the changing environment and community structures that influence how different demographic groups experience difficulty and hostility in the adaptation process to other groups. Social disorganisation theory is defined as the inability of community members to realise the shared values of their residents and maintain effective social controls (Ciobanu, 2019; Osgood & Chambers, 2003). This theoretical framework posits that neighbourhood characteristics, such as poverty, residential instability, and ethnic heterogeneity, contribute to social disorganisation, thereby increasing the likelihood of crime, including hate crimes (Benier, 2017; Sampson et al., 1997). Communities characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment, residential instability, and social isolation may be more susceptible to hate-motivated violence due to heightened social tensions and a lack of cohesive social networks (Walters, 2014).

Based on these theoretical underpinnings, hypotheses can be developed to explore the relationship between community characteristics and hate crime prevalence, considering factors such as ethnic composition, socio-economic status, and community cohesion. Therefore, the main goal of this chapter is to explore the potential correlation between certain types of hate crimes based on grounds, and the geographic locations of municipalities throughout North Macedonia. There is a prevailing perception that specific types of hate crimes predominantly occur in certain municipalities within the country. Drawing from social disorganisation theory, social identity theory, and realistic group conflict theory, our analysis seeks to clarify the underlying dynamics of hate crimes within different regions. For instance, in the Skopje and Polog Region, where ethnic tensions are noticeable, hate crimes based on ethnicity are anticipated to be prevalent, as suggested by social psychological theories. Additionally, in communities along migrant routes, as posited by social disorganisation theory, heightened xenophobic tendencies may manifest,

potentially resulting in increased hate crimes targeting migrants or minority groups. For example, in the Eastern Region, xenophobic hate crimes might be observed. At the same time, in the Vardar Region and border areas, offences related to refugee or migrant status could be more prevalent. Moreover, social psychological theories suggest that hate crimes based on sexual orientation might be more common in the Northern Region. By integrating these hypotheses, our study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how community dynamics influence the prevalence of specific criminal behaviours.

2.3 Individual-Level Factors

Research has shown that individual-level factors like prejudice, bias, and stereotypes are significant motivators of hate crimes. Numerous studies have demonstrated the role of social identity and intergroup dynamics in shaping attitudes towards out-groups and fuelling prejudice and discrimination (Acosta, 2015).

Social psychological theories, such as social identity theory and realistic group conflict theory, suggest that individuals may be more likely to engage in hate-motivated behaviour when they perceive a threat to their own group identity or when they perceive members of other groups as competitors for resources or status (Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011). Those who have prejudiced views towards particular social groups are more likely to endorse violence or aggression against members of those groups, as exemplified in the case of immigrants (Pauwels & Williamson, 2024). Implicit biases, which operate beyond conscious awareness, may also contribute to the perpetration of hate crimes.

3 Legal Framework for Countering Hate Crime in North Macedonia

North Macedonia has a well-established legal framework for countering hate crime, with the Criminal Code (1996) largely aligning with European standards following the inclusion of “hate” as a motive for numerous crimes. Before 2018, hate crime or hatred was only considered an aggravating circumstance in determining sanctions, as outlined in Article 35 of the Criminal Code (1996). However, in 2018, amendments to the Criminal Code (Amendment of the Criminal Code, 2018) introduced a definition specifying what constitutes a hate crime, stating that: “*A hate crime expressly provided by the provisions of this Code is considered a criminal offence against a*

natural or legal person and related persons or property committed in whole or in part due to a real or presumed (imagined, conceived) characteristic or connection of the person on grounds of race, skin colour, nationality, ethnicity, religion or belief, mental or physical disability, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and political belief.” (Article 122 of the Amendment of the Criminal Code, 2018).

Additionally, phrases such as “out of hatred” or “if the crime was committed out of hatred” have been incorporated into over 20 offences. This more explicitly sanctions crimes resulting from hatred or biases. Criminalising acts of violence driven by such biased motives enhances understanding of what constitutes hate crimes and should improve efficiency in detecting offences and gathering statistics and other relevant data on hate crimes. The adoption of amendments to the Criminal Code in February 2023, which address criminal acts of gender-based violence – including stalking – and hate crimes based on gender identity, represents significant legislative progress (Amendment of the Criminal Code, 2023).

According to the 2023 Screening Report from the European Commission, North Macedonia’s legal framework for combating racism and xenophobia partially aligns with the European Union *acquis* (European Commission, 2023). The report also indicates a need to revise the Criminal Code, particularly to incorporate provisions addressing hate speech. Furthermore, alignment with Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin (2000), which implements the principle of equal treatment regardless of racial or ethnic origin, is necessary. The legal framework for combating hate speech requires further enhancement, consistent with the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance’s (2015) General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech.

The Screening Report also underscores the primary challenge of collecting official data on hate crimes, which posed an obstacle during the preparation of this paper. Previous reports from the European Commission consistently highlighted that “the collection of data on hate crime and hate speech is not systematic, despite an increase in hate crime cases” (European Commission, 2019–2022). According to the 2023 report (European Commission, 2023), there is a need for more systematic gathering of official data, along with increased efforts to develop a recording and data collection framework by the authorities. Despite the obligation to register hate

crimes as a distinct phenomenon, detailed data from the courts remains unavailable. Ensuring the systematic collection of disaggregated data and statistics on hate crime and hate speech is essential. Additionally, efforts should focus on enhancing the capacity of law enforcement and criminal justice officials to effectively prevent and prosecute all instances of violence, hate crimes, and hate speech.

4 Governmental Data Collection of Hate Crimes

As mentioned earlier, law enforcement officers do not always classify incidents as hate crimes, regardless of whether they are not trained to recognise hate crimes or choose to avoid complicating the case, thereby making it more challenging for prosecutors to establish a subjective, biased motive. Police officers should document relevant information in a section titled “Indications that a Hate Crime Has Been Committed” (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014). This section should identify indicators suggesting that the incident constitutes a hate crime and specify the relevant characteristics of the victim (e.g., gender, race, skin colour, age, ethnic affiliation, language, mental or physical disability) targeted by the perpetrator.

Data concerning criminal charges filed under the relevant articles should be entered into the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ electronic data system. The Ministry’s Unit for Criminal Intelligence and Analysis is responsible for maintaining national police records. The Ministry of Internal Affairs utilises a unified criminal report form that includes a dedicated field for hate crimes. Additionally, the Ministry employs an internal electronic bulletin with a designated checkbox for hate crimes (Law on Police, 2015; Netkova & Parry, 2022). However, based on available information, it appears that law enforcement agencies have not consistently documented the biased motivations behind hate crimes (ECRI, 2023; OSCE ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting, n.d.). The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights reminds us that Ministerial Council Decision 9/09 (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE], 2009) calls upon OSCE participating States to promptly investigate hate crimes and ensure acknowledgement of the motives of those convicted of such offences. Since North Macedonia is a member of the OSCE, it should adhere to the commitments outlined in Decision 9/09.

In October 2020, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of North Macedonia, launched a website called “the red button for hate crime,” allowing citizens to report hate crimes, hate speech, and other forms of violence. Although the Ministry manages this reporting platform, the subsequent actions taken are not entirely transparent (European Commission, 2022). According to the 2022 Report of the European Commission: “*The lack of organised data collection on hate crimes and the ineffective response of authorities to them remains a significant concern. Hate crime incidents are recorded in the civil society database, which results in reports.*” In addition, the report from the ECRI in 2023, states that North Macedonia regularly reports hate crime data to the OSCE. According to this statistic, the police recorded 33 hate crime incidents in 2018, 23 in 2019, 29 in 2020, and 22 in 2021 (OSCE ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting, n.d.) However, according to ECRI, there is also no integrated and comprehensive data system available that indicates the number of indictments and convictions for crimes involving a biased motivation. ECRI received information that civil society organisations maintain an unofficial count of incidents that indicate around 800 hate-motivated attacks of various levels of severity over recent years (compared with the around 100 cases reported from the police, for the same period). About 70% of these cases are presumed to be between ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian youngsters at a low-intensity level, and they are often not officially reported’ (ECRI, 2023).

The Public Prosecution utilises an electronic Case Management System, a web-based application that includes a checkbox for hate crimes. Data input begins with a data administrator and is later taken over by a public prosecutor once appointed (Netkova & Parry, 2022). However, in the annual reports of the Public Prosecution Offices in North Macedonia from 2016 to 2021, no data on hate crimes are available. The 2019 report mentions that several public prosecutors received training on prosecuting hate crimes, while the reports for 2017 and 2018 highlight the need to strengthen efforts against hate crimes (Javno obvinitelstvo na Republika Severna Makedonija, 2016–2021). Proving biased motives presents greater challenges than establishing the underlying crime, as prosecutors must demonstrate that the offender acted out of hatred or biases based on a protected characteristic. Due to this difficulty, hate crimes are not always recognised, identified, or prosecuted as such. The definition of a hate crime outlined in Article 122 of the Criminal Code (1996) requires that the motive be rooted in prejudice towards a protected characteristic (such as race, skin colour, nationality, ethnicity, religion or belief, mental or physical disability, gender,

gender identity, sexual orientation, or political belief) without explicitly stating “hate” as a prerequisite. This approach facilitates a practical application of these provisions in identifying, prosecuting, and handling such offences (Netkova & Perry, 2022).

Ultimately, courts should also collect data on hate crimes using the Automated Court Case Management Information System (ACCMIS). ACCMIS is a highly advanced system with numerous options for storing and analysing data. Similar to the Electronic Bulletin of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Case Management System used by public prosecutors, ACCMIS features a checkbox specifically for hate crimes. This checkbox should be utilised after the court delivers its judgment. However, like the other two systems, we can only presume the possibility that judges often neglect to check this box, resulting in a limited number of registered hate crime cases. Furthermore, ACCMIS can categorise cases by the law articles but not by specific paragraphs, posing a challenge for compiling hate crime statistics since hate crimes are specified within the paragraphs of broader article incriminations.

Thus, the legal framework alone is insufficient for combating hate crimes. Inadequate implementation of the laws by all relevant actors leads to a significant number of unreported crimes or cases that are reported but do not initiate appropriate procedures (Iganski, 2019). These factors contribute to the underdevelopment of the national framework for monitoring, mapping, and preventing hate crimes, hindering efforts to accurately portray the prevalence of hate crime incidents in North Macedonia.

5 Methodology

As previously mentioned, collecting accurate data on hate crimes is burdened with several challenges, including failure by police officers to register data, reluctance to prosecute hate crimes as such, and victims’ lack of faith in the system leading to underreporting. Hence, we combine the official data and the NGO data. Specifically, we rely on quantitative and qualitative cross-referenced data from the annual reports of the Macedonian Helsinki Committee (hereinafter MHC), monthly reports from the MHC, data from the OSCE/ODIHR hate crime reporting for North Macedonia (OSCE ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting, n.d.), and reports and data provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The quantitative dimension entails the systematic analysis of 561 cases reported. We analysed the data on a case-by-case basis, noting instances where multiple protected characteristics might be applicable (e.g., different ethnicities can encompass variations in language and may also involve elements of racism or xenophobia). The 561 cases are distributed according to the year, bias motivation, and the region in which they occur. The regions are categorised based on the last regionalisation from the Parliament in 2009 (Law on Spatial and Urban Planning, 2009).

The qualitative dimension of the analysis includes an analysis of the bias motivation for the hate crime as well as the region where the hate crime occurred. The latter is done to determine if certain types of hate crimes predominantly occur in specific municipalities within the country. In comparisons across cities, we standardise the number of hate crimes per 100,000 people in each region.

The paper also uses ‘geovisualisation’ techniques to map hate crimes and analyse their characteristics based on bias motivation and spatial distribution, according to the region in North Macedonia. Two interactive maps allow readers to explore spatial data and gain deeper insights into the spatial relationships within the data.

This chapter has several methodological shortcomings, mainly due to limitations in data collection and measurement errors. The latter is because some hate crimes based on ethnicity can also be perceived as hate crimes based on nationality or race. Additionally, in instances of sports events, hate crime incidents can occur in a municipality or region that is hosting two different guest sports teams from other regions. Additionally, the absence of the 2021 report from the Macedonian Helsinki Committee (MHC) poses a significant obstacle, hindering the analysis of recent trends and possibly leading to incomplete or outdated conclusions.

6 Results

6.1 Hate Crimes in 2015

Between January 1st and December 31st, 2015, a total of 44 hate crimes and incidents were registered. Of these, 31 incidents were verified through various means such as police contact, bulletins, media reports, and victim meetings, as detailed in Table 1. Additionally, 13 incidents that were not verified were still included in the report due

to the presence of bias indicators (Stojanovski et al., 2016). The OSCE/ODIHR reported five cases from police sources and 34 cases from civil organisations (OSCE ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting, 2017).

The majority of hate crimes are motivated by the refugee or migrant status of the victim (48%) or by the differing ethnic backgrounds of the victim and perpetrator (43%). Between the end of 2014 and throughout 2015 and 2016, the country experienced an unprecedented influx of refugees passing through to enter the European Union's Schengen zone (Veigel et al., 2016). During this period, hate crimes often involved attacks and robberies targeting refugees and migrants in transit through the country. Nearly all these incidents featured ethnic Macedonians and Albanians as victims and/or perpetrators, with refugees from Morocco, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan being targeted. Incidents related to political affiliation accounted for 11% of all cases (Stojanovski et al., 2016). In general, hate crimes in 2015 were triggered by the migrant crises in the regions that are close to the state borders on the south and north – the Northeastern Region (6 cases), the Southeast Region and the Vardar Region. In the Skopje Region, most of the hate crimes were based on ethnicity.

6.2 Hate Crimes in 2016

During the period from January 1st to December 31st, 2016, the Annual Report from the MHC indicated a total of 70 registered hate crimes and incidents (Stojanovski et al., 2017). Of these, 35 incidents were verified through police contact, bulletins, and media reports, while the remaining 35 were unverified. However, these unverified incidents are included in both the report and this analysis due to the presence of bias indicators. These indicators encompass factors such as victim or witness perceptions, comments made at the scene, ethnic differences between victim and perpetrator, frequency of previous incidents, nature of violence, absence of other motives, and location and timing considerations (Stojanovski et al., 2017). Additionally, the OSCE/ODIHR reported three incidents from police sources and 18 incidents from international organisations (OSCE ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting, 2017).

While the regions near the border with Greece and Serbia, continued to be hotspots for xenophobic hate crimes in 2016, political tension had a great impact on hate crimes in 2016 as well. North Macedonia experienced a “Color Revolution” in 2016, marked by widespread protests of alleged government corruption and electoral fraud. Sparked by the opposition’s claims of authoritarianism, the movement demanded political reform and transparent elections. The effects of this movement can be found in the higher numbers of hate crimes based on political belief, especially in the capital – the Region of Skopje – but also in the Vardar, Polog and Northeastern Region.

6.3 Hate Crimes in 2017

Between January 1st and December 31st, 2017, the MHC's Annual Report registered a total of 70 incidents as hate crimes. Of these registered incidents, 58 were verified, while 12 remain unverified (Delovski & Saplieva, 2018). The OSCE/ODIHR did not have available data for the year 2017 (OSCE ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting, 2018).

In 2017, the main motivations for hate crimes were political affiliation (35 incidents) and nationality (30 incidents). These findings can be attributed to the local government elections held in 2017. This tumultuous environment is reflected in the statistics, showing a significant increase in hate crimes based on political affiliation or belief as the motivating bias for these crimes. In Skopje, 25 hate crime cases based on ethnicity had been registered, but also a great number of cases (23) based on political belief. The other regions also had a small portion of hate crimes based on political belief, and as in the previous years – borderline regions are typical for xenophobic hate crimes.

6.4 Hate Crimes in 2018

In its Annual Report for 2018, the MHC registered a total of 123 incidents as hate crimes for the period between January 1st and December 31st, 2018 (Shterjova-Simonovikj & Barlakovska Velko, 2019). Of these 123 incidents, 60 (49%) were verified at the time of the report's filing, while 63 (51%) remained unverified. In 2018, the OSCE/ODIHR received reports of 33 cases from the police (OSCE ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting, 2019), while the MHC reported 73 cases. Among

the 123 cases analysed in the 2018 Annual Report (Shterjova-Simonovikj & Barlakovska Velko, 2019), several were categorised as hate speech rather than hate crimes, particularly those involving biased motivation against members of political parties. Furthermore, the context of hate crimes for this year was unique due to the referendum (the Prespa Agreement) and the subsequent change of the state's name to the Republic of North Macedonia.

According to the MHC Annual Report on hate crimes in North Macedonia for 2018 (Shterjova-Simonovikj & Barlakovska Velko, 2019), ethnicity (79 incidents) and political affiliation (31 incidents) were the primary motivations for hate crimes that year. In the Skopje Region, most of the crimes (67 cases) were based on ethnicity, 14 cases were based on political belief, and a small portion were based on nationality, religion or belief, and racism and xenophobia. In the Vardar Region hate crimes based on racism and xenophobia are typical. In the Polog Region, most cases were based on ethnicity, and a few were based on political belief. In the Pelagonia Region, for this year, there are a significant number of cases based on political affiliation and 4 cases based on ethnicity. The Southwest, East and Northeast Regions, also have a small number of cases based on political belief and few cases based on racism and xenophobia.

6.5 Hate Crimes in 2019

Between January 1st and December 31st, 2019, the MHC registered a total of 159 incidents as hate crimes (Amet & Barkajivska Velko, 2020). Many of these incidents were recorded based on police bulletins and media reports. Out of the total registered incidents, 33 (20%) were verified, while 126 (80%) remained unverified at the time of the report's presentation by the police authorities. As unverified remains, most of the cases were according to the other indicators (location, manner of execution, involvement of minors and high school students, etc.). There is a reasonable belief that these are biased incidents motivated by the ethnicity of the victim. On the OSCE/ODIHR website for 2019, only 23 incidents were reported by the police (OSCE ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting, 2020). In contrast, the MHC reported a total of 144 incidents, with 134 categorised as racist and xenophobic crimes.

According to the MHC report (Amet & Barkajivska Velko, 2020), the primary grounds for hate crimes committed in 2019 were ethnicity, with 135 incidents, and political affiliation, with 15 incidents, given the Presidential elections that year. Also, in 2019, amendments to the Criminal law introduced a definition of hate crimes and special paragraphs in the general incriminations. In the Skopje Region, the majority of the hate crime incidents (115) were registered based on ethnicity, and a few cases were based on political beliefs (8) and other reasons (6). In the Vardar Region, there was only one case based on political belief; in the Pelagonia Region, there was one case based on nationality and one based on ethnicity; in the Polog Region, most of the cases (6) were based on ethnicity.

6.6 Hate Crimes in 2020

In 2020, the MHC documented a total of 104 incidents as hate crimes (Drpljanin, 2021). Among these, 37 incidents (36%) were verified, while the remaining 67 (64%) remained unverified. Most of the unverified cases concern situations where according to other indicators, there is a reasonable belief that these are biased incidents motivated by the ethnicity of the victim. Despite the requests for confirmation of the indicators, the Ministry has yet to verify these hate crimes/incidents. Concurrently, the OSCE/ODIHR official website for the year 2020 reported 29 registered incidents, with 13 documented by the police and 103 by the MHC (OSCE ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting, 2021). According to the MHC's annual report (Drpljanin, 2021), ethnicity (76 incidents) and political affiliation (12 incidents) were the primary grounds for hate crimes in 2020. Additionally, five hate crimes targeted migrants or refugees based on their status, four incidents were motivated by nationality, three were due to religious beliefs, two were based on sexual orientation, one was attributed to intellectual disability, and one was gender-based (Drpljanin, 2021).

The year 2020 marked the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly influenced hate crimes. It is essential to highlight that the most pronounced impact was observed in the context of hate speech, particularly targeting Asian nationalities. Additionally, there were instances of hate crimes directed at citizens returning from abroad and being quarantined in hotels. The Skopje Region is the main Region for hate crimes based on ethnicity, with 54 cases registered, seven cases based on political belief, and also seven cases based on racism & xenophobia founded on

migrant status, language, and skin colour (hereafter racism and xenophobia). In the Vardar Region, there were two hate crime cases of racism and xenophobia and one based on nationality. In the Southwest Region, most of the cases (5) were about racism and xenophobia. The Pelagonia Region had two hate crime cases based on ethnicity and also two based on racism and xenophobia, one case based on political belief, one based on mental and physical disability, and one based on sexual orientation. The Northeast Region has 5 cases based on xenophobia and racism and one case based on ethnicity. The Easter Region has one case based on racism and xenophobia and the Polog Region has 2 cases based on religion and belief.

6.7 Summary Distribution of Hate Crime for the Period 2015–2020

The hate crime rate is calculated depending on the total number of cases of hate crimes and the population in a specific region. The number of the population per region is according to the last census conducted in 2022 (Statistical Office of North Macedonia, 2023): Skopje region (66.1), Vardar region (15.9), Northeast region (21.6), Southwest region (10.2), Polog region (11.5), Pelagonia region (16.3), East region (7.4), and Southeast region (8.8). Figure 1 also contains these rates, with lighter colours indicating a lower rate of cases. This map shows that the Skopje Region—the capital—has the highest hate crime rate, followed by the Northeast Region (Figure 1). On the other hand, the Eastern Region has a lower hate crime rate.

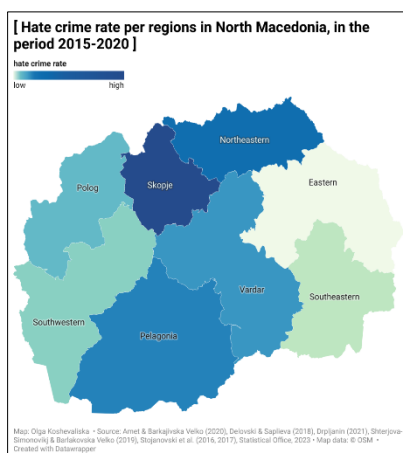


Figure 1: Hate Crime Rate per Regions in North Macedonia in the Period 2015–2020

Source: <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/GdcdO/1/>.

The distribution of the percentages of hate crimes depending on the bias motivation and the region in which they occur is presented in Figure 2. The proportion of all hate crimes motivated by ethnicity was the highest in the Skopje Region (75%), Polog Region (66%), and the East Region (55%). On the other hand, racism and xenophobia accounted for the highest percentage of hate crimes in the Southeast Region (77%), Northeast Region (64%), and the Vardar Region (55%). The Pelagonia Region was the only one with a substantial proportion of the cases motivated by political belief (50%).

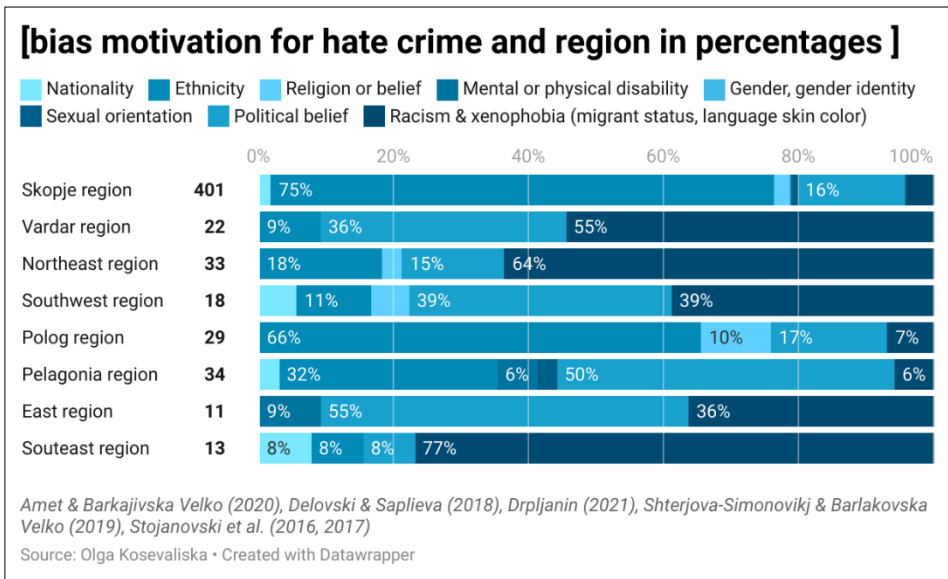


Figure 2: Bias Motivation for Hate Crime
 Source: <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/6VQjj/2/>.

7 Summary of the Bias Motivation for Hate Crime in Different Regions in the Period 2015–2020

As shown in Table 1 and Figure 4 the Skopje Region records the highest percentage of hate crimes. The predominant types of hate crimes in this Region are those based on ethnicity and political beliefs. Regarding hate crimes rooted in ethnicity, many incidents in Skopje have occurred in public transport, particularly on routes connecting neighbourhoods predominantly inhabited by ethnic Macedonians and Albanians. Additionally, a significant number of incidents have taken place in

schools with mixed ethnicities and during sports matches involving teams of ethnic Albanians and Macedonians. These findings underscore the preventive role that law enforcement can play and help anticipate potential conflicts. Concerning hate crimes based on political beliefs, they predominantly occur during election years or significant political events, such as the signing of the Prespa Agreement (United Nations, 2019) and related referendums. Most of these incidents involve property damage to political parties, but they also frequently include online threats against politicians and the dissemination of racial and xenophobic materials through information systems. As for hate crimes based on religious beliefs, they are primarily concentrated in Skopje and its surrounding municipalities.

Cities located in the region near the border (the Vardar, the Northeast and the Southeast Regions) primarily experience hate crimes based on migrants' status. Many of these crimes involve attacks or robberies, including armed robberies, targeting refugees or migrants passing through the country. Therefore, these findings suggest that increased police patrols in “hotspots” like the villages of Lojane and Vaksince in Kumanovo could aid in prevention efforts. The city of Veles, located in the central part of North Macedonia stands out on the hate crime map due to its location along the Balkan route for migrants, making hate crimes against migrants particularly common in this city.

Municipalities with a significant representation of ethnic Albanians, in the Polog Region experience a higher rate of hate crimes based on ethnicity. Half of these incidents occur during sports matches involving teams perceived as ‘opponents’ based on ethnicity, such as between Albanians and Macedonians. Therefore, proactive policing measures at sporting events could help prevent such hate crimes. Additionally, political hate crimes tend to increase during election periods. It's also crucial to highlight hate crimes motivated by religion and religious beliefs, which often result in property damage to sacred places, temples, and places of worship.

In the Pelagonia Region hate crimes based on ethnicity and political motivations are most prevalent. Bitola, with its diverse ethnic population, has previously witnessed similar incidents, especially targeting the Roma community. Most hate crimes based on ethnicity involve damaging objects and property belonging to others. For instance, the Museum of Albanian Alphabet has faced multiple attacks during the research period. Additionally, it's essential to highlight hate crimes based on political

beliefs in both Bitola and Prilep, contributing significantly to the overall number of political hate crimes. Many of these offences involve public threats against politicians and damage to political party headquarters during elections or significant political events. Recognising these patterns can aid in preventing such incidents. Furthermore, there were instances in Bitola where billboards displaying LGBTI messages were vandalised with Nazi symbols, along with two cases targeting individuals based on mental or physical disabilities.

The Eastern Region is notable for hate crimes based on political affiliation or belief. While these municipalities are primarily inhabited by the Macedonian ethnic community with a smaller Roma population, hate crimes based on ethnicity are not common. However, xenophobic hate crimes are prevalent in this area, particularly offences related to the dissemination of racial and xenophobic material through information systems. The Southwest Region is also a significant area for hate crimes based on political affiliation, as well as hate crimes related to migrant status, racial, and xenophobic motivations.

Table 1: Summary Distribution of Hate Crimes in North Macedonia in the Period 2015–2020

Region	Year	Nationality	Ethnicity	Religion or belief	Mental or physical disability	Gender, gender identity	Sexual orientation	Political belief	Racism & xenophobia	Total number per year and region
Skopje region	Total	7	299	9	0	1	4	64	17	401
	2015	2	11	0	0	0	0	3	2	18
	2016	0	27	3	0	0	0	9	3	42
	2017	0	25	2	0	0	1	23	1	52
	2018	2	67	2	0	0	0	14	1	86
	2019	1	115	1	0	0	1	2	8	131
Vardar region	Total	2	54	1	0	0	1	7	7	72
	2015	0	2	0	0	0	0	8	12	22
	2016	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	4
	2017	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	8
	2018	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	0	5
	2019	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Northeast region	Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2015	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
	2016	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
	2017	0	6	1	0	0	0	0	5	33
	2018	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	6	7
	2019	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	4	8
Southwest region	Total	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
	2015	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	5
	2016	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	5
	2017	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	6
	2018	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	18
	2019	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2015	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	2016	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
	2017	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
	2018	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	5
	2019	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
2020	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	5	8	

Region	Year	Nationality	Ethnicity	Religion or belief	Mental or physical disability	Gender, identity	Sexual orientation	Political belief	Racism & xenophobia	Total number per year and region
Polog region	Total	0	19	3	0	0	0	5	2	29
	2015	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	2016	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	6
	2017	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	2018	0	6	0	0	0	0	3	0	9
	2019	0	6	1	0	0	0	0	2	9
2020	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	
Pelagonia region	Total	1	11	0	2	0	1	17	2	34
	2015	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
	2016	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	4
	2017	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	0	7
	2018	0	4	0	0	1	0	7	0	12
	2019	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
2020	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	2	7	
East region	Total	0	0	0	1	0	0	6	4	11
	2015	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	2016	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
	2017	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	2018	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
	2019	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
2020	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	
Southeast region	Total	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	10	13
	2015	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10
	2018	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	2019	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
2020	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	
Total	10	340	14	3	1	5	114	75	561	

Note: "Year" indicates the year of the reported hate crimes. If no cases were reported in a region for a given year, that year is not included in the table. "Region" denotes the specific Region where the hate crimes took place. "Bias Motivation" lists the motivations/grounded reason behind hate crimes (e.g., Ethnicity, Religion, Sexual Orientation, etc.). "Number of Hate Crimes" indicates the count of hate crimes reported for each combination of year, region, and bias motivation. "Total number per year & region" indicates the total number of hate crime cases that occurred in one region, and "total" is the total number according to the bias motivation, the region and the year the hate crime occurred.

Source: Amet & Barkajajska Velko (2020), Delovski & Sapleva (2018), Drpljanin (2021), Shterjova-Simonovski & Barakovska Velko (2019), Stojanovski et al. (2016, 2017).

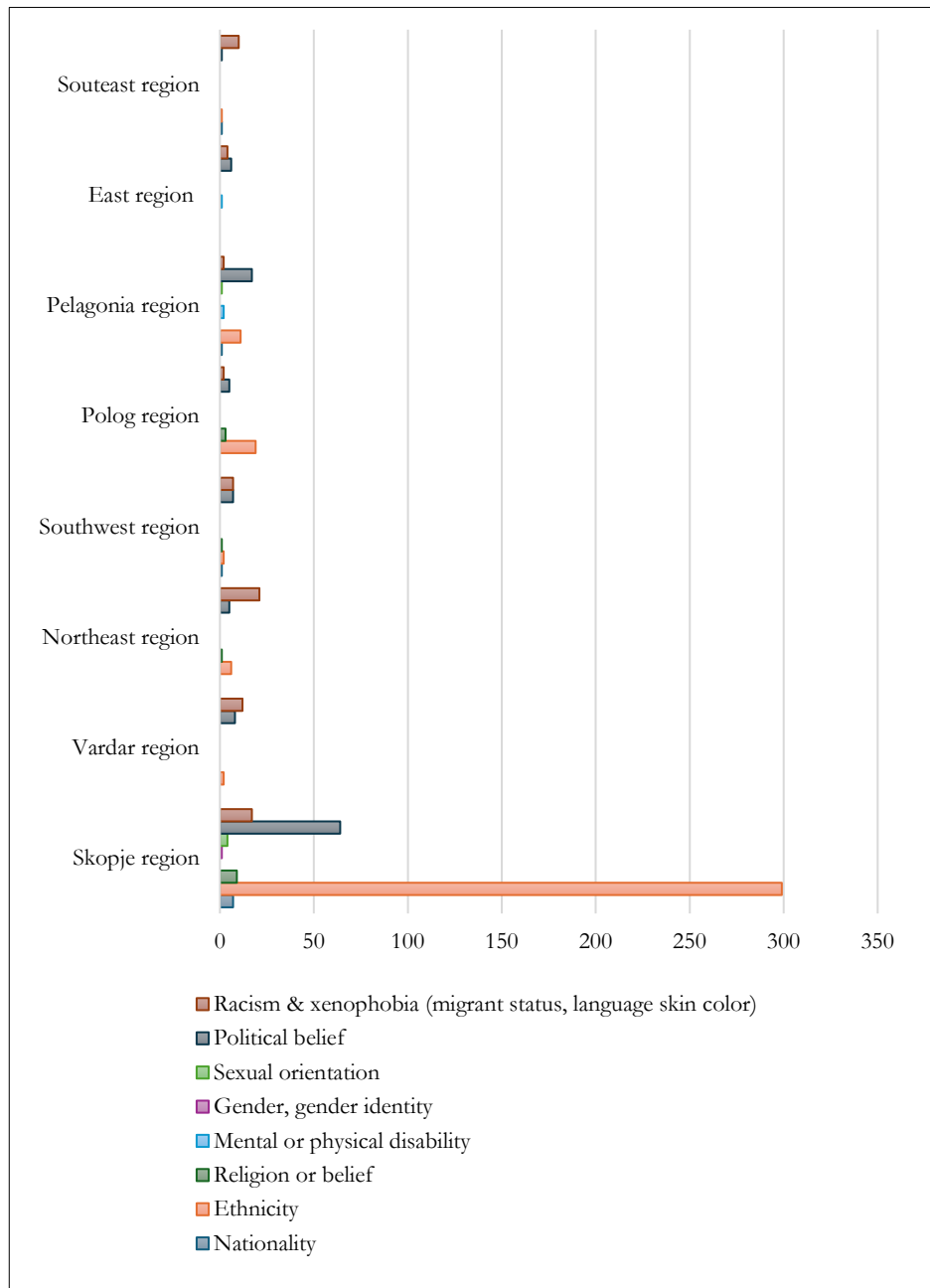


Figure 3: Summary Distribution of Hate Crimes in North Macedonia in the Period 2015–2020

Source: Amet & Barkajivska Velko (2020), Delovski & Saplieva (2018), Drpljanin (2021), Shterjova-Simonovikj & Barlakovska Velko (2019), Stojanovski et al. (2016, 2017).

As shown in Figures 3 and 4, Skopje Region has the highest percentage of hate crimes based on ethnicity and political belief. In contrast, the Northeast Region has the highest prevalence of xenophobia and hate crimes based on migrant status, followed by the Southwest Region. The Pelagonia Region is the second in line for hate crimes based on political belief but also has a significant number of hate crimes based on ethnicity.

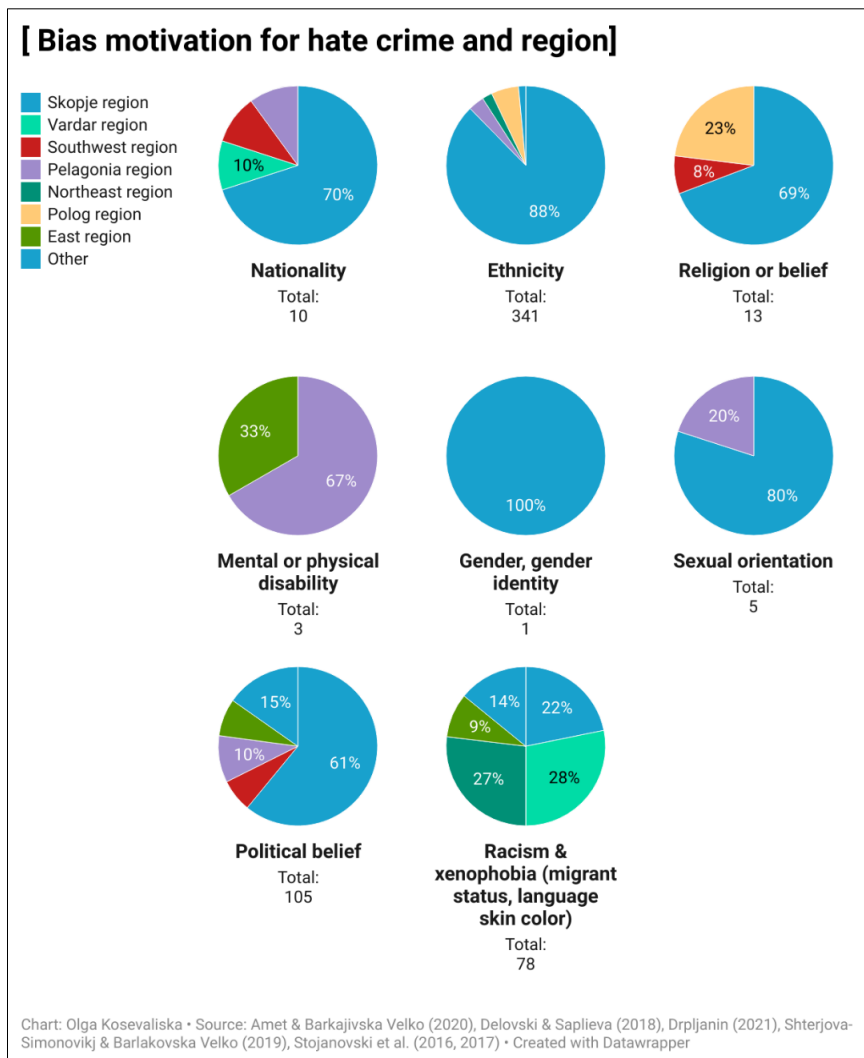


Figure 4: Bias Motivation for Hate Crime and Region

Source: <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/CSK18/2/>.

8 Discussion

Our results show that the highest number of hate crimes committed in North Macedonia between 2015 and 2020 targeted ethnic communities. Most of these crimes occurred in Skopje, particularly in municipalities with diverse ethnic populations. Numerous incidents took place on public transportation routes connecting municipalities with diverse ethnicities. Additionally, incidents frequently occurred before, during, or after sports matches involving teams from various ethnic backgrounds. A significant number of cases also occurred in public schools with students from different ethnicities, involving minors as both perpetrators and victims.

The Criminal Law amendments of 2019 may have had a positive impact on the recognition and reporting of hate crimes. We can see an increase in reported cases for the Skopje Region in 2019, but not in 2020. Also, in 2019, the Presidential election took place, so the impact of the amendments could not be seen independently. The insertions of general information for hate crimes incidents in the Public Prosecution report (Javno obvinitelstvo na Republika Severna Makedonija, 2023) and the Ministry for Internal Affairs report (Ministerstvo za vnatrešni raboti, 2022) may be a result of these amendments. We expect that the amendments could increase the number of reported hate crimes, as previously unreported incidents come to light. The amendments might also serve as a deterrent to potential offenders, sending a message that hate-motivated behaviour will not be tolerated. However, the effectiveness of these amendments will depend on enforcement, public education, and broader societal attitudes towards hate and discrimination.

Hate crimes based on migrant status peaked in 2015 during the height of the migrant crisis. They were predominantly prevalent in border municipalities, except for Veles. In subsequent years, these types of hate crimes were primarily registered in the territory of Kumanovo and its municipalities.

As compared to 2015, hate crimes based on political affiliation or belief increased by 320% in 2016. This increase can be attributed to the political tension that arose in 2016 following the ‘Colour Revolution’ and the numerous demonstrations held to demand a change of the ruling party. In subsequent years, political affiliation

remained a prominent motive for hate crimes, especially during political events and contexts in the Skopje Region, Pelagonia Region, and the Eastern Region.

Incidents motivated by the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity are seldom reported. This might suggest increased confidence within the LGBTI community in institutions, possibly due to the positive messages and public support from the ruling party and certain political figures, such as the participation of the President in the LGBTI Parade in 2021. However, this does not necessarily indicate greater societal tolerance towards the LGBTI community. It is crucial to note that many hate crimes based on sex and sexual orientation go unreported, so the statistics should not be taken at face value.

It is important, again, to mention the latest ECRI report from 2023, which highlights the current situation regarding prosecuting and sentencing hate crimes and the raised concerns about the potential danger to the country's societal cohesion and ethnic tolerance in the future if violent incidents are not dealt with appropriately. If left unchecked, this could become increasingly difficult to control and may escalate out of hand. Therefore, ECRI recommends that the relevant authorities take this issue seriously and respond appropriately by thoroughly investigating such incidents and holding the perpetrators accountable.

9 Conclusion

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can relate to hate crimes by understanding the wider societal implications of hate crimes and how they intersect with various aspects of sustainable development (Peacock, 2021). For instance, the 16th Goal of the SDGs which focuses on peace, justice, and strong institutions, deals with hate crimes by promoting peaceful and inclusive societies to achieve sustainable development, ensuring justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. Hate crimes can undermine peace and stability in societies and often indicate systemic issues within institutions. Hate crimes, such as in the case of North Macedonia, which persistently stay unregistered, undermine the trust in the institutions (European Commission, 2023; Netkova & Perry, 2022). These crimes often target vulnerable populations like children, which can aggravate their vulnerability to violence and exploitation. Achieving the 16th Goal of the

SDGs requires preventing and addressing hate crimes as a form of violence against children while ensuring their protection and well-being.

Hate crimes are often rooted in prejudice and discrimination against certain groups based on factors [protected characteristics] such as sex, “race”, skin colour, gender, belonging to a marginalised group, ethnic affiliation, language, or nationality. This analysis, as well as many more scholarly articles (Iganski, 2023; Poposka, 2015, 2022; Poposka & Josevski, 2017; Stojanovski, & Poposka, 2017; Veigel, 2016), have shown that the multicultural, multi-ethnic society in North Macedonia, is still in a glitch with prejudice. Achieving the 10th Goal of the SDGs involves combating discrimination and promoting social, economic, and political inclusion for all, which means addressing hate crimes as a manifestation of inequality and exclusion.

Hate crimes can also target individuals based on their gender or gender identity. By connecting hate crimes with the 5th Goal of the SDGs, we can identify and address the intersectionality of hate crimes with gender-based discrimination and violence and promote gender equality to combat such crimes. Despite North Macedonia’s authorities’ efforts, the low number of reported hate crimes based on gender or gender identity and the alarming number of femicides in recent years suggest that their prevention measures are not up to par. It is crucial that they take effective actions to address these issues and to ensure the safety and well-being of all citizens.

Hate crimes can disrupt communities and undermine efforts to build inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and communities and sustainable cities and communities is the 11th SDGs Goal. Addressing hate crimes requires promoting social cohesion, tolerance, and respect for diversity within urban areas. These crimes can have significant psychological and emotional impacts on individuals and communities, affecting their mental health and overall well-being. By connecting hate crimes with Goal 3 of the SDGs, we can address the health consequences of hate crimes and promote mental health support and services for affected individuals.

By recognising the links between hate crimes and the broader goals of sustainable development, policymakers, advocates, and communities can develop more holistic approaches to addressing hate crimes and promoting inclusive and equitable societies for all.

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