



Taking Stock of Approaches to Counter Hate Speech in the Western Balkans

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RAN 
Practitioners

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Introduction

In recent years, the prevalence of hate speech has become an increasing concern across European societies because of its damaging effect on the very foundation of society and trust between communities.

Experts and practitioners have offered a variety of hate speech definitions ⁽¹⁾. For the purpose of this paper, we will use the definition from the Recommendation of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe that defined hate speech as:

“advocacy, promotion or incitement, in any form, of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well as any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat in respect of such a person or group of persons and the justification of all the preceding types of expression, on the ground of ‘race’, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics or status” ⁽²⁾.

In the Western Balkans (WBs), hateful narratives are particularly dangerous because of their substantial potential to increase the existing tensions between communities and negatively affect the trust building process as well as genuine recovery of the whole society from the past conflicts. The manifestation of hate speech is evident in all areas of WB reality. Hate messages may be found on the web, in media and cultural manifestations, and in urban and rural, ethnically homogeneous and heterogeneous environments.

The legacy of the wars in the 1990s, the lack of consensus on the narratives of the past, the existing fragmentation of the society, the dominance of collective identities, significant economic problems, various foreign influences, strong patriarchal norms, and the media propagating intolerance (and hatred) on a daily basis all contribute to the acceptance of hateful narratives and hate speech as ‘normal’ in the WB society. This normalisation of hate speech consequently contributes to the WBs being a breeding ground for radicalisation leading to violent extremism, since the usage of hate speech is a frequent starting point for radicalisation. It is used by radical groups and fringe ones as the main generator of the social climate of intolerance and prejudice that appears as a general psychological framework for the expansion of all forms of acts of hatred from physical violence to verbal and psychological abuse ⁽³⁾.

The dynamics of hate speech in the WBs are complex and multifaceted:

- In general, hate speech mainly targets members of vulnerable/minority groups (LGBTQI+, refugees, Roma, women, people with disabilities and migrants) ⁽⁴⁾, but in the WBs it is also used to fuel the old tensions between the different ethnic, national and religious groups. Even though different ethnic, national and religious groups in the WB countries are not recognised as vulnerable/minority groups by law, in reality, they often are, such as citizens returning to the WBs who had left their countries during the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In a regional overview under a media monitoring report of hate speech, it was recognised that in the WBs “three categories were identified as the main target of hate speech: ethnicity, gender identity and sexuality” and it also noted that: “Ethnicity is the most problematic category, according to the research findings. Cases of hate speech targeting ethnicity were often tied to the war in the 90s, incidents against migrants and refugees, and the current political situation” ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ See: Council of Europe Recommendation No. R (97) 20 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on “hate speech” available here: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680505d5b and OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 9/09 on combating hate crimes of 2 December 2009 available here: <https://www.osce.org/cio/40695>

⁽²⁾ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. (2016). *ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/recommendation-no.15> (p. 3)

⁽³⁾ Kambovski, V., Georgieva, L., & Trajanovski, N. (2020). *National approaches to extremism. North Macedonia*. European Institute of the Mediterranean. https://h2020connekt.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/North-Macedonia_CONNEKT_Approaches_to_extremism.pdf

⁽⁴⁾ OHCHR. (2021, 23 March). *Report: Online hate increasing against minorities, says expert*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2021/03/report-online-hate-increasing-against-minorities-says-expert>

⁽⁵⁾ Šinković, N. (2022). *Media monitoring report on hate speech: A regional overview*. Reporting Diversity Network 2.0. <https://www.reportingdiversity.org/media-monitoring-reports-hate-speech-in-the-balkans-mainly-targets-ethnicity-gender-and-sexual-orientation/>

- If (ab)used by political figures, this “directly normalise[s] and reinforce[s] hatred and violence in society”⁽⁶⁾. As stated in the results of the RESILIENCE project’s research on ‘Hate Narratives in the Western Balkans and Turkey’: “In many cases, hate narratives are clearly politically orchestrated, and mainly disseminated through media affiliated with the leading political parties. While the hate narratives identified in the research are not new, they have now been normalized to a very significant extent. Rather than being consistently condemned, they are often instrumentalized for political campaigns and increasingly seen as a regular part of public discussion”⁽⁷⁾.
- Hateful political statements can lead to reciprocal radicalisation. “Reciprocal radicalisation (and related terms, including cumulative extremism and co-radicalisation) is the idea that extremist groups fuel one another’s rhetoric and/or actions, including violence”⁽⁸⁾. For example, the most common hate narratives used on political opponents in the WBs (and Turkey) were that they are: enemies of the state/people, foreign mercenaries, dangerous and corrupt⁽⁹⁾. Those narratives fuel one another’s rhetoric and/ or actions leading to incremental growth in radicalisation on both sides of this division.
- The media are often generators of hate speech and hateful narratives: There is a variety of ways and reasons for how and why the media participate in the spreading of hate speech, such as a lack of professional standards in reporting, transmitting hateful messages without critical stance, use of mis/dis/mal-information, clickbait and hate bait as a business model, etc. The mis/dis/mal-information, clickbait and hate bait are related but distinct phenomena, with certain areas of overlap with hate speech. They can easily be used for hate speech spreading what is clearly visible from their definitions presented in Table 1.

⁽⁶⁾ European Parliament, European Parliament resolution of 25 October 2018 on the rise of neo-fascist violence in Europe (2018/2869(RSP)), P8_TA(2018)0428, Strasbourg, 2018. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0428_EN.html

⁽⁷⁾ RESILIENCE. (2021). *Hate narratives in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Key research findings*. SEENPM. <https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Research-2-PDF.pdf>

⁽⁸⁾ Radicalisation Research. (2018, 3 September). *Briefings: Reciprocal radicalisation*. <https://www.radicalisationresearch.org/research/briefings-reciprocal-radicalisation/?it=debate/briefings-reciprocal-radicalisation/>

⁽⁹⁾ “Enemies of the state/people (Albania, BiH [Bosnia and Herzegovina], Montenegro, North, Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey), e.g. aiming to destabilize, working against the country’s interest, traitors.

Foreign mercenaries (Albania, BiH, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo), e.g. proponents of Russian and Serbian (in Montenegro), western or George Soros’s agenda (The latter most of all in N. Macedonia).

Dangerous and corrupt (Albania, BiH, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Kosovo), e.g. unstable, primitive, instigators of violence, godless, vermin, thieves and turncoats, liars, irresponsible, coronavirus cluster (in N. Mac.), criminals, cowards, hypocrites and manipulators (in Albania), mentally ill (BiH).” RESILIENCE (2021): <https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Research-2-PDF.pdf>

Table 1: Definitions of mis/dis/mal-information, clickbait and bait

Misinformation ⁽¹⁰⁾	Disinformation ⁽¹¹⁾	Mal-information ⁽¹²⁾	Clickbait ⁽¹³⁾	Bait ⁽¹⁴⁾
“Misinformation is information that is false, but the person who is disseminating it believes that it is true.”	“Disinformation is information that is false, and the person who is disseminating it knows it is false. It is a deliberate, intentional lie, and points to people being actively disinformed by malicious actors.”	Mal-information is information “that is based on reality, but used to inflict harm on a person, organisation or country.”	Something (such as a headline) designed to make readers want to click on a hyperlink, especially when the link leads to content of dubious value or interest.	To persecute or exasperate with unjust, malicious or persistent attacks (baiting minority groups). To try to make angry with criticism or insults. (Baiting a politician during a debate.)

The role of the media in generating and spreading hate speech in the WBs is recognised in many reports. As stated in the RESILIENCE report ‘Hate Narratives in the Western Balkans and Turkey’ in the narrative strategies exposed in both media and user content, clear features of fascism, mainly racism, nationalism, intolerance to difference and misogyny, can be found ⁽¹⁵⁾. Hate narratives are not isolated cases of specific individuals but results of devised campaigns that use different methods, such as biased reporting, mis/disinformation and spread of fear ⁽¹⁶⁾. Even when the mainstream media do not produce hate speech narratives on their own, they become a means for carrying them ⁽¹⁷⁾. At the end, the media also play a negative role when they fail (due to lack of resources and/or lack of will) to adequately deal with those user comments in which hate narratives particularly escalate ⁽¹⁸⁾.

- Hate speech and hateful narratives are used to mobilise support for nationalist and exclusionary ideologies targeting specific ethnic or religious groups and to dehumanise and delegitimise these groups, making them vulnerable to discrimination and violence.
- Hate speech in the WBs contributes to the perpetuation of discrimination and violence against targeted groups, and it can also radicalise society in a manner that can lead to violent extremism.

Therefore, the response to hate speech, taking the complexity of the phenomenon into account, should be multifaceted and multisectoral. The efforts of institutional actors should be supplemented with the work of other actors, such as civil society organisations (CSOs). This paper aims to systematise the current role of CSOs in combating hate speech in the WBs, to frame limitations in their work and to discuss possible direction for actions that are feasible and sustainable.

After a brief introduction of the main institutional actors that are in charge of combating hate speech in all countries of the WBs, the role of CSOs will be elaborated (current role, limitations and potential). The paper ends with an overview of possible further directions of action and policy recommendations.

⁽¹⁰⁾ UNESCO. (2018). *Journalism, fake news & disinformation: Handbook for journalism education and training*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265552>

⁽¹¹⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹²⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹³⁾ Merriam-Webster Dictionary: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clickbait>

⁽¹⁴⁾ Merriam-Webster Dictionary: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bait>

⁽¹⁵⁾ Hrvatin, S. B., Petković, B., & Hodžić, S. (2021). *Hate narratives in the Western Balkans and Turkey. Regional overview*. Peace Institute and SEENPM. <https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Regional-overview-Resilience-research-2.pdf> (p. 22)

⁽¹⁶⁾ Sokol, A. (2021). *Hate narratives in the media and user-generated content*. SEENPM, Peace Institute and Foundation Mediacentar Sarajevo. <https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Resilience-research-publication-2-BiH-English.pdf> (p. 20)

⁽¹⁷⁾ Londo, I. (2021). *Hate narratives and disinformation in online media in Albania*. SEENPM, Peace Institute and Albanian Media Institute. <https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Resilience-research-publication-2-Albania-English.pdf> (p. 23)

⁽¹⁸⁾ RESILIENCE. (2021). *Hate narratives in the Western Balkans and Turkey*. Peace Institute and SEENPM. <https://www.mirovni-institut.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/E-book-Resilience-research-2-without-KOS-corr-3-March-2021.pdf> (p. 21)

Main institutional actors combating hate speech in the WBs

The main institutional actors involved in the combating of hate speech in all WB countries are the police and the judiciary. Even though all WB countries adopted relevant provisions in their legal framework that allowed sanctioning of hate speech by the police and/or courts, there is a huge discrepancy in the numbers of recorded vs prosecuted cases that is stated in a variety of monitoring tools⁽¹⁹⁾ and reports⁽²⁰⁾. Furthermore, as stated in the RESILIENCE report ‘Hate Narratives in the Western Balkans and Turkey’: “Across the region, there is a reluctance within the judiciary to process discriminatory and hate speech and to consider the hate towards particular social groups as an exacerbating factor in criminal offences”⁽²¹⁾. Those findings lead to a conclusion that those mechanisms may not be sufficient, especially bearing in mind that they mostly react after the hate speech has been committed without enough focus on the prevention.

Besides the police and judiciary, there are various other bodies that act in preventing and countering hate speech:

- Equality bodies established by the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC)⁽²²⁾
 - An essential part of the competence of the equality body is to provide independent assistance to victims of discrimination, including harassment and hate speech. In accordance with the Recommendation of the European Commission on standards for equality bodies, in connection with ECRI General Policy Recommendations (GPR) no. 2, there are two types of these bodies: the equality bodies that have attributes of a tribunal and the equality bodies that are of a promotional type⁽²³⁾. The equality bodies that have attributes of a tribunal can: receive, study, discuss and reconcile individual and collective complaints and adjudicate those complaints in accordance with applicable laws; decide whether there has been a violation of the law; make legally binding decisions that require measures to stop unruly behaviour and impose sanctions; and ensure the execution and implementation of their decisions and the publication of their decisions and recommendations. Equality bodies that are of a promotional type make non-binding recommendations that require measures to stop unruly behaviour; they ensure the implementation of their recommendations and, when appropriate, publish their decisions. Currently, all EU Member States are required to set up national equality bodies, and even though WB countries are not EU members in this respect they acted proactively. Therefore, in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia there are established equality bodies with attributes of a tribunal, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), Kosovo⁽²⁴⁾ and Montenegro the equality bodies are of a promotional type (the authority for equality is granted

⁽¹⁹⁾ See ODIHR report: <https://hatecrime.osce.org/infocus/2021-hate-crime-data-now-available>

⁽²⁰⁾ See: Hysa, D., & Lani, K. (2022). *Monitoring report on hate speech in Albania*. Albanian Media Institute.

<https://www.institutemedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Monitoring-Report-on-Hate-Speech-in-Albania-12072022.pdf>;

Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. (2021). Decision nr. 217, dated 15.11.2021: https://kmd.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Vendim-nr.-217-date-15.11.2021-Ceshtje-kryesisht-nga-Komisioneri-ne-lidhje-me-gjuhen-e-perdorur-kunder-personave-LGBTI-Diskriminim_Gjuhe-urrejtje.pdf;

Godišnji izvještaj o rezultatima aktivnosti Institucije ombudsmena za ljudska prava Bosne i Hercegovine za 2021. Godinu: https://www.ombudsmen.gov.ba/documents/obudsmen_doc2022041413104027bos.pdf;

European Commission, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022 Report: <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Bosnia%20and%20Herzegovina%20Report%202022.pdf>;

Amnesty International Report 2022/2023: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/north-macedonia/report-north-macedonia/>;

Jovanović, I., & Anđušić, A. (2022). *Monitoring report on hate speech in Serbia*. Media Diversity Institute and Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans. https://www.reportingdiversity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/MRHS_Serbia.pdf;

Redovan godišnji izveštaj Poverenika za zaštitu ravnopravnosti za 2022. Godinu: <https://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/rs/izvestaji/>;

Zaštita ljudskih prava i Sloboda. (2022). Izvještaj o zaštiti od diskriminacije sa stanovišta djelovanja Institucije zaštitnika ljudskih prava i sloboda Crne Gore: https://www.ombudsman.co.me/docs/1672090896_polugodis--nji%20izvjes--taj%20o%20zas--titi%20od%20diskriminacije_21122022.pdf

⁽²¹⁾ Hrvatinić, S. B., Petković, B., & Hodžić, S. (2021). *Hate narratives in the Western Balkans and Turkey. Regional overview*. Peace Institute and SEENPM. <https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Regional-overview-Resilience-research-2.pdf> (p. 22)

⁽²²⁾ See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32000L0043&from=EN>

⁽²³⁾ About equality bodies see more here: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/tackling-discrimination/equality-bodies_en

⁽²⁴⁾ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

to domestic ombudsman institutions that can conduct monitoring and initiate misdemeanour proceedings).

- Media regulatory agencies
 - All countries have established independent regulatory agencies for the media that oversee monitoring traditional media broadcasters (radio and TV) as well as audio and audiovisual media services. In some countries, such as Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, these bodies are also in charge of monitoring printed media. These agencies have a legal basis to act on complaints about hate speech with different types of sanctions that they can impose upon the media. Almost all of them can impose the measures of a warning or revoke, or at least temporarily suspend licences and ban publication (or broadcast). Three regulators (B&H, Kosovo, Montenegro) can act according to their official duties when it comes to complaints, and some can impose fines (Albania, B&H, Kosovo). Regulators in B&H, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia can publish their decisions on their websites or in annual reports.
- Media self-regulatory mechanisms
 - These mechanisms can act as mediators, they usually make decisions, and in some cases they can order the correction or removal of content or the publication of an apology. Their decisions are not legally binding, and they cannot impose sanctions, but they can publish their decisions, depending on the country they are embedded in via the Code of ethics adopted by the Association of Journalists (Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia), Code for press and online media (B&H), and Code of Journalists (Montenegro).
- Central Election Commissions
 - These commissions have a mandate to monitor election campaigns and they can sanction candidates who use hate speech. With a variation in the name (Central Election Commissions: Albania, B&H and Kosovo; State Election Commissions: Montenegro and North Macedonia; and Republic Election Commissions: Serbia), they exist in all WB countries.

For example, the Central Election Commissions of B&H, according to the Election Law of B&H, can impose fines on and removal from the candidate list of political subjects who use hate speech during election campaigns. Following the existing mechanism, the Central Election Commissions of B&H related to a general election in 2022 imposed a fine in the amount of BAM 3 000 to the political party Democratic Action Movement of B&H (PDA) and a fine in the amount of BAM 5 000 to the PDA candidate Elzina Pirić for the use of hate speech in a political rally in Aljkovići-Općina Banovići.

But besides the existence and efforts of these bodies, hate speech in the WBs is still widespread. Lately there has been growing recognition of the multiple ways in which CSOs can support prevention and countering of hate speech and its devastating effects.

CSOs play an important role in understanding and responding to hate speech. Many CSOs have unique knowledge and understanding of the local contexts and the challenges faced by individuals and groups at risk of hate speech victimisation and the needs of those affected by hate speech. Partnerships between previously mentioned agencies and CSOs allow responses to be fitted to each individual case, can support operational work and, beyond all, help build trust and confidence in authorities. A good example of this practice can be found in the cooperation and partnership of the Sarajevo Open Centre and several Prosecutor's Offices in B&H ⁽²⁵⁾. Through this partnership in several Prosecutor's Offices in B&H, a contact person who will directly work with LGBTQI+ persons, a victim of crimes committed out of hate (including hate speech), was appointed. Although every citizen in B&H is legally guaranteed protection against violence, by appointing a contact person, direct access to the holder of the judicial office who is sensitised and above all trained to work with LGBTQI+ persons will be enabled. Furthermore, through this cooperation, trainings on

⁽²⁵⁾ The Sarajevo Open Centre is a civil society organisation (CSO) that works to advance human rights, especially the position and human rights of LGBTI people and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through representation of their realities and advocacy for legal, policy, economic, social and cultural changes in all areas of life. See more here: <https://soc.ba/en/about-us/>

hate crime and hate speech become regular modules of the educational trainings that are offered to prosecutors and judges by the centres for the education of judges and prosecutors.

Overall, active and meaningful participation of CSOs could apprise and contribute to various state actions to combat hate speech.

Current role of CSOs

The current role of CSOs in fighting hate speech is mostly in prevention and detection while most institutional actors work in formal reactions and sanctioning. Therefore, the combination of those efforts can improve current endeavours in fighting hate speech across the WBs. Currently, CSOs are mostly involved in the following activities:

- Monitoring, recording, data collection and reporting:

The most prominent organisation in this area is the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) that collects official data and the data reported from a variety of CSOs in targeted countries ⁽²⁶⁾. Some of the organisations that record and report incidents that take place in the WBs are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: CSOs that record and report hate speech incidents

Country	CSO	Activities
Albania	The Muslim Forum of Albania ⁽²⁷⁾	Record and report incidents
B&H	Center for Education and Research Nahla ⁽²⁸⁾	Record and report incidents
B&H	Sarajevo Open Centre	Record and report incidents
Montenegro	LGBT Forum Progress ⁽²⁹⁾	Record and report incidents
North Macedonia	The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia ⁽³⁰⁾	Record and report incidents
Serbia	Federation of Jewish Communities of Serbia (SJOS) ⁽³¹⁾	Record and report incidents
Serbia	Association "Da se zna"! ⁽³²⁾	Record and report incidents

⁽²⁶⁾ OSCE/ODIHR collects data on hate crime, hate speech and incitement to hatred. See more here: <https://hatecrime.osce.org/index.php/hate-crime-data>

⁽²⁷⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://forummusliman.org/english/>

⁽²⁸⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://nahla.ba/>

⁽²⁹⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://lgbtprogres.me/>

⁽³⁰⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <http://www.mhc.org.mk>

⁽³¹⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://www.savezjos.org/en/>

⁽³²⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://dasezna.lgbt/en/who-we-are/>

Kosovo	Kosovo 2.0 ⁽³³⁾	Record and report incidents
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These organisations are monitoring the occurrence of hate speech against the protected characteristics that are in the focus of their work (ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender, etc.) ⁽³⁴⁾. They collect and record those data and report them to a variety of institutions. Some CSOs report incidents to the previously discussed institutional actors and/or to the other bodies that collect data on a wider level, such as the example of the OSCE/ODIHR. Some of them also publish periodical reports on detected and recorded incidents and/or do follow-up on cases reported to police or other relevant institutional actors.

Beside the OSCE/ODIHR that collects data for 57 participating states (including all WB countries except Kosovo), there are CSOs that conduct those activities on the level of the WBs. The example of data gathering within WB countries can be found in the work of Reporting Diversity Network 2.0 that collects data on hateful and discriminative discourse in the media environment via national CSOs ⁽³⁵⁾ and in the work of You Are Heard: Western Balkans and Turkey that collects data on anti-LGBTQI+ incidents, such as harassment, violence and hate speech across the WBs and Turkey ⁽³⁶⁾.

Regarding this part of CSOs' activities, deficiencies can occur in the methodological framework that they use for monitoring, recording and collection. Most of the CSOs developed their own methodology that is not necessarily in accordance with existing legal framework in this area and therefore those data cannot be used in full capacity (for mapping, reporting, analysis of detected vs prosecuted cases, etc.). Furthermore, an individually developed methodology does not allow comparison of recorded data within the country or WB region.

- Education and raising awareness:

A certain number of CSOs conduct a variety of educational activities in different forms and with different targeted audiences depending on the scope of their work. Those practices can, for example, be seen in the work of the organisations presented in Table 3.

⁽³³⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/about-us/>

⁽³⁴⁾ This is not a comprehensive list of the CSOs working in this area.

⁽³⁵⁾ They also publish their Monitoring report on hate speech in each country as well as the Monthly Monitoring Highlights for all WB countries.

⁽³⁶⁾ See more in the section 'Recommendations'.

Table 3: Examples of CSOs' educational activities

Country	CSO	Activities
North Macedonia	Metamorphosis Foundation ⁽³⁷⁾	Conducted series of trainings for tackling hate speech in the media
Montenegro	Forum MNE ⁽³⁸⁾	Conducted training on 'Countering hate speech on the internet'
Kosovo	The Advocacy Training and Resource Center ⁽³⁹⁾	Conducted series of trainings for students, CSOs and human rights activists
Kosovo	Kosova Young Lawyers (KYL) ⁽⁴⁰⁾	Within the project 'THINK! Don't Hate', they have developed formal and non-formal educational approaches that are published online in an interactive form and are available to all people willing to join a struggle against online hate, fake news and disinformation
Serbia	Libero ⁽⁴¹⁾	Held education for high school students
B&H	Perpetuum Mobile: Institute for Youth and Community Development ⁽⁴²⁾	Conducted trainings for politicians aiming to prevent hate speech in political campaigns

These educational activities are often used as a tool for raising awareness, but sometimes CSOs lead different forms of activities only with a purpose of raising awareness, like Youth for Peace (B&H) ⁽⁴³⁾ that, in partnership with the Somborski Edukativni Centar (Serbia) ⁽⁴⁴⁾ and Udhetim i Lire (Albania) ⁽⁴⁵⁾, has been implementing the #ALTerHate campaign within the #Speech4Change platform aiming to combat hate speech through activities of education, sensitisation and advocacy for acceptance of diversity and inclusion through the creation of alternative narratives. Some CSOs, such as Civic Initiatives (Serbia) ⁽⁴⁶⁾, are raising awareness by issuing notes of condemnation of detected hate speech, while some, such as CIVIL (North Macedonia) ⁽⁴⁷⁾, are organising public events and promoting related publications. Raising awareness is sometimes achieved by organising round tables on the topic of hate speech and their broadcast, e.g. Democracy for Development (Kosovo) ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Regarding education, the problems are related to the question of sustainability. Educational activities are often related to specific CSOs' projects that have a certain duration and therefore they have limited reach. On the other hand, awareness-raising activities, depending on the practical tool they use, have larger dissemination and sustainability.

- Research:

⁽³⁷⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://metamorphosis.org.mk/en/>

⁽³⁸⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://www.forum-mne.com/>

⁽³⁹⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://advocacy-center.org/>

⁽⁴⁰⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://kyl-kos.org/>

⁽⁴¹⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://libero.org.rs/>

⁽⁴²⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://www.pm.rs.ba/about-us/>

⁽⁴³⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://www.youth-for-peace.ba/en/>

⁽⁴⁴⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://sec.org.rs/>

⁽⁴⁵⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://udhetimilire.org/en/>

⁽⁴⁶⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://www.gradjanske.org/en/about-us/>

⁽⁴⁷⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://www.civil.org.mk/>

⁽⁴⁸⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://d4d-ks.org/en/mission-and-vision/>

CSOs also do a variety of research in this area that can be a useful foundation and help in combating hate speech. The results of these research initiatives, depending on the subject, are used to educate the public, raise awareness, question the efficiency of legal frameworks, detect instigating factors, etc. Certain shortcomings in the work of the CSOs in this area are related to the lack of temporal and territorial continuity. Examples of CSOs' work in this area are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Examples of CSOs' research activities

Country	CSO	Activities
Serbia	Belgrade Centre for Human Rights ⁽⁴⁹⁾	Published research on the mechanisms of protection against hate speech on the internet
Serbia	The Center for Media Professionalization and Media Literacy (CEPROM) ⁽⁵⁰⁾	Conducted research on the presence of hate speech in the media and on the internet
Montenegro	LGBT Forum Progress ⁽⁵¹⁾	Conducted and published research on police and judicial practice in cases of violence and hate speech towards LGBTQI+ persons
B&H	Atlantic Initiative: Center for Security and Justice Research ⁽⁵²⁾	Conducted and published research on the legal and institutional mechanisms of protection against hate speech and currently is conducting research on judiciary practice in prosecuting incitement to hatred in B&H in the last 10 years
North Macedonia	CIVIL ⁽⁵³⁾	Conducted and published research on hate speech within political and election processes

- Victim assistance and support:

The most common ways in which CSOs assist and/or support victims of hate speech in general and in the practice of CSOs of the WBs are free psychological help/counselling and free legal aid. The potential problem that appears in this area is the question of funding. Namely, if the activity is not related to core funding but to the one specific project, the durability of provided assistance and support can be just temporary. Furthermore, dissemination of the information about available help can be an issue. Examples of CSOs' work in the area of victim assistance and support are listed in Table 5.

Table 5: Examples of CSOs' activities regarding victim assistance and support

Country	CSO	Activities
B&H	Sarajevo Open Centre	Psychological help/counselling and legal aid

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Stojković, M., & Pokuševski, D. (2018). *Anonimna mržnja: Mehanizmi zaštite od govora mržnje na internetu*. Beogradski Centar za ljudska prava.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ CEPROM. (2019). *Komunikativna agresija u Srbiji 2019*. CEPROM.

⁽⁵¹⁾ Zeković, A. S., Kojičić, J., & Tomović, P. (2014). *Mitovi i stereotipi – Nasilje i govor mržnje prema LGBT osobama: Policijska i pravosudna praksa u Crnoj Gori*. LGBT Forum Progress.

⁽⁵²⁾ Halilović, H., & Lučić-Catić, M. (2022). *Krivična djela iz mržnje i govor mržnje, kako ih prepoznati i adekvatno procesuirati – priručnik za sudije i tužitelje*. Atlantska inicijativa.

⁽⁵³⁾ CIVIL. (2022). *Изборите под канонада на дезинформации и говор на омраза: локални избори*. Цивил - Центар за слобода. Radicalisation Awareness Network

B&H	Udruženje Okvir ⁽⁵⁴⁾	Psychological counselling for LGBTQI+ people
Serbia	The Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM)	Legal aid
Montenegro	The Legal Center ⁽⁵⁵⁾	Legal aid
North Macedonia	The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia	Legal aid

How to improve existing practices

So far, as previous analysis has shown, there are certain limitations related to the work of CSOs and solutions for overcoming detected deficiencies.

- Monitoring, recording and data collection:

Insights into the presence of and knowledge on the extent of the phenomenon is a first step in creating an adequate response. CSOs, unlike institutional actors, have a unique position in this task since they often have more capacity for monitoring, victims have more trust in CSOs and are more likely to report to a CSO than to a formal body, they can cooperate and share data without the burden of bureaucracy and formal procedures, etc. Therefore, to achieve maximum value of their activities, CSOs should consider the following:

- Depending on the target group(s) that CSOs follow (LGBTQI+, refugees, Roma, women, people with disabilities, migrants, etc.) and specific areas of interest (hate speech in political discourse, hate speech in printed media, etc.), use/develop a data collection framework arising from the national legal framework.
- To enhance comparability and compatibility of data, use the methodology developed by institutional actors (if existing) or the methodology developed by other CSOs.
- To enhance the impact of data sharing, align definitions and data collection methods with CSOs that are working with similar target group(s) and areas of interest.
- Share data collection methodologies and set up a system for regular information exchange.

- Education:

The main problem in this part of CSOs' work is the issue of sustainability and reach of educational programmes. Even though every educational activity led to a change bearing in mind the costs and complexity of creation of educational activities, long-term use and self-sustainability should be ensured when possible. To achieve that, CSOs should consider the following:

- Create and advocate for the inclusion of educational packages in formal education (for practitioners, in schools' curricula, in universities' curricula, etc.).
- Inclusion of human rights education in formal education (for practitioners, in schools' curricula, in universities' curricula, etc.).

⁽⁵⁴⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <http://www.okvir.org/o-nama/>

⁽⁵⁵⁾ About the CSO and its activities see more here: <https://pravnicentar.co.me/>

- Include educational packages in existing public forums and campaigns, conferences, film and video, exhibitions and museums, sports and sports events, community activities, etc.
- Use of technology (educational social media campaigns, free online tools, interactive educational tools, etc.).
- Victim assistance and support:

Most information about CSOs can be found only via the internet, which leaves many people that need help in a disadvantaged position and without information about help that they can get due to the limited presence of the internet in certain parts of the WBs and the lack of digital literacy. To overcome this issue, CSOs should make the information about available help more visible using traditional media (radio, television, printed media, posters on location of significance, leaflets, etc.).

What else can CSOs do?

Besides the activities that CSOs are already involved in, depending on their portfolio, their contribution can be extended to the following activities:

Reporting should be enhanced by empowering those affected by hate speech and witnesses to come forward and through **third-party reporting**. Third-party reporting is the process in which a victim or witness reports a potential hate speech to a CSO. This CSO then reports the hate speech to the relevant formal body. For third-party reporting to be effective, the CSOs should align definitions and data collection methodologies, ensure confidentiality and data protection safeguards, and certify that all personnel involved are adequately qualified and trained. When possible, it is recommended to formalise those commitments through institutional agreements.

Structural cooperation and partnerships should be established. There is a variety of models for establishing and improving cooperation and partnerships, such as signing a memorandum of understanding, setting up committees and working groups, participating in advisory or expert bodies, appointing specialised officers/community liaison officers/hate speech contacts at regional or local level, designating CSO representatives to cooperate with the police and other formal bodies, etc. Such cooperation and partnerships should not, at any moment, affect the independent role of the CSOs.

Relevant good practice in the EU

Regarding lessons learned from the EU that can help and support practitioners in the WBs, a good direction of action can be found in the work of the EU High Level Group on combating hate speech and hate crime. The High Level Group is envisioned as a platform to support EU and national efforts in ensuring effective implementation of relevant rules and in setting up effective policies to prevent and combat hate crime and hate speech. This is done by fostering thematic discussions on gaps, challenges and responses, promoting best practice exchange, developing guidance, and strengthening cooperation and synergies between key stakeholders. Their work has already resulted in a number of practical guidance tools in key areas such as hate crime training, access to justice, support and protection for victims of hate crime and hate speech, and hate crime recording ⁽⁵⁶⁾.

Furthermore, an important question for CSOs' work is the issue of funding. In the EU, the European Commission provides financial support to national authorities and CSOs working on hate speech and hate crime, through the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme, recognising that CSOs play a crucial role in combating hate speech and hate crime and thus contributing to safeguarding and promoting fundamental rights.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ The 2022 [Key guiding principles on cooperation between law enforcement authorities and civil society organisations](#) are an example of guidance produced by the High Level Group.

These practices, among many others in the EU, can serve as a guidance for future actions in the WBs that can produce unified actions across the WBs and have long-lasting effects on countering hate speech.

Recommendations

1. A **joint network** for hateful narratives and hate speech projects and activities in the WBs, such as the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, You Are Heard: Western Balkans and Turkey, and Reporting Diversity Network 2.0, should be established. Such a network should develop a unified methodology of monitoring, recording and data collection, education and awareness-raising programmes, and advocacy initiatives. Furthermore, experienced organisations should empower local CSOs and enhance information sharing among WB states and/or key institutional actors.
2. Creation of **strategic alliances** within a state and/or region should be imperative. Namely, when relevant to the context, CSOs should support convening of key actors that will reframe problems in ways that make solutions more attainable. If possible, CSOs should use independent mediation and expertise and build coalitions. Moreover, partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including those working in the tech industry, should be established/strengthened. Most of the meaningful action against hate speech will not be taken by the CSOs alone, but by governments (including regional authorities), private companies, media, and religious and other actors.
3. Establishment of **structural cooperation and partnerships with respective institutional** actors is a very important step in fighting hate speech on a state level, bearing in mind that such cooperation and partnerships should not affect the independent role of the CSOs. Namely, all CSO activities in preventing and fighting hate speech can bring multiple advantages if combined and complemented with the work of institutional actors. Institutional actors can benefit from information, knowledge and activities undertaken by CSOs in the field of monitoring, recording and data collection, education and advocacy activities. Namely, an adequate and comprehensive response to the appearance of hate speech demands full understanding of the occurrence's dynamics. Since, in some cases, institutional actors do not have the capacity for (it is not in their line of work) a comprehensive approach, the combination of CSOs' findings can be beneficial.
4. Besides organisational factors, **the greatest emphasis should be given to education**. Education can be the basis to countering intolerance and discrimination, raising awareness, addressing the root causes of hate speech, and advancing inclusion and peaceful coexistence. Endeavours should be directed to the inclusion of educational curricula in formal educational programmes that will ensure sustainability. Also, non-formal initiatives, such as education of the personnel of institutional actors and personnel related to media, youth, etc., are welcome and can complement compulsory education accompanying any deficiencies. Namely, development of responsible behaviour, civic engagement, critical thinking skills and media literacy can encourage growth of advanced positive values of mutual understanding and respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity across the WBs.
5. There is a necessity for more **empirical research** on hate speech in the WBs and its local specific, regional, and international connections. Such research will enable better understanding of factors and actors that lead to hate speech in different spheres of society, to sensitise the professional community and public, and for signalling potential security threats and escalation. The results of all research and related recommendations should be available to the public and delivered to respective local, regional and/or international stakeholders.

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