



MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN KOSOVO

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Introduction

The aim of this research is to identify the most common patterns and examples of hate speech and divisive narratives in the media, including the most common targets, the most common ideas and comments, the reactions and the dynamics of said narratives. As part of the Reporting Diversity Network 2.0, Kosovo 2.0 has continuously monitored and reported hate speech and divisive narratives, through an incidents form database, monthly monitoring highlights, and different reports as part of the activity “Hate Speech in the Western Balkans”.

The key objective of this activity is to monitor traditional and online media, including social media, to uncover hate speech and divisive narratives, main trends and targeted groups.

Living in the digital age, the accessibility for people to spread hate speech and propaganda has increased. Most TV and media outlets also use social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) to disseminate different event announcements and news to the general public, thus creating a platform for hateful and divisive narratives to take place.

Hate speech targets people, as groups or individuals because of who they are, on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinions, national or social origin, property, birth, indigenous origin or identity, disability, migrant or refugee status, sexual orientation, gender identity and other socioeconomic dimensions.

The report starts with a narrative analysis of the main target groups of hate speech in Kosovo by providing representative examples, gives insight into the actions taken by Kosovo institutions and Civil Society to combat hate speech, and analyses the most common words used towards target groups.

While a number of reports have analysed the narratives against migrants, journalists, politicians and others, this specific report focuses on the narratives against Kosovo Albanians, Kosovo Serbs/Serbiens, women, and the LGBTQ+ community, who were identified as the most targeted groups of hateful discourse by the media monitoring carried out during this project.



Methodology

This report uses a quantitative and qualitative analysis methodology pre-designed for the monitoring of hate speech in the Western Balkans, which serves as the ground for the findings of this report.

The data collected through the media monitoring generated the main target groups of hate speech based on the set indicators, the main actors of hate speech and divisive narratives, and the most common patterns and language used, which will be elaborated in the next chapters.

For the purposes of this research, the sentiment analysis collected incidents were classified according to the methodology of George Washington University¹, which uses a scale from 1 to 6 to rate cases of hate speech:

- 1. Disagreement** - Rhetoric including disagreeing with the idea at a mental level. Challenging groups' claims, ideas, and beliefs, or trying to change them.
- 2. Negative actions** - Rhetoric including negative nonviolent actions associated with the group.
- 3. Negative character** - Rhetoric including non-violent characterizations and insults.
- 4. Demonising and dehumanising** - Rhetoric including specifications of sub-human and superhuman characteristics of the targeted individual/group.
- 5. Instigation of violence** - Rhetoric implies infliction of physical harm or aspirational physical harm.
- 6. Death** - Rhetoric implies literal killing or elimination of a group.

¹. Bahador Babak, Kerchner Daniel, Bacon Leah, Menas Amanda, (2019), *Monitoring Hate Speech in the US*. Washington, DC: George Washington University.
https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/8/846/files/2019/03/Monitoring-Hate-Speech-in-the-US-Media-3_22-z0h5kk.pdf

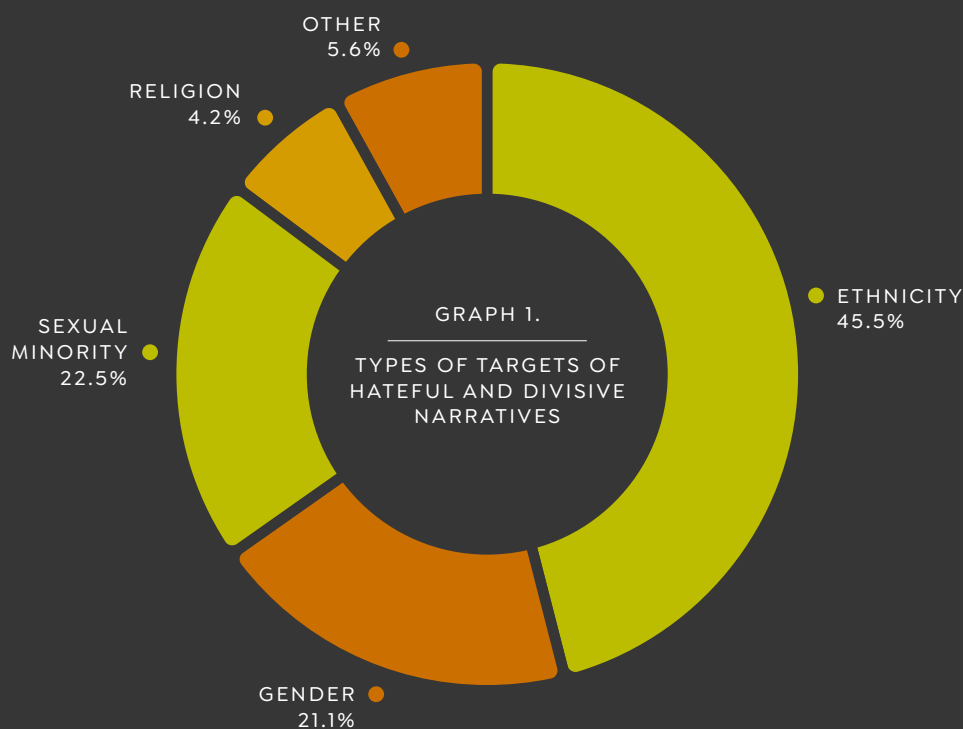


HATE
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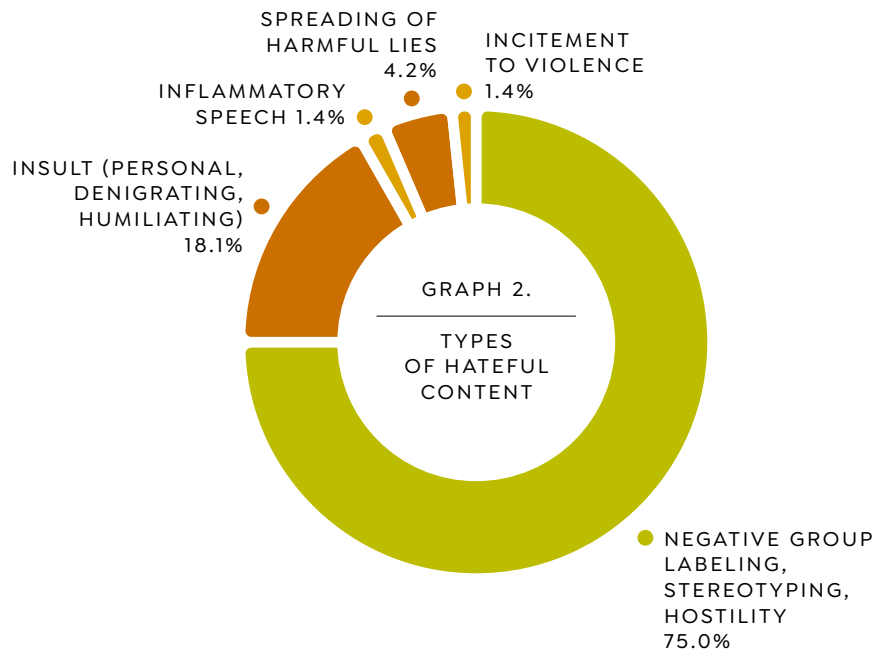
Quantitative analysis

From October 2020 until April 2022, Kosovo 2.0 has systematically monitored hate speech and divisive narratives in the media, including social media, in Kosovo. During this period a total of 71 cases have been evidenced that contain hateful and divisive narratives, with women, the LGBTQ+ community, Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs/Serbians being the main targets.

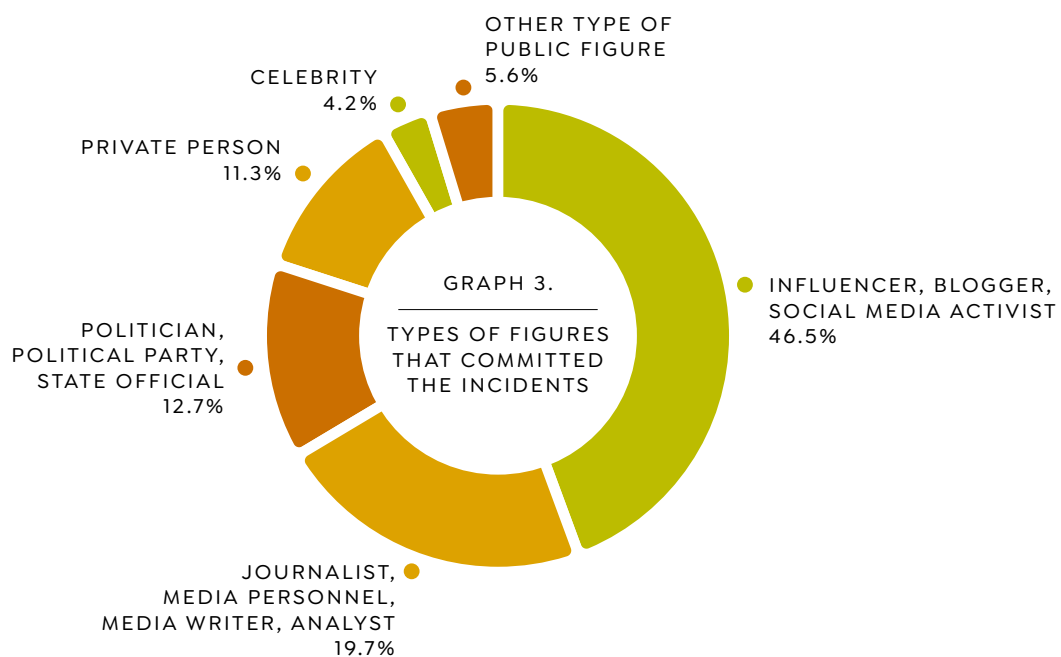
As presented in the chart below, hate speech against ethnicity (46.5%), the LGBTQ+ community (22.5%), and gender (21.1%) predominates in the cases gathered.



In relation to the type of hateful content, negative group labelling, stereotyping and hostility was the most common (75%), followed by personal, denigrating and humiliating insults (18.1%), spreading of harmful lies (4.2%), and incitement to violence and inflammatory speech (each 1.4%).



The hate speech incidents were mostly committed by influencers, bloggers, social media activists (46.5%), followed by journalists, media personnel, media writers, analysts (19.7%), politicians, political parties, state officials (12.7%), private persons (11.3%), celebrities (4.2%), and other types of public figures such as intellectuals, professors (5.6%).



Narrative analysis

Reported incidents were rated on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being disagreement with a group and 6 being incitement of literal killing or elimination of a group. The average score was 2.89 for all cases. On average, the highest scored incidents per type of targeted group were cases of hate aimed at journalists (4.5) and incidents categorised as hate directed at multiple identities (3.34), together with ethnic hate speech (3.17). Alongside this, hate against sexual minorities on average scored 2.79, followed by hate directed at migrants and refugees (2.78), gender (2.7) and religion (2.67). The lowest rated incidents of hate speech were those directed at political and ideological opponents scoring on average 2.34. The most extreme incidents with incitement of physical violence, killing and the elimination of a group (scores 6 and 5) were usually targeting gender (5 recorded incidents) and ethnicity (4 recorded incidents). With these identities also being the most common targets, this further proves that women, ethnic minorities in Serbia and other ethnic groups in the Western Balkans are the most threatened by hateful narratives and demonstrates how widely socially accepted these narratives are in Serbian society.

Hate speech on the basis of ethnicity

Main narrative against Kosovo Serbs/Serbians: They are gangsters, criminals, terrorists.

Main narrative against Kosovo Albanians: They are members of a “wild” society and terrorists.

With Kosovo being a multi-ethnic society and taking into consideration its past, the current political developments and the lack of proper understanding of transitional justice processes, tensions between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs are still present to this day, particularly at the level of narrative creation and meaning-making.

Case #1:

In July 2021, an article posted on KosovaPress said that more than 1,500 citizens in Decan were infected with poisonous water and had to seek medical help. Although the cause of the infection was still not proved to be water, an owner of a restaurant very close to the water well in Decan stated that just days before the event two young people with Serbian licence plates visited his restaurant and asked him about the road direction to visit the Monastery in Decan.²

In his statement, the owner of the restaurant raised his suspicions and linked the two youngsters with the incident. In his statement for the KosovaPress, he said *“They looked suspicious to me, that’s where the suspicions arose, they came with a white SUV, but I do not remember the brand.”*³

After linking the two youngsters with the poison incident, the police and the Basic Prosecution in Peja were involved in identifying the two youngsters and stated that further necessary steps would be undertaken if it would be necessary to prove that the two young men were involved in the incident.⁴

Despite there being no evidence that linked the two young men with the water poisoning, the restaurant’s owner statement made it all over the Kosovo media, which deepened stereotypical and xenophobic narratives solely based on the nationality of the two young people who were visiting the region in the same days when the incident happened.

2. <https://kosovapress.com/banoret-dyshojne-se-dy-serbe-helmuan-ujin-ne-decan-foto/>

3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENTDIXfJIM&t=33s&ab_channel=KosovaPress

4. <https://www.reportingdiversity.org/hate-speech-in-the-western-balkans-july-monthly-highlights/>

Case #2:

On November 5, 2021, an article published by Kosovo Online alleged that a Serbian family in a refugee reception centre in a French town was attacked by an Albanian family in the same accommodation. The article stated that an Albanian and his wife physically threatened and attacked a Serbian family at a refugee reception centre in Paris, who were also housed there. According to this article, a pregnant woman received several blows to the stomach, while the Serbian man had his cross necklace cut off.⁵ Kosovo Online published the headline on their Facebook page providing a platform for hate speech towards the Albanian community in general.

Some of the comments made on the Facebook page were directly aimed at Albanians, calling them *“a wild and terrorist society that you can only pick savage and terrorist behaviour from”*.⁶

Interethnic relations between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo are still problematic due, among other things, to the many unresolved issues and problems related to the war in the late '90s. One of the key principles of transitional justice processes is not to attribute a crime or attack to a whole nation/ethnicity, and in this particular case, after the published alleged attack on the Serbian family, the divisive and hateful narratives that Albanians are terrorists and criminals were identified in the post published by Kosovo Online.

Hate speech against gender

Main narrative: Murders and domestic violence happen because of women.

Case #1:

On August 22, 2021, an 18-year-old girl was brought to the Hospital Center of Ferizaj showing no signs of life, a case that the Kosovo Police and the Prosecution of Kosovo treated as “aggravated murder”. There were two men who were identified as suspects, with one of them being arrested and one of them being on the run.⁷ Protests, statements and calls for condemning the murder were made by several civil society activists.

Xhevdet Pozhari, a policy analyst, made a Facebook post about the case saying that *“It is true that we have to work hard for the education of boys in this society, especially for respect for women and to break down patriarchal stereotypes. But, it is equally important that girls should be reminded as often as possible that it is not the Audi A8 that matters, but the donkey that drives it.”*⁸

This Facebook post got a lot of attention. Many people in the comments agreed with Pozhari's statement, while there were also citizens who had negative reactions toward the post.

In hindsight, a problematic statement like this one shifts the blame towards women and neglects the actual problem: a woman being killed. This post in a way justifies the actions of the suspects because Pozhari implies that women should be more careful of “what cars they chase”. It is a clear case of sexist and misogynistic narrative where women's safety is determined by what they do, as opposed to what is done to them. The blame is also shifted from the perpetrators to the victim.

5. https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/napad-abanaca-na-srpsku-porodicu-u-prihvatnom-centru-u-francuskoj-5-11-2021?fbclid=IwAR2HZcu2OkzJQBE0i_aD5-SitWchxpoTOQGNIImXTK9ncqbyGvWin7b-HEjQ

6. <https://www.facebook.com/KosovoOnlinePortal/posts/60647377367831>

7. <https://www.reportingdiversity.org/hate-speech-in-the-western-balkans-august-monthly-highlights/>

8. <https://www.facebook.com/xhevdet.pozhari/posts/539596497260437>

Case #2:

In the period of January to April 2021, acting President, Vjosa Osmani, was the target of verbal abuse as well as edited photos that changed her appearance, with the aim of mocking her, during her campaign for presidential candidate. This is another case where public figures, especially women, are ridiculed for their looks and appearance, contributing to sexist and misogynistic narratives. Reporting Diversity Network 2.0 produced a video⁹ highlighting the concerning situation regarding not only Vjosa Osmani's candidacy for President, but also the fact that the patriarchal mindset is so present in Kosovo that it treats women within the public sphere as less valuable human beings.

This is not the only time that the now President of Kosovo has been a target of hate speech. As per the RDN 2.0 monitoring database, the President has been receiving both sexist comments and hate speech based on her ethnicity.

In an article published by Kosovo-Online where she stated that Kosovo's goal is Nato and EU integration, a lot of insulting comments were directed towards her and the Albanian community in Kosovo.¹⁰ Another case of hate speech aimed towards the President was identified in a post published by GazetaBlic, where the President received comments on her body appearance, specifically her weight.¹¹

Such denigrating and humiliating comments contribute to narratives where women are judged solely on their appearance and are not respected for their authority, nor are they seen as equal as men once in positions of power. A total of 17 cases in social media posts have been identified with hate speech aimed at the Kosovo President alone.

Hate speech against the LGBTQ+ community

Main narrative: The LGBTQ+ community is shameful and a direct threat to humanity, and people from this community are the main transmitters of STIs/STDs.

Case #1:

On May 2, 2021, Lend Mustafa, one of the most prominent LGBTQ+ rights activists in Kosovo, was verbally and publicly attacked in the main square of Pristina by an individual who went as far as spitting on Mustafa's ear and threatening to kill him.

The activist made a public Facebook post describing the whole story and stating that this was not the first time that he had received such threats or was the subject of hate speech and intimidatory actions.¹²

After the incident, Insajderi published an article with the title *“I will kill you” - LGBT community rights activist threatened with death in downtown Pristina*, where they described the post made by Mustafa.¹³

The article was posted on Insajderi's Facebook page with the same headline and it received a lot of attention. More than 200 people commented on the post, with the majority of them directing hate speech towards not only the activist, but the whole community in general. The post received comments such as that this community is indoctrinating society and is against the rules of procreation, that they are crippled, and that they should be cured.¹⁴

Though Kosovo has very progressive laws and constitutional provisions on equality, as it is codified in the law that no one can be discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity or sexual orientation, the LGBTQ+ community remains one of the most oppressed groups in Kosovo. Denigrating and hateful narratives are very present in the media, especially in the comments section of news related to the community.

9. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLqmqFRFVne/>

10. <https://www.facebook.com/KosovoOnlinePortal/posts/670540384294503>

11. <https://www.facebook.com/gazetablic/posts/3983293765068482>

12. <https://www.facebook.com/lendi.mustafa.54/posts/2877639619141066>

13. https://insajderi.org/kam-me-tvra-kerenohet-me-jete-ne-gender-te-prishtines-aktivisti-per-te-drejtat-e-komunitetit-lgbt/?fbclid=IwAR3DBXcRVixZYVS54DA02QhA-fpv9xtT9V0hn5YKRb9NZZIQCa-xn_82Lxs

14. <https://www.facebook.com/GOInsajderi/posts/3582851275274010>

Case #2:

On February 24, 2022, the Draft Civil Code was brought to the Kosovo Parliament for discussion. The Draft has been one of the main hot topics in the political and social scene in Kosovo for a number of years, mainly due to the fact that for the first time, if passed, same-sex partnerships would be mentioned in the Kosovo legal framework. It should be noted however that, if passed, the latest Draft Civil Code would have not directly allowed for the recognition of equal marriage or civil partnerships for same-sex couples. Notwithstanding, the reactions towards the proposed idea were nothing short of hateful.

On February 23, 2022, Duda Balje, Member of Parliament and Head of the Human Rights Committee of the Assembly of Kosovo, publicly stated that she would vote against the bill. On her personal Facebook page she published a post saying:

“Dear citizens,

As you are aware, tomorrow in the plenary session we have the Civil Code under consideration and voting. The item on the agenda is that this Civil Code also contains permits for same-sex marriages. As an MP, I cannot go against the religion I belong to, the principles according to which I live or against the family values which I grew up with. Therefore, my vote will be AGAINST.”¹⁵

This statement got a lot of attention, and a lot of support as well. Most of the people in the comments were congratulating the MP for her stance and were calling for other MPs to join her vote against the Draft Civil Code. The next day, during the plenary session where the Draft was being discussed, a number of MPs used different arguments as to why same-sex partnerships fall against Kosovo’s religion, culture, and tradition.

Gazeta Express published an article with MPs Labinote Demi Murtezi’s speech in the Parliament, where she used very offensive language towards the LGBTQ+ community, by calling them *“degenerates that bring sickness”*, defending the idea that only opposite sex marriage should be allowed, and arguing that any other partnership outside of this combination is to be considered as debauchery and moral degeneration. Furthermore, she stated: *“I declare my vote against in the form of how this civil code came about, that is why I say yes to traditional marriage, the protection of public morality, the protection of public health and, above all, the protection of the best interests of children.”¹⁶*

The headline was also published on Gazeta Express’ Facebook page, where more than 170 people commented with most of them agreeing with the MP.¹⁷

Kosovo’s Constitution does not establish that marriage can be only between partners of different genders. Many MPs used derogatory and hateful comments towards the LGBTQ+ community, and presented their own personal opinions by defending their arguments in the name of religion and tradition, even though they have sworn to protect the Constitution and obey the laws of Kosovo that guarantee equality and freedom for all its citizens. The hatred towards the LGBTQ+ community goes well and beyond the public media and social media sphere and the Draft Civil Code discussion proved that further.

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/duda.balje/posts/2136082403221583>

¹⁶ <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/murtezi-e-vvse-fyen-homoseksualet-i-quant-te-shthurur-te-degjeneruar-qe-sjellin-semundje/>

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/GazetaExpress/posts/10158596819791711>

Sentiment analysis

After a sentiment analysis that was carried out for each case reported, the average score calculated is 3.69. This shows that the most commonly spread hate speech and divisive narratives are either characterised as the “*Negative character*” or “*Demonising and Dehumanising*” categories. In the given Kosovo case studies, the grade 3.69 suggests that negativity is an inherent feature of the group and less likely to change.

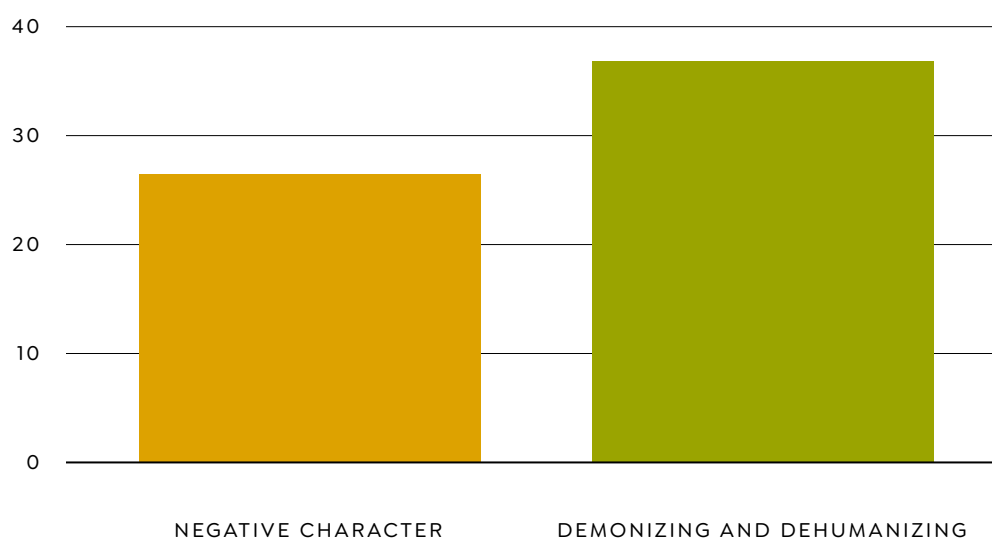
Some of the most common tokens used are:

Against Albanians: Terrorists, monkeys, ordinary liars, “shiptars”, retards, filthy.

Against Kosovo Serbs/Serbian: Terrorists, criminals, gangsters, “shka”, “shkina”.

Against Women: Bitches, cows, sluts, whores.

Against the LGBTQ+ community: Psychopaths, degenerates, crazy, paedophiles.



GRAPH 4.
THE TWO MOST COMMON SENTIMENT LEVELS

Visibility analysis

The cases collected to present and visualise the data in this report are gathered from multiple online media and their respective social media accounts (mainly on Facebook) and private persons' public posts that contain hate speech or divisive narratives either on the comments or the title of the posts.

Based on their outreach, the most popular monitored media and their Facebook accounts are:

Gazeta Express - 1.2M likes

Gazeta Blic - 431K likes

KultPlus - 121K likes

Gazeta Metro - 162K likes

KosovoOnline - 20K likes

Insajderi - 286K likes

Compared to others, the above-mentioned media have a high audience of people who comment on their social media posts and use them as a platform to disseminate opinions that contain hate speech, making them some among the biggest disseminators of divisive narratives.

As per the incident monitoring database, the most concerning cases of hate speech arose in cases of ethnic reporting (i.e. political statements regarding the Kosovo - Serbia dialogue, statements from politicians such as the Kosovo Prime Minister, Kosovo President, Serbian President, Serbian Prime Minister and other political figures). On the other hand, female politicians received a lot of hate speech too, entirely on the basis of their gender. Another "intriguing" topic for the Facebook hate speech spreaders remains the LGBTQ+ community, where news about this community receives a lot of attention, but mainly with offensive and denigrating language used against them.

Comparative analysis

Out of the 71 cases collected and analysed for the purpose of this report, and especially the main three target groups selected that were elaborated below, a clear perspective arises on what the general mindset in Kosovo is regarding "sensitive" topics such as politics, gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and other minority rights.

When it comes to cases of ethnic hatred towards either Kosovo Albanians or Kosovo Serbs/Serbians, the language used is always almost the same, whether it is directed to one or the other group. This is also noted in cases where women are attacked based on their gender: it is worth noting that female politicians and victims of domestic violence, including women victims of femicide, have received hateful comments in news concerning them. This included comments on their weight and looks, denigrating slurs, and gender-based violence being minimised or outright condoned. Meanwhile, the rhetoric used against the LGBTQ+ community remains also the same in most cases, where the main discourse is that queer individuals are a menace to society, mentally ill, and degenerates.

Preventive and ex post actions to combat hate and disinformation narratives in the country

Though the implementation of the legal framework in Kosovo is lacking, there are many state initiatives and laws that combat discrimination and hate speech, starting from the Constitution of Kosovo that establishes that “no one can be discriminated on the basis of race, color, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, relation to any community, property, economic and social condition, sexual orientation, birth, disability or other personal status.”

Additionally, Kosovo has a Law on Protection from Discrimination, and it also establishes hate speech as a crime in its Criminal Code. When it comes to media and hate speech legislation, the Press Code of Kosovo, the Law on the Independent Media Commission, and the Regulation on Audiovisual Commercial Communications all condemn hate speech in their respective legislative acts.

Civil Society continuously works on combating hate speech through different projects, research reports, and initiatives.

Kosovo 2.0, as one of the biggest media outlets related to social issues in Kosovo, actively publishes articles and reactions shedding light on online hatred in the media and social networks that individuals from different communities are subjected to. These articles promote public awareness on the issues of sexism, homophobia, and ethnic hatred amongst Kosovo citizens. These articles elaborate in detail gender and social norms, ethnic prejudice, sexism in the media, online and offline attacks against the LGBTQ+ community, and the overall patriarchal narratives that dominate in the country.¹⁸

Research carried out by the South East European Network for Professionalisation of Media shows that Kosovo's citizens put a lot of trust in television, but a majority of citizens think that social networks are used to spread political propaganda, hatred and disinformation. The research also found out that female journalists are discriminated against and in a less favourable position in comparison to male journalists.¹⁹

Advocacy Training and Resource Centre (ATRC) also monitors and researches cases of hate speech and hate crimes. In its “Hate Speech and Hate Crimes in Kosovo” report for the year 2021, ATRC gives recommendations for public institutions (both local and central) to intervene and condemn incidents of hate speech, calls for judges to issue proportionate sentences in their judgements, and for prosecutors to take the necessary steps and collaborate with other relevant institutions to properly investigate crimes of hate speech.²⁰

Another research that was conducted within the framework of the project “Resilience – Civil society action to reaffirm media freedom and counter disinformation and hateful propaganda in the Western Balkans and Turkey” shows that hate narratives and disinformation are very present in Kosovo's media, online media, social networks, and even in political and public institutions. This research finds that derogatory and hateful language is especially targeted at women, the LGBTQ+ community, migrants, and journalists (in cases where journalists are women, the attacks are more severe).

In regard to Media Trust in Kosovo, the research recommends that the Independent Media Commission and the Press Council should be stricter when the Code of Ethics is violated, while it also recommends that Kosovo's political parties should commit to not feeding into hateful narratives.

18. <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/>

19. https://seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Trust-in-the-media-Kosovo_tehnickal-report.pdf

20. https://advocacy-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Raporti_ATRC-monitorimit_EN.pdf



Conclusions

The findings of this report show that Kosovo's society has a lot of work to do in order to become fully inclusive and accepting of diversity without prejudice, hatred, and discrimination. Despite the fact that Kosovo has very progressive legislation, patriarchal, xenophobic, and negative group labelling attitudes in Kosovo are still endemic in society.

The key takeaways from the analysis of the cases reported in the database show that:

- The media, playing a big role in informing the public, should adequately report on acts of domestic violence (for instance, by avoiding victim-blaming or sensationalistic wording), and avoid engaging in sexist stereotypes and narratives.
- Sometimes headlines that can trigger the hate speech disseminators are used as clickbait from the media in order to get more reach, which makes the reporting unprofessional and biased.
- Stereotypical and xenophobic narratives are still very present in Kosovo, showing a shared difficulty in embracing human dignity beyond ethnic divisions.
- Homophobic narratives and sometimes calls for acts of violence towards the LGBTQ+ community are still present, especially in online media, with homophobic narratives being present also in the Parliament.
- Patriarchal norms where the woman is seen as an inferior human who should be in service to her husband's family members are still prominent in Kosovo. In many cases related to domestic violence reporting, comments were calling for women to obey their husbands so as not to incite violence and murders.
- As women continue to take space in the political scene, sexism continues to rise. In many cases where women politicians made statements, denigratory comments were based on hatred towards their gender, which further indicates a lack of education in issues of gender equality.
- Women, the LGBTQ+ community, Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs are the most targeted according to the monitoring database, but there is a lack of reporting and news regarding the Roma, Egyptian, and Ashkali communities. This, however, is no indicator that they are safe from hate speech, systemic racism, and discrimination. In fact, this may be the result of the fact that they have limited space in the media and the news.



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