

# MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN ALBANIA

2023

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# Introduction

This annual report depicts the situation of hateful and discriminative discourse in the Albanian media environment. The report is based on media monitoring conducted from January 2023 – December 2023. The unit of monitoring is based on the incidents containing hateful and discriminatory discourse (HDD) produced by, shared, or even allowed to be expressed in media outlets, including traditional, new and social media.

Incidents are identified by using a set of key words<sup>1</sup> used by media, and the daily monitoring of several media platforms, including radio, television, print, online and social media.

Identified incidents were examined and reported based on Professor Snježana Milivojević's, (Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Belgrade), reporting design. The monitoring focused on incidents that contained hate speech directed at gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual minorities, migrants, and refugees. Nevertheless, new categories were also reported and added to the report, including hate speech towards journalists, and also political opponents.

**The three most ubiquitous target groups that were subject to hate speech and discriminatory discourse were: gender (41%), ethnicity (38%), and sexual minorities (11%).**

The issue of gender-based hate speech remains a prominent concern. This year, we have observed that the media, journalists, public figures, artists, and other professionals or intellectuals have not held back in making harsh statements against women of all ages and backgrounds, including: journalists, new mothers, girls, female singers, women over 30 who may be homeless and are forced to work as sex workers, and young women with mental disabilities. Instances where men are mentioned in a derogatory manner typically revolve around incidents related to the lives of women within their families or their partners. With regard to ethnicity, there is a rise of HDD on migrants and refugees, triggered by some recent actions of the Albanian Government regarding the temporary hospitality of migrants from Italy in Albanian soil.

Unfortunately, **the primary origins of hate speech stem from media – journalists and analysts.** The media continues to perpetuate harmful and discriminatory stereotypes about “others” when reporting on different groups of society. In sporadic cases we have also seen politicians, artists, intellectuals, professors, celebrities, and other individuals with public influence, expressing views on certain topics with hateful and discriminatory vocabulary. To make it worse, these entities use media platforms to disseminate their harmful narratives, even national ones, without going challenged by the moderators of the programmes or journalists themselves.

Reporting news on crimes from around the world with a particular emphasis on highlighting sexual orientation involves a focused effort to bring attention to events and issues related to sexual minorities. Media monitoring has been instrumental in averting the escalation of hate speech, yet persistent trends seek to “normalise” such discourse.

**On a positive note, 2023 saw the rise of better media regulation that will prevent sexism in audio-visual media.** For the first time, a definition for sexism<sup>2</sup> and the sanctions for media operators that violate it was included in the amended Law on Audiovisual Media on 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2023. And a year earlier, Albania's Audiovisual Media Authority's (AMA) new Broadcasting Code entered into force in May 2022 a new chapter on sexism and gender equality. **The Commissioner against Discrimination has consolidated the practice of HDD used in the media by providing professional and complete analysis of its decisions, setting a model for other institutions to follow.** To add to all this, there has also been increased awareness and reaction from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) regarding the use of HDD in the media, starting with Roma and Egyptian CSOs, but also women's rights organisations, etc.

1. For example, key words that are derogative to certain categories such as women and girls (slut; prostitute), migrants and refugees (invaders, street bugs), LGBTQ+ (perverse; immoral; sick), etc.

2. Sexism is defined as is any act, action, gesture, visual representation, written or spoken words in audio and audio-visual media, practice or behaviour based on the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of gender, which occurs in the public or private sphere, online or offline, with the effect and purpose of violating human dignity, the rights and fundamental freedoms of a person or group of persons, Albanian citizens, foreigners or stateless, that results in physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic damage or suffering to a person or a group of persons, Albanian citizens, foreigners or stateless or that creates or fosters the creation of an intimidating, hostile, degrading, offensive or humiliating environment or fosters or aims to perpetuate and reinforce gender stereotypes. Accessible here: <https://ama.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/AMA-Kodi-i-Transmetimit.pdf>



# Methodological Approach

The data for this report were collected between January 2023 – December 2023. Media monitoring was undertaken weekly to identify and report cases of hate speech related to gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual minorities and migrants/ refugees.

An instrument was designed to report incidents, and through it, we collected information on the incidents' date of publication, the location/country where it occurred, the type of hatred identified, the content/narrative of the discourse, the author/s of the incident, the media in which it was identified and finally the public reach. For the most severe cases, responses were prepared and published, including articles, posts, letters to editors, and reporting of cases in social media platforms.

All the data gathered was subject to quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis provides an overview of HDD frequency for each category, while qualitative analysis is comprised of narrative analysis, sentiment analysis and visibility analysis that together provide an in-depth understanding of the narratives. Sentiment analysis is based on the instrument developed by George Washington University<sup>3</sup> which is a 6-level intensity scale:

- 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 characterisations 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.

The purpose of this research report is to contribute to the understanding of hateful discriminatory discourse models of media and communication in Albania and to increase the ability of society to respond and to develop counter-narratives that promote human rights, diversity and tolerance.

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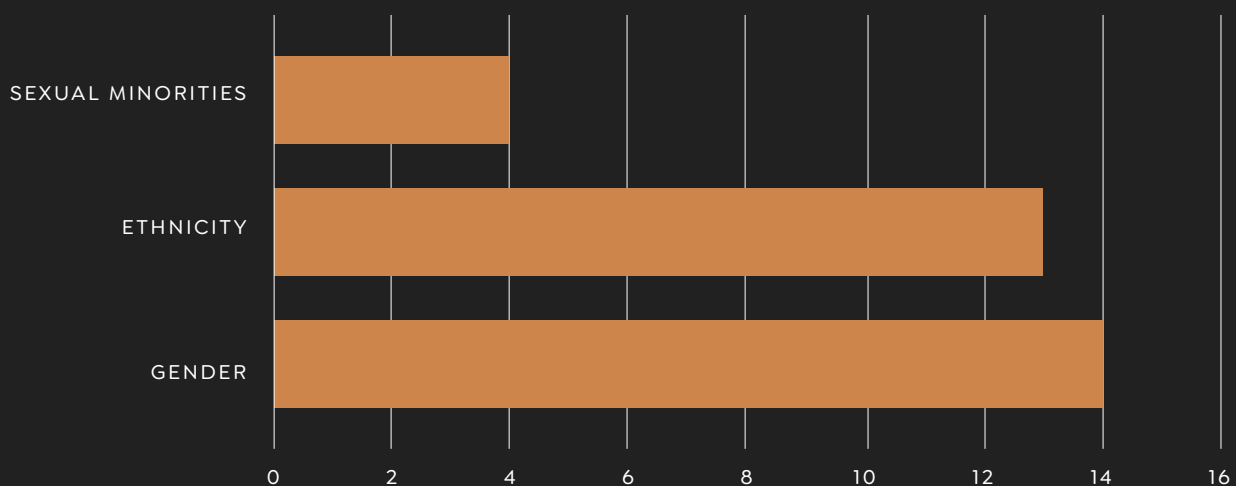
3. The George Washington University (2019). Monitoring Hate Speech in the US Media. Working paper. Media and Peacebuilding Project, page 5. Available online at: [Monitoring-Hate-Speech-in-the-US-Media-3\\_22-z0h5kk.pdf](https://www.peacebuilding.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Monitoring-Hate-Speech-in-the-US-Media-3_22-z0h5kk.pdf) (cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com)



# Narratives and sub-narratives of HDD

## 1. General overview of HDD in Albania

The HDD Media Monitoring chart in Albania during 2023 has returned to the previous pattern with women as the most targeted group that are subject to hate speech and discriminatory discourse with an alarming increase (41%), followed by ethnicity (38%) and sexual minorities (11%).



However, these are not the only targets of HDD. Journalists (2%) appear also in the HDD map, although with a strong gender bias. There are also a number of incidents that target multiple categories, for example women and disabled persons, or religious affiliation and women.

On a positive note, religion continues to be the less affected category by HDD confirming the reputation of Albania as a country of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. To confirm this trend, the monitoring report also brings a positive example how Albanian media has reported the episode of burning of the Quran in Sweden, which has caused much controversy around the world. Albanian media reported on the incident neutrally, also giving space to Pope Francis' statements condemning the act of the burning of the holy book<sup>4</sup>. Most importantly, in line with Albania's multi-faith society and peaceful approach to religion, the comments on the social media posts of the news items were overwhelmingly positive, with practitioners of the Catholic Church expressing sympathy and support for Muslims.

**“For us Catholics, it is not a matter of faith, it is a matter of respect, respect for our Muslim friends and well-wishers”.**

4. <https://www.facebook.com/100041829021769/posts/994502431954048>  
[https://www.instagram.com/p/CuOxrs\\_NjZq/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CuOxrs_NjZq/?img_index=1)

## 2. HDD on ethnicity

With a slight decrease from the previous year, there remains a concerning trend of anti-migrant hate speech. The monitoring report shows that the major groups targeted by these narratives are the established ones: Serbs, Greeks and Roma minorities. In some cases, however it is also directed against foreign refugees and Albanian Kosovars.

Two main events appeared to be the instigators of HDD on ethnicity. The first, local elections held in May, that saw the candidacy of controversial figure<sup>5</sup>. Alfred Beleri running for Mayor in Himara, South of Albania. The second was an agreement signed between Albania and Italy to host refugee camps in Albanian territory until repatriation.

Other triggers for HDD include the crisis in the North of Kosovo after partial elections in Leposavic triggered international reactions regarding the government of Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti, including tensions between him and Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama, who decided unilaterally to cancel a planned joint meeting of the two governments.

The pattern noticed in HDD towards Serbs, is that everyone who supports or cooperates with them is considered anti-Albanian or working against the national interest of Albania. This sentiment applies to all, including public figures. They've been asked to justify their statements, while those out of the public eye, who have made HDD comments are referred to as "brainless" or "spineless".

When the singer Rita Ora, of Albanian origin, was filmed during a concert in Hungary waving a Serbian flag taken from a fan, it sparked numerous negative reactions online<sup>6</sup>, expressing disappointment with the singer's actions, who has openly expressed her Albanian origin on multiple occasions. Although in her subsequent reaction, she indicated that she did not attach importance to the identity of the flag as she was singing and implied that she mistook it for a Hungarian flag - given their similar colours, again comments and subsequent articles blamed her for such an act. In an article published by the JOQ portal<sup>7</sup>, a video showed Ora had taken the flag "voluntarily," contradicting the singer's statement that the flag was "given" to her by a fan. Such an interpretation only fuels the fire by keeping alive the targeting of Serbs as historical enemies of Albanians. In a statement Ora clearly expressed that she is open-minded and does not prejudge people based on nationality, but she would not want her action to be taken as a denial of her Albanian/Kosovar heritage.

Negative reactions towards Serbs are also prevalent during sports matches, where footballers of Albanian origin compete. In an article published about the Serbia-Switzerland match<sup>8</sup>, it stated the Serbian coach used racist expressions against Albanians, while Albanian footballer Granit Xhaka responded by wearing a jersey with the name Jashari emboldened on the kit. The name pays tribute to Adem Jashari one of the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Xhaka later explained the football shirt was often waved to encourage fans to support their national team. However, the gesture of putting his hands to his genitals<sup>9</sup> was taken as an insult to the Serbs, while Xhaka expressed that it was a response to the insults of the Serbian coach.

In another case, the news of a marriage between a Serbian man and an Albanian woman, was sensationalised with headlines intended to stir reactions. The bride is quoted as saying: "I feel Serbian"<sup>10</sup>. The reaction to her comments were considered HDD. She was referred to as "spineless," and a "traitor". The couples' unborn children were called "vica" - an allusion to the Serbian surname suffix *vic*, but in Albanian refers to a small animal, a calf. The bride was also targeted with sexual innuendos, one stating "she liked Serbian clarinets," (implying male genitals).

The same pattern is observed in reporting of an incident involving a former Albanian politician with the Montenegrin police<sup>11</sup>, who was filmed assaulted inside his car by two uniformed police officers. The target of the

5. He was sentenced two years in prison for vote-buying.

6. <https://shqiptaria.com/lajm/interpretoi-ne-mes-te-skenes-ne-hungari-me-flamurin-e-serbise-te-hedhur-kraheve-rita-ora-kryqezohet-ne-rrjet-nga-fansat-video>

7. <https://joq-albania.com/artikull/1159190.html>

8. <https://shqiptaria.com/lajm/ndeshja-me-zvicren-trajneri-serb-kapet-nga-kamerat-duke-share-nenat-shqiptare-ishv-ministria-presim-qe-fifa-te-reagoje>

9. <https://joq-albania.com/artikull/1088820.html>

10. <https://shqiptaria.com/lajm/shqiptaria-martohet-me-nje-serb-ne-leposavic-tani-ndihem-serbe>

11. <https://www.syri.net/politike/572529/dhuna-ndaj-petraq-milos-si-i-justifikoi-policet-abazovici-i-mallit-te-zi/>  
[https://www.instagram.com/p/Co9\\_nxhoUK0/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Co9_nxhoUK0/)



article published in Syri.net is the former Prime Minister of Albanian origin Dritan Abazovic, who is accused of delayed reaction and defending the actions of the police. The technique used here is based on associating the actions of two individuals with the entire group. Abazovic is mentioned as giving much support to Serbs, as a fact to devalue him as an Albanian politician.

Hate speech towards Greeks has been reactivated after a relatively quiet period. The main factor in this direction has been the candidacy under the opposition's emblem of a controversial figure as Alfred Beleri, the leader of the Greek ethnic association Omonia. Beleri's involvement in an incident with Albanian border guards, known as the Massacre of Peshkopia, where two border guards were killed in an attack from Greek territory, and particularly an interview discussing the Hellenisation of Himara, in southern Albania, has sparked numerous negative comments online.

Following his candidacy, some perceive this as an attempt by Greek chauvinist circles to assert territorial claims against Albania, advancing the thesis of Northern Epirus. PM Rama condemned Beleri's problematic statements, as well as accusing him of pressuring Albanian immigrants in Greece to vote for him. On the evening of 11 May, Beleri was arrested on charges of buying votes. Headlines that call Beleri "donkey"<sup>12</sup> as in comparison to the Trojan "horse", attracted a number of negative reactions about Greeks in general, echoing old hostilities between two countries:

***The Greeks, these people who are half women and half bastards, have now become brave and you think they are "palikara" [pun on the Albanian word for "dickhead"], but in fact they are "palibytha" [pun on the Albanian word for "faggot"]***

As for the Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania, they are constantly in the spotlight of denigrating and negative comments in the media, especially when a punishable act by members of this community is involved. However, during 2023, there was an increase in awareness for timely reaction from interest groups such as the case of *informim.al*, which reported and protested the use of denigrating words such as "gypsy" to refer to some football players by a well-known producer and director in the TV sports programme of the Albanian public television RTSH<sup>13</sup>.

In his apology, the director pointed out that the derogatory term used by himself in the programme is a product of "a legacy of expression, left in the sub-consciousness by the jargon of communication of that part of society which is not aware of the effect of the words damaging the reputation of minorities".

This argument, "the rudimentary legacy of expressions regarding the Roma and Egyptian community" can also be confirmed in another reported incident as hate speech on the national television Top Channel during the broadcast of the reality show "Big Brother". The 2023 edition had a record number of viewers, so the production's reaction to episodes of hate speech among contestants becomes even more important. One of the residents, former singer Ermiona Lekbello, was expelled<sup>14</sup> from the programme after a quarrel where she used derogatory language with racial connotations towards the Egyptian community against another contestant. However, it should be noted that no media outlet reported why precisely she was expelled, only alluding to her use of verbal violence, in a case where awareness could have been raised about the normalised use of derogatory terms towards the Roma community.

On the contrary, an article published by the media<sup>15</sup>, has not only prompted negative comments but has also incited calls for violence against this community. The outlet published the message of a woman complaining about two Roma children who pushed her into the street in front of cars risking an accident. The article is accompanied by a photo of two Roma children whose eyes are covered, but it is not clear whether they are the ones who pushed the woman or someone else. Even the presentation of the title emphasising in red letters the words "Girl **scared** of **Roma** children - they pushed me in front of **cars!**" reinforces the idea of Roma as a violent community, from which one should be afraid.

12. <https://gazetadita.al/himara-greku-nga-progonati-dhe-disa-pyetje-qe-duan-dhe-presin-pergijie/>  
<https://javanews.al/kale-troje-apo-gomar-himare/>

13. <https://informim.al/gjuha-denigruese-ndaj-komunitetit-egjiptian-ne-rtsh-ne-qatar-2022-petri-bozo-kerkon-ndjese-publike-organizatat-protesta-do-kete-qel-lim-sensibilizues/>

14. <https://www.voxnews.al/lifestyle/e-fundit-ermiona-lekbello-perjashtohet-nga-shtepia-e-bbv-i33768>

15. <https://joq-albania.com/artikull/1126724.html>  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CRk5M7kNDDO/>

The post has received 10,750 likes on Instagram, while the comments are filled with hate speech ranging from derogatory labels to aggressive calls for direct violence. References to the Communist era, during which the infamous Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu became proverbial for his brutality towards the Roma community, are also noticeable: "Mehmet Shehu should be awakened", "It wasn't Enver's fault that he pressed them with bulldozers", etc. This is a very dangerous way of reporting, firstly for the community and secondly for the children, who are left exposed to the reaction of enraged people.

It is not the first time that media publishes unverified messages, without providing context for the event and following it as a problem with institutions responsible for the protection and well-being of children. Among the comments, a minority seeks to alter the narrative by fostering a deeper understanding of this community's situation and proposing solutions to their challenging circumstances, providing a more positive perspective. These are cases that need to be carefully considered ethically so to avoid providing a platform for those promoting hate. Responsible reporting requires addressing an issue while keeping in mind the public's highest interest, not witch-hunting when responsible for minor misconduct bears all the prejudices for the community they belong to, without conducting an analysis of where this prejudice comes from and how to solve it.

Disagreement	n/a
Negative actions	It is in their blood, to stay in the streets; Begging is their life; They should be closed in a museum as species risking extinction; (former communist PM) Mehmet Shehu should be revived
Negative Character	Filthy Gypsies; they smell asses; they just make the babies and leave them in the streets; those bad Gypsies; parasites; street bugs; etc
Demonising and dehumanising	Animals, species in extinction danger
Violence	They should be beaten with wooden batons; hit them with your bag, keep even a stone with you, those filthy creatures should be beaten
Death	They need petrol (to be burned); Enver (former Albanian dictator) has no blame, pestle them with bulldozer Extinction

Another concerning phenomenon that has been observed in the Albanian media in recent years, is also the growing hate speech against immigrants of colour. Since Albania has become part of agreements to host refugees in its territory, anti-immigrant sentiment has begun to rise, reaching its peak in 2023 when an agreement was signed with the Italian Government for the temporary sheltering of refugees pending repatriation. The agreement was extensively commented in the Albanian media and received reactions from human rights defence associations for debatable points regarding the sovereignty of the country, as well as the conditions of reception of these immigrants.

However, the HDD in this case is noted in an article published by the portal syri.net<sup>16</sup>. Hyperbole is the technique used to increase anxiety and fear. The large number of immigrants expected to come during the entire duration of the agreement (five years) is deliberately given in bulk to increase panic and give the appearance of an apocalypse.

**"360,000 immigrants, which make up 12 percent of the total population."**

**"Over 10 million** African immigrants roaming the streets, being the main perpetrators of sexual crimes, robberies, and the criminal contingent in the country."

16. <https://www.syri.net/op-ed/637547/shqiperia-e-zeze-e-edi-rames-a-jeni-qati/>

Talking about 10 million Africans for a small country like Albania with nearly 2 million inhabitants and with an immigration crisis, creates the idea of being overrun and disappearing as a nation in front of this massive wave of Africans.

The title itself "The Black Albania of Edi Rama, are you ready?" carries racist notes by implying the superiority of Albanians as a white race against these immigrants, who come mostly from Africa. The entire article aims to create panic among the Albanian population by calling immigrants "a big social bomb for five plus five years" and attributing issues such as crime or even terrorism to immigrants.

**"Refugee crimes** have been among the most varied, ranging from terrorist attacks on the population to rape, violence or serious robberies."

The phrase "refugee crimes" unfairly associates crime with refugees as a social group, giving a negative connotation to the whole phenomenon. Crime is crime whether committed by locals or foreigners.

The author refers to a study carried out by the National Institute of Statistics of Italy, claiming that "all sexual crimes are committed by immigrants", but the link to the report is not provided in the article. Ironically, Albanians themselves have been pre-judged for their involvement in organised crime in Italy and have suffered from negative media coverage. This is precisely because the press there made the mistake of labelling an entire population, such as Albanians, based on the actions of a small criminal group.

The article continues with data from France, Germany and Sweden regarding immigrant crimes, to conclude that such a thing is expected to happen in Albania when the agreement comes into force. All this creates an unwelcoming, hostile, and prejudiced climate against people who represent a part of the communities they come from. The fact that they will be hosted on a beach area, when Albania is living its momentum in tourism, adds to the prejudice and the double standard of "hospitality" Albanians have been praised on for centuries.

It sounds strange and somewhat artificial that Albania, a country historically linked with a rich and sad story of emigration, is assuming such a position in its press. This approach, even when inspired by the watchdog functions of the press – being critical of the government's activities – can backfire. Focusing on the perceived negatives of immigrants diverts attention away from instances of misgovernance.

### 3. HDD on Gender

In the Albanian society, the attempt to dictate the lives of girls, to predetermine their fate, and to limit women's opportunities has always been present. A recent study from Faktej<sup>17</sup> revealed that media has supported campaigns of gendered disinformation targeting women as category using harmful narratives: women belong in the home; adultery is a reason to kill women; degenerated women are destroying families; all men that rape are monsters; women like violence because they do not resist, even in rape, etc.

During the year 2023, there has been an increase in HDD through various events reflected in the media, where there is a noticeable tendency of certain individuals to restrict women's freedom of movement and to give men privileges to public spaces.

*"... we know who goes to the stadium. A woman cannot go to the stadium precisely at a match where she ... Now, can this woman find a ticket? Does she need to be accompanied by a man?!"<sup>18</sup>*

On the other hand, in TV afternoon programmes which claim to address "the hottest topics of current affairs, personal stories and social issues, the problems we face every day and suggestions for a better life" intentionally or unintentionally, women have been the subject of discriminatory language. Such programmes, which have a considerable female audience, have dismissively sparked discussions on important and highly sensitive topics, debates that have targeted women's health and intellectual capacity, even their rights and dignity. This was the case of a statement made by a gynaecologist invited at Vizion plus TV regarding the fertility of women. He was quoted saying:

17. <https://faktoje.al/perkatesia-gjinore-dhe-dezinformimi-ne-shqipëri-si-formeson-media-qendrimit-ndaj-rolleve-gjinore/>

18. Gazetari i sportit bën deklaratë talebaneske: Nuk mund të shkojnë gratë para burrave në stadium për të parë Kombëtaren! – AKTUALITET (tpz.al)

**"... at 30, they are called old women"<sup>19</sup>,**

assuming that women should be mothers before the age of 30-years-old. In another case, a lawyer claimed on national TV that women that go to work are by default mistresses of the directors, confirming the harmful narrative that women belong in the home:

**"If you let your wife work, you have given her to the director/manager!"<sup>20</sup>**

The HDD on women has a negative narrative in 2023 when it comes to reporting rape. The case of a 26-year-old girl raped in Vlora by a group of boys after being drugged and abandoned in the hotel<sup>21</sup> shocked the public for days.

Among the endless debates that took place during this time, the statement of a lawyer was one of the most flagrant incidents of sexist language in the media. While talking in national TV about the phenomenon of rape among other things, he cited the English criminal law emphasising the time of woman's resistance during an act of rape and then surrendering to enjoy the intimate act even though we are talking about rape's circumstances:

**"There comes a certain moment when a woman, after she has begun to resist rape, gives in to pleasure."<sup>22</sup>**

Another lawyer, said in Vizion Plus TV that girls have to be careful in order to avoid sexual abuse, because "Rapes usually happen on Fridays when girls are drunk. Men are men"<sup>23</sup>. Both statements have been classified sexist and discriminatory by the Commissioner Against Discrimination and AMA, but the measures taken were different: while one station didn't give banned the lawyer from returning on air, the latter was urged to remove the video from the channel within 30 days.

It is more than understandable that such statements made by law professionals easily get attention in society as authority figures, but if they go unchallenged by the moderators and journalists that are hosting the programme, their impact is very negative, reinforcing harmful stereotypes that rape is asked for by the victims, not caused by the aggressors. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that the reaction from the public for these two cases has been in favour of women survivors of rape, rejecting the lawyers' views.

Meanwhile, the local journalist Afrovita H. who first published the news about the rape in Vlora was publicly threatened by the owner of the local TV station in the Facebook page of the station, referring to blood feud practices- killing for honour- and calling her a "slut" 14 times.

**"You owe me your blood. Prosti' (i.e the prostitute) was the news, not Afrovita! "<sup>24</sup>**

After the Albanian's Union of Journalists intervened, the television station owner retracted the statement, admitting that he acted in an angry mood. His justification for the use of the word "prostitute" was that it refers to the unverified news that one of the perpetrators of the rape was allegedly his son.

This case raised a question whether the public statements of an audiovisual media licence holder against journalists should be subject of the Authority of Audiovisual Media for sexist language. Although there was a complaint to AMA from women's organisations to address the issue, the request was dismissed because the attack was made in social media channel, which is out of the jurisdiction of AMA's activity.

During media monitoring, it has also been evident that women are constantly targeted by certain individuals or groups attempting to neutralise crimes and the "image" of those involved in them. Reporting gender-based crimes through the association of terms with negative connotations (prostitute, slut, homeless), especially of those announcing the end of a woman's life, aims to relativise the weight of the news by shifting attention from the incident to the victim's profession or ethnic affiliation. This approach leads also to reducing the reaction of audiences.

19. [30 vjec quhen plaka gjinekologu trondit me deklaraten: Nese nuk bejne femije deri...-Vizioni i Pasdites - YouTube](#)

20. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C02DkPONpGx/?igshid=MTC4MmMIYmi2Ng%3D%3D>

21. <https://shqiptaria.com/lajm/vlore-nxiten-nje-26vjecare-te-pinte-droge-dhe-me-pas-abuzuan-seksualisht-me-t-2-te-arrestuar-1-ne-kerkim>

22. "Femrat mezi bëjnë rezistencë, shtirën sikur s'duan"- Shokun avokatit Spartak Ngjela: Edhe kur përdhunohet dorëzohet nga kënaqësia (panorama.com.al)

23. [https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cyv9VWos08l/?utm\\_source=ig\\_embed&ig\\_rid=e32bd752-546e-4ae3-96ff-6f41493a7752](https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cyv9VWos08l/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=e32bd752-546e-4ae3-96ff-6f41493a7752)

24. [Lajmi për përdhunimin e 26-vjeçares në Vlorë, kërcënohet gazetaria e Faxneës Afrovita Hysaj - Faxweb](#)

"Horror event in Durres. Worked as a prostitute, 32-year-old sexually abused and thrown lifeless among the bushes at the Dajlani Bridge! How Luljeta Preza was massacred with a knife".<sup>25</sup>

Media monitoring reveals also the double standard when it comes to killer's identity. In another ordinary article, but where the murder of a man is discussed, journalists or editorial policies do not hesitate to describe the murderer as; "Menduh Kurti, the ex-lover who burned 'the Terrible Marjeta' alive in Dajti"<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, when a man kills three women within a few hours in the capital, the media circulate news, interviews, and shows that aim to analyse the psychological profile of a murderer: "Dan Hutra has mental health problems! Seeks male dominance."<sup>27</sup>

In cases where men become the target of the media and discourse of discriminatory language, we deal with incidents where the story of a woman is at the centre – either with humour or sarcastic irony – is indirectly ridiculed by journalists through a brother, husband, father, or close person to her. This discourse, besides hatred and discrimination, also affects the multiplication of sexist, derogatory rhetoric, as well as inciting hatred and discord in society.

Level	Hateful/Discriminatory Discourse on Gender
<b>Disagreement</b>	She wanted to divorce and that's why her husband killed Liridona.
<b>Negative Actions</b>	Who keeps this idiot on TV??? Get rid of him because it's a shame. What a humourless filth.
<b>Negative Character</b>	<p>"Prosti" aka prostitute (the journalist who published the news about the rape in Vlora)</p> <p>Do you know who f... you sister? Bastard! You are just a model of degeneration.</p> <p>Such women who cannot even be called women; are the ones who raise the monsters and applaud them.</p> <p>Maybe his mother told him about her experiences with state security's agents (making reference to the lawyer who has been in jail during Communist period as a political prisoner).</p> <p>They (women) succeed only by opening their legs.</p> <p>Why should a woman drink in the company of men who do not know them well, do not trust them!</p>
<b>Demonising &amp; Dehumanising</b>	Terrible / Criminal/ Raper/ You idiot! You are ugly. Drunkard. Disgusting man. I hate you. Heartless. Failed man. Ignorant.
<b>Violence</b>	They are crazy they need psychologist.
<b>Death</b>	From POLITICS to PERVERSITY. Completely crazy, ah ENVER! these monsters, it's good that you have sent them to the soap.../ Woe to us, what is being done... such garbage should be hung in the middle of the city... otherwise the others will not learn / Hang that "dog" on a rope! There is no trial for him! /

It's interesting to observe shifts in online discourse, and it's positive that there appears to be a decrease in hate speech against women on social media platforms compared to the previous year. However, the increase in aggressive commentary related to statements or incidents involving men, as well as negative comments from women against other women, remain concerning.

25. <http://www.panorama.com.al/ngjarje-horror-ne-durres-punonte-si-prstitute-32-vjecaria-abuzohet-ksualisht-dhe-hidhet-e-pajete-mes-shkurreve-tek-ura-e-dajlanit-si-u-masakrua-me-thike-luljeta-preza/>

26. <https://joq-albania.com/artikull/1093421.html>

27. <https://www.balkanweb.com/dan-hutra-ka-probleme-te-shendetit-mendor-psikologia-per-autorin-e-vrasjes-ge-tronditi-krueqytetin-kerkon-dominance-mash-kullore-profilin-i-tij-psikologjik/#gsc.tab=0>

It is observed that the chain that sustains hate speech and discriminatory language against women is extending due to the interaction between traditional and modern media; due to the ease of reporting/reacting/writing without the humanity of journalists, professionals, artists, influencers from the world of art, sports, politics, or business.

Based on sentiment analysis, the average result of hate speech and discriminatory language against women reaches 3.9. Narratives demonising women are inhumane, highly intensive, and unrestrained in discrimination.

Regarding the sources of hate speech and discriminatory language against women, it is observed that journalists/media are at the forefront of this problem, followed by famous figures of public life, academics, intellectuals, citizens like online audiences, politicians, and other professionals. The modernisation of the media has "aided" the spread of such denigrating discourse against women by giving it an uncontrollable space on portals or social media platforms, to commentators who do not hesitate to express themselves, usually against women.

Due to the utterly dishonest and unprofessional tactics of increasing viewership or clicks through sensational headlines and unauthorised published photos, the visibility and spread of hate speech and discriminatory language are reflected in incidents that attract the attention of 18,000 or more than 80,000 people through social media platforms.

#### 4. HDD on LGBTQ+

The narrative about LGBTQ+ community in Albania continues to be filled with hate speech and discriminatory language, but in 2023 it has been triggered by a rise of the pro-family movement led by openly anti-LGBTQ+'s rights individuals. Besides domestic events, media select articles related to crime and LGBTQ+ persons happening abroad, providing a fertile ground for hate speech waves, knowing the sentiment of the population on these issues.

This is the case of two articles referring to events happening in the USA, when one gay couple was found guilty for sexual abuse of their children, and another transgender person was the perpetrator of a mass killing in a school.

Tema, Albania's most circulated newspaper, reported on the first incident with the headline: "The tragedy of two minors adopted by a gay couple". What follows is a description of the crimes committed by the couple including sexual abuse, selling of their children for sex, pornography, etc. The unsigned article calls the protagonists of the story "this filthy couple" to conclude at the end with this paragraph using this case as general for the whole LGBTQ+ community: "This case shows that, at best, after homosexuality, a **human insanity** transformed into an **imposing** agenda, what follows as further **insanity** is the adoption of children from them, guaranteeing this even legally, after allowing equally **insane** same-sex marriages."

Note the repetition of the word "insane" three times confirming the thesis of homosexuality as a mental disease. Linking paedophilia with the queer community is extremely harmful, as it falsely suggests a connection between homosexuality and paedophilia. Comments on Tema's article page are equally problematic, with users voicing (through extreme homophobia) their concern over the adoption of children by queer couples.

In the article dedicated to the event of a school shooting in the USA by a transgender person, the headline "Killed 6 people, 3 children among them, the moment when the transgender (woman) enters the Christian school with an automatic rifle" associates the crime with sexual identity, suggesting that queer individuals are prone to criminality. (Some headlines did not even correctly report that the perpetrator was a transgender woman, not a man, hence not even using appropriate terminology). Some outlets also included that the attack was carried out on a Christian school, feeding the "LGBTQ+ vs church" narrative. Comments were overwhelmingly hateful, even wishing death to the queer community, but especially focused on how LGBTQ+ individuals and the community "pose harm to the children, even killing them."



The post on the JOQ with the text and the picture of the killer, got 10,146 likes. Although some of the comments on the portal were trying to distinguish between ones' actions and sexual identity, the majority was calling them "insane", "mentally ill" persons, wishing death to them or outlaw.

***"These (people) bring diseases, make disappear the values, moral, culture and tradition of a nation".***

Disagreement	n/a
Negative actions	OMG. They should be banned by law. Laws should be harsher on them. They do not know limits, they do not recognise the nature's laws that God created, those who support them, may their children be dead
Negative Character	They should all be isolated because they are not normal. Immoral, their brain has got cracked, I ka ik trruni per lesh, transgender is mental illness, schizophrenia, cancer of the f*ing culture of Hollywood, This is not sexuality but mental illness These (people) bring diseases, make disappear the 0values, moral, culture and tradition of a nation perverse LGBTQ+ community are a community of mental health problems and personality disorders Psychotics
Demonising and dehumanising	Monster They are contrary to God, it is not expected less from them. Zombies Witch
Violence	
Death	This is why these lgbt do not deserve life; they should be killed (they deserve to be) Burned alive Pam, in the middle of the front These species do not deserve to live May the God kill them May the God kill you after this life as well In Africa a state has approved a law which condemns at death for this organisation LGNT (a misspelling of LGBT), and it has done well, Make disappear these trans, may them be dead all in the world You should be hanged on alive This kind of creatures should be eliminated as soon as you see them These should be burned with hot oil

The narrative on queer people that aim to hurt children is dominant also in the other report by Syri TV's morning show "Kafe Shqeto". The title itself "Who is pushing children towards the LGBT community?", suggests the editorial stand on the topic. The debate between Linda Pano, representative of the movement Pro-Family and Luana Myrto a transgender, quickly turned sour, with accusations from Pano that LGBT propaganda is pushing children towards the queer community, misusing information from a Gallup poll that shows that "20% of children consider themselves part of the queer community and 80% of children are undecided." Presenting this data at the introduction of the article shows a bias of the media towards the community, using the phrase 'very quick and very frightening'.

*“The number of children that are asked to become part of the LGBT community is growing very quick and very frightening way. These are the results of the latest study from Gallup.”*

Furthermore, the host of the show repeatedly referred to Luana Myrto by her previous name, Luan, completely assaulting her integrity.

The narrative around LGBTQ+ people is based using the metaphor of a battle, between “us” hetero versus “them” homosexuals, “us” representing the good, the moral given by God and “them” as the evil, the deviation, the bad of society.

In this context, any event that would justify the actions taken against this community will be represented with words such as “victory”, or “loss”. In this line goes the news about a verdict by the Administrative Court to overthrow the decision by the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination last year, which ruled that the Evangelical pastor Akil Pano, leader of the Alliance for the Protection of the Family, had used substantial hate speech against the LGBTQ+ community in Albania. However, Pano and media<sup>28</sup> presented this decision as a legal “victory” against “parent 1 and parent 2” and the queer community, when in fact this is far from reality: the “parent 1 parent 2” initiative was allegedly withdrawn from the legal docket in 2022, so there was no victory of “mother and father” against “parent 1 and parent 2”.

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28. <https://newsbomb.al/fitore-e-madhe-e-familjes-pastori-akil-pano-fiton-gjyqin-kunder-ajendes-se-komunitetit-lgbt-per-prindin-1-dhe-prindin-2/>



# Comparative analysis

Analysing media articles which contain HDD during 2023, we can notice some patterns of hate speech and discriminatory discourse targeting different communities in Albania, but also some differences.

First, **hateful discriminatory discourse is directed against the most vulnerable groups of society such as women, ethnic minorities, refugees or LGBTQ+ people.** These are groups also without a strong political representation, thus the attack on them is made more easily. Using harmful stereotypes representing them as the “evil” of society or as “logical way of being” contribute to the reinforcing of the social norms that excludes these groups from participating in the public life.

Second, **reporting on marginalised groups of society is often based on isolated events done by individuals belonging to these groups using sensationalist headlines.** Selecting only negative events where these individuals are involved, usually in crimes, in the country or abroad, without using context and hyperbolising the danger without facts, trigger more hate and discriminatory comments by the audience, making them go viral on social media.

Third, **HDD is increasingly spread through the dissemination of harmful narratives by professionals such as lawyers, doctors,** and go unchallenged by the moderators of the media programmes, which use these false quotes to make sensationalist headlines in social media channels to attract more reactions. Fortunately, the public has demonstrated a higher level of emancipation in these cases, rejecting this kind of discourse and turning against their authors, although in some very isolated cases, there have been observed a judgement of the victims.

**Fourth, HDD continues to use combined forms of verbal (written and spoken) and visual (videos, images, memes) elements.** The rise of viewership of reality show formats in television such as Big Brother or dating shows has provided new territory for HDD to thrive when it happens within these programmes. HDD is often accompanied by humour through memes and jokes in social media, but also in humorous shows on TV, especially around women, minorities and refugees.

On the other hand, we observed some differences among cases and categories. HDD substantially varies depending on the sources who produce it. There are different sources, usually more than just one, per category, combining journalists and media personnel, political figures, public figures, influencers, and private persons (audience member). It is important to clarify that journalists/moderators are not in all cases directly responsible for producing HDD, but they do spread it and make it visible, by not challenging it. By “just quoting what was said” and making it a headline despite the hate it contains, journalists are contributing to the spread of HDD.

Different HDD are spread in different platforms or media outlets; nevertheless, what is broadcasted on TV is also published in newspapers, online info portals and social media.

# Country action against hate speech

Nationwide, actions taken against hate speech are not prevalent nor sustainable. However, there are some initiatives undertaken by different stakeholders, including public institutions, media authorities, media organisations and civil society organisations.

On a more positive note, the 2023 has seen the rise of the role of Regulatory bodies in preventing sexism in the audiovisual media. Both AMA and the Commissioner Against Discrimination have been more active this year compared with previous years.

For AMA, this is mainly due to the change of the legislation namely the Law on Audiovisual Media on 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2023 with the introduction of a definition of sexism and the sanctions for operators that violated it. The amendment on sexism was the result of a yearlong process initiated by the Albanian Woman in Audiovisual Association in the framework of the EU harmonisation protocol that Albania is obliged to make in order to obtain EU membership.

The adoption of a new Broadcasting Code by AMA with a new chapter on Gender Equality and Sexism also helped to align the efforts with the Parliament to make it obligatory for audiovisual operators – the biggest market share of media in Albania – to adhere to. Joining forces with other CSOs in fighting sexism in the media, added to the number of complaints AMA received in 2023 on sexist language. Although in some cases, the response from AMA's Council of Ethics has not been satisfactory, i.e denying the sexist approach of the humour programmes, it is positive that in other cases the order has been to remove sexist content from the media channels.

This period has demonstrated also that although efforts to educate the public about the media and misogyny should continue, on the other hand, AMA members of Council of Ethics which has the power to interpret complaints about sexist content, need help from legal experts. Also an information campaign about the changes in the legislation should continue along with training of the media operators how to prevent and above all, challenge views that are violating the Code of Broadcasting and the Law. Also the cooperation between AMA and CSOs should be strengthened using resources at maximum and creating energies to fight HDD on a massive scale.

On the other hand, the Office of the Commissioner has consolidated its practice over the years and is increasingly referred to as a serious institution in protecting human rights. The rationale of its decisions is thorough and strictly professional, especially in the cases against sexist language being a new practice in the Albanian legislation. The Commissioner has issued 240 Decisions during 2023<sup>29</sup>. Out of these, nine cases are for hate speech and discrimination based on ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation happening in the media. The Commissioner has decided in favour of two of them finding discrimination, while the other seven have been considered non-discrimination. The subjects complaining most for HDD are from LGBTQ+ organisations, followed by Roma and Egyptian private persons or organisations.

Finally, there is increased awareness and reaction from civil society organisations regarding the use of the hate speech in the media. In two cases, Roma and Egyptian rights organisations have demanded public apologies from the largest television channels, RTSH and Top Channel. At the time of publication of this report, only RTSH had issued an apology, after a protest in front of the station's main building.

Top Channel made a gesture by excluding one of the contestants of the Big Brother reality show after she used a derogatory term for Roma and Egyptian Communities. Also AWA- Albanian Woman in Audiovisual has been very active in reporting sexist language in the audiovisual media after the amendment of the law. Out of three complaints that AWA has made for year 2023, two of them have been successful, while AMA has agreed to accept legal advice for the third issue.

29. <https://www.kmd.al/vendime-te-komisionerit-2023/>

# Conclusion

The focus of the monitoring for this report were incidents that contained HDD related to gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual minorities, migrants/refugees, etc. The incidents have occurred in traditional media and newer forms of media, including social.

The three most prevalent categories that were subject to hate speech and discriminatory discourse were gender (41%), ethnicity (38%), and sexual minorities (11%).

A sentiment analysis with a level 3 mean score indicates a medium level of intensity in hateful and discriminative discourse in Albania's information environment, with a rhetoric characterised by offensive narratives, insults, and non-violent speech. However, that does not diminish the negative impact that these divisive narratives have on their respective targets and on society in its entirety.

Women continue to be the main target of HDD in Albania, with a concerning escalation on reporting violence against women, especially rape crimes. Media has been giving a platform to victim-blaming theories by public figures such as lawyers, without challenging them or hiding behind them to attract more clicks on their social media pages. In these cases, the reaction from the public has been defensive towards women being judged for their actions and offensive towards men and women who justified rape crimes or committed sexual abuse. Therefore, we notice a more emancipated level of the public regarding the spread of these HDD by or through the media.

HDD against ethnicity is reaching a new peak towards migrants coming to Albania as part of inter-state agreements using arguments and language reflecting a right-wing extremist vocabulary, which is not natural for Albania, a country with a rich and sad story of emigration itself. Likewise, HDD against the LGBTQ+ community is ever-present, especially in online media.

The amendment of the Law on Audiovisual Media on April 2023 introducing a specific article regarding sexism and the new Broadcasting Code for audiovisual media is expected to contribute to the decrease of HDD on women at least. Nevertheless, the work for raising awareness about HDD among the public and the media should continue in close collaboration with institutions and civil society.



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## MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN ALBANIA

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Norway