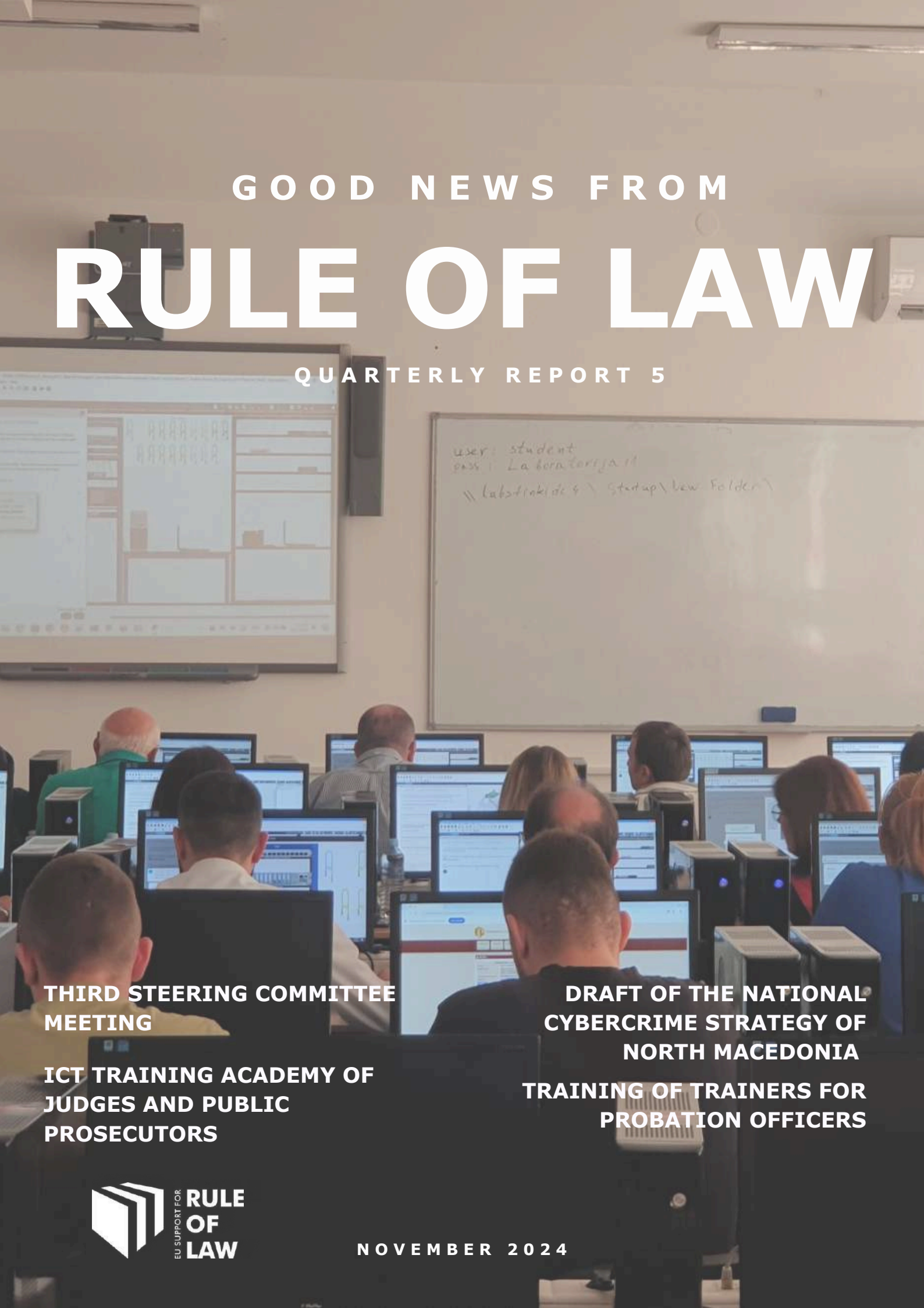


GOOD NEWS FROM

RULE OF LAW

QUARTERLY REPORT 5

THIRD STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

ICT TRAINING ACADEMY OF JUDGES AND PUBLIC PROSECUTORS

DRAFT OF THE NATIONAL CYBERCRIME STRATEGY OF NORTH MACEDONIA

TRAINING OF TRAINERS FOR PROBATION OFFICERS

EU SUPPORT FOR RULE OF LAW

NOVEMBER 2024

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FOREWORD



Dieter SCHINDLAUER

Team Leader, Eu Support for Rule of Law

"We use this publication to keep up a good spirit and uphold an ethic of belief in the good reason for change, reform, and a continuous improvement process. To do so, we will show steps forward and celebrate them so that they are not lost in the much more dominant noise of disheartening news."

Dear reader,

For our fifth quarterly report we again collected good news for you from all aspects of the rule of law our project is dealing with.
In this edition, the internet – with all its positive opportunities but also its dangers - plays a major role. You will witness the evolution of the first draft National Cybercrime Strategy, read about police skills being enhanced against online fraud, and IT professionals in courts and prosecution offices brushing up their knowledge on cyber hygiene, servers, and networks. These stories tell of efforts to master the real and present digital challenges through collaboration, continuous improvement and commitment to success.

Another emphasis in this report lies on training, especially on the training of trainers. You will encounter trainers from different institutions trained to hold workshops on anti-discrimination and equality and see their commitment to use their skills on a variety of target groups while probation officers were trained to enhance the onboarding of their new colleagues and support their peer-to-peer learning effectively.

FOREWORD

On our own behalf, we report about our third Steering Committee Meeting where the strong display of commitment of our Macedonian partners to collaboration and their high expectations towards the project were once more confirmed. Last but not least, you find an interview with our Component Leader Barbara Liegl in our “Meet the Team” chapter, where she gives insights into the work on human rights protection, prevention of infringements, and practical experiences.

Enjoy the good news!



Dieter Schindlauer
Team Leader

MAY WE PRESENT:

THIRD STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

Our project held its third Steering Committee Meeting: Strengthening rule of law through close cooperation on October 17, 2024. The meeting focused on presenting results from February to August 2024 and the planned next steps.

DRAFT OF THE NATIONAL CYBERCRIME STRATEGY OF NORTH MACEDONIA

The presentation of the first Draft National Cybercrime Strategy and Action Plan of North Macedonia after 30 years. This event represented a significant step forward in the nation's efforts to address cybercrime.

TRAINING OF TRAINERS FOR PROBATION OFFICERS

The training of trainers "Strengthening Capacities for Onboarding and Peer-to-Peer Learning" has empowered probation officers with vital new skills to enhance team cohesion and institutional cooperation.

Let's talk about...

- Third Steering Committee Meeting: Strengthening Rule of Law Through Close Cooperation
- Networking Training for IT professionals at courts and prosecution offices
- Inter-institutional expert working group meeting on awarding damages by CPPD
- The first draft of the National Cybercrime Strategy of North Macedonia developed after 30 years
- Training empowers police officers to combat online fraud with advanced skills and collaborative strategies
- Techniques of peer-to-peer learning and mentoring as motivation for achieving a high level of professionalism within the probation service
- Training of Trainers Program on Anti-Discrimination and Equality

Third Steering Committee Meeting: Strengthening Rule of Law Through Close Cooperation

The EU Support for Rule of Law Project held its **third Steering Committee Meeting** on October 17, 2024, at the premises of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC). The meeting focused on presenting results from February to August 2024 and the planned next steps.

Tatjana Dimitrovska, President of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, welcomed the participants, expressing her pleasure in hosting the meeting as one of the project's beneficiaries. She emphasized her commitment to continued cooperation and collaboration with the project.

Dieter Schindlauer, Team Leader of the Project, moderated the meeting and emphasized that the project aims to produce resonance in the supported institutions and should be stronger and more efficient through the support.

Agnes Taibl, Project Director from the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Fundamental and Human Rights, congratulated everyone on the project's achievements, expressing gratitude for the continuous support and collaboration. She emphasized the importance of close cooperation in achieving joint results, highlighting key milestones such as the adoption of national action plans, implementation of the recommendations from the EU peer review mission, the National Action Plan for Children's Rights, and the development of a human resources system for SCPC. She noted that these successes were made possible by the expertise of both international and national experts and the continued dedication of all consortium partners.



Marzia Palotta, representative of the Delegation of the European Union (DEU), reiterated the significance of joint efforts and the important role they play in the successful implementation of the project and reforms related to the rule of law in North Macedonia.

Component leaders presented highlights of their results, detailing how the project supported the implementation of EU Peer Review Recommendations by enhancing Judicial Council regulations, preparing reports for public prosecutors, and facilitating IT system preparations under IPA III. Over 40 hours of IT training were conducted, and assistance was provided to the Ministry of Justice in managing the Judicial Strategy 2024-2028.



Key capacity-building initiatives included workshops on Darknet, financial investigations, anti-corruption, and specialized police training. The project also completed analyses on terrorism and national strategies for organized crime and cybercrime, fostering collaboration with other donor-supported initiatives. Additionally, it reviewed SCPC procedures, developed HR and User Access policies, conducted the first IACA course on Organizational Wrongdoings, and hosted communication training for independent institutions.

Awareness campaigns reached over 13,000 professionals and the public, and strategic documents for children's rights and Roma women and girls were developed.

Representatives from partner institutions of the Republic of North Macedonia expressed their appreciation for the project's assistance and its valuable contributions to the rule of law field.

The meeting, attended by 37 representatives from the EU delegation, consortium partners, beneficiary institutions, and experts, underscored the collaborative effort toward fostering a more just and transparent society in North Macedonia.





Capturing Success:

A Visual Celebration











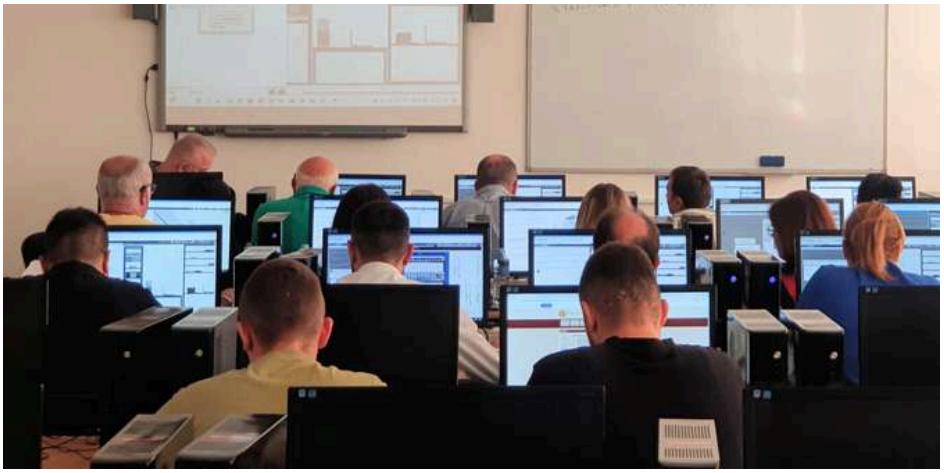
Networking Training for IT professionals at courts and prosecution offices

The IT experts from the project have explored means and ways to help improve the efficiency of Public Prosecution Offices (PPOs) and Courts in the Republic of North Macedonia. Within their area of expertise, they proposed multiple activities at their meetings with representatives of IT personnel at Courts and PPOs. During these meetings, it became evident that IT professionals were not provided with sufficient opportunities to further develop their professional skills. Project IT experts proposed to organize multiple trainings in collaboration with the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors (Academy).

Out of the multiple proposed trainings, the following were found as **most important and useful for IT personnel** at Courts and PPOs:

- Cyber Hygiene Awareness Training
- Basic Networking Training
- Basic Virtualisation Training
- Windows Server Training

The first of the proposed trainings (Cyber Hygiene Awareness) was delivered at the Academy in four one-day workshops, with the active participation of fifty-six IT professionals from courts and prosecution offices. These workshops were held at the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024.



The second round of trainings (Basic Networking Training) is taking place at the Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering, due to the requirement of a computer laboratory. The organisational activities for the trainings were split between the Academy and the Project.

In September and October 2024, the first group of trainees went through the forty-hour training, split in ten days. The first group of fourteen trainees was comprised of IT professionals from basic, appellation and supreme courts, as well as IT personnel from prosecution offices in Skopje and Bitola. All participants took an active part during the training sessions and at the end of the training, all of them showed great appreciation of the organisation of the training. They also showed great interest in further participation in other proposed trainings.



During the training, it became clear that the decision to include a mix of IT personnel from different courts and prosecution offices is beneficial for their mutual understanding. They started exploring means of further cooperation and increasing the efficiency of the interactions between courts and prosecution offices. Some of the possibilities were already taken into consideration, and further activities toward achieving better interaction were instigated before the end of the training.

Inter-institutional expert working group meeting on awarding damages by CPPD

On the 26th of September 2024, an Inter-institutional expert working group meeting was convened at the Commission for Prevention and Protection of Discrimination. This unprecedented gathered together judges from civil courts and those handling misdemeanour cases, practising lawyers, national and international experts in discrimination and compensation, and CSO representatives offering free legal aid in discrimination cases.

This meeting aimed to explore the possibilities of using the existing legal avenues to award damages to victims who claimed protection before the CPPD. The insights shared, particularly from a judicial perspective, were crucial and ensured that the discussion was grounded in practical realities and informed by the practice of filing and handling discrimination cases.



During the discussion, the participants acknowledged the growing acceptance of equality bodies' competencies in Europe to prescribe fines and the lack of acceptance of competencies for awarding compensation. However, the CPPD practice pointed out cases where the victims' compensation is the only remedy that will address the situation. The participants agreed that the existing mandate of the CPPD, particularly given the advisory nature of its opinions, extends the possibility of reframing the recommendations in their opinion and providing a pathway to justice for the victims of discrimination who claim protection before the equality body.

Part of the meeting was dedicated to alternative forms of conflict resolution and ways in which the equality body can engage in that respect. The experts provided examples from cases that have resulted in alternative conflict resolution. However, the participants agreed that the parties to the case should be fully and well educated on the implications of choosing mediation.

Since there is no clear legal provision in the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination that grants CPPD the authority to award damages and engage in mediation, the participants unanimously agreed on the need for CPPD to exercise caution in the wording of its recommendations. **They recognized the importance of aligning these recommendations with the national context and ensuring their practical implementation.**

The initiative to initiate a dialogue on awarding damages and enhancing discrimination protection was met with approval from all participants. Their expressed willingness to continue these discussions underscores their commitment to the cause.

Based on the event's conclusions, an international expert will support the CPPD in developing internal guidelines that will enhance protection against discrimination by developing appropriate recommendations that address the specific problem of each case.



The first draft of the National Cybercrime Strategy of North Macedonia developed after 30 years

The presentation of the Draft National Cybercrime Strategy and Action Plan took place on Wednesday, 11 September 2024, bringing together key stakeholders, legal experts, and government representatives. This event represented a significant step forward in the nation's efforts to address cybercrime.

The event featured insightful presentations by the Croatian experts Mr Predrag Pale and Mr Renato Grguric, who shared their knowledge and perspectives on the draft strategy and action plan. The strategy is centred around several key goals, including establishing an effective criminal justice framework, improving situational awareness, and building capabilities for early detection, prevention, and quick response to cybercrime. Additionally, the strategy emphasises the importance of developing human resources and increasing public awareness and resilience against cyber threats.



Participants engaged in interactive discussions, offering valuable insights and feedback that contributed to further refining the action plan. The detailed steps for implementing the strategy were presented, outlining strong measures to be taken in the coming years to strengthen national cybersecurity efforts.

In his address, **Mr Aleksandar Janev,** the Director General of the Police, expressed his gratitude for the support provided by the European Union and Project – Component 2 in enhancing the capacities of the bureau and the Ministry of Interior.

He highlighted that, after 30 years, this initiative represents the first comprehensive effort to develop a national strategy for combating cybercrime. “This event marks a significant step in our joint efforts to establish the first National Cybercrime Strategy and Action Plan, which will serve as a roadmap for strengthening our country's resilience against this ever-evolving threat,” Janev stated.

The discussions during the event proved productive, leading to further development of the draft action plan, and setting the stage for the implementation of a strong national framework to address the growing challenges of cybercrime.







Capturing Success:

A Visual Celebration







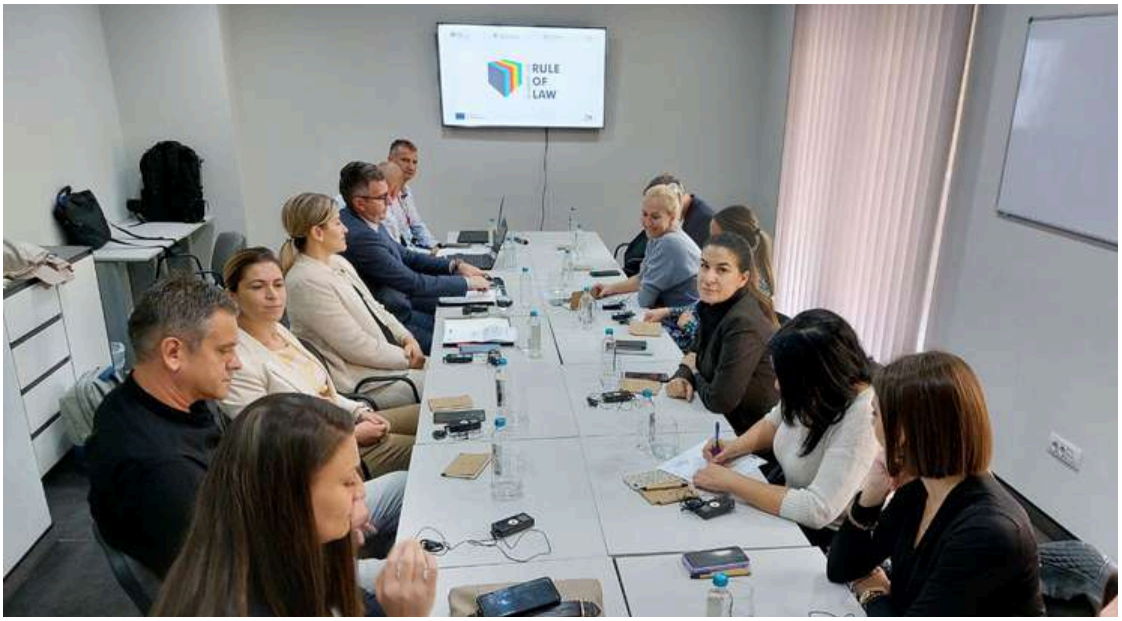




Training empowers police officers to combat online fraud with advanced skills and collaborative strategies

On October 3, 2024, at Hotel Alexandar Square in Skopje, police officers gathered for a training session titled "Combating Online Fraud: Understanding Schemes, Investigative Techniques, and Collaboration Strategies." Led by experts David Gracer, a member of EMPACT OFS, and Boštjan Rozman, both Senior Criminal Inspector Specialists from the Slovenian Police, this training addressed the critical issue of online fraud—a growing threat in today's digital world.

Participants explored a range of fraudulent tactics, including investment scams, CEO fraud, business email compromise, romance scams, fake technical support schemes, and phishing. By understanding how these complex schemes operate and evolve, officers are better equipped to identify and counteract these cybercrimes effectively. The training emphasized modern investigative tactics, allowing participants to engage in hands-on exercises that reflect real-world scenarios and enhance their ability to track criminals who operate in the shadows of the internet.



Officers practised advanced techniques for uncovering digital trails that fraudsters use to mask their identities, enhancing the effectiveness of their investigations. Collecting and preserving electronic evidence was another critical focus, as officers learned to identify and secure digital proof essential for building cases against cybercriminals.

Additionally, they explored methods for tracing illicit financial activities across borders, from spotting money mule networks to following suspicious transactions and unraveling the financial infrastructure that supports online fraud. Collaboration was a central theme, with trainers emphasizing the importance of partnerships between law enforcement, financial institutions, and private sector entities to disrupt cybercrime networks. This training not only equipped officers with the skills needed to combat online fraud but also reinforced the value of cross-sector cooperation to protect victims and communities. In an era where cybercrime continues to evolve, specialised training sessions like this are essential for strengthening law enforcement capabilities and ensuring a safer digital environment for all.



Techniques of peer-to-peer learning and mentoring as motivation for achieving a high level of professionalism within the probation service

The training of trainers “Strengthening Capacities for Onboarding and Peer-to-Peer Learning” has empowered probation officers with vital new skills to enhance team cohesion and institutional cooperation. By introducing techniques in adult education and mentoring, participants experienced ways of tailoring the onboarding process to new staff members’ needs, marking a shift in the probation service's approach to professional development.

The international short-term experts on probation from Croatia shared first-hand experiences from their probation service, providing practical insights into peer-to-peer learning, mentoring, and establishing a positive organizational culture. Participants actively engaged in group discussions and exercises, with many expressing the intent to implement the newly acquired strategies in their work.

The training focused on core areas such as effective feedback, goal-setting, and empathy, equipping probation officers to better support colleagues and improve workplace dynamics.



The international experts shared knowledge on creating individualized treatment programs for offenders and structuring case management, which inspired the participants to move away from team-based case work toward more individualized approaches.

The probation officers were particularly interested in the Croatian model’s emphasis on regular communication, flexible hierarchical structures, and two-way information exchange, sparking ideas on how to improve their own service operations.

They saw the need to introduce ways to deliver information to colleagues in a more easily accessible way and to strengthen the interpersonal relations of probation officers. Participants voiced appreciation for the trainers' expertise, describing the sessions as not only educational but also motivational.

Vesna Zelić Ferenčić, one of the trainers and head of service for the development of the probation system at the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation of the Republic of Croatia, sees capacity building as a reciprocal process:



> „Education is always a learning opportunity not only for the participants but also for the trainers. The trainers in each educational group do the best they can and try to establish a positive working and educational atmosphere, but that click, the magic between the trainers and the group that happened during this training, is a rare phenomenon. It is an honour and an inspiration to participate in this kind of training with professional and motivated probation officers whose modesty and desire to learn pushes us to be better trainers."

Interactive sessions allowed probation officers to reflect on the organizational culture of the probation service in North Macedonia, identifying areas for improvement and proposing ideas, such as appointing probation office heads to strengthen leadership. Hands-on exercises underscored the importance of adaptable onboarding methods, and the participants eagerly embraced new mentoring concepts as part of their future practices. Feedback questionnaires revealed high satisfaction with the training format and content, especially the open atmosphere and practical guidance from trainers.Inspired by these new tools, probation officers left the training committed to fostering supportive, efficient team environments and incorporating structured, individualized support for new staff.



Training of Trainers Program on Anti-Discrimination and Equality

On October 4, 2024, the final day of the 12-day Training of Trainers (ToT) program on “The Art of Training and Participatory Facilitation for the Prevention of Discrimination and Promotion of Equality,” marked a milestone for 18 trainers from three key institutions – the CPPD, the Ombudsman Office, and the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth.

Hosted by a dedicated team of legal experts and participatory facilitators of Component 4, the training provided participants with essential knowledge, materials, and skills to raise awareness, foster allyship, and champion equality among a wide range of target groups.

The ToT program adhered to human rights education standards, with a strong emphasis on experiential and participatory learning to maximize engagement, reflexivity, and commitment.





The ToT group completed the program well-prepared and highly motivated to implement future trainings in a more engaging manner than before. Their next step will be to apply their skillset with diverse audiences – ranging from state officials and legal practitioners to educators and police officers.

> "I will deliver an event using the exercises and tasks from the training of trainers!"
>
> "I appreciated the interactive exercises, the trainers' approach, and the environment of mutual respect, trust, and creativity that was created."

The trainers reported significant professional and personal growth, largely due to the thoughtfully conceptualized and interactive approach of the program. With access to a comprehensive online library of materials, they can easily refer to resources and methods as they design sessions for diverse groups.

Reflecting on the feedback received, participants expressed appreciation for the program's focus on both the legal dimensions of anti-discrimination and the introspective work of examining personal biases and attitudes. Igniting discussions on anti-discrimination, equality, and human rights through experiential and participatory learning methods was the most beneficial experience for the group, as their feedback reveals:

> "I take with me a wide range of activities, materials, and methods for an interactive approach that encourages participant engagement and inclusion."
>
> "I especially liked the well-structured activities with a clear aim and purpose, whether for raising awareness on a topic or strengthening techniques and skills for countering prejudice and hate speech."



LIEGL Barbara

INTERVIEW

MEET THE TEAM

COMPONENT LEADER

THE RULE OF LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS ARE INSEPARABLY INTERLINKED

Meet the team: The interview session is designed to introduce and familiarise you with the team members of the "EU Support for Rule of Law" project.

Ms. Barbara Liegl, Component Leader for Component 4, is a long-standing expert in anti-discrimination, diversity, and human rights. With a background in political science and English from the University of Vienna, and advanced studies from the Institute of Advanced Studies, Vienna. She previously headed key programs on asylum, migration, and non-discrimination at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Fundamental and Human Rights. She was executive director of the Vienna-based NGO ZARA – Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit, which combats racism and online hate. Barbara has supported equality and minority rights initiatives in Croatia and Serbia and has led diverse teams on numerous EU-funded projects, collaborating with public institutions and stakeholders to advance equality and the rule of law.

As the leader of Component 4 focusing on the protection of fundamental rights and strengthen the uptake of alternative means to detention in North Macedonia, how do you define the rule of law?

The rule of law and human rights are inseparably interlinked. The rule of law makes possible the enforcement of freedoms and rights established within the human rights regime. Without rule of law, human rights could be violated without any consequences, and without human rights, laws could be discriminatory. Human rights guarantee certain standards and qualities to be taken into account by the legislative power. Laws that prohibit discrimination based, e.g., on gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, race, disability, age, or social status do not only protect human rights, but they are also a commitment to apply the rule of law principles. These laws guarantee that individuals from diverse backgrounds and in different vulnerable situations can exercise their right to equal treatment in areas like employment, housing or education. Human rights ensure that differences are respected and protected by the legal system, they promote inclusivity and support measures accommodating differences.

The principles of the rule of law support the enforcement of these rights: people affected by human rights violations can gain access to justice (e.g., by way of an ombuds institution, an equality body or a court) and effective remedies. Their situation can be rectified and similar future violations can be prevented.

In leading Component 4 of this project, what challenges or victories have you encountered that altered your approach to supporting fundamental rights?

At the core of human rights protection is the dignity of human beings. In North Macedonia institutions, communities and citizens are on a "learning journey" concerning "human rights", as a participant in the first Human Rights Forum (21.03.2024) put it, "human rights are still a novel topic; some learn faster than others". Project activities have pointed us to the lack of awareness for protecting the dignity of children, e.g., a 13-year-old Roma girl deprived of her right to quality education and health due to not being registered or a boy in elementary school who is bullied by his peers, gets no support from institutions who have the duty of care and therefore has to experience re-victimization. A member of my great team of experts supported the children and their families in submitting complaints to all relevant institutions – like the Ombudsman, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, the Ministry of Education and Science and the State Educational Inspectorate. It is very encouraging to see that when these institutions conduct inspections the respective public authorities start taking action including holding meetings and workshops with the children, parents, and teachers to stop the bullying.



Component 4 launched the annual Human Rights Forum, an event set to happen each year. How does this forum contribute to advancing anti-discrimination and strengthening human rights in North Macedonia?

No matter whether you are a student, a person working for a CSO, a public official, a police officer or a member of parliament, everybody has the potential to become a defender of human rights. The Human Rights Forum makes representatives of public institutions aware of their duties as well as their potential for protecting and promoting human rights. The forum provides an informal space for identifying challenges faced in protecting human rights and good practice examples of how human rights protection is already functioning. The participants from different institutions can exchange their experiences, learn from each other and develop a culture of cooperation, which fosters a strategic and strengthened approach to establishing more effective policies and measures for not only protecting citizens against discrimination and other kinds of human rights violations but also for prevention. Preventive measures preserve human dignity, reduce exposure to harm and send a strong message of holding perpetrators accountable.

The Human Rights Forum is using the World Café method—why is this approach important for fostering dialogue on human rights? What unique value does it bring to discussions in this field?

The first Human Rights Forum focused on identifying challenges and good practices within the human rights protection system and developing recommendations on how the human rights protection system can be strengthened. The World Café is a participatory method, which facilitates dynamic exchanges among the attending stakeholders, who share their invaluable insights and show their strong willingness to collaborate with the aim of shaping the outcomes of the event. Participants are invited to document insights, ideas or other results from their conversations, which supports harvesting conversations that matter. The method guarantees that participants share their ideas and are heard and taken seriously to develop the human rights protection system in North Macedonia further.

How has your collaboration in the field of probation shaped the approach to implementing alternative sanctions in North Macedonia? What changes have you seen as a result of this ongoing work?

Experts from the probation system of the Republic of Croatia, judges from Skopje and the director of the DES shared many practical examples and showed enthusiasm about the benefits of and the results to be achieved by alternative measures. The brochure “Probation – Powerful tool in the criminal-legal system” were disseminated at the round tables. The DES witnessed a positive impact of the round tables: The probation office in Bitola for the first time received requests from the court for the preparation of two risk assessments of the accused persons during court proceedings. Overall, the number of probation cases showed a slight increase of two per cent (474 in 2022 to 483 in 2023).

As human rights are a cross-cutting issue in this project, how do you coordinate this with the other Components?

Human rights and the prevention of corruption are interconnected, as corruption undermines mechanisms protecting (human) rights and can exacerbate inequalities and abuses. Together with Component 3, we offer communication trainings to representatives of independent institutions like the CPPD, OO, State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), and Agency for the Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information (ASPI), which allows them to get to know each other, collaborate and develop common strategies helpful in their everyday professional duties. Experts of our component commented on the National Cyber-crime Strategy and Action Plan developed by Component 2. We suggested expanding the list of forms of violence that can occur online (e.g., gender-based violence) as well as including measures on education and prevention of all forms of violence that can happen online targeting children. This form of violence can negatively impact mental health, normalize discrimination and exclusion, and incite physical violence against people in vulnerable situations.



NOVEMBER 2024 - FEBRUARY 2025

CALENDAR
UPCOMING EVENTS

15 NOV

Round table for discussion of the proposed amendments and additions to the Law on Judicial Council

Component 1

12 NOV **14 NOV**

Study Visit - Slovenia
Undercover Operations and Crime Intelligence and Analysis development

Component 2

19 NOV **20 NOV**

Judicial Conference:
Enhancing Judicial Accountability, Independence and Public Trust

Component 1

04 DEC

Human Rights Forum

Component 4

08 NOV

Anti-corruption Afterwork

Component 3





Capturing Success:

A Visual Celebration









IMPRINT

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