EU SUPPORT FOR RULE OF LAW

GOOD NEWS FROM

RULE OF LAW

QUARTERLY REPORT 6



"PEER VIOLENCE IS NOT OK – IT'S TIME TO MAKE SOCIETY AWARE!"

STUDY VISIT TO SLOVENIA

ENSURING AN INCLUSIVE AND TRANSPARENT PROCESS FOR AMENDING THE LAW ON JUDICIAL COUNCIL

FORUM OF IMPULSES: NETWORKING FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

FEBRUARY 2025

DISCLAIMER:
THIS REPORT WAS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION. ITS CONTENTS ARE THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF LUDWIG BOLTZMANN GESELLSCHAFT - INSTITUTE OF FUNDAMENTAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS (LBI-GMR) AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION.



Funded by
the European Union



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,

In our sixth quarterly report, we can again bring you a range of good news from across the many aspects of the rule of law.
You find continuous efforts to enhance the justice system in a transparent and participatory manner, see how the fight against organised crime and corruption continues with a lot of challenges for the law enforcement agencies who strive to improve and adapt to these constantly.

For this edition, I want to particularly put your attention to the issues of child rights and the campaign against bullying in school. You will find a report about the latest fine-tuning steps on the way to a new National Action Plan for Children's Rights in this edition. Once implemented, this will be another milestone for children in North Macedonia. One of the principles of children's rights is that, besides being protected, children also need to be heard, and their perspectives and expertise need to be integrated in all issues concerning them. The project involved children in the process of developing the new action plan and some children also became our allies when we launched a campaign against the widespread phenomenon of bullying and violence in school.

FOREWORD

The video with the main message of “it is time to act against peer violence” was spread through TV and social media in December 2024. In this edition, you can meet Dragana, Nikola, Jana and Ivan, students at high school “Nikola Karev” who were involved in our campaign and featured in the respective video. After the campaign, our editor and visibility officer Kristina Vesikj met them at their school and interviewed them about the campaign, their experiences and solutions regarding peer violence and bullying. I believe their answers are remarkable, as they show great awareness, and a sense of wisdom too rarely associated with young age in our societies. In their own words, they explain why prevention is so important, why social media can become a dangerous place and why showing solidarity with victims is needed. Maybe their most striking conclusion is that bullying is too often perceived as normal among both children and adults. They advocate for a clear message to be spread: “No! Bullying is not normal. It is a serious issue that leaves a mark. We need to stand up against it.” I could not agree more. Reading the words of these dedicated, sensible, and strong young Macedonians lifted my spirits and hopes and I hope it does the same to you. We can only thank them wholeheartedly for their cooperation and commitment.

Furthermore, in this report, you will find stories about our interactive Human Rights Forum, Forum of Impulses, and a group interview with many of our project experts from Component One, who support the judiciary system and give insights on their roles, team spirit, and successes.

I hope you will have a good time and gain useful insights from the report.



Dieter Schindlauer
Team Leader

MAY WE PRESENT:

“BREAK THE CYCLE OF PEER VIOLENCE”

In collaboration with the Ombudsman of the Republic of North Macedonia, we launched awareness-raising campaign to promote children’s rights and protect children from peer violence.

STUDY VISIT

This event highlights the important role of Slovenian experts who actively participate in the project to strengthen the rule of law in North Macedonia, with a focus on the fight against organized crime and improving the capacities of the Ministry of Interior of North Macedonia.

FORUM OF IMPULSES

The Forum of Impulses: Networking for the Independence of Human Rights Institutions brought together over 30 representatives from independent institutions, governmental bodies, civil society organizations, international projects, academia, and courts, following the theme of “having coffee with a purpose.

Let's talk about...

- Forum of Impulses: Networking for the Independence of Human Rights Institutions
- Enhancing Judicial Independence, Accountability and Public Trust in North Macedonia
- Successfully Conducted Workshop on Combating Corruption Criminal Offences
- Ensuring an inclusive and transparent process for amending the Law on Judicial Council
- Strengthening the Transparency and Accountability of the Council of Public Prosecutors
- Working visit to the Republic of Slovenia to promote cooperation and the fight against organized crime
- Developing the National Action Plan for Children's Rights in the Republic of North Macedonia (2024-2028)
- “Peer violence is not OK – it’s time to make society aware!”

Forum of Impulses: Networking for the Independence of Human Rights Institutions

On December 4, 2024, the Forum of Impulses: Networking for Independence of Human Rights Institutions" took place at Laboratorium. This participatory event brought together over 30 representatives from independent institutions, governmental bodies, civil society organizations, international projects, academia, and courts, following the theme of "having coffee with a purpose." Utilizing the World Café method, the forum created a dynamic space for purposeful discussions and the exchange of experiences on the multifaceted aspects of independence.



Sasa Jankovic, International Expert of the EU Support for Rule of Law Project

The forum began with insightful presentations by Tena Simonovic Einwalter, Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia, and Sasa Jankovic, International Expert of the EU Support for Rule of Law Project and former Ombudsman of the Republic of Serbia. These inputs set the stage for an engaging exploration of challenges and opportunities related to the independence of human rights institutions.

Participants rated the general independence of Macedonian human rights institutions as 2 out of 5, with 1 being "not independent" and 5 "fully independent." This assessment highlighted the importance of having an ongoing dialogue and action to strengthen institutional autonomy.

Key insights from the discussions included:

- **Integrity matters:** Every individual within a human rights institution should embody integrity. While leadership is vital, the contribution and satisfaction of all staff members are equally important.
- **Voice in society:** Human rights institutions must be vocal advocates in their communities.
- **Independence as a process:** Achieving independence is an ongoing journey rather than a fixed state. Public support is a critical safeguard for institutional independence.
- **Inclusivity builds resilience:** Internal diversity strengthens institutions against external pressures. Leaders who actively consider employees' opinions foster a culture of inclusivity that enhances resilience.

Tena Simonovic Einwalter emphasized the value of the participatory approach used during the forum: "This method is particularly effective for discussing independence. It avoids imposing external definitions and instead focuses on identifying context-specific solutions that align with international and European standards."



Tena Simonovic Einwalter, Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia

Inspired by the collaborative spirit of the event, one participant reflected, "We hold powerful positions that influence others' lives. It is our duty to set an example and work together to uphold the highest standards for human rights institutions."

This forum marked a significant step in fostering networking, shared learning, and collective action to enhance the independence and effectiveness of human rights institutions.

The project "EU Support for Rule of Law" will organize two more Human Rights Forums that will involve beneficiary human rights institutions and address the most important challenges.





Capturing Success:

A Visual Celebration











Enhancing Judicial Independence, Accountability and Public Trust in North Macedonia

In the ongoing pursuit of EU integration, strengthening North Macedonia's judiciary is paramount. To address persistent challenges to judicial independence and accountability, as highlighted in recent reports and public opinion surveys, the EU Support for Rule of Law Project, together with the CEELI Institute and the national Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, convened a judiciary conference in Skopje between 19-20 November 2024.

Hosted at the Supreme Court, the conference brought together more than 60 key judicial actors to address critical issues facing the judiciary. The opening remarks were delivered, among others, by Irina Trajkoska Strezoski, Director of the Judicial Academy, who emphasized the importance of training and capacity building, Besa Ademi, President of the Supreme Court who highlighted the need for greater transparency, and Vesna Dameva, who was then President of the Judicial Council who focused on the need for internal reforms. These set the stage for two days of impactful discussions.



Besa Ademi, President of the Supreme Court

The conference focused on strengthening accountability through various mechanisms, including disciplinary measures, ethics, and vetting processes, while prioritizing the preservation of judicial independence. A key element of the event was drawing on comparative experiences from other countries to inform a roadmap for reforms in North Macedonia.

One of the most impactful sessions, titled "Judges Defending the Rule of Law and Judicial Independence," featured speakers from Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Moldova. These judges shared firsthand accounts of the challenges faced by their respective judiciaries in upholding independence and the rule of law, discussing the negative impacts of smear campaigns, threats, attacks, frozen salaries, forced early retirements, politically motivated appointments, and disciplinary proceedings. The judges stressed the importance of unity, solidarity, and public engagement in countering these challenges.

The conference served as a platform for dialogue and exchange, promoting a deeper understanding of the challenges and potential solutions for enhancing judicial accountability, independence, and public trust in North Macedonia. The active participation of judges and experts from across Europe, highlighted a strong commitment to supporting North Macedonia's progress towards a more vigorous and trustworthy judicial system. Moving forward, the insights and connections fostered during this event will be crucial for driving meaningful and sustainable reforms in the national judiciary.



Successfully Conducted Workshop on Combating Corruption Criminal Offences

The workshop "Guidelines and Instructions for Effective Detection and Investigation of Corruption Criminal Offences," held on December 10, 2024, brought together law enforcement officials to enhance strategies for tackling corruption. It provided a platform for exchanging knowledge, identifying practical solutions, and strengthening inter-agency collaboration. The workshop aimed to equip participants with tools to improve investigative processes and address corruption-related challenges effectively.

Comprehensive guidelines were presented to enhance the detection and investigation of corruption offences, along with a detailed implementation plan and strategies for monitoring their execution. Participants shared best practices, engaged in open discussions, and reviewed practical case studies to understand the complexities of corruption cases better.



Workshop on Combating Corruption Criminal Offences

Experts Mojca Kuzmicki, MSc, and David Smolej, PhD, shared their expertise, offering innovative methodologies and critical insights into successful corruption investigations. Their presentations underscored the importance of a coordinated approach to tackling corruption.

The workshop empowered attendees with actionable knowledge, reinforcing the importance of inter-agency collaboration and a proactive approach. This event marked a significant step in building a stronger foundation for justice and transparency, contributing to the ongoing efforts to create a corruption-free society.



Project experts from the EU Support for Rule of Law Project, David Smolej, PhD and Mojca Kuzmicki, MSc, and Robert Splajt, Component Leader


онија
вда
nia
e

Ensuring an inclusive and transparent process for amending the Law on Judicial Council

In November and December 2024, the EU Support to the Rule of Law project supported the Ministry of Justice in organising a series of public consultations for the improvement of the Law on Judicial Council. The purpose of these consultations was to ensure that the voices of judges and experts regarding the draft amendments to the Law on Judicial Council were heard and reflected in the final version of the amendments. An inclusive and transparent process is a key precondition for better legislation.

The Ministry of Justice began the process of amending on the Law on Judicial Council in order to address the recommendations of the Peer Review Mission on the functioning of the Judicial Council. Experts hired by the European Union identified systemic weaknesses in the legislative framework regulating the Judicial Council.



Public consultations for the improvement of the Law on Judicial Council

The Ministry of Justice established a working group that prepared draft amendments which were shared and discussed at the events. The consultations were held in the form of roundtable discussions, where each participant had the opportunity to contribute and provide input. Five roundtables were organised, two in Skopje and one in Bitola, Gostivar and Shtip. Over 100 judges from all levels of courts, and each appellate region, along with renowned legal experts actively contributed to the consultations.

Among the key topics that were discussed were: the criteria and procedure for electing members of the Judicial Council, the status and accountability of the members, the transparency of the Council and the disciplinary proceedings against judges. The attendees at the roundtables provided useful and constructive recommendations that are summarized in a comprehensive report prepared by the project experts. This report will be presented to the Ministry of Justice for future consideration.



The EU Support to the Rule of Law project encourages the Ministry of Justice to carefully consider the comments and recommendations provided by judges and experts. The project will continue to support the law-making process to ensure that the final version of the Law on Judicial Council addresses the Recommendation of the Peer Review Mission and aligns with international and European standards.

Strengthening the Transparency and Accountability of the Council of Public Prosecutors

Transparency and accountability are achieved by unhindered access to public information. By regularly informing the public on how procedures are implemented and how decisions are made, the Council of Public Prosecutors plays a key role in influencing public opinion and gaining citizens` trust in the institution.

Taking these important principles into account, the project supported an international expert mission to assess the legal framework and current practices of the Council of Public Prosecutors, with the aim to improve transparency and accountability in line with EU standards.

An international expert (a public prosecutor with extensive experience) drafted a report with an assessment of the current practices of the Council, based on meetings and interviews held with representatives from the Council of Public Prosecutors, the Public Prosecution Office, members of the Association of Public Prosecutors, media, and civil society.

The report, which offers conclusions and specific recommendations on how to improve the situation, was presented to the members of the Council of Public Prosecutors at a roundtable led by an international expert. The discussion focused on ways to strengthen transparency and accountability in the Council's operations.

The Council members welcomed the findings of the expert mission, and eagerly agreed to initiate a process of implementing the recommendations into by-laws and applying them to the Council's day-to-day work. This is a significant improvement, as transparency and accountability are essential pillars for building trust in the public prosecution system.



Roundtable with the members of the Council of Public Prosecutors

Working visit to the Republic of Slovenia to promote cooperation and the fight against organized crime

The delegation of the Republic of North Macedonia, led by the Director of the Public Security Bureau, Mr Aleksandar Janev, carried out the first working visit to the Republic of Slovenia on November 13, 2024, organized within the project "EU Support for the Rule of Law." This event highlights the important role of Slovenian experts who actively participate in the project to strengthen the rule of law in North Macedonia, with a focus on the fight against organized crime and improving the capacities of the Ministry of Interior of North Macedonia.

During the visit, Director Janev met with the Minister of Interior of the Republic of Slovenia, Mr Boštar Pokljuka, and with the General Director of the Slovenian Police, Mr Senad Jusić, during which the support of the Republic of Slovenia in the process of North Macedonia's approximation to the European Union was confirmed. These meetings confirmed the cooperation within the project, including Slovenian experts who actively participated, contributing their knowledge and experience to improving processes in the country, especially in the police and criminal intelligence areas.



Director of the Public Security Bureau of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr Aleksandar Janev and Minister of Interior of the Republic of Slovenia, Mr Boštar Pokljuka

As part of the visit, a workshop was organized by the Slovenian Ministry of the Interior, where participants were introduced to advanced practices in covert operations and criminal intelligence. The workshop enabled the exchange of good practices and the promotion of inter-institutional cooperation, which positively influenced the structural changes in the Ministry of the Interior of North Macedonia.

The project plays an important role in these efforts, creating platforms for the exchange of knowledge and resources. Our continued contribution confirms our commitment to building a police force with high integrity and professionalism and adapting to European values.


REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR
POLICE
REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA
MINISTRSTVO ZA NOTRANJE ZADEVE
POLICIJA

Developing the National Action Plan for Children's Rights in the Republic of North Macedonia (2024-2028)

Children are the heart of every society, representing its potential and the path to a more promising future. Addressing their different needs, vulnerabilities, and rights is paramount for fostering a just and inclusive society. A National Action Plan (NAP) for Children's Rights serves as a structured framework and tool for ensuring the comprehensive protection, promotion, and realization of these rights.

The EU Support for Rule of Law project has actively supported the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography, and Youth in formulating the National Action Plan for Children's Rights (2024-2028). This plan was developed through a comprehensive and inclusive process bringing together diverse stakeholders from various institutions and ensuring the active involvement of children.

INCLUSIVE AND COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The NAP was crafted by a multidisciplinary working group with representatives from:

- **Government Ministries:** Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth; Ministry of Education and Science; Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Internal Affairs; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade.
- **Government Entities:** General Secretariat of the Government, Institute for Social Activities, and State Statistical Office.
- **Independent Bodies:** Ombudsman, UNICEF, and civil society organizations (CSOs).

A hallmark of this process was the active involvement of children, making their voices a vital part of shaping the policies that affect their lives.

STRATEGIC VISION AND GOALS

The primary objective of the NAP is to enhance children's living conditions, ensuring they grow up in a safe, secure, and nurturing environment. The plan aims to harmonize national policies with key international frameworks, including:

- **The European Child Guarantee**
- Recommendations from the **Committee on the Rights of the Child**
- The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

This alignment integrates the NAP into the broader **National Development Strategy 2024-2044**, reinforcing its coherence and long-term impact.



Keti Jandrijeska Jovanova, Project expert EU Support for Rule of Law

PRIORITY AREAS OF ACTION

Through comprehensive consultations with state institutions, civil society organizations, and children, the NAP identifies eight priority areas for advancing children's rights:

1. Addressing **child poverty**
2. Promoting **civil rights and freedoms**
3. Combating **violence against children**
4. Ensuring a supportive **family environment and alternative care**
5. Enhancing support **for children with disabilities**
6. Improving **healthcare access and outcomes**
7. Strengthening **education systems**
8. Building state capacity for effective implementation **and monitoring of children's rights**



eti Jandrijeska Jovanova, Project expert EU Support for Rule of Law

These priorities reflect a commitment to transitioning from policy rhetoric to actionable strategies that foster the overall development, empowerment, and well-being of every child.

GOVERNANCE AND OVERSIGHT

To ensure an effective implementation, the NAP envisions the establishment of a **National Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights.** This body will coordinate and oversee the execution of the NAP and monitor adherence to the rights enshrined in the **Convention on the Rights of the Child.** Additionally, through the EU Support for Rule of Law project, an instrument for monitoring children's rights will be developed, which the Commission will use in its work.

PRESENTATION AND NEXT STEPS

The draft National Action Plan for Children's Rights (2024-2028) was officially presented in the Government Hall of the Republic of North Macedonia on November 21, 2024, during a meeting of the Sectoral Working Group on Education, Employment, and Social Policy.

The presentation targeted representatives from relevant ministries, ambassadors, social partners, civil society, and the donor community, striving for widespread support and endorsement of the NAP.
Regarding the development timeline, the last National Action Plan for Children's Rights (NAP CR) expired in 2015. Since then, children's rights have been addressed only through separate action plans on specific topics, rather than within a comprehensive NAP CR. Without the support of the Project, it is uncertain when a new NAP CR would have been developed. The final draft of the NAP CR has been shared with the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth (MSPDY), which will then submit it to the Government for adoption. The timeline for submission and adoption will be determined in discussions between the MSPDY Minister and the Government, with the NAP CR expected to be adopted within the next several months. Following its adoption, the project will support the MSPDY in implementing specific activities and developing a tool for monitoring the NAP CR.

CONCLUSION

The NAP 2024-2028 represents a transformative approach to children's rights, rooted in inclusivity, backed by evidence, and aligned with international standards. By prioritizing the well-being and empowerment of every child, the plan lays a robust foundation for a more equitable and prosperous future for all children.



EU SUPPORT FOR RULE OF LAW

Република Северна Македонија
НАРОДЕН ПРАВОБРАНИТЕЛ
Republika e Maqedonisë së Veriut
AVOKATI I POPULLIT
Republic of North Macedonia
OMBUDSMAN

ДА ГО ПРЕКИНЕМЕ КРУГОТ НА НАСИЛСТВОТО

Финансирано од Европска Унија

ЕУ со ТЕБЕ

“Peer violence is not OK – it’s time to make society aware!”

Ivan Ivanov, Dragana Janjic, Nikola Todorovski and Jana Georgievska have a clear picture of peer violence, they are aware of what is happening in their environment, in their high school “Nikola Karev”, but at the same time, they show great maturity in their thinking about solutions. What fascinated me most in talking to these young people was their willingness to take an active role in the fight against violence, whether it happens at school, in their environment or on the internet.

Talking to them was another reminder that real change starts with young people themselves – when they are encouraged to speak up, when their voices are heard and when they are provided with the support to act. The campaign “Break the Cycle of Peer Violence” in which they participated is an important step in that direction.

“We had a great time. It was very interesting and very cool,” our conversation began, and we shared impressions.

“We met peers from different schools. It was interesting to hear how they became part of the campaign and what motivated them to join,” says Jana.



Ivan Ivanov, Dragana Janjic, Jana Georgievska and Nikola Todorovski

All four of them volunteered, driven by the desire to contribute to raising awareness about peer violence.

“Honestly, the experience is really significant! And, since we participated, we are against bullying and our goal is visible, but we also had a wonderful time, I think it was a bit hot, but fun,” adds Nikola.

After the official presentation of the campaign, which took place on 19 November 2024, everyone noticed their participation. “I didn’t need to share the video. The first moment it appeared on television, my mother was watching me, my whole family and everyone who knows me in Skopje saw the video and everyone had wonderful impressions of it,” says Jana with a smile.

Speaking of parents, I was interested in how they reacted to their children's desire to be part of this campaign. That's when I heard the story of Dragana, who was once a victim of peer violence.



> “When my parents heard that I would be part of this campaign, they liked it a lot. They were glad because due to my speech impediment, I was often made fun of in elementary school. Some people who didn’t know me thought I was doing it on purpose, and that bothered me a lot. It wasn’t easy for me at all then, but my parents taught me how to fight back, how to explain to others that it was a part of me and that I couldn’t change it,” Dragana recalls.

Her honesty and the maturity with which she spoke about that experience gave me hope. If “the world is left to the young,” then we should be calm – especially if we leave it to young people who are aware of the prejudices in society and, more importantly, are prepared to fight against them.

At that moment, I got a bit curious, so I asked them: **How did you reach this point of such self-awareness about things, to understand bullying this way and to find ways to suppress it?** It all starts with home education, they were unanimous, and then school.

> "I had a situation in elementary school where I was framed for bullying. In the end, it was proven that I was not guilty, but then I realised that I could fight against it so that I would not be in a situation where I would feel uncomfortable again. But I think that anyone who has the right support at home has no problem understanding and facing even more severe forms of violence," says Nikola.



Peer violence is a common occurrence, but what surprised me in talking to these young people was not its presence – we already know that – but the fact that many of their peers do not recognise it.

"There is a lot of peer violence, but people have a hard time recognising it," says Ivan, to which Nikola adds: "Bullying happens everywhere, but it is often not seen as a problem because it is too normalised."

Jana highlights another important dimension:



> "It's not just in schools – people often don't realise the impact their words have. That's why it's important to point out to them when something is not okay.

Dragana, as part of the student community, testifies that peer violence is a constant topic in their meetings. These discussions helped her bring the campaign closer to those students who didn't understand its message.

Cyberbullying is an increasingly common form of peer violence, and I was interested in what happens after something is posted on social media. Do students stand up for the victim or do they silently watch the events unfold? "Today, that's the main source of bullying. It spreads quickly – as soon as you get to school, everyone already knows," says Ivan.

Dragana shared a distressing example: "Two years ago, we had a case where two classmates, not from our class, filmed a girl with a disability, posted the video and made fun of her. They were expelled from school, but the trauma for the girl remained. That's why we have to react before it happens."

Jana adds: "It doesn't even have to be a video – a single conversation is enough to spread so that the victim becomes isolated and helpless. The whole school will find out and you are in some way a target. In such moments, it is hard to find support."

While we were talking, I couldn't help but wonder – if these teenagers are so aware of the problem, do they have a solution?



Ivan Ivanov, Jana Georgievska, Nikola Todorovski and Dragana Janjic



> “I think that sanctions should also be introduced for hate speech. Today, anyone can write whatever they want on the Internet, without any responsibility. In some countries this is regulated, it should also be the case here ... take it more seriously,” says Ivan.

Jana agrees that this would help, especially with cyberbullying, but she believes that the long-term solution lies in raising awareness. “It’s important for the victim to know they are not alone. If one person shows awareness, it can encourage others to realise that what is happening is not okay. We need more people who are not afraid to stand up for what is right,” she adds.

The conversation was slowly coming to an end, but I wanted to hear their messages once again – what they would say to everyone who has followed the campaign, read this interview or in any way familiarized themselves with the topic.

“I think some people need to look twice at the campaign if they don’t understand it. This is a really important topic – peer violence happens too often and unfortunately; it has become normalised. It’s time to say stop and raise our awareness, not only us but the whole society,” says Jana.

Nikola adds: “Before we say or do something, we need to stop and think. To put ourselves in their shoes. If we only for a moment become aware of what they are feeling, we will take a step towards change.”

“Society must become aware. Bullying leaves a mark – not only physically, but also psychologically, and that is even more serious. We need to be careful about our actions because the consequences are permanent,” warned Ivan.

Dragana, on the other hand, sees the campaign as a mirror of the reality we live in: “Anyone who looks at it will be able to see what kind of world we live in and what kind of people we are surrounded by. It is important not to engage in toxic conversations, to stop bullying and to become aware.”

If you haven’t seen the campaign yet, these young ambassadors have already brought its essence closer to you – peer violence is a reality that we must change. Watch the campaign and remember: "LET'S BREAK THE CIRCLE OF PEER VIOLENCE!"

LINK TO THE GALLERY

LINK TO THE VIDEO







Capturing Success:

A Visual Celebration











THE EXPERTS



MEET THE TEAM

INTERVIEW

COMPONENT 1

IN THIS TEAM NO ONE IS LEFT WITHOUT SUPPORT OR GUIDANCE, TRUST IS CRUCIAL

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.

Being part of Component 1 means working within a team that strikes a perfect balance between international and national expertise, allowing for constant exchange of ideas. The experts in this Component are dedicated to strengthening the justice system in North Macedonia by enhancing its efficiency, transparency, and accountability. Through the efforts of a team of international and national experts, the goal is to build public trust and reinforce the judiciary as a foundation of a fair society.

In this edition of Meet the Team, we spoke with Slaven Lekic and Goce Kocevski, experts on the Ministry of Justice; Boro Ilkoski, expert on Public Prosecution; Kiril Kjiroski and Miroslaw Giembicki, experts on ICT for justice institutions; and Voislav Stojanovski, expert on the judiciary. They shared insights into their work, the challenges they face, and the impact of their contributions to judicial reform.

What is it like to be part of Component 1, collaborating as a team of experts from diverse fields? How does this multidisciplinary approach benefit your work?

As Slaven Lekic said, this composition enables continuous relay of knowledge, ensuring that no one is ever left without support or guidance. Voislav Stojanovski sees it as a think tank environment, surrounded by incredibly talented people, where his role extends beyond just the legal perspective. He connects the dots, questioning whether a policy would stand up in Strasbourg or how to empower judges to take ownership of efficiency without burdening them with excessive pressure from the Judicial Council.

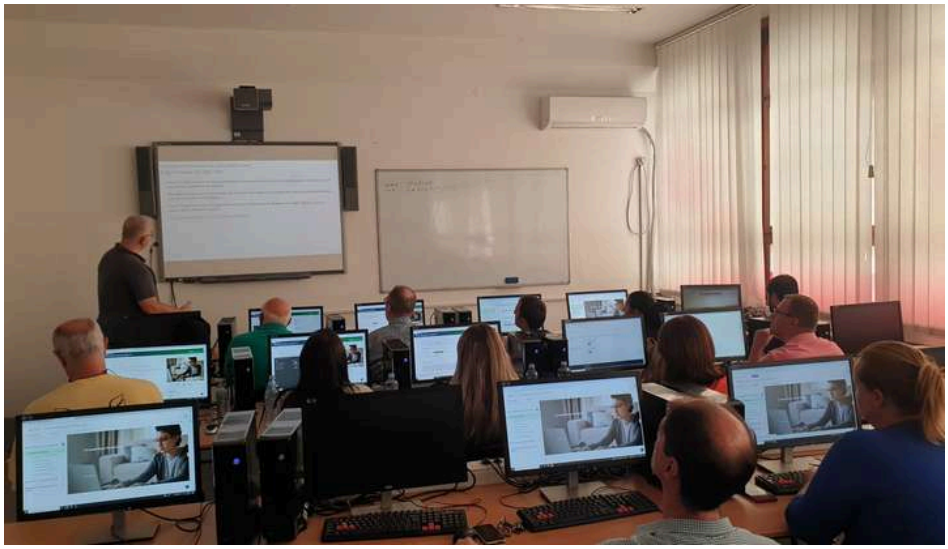
Kiril Kjiroski and Miroslaw Giembicki emphasize that this multidisciplinary approach fosters fresh ways of thinking and problem-solving, ensuring that a variety of perspectives and specialized knowledge are integrated into the decision-making process.

By bringing together experts from different fields, the team creates well-rounded solutions, which leads to more effective and creative tackling of complex challenges. Boro Ilkoski highlights the honour and responsibility that comes with being part of such a distinguished team, underscoring the unique aspect of their work: the integration of both international standards and local needs. This approach allows them to adapt and refine their recommendations, setting their work apart from other similar projects.

For Goce Kocevski, contributing to judicial reforms is both challenging and rewarding, especially when working with such skilled colleagues. The freedom to discuss ideas without hesitation, think outside the box, and learn from each other adds immense value to their efforts. The collaborative spirit of the team is a driving force, making their work impactful and transformative for the justice system.

When it comes to describing the team spirit within Component 1, the experts collectively share a sense of unity that transcends their diverse fields. Each member brings a unique perspective, and their collective strength stems from how they support one another and work towards common goals.

Slaven Lekic captures it best with the word "Trust," reflecting the deep confidence built over time, especially through overcoming various challenges together. This trust allows them to rely on each other in both complex and everyday situations. For Voislav Stojanovski, the word "Catalyst" encapsulates the essence of the team. He sees them as more than just a group of experts—they are transformative agents sparking change that none of them could achieve individually.



Kiril Kjiroski and Miroslaw Giembicki agree, choosing "Synergy" to describe the collective power of the team. They believe that each member's contributions amplify the efforts of others, fostering innovation and problem-solving that go beyond what a single discipline could accomplish alone. Boro Ilkoski opts for "Proactive," emphasizing the team's forward-thinking approach, always anticipating needs and staying ahead of the curve. For Goce Kocevski , the word "Collegiality" stands out, representing the collaborative environment where everyone is always ready to lend a helping hand and support one another.

Together, these words paint a picture of a dynamic, supportive, and forward-moving team that thrives on collaboration and shared goals.

In continuing the conversation about team spirit, when it comes to describing the impact of Component 1's work in just three words, the team reflects on the tangible outcomes and collaborative efforts that define their mission.

Slaven Lekic emphasized the team's commitment to tangible, feasible, and realistic activities that lead to real measurable impact. Voislav Stojanovski highlighted the driving forces behind their work: momentum, collaboration, and reform. For Kiril Kjiroski and Miroslaw Giembicki, comprehensiveness, collaboration, and impact best describe their approach, as Component 1 takes a holistic view of judicial improvements—enhancing transparency, accountability, and efficiency while fostering partnerships across institutions and disciplines to create meaningful change for beneficiaries. Boro Ilkoski sees their efforts as reliable, impactful, and transformative, while Goce Kocevski defines them as recognizable, significant, and appreciated.

Their work covers key areas of judicial reform, from strategy development and ICT advancements to disciplinary measures. But with such an ambitious scope, challenges are unavoidable. **What has been the most difficult aspect of this work, and how has the team tackled it?**

Slaven Lekic notes that despite beneficiaries' active involvement and ownership in the process, delays due to elections, HR issues, and budget constraints have impacted progress.

Voislav Stojanovski highlights the difficulty in aligning the distinct timelines and priorities of the executive, parliamentary, and judicial branches. The team has worked to bridge these divides through consultation roundtables, particularly around the drafting of the Law on the Judicial Council.

Kiril Kjiroski and Miroslaw Gembicki point to the challenge of integrating modern digital solutions within existing legal frameworks, facing resistance to change and institutional inertia, while balancing strategic and legislative demands.

Boro Ilkoski stresses the importance of shifting mindsets away from outdated approaches, emphasizing that improving legal practices requires a broader cultural change.

Goce Kocevski sees the true challenge as transforming the judiciary's mindset to one that is professional, accountable, and resilient, rather than focusing solely on changing laws or acquiring ICT tools.

Despite these hurdles, the team remains committed to driving reform through collaboration and a multidisciplinary approach.

How do you support each other in collaborating with interconnected judicial institutions, ensuring that reforms under Component 1 are implemented as part of a cohesive strategy rather than in isolation?

Slaven Lekic emphasized the team's open-minded and highly cooperative nature, where experts readily share experiences, seek advice, and offer support to one another.

Voislav Stojanovski highlighted the importance of regular coordination meetings, joint events, and continuous exchange of best practices to provide consistent support across institutions. Through advisory work and peer coaching, the team fosters collaboration, ensuring that reforms align with a unified vision rather than being fragmented efforts.





Kiril Kjiroski and Miroslaw Gembicki, who work with all key beneficiaries of Component 1, stressed the value of open communication, shared insights, and a coordinated approach. By understanding the unique challenges and priorities of each institution, they help create synergies that drive comprehensive judicial reform, ensuring that improvements in one area positively impact others.

Boro Ilkoski underscored that the interconnected nature of the justice system requires cooperation and coordination among courts, public prosecutor's offices, the Judicial Council, and the Council of Public Prosecutors. Recognizing these shared challenges, Component 1 plays a key role in facilitating joint efforts and achieving common objectives.

For Goce Kocevski, the essence of collaboration lies in sharing information and maintaining a coordinated approach, reinforcing the team's commitment to a transparent, efficient, and accountable judiciary.

Looking ahead, what are the next priorities for Component 1, and what impact do you hope to achieve?

Slaven Lekic emphasizes a careful, realistic approach, focusing on creating a sustainable legal environment that aligns with international standards and supports North Macedonia's EU membership aspirations.

For Voislav Stojanovski, revitalizing the Judicial Council's Human Resource Management Strategy is a key focus. Originally adopted in 2020, its execution was delayed, but now, through a detailed analysis of the judicial network, recruitment systems, and training, the goal is to optimize resource allocation. By addressing the shortage of judges and creating clearer career pathways, this overhaul will ensure that courts are staffed effectively, meeting EU integration goals and building public trust in the judiciary.

Kiril Kjiroski and Miroslaw Gembicki highlight advancing judicial digitalization as a primary priority. They are focused on improving IT strategic planning, strengthening institutional coordination, and enhancing transparency. The integration of modern ICT solutions will make the system more efficient, accessible, and accountable, ultimately supporting a justice system that upholds the rule of law and fosters public confidence.

Boro Ilkoski points to the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Council of Public Prosecutors, which face significant challenges. Transparency and accountability in these institutions will be the focus, with the ultimate aim of transforming public perception and ensuring the institutions operate with greater efficiency and integrity.

For Goce Kocevski, the priority is clear: seeing a tangible increase in public confidence in the judiciary, a goal that underpins the work of Component 1 and will mark the success of their efforts.





FEBRUARY - MAY 2025

CALENDAR
UPCOMING EVENTS

MAR

Presentation of the Communication Strategy for the Public Prosecution Office

Component 1

06 MAY **07 MAY**

training on presentation skills for public relations working group of the probation service

Component 4

02 APR

Beneficiary Human Rights Forum

Component 4

EU SUPPORT FOR RULE OF LAW

IMPRINT

Publisher: Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft - Institute of Fundamental and Human Rights (LBI-GMR), Vienna, in the framework of the "EU Support for Rule of Law" Project, Skopje
Editor: Kristina Vesikj
Proofreader: Ane Petrushevska
Reporting period: 08 November 2024 - 07 February 2025
Date: 07 February 2025

Funded by the European Union

EU with YOU