



# MONITORING REPORT ON HATE SPEECH IN ALBANIA

DORENTINA HYSA AND KRISTINA LANI

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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 the media monitoring conducted from January 2021 - April 2022. The unit of monitoring has been the incidents that contained hateful and discriminatory discourse (HDD) produced by, shared or even allowed to be expressed in media outlets, including traditional, new and social media.

Incidents were identified using key words and daily monitoring of different media channels. The identified incidents were examined and then reported based on the reporting instrument designed by Prof. Snježana Milivojević. The focus of the monitoring were incidents that contained hate speech directed at gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual minorities, migrants and refugees. Nevertheless, new categories emerged, i.e., disabled people, deceased persons, journalists, political opponents, etc., which were also reported and included in this report.

The three most prevalent categories that were subject to hate speech and discriminatory discourse were ethnicity (38.5%), gender (20.5%) and sexual minority (12%). For years, the situation has remained the same for these categories, and, despite the efforts done by media organisations and media authorities, the situation continues to be problematic. A media monitoring report<sup>1</sup> published in 2021 reveals that women are the most targeted group of online discriminatory and hateful language, a finding which is also confirmed by the media monitoring<sup>2</sup> that the Albanian Media Institute (AMI) did in 2022, where 81.8% of the cases targeted women.

It is the first time that ethnic-based HDD prevails, contrary to other monitoring reports published earlier.<sup>3</sup> That can be explained in the context of the latest developments within the country, such as the welcoming of Afghan and Syrian refugees in Albania, conspiracy theories related to COVID-19 and their impact on attitudes towards Chinese and Jewish people, political developments between Albania and other countries. Another contributing factor is that ethnic minorities in Albania, namely, the Roma and Egyptian communities, are included under this category. The media contributes to harmful discourse by reinforcing ethnic prejudices, writing headlines that target a whole ethnic group even when it is just one individual involved, and by allowing online users to post their derogatory and hateful comments without filtering them.

When it comes to the LGBTQ+ community, they remain a target of hateful and discriminatory discourse that is fuelled by the media through sensational headlines and by publishing unverified information that incites the hateful discourse of the online audience. This is related to local developments, such as the ongoing discussions on the family, which produced discriminatory discourse amongst LGBTQ+ supporters and the ones who support the traditional family, such as some religious communities. However, the mean score of intensity level of HDD according to the methodological scale remains low at (2.1).

Overall, despite the concerning presence of HDD in Albanian media and public communication, the classification according to sentiment analysis indicates a level 3 mean score, which demonstrates that the severity of the cases is intermediate, characterised by offensive narratives, insults and non-violent. However, that does not diminish the negative impact that these divisive narratives have on respective targets and society.

1 Historia Ime (2021). Monitorimi i Gjuhës së Urrejtjes, diskriminuuese dhe seksiste në mediat online dhe televizion. Available online at: <https://www.historiaime.al/media/raport-monitorimi-i-medias-per-gjuhen-diskriminuuese-dhe-seksiste-2021/>

2 AMI (2022). Mind the language. Project Handbook. Available online at: <https://www.annalindhoundation.org/sites/default/files/documents/network-news/Mind%20the%20Language%20-%20Project%20Handbook.pdf>

3 OSFA, ISHM. Prijet e gjuhës së urrejtjes në median shqiptare. Një monitorim i disa mediave të shkruara dhe online. Available online at: [https://www.osfa.al/sites/default/files/monitorimi\\_per\\_gjuhen\\_e\\_urrejtjes\\_ne\\_gazeta\\_dhe\\_media\\_online\\_3.pdf](https://www.osfa.al/sites/default/files/monitorimi_per_gjuhen_e_urrejtjes_ne_gazeta_dhe_media_online_3.pdf)



# Methodological Approach

The data for this report were collected between January 2021 and April 2022. Media monitoring was done 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 incidents' date of publication, country where it happened, type of hatred identified, the content/narrative of the discourse, the author/s of the incident, media in which it was identified and the 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 these data gathered were 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>4</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 characterizations and insults.
- 4. Demonising and dehumanising** - Rhetoric including specifications of sub-human and superhuman characteristics of the targeted individual/group.
- 5. Instigation of violence** - Rhetoric implies infliction of physical harm or aspirational physical harm.
- 6. Death** - Rhetoric implies literal killing or elimination of a group.

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.

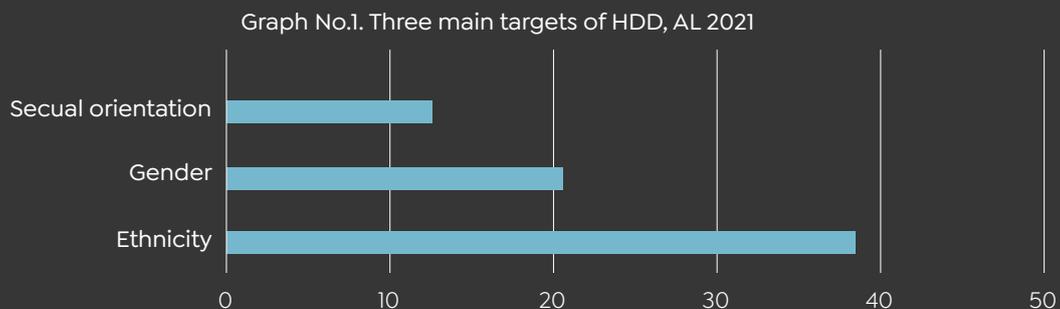
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<sup>4</sup> The George Washington University (2019). Monitoring Hate Speech in the US Media. Working paper. Media and Peacebuilding Project, page 5. Available online at: [Monitoring-Hate-Speech-in-the-US-Media-3\\_22-z0h5kk.pdf \(cpb-us-el.wpmucdn.com\)](#)

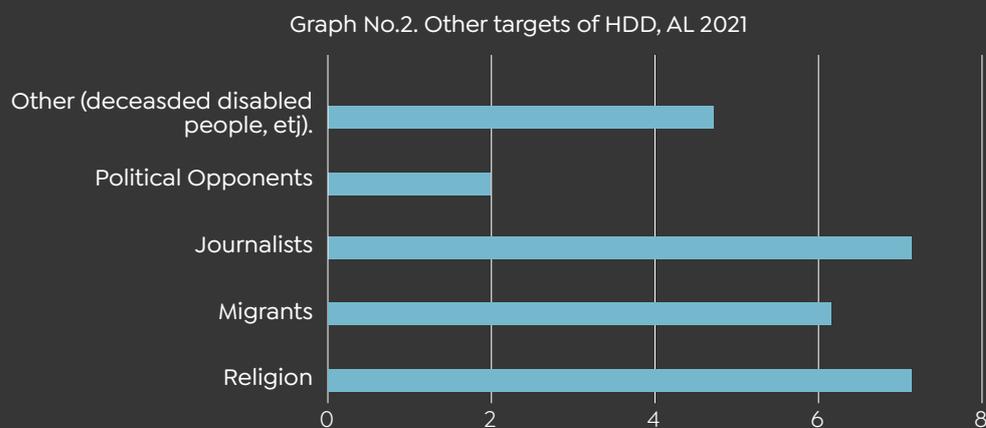
# Narratives and sub-narratives of HDD

## 1. General overview of HDD in Albania during 2021

For the reporting period covered in this report, the most prevalent cases of hateful discriminative discourse, as shown in graph no. 1, are related to ethnicity (38.5%), gender/women (20.5%) and sexual minorities (12.5%). It is interesting to note that for the first time in media monitoring, ethnicity surpasses gender and that can be strongly related to the political and social developments in the country during the monitoring period.



However, these are not the only targets of HDD. As graph no. 2 shows, HDD has been almost equally shared against religion (7.2) and political opponents (7.2%). This is followed by HDD against migrants/refugees (6.2%), other (4.8%) including disabled people, deceased persons, body image, and journalists (2%). Another important finding is that there is a considerable number of incidents (25.30%) that target multiple categories, for example women, political opponents, and ethnicity.



## 2. Hateful/Discriminatory Discourse on Ethnicity

The presence of ethnic hateful/discriminative discourse has never been so present in the Albanian media environment, at least based on the available research, which has indicated the scarcity of such discourse in the past<sup>5</sup>. However, our media monitoring for 2021 shows an increased presence of ethnic discriminatory discourse which can be explained with the series of events taking place within the country, in the region, as well as in the international context. One of the events that might have had an impact on the discourse is the coronavirus pandemic which was accompanied by conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation that put Chinese and Jewish people at the center of hateful and discriminatory discourse. For example, here is the headline of an online outlet<sup>6</sup> containing HDD:



*“The patient of the hospital “Shefqet Ndroqi” shares his battle with coronavirus: I prefer better to die from God rather than from those scoundrel Chinese.”*

Other triggering events are the welcoming of Afghan and Syrian refugees in Albania, the approval of the Law Nr. 79/2021 “On Foreigners”<sup>7</sup> that regulates the entry, stay and employment of foreigners from countries such as Bangladesh, India, and Morocco; the increase of visitors from Serbia, Arabic and Asian countries; the political statement of a Serbian MP; musical events. Some headlines and comments from the audience reflect the fear of being “invaded” by these foreigners who are perceived and reported to be “violent”, “thieves”, “aggressive” and even in some cases “grabbing the opportunities” from Albanians’ hands, or even being blamed for certain situations. Here is an example of that narrative, published in a newspaper<sup>8</sup>:



*“...in Albania can enter “pigs and sows”, illegal immigrants as well as Indian, Syrian, Afghan, Bangladeshi, Asian immigrants who are bringing with them the deadly virus.”*

A common ground for all the incidents identified is that the reporting is done based on prejudice, stereotypes and clichés, which in several cases are written as headlines that encourage the online audience to express hatred in comment sections in online news portals and in social networks. This logic of reporting reinforces the ethnic divisions between “us” and “them”, and usually “us” is good and “them” is “bad”. Here is how this division can be present in media, taking for reference the reporting that involves Albanian and Greek people, where two patterns are noted: 1) the model that presents the Albanians as superior and winning over Greeks<sup>9</sup> and 2) the model that portrays Albanians as murderers and criminals in crimes that happen in Greece<sup>10</sup>, even when Albanians are not involved at all. This model is also present in incidents that involve Albanians and other ethnicities. There is a vicious circle of HDD in this regard, where one narrative depicts one side as “good” and the other side as “bad” in respective countries. However, it is interesting that in quite some cases, Albanians are the target of HDD that comes from Albanian media and Albanians themselves. This is something that needs to be investigated further to understand the motives behind it.

5 Instituti Shqiptar i Medias (2015) Prirjet e gjuhës së urrejtjes në median shqiptare, p. 7.

6 TemA (22 February 2021). “Pacienti me COVID në Sanatorium: Më mirë të vdesësh nga Zoti, se sa nga ata qen bir qensh, kinezët”. Available online at: <https://www.gazetatema.net/2021/02/24/pacienti-me-covid-ne-sanatorium-me-mire-te-vdesesh-nga-zoti-se-sa-nga-ata-qen-bir-qensh-kinezet/>

7 Parliament of the Republic of Albania (2021). Law Nr. 79/2021 on Foreigners. Available online at: <https://www.parlament.al/Files/Akte/2021070817284820210705135531ligj%20nr.%2079%20dt.%2024.6.2021.pdf>

8 Gazeta Telegraf (16 September 2021). “Bota po mbyll kufijtë, Shqipëria “han pa porta”. Available online at: <https://telegraf.al/politike/bota-po-mbyll-kufiite-shqiperia-han-pa-porta/>

9 Incident related to the Albanian youths giving orders to Greek soldiers.

10 Incident related to the murder in Glyyka Nera, Greece, where both Albanian, Greek and international media reported on the implication of Albanians when in fact they had no involvement.

For example, a narrative against Albanians themselves is the case of a public figure that says:



*“This is a peasant nation! We are a republic of ‘kollovars’”.*

When it comes to sources of HDD for this category, journalists/media prevail, followed by private persons (through comments), politicians, public figures and influencers. Media and journalists, despite not being the authors of HDD, become part of it by reproducing what others have said without filtering it. The media highlights hateful and discriminatory discourse, by publishing clickbait and sensationalist headlines that in most cases inspire more hateful comments from users, which are not filtered regardless of the hate speech they contain. Another pattern noted is that media often, in violation of the Code of Ethics of Journalism, mention ethnicity when in fact it is not relevant to the story, such as the case of a tourist who was caught stealing in a shop in Albania, making the news because of the person’s ethnicity which sparked HDD by the readers afterwards. The targeting of a whole ethnic group instead of the person who commits an act is damaging to the entire group and keeps alive negative stereotypes that divide people and become the basis for hate speech, discrimination and exclusions in real life, both online and offline.

Based on the sentiment analysis, the average score for all incidents related to ethnic HDD is 3, which indicates that despite the quantity of the incidents, they remain in the lens of portraying the “others” as negative characters and the rhetoric includes non-violent characterisations and insults. However, among the incidents there have been different rankings from 1-6, which shows a mixture of narratives that start from disagreement up to the harshest one, which is the physical elimination of a person/group. Some of the examples of this rhetoric are listed in the table below:

Level	Hateful Discriminative Discourse – Ethnicity
1-Disagreement	“Syrians explode Albanian borders”; “an added danger in times of pandemic”; “state of gypsies”; “shameful provocation”; “get them back to their country”; “Crazy nationalist party”; “Why doesn’t UEFA fine this f***** race that makes racist-nationalist symbols?”; “The actor angers Greeks, says it “boldly” in the show: I don’t want a Greek surname, I’m proud to be Albanian”, etc.
2-Negative Actions	“The enemy”; “Friends of Turkey”; “scoundrel Chinese”; “This is a peasant nation! We are a republic of ‘kollovars’”; “Kosovo is Serbia”; “horrific crimes were committed against Serbs and when all Serbs were expelled through the fault of Albania”; “do not spend summer holidays in Albania”; “Strange...because these were supposed to be the cream of Afghan society. It’s true that terror runs in their blood.”, etc.
3-Negative Character	“F*ck Kosovo”; “sons of bitches”; “Serbian piss”; “You idiot, go find some gypsy...A gypsy would suit him, because he’s black...”, etc.
4-Demonizing & dehumanizing	“jevgjite” (gypsy); “monsters”; “evil race”; “bastards”; “Karlomalavita”; “Mentally ill”; “hopefully they have not contracted any virus with Bangladesh mutation because they are also close to India”; “The tourists we got” (versus the tourists we expected, implying they are “undesirable” tourists); “perverted”, etc.
5-Violence	“Serbian flag waves in the center of Tirana”: “Shame”; “It will burn in flames”; “the police believe that Albanians are behind them”; “the link between Albanians and violent and organized crime - such as human trafficking, extortion and robbery - across Europe is indisputable”, etc.
6-Death	“Damned indians (Indianet e leshit)”; “They are as cute as to be burned with (Kastrati) oil.”; “May he prosper [in death] and take the whole Serb race with him!”, etc.

<sup>11</sup> Most approximate translation of the term is “men who profit off their wives.” Dosja.al (2021). [ME VIDEO: Arjan Curri nuk përmbahet: Ky është komb fshatarësh! Jemi republikë ‘kollovarësh’ - Politike \(dosja.al\)](#)

The incidents have occurred mostly on info portals, traditional media (televisions and newspapers) and social media. The reach of each outlet or post varies depending on the platform where the content is published, however, since most of the cases are found online on info portals, that highlights the issue of “self-regulation,” or rather, more accurately, the issue of ineffectively enforced self-regulatory mechanisms. The reach was not possible to be traced for all incidents, but in those where this data was available, it was noted that it reached thousands of people; for instance, the case of the Syrian refugees published on JOQ’s social media (9,344 likes).<sup>12</sup> As a rule of thumb, the more sensational, denigrating and negative the content is, the more visible it becomes, spreading quickly and reaching a vast audience until in some cases it becomes viral.

### 3. Hateful/Discriminatory Discourse on Gender

Gender is the second most targeted group of HDD in Albanian media, according to our monitoring. It has arguably always been a problem considering the patriarchal mentality within the entire society which, in return, devalues women and girls and legitimises their maltreatment. Traditional media reinforces traditional views and existing gender stereotypes that are harmful to women and girls. In news editions, TV shows and newspapers, women are represented in the media and through media as just “beautiful”, “entertaining”, “sexy”, and “decorative”, etc. For example, in a dance show, one of the female contestants was a target of misogyny by a male member of the jury<sup>13</sup> who says to her:

“

*“You are old and not suitable to compete in a dance competition with youngsters. Go make babies.”*

It is important to mention that women as a group easily become a target of HDD, nevertheless our cases show that women in the art/music industry, politics and female journalists in particular are also the target of inappropriate media reporting and hate speech.

There is an interesting phenomenon that happens, where audiences do not focus on the content of the article that is being published but rather focus on the person who is mentioned in it. By skipping the content, they focus on the person and his/her personal life, violating ethics and privacy and spreading HDD. On the other hand, media does the same in most cases of HDD, as it deals with the individual or a specific case rather than analysing the problem or the phenomenon as such. For example, after a murder that happened in Elbasan, media focused on the girl, a minor, who was blamed for being the motive of the murder, instead of analysing the situation from a broader point of view. Here is one example of headlines related to the case:

“

*“Who was the “apple” of the quarrel that took the life of the young man in Elbasan; the body of the victim lying on the ground, the heavy images are whitened.”<sup>14</sup>*

Victim blaming is also overtly present in the Albanian media environment. For example, in cases of sexual abuse/harassment, and violence committed by boys and men, the media often blames the women or girls involved. It is surprising that victim blaming can be found even amongst professionals, such was the case of a lawyer who in a TV appearance expressed that the reason for the increase in divorce numbers is that “women no longer tolerate violence”<sup>15</sup> as if it were their duty to tolerate and endure violence, when actually the problem/cause is the violence itself.

<sup>12</sup> JOQ Albania (7 September 2021). Instagram post. Available online at: [https://www.instagram.com/p/CTg5JCqD6d6/?utm\\_medium=copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/CTg5JCqD6d6/?utm_medium=copy_link).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXr6Gx2j-> (video no longer available.)

<sup>14</sup> Pamfleti (5 November 2021). “Kush ishte “molla” e sherrit që i mori jetën të riut në Elbasan; trupi i viktimës shtrirë në tokë, zbardhen pamjet e rënda”. Available online at: <https://pamfleti.net/kush-ishte-molla-e-sherrit-qe-i-mori-jeten-te-riut-ne-elbasan-trupi-i-viktimes-shtrire-ne-toke-zbardhen-pamjet-e-renda/>.

<sup>15</sup> Top Channel (18 April 2022). “Pse po shtohen divorcet? Avokatja: Gratë nuk e durojnë më dhunën”. Available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIDl6YRp8>.

In addition to traditional media, a great source of HDD against women are online media/info portals and social media. Online media portals are often clickbait-driven and this somewhat explains their approach in producing content (which cannot be considered news at all) that sell, including sexist and misogynistic discourse and hate speech. It is more likely that a sensationalist headline combined with sexist tones will be clicked on in comparison to an accurate/informative headline.

When it comes to the motives that trigger HDD against women, there is no need for specific events, as it has become a norm and it is an inseparable part of daily media content. However, the sensationalistic headlines combined with sexism and misogyny seem to be a formula that work quite well with the Albanian audience, as it always produces hate, with hate bringing more audience to the discussion. HDD against women is normalised (by being overtly present in media and thus the audience being repeatedly exposed to it) and even in some cases done by other women against women.

Based on the sentiment analysis, the mean score of HDD against women is the highest compared to the other two categories, reaching 3.8. Almost at a level 4, this indicates an intense HDD that includes narratives that demonise and dehumanise women. The table below shows some samples of the narratives that were found in the reported incidents.

Level	Hateful Discriminative Discourse – Gender
1-Disagreement	NA
2-Negative Actions	“Old and not suitable to compete in a dance competition with youngsters.”; “Go make babies.”; “Bride “goes crazy”/Twerks to her husband in front of guests almost naked”, etc.
3-Negative Character	“You are gay because you follow only naked men on Instagram”; “You are the most impotent man”; “degenerative for society”; “uneducated”; “you don’t know the concept of the family”; “ignorant”; “Pieces of meat, ignorant”; “What’s next, should we include women in construction and mining too?”, etc.
4-Demonizing & dehumanizing	“Arjan/a Konomi; he and his phalanxes; Arjan Konomi and immorality.”; “Hooligan, caveman, plagiarism man; sick man; wounded hyena; ugly scribble/doodle man, etc.”; “Gridare, gridare, gridare ohoho”; “A cult”; “to promote homosexuality as the great value of advanced societies”; “mutants”; “gypsy singer that is not even Albanian;” “she wrote the lyrics of the song while having sex”; “Dutch cow”; “Albanian donkey”, etc.
5-Violence	“If we were in Albania, I would have bitten you badly”; “Do you feminist women not like to be spanked in the butt? There are many comments from frustrated, women, honorable women, “virgins”, about the girls’ butts, which these women could never have...); “She abandoned her 2 children to go to her boyfriend.”; “Women are crazy, they found the word “I was abused”: you were abused because you were bad...”, etc.
6-Death	“Seize those paedophiles you have in Germany. You have the highest number of paedophiles, and these types of races are protected a lot. You are turning the world upside down. May God kill you.”

The sources of HDD against women are, in most cases, journalists/media for the above-mentioned reasons, followed by celebrities, private persons (online audience) and politicians. These incidents are common and can be seen on TV, newspapers, online portals and social media alike. Similar to HDD against ethnicity, HDD against women is expressed both verbally (both spoken and written form) and visually (audio/video and images).

Visibility and reach of HDD against women is quite well covered, as evidenced by the fact that it reaches at least 13,000 people via social media platforms, demonstrating the exposure of such content and the engagement of the public, which is generally supportive of violence, hatred, sexism and misogyny. This is a red flag that reveals the need to educate audiences regarding hate speech and its impact on society.

## 4. Hateful/Discriminatory Discourse on Sexual Minorities

The third group most targeted by HDD in the Albanian information environment throughout the reporting period was the LGBTQ+ community. While Albania has made progress in terms of the integration and acceptance of LGBTQ+ people in society, HDD towards the community remains common in the media. The process of “otherisation” of said community is particularly noticeable, especially in the context of the backlash due to proposed changes in legislation aimed at making the community more equal in society.

Namely, most incidents occurred in the context of the proposal to substitute the terms “mother” and “father” in official forms, instead opting to use “parent 1” and “parent 2” for a more equal or inclusive approach. Thus, the main narrative identified in our reporting involves the perceived threat that the LGBTQ+ community poses to the notion of the family, a core concept in Albanian society and tradition.

Starting in June 2021, hate speech against the LGBTQ+ community made headlines in virtually all media outlets due to a now well-known dispute with prominent evangelical pastor Akil Pano<sup>16</sup>, who heads the Albanian Coalition for the Protection of the Family. Pano was reported by the LGBT Alliance, the main organisation in Albania dedicated to the protection of LGBTQ+ rights, to the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, following hateful comments in various television shows and public appearances. Pano, who has positioned himself at the forefront of the fight against the aforementioned changes in legislation, recurrently speaks about the dangers of the “Gay Agenda,” making statements referring to homosexuality as a deviation, considering the possibility of homosexuals adopting and parenting children a “criminal act,” and effectively even comparing homosexuality with bestiality:

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“*With the legalisation of marriages, the moral bar is removed...Which means that anyone can come and ask for marriage with an animal, or also request a triple, quadruple marriage...There is no limit.*”<sup>17</sup>

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In November 2021, the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination ruled in favour of the LGBT Alliance, stating that Pano had effectively used hate speech against the LGBTQ+ community: “The views and attitudes expressed by A.P. are beyond freedom of expression and freedom of expression of religion and belief...”

However, attacks on the LGBTQ+ community in Albania have not been limited to HDD, but have also included disinformation or information manipulation efforts. In late October, Pano reported on his Facebook page about the existence of a form handed out at a kindergarten in Tirana, where the terms “mother” and “father” were, in fact, substituted with “parent 1” and “parent 2,” in violation of the Albanian Family Code. This incident was later reported on negatively by some outlets, with some portals deeming it “shameful.”<sup>18</sup> Relevant public officials addressed the controversy, affirming that the Municipality of Tirana only circulates registration forms in accordance with the Family Code, and adding that the form Pano reported seemed like a questionnaire for a dissertation. The LGBT Alliance responded condemning the media for its lack of professionalism in rushing to report on the form:

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“*We urge the media and journalists to distance themselves from this unacceptable practice and to play their investigative and informative role, independently and uninfluenced, instead of turning into a source of misinformation and slander, confronting us unfairly and several times with invented waves of hatred...*”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Klan TV (18 June 2021). “Pastori Akil Pano: Komuniteti LGBT perdor gjuhe shantazhi”. Available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56uukpnhh80>.

<sup>17</sup> Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (2021). Decision nr. 217, dated 15.11.2021. Available online at: <https://kmd.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Vendim-nr-217-date-15.11.2021-Ceshtie-krvesisht-nga-Komisioneri-ne-lidhje-me-gjuhen-e-perdorur-kunder-personave-LGBTI-Diskriminim-Gjuhe-urreitje.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Priza.al (October 2021). “Ngjarja e turpshme në kopshtet e Tiranës/ Fjala ‘mami’ dhe ‘babi’ zëvendësohen me ‘prindi 1’ e ‘prindi 2!’”. Available online at: <https://www.priza.al/2021/10/27/ngjarja-e-turpshme-ne-kopshtet-e-tiranes-fjala-mami-dhe-babi-zevendesohen-me-prindi-1-e-prindi-2/>.

<sup>19</sup> Aleanca LGBT (28 October 2021). Public statement for media. Available online at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CvKXlImtZX2/>.

While the ongoing dispute between the LGBTQ+ community and pastor Akil Pano dominated the media environment with respect to HDD against this community, other narratives have been observed, especially in the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine rollout. Thus, a headline reads:



*“Shocking Statement on Coronavirus Vaccine:  
It Can Make People Gay”<sup>20</sup>*

Sentiment analysis, however, indicates a relatively low level of intensity in HDD (2.1), remaining at the level of rhetoric which does not call for violence against the group. Nevertheless, some incidents presented a high level of intensity (5), such as in the reporting on the attack of a 21-year-old transgender activist in Tirana in June 2021.<sup>21</sup>

Level	Hateful Discriminative Discourse – Sexual minority
1-Disagreement	“Shocking Statement on Coronavirus Vaccine: It Can Make People Gay”; “The child will think homosexuality is completely normal; he will go to school and kiss his male classmate because he likes him very much.”; “The Gay Agenda has begun to be implemented, calmly and in violation of the Family Code in force in Albania.”
2-Negative Actions	“Bless Enver Hoxha for detaining gay men in the women’s prison due to fear of infecting other men in men’s prisons.”
3-Negative Character	“it’s a great misfortune [that a LGBTIQ person] gives birth to a child.”; “Before, Albanians were represented by men, now they are represented by faggots.”; “I’m so sorry you call these people artists, this is simply a mentally ill person.”
4-Demonizing & dehumanizing	-
5-Violence	“Activist Xheni Karaj denounces: 21-year-old Albanian is attacked and assaulted by 10 boys / Publishes marks on the body.”
6-Death	-

While prejudicial and biased headlines are present in traditional mainstream media, it is online media where the most sensationalist headlines flourish, giving space to individual users to express their hateful sentiments in comment sections. Here, JOQ Albania’s role in spreading HDDs must be emphasised.

The outlet has effectively positioned itself as having an anti-LGBTQ+ editorial line, being the outlet with most reported incidents of hate speech against this group. Although this editorial line is not openly stated, it appears obvious to the reader considering the language and even imagery that is used. In one prominent example, the outlet negatively reported on Imam Shefqet Krasniqi’s comments regarding the Kosovo Parliament’s non-approval of the proposed change in the Civil Code to include LGBTQ+ marriages under the headline:



*“Non-approval of the Gay Code/Imam Shefqet Krasniqi:  
We are saved from the wrath of the almighty God!”<sup>22</sup>*

Furthermore, the accompanying image included the Imam along with a photograph of two men kissing, one of them holding a book, suggesting that it could be a religious book. It should be highlighted that imagery is key, as users, especially on Instagram, react negatively to the images and express their negative views in the comment section through hateful comments.

20 Top Channel (18 January 2021). “Deklarata shokuese për vaksinën e koronavirusit: Mund t’i kthejë njerëzit në homoseksualë”. Available online at: [https://top-channel.tv/2021/01/18/dklarata-shokuese-per-vaksinene-e-koronavirusit-mund-ti-ktheje-njerezit-ne-homoseksuale/?fbclid=IwAR2ND3ISXZ2ZcpCnpOrmna\\_mAi8K\\_DUDX0xrMGGc58abown\\_f5S2vRplr7o](https://top-channel.tv/2021/01/18/dklarata-shokuese-per-vaksinene-e-koronavirusit-mund-ti-ktheje-njerezit-ne-homoseksuale/?fbclid=IwAR2ND3ISXZ2ZcpCnpOrmna_mAi8K_DUDX0xrMGGc58abown_f5S2vRplr7o).

21 Top Channel (16 June 2021). “Aktivistja Xheni Karaj denoncon: 21-vjeçarja shqiptare sulmohet e dhunohet nga 10 djem/ Publikon shenjat në trup”. Available online at: <https://top-channel.tv/2021/06/16/aktivistja-xheni-karaj-denoncon-21-vjecarja-shqiptare-sulmohet-e-dhunohet-nga-10-djem-publikon-shenjat-ne-trup/?foto=3#g>

22 JOQ Albania (18 March 2022). “Mosmiratimi i Kodit të Homoseksualëve/ Hoxhë Shefqet Krasniqi: Shpëtuam nga hidhërimi i të madhit Zoti!” Available online at: <https://joq-albania.com/artikull/995749.html>.



## Comparative analysis

Hateful and discriminatory discourse can vary case to case, yet, regardless of differences amongst cases and categories, we have identified some common characteristics that are found in all of them.

First, hateful discriminatory discourse is done based on prejudices, stereotypes and clichés related to gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or disabled people. These existing harmful narratives are reinforced and kept alive to “legitimise” the HDD that media and audiences produce and turn it into something normalised, widely spread and accepted.

Second, it is noted that an entire group becomes the target of HDD, even when the act is individual. Generalised HDD is carried out against women, ethnicity, minorities. Erroneous generalisations are present in the portrayal or reflection of “the other” or of the one who is different or has different opinions.

Third, HDD is triggered by a sensationalist approach in reporting on women, sexual minorities, ethnicity, religion, migrants/refugees, etc. Such headlines attract the audience and inspire it to spread HDD just based on the title, without even reading the content. The HDD can also target the person that is mentioned in the news even intruding in his/her personal life, thus violating privacy.

Fourth, HDD comes combined with verbal (written and spoken) and visual (videos, images, memes) elements. In particular, on social media, HDD is accompanied by humour through memes and jokes, while in news portals, it is accompanied by images or videos that are inappropriate, sensational, out of context or even in violation of human rights.

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 are not in all cases directly responsible for producing HDD, but they do spread it and make it visible, at the same time remaining “hidden” behind the author/s by “just quoting what was said” and making it a headline despite the hate it contains.

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. The reach of a case may logically be exacerbated as incidents can be disseminated via several different platforms. Social media play a key role in making such HDD cases viral and amusing an audience that feeds itself with such content, making it part of normal everyday discourse.

Finally, the phenomenon of “hate silence” cannot be overlooked. Hateful discourse in the media environment, but even crimes against certain groups and minorities, namely against the Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania, go unreported due to public disinterest and due to the alienation of these communities from society.

## Country action against hate speech

Country-wise, actions taken against hate speech are not prevalent or sustainable. However, there are some initiatives undertaken by different stakeholders, including public institutions, media authorities, media organisations and civil society organisations.

The Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA), through the Council of Complaints, intends to respond to hate speech and unethical content published by audiovisual media outlets; however, the impact of such action remains yet to be seen, because sexism, misogyny and other HDD are still present in different TV programs, albeit not as much compared to online and social media.

In 2019, the People’s Ombudsman, the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, the Audiovisual Media Authority and the Albanian Media Council established the Alliance Against Hate Speech<sup>23</sup> with the aim to tackle hate speech “in all dimensions” in which it appears in society, with a special focus on online hate speech. Again, despite these joint efforts, the situation has not significantly improved in these past few years.

On the other hand, there are some media organisations and CSOs that try to address hate speech through different projects and undertakings, such as through the training of journalists.; nevertheless, these efforts are sporadic, short-term and have little impact or limited reach.

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<sup>23</sup> People’s Ombudsman (2019). “Aleanca Kunder Gjuhës së Urrejtjes.” Available online at: <https://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al/sq/articles-layout-1/media/Memorandume-marreveshje/aleanca-kunder-gjuhs-s-urrejtjes-517/>.



## Conclusions

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, new and social media.

The three most prevalent categories that were subject to hate speech and discriminatory discourse were ethnicity (38.5%), gender (20.5%), and sexual minorities (12%).

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.

The media contributes to this harmful discourse by reinforcing ethnic prejudices, writing headlines targeting an entire ethnic group even when it is just one individual involved, as well as sensationalising events. Media equally contributes to the perpetuation of sexist and misogynistic narratives in society, as well as in the "otherisation" of the LGBTQ+ community. While both traditional and online media carry the burden of creating, spreading and not filtering hateful and discriminative discourse, it is online media, including the online versions of these traditional media outlets, where hate flourishes through comment sections.

For the first time, ethnicity emerges as the main target of HDD in Albania. This is undoubtedly due to events at the national, regional, and international levels, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, HDD against gender reaches higher levels of intensity, indicating a deep-rooted negative perception of women that is easily perpetuated through media. Likewise, HDD against the LGBTQ+ community is ever-present, especially in online media.

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