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# HATE SPEECH



# FREEDOM OF SPEECH

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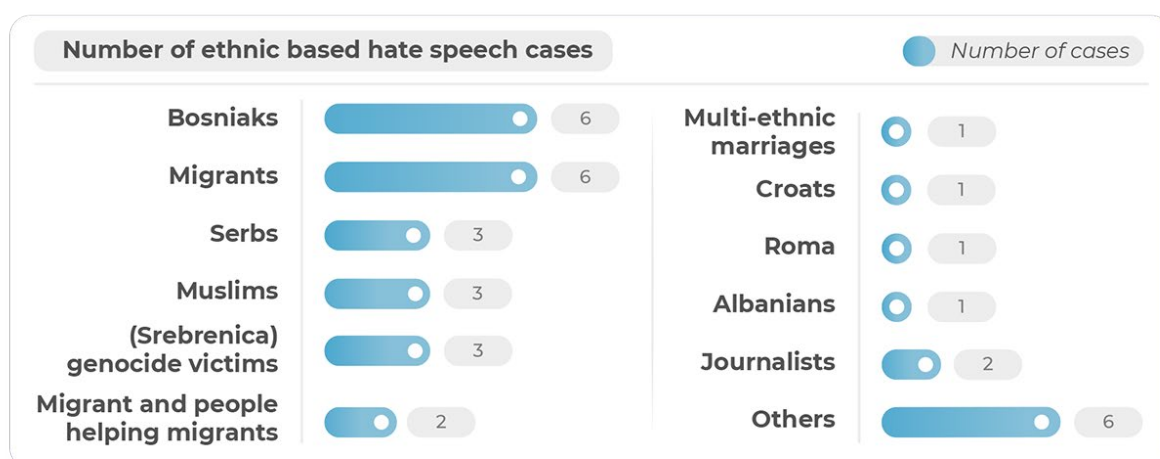
# HATE SPEECH IN THE WESTERN BALKANS – THE CASE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Hate speech in the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is represented in different forms, in different frequencies, different intensities, but what is common, for all cases covered by this monitoring, is that it always **uses personal characteristics for targeting and the same goal aimed at individuals and groups**. Using public space, especially online, hate speech is being introduced as **an unauthorized and almost normalized phenomenon**.

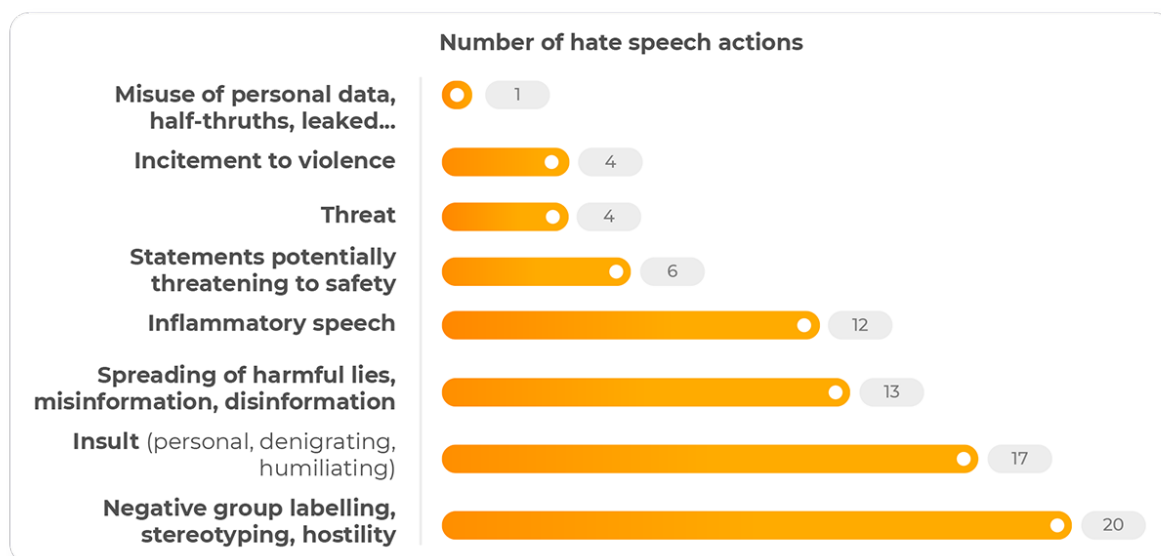
In period **October 2020 – March 2022**, in **total 100 cases of hate speech** were registered by media monitoring. No special time intervals were recorded in which hate speech was more pronounced in the media, but an inspection of the records shows that in each calendar month several cases of hate speech were regularly registered, varying in forms, types, perpetrators.

Hate speech was most often **based on ethnic, gender and migrant identities**. It was aimed at both individuals and groups as abstract communities that share a certain personal characteristic (women, migrants, LGBTQ+ people). Regardless of the basis for hate speech, the **goal was to create a hostile environment and/or attitude towards the target**. At the same time, these hateful narratives came in some cases in continuously organized activities, creating an inflammatory and intolerant atmosphere in the community (society). It is interesting that in addition to the existing ethnic narratives (relations between Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs),

Hate speech based on ethnicity is the most common form in the review of identified cases. Out of 100 cases of hate speech, those **based on ethnicity are represented by 34 cases (34%)**. Other than that, ethnicity appears in combination with other grounds, **most often in combination with gender and in relation with migrants/refugees**.

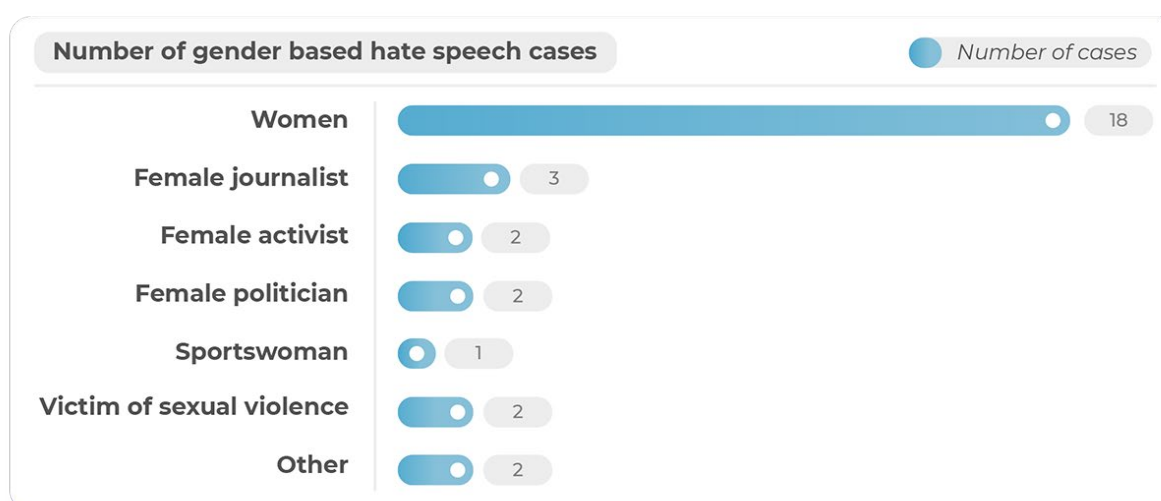


Graph 1: Number of ethnic based hate speech cases towards the individuals or groups against whom it is directed

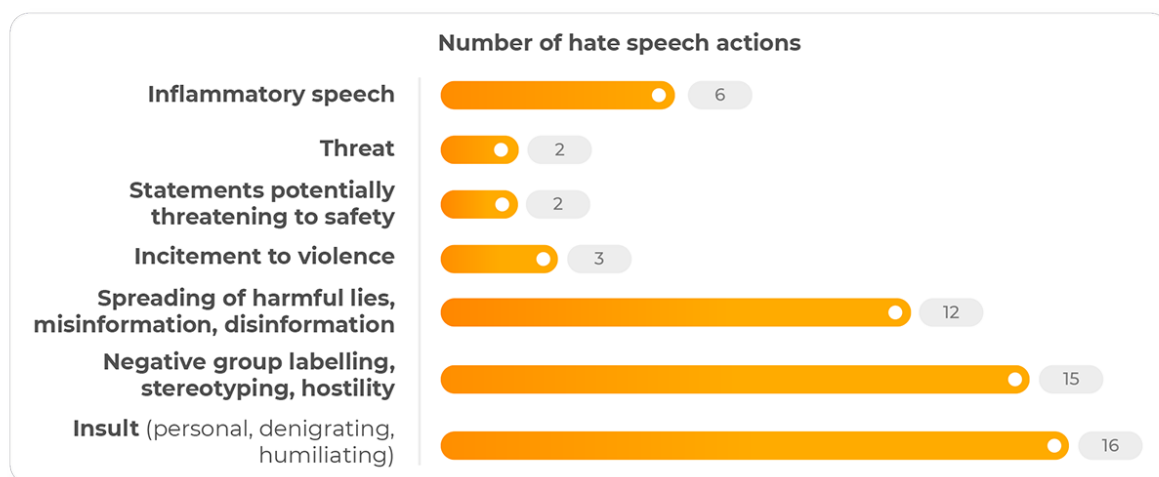


Graph 2: Number of hate speech actions per reported cases

Based in unequal power positions and long persistent misogyny, sexism is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which leads to discrimination and prevents the full advancement of women in society. Hate speech in that regard, is just **another form of breaching principles of gender equality**, also representing a way of **gender based violence**. It is important to recall that gravity of hate speech is in particular visible by targeting women both on account of their sex, gender and/or gender identity and when this is coupled with one or more of their other characteristics. **Online sexism shows that women are disproportionately affected – especially young women and girls, women journalists, politicians, public figures and women’s human rights defenders.** While attacks on men are more often based on their professional opinions or competence, **women are more likely to be subject to sexist and sexualised abuse and invective**, the extremity of which may be magnified by the anonymity offered by the internet.

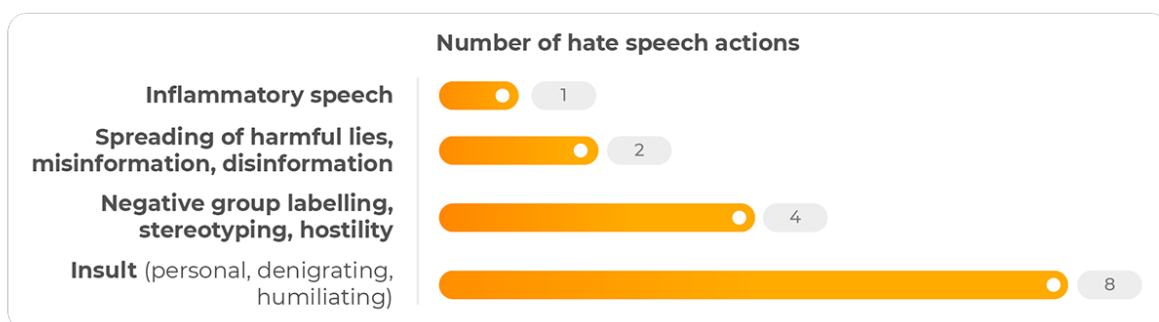


Graph 3: Number of gender based hate speech cases towards the individuals or groups against whom it is directed



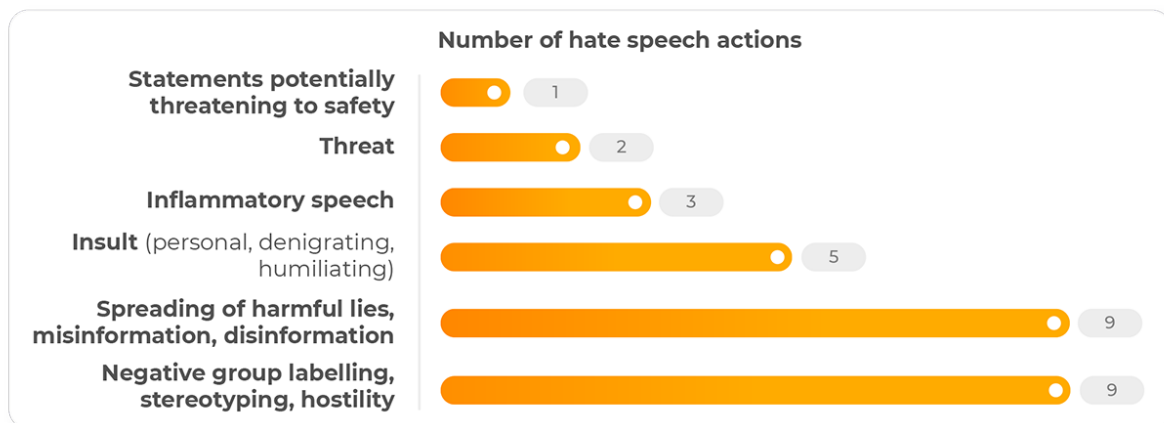
Graph 4: Number of hate speech actions per reported cases

Anti-LGBTQ+ hate speech is often closely entwined with broader anti-gender discourse and includes **discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics**. Combating rising hate against LGBTQ+ people in Europe recognize increase in hate speech, violence, and hate crime against LGBTQ+ people, communities, and organisations. significant proportion of hate speech, vilification and scapegoating of LGBTQ+ people, as well as broad attacks on the exercise of their civil rights, have come from political figures and leaders, including government representatives, as well as from religious leaders.



Graph 5: Number of hate speech actions per reported cases

Media presentation of subjects connected with immigrants and ethnic minorities has a significant influence on public opinion, i.e. may play role in combating racist and xenophobic views but also having a role in the emergence or strengthening of such views. BiH has been territory of migration flows for last five years in which **different forms of intolerance towards migrants/refugees have been shown, where hate speech is high by its presence**. This was heavily supported in public sphere by media discourse, and often promoted or encouraged by politicians.



Graph 6: Number of hate speech actions per reported cases

In most cases, hate speech was expressed through **negative group labelling** (in total 61 cases). This activity is accompanied by making hate speech through using **insults** (in total 48 cases) and then **spreading of harmful lies** (in total 36 cases). It is important to point out that the expressed hate speech often actually combines the different actions, and thus includes all three of these activities together and with them also **threats, misinformation, disinformation, statements potentially threatening to safety, incitement to violence, inflammatory speech and misuse of personal data**.

The case studies conducted for BiH demonstrate that the **mainstream media and the leading politicians in the country are one of the primary sources and disseminators of hate narratives** towards the selected target groups, particularly towards migrants and refugees and the political opposition. These narratives are further popularized through user-generated comments. Findings from this monitoring show that **online media and leading politicians** are those who still not only **use hate speech** but are **promoters of narratives against particular groups**. Info portals make up 42% of the media that had hate speech in the observed period. This includes hate speech on various grounds, while some of the portals are very specific to certain groups (such as the anti-immigrant portal).

The high prevalence of hate speech in online media can be interpreted through at least two segments: **changes in audience habits regarding preferred media** (transition from traditional to online/social media), but also **very poor regulation of hate speech** in this area. Regarding the first contextual circumstance, the monitoring data indicate that the range of content that these media and social networks have is very large. On the other hand, poor or non-existent regulation of such content means its normalization in public space.

**Hate speech processing in BiH is very limited.** Legal proceedings under criminal law are rare and most often relate to criminal offense of inciting national, racial and religious hatred, discord and intolerance in all criminal laws in B&H. Slightly more cases have been recorded for prohibited hate speech under the BiH Election Law, but even in these proceedings, due to procedural errors, a sanction is actually not imposed and the act is not legally qualified as hate speech. Misdemeanour proceedings are also rare, and according to available data, about 80% of hate incidents that are reported remain in the reporting phase, i.e. no further prosecution is provided.