

ANNUAL
REPORT

2025.

**RIGHTS
ON A
GRAIN OF
PEA**

LGBT Forum Progress

FOREWORD: 15. YEARS OF PROGRESS

We hereby present the official statement on the occasion of our organization's 15th anniversary.

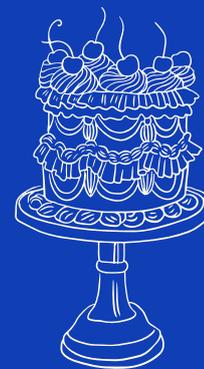
Today, 10 December 2025, on International Human Rights Day, LGBT Forum Progres proudly marks **fifteen years of existence and continuous work** dedicated to the promotion, protection, and advancement of human rights in Montenegro. As the first and oldest LGBTI organization in the country, Progres has, throughout the past decade and a half, been - and remains - a steadfast voice for all those who fight for dignity, equality, and justice

It is symbolic that our anniversary falls precisely on the day when the entire world marks the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This date reminds us that human rights are universal, indivisible, and inalienable - that they belong to everyone, regardless of who we are, whom we love, or how we identify.

Over the past fifteen years, LGBT Forum Progres has achieved numerous results that have directly improved the quality of life of LGBTI people in Montenegro. We launched and developed the first LGBTI shelter in the country - a safe space for individuals who have experienced violence or discrimination. We established the LGBTI Community Center as a place of gathering, support, and empowerment. We have provided free assistance to hundreds of people who faced violations of their rights, and our mental health program has ensured that psychosocial assistance and support are available to everyone - at any time of day or night, in every municipality across Montenegro.

For us, these fifteen years also mean hundreds of trainings, campaigns, research initiatives, materials, and advocacy efforts that have contributed to changes in the legislative framework and public policies. We have been active participants in the development of strategic documents, collaborated with institutions, and continuously built bridges between the community and decision-makers.

In recent years, the scope of LGBT Forum Progress work has expanded significantly. Aware that human rights are indivisible, we broadened our mission to include other marginalized groups in Montenegrin society - young people, women with experiences of violence, and older persons - providing them with support, education, and empowerment necessary for active participation in society...



...In this same spirit, our recent activities include trainings for school pedagogical-psychological services, institutional networking, the establishment of caregiver services in both the northern and southern regions for older persons, human rights and activism camps for young people, as well as numerous other initiatives. This expansion is not a departure from our core mission - on the contrary, working with different marginalized groups reflects our understanding that the fight for the rights of one group cannot be separated from the fight for the rights of all who need support and assistance.

Fifteen years of continuous work would not have been possible without our community, our members, volunteers, expert collaborators, partners, and donors. We extend our gratitude to everyone who has stood by us over the years - to those who have given their time, knowledge, or resources. We owe special thanks to all activists who have built this organization throughout the years, often at great personal sacrifice

We also extend our gratitude to the partners who recognized the importance of our work and supported us, as well as to the media who reported responsibly on human rights issues and contributed to shifting the public discourse.

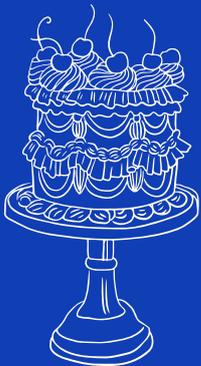
As we mark this anniversary, we remain acutely aware of the challenges ahead. Montenegro has made important strides in strengthening its legislative framework, but full equality and quality of life for LGBTI people and other marginalized groups remain at a concerning level. Yet it is precisely for this reason that we continue.

Our vision remains the same: a Montenegro that is democratic and European, with a socially accepted, visible, and protected LGBTI community - and a society in which every person, regardless of their characteristics, has the right to dignity, safety, and equal opportunities. We continue our work on the ground, within institutions, and in communities - everywhere where the fight for fundamental human rights is needed.

Today's International Human Rights Day reminds us of the most important truth - **human rights have no conditions and no exceptions.**

**We began on that principle.
And on that principle, we continue.**

LGBT forum Progress Team



ANALOGY - RIGHTS ON A GRAIN OF PEA

When choosing the framework for our 2025 Annual Report, we searched for a way to clearly, simply, and truthfully portray the complexity of the position of marginalized and multiply marginalized people in Montenegro - all those who need support in order to realize their rights, to be safe, visible, and equal, and to have their voices heard in a society that often overlooks them. We looked for a metaphor capable of capturing progress and obstacles, laws and lived reality, institutional shifts and everyday struggles. In that process, the fairy tale of the princess and the grain of pea emerged as an unexpectedly precise reflection of what we have witnessed in our work for fifteen years - and what stands out so clearly in 2025.

In the fairy tale, the bed is made of many mattresses and cushions, yet one small pea, hidden deep beneath all the layers, still causes discomfort. In our context, those layers represent everything Montenegro has formally built: laws, strategies, institutions, action plans, international commitments, services, and programs developed over the years. These are layers that exist, that matter, and that cannot be dismissed. They form the framework within which human rights are protected and realized today.

But beneath all those layers, there is still a “grain” - the reality we see every day through our services, research, discrimination reports, community work, and the experiences of the people who reach out to us. That grain is the non-implementation of laws, institutional inertia, covert or overt discrimination, fear of approaching institutions, violence that goes unreported, bureaucratic barriers, lack of understanding, and the quiet marginalization that does not appear in statistics but is deeply felt in people’s lives. **That grain is what prevents a peaceful night’s sleep - not because people are “too sensitive,” but because the problem truly exists, even when it is hidden beneath many layers.**

This analogy allows us to present 2025 as it truly was: a year marked by visible progress, but also by persistent obstacles; a year in which services were strong and accessible, yet the needs of communities remained just as significant; a year in which institutions had capacities, but not always the will; a year in which laws existed, but did not always come to life in practice. It helps us explain why our work remains essential, why our services remain full, and why the fight for equality does not end with the adoption of a single law or a single strategy.

In this sense, the analogy is not only a symbol of obstacles, but also a symbol of responsibility. It reminds us that change does not happen on its own - it requires constant presence, monitoring, response, and advocacy. Every layer that society adds - whether a new law, a new strategy, a new service, or a new institutional procedure - has value only if it helps reduce the grain, not simply hide it more effectively. Our work throughout 2025 showed that persistence, and the daily engagement with what lies beneath the surface, is the key to real change.

This is why it is important to emphasize that the “grain” cannot be viewed as an isolated incident, nor as a temporary exception that can be overlooked in the broader picture of progress. Every individual case of discrimination, violence, institutional failure, or injustice carries systemic weight, because it undermines the integrity of the overall work - both of institutions and of civil society. Regardless of good intentions, capacities, or formal mechanisms, it is precisely these individual cases that reveal where the system breaks and where action is needed. They are not anomalies, but indicators of what lies beneath the surface, and therefore require attention, intervention, and long-term solutions - not silent acceptance as unavoidable exceptions.

“Rights on a Grain of Pea” is therefore more than a metaphor - it is a way to portray a reality that is often invisible, yet deeply present. It reminds us that progress is not enough if it does not reach every layer of society. It calls on us not to be satisfied with the height of the bed, but to address what lies beneath it. And this is, ultimately, the reason why this report carries this title: because we want to show all the layers of our work, but also clearly name what still causes pain - so that we can work together to finally remove the grain.

PROGRAMMES

The programmes we implement form the foundation of our work and represent a key mechanism through which we ensure continuous, accessible, and high-quality support to the community. Through various models of information-sharing, counselling, education, and empowerment, these programmes make it possible to identify and address the needs of beneficiaries in a comprehensive and sustainable way. Each programme has been developed in response to concrete challenges, and their shared goal is to enhance safety, improve access to rights, and contribute to the creation of a more inclusive social environment.

The programmes we implement include:

- Free legal counselling
- Free psychosocial counselling
- Volunteer programme
- Online hate-speech monitoring
- Sports club
- Professional training programme
- Sexual-health protection

PROJECTS

AS THE LEAD ORGANIZATION

- *Laws Are Here to Be Used!*(Donor: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights)
- *Equal Opportunities: Integration and Empowerment of Women in the Labour Market* (Donor: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights)
- *Education and Networking for a Better Future of Young People in Montenegro* (Donor: Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography)
- *Together for the Third Age: Improving Non-Institutional Support for Older Persons* (Donor: Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography)
- *A Voice for Justice - Support for LGBTIQ Women Survivors of Violence* (Donor: Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography)
- *Change Begins with Youth!* (Donor: Ministry of Sports and Youth)
- *Protection and Advancement of the Rights of LGBTI Persons through the Implementation of the Law on Life Partnership of Same-Sex Couples* (Donor: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights)
- *Words Have Power: A Systemic Fight Against Discriminatory Speech and Misogyny in Montenegrin Society* (Donor: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights)
- *In the Game Together – A Systemic Approach to Combating Hate Speech and Discrimination in Sports* (Donor: Ministry of Sports and Youth)
- *Youth First: Connecting Institutions and Empowering Young People in Montenegro's Education System* (Donor: Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography)
- *Support Network for the Third Age - Expansion and Integration of Non-Institutional Support Services for Older Persons in Montenegro* (Donor: Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography)
- *Strengthening the System of Social Support for LGBTIQ Women Survivors of Violence in the Northern Region* (Donor: Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography)

PROJECTS

AS PARTNER ORGANIZATION

- *Dialogue for Change: Inclusive Education and Strengthening Support for LGBTI Human Rights (Donor: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights)*
- *Counselling for Girls and Women with Disabilities, LGBTIQ Women, and Roma and Egyptian Women Survivors of Violence (Donor: Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography)*
- *Health for All - Improving Healthcare Practices for LGBTI Persons in Montenegro (Donor: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights)*
- *Get Active! - School of Volunteerism and Human Rights for Youth in Montenegro (Donor: Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Dialogue)*
- *Safe and Strong - Together in Protecting Against Gender-Based and Domestic Violence in Montenegro (Donor: Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography)*

OUR APPROACH

MORE THAN A SINGLE STORY, MORE THAN A SINGLE SOLUTION

The diversity of projects we implemented in 2025 is neither accidental nor merely a response to the varying priorities of public calls and competitions. It reflects our core belief that **human rights cannot be viewed through a single lens**, nor can people's needs be reduced to one characteristic by which society often categorizes them. Marginalized and multiply marginalized individuals live realities that are complex, layered, and deeply interconnected, and any attempt to explain their experiences through a single identity or a single problem inevitably misses the essence.

This is precisely why we advocate for and apply an intersectional approach - one that recognizes that discrimination, inequality, and exclusion do not occur in a vacuum, but at the points where different identities, circumstances, and barriers intersect. Our projects in the areas of social protection, education, gender equality, mental health, digital safety, human rights, culture, and public policy are not separate units, but parts of a broader picture. They demonstrate that real progress requires more than one solution, more than one institution, and more than one type of intervention.

A multisectoral response is not just a recommendation - it is the only way to achieve sustainable change. Every project we implement, regardless of its theme, is grounded in the same belief: that human rights can be realized only when different systems work together, when individuals' needs are understood in their entirety, and when barriers are addressed on multiple levels at the same time. Our diversity is therefore our strength. It shows that we understand the complexity of the realities people live in and that we are ready to act precisely where those complexities intersect.

Because people are not one-dimensional, and the solutions we offer them must not be either.



FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Throughout the year, we continued to finance our projects through a diverse range of sources, combining programmes and public calls issued by ministries and other institutions in Montenegro with private donations and membership contributions. This funding approach reflects our strategic commitment to long-term sustainability and independence, as the majority of our activities directly relate to the implementation of existing laws, public policies, and regulatory frameworks governing the situation in the country.

Cooperation with institutions, private donors, and organizational members enables us to work in full alignment with national priorities, accurately address challenges identified in the local context, and contribute to improving practices relevant to Montenegro's institutional system. The diversification of funding sources strengthens the sustainability of our programmes and ensures that the results we achieve have a lasting impact within both the community and public structures.



PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

SOCIJALNI CENTAR



ILGA WORLD



ESWA



IGLYO



IGLYO

ILGA EUROPE



CENTAR E8



GRAĐANSKA ALIJANSA



ĐAKOMO ADRIATIC



INICIJATIVA MLADIH ZA LJUDSKA PRAVA - YHIR



MREŽA ZA MLADE CRNE GORE



Mreža za mlade Crne Gore

POLIGON ZA ŽENSKU IZUZETNOST - SOFIJA



Poligon za žensku izuzetnost Sofija

EUROPEAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS - ECHR



DEKAPLUS



NVO SISTEM



SAČUVAJMO SINJAJEVINU



NE BACAJTE BOCE



PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

The work of our organization over the past year was grounded in the belief that social change does not happen in isolation. Every issue we address - from human rights and social protection, to mental health, gender equality, support for older persons, and the fight against violence and discrimination - requires the joint effort of different sectors, experts, and communities. This is precisely why cooperation with external partners and collaborators represents one of the key pillars of our intersectional approach. It enables us to capture the complexity of real-life situations, reach diverse groups, and design programs and campaigns rooted in knowledge, experience, and professional ethics.

Throughout the year, we continuously built and expanded a network of institutions, civil society organizations, experts, and individuals who share our values and are committed to contributing to a more inclusive and just society. Our work relies on recognizing our own capacities, but also on intentionally engaging external expertise - because no organization can respond to all community needs on its own. Outsourcing expertise, mobilizing diverse actors, and nurturing partnership relations have enabled us to provide higher-quality services, design stronger campaigns, and ensure that our work remains sustainable, relevant, and aligned with the real needs of the people we serve.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS



**INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF
HUMAN RIGHTS, COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



UNITED NATIONS



MONTENEGRO

**HARRIMAN INSTITUTE FOR RUSSIAN,
EURASIAN, AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES,
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

 **COLUMBIA | HARRIMAN INSTITUTE**
Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies



UN PSEA GROUP

DOMESTIC INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS



PROTECTOR OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF MONTENEGRO OMBUDSMAN



MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND THE POLICE DIRECTORATE

INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL AND CHILD PROTECTION



Zavod za socijalnu i dječiju zaštitu Crne Gore

INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC HEALTH



CENTRE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION



CENTAR ZA STRUČNO OBRAZOVANJE

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION



Ministarstvo prosvjete, nauke i inovacija



PUBLIC INSTITUTION HOME FOR THE ELDERLY PODGORICA

CENTRES FOR SOCIAL WORK



JU Centri za socijalni rad
Crna Gora

EMPLOYMENT AGENCY



BUREAU FOR EDUCATION SERVICES



Crna Gora
Zavod za školstvo

MONTENEGRIN EMPLOYERS FEDERATION



UNIJA POSLODAVACA CRNE GORE

EXPERT COLLABORATORS AND SPECIALISTS

In addition to institutional partnerships and collaboration with activists, an important part of our work is carried out by experts who, through their knowledge, professional experience, and public engagement, contribute to the quality of our programmes, publications, and events.

- **Prof. Dr Vesna Simović Zvicer – legal expert, professor, and author** of publications in the fields of labour law, gender equality, and institutional standards. As a contributor to our publications and a guest at the “Equal Opportunities” panel, she provided significant insight into the position of women in the labour market, the challenges within labour rights, and the need for systemic improvement of equal-opportunity policies. Her expertise and professional integrity added substantial weight to the topics we address.
- **Dina Knežević – Chief Adviser to the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms**, her professional contribution has been essential in the areas of anti-discrimination protection, institutional procedures, and the advancement of human-rights standards. Her openness to collaboration and willingness to actively contribute to our programmes significantly enhanced the quality of the activities we implemented.
- **Aleksandar Dragičević – civic activist** whose work in the field of public advocacy and campaign organizing has left a visible mark on Montenegrin society. His persistence in promoting public advocacy as a tool for real change provided important support to our communication and educational activities.
- **Danka Ćetković - NLP Trainer and Coach**, through her extensive professional experience as an NLP trainer, coach, and hypnotherapist, she successfully combined these approaches in our workshop aimed at strengthening the self-confidence and communication skills of unemployed women.
- **Mr Marija Nikolić – Director of the Centre for Social Work Podgorica and member of the teaching staff** at the University of Mediterranean. Her role within the social-protection system and her long-standing experience in working with marginalised groups contribute significantly to the education and training of professional social-work staff

- **Tamara Pavićević - Chief Police Inspector**, known for her interactive and innovative approach to training and for her long-standing commitment to improving professional standards. Cooperation with police structures has been of particular importance for strengthening protection mechanisms and enhancing the understanding of the specific needs of different communities.
- **Ida Marković - Gestalt psychologist**, has significantly strengthened our training programmes by empowering marginalised youth and sensitising group participants.
- **Jelena Šofranac - Director of the Public Institution Home for the Elderly Podgorica**, has demonstrated exceptional readiness for cooperation and a strong commitment to improving practices in the field of elderly care, as the representative of the only licensed entity for home-care training.
- **Miloš Ristić - Graduate social worker** from the Institute for Social and Child Protection, he contributed by addressing ethical questions, professional responsibility, as well as the historical-philosophical context of understanding marginalised groups.
- **Rebeka Čilović - activist, writer, and founder** of the Polygon for Women's Excellence "Sofija". Her long-standing commitment to women's rights and her strong community voice were invaluable in activities dedicated to gender equality and the fight against violence
- **Milica Boca - Environmental activist**, recognised for the slogan "I won't stop until I clean Montenegro." Her dedication demonstrates how personal responsibility can transform into social change and inspires communities across the country.
- **Milan Sekulović - one of the most recognisable environmental and social activists** in Montenegro. As the founder of the "Save Sinjajevina" initiative, he sparked a wave of resistance against the militarisation of natural resources and demonstrated how a local voice can grow into a global movement.
- **Ilija Jokić - Lawyer**, For the past four years, he has been actively providing free legal counselling and support to marginalised communities, and has been a long-standing collaborator of the organisation.
- **Irena Abazović - psychologist** and transactional analysis practitioner, engaged in education within the transactional-analytic psychotherapeutic modality, and a long-standing collaborator of the organisation.

TARGET GROUPS

The diversity of our target groups reflects the diversity of real life. The people who reach out to us come from different social backgrounds, generations, identities, and experiences, yet they share a common need for support, understanding, and access to rights that are often out of reach. Among them are young people facing family pressures, older persons living in long-term isolation, women experiencing multiple forms of discrimination, people at risk of poverty, individuals struggling with mental health, as well as those navigating institutional barriers that further marginalize them. Each of these groups carries its own specific challenges, but also its own strengths, which is why our work must be just as diverse as the people it is meant to serve.

Precisely because of the diversity of our target groups, their intersecting vulnerabilities, and their different life circumstances, we design our project activities in the same way - so that they respond to the real needs of people, rather than to predefined categories.

What makes these groups particularly vulnerable is the fact that their identities and life circumstances intersect. Many of our beneficiaries are not part of just one category; they simultaneously experience poverty, discrimination, violence, health challenges, gender inequality, family conflict, or institutional invisibility. This is precisely why an **intersectional approach is not merely a theoretical framework, but a practical necessity**. It enables us to understand how different forms of vulnerability accumulate and reinforce one another, and to provide support that is tailored to real - rather than simplified - human needs

The activities implemented corresponded to the priority areas for advancing human rights in Montenegro:

- protection of women from gender-based and/or domestic violence
- advancement of the rights of LGBTI persons
- care for older persons
- social care for children and youth
- advancement of sports
- gender equality

SERVICE

Throughout 2025, our services remained a key point of support for the community. Through formal support programs, the following results were achieved:

- Free Legal Service: **162** beneficiaries
- Social Support: **46** beneficiaries

Our support services remained the foundation of our work in 2025, despite the fact that the needs of the community did not always fit neatly into project frameworks, working hours, or planned activities.

These numbers represent only the visible part of our work, captured through the statistical reports of our professional service providers. The year 2025 was marked by an exceptionally high number of informal, urgent, and crisis interventions that were not foreseen in project plans, yet were essential to protect the safety and well-being of the people we support.

SUPPORT

Examples such as the case of Ž.Š., which we publicly addressed in last year's statement, show that crisis situations arise suddenly, often outside regular working hours, and require a rapid, coordinated, and professional response. These cases are not exceptions - they are indicators of the community's real needs and of the points where the system is failing.

This is why, throughout the entire year, we worked beyond regular hours, remaining available outside all planned time slots, responding to calls, messages, emergencies, institutional failures, and the needs of people who had no one else to turn to. Our services are therefore far more than project-based activities.

They are a safety net, a first line of defense, and the only continuous support mechanism for marginalized and multiply marginalized individuals facing discrimination, violence, poverty, institutional barriers, and crisis situations.

SERVIS BESPLATNE pravne pomoći



Podrška LGBTI osobama sa iskustvom nasilja, govora i zločina iz mržnje kao i diskriminacije učinjene usljed seksualne orijentacije ili rodnog identiteta

podraska@lgbtprogres.me

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i porodice
Republike
Srbije

BESPLATNI
SERVIS

FREE OF
CHARGE

PRAVNE POMOĆI

LEGAL AID

ZA KOGA JE SERVIS?

LGBTI osobe koje
žele ili su sklopile
partnerstvo

WHO IS THIS SERVICE FOR?

LGBTI people in
or entering a life
partnership

SUOČAVŠ SE S PREPREKAMA?

Ne znai kako da
ostvari svoja prava?

FACING OBSTACLES?

Unsure how to
claim your rights?

DISKRETNO, INKLUZIVNO, POUZDANO.
DISCREET, INCLUSIVE, RELIABLE

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i porodice
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Srbije

BESPLATNA PRAVNA POMOĆ

u slučajevima
diskriminacije i mizoginog
govora



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BESPLATNI
SERVIS

SOCIJALNE POMOĆI I PODRŠKE



Tvoje iskustvo je važno.

Rad sa socijalnom radnicom
garantuje anonimnost identiteta.

Nisi sama.

Radnik je dostupna od 9:00 do 17:00 u radnim danima i vikendima od 10:00 do 14:00 u subotu. Kontaktirajte nas putem društvenih mreža ili putem e-pošte: podraska@lgbtprogres.me

In 2024, a total of 918 sessions were delivered through various support services. In 2025, although the number of formal sessions was lower due to the high volume of emergency interventions, the intensity and depth of our work with the community remained equally strong. Of the total number of beneficiaries who had been in long-term, continuous support with our professional staff, 18% concluded their formal cooperation during 2025.

These are not “lost beneficiaries,” but people who, after a years-long process, have finally reached a stage in life where they feel **independent, stable, empowered, and capable of handling challenges without continuous professional support.**

This is a sign of the service’s success, not a decrease in need.

Because while some complete their process, new beneficiaries reach out every day, often in situations that require:

- an urgent response
- long-term support
- multi-sector cooperation
- legal and social intervention
- emotional and psychosocial support

The services remain irreplaceable. They are the only space where people feel safe, heard, and supported; the only mechanism that responds even when institutions fail; the only structure that accompanies people over long periods of time, until they become stable enough to continue on their own. This is why the numbers are not just statistics - they are evidence that our work has a long-term impact, and that the needs of the community remain significant, complex, and demanding



HOME-CARE SUPPORT SERVICE

The home-care support service represents one of the **most concrete and most humane forms of assistance** we provided during 2025. This service was developed to meet the needs of older persons, persons with disabilities, people with chronic illnesses, as well as all those living in conditions of social isolation, poverty, or without adequate family support. It is a service that enters directly into people's homes, providing care, safety, dignity, and the reassurance that they are not alone.

In 2025, two training programs for caregivers were conducted - in March and November - in cooperation with the Public Institution Home for the Elderly Podgorica, the only licensed institution in Montenegro that provides such programs. The trainings last five days and conclude with a certificate issued by the Institute for Social and Child Protection, which is permanent and remains valid for participants throughout their lives. Through this, **we not only strengthened ten women professionally, but also supported them economically, opening opportunities for long-term employment and financial stability.**

The first training was implemented with the aim of strengthening the availability of the service in the **north of Montenegro**, while the second was focused on the **south**, ensuring more even territorial coverage and accessibility. After the first training, the service operated for five months, with continuous field visits, distribution of informational materials, and direct work with older beneficiaries. Following the second training, the service was planned for three months, of which two were implemented during 2025, while the remaining month will be completed at the beginning of 2026.

This service is more than a social intervention - it is a bridge between institutions and the people who are most often invisible to the system. It is a way to reach those who cannot come to us, and to provide support where it is needed the most.

In 2025, the home-care support service reached **144 beneficiaries**, which represents a significant scope for a service delivered directly in people's homes and one that requires a high level of expertise, trust, and dedication. A total of **more than 220 field visits** were carried out, including regular check-ins, urgent interventions, needs assessments, and the provision of concrete assistance with daily activities.

This number of visits shows that the service was not symbolic, but intensive and continuous. The caregivers worked in diverse conditions, often in remote areas, with beneficiaries who live alone, in difficult material circumstances, or without adequate institutional support. Each visit was an opportunity to provide not only care, but also conversation, information, emotional support, and a sense of safety.

It is especially important to highlight that in 2025 the home-care support service also served as a **mechanism for women's empowerment**. The ten participants who completed the trainings now hold permanent certificates, giving them the opportunity to work professionally in a field that is chronically understaffed in Montenegro. In this way, the service has a dual impact: it improves the quality of life of beneficiaries while simultaneously contributing to the economic empowerment of women, particularly in communities where employment opportunities are limited.

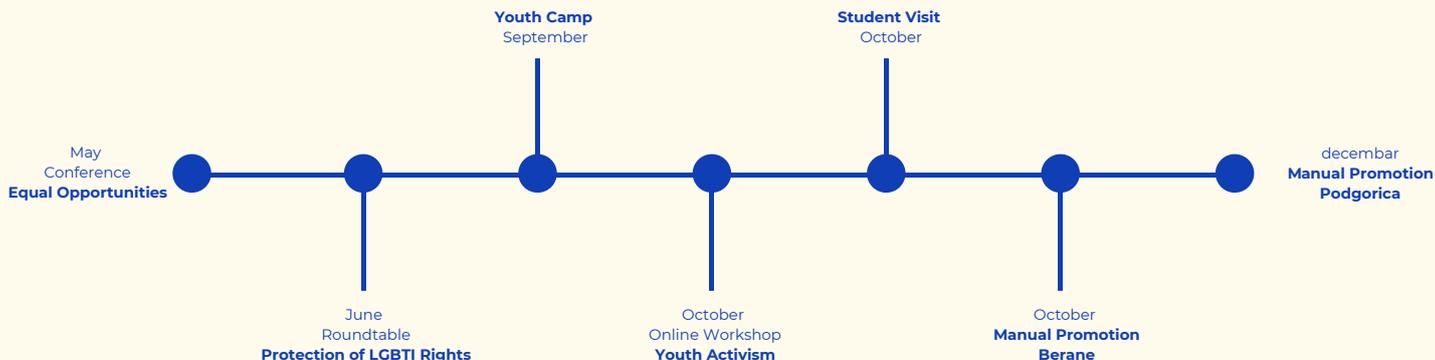
The home-care support service has demonstrated that a multisectoral approach is the only sustainable model: social protection, health care, field work, education, and economic empowerment must be interconnected in order to achieve real impact. The figures from 2025 confirm that this service is not only necessary, but irreplaceable - and that it represents one of the most important ways for marginalized and multiply marginalized individuals to receive the support that enables them to live with dignity, safety, and a higher quality of life.



EVENTS



Throughout 2025, we organized a diverse range of events covering a wide spectrum of topics, target groups, and formats - from professional gatherings to direct community engagement. Our events were not uniform, nor aimed at a single type of audience; on the contrary, they were carefully designed to respond to the needs of the different groups we work with and to create space for dialogue, learning, empowerment, and connection. Through these events, we brought together unemployed women at risk of social exclusion, judges and police representatives, students, young people from various communities, as well as professionals from the fields of social and health protection, among others.





This diversity is not accidental. It reflects our intersectional approach and our belief that real progress in human rights and social justice can only be achieved when work happens on multiple levels at the same time — through education, institutional strengthening, community engagement, public discussions, and the creation of new formats that reach people in ways that feel accessible and relevant to them. This is why, throughout the year, we organized online workshops for young people, as well as entirely new formats such as the youth camp, which created space for intensive learning, connection, and skill-building in a safe environment.

In addition, we presented our publication - a manual designed to improve non-institutional services and support for older people in Montenegro. The publication was introduced through two promotional events, allowing its content to reach both professionals and the wider public, and opening a conversation about the importance of accessible, humane, and sustainable services for older adults.

Together, these events form a mosaic of our work in 2025 - work that was dynamic, inclusive, and grounded in the real needs of people. In the following pages, we present a detailed overview of each event.

CONFERENCE “EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: INTEGRATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET”

The conference was held on 19 May 2025 at the NEST Coworking space in Podgorica, with the financial support of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro. The event brought together experts in the fields of human rights, gender equality, and the labour market, as well as representatives of institutions that play a key role in improving the position of women in Montenegro.



In the opening segment, **Prof. Dr Vesna Simović Zvicer** presented the analysis “Special Protection of Women in Montenegro,” focusing on the legislative framework, international standards, and the specific challenges related to protecting women during pregnancy and parental leave. The central part of the conference was the panel discussion “Strengthening the Position of Women in the Labour Market – A Systemic Approach,” moderated by Bojana Jokić, President of the Board of LGBT Forum Progres. Panelists **Dina Knežević (Ombudsman)** and **Gordana Bošković (Employers’ Union)** discussed gender stereotypes, discrimination in employment, unequal pay, limited opportunities for advancement, and the challenges of balancing private and professional life.

The conference highlighted the importance of a systemic approach to improving the position of women in the labour market, including strengthening legislation, educating employers, promoting gender equality, and developing policies that create better conditions for women at all stages of life and career.



ROUNDTABLE “EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, AND BARRIERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGAL PROTECTION MECHANISMS”

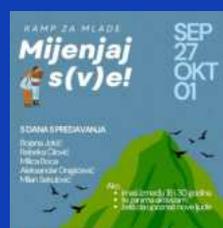
The roundtable was held on 30 June 2025 at Hotel Wulfenia in Kolašin and brought together representatives of the Police Directorate, misdemeanor judges, and civil society organizations. The aim of the event was to strengthen cross-sector cooperation and facilitate the exchange of experiences in applying legal protection mechanisms against discrimination, hate speech, and domestic violence, with a particular focus on LGBTI persons.

The event was opened by **Bojana Jokić** (LGBT Forum Progres) and **Milan Sekulović** (journalist and activist), followed by the presentation of the **analysis “Judging Hatred”** which, through an overview of court practice, highlights the challenges in prosecuting cases of violence and hate speech. Participants discussed their professional experiences, obstacles in the implementation of the law, and opportunities to improve the effectiveness of existing protection mechanisms

During the discussion, several key recommendations were highlighted: the need to expand the binding instruction of the Supreme State Prosecutor’s Office regarding the handling of hate-speech cases, improved regulation of the media and social networks, stronger sensitization of social and political structures, as well as the urgent resolution of the shortage of judges, prosecutors, and police inspectors who are essential for the effective prosecution of such cases. After the official part, the conversation continued in an informal setting. The activity was implemented within the project “Laws Are Here to Be Used!”.

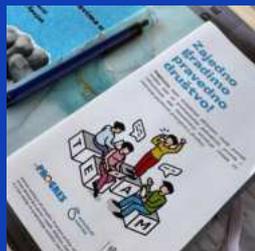


EDUCATIONAL CAMP ON ACTIVISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS



The camp on activism and human rights introduced an entirely new format within our youth programme - and marked the first camp of its kind ever organized by LGBT Forum Progres. We developed this concept after recognizing that young people need a space that goes beyond a workshop, beyond a one-day event, and beyond formal lectures - a space where they can learn, live, talk, connect, and build skills in an environment that is safe, supportive, and inspiring. The camp was designed as an intensive three-day programme that allowed participants to step away from their everyday obligations and fully immerse themselves in learning about human rights, social equality, and activism, while also building a network of peers who share similar values and interests.

Set in the atmosphere of the Bali Mountain Resort in Bijelo Polje, the camp brought together participants from different parts of Montenegro, forming a diverse and dynamic group of young people eager to learn and engage in social processes. Over the course of three days, the programme included educational sessions, workshops, and discussions led by prominent lecturers and activists. **Rebeka Čilović** spoke about gender equality and the position of women with experiences of violence, particularly in the north of Montenegro. **Milica Boca** shared her experience in environmental activism and emphasized the importance of personal and collective responsibility in protecting the environment. **Bojana Jokić** addressed the position of LGBTI persons, the challenges faced by the community, and the importance of solidarity and inclusivity.



In addition to the formal programme, the camp included sports activities, environmental actions, outdoor film evenings, and group conversations, all of which further strengthened team spirit, mutual trust, and motivation for continued activism. As the first camp of its kind in our work, this activity laid the foundation for new formats of youth empowerment and opened space for long-term investment in their knowledge, skills, and social engagement.

ONLINE LECTURES ON CIVIC ACTIVISM AND PUBLIC ADVOCACY

Following the successful implementation of the first educational camp on activism and human rights, we continued working with young people through two online lectures dedicated to civic activism and public advocacy. This format made it possible to carry the energy and motivation from the camp into the digital space, enabling participants to continue developing their knowledge and skills even after the three-day programme had ended. The lectures were held via the Zoom platform and brought together 15 young people from different parts of Montenegro.

The first lecture was delivered by **Milan Sekulović**, a representative of the civic initiative Save Sinjajevina, who shared his experiences in the field of civic activism. Using photographs, video materials, and real-life examples, he spoke about organizing protests, international cooperation, strategies of action, and the ways in which citizens can influence social processes. The lecture was highly interactive, with active participation from the young attendees and a constructive discussion on opportunities for engagement within their local communities.

The second lecture was delivered by **Aleksandar Dragičević**, a civic activist known for his work on public advocacy campaigns. His presentation focused on how successful campaigns are created - from defining goals and building alliances to shaping messages that inspire people to take action. Dragičević presented concrete examples of successful civic and environmental initiatives, emphasizing the importance of persistence, strategy, and clear communication.

These online lectures represented an important continuation of the youth-empowerment process initiated at the camp, providing participants with additional tools, knowledge, and inspiration for active engagement in social change. The activities were implemented within the project "Change Begins with Youth," with the financial support of the Ministry of Sports and Youth.

STUDENT VISIT: LEARNING ABOUT THE CIVIL SECTOR FIRST-HAND

On 21 October 2025, our offices hosted students of the University Mediterranean who, as part of their practical coursework and accompanied by teaching associate **Marija Nikolić**, selected our organization for an educational visit. This activity enabled young people to gain first-hand insight into the work of the civil sector, its impact on social processes, and the role that non-governmental organizations play in protecting and advancing human rights.

During the visit, we presented our long-standing work, key campaigns and support services, as well as the current situation of marginalized and multiply marginalized groups in Montenegro. Special emphasis was placed on how the civil sector influences the creation of public policies and legislation, which sparked strong interest among the students and opened space for a discussion on the role of young people in driving social change.

The enthusiasm of the participants was reflected in their interest in joining future volunteer activities, as well as in their initiative to invite representatives of the organization to deliver a lecture at their faculty. **Such visits represent an important step in strengthening the connection between the academic community and the civil sector**, especially in light of the growing interest among young people in working in the fields of human rights and social justice.



LAUNCH OF THE INCLUSIVE CARE HANDBOOK

In 2025, we organized two promotional events for our handbook aimed at improving non-institutional services and support for older persons in Montenegro. This handbook represented the first document of its kind in the country, creating a clear need to present its content to the broader professional and public audience, as well as to practitioners who work with older people on a daily basis. Precisely because of its uniqueness and importance for the development of support services, we decided to hold two separate launches - one in Berane and the other in Podgorica.

A special value of these promotional events was the **presence of caregivers** who had completed our trainings within the projects implemented during the year. Their participation made it possible not only to present the handbook, but also to open a direct conversation about practical field experiences - the challenges they encounter, the needs of beneficiaries, the quality of services, and the real conditions in which non-institutional care is provided. Their testimonies further confirmed the importance of the handbook as a tool that can improve both practice and standards in this field.

Below is an overview of both implemented promotional events.

BERANE

On 29 October 2025, a promotional event for the **Handbook for Inclusive Care and Support for Older Persons in Montenegro** was held in Berane, with a particular focus on working with individuals from marginalized communities.

The event was organized following the completion of a five-month period of field work carried out by trained caregivers from the northern region, who provided free home-care services to older persons living in rural and less developed areas. Their presence at the launch enabled an open discussion about field experiences, challenges in their work, and the needs of beneficiaries, further highlighting the importance of continuous education and support for caregivers, especially those working with multiply marginalized older persons.

During the event, the handbook was presented as a resource introducing innovative, inclusive, and gender-sensitive approaches in the field of social protection, grounded in findings from field visits and practical observations from work with older persons. Participants expressed their readiness for further training, networking, and applying the handbook's recommendations, recognizing its importance for improving the quality of non-institutional services in Montenegro.



PODGORICA

On 8 December 2025, the second launch of the handbook was held in **Podgorica**. The event took place at the “13. Jul Plantaže” restaurant and brought together 18 participants from the civil sector and the professional community.

Unlike the event in Berane, which was strongly focused on the experiences of caregivers from the northern region and the challenges present in rural areas, the Podgorica launch created space for a broader discussion on the handbook’s impact on practice and service development. In Podgorica, participants explored how the handbook’s recommendations can be applied across different institutional and non-institutional settings, how to improve standards of support for older persons, and how this document can serve as a tool for professionals, organizations, and decision-makers. This emphasis on wider systemic impact and practical application made the Podgorica event distinct and complementary to the launch held in Berane.



TRAININGS AND CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Our “pea-under-the-mattress” analogy served as the core framework for all trainings we conducted throughout the year. We start from the idea that injustice and exclusion do not occur on a single level, but accumulate - like peas beneath a mattress - and that only by identifying each layer individually can we understand how deeply they affect people’s lives. This is precisely why our trainings were designed to address different layers of vulnerability: from gender-based violence and discrimination, to the marginalization of young people, and the challenges faced by older persons and those who care for them.

Through a **series of specialized programs**, we worked with women, caregivers, social workers, school counselling services, and professionals within the social-protection system. Each training had its own focus, yet they all shared a common goal: to strengthen those who work daily with the most vulnerable groups, equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to identify the “hidden peas” - the invisible yet painful obstacles that affect the dignity, safety, and quality of life of marginalized individuals.

This set of trainings represented our most comprehensive educational cycle to date. Through diverse themes and approaches - from confidence-building workshops, to licensed programs for caregivers, to trainings focused on the protection of LGBTIQ women, marginalized youth, and older persons - we built a network of professionals who understand the complexity of vulnerability and are prepared to act. In this way, each training became a small but meaningful step toward a society in which no one is left alone with their own “pea under the mattress.”

Berane - NLP
Training -
Strengthening
Women's
Self-Confidence
and
Communication
Skills

Njegovateljice -
Licensed
Training No. 1 at
the Public
Institution Home
for Older
Persons
Podgorica

Njegovateljice -
Licensed
Training No. 2 at
the Public
Institution Home
for Older
Persons
Podgorica

Žabljak - Training
on Sensitizing
Social Workers for
Work with
Marginalized
Women

Sutomore -
Training on
Sensitizing Social
Workers for Work
with Marginalized
Women

Centar i sjever -
Training for
Secondary-School
Pedagogical and
Psychological
Services

Jug - Training for
Secondary-School
Pedagogical and
Psychological
Services

Kolašin -
Intersectional
Training for
Secondary-School
Pedagogical and
Psychological
Services and
Employees of
Social Work
Centres

Briga o starijima
- Training for
Social Workers in
the Field of
Support to Older
Persons in
Montenegro

NLP Training - Strengthening Women's Self-Confidence and Communication Skills

An interactive training dedicated to strengthening self-confidence, communication skills, and leadership abilities among women from northern Montenegro was held at the Regional Business Centre in Berane on 26 March 2025.

Trainer Danka Ćetković from NLP Network worked with **15 participants** through dynamic and practical exercises focused on goal-setting, strengthening positive beliefs, effective communication, and increasing productivity. Through group work and individual tasks, participants had the opportunity to develop strategies for professional success and empowerment in their everyday work.

Caregivers - Two Licensed Trainings at the Public Institution Home for Older Persons Podgorica

Two five-day trainings were delivered for a total of ten caregivers from the northern and southern regions of Montenegro.

Through both theoretical and practical work, participants learned the fundamentals of gerontological care, principles of working with older persons, first-aid provision, and other key skills necessary for delivering quality support to older people in the community.

The trainings were led by expert teams from the Public Institution Home for Older Persons Podgorica, with a particular focus on practical exercises and situational tasks that prepare participants for field work. After completing the program and obtaining their certificates, caregivers will provide home-care services and support to older persons in rural areas of both the northern and southern regions. We extend our gratitude to the Public Institution Home for Older Persons Podgorica and its director, Jelena Šofranac, for their continuous support and cooperation in implementing these activities.

Training on Sensitizing Social Workers for Work with Marginalized Women

Two two-day trainings were delivered for employees of social work centres and professionals from the social and child-protection system, bringing together more than 40 participants from various institutions.

The trainings focused on working with women with experiences of violence, with particular emphasis on LGBTIQ women as a group whose needs often remain unrecognized within the protection system. The program covered topics such as intersectionality, ethical dilemmas, institutional cooperation, and specific risks in working with marginalized beneficiaries

Both trainings were led by: **Tamara Pavićević**, Chief Police Inspector - the role of the police, challenges in working with LGBTIQ women, standards of conduct **Miloš Ristić**, Bachelor of Social Work - ethical principles, legislative framework, and the historical-philosophical context of LGBT identities

Training for
**secondary-school
pedagogical and
psychological** services

Intersectional training
for secondary-school
pedagogical and
psychological services
and employees of
centres for social work

Elderly care – training
for social workers in the
field of working with
older persons in
Montenegro

Two two-day trainings for representatives of pedagogical-psychological services from the central, northern, and southern regions of Montenegro brought together participants from various secondary schools and relevant institutions.

The trainings were dedicated to working with **marginalized youth** in the education system, with a focus on recognizing signs of marginalization, supporting young people experiencing violence, psychological empowerment, inclusive practices, and cross-sector cooperation between schools, families, and the social-protection system.

The programme was led by:
Ida Marković, Gestalt psychologist
Marija Nikolić, Director of the Centre for Social Work

A two-day training aimed at networking representatives of pedagogical-psychological services from secondary schools and representatives of social work centres from all three regions of Montenegro. The training brought together participants who had previously completed specialized education on working with marginalized youth and were now, for the first time, connected with one another to strengthen cross-sector cooperation. The programme was led by Ida Marković and Marija Nikolić, covering topics such as professional ethics, inclusive practices, early risk identification, and a coordinated school–family–social-work-centre approach.

Participants worked on practical tasks, exchanged experiences, and created video messages of support for a campaign aimed at marginalized young people.

A **pilot training** was delivered for employees of social work centres on approaches to and work with multiply marginalized older persons. The training was led by **Bojana Jokić and Marija Nikolić**, covering topics such as multiple marginalization, a human-rights-based approach, communication in complex situations, and removing barriers in work with older people.

Participants from all regions emphasized that work with the older population in Montenegro is significantly neglected and that there is a clear need for continuous training in this area. **Precisely in response to this identified need, the organization accredited a new training programme at the end of the year, dedicated to providing professional support to marginalized and multiply marginalized older persons, thereby strengthening this area at a systemic level.**

RESEARCH

In 2025, we conducted **three extensive studies** that represent the most significant analytical segment of our work this year. These studies covered diverse target groups and social contexts, including respondents of different ages, regions, professional backgrounds, as well as members of marginalised communities. In total, **378 people** participated, enabling us to gather representative data and observe the situation on the ground from multiple perspectives.

All three studies have been fully completed, analysed, and published in the form of reports, and their findings were publicly presented through our communication channels, ensuring full transparency and accessibility of results to the wider public, institutions, and professional stakeholders. **Based on the findings, concrete recommendations were developed** to improve policies, institutional procedures, and professional practice in the areas covered by the analysis. The publications containing detailed results and recommendations will be presented in the next chapter of this annual report.

The diversity of the conducted research directly reflects the core analogy that runs throughout this annual report: social change does not occur through a single channel, but through **a network of interconnected points** that together build a more stable, just, and inclusive system. This is precisely why, over the course of the year, we examined different populations, various forms of marginalisation, and a range of institutional practices - because only in this way can we understand the broader picture and identify where systems overlap, where they fracture, and where there is room for progress. This strategic diversity allows us to observe social processes from multiple perspectives and to ensure that the recommendations we develop are grounded, applicable, and aligned with the real needs of both people and institutions.

RESEARCH: YOUTH ATTITUDES TOWARD ACTIVISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN MONTENEGRO

The research was conducted among young people aged 15–30 from all regions of Montenegro, with a total of **202 participants**. This age group was selected because it represents a period in which young people form long-term value orientations and begin to take on active social roles, including participation in processes that contribute to social inclusion, democracy, and the rule of law.

The data collection process focused on examining young people's attitudes toward activism, human rights, and their perception of the potential for activism to contribute to strengthening the rule of law in Montenegro. Special attention was given to their level of awareness of the mechanisms and tools available for engaging in activist and volunteer activities, as well as their willingness to participate in such processes.

Data were collected using structured instruments that enabled the combination of quantitative and qualitative insights. After collection, the data were processed through standard statistical analysis procedures and thematic coding, which made it possible to identify patterns in attitudes, levels of knowledge, and motivational factors among young people. This approach provided a reliable foundation for the subsequent development of evidence-based recommendations.

RESEARCH: BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY LGBTIQ WOMEN IN MONTENEGRO

This research focused on understanding the barriers and challenges faced by LGBTIQ women in Montenegro, with a total of **144 participants** taking part. The starting point of the research was the recognition that gender-based violence is already a deeply rooted social problem, and that risks and obstacles are further amplified when a woman does not conform to the heteronormative patterns assumed by society. It is precisely this combination of gender- and sexuality-based marginalisation that creates specific layers of vulnerability which required detailed examination.

Data collection was carried out using instruments specifically adapted to the sensitive nature of the topic, with a focus on experiences of discrimination, violence, institutional barriers, and everyday obstacles in accessing rights and services. The methods used enabled the capture of both quantitative patterns and qualitative experiences, providing a deeper analysis of the real situations LGBTIQ women face across different areas of life.

The questionnaire included **an accompanying note with contact information for support services**, ensuring that participants experiencing violence, discrimination, or emotional discomfort during the survey had a clear and accessible pathway to assistance. This approach formed an important part of the ethical framework and demonstrated sensitivity toward the participants.

RESEARCH: PERCEPTIONS AND THE SITUATION OF MARGINALISED YOUTH IN MONTENEGRO'S SECONDARY SCHOOLS – THE PERSPECTIVE OF PEDAGOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

The third study focused on the pedagogical and psychological services of secondary schools, which in this process served as the key respondents. The research was conducted with the official approval of **the Bureau for Education Services, the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, and the Centre for Vocational Education**, confirming that the relevant institutions recognised its importance and social value. A total of **32 professionals** participated in the study, which is particularly noteworthy given that all participants were women - a reflection of the gender structure characteristic of this professional field.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire completed by school staff, with the research centred on the perception of the situation of marginalised youth in Montenegro's secondary schools. The central research question was "Is school for everyone?", accompanied by additional questions on the importance of inclusion, practical barriers, institutional capacities, and everyday challenges in working with young people who face various forms of marginalisation. This approach made it possible to gain first-hand insight into how professionals perceive the inclusiveness of the school system and where they identify key points of progress or stagnation.

At the end of 2025, we launched a study aimed at understanding the level of public awareness regarding same-sex civil partnerships, with a focus on how familiar citizens are with the law, its implementation, and the procedures involved in exercising this right. The research also examines the availability of services, potential administrative and social barriers, as well as the extent to which people are informed about protection mechanisms in cases of discrimination during the partnership registration process.

Data collection is being carried out through a structured questionnaire, with particular emphasis on understanding the real experiences and perceptions of individuals who may be directly or indirectly affected by this legal framework. As this is a relatively new and still insufficiently explored topic in Montenegro, the process represents an important step toward mapping actual needs, obstacles, and the level of accessibility of rights guaranteed by law.

Although the research will be completed in early 2026, its significance warranted inclusion in this annual report, as its findings and recommendations will have a substantial impact on the further development of policies, institutional procedures, and public services in the field of protection and equality of LGBTIQ persons.

PUBLICATIONS

Throughout 2025, we published a series of materials that reflect the results of our research, educational, and advocacy work. These publications cover a wide range of areas - from social inclusion of young people and the barriers faced by LGBTIQ women, to the inclusiveness of the school system and the accessibility of legal protection for LGBTIQ persons. In addition to data-driven analytical reports, we also developed practical manuals and educational modules for professionals, teaching staff, and young people, ensuring that the findings of our research are translated into concrete tools for work in the field.

A total of 1,150 physical copies of our publications were printed during the year, while all materials are also permanently available for free reading and download on our official website, ensuring broad accessibility. The publications presented in this chapter reflect our commitment to transparency, knowledge accessibility, and the improvement of practices that contribute to a more inclusive society.



FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION: Youth Attitudes Toward Activism and Human Rights in Montenegro



Publication *[From Insight to Action](#)* (click for online version) was developed based on research conducted among 202 young people aged 15–30 from all regions of Montenegro. The publication focuses on understanding how young people perceive activism, human rights, and their role in strengthening the rule of law, as well as how strongly they believe that their engagement can contribute to social change. This age group was selected because it represents a formative period in which long-term values are shaped and first active roles in the community are taken on.

The publication analyses the level of awareness among young people about the mechanisms and tools available for engaging in activist and volunteer processes, as well as the factors that influence their motivation, readiness, and perception of their own agency. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, it maps patterns in youth attitudes, their needs, and the areas in which additional support, knowledge, and institutional accessibility are required.

In addition to the analytical overview, the publication offers data-driven recommendations aimed at institutions, the education system, and youth organisations, with the goal of creating an environment that encourages active youth participation. The publication was printed in **200 copies**, ensuring its availability to schools, organisations, and decision-makers, and it serves as an important bridge between research and practical action - from insight to concrete change.

THROUGH THE LENS OF NEEDS: Analysis of the Challenges and Needs of LGBTIQ Women in Montenegro

Publications [*Through the Lens of Needs*](#) (click for online version) In addition to providing an analytical overview, the publication offers a detailed account of the experiences of LGBTIQ women in Montenegro through the lens of everyday obstacles, the availability of support, and the ways in which social norms shape their sense of safety and belonging. The focus is placed on how multiple forms of marginalisation influence life choices, relationships with institutions, and the ability to exercise basic rights.

Through a carefully structured research process, the publication documents situations in which LGBTIQ women encounter misunderstanding, invisibility, or overt discrimination, as well as moments in which the system demonstrates the capacity to provide support. Particular attention is given to patterns of violence, barriers in accessing services, and the ways in which women themselves assess the availability of safe spaces and professional assistance.

The publication provides a clear overview of the recurring needs identified in the experiences of the respondents and highlights the areas in which institutional practices, professional standards, and cross-sector cooperation must be improved. It was printed in **150 copies**, with the intention of ensuring its availability to organisations, institutions, and professionals working in the fields of gender equality, social protection, and human rights.



SCHOOL FOR ALL? : Perceptions and the Situation of Marginalised Youth in Montenegro's Secondary Schools

Publication [*School for All?*](#) ([*click for online version*](#)) offers insight into how the pedagogical-psychological services of Montenegro's secondary schools perceive the position of marginalised youth and the capacity of the school system to respond to their needs. The focus is on the professional assessments of the specialists who work with students every day and who best understand the dynamics of the school environment - its possibilities, but also its limitations.



Through the analysis of their perspectives, the publication raises questions about the availability of support, the visibility of problems, and the readiness of schools to address different forms of marginalisation — from socio-economic barriers and discrimination to the lack of safe spaces for young people facing multiple challenges. It examines to what extent schools truly function as inclusive environments and where, in practice, gaps emerge that affect students' sense of belonging and overall well-being.

The publication summarises the key insights of the participating professionals and offers guidance for improving school policies, cross-sector cooperation, and professional support. Printed in **150 copies**, it is intended for schools, institutions, and organisations working with young people, and serves as an important resource for understanding the real state of inclusivity in Montenegro's secondary schools.

PROSECUTING HATE

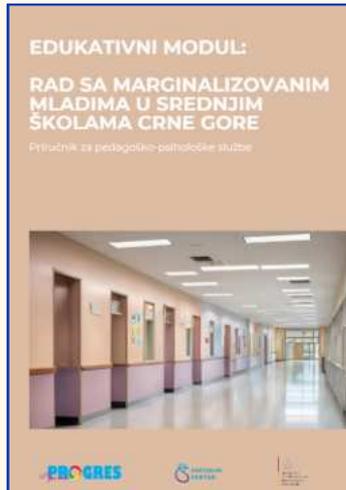
Publication [***Prosecuting Hate***](#) ([click for online version](#)) examines how Montenegro's legal system recognises, processes, and sanctions violence and discrimination motivated by hatred toward LGBTI persons. Through an overview of legal provisions, court practice, and institutional procedures, the publication raises the question of how functional the existing framework truly is in protecting victims and to what extent protection mechanisms are applied in practice.

A particular focus is placed on how hate-motivated criminal offences are qualified, how evidence is collected, how proceedings are conducted, and where gaps appear that affect the effectiveness of protection. The publication also analyses the roles of the police, prosecution, and courts, highlighting the discrepancies between normative obligations and actual institutional capacities. In doing so, it creates space for understanding why certain cases are not recognised as hate crimes and how this affects the sense of safety within the LGBTI community.

The publication also provides recommendations for improving practice - from more precise recording of hate-motivated incidents and strengthening professional capacities to enhancing cross-sector responses. Printed in **300 copies**, it is intended for legal professionals, institutions, civil society organisations, and all those working in the field of human rights, serving as a tool for understanding existing challenges and improving the protection of LGBTI persons in Montenegro.



EDUCATIONAL MODULE: Working with Marginalised Youth in Montenegro's Secondary Schools



Educational Module (click for online version) was developed as a practical tool for pedagogical-psychological services that work daily with young people in secondary schools and encounter various forms of marginalisation, discrimination, and social vulnerability. Unlike analytical publications, this handbook is designed to provide specialists with concrete methods, procedures, and recommendations that can be applied immediately in their work with students.

The content of the handbook includes an overview of the most common situations in which marginalised youth find themselves, ways of recognising risk patterns, and approaches that contribute to creating a safe, supportive, and inclusive school environment. Special emphasis is placed on communication techniques, needs assessment, crisis intervention, and cooperation with other institutions, ensuring that school specialists have clear steps to follow in situations that require a quick and sensitive response.

The handbook was developed to reflect the realities of Montenegro's school system and to respond to the challenges that school specialists themselves have identified in practice. As an online edition, it is accessible to all schools and professionals, ensuring broad applicability and continuous use in working with young people who face various forms of marginalisation.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND YOUTH IN MONTENEGRO: Strengthening Young People's Capacities for Active Citizenship and Participation

Educational Module for Young People (click for online version) was developed as a set of practical materials intended for organisations, schools, and youth groups that wish to work with young people on developing active citizenship. Unlike traditional manuals, this module functions as a “toolbox” - offering clear steps, exercises, and activity scenarios that can be implemented during multi-day workshops, trainings, or youth camps.

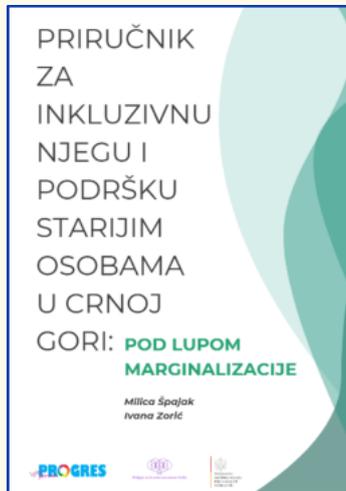
The module covers topics such as civic participation, critical thinking, social responsibility, and the role of young people in decision-making processes. Special emphasis is placed on methods that encourage experiential learning: simulations, group tasks, discussions, community problem-mapping, and the development of small action initiatives. The module is designed so that facilitators can easily adapt it to different groups of young people, regardless of their prior knowledge or level of engagement..

As **an online edition**, the module is available to everyone who wishes to work on empowering young people and developing their civic competencies. Its purpose is to provide a structured yet flexible framework that enables young people to recognise their own role in society and to develop the skills needed for active participation in their communities.



POD LUPOM MARGINALIZACIJE: Priručnik za inkluzivnu njegu i podršku starijim osobama u Crnoj Gori

Handbook for Inclusive Care (click for online version) was created in response to the growing need to ensure that older persons in Montenegro receive care that is professional, accessible, and sensitive to different forms of marginalisation. The publication focuses on how older people - especially those who live alone, in poverty, without family support and/or belong to a marginalised group, often experiencing multiple layers of marginalisation - perceive the care system and where, in practice, gaps emerge that affect their health, safety, and dignity.



The handbook combines an overview of existing services with practical guidelines for service providers, both institutional and community-based. It addresses topics such as recognising neglect, communicating with older persons who face discrimination, assessing needs in home environments, and identifying ways in which different sectors - health care, social protection, local services, and civil society - can collaborate more effectively. The aim is to offer professionals a clear, applicable framework that improves the quality of care and reduces the risk of exclusion.

The publication was printed in **150 copies** and is intended for caregivers, social workers, health professionals, local services, and organisations working with older persons. As a resource, it encourages the development of inclusive practices and the strengthening of support networks, ensuring that older people - regardless of identity, family situation, or social status - have access to care that respects their rights and meets their needs.

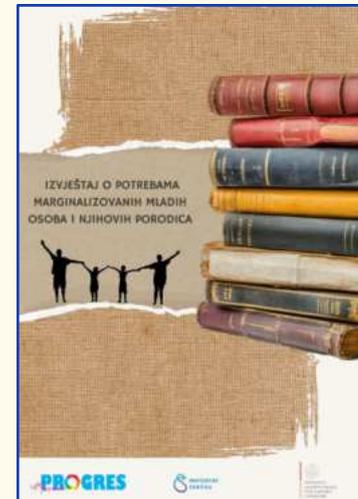
Report on the Needs OF Marginalised Young People and their Families

Report on te Needs ([click for online version](#)) provides an overview of the real, everyday needs of marginalised young people and their families in Montenegro, with a focus on how different forms of vulnerability shape life within the household. The publication examines how young people and their families perceive the availability of support, which barriers they most commonly identify, and how they cope with challenges that affect their wellbeing, education, mental health, and sense of safety.

Through collecting information from school pedagogical-psychological services as well as staff in centres for social work, the report captures first-hand experiences of young people and their families. This approach made it possible to hear the nuances of everyday situations that often remain invisible within formal systems:

from the ways in which families allocate limited resources to the emotional and social burdens carried by young people facing marginalisation. It is through these personal accounts that the gaps in support become visible - where assistance is missing, how needs accumulate, and which types of help would genuinely make a difference in their lives.

The report provides an overview of the key areas in which institutional services, cross-sector cooperation, and access to information must be strengthened in order to ensure more stable and equitable support for young people and their families. The publication was printed in **200 copies** and is intended for institutions, organisations, and professionals working with young people, serving as a resource that helps deepen understanding of the real conditions in which marginalised youth grow up.

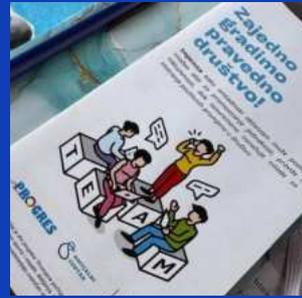


INFORMATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Throughout the year, alongside extensive publications and research processes, we also developed shorter informational materials that serve as quick, accessible resources for the diverse communities we work with. These leaflets and brochures were created out of the need to convey key information clearly, simply, and in a way that can be applied immediately - whether for older persons who need support in daily care, young people seeking ways to engage in social processes, women facing workplace discrimination, or citizens who want to understand their rights and recognise forms of violence and discrimination.

Although these materials were designed as short and practical resources, their true value became evident through the wide community-level distribution to which we dedicated special attention. Over the course of the year, we **printed and distributed more than 5,000 leaflets and brochures across all municipalities in Montenegro**, directing them specifically toward the communities for whom they were intended. In parallel with physical distribution, we prepared electronic versions of all materials to ensure they remain publicly and permanently accessible, regardless of where someone lives or what kind of access to information they have. In this way, these short formats became small but reliable elements of our broader work - complementing larger publications and services much like individual pieces fit into a whole that only makes sense when available to everyone.

The information in these materials was concise, clear, and direct, shaped to offer people exactly what they need at the moment they need it. Leaflets created within project activities always included details about the support services available through the project, as well as contact information for our organisation and partner services relevant to each topic. In doing so, these resources functioned not only as informational tools but also as practical entry points to real assistance.



- **Care for Older Persons**

The leaflet provides older people with simple and practical information about available home-care services, health-preservation tips, and opportunities for community-based support. The content is designed to be easy to understand and immediately applicable - from recommendations for daily physical and mental wellbeing to explanations of how home visits work and whom they can contact for additional assistance. The leaflet clearly highlights the contact details of our organisation and partner services, ensuring that every older person has a direct pathway to the support they need and deserve.

- **Building a Just Society Together**

The material aims to introduce young people to the idea of active citizenship and show them concrete ways to engage in social processes. Through simple and motivating messages, it explains the mechanisms of youth activism, opportunities for participation in decision-making, ways to build networks, and examples of how young people can become drivers of change in their communities. The contact list provides direct access to support, information, and spaces where young people can develop their ideas and initiatives.

- **Equality Is Not a Privilege**

The brochure presents concise research insights on the unequal treatment of women in the workplace and during recruitment processes. Through clear examples and recognisable situations, the material highlights the most common forms of discrimination women face - from being denied opportunities for advancement to unfair hiring criteria. The aim of the leaflet is to help women identify discriminatory practices, understand their rights, and know whom they can turn to for support. The material includes contact information for our organisation and partner services that provide advisory and legal assistance in cases of discrimination.

- **Record - Preserve - Respond**

The interactive brochure is designed as a practical tool that helps individuals experiencing gender-based and/or sex-based discrimination to record all key information about an incident in a timely manner. In moments when it is difficult to gather one's thoughts, the brochure serves as a reliable ally: it guides the user through essential questions, helps structure the facts, and prepares material that can be used in subsequent protection procedures. Once completed, the brochure can be submitted to the police as part of a report, used as a basis for contacting the Ombudsperson, or sent to our team to receive free legal advice. In this way, the material represents a first step toward legal protection - simple, accessible, and designed to empower individuals facing discrimination to record, preserve, and respond.

- **Violence Has Many Faces. None of Them Is Acceptable.**

The leaflet was developed as a tool to empower LBTIQ women by helping them recognise different forms of violence and access clear information about available support services. The material is intended for both the community and professional associates, as well as for those who seek information discreetly - which is why, in addition to physical distribution, a digital version was prepared to ensure anonymity and quick access in crisis situations. The leaflet recognises a wide spectrum of violence, from psychological and economic to institutional and intimate-partner violence, and offers concrete steps, contacts, and services that women can turn to for help. The aim of the material is to inform, connect, and provide a sense of safety to those facing violence.

- **Same-Sex Life Partnership**

The material provides essential and practical information on the procedure for entering a same-sex life partnership, including key steps, required documentation, and the rights that arise from the partnership. It was prepared in both Montenegrin and English to ensure accessibility for a wider group of users. The leaflets also clearly outline instructions for using our organisation's free legal service, which offers support throughout the registration process and in exercising the rights guaranteed by the Law. The aim of the material is to provide reliable information and make legal protection and equal treatment more accessible.

CAMPAIGNS

Throughout 2025, we carried out several campaigns aimed at raising public awareness, breaking taboos, and creating space for open discussion on topics that are often suppressed or misunderstood. Each campaign had its own focus, yet they all shared a common goal: mobilising individuals to become active participants in building a more just society.

Through a variety of formats - from visual messages and digital content to community-based activities - we sought to reach as many people as possible and encourage them to be part of the conversation rather than passive observers. These campaigns were not merely informational; they were a call for empathy, solidarity, and active engagement in social change. Each one aimed to remove the “taboo” label from issues related to violence, discrimination, mental health, gender equality, reproductive health, and human rights.

Progress continuously strives to encourage the wider public to engage with these topics openly, courageously, and without fear.

The Law Is There to Be Used! *(campaign for the legal protection of LGBTI persons)*

The campaign “The Law Is There to Be Used!” focused on reminding LGBTI persons that their rights exist, that they are applicable, and that they can be used as real mechanisms of protection against discrimination and hate speech. Its core aim was to empower the community to recognise discrimination, understand whom they can turn to, and realise that **institutional support is not abstract but accessible and within reach**.

Through a series of visual and informational posts, we presented the results of our free legal counselling service, through which more than one hundred individuals received personalised support related to discrimination, family matters, and access to healthcare services. The campaign emphasised that the law is not a privilege and that it applies to everyone - without excuses, shifting responsibility, or ignoring reports.

A special emphasis was placed on the concept of the “concentric circle of support,” illustrating how change begins with individuals: from frontline officers who provide accurate information, to allies who respond to hate speech, to institutions that protect human rights. The campaign also included a **video dedicated to countering hate speech**, carrying a clear message that everyone has a role in creating a safer environment.



Together for the Third Age *(campaign on dignity and support for older persons)*

The campaign “Together for the Third Age” was dedicated to raising awareness that **ageing is not merely a matter of years, but a combination of diverse identities, experiences, and intersecting needs**. In a society where older persons often face invisibility, the campaign aimed to remove the taboo surrounding dignity, care, and access to support, and to show that an intersectional approach is essential for understanding their position.



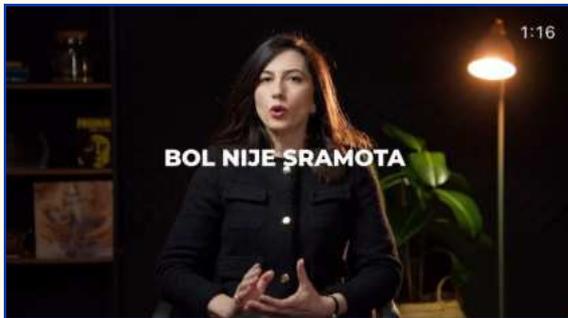
Through a series of video statements by social workers and a psychologist, the campaign opened space for discussing what everyday work with older persons looks like and which obstacles and needs professionals identify in practice. Their voices highlighted that cross-sector cooperation - between institutions, civil society, and the community - is essential to ensure that older persons have access to support that is dignified, accessible, and adapted to their real-life circumstances.

The campaign also featured a joint video in which representatives of social work centres and civil society activists addressed older persons in Montenegro with a clear message: dignity does not fade with age - it becomes even more important. The video underscored that the way we care for the oldest among us reflects the values of the society we are building and the future that awaits us all. Every spoken word was an expression of respect for the generations that laid the foundations of the community we live in.

The campaign demonstrated that solidarity is not just a concept, but a practice built through understanding, visibility, and a willingness to act. The message **“It’s Time for a Dignified Age”** became a call to view old age as a life stage that deserves care, safety, and full social attention.

Pain Is Not a Shame (*campaign for menstrual leave*)

The campaign was launched in response to the reality in which thousands of women work every month while experiencing severe pain, faint at their workplaces, and cannot request leave without fear of consequences. In a society where menstrual health is still treated as a taboo, the campaign opened a conversation about how deeply this issue is connected to labour rights, healthcare access, and women's dignity. It also highlighted that fear of losing one's job contributes to 61% of women in Montenegro discovering cervical cancer too late, as they miss or postpone medical check-ups due to work obligations.

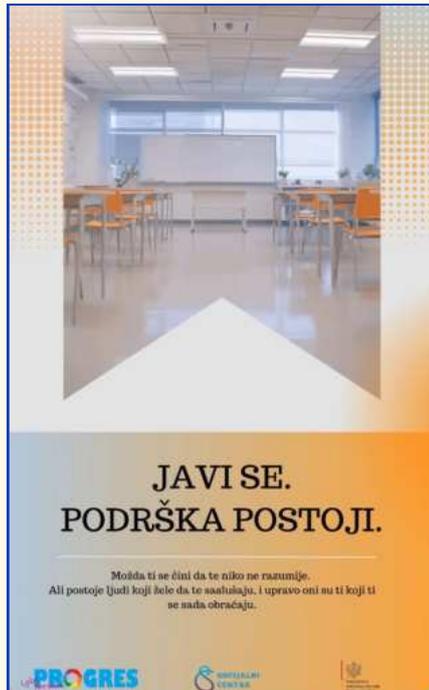


This initiative also highlighted a historical paradox: fifty years ago, our grandmothers had the right to menstrual leave, while women today do not. Precisely for that reason, the key message of the campaign was a call for adopting a legal solution that would establish menstrual leave as a legitimate, legally protected right. The message “**Pain Is Not a Work Obligation**” became the central motif of the campaign - a call for solidarity, understanding, and institutional change.

Through powerful visual messages and public advocacy, the campaign created space for discussing menstrual health as an issue of labour rights and public health - not a private “women’s matter.” In partnership with **MP Jevrosima Pejović** and the NGO Social Centre, we issued a clear demand to institutions: it is time for the law to reflect the real needs of women and to end the practice of normalising pain and ignoring health needs.

The campaign mobilised a large number of citizens, opened a public debate, and demonstrated that change happens when taboo topics are addressed loudly, clearly, and without fear - in the name of health, dignity, and equality.

Reach Out, Support Exists (*youth support campaign*)



The campaign was created out of the need to send young people in Montenegro a clear, simple, and human message: support is real, it is accessible, and no one should go through difficult periods alone. At moments when young people feel out of place, misunderstood, or overwhelmed, the campaign aimed to remove the taboo around discussing emotional difficulties and to normalise seeking help as an act of strength, not weakness.

Through a video featuring psychologists, pedagogues, representatives of social work centres, and civil society activists, the campaign brought together experts from different fields to jointly deliver a message of encouragement. Their statements emphasised that support exists, that it is available regardless of identity, background, or the challenges young people face, and that everyone has the right to ask for help when they need it.

The visible readiness of professionals to stand with young people sent a powerful message of solidarity and shared responsibility: **caring for the mental and emotional wellbeing of youth is not only a professional duty, but a social value.** The campaign opened space for conversation, reduced feelings of isolation, and reminded young people that they are not alone - and that there is always someone they can reach out to.

Speaking Openly About Violence *(story series of LGBTIQ women)*

The series “Speaking Openly About Violence” was one of the most intimate and courageous testimonies shared by the community this year. Through ten written interviews, LGBTIQ women from different parts of Montenegro spoke about experiences of violence, social isolation, discrimination, and rejection - experiences too often hidden behind silence, fear, and invisibility. Each story served as a reminder that violence against LGBTIQ women takes many forms and frequently occurs in private, family, and institutional spaces where support is absent.

The interviews were collected in a safe environment, with full respect for the anonymity and integrity of the participants. The women who contributed to this series are part of the organisation’s internal network, connected through years of trust, free support services, and a community built through both formal and informal channels. It is precisely this network that made it possible for these stories to be told without fear, but with a clear intention - **to name violence, to speak about it, and to ensure it is never normalised again.**

On the following pages, we present selected quotes from the interviews, while the full stories are available on our social media channels. In this way, the series became a tool for raising public awareness, opening dialogue, and offering support to women who face similar experiences.

”

Najteže mi je bilo kad sam prvi put pokušala da se autujem bliskoj prijateljici, a ona mi je rekla da je to *'faza'*.

M.K. 24 godine, lezbejka

”

Najčešće se prećutkuje koliko to nasilje utiče na naše *mentalno zdravlje*.

I.T. 27 godina, lezbejka

”

Sve je ili-ili, a ja sam stalno *između*.

T.D. 33 godine, biseksualna žena

”

U vezi sam bila s muškarcem i tada su me svi tretirali kao *'normalnu'*, a kad sam bila s partnerkom, odjednom sam postala *'problem'*.

S.B. 31 godina, biseksualna žena

”

Nasilje je bilo u tome što sam morala da biram između *sigurnosti i istine*.

D.R. 42 godine, lezbejka

”

Osjećala sam kao da moram da zaslužim osnovne stvari — *pažnju, sigurnost, prostor*.

J.V. 36 godina, queer žena

”

Ljudi misle da su to samo riječi, da možeš da *'isključiš telefon'*.

K.L. 22 godine, biseksualna žena

”

U komšiluku me gledaju kao *'ušedelicu'*.

45 godina, lezbejka
sagovornica potiče iz male sredine, strahuje od otkrivanja identiteta preko inicijala



The series opened space for discussing forms of violence that are not always visible from the outside, yet leave deep and lasting consequences. Each published story was an invitation for the public to hear the voices of women who have been silenced for far too long, as well as a call to institutions to recognise the specific risks LGBTIQ women face. Through these testimonies, the community showed that courage lies not only in surviving, but also in sharing one's experience so that other women know they are not alone.

Violence Has Many Faces, None of Them Is Acceptable

In Montenegro, many women face different forms of violence every day, and LGBTIQ women are additionally exposed to risks that often remain invisible and unrecognised. The video content opened space for discussing this reality, showing forms of violence that are not always visible from the outside but leave deep and lasting consequences. The video also featured anonymous testimonies from the series “Speaking Openly About Violence,” in which LGBTIQ women share experiences of psychological, physical, economic, and institutional violence - experiences that society far too often silences.

The central message was that violence is real even when we cannot see it, and that it is everyone's responsibility to recognise it, name it, and respond. The call to citizens was clear: **believe women - regardless of their gender identity or sexuality - and reject any attempt to justify violence.** In doing so, the campaign opened space for public awareness, sensitivity, and breaking the taboos that prevent women from seeking help.

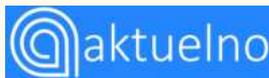
The content concluded with concrete information on where support can be sought in urgent situations, sending a clear message that no woman should face violence alone. This video served as a powerful call to the community and institutions to take responsibility and stand with women who experience injustice every day.

(anti-violence campaign)



MEDIA COLLABORATION

Throughout 2025, we maintained stable and visible collaboration with the media, who consistently followed our activities and created space for topics related to human rights, social protection, gender equality, mental health, and the position of older persons. Media outlets reported on our trainings, panels, campaigns, and support programmes, as well as on broader social issues we addressed through public statements and appearances. Particularly notable was the visibility surrounding the organisation's 15th anniversary, with several online portals publishing extensive articles highlighting our long-standing contribution to the development of human rights in Montenegro.



Our activities in schools, social work centres, and the Podgorica Home for the Elderly received significant coverage on online portals and social media, while the campaigns we launched generated strong public interest and secured important media space. This visibility allowed our messages to reach audiences that are often difficult to engage. Media outlets also reported on our analyses, recommendations, and commentary, helping ensure that the issues we raise remain present, relevant, and accessible to the wider public.



For the past five years, Programme Director Milica Špajak has served as a member of the Council of Radio Television of Montenegro, where she contributes to strengthening the standards of the public broadcaster through consistent advocacy for human rights protection, professional reporting, and inclusive media content. As a long-time activist and human rights expert, she is recognised within the Council for her principled approach, insistence on accountability, and clear understanding of the legal framework governing the work of the national public broadcaster.

Her presence in the Council contributes to reinforcing transparency, integrity, and the alignment of RTCG with European standards of public information.

We appeared in news programmes, provided statements on current social issues, and participated in broadcasts focused on social policy, education, and institutional practices.

The weekly programme “Pretres” on Radio Television of Montenegro, broadcast once every week, is one of the most important media spaces for analysing social issues, public policies, and current topics of relevance to citizens.

The President of the Board, Bojana Jokić, is engaged as a regular guest and commentator on the programme, contributing expert analysis in the fields of human rights, gender equality, and the position of marginalised communities. Her presence in the programme enhances the quality of public debate and strengthens the visibility of topics that are often insufficiently represented in the media landscape.



This level of collaboration throughout 2025 strengthened public trust in our work, made our programmes more accessible and easier to understand, and ensured that the voice of the community was heard more clearly and powerfully. Media visibility was not merely an accompanying element of our activities, but an essential part of a broader strategy to bring social issues closer to people, open space for dialogue, and encourage accountability from both institutions and the community.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENTS AND PROFESSIONAL REPRESENTATION

We actively participated in a range of external events, expert gatherings, consultations, and meetings with domestic and international partners. These engagements represent an important part of our work, as they ensure that community perspectives and practical experience are directly integrated into policy-making processes, situation assessments, and the improvement of institutional human rights protection mechanisms. Through participation in panels, round tables, focus groups, and bilateral meetings, the organisation continued to contribute to the development of inclusive standards and the strengthening of institutional accountability in the areas of gender equality, social protection, and the position of marginalised groups.

Our involvement in these events further confirms our recognition as a relevant and reliable stakeholder in processes that require expertise, practical insight, and a deep understanding of the challenges faced by vulnerable communities in Montenegro. It is particularly significant that international organisations and partner institutions acknowledged our role in assessing current trends, identifying systemic gaps, and proposing sustainable solutions. This not only strengthens the organisation's visibility, but also its strategic contribution to the development of evidence-based policies grounded in the needs of the community.

Through these processes, we continue to build bridges between institutions, civil society, and international actors, contributing to the creation of a framework in which human rights, inclusion, and equality are not viewed as declarative values, but as binding standards that must be consistently implemented in practice.

Participation of Bojana Jokić in the Human Rights Advocacy Program (HRAP), Columbia University

The President of the Board, Bojana Jokić, was a **Harriman donor-funded fellow during** the 2024/2025 academic year at the prestigious **Human Rights Advocacy Program (HRAP)** at **Columbia University** (*Click on HRAP to learn more about the program*) in New York, one of the most significant international programmes dedicated to strengthening the capacities of human rights leaders. HRAP brings together selected activists from around the world, providing intensive academic, mentoring, and practical support aimed at enhancing their advocacy strategies, institutional approaches, and international networks of cooperation.



Participation of Bojana Jokić (*click on the name to view the Alumni page*) in this program represents an exceptional professional achievement, as well as an important step forward for the organisation, given that HRAP fellows undergo a rigorous selection process and **are selected based on their years of work**, community impact, and potential for further development. (*click on the bolded text to view the profile*)

It is important to note that she was one of the key speakers on the panel **[“The Current State of LGBTIQ+ Rights Around the World”](#)** (click on the panel title to view the University’s official announcement). As a representative of Montenegro and the wider region, Bojana made an exceptionally valuable contribution to the discussion, presenting the real challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ people in our society.



In her remarks, she highlighted that although physical violence is less frequent than in the past, deeply rooted stigmatization remains the dominant problem - with around 70% of citizens still holding negative attitudes toward the LGBTIQ+ community. She also emphasized that political polarization in Montenegro does not produce meaningful differences in approaches to human rights, as both sides include strongly conservative actors. In doing so, she clearly pointed to the complexity of the context in which the organisation operates and to the need for a long-term, systemic approach.

Bojana’s participation in this panel positioned both her work and the work of the organisation under her leadership within a global framework, reaffirming her status as one of the most recognisable voices from the region in the field of human rights. Her contribution was strong, authentic, and grounded in years of experience, further strengthening the organisation’s international visibility and credibility.



During her time at Columbia University, Bojana had the opportunity to collaborate with international experts, institutions, and organisations that shape global human rights standards, which further strengthened our capacities for strategic advocacy and international cooperation.

Her participation in the HRAP programme contributed to strengthening Montenegro's visibility on the international stage, as well as to positioning the organisation as a relevant actor in regional and global human rights processes. The knowledge, contacts, and experience she gained are directly reflected in the quality of our work, particularly in the areas of institutional advocacy, international networking, and the development of evidence-based policies.

This achievement represents not only personal recognition for Bojana Jokić, but also a confirmation of the organisation's long-standing work, credibility, and commitment to improving the position of marginalised groups in Montenegro.

Exemplum ducimus!



Roundtable of the Institute for Social and Child Protection

At the invitation of the **Institute for Social and Child Protection**, on 28 May 2025 we participated in a roundtable dedicated to improving access for LGBTI persons within the social and child protection system. The event was moderated by **Bojana Jokić**, President of the Board of the LGBT Forum Progres, who opened the discussion through experience-based examples, highlighting practical challenges and institutional barriers.

Participants from institutions and civil society pointed to the lack of mandatory training, silent discrimination, and rigid procedures that hinder timely support for LGBTI persons. The need for continuous sensitisation of professional staff and for aligning the legal framework with the real-life situations of the community was particularly emphasised. The discussion also raised the issue of urgent response in cases where the rights of LGBTI persons are directly endangered, with an initiative to consider special regulations for emergency situations. The Institute confirmed its readiness to cooperate with civil society and encouraged the accreditation of educational programmes.

Despite the low turnout, the event demonstrated that there is a clear willingness among individuals from the system and civil society to work together on improving the position of LGBTI persons, underscoring that coordination, education, and institutional consistency are key to achieving real change.



“Buntarka” Award for the President of the organisation’s Board

The President of the Governing Board, Bojana Jokić, **received a special “Buntarka” award** within the literary festival “Literature Also Has a Woman’s Face,” held on 12 March and organised by the Platform for Women’s Excellence Sofija.

The award was presented to women whose work, courage, and long-standing dedication bring real social change. In doing so, Bojana’s continuous contribution to the fight for gender equality, human rights, and support for marginalised communities was recognised, as well as her influence as one of the most prominent voices of contemporary activism in Montenegro.

Due to her absence, the award was accepted on her behalf by a representative of the organisation.



Roundtable: Youth in Action

In April, we participated in the roundtable “Youth in Action - Promoting Equality and Inclusion in Local Communities,” organised by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR). The organisation’s representative, **Ivana Zorić**, took an active part in the discussion on the role of young people in advancing equality and inclusion at the local level, particularly emphasising the importance of their involvement in shaping policies and practices that contribute to more open and just communities.

Panel “The Power of Decision-Making Without Gender Balance”

We attended the panel “The Power of Decision-Making Without Gender Balance,” organised by the Civic Alliance and held in the Blue Hall of the Rectorate. As an organisation that has been advocating for gender equality for many years, participating in this event was a natural continuation of our long-standing engagement. The discussion focused on how to ensure that laws and strategies in the field of gender equality do not remain merely symbolic, as well as on meeting the objectives of Directive 2022/2381 and the obligations arising from other negotiation chapters related to gender equality.



Our participation in the panel enabled us to contribute to the discussion on the real challenges in implementing policies and to highlight the importance of consistently applying standards that guarantee the equal participation of women in decision-making processes.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Visit of the Council of Europe Representative - 9 May

On 9 May, we hosted a **representative of the Council of Europe**, who expressed interest in our work and in the current challenges faced by marginalised communities in Montenegro. Such visits confirm the importance of the active engagement of civil society organisations in the field of human rights and inclusion, as well as the value of international support in monitoring the situation on the ground. We are particularly encouraged by the fact that we are recognised as a relevant interlocutor and a reliable source of insight regarding the position of marginalised groups in the country.

Participation in the UN PSEA Network Focus Group



We took part in the focus group of the **UN PSEA Network** in Montenegro, held at the United Nations offices in Podgorica, where we discussed with PSEA consultant **Nataša Lambić** the key obstacles and risks that LGBTIQ+ persons face in accessing protection. The discussion covered the reasons behind mistrust and the difficulties in reporting violence, existing support mechanisms and their gaps, as well as measures that could improve safety, prevention, and the response to sexual exploitation and abuse. Being part of such focus groups is important because it ensures that the voice of the community is directly embedded in risk-assessment processes and in the development of international protection standards.



EXPECTATIONS AND PLANS FOR 2026

In 2026, the organisation will focus on developing and implementing several pioneering initiatives that represent the first of their kind in Montenegro. We are preparing two digital platforms of particular importance: the first dedicated to the process of entering into same-sex life partnerships, which will, for the first time, consolidate all information, procedures, and support in one place; and the second designed for young people, providing a space for information, counselling, and capacity-building in the areas of mental health, human rights, and personal development. Both platforms aim to improve access to information, reduce institutional barriers, and offer safe, inclusive, and accessible support to users.

We also highlight an activity coordinated by **Dajana Maraš**, addressing an exceptionally important topic - creating safer sports environments through the prevention of hate speech and discrimination. This project represents a significant step forward in a field that remains insufficiently addressed in Montenegro, and we expect its impact to be felt both locally and nationally. You can expect to see some familiar names in some sporting roles.

We will continue to provide our free support services, which have been one of the most important pillars of our work for more than a decade. These services are free because they are intended for individuals who most often face economic, social, and institutional barriers, and any financial obstacle would further limit their access to safety, information, and professional assistance. Ensuring continuity of support is essential: it builds trust, enables long-term monitoring of community needs, and provides a stable point of reliance for people in crisis, at risk, or in situations of discrimination. More than ten years of uninterrupted work in the field confirms our commitment, reliability, and ability to respond to the needs of the community - and to remain a place people return to, not only because of our expertise, but also because of the sense of safety, understanding, and support we provide.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this report, we used the analogy of “rights on a pea” to describe the reality in which we work. Just as in the story, where a single small pea can be felt despite many layers of mattresses, so too in society there are laws, strategies, and institutions - yet the problems faced by marginalised people remain present. Throughout 2025, we continued to work precisely in those places where these problems are most visible - through support services, education, research, and cooperation with institutions and organisations across Montenegro. Through trainings, publications, projects, and direct work with communities, we sought to contribute to a better understanding of the needs of marginalised groups and to strengthening support systems.

At the same time, field experience shows that formal progress does not always translate into real change in people’s everyday lives. Individual cases of discrimination, violence, or institutional barriers continue to reveal where additional action is needed and where weaknesses in the system persist. This is why our work remains focused on continuous community support, strengthening institutional capacities, and creating space for dialogue and cooperation. Change in the field of human rights requires time, persistence, and the joint effort of many different actors

In the coming period, we plan to engage even more strongly and assertively in international programmes, networks, and partnership initiatives, as contemporary human rights challenges demand precisely this kind of cooperation. Regional and global projects enable knowledge exchange, access to innovative practices, and capacity-building that goes beyond national frameworks, while also creating opportunities for experiences from Montenegro to be recognised and valued internationally. Our intention is to actively contribute to these processes and, through them, secure additional resources, support, and visibility for the communities we work with.

Ultimately, the message of this report remains simple: the layers of protection and support exist and they matter - but they fulfil their purpose only when they reach people’s everyday lives. That is why we continue working to ensure that the “pea” is recognised, understood, and gradually removed.

*See you in 2026.
LGBT forum Progress*

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