# Highlights 8 January - March 2025

## Restoring hope and justice: A lawyer's fight for women's rights after the earthquakes in Türkiye

When the devastating earthquakes struck Türkiye in 2023, the destruction went far beyond collapsed buildings. It shattered lives, leaving many women in vulnerable situations, displaced, and trapped in difficult circumstances. For Fatma Sonay Baakan, who is a lawyer from Hatay, providing legal aid to these women became more than just a profession- it turned into a mission. Through the grant scheme implemented by the Council of Europe and the Union of Turkish Bar Associations (UTBA) under the action "Fostering Women's Access to Justice in Türkiye," she helped women navigate the legal challenges that emerged in the aftermath of the disaster.

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## STRENGTHENING JUSTICE

### A rare internship opportunity: Sofija Lekić's journey into human rights law

For many young law students, the path to understanding the complexities of human rights law is often a theoretical one.

But for Sofija Lekić, a 22-year-old law student from Belgrade, the opportunity to dive into real-world cases at the European Court of Human Rights has provided a rare and invaluable experience. As one of 22 students who went through the internship at the Government Agent's Office which represents Serbia before the European Court of Human Rights, organised with the Council of Europe action's support, Sofija gained firsthand knowledge of how human rights cases are handled, sharpening her skills and deepening her passion for the field.

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### Trauma-informed therapy for women offenders to be introduced soon in Albania

The Council of Europe is assisting the Albanian prison service in the process of introducing for the first time the trauma-informed therapy for women offenders. It promotes emotional recovery by being aware of patient's triggers as well as recognises the signs of trauma and builds on a strength-based approach to resist re-traumatisation. In this view, an on-site visit of Council of Europe experts was conducted for the newly built "Prjoshë" prison near Pogradec, aiming to assess the situation and modalities of piloting the treatment programme.

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### Monitoring officers better equipped to communicate with minors in enclosed institutions

Monitoring officers have strengthened their ability to engage with minors in closed institutions following a specialised capacity building activity on effective communication techniques. Monitoring officers from the Montenegrin Ministry of Justice, National Prevention Mechanism (NPM) and the Treatment Department of the Administration for Execution of Criminal Sanctions improved their skills to conduct more in-depth monitoring visits.

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### Addressing school segregation in Albania, in line with European Court judgements

Representatives of the Albanian government, local institutions and civil society organisations involved in primary education gathered in Korça to address the ongoing challenge of segregation of Roma and Egyptian pupils at the "Naim Frashëri" school. This roundtable, organised in partnership with the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and the State Advocate's Office, identified concrete actions and determined related responsibilities in the implementation of the European Court of Human Rights' judgments.

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## FIGHTING ECONOMIC CRIME & CORRUPTION

### Strengthening oversight of high-risk businesses to tackle financial crime in Türkiye

Supervisors in Türkiye are better equipped to monitor and regulate businesses vulnerable to money laundering and terrorist financing, following a two-day capacity building on risk-based supervision of Designated Non-Financial Businesses and Professions (DNFBPs). Organised by the Council of Europe, in collaboration with the Financial Crimes Investigation Board (MASAK) on 25-26 February 2025 in Ankara, the training focused on practical tools and strategies for supervising high-risk sectors such as real estate businesses and dealers in precious metals and stones.

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### Enhancing financial investigations and asset recovery in Bosnia and Herzegovina

A specialised capacity-building workshop on improving law enforcement and judicial practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina concerning financial investigations and asset recovery concluded today in Sarajevo.

With the support of the Council of Europe experts, participants from courts, prosecutors' offices, and law enforcement agencies examined the domestic legal framework, international standards, and the strengths and weaknesses of current practices related to the seizure and recovery of illicit assets.

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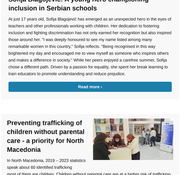
## PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY



### Sofija Blagojević: A young hero championing inclusion in Serbian schools

At just 17 years old, Sofija Blagojević has emerged as an unexpected hero in the eyes of teachers and other professionals working with children. Her dedication to fostering inclusion and fighting discrimination has not only earned her recognition but also inspired those around her. "I was deeply honoured to see my name listed among many remarkable women in this country," Sofija reflects. "Being recognised in this way brightened my day and encouraged me to view myself as someone who inspires others and makes a difference in society." While her peers enjoyed a carefree summer, Sofija chose a different path. Driven by a passion for equality, she spent her break learning to train educators to promote understanding and reduce prejudice.

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### Preventing trafficking of children without parental care - a priority for North Macedonia

In North Macedonia, 2018 – 2022 statistics speak about 60 identified trafficking most of them are children. Children without parental care are at a higher risk of trafficking due to their life circumstances. In this context, the role of psychologists, social workers and pedagogues is pivotal to educate children about the perils of child trafficking and to assist child trafficking victims. To assist them in preventing child trafficking and in taking good care of child trafficking victims a 2-days capacity building activity was organised on detecting, identifying, protecting and referring potential child trafficking victims.

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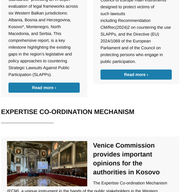
## EDUCATION FOR ALL



### Teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina leading change for inclusive and democratic classrooms

Teachers from across Bosnia and Herzegovina are shaping more inclusive and democratic future through innovative training on the *Reference Framework of the Competences for Democratic Culture*. From 11-13 February, teachers from primary and secondary schools in Brčko, Goražde, Orašje, Srebrenik, and Zenica gathered in Brčko for a three-day seminar gaining new methods and tools to improve democratic school culture in their classrooms. The meeting reviewed progress made since November 2024, set priorities for the next phase, and reaffirmed the commitment to integrating innovative digital practices into Türkiye's education system.

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## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA

### Regional assessment on countering SLAPPs in the Western Balkans provides key results and recommendations

The Council of Europe published the "Regional Baseline Assessment of Legislative and Policy Needs for Implementing European Anti-SLAPP Standards," providing an in-depth evaluation of legal frameworks across six Western Balkan jurisdictions: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. This comprehensive report, is a key milestone highlighting the existing gaps in the region's legislative and policy approaches to countering Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs).

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### New Animation Explains SLAPPs and Legal Safeguards

Check out our latest video animation produced to raise awareness about combating SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) in the efforts to advance freedom of expression and freedom of media, in line with the European standards. The video provides reference to EU and Council of Europe main instruments designed to protect victims of such lawsuits including Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)2 on countering the use SLAPPs, and the Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council on protecting persons who engage in public participation.

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## EXPERTISE CO-ORDINATION MECHANISM



### Venice Commission provides important opinions for the authorities in Kosovo

The Expertise Co-ordination Mechanism (ECM), a unique instrument in the hands of the public stakeholders in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, continues to provide essential legislative expertise and policy advice, as a key support for the Beneficiaries to meet their reform agendas in the fields of human rights, rule of law and democracy and to comply with European standards.

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## NEW PUBLICATIONS

### Get to know the most recent publications under the Horizontal Facility programme



In this edition of Highlights, we present the main publications produced under the framework of the Horizontal Facility III programme with an aim to enhance knowledge and bring European standards in various areas close to the beneficiaries in the Western Balkans and in Türkiye.

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