



Attack in Thessaloniki: yet another violent incident targeting people because of their identity

Athens 15.03.2024 - The Racist Violence Recording Network strongly condemns the violent incident against two LGBTQI+ individuals in Thessaloniki by a large group on Saturday 9 March 2024 and expresses its deep concern about the escalating homophobic and transphobic rhetoric targeting LGBTQI+ people and the impact it might have on their safety and well-being. According to the victims' testimonies, teenagers and young adults were among the group of alleged perpetrators. Several people were arrested and subsequently charged.

The recent incident during which two individuals appear to have been targeted, with verbal and physical violence, because of their gender expression/identity/characteristics illustrates a pattern that the Network has documented over time: victims moving in public space are subjected to unprovoked violence because of their specific identity characteristics. To recall that the trauma resulting from this type of violence is deeper precisely because the victims are targeted for characteristics that are essential to a person's identity and that no person should be ever asked to hide or change. Justice is a key element in restoring the trauma of citizens targeted by unprovoked violence motivated by prejudice, as well as for their trust in the rule of law. Administration of justice is the most effective way to send a clear message against impunity to both the alleged perpetrators and society.

The Network welcomes that the authorities are investigating if there is a racist motive behind the incident under article 82A of the Criminal Code and urges that a prompt, thorough and transparent investigation is conducted. At the same time, however, the absence of an effective national mechanism for the support and protection of victims of racist crimes, despite the relevant provisions of the legal framework (Law 4478/2017) requiring such an entity be established, remains a concern and something that exposes the victims to the risk of experiencing the trauma of the secondary victimization and/or re-victimization. Moreover, this incident highlights the pressing need for the State to respond effectively with a set of prevention and response policies to the increasing phenomena of violence by underage perpetrators.

It should be noted that this incident takes place at a time of intense hate speech against LGBTQI+ people in the context of the debate and recent adoption of the law legalizing same-sex marriage. This is expressed in the public discourse both by senior politicians and members of the Parliament, as well as by media and representatives of the Church in the country. The intensification of this rhetoric, as the Network has pointed out in the past, normalizes, encourages and ultimately escalates racist reactions, sometimes even resulting in (mass) attacks on the street against members of the targeted communities.

The Network, recalling its recommendations for effective prevention against the dissemination of intolerant ideas, especially among children and young people, and with a focus on the role of the education system, calls on the competent authorities to coordinate and adopt comprehensive and effective policies to address and prevent such phenomena that lead to the dehumanisation and targeting of individuals on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender characteristics/expression. No crime, motivated solely or cumulatively by prejudice, should go unpunished; no victim should be left without protection and support, without a voice.

For more information: Garyfallia Anastasopoulou, 210.7233216, racistviolence@nchr.gr