



ANNUAL REPORT

2025

Justice should not be a privilege. For many people, however, justice is distant, incomprehensible, and inaccessible - not because of lack of laws, but the gap between what the law stipulates and the reality in which people live.

Why We Exist

For over two decades, MYLA exists to bridge that gap. We believe the law holds true value only when it can be understood and applied, and when it can be felt in everyday life. We put our work in the service of those who need it most, by providing legal assistance, engaging in strategic litigation, and contributing to systemic changes that create a more just and sustainable society.

Our Vision

A just, equitable and fair society where the law protects human dignity, serves the public interest, and ensures a sustainable and safe environment.

Our Mission

MYLA protects and promotes the fundamental principles and values established under the Constitution. By using the power of the law, it protects and empowers the disadvantaged, and advocates for improved laws and policies under which individual freedoms and rights, the rule of law, and the environment are fully protected.

Whom Do We Work For

We stand next to people that oftentimes remain invisible in the system: asylum seekers, migrants and stateless people, victims of human trafficking, victims of discrimination and human rights violations, children and youth, people at social and financial risk, persons with disabilities, and prisoners. At the same time, we cooperate with institutions, lawyers and civil society organizations, because the change in individual lives and the systemic change are two sides of the same struggle.

How Do We Work

Our work combines individual protection with systemic change. We provide legal assistance to people whose rights have been threatened, we lead strategic litigation that sets standards, and we actively participate in shaping policies and laws. We invest in people and knowledge to encourage informed public debate and accountable institutions. Everything we do is guided by a simple principle: the law should be available, applicable, and equitable for all.

Legal Assistance

We provide free legal aid to people whose rights have been violated or threatened, providing them access to legal protection and justice.

Strategic Advocacy

We work on changing policies, laws and institutional practices by means of strategic litigation, initiatives, and partnerships.

Research

We develop analyses and evidence that uncover systemic weaknesses and raise issues of public interest.

Education

We work on capacity-building for lawyers, institutions and communities, aimed at ensuring more efficient and adherent enforcement of the law.



Message from the President

For the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA), 2025 was a year of embracing changes, but we did not only accept the changes, we led them.

For the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA), 2025 was a year of embracing changes, but we did not only accept the changes, we led them.

We leave behind a year where we demonstrated that justice is achievable when one is persistent.

Resolution of all known statelessness cases originating from the disintegration of the former state and establishment of systemic discrimination was not only a legal victory - it also meant restored dignity for hundreds of fellow citizens. This success story is yet another proof that MYLA is most needed when the system underperforms.

The reality, unfortunately, is rather cruel: the threshold of human rights violations remains high. That is why we remain steadfast and committed to our mission. We believe that every case won, every child protected, and every injustice prevented, maintains the necessary balance, and between the good and the evil – we firmly stand on the right side.

**Bojana
Bozhinovska
Siljanovska**





Our story is not only a sum of reports and numbers. It is an example that, we hope, would inspire young lawyers to believe in the power of the law, all the while making proud those who placed the foundations of this organization.

The institutional support provided by the Sigrid Rausing Trust represents an investment in MYLA's long-term development and sustainability. Through this partnership, MYLA continues to advance its mission and provide legal assistance, advocacy, and support to those who need it most.

Brief Overview of 2025

Key Figures

3.000+	LEGAL ADVICE PROVIDED TO CITIZENS
317	persons granted citizenship after many years of living without legal status
111	asylum seekers and
211	Kosovo refugees received active legal assistance
340	persons supported in the pre- and post-penal stage
366	persons at risk of statelessness were provided legal aid
326	vulnerable persons identified and supported in the context of trafficking in human beings

In 2025 we worked
where rights do not
reach and where
support makes a
true difference.

33

CHILDREN COVERED
WITH THE SKILLS4LIFE
PROGRAM

12+

PARTICIPATIONS IN NATIONAL
WORKING GROUPS AND
STRATEGIC PROCESSES

10+

PUBLICATIONS,
ANALYSES AND
POLICY BRIEFS

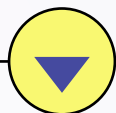
Key Changes



North Macedonia became the first country on the Balkan to have resolved all known cases of statelessness originating from Yugoslavia's disintegration. A significant number of these cases were identified and led by MYLA.



The Court of Appeals upheld the verdict establishing systemic and continued discrimination against persons without access to their law-guaranteed rights. Most of them are cases involving Roma people who were issued temporary personal identification documents.



The practice on securing translators in asylum proceedings was promoted – an issue we had pointed out for many years.



In a joint effort with other organizations, we prevented legal changes that would have lowered protection for victims of domestic violence.



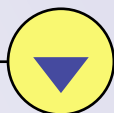
For the first time, applications submitted before the European Court of Human Rights address the issue of waste management in North Macedonia through the prism of human rights. That was the first instance of domestic entities raising such issue before this international institution.



Upon our initiative, the Ombudsman's Office established infringement of rights relating to public transportation in Skopje.



At the annual legal education conference, we hosted more than 70 participants from the academic and expert legal community.



We joined MKSafeNet Advisory Board, thereby contributing to policy making on internet safety for children and youth.

Introduction

Human rights that exist only on paper are not rights. This provides the starting point of our work.

In 2025 we worked where the rights often do not reach the people: undocumented persons, asylum seekers, children at risk, persons in custody, and communities affected by pollution without effective access to justice - not only through legal advice, but also through presence, advocacy, lawsuits, and continuous pressure on institutions, even when responses were delayed, missing or insufficient.

Throughout the year we provided thousands of legal advices, and supported hundreds of people in exercising their rights.

All these figures represent specific results:

317 persons were granted citizenship,

practices relating to asylum proceedings were improved,

pollution-related cases were motioned before the European Court of Human Rights,

and legislative changes that would have weakened protection for victims of domestic violence were prevented.

In the aftermath of the tragedy in Kochani, affected families sought our help and assistance. We view this moment as a responsibility to be present whenever the system is under great pressure and whenever the people are in great need of clarity, support, and protection.

For us, every docket is more than an individual case. Whenever a person is unable to exercise certain rights, usually there is an underlying systemic weakness. That is exactly where we intervene: **through legal assistance, strategic litigation, education, and by opening public debate.**



This report is about the people behind the numbers and about the system that is yet to adequately respond.

Access to Justice Through Free Legal Aid

[Beneficiaries] are gradually encouraged and believe they have the right to seek protection. For me, victory is the exact moment when a client says that, for the first time, they have felt seen and protected by the system.

Maja, MYLA

Access to justice remains a serious challenge for many citizens, especially for people in vulnerable positions. Lack of information about the rights, complex administrative procedures, and limited access to legal assistance create barriers that often lead to people being unable to effectively exercise their rights. This creates challenges that are more prominent among undocumented people, elderly populations, and marginalized communities. Moreover, preliminary legal aid remains accessible mainly through associations, but lacks adequate and continuous state funding. This significantly limits availability of legal aid and creates a serious risk for the system's sustainability.

What We Did

In the course of 2025 we provided preliminary legal aid to more than 480 persons: legal information, legal advice, and practical support to navigate institutional procedures. As regards cases that meet law-stipulated conditions, we submitted 12 applications for secondary legal aid.

This year we enhanced our field work. In November and December we were directly present at the Administration of Civil Registries where citizens face specific administrative procedures relating to their legal status and documents. This activity, supported by the Council of Europe, was aimed at persons facing greater barriers in accessing the institutions: persons without regulated legal status and members of marginalized communities.

In parallel, we contributed to expanding the system of free legal aid to cover victims of trafficking in human beings. Previously, this category of legal aid beneficiaries heavily depended on project-based assistance, not systemic protection.

In cooperation with the City of Skopje's Red Cross we worked with elderly people, mainly through educational sessions and direct legal support relating to property rights and personal data protection as areas where this population group is particularly exposed to abuses.

What Changed

Numbers speaks louder than words: in November and December we supported more than 250 persons, reaching a peak of 140 persons in November, which represents a multiple increase compared to the monthly average. This was not only a result of increased demand, but also of greater availability due to our field-based approach.

Significant portion of legal aid beneficiaries come from vulnerable population categories, including members of the Roma community, which shows that we have managed to reach out to groups that oftentimes remain outside the system. For some of them, this was the first step towards obtaining personal documents and formal recognition.

Emergency Support

After the tragedy in Kochani, the victims' families addressed MYLA for legal assistance and advice. We provided them clear information on legal aspects of the procedure, defined realistic expectations, and monitored the court process. For all stakeholders involved, these processes represented a period of facing complex legal and emotional challenges. We accepted this endeavor as a responsibility to be present when support is most needed.



IN ADDITION
TO LEGAL
ASSISTANCE, MYLA
ALLOWED ME
THE FEELING OF
DIGNITY, HAVING
THE WIND IN
MY BACK, THE
FEELING OF HOPE
AND INSPIRATION.

Julija,
legal aid beneficiary
and former intern



“At 17 years old, I stood alone at institutional counters being referred from one to another department, all the while enduring a heightened pressure by enforcement officers. My state-appointed foster parent was unavailable, and I was continuously told one and the same thing: ‘just wait’, ‘where is your foster parent’, ‘come back when you turn 18 years of age’.

When I addressed MYLA, I felt truly heard for the first time in my life. I was provided legal aid, clear guidance through procedures, and support that led up to the Ombudsman’s Office. Also, the association provided me with an attorney-at-law whose support helped me resolve the issue with enforcement officers and overcome the legal barriers. All that allowed me to obtain passport and leave for studies abroad on a scholarship.

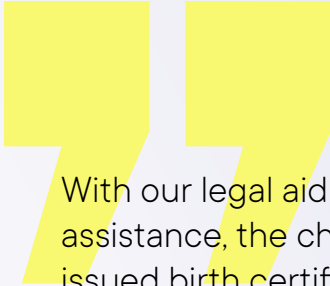
The next summer I went back to MYLA – not as beneficiary, but as intern. I worked on research related to weaknesses underlying the foster care system for children, inspired by my personal experience.

My story showcases why MYLA exists: not only to resolve cases, but restore the dignity of people who have been made invisible by the system.”

What We Learned

Access to justice cannot be ensured only by provision of legal information. Practical support, especially in the field, is of crucial importance to overcoming the administrative barriers.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS INCREASE THE OUTREACH, BUT THE MODEL THAT COMBINES SYSTEMIC APPROACH AND DIRECT WORK WITH PEOPLE REMAINS THE MOST EFFECTIVE.



With our legal aid and assistance, the children were issued birth certificates and were enrolled in kindergarten. Again, this showed that something that might seem like ordinary administrative procedure could, in reality, mean access to healthcare, education, and opportunity for a better future, not only for the child, but for the whole family.

Andrijana,
MYLA





When an administrative procedure decides whether a child is visible to the system

She is a single mother and domestic violence survivor who alone cares for her children born abroad. When she attempted to obtain birth certificates for her children, the institutions requested a document from the father – a man with whom she no longer lives together, with unknown address, and a man against whom several temporary domestic violence protection measures had been issued.

In the absence of such document, her application was denied, and without birth certificates the children are deprived of healthcare insurance, possibility to enroll in kindergarten, and access to basic rights and services.

We provided legal aid and supported her throughout procedures led before the institutions, including before the Social Work Centre and the Ombudsman's Office. After many complaints and urgencies, the children were finally issued birth certificates and were enrolled in preschool education. In parallel, we provided assistance for exercise of social and child protection rights.



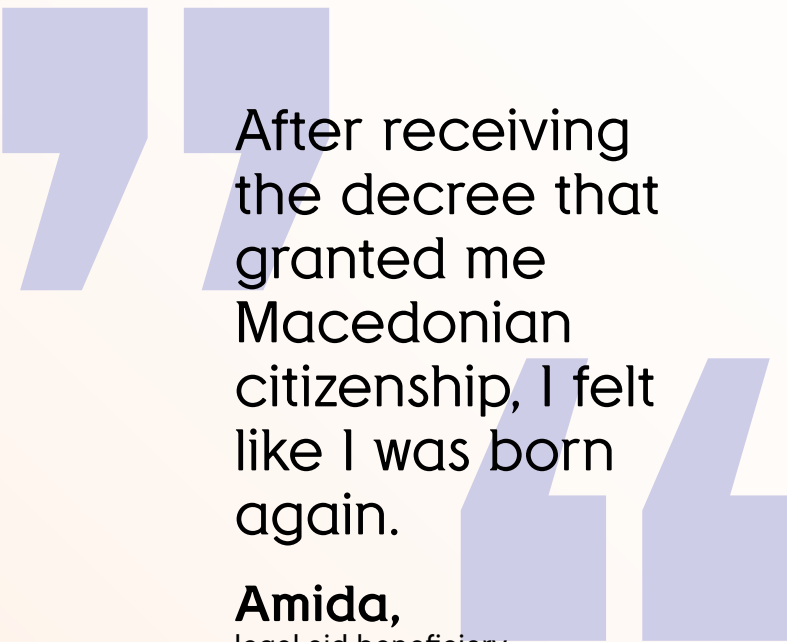
Светски ден на бегалците

2025

SOLIDARITY WITH REFUGEES



Asylum, Migrations and Statelessness



After receiving the decree that granted me Macedonian citizenship, I felt like I was born again.

Amida,
legal aid beneficiary

People on the move cannot afford to wait. Asylum seekers, persons without regulated status, persons navigating the legal void after Yugoslavia's dissolution – all of them are facing systemic barriers that are not accidental, but built over many years of administrative inertness and institutional neglect.

What We Did

As part of activities supported by UNHCR, we disbursed **2,554 pieces of legal advice** to asylum seekers, people detained at the transit centers Vinojug and Tabanovce, Kosovo refugees, people detained at the Reception Centre for Foreigners in Gazi Baba and the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers in Skopje. We actively represented **111 asylum seekers** and **211 Kosovo refugees**, while also working on cases initiated in the previous years. In the area of statelessness, **366 persons received legal aid**, with focus on long-term legal status issues.

It should be noted that numbers do not tell the whole story. In addition to direct work, we also intervened at the systemic level: by communicating with the institutions, publicly indicating the system's shortcomings, and by submitting more than 10 interventions to the border police and the sector on asylum aimed at ensuring access to relevant procedures or releasing people who had been detained without legal basis. We submitted complaints to the Ombudsman's Office and followed them up with urgencies to accelerate proceedings.

A specific outcome: improved practice on securing translators in asylum proceedings - an issue we have raised for long period of time.

What Changed

2025 brought about results that surpassed the annual performance framework. North Macedonia was acknowledged as the first country in the Balkan to have resolved all identified cases of statelessness originating from the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. A total of **317 persons were granted citizenship**, with significant number of them being identified and legally guided by MYLA.

Moreover, **70 Kosovo refugees were issued permanent residence permits**, ensuring long-term legal certainty for people who had long lived in a state of limbo.

In the area of strategic litigation, together with the European Roma Rights Centre we motioned a civil action lawsuit against the Administration on Civil Registries. The Court of Appeals upheld the verdict taken by the first-instance court establishing systemic and continued discrimination against persons who, while in possession of birth certificates and personal identification documents, do not have access to law-guaranteed rights. This is another legal victory and a clear signal that the contested situation cannot be allowed to continue.



When resolution of a single status changes the life of an entire family

Initially, we supported the mother to obtain Macedonian citizenship and personal identification card. Up to that moment, she and her children were living on the margins of the system, without access to their basic rights.

In 2025 the process continued to resolve the status of her five children. With MYLA's support, they were also granted Macedonian citizenships.

The resulting change was immediately visible. The woman found employment, the children were enrolled in school, were granted healthcare coverage and access to social rights. At last, the family became part of the system that had excluded them in the past.

This case clearly shows how statelessness is transferred from one to another generation, as well as how this vicious circle could be interrupted with timely support. Once the parent's status is resolved, it opens a path of visibility for the children, allowing them actual integration in the society.

What We Learned

An individual case and systemic change are mutually dependent. Direct work with the people shows us where the system underperforms, while institutional dialogue and strategic litigation are the way towards attainment of necessary changes. When these approaches are combined with continuous pressure, specific field-based findings, the change becomes possible, even inevitable and certain.



Protection of Children's Rights



Now we
are like all
other kids.

child at
JCF Volkovija

Whenever a child enters the judicial system, they are rarely asked about their feelings.

The system is designed for adults, following the logic of adults and procedures assuming that the person in question understands what is happening. Most often, children at risk or children in conflict with the law do not understand. To make matters worse, oftentimes they do not have anybody to explain. This problem cannot be solved only by provision of legal aid as it requires a change to how the system views the child.

What We Did

In 2025 we provided direct legal assistance and psycho-social support for children at risk and children in conflict with the law, notably by work performed by our team and by engaging attorneys-at-law and psychologists. **We provided direct legal assistance in 12 cases, covering a total of 15 children,** including legal representation in criminal proceedings and support throughout the entire process. Furthermore, we worked on cases that required urgent intervention in respect to family life protection, access to documents, and prevention of additional trauma with the children.

In parallel, we developed a skills4life program adjusted to children accommodated at the juvenile correction facility Volkovija and the public institution for the care of children with educational-social problems and behavioral disorders (PI CCEPBD). By the year's end, **33 children attended workshops and received individual support** aimed at communication, conflict management, emotional regulation, and preparations to rejoin the community. At JCF Volkovija, **we covered two groups of 11 children each and organized two individual sessions,** while additional **9 children** from PI CCEPBD also attended the program.

Moreover, we worked on what often remains invisible in individual cases, i.e. how the institutions treat these children. In cooperation with the State Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency

and Justice for Children, we supported three specialized training sessions for professionals at social work centers, the police, prosecution services and the judiciary, focused on use of indicators to monitor the justice for children system and on adequate data collection. These trainings were attended by 29 representatives from social work centers, 14 juvenile delinquency inspectors at sectors of internal affairs across the country, as well as representatives from prosecution services and the judiciary. As a result, four documents with practical guidelines were developed for the different sectors involved.

Furthermore, we organized a training for juvenile delinquency inspectors and educators at the Ministry of Interior focusing on trauma-informed approach given that officials who establish the first contact with children at risk must know how to engage with them without causing additional harm.

In the course of the year we initiated monitoring of the implementation of laws pertaining to the justice for children system, with a focus on the Law on Justice for Children, free legal aid, and compensation for victims of violent crimes. For that purpose, we developed the monitoring methodology and started the process, which will continue in 2026. In parallel, we developed another methodology and manual with a self-evaluation checklist for the quality of social services provided by social work centers to children in the justice system.

What Changed

We organized four regional meetings in Shtip, Gostivar, Bitola and Skopje, creating space for joint discussion among attorneys-at-law, public prosecutors, judges, inspectors, and expert associates from social work centers. The focus was on practical challenges in implementation of alternative measures and diversion programs, given that these are law-stipulated mechanisms but rarely enforced.

As part of our advocacy for systemic changes, together with the Ombudsman's Office, we worked on access to education for children at juvenile correction facilities. We drafted a policy brief on implementation of the Barnahus Model in North Macedonia, with specific recommendations for legislative changes, institutional coordination, and gradual introduction of the model that allows better and more coordinated protection of children-victims.

In cooperation with the State Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency and Justice for Children, we initiated the process on mapping active, inactive and informal local councils for prevention of juvenile delinquency. This effort provided a baseline for introducing the pilot model of mentorship support for local councils, which will continue in 2026.

The number of directly supported cases is small, but the impact at the systemic level is significant. Through training and meetings we worked on capacity-building for professionals that work with children on daily basis, and we opened space for a conversation that was almost non-existent in the past, especially around the issue why alternative measures remain unused and what needs to change for the children to be truly in the center of the justice system.

As part of these activities we did not only work on individual cases, but also on the conditions under which children enter the system. We raised issues relating to the access to education for children at juvenile correction facilities, the quality of social services, and the role of local councils for prevention of juvenile delinquency, notably by initiating the process on mapping and developing long-term mentorship support.



When legal assistance means staying with your children

She is a mother of two young children, one of which has autism. After returning to the country, instead of stability she was faced with domestic violence, fear and complete absence of any support from their father. Although the court has awarded her custody over the children, the father refused to give consent for issuance of passports, leaving the children in a deadlock, deprived of the possibility to travel or leave the vicious circle of problems.

In the meantime, the mother's passport had expired, leaving her without regulated residence and exposing her to an actual risk of being deported and separated from her children.

We supported her during court proceedings and secured an attorney-at-law, while we simultaneously worked on resolving her legal status and documents. Most importantly, we prevented her being separated from the children at the moment when they needed her the most.

What We Learned

Effective protection of children cannot be the responsibility of only one institution or organization. It requires coordination, multidisciplinary approach and professionals trained to choose what is best for the child in question. Exactly this was in the focus of our work throughout 2025 and will remain our priority in the following period.

Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings

Trafficking in human beings does not recognize borders, but it was through coordination and exchange of information with foreign organizations that we managed to prevent child trafficking and forced marriage. This is proof that timely coordination and commitment can actually protect a human life.

Angela, MYLA

Trafficking in human beings does not take place on distant locations and within the realm of impenetrable criminal networks. It happens within marginalized communities, vulnerable families, at border crossings, and under labor relations that might initially appear legal. Hence, the response must be present where the risks emerge: in the field, at the schools, in the institutions, and in the laws. In 2025 we worked at all levels indicated above.

What We Did

Through the multidisciplinary teams in Tetovo, Kumanovo, Bitola and Gevgelija, we identified and supported 326 vulnerable persons and 13 assumed victims of trafficking in human beings, including one confirmed victim.

Field work was directed at early prevention. The mobile team in Gevgelija delivered educational sessions to 307 students, while the team in Bitola organized risk detection and prevention workshops with 89 parents. At the transit center Tabanovce, information was provided to people on the move from Afghanistan, Egypt and Morocco, identified as groups of higher vulnerability that rarely have access to such support. In addition, we organized sessions for police officers from the border police and contributed to institutional capacity-building by working with the national bodies, including relevant units at the Ministry of Interior and public prosecutors.

In parallel, MYLA continuously contributes to strengthening the system of free legal aid for victims of trafficking in human beings. Timely access to legal aid is crucial for victims to be informed, make decisions, and effectively use their rights. While certain improvements are already noted, the system is still not fully operational, especially in respect to access to free legal aid for children.

A positive step is identified in the Ministry of Justice's approval of six urgent applications and appointment of attorneys-at-law to represent the victims in criminal and related proceedings, in compliance with recommendations put forward by the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings

(GRETA). This is indicative of increased institutional sensitivity, but also the need for further systemic improvements.

In that regard, MYLA is part of the working group tasked to draft amendments to the Law on Free Legal Aid, aimed at improving access to justice, especially for children-victims.

Furthermore, we submitted two motions for victim compensation under the Law on Pecuniary Compensation for Victims of Violent Crimes. Among the total of 56 motions submitted, only four have been approved to present. This piece of information demonstrates the restrictive implementation of the law in question and the need for future improvements.

What We Learned

Prevention is effective only when it is timely and targeting the most vulnerable individuals. Systemic protection of victims requires laws that are functional in the practice. Therefore, continued presence in the field, at the institutions, and as part of legislative process, are essential for delivering results.



MYLA

UNHCR

IN GRATITUDE
AND RECOGNITION

Presented to
UNHCR North Macedonia

For 10 years of dedication to protecting refugees, asylum seekers, and vulnerable persons in North Macedonia, ensuring their rights, dignity, and safety, and for 10 years of mutual partnership with the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association.

Your commitment to safeguarding human rights and supporting those in need has made a lasting impact, laying a strong foundation for continued protection and justice.

THANK YOU FOR STANDING WITH US.

Macedonian Young Lawyers Association

2023

Protection Against Torture and Inhumane Treatment and Resocialization

When working with persons who serve their imprisonment sentences, it becomes evident how easily the society punishes them anew. Their stories often show that a single bad decision or a moment of inadvertence could turn one's life upside down. That is why I believe that resocialization and opportunity for somebody to stand on their own feet are very important.

Irena, MYLA

Incarceration is not the end of a story, but for many, release from the prison is the beginning of a new deadlock. Without support, without documents, without a support network, and with untreated addictions, the chances for successful reintegration are slim to none. The system is aware of this and yet resocialization continues to be the most undermined stage of this process.

That is exactly where we focused our work in 2025, i.e. the stages before and after release from prison.

What We Did

We provided around **300 pieces of legal advice on pre- and post-penal support**, and additional **40 pieces of legal advice** to persons in custody and persons undergoing reintegration. Special focus was put on direct work with persons who have addictions, especially in the period before their release from prison. At the prison in Strumica we implemented a six-month program comprised of **27 sessions**, individual and group, intended for persons serving the last 6 to 12 months of their sentence before being released. We worked on psycho-social support, strengthening their personal responsibility, and specific preparations for a life outside the prison.

In parallel, we submitted **10 complaints, initiatives and interventions** aimed at improving the treatment and the rights of incarcerated persons.

As part of regional round tables, we opened discussion about overcrowded prisons together with judges, public prosecutors, representatives from the Administration for Execution of Sanctions and the probation service, with a focus on much broader use of alternative measures, electronic monitoring, and probation.

What Changed

Preparedness to rejoin the society was strengthened among persons we directly worked with, especially those who have addictions, as the risk of recidivism is the highest among them.

At systemic level, space was opened for use of outpatient medical treatment for persons in need of such care, which represents a shift in the practice and could bring about long-term changes both for affected individuals and in terms of overcrowded prisons.



MYLA continues to provide legal aid and representation in cases relating to excessive use of force and migrant rights. One such case concerns a highly-publicized incident when a police officer opened fire against a group of migrants, resulting in the death of a migrant woman.

This case attracted great attention in the public and was closely followed by the European Commission. In the course of relevant proceedings, the courts upheld divergent legal views. Namely, the first-instance court adopted an acquitting verdict, while the higher-instance court initially revoked the verdict, but later commuted it to conditional sentence. A final and enforceable verdict is still not taken in this case, but MYLA provides legal assistance to the damaged party, i.e. the husband of the deceased person.

This case opened much broader questions about the use of force by the police, access to justice for migrants, and the institutions' obligation to ensure effective and independent investigation when a human life had been lost.

What We Learned

Resocialization does not start with release from the prison. It starts when the person is still within the penitentiary system, through provision of legal assistance, psycho-social work, and a clear perspective about what comes next. The chances for actual change are much greater when these elements are in place and interlinked. That is the model we are building.



Environment and Environmental Justice

I would rather have the phrase ‘the matter is not within the realm of our competences’ being uttered less frequently, and more often witness the institutions taking action upon citizens’ requests and complaints.

Bojan, MYLA

The right to a healthy environment is human right, but it still needs to be proven before the institutions that fail to take timely action or act only after harm had been done. In our country, pollution is a complex problem, closely connected to systemic challenges in management: inefficient state administration and inspection supervision, inadequate implementation of environmental legislation, inefficient judiciary, and insufficient funds for investment in infrastructure, personnel and equipment. All this points to the need of clear responsibility for decision-making and implementation – a responsibility which we, at MYLA, continuously request through legal proceedings, public pressure, and institutional dialogue.

What We Did

We provided more than **40 pieces of legal advice to citizens on issues relating to pollution**, waste management, and urban planning, and we also worked on developing legal analyses in cooperation with civil society organizations.

Our work was also included strategic litigation, ranging from environmental impact assessment procedures for major infrastructural projects, to cases relating to waste management and protection of national parks, including lawsuits against administration silence. In this context, we submitted an application before the European Court of Human Rights relating to human rights in respect to pollution from an illegal landfill in Struga, thereby raising an issue avoided by the institutions for a long period of time.

In parallel, by initiating inspection procedures and issuing public reactions, we contributed to a more responsible institutional approach, especially in respect to waste management in Skopje through the **initiative called “Hello, Inspector”**.

These activities were complemented with participation in parliamentary oversight debates on the effects of air pollution on the people’s health, as well as with active participation in legislative and international processes – submission of comments and remarks to draft laws, participation in policy creation, and initiatives to recognize the right to a healthy environment as standalone human right.

At the same time, by supporting local organizations and awarding them 7 grants, we contributed to **strengthened capacity for local action and implementation of the Green Agenda**.

What Changed

Currently, pollution and environmental justice issues are high on the agenda, both at national and international level. Strategic litigation contributes to creation of legal practice that establishes the link between the environment and the human rights as a practice that was previously limited or non-existent. The institutions were targeted with increased pressure for transparency and accountability in respect to waste management issues. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the problem is solved, but that it can no longer be easily ignored.



Access to documents for a small hydropower plant

Environmental activists requested a municipality to disclose documents relating to the construction permit for a small hydropower plant. FOI requests were rejected on the grounds of Article 6 of the Law on Free Access to Public Information. We provided them legal assistance and, and on two occasions, the activists lodged appeals before the Agency for Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information. Final outcome: activists were granted insight into the requested documents.



Forest protection in the Prespa Region

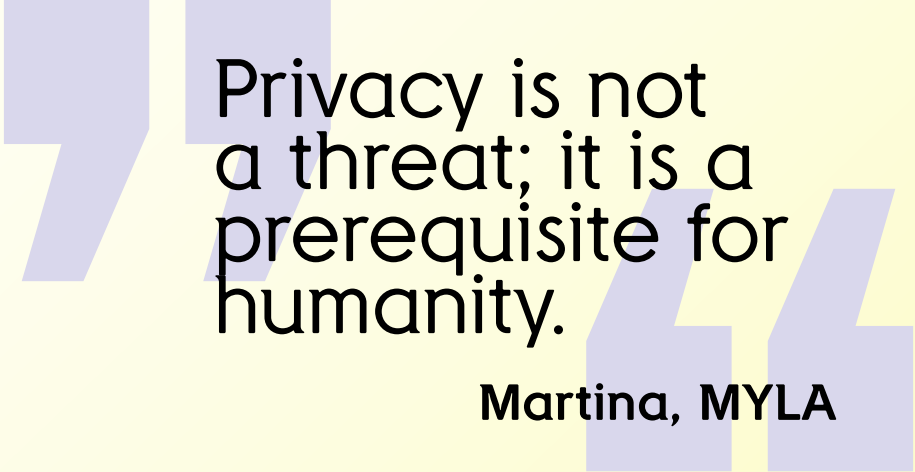
Activists sought to end the practice of logging due to the risk of erosion and direct harm to the property and lives of the residents in a nearby village. With our legal assistance, the activities motioned a request to terminate logging in the forest, make changes to the special forest management plan, and introduce forest order measures. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy commissioned a field inspection and expert opinion with a focus on risks to the local population and infrastructure.

What We Learned

Environmental justice cannot be achieved only by lodging appeals. It requires a concerted and combined effort that includes legal proceedings, public pressure, institutional dialogue, and local action. On their own, none of these approaches is sufficient to yield results, but combined they create a pressure that is difficult to be ignored.



Digital Rights and Personal Data Protection



Privacy is not a threat; it is a prerequisite for humanity.

Martina, MYLA

Digital rights are rarely acknowledged as human rights unless they have been violated. In the meantime, regulations are adopted, new technology is introduced, but the public debate lags behind. At times of rapid technological development and expanded digital surveillance, the risk of privacy violations grows faster than the protections designed to prevent them. In 2025 MYLA was focused on and worked in the space where rules are still under development.

What We Did

We took active participation in advancing the legal framework and the public debate around personal data protection at times when new technologies and legal solutions are increasingly redefining the boundaries of privacy.

Together with the Center for Legal Research and Analysis we organized a consultation meeting dedicated to promotion of misdemeanor sanctions for violations of the right to privacy, with specific proposals to amend the Law on Misdemeanors aimed at addressing existing shortcomings through more effective and deterrent sanctions. On the occasion of the European Data Protection Day, we organized a TAIEX workshop in cooperation with the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, with a focus on EU legislation, artificial intelligence, and domestic practices for protection of privacy.

In parallel, we worked on early prevention and public awareness, especially among the elderly population that is more frequently targeted with digital fraud, aimed at strengthening their capacity to recognize and protect themselves against such abuses.

At institutional level, MYLA became part of the advisory body at the National Center for Safer Internet, thereby directly contributing to development of guidelines and policies on protection in the digital space.

At the same time, we initiated an oversight process on video-surveillance systems used as part of the concept known as “Safe City”, raising questions about how data are used, who has access to data, and whether there are adequate guarantees in place to protect privacy.

Furthermore, in the media, at public appearances and expert forums, we contributed to raising questions about the new legal solutions, including the Draft Law on Cyber Security.

What Changed

We shifted the debate's paradigm: from formal alignment of laws to meaningful protection of the rights. Space was created for a more critical review of legal solutions, especially their impact on privacy, as well as for examining use of new technologies through the human rights prism.

What We Learned

Digital rights are protected through timely participation in processes focused on creation of rules. The earlier these issues are raised, greater is the chance to prevent systemic violations in the future. Personal data protection is a matter of trust, control and rights.



Prevention of Violent Extremism

Radicalization does not happen at once. It is developed gradually, oftentimes within environments where the signs are difficult to discern or there are no straightforward answers about what needs to be done once they emerge. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to work on prevention and capacity-building at schools, social work centers and local self-governments. That is exactly where we focused our work in 2025.

What We Did

We provided 20 pieces of legal advice, worked on two cases, and motioned one administrative procedure. Nevertheless, the essence of this work was preventive in nature. We worked on capacity-building at local level, by organizing 5 one-day workshops for employees in the area of education, social and health protection, aimed at detecting signs of radicalization and understanding the role of the local self-government.

In addition, we conducted 2 two-day training sessions for local multidisciplinary teams, with a focus on practical skills for working with returnees from foreign conflict zones and members of their families – a group that requires careful and specialized approach.

In parallel, we participated in coordination processes between the institutions, civil society organizations and religious communities, creating space for cooperation and information exchange among actors that rarely engage in joint actions.

What Changed

Capacity of local actors for early recognition and adequate response was strengthened.

Coordination among the institutions was improved, which directly impacts the fact whether somebody would receive timely support or not.

After the training sessions, professionals from different institutions who had previously worked separate from one another and did not exchange information began to communicate and coordinate their response. This is a small, but a crucial change in the system's method of operation at local level.

What We Learned

Prevention of violent extremism cannot be the responsibility of a single institution or organization. It requires coordination and strengthened capacity at local level.

Local community is the first to notice changes and the first to respond. Hence, support should be directed at exactly this level.

Advocacy and Impact on the Legislation

Laws are not neutral documents. Legal provisions determine who is protected and who is not, and any change to these stipulations, irrespective of their technicality, could bring about tangible consequences for the people in reality. On that account, monitoring of legislative processes is not administrative work, but essential part of human rights protection.

In 2025 this work was frequently performed as a joint effort, i.e. as part of coalitions and networks, especially knowing that a joint voice has greater impact and arguments are difficult to be ignored.

What We Did

Within the Network for Protection Against Discrimination and in cooperation with civil society organizations, we actively reacted to several legal solutions and policies.

The most specific result concerned the reaction to proposed amendments to the Police Law, which would have weakened protection in domestic violence cases. Together with the National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and the Gender Equality Platform, we contributed towards withdrawal of proposed law changes by the Ministry of Interior.

Through the Network for Protection against Discrimination, we submitted initiatives to assess constitutionality of legal changes in the field of education, as well as reactions relating to selection of members to independent bodies and public office appointments.

Also, we participated in expert discussions to promote legislation, the round table organized by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of North Macedonia, and attended meetings with representatives from the Venice Commission.

What Changed

Legal changes that would have downsized protection for domestic violence victims were prevented. At the same time, space was opened to re-examine other legal solutions in terms of their alignment with human rights.

In the long run, the civil society's position as an important check-and-balance mechanism in legislative processes was strengthened.

Amendments to the Police Law were not adopted due to the timely and coordinated action on the part of civil society organizations, based on clear arguments. This effort shows that coalition-based action could have a specific impact on legislative processes.

What We Learned

An individual voice is rarely sufficient. Hence, an organized, joint action and timely reaction are crucial in the endeavor to ensure that legislation protects and does not limit the rights.

The civil society plays an important role in these processes, not as a silent observer, but an active participant.

IREM BOLAT
MYLA Intern

A portrait of Irem Bolat, a young woman with dark hair, smiling. The background is a blue-tinted image of a lake with a small boat.

My internship experience at MYLA was wonderful. Everyone at the association was incredibly kind and supportive. I had the privilege of learning from experts in their respective fields and was also included in activities beyond the office environment.

My internship experience at MYLA was truly wonderful. Everyone in the organization was exceptionally kind and supportive. I had the opportunity to learn from experts in their respective fields and was involved in activities outside the office surrounding.

Irem,
intern at MYLA

FRANCESCA RUGGERI
MYLA Intern

A portrait of Francesca Ruggeri, a young woman with dark hair and glasses, smiling. The background is a blue-tinted image of a lake with a small boat.

My internship at MYLA, through the Refugee Law and Migration Center of the Iustinianus Primus Faculty of Law, was my first work experience and it was really enriching and challenging. I found a welcoming workplace with great people who asked me to explore and study things I've never heard about before.

The internship at MYLA was my first professional experience and it was truly enriching and challenging. I encountered a work environment where people encouraged me to research and learn about topics I have never heard of before.

Francesca,
intern at MYLA

Legal Education and Youth

In cooperation with the EU House, we made another contribution to the educational game “Navigator”, designed for the occasion of the Human Rights Day. By designing content on key legal areas, we helped make human rights more understandable, available and close to young people. This year, the game was expanded with addition of a new area dedicated to gender-based violence, as part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, which further enhanced its societal relevance and impact.

For the third year in a row, MYLA joined the initiative “Social Day 2025”, organized by “Youth Can” – a day when youth replace school classes with a work engagement and donate their earnings to societal causes.

As part of this initiative, one student spent a working day at MYLA, learning about our work and the role of legal aid in human rights protection.

In joining this endeavor, we contributed to development of solidarity, active citizenship and greater involvement of youth in societal processes.

Communications and Raising Public Awareness

In the course of 2025, MYLA's communications were an important part of our efforts to build greater understanding, trust and connection with the people we work for. At times when legal and social topics remain complex, distant or insufficiently understood, our goal was to communicate clearly, humanely and close to everyday experience of citizens.

Through social media posts, media appearances, infographics and video content, public campaigns and direct communication with the communities, we did not endeavor only to inform but also explain why these topics are important and how they affect the people's lives. Special focus was put on sharing authentic stories and showcasing the human dimension behind legal procedures and statistics, especially because we believe that actual changes start when the public is able to recognize, understand and feel empathy.

Communication activities were also geared towards raising awareness about human rights, encouraging people to seek assistance, and creating a feeling that justice and institutions should not be unreachable or incomprehensible. At the same time, we worked on building a more open and accessible voice of the organization that would speak loudly, honestly and responsibly about challenges faced by vulnerable communities.



Follow MYLA on
**Instagram, Facebook,
LinkedIn and YouTube.**





PUBLICATIONS

- ▶ “Do Child Diversion Programs and Alternative Measures Face Challenges in Their Implementation?” – policy brief
- ▶ “Comprehensive National-Level Assessment on Availability and Effectiveness of Free Legal Aid for Children in Conflict with the Law: Legal Arrangements versus Current State of Affairs”
- ▶ Legislative Assessment of Access to Free Legal Aid for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings
- ▶ Efficiency of Human Rights Protection in the Republic of North Macedonia, 2025 Annual Report
- ▶ Annual Field Report “Detention for Immigration Reasons in North Macedonia, January-December 2024”
- ▶ “Key Considerations for Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness among Roma in the Western Balkans: Regional Challenges and Action Areas”
- ▶ Input to EMRTD study „Climate Justice, Sustainability, and the Right to Development“.
- ▶ Input to “Fossil Fuel Based Economy and Human Rights”.
- ▶ Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Impact Assessments
- ▶ Probation Directed at Key Challenges in Establishing Effective System for Resocialization and Social Reintegration
- ▶ Offender Profiling as Precondition for Successful Resocialization and Social Reintegration of Convicted Persons and Children
- ▶ Path to Resocialization and Reintegration: Analytical Study on the Role of Institutions, Policies and Community in Reintegration of Convicted Persons in the Society
- ▶ Work as Form of Treatment for Successful Resocialization and Reintegration of Convicted Persons
- ▶ Perspectives on Improving the Prison System and Promoting Resocialization by Amending the Law on Execution of Sanctions
- ▶ Parole – Legislative Framework and (In)Effective Implementation

Organizational and Team Development

In addition to program-based work, in 2025 we also focused on how we operate as an organization. In parallel to field work and work with the institutions, we invested in the organization's structure, processes and team, with the goal of being more efficient, sustainable and clearer in what we do.

As part of EU TACSO 3 Strategic Mentorship Program, we underwent a process of re-examining and re-designing our organization. Through conversations with the team, the Governing Board and persons who were part of the organization, we raised questions that remained unanswered for long time: **how we share responsibilities, how we take decisions, and what kind of organization we strive to become.**

This process resulted in a more straightforward internal structure, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and baseline for new systematization of job positions. We designed a plan for amending MYLA's internal acts and developed several key internal rules that govern the organization's day-to-day operation.

These changes contributed to **greater clarity of operations, better coordination among team members, and clearer responsibility at all levels within the organization.** As a result, we now have a much stronger baseline for planning, decision-making and implementing activities, as well as for further sustainable development beyond short-term project cycles.



We worked on how we communicate, how we cooperate, and how we support each other as a team, given that these matters directly affect how we work with the people and the institutions.

In the course of the year, we held the regular annual assembly to select new members to the Governing Board, thereby strengthening the organization's governing structures.

The team was enhanced with involvement of interns and young lawyers who injected new energy and perspective.

**In 2025 MYLA's team
was comprised of**

**20 employees,
of which**

90%

ARE WOMEN

and

10%

ARE MEN.

Most team members are lawyers, 16 have legal education background, of which 10 have passed the bar exam, complemented with experts in the fields of finances and communications. Such combination of legal expertise, organizational support and different perspectives allowed us to maintain continuity and stability during a particularly challenging period for the civil society.

In addition to team work, we also invested in how we connect among each other. Through informal meetings and joint activities, we gave ourselves space for discussion, not only about work, but also about how we feel and what we need to continue further.

On the International Women's Day, we organized a joint photoshoot and discussion about women in arts, and opened space for critical examination of women's visibility and representation. The discussion focused on how women votes have been marginalized throughout history and today, as well as the importance of their recognition, valuation and active engagement, as part of our broader effort for gender equality and feminist approach to work.

Finances and Transparency

In 2025, funds for implementation of program-based activities and MYLA's operation were primarily secured in the form of grants and donations and, in much lower scope, from own revenue sources and membership fees.

Continuing our effort to demonstrate accountability and transparency, the organization's Income and Expenditure Account and Balance Sheet are publicly available on MYLA's website.

87.932.366
MKD

TOTAL INCOME

In 2025 the organization's total income amounted to 87,932,366 MKD. Most funds were secured as support from international donors and partners, including the European Commission,

UNHCR, Sigrid Rausing Trust, GCERF, UNICEF and CLRA-EU. A portion of total income was secured on the basis of own revenue from activities and services.

2025 income (in MKD)

European Commission -	20.083.380
UNHCR -	10.672.089
Sigrid Rausing Trust -	9.012.707
Danish Refugee Council -	215.776
GCERF -	9.736.091
UNICEF -	4.653.400
CLRA-EU -	6.843.344
Macedonian Environmental Society	30.850
Revenue from sales of products and goods	971.700
Revenue from services	501.082
Surplus revenue rolled over from the previous year	26.298.577
Own revenue from membership fees	7.800
Repayment of grant funds from previous years	1.094.430
Total Income:	87.932.366 MKD

A LOOK AHEAD: 2026

In 2026 we continue to work on same issues that hallmarked this reporting year: access to justice, protection of vulnerable groups, digital rights, children rights, migrations, and environmental protection. Next year will be important for another endeavor: scaling up systemic work and strengthening MYLA's role as an organization that does not only react to individual cases, but actually impacts how institutions and public policies operate.

2026 priorities are based on MYLA's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan which defines the direction of the organization's development and areas where we will continue to work in the next years.



Strategic Priorities

In the forthcoming period, we will continue to work on:

- ▶ legal empowerment of poor, vulnerable and marginalized persons;
- ▶ protection of the rights of refugees, migrants and stateless persons;
- ▶ strengthening young lawyers and digital rights;
- ▶ community resilience in dealing with violent extremism, trafficking in human beings and crime;
- ▶ enhancing legal mechanisms for environmental protection.

What We Plan in 2026

In 2026 we will continue to monitor the system of justice for children, we will work on establishing the pilot model for supporting local councils for prevention of child delinquency and will continue to advocate for introduction of the Barnahus Model in North Macedonia.

Also, we will continue work on issues relating to digital rights, privacy and online security, especially in the context of surveillance systems, digital violence, and impact of new technologies on the human rights.

In the area of environment, we will provide free legal aid and assistance to citizens, organizations and activists attempting to use legal mechanisms for protection of the public interest.

In parallel, we will continue to actively participate in processes on drafting laws, strategies and policies, including in the areas of trafficking in human beings, migrations, justice for children, and digital rights.

Young Lawyers and New Generations

In 2026 we will restart the MYLA Internship Program, intended for law students who wish to acquire practical experience through work at institutions, mentorship and training on human rights, equality, digital rights, and online security.

We will continue publication of the magazine “Legal Focus” as a space for young lawyers, researchers, and authors who wish to raise issues related to the law, technology, and social changes.

In addition to legal education, we will continue to work with young people as part of other initiatives such as the School of Gender Equality and Youth Activism, where young people are given space to link their personal experience to broader social issues and to develop ideas for local action and changes.

Open Cases and Advocacy

In 2026 we will continue to lead cases of public interest and advocate for issues that raise broader systemic problems: from rights of stateless persons and access to justice, to environmental protection and digital rights. Some cases are already initiated and led before domestic courts and international mechanisms, and their outcome might impact future policies and practices.

Several applications relating to excessive use of force at the prisons Idrizovo and Bitola, ineffective investigations and non-functional mechanism for reporting torture are pending decision before the European Court of Human Rights. Another decision is expected in respect to the application concerning police brutality against people of Roma ethnic background. These cases raise important issues about the state’s commitment to ensure effective protection against torture, inhumane and humiliating treatment, as well as access to effective investigation and justice.

In the area of environmental protection, in 2026 we expect a response from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy to our request for forest protection in the Prespa Region. At the same time, we expect a decision by the Higher Administrative Court whether the courts are competent to take action when public office holders fail to develop strategic documents on environmental protection within the law-stipulated deadlines.

Partnerships and Community

MYLA's work would not be possible without its cooperation with institutions, civil society organizations, attorneys-at-law, activists, journalists, experts, and local communities. In 2026 we will continue to build partnerships and create space for joint actions, especially at times when

human rights and civic space have become increasingly fragile.

At the same time, we remain open for new associates, volunteers, interns, and supporters who wish to take part in work that directly affects people's lives.



Title of publication: Annual Report 2025
Publisher: Macedonian Young Lawyers Association
Graphic design: KOMA
Skopje, 2025



Macedonian Young Lawyers Association
Donbas n. 14/6 1000 Skopje
+389 72 223 963
www.myla.org.mk