



CROATIA

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Hate speech continued to be on the rise this year. Two public figures, an actor and a psychiatrist said in interviews in June that they would organise a 'straight pride march' and spoke harshly about LGBT people, particularly trans people. The organisers demanded that children be protected from so-called 'gender ideology' and that gender-affirming healthcare only be available for those aged 21 and up. The event was eventually cancelled.

A priest made hateful remarks after realising that some events of the queer film festival took place at Kinoteka cinema, which is rented by the municipality of Zagreb but owned by the Church. The court refused to grant a temporary injunction and the event went on as planned.

Online hate speech against LGBT people continued to be on the rise. Zagreb Pride filed three criminal complaints for hate speech and recorded many more.

In October, the Supreme Court overturned the ruling of the Zagreb County Court, which dismissed kolektIRV's claim against the right-wing NGO GROZD concerning discrimination and harassment. KolektIRV's appeal to the Supreme Court was first left unanswered within six months and was referred to the Constitutional Court, which in April requested the Supreme Court to issue a verdict within six months. The October judgment means that the original case will be sent back for a retrial.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

The Ombudswoman's annual report found that 2021 marked a sharp increase in anti-LGBT hate crimes. The Ombudswoman affirmed that hate speech by politicians can contribute to such a trend.

In July, for instance, three gay men were verbally and physically assaulted in a club.

EDUCATION

The study 'Experiences and needs of young LGBTIQ persons' found that over half of the respondents heard negative comments in high school classes at least once; 20% were verbally abused by teachers or staff; 77% did not know where they could report

violence. The majority said that a curriculum, including sex education, that covers LGBTIQ topics, would be the best support. This was the first study in Croatia that focuses on young LGBTIQ people.

Another study found that over half of high school graduates thought 'homosexuality' was an illness, which some described as the failure of the education system.

In June, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended Croatia introduce comprehensive sex education.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The city of Zagreb placed a rainbow-coloured bench in the Zrinjevac park for the occasion of IDAHOBIT in May. A few hours later a man painted it with black paint, and the city had to repair the bench. It was then reinstalled for 24 hours but later removed by the authorities who said it was only a temporary installation.

The conservative centre-right party Croatian Democratic Union announced in June that it would redefine its previous stance on rainbow families and that its new program will "respect all communities of family life that are based on mutual love and care and the principles of solidarity and social responsibility". LGBT organisations welcomed the move.

The Supreme Court in Croatia ruled against an ultra-conservative NGO "Vigilare" anti-LGBT petition, sustaining the appeal made by Rainbow Families Croatia against a lower court ruling, and found that "Vigilare" had "incited discrimination and harassment of LGBTIQ persons and their families".

FAMILY

On 26 May, the High Administrative Court issued its landmark ruling establishing that same-sex couples have the right to adopt children. The ruling ends the six-year legal battle of a gay couple. The Court upheld the 2021 ruling of the Zagreb Administrative Court and struck down the appeal filed by the Ministry of Labour, Family, and Social Policy. The High Court dismissed the Ministry's argument that allowing same-sex couples to adopt would in any way violate the best interest of the child.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Zagreb Pride was held successfully this year, with the motto 'Give us our four walls', referring to the need in the community for a permanent LGBTQI community space. The mayor joined the march for the second time this year, and other politicians were also present. Mayor Tomašević said Zagreb is ready to discuss options for a community space.

This year, the third Pride Ride was held in Zagreb, attended by representatives of the city administration.

HEALTH

Trans healthcare access remained difficult this year. There was a five-year break in the coverage of costs at the expense of mandatory health insurance. Starting this year, mastectomies are covered again. Genital surgeries remain unavailable and those available abroad should be covered by mandatory health insurance, however, this is not happening. While mastectomies are covered by health insurance, hormonal therapy is not. Trained and trans-friendly medical professionals are still few, and personal bias still plays into the quality of care provided.

The Croatian Medical Chamber and the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality found that a doctor discriminated against a trans person when denying them an ultrasound exam, which is a routine part of medical transitioning. The doctor spoke negatively about the person's trans identity, saying he was ruining his life.

The Ombudsperson for Gender Equality also established that the lack of trans healthcare regulations constitutes discrimination against trans people and that the Ministry of Health and the Croatian Health Insurance Institute must remedy the situation.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Trans Network Balkan, kolekTIRV, Spektra and Talas's regional feminist group, formed in 2021, is now in the process of developing strategies against anti-trans movements, particularly those originating in women's rights spaces, in the region.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

KolekTIRV lobbied firmly against the board of psychiatrists, which was set up in 2018 to decide on trans people's access to transition-related healthcare and legal gender recognition. In Croatia, there were three psychiatrists designated by the Ministry of Health as responsible for the LGR procedure. One of those three psychiatrists introduced an additional step in the LGR procedure: approval by the mentioned board of psychiatrists.

Civil society objected, and rather than withdrawing the need for involvement of the board, the psychiatrist withdrew himself (in 2022) from the list of psychiatrists responsible for the LGR procedure, leaving only two psychiatrists on the list.

The National Health Council, which grants final approval in LGR cases, continued placing additional administrative requirements on applicants and failing to meet the 30-day deadline it should abide by.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

The first gay bar opened in Dubrovnik in the spring.

In July, a court established discrimination in the case of two men who expelled two gay members of their choir because of their sexual orientation. Both were fined HRK 15,000 (2,000 euro) each.

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