

2023
**ANNUAL
REVIEW**

OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION
OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANS
AND INTERSEX PEOPLE IN EUROPE
AND CENTRAL ASIA

FIND THIS REPORT ONLINE:

WWW.RAINBOW-EUROPE.ORG



Rue du Trône/Troonstraat 60
Brussels B-1050
Belgium
Tel.: +32 2 609 54 10
Fax: + 32 2 609 54 19

info@ilga-europe.org
www.ilga-europe.org

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SWEDEN

ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

Several Uber drivers refused to drive participants at Stockholm Pride in August.

ASYLUM

In October, civil society reacted with grave concern about the incoming government's plans for changing asylum and migration policies. The governing coalition's agreement, which includes the right-wing populist and anti-immigration Sweden Democrats, sets out a number of restrictive measures. These include stricter family reunification rules, the abolishment of permanent residence permits, the drastic reduction of the number of quota refugees, and the establishment of transit centres for asylum applicants. Nevertheless, LGBTQI refugees remain a priority group in the agreement, which also sets out a review of the asylum process to improve procedures for LGBTQI applicants.

The story of a Nigerian gay activist made headlines after the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) refused to believe him and threatened to deport him. Abel's partner was murdered in his home country, and he has been an active member of the LGBTQ activist community in Sweden.

West Pride launched a billboard campaign on the risks LGBTQ+ refugees face in Sweden.

Civil society organised support for LGBTQI+ people fleeing Ukraine. Part of the support was localised inside Ukraine, in cooperation with Ukrainian partner organisations, and in some neighbouring countries of Ukraine.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH AND VIOLENCE

Anti-LGBTQI statements were common this year. For instance, local Sweden Democrat politician Simon O. Petterson said that the "homosexual lifestyle" is "characterised by promiscuity".

The concept Drag Queen Story Hour, during which drag artists read fairy tales to children in libraries, came under serious attack this year. The staff of the Malmö library received threats after an event. In Kalmar, Sweden Democrat politician Jonathan Sager called the event "perverted" and unsuitable for children and demanded the event to be cancelled, alongside removing all "inappropriate and sexualising

materials" from libraries and preschools. Minister of Culture Parisa Liljestrand expressed deep concern about the hateful speech and threats and called them "extremely serious".

BODILY INTEGRITY

The report of the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society Affairs, released in March, found that LGBTQI young people in Sweden are subjected to pressure, coercion, and so-called 'conversion therapy' to change or hide their sexual orientation or gender identity. The report highlights the particular vulnerability of trans youth. In July, the government called for an investigation to see if the current legal framework provides enough protection against these harmful practices. A survey showed that nine out of ten in Sweden would support a ban. Incoming Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson mentioned the possibility of a ban when outlining the newly elected government's program in October.

EMPLOYMENT

A survey with over 1,400 employers found that 16% did not have an LGBTQ+ inclusion policy and 27% did not know if they had one in place.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In January, the government presented its LGBTQI Action Plan for 2020-2023, which includes measures to address discrimination against intersex people and to respond to suicide rates. Civil society expressed concern about the lack of clear prioritisation of the legal gender recognition law reform and improvements on asylum. The new government kept the Action Plan unchanged.

FAMILY

A new law, which makes the presumption of parenthood automatic for all couples who are married and have a child in Sweden, regardless of gender, entered into force on 1 January. The law includes two unfortunate exceptions, however where parenthood can be later invalidated - in the case of home insemination or assisted reproduction that was conducted abroad and with an unknown donor. Previously Sweden differentiated between same-sex and different-sex couples when it came to parenthood recognition for a child born and

registered abroad. A new law, putting an end to that differentiation, entered into force on [1 August](#).

In June a [public inquiry](#) presented a wide range of proposals to the government about how Swedish family law could become more modern and inclusive, including laws using gender-neutral language and recognition of more than two parents.

HEALTH

In June, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) published its report '[I'm not alone, there are others like me](#)' on the living conditions of young LGBTQI people. The report [found](#) that almost one in five young (ages 16-25) LGBTQI people in Sweden have considered taking their own life; that it is common for them to be bullied, threatened, and assaulted; that they have worse health and particularly mental health than other young people; that many feel unsafe at school and refrain from leisure activities out of fear of bullying.

The waiting times for trans-specific healthcare [continued](#) to increase, currently between 1 and 3 years for a first appointment for both minors and adults. Gender clinics lack resources and are understaffed, and often lack staff with specific medical expertise. The 2021 decision of the National Board for Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) to classify gender-affirming care as so-called "national specialised health care" has further worsened the situation. The decision aimed to make care more equal and connected to research but will reduce the number of gender clinics from seven to three. The process of choosing the three clinics continues to be stalled.

In February, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare published new [guidelines](#) on hormone treatment for those under 18, calling for "restraint" when it comes to the provision of hormone blockers and cross-hormones to trans children. The recommendations are to only give minors access to hormone blockers and cross-hormones within clinical studies or, in the absence of such studies, only in exceptional cases. There are no such ongoing studies in Sweden. Civil society firmly [condemned](#) the regressive move and the lack of clarity and transparency of the regulations.

The Public Health Agency (Folkhälsomyndigheten) [announced](#) it might introduce individual risk assessment for men who have sex with men (MSM) who want to donate blood, focusing on risky behaviour instead of 'risk groups'. In 2021, the mandatory deferral period was [reduced](#) from one year to six months.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

At the beginning of the year, civil society and government agencies shared their input on [the first draft](#) of a new legal gender recognition law. This draft would have introduced self-determination, lowered the current age limit, and allowed non-binary people to access LGR but only with binary gender options. LGBTQI+ civil society [welcomed](#) that the draft abolished medical requirements.

In July, the government announced submitting an [amended draft law](#) to the Legislative Council, which steps away from the self-determination model. This draft was firmly [criticised](#) by civil society in Sweden and [abroad](#).

It is unclear if and how the process will continue under the new government.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Eleven openly LGBTQ politicians were [elected](#) as MPs during the September parliament elections, in which four centre-right parties, including the right-wing populist Sweden Democrats, gained the parliamentary majority. One of the new parliamentarians is the former president of RFSL Ulrika Westerlund (Greens).

PUBLIC OPINION AND ATTITUDES

Despite anti-trans rhetoric and attempts to bar trans minors from accessing gender-affirming care, public opinion remained supportive. A survey highlighted that three out of four [support](#) trans minors in getting the care they need.

[SWEDEN WEB PAGE](#)

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