



SERBIA

ASYLUM

Crisis Response and Policy Centre and UNHCR published a leaflet listing all services available for LGBTI+ asylum seekers and refugees in Serbia.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Anti-LGBT hate speech remained a serious issue this year, most commonly in the context of EuroPride in Belgrade (see more under *Freedom of Assembly*).

In August, a large demonstration was held in Belgrade against EuroPride, with many slogans conflating LGBT people with child molestation. The Bishop of Banat said that the Pride event would ‘desecrate’ Belgrade and went further by stating he would curse and use force against Pride organisers and participants. Both the President and the Prime Minister condemned the statement. NGO Da se zna! filed a complaint to the Prosecutor’s Office, which has initiated an investigation into the case.

The newly appointed Patriarch Porfirije made several hostile statements about LGBT people this year and praised traditional families.

After ‘banning’ EuroPride in August, President Aleksander Vučić said that the event was “imposed on the Serbian people with evil intentions.”

The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality found that the statement of Sulejman Ugljanin, head of the Sandžak Democratic Action Party, in which he compared LGBT people to “cattle”, amounted to hate speech. Ugljanin has to remove the hateful statement from his social media platforms, issue a public apology, and arrange a meeting with an LGBT organisation.

Throughout the year, several other politicians made anti-LGBTI statements (see here, here, and here) on TV, during parliamentary debates, or on social media.

A doctor stated during a TV appearance in September that ‘homosexuality’ is a disease and that it can be cured.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Hate crimes continued to take place on a regular basis and largely with impunity.

In its annual hate crime report, Da se zna! documented the highest number of anti-LGBT incidents since 2017: 83 cases of anti-LGBT hate crimes, hate speech, and discrimination in 2021, marking a 38% increase compared to 2020 (52). The number of hate crime cases sharply increased in August and September following a series of hateful statements by political and religious leaders. EuroPride billboards were vandalised.

The Belgrade Pride Info Centre was again attacked in February and October. For the first time, a politician, Belgrade’s deputy mayor Goran Vesić condemned the violence. None of the perpetrators in the 14 attacks have been prosecuted.

In April, the home of a same-gender couple was attacked in Grocka.

Five men were arrested in August after they lured several men on dates, took them to a forest, raped, beat, or robbed them.

Several people were attacked during, directly after and in the weeks after EuroPride.

EDUCATION

In September, the Dveri movement targeted several biology textbooks, used in eighth grade, that discuss diversity in terms of SOGI and the importance of acceptance. The movement’s leader, Boško Obradović called the books “scandalous propaganda of homosexuality and transgenderism to minors”. The Ministry of Education set up a working group, several members of which had previously shown bias towards LGBT people, to assess the textbooks. In October, the group requested the publishers to amend the books.

EMPLOYMENT

Labris started forming the ‘Proud at Work’ network and launched an online campaign to map LGBTI-friendly businesses. Labris will train the companies in 2023.

Rainbow Ignite joined the UN Global Compact’s initiative to implement the UN Standards of Conduct among businesses and ensure a safe work environment for LGBTIQ+ employees.

LGBTI+ asylum seekers continued to struggle with unemployment, as they have to wait around nine months to receive a work permit. Civil society lobbied the government to change the policy.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Four years after the expiration of the previous strategy in 2018, the parliament adopted its new Strategy of Prevention and Protection against Discrimination in January.

In April, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recommended Serbia combat discrimination against LGBTI people.

On the occasion of IDAHOBIT, Serbia's Ombudsman Zoran Pašalić reminded the government that additional legal reforms were necessary, such as sanctioning anti-LGBTI hate crimes and providing free legal aid to victims of discrimination and violence. The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Brankica Janković echoed these points.

During EuroPride, intersex activists from several European countries, including Austria, Germany, Russia, Ukraine and Serbia shared their experiences and the legal situation in their countries at the panel 'Legal protection of intersex persons across Europe'.

FAMILY

The draft Law on Same-Sex Partnerships continued to be stalled.

Labris formed a Rainbow Family group with over 20 participants, held three meetings, and a Colorful Picnic for children whose parents are LGBTIQ.

FOREIGN POLICY

In May the European Parliament adopted its report on Serbia which called for the adoption of the draft law on same-sex partnerships and action to combat harassment, propaganda and hatred against LGBTI people, including proper investigation and conviction of hate crimes.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

EuroPride was held in Belgrade this year, marking the first time that a Balkans country hosted the event.

On 28 August, President Aleksander Vučić announced that EuroPride would not go ahead, citing several reasons, including tensions with Kosovo, threats from far-right extremists, and others.

On 13 September, the police announced a ban on the Pride route, which was previously agreed upon between the organisers of Pride and the Serbian authorities. Local and international civil society, the EU and Council of Europe criticised the authorities' stance. Serbia was added to CIVICUS Monitor's International Human Rights Watch List and received the rating of 'obstructed'.

The organisers repeatedly affirmed that they would go ahead with EuroPride. In the end, the event took place on 17 September, on a shorter route than planned, and was attended by over 10,000 participants. Prime Minister Ana Brnabic only gave green light to the event hours before it started and her previous inaction was firmly criticised by civil society. There was heavy police presence at all EuroPride venues. During the march, the police pushed back small groups of counter-demonstrators who waved crosses and religious insignia. Minister of Interior Aleksandar Vulin later stated that the ban was enforced and what some saw as a march was just the police escorting people to a concert.

Civil society documented 16 attacks against EuroPride participants, including on activists from Albania. These included physical assault, verbal harassment, and the destruction of property. In several cases, the participants were attacked in front of the police, who refused to intervene. Over 80 far-right counter-protesters were arrested and ten police officers were injured. Civil society expressed disappointment that most arrests concerned extremists who assaulted the police. NGOs called for a similarly firm response in the case of attacks against participants.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Rainbow Ignite was established this year.

Under the auspices of Labris, two new groups were established this year: one for rainbow families and one for LBTQ Women over 45.

LGBTI+ civil society organisations faced serious

financial difficulties this year, with funding cuts and a lack of targeted funding opportunities.

HOUSING

Due to a drastic increase in rental prices, LGBTI+ asylum seekers had a particularly difficult time finding accommodation, and many stayed in reception centres for prolonged periods.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Civil society continued calling for a legal gender recognition law that provides for a model based on self-determination. The new Strategy of Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and its related Action Plan specifically mentions the drafting and adoption of an LGR law.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Labris and Rainbow Ignite held the first WLW (Women Loving Women) art festival in Belgrade in September, during Pride Week.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

President Aleksandar Vučić announced that medically assisted reproduction will be available from December onwards, but it is unclear who will be able to access services.

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