

BULGARIA

ASYLUM

The Bulgarian Supreme administrative Court refused to recognise the same-sex marriage entered into by Russian-Belarusian asylum-seekers. Subsequently, the Belarusian citizen was refused international protection, although his married spouse was granted refugee status.

Bulgaria continues to reject requests for asylum by LGBTI people coming from Russia and Belarus.

Bulgaria unlawfully detains LGBTI asylum-seekers coming from Palestine in closed detention centres.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

The Bulgarian musician and performer, Mila Robert was subjected to online harassment and death threats after her performance at the Sofia Pride 2024 concert, during which she removed her dress in the colours of the Bulgarian flag to reveal another dress with a rainbow flag.

Following Single Step's campaign for data collection on the experiences of LGBTI high school students, the organisation has been a target of focused attacks, which led to several institutional checks against the foundation. Kostadin Kostadinov, leader of Vazrazhdane (Revival) party, threatened to revoke the foundation's licence to work with minors.

The Administrative Court of Sofia ruled that the statements made by the VMRO Party against the LGBTI community after the movie 'Snake' was shown at the Sofia Pride Film Fest in 2021 constituted hate speech and discrimination.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In 2024, no criminal proceedings were initiated based on the sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) amendments in the Penal Code introduced in 2023.

DATA COLLECTION

In June, GLAS foundation released a report assessing the economic cost of homophobia in Bulgaria. The report underscored how the full enjoyment of rights of LGBTI people is often associated with higher levels of economic development and wellbeing.

In November, a survey conducted by the Single Step Foundation on the experiences of Bulgarian LGBTI students aged 14-19 revealed that two out of three students (67.6%) were verbally harassed in the past year because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression and nearly one-quarter (23.8%) were physically bullied. 12.2% of students had been assaulted at school, including being punched, kicked or attacked with a weapon.

EDUCATION

In August, a new law was introduced banning the representation of LGBTI identities in schools. The legislation, spearheaded by Kostadin Kostadinov, chairman of the Vazrazhdane (Revival) party, sparked significant controversy as civil society organisations underscored that the legislation would negatively impact children and adolescents by increasing bullying and legitimising discrimination by other students, and even teachers. Kostadinov defended the law by stating that "LGBT propaganda is anti-human and won't be accepted in Bulgaria."

FAMILY

The appeal by two Bulgarian women, Boyana and Anelia, to have both their names listed as parents on their Austria-born child's Bulgarian birth certificate was upheld by the Administrative Court of Kardzhali. The Court overturned the municipality's earlier refusal to issue the certificate and instructed its issuance, citing Bulgaria's obligations under the CJEU's "Baby Sara" ruling (C-490/20), which requires member states to recognise the parental rights of same-sex couples as parents.

The Bulgarian Migration Directorate continues to refuse visas for the third country family members of Bulgarian citizens, contrary to the Coman ruling of CJEU.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

In June, the city of Varna organised its first Queer Festival with the support of the European Union.

In June, concurrently with the human rights rally and LGBTI pride march organised by the Sofia Pride organisation, conservative groups have led rival demonstrations to advocate for traditional family values.

In August, the far-right Revival party proposed a foreign agent law targeting human rights NGOs and civil society, echoing efforts previously overturned in 2022. The proposed law, along with the previously introduced education law banning the representation of LGBTI identities in schools, closely mirrored Russian legislation that criminalises the LGBTI community. In late September the proposal was rejected by the Bulgarian Parliament's Committee on Culture and Media.

FREEDOM FROM TORTURE, CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

In the Baby Sara case, the LGBTI organisation Deystvie submitted a formal complaint to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), arguing that the treatment faced by the child, whose birth certificate was denied by Bulgarian authorities, amounts to inhuman and degrading treatment.

HEALTH

Due to the lack of implementation of the [CJEU Pancharevo ruling](#), tens of children are left without access to public healthcare in Bulgaria.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Following amendments to the Pre-School and School Education Act, criminal and data protection proceedings were launched against the Single Step Foundation, charging them with educational efforts that support non-traditional sexual orientations and gender identities.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

In July, the European Court of Human Rights overturned the [decision on the revision of the Y.T v Bulgaria case](#), emphasising that Bulgaria is obliged to set up a robust legal framework for legal gender recognition. Nonetheless, there remains a total ban on legal gender recognition in Bulgaria.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL LIFE

In September, the National Film Centre stopped the LGBTI-themed Bulgarian-Spanish film 'Luben' from [participating in the Golden Rose Film Festival in Varna](#). This happened against the backdrop of criticism from the pro-Russian Vazrazhdane party, which called the film "homosexual propaganda", claiming that a violation of the law was committed in its making because of the involvement of an actor who was underage at the start of filming.

PUBLIC OPINION

A [national survey](#) by the Alpha Research agency, commissioned by the GLAS Foundation, established an improved attitude of Bulgarian citizens towards LGBTI people. The survey indicated an overall increase of respondents declaring interest in receiving better information on LGBTI topics and a decline in the acceptance of harmful stereotypes about LGBTI people. For example, 36% of people were reported disagreeing with the idea that homosexuality and trans identities are mental disorders.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law enforcement has been cooperating with NGOs to strengthen the investigation of SOGIESC motivated crimes. As part of this initiative, 55 investigative police officers from across the country and 10 prosecutors from the Sofia Regional Prosecution were trained by Deystvie on these matters.



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