



# BELGIUM

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Sports journalist Eddy Demarez was suspended after his inappropriate statements about Belgium's national basketball team in the summer. His remarks were condemned by Flemish Minister of Media Benjamin Dalle, top athletes, and other politicians.

Anti-LGBTI stickers appeared in Ghent and Antwerp in September. The police arrested suspects.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

A presumed homophobic murder by three minors shook Belgium in March. The victim David Polfliet was a gay man, who was lured on a date via a dating app and was later found dead in a park in Beveren. Prime Minister Alexander De Croo flew a rainbow flag from his residence the next day.

LGBTI+ civil society organisations met with Flemish Minister of Society Bart Somers to come up with an action plan. On 16 June, the Flemish parliament adopted a resolution on violence and discrimination against LGBTI+ people, asking the Flemish government to invest in hotlines, helplines, awareness raising, and training in the education and welfare sectors.

Another presumed homophobic murder took place in September in Liege. In August, a gay man was spat on and beaten up in Brussels after kissing his partner.

The Rainbow House in Verviers was attacked in October.

## BODILY INTEGRITY

On 11 February, the federal Chamber of Deputies unanimously adopted the resolution on the fundamental rights of intersex persons to ban medically unnecessary and non-consensual surgeries on intersex children. The resolution was prepared with the support of local intersex activists and was welcomed by civil society. The parliament will now have to pass legislation on the matter. Nevertheless, Genres Pluriels highlighted a number of gaps in the resolution, such as the continued need to sanction surgeries, to ensure access to healthcare to intersex people throughout their lives, and access to their own medical history. Genres Pluriels was also disappointed that the Groen-Ecolo resolution from January 2020 was not discussed in the Chamber. The resolution included even stronger protections, including sanctions for non-consensual interventions.

## EDUCATION

From 1 September, in the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, parents can now enrol their children in secondary school under a neutral gender. The change aims to reduce discrimination and will include measures to make bathrooms and changing rooms gender neutral.

The Flemish parliament adopted new legislation this year obliging schools to teach about sexual orientation and gender identity in secondary schools.

## EMPLOYMENT

A study commissioned by the city of Ghent found that people who indicate in their job application that they are trans were 29% less likely to be invited for an interview.

In March, StepStone's study on the employment experiences of trans people found that four in ten trans employees have left their jobs because of an unwelcoming work environment. StepStone interviewed over 100 trans people.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The federal government failed to have its Interfederal Action Plan on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics ready by the 2021 deadline.

Arc-en-Ciel Wallonie welcomed that 160 of Wallonia's 262 municipalities raised a rainbow flag on the occasion of IDAHOBIT this year, marking a 19% increase compared to 2020. The figures in the Brussels-Capital Region are close to 100%. In Flanders, all cities hung the flag.

The government adopted its Gender Mainstreaming Plan in June, which includes a total of 186 political measures.

In September, the Flemish Youth Ministry announced they would free up an additional 1.54 million euro funding for work with vulnerable youth, but did not specifically mention LGBTQ+ youth. Given the recent violent attacks, youth organisation Wel Jong expressed concern and launched the #SafetyNotFound campaign with a petition to urge the government for more funding.

## FAMILY

Johan Bonny, the Bishop of Antwerp expressed his support for same-sex couples following Pope Francis' statements in March that Catholic priests should not bless same-sex marriages.



## FOREIGN POLICY

Belgium initiated the joint action of 18 EU Member States who condemned Hungary's new propaganda law banning the discussion of LGBT topics in front of minors. The 2020 coalition agreement stated that Belgium will advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights globally. MEPs of the far-right Vlaams Belang Belgian party voted against the resolution on Hungary.

In response to the so-called LGBT-free Zones in Poland, Wallonia declared itself an LGBTQIA+ Freedom Zone in July.

## HEALTH

Following this year's homophobic murders, çavaria encouraged LGBTI people to reach out to its helpline Lumi for mental health support. This year, a record number of LGBTI people were helped by Lumi.

The pandemic continued to have a detrimental impact on LGBTI people's mental health.

Waiting lines to access trans specific healthcare in some regions continued to grow. In Flanders, a record number of trans people sought out trans healthcare services in the past year. The gender clinic of Ghent University Hospital repeatedly urged other clinics to take up this care task as well, and new gender teams have opened their doors in 2021.

Genres Pluriels's trans\*/inter\* psycho-medico-social network continued its work this year to increase the accessibility and decentralisation of healthcare services for trans\* and intersex\* people.

## LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

The Institute for the Equality of Women and Men shared that 414 people changed their legal gender in 2020 and 521 in 2021. The number was similar in 2019, but reached a record 742 in 2018 when the new trans law was adopted.

The federal Minister of Justice, Vincent Van Quickenborne, asked for written advice on LGR reform from the gender clinic at Ghent University Hospital, who published their advice in November. The 2020 government coalition agreement vowed to implement the 2019 court decision on the issue. A few policy proposals are being prepared in the federal parliament, but have not been made public,

shared with civil society, or tabled. Civil society expects that the legal changes, expected for 2022, will include a model where gender markers would no longer be printed on ID cards. Other details of the proposals are expected to be clarified in 2022.

## PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Brussels' Archives and Museums encouraged LGBTQI people to share their own artefacts for an upcoming exhibition in the Brussels Rainbow House.

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

A number of trans people won disputes after they were denied reimbursement for gynaecological exams. The refusals were allegedly due to patients' legal gender, despite regulations not restricting access on this basis. The Royal Resolution on cost coverage for contraceptives and the morning after pill exclude those who do not have the legal gender 'female'. The Ministry of Health requested the regulation to be modified.

To better inform trans people who wish to have children about their options, the Transgender Infopunt collaborated with fertility centres, the Flemish centre for adoption, and Foster Care Flanders, who added and spotlighted information for trans people on their website.

## SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The LGBTI shelter in Brussels expanded their housing capacity for young people, as did Wallonia. In Flanders a new collaboration started between the Centre for General Welfare (CAW), the institution in charge of sheltering/housing, and çavaria. The goal of this collaboration is to ensure inclusivity of all shelter opportunities for LGBTI youth in Flanders.



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