

#TransDayofVisibility 2021: Seka's story

[Blog](#), [Trans](#)

"When we are connected, our voices are louder and more heard."

Their name is Asmira Topo, but everybody calls them Seka. "A long time ago, a friend thought that I was much younger than her when we first met, and that's the name she started calling me," Seka explains. "It means little sister in Balkan languages. It just stuck."

It's March but it already feels like summer in Zagreb, where Seka, originally from Bosnia, has lived for the past decade. Initially they came to the city to do their masters and be with their (now former) partner, but then they got involved in activism with the Croatian organisation, [Trans Aid](#). Back in Bosnia, Seka hadn't been activism oriented at all. "If somebody had asked me, I would have said 'it's not for me'," they say. "But now that I'm actually doing it, it's like, 'this is really what I'm supposed to do'."

Seka has taken a break from a gathering of their team outside their apartment to talk to ILGA-Europe. It is a small team and, as with all trans activists and communities in the region, hate is taking a toll on them all. ILGA-Europe's Annual Review shows that online hate speech against LGBT people in Croatia was sharply on the rise in 2020. Overall, there is a substantial rise in anti-trans discourse across Europe and Central Asia, from official sources, in the media and online.

For Seka, the rise of trans exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs), who deny that trans women are women and reject them from their spaces, and do not not acknowledge non-binary people at all, is very worrying and exhausting. "It really upsets me when feminists are anti-trans, because I believe the trans movement is not separable from the feminist movement," says Seka. "We were supposed to be working and improving society together, but instead they're having all this anti-trans discourse. It's just painful."

Dealing with institutions when your identity is denied can be invasive. As part of the process of applying for citizenship in Croatia, Seka had to request some documents from Bosnia. "It was really awkward because they asked me very personal questions," they say. Bosnian officials addressed them as "Mrs." and "Miss" after Seka had asked them not to use either of those, the officials were rude and commented amongst each other, "For God's sake, what is this?" referring to Seka as an object.

"I have all the documents from Bosnia for a month now," says Seka, sitting by the balcony of their living room while the sounds of children playing outside is audible. "But I haven't gone to the ministry here in Croatia yet because the personal questioning from Bosnia was too traumatic. I need to recover before going to another institution."

Everyday life presents other complexities and discomfort. In their mother tongue, Seka uses both he and she pronouns. "If I'm in a store and I'm using both genders while talking on the phone, people will stare at me, trying to analyse what am I trying to say, wondering why I'm using 'she' and 'he' in the same sentence when talking about myself. They look at you, they try to analyse what's going on. They don't ask any questions or anything, but it's still awkward."

Unfortunately, the possibility of trans rights regressing is a realistic scenario under the current conservative

government in Croatia. Many human rights organisations are solely focusing on not moving backwards.

“I honestly just hope that politicians are going to stop attacking us,” Seka says. “The legal gender recognition procedure was never perfect. It was always discriminatory and pathologising, but it was functioning and we had good communication with the medical experts involved. Now they’re not so open and we’re not having honest conversations anymore. I’m just hoping that the attacks are going to stop at some point and that we’re going to have some space to breathe and figure out what to do next.”

Before we finish our call, Seka shares their message for all trans communities in Europe and Central Asia, which in their diversity are facing similar struggles. “I hope to stay connected to each other and have each other’s backs. When we are connected, our voices are louder and more heard. We will not get lost in this chaos.”