BELGIUM

ASYLUM
The so-called “reception crisis” continues, whereby for two years the Belgian government has been seriously failing to accommodate people with dignity during their asylum procedure. This leads to asylum seekers having to survive and sleep on the streets (see here). The people most impacted by this crisis are single men, including members of the LGBTQI+ community. When people requesting asylum are being granted shelter, the basic safety needs of LGBTQI+ people are usually not met in the main reception centers.

ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES
Mons became the second city where businesses will receive a label for being welcoming of LGBTQIA+ people, after a training provided by Maison Arc-en-ciel (MAC).

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH
(See also under Education)
The Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (Unia) called for urgent legal changes to ensure that perpetrators of hate crimes are prosecuted in criminal proceedings.

CSOs filed a complaint with the Prosecutor against a far-right organiser and founder of the extreme right-wing youth movement ‘Schild en Vrienden’, who demanded a store take down its rainbow flag because it spreads “paedophilia”. The video of the action went viral and spread hate.

An LGBTQIA+ iftar (the fast-breaking evening meal of Muslims in Ramadan) in Antwerp had to be cancelled after countless hate messages and threats. Several politicians, including the Flanders Minister for Equal Opportunities, condemned the hate wave.

Drag story time events were targeted by hate speech and harassment this year, with at least one event disrupted by a handful of far-right protesters. Drag shows were also targeted by hate.

Flemish right-wing politicians continued to use hateful speech towards LGBTQI+ people. During a parliamentary session in October, MP Stefaan Sintobin (Vlaams Belang) upheld that schoolteachers should not address how gay and lesbian couples can have children.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE
(See also under Education)
After her disappearance in December 2022, the murder of a Georgian young trans woman in Belgium was reported in January.

Unia shared that it closed 137 files relating to discrimination based on sexual orientation in 2022, a worrying figure but a slight decrease compared to 2021. It received 7,310 complaints in 2022. Unia called for a new interfederal action plan against discrimination and violence against LGBTI+ people, as the previous one expired in 2019.

UZ Gent/Transgender Infopoint’s study, commissioned by the government, found that one in three LGBTQ+ people in Flanders have experienced physical violence in the past two years and 93% have reported verbal or psychological abuse.

Three LGBTQI+ bars were vandalised in Brussels. A man in his 70s was lured on a fake date on a dating app and robbed by five young men. A man was the victim of a homophobic and autistophobic attack in Brussels. Several rainbow crossings (see under Equality and Non-discrimination) were vandalised (see here, here, and here).

The Brussels metro received several terrorist threats, which also included anti-LGBT language.

The perpetrator in a 2022 homophobic hate crime was sentenced to 18 months of prison, including nine months of probation. One of the three perpetrators of a 2018 homophobic murder was sentenced to 28 years in prison - the others stood trial in 2021.

In July, Belgium adopted the first law against femicides in Europe. It includes protections for gender minorities who do not identify as women.

BODILY INTEGRITY
In July, the parliament adopted a ban on so-called ‘conversion practices’, covering sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, in the case of both minors and adults. The sanctions will include prison sentences and/or fines.

The parliament is yet to ban non-consensual surgeries performed on intersex children, in line with the 2021 parliamentary resolution on intersex people’s rights. Civil society continued to lobby for a ban, and also for sanctions,
better access to healthcare for intersex people throughout their lives, and access to their own medical history.

In an important judicial victory, the Brussels Court of Appeal held a hospital accountable for non-consensual medical interventions performed on an Intersex minor. Civil society widely welcomed the ruling.

EDUCATION
(See also under Bias-motivated Speech)

The Ook Genks Wel Anders (OGWA) association’s IDAHOBIT event at a school in Genk was attacked by approximately 100 far-right students, who also assaulted a volunteer and city representatives. In response, the city and OGWA launched a campaign against anti-LGBT hate in schools.

The Hasselt Sports School suspended eight teachers for racist and homophobic speech on a messaging app. An official investigation was launched and later dismissed because of a lack of evidence, but a disciplinary investigation continues.

Sint-Rita college installed a rainbow crossing upon a students’ initiative (see more under Equality and Non-discrimination). Students in the Herzele municipality received rainbow bracelets for IDAHOBIT.

In June, the Constitutional Court struck down the so-called ‘attainment targets’ for second and third-grade secondary education. The new targets don’t explicitly include LGBTI+ rights and experiences. Civil society found the ruling alarming and a step back.

A survey conducted by çavaria revealed that the situation for LGBTI+ students in secondary schools in Flanders has not improved in the past five years.

Sex education (EVRAS) became mandatory in French-speaking schools. The law was voted almost unanimously but the decision was used by far-right and religious groups to stage violent protests, including a wave of disinformation on social media and the vandalisation of some schools. Some of these groups looked at bringing the new law before the Constitutional Court.

EMPLOYMENT

Civil servants in Ghent are now eligible for 20 days of transition leave.

A new study by the University of Ghent found that lesbians and gay men face little discrimination in employment, contrary to trans people. Ghent allocated funding this year to test transphobic discrimination in employment and take legal action.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The parliament and the Prime Minister celebrated IDAHOBIT again this year. Municipalities also continued to raise the rainbow flag on IDAHOBIT and organise events (see here, here, here, here, here, and here).

The Ministry of Mobility announced on the occasion of IDAHOBIT that municipalities can request a rainbow pedestrian crossing from the Flemish Roads and Traffic Agency. In May over a third have already done so. The municipality of Hemiksem wanted to also install a rainbow traffic light, but the traffic institute deemed it unsafe and confusing. The rail company NMBS/SNCB ran a rainbow-coloured train from Antwerp on IDAHOBIT and a #trainbow in Liège.

Civil society petitioned the parliament to ban facial recognition technology in Brussels, which disproportionately impacts LGBTQI+ people, migrants, homeless people, and racial and ethnic minorities.

Three laws on discrimination were amended to replace “sex change” as a protected group with “medical or social transition” and to recognise multiple discrimination. The definition of sexual orientation was updated to reflect that sexual orientation can be fluid.

FAMILY

This year marked the 20th anniversary of marriage equality in Belgium.

FOREIGN POLICY

Belgium joined the European Comission’s infringement proceedings against Hungary over its anti-LGBT legislation.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Belgium Pride was held in May (see here and here), with the motto ‘Protect the Protest’.

In Flanders, Antwerp Pride celebrated its 16th edition in August.

The first Pride march in Wallonia backed by official institutions will take place in Liège in 2024. TransPédéGouines Pride,
organised by grassroots groups, took place for the second time in May.

The “anti-rioters” draft law, which would have severely restricted freedom of assembly, was eventually dismissed in November when the PS and Ecolo parties refused to vote in its favour.

HEALTH

UZ Gent/Transgender Infopoint’s study found that almost 70% of LGBTQ+ people have considered suicide. Transgender Infopoint celebrated its 10th anniversary.

An LGBTQIA+ health centre opened in Brussels and is run by three civil society organisations. In Wallonia, five such centres exist and two more will open soon. Funds were allocated to establish five more centres dedicated to trans health.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

It is now possible to change one’s name or gender marker (M/F only) any number of times. Names no longer have to align with the person’s gender identity.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

The Belgian Football Association launched a campaign against racist and homophobic hate in the sport, as the number of incidents more than doubled between 2021-2022. Eight football teams joined the Jarfi tournament against homophobia and discrimination, remembering Ishane Jarfi who died in a homophobic murder in 2012.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

In March, the FPS Justice, formerly the Ministry of Justice, launched an internal recommendations guide at the Gender & Justice Colloquium for the treatment of incarcerated trans people.

Transgender Infopunt published a trilingual self-help guide for trans people in Belgian prisons and an info sheet for correctional staff on how to support them during their detention.

Several members of the army joined Brussels Pride for the first time this year.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

A new shelter for LGBTQI+ youth (18-25) will open in Charleroi, funded by the City of Charleroi and a number of institutional partners. The demand for emergency housing for those kicked out from home remains high.

Ghent became the first city to fulfil all criteria on the Rainbow Ambassadors manifesto, which lists a five clear ways to support LGBTQ+ seniors, including provision of a confidential counsellor in all residential care centres and local service centres in the city, and appropriate training for care workers to deal with all forms of sexuality and orientation with respect.

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