

BULGARIA

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

In April, a Bilitis's [report found](#) that, in the past three years, almost a third of non-binary people did not have enough money to buy food for themselves or their families.

ASYLUM

Bilitis's humanitarian fund continued to [support](#) LGBT asylum seekers, including from Ukraine. In 2023, 30 asylum seekers received direct financial support, which represents over half of those who made a request.

Deystvie is currently litigating ten cases of LGBTI Russian asylum seekers.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee's media monitoring report [highlighted](#) the issue of anti-LGBTI content, documenting the use of terms such as "brutal gender fraud", "locusts of Sodom", "Brussels obsession with gender ideology", "revision of biology and normal", "gender worshipers, defenders of pedophilia", and others in the media.

Hate speech continued to be common among politicians. In June, civil society [called for](#) sanctions on hateful speech in the parliament. During the debate about the new domestic violence law (see under Equality and Non-discrimination), MP Kornelia Ninova (Bulgarian Socialist Party) for instance [stated](#) that it was "dangerous" for children to be "poisoned" with information about LGBTI minorities and said "we will never sign and agree to have a third gender in Bulgaria."

Civil society organisations [called](#) for a ban on an annual far-right fascist march, which was held in late February. The Prosecutor [launched](#) an investigation against the far-right extremist party Vazrazhdane, who are [known](#) for anti-LGBT, antisemitic, anti-migrant, and anti-Roma rhetoric.

In July, the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) condemned the newspaper, "Trud" for featuring an article promoting hatred towards gay people in 2019, [affirming](#) that freedom of speech does not protect hate speech.

Deystvie was fined 1,500 EURO as the SAC did not find discrimination in incitement to hate by a far-right rock singer. Deystvie won a lawsuit against the far-right political party VMRO.

The new Criminal Code sanctions hate speech as well (see more

under Bias-motivated Violence). Incitement to hatred based on sexual orientation through the media and online is now a crime punishable by one to four years in prison and a fine of 5,000 to 10,000 Leva (2,500 to 5,000 EURO).

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In May, a group of young men [assaulted](#) several people to "clean the park of gays", including minors.

On 10 June, a group of far-right extremists held up hateful banners outside the screening of *Close* during the Sofia Pride Film Fest and allegedly [assaulted](#) a woman. The group then went inside to [disrupt](#) the event, took photos of the attendees, called them "paedophiles", and chanted "LGBT virus". The event was cancelled. The police were present, but allegedly shook hands and saluted the protesters. Civil society [called](#) on Sofia's mayor to prohibit hateful actions and ensure that future screenings can go ahead with police protection.

On 23 June, a screening of *Close* was also [disrupted](#) by extremists in [Varna](#). The film was screened several times in Bulgaria prior to Pride events.

In the lead-up to Sofia Pride in June, several Pride posters and billboards were [vandalised](#) in the capital (see under Freedom of Expression). Fake hand-written banners were also [put up](#) across the city, falsely calling for violence on behalf of Pride organisers.

On 10 July, the Sofia Court of Appeals [convicted](#) former presidential candidate and neo-fascist party leader Boyan Rasate of hooliganism after [storming](#) into the Rainbow Hub in 2021 and punching staff member Gloriya Filipova in the face. The Court of Appeals gave him six months probation.

In a long-awaited move, the parliament [amended](#) the Criminal Code on 28 July to sanction hate crimes motivated by the victim's sexual orientation. Civil society had [advocated](#) for this step for [many years](#) and [welcomed](#) the developments.

EDUCATION

Civil society organisations provided training in educational settings to promote the inclusivity of LGBTI students. Bilitis trained 40 teachers. Single Step trained [20](#), conducted an international training for 45 people, and hosted a [Human LGBTI+ Library](#).

EMPLOYMENT

Bilitis's [study](#) found that in the last three years 39% of LGBT respondents [had](#) difficulty finding a job.



On May 17, [Sofia Pride Business Forum](#) took place for the first time, attracting over 60 representatives of different companies.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The new Law on Protection from Domestic Violence (LPDV), which was in the drafting process for over two years, [fails](#) to protect those in a same-sex relationship and anyone who does not live together with their partner.

FAMILY

In March, the Supreme Court [denied](#) Baby Sara the right to a birth certificate and citizenship, despite the CJEU ruling.

On 8 August, the Supreme Court [ruled](#) that there was no right to officially register de facto cohabitation in Bulgaria and as no such right exists, couples (both different- and same-gender) should not be allowed to request recognition in court or appeal. The ruling goes against a previous judgement, where a lower court did not recognise the couple's cohabitation either, but [suggested](#) this could possibly be done if they can prove their address is the same, that the contract is on both their names, and a witness supports their plea.

The ECHR [ruled](#) in favour of Liliya Babulkova and Darina Koilova and established that Bulgaria must create a legal framework to recognise same-sex relationships.

1,428 same-sex couples were living together in 2021, according to the national census held that year and published in 2023. It was the first time that this information was collected.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

(see more under Bias-motivated violence)

The 16th Sofia Pride, [focusing](#) on the theme of family, was [held](#) in June and attended by thousands. A day before Pride, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Kalin Stoyanov, [met](#) with the organisers and assured them of police protection. A parallel counter-demonstration for "Christian family values" was also organised. In the weeks leading up to Pride, several anti-LGBTI incidents took place (see more under Bias-motivated violence).

Sofia Pride also [hosted](#) a Human Rights Forum, which gathered over 100 participants, including embassies, representatives of the European Parliament Intergroup on LGBTI Rights, Sofia's mayor, representatives of the executive, the judiciary and the prosecutor's office.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Sofia Pride billboard campaign, featuring both rainbow and traditional families, was formally investigated for "promoting same-sex families as superior". Two women photographed in the campaign with their children were later summoned to the Ministry of Interior directorate in Sofia. This investigation is ongoing (see under Bias-motivated Violence).

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Two years after the Rainbow Hub was attacked, it [secured](#) a long-term home in Sofia this year.

Human rights defender Denitsa Lyubenova was investigated in three different SLAAP cases.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Due to previously conflicting judgments from the Supreme Court on legal gender recognition (LGR) requirements, the General Assembly of the Civil College (SC) of the Supreme Court of Cassation (SCC) [issued](#) an interpretative decision in late February. The decision [stated](#) that as gender is an unchangeable biological factor, legal gender recognition should not be possible in Bulgaria. Civil society expressed deep concern about the ruling which violates international human rights law.

Over the next months, several court judgments seemed to ignore the Assembly's guidance. The Plovdiv district court [granted](#) LGR to a trans person, arguing that the person's right to private life must be protected. Early March, the Supreme Court of Cassation also [ruled](#) that the European Convention on Human Rights is the legal basis for LGR in Bulgaria. In May, the Sofia City Court also [decided](#) to process a trans person's LGR case. Civil society has so far concluded that the interpretative decision does not block LGR.

The first book on LGR by Bulgarian authors, a study of the legal practice for the last decade, was published in December.

In November, Gabriela Bankova [went](#) on a hunger strike in front of a Sofia's court. Precedently, she had been refused to have her gender identity recognised in her official documents. The 12-day protest ignited a spark within the trans community to advocate for their rights.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

An openly gay architect is running in the local elections for Sofia municipality.



POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Deystvie trained 100 police officers on responding to anti-LGBT hate crimes.

GLAS and Bilitis trained over 80 prosecutors on hate crimes, legal cases and LGBTI people's needs.

PUBLIC OPINION

A representative study affirmed that public acceptance towards LGBTI people continues to increase, albeit slowly.



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