

CROATIA

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Hate speech continued to be on the rise this year, including among politicians. Zagreb Pride's report documented a steady increase over the past five years. Anti-trans hate speech has particularly increased - civil society made important efforts through articles, panel discussions, interviews, and infographics to bust anti-trans myths (see here, here, and here).

In February a Catholic priest published an article claiming that same-sex unions can never compare to heterosexual marriage and that Catholics should stay away from "LGBT ideology".

In April, the TV presenter Zoran Šprajc made jokes about trans people on his show. Throughout the year, the "Be Manly" ultra-conservative group held public prayer sessions in the streets once a month. A website linked to football fans posted videos on social media in May, showing rainbow flags burning, as a response to adoption rights for same-sex couples. Former MP Ivan Pernar from The Key of Croatia party shared online that he reported a Croatian man's trans identity to the Zambian authorities, where the person was in custody at the time. NGOs and the Gender Equality Ombudsman filed criminal complaints.

In March, the Council for Electronic Media (VEM) allocated 11,000 EURO to the association In the name of the family, which has been a vocal anti-trans actor in the country. A part of the funds will go to the group's 'research' on the so-called and alleged "epidemic of transsexualism in Croatia". A number of politicians demanded the VEM withdraw the funding.

In October 2022, the Supreme Court overturned the ruling of the Zagreb County Court, which dismissed kolektIRV's claim against the right-wing NGO, GROZD concerning discrimination and harassment. In December 2023, Zagreb County Court ruled that it wasn't discrimination. kolektIRV will file another complaint to the Supreme Court.

In March, the Zagreb County Court ruled that the Vigilare association's petition "Protect children from homo adoption" constituted discrimination, harassment, and incitement. This is not the first time that the association received such a verdict. The Rainbow Family Association decided to launch a criminal complaint against them.

In May, the court ruled in favour of two gay men and fined two men who harassed and insulted them.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

The Rainbow Family Association's study found that one in

four LGBTQ people in Croatia have been physically assaulted. Zagreb Pride's report found that the number of hate speech instances and hate crimes have been on the rise between 2018-2022 and that there were serious gaps in the implementation of existing laws. In 2022, the Ministry of Interior documented eight SOGI-based hate crimes.

In January, two men who were kissing, were attacked and chased away from a club in Split. In May, three young men tried to tear down a rainbow flag on a square in front of the National Theatre, but were prevented by a high school teacher, who received both praise and online hate afterwards. In June, three men were arrested after throwing burning torches on stage at a Pride month event in Pula.

BODILY INTEGRITY

In May, the Možemo! party called for a ban on so-called 'conversion practices'.

EDUCATION

Local NGO LORI published a study finding that 77% of LGBTIQ high school students have been regularly exposed to homophobic and transphobic comments from their peers, and 20% from teachers of staff. LORI also analysed textbooks and curricula, finding that LGBTIQ issues are mostly invisible or underrepresented. Over 50% of students learned about LGBTIQ topics in school in a negative context.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Ombudsman for Gender Equality shared that she received 34 complaints relating to LGBTIQ rights in 2022.

The Rainbow Family Association's study found that three out of four LGBTQ people in Croatia have experienced discrimination and that the fear of future discrimination or violence is very common. LORI's study about young LGBTIQ people in Dubrovnik-Neretva found that two-thirds are planning to leave the area, most are not open about their identities, three-quarters have experienced verbal harassment and almost a third sexual violence.

The Možemo! party presented a package of 13 legislative changes to improve LGBTIQ equality, including on family recognition, medically assisted reproduction, trans healthcare, so-called 'conversion practices' and hate crimes, establishing the party as LGBTIQ+ friendly. Možemo! are in opposition, and all their suggestions have been ignored by the government.

The biggest opposition party, SDP, founded an LGBTIQ+ Forum (similar to working groups) and promised to include NGOs.

Several trans people and a [mother](#) of a trans person shared their stories in the media this year (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), to tackle stigma and discrimination.

FAMILY

In a statement in January, the Croatian Protestant Conference [distanced](#) itself from the practice of marrying and supporting the marriage of same-gender couples.

In 2022, the High Administrative Court [issued](#) its landmark ruling establishing that same-sex couples have the right to adopt children. Civil society [has claimed](#) that uncertainty and discrimination against same-sex couples in this process remain.

Children of same-sex couples born abroad continued to be [unable](#) to get Croatian citizenship, as the state refuses to recognise two mothers or fathers on their papers.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

(See also under Bias-motivated Violence)

The 21st [Queer Zagreb](#) festival was [held](#) in May. The fourth Pride Ride was [held](#) in Zagreb in June. Split [hosted](#) its 12th Pride march and Karlovac its [first](#) one - no incidents took place. The 22nd Zagreb Pride Festival [kicked off](#) on 22 May and the [Pride march](#) was [held](#) successfully in June, under the motto "Together for trans rights!". The mayor joined the march for the third time this year, and other politicians were also present. Mayor Tomašević [said](#) Zagreb "is side by side with European cities". No incidents were recorded.

HEALTH

The Rainbow Family Association's study [found](#) that over 70% of LGBTIQ+ people have considered suicide and 15% have made a suicide attempt. 65% [feared](#) discrimination in healthcare.

Civil society launched the first psycho-social counselling and support [platform](#) for LGBTIQ people.

In February, the Parliamentary Committee for Health and Social Policy and the Committee for Family, Youth and Sports held a joint session to discuss the situation of trans minors. Several experts, who joined the event, left after Željka Markić from the In the Name of the Family group (see under Bias-motivated

Speech) was also invited. The event's invitation page [alleged](#) a stark increase in the number of trans diagnoses among children, which the Ministry of Health proved to be false at the session.

Trans healthcare access [remained](#) difficult this year; civil society [continued](#) to lobby for better access, including after the [appointment](#) of the National Health Council members. Genital surgeries remain unavailable and those available abroad should be covered by mandatory health insurance, however, this is not happening. Trained and trans-friendly medical professionals are still few.

In 2022, mastectomies started to be covered again under mandatory health insurance. However, in 2023, the only hospital performing them postponed many interventions due to work in their building.

Hormone therapy is covered only for some people, mostly those who have changed their gender markers. KolekTIRV is preparing a class action lawsuit demanding the general coverage of hormone therapy.

The Ministry of Health held meetings with KolekTIRV over trans issues. The Ministry invited a psychiatrist who is one of the leaders of the anti-gender movement in Croatia to participate in these meetings. In June, the Ministry of Health ceased all communication with kolekTIRV, without any official announcement. It has not yet established a working group, as recommended by the Ombudsperson for gender equality.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

The National Health Council, which grants final approval in LGR cases, continued placing additional administrative requirements on LGR applicants, failing to meet the 30-day deadline it should abide by. KolekTIRV has [urged](#) the newly appointed members of the Council to remedy this issue.

PUBLIC OPINION

The Ombudsperson's study on discrimination found that negative public opinions about LGBTQ people are [decreasing](#), especially among young people.



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