

MALTA

ASYLUM

Civil society continued to lobby for the government to remove all countries that criminalise LGBTIQ+ persons, such as Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Morocco, from the list of safe countries and to stop processing claims from LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in accelerated procedures. This year's March for Peace in June also addressed these issues.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Online hate speech was widespread before and during EuroPride, hosted by Malta this year. For instance, countless hateful comments were posted about 'Dancing with Pride', a communal dance event championing diversity. Politicians and veteran television presenters implied that LGBTI people should hide from children. Eight human rights organisations issued a statement, calling out the hateful events. Several memes and posts were spread online ahead of EuroPride, conflating the event with "paedophilia" and "child grooming".

Following his acquittal in 2022, Catholic priest Fr David Muscat was found guilty on appeal of online hate speech in May for his statement that "gayness" was worse than "being possessed". The sentence is six months of prison with two years of suspension.

In another appeal, a man was found guilty of hateful comments in 2022 against the Pride March in Gozo, when he commented on a Gozo Pride Facebook post, "should bomb u all u freaks". He received a 3,000 EURO fine and six months of prison with three years of suspension.

Two suspects were acquitted in the murder trial of a trans sex worker, Sion Grech, back in 2005. Her family filed a judicial protest over the acquittal and the fact that the investigation took 18 years.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Several incidents took place this year in response to Pride events. Ahead of the opening ceremony of EuroPride, a poster about the event was vandalised in Valletta. A group of Pride participants in Gozo were verbally harassed after leaving the march and one of them was physically assaulted. The police started an investigation.

BODILY INTEGRITY

In February, three people were charged with promoting so-called 'conversion practices', including a man who claims to have "healed" from 'homosexuality' through his religion, and the two owners of a website that live streamed the man's interview. Several LGBTIQ+ people spoke about the harmful impact of the man's claims and of other forms of so-called 'conversion practices' (see here and here).

In March, a parliamentary committee approved amendments to the 2016 ban on these harmful practices, including clearer definitions of what counts as promotion and advertising.

EDUCATION

The Ministry of Education launched a new policy to make schools more inclusive to trans, gender variant and intersex children.

EMPLOYMENT

As part of EuroPride 2023, Malta's Chamber of Commerce together with the Allied Rainbow Communities (ARC) hosted a conference to raise awareness and promote engagement among industry experts and LGBTIQ+ communities and later signed a memorandum of understanding.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

On the occasion of IDAHOBIT in May, the government launched and presented the new and third LGBTIQ Equality Strategy and Action Plan (2023-2027). The plan covers 10 sectors and 94 measures to combat discrimination and violence. It includes police training; addressing data gaps; inclusive education and review of sex-ed curricula; mainstreaming sexual health; and capacity building of professionals working with asylum seekers and migrants. The plan was drafted in cooperation with the LGBTIQ Consultation Council, which includes a range of stakeholders, including civil society groups.

The SOGIGESC Unit of the Maltese government published its annual report in September during its annual conference.

After a year of consultation, the group Drachma Parents presented the manifesto of Parents of Trans Persons to the Speaker of the Parliament in January.

FOREIGN POLICY

Malta joined the European Commission's infringement proceedings against Hungary over its anti-LGBT legislation.

In May, activists gathered outside the Honorary Consulate of Slovakia in Malta to protest on the de facto ban on legal gender recognition.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Malta hosted EuroPride Valletta 2023 between 7-17 September, under the theme #EqualityFromTheHeart. The ten day festival featured cultural events, a Pride march, discussions, a conference, and a community dialogue held by the NCPE and with the participation of Maltese EU Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli. The conference and the Pride march



were attended by the Prime Minister. The Pride march, held on 16 September, gathered thousands, including the staff of the NCPE, and featured Christina Aguilera as the final performer. The Maltese President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, did not join the events.

Several human rights groups and the former president Marie Louise Coleiro Preca urged the organisers to withdraw the invitation of the 2018 EuroVision winner Netta Barzilai from Israel and show that EuroPride does not support apartheid and occupation. EuroPride did not follow suit. Several people chanted 'Free Palestine' during Barzilai's performance. Gozo, a more conservative area in the Maltese Islands, held its second Pride march on 9 September. One incident took place (see under Bias-motivated Violence).

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Nationalist MP Julie Zahra criticised a theatre performance and workshop in Żiguzajg, a cultural festival for children, about gender fluidity. Several politicians, including the Minister of Culture, condemned her statements and called them anti-trans and anti-gender sentiments. The ADPD international secretary wrote to the Commissioner for Children urging an investigation into reported intimidation and harassment of attendees by members of an ultra-conservative party. The commissioner asked the police to investigate.

HEALTH

The media reported in July that Malta's sexual health clinic has a six-month waiting list for routine check-ups. In July, the Ministry of Health announced that three new GU community clinics were set to be opened. Checkpoint Malta carried out free community testing throughout the year and during EuroPride 2023.

Civil society has been campaigning for a new national sexual health policy, last updated in 2010, and carrying on awareness-raising campaigns. Malta has one of the highest HIV transmission rates in Europe. PEP is not provided for free to people involved in consensual sexual relations, nor to survivors of sexual assault or health workers injured by needles. The Minister for Health stated that free PEP and PrEP will be part of the new sexual health strategy, which they said will be out for public consultation later in 2023.

HOUSING

MGRM's Dar il-Qawsalla (Rainbow House), which will provide housing to LGBTIQ people kicked out of their homes, is on track to open in 2024.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

The Ministry for the Family and Children's Rights will provide financial support to MGRM in a three year agreement to continue providing services to the LGBTIQ+ community.

INTERSECTIONALITY

The National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing (2023-2030), presented in January, includes actions to support LGBTIQ+ elderly people.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

The exhibition Tender and Masculine was hosted in Rosa Kwir in January.

In September, several cultural events and performances were held in Valletta as part of EuroPride 2023, including exhibitions, theatre, concerts, drag shows, literary events, and more.

PUBLIC OPINION

The Parliamentary Secretariat for Reforms launched guidelines for media reporting on the LGBTIQ+ community.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Malta's Parliament legalised abortion in cases where a woman is at risk of dying. The majority of MPs voted in favor, removing Malta from the list of the last four countries with a complete abortion ban. The bill allows for abortion after the approval of three doctors and only when the pregnant person's life is at risk.

Abortion in cases of rape, incest and domestic abuse are still prohibited. Pro-choice activists criticised the amendments. MGRM joined the pro-choice civil society coalition this year, and participated in the pro-choice rally on September 30. There, Cynthia Chircop, coordinator of MGRM, stressed the paradox of Malta's civil rights record and added "LGBTIQ rights and the right to reproductive healthcare, including abortion, have one common foundation; bodily autonomy. This is a fundamental right."



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