



Bosnia and Herzegovina

ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

In 2025, the Municipal Court in Sarajevo ruled in *SOC v. MHS* that discrimination had occurred in access to advertising services. The Court established that the refusal to broadcast promotional materials for an LGBTI cultural event amounted to direct discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. It found that the service provider had selectively and unjustifiably restricted access to a service that was otherwise offered to other clients under equal conditions.

ASYLUM

In 2025, the Council of Europe expanded its curriculum of online training programs to include a formation on "LGBTI Asylum Seekers in Bosnia and Herzegovina," with several public officials, including border police officers, kickstarting the program by taking part in it.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In February Sarajevo imam Muhamed Velic called queer Bosnian singer Božo Vrećo a "monster" and a "freak" during a sermon, accusing him of disrespecting Bosniak cultural heritage through his performances of *sevdalinka*, a traditional folk genre.

In response, the head of Bosnia's Islamic Community, Husein Kavazović, addressed a letter to Vrećo on January 29, affirming the importance of diversity and Bosnia's legacy of coexistence, though he did not directly condemn Velic's comments.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In January, the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of BiH (HJPC BiH) issued a notice to relevant judicial institutions regarding updates to the National Judicial Case Management System (CMS/TCMS) for what concerns hate crimes. The update enables systematic data collection on the motives of attacks and on the belonging of injured parties to protected characteristics, including SOGI elements. The amendment entered into force on January 27.

In June, two LGBTI persons were attacked following their participation in the 2025 BiH Pride March, due to the fact that they were wearing rainbow symbols.

EDUCATION

In June a book titled "The History of Queer Life in Bosnia and Herzegovina" was released. The book traces the experiences of LGBTI people from the Middle Ages through the Ottoman period, the Yugoslav Kingdom, and Socialist Yugoslavia, and is regarded as the first book of its kind in the country.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In 2025, civil society groups reported that - in the last five years - local governments in Republika Srpska have provided over 2 million KM in funding to 11 anti-LGBTI groups. These organisations oppose women's reproductive rights and LGBTI rights and have campaigned against laws protecting women from violence.

In February, the Cantonal Court in Sarajevo issued a final ruling establishing discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics.

The ruling concerned a public statement made by the then-member of the Sarajevo Canton Assembly, Samra Čosović Hajdarević, who, following the announcement of the first BiH Pride March in 2019, published a Facebook post that, among other things, contained calls for segregation, isolation, and discrimination against LGBTI persons.

In March, the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska passed amendments to its Criminal Code that erased "gender identity" from the list of 'protected characteristics' from all provisions of the law.

In June, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina amended its Criminal Code, narrowing the definition of "close person" in laws protecting individuals from violence to include only partners of the opposite sex. This change was introduced in response to unfounded claims that the previous gender-neutral definition could lead to the legal recognition of same-sex couples.

In October, the Agency for Public Officers of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, jointly with Sarajevo Open Centre, organised a training session

on discrimination based on SOGIESC for public officers.

Similar trainings were also organised in May and October for members of the judiciary both in the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Commission for Human Rights of the House of Peoples of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina refused to examine a complaint submitted by the Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC), reportedly on the basis of prejudicial attitudes towards LGBTI people. Only the President of the Commission issued a dissenting opinion.

FAMILY

In October, the first session of the Working Group of the Government of the Federation of BiH on the Same-Sex Partnership Law was held. The establishment and initial meeting of the Working Group marked a formal step forward following years of advocacy by LGBTI organisations for legal recognition of same-sex couples in the Federation entity. However, by the end of 2025, no draft law had been published and no clear timeline for adoption had been communicated.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

In June, nearly a thousand people took part in the sixth Sarajevo Pride, highlighting the continued lack of legal recognition for same-sex marriage and adoption. Pride remains limited to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as authorities in the Republika Srpska entity have repeatedly banned such gatherings. Draško Stanivuković, mayor of the capital of the entity, previously stated that Pride in Sarajevo was sufficient, claiming such events do not align with the "spirit of the Serbian people."

DATA COLLECTION

In May, the Sarajevo Open Centre published its Annual Report on the State of Human Rights of LGBTI People in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While the report acknowledged modest progress in public discourse and some signs of institutional openness, it emphasised that systemic advancements remain limited and largely reliant on individual initiatives rather than coherent strategies or policies.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

In July, the European Parliament published its annual report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, placing new emphasis on countering hybrid threats such as foreign interference and disinformation. The report expressed concern over increasing efforts by malign foreign actors to exploit ethnic divisions and institutional weaknesses to obstruct reforms and erode trust in the EU. It also criticised Milorad Dodik, current president of BiH, and members of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) for launching initiatives aimed at nullifying state laws within the Republika Srpska entity and attacking key state institutions.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

LGBTI human rights defenders attacked in March 2023 by a mob in Banja Luka are still waiting for their assailants to be prosecuted.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

In May, the Cantonal Court of Sarajevo issued a decision in favour of a trans woman whose legal gender recognition approval was declared dependent, by administrative authorities, on her divorcing her wife. Despite the ruling, administrative authorities still refused to allow the procedure to take place, leading the applicant to challenge the decision once more in front of the Cantonal Court.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

In 2025, a total of 296 participants attended a special training program on human rights with a focus on SOGIESC issues - 23 candidates for the rank of junior inspector and 273 candidates for the rank of police officer. This training was organised by the Sarajevo Open Center and in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Interior.



Bulgaria

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In April, in the centre of Sofia, a trans woman was attacked by a man wielding a machete. The incident occurred late at night, while the victim was returning from a gathering with friends. She was approached by a man with a bicycle who started hurling threats at her, saying that "freaks like her should not live" before slashing her on the head and legs. Once she fell to the ground, he continued by kicking her repeatedly. She has since filed a complaint with the police.

EMPLOYMENT

In April, disinformation circulated on Bulgarian social media claiming that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF) had introduced a quota system requiring farms to employ at least 10% "homosexual, bisexual, or trans workers by 2026. The Ministry issued an official rebuttal, condemning the story as gross misinformation intended to mislead the public and damage the institution's credibility. The statement stressed that the Ministry had never adopted, discussed, or agreed upon any measures related to collecting data on the sexual orientation of agricultural workers.

EDUCATION

In August, one year after Bulgaria's parliament banned the discussion of LGBTI issues in schools, students and teachers reported that the law has deepened fear and anxiety in the classroom. The amendments prohibit so-called "propaganda" of "non-traditional sexual orientation" in schools. Educators, experts, and international organisations had warned that the law was vague, unnecessary, and likely to fuel bullying rather than prevent it. Students interviewed by national news outlets reported the law has instead introduced more stress into schools without addressing any real problems.

Previously, in February, the Prosecutors pardoned members of the Revival Party for blacklisting teachers by posting calls on Facebook to hold teachers accountable for opposing the law amendments. In September, LGBTI organization Deystvie, Single Step Foundation and Assoc. Prof. Deyana Marcheva submitted a formal request to the

Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria insisting on referring the law to the Constitutional Court in order for it to be repealed.

HEALTH

In October, Single Step Foundation successfully established the first LGBTI-friendly healthcare partnership with a focus on preventative care in the areas of gynecology, internal medicine, dermatology, psychology and otorhinolaryngology with a local private health centre. The service offers free checkups and discounted cosmetic procedures delivered by supportive medical professionals. In addition to that, Single Step established the first network of LGBTI-friendly general practitioners in Sofia and expanded its trans healthcare support programme by establishing partnerships with additional endocrinologists in Sofia; thus, counteracting the lack of state-funded LGBTI-oriented healthcare

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

In February, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) presented its assessment of Bulgaria's progress on two high-priority recommendations from its 2022 monitoring report. ECRI rapporteur Jens Vedsted-Hansen noted that while Bulgaria has taken steps to expand the number and regional distribution of Roma mediators in healthcare, education, and employment, it has failed to implement the recommendation concerning the rights and equality of LGBTI people. Specifically, Bulgaria has neither established a working group nor adopted a national action plan to protect LGBTI rights, as ECRI had urged.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

In May, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) held a hearing in the Shipov case (C-43/24). The case was brought by a Bulgarian trans woman living in Italy, whose repeated attempts to amend her gender marker and name on official Bulgarian documents were denied by national courts, creating issues in accessing healthcare, education, employment, housing, welfare, and even exercising her freedom of movement within the EU. This case comes against a backdrop of repeated

condemnations from the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which ruled that Bulgaria was in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights for failing to ensure quick, transparent, and accessible gender recognition procedures. Nonetheless, Bulgaria's Supreme Court issued a binding interpretative decision in 2023, declaring that national law does not permit courts to authorize a change of sex, name, or personal identification number for trans people in the civil register.

In September, CJEU Advocate General Jean-Richard de la Tour presented an [opinion](#) on the case, stressing that Member States are obliged to legally recognise the gender identity of their citizens and to reflect this in civil status documents, regardless of whether the person has undergone surgical interventions. He argued that if a trans person cannot obtain an identity document reflecting their gender identity, this constitutes a restriction on the fundamental rights enshrined in EU doctrine - among which the right to free movement. Further, he also underscored that the condition of surgical operation as a prerequisite for recognition of gender reassignment violates the right to personal integrity and the right to private life.