



Serbia



Political support for LGBTI citizens varied in 2015, as discussions began on the possibility of registered partnership for same-sex couples. The vulnerability of trans people in Serbian society was exposed when an army officer was forced to retire when they began to transition. The European Commission also stressed the need to protect trans people in their annual enlargement reports. A group of lesbian women were attacked in the capital and filed a complaint under hate crime legislation. Civil society groups also launched an online portal to report hate crime against LGBTI people. Several members of parliament attended Belgrade Pride for the first time and a minister was singled out for particular praise with an equality award.

Bias-motivated speech

- During a parliamentary discussion about the 2009 anti-discrimination law in May, Aleksandar Martinovic MP (Serbian Progressive Party, SNS; centre-right) made several negative remarks about the LGBTI community and affiliated NGOs. Martinovic said that while LGBTI people should have legal rights, he could not understand the need for Pride parades and that such events were against moral norms. In September, proceedings against Martinovic were dropped as the MP had been speaking under parliamentary privilege.
- An opinion poll carried out by the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI, see **Public opinion**) revealed that 72% of the LGBTI people surveyed in Serbia had been verbally harassed or abused because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Bias-motivated violence

- An opinion poll carried out by the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI, see **Public opinion**) revealed that 23% of the LGBTI people surveyed in Serbia had suffered physical violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Four lesbian women were verbally and physically assaulted by a man in a café in Belgrade on 26 September. Three of the women were injured. One of the women attacked, activist and writer Dragoslava Barzut, called the police. Before assistance arrived, another man joined and attempted to harm the women; they hid in the café's toilet until police arrived at the scene. Two of the women were treated in hospital for their injuries. Speaking at a press conference after the attack, Dragoslava Barzut said that she felt a "...moral responsibility to condemn the lesbophobic attack on my friends and me...". A complaint was filed under the country's hate crime legislation. The attack was also publicly condemned by several MEPs. At the end of the year, the case was pending before the state prosecutor's office.

Data collection

- On 19 November, NGOs Labris and Gayten-LGBT along with the National Democratic Institute launched a

new online portal for reporting violence and discrimination against LGBTI people. DA SE ZNA will allow individuals to report incidents and also serve as a resource by keeping track of resolved cases.

Education

- In response to a letter from NGO Labris, the Institute for the Advancement of Education confirmed in August that all school texts aged 20 years or older will be revised in line with legal frameworks in 2016. The education ministry assured them that books without discriminatory content related to LGBT people will feature on the 2016/2017 curriculum.

Employment

- In January, a trans woman claimed she had been forced to take early retirement after she began to transition. A major in the Serbian army, she had been declared physically fit for military service but the defence ministry claimed that she could have a "negative effect" on the army's reputation. She filed a complaint to the equality commissioner and commenced legal proceedings against the defence minister, ministry of defence and the Serbian army. These charges were later dismissed by the Higher Public Prosecutor in Belgrade.

Enlargement

- Serbia formally applied to join the European Union in 2009 and began negotiations in 2014. In its annual report on progress made towards EU accession, published in November, the European Commission noted a divergence between the comprehensive 2009 anti-discrimination law and its application in practice. LGBTI people were named among the groups most vulnerable to discrimination. Hate crimes against these groups still need to be properly investigated and sanctioned. The success of Belgrade Pride in 2014 and 2015 was praised as well as government-run awareness raising activities. However, the Commission stressed that more political commitment was needed, both to promote equality across society and introduce change for marginalised groups such as trans people.

Equality and non-discrimination

- An opinion poll carried out by the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI, see **Public opinion**) revealed that 51% of the LGBTI people surveyed in Serbia had been personally discriminated against because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Family

- Public discussion on an official preliminary draft of a new Civil Code, including registered partnership for same-sex couples, started on 2 July and will run until summer 2016. In November, Deputy Prime Minister Zorana Mihajlovic (Serbian Progressive Party, SNS; conservative) said that she was personally against equal marriages but did not see any problem with discussing the issue. Current minister for social policy, Aleksandar Vulin (Movement of Socialists, PS) said that he opposed marriage equality and that, as the responsible minister, he would never sign such a law.

Freedom of assembly

- In April, the country's first ever Lesbian March took place. The first Trans Pride in Belgrade also took place on the same day as the Pride parade in September. NGO Gayten-LGBT organised their first ever trans, intersex and queer conference in October.
- An opinion poll carried out by the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI, see **Public opinion**) revealed that 59% of the LGBTI people surveyed in Serbia felt that Pride parades have improved the position of the LGBTI community in society.
- Belgrade's Pride parade took place on 20 September, with no major incidents reported. This was the second year in a row where the parade passed off peacefully, after several years where threats of violence caused the event to be cancelled. Riot police closed down the city centre and approximately 300 people marched to the Serbian parliament.

Participation in public, cultural and political life

- To coincide with IDAHOT, NGO Gay Straight Alliance announced that the 2015 recipient of their 'Rainbow

Award' was Jadranka Joksimovic MP (SNS). The minister without portfolio with responsibility for European integration was chosen for her unequivocal support for the rights of LGBT people and the good working relationship she developed with the Serbian LGBT movement. The award ceremony was held in Belgrade City Hall.

"Our commitment and our goal is to ensure that all people have equal rights, equal opportunities and that no one is part of the 'invisible minority'. I will fight for a city in which everyone can express their opinion on any subject. Because this is a city of diversity and all are welcome into it."

- Mayor of Belgrade, Siniša Mali at GSA Rainbow Award ceremony, 16 May 2015

- Several political figures publicly supported LGBTI equality by taking part in Belgrade Pride (see **Freedom of assembly**), including Jadranka Joksimovic MP (SNS), culture minister Ivan Tasovac (Independent) and Belgrade's mayor Siniša Mali (Independent). The equality commissioner Brankica Jankovic, US Ambassador to Serbia, Michael Kirby and Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, Michael Davenport also took part in the march. Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic (SNS) said he was not interested in attending but that "...state institutions must ensure that every citizen feels secure and that is a European standard."

Police and law enforcement

- NGO Labris held five trainings during 2015, reaching a total of 125 police officers. Eight LGBTI community liaison officers were appointed and the Kragujevac police department opened an emergency phone line for LGBT people and their family to report hate crime or discrimination.

Public opinion

- From June – August, the National Democratic Institute, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Gay and Lesbian Victory Institute and Civil Rights

Defenders carried out opinion polls in the Western Balkans on attitudes towards LGBTI people. The survey combined online questionnaires, focus groups with LGBTI people and face-to-face interviews with the general public. In Serbia, 48% of the general public said that they would try to help their son or daughter find a cure if they found out that their child was not heterosexual. 47% said they would not vote for a political party that championed the rights of LGBTI people.