



Slovakia



2015 was certainly a year of mixed emotions for LGBTI activists. Despite interventions from the Vatican, a referendum to limit LGBTI equality failed to attract an adequate number of voters to the ballot boxes in February. The negative atmosphere generated by the tense campaign led to the postponement of Bratislava Pride. The Council of Europe's leading human rights expert expressed concern over the treatment of LGBTI people while the government introduced the country's inaugural human rights strategy. EU-commissioned opinion polls showed a lack of public support for LGBTI equality, yet another national survey demonstrated a majority of the population favoured registered partnerships for the first time ever.

Data collection

- In October, NGO TransFúzia released the results of the first qualitative research study on the availability of healthcare for trans people. 30 trans people from various regions in Slovakia, doctors and other experts had been interviewed. The most common problems identified were finding a doctor that would not stereotype them, long waits for medical care and intrusive procedures.

Equality and non-discrimination

- On 18 February, the government introduced the first nationwide Human Rights Promotion and Protection Strategy. The Alliance for Family (AZR) group had opened a petition on 17 February calling on the government to reject the human rights strategy. This strategy outlines the government's human rights priorities and was drafted by the foreign ministry. Among its proposals are improving human rights education, preventing violence and protecting the rights of unmarried couples. LGBTI issues were not included in the strategy, as they were planned for inclusion in a separate action plan for LGBTI people 2016-2019, opposed by the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) in October. The action plan had not been approved before the end of the year.

- CoE Commissioner for Human Rights Nils Muižnieks visited Slovakia from 15 to 17 June. The Commissioner released the report on his country visit on 13 October and the treatment of LGBTI people was one of his most prominent concerns. Among his recommendations was the extension of existing hate crime and speech legislation to cover all LGBTI people and to ensure the bodily integrity of trans and intersex people was respected.

Family

- On 8 February, a referendum involving a series of questions on the rights of LGBTI people took place. Voters were asked if the term 'marriage' should only apply to a union between a man and a woman, if they agreed that same-sex couples should be banned from adopting children, and if parents should be allowed to remove their children from school lessons about sexuality or euthanasia. Conservative groups backed by the Catholic

Church were in favour of the proposals. The Conference of Slovak Bishops spoke out in favour of the referendum. During an audience in Rome days before the vote, Pope Francis said "...I wish to express my appreciation to the entire Slovak church, encouraging everyone to continue their efforts in defence of the family...". A group of theologians issued a statement against the referendum, arguing that it was counter-productive. Speaking before the vote, Prime Minister Robert Fico (Direction- Social Democracy, SMER-SD) said on 5 February that there was a duty on the government to "unburden practical parts of life for same-sex couples", in areas such as inheritance and medical records. LGBTI activists distanced themselves from the campaign and encouraged people to boycott the vote. 21.4% of the eligible electorate turned out, below the 50% quorum required for results to be valid. The proposals were not approved.

- The Life Partnership platform was established in June. The coalition of 39 NGOs and activists support the introduction of an alternative partnership for both different-sex and same-sex couples, one that is recognised by the state and has similar rights and responsibilities to civil marriage. In the first phase of its campaign in 2015, Life Partnership gathered stories of couples who would benefit from the introduction of registered partnership.

Freedom of assembly

- The organisers of Bratislava Pride cancelled the 2015 event in June, as activists felt a negative atmosphere had been generated by the referendum campaign. Activists focused instead on the civil partnership campaign (see **Family**).

Human rights defenders

- In April, LGBT NGO Inakost and other national LGBT organisations were awarded the 2015 Human Rights Defender Award by the US Embassy in Slovakia.

Participation in public, cultural and political life

- President Andrej Kiska (independent) formally sponsored Inakost's ninth Queer Film Festival in October;

he was the first major political figure to officially support any LGBT event.

Public opinion

- A Focus Polling Agency survey carried out in August revealed that 50.4% of people questioned supported the idea of a recognised partnership option for couples who cannot/do not want to get married. The poll was commissioned by Life Partnership, a platform of 39 NGOs in favour of registered partnership (see **Family**). This is the first time that a majority of the population was shown to be in favour of introducing an alternative to marriage.
- According to Eurobarometer 2015, 38% of people surveyed in Slovakia believe that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is widespread (EU28 average was 58%). When asked about gender identity, 33% felt discrimination on this ground was widespread (EU 28 average was 56%). 36% totally agreed with the statement that LGB people should have the same rights as heterosexual people (EU 28 average was 71%). When asked to grade how comfortable they would be with certain scenarios on a scale of 1 (not comfortable at all) - 10 (totally comfortable), 41% said they would be comfortable or moderately comfortable with an LGB work colleague (EU28 average was 72%). When asked about a potential trans work colleague, 32% said they would be comfortable or moderately comfortable (EU28 average was 67%).