



# BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

## ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

The Ombudsperson sent several inquiries to the Academy of Fine Arts this year, regarding their refusal to allow the NGO Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC) to organise an LGBTI-themed exhibition there last year. The Academy has not responded.

## ASYLUM

The number of LGBTI people wanting to leave the country and/or apply for asylum remained steady this year. SOC organised a series of workshops to share information with those who are considering leaving.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

A few days before the Merlinka Festival in Tuzla, which took place between 15-16 March, homophobic graffiti was painted on the wall of the festival venue saying “Faggots, get treatment!”.

Kristina Ljevak, a journalist and visible ally to LGBT people, was targeted by a smear campaign after being appointed as the Director of the Sarajevo Canton Television in June.

Following the news that the country’s first Pride would be held in September (see under **Freedom of assembly**), hate speech became more common, mainly on social media. For instance, MP Samra Ćosović Hajdareić publicly called for the isolation and expulsion of LGBT people from society, and particularly children. Numerous complaints from concerned citizens and the Pride Organisational Committee were sent to the Ethics Council of the Canton Sarajevo Assembly, along with an inquiry sent by the Ombudsperson. None of these have been answered by the Council.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

On 2 February, a lesbian couple was verbally assaulted and threatened with a knife and three days later were physically attacked by the same man and his friends. The violence was presumed to be linked to heightened homophobia ahead of the country’s first Pride march (see under **Freedom of assembly**). The police identified the perpetrator and charged him for “offence”, resulting in a fine of 1000BAM (500EUR). The bias motive was not recognised.

In Banja Luka, a lesbian couple was physically and verbally assaulted in July. The victims immediately contacted the police. Due to the hostility of the police, the couple lost faith in pursuing the case. In the end, they decided not to press charges and to leave the country.

As part of its third UPR review, Bosnia and Herzegovina was recommended to train law enforcement and the judiciary on combating anti-LGBT hate crimes, hate speech, and discrimination.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Contrary to its earlier plans, the Ministry of Labour, Social Policy, Displaced Persons and Refugees of Sarajevo Canton decided not to publish a thematic report on the human rights of LGBTI people and women. Instead, they pledged to extensively cover these topics in their upcoming Gender Action Plan.

Despite the FBiH government’s earlier statements, no concrete steps were taken to adopt an LGBTI Equality Action Plan this year.

On 6 April, attendees at a soccer game hung a banner saying “Forbid it, please!” alongside the flag of the Kingdom of Brunei. Shortly before, Brunei had announced that it will criminalise same-sex relations and punish them with the death sentence. LGBT NGOs sent an appeal to the Football Association, requesting an official statement condemning the action, but have not received a response.

On 8 November, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that Bosnia & Herzegovina respect of the human rights of LBT women and ensure that national action plans on gender equality address stigma and discrimination against them in all spheres of life.

As part of its third UPR review, Bosnia and Herzegovina was recommended to combat discrimination against LGBTI people.

## FAMILY

After what seemed to be strong political will on the issue in 2018, no progress was made this year to provide legal recognition for same-sex couples. Couples continued to register their partnership abroad and ask for recognition back home. Several couples sent complaints to the Ombudsperson.



## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

In April, activists announced that they would hold Bosnia and Herzegovina's first Pride March in September. The March was successfully held in Sarajevo on 9 September, with almost 3,000 participants. Over 1,000 police officers secured the event and no incidents were reported. Even though the March was a success, problems concerning freedom of assembly still persist. For instance, organisers were faced with large and unreasonable financial burden for organising security, paying security agencies and financing metal and concrete barriers throughout the Pride March route.

The Pride Organising Committee included 16 volunteer activists from all over the country (Prijedor, Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Bijeljina, and Tuzla). The March was met by mixed reactions from the political sphere. The Party of Democratic Action (SDA) urged organisers to cancel the event and one of its members called for the segregation of LGBTI people in an angry social media post. Dragan Covic, head of the Croatian Democratic Union in Bosnia expressed his support, along with the relevant authorities. The Bosnian Serb leadership remained silent on the issue.

The 7th Merlinka International Queer Film Festival, a symbol of resistance to the violence and repression of LGBTI people in 2014, successfully took place between 7-9 February in Sarajevo. This year's theme was "I am a lesbian, so be it".

## POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

In accordance with the signaled support of the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs last year, the Police Academy of FBiH, in cooperation with SOC, trained 213 students this year. The training aimed to prepare police trainees for handling hate crimes and took place over a month. It is yet to be known if students will receive the same training in the future. The permanent curriculum of the Academy is unlikely to be changed.

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In September, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reviewed Bosnia and Herzegovina and called for equal access to sexual and reproductive services for LGBTI children.