



LITHUANIA

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In March, the national LGBT rights organisation LGL published a media reporting and reference guide for journalists and others on the rights of LGBT people and the discrimination they face. On the basis of this guide, LGL organised eight training sessions in 2019 for a total of 200 media students and professionals.

In May, LGL disseminated 10,000 leaflets about homophobic and transphobic hate speech (“Hate is Not a Family Value”) among the residents of the five biggest Lithuanian cities. The action was a response to fliers that were previously mailed to homes, inciting hate against LGBT people and calling for a ban on Baltic Pride. In June, the Ombudsperson for Journalist Ethics concluded the leaflets amounted to hate speech and were in violation of the Law on Provision of Information to the Public.

The public broadcaster reported in June that hateful anonymous comments are alarmingly common on Lithuanian sites. As an example, there was a stark rise in anti-LGBT comments on articles about this year’s Baltic Pride in the capital.

In the same month, LGL launched a survey on online hate speech incidents against LGBT people. The results will be published in 2020.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In February, LGL launched two initiatives (“Hatred is not a Family Value” and “Identify and Report”) to reduce LGBT-motivated hate crimes. Through a series of public and awareness raising events, the campaigns seek to encourage reporting, and educate on the legal basis of LGBT-related hate crimes and hate speech.

In April, the rainbow pedestrian crossing was re-painted outside the LGL office, in preparation for Baltic Pride. The action was sponsored by the Embassy of Canada in Lithuania, private donors and NGOs. In September, the crossing was vandalised and painted blue.

DIVERSITY

In June, ten brands released their logos in rainbow colors to support Baltic Pride. The campaign was coordinated by the popular magazine Žmonės (People). In September, the campaign

received the prestigious ‘Baltic Best’ advertising award. This was the first time that local companies and organisations openly supported the Pride events.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In September, the Parliament began to discuss draft amendments to the Law of Equal Treatment, as initiated by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. Although the Ombudsperson had considered gender identity related cases under the ground of “gender”, the current draft law does not explicitly include gender identity as one of the protected grounds against discrimination. On 14 November, LGL submitted a formal proposal to the Parliament to remedy this. This proposal is in line with the official position of the Ministry of Justice, i.e. to include this ground and expand the legal definition of prohibited discrimination.

FAMILY

On 11 January, the Constitutional Court delivered a landmark judgment concerning the residence permit for the same-sex spouse of a Lithuanian citizen. The case dates back to 2015 when a Belarusian citizen married a Lithuanian man and applied to the immigration authorities for permission to live together with his spouse in Lithuania. The case was referred to the Constitutional Court in 2016, after the Migration Department rejected the request. The Constitutional Court affirmed that the Constitution protects the family life of same-sex couples, and that it safeguards against discrimination based on sexual orientation, and also on gender identity. It also reminded that, as noted in a 2011 Constitutional Court ruling, the Constitutional concept of family may not be derived solely from the institute of marriage; marriage is one of the foundations of the family, but that does not mean that no other form of family than marriage is protected under the Constitution. The Constitutional Court also noted that, unlike the constitutional concept of marriage, the constitutional concept of the family is, among other things, gender-neutral. Human rights defenders are hopeful that this will bring about broader legislative changes and provide for recognition and protection of same-sex unions in the near future.



FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Baltic Pride 2019 March For Equality successfully took place on 8 June in Vilnius, with a record number of 10,000 participants and without any incidents. The event was part of the broader Baltic Pride Festival (4-8 June), which also featured a human rights conference on 6 June. The conference included panel discussions on this year's theme, "Towards a Future European Roadmap for LGBTI Equality" through governmental, civil society and business lenses.

Baltic Pride is held in Lithuania once every three years, and this was the fourth time it took place there. This year's theme was "We Are Family". After the march, the crowd celebrated in a park nearby. This year 15min, a leading national media outlet, was the official media partner of Pride, becoming the first news site in the country to openly support LGBT rights.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In October the national broadcaster LRT aired an online documentary "Spalvos" ("Colours"), which included stories on same-sex parenting. Despite numerous complaints, the Radio and Television Commission concluded that public information on same-sex parents does not qualify as "detrimental information to the minors". The online petition in support of the documentary collected more than 10,000 signatures.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Following 14 successful applications in 2018, trans people continued to be able to access legal gender recognition (LGR) through a judicial procedure this year, without surgery or sterilisation. 9 successful cases were recorded this year.

In June, the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson issued a national report on the situation of trans people in Lithuania. The report found that due to a lack of regulations in place, trans people face numerous challenges even after LGR, including in healthcare, private and family life and other areas. In August, the Ministry of Justice announced that it is putting the ongoing LGR reform process on hold, because the issue needs to be examined in more detail.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Tomas Vytautas Raskevičius, LGBT activist and previous staff member of LGL, was elected to be a member of the City Council of Vilnius in the municipal elections in March.

In May, LGL jointly led the Europe-wide campaign #WeDeserveBetter, to enhance digital empathy, tolerance and respect in debates and public discourse on the European Parliamentary elections.