



Belgium

ASYLUM

In September, 16 months after the 2019 election, Belgium adopted a coalition [agreement](#) and [formed](#) a government. The agreement envisions specific attention to LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers in policies and measures. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many existing issues, such as trans asylum seekers' lack of access to trans specific healthcare.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In August, Leuven authorities [opened](#) an investigation into a Telegram group chat called Criminal System, for hate speech and promotion of anti-LGBT violence. The police got involved after a video of a young person being beaten up went viral.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In September, a young pansexual woman was physically [assaulted](#) in Brussels after having kissed another woman. The aggressor called her a "dirty lesbian". The investigation is ongoing.

BODILY INTEGRITY

The Groen-Ecolo parties presented a draft resolution [on the fundamental rights of intersex persons](#) in January, following up on UN recommendations urging Belgium to ban medically unnecessary and non-consensual surgeries on intersex children, provide them and their parents counseling and support, and effective remedies. The proposal was prepared with the support of local intersex activists. In the following months, three hearings were held on the topic. The new Secretary of State for Gender Equality, Equal Opportunities and Diversity also affirmed her commitment on the issue.

On Intersex Solidarity Day, November 8, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men launched a new [information brochure for parents of intersex children](#), and an informative video to raise awareness among young people.

DIVERSITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

The new Secretary of State also affirmed in a policy note that policies against violence against women must be intersectional, and include trans migrants, sex workers, and others.

EDUCATION

The Flemish government [approved](#) the new mandatory curriculum goals for second and third grade high school students in November, which now cover SOGIESC topics.

EMPLOYMENT

The COVID-19 lockdown measures had a severe [impact](#) on sex workers, who lost their source of income and/or had to work in unsafe conditions.

With support from Transgender Infopunt, the National Belgian Railway Company (NMBS/SNCB) put in place a trans policy to foster inclusion and diversity in November, and guidelines for supporting those transitioning.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

On 30 March, Parliament [amended](#) the 2007 gender equality legislation, adding sex characteristics to the list of protected grounds.

FOREIGN POLICY

The September coalition [agreement](#) states that Belgium will advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights globally, focusing on decriminalisation.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Pride marches and other events were cancelled.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

During mandatory lockdowns, some groups introduced online meetings, but those without stable Internet were excluded.

HEALTH

In April, çavaria launched a survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and proposed a [set of recommendations](#) based on the findings. They recommend to include LGBTI people in all COVID-related measures, to ensure accessible healthcare services to all, to pay particular attention to the protection of asylum seekers, and to support LGBTI organisations in their efforts to support the community during the pandemic.

The pandemic had a detrimental impact on LGBTI people's mental health. Many had to move back or stay at their unsupportive family homes. Feelings of loneliness and isolation have reportedly increased. Local trans and intersex organisation Genres Pluriels, for instance, reported that many of their beneficiaries were unable to join online counseling sessions, for fear of being overheard by their family members. Between March and May, çavaria's hotline recorded a 65% increase of incoming calls, and twice as many calls about loneliness, fear, depression,

and suicidal thoughts, as during the same period last year.

Waiting lines to access trans specific healthcare in some regions grew significantly during the pandemic, with appointments and “non-essential” surgeries postponed. In Flanders, surgeries were continued and other appointments were moved online, saving time and money for all. TIP also released pandemic-related [resources](#) for the community.

Genres Pluriels’s trans*/inter* psycho-medico-social [network](#) continued its work this year to increase the accessibility and decentralisation of healthcare services for trans* and intersex* people. The network took part in the June parliamentary hearing on intersex issues and advocated for access to healthcare and a ban on genital mutilation.

Belgium Pride [dedicated](#) this year’s Pride events to the theme of physical and mental health.

HOUSING [NEW]

Many trans people were pushed into housing insecurity during the pandemic, and shelters proved to be unprepared to support and accommodate them.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Genres Pluriels reported that they struggled to meet the growing demand for support from trans and intersex people during the pandemic, with a lack of resources to provide sufficient support.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT [NEW]

All structural funds to LGBTI organisations were renewed, and new funding for KLIQ will be provided from 2021 onwards. The coalition agreement sets out key actions, such as legal gender recognition law reform, targeted measures to protect LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers, an intergovernmental LGBTI action plan, and international solidarity.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

The coalition agreement (see above) states that every person in Belgium has the right to determine their gender identity. It also vows to implement the [2019 Court decision](#) that found the principle of irreversibility of legal gender recognition (LGR) and the absence of any recognition for non-binary persons unconstitutional. The government will investigate “accompanying implications”. In November, the federal Minister of Justice launched a [policy note](#), briefly mentioning LGR reform.

Regrettably, LGR will continue to exclude those under 16.

Youth under 18 must present a statement from a child or youth psychiatrist that they are capable of making their own decision, and proof of consent from both parents. Name change is only possible for those 12 years or older. Civil society hopes that the LGR reform will abolish age limitation.

The commune of Verviers briefly suspended LGR procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic, but was pressured by civil society to reverse the decision.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

In [January](#), Matthias De Roover, football player and Mister Gay Belgium 2019, launched a campaign for diversity in sports, involving top athletes. In [May](#), a study of the Belgian Football Federation showed that one of six referees had faced homophobia in their work.

In [July](#), RTBF, public broadcaster for the Wallonie region, announced a call for audiovisual projects that challenge the stereotypes around the LGBT+ community.

Petra de Sutter, a trans politician, was [appointed](#) as Belgium’s Deputy Prime Minister in October.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Two trans men were denied reimbursement this year, one for the morning-after pill and the other for a pap smear test, as the law only [provides](#) coverage for those whose legal gender is female.



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