



Croatia

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Online hate speech against LGBT people was on the rise this year. Zagreb Pride filed nine criminal complaints in 2020, but most were rejected. One resulted in a conviction for inciting hate and violence on the basis of sexual orientation.

In October, “death to faggots” was painted on the windows of an art gallery, where local lesbian organisation LORI celebrated its 20th birthday. Liberal and leftist political parties condemned the attack. LORI launched a criminal complaint.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

A few days after a ruling by the Supreme Court on the right of same-sex couples to foster children (see under Family), an effigy of a gay couple and a child was burnt at a festival in Imotski. President Zoran Milanovic and other politicians condemned the incident and demanded an apology. LGBT organisations launched a criminal complaint.

In six different incidents, rainbow flags were torn down and burnt in Zagreb and Split, mostly by youth. The police arrested some and the Public Prosecutor pressed hate crime charges - a positive development, as similar cases had normally been processed as vandalism.

In May, Zagreb Pride published the preliminary results of a 2019 survey finding that 64% of the 800 LGBTIQ respondents had experienced physical or verbal violence. More than 60% reported always adapting their behaviour in public for fear of harassment. 40 billboards displayed the results across Croatia.

DATA COLLECTION

Trans Aid conducted research among 30 hospitals this year, on the treatment of intersex people. In light of their experiences with a similar study in 2017, Trans Aid adjusted its methodology, and avoided using the term ‘intersex’. The response rate significantly increased, from 14 to 21 hospitals responding and reporting a total of 2,502 cases. Trans Aid is in the process of analysing the results.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Zagreb Pride’s survey has found that 60% of LGBTIQ respondents had been discriminated against in the past five years.

FAMILY

In January, the Social Welfare Center in Zagreb rejected the application of a gay couple to foster a child, despite the

Administrative Court ruling in their favour in December 2019.

This was the second time that the Center blocked the fostering process for the couple. On 7 February, the Supreme Court passed a positive judgment, affirming that denying same-sex couples’ right to foster children is discriminatory and a clear violation of the Constitution. Local LGBTIQ organisations reminded that in addition to registered partners, life partners must be also included in the interpretation of the judgment, as the 2014 Life Partnership Act granted them the same rights as married couples have. The couple is now successfully fostering two children.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the 19th Zagreb Pride march was held outside the Parliament in September, with over 2,000 participants demanding a Constitutional amendment to ensure equal rights and responsibilities for all families. Zagreb Pride’s manifesto called on lawmakers to recognise that the 2013 referendum and consequent Constitutional amendment are “discriminatory, obsolete and absurd”. They reminded lawmakers that the Constitutional Court had just affirmed this by its ruling on fostering (see under Family). There was a large presence of young people at the march.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Due to public pressure, a government proposal on mobile phone and location surveillance during the COVID-19 pandemic was dropped.

HEALTH

Civil society launched a website to support LGBTI people with information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the spring lockdown, Zagreb Pride recorded a clear rise in requests for psycho-social counseling and set up a team to meet the growing demand.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused large and further delays in trans healthcare. Even before the onset of the pandemic, due to a lack of clear regulations, trans healthcare continued to be inaccessible, pathologising, and influenced by the personal bias of medical professionals. Given the lack of transparent information about insurance coverage, the National Health Insurance Fund has claimed that trans healthcare costs are not covered. In some cases, NHIF warned doctors that they would have to pay for hormone costs themselves.

Trans Aid prepared a draft trans healthcare protocol, supported by the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality.

HOUSING

Many trans people reported having to move back home and endure family rejection and violence, due to a loss of income during the COVID-19 pandemic and/or a loss of their homes, due to the 2020 earthquakes.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Zagreb Pride March was postponed from June to September (see under **Freedom of assembly**). The 10th Split Pride was cancelled, but local activists held some actions to mark its anniversary.

Other organisations have also been impacted. For instance, Trans Aid's planning now revolves around the information shared by the government about the pandemic, and their work has moved online.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

The left-green coalition (Možemo, Nova ljevica and Radnička Fronta) made it to parliament for the first time this year. Most of the seven MPs have a background in human rights, feminism, green activism, and are allies of the LGBTIQ community.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Accessing legal gender recognition (LGR) continued to be increasingly difficult this year, with waiting times getting longer and the process more complicated. The National Health Council, which has the final say in each LGR application, started requesting an expert opinion from an endocrinologist, even when someone applies to LGR on the basis of "living in another gender identity". This opinion had only been required when the application was made on the basis of "sex change". The only endocrinologist issuing these opinions has also started requiring one year of hormone therapy as a prerequisite. Trans Aid has documented the increase in discriminatory treatment and waiting times in its recent research. Trans Aid is working on a proposal on LGR regulations.

PUBLIC OPINION AND ATTITUDES

Social Democrat politician, Domagoj Hajduković came out in June, becoming the first gay Croatian MP. Hajduković was supported by the public and was re-elected in July.

In December, the prominent feminist Centre for Women Studies (CŽS) in Zagreb appointed a new executive director, known to have taken up and defended anti-gender positions. Critical reactions swiftly followed by the leftist feminist collective Faktiv and by Zagreb Pride in support of trans people.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Following the 2017 Constitutional Court decision affirming that abortion may not be banned, there was no progress this year on adopting an abortion law. The main anti-abortion march in Zagreb was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but smaller ones were held in Rijeka and for the first time in Sisak. Both encountered counter-protests by feminist organisations.



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