



# Montenegro

## ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

During the early COVID-19 lockdowns, NGOs Juventas, Queer Montenegro, Spektra and Stana distributed food and hygiene packages to LGBTIQ people in need, redesigning their organisational budgets. Some donors provided targeted funding later in the year.

## ASYLUM

Juventas, Queer Montenegro, and Spectra, held two trainings for employees of the Directorate for Asylum under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In cooperation with the Ministry and UNHCR, the three NGOs developed guidelines on supporting LGBTIQ asylum seekers and refugees.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In June, Amfilohije Radović, Metropolitan of the Serbian Orthodox Church said that same-sex love was “murder” and “child murder”.

Over 200 hate speech complaints were reported to the police within a few days after the adoption of the civil partnership law in July (see under **Family**).

In July, a number of LGBTIQ organisations filed a criminal complaint against prominent lawyer Velibor Marković, for a series of hateful and threatening [comments](#). The complaints were sent to the police, the Bar Association, the Lawyers Association, and the Ombudsman.

The Podgorica Misdemeanour Court fined a perpetrator 100 euro for threatening LGBTIQ activists last year.

Police complaints in hate speech or hate crime cases were impossible to file during COVID-19 lockdowns, as the police do not accept online complaints.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In a regressive judgment, the Higher Court in Bijelo Polje overturned the Kolašin Basic Court’s previous ruling, which established a 2019 attack against a trans man as transphobic hate crime. During the retrial, the victim had to [endure](#) intrusive and inappropriate questions about his gender identity, which were all approved by the court.

## EDUCATION

In March, trans organisation Spectra and the Mirko Vešović high school in Podgorica signed a memorandum of understanding, the first of its kind, planning educational workshops for students, teachers and school staff.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Juventas and Queer Montenegro continued their work on supporting local municipalities, in cooperation with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights. With the exception of Mojkovac, four pilot cities of Podgorica, Kolašin, Bijelo Polje and Kotor have adopted local LGBTIQ action plans.

Kotor became the first municipality and third in the Balkans to become a member of the international [Rainbow Cities Network](#).

In March, Queer Montenegro, Juventas and Spectra, in cooperation with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, helped create a focal points network of local governments on LGBTIQ rights. The network has 17 members so far.

## FAMILY

On 1 July, Montenegro became the first Western Balkans and non-EU country in Europe to [legalise](#) same-sex civil partnerships with a 42 to 5 vote in parliament. Those in civil partnership will enjoy the same rights as married couples, with the exception of adoption. The same vote held in 2019 was [unsuccessful](#). Civil society celebrated this year’s victory.

*“A confirmation that our society is maturing, accepting and living the differences. Born free and equal in dignity and rights!” - Milo Djukanovic, President of Montenegro on his social media [feed](#).*

The Law came into effect on 15 July, with the parliament affirming that all laws and bylaws must go through the necessary amendments in the next one year.

## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Stana, Montenegro’s first LBTQ women’s organisation was [established](#) in March.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

A public discussion on LGBTIQ rights and a related photo exhibition were held in Nikšić this year.

## HEALTH

In October, the Ombudsman [found](#) that the Ministry of Health violated the rights of trans women when failing to ensure them access to hormone therapy. Estrogen is on the list of medications covered by health insurance, but was unavailable in the country. The Ministry has since been working in cooperation with Spectra to remedy the situation. A shortage of testosterone was also an

issue during the lockdown, but was quickly addressed by the Podgorica Public Health Centre.

A third trans man since 2012 managed to have his gender affirming care costs covered by public health insurance.

The first ever trans healthcare guidelines were adopted by the Commission for trans health at the Clinical Centre of Montenegro, based on an individualised approach and centering full and informed consent.

Spectra launched a project on HIV prevention and harm reduction among the trans and gender diverse community.

The first study on LGBTQ women's mental health was published this year, in a study coordinated by several NGOs and mental health professionals. The study found that LGBTQ women in Montenegro are ten times more likely to have anxiety or depression, compared to the general female population in the country. Many reported experiences of violence, discrimination, external and internalised stigma, and negative self-perception.

## HOUSING

Spectra provided rent and utilities support to six trans people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all gatherings and meetings were cancelled, and the majority of work was transferred online. LGBTI communities reported a loss of jobs and economic independence, housing insecurity, deteriorating mental health, and increased risk of domestic violence.

NGOs had to quickly adapt to meet the community's changing needs. Juventas provided food and hygiene packages, laundry services, helped with rent coverage, and made safer sex essentials available. Juventas, Queer Montenegro, Spectra, and Stana prioritised emergency mental health support and suicide prevention. Spectra sensitised public health hotline workers on supporting trans, intersex, and gender diverse people.

No state funding was provided for any of this work. Some NGOs, such as Spectra, lost their external funding, despite modifying their activities and budget. Several programmes and NGOs are now at risk of closure.

Two LGBTI activists received death threats and were publicly outed following a protest related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

In June, the Head of Secretariat for Social Care in Podgorica, Ivan Terzić, Head of the Directorate for Human Rights, Blanka Radošević Marović, and the new Ombudsman, Siniša Bjeković, visited Juventas' Drop-in centre in Podgorica. Bjeković later held a lecture at the SOGI Center. Both events were part of the Pride month programme, supported by several ministries and the US embassy. Other events were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Legal gender recognition reform continued to be stalled this year, amidst civil society criticism.

## POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

In February, National Police Assistant Director Nikola Janjušević, stated that the police must be sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups, including LGBTI people.

The police Team of Trust cancelled its meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but worked with civil society on emerging cases.

## SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The LGBTIQ Shelter provided housing, psychological and legal aid during 2020. The SOGI Center provided psychological and social services to 150 individuals in 2020.



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