

# Slovakia

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In August, graffiti saying “Fuck LGBT” was painted on the Lafranconi bridge in Bratislava. The same graffiti appeared at another location in the capital shortly afterwards. Mayor Matúš Vallo had the signs removed and said:

*“We will not tolerate any expressions of hatred. As mayor, I wish Bratislava to be a tolerant city, where no one has to be afraid or ashamed of their otherness and where we will all be respected in our attitudes and values.”*

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Polarisation over LGBTI issues continued this year. The new Prime Minister Igor Matovič, whose coalition government was formed in March, has been known for his religious conservatism. In May Olga Pietruchova, Director of the Gender equality and equal opportunities department at the Ministry of Labour, resigned from her post, saying on social media:

*“Too often have I listened to my Polish colleagues at international fora reading government statements spurning gender ideology and the LGBTI agenda. I can't do this and I won't do this.” - Olga Pietruchova on social media.*

The hostile attitude towards LGBTI human rights issues was tangible in the Parliament on 13 May, when Ombudsperson Mária Patakyová presented her annual report and was met with serious backlash (see more under **Human rights defenders**). The report, although only briefly, noted with concern that a number of LGBTI human rights issues remain unsolved and Slovakia's obligations under international law are yet to be implemented.

## FAMILY

The COVID-19 pandemic deepened inequalities between different-sex and same-sex couples and their family rights. Same-sex couples and/or parents in rainbow families were excluded from measures to alleviate the burdens of the pandemic, such as family reunification, parental leave during sickness, and others.

In her annual report, the Ombudsperson highlighted that Slovakia is one of six EU countries that still do not provide any legal recognition to same-sex couples, which must be remedied (see more under **Human rights defenders**).

The Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) party (EP: European Conservatives and Reformist Party) and Progressive Slovakia (EP: ALDE/Renew Europe) endorsed registered partnership in their

election campaigns. Only SaS made it to parliament, and is now a member of the governing coalition.

The new government's manifesto promises adopting legislation on inheritance and property rights for cohabiting couples and same-sex couples.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Bratislava Pride was celebrated online. Ombudsperson Mária Patakyová, Bratislava mayor Matúš Vallo, Minister of Justice Mária Kolíková, and evangelical pastor Anna Polcková (see under **Freedom of expression**) were some of the speakers. The President of Slovakia expressed support in an official statement.

## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

A new online social network was launched in July, aiming to provide a safe space for LGBT people. The network was joined by 1,500 people on the first day.


## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In January *Plus 7 Dní* editor-in-chief Katarína Šelestiaková resigned, after the Prime Minister blocked the publishing of an interview, where he was asked about his sexual orientation. Šelestiaková argued that given Pellegrini's hostile stance towards LGBT rights issues, it was a legitimate question to ask. In June for instance, Pellegrini (who was no longer Prime Minister at that point) stated, without any data to cite, that registered partnership is not a relevant topic in Slovakia and nobody is asking for it.

On 1 June, evangelical pastor Anna Polcková said on a podcast, that if Jesus would return today, he would probably return as a gay man or a Roma woman. Her statement was criticised by other church leaders - three bishops published a response, warning that the pastor's views were verging on blasphemy. Despite these warnings, Polcková decided to give a speech at Bratislava Pride.

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The Ombudswoman received harsh criticism for her annual report (see under **Equality and non-discrimination and Family**), which listed over a hundred instances of human rights and freedoms being violated by public bodies in 2019. A small fraction of the report focused on the importance of legal recognition for same-sex couples and the importance of abolishing the mandatory sterility requirement of legal gender recognition. Several politicians specifically attacked these



sections, stating that the report was “ideologically led”, sounded like it was written by a Soros-funded NGO, and propagated “the LGBTI agenda”. President Čaputová endorsed the report. Regardless, only 34 of the 150 MPs voted to adopt it, marking the first time that the Ombudsperson’s report was not acknowledged by the Parliament.

## LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

In September, the Minister of Health refused to sign the Professional Guidelines to unify medical procedures for issuing medical opinions on gender reassignment, which was prepared in 2019 by the working group set up by the previous government. This is the third Minister who refused to move the process forward. The guidelines abolished forced sterilisation and other medical interventions as requirements for legal gender recognition, and were developed jointly by medical professionals and trans advocates. The last meeting on the issue took place in January 2020, with the leadership of the previous government. The process was then stalled by the elections and the COVID-19 pandemic. Trans people’s access to legal gender recognition is now jeopardised. Medical professionals stated they did not want to provide trans healthcare services without the guidelines being adopted.

(see under **Human rights defenders**)



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