

# LITHUANIA

## ASYLUM

The situation of LGBTIQ migrants and/or asylum seekers remained difficult. In February, several LGBTIQ asylum seekers went on a hunger strike against long-term uncertainty, poor housing conditions, lack of medical care, and anti-LGBTQI bias. Several applicants were denied refugee status again this year. Dozens remained in reception centres, and later left Lithuania for other EU countries.

In April, the police started investigating a series of sexual abuse cases perpetrated in a reception centre by an official of the Border Guard Service.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Anti-LGBT speech by political and religious leaders remained a serious issue. A guest speaker spoke about the “homosexualization of Lithuania” in parliament in March. The Prime Minister and the majority of MPs left the room in protest. In May, an investigation was launched against MP Petras Gražulis after he called LGBT people “degenerate” and “spreading diseases” following the parliamentary debate on civil unions (see under Family).

In February, the Vilnius Regional Court dismissed the appeal of Pranciškus Valickas, former MP candidate of the People’s Party, who will have to pay a 5,000 euro fine for anti-LGBT incitement.

In April, a man was sentenced to one year and three months in prison for incitement, for producing posters against migrants and LGBT people in 2021.

In September, a woman was sentenced for inciting hatred against the LGBT community and some LGBT individuals specifically, on seven different occasions, including at the 2021 Kaunas Pride events and online.

A rally organised by the Movement of Families was held “in defence of the Constitution” in late October and was attended by several hundred. Some of the messages were explicitly against LGBT people.

The Human Rights Monitoring Institute published the national report ‘Hate speech and Euroscepticism’, conducted among young people (16-25) between 2010-2021, finding that hate speech is widespread and routinely perpetrated by political leaders.

Threats against LGL continued to be treated inadequately by law enforcement. One investigation concerning death threats that LGL received in 2021 was indefinitely suspended. In another similar case, the police refused to initiate a pre-trial investigation despite having identified the perpetrator. Civil society reported that the police said the following to one of the victims: “Why are you even coming here? We will terminate this investigation anyway”.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

The court awarded non-pecuniary damages to a person who was lured on a fake date on a dating app, robbed and physically assaulted. The Prosecutor initially failed to establish this was a hate crime.

## EDUCATION

Anti-trans rhetoric continued in academia. In October, the Lithuanian Scientific Society held a discussion on how “genderism and globalism” threaten society.

## EMPLOYMENT

LGL wrapped up three cycles of IT courses for young LGBT people to help those with long-term unemployment find a job.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Two amendments to the Law on Equal Opportunities were adopted to cover the ground of ‘family status’ and to prohibit sexual harassment beyond the sphere of employment. Parliament will hold a vote in 2023.

On 9 December, LGL organised a discussion on the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, where Commissioner Dalli called on Lithuania to adopt a national LGBTIQ action plan. Vice-minister of Social Affairs and Labour, Justina Jakštienė participated at the event and assured that follow-up steps will be taken.

## FAMILY

Several smaller protests were held this year in support of legal recognition for same-gender couples and their families (see here and here).

Following the rejection of the Partnership Bill in 2021, the parliament dropped the wording ‘same-sex partnership’ in a new approach. The new Civil Union



Bill uses the gender-neutral terms 'partners' and 'civil unions', and passed its first parliamentary reading in May. While a step forward, it is much weaker than the previous version and seen by many as too much of a compromise and as a 'minimum standard'. Civil unions would be registered by a notary, not the civil registry office, and partners could not take each other's last names. The law would be a positive development in terms of inheritance rights and accessing a partner's health information. It, however, does not mention children at all, and like the previous Partnership Bill, does not allow for adoption. Some called the law humiliating for same-gender couples as it still excludes them from the concept of family. Nevertheless, conservative voices have called for a referendum even on this weaker version of the law. In September, the parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs in parliament approved the Civil Union Bill, but its reading is delayed.

Another, competing bill also passed its first reading in May, but was later rejected. This would have amended the Civil Code, and used the wording 'close relationship', further distancing same-gender couples from the definition of family.

On the occasion of IDAHOBIT, 20 embassies expressed support for the LGBTIQ+ community, including the right to be recognised as a family.

Civil society launched a strategic litigation case concerning article 3,229 of the Civil Code, which defines cohabitation as between a man and a woman.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

On 15 May, parents of LGBTIQ children held the 'All Families Matter' rally in Vilnius to support the Civil Union Bill. The event was attended by the PM, the Speaker of the Parliament, members of the cabinet, and both government and opposition MPs.

On 4 June, the Baltic Pride March was hosted by Vilnius for the fifth time and was attended by roughly 20,000 people. This year's slogan was 'For Equality and Peace'. The ombudsperson, alongside Nordic equality bodies, called for protection for the participants. A small crowd of anti-Pride protesters were present, but no incidents were recorded. The

Baltic Pride Festival spanned between 31 May and 5 June and featured a conference, workshops, talks, exhibitions and parties. In January, Mayor of Vilnius Remigijus Šimašius shared a welcome message to all prospective participants. A magazine and a phone app were launched. LGL secured the largest support to date from private donors, embassies, and the municipality. Some ministers joined the march, along with some MPs, mostly from the Freedom Party. Many diplomatic and corporate allies cooperated for the organisation of Pride.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In July, the Vilnius District Administrative Court dismissed a case that the police filed against a rainbow crossing in the capital. The Court ruled that the issue is a difference of opinions and that the police had not been able to prove that the crossing was dangerous to traffic.

## HEALTH

The law lifting the blood donation deferral period for men who have sex with men entered into force in May.

Media incorrectly described monkeypox as a "mostly sexually transmitted disease" spread by men who have sex with men (MSM). The Ministry of Health committed to providing MSM vaccines, but the timeline is yet unclear.

In August, the long-pending and first-ever trans healthcare protocol was released, setting out guidelines and steps for care provision. The protocol maintains pathologisation and does not cover surgeries.

## INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

LGL developed a partnership with the Vilnius municipality within the context of Baltic Pride 2022.

## LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

As of February, trans people can change their first names without a gender marker change. The new regulation mandates a psychiatric diagnosis and is only accessible to those over 18 and unmarried.



Trans people continued to be able to access LGR through a judicial procedure, without surgery or sterilisation.

The case *L. v Lithuania* remains under the supervision of the Council of Europe. In June, the Committee of Ministers concluded that implementation continues to be lacking.

## **PUBLIC OPINION**

The Human Rights Monitoring Institute's Hate speech and Euroscepticism report found that the social acceptance of LGBT people among young people remains around 50%, having barely improved in the past ten years.

Another survey found this year that about 50% of the population supports same-sex civil unions.

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