

LATVIA

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In January, the Ombudsperson called on politicians to refrain from prejudicial and stigmatising statements about same-sex couples during parliamentary debates on the Civil Union Law (see under Family).

Several politicians made hostile comments about Agnes Kalniņa, Latvia's Ambassador to Hungary, posing in front of the Latvian flag with her same-sex partner.

The police started an investigation after former MEP Andrejs Mamikins published a homophobic social media post in response to the election of President Rinkēvičs (see under Participation in Public, Cultural and Political Life).

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Mozaika documented nine anti-LGBT hate crimes this year. In May for instance, two people were attacked in Daugavpils for being LGBTQ+. One suspect was identified, but the police dropped the criminal case. Prosecutor General Jūris Stukāns questioned the legality of the police's decision and reopened the investigation.

Civil society reported that more and more people report hate crimes and police investigation has improved.

EDUCATION

Liene Voronenko, president of the Latvian National Centre for Education was suspended in September after releasing educational materials to help teachers run sex education classes and including information about gender identity and the existence of trans people.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Riga's mayor, Mārtiņš Staķis, raised the rainbow flag on the City Council's building ahead of the Pride festival, but was criticised by several conservative politicians who demanded its removal (see here, here, and here). In June, the mayor said the flag would not be removed, but apologised for not coordinating with Council members about flying it. Hundreds of businesses and organisations expressed support for Staķis's action and asked for the flag to stay on the building.

FAMILY

Following the Saeima's failure to adopt the Civil Union Law in December 2022, the Ombudsperson called on the parliament in January to respect, recognise and protect rainbow families.

In 2020 and 2021, the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex partners should be given civil status, and also are entitled to be recognised as a family. The Ministry of Justice again expressed commitment to legislating the issue. Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš also expressed hope for the adoption of the necessary legislative changes.

In April, the parliament amended the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, setting out that children can only be adopted by foreign couples if they are in a heterosexual marriage - in line with the Constitution.

Dozens of same-sex couples have turned to administrative courts across Latvia requesting to be recognised as a family. 31 were recognised in 2022 and 40 in 2023, clearly signalling that the courts are ahead of legislators on the issue.

In November, the parliament adopted legislation on civil unions. The law finally grants legal recognition of same-sex couples. The couples can register their partnerships by contacting a notary. However, following the requests of right-wing MPs from United List, National Alliance and Latvian First to hold a nation-wide referendum with a view to cancel the amendments, the President has delayed the promulgation of the law. The MPs have two months to gather necessary signatories to call for a referendum on the issue.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

This year's Riga Pride was held under the motto 'We are Latvia too'. The festival ran between 29 May and 4 June. The march was the largest to date with over 7,000 participants, and an outdoor party was held for the first time this year. No major incidents were recorded, but one counter-protester was detained.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

(See also under Equality and Non-discrimination)

Riga's mayor Mārtiņš Staķis spoke at the opening of a new gay club, Skapis.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

The parliament elected openly gay Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs as the country's new president, becoming the first LGBTI person to hold this post in the EU.

'Daugavpils', a film about being LGBTQ+ in Daugavpils was released this year.

PUBLIC OPINION

In March, the social opinion polling agency SKDS and Mozaika's poll found that half of the population had a neutral stance towards 'homosexual' people and 26% were accepting (2015: 9%).



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