



## Annual Review

of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex People in Belgium covering the period of January to December 2018

# Belgium

## Access to goods and services

The city of Ghent conducted [research](#) on discrimination in the housing market on grounds of sexual orientation, finding no discrimination during the phase when the two parties first meet. The research did not look into whether discrimination occurs later.

## Bias-motivated speech

In August, the Antwerp Police Department posted a tweet about Antwerp Pride. A 21-year old man responded by saying “the day all faggots come together in one place”, and shared an image of soldiers with machine guns. He was promptly arrested. At his home, police found forbidden weapons and a swastika. When news broke that he was a member of Vlaams Belang, an extreme-right Flemish party, the party cancelled his membership and stated that such tweets “were unacceptable and could harm the party”.

## Bias-motivated violence

In February, the 2017 winner of Mister Gay Belgium, Jamie De Blicke, was attacked in Roeselare. He reported the incident to the police.

In April, a group of people followed and attacked a gay couple holding hands in downtown Brussels. The Facebook post about the attack went viral. In support of the victims and to draw attention to violence against LGBT people in Brussels, RainbowHouse Brussels organised a kiss-in.

In May, another gay couple was attacked by their neighbours in Brussels, in the street where they lived, with people cheering. After a Facebook post about the attack went viral, both the Brussels and the Federal State Secretaries of Equal Opportunities Bianca Debaets and Zuhair Demir condemned the violence.

In August, an Italian-American gay couple in Ghent was brutally attacked by their neighbour and her partner, and were hospitalised. A solidarity event was held to support the victims and raise awareness of hate crimes in the city. Police are investigating the matter and a trial will follow.

## Data collection

In December, [“Living as trans in Belgium - ten years later”](#), an update of the first social study into the lived experiences of trans people in Belgium in 2007, was published. The research was carried out by Transgender Infopunt, on behalf of the Institute for the Equality of women and men. It highlights improvements in social and psychological well-being after 10 years of equality policy for trans people, but also notes the continuation of certain problems as well as new pitfalls on education, work, and healthcare.

## Education

On 11 May, Çavaria published the first Flemish school climate survey with the support of GLSEN and Columbia University. The survey found that 41% of LGBT+ students felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation and 27% because of their gender expression. Almost one in four tried to avoid the school toilets and gym locker-rooms because they felt unsafe. 50% said that teachers never responded to homophobic or transphobic remarks in school.

In February, the Belgian Equality Body (Unia) published the Diversity Barometer Education on exclusion in the education system, covering the three education systems of Flanders, Wallonia and the German speaking part of Belgium. The report showed that teachers recognised the importance of addressing LGBT topics, but did not know how to do so. A need for training was expressed.

In late 2018, the Flemish parliament approved a new school curriculum for the first grade of secondary schools, making it mandatory for schools to educate students about sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender issues. Schools can now be subjected to inspections evaluating their performance on these metrics.

## Employment

This year, the first KliQ Works Inclusion Index celebrated the most inclusive employers in Belgium. The index is based on an inclusion scan that measures the inclusion of sexual and gender diversity in companies and organisations.

## Equality and non-discrimination

In May, the Federal government, along with the Flemish, Brussels, Walloon, French-speaking and German-speaking governments, launched Belgium's second "[Action plan against LGBTI-phobic discrimination and violence](#)" (2018-2019). The plan features 115 measures to combat discrimination and violence on grounds of SOGIESC. The plan was long overdue, as the first one had expired in 2014. The plan has been criticised by civil society, for only spanning until 2019, lacking coordination mechanisms, and being biased against religious and ethnic minorities when it comes to hate crimes against LGBT people.

## Foreign policy

During the ILGA-Europe conference in Brussels in October, the Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Development Cooperation launched a call for applications for civil society associations working on LGBTI issues for the first time. The available funds are EUR 500,000.

## Legal gender recognition

On 1 January, the updated gender recognition legislation (approved in June 2017) came into effect. LGBTI activist had previously highlighted its shortcomings - including the exclusion of non-binary people. The non-profit associations Çavaria, Genres Pluriels and RainbowHouse Brussels filed an application to the Constitutional Court on 10 January, arguing that the new process was discriminatory, providing for only 'male' and 'female' options on IDs.

## Participation in public, cultural and political life

A journalist with Flemish television station VTM publicly came out as trans in January. Bo Van Spilbeeck shared updates about her transition throughout the year on social media and was the subject of an RTL documentary in Flanders.

A documentary M/V/X was broadcast in spring 2018, following five trans people in Flanders.

## Police and law enforcement

Several police trainings were organised on LGBT hate crime in Flanders and Brussels this year, with the involvement of LGBT organisations.

## Public opinion

In August Theo Francken, Belgian State Secretary for Asylum and Migration, published a homophobic and transphobic Facebook post. The post said the world is going crazy as men are wearing lipstick and getting pregnant. His party distanced itself from the post, but Francken has not apologised.

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