



Belgium



Belgian society continued to demonstrate support for LGBTI people, a fact borne out by encouraging Eurobarometer survey results. Legislation extending automatic parental recognition to non-birth mothers in lesbian couples came into effect at the beginning of the year. At federal government level, discussions began on improving the legal gender recognition process. A Brussels-based criminal court recognised the homophobic motive behind an attack on a city centre bar and the Bishop of Antwerp modestly refused an LGBT equality accolade.

Asylum

- NGO Subversive Front in FYR Macedonia registered one case of an LGBTI person seeking to leave the country and apply for asylum in Belgium. The man had been subjected to homophobic bullying due to his sexual orientation and in June, he moved to Brussels. In October, he was granted refugee status by the Belgian authorities.

Bias-motivated speech

- Conservative organisation Pro Familia sent an email to their supporters that claimed homosexuality and paedophilia are closely related. The email was entitled "Homosexuality and pedophilia: A two-headed monster".
- Footballer Benito Raman was suspended by his club AA Gent in December after he started a homophobic chant after a match. After the incident, AA Gent apologised and said that Raman would receive counselling and attend an information session with LGBT NGO Çavaria.

Bias-motivated violence

- In March, a 42 year-old man was fined EUR 1,800 and given 300 hours of community service for an attack on Brussels LGBT bar La Fontainas in 2011. The criminal court noted the homophobic nature of the attack; an accomplice was also given a community service order.

Bodily integrity

- In June, the Flemish Minister for Equal Opportunities Liesbeth Homans (New Flemish Alliance, N-VA; centre-right) stated that the Flemish government was considering adding the rights of intersex people to the region's equal opportunities policy. Before the end of 2015, the rights of intersex people were added to the policy. Minister Homans also launched research into the situation of intersex persons; this was on-going at the end of the year.

Diversity

- Johan Bonny, Bishop of Antwerp, turned down an LGBTI equality award from LGBT NGO Çavaria. The bishop was recognised for his call for acceptance in an open

letter to colleagues in 2014 but said he could not accept a prize for work that was central to his role as a bishop.

Employment

- Youth organisation Chirojeugd Flanders, Karel de Grote University College in Antwerp, the Flemish and federal governments all added X options to their job application forms in 2015, meaning that potential employees were not limited to identify as male or female.

Family

- On 1 January, legislation came into force that put co-mothers in same-sex couples on an equal footing with fathers in different-sex couples as to the recognition of their parenthood. Co-mothers no longer have to go through an adoption process, but will be recognised automatically when the parents are married, or through a simple declaration when the parents are not married.

Foreign policy

- Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Development Cooperation Alexander de Croo (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats, VLD; centre-right) addressed the UN Commission on Population and Development in April. He raised discrimination against LGBT people in health policy and sex education.

Freedom of assembly

- The Ihsane Jarfi Foundation organised a march to protest against homophobic violence. On 4 May, approximately 100 people, including Flemish and francophone politicians from the socialist and green parties, marched in Brussels city centre. The protest received applause and isolated insults from passers-by.

Legal gender recognition

- Secretary of State for Equal Opportunities Elke Sleurs (New Flemish Alliance, N-VA) announced her intention to reform the legal gender recognition process. In a TV interview on Canva's *Reyers Laat* programme in January, Sleurs said that the current sterilisation and surgical intervention requirements violated the integrity of trans

people. Justice Minister Koen Geens (Christian Democratic and Flemish Party, CD&V; centre-right) also stated that he was in favour of removing medical requirements in response to a parliamentary question on 6 May. Discussions on the issue were still on-going at the end of the year.

Public opinion

- According to Eurobarometer 2015, 59% of people surveyed in Belgium believe that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is widespread (EU28 average was 58%). When asked about gender identity, 55% felt discrimination on this ground was widespread (EU 28 average was 56%). 81% totally agreed with the statement that LGB people should have the same rights as heterosexual people (EU 28 average was 71%). When asked to grade how comfortable they would be with certain scenarios on a scale of 1 (not comfortable at all) - 10 (totally comfortable), 90% said they would be comfortable or moderately comfortable with an LGB work colleague (EU28 average was 72%). When asked about a potential trans work colleague, 83% said they would be comfortable or moderately comfortable (EU28 average was 67%).