

>THEMES

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

AZERBAIJAN

(See under Bias-motivated Violence)

BELARUS

(See also under Freedom of Assembly, Association, and Expression)

Belarus continued making headlines due to the brutal government crackdown waged against civil society and the opposition. Several journalists, political activists, and others were detained, stood trial and received harsh prison sentences this year (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Thousands continue to be detained and subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

Civil society organisations working on LGBT issues continued being harassed by the authorities. Some initiatives had to close down and several activists fled the country. LGBTI activists and human rights defenders state that refusals on organisations' registering continue to occur outside the existing legal framework.

BULGARIA

Two years after the Rainbow Hub was attacked, it [secured](#) a long-term home in Sofia this year.

Human rights defender Denitsa Lyubenova was investigated in three different SLAAP cases.

CYPRUS

Accept-LGBTI Cyprus and Queer Cyprus Association [won](#) the European Citizen 2023 award for Cyprus, for organising the Annual Cyprus Pride Festival, given out by the European Parliament.

DENMARK

The Danish Institute for Human Rights, Denmark's equality body, [launched](#) a LGBT+ barometer on the living conditions of LGBT people in Denmark, grouping existing data from different sources, but failed to include key information on human rights violations against intersex people, which had been supplied by CSOs.

ICELAND

Trans Iceland [received](#) the Reykjavík Human Rights Award 2023 in May.

KAZAKHSTAN

In April, two LGBTQIA+ activists collaborated, suggesting a link between the "Kazakhstani Union of Parents" and separatist activities in North Kazakhstan ([Russian](#), [Kazakh](#)). In response, anti-gender activist Olga Shantal posted three denials (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) on Instagram, disassociating herself from the Union and calling for legal action against Sadykov and two others for defamation, spreading false information, and inciting interethnic conflict. Two other representatives from the Union - Yurkovskaya and Yurkina - subsequently filed statements against Sadykov.

KYRGYSTAN

Since 2022, the persecution of civil society by the state has become more frequent, with [foreign media](#) and people speaking out against NGOs in Kyrgyzstan. An ultraconservative organiser in the US [appealed](#) to the Kyrgyz President to monitor the work of Kyrgyz Indigo.

MONTENEGRO

LGBTI activists were again targeted by hate speech throughout the year.

Death threats to the LGBTIQ activist Danijel Kalezić happened over the past two years have not been adequately investigated, and there is no available information on the actions of the relevant authorities, nor any person prosecuted.

LGBTI civil society faced huge issues with the continuation of their work due to lack of funding.

NETHERLANDS

COC celebrated 50 years of official recognition by the government this year. The Ministry of Finance [issued](#) a commemorative euro coin in honour of COC's work.

Trans [activist](#), writer and researcher Alejandra Ortiz [received](#) the Winq Community Award.

NORWAY

FRI [received](#) the 2023 Humanist Award from the Human-Etisk Forbund.

FRI [apologised](#) that the organisation in the 1980's, by a small, but prominent part of the leadership, had given the so-called 'paedophile working group' acknowledgement

>THEMES

as a subgroup of the organisation. The group was quickly excluded. FRI states that inclusion of the group never should have happened, and hopes that more openness regarding abuse can provide necessary support for victims.

POLAND

In May, three LGBTQI+ activists were sentenced to six to twelve months of community service for attacking a religious fundamentalist van which spread anti-LGBT messages in 2020.

RUSSIA

In January, Russia's oldest human rights group, the Helsinki Group (MHG), was shut down by a court order. Throughout the year, human rights defenders continued their work but under difficult circumstances and with the constant threat of prosecution and detention.

In 2023, Russian authorities included 227 organisations, activists, journalists, politicians and bloggers in the register of "foreign agents."

SLOVAKIA

Following the 2022 terrorist attack at Tepláreň, Inakost raised over 80,000 euro this year for a community centre for LGBTQI+ people, which is set to open in 2024.

SWEDEN

The youth organisation RFSL Ungdom turned 20 this year.

TAJIKISTAN

Activists continued to report being pressured, harassed, and detained by the authorities, often under false charges. In July, UN human rights experts issued a joint statement condemning the treatment of human rights defenders in the country. In late 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders visited Tajikistan - her report has not been published yet.

TURKEY

In May, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights called on Turkey to cease pressure on human rights defenders, NGOs, journalists and lawyers.

Some activists received death threats. The 17 May Association provided well-being support to 65 LGBTQI+ rights defenders.

Following the earthquake in February, most LGBTQI+ groups suspended their usual work and focused on relief work and addressing discrimination in the provision of aid and support, which was common. A report on 'The Situation of LGBTQI+ People After the Earthquake' found widespread discrimination and need for support, even months after the disaster.

TURKMENISTAN

The authorities continue to detain critics of the government, who express or, even hint at dissent. Several activists were detained again this year, or disappeared, due to their political opinion or LGBT identity.

*Some of the information about Turkmenistan was shared with ILGA-Europe by activists who for safety reasons need to stay anonymous.

UKRAINE

Some organisations had to evacuate and became displaced.

ROMANIA

In February, two far-right MPs tabled the legislative initiative B68/2023 to ban any visual, audio or video materials about LGBTQ+ people, allegedly for the "protection of minors". Civil society widely condemned the move and asked for the bill to be withdrawn.

RUSSIA

(See also under Bias-motivated Speech; and Education)

The 2022 propaganda law had a detrimental impact on the community this year (see here, here, here). The law prohibits positive and also neutral information about LGBT people to minors and adults, information about "gender reassignment" and the "promotion of paedophilia". Individuals can be fined roughly 4,200 EURO and organisations 52,000 EURO. In March, MP Vitaly Milonov (United Russia) proposed to create a register of all materials that contain 'LGBT propaganda' and previously suggested introducing a special unit to detect such materials. In April, the Ministry of Justice approved a set of criteria for "LGBT propaganda, pedophilia and gender reassignment", which entered into force in September.

The law was used against several LGBT people and organisations this year (see here, here, and a list here),

>THEMES

including minors. People were fired from their jobs, expelled from school, arrested, and deported (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). TV channels and streaming platforms were also fined (see [here](#), and [here](#)). Cinema screenings, theatre plays, books and bookstores were also targeted (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

There were several attempts again to block LGBTI-themed websites and some faced prosecution for groups on social media/messaging sites or for blogging (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Search functions started [failing](#) on VKontakte. Channels on messaging apps were also [shut](#) down and dating apps [blocked](#). In May, a (German) man was [deported](#) from Russia for messages sent on a dating app.

SPAIN

Legal rows over the display of rainbow flags [continued](#) this year. Vox council members requested that the flags be removed from public buildings in several regions (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). The Superior Court of Justice of Castilla y León [ruled](#) the flag should not be removed from the regional parliament's building or the [city council](#) of Valladolid. Madrid's Superior Court of Justice [ruled](#) against the flag.

Vox and ultra-conservative religious groups continued to wage a cultural war on LGBTI+-themed works, including plays, books, exhibitions and films (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

In A Coruña, ruled by the left party PSOE, the city council [has not flown the rainbow flag](#) in the last four years, despite this being requested every year by LGBTI+ organisations.

SWITZERLAND

Four MPs in Valais tried to ban drag story events; the motion was rejected by a clear majority of the parliament. The Federal Council [concluded](#) that libraries are free to organise their own activities and that the story events were fully in line with their mandate.

TAIKISTAN

LGBT bloggers living abroad were targeted by intimidation and threats online. Their families back home were also harassed by police.

TURKEY

President Erdogan announced new measures to curb Turkey's media content, saying reprisals are needed to protect Turkish culture and children.

The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) fined several streaming platforms this year because of LGBT+ characters (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

Journalist Semra Çelebi was [acquitted](#) for posting a rainbow flag on her social media during the 2020 Pride march.

In [Dugan v. Turkey](#), the ECtHR found a violation of Art 5.1, right to liberty, when the police took a trans woman sex worker to a police station to identify her and eventually fined her for disruption of traffic, as this is usually done on the spot.

TURKMENISTAN

Most social media sites continue to be blocked and TV channels are censored.

UKRAINE

In February, the parliament [rejected](#) a bill that would have banned "propaganda of homosexuality and transgenderism". A number of similar bills are also being [discussed](#).

The parliament also [dismissed](#) a resolution that would have withdrawn state support for the production of a film, *My Young Prince*.

UNITED KINGDOM

A trans-themed poster was [removed](#) from the V&A children's museum before its opening.

UZBEKISTAN

Human rights defenders continued to be prosecuted under the 2022 law, which [criminalises](#) "insult and slander" against Uzbek leaders, prohibits "disrespect for society, the state, state symbols (national and universal values)", and labels demonstrations as being "in violation of the established order."

In May, Nezir Sinani, an LGBTQI activist from Kosovo, who was attending a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) meeting in Samarkand, was

>THEMES

harassed and surveilled by police who confiscated rainbow-coloured bags he had with him. Sinani urged the EBRD and other international financial institutions that support Uzbekistan, to condemn such actions and call for decriminalisation.

In May, a fashion show in Tashkent caused widespread discussion because a male model wore a skirt, as a result of which the designer was taken to law enforcement agencies and forced to write an explanatory note that she was not engaged in LGBT+ propaganda.

In June, a video featuring doctors urging the government to ban men ‘impersonating’ women, went viral on social media. “Uzbek travesty divas” are impersonators, entertainers, and parodists, who are part of Uzbek culture and perform at weddings, birthdays, and other important celebrations.