



AZERBAIJAN

ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

LGBTI people working in the informal or criminalised sector, particularly sex workers, were unable to receive state assistance during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, tax refunds were not an option for those engaging in sex work.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH AND VIOLENCE

Hate crimes against the LGBTI+ community continued to be a serious issue this year. In May and June, a series of attacks took place in Baku against trans people (see [here](#), [here](#)), gay men (see [here](#), [here](#)), and a [gay couple](#). Ten incidents were reported to the police, but the response has been poor. Civil society in [Azerbaijan](#) and [internationally](#) expressed concern that the lack of police action will continue to create an atmosphere of impunity.

In August, a trans woman was brutally murdered in Baku. A dozen activists held a protest outside the Office of the Ombudsperson as a response. Another trans woman was attacked in Baku in November.

Several young women committed suicide in Azerbaijan this year. In February, 20-year-old Sevil Atakishiyeva killed herself after being subjected to threats and abuse from her family, because she wanted to study abroad, she missed a curfew, or appeared in a photo with a man. The suicides sparked hateful articles about feminism being the culprit, many of which directly blamed Gulnara Mehdiyeva, a prominent defender of women and LGBTI people's rights (see under **Human Rights Defenders**)

Hate speech also remained a serious issue. QueeRadar published its hate speech monitoring report in October, highlighting the frequency of hostile content in mainstream media.

In January, Deputy Chairman of the parliamentary Human Rights Committee, Tahir Karimli said,

“As long as I am an MP, I will protest against the issue of sexual minorities, I will even revolt. Everything can be tolerated, but not this one. It is [...] necessary to strangle [this trend] on the spot.”

In June, a well-known blogger posted anti-LGBTI+ content on their platform, which civil society fears will encourage more hate crimes and suicides. A group of trans women

held a protest in front of a police station, demanding action. In July, the leader of the Muslim Union Movement (MBH), Tale Bagirzadeh, called LGBTI+ people “immoral and sick-minded” in an interview. In July, the Chairman of the White Party, Tural Abbasli called LGBTIQ+ people an abomination, saying that propaganda brainwashed people and that the party “will fight against it to the end.”

BODILY INTEGRITY

In February, a psychologist, Samira Babayeva, stated on social media that one of the aims of sex education is to eliminate same-sex relationships and gender affirmation. Babayeva suggested that conversion therapy is part of sex education.

EDUCATION

A queer student reported queerphobic bullying at school No. 244, which he repeatedly raised with the headmaster to no avail. He started an online campaign to raise awareness about bullying and discrimination in schools (see also [here](#), [here](#)).

EMPLOYMENT

Between January and August, civil society received 130 complaints of unemployment from LGBTIQ+ people, with many citing discrimination on grounds of their SOGI as a reason. The accounts revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the difficult situation of LGBTIQ+ people in the labour market.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

QueeRadar's survey on LGBTQ+ people's well-being during the 2020 lockdowns found that many were impacted by a loss of income and housing, had to move back to unsafe family homes, lost their employment, or had difficulty accessing social benefits. The authors highlighted that trans people have been particularly at risk of discrimination and violence since the COVID-19 pandemic started, and that the police did not provide any effective support in these cases.

In April, the US Embassy in Azerbaijan published the detailed 'Report on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan - 2020', highlighting discrimination, violence, and other forms of ill-treatment against LGBTI people as a key concern.



FREEDOM FROM TORTURE, CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

Several LGBT people were arrested this year, allegedly on drug charges, including a trans woman and two gay men.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

On 8 March, activists held a Women's Day rally again this year, after being denied a permit on 4 March. The organisers urged the government to ensure equal rights for all without discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, to protect women from violence, and to ratify the Istanbul Convention. The event was disrupted by the police and 20 protesters were detained. The police also shut down public transportation in some areas of Baku, falsely claiming COVID-19 restrictions as a reason.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The Q Collective initiative was established this year, focusing on community building and support, and capacity building.

The new Qiy vaar! podcast produces content about sex, sexuality, pleasure, sexual health, and queer-feminist activism in the country.

HEALTH

In June, a trans woman was denied medical care and was laughed at by the personnel of a clinic.

The Gender Resource Centre launched LGBTI+ Talkline, which will provide psycho-social support to the community. The Centre also published a trans-inclusive resource about periods.

HOUSING

On 9 June, three trans women were evicted from their homes by the police. The women had no conflicts with their landlord and filed a complaint to the Ombudsman's office, who dismissed it.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

One of the last standing lawyers in the country who represents women and queer people in court was disbarred this year. The basis of stripping Shahla Humbatova from her licence was her delay in paying her fees to the Bar Association. Humbatova confirmed this was true, but that she was never notified of the issue

before hearing the news from the media. On March 5, the Baku Administrative Court upheld the Bar Association's decision. The repression against lawyers who defend victims of human rights abuse creates a gap in LGBTI rights protection as well.

On 4 August, following this year's suicides and the murder of a woman in a case of domestic violence, feminist activists and journalists held a small demonstration at a Baku police station. The victim, Sevinj Maharramova asked for help from women's rights activists and the police earlier this year, but the police failed to intervene effectively. The protesters poured red paint on the gate, symbolising the blood that's on the police's hands for failing to protect women who are victims of domestic abuse. They were holding signs saying: "Femicides are political". The demonstrators were violently detained and abused while in detention.

Social media groups for women and individual activists' social media accounts continued to be hacked, in what seem to be attacks by the authorities. Gulnara Mehdiyeva, a prominent defender of women and LGBTI people's rights, was a key target again this year. In February, her accounts were hacked and her conversations were shared widely. She received countless death threats. Mehdiyeva reported the cases to the police, who failed to launch an investigation. In May, her legal representatives filed an application to the European Court of Human Rights, which argues that the police's failure to intervene led to violations of Mehdiyeva's rights to private life and freedom of expression. Mehdiyeva lawyers also argue that state actors were involved in the February cyber attack. Civil society is concerned that such attacks have a chilling effect on human rights defenders in general.

The accounts of activist Narmin Shahmarzadeh were also hacked days before the Women's Day March, which she co-organised. Her face was also pasted on pornographic images and shared widely.

The social media pages of the new Qiy vaar! podcast received queerphobic backlash, and was hacked and blocked.



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