

“I’m afraid for my family if the authorities find out about my homosexuality.” Criminalisation in Uzbekistan: Oliver’s story

[Blog](#), [Legal Protection](#), [Decriminalisation](#), [Uzbekistan](#)

At this moment, the Central Asian country of Uzbekistan has a historic opportunity to decriminalise same-sex relations between men and provide better protection for LGBT people. In today’s blog, Oliver, an LGBT activist from Uzbekistan, shares his story with us, and what changing the Criminal Code would mean for him.

As he did every morning, Oliver began his day checking his email, drinking a cup of coffee. But this morning, the 32-year-old LGBT activist from Uzbekistan was upset.

The reason was that a member of the Uzbek Parliament, Rasul Kusherbaev, had publicly [declared](#) the day before, March 15, 2021: “I will never accept the cohabitation and relationship of a man with a man as husband and wife. And I believe that while we are alive, such absurdity in Uzbekistan will not be allowed by law. The day this is allowed will be the day of our death.”

At this unique moment in its history, the country of [Uzbekistan has an opportunity](#) to finally decriminalise consensual same-sex relations between men in its review of its Criminal Code. This would align Uzbekistan with international human rights standards and its own Constitution. However, despite calls from international human rights bodies including the United Nations, the provision remains in the new draft version of the Code, moved from Article 120 to Article 154, without changing its substance.

Although the Uzbekistani Constitution guarantees privacy, equality and non-discrimination, Uzbekistan is one of the only two Central Asian countries that retain legislation criminalising private, consensual same-sex conduct between men.

“This [criminalising] article is perceived in society as a ban on LGBT people,” says Oliver. He fears persecution from radicals calling for hatred in a state that offers no protection, where even lawyers are reluctant to defend LGBT people. “I am afraid for my relatives, who may also suffer if authorities find out about my homosexuality,” Oliver adds.

“I love Uzbekistan very much. People may be homophobic here, but this does not mean that with proper awareness raising and education by the state, people will not become more tolerant.”

Oliver has personally suffered the consequences of the lack of protection for LGBT people in Uzbekistan. Some years ago, he went on a date with a man he met on a social media network. “I was a very stupid naïve boy who just wanted to be happy,” he says. It turned out he had been lured into a trap, and the man he met was a homophobe who beat him up.

“Obviously, I did not even dare to report the incident,” Oliver says. “The fear that someone would find out, that most people would support him and say that I was mentally ill and deserved it, stopped me.”

In the [ILGA-Europe Annual Review 2021](#), it’s reported that throughout 2020 the article criminalising same-sex relations in Uzbekistan continued to be used by the police to threaten, intimidate, psychologically and physically torture, and detain LGBT people. The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) [has highlighted](#) that the public usually sides with perpetrators of anti-LGBT violence and that law enforcement officers blackmail the victims and extort money.

For Oliver, decriminalising same-sex conduct in Uzbekistan would mean that “the state is ready to start a dialogue.” Decriminalisation would protect LGBT people from violence and harassment. It would also open a space for LGBT communities to self-organise and access health and legal counselling.

“We are ordinary people. We don’t want to be afraid of society, of the state. We simply want the state to protect us.”

Oliver has hope for his country and faith in his fellow citizens.

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Here is what you can do:

Join our campaign to call on the President and government of Uzbekistan to decriminalise same-sex relations in the review of the country’s Criminal Code by tweeting [#Repeal154](#)!

Looking for inspiration? Here is a call you can tweet:

I call on the President and government of Uzbekistan, member of the UN Human Rights Council, to [#Repeal154](#) to decriminalise same-sex conduct between men under the ongoing review of the Criminal Code.

[@aripov_abdulla](#) [@president_uz](#)