

HIGHLIGHTS AND TRENDS

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD & GOODS AND SERVICES

Reporting from the movement on socio-economic equity is increasing. There is a growing level of information showing that **mainstream services are not safe, inclusive or educated on the particular needs of LGBTI people**, who are disproportionately affected in times of crisis and are often socio-economically disadvantaged in specific ways. There are reports of trans and non-binary people struggling in Belarus, Bulgaria, Denmark, and Greece. There is a continuing **lack of awareness and lack of political will** to address socio-economic inequalities for LGBTI people. In Turkey, for instance, LGBTI people struggled to access humanitarian aid after the earthquake in February, and difficulties continued throughout the year. **CSOs and activists often step in to fill the absence** of public services to support LGBTI people with basic needs, reported for instance in Albania, Belarus and Denmark, but as we know from our work a reality in many more countries in our region, including Armenia, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Ukraine.

ASYLUM

More and more people are seeking safety, but **overall policies are doubling down, making the situation for asylum seekers increasingly untenable**. New legislation in Iceland, for instance, strips asylum seekers from essential services. In the Netherlands, over half of LGBTI asylum seekers reported feeling unsafe in the asylum system and three-quarters went back into the closet. In several countries, including Finland and Slovakia, trans asylum seekers experienced serious challenges in access to gender-affirming healthcare. In Belgium, the ‘reception crisis’ continues, in which single men are not being given shelter, which adversely affects GBT men. There is worrying regression in the UK with the adoption of the Illegal Migration Act which sets out measures to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, an unsafe country for LGBTI people. In the wake of a wave of harsh new anti-LGBTI laws in Russia, LGBTI people and activists are fleeing, but they face difficulties getting visas. Sweden rejected 96% of asylum cases, with LGBTI people rarely receiving any specific examination and applicants deported back to home countries that criminalise LGBTI people, including with the death penalty. There is **progress in Czechia**, where the new asylum law includes sexual orientation, gender identity (SOGI) grounds, and mixed developments in Germany with dedicated funding for queer asylum seekers legal advice, but the introduction of a bill to speed up deportation. **CSOs continued to support LGBTI migrants**, particularly from Ukraine and Russia, in Armenia, Bulgaria, and Moldova, amongst others

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

There has been **a clear accumulation of anti-LGBTI speech from officials across the region**, often instrumentalising children by falsely invoking concerns for their safety. There was bias-motivated speech from politicians reported in Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK. **Transphobic speech continues to be on the rise** in Croatia, Ireland, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the UK, and intensified around parliamentary discussions in Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, and Portugal, around LGBTI events in Iceland and Luxembourg; and in the lead up to elections in Moldova, Slovakia and Georgia. Hate speech concerning trans minors’ access to healthcare was commonplace. At the same time there was a rise in **court judgements recognising bias-motivation**, including in Albania, Bulgaria, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the UK.

LGBTIphobic and transphobic pieces in the media are further on the rise (Andorra, Azerbaijan, Belarus Bulgaria, France, Sweden Turkey, and the UK), while online hate was reported in Andorra, Albania, Armenia, Austria, Cyprus, Northern Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Malta and Turkey. In Portugal there was an 185% increase in anti-LGBTI hatred online between 2019 and 2022, and an 130% increase in Spain over the same period.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Of the 54 countries reporting in this review only six of them reported no hate crime in 2023. In the other 48 countries, **much of the reported verbal and physical violence targeted trans people. This is in clear correlation to an exceptional rise in anti-trans hate speech this year, particularly from official sources.**

Pride events are increasingly being targeted, with reported attacks before, during or after Pride parades and events in 16 countries, namely Austria (an attempted bomb attack), Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey, and Russia. Rainbow flags and LGBTI symbols were vandalised, burnt or destroyed in Georgia, Belgium, Croatia, Northern Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK.

Increases in bias-motivated violence were recorded in Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland (highest record to date) and the UK. Police failed to protect victims in Armenia, BiH, Slovenia, and Turkey, and perpetrated attacks in Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Russia. Hate-motivated murders took place in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Italy, Russia, Serbia, Spain, and Turkey.

Again, there has been **progress in court cases prosecuting anti-LGBTI hate crime**, including in Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Spain, Switzerland, and for the first time, Ukraine. There were slight decreases in violence reported in Belgium and Spain, while hate crime legislation progressed in Bulgaria, Ireland and Scotland.

BODILY INTEGRITY

Last year we reported intersex bodily integrity as a rising trend, but this year we have seen that where there is **stagnation on IGM bans**, it is longstanding, with governments not following up on commitments they've made, particularly in Austria, Belgium, Finland and Ireland.

There is **strong forward movement in banning so-called 'conversion practices'**, with Belgium, Cyprus, Iceland, Portugal and Spain all adopting legislation. Parliamentary debates and plans for bans are taking place in Finland, Ireland, Netherlands and Switzerland, while Norway has approved legislation. Malta made improved amendments to its law and three people were prosecuted under the ban. Austria and the UK both stagnated with their plans to ban the practices.

CENTRAL ASIA

Reporting from countries in Central Asia is a stark reminder of the **pervasive lack of protection for LGBTI people in the region**. The criminalisation of LGBTI people remains in place in some countries, basic anti-discrimination legislation is lacking in most countries, LGBTI people are entrapped and blackmailed, often by the police, and there is a lack of safe spaces for LGBTI people to gather, with raids on bars and social spaces ongoing, and police brutality rife.

In Kyrgyzstan, several pieces of Russian-style legislation targeting LGBTI people and activists were instituted.

A prohibition was instituted regarding the display of paraphernalia associated with the rainbow symbol. In August, the president signed in a new law On Measures to Prevent Harm to Children's Health, Their Recovery, Intellectual, Mental, Spiritual, and Moral Development. The law is similar to those in Russia and Hungary and bans the spreading of information that denies family values, or promotes "non-traditional sexual relationships". The law also calls for a complete ban on discussing LGBT rights and experiences in schools. In October, a bill that introduces the concept of "foreign non-governmental organisation" passed. It aims at restricting the freedom of speech of civil society, as it threatens the closure of NGOs in the Kyrgyz Republic, including LGBT+ organisations, as well as the persecution of human rights defenders and activists, who may be subject to five to ten years in prison.

EDUCATION

Scare tactics around sex education are further on the rise, with the far right and other actors **instrumentalising children in anti-LGBTI arguments and sowing division** amongst young people and parents. There were draft amendments seeking to limit sex education in Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia, while education became a touchstone for anti-LGBTI mobilisation in countries including Belarus, Hungary, Lithuania, Sweden, Turkey and the UK.

With that, **there has been progress in inclusion** of sexual orientation and gender identity, (SOGI) in education in Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Romania and the UK.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

There has been steady **progress in institutional commitment to LGBTI equality and more comprehensive approaches to addressing gaps in legislation** through LGBTI action plans and policies in Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Ukraine, and Scotland and Wales in the UK.

The situation for LGBTI people in Russia is steadily deteriorating since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and subsequent legislation targeting LGBTI people, with a large increase in homophobia and transphobia in the public space. The same is happening in Turkey, with planned legislation to ban marriage equality and LGBTI associations. In Netherlands anti-discrimination cases doubled, while in Serbia the situation of LGBT people has worsened since attacks on EuroPride in 2022.

FAMILY

After a number of years when **partnership recognition** had either stagnated or was on a downward trend, **the issue continued to rise this year**. Estonia became the first Baltic country to introduce marriage equality, while in Switzerland 749 same-sex marriages took place and over 2,200 couples converted their partnership to marriage since the introduction of marriage equality in 2022. There were positive developments for rainbow families in Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Spain. A draft bill on registered partnerships was published in Ukraine.

While same-sex partners are achieving more rights, **the children of LGBTI families are less recognised**. In Bulgaria, the Supreme Court denied a birth certificate and citizenship to a child of two mothers, one of whom is Bulgarian, despite the CJEU ruling saying it must do so. There were major setbacks in Italy with a measure to only recognise biological parents on birth certificates, resulting in a large number of birth certificates being revoked. The Italian government also tabled a bill to extend the ban on surrogacy to those who access the practice abroad. Russia banned trans people from adopting or fostering children.

Where governments fail to ensure the protection of rainbow families, courts increasingly come into play. There were favourable rulings in Austria and Denmark, while the European Court of Human Rights ruled favourably on strategic cases against Romania, Poland, Russia and Ukraine.

FOREIGN POLICY

Moves by European Union member states to limit the rights of LGBTI people are being finally addressed by the EU Commission and other member states. 16 countries, Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Austria, Ireland, Denmark, Malta, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Slovenia, France, Germany and Greece, signed on to act together with the European Parliament as third parties in the infringement process last year by the Commission against Hungary's Child Protection Law, widely criticised as being anti-LGBT.

The Commission added an amendment in 2022 to its Partnership Agreement with Poland to ensure that municipalities that have anti-LGBT resolutions in place do not receive financial support. This action was successful with many municipalities dropping their resolutions.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

In spite of reported attacks in 16 countries, Pride continues to be core to the LGBTI movement, identity and self-expression, with more and more Pride events being organised across Europe. There were first-ever Prides in towns in Denmark, Croatia, France, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Slovakia.

Turkish activists, community members and allies continued to show great resilience by holding and attending Pride events across the country, despite systematic bans, violent attacks, mass detentions, police obstruction, and targeting by political parties.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND EXPRESSION

Russian style anti-LGBTI laws are being copied by other countries seeking to put controls on civil society, which is heavily affecting freedom of association. In Belarus and Georgia possible ‘propaganda laws’ remained on the agenda, while Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a Russian style foreign agents law. The Lithuanian Parliament rejected a repeal of its ‘propaganda law’, Romania tabled a bill to ban LGBT themed audiovisual materials, and Moldova adopted an ‘LGBT propaganda’ ban. In Russia the Supreme Court ruled that the LGBT international movement is “extremist” and LGBT activism is “criminal”, while the 2022 propaganda law continued to have a detrimental effect, with LGBT people fired, expelled from schools, arrested and deported, websites blocked, and bloggers persecuted.

In Hungary, bookstores who stocked LGBTI titles were fined under the propaganda law. Literature was used by the far-right to attempt the repression of LGBTI expression and information in Ireland and Portugal. Turkey announced new measures to curb media content to “protect culture and children”.

HEALTH

Access to trans healthcare is a growing problem, particularly for trans minors, amid rising difficulties for trans people reported elsewhere in this review. Barriers are reported in 17 European countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Northern Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and the UK.

Several suicides of trans people were reported this year.

Switzerland published recommendations for gender-affirming care based on ICD-11 and introduced a new HIV programme that includes trans people for the first time.

The trend of lifting restrictions on blood bans from men who have sex with men (MSM) continued, with lifts of restrictions and steps forward in Finland, Germany, Norway and Switzerland.

HOUSING

Rising costs of living and an overall housing crisis are often impacting LGBTI people disproportionately, due to discrimination and subsequently their often weaker socio-economic situation. Housing insecurity for LGBTI people, and particularly for trans people, is reported in Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Georgia. Young LGBTI people are disproportionately impacted by the housing crisis in Ireland, while in Italy there were 400 cases of LGBT young people kicked out of home, with only 10% finding emergency shelter.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Despite negative public opinion and a stark rise in anti-trans speech from official sources, **governments are following up on commitments, several introducing good self-determination standards in legal gender recognition (LGR)**. Andorra introduced a new gender marker and name change; Armenia simplified its name change process; Belgium made change of name or gender markers possible any number of times; Finland adopted LGR based on self-determination; Germany's cabinet presented LGR based on self-determination to parliament; a new bill tabled in Iceland would allow to change family name based on self-determination; and Spain adopted its LGBTI law with a self-determination model for LGR.

A reported six trans people committed suicide in the aftermath of Russia's LGR ban. Slovakia's de facto LGR ban passed on its first reading. It didn't pass the second reading, but an identical bill was newly submitted. The UK sought to block implementation of Scottish LGR based on the self-determination model.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Sport is becoming more visibly an area of engagement with actors both for and against trans and intersex inclusion. In Ireland, Ladies Football approved its first trans applicant and implemented new inclusive guidelines. In Spain, the new Sports law bans discrimination against LGBTI people in sports, but the Basketball Federation refused to have a trans player in its second league. In the UK, several sports associations introduced 'open' categories that in reality discriminate against trans athletes, and in a survey 63% of trans young people reported worsened mental health due to exclusion from sport.

PUBLIC OPINION

While Pride events are increasingly being targeted and LGBTI symbols vandalised, conversely **there is a slow but steady increase in acceptance across countries where LGBTI discrimination has been previously widespread**. A study in Bulgaria shows that public acceptance continues to increase; in Czechia support for marriage equality has grown by over 40% since 2019; in Hungary, support for LGBTQI rights has increased, with support for marriage equality has gone up 150% over the past ten years. In Poland there is increased public support for Pride marches and support for equal marriage has grown from 21 to 32% in the last decade. In Slovakia, 40% support registered partnerships, and in Slovenia, 45% support rainbow families.