



CYPRUS

ASYLUM

An asylum seeker was deported to Nigeria although he was at clear risk after Nigerian media had outed him while he was in Cyprus, and even though the appeal against his asylum rejection in Cyprus was still ongoing.

The Cyprus Refugee Council is currently running a project for the integration of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees in the local LGBTI community.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Accept-LGBTI Cyprus expressed concern over the increase in anti-LGBTI hate speech in 2023, shared examples of hate messages, and called for the state to tackle the issue. Anti-LGBTI groups spread several fake news posts on social media, all inciting hatred towards LGBTI people, Pride marches, and sex education (see under Education).

In January, a non-commissioned military officer (NCO) posted homophobic content on his social media and was later put under investigation. The Minister of Defence and the Ombudsperson both condemned the videos. The case will go to court in 2024 and it will be a test case on the application of the hate speech law.

Hate speech from politicians also remained an issue. MP Andreas Themistocleous, for instance, continued making anti-LGBT, sexist, and racist remarks throughout the year, but without any consequences. Themistocleous was reported to the House Committee on Ethics after making hateful comments about another MP welcoming the ban on so-called 'conversion practices' (see under Bodily Integrity). The Committee later dismissed the case as the comments were made outside of the parliament's premises. While homophobic and transphobic hate speech were criminalised in 2015, there have been no prosecutions to date; the matter of enforcement and unwillingness to prosecute senior politicians or religious circles remains a serious problem.

In its report published in March, ECRI expressed concern about anti-LGBT hate speech and hate crimes and the lack of implementation of relevant laws.

In June, high school students put up homophobic stickers all across a park in Nicosia, in part to target a peer perceived as gay.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In February, a group of hooded men disrupted a Rainbow

Meeting at Cyprus University of Technology (TEPAK) in Limassol, used fire extinguishers, chanted homophobic slurs and slogans, physically assaulted one student, and damaged property when they were leaving. Five suspects were arrested, three of whom are students at TEPAK. President-elect Nikos Christodoulides condemned the violence.

BODILY INTEGRITY

In a historic move, Cyprus banned so-called 'conversion practices' on 23 May, covering SOGIE grounds, both adults and minors, and including sanctions advertising. In a last-minute amendment, it was clarified that priests can still provide counselling to LGBTI people, but they are not exempt from the ban, as sought by the far-right. This means that priests cannot conduct "conversion practices". The ban, endorsed by Cyprus' psychologists association, is the result of extensive advocacy by civil society.

EDUCATION

(See also under Bias-motivated Violence)

As of 1 September 2023, holistic sex education is mandatory by law at all levels in both public and private schools. SOGIE concepts are properly introduced in secondary school. The change was met with hostility from some politicians, religious groups, and parents, the latter alleging that the classes would promote "gender fluidity", undermine traditional family values and the Christian faith.

Accept-LGBTI Cyprus met with the new Minister of Education to demand the nationwide implementation of the 'Code of Conduct Against Prejudice in Schools' and the 'Guide to Handling and Recording of Incidents of Prejudice'. However, it is still up to each school to request support and training, therefore implementation remains flawed.

EMPLOYMENT

Events continued to be held this year to address LGBTQI+ rights in the workplace, resulting from the collaboration between some large companies and CSOs. In January, the governments of Cyprus and the UK co-hosted a conference on workplace diversity and LGBTQ+ inclusion.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

ECRI's report on Cyprus called for the development and adoption of a national LGBTI strategy. The Justice Ministry has been tasked with creating a multi-ministerial committee to develop this strategy.



FAMILY

In October, the Green party tabled a [bill](#) in parliament to remove the exclusion of same-sex couples from adoption in the civil union's legislation. Any proposal must first be heard by the relevant committee of the Parliament. It is up to the president of the committee to include it in the agenda, which currently has not been done.

FOREIGN POLICY

Cyprus acted as vice-chair in the Council of Europe's newly formed Working Group on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics ([GT-ADI-SOGI](#)) of the Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) this year.

Civil society [expressed](#) alarm that Cyprus [did not join](#) the European Commission's infringement proceedings against Hungary.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Cyprus Pride 2023 was [held](#) in May in [Nicosia](#) under the theme 'In solidarity we thrive'. Over 6,000 people attended.

On 17 June 2023, the bicomunal event United by Pride was held for the second time in Nicosia, with two parallel Pride marches on both sides of the cities, [bringing together](#) people from across the island. The [African LGBTQ Community Cyprus](#), [LGBT Pilipinas](#), LGBTI Cyprus Diaspora, and two LGBTI university student organisations co-hosted the marches with Queer Collective Cy and Queer Cyprus Association (QCA).

Several LGBTI groups [joined](#) anti-fascist marches and [actions](#) in response to the unprecedented wave of xenophobic and racist rhetoric and [violence](#) against migrants in late summer.

HEALTH

Accept LGBTI Cyprus continued advocating for inclusive healthcare, engaging with the European Commissioner of Health and urging the Ministry of Health for LGBTI-inclusive medical services. This effort resulted in a December 2023 meeting chaired by the Health Ministry's Director General. Key outcomes included plans on updating trans-related hormones coverage, establishing a medical centre for trans healthcare, and more.

Trans people continued facing difficulties in accessing hormonal therapy. Some also shared that endocrinologists were unwilling to help adjust their dosage, and they were struggling with depression as a consequence.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

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.

INTERSECTIONALITY

(see under Freedom of Assembly)

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Despite major advances in 2022 for a legal gender identity recognition [bill](#) including a first reading of the bill in November 2022, there have been no developments in 2023.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

The fourth Queer Wave film festival [took](#) place in September 2023. The State Gallery of Contemporary Art - SPEL hosted a series of queer-themed performances between June and December.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Accept presented a seminar in Nicosia in collaboration with the Cyprus Police. The plan is to extend the seminar to other districts in 2024. There are ongoing talks exploring the inclusion of an LGBTI-focused course in the Police Academy's curriculum.

PUBLIC OPINION

There has been an increasing wave of homophobic and transphobic rhetoric, especially within social media, with creation of online communities for so-called protection of traditional families and of children from sexual education.

Cyprus Youth Council research showed that 20% of respondents found same-sex relationships somewhat acceptable and 54% fully agree with equal marriage. Another [survey](#) highlighted that one in three Cypriots support same-sex couples having children.



NORTHERN CYPRUS

**Areas not under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus.*

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

The economic challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic persisted impacting the LGBTI+ community with income loss and food affordability issues. QCA's Social Welfare team created a list of supportive NGOs and local authorities. This list included different services like food donations, psychosocial support, and more for the LGBTI+ community.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Hate speech towards LGBTI+ people continued to be an issue and was particularly common on social media platforms in May and June when Pride events were held.

In January, civil society condemned the speech held by the President of Religious Affairs, Ahmet Ünsal in Famagusta, who normalised child marriage, compulsory heterosexuality, and patriarchal norms.

Also in January following the protests against Ahmet Ünsal, MP Erhan Anklı of the Rebirth party questioned the right to freedom of LGBTI+ people and attacked the QCA awareness campaign.

Editor-in-Chief of Cyprus Media Group Özer Kanlı published a LGBTI-phobic article in Kıbrıs Newspaper.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Several people reported harassment and violence to QCA. In March, for instance, a young man was attacked in Famagusta and verbally harassed by a man, who also poured sewage water on him.

On 27 January 2023, a minor attempted to tear the rainbow flag hanging outside the youth centre of Famagusta.

DATA COLLECTION

The Human Rights Platform (HRP), launched by QCA in 2021, continued monitoring the situation of LGBTI+ community. The report showed that local authorities rarely investigate hate speech cases and that the absence of legal recognition for trans and non-binary people results in rights violations, impacting their access to health services and in prisons.

QCA requested permission from local bodies to collect data in educational and medical settings. Both requests were denied.

EDUCATION

As part of continuous advocacy, research and capacity building to promote greater inclusivity in education, QCA released the *LGBTI+ Inclusive Education is Possible* brochure on LGBTI+ terminology, the effects of bullying faced by students, and ways to support LGBTI+ students in education.

QCA met with the VP of the Assembly of the Republic and discussed school curriculum, fighting hate speech, and more (see under Legal Gender Recognition).

QCA criticised the intention of the local body responsible for education to revise a number of primary school textbooks and bring them more in line with conservative values, and called for a curriculum that promotes diversity on SOGIESC grounds.

QCA research on teachers' attitudes showed that a large proportion of teachers support LGBTI+ inclusive education.

FAMILY

A trans person reported receiving death threats from their family to the QCA Solidarity Line.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

In January, civil society with the support of political parties Bağımsızlık Yolu, CTP Kadın Örgütü, TDP, and YKP, organised a joint protest against the hate speech of Ahmet Ünsal.

On 17 May, QCA held a Pride march in the northern part of Nicosia.

On 17 June, the bicomunal event United by Pride was held for the second time in Nicosia, with two parallel Pride marches on both sides of the capital and bringing together people from across the island. The African LGBTQ Community Cyprus, LGBT Pilipinas, LGBTI Cyprus Diaspora, and two LGBTI university student organisations co-hosted the marches with Queer Collective Cy and QCA.

Several LGBTI groups joined anti-fascist marches and actions in response to the unprecedented wave of xenophobic and racist rhetoric and violence against migrants in late summer.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Two rainbow coloured sculptures were removed from the METU



Northern Cyprus Campus in July, seen by civil society as a move to restrict freedom of expression.

HEALTH

Trans people continued facing difficulties in their access to hormonal therapy and gender-affirming healthcare, as reported to the QCA Solidarity Line. The QCA Solidarity Line continued providing essential psychological aid and other social services to LGBTI+ people in need.

QCA research on health provider attitudes revealed that 60% reported having no prior experience in handling situations involving LGBTI patients. Only 10% reported having lots of experience with the LGBTI community.

HOUSING

Famagusta's safe housing for women now welcomes LGBTI+ people .

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Sixty organisations, including CSOs, unions, foundations, political parties, municipalities, media and companies supported QCA's ninth anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality campaign.

INTERSECTIONALITY

QCA held a thematic discussion event on disability and gender in collaboration with the Cyprus Turkish Orthopaedic Disabled Association (KTOÖD)

CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

The fourth Queer Wave film festival took place in September.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

In late 2022, a court in Nicosia affirmed that keeping trans detainees in solitary confinement for their own protection was unacceptable. Despite this decision, in 2023 a trans woman was detained and kept in solitary confinement at the Kyrenia police station. She was then sent to prison, where she also spent time in solitary confinement.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

After the revision of the list of dangerous infectious diseases, people living with HIV will not be subject to deportation when seeking a student visa or residency permit, as long as they can cover their medication expenses and comply with quarterly

check-ups. However, the potential for deportation still exists for those applying for a work permit.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The social welfare department of Northern Cyprus, in collaboration with QCA, provided guidance to trans youth and will receive specialised training on LGBTI+ issues.



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