

>THEMES

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

AUSTRIA

Drag Queen Candy Licious [shared](#) that her reading events for children now only happen with police protection in place. A reading in March [had](#) 15 police officers present.

FPÖ's attempts to ban drag story time and threats by right-wing groups to attack readings for children led to a [demonstration](#) against drag story time and a counter-demonstration for LGBTIQ-visibility outside Vienna's Türkis Rosa Lila Villa during a reading event. Several politicians went to the scene and spoke out against anti-LGBTI hate.

In October, FPÖ [pushed](#) the Vienna city council to cancel yearly funding to Türkis Rosa Lila Villa after the Palestine flag was hung by an occupant of the building. On a local level, FPÖ pushed for tearing down the centre and building social housing on the site. Both attempts failed.

AZERBAIJAN

In June, the Minister of Education was [criticised](#) after sharing a picture on social media on Children's Day, which featured a rainbow-coloured kite.

Following the adoption of Russia's latest anti-LGBT propaganda law, several politicians, including from the government, [said](#) Azerbaijan should adopt a similar law.

In February, [a year after](#) the homophobic murder of LGBTQ+ activist Avaz Hafizli a documentary about his life was [screened](#) in Baku.

In March, the Turkish singer Kalben [hung](#) a trans flag during her concert in Baku.

BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA

In July, the Republika Srpska Parliament [adopted](#) amendments to the Criminal Code, which will impose thousands of Euros of fines for defamation, which many believe would contribute to censorship. The EU [called](#) for the withdrawal of the law.

BULGARIA

Sofia Pride billboard campaign, featuring both rainbow and traditional families, was formally investigated for "promoting same-sex families as superior". Two women photographed in the campaign with their children were later summoned to the Ministry of Interior directorate

in Sofia. This investigation is ongoing (see under Bias-motivated Violence).

NORTHERN CYPRUS

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.

FINLAND

(see under Bias-motivated Speech)

GEORGIA

Media freedom continued to [deteriorate](#). Alt-Info continued attacking events (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

In March, the parliament [voted](#) against the draft foreign agents law following massive public outcry and demonstrations (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) in the country and criticism from abroad. Over 60 media outlets and civil society groups had promised they would not comply with the law. The police [used](#) excessive force, including water cannons and tear gas, against the protesters.

Far-right politicians and religious leaders [called for](#) a ban on a number of books and screenings this year, for spreading 'LGBT propaganda'.

Several political and religious leaders again suggested introducing an 'LGBT propaganda' law, including the Prime Minister (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

In June, rainbow-coloured umbrellas were [removed](#) from a park in Tbilisi.

GREECE

Far-right politicians [took issue](#) with a rainbow painted on a school's wall in Corinth. The mayor and the deputy Minister of Education both stated the painting had nothing to do with LGBTQI+ rights and it was merely a rainbow.

HUNGARY

In January, the European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) in [Macatè v. Lithuania](#) that restricting and labelling a book of fairy tales as harmful to children for including LGBTQI+ characters is a violation of Art. 10 (freedom of expression). The ruling repeatedly mentions the Hungarian Child Protection law and the censoring of Wonderland is for

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Everyone as a similar example of censorship. Hátter had [submitted](#) a third-party intervention.

Also in January, a court [confirmed](#) the obligation of the Primer Minister Office to release the data on the measures taken against “LGBTQ propaganda”.

The European Commission’s [infringement](#) procedures [continued](#) against Hungary over its anti-LGBT Child Protection Law. By the April deadline, [15 EU Member States](#) and the [European Parliament](#) [joined](#) the proceedings this year.

Bookstores were [fined](#) this year for not complying with the ‘propaganda law’ (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). A different decree [sets out](#) that stores within a 200-metre radius of a school or church cannot sell any books that feature LGBTQ characters and that stores outside this radius must remove them from the youth section, wrap them in foil, and put a 18+ mark on them. In July, for instance, the bookshop Lira was [fined](#) 12,000,000 huf (32,000 EURO) for displaying Heartstopper, an award-winning YA novel, at the children’s section without a plastic cover. The establishment requested a review of the case, another fined bookstore too. The author of Heartstopper [condemned](#) the government’s backlash. 34 Hungarian authors [published](#) a joint statement condemning the government’s censorship.

In July, college students [set up](#) tables outside a Libri store with a “banned books for free” sign, selling the foiled books for a donation. Civil society launched the [www.folianekul.com](#) website (Eng: without a foil) and the hashtag #homofolia trended on social media (ed: ‘folia’ means plastic cover) for weeks.

In May, the Metropolitan Court [ruled](#) that Hátter’s request to the Media Council regarding the number of proceedings the Council was initiated on the basis of the Child Protection Law. Hátter lost the appeal and the case is pending for review before the Curia.

Budapest Pride [turned](#) to court after the Media Council refused to classify this year’s campaign film as a Public Service Announcement and would only allow it to be streamed between 10pm and 5am. TV channel RTL Klub also [turned](#) to court to [challenge](#) the Council’s anti-LGBTQ classification.

The Ferencváros municipality and Amnesty International

Hungary painted a bench with rainbow colours ahead of the Budapest Pride march. The bench was [repainted](#) every day for a week by far-right extremists, who also tagged it with hateful slogans, and then painted again, or wrapped in foil (see above) by LGBTQ activists. The bench had to be [removed](#) after getting damaged in the process.

The Consumer Protection Department of the Budapest Government Office [launched](#) an investigation into Sziget Festival’s promotional video for featuring a same-sex kiss. Google/YouTube [were](#) investigated as well for showing the video.

The Ministry of Culture [banned](#) the entry of minors to the World Press Photo exhibition because photos of LGBTI seniors were portrayed.

ICELAND

Rainbow flags and trans flags were raised across the capital on the occasion of IDAHOBIT on 17 May and during trans visibility week.

IRELAND

Several protests [took place](#) across the country against LGBTQ-themed books and/or books [written](#) by trans authors in public libraries, for instance in [Dublin](#), [Cork](#), among other towns (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). The far-right protesters [harassed](#), intimidated and filmed librarians and called for the removal of the books. The cities’ leadership and Ministers [condemned](#) the attacks. In July, the Cork library [closed](#) due to safety concerns after the protesters hung up a “there are only two genders” sign at the entrance. Kerry’s library was [stormed](#) during a drag storytime event in July. Solidarity protests were also held (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) throughout the year.

Children’s Books Ireland [launched](#) a new campaign, Reading Matters, in response to the hateful attacks.

Several young adult books with LGBTQ content have been [reclassified](#) by some libraries as adult content.

In December, Dublin City Council passed a [motion](#) to support libraries that provide LGBTQ literature and protect them from intimidation by far-right protesters.

KAZAKHSTAN

In October, the Kazakhstan Parents’ Union launched a

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campaign against the children’s theatre studio, ‘Fourth Wall’ in Semey after a post on Instagram claimed the teachers were inviting children to a “homo-performance.”

KYRGYSTAN

In Spring, several draft amendments to the Mass Media Law were [tabled](#), [prohibiting](#) materials that “form a positive attitude towards non-traditional sexual relationships” and promote the “propaganda of same-sex marriages”. National and international civil society called for the withdrawal of the amendments (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

In June, the parliament [adopted](#) the new law On Measures to Prevent Harm to Children’s Health, Their Recovery, Intellectual, Mental, Spiritual, and Moral Development, which was first [tabled](#) in March and [signed](#) into law by the President in August.

The law is similar to those in Russia and Hungary, and [bans](#) the spreading of information that denies family values, promotes “non-traditional sexual relationships”. The law [calls for](#) age limit signs on media content, books, and other materials, similar to the ‘foiling’ in Hungarian bookstores and a complete ban on discussing LGBT rights and experiences in schools.

The law also calls for SIM cards for children to be registered, to ensure that harmful content is blocked on their phones.

In July, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on the crackdown on the media and freedom of expression in Kyrgyzstan, expressing deep concern about the law, which was also criticised by civil society in the country and abroad (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

LITHUANIA

In January, the European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) in [Macatė v. Lithuania](#) that restricting and labelling a book of fairy tales as harmful to children for including LGBTIQ+ characters is a violation of Art. 10 (freedom of expression) (see more [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). To implement the judgement, the Ministry of Justice [prepared](#) the necessary amendments to the Law on the Protection of Minors from the Negative Effects of Public Information in July. With the proposed change, information about same-sex relationships and diverse families would no [longer](#) be [considered](#) harmful. Heated debates are [expected](#) on the issue. LGL started a [petition](#) in support of the legal amendments and [held](#) a protest in September.

The Lithuanian Family Movement [announced](#) plans to submit motions to municipality councils to adopt a declaration on “stopping gender propaganda and LGBTQ+ ideology”. The plans included motions in Kaunas, Šilalė, Šilutė and Pagėgiai. Some council members expressed their support (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Motions were tabled but rejected in [Prienai](#).

In November, the Parliament [rejected](#) the Ministry of Justice’s proposal to repeal the “anti-LGBTIQ propaganda” law. President Gitanas Nausėda [said](#) that a repeal would give “green light to denigrate family.”

MALTA

Nationalist MP Julie Zahra [criticised](#) a theatre performance and workshop in Żigūzajg, a cultural festival for children, about gender fluidity. Several politicians, including the Minister of Culture, condemned her statements and called them anti-trans and anti-gender sentiments. The ADPD international secretary [wrote](#) to the Commissioner for Children urging an investigation into reported intimidation and harassment of attendees by members of an ultra-conservative party. The commissioner asked the [police](#) to investigate.

MOLDOVA

Disney’s *Strange World* was [removed from](#) cinema schedules in the Transnistrian region due to alleged ‘LGBT propaganda’.

In February, Alexandr Nesterovschi, a deputy from the Communists and Socialists Bloc, [proposed](#) the inclusion of a draft law on the parliamentary plenary session’s agenda that bans LGBTI “propaganda” in schools. The parliamentary majority declined this initiative.

NORWAY

The commission reviewing the state of freedom of expression in Norway [published](#) its report. The Norwegian Patient Organisation for Gender Incongruence [criticised](#) the report for being more focused on the chilling effects of the hate speech legislation than protecting minorities from hate speech, which also was supported by other organisations.

POLAND

In April, the Częstochowa District Court [sentenced](#), in first instance, two activists to community service and a fine for

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carrying a picture of Virgin Mary with a rainbow halo and the 2021 Equality March.

General Prosecutor Ziebro [sent](#) an extraordinary complaint following the 2022 ruling of the Częstochowa District Court, which found that carrying the rainbow-haloed Mary at the 2019 Equality March was not offensive. The case is with the Supreme Court.

The trials against the creators of Atlas of Hate [continued](#) this year. The Białystok appeals court [ruled](#) in favour of the activists in April. In October, the Powiat Przysuski Court [decided](#) to discontinue the case.

PORTUGAL

The second edition of the children's book *No Meu Bairro* was [presented](#) in a bookstore in Lisbon and was [met](#) with a hostile and intimidating protest outside. The book features 12 stories of children who talk about their lives, racism, gender identity, religion, bullying and activism.

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](#)), 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.

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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.

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.

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 [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.