TURKEY

ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

Following the February 6 earthquakes, LGBTI+ people in the disaster area experienced increased levels of discrimination and barriers to accessing humanitarian aid, including food and sanitation as well as financial, psychological, and housing support. See here and here.

A report on 'The Situation of LGBTI+ People After the Earthquake' found widespread discrimination and need for support even months after the disaster.

ASYLUM

LGBTQ+ Syrian refugees faced exclusion, discrimination and harassment in the aftermath of the February earthquake, which killed thousands and left millions displaced.

In June, the Iranian LGBTI+ refugee and activist Elyas Torabibaeskendari was detained at the Istanbul Pride march and threatened with deportation. Family members and human rights organisations held a press conference urging his release, citing violations of international agreements. He was released a month later.

A report about a Portuguese man targeted as gay, arrested on the day of Istanbul Pride and detained for 20 days revealed the condition of repatriation centres in Turkey.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Throughout the year, countless politicians made hateful statements. Religious leaders also continued to spread anti-LGBTI hate. President Erdogan was again one of the most vocal speakers against LGBTI people (see here, here, here, here), and particularly during the campaign leading up to the elections in May. Banning LGBTI+ organisations and the protection of traditional family values were key elements of campaigning this year. Two parties, the New Welfare Party and HÜDA-PAR entered into parliament for the first time, both representing extremist, anti-LGBTI and anti-gender views. Civil society reports that even the opposition alliance has been hesitant to advocate for LGBTI+ rights. Ahead of the elections, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights called on Turkey to stop its unprecedented hateful rhetoric against LGBTI people.

In the commission discussing the proposed amendment to Article 41 of the Constitution from "The protection of family and children's rights" to "The protection of family, conjugal union and children's rights", officials and politicians made hateful, discriminatory speeches. Pro-government media outlets continued speaking about LGBTI+ people with hate. Especially after the general elections, the term "LGBT terror" was frequently used in the media (here, here, here, here) close to the government. Yeni Akit Newspaper, known for its anti-LGBTI+ views, frequently targeted bar associations working on LGBTI+ rights. There were news articles that defined being LGBTI+ as sick, including opinions from 'experts'.

In its country report on Turkey, the European Commission highlighted anti-LGBTIQ hate speech as a serious issue and noted its increase since the February earthquake.

Kaos GL's survey found that 89% of LGBTI respondents had been targeted by digital violence.

Hateful backlash and the spread of harmful misinformation was launched after a research article on gender incongruence in adolescents was published. Civil society stood in support of the researchers.

In September, the anti-LGBTI+ Great Family March was held in Istanbul with the slogan "LGBT Propaganda should be banned for our children, our family, and humanity". RTÜK approved the march’s ad called ‘Say No to LGBT Propaganda’, which was then publicised on national TV as a ‘public service announcement’ (PSA). Kaos GL filed a complaint against the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) for the alleged PSA, but the Prosecutor dropped the charges saying the spots were to “protect the institution of family". Ten activists, who protested against the so-called 'PSA' were detained in Izmir.

SPoD reported that applications to its LGBTI+ Helpline on SOGI-based discrimination and violence increased by 42% in the first month following the first anti-LGBT+ demonstration and by 240% compared to the same period of the previous year.

Kaos GL and other LGBTI+ associations organised a broadcast on YouTube on the day of Great Family March, with the participation of many journalists, academics, celebrities, activists, and politicians.

An academic with records of discriminatory discourse against LGBTI+ people was appointed to the High Board of Religious Affairs of the Presidency of Religious Affairs.

In September, Turkish State Railways (TCDD) filed a criminal complaint against a pro-LGBT+ advertisement from Kaos GL, which was shot in Istanbul’s commuter rail Marmaray. Kaos GL withdrew the video due to the wide targeting and death threats.
SPoD and it's LGBTI+ Rights Protocol, which is signed by the candidates during the election period, was targeted by one of the Big Family Alliance members.

In September, the so-called Grand Family Platform held a demonstration in Istanbul on the anniversary of their first anti-LGBTI+ protest and petitioned the parliament to shut down LGBTI+ associations.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Kaos GL’s annual monitoring report found that 2022 again was characterised by widespread police violence, torture and ill-treatment, and unlawful detention, particularly at demonstrations. At least 571 LGBTI+ activists were detained in one year. At the same time, the police failed to protect LGBTI+ people from hate crimes and most attacks remained without sanctions. 2022 was also a year where the government made relentless efforts to eliminate LGBTI+ people and topics from the public sphere, through bans and censorship.

A trans woman was murdered in her home in Ankara in August. A trans woman was found dead in Kocaeli in November.

Countless hate crimes were documented throughout the year. On 5 January 2023, in the early hours of the morning in the Alsancak district of Izmir, trans woman Ecem Seçkin was murdered with a hate motive.

In İzmir Alsancak, trans woman Melis Yağmur Hanzade was attacked by a group wandering the streets, calling for the observance of the Islamic faith. There is no information that the perpetrators were caught.

A group attacked a trans woman waiting at a bus stop with a fire extinguisher. Those arrested said they did it ‘as a joke’. (here)

Reactionary and anti-LGBTI+ groups tried to attack a breakfast organised by the LGBTI+ Rights Commission of the Izmir Bar Association as part of Pride Week activities. The group raised the takbir and used insulting and threatening words against the lawyers. The police did not intervene against the group (see here, here).

In June, 154 journalists and press workers published a joint statement ‘We do not want to write any more news about violence and prohibition against LGBTI+ people’.

A number of court cases, focusing on anti-LGBTI+ attacks or murder, continued to be pending or deliberately stalled this year (see here, here, here, here, here) - some for over 15 years.

BODILY INTEGRITY

In some hospitals in big cities, doctors have gradually reduced or stopped performing non-consensual surgical interventions, but civil society reports that in provincial hospitals, surgeries continue at the same pace.

Inter Solidarity, the country’s only Intersex organisation, continued to develop relationships with medical professionals and advocate within the medical community on the protection of bodily integrity. The organisation held two workshops with medical students and doctors in 2023.

Inter Solidarity was included in the Ankara Medical Chamber LGBTI+ working group.

In December 2022, Nationalist Movement Party Vice President Feti Yıldız announced that the party would “submit a bill to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey that prohibits gender transition except for medical necessity.” Throughout 2023, intersex and trans activists mobilised against the bill and the Nationalist Movement Party claimed it could not submit the bill to the parliament.

EDUCATION

In September, the Ministry of Education announced introducing a new optional course on ‘The Family in Turkish Society’ to combat “LGBT values”.

EMPLOYMENT

The Supreme Court ruled in July that the firing of trans doctor Larin Kayataş for “undermining morals” in 2021 was unlawful and that she needs to be re-hired.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The government dropped a number of planned constitutional amendments after the earthquake in February. These planned to introduce a constitutional ban on marriage equality and could have paved the way to ban LGBTI+ associations. Civil society remains concerned that the initiatives will be tabled again.

Kaos GL and the May 17 Association released the “LGBTI+’s Access to Justice” report, finding inadequate mechanisms, difficulty finding LGBTI+-friendly lawyers, and high costs.
In his victory speech in May, President Erdogan promised to protect the institution of the ‘family’, which many fear means a continued and increased crackdown on LGBTI+ rights and organisations. In October for instance, Erdogan called LGBTI+ people one of the greatest threat to ‘family’. Throughout the year, LGBTI+ picnics, concerts and film screenings were also banned and obstructed by police (see here, here, here, here).

LGBTI+ people joined Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır with rainbow flags, but were attacked.

Several Women’s Day events were held on 8 March in Ankara, İstanbul, İzmir, Bursa, Diyarbakır, Mersin, Eskişehir, Antalya, Gaziantep, Aydın, and Balıkesir. In some cities, police tried to ban and prevent the marches. 28 people including LGBTI+ activists were detained in Istanbul and released on the same night, and the police used excessive force against the participants.

The court case against 12 activists who participated in Pride at Boğaziçi University in 2021 continued this year and ended with an acquittal in January. The case against Ankara Pride participants also continued. Court proceedings against Tarlabası Community Centre, a women’s and children’s rights organisation that planned an LGBTI+ event, continued this year.

Several of the Pride marches were targeted not only by extremist religious and nationalist groups, but also by political parties. The Patriotic Party and its youth branch, Turkish Youth Union (TGB), targeted an LGBTI+ Pride Month event scheduled to take place at the Ankara Bar Association. A group of ten people gathered before a gender equality panel and insulted those attending. The police did not intervene, and the event went ahead despite the provocation.
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.

HEALTH
In August 2023, some doctors and mental health professionals from Istanbul University were targeted by Islamist media for providing gender-affirming medical care to underage trans people, claiming that this constituted child abuse. State authorities did not challenge this targeting. In response, all medical faculties offering gender affirming medical care suspended or restricted their services for a period of time.

Following the February 6 earthquakes, LGBTI+ people in the disaster area experienced problems in access to healthcare services, especially hormone replacement and antiretroviral therapies (see here).

HOUSING
LGBTI+ people continued to be unlawfully evicted from their homes. The economic crisis has increased poverty in Turkey and adversely among LGBTI+ people and LGBTI+ refugees.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
In May, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights called on Turkey to cease pressure on human rights defenders, NGOs, journalists and lawyers.

Some activists received death threats. The 17 May Association provided well-being support to 65 LGBTI+ rights defenders.

Following the earthquake in February, most LGBTI+ groups suspended their usual work and focused on relief work and addressing discrimination in the provision of aid and support, which was common. A report on 'The Situation of LGBTI+ People After the Earthquake' found widespread discrimination and need for support, even months after the disaster.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE
LGBTI+ activists including trans activist Esmeray Özadıkti ran as a candidate for the Turkish Workers’ Party (TİP).

A total of 58 candidates from CHP, TİP, and the Green Left Party signed the LGBTI+ Rights Charter prepared by SPoD, which was open for signatures by parliamentary candidates from all political parties. Eleven candidates who signed the LGBTI+ Rights Charter were elected: one MP from CHP, three from TİP, and seven from the Green Left Party.

Pop singer Gülşen was given a suspended sentence of ten months in prison for mocking religious schools and served five days in prison and 15 under house arrest. She has frequently been targeted by pro-government media for her support of LGBTI+ people and for using the rainbow flag at concerts.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT
In its country report on Turkey, the European Commission highlighted violence against LGBTI+ incarcerated people. Despite petitions, the authorities have failed to relocate a trans woman prisoner to a women’s prison.

PUBLIC OPINION
A study found that 30% of society supports legal recognition for different sexual orientations.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS
A Sexual and Reproductive Health Consultancy Centre opened in Kadıköy.