

# Freedom of Expression

## ALBANIA

In July, Albania's parliament adopted a new [National Strategy against Foreign Intervention and Disinformation](#), promoted by the ruling Socialist Party. While framed by the government as a national security measure, opposition and media-freedom voices warned it could be used to restrict critical reporting and civil society activity, including work by organisations supporting marginalised groups such as LGBTI people.

## AZERBAIJAN

In March, a [queer singer performing at a Novruz](#) celebration in a public school in Baku was framed by local media as "controversial" because of their sexual orientation, inviting public judgment and negative reactions.

Later in the year, trans singer [Samira Şah](#) became the target of a massive media campaign after performing at a cultural event attended by schoolchildren. Some outlets published footage and commentary out of context, presenting the performance as "controversial."

In July, the Court of Grave Crimes in Baku [sentenced](#) seven independent journalists linked to Abzas Media, an outlet known for investigative reporting on corruption, convicting them on smuggling and related charges. The prosecutions were linked to Azerbaijan's restrictive grant regulations, which have been used to initiate criminal cases against journalists and civil society actors.

In November, authorities [issued](#) arrest warrants and summonses against several journalists, activists, and analysts living in exile. The Prosecutor General's Office stated that the Binagadi District Court had authorised warrants in absentia under multiple provisions of the Criminal Code. The factual basis of the charges has not been publicly clarified. Those targeted are known for criticising the government and commenting on human rights issues. Independent civil society [commentary](#) consistently describes these measures as a widening and intensifying of tactics used against independent media and human rights actors.

## BELARUS

In 2025, civil society [reported](#) that the Belarusian

state continued to use the register of "extremist materials" to ban books, magazines, and online media platforms, including those operating in Europe but produce information in Russian or Belarusian that deal with topics of sexuality, sexual and reproductive rights. Following court decisions of Russia, the Belarusian state banned fiction and non-fiction books, such as "Call me by your name" by Andre Aciman, "Middlesex" by Jeffrey Eugenides, and others.

In July, Belarus [adopted](#) Law No. 86-Z amending the Law "On the Rights of the Child." The amendments classify "propaganda of homosexual relations, gender reassignment, pedophilia, and childlessness" as harmful to children's psychological health. The revised wording of Article 37 includes "discrediting the institution of the family and marital and family relations aimed at the propaganda of homosexual relations, gender reassignment, pedophilia, and childlessness." The amendments entered into force in January 2026. In July, a similar [draft law](#) was submitted by the Prosecutor General against "propaganda of homosexual relations, sex change, childlessness, and paedophilia." The proposed article criminalises the "dissemination in any form of information aimed at shaping citizens' perceptions of the attractiveness" of LGBTI identities or child-free living, while equating them with pedophilia. According to the [draft](#), any product with a mention of LGBTI themes should contain an age label of 18+, with the provision applying to books, movies, and the media at large. Penalties under the draft include fines of up to €220 for individuals, up to €1,110 for entrepreneurs, and up to €1,650 for legal entities. If the alleged information is accessible to minors, sanctions increase to short-term detention for citizens and fines up to €2,200 for companies.

In October, the lower house of the Belarusian parliament [adopted](#), at first reading, the draft law. The bill must still pass a second reading, be reviewed by the Council of the Republic, and be signed by President Alexander Lukashenko.

Civil society groups expressed [concerns](#) on the draft law, [condemning](#) it as "an open attack on human rights and personal freedoms, including freedom of expression, the right to non-discrimination, and the right to privacy."

## FRANCE

In [January](#) and again in [April](#), the rainbow-coloured staircase at the University of Rennes 2 was vandalised. The staircase, inaugurated in 2019 as a symbol of tolerance, was painted over in blue, white, and red and defaced with a homophobic insult. In May, a similar episode [targeted](#) the rainbow-colored stairs leading to Avenue de Verdun, in the 10th arrondissement of Paris, with Mayor Alexandra Cordebard from the Socialist Party denouncing the act as a "homophobic act".

In January, a 22-year-old man was [arrested](#) in Pau for assaulting a passerby wearing a rainbow pin. The aggressor initially questioned the victim about the meaning of the badge and, believing it signalled support for an anti-fascist cause, struck them multiple times.

In April, balloons filled with white paint were [thrown](#) against the windows of the LGBTI Iskis center in Rennes, and an insulting tag was painted on one of the walls.

In August, a Pride banner displayed on the façade of the Hôtel de Région in Rennes was deliberately [vandalised](#). Authorities strongly condemned the act, which comes amid a surge in attacks targeting locations and symbols associated with the LGBTI community in the Breton capital.

## GEORGIA

Throughout 2025, civil society actors reported a [continued](#) deterioration of the human rights environment amid broader democratic backsliding. The Women's Initiatives Supporting Group (WISG) noted that anti-Western narratives and institutionalised LGBTI-phobic rhetoric have intensified pressure on civil society organisations and independent media. According to these reports, legal and administrative measures have increasingly been used to restrict access to funding, stigmatise organisations, and expand compliance and enforcement risks for human rights defenders.

In April, the Georgian Parliament [received](#) a legislative proposal aimed at restricting LGBTI symbolism. The initiative [came](#) from the international association "Protect Your Homeland," which called

for urgent adoption of a law banning LGBTI marches in Georgia and prohibiting the display of rainbow clothing in public gathering spaces. According to the Parliament's Bureau, the Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee was assigned to study the proposal and report back to the Bureau.

## HUNGARY

In January, Hungary's Supreme Court [rejected](#) a government office's request for review in a case against the Lira bookstore in Kecskemét, which had sold the book 'Evening Tales for Rebel Girls'. Under the Orbán government's [2021 "child protection" law](#) minors' access to content on sexuality and gender diversity is restricted, and the implementing legislation prescribes (Packaging Decree) that books depicting LGBTI characters must be sealed in foil and cannot be sold in proximity to schools or religious institutions. Lower courts had already ruled that the book did not intentionally promote deviation from birth-assigned gender identity but the government office appealed, seeking to annul those judgments. The Supreme Court dismissed the appeal, stating that disagreement with a final judgment did not in itself justify legal remedy, and that no legal issue of principle had been demonstrated. In September, a Budapest court requested a preliminary ruling on the restrictions introduced by the Packaging Decree (C-638/25).

In June, European Union Advocate General Tamara Čapeta [issued](#) an advisory opinion in case C-769/22 Commission v Hungary, declaring that Hungary had crossed several "red lines" of EU fundamental values, including equality, human dignity, and respect for fundamental rights, in its treatment of LGBTI people. The opinion addressed the European Commission's challenge to Hungary's 2021 "child protection" law, which, while framed as a measure to protect minors and crack down on paedophile crimes, prohibits access to LGBTI content for those under 18. Čapeta considered the Commission's appeal to be "well-founded on all grounds," finding that the law interferes with the prohibition of discrimination based on sex and sexual orientation, the right to private and family life, freedom of expression and information, and the right to human dignity under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán rejected

the Advocate General's conclusions, calling them "shameful." He [accused](#) Brussels of prioritising "the freedom to spread sexual propaganda" over the protection of children, [insisting](#) that Hungary does not forbid LGBTI people from gathering or expressing themselves, but drawing a distinction between public Pride events and what he portrayed as genuine expressions of free speech.

In late March, six opposition deputies in Hungary were hit with [sanctions](#) after staging a protest against the newly passed amendment to the Assembly Act. The lawmakers set off smoke bombs inside the chamber to denounce the amendment, which prohibits assemblies deemed to "promote homosexuality" (See more under Freedom of Assembly). As punishment, the deputies were denied access to the parliament building, effectively suspending them from parliamentary activity for 12 days.

In June, the Pázmány Péter Catholic University opened an [ethics case](#) against three psychology lecturers after they published an article ahead of Budapest Pride arguing that every relationship built on love is equal, discussing the exclusion of gay people and rainbow families ahead of Budapest Pride. The piece argued that children's wellbeing depends on a loving family environment, not the gender of their parents. The authors also criticised political measures justified as child-protection, pointing out that scientific studies consistently show no developmental differences between children raised by same-sex couples and those raised by heterosexual parents. The outcome is still pending, but if the committee concludes that a serious violation occurred, the lecturers could face dismissal. The disciplinary procedure ended with a warning issued by the University. All three lecturers [decided to leave](#) their position at the University. In June, a fourth professor at the same university was [dismissed](#) after criticising the institution for allegedly withholding a publication bonus. He claimed that the bonus had been denied because the article concerned the role of religion in shaping attitudes towards gay people. The professor subsequently initiated legal proceedings challenging his dismissal.

## IRELAND

In May, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties hosted a [discussion](#) on how to challenge attempts to

limit LGBTI people's rights to express, assemble and associate in Ireland. The discussion saw contributions from the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Graeme Reid and Irish LGBTI advocates and organisations.

## ITALY

In 2025, Italy dropped to 49th place out of 180 countries in the [Reporters Without Borders](#) press freedom index, with journalists facing intimidation, lawsuits, spyware, threats, and gag laws, while RAI (the Italian national broadcaster) remained under political occupation.

## KAZAKHSTAN

In January, Yedil Zhanbyrshin, a member of parliament from the ruling Amanat party, publicly [praised](#) the policies of US President Donald Trump and cited recent rhetoric from the United States on LGBTI issues to argue in favour of introducing restrictions on what he described as "LGBTI propaganda." At the same time, the government promoted public petitions as part of its stated effort to reflect public opinion. One of the first petitions to exceed the 50,000-signature threshold required to trigger official consideration was submitted by the Union of Parents of Kazakhstan and called for a ban on both overt and covert expressions related to LGBTI issues.

In late July, Majilis deputy Edil Zhanbyrshin proposed introducing [criminal liability](#) for individuals who engage in LGBTI propaganda, whether openly or indirectly. His proposal came during a parliamentary session otherwise focused on labour legislation and Kazakhstan's obligations under International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions. Zhanbyrshin's intervention shifted the discussion toward restricting expressions of LGBTI identity, calling for punitive measures at the criminal law level.

## KYRGYZSTAN

In March, Kyrgyzstan's national parliament published a [draft bill](#) proposing criminal sanctions for spreading information about LGBTI issues. The bill, though released for public discussion, had not yet been officially registered for parliamentary consideration. The draft seeks to amend the Criminal Code, the Code

of Administrative Responsibility, the Law on Peaceful Assembly, and the Law on Mass Media, introducing criminal and administrative penalties for actions or speech that create a positive attitude toward non-traditional sexual orientation. Under the proposed amendments, anyone found guilty of creating a positive attitude toward non-traditional sexual relations through media or telecommunications could face up to six months imprisonment and a fine between 2,000 and 5,000 som (€20-52). If such actions involved minors or repeat offenses, the penalties would rise to one year in prison and fines between 3,000 and 6,000 som (€31-62).

## LITHUANIA

In July, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe closed its supervision of the *Macate v. Lithuania* case, which concerned restrictions on the distribution of a children's book depicting same-sex relationships. The case arose from a 2014-2015 suspension of the book's distribution under the Minors Protection Act, followed by its re-release with warning labels stating that the content could be harmful to children under 14. The European Court of Human Rights had ruled that these measures violated Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, finding that the restrictions aimed to limit children's access to depictions of same-sex relationships without legitimate justification. The Committee noted that, in December 2024, Lithuania's Constitutional Court had declared the contested legal provision unconstitutional, affirming that the Constitution's concept of family is gender-neutral. The Court held that restrictions on information about diverse family models impede children's development as mature and well-rounded personalities and contradict the state's duty to ensure their harmonious growth in a spirit of equality, pluralism, and tolerance.

## MOLDOVA

Throughout the year, political actors advanced initiatives and rhetoric aimed at restricting LGBTI expression in public space. In May, the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova announced its intention to pursue legislation banning LGBTI marches and introducing criminal liability for so-called "LGBTI propaganda" directed at minors. Party

chair Igor Dodon framed the initiative as a defence of Orthodox values and urged municipal authorities to deny authorisation for LGBTI marches.

Following this, Chisinau Mayor Ion Ceban publicly opposed LGBTI marches and what he described as propaganda in the capital. He signed an order restricting the promotion of LGBTI topics in state schools and at public events, and announced the preparation of a draft municipal decision to regulate public meetings on so-called sensitive topics, including sexual orientation and gender identity. Civil society organisations and legal experts criticised the measures as discriminatory and legally unenforceable. Genderdoc-M announced its intention to file a complaint with the Equality Council, while the People's Advocate condemned the measures as an unjustified interference with freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Activist Vasile Micleuşanu filed a police complaint invoking criminal law provisions on violations of equal rights. Police confirmed that they were reviewing the complaint (see also under Freedom of Assembly and Education).

In April, the authorities in Moldova's Transnistrian region advanced a draft law aimed at banning the so-called propaganda of non-traditional values among both adults and children. The proposal, approved in first reading by the region's unrecognised parliament, sought to amend seven existing laws to prohibit the dissemination of content related to non-traditional sexual relations, gender reassignment, and the choice not to have children, and to introduce administrative penalties, including fines and the suspension of operations for legal entities.

In July, the Supreme Council adopted the law in final reading. It was subsequently signed by the region's self-declared President and entered into force following official publication.

## NETHERLANDS

In May, the Dutch public broadcaster AVROTROS announced that it would formally object to a new rule introduced by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) prohibiting all flags other than national ones during official segments of the Eurovision Song

Contest. According to the updated EBU policy for the 2025 contest, only national flags are permitted in official contest areas, including the stage and the Green Room, which excludes flags such as the rainbow flag, the Palestinian flag, and the EU flag.

## POLAND

In February, the ECtHR ruled against Poland in the P. v. Poland case, finding that the dismissal of a secondary school teacher for maintaining a blog aimed at adult gay men violated Article 10 of the ECHR, which guarantees freedom of expression. The teacher had written an illustrated diary under a pseudonym that contained sexual content, which the authorities deemed offensive to Polish social mores and a potential threat to the moral education of students. In March, Grzegorz Braun, a Polish MEP for Lesser Poland and Świętokrzyskie and, vandalised an LGBTI exhibition in Opole's main square by spray-painting anti-LGBTI slogans. Witnesses reported that Braun arrived with black paint and wrote "stop pervert propaganda" across panels documenting local LGBTI activities. Following the incident, speaker Szymon Hołownia said there was "no place for hooligans in the Sejm (the lower house of parliament)," and announced that Braun had been escorted out by security and banned from the building.

In April, Professor Magdalena Pecul-Kudelska, an activist affiliated with the Citizens of Poland movement, was set to appear before a Warsaw court following a police intervention in 2020, when Pecul-Kudelska placed a rainbow flag bearing the inscription "Solidarity with the Persecuted" on the pedestal of the Sursum Corda statue of Christ, located in front of the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Warsaw.

In July the Regional Court in Bolesławiec delivered a first instance judgement acquitting journalists Grażyna Hanaf and Krzysztof Gwizdała from istotne.pl media of defamation charges. The journalists were accused by former local priest Andrzej Jarosiewicz and celebrity Adrian Drenkowski of defamation due to the fact that they published a cycle of articles focusing on their same-sex relationship. The verdict of the court of first instance is not final.

In October, the Ministry of Justice presented a draft bill to implement Directive (EU) 2024/1069 on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), aimed at protecting individuals engaged in public debate from abusive or intimidatory litigation. The Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH) submitted comments on the proposal, expressing concern that requirements such as high deposits and early-stage fines could deter activists and smaller organisations from pursuing claims. KPH also argued that certain provisions should be incorporated into the Civil Code or Code of Civil Procedure to enhance clarity and warned that some measures risked placing disproportionate burdens on plaintiffs.

## RUSSIA

In February, in Kuzbass, a prisoner had his sentence extended after being accused of "involving other convicts in the LGBT movement," marking the first known conviction under Russia's ban on the "international LGBT movement." The Yaysky District Court of the Kemerovo region found the man, already serving an 18-year sentence for multiple counts of sexual violence against a child under 14, guilty of engaging in "LGBT activities" and recruiting others into an "extremist organisation" while in detention.

In February, the ECtHR issued its judgement in Klimova and Others v. Russia, unanimously ruling that Russia had violated Article 10 (freedom of expression) in six joint applications and Article 8 (right to respect for private life) in one. The case concerned the prosecution and censorship of LGBTI-supportive online platforms under Russia's laws banning the "promotion of homosexuality among minors." The ECtHR found that the Russian authorities' measures

– including fines, criminal charges, and content bans – were motivated purely by sexual orientation considerations. The Court concluded that these actions lacked a clear legal basis and failed to satisfy the criteria of being "prescribed by law" or "necessary in a democratic society,"

In April, the Russian Justice Ministry for the first time designated an individual as part of the so-called "international LGBT movement," declared extremist

in 2023, by naming journalist Vadim Vaganov as a member. Vaganov, who is already challenging his inclusion on Russia's "foreign agents" register, learned of the designation during a court hearing.

Since the beginning of the year, Russian police carried out [raids](#) on bookstores using a list of 48 prohibited titles, ordering staff to remove the books and launching administrative cases that resulted in fines. In May, the situation escalated, with Russian security forces [detaining](#) at least ten people in Moscow in connection with a criminal investigation into the publication of LGBTI-themed books, under charges of "involvement in the activities of an extremist organisation," "participation in its activities," and "organizing its work using official position". On May 15, three individuals were formally charged. If convicted, they could face prison terms of up to 12 years.

In July, Russian lawmakers approved a [bill](#) that penalises internet users for deliberately seeking out information considered "extremist." The bill introduced fines of up to \$64 (approximately €59) for first-time offenders who "search for and access extremist materials" online. In September, the law officially [entered into force](#) in the Russian Federation. Concretely, the law introduces administrative penalties for individuals who use search engines to access or seek out "extremist" material. Since 2024, LGBTI activism and related content have been formally classified as "extremist" under Russian law, placing them squarely within the scope of these provisions. Independent experts and human rights defenders underline that this framework represents a substantive escalation in repression: liability now extends beyond the creation or dissemination of content to the mere act of searching for information.

In June, a Russian court imposed a [fine](#) of six million roubles (approximately €60,000) on US tech company Apple for allegedly violating the country's strict legislation against so-called "LGBT propaganda." As part of the package of [reforms](#) adopted in July on Russia's anti-extremism framework (see also under Freedom of Association), changes were also introduced to the Administrative Code, updating the rules on how media must mark content deemed

extremist. At the same time, the Duma's Committee on State Building and Legislation advanced a draft law introducing liability for the search and access of extremist materials online. The proposed Article 13.53 of the Administrative Code would penalise the intentional search for content included in the federal list of extremist materials or otherwise restricted under the 2002 law on countering extremism. Even the use of VPNs or other tools to access blocked resources could trigger sanctions, with fines ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 rubles.

In July, a Moscow magistrate's court [fined](#) Alexander Dunaevsky, General Director of the online streaming service Kinopoisk, 250,000 rubles (approximately €2,500) for allegedly allowing "LGBT propaganda" through the platform. The case was initiated by the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor), which claimed that the online cinema made available a film presenting same-sex relationships in a positive light. The expert report concluded that such representation amounted to propaganda, arguing that the film risked shifting public attitudes "from negative to positive" toward same-sex relationships.

In August, Moscow's Tagansky District Court [fined](#) the online comic library Mangalib a total of 14 million roubles (approximately €140,000) for hosting seven manga titles found to violate Russia's law against so-called "LGBTI propaganda." Judge Alexandra Anokhina imposed separate fines of 2 million roubles (approximately €20,000) for each title. The court upheld a state expert assessment claiming that at least one of the comics constituted a "cultural threat to national security." According to the [prosecution](#), the seven publications contained elements described as "destructive ideology," including same-sex romantic relationships and themes of gender transition.

In early September, a court in Tatarstan [fined](#) twin brothers 100,000 rubles (approximately €1,000) each for posts on their joint lifestyle blog. The brothers were found guilty under Part 3 of Article 6.21 of the Administrative Code for "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" online. The case concerned Instagram posts, which authorities

claimed promoted LGBTI content, though the specific content cited by the court was not detailed. The blog covers travel, daily life in Russia, training, and recipes. Authorities from the Center for Counteracting Extremism in Tatarstan had flagged the blog in August and issued the initial administrative protocol. During the trial, the brothers partially admitted wrongdoing but stated they did not intend to promote non-traditional sexual relations. The court rejected this argument, concluding it was an attempt to avoid punishment.

In September, a historical reenactment centre in Kaliningrad known as Kaup, which presents itself as a "Viking village," was fined 800,000 rubles (approximately €8,000) under Russia's law banning so-called "LGBTI propaganda." According to Mediazona, the case was linked to an event titled From Dusk Till Dawn, organised by a local businessman who had rented the venue. During the event, a humorous photo booth featuring the letters "BDSM" was installed, which authorities cited as one of the grounds for the fine. Police also opened a case over a photograph allegedly depicting two women kissing on the premises and for the alleged presence of sex toys at the venue, for which the centre was fined 1 million rubles (approximately €10,000).

In December, the Cherkess City Court (KCR) sentenced a local resident for participating in activities associated with what the authorities described as an "extremist" LGBTI group. The charges related to comments he posted in a Telegram chat created for male dating. According to the KCR courts' joint press service, he was considered "an adherent of the international public movement 'LGBTI'."

The court statement indicated that the man's posts "have psychological signs of propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations – propaganda of ideas that do not correspond to the spiritual and moral values of Russian society; ideas of permissiveness and immorality promoted by the LGBT community." Despite the administrative nature of "propaganda" offences, the criminal case resulted in a non-conditional sentence.

In December, the Basmaniy District Court of

Moscow registered an administrative protocol for alleged "LGBT propaganda" under Article 6.21 of the Russian Administrative Code against the feminist publishing house No Kidding Press. The grounds for the protocol have not been disclosed.

In December, St. Petersburg courts confirmed the conviction of activist and human rights defender Igor Kochetkov under Article 6.21 of the Administrative Code for "LGBT propaganda." The ruling imposed a fine of 100,000 rubles (approximately €1,000).

## SERBIA

In November, the European Commission 2025 Report on Serbia flagged back-sliding in freedom of expression. While formal legal guarantees exist, the Commission highlighted that media remain subject to strong political and economic influence, undermining newsroom independence and pluralism. Journalists and media outlets face an environment where self-censorship and external interference prevail.

## SPAIN

In March, the Court of Instruction No. 4 of Gijón opened preliminary proceedings against two members of the feminist collective AMA Asturias, over their role in organising the "Santina Queer" procession, which featured a doll of the Virgin of Covadonga with a trans symbol as a halo and carried on a platform draped in the rainbow flag. The case followed a complaint by the Spanish Foundation of Christian Lawyers, which alleged that the act constituted an offence of discrimination. In April, Judge Ana López Pandiella rejected the appeal presented by the Prosecutor's Office to close the case and with it, decided to go ahead with the proceedings.

In June, the High Court of Justice of Madrid (TSJM) annulled a 2022 ruling that had forced the temporary removal of LGBTI flags from the municipal groups' building on Calle Mayor, following a lawsuit by the Vox party. The TSJM has now overturned that decision, rejecting Vox's appeal as it was filed after the legal deadline.

In July, the Supreme Court upheld the legality of displaying the LGBTI flag on the balcony of Valladolid City Council on June 28, 2020, during the tenure of socialist mayor Óscar Puente. The ruling definitively

rejects the appeal filed by the Christian Lawyers Association, which had already been dismissed by both the Contentious-Administrative Court No. 3 of Valladolid and the High Court of Justice of Castilla y León.

## TURKEY

In February, journalist Yıldız Tar, Editor-in-Chief of the LGBTI news portal KaosGL.org, was arrested and charged with "membership in a terrorist organisation" as part of a wider crackdown in which 52 people, including journalists, opposition MPs, artists, and activists, were taken into custody. After being held in pre-trial detention, Tar was released in May under judicial control, including an international travel ban. The case was transferred from Istanbul to Ankara following a ruling of lack of jurisdiction. At the first hearing, held on 13 October before the Ankara High Criminal Court, the court decided to maintain the judicial control measures and adjourned the proceedings. The trial is ongoing, with the next hearing scheduled for February 2026.

In February, LGBTI activist İris Mozalar was acquitted of charges of "publicly inciting hatred and hostility" over social media posts condemning racist attacks against Syrians in Kayseri. Mozalar had been detained in July 2024 for four posts and briefly arrested, before being released two days later. During the third hearing at the 61st Criminal Court of First Instance in Istanbul, the judge ruled that the posts were protected under freedom of expression.

In March, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) and the Istanbul Family Foundation signed a "Cooperation Protocol on the Protection and Strengthening of the Family." According to RTÜK, the agreement aims to align digital and television content with so-called family values, protect children from "harmful" material, and promote national and spiritual values through the media. Under the protocol, initiatives include the creation of a "Family Broadcasting Hour," as well as short film, animation, and documentary competitions designed to promote family unity and encourage the production of content that reinforces "positive family values." In light of the protocol, RTÜK Vice Chair Feyzullah Tecirli declared 2025 the "Year of the Fight Against

LGBT," while Vice Chair Abdülkerim Gün stated, "We will never allow LGBT content."

In April, Turkey's government coalition partner HÜDAPAR introduced the "Bill on Amendments to the Turkish Penal Code and Certain Other Laws" containing an explicit ban on LGBT propaganda. The proposal would impose severe prison sentences, while banning any form of LGBTI-related content across virtually all media, communications channels and the work of civil society organisations, regardless of their field of activity. The bill would also criminalise trans people who fail to disclose their sex assigned at birth before marriage, classifying such unions as "fraudulent marriages" punishable with imprisonment. In June, the Free Cause Party's (HÜDA-PAR) Chairman met with the leader of the New Welfare Party (Yeniden Refah) to express joint support for the bill.

In June, the Istanbul 12th Criminal Judgeship of Peace ordered an access ban on the online newspaper KaosGL.org, along with its newly created X account and its Facebook and Instagram pages. This came shortly after the platform's original X account had already been blocked by a separate court order.

In June, pro-government media reported that the Ministry of Culture canceled concerts by several prominent artists because of their outspoken defense of LGBTI rights.

In September, the RTÜK issued fines against several LGBTI-themed films available on major digital platforms. RTÜK justified the penalties by claiming that the films violated Article 8 of Law No. 6112, specifically the clauses prohibiting content deemed "contrary to national and spiritual values, general morality, and the protection of the family," as well as provisions against "obscenity."

In late November, trans activist Janset Kalan was sentenced to five months in prison and fined 400 TL on charges of "obscenity" for a social media post depicting her legs and cleavage, shared on an account that did not belong to her. The Ankara 48th Criminal Court of First Instance ruled on the case, with the official announcement of the sentence postponed. The indictment specifically referenced

the visibility of her legs and cleavage as the basis for the obscenity charge.

## UKRAINE

In March, commanders of the A4030 military unit pressured openly gay serviceman Volodymyr Veselovsky and the news agency Ukrinform to remove an interview he had given. According to the association Ukrainian LGBT+ Military and Veterans for Equal Rights, the demand was explicitly linked to Veselovsky's sexual orientation. The incident drew a swift reaction from the Ministry of Defense, with the Gender adviser and the Department for the Protection of Military Rights expressing support for Veselovsky.

In June, Russian occupation authorities in Sevastopol fined a 19-year-old college student a total of 99,000 rubles (approximately €990) on charges of "discrediting" the Russian army and "promoting non-traditional sexual relations." According to occupation police, the young man held "pro-Ukrainian beliefs," criticized Russia's war in Ukraine, and openly identified as gay in Telegram chats.

## UNITED KINGDOM

In February, the High Court heard arguments in the case involving the British pop-rock band The 1975, after Malaysian authorities shut down the Good Vibes Festival in July 2023 when frontman Matty Healy kissed bassist Ross MacDonald on stage in protest of the country's anti-LGBTI laws. Festival organisers, Future Sound Asia (FSA), allege the band breached its contract and that members owed a duty of care. However, the band's lawyer argued that Healy and his bandmates should not be personally liable for the authorities' decision to cancel the festival and blacklist the group from performing in Malaysia.

In March, the Office for Students (OfS) fined the University of Sussex a record £585,000 (approximately €685,000) following a three-and-a-half-year investigation into its handling of the case of philosophy professor Kathleen Stock. Stock resigned in 2021 after sustained protests by students and staff in response to views she had expressed on gender identity and related policy debates. The OfS concluded that the university's trans and non-binary

equality policy, which required teaching materials to "positively represent trans people" and prohibited "transphobic propaganda," had created a chilling effect on lawful speech and academic freedom. The University of Sussex rejected the ruling as disproportionate and politically motivated and, by the end of 2025, had initiated judicial review proceedings challenging the fine. The case remained pending at year's end.

In late May, the Labour Party's National Executive Committee (NEC) prepared to cancel the party's national women's conference rather than uphold its policy permitting trans women to participate. According to LabourList, the NEC was also considering preventing trans women from standing on all-women shortlists, citing concerns about potential legal challenges from groups opposing the inclusion of trans women in women-only political spaces.

## UZBEKISTAN

In 2025, an independent journalist who had published an article critical of a controversial investment project was summoned for questioning by the State Security Service (SSS). During the meeting, officers shifted the discussion to his private life, presenting printed copies of his private correspondence with other men, which they used to imply same-sex relations. They then threatened to prosecute him under Article 120 of the Criminal Code – criminalising same-sex conduct – unless he ceased publishing critical reports.

In June, ahead of the EU-Uzbekistan Human Rights Dialogue, the International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) and the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia (AHRCA) released a joint briefing paper drawing attention to severe restrictions on civic freedoms in Uzbekistan. The document underscores that human rights defenders, independent journalists, bloggers, and other critical voices remain at constant risk of imprisonment and reprisals. Authorities have intensified suppression of media freedom, including by shutting down independent information platforms and broadening the list of banned materials.