

# Highlights and trends

The developments recorded in 2025 suggest not a series of disconnected regressions but the consolidation of legal and administrative approaches that have been evolving across Europe and Central Asia over the past decade's reporting. Across different political systems, similar instruments recur: criminal law framed around "propaganda" or extremism; foreign funding controls and misuse of administrative powers that lead to closing of organisations; erasure of trans, intersex and non-binary people from public life through constitutional amendments defining sex in strictly biological terms; and assembly restrictions justified through child protection or public order arguments. Taken together, these measures restrict who can organise, speak, assemble, or be legally recognised in public life, reshaping the conditions for civic participation. At the same time, developments across the region remain uneven, with several jurisdictions adopting legislative or judicial measures that reinforce protections or reverse earlier discriminatory policies.

## CIVIC SPACE: LEGISLATIVE BANS AND REGULATORY CONTROL

In 2025, Hungary adopted legislative amendments banning Pride and other LGBTI-themed assemblies, introducing fines for organisers and participants and authorising police to use facial recognition technology to identify those attending prohibited events. This marked the first time a Member State of the European Union used primary legislation to prohibit LGBTI public assemblies, with organisers facing criminal proceedings in connection with such events.

In Turkey, Pride marches and Pride Week activities were again banned by governorates in several cities. University Pride events were prevented from proceeding, and participants were detained when attempting to assemble. In addition, organisers faced indictments and ongoing criminal proceedings linked to Pride gatherings.

In Russia, enforcement under the 2023 Supreme Court designation of the so-called "international LGBT movement" as extremist continued to provide the legal basis for raids on venues, administrative

penalties and the blocking of websites. Authorities blocked access to organisations including Rainbow Railroad, describing their activities as extremist.

Regulatory pressure on civil society intensified also elsewhere. In Georgia, following the anti-LGBTI legislation introduced in 2024, further restrictions were adopted through a Foreign Agents Registration Act requiring organisations receiving foreign funding to register as foreign agents, alongside amendments to the Law on Grants introducing prior government approval for foreign grants and fines of up to twice the grant amount for non-compliance. In Serbia, a draft Law on the Special Registry of Agents of Foreign Influence proposed mandatory registration for non-profit organisations and media outlets receiving more than 50 percent of their funding from abroad.

These measures rely less on immediate formal dissolution and more on sustained administrative pressure labelled as "oversight", financial constraint and reputational stigmatisation, creating conditions in which organisations face mounting compliance burdens, restricted access to funding and increasing operational costs that can ultimately render their work unsustainable.

## CRIMINAL LAW AND "PROPAGANDA" FRAMEWORKS

Criminal and quasi-criminal provisions framed around the protection of children or national values continued to expand.

In Belarus, Law No. 86-Z of 12 July 2025 amended the Law on the Rights of the Child to classify "propaganda of homosexual relations and gender reassignment" as harmful to children's psychological health, entering into force in January 2026. In parallel, draft amendments submitted by the Prosecutor General proposed criminalising the dissemination of information portraying LGBTI identities or child-free living as "attractive."

In Kyrgyzstan, a draft bill published in March proposed amendments to the Criminal Code introducing criminal and administrative penalties, including possible imprisonment of up to six months,

for actions or speech creating a "positive attitude" towards so-called non-traditional sexual orientation, with harsher implications where minors are involved.

In Russia, administrative fines under "propaganda" legislation continued to be used to populate official records, with the Interior Ministry reportedly preparing an electronic database drawing on such violations. Raids on venues were publicly justified through reference to the "extremist" designation.

These developments demonstrate how criminal law, administrative sanctions and digital monitoring mechanisms interact.

## CRIMINALISATION OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS

The criminalisation of LGBTI individuals, as well as more specifically activists, is gaining alarming momentum across the region. Despite differing political systems, governments are deploying strikingly similar legal tools and narratives to suppress visibility, activism, and basic rights.

The Turkish Court issued criminal proceedings against 11 activists in the Young LGBTI+ Association, under the Associations Law. In Turkey also, journalist Yıldız Tar, Editor-in-Chief of the LGBTI news portal KaosGL.org, was arrested and charged with "membership in a terrorist organisation". Turkish LGBTI Rights Defender and youth delegate to the Council of Europe, Enes Hocoğulları was detained and charged of "publicly disseminating misleading information," after giving a speech about erosion of democracy at the Council. In Hungary, an investigation into the Mayor of Budapest in connection with the organisation of Pride resulted in the prosecution office pressing charges and proposing that the court impose a fine through a penal order, without holding a trial. The mayor has sought a full trial to contest the charges. The organiser of Pride in the southern Hungarian city of Pécs faced similar criminal proceedings.

In Russia, following the designation of the so-called "international LGBT movement" as extremist, individuals risk criminal liability for alleged involvement in LGBTI-related activities, and organisations have been closed under extremism legislation.

In Kazakhstan, criminal and administrative measures have been used to restrict LGBTI organising and expression, contributing to legal pressure on individuals associated with advocacy.

In Moldova and Poland, political and legislative discourse has framed LGBTI identities as threats to national, moral or religious values, reinforcing an environment in which legal action against individuals and organisations is legitimised.

## EDUCATION AND YOUTH SPACES

Educational institutions increasingly function as early sites where restrictive interpretations of gender, sexuality and child protection are translated into practice.

Hungary's Child Protection Act framework continues to prohibit school content that authorities characterise as promoting gender reassignment or homosexuality, thereby restricting discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity in curricula and external educational materials.

In Belarus, the July amendments concerning "propaganda" harmful to children provide a formal basis for excluding LGBTI-related information from youth and educational contexts.

In Turkey, Hacettepe University shut down its Queer Studies Club in July, alleging misuse of public funds to promote "LGBTI propaganda" and accusing the club of opposing national and religious values. The closure illustrates how restrictions extend into higher education governance.

In the United Kingdom, a Supreme Court ruling interpreting "woman" and "sex" as referring strictly to biological sex assigned at birth has implications for how equality duties are interpreted by schools and other public bodies when developing inclusion policies for trans pupils.

Taken together, these measures demonstrate how legal reinterpretations and child protection frameworks directly shape what can be taught, discussed or organised within educational and academic institutions.

## CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE ENTRENCHMENT OF BINARY SEX DEFINITIONS

Several countries advanced or adopted measures denying appropriate legal recognition of gender identity, leading to the erasure of trans-, intersex and non-binary people from public life.

Hungary approved the 15th Amendment to its Fundamental Law in April 2025, defining sex as a biological characteristic determined at birth and linking assembly restrictions to the protection of children.

In Slovakia, constitutional amendments adopted in September 2025 recognise only two sexes and restrict legal gender recognition to exceptional cases, leading the European Commission to open an infringement procedure.

In Georgia, amendments to the Law on Gender Equality removed the term "gender" and replaced references to "gender identity" with language focused on equality between women and men.

These measures do not simply regulate procedure; they redefine core legal concepts that shape access to recognition, healthcare and public participation, blocking trans, intersex and non-binary people from recognition under the law and narrowing who is considered a full participant in civic life.

## ADMINISTRATIVE AND JUDICIAL PRESSURE ON ACTIVISTS

In addition to legislative reform, 2025 saw continued reliance on civil, administrative and criminal proceedings affecting activists and organisations.

In Turkey, the Izmir 3rd Civil Court of First Instance ordered the shutdown of the Young LGBTI+ Association's social media account following a lawsuit initiated by the Chief Public Prosecutor's Office. Criminal proceedings were simultaneously launched against 11 activists under the Associations Law. Journalists reporting on LGBTI-related matters faced investigations under disinformation legislation, even where cases were later closed.

In Poland, a regional court upheld a defamation ruling against an LGBTI activist accused of fabricating

discrimination claims linked to foreign funding narratives, reinforcing delegitimising discourses around civil society.

These cases demonstrate how legal tools, regardless of the outcome of the proceedings, can impose costs, uncertainty and reputational harm.

## DIVERGING TRAJECTORIES AND RESISTANCE

Instances of policy reversal and reinforcement of protections were also recorded in 2025.

In April, the final remaining "LGBTI-free zone" resolution in Poland was repealed, ending a period during which local government measures had symbolised institutional stigmatisation.

In Spain, the Canary Islands Parliament unanimously rejected a proposal to repeal equality and non-discrimination laws, and the Parliament of Catalonia adopted Law 13/2025 strengthening sanctions against LGBTI-phobia, including provisions addressing conversion practices and online incitement.

In Denmark, the Region of Southern Denmark initiated the drafting of a dedicated policy and action plan to improve healthcare responses to LGBTI people, following dialogue with civil society organisations.

At regional level, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted a new Recommendation on the human rights of intersex people, setting out standards on bodily integrity, legal recognition and protection from discrimination. The Recommendation stands in contrast to national measures entrenching binary sex definitions and signals continued commitment within parts of the European human rights system to safeguarding the rights of intersex people.

These examples indicate that institutional responses continue to vary and that legislative and judicial arenas remain contested spaces.