Statement: Kyrgyzstan targets LGBTI communities in a new law

News, Civil Rights and Freedom, Anti-propaganda Laws, Central Asia, Children, Freedom of Expression, Kyrgyzstan

> ILGA-Europe expresses solidarity and stands with LGBTI organisations and communities in Kyrgyzstan as the country's President signed into law a discriminatory provision banning dissemination of information about LGBTI people, rights, and identities among minors.

We firmly assert that this specific provision in the new legislation does not protect anybody; instead, it deprives LGBTI children from access to services and support that they need to thrive and puts them at risk of harassment, violence and a generally hostile environment. The damaging effects of similar Russian legislation on the lives of children, as well as on the lived realities of LGBTI people in general, are well-documented.

Information about LGBTI people and identities is listed in the new law on a par with violent or pornographic content, and the adoption and discussion of this law unfolded in parallel with smear campaigns against LGBTI organisations, activists, and communities in Kyrgyzstan. This confirms that the new law is a deliberate attempt to stigmatise LGBTI people and to fuse LGBTI people and identities with abuse of children and exposing children to harm.

Finally, just like previously in Russia, Poland and Hungary, this legislation comes along with other anti-democratic developments, such as the draft law on media and the attempts to outlaw foreign funding, and is a precursor of other attempts to limit the space of independent civil society and media. It sounds an alarm for the entire civil society in Kyrgyzstan and its partner and ally organisations and demands a united front across different parts of the country's civil society as well as international supporters, funders, and allies.

Together with our members and partners, ILGA-Europe will continue to advocate for the rights of LGBTI people in Kyrgyzstan and will be rallying support and solidarity for LGBTI organisations and their allies in the country.

Now that LGBTI organisations in Kyrgyzstan need to take their time to assess the situation and plan ahead, we encourage all supporters and allies to not rush to action but follow the lead of the LGBTI organisations in the country. It is also a moment for all of us to consider where our positions and resources could be most helpful, immediately and in the long term. Be it documenting the effects of the law on the rights and freedoms of LGBTI people and their allies, advocating for its repeal, offering security support, building solidarity across the civil society, or otherwise supporting different communities to counter the gaps and risks created by this law.

Background

On 15 August, Kyrgyzstan enacted a new law that aims to restrict freedom of expression and access to information about LGBTI people, identities, rights, and lives.

Formally, the law seeks to ban dissemination of harmful information among minors, while labelling as harmful also information that "denounces family and traditional societal values, promotes non-traditional sexual relations and

initiates disrespect towards parents or other family members." This language echoes the 'anti-propaganda' laws that are in place in Russia and Hungary.

The law comes into force on 30 August, 15 days after its publication.

The official title of the law is "On introducing amendments to several legal acts of the Kyrgyz Republic", and it amends the Code of Misdemeanors, the law "On measures to prevent harm to children's health, physical, intellectual, mental, spiritual and moral development in the Kyrgyz Republic", and the law "On Mass Media".

Dissemination of "harmful information" will lead to fines of up to 5,000 soms (around 52 euro) for individuals, and up to 25,000 soms (around 260 euro) for legal entities.

This has been the third attempt to adopt a so-called 'anti-propaganda' law in Kyrgyzstan. The first two attempts in 2014 and 2015 did not succeed in writing discrimination against LGBTI people into law.

Attempts to target LGBTI people and the civil society in general are seen by activists in the country as attempts to distract public attention from major issues in Kyrgyzstan such as increasing electricity prices, shortage of irrigational water supplies due to drought across the country, and many other socio-economic problems that the Government of Kyrgyzstan has been struggling to address.