



AZERBAIJAN

ASYLUM

The personal account of an Azerbaijani asylum seeker, living in fear and uncertainty in Germany was published in December.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In February, Aynur Sofiyeva, Deputy Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs, made homophobic remarks at an event, criticising the West for trying to impose same-sex marriage on others.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Hate crimes against the LGBT community continued to be a serious issue this year. In February, the European Court of Human Rights communicated the A v. Azerbaijan case and 24 other applications to the government, condemning the 2017 raids, where over 80 LGBTQ people were detained, many tortured and abused.

On 1 April, at least eight gay men and trans sex workers were detained by the police in Baku, signaling a new wave of arrests of LGBTQ people. Most were lured to a meeting by undercover police, who took them into custody. A few days later at least seven more were detained, some in their homes. Many were forcibly subjected to STI testing. Some were fined under Article 510 of the Code on Administrative Offenses (minor hooliganism) and others were sentenced to 10-30 days of prison under Article 535.1 (disobedience to a lawful order by police officers).

“They called us to the meeting place, then they pulled out handcuffs and took us to the police departments.” - victim of the raids to Minority Azerbaijan

On 2 April, a gay sex worker became a victim of extortion, theft, and blackmail in Baku. The perpetrator was detained.

On 28 June, five trans women were physically assaulted by a group of 15 on a beach in Mardakan. Four of the attackers have been arrested.

On 6 July, a trans person was attacked outside a club while waiting for a taxi. The attacker was drunk and aggressive, asking questions about the victim’s gender identity. The case was not reported to the police.

In September, a gay man was beaten, harassed, and expelled from his village by his family for “dishonouring” them. The man reported the violence and a rape he was victim of last year. The men who raped him took photos of the brutal act, which surfaced this year.

BODILY INTEGRITY

A surgery performed on an intersex teenager was reported on an online news site in March. The teenager had been subjected to non-consensual medical interventions as a baby. The article used stigmatising language. Local activists were unable to get in touch with the teenager.

EDUCATION

In April, Elina Hajiyeva, a 14-year-old girl attempted to kill herself by jumping out a window in her school, due to homophobic bullying. Although Elina’s mother and teachers had reported the bullying to the principal, she took no action. After the attempted suicide, the principal kept Elina in her office for an hour. Elina died in the hospital later. On 16 October, the General Prosecutor sentenced the principal to 2.5 years in prison, and forbade her to hold positions in educational institutions for three years. On 24 October, the Sabail District Court ordered the principal to be under home arrest for the rest of her sentence, two years and two months, between the hours of 23:00-07:00. Both parties are appealing the judgment.

Activists continued their advocacy against school violence, and on 13 May the Ministry of Education approved an Action Plan and launched an anti-bullying campaign in October, called Menimle Danish/“Talk to me”.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In January, Nafas LGBT Azerbaijan Alliance sent an inquiry to multiple ministries regarding the implementation of the SDGs. The State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs was the only one to respond, but did not address questions on LGBTI children, youth and LBT women.

In September, Nafas published a report documenting discrimination and violence against LGBT people between January and June, including hate crimes; bullying in school; domestic violence; extortion, blackmail, torture and ill-treatment by police; and police immunity.



Three employees of the Azerbaijani airline AZAL were fired after releasing personal information of a trans passenger on social media, including a photo of her passport. The airline apologised.

An Azerbaijani immigrant in Germany Maria M., who is married to a German woman, was told by the authorities to return to Baku and apply for a visa, so that she can continue to reside in Hamburg. Maria M. suffered lesbophobic harassment in Azerbaijan, and her marriage could place her in grave danger. Maria appealed and applied for asylum.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The police denied a permit for a feminist rally, which organisers held regardless, on 20 October. The protest against domestic violence was forcefully dispersed by the police. Several participants were injured and detained. A group wore T-shirts calling for justice for Elina Hajiyeva (see under **Education**).

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The British Embassy in Baku raised the rainbow flag on IDAHOT again this year.

LGBTIQ+ people kept gaining more visibility online this year, through interviews, social media posts and pages.

As part of the International Festival of Contemporary Art in September, a Swedish graffiti artist installed a giant mural of a trans woman in Baku. Local residents complained to the authorities who covered half of the mural a few days later.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

In-Visible, the first film festival on gender issues took place on 23 May in Baku.

On 3 October, the film "I Do Not Belong In This Body...", presenting the story of a local trans man seeking gender affirming care in Azerbaijan, was screened at DokuBaku.

'All Monsters Are Human', depicting the 2017 crackdown, was awarded the Best Short Film Award at the International Queer & Migrant Film Festival.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

At the end of October, several sex workers from the GBT community reported that they were asked by police to protest against political opposition parties in exchange of monetary remuneration (100-300USD), allegedly common practice.

PUBLIC OPINION

For the first time, a number of celebrities showed their support for the LGBTIQ+ community in social media posts during Pride month, including singer Röya, 'Eurovision Song Contest', winner Eldar and stylist Anar Aghakishiyev.

The Baku Research Institute published a positive piece on sexual orientation and gender identity, highlighting the negative impact of social prejudice.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Following the rally against domestic violence on 20 October (see under **Freedom of assembly**), the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs announced that the government would ratify the Istanbul Convention and the Lanzarote Convention. The latter was ratified a day later.