



# Turkey

## ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

A number of shops refused to serve LGBTI customers this year, with one shop in Osmaniye hanging up a sign “we are closed to LGBT”.

In December, the Advertising Council affiliated with the Ministry of Trade announced that any product with LGBT symbols must feature a +18 classification mark on e-trade websites.

## ASYLUM

In February, the government announced that it will open its borders for people wanting to cross into Greece and the EU. Over 100,000 asylum seekers headed to the border in the next few days, including many LGBTQI people. In March, some were interviewed by Kaos GL, reporting on the conditions for LGBTI people in Turkey:

*“Police and gendarmerie officers beat us. Everyone has forgotten about us. The world is only thinking about Corona now. No one thinks about us” - LGBTQI asylum seeker, to Kaos GL.*

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

A great number of hate speech incidents and campaigns took place again this year. In some instances, the government or public figures blamed LGBT people or gay men for the COVID-19 pandemic, and for spreading other illnesses. On 7 May, the EU LGBTI Intergroup called out Turkey’s political and religious leaders on spreading hate against LGBTI people and people living with HIV.

Preceding the statement, the head of Turkey’s Religious Affairs Directorate, imam Ali Erbaş, held a sermon focusing on COVID-19, saying that homosexuality “brings illness.” In March, theologian Ali Rıza Demircan said on a mainstream news channel, that “the homosexual relationships [...] should be banned in order to prevent the contagion of COVID-19. These are also banned by God”.

A number of hate campaigns were run on social media, and endorsed by leading political figures. In April, for instance, the #Netflixadamol (NetflixBeAMan) was trending in Turkey with over 70K Tweets, condemning Netflix for featuring two gay high school students in the show “Aşk 101” (“Love 101”). The chief of RTÜK (The Supreme Council of Radio and Television) threatened Netflix and said that it would not let such content be streamed (see more under **Freedom of expression**).

A homophobic social media campaign, in support of imam Erbaş,

was launched on Lesbian Visibility Day. Several leading politicians stood up in support of the imam, including President Erdoğan, his Spokesman and Chief Advisor İbrahim Kalın, Zehra Zümrüt Selçuk, the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Services, and Parliamentary Human Rights Investigation Commission Spokesman, AKP’s Van Deputy Osman Nuri Gülaç. A hate campaign on Twitter targeted LGBTI people, in support for the Imam.

LGBTI activists launched a campaign on Children’s Day on 23 April, asking fellow LGBTI people to share a childhood photo of themselves with the hashtag of #LGBTİÇocuklarVardır (#LGBTIkidsexist). Thousands joined the campaign. A counter-campaign soon emerged on Twitter.

In April, two petitions demanding that LGBTI organisations be shut down were set up on change.org. Kaos GL managed to get both removed. In May, an article from the pro-government Newspaper, *Yeni Akit* also called for LGBTI organizations to be shut down, and another one targeted funders of LGBTI organisations, including embassies, Amnesty International, Freedom House, UNHCR, and Open Society Foundations.

Sports shop Decathlon celebrated Pride Month in June, and was later targeted by pro-government newspaper, *Takvim*, calling on customers to boycott them.

On 16 June, Watan TV, an Istanbul based Muslim channel, called for LGBTI people to be killed.

On 29 June, President Erdoğan targeted the LGBTI community in a speech that was broadcast on 18 national television channels, saying “I call upon my nation to assume an attitude against all kinds of perversions cursed by God. Our national and sentimental values are under a sneaky assault. Those who support marginals against our faith and culture, share the same perversion”.

In July, hundreds of lawyers in Turkey issued a joint statement condemning the government’s hate campaign against LGBTI people.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In January, Ajda Ender, a trans woman living in Istanbul, filed a report to the police after months of being trapped in her house due to escalating violence targeting her, including a threat of having acid thrown in her face. Several other trans women were also attacked this year. A trans woman was assaulted a number of times over the summer, and her life was threatened.

A solidarity demonstration was held by activists, condemning

anti-LGBTI violence in Turkey. Several trans women committed suicide in 2020, in what is assumed a consequence of transphobia they suffered.

In June, the murderer of trans woman Gökçe Saygı was sentenced to lifetime prison. Saygı was murdered last year. The lawyer voiced hope that the impunity over transphobic murders would end.

In June, a number of leading politicians including Gökçe Gökçen, the Deputy Chair from the Republican People's Party (CHP) spoke out against the increasing number of hate crimes and hate speech incidents against LGBTI people.

In March, local NGO SPoD expressed concern about new restrictions by Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK), which would suspend Law No. 6284 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The law is to protect against domestic violence and violence against women. It is feared that the suspension would result in impunity in anti-LGBTI crimes.

## EMPLOYMENT

Turkey's largest trade union Eğitim-Sen, uniting teachers and school staff, issued a statement affirming that LGBTI+ rights are part of union rights.

## FAMILY

On 26 May, the mayor of Istanbul Ekrem İmamoğlu stated that Turkey has a responsibility to protect the freedoms of "homosexuals", but that the country is not ready for marriage equality.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

On 19 February, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović published her country report on Turkey, calling for an absolute ban on any restrictions on freedom of assembly and attacks targeting LGBTI human rights defenders and their work.

On 4 March, police used tear gas and other violent measures against participants of the women's rights march, and forcibly took LGBTI flags from those marching.

On 4 March, an Ankara court ruled in favor of Asli Yasemin, an activist who was detained during the 2017 Istanbul Pride, and ordered the authorities to pay damages. The fine is a tenth of what Yasemin requested - her lawyer will appeal the judgment.

The court case against 19 students and teachers who participated in the Middle East Technical University (METU) Pride

March in 2019, continued at an Ankara criminal court this year. The second hearing was held on 12 March, closely monitored by embassies and human rights organisations. A decision was postponed, and the next trial took place on 10 December where the decision was postponed yet again, to 30 April 2021. Activists with their lawyers are arguing that the repeat postponements infringe on their human rights, has puts them under severe pressure for almost two years. In addition, on 31 July an Ankara administrative court annulled the 2019 ban on the METU Pride march, which should have led to the acquittal of the defendants on 10 December.

On 23 March, the blanket ban on events related to LGBTI rights issues in Ankara, was overturned by the courts for the second time. The local government failed to prove why the ban was justified. It appealed the judgment in April.

In April, the court lifted the ban on Izmir Pride events, except for the march. The judgment has been criticised by civil society. On 22 December, the defendants of the İzmir Pride trial, in which 13 people, including Özgür Gür, were charged with organising an illegal assembly, were acquitted.

In December, Istanbul's 7th Administrative Court decided that the ban on Pride marches in Istanbul is illegal. The ban was revoked, and the court stated: "the ban was against the constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights, and international agreements, the decision of the governor was arbitrary and the march was peaceful protest so the state should let it happen". This is an encouraging development as regards current Pride bans and ongoing prosecutions of Pride participants in other cities.

## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

On 27 December, the parliament passed the "Law on Preventing Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction". Most provisions of the law focus on further tightening government control on civil society, imposing annual inspections, limiting activities, and making it possible for NGO board members to be removed if they face terrorism charges, which are often used in Turkey against activists, journalists, and academics. NGOs and the Council of Europe are deeply concerned.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

On 20 July, RTÜK demanding censorship rights over all of Netflix's contents featuring LGBTI characters, which civil society has harshly criticised. Following the hate campaign against "Love 101", Netflix pulled the show from its Turkish site (see under **Bias-motivated speech**).

On 29 July, the parliament passed a law tightening control over social media sites in Turkey, which had provided some sense of free expression of political views. Human rights groups have expressed serious worry over the law, given that social media sites have already been monitored, and some have been prosecuted for criticising the President.

The Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services ordered the review of the book “Declaration of the Rights of Boys and Girls by the Board of Protection of Minors”. The Board concluded that the book encouraged “homosexuality” and spread ideas about gender identity. The book was pulled from bookstores.

On 19 August, RTÜK fined TLC TV for streaming a program featuring LGBTI parents, claiming it harmed Turkish society.

## HEALTH

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed unprecedented hardships on LGBTI people amidst state-run hate campaigns waged against them, some of which scapegoated them for the spread of the virus. LGBTI people have experienced increasing difficulties in employment and healthcare since March and faced growing levels of violence at home during lockdown. LGBTI asylum seekers have been hardest hit by the pandemic and its consequences (see under **Asylum**).

On 15 August, a doctor in an Istanbul state hospital refused to treat a man, saying “I don’t cure you, faggot!”. The Turkish Medical Association and the Istanbul Medical Chamber both established that the doctor’s behaviour was discriminatory.

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Several civil society organisations’ sites were hacked this year, and some received threats, including KAOS GL and the Hrant Dink Foundation.

## PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

In March, Izmir Youth LGBTI+ Association and the Swedish Institute jointly organised the Rainbow Film Festival in Izmir.

## POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

A number of protesters were subject to police brutality, including torture and ill-treatment. For instance, LGBTI activist Temel was brutally violated by officers during a protest in August.

## PUBLIC OPINION AND ATTITUDES

Kadir Has University’s annual survey on public attitudes found that the acceptance of LGBTI people is at a record high, with almost 50% of the population supporting LGBTI equality - 9% higher than in 2019.



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