



United Kingdom

ASYLUM

On 24 September, the UK Home Office published its annual statistics on asylum claims based on sexual orientation, sharing that it granted international protection to twice as many LGBT people in 2019 than 2017. Nonetheless, cases of rejection and possible deportation made headlines again this year, in the case of a lesbian asylum seeker from Cameroon and a gay man from Guinea living with HIV. The Home Office later granted protection to the asylum seeker from Guinea.

Civil society expressed concern about the government's intention to hire private companies to conduct asylum interviews and their plans to make the asylum system stricter.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Anti-trans rhetoric continued to cause serious damage in the UK again this year. A prime example is repeated transphobic attacks by author J.K. Rowling, on Twitter and in her writing. Her statements have been harshly criticised by trans people, activists and writers. A growing number of celebrities, including from "Harry Potter" films, have spoken out in support of trans communities.

Some trans people expressed their wish to leave the UK because of the growing hate.

In March, hundreds of staff and clients of the Guardian issued a joint statement calling for an end to transphobic articles being published in the newspaper.

A school in a London suburb painted a rainbow crossing outside its building in January, and received hundreds of abusive messages afterwards. The school shared that such hateful attacks will encourage them to stand in even firmer support with their LGBTQ students.

Polo Lounge, Scotland's most well-known queer club in Glasgow, was vandalised by a homophobic graffiti in February. The investigation is ongoing.

The Scottish Government's Hate Crime and Public Order Bill was introduced on 23 April. It modernises hate crime law and strengthens protections against stirring up hatred. It has run into significant opposition, with a coalition of politicians, religious groups, writers and others objecting that free speech will be affected. The bill is expected to have its final vote around March 2021.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In October, the Home Office published its annual Hate Crime statistics, finding a continued increase in hate crime cases as compared to the previous year, with sexual orientation based hate crimes increasing the most (19%) and anti-trans hate crimes second most (16%).

Four suspects were arrested in February and one in July for the murder of Lyra McKee, a Northern Irish journalist and LGBTI activist shot dead last year.

The perpetrator in a bias-motivated murder case was sentenced to life in prison in March. The victim was a young gay man, lured on a date and stabbed to death.

In March, a man was given a suspended sentence, a fine, and community service for his lesbophobic assault against a paramedic last August.

In September, a consultation was launched by the Law Commission on proposals to update hate crime law in England and Wales.

In Northern Ireland, transphobic hate crimes had been steadily increasing over the past year, in part due to an increase in reporting, but also influenced by increasing hostility in UK-wide media towards trans identities and communities. While the Police Service in Northern Ireland can record hate crimes as transphobic, there is currently no provision in the law for prosecuting transphobic hate crimes; they must instead be pursued as homophobic incidents.

On 1 December, the review on including trans identity as a protected characteristic in the hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland was finalised, concluding that "age, sex/gender and variations in sex characteristics" should be included and affirming that "sex/gender" includes "transgender identity". Legislation will need to be passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly before any changes are made to hate crime processes.

BODILY INTEGRITY

Prime Minister Boris Johnson pledged in July to ban conversion therapies against both LGBT and trans people, after the conclusion of a study on the topic. The government has delayed a nationwide ban for years.

In September, Women and Equalities Secretary Liz Truss stated that the Government was working to end conversion therapy, and was currently conducting research on how to end conversion

therapy in the UK, and that it hopes to set out the 'next steps' shortly. There have been no updates since then.

EDUCATION

Strictly orthodox Jewish communities representing 35 schools [issued](#) a statement in February saying that teaching LGBT equality is against their religious teachings. The guidelines on mandatory inclusion of LGBT topics were adopted in 2019, and entered into force this September.

Regrettably, there have been other critiques of the evolving curriculum in the UK, some [launched](#) by [students](#) themselves.

In Northern Ireland, Relationships and Sexuality Education continues to lag significantly far behind the rest of the UK. Despite the implementation of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, which [mandated](#) the adoption of CEDAW recommendations concerning the provision of abortion services and adequate RSE programmes, schools in the region are able to design their own RSE programmes around their religious or other ethos. As a result, 70% of schools receive Relationship & Sexuality Education from an LGBT-exclusionary organisation which bases its programmes in Christian teachings around sexuality and gender, and takes a pro-abstinence approach to RSE.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In the case of [Taylor v. Jaguar Land Rover](#), for the first time an Employment Tribunal ruled that non-binary people are protected by the Equality Act 2010 from discrimination based on their gender identity.

FAMILY

Northern Ireland joined other parts of the UK in [recognising](#) same-sex marriage, with the first weddings taking place at the beginning of the year. The NI Court of Appeal ruled on 7 April that the previous ban on same-sex marriage was [discriminatory](#).

On 29 April, the Court of Appeal [passed](#) a more grim ruling, depriving a trans father of his right to be featured on his child's birth certificate as a father, because he gave birth. The father, Freddy McConnell, will now appeal to the Supreme Court.

FOREIGN POLICY

As co-chairs of the [Equal Rights Coalition](#) with Argentina, the UK was to host a global LGBT conference in May. The conference was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The first LGBTI Muslim Festival was [postponed](#) because of the pandemic.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

On 6 November 2020, the Joint Committee on Human Rights launched an inquiry into 'Freedom of Expression', and plans to answer questions on whether hate speech law needs to be updated, as a result of shifting social attitude, leading some to 'consider commonly held views hateful'; whether greater clarity is required for greater understanding and fairness of the law in relation to freedom of expression; and whether everyone in the UK has equal protection of their right to freedom of expression.

HEALTH

Local civil society organisations have [made](#) numerous materials and resources available for the community relating to the pandemic, and access to healthcare and social support.

A number of LGBTI organisations conducted research into the impact of COVID-19 on LGBTI people, including [Time for Inclusive Education](#) and [LGBT Foundation](#).

Stonewall submitted a [response](#) to the Women and Equalities Select Committees inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on groups with protected characteristics. Stonewall also conducted a public survey on the impact of COVID-19 on LGBT people. The results are yet to be published.

In April, Northern Ireland [lowered](#) its one-year blood donation deferral period to three months, for men who have sex with men. In December, it was [announced](#) that the deferral period will be abolished throughout the UK as of summer 2021.

Access to gender affirming healthcare for trans adults in Northern Ireland continued to be almost completely non-existent, with the single adult Gender Affirming Service in the region not having accepted a new patient since early 2018. Despite the commissioning of a review of these services in late 2019, little progress was made this year, and no harm reduction measures have been adopted to support those on the waiting list or those self-medicating. Community engagement with the review has been minimal, as has uptake of input from trans-led civil society.

[TransPlus](#), a pilot Gender Dysphoria Service, commissioned by NHS England, was launched in London in partnership with [56 Dean Street](#) in June. Set to run for three years, the TransPlus pilot



integrates specialist gender care for trans/non-binary people with a range of sexual health and wellbeing services and is the first clinic of its kind in England. A second pilot in Manchester, the [Indigo Gender Service](#), was announced in September, in partnership with the LGBT Foundation.

As part of its [response](#) to the 2018 consultation on Gender Recognition Act reform, the UK Government has acknowledged the need to focus on improving healthcare for trans people, and pledged to take 'meaningful action' to reduce waiting times for Gender Identity Services. It aims to see waiting lists cut by 1600 people by 2022.

On 30 November, the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) launched the online action [#TransHealthcareNow](#) in Ireland and Northern Ireland, calling on political leaders to [ensure](#) trans and non-binary people's prompt access to healthcare services.

On 1 December, England and Wales's High Court [ruled](#) that young people under 16 are unlikely to be capable of consenting to hormone blockers. The NHS now requires a court decision in each individual case, that would establish that it's in the young person's "best interest" to access treatment. Minors over 16 might need to have a similar court order to start hormones, if their doctor is unsure about their ability to consent. Civil society is extremely concerned about the judgment. The Tavistock gender identity service is appealing the ruling, which has suspended implementation for now.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

The Scottish Government [provided](#) £87,700 additional funding to support the LGBTI voluntary sector to address COVID-19. Other charity funding has also been provided for this purpose across the UK, including [£525,000](#) from Comic Relief and [£350,000](#) from the National Emergencies Trust.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Legal gender recognition (LGR) law reform processes continued in the UK and in Scotland this year, amidst continued hateful discourse against trans people. The consultation processes have heavily weighed on trans people, their basic human rights, dignity, and existence being up for national debate.

On 20 January, the Scottish government [announced](#) that it would postpone the reform process in order to achieve "maximum consensus" on the matter. A few days later, 72 LGBT+ organisations, health charities, sports groups, and others [signed](#) an open letter urging the Scottish parliament to speed up the

reform process, and ensure that trans people will have access to LGR based on self-determination. Following another round of parliamentary [debate](#) in March, instead of speedy adoption, the process was again put on hold, [allegedly](#) due to the COVID-19 crisis. In April, a group of politicians [wrote](#) an open letter to the government, asking them to not "rush" into a decision just yet. In June, more news appeared on the postponement. It is assumed that the GRA may only be picked up again following the 2021 elections, a decision that would fail trans people.

The UK government made similar attempts to halt the reform process, with many fearing that the topic had by now become so divisive that no politician wanted to move into any firm direction. 70% of the inputs received in the GRA consultation pushed for progressive change. Nonetheless, Minister for Women and Equalities, Lizz Truss announced in April that the GRA would help "save" single-sex bathrooms, and minors from "irreversible" decisions. Following Truss's statement and the June reporting of the *Sunday Times* that the GRA reform would be shelved, Gender Intelligence launched the [#Trusstime](#) campaign as a response. It was supported by 44,000 people.

On 22 September 2020, the UK government eventually published its [response](#) to the public consultation on the Gender Recognition Act, dropping a meaningful reform and proposing instead only superficial changes in England and Wales. The proposal fails to respond to the clearly expressed needs of trans people, such as self-determination, the availability of more than two gender markers, and other key issues. Trans and LGBTI organisations across the UK and spoke out against the government's misstep (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), or [here](#)).

"Moving the process online without any change to the underlying requirements will leave the majority of problems with the process still in place: it pathologises trans people by relying on a psychiatric diagnosis, it requires us to submit intrusive medical evidence about our bodies and transition choices, it excludes trans children and young people, and it excludes non-binary people. It is barely a reform at all." - Scottish Trans Alliance on [social media](#)

One positive part of the proposal was the government's support for lowering fees in LGR processes.



After the publishing of the government's response, the Women and Equalities Select Committee issued a further call for evidence into the proposals in October. This was shortly followed by a worrying consultation into toilet provision by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. On 9 December, a parliamentary evidentiary hearing took place.

While the significant media debate and de-facto culture war has had an impact on trans communities in Northern Ireland, the review itself specifically ruled out considering any changes to NI's Gender Recognition legislation, despite it being identical to that in the rest of the UK, due to powers over this legislation being devolved to the NI Assembly. As a result of the aforementioned issues with accessing healthcare and the medicalisation of the gender recognition process, trans people are unable to access the medical reports required to go through these processes without paying for private care, thus creating a class barrier to accessing LGR.

In March, the Court of Appeal ruled that the inability of Christie Elan-Cane, a non-binary activist, to have a gender-neutral passport does not violate their basic human rights. Elan-Cane has fought for LGR for almost 30 years and called the judgment "devastating".

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

In February, the Scottish Football Association announced a new action plan to combat homophobia in the sport.

PUBLIC OPINION AND ATTITUDES

Journalist Iain Dale remarked in an interview that public attitudes towards gay politicians have significantly improved over the past two decades. Dale came out in 2003, as a Tory candidate, and received a lot of homophobic harassment during his career.

Despite the rights of trans communities in Northern Ireland being neglected for many years by the legislature and statutory authorities, public opinion on trans rights in the region is generally quite high. 72% of respondents to the Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey reported that they were not prejudiced at all against trans individuals, and over half of respondents supported and were comfortable with trans people accessing gendered toilets, domestic/sexual violence refuges, and LGR, based on their identity.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Ahead of publishing the results of a nationwide study and resource 'Living in Love and Faith', the Church of England stated in January that only married straight couples should engage in sex. The statement was criticised by bishops and congregations across the UK for stigmatising same-sex couples. In March, the Church launched an LGBTI chaplaincy service to make the Church safe for all.

Abortion became legal in Northern Ireland in March, but implementation has been delayed due to a lack of willingness from the Health Minister to commission services. Despite advocacy from both trans and feminist organisations, the needs of trans men and non-binary people in accessing abortion care weren't taken into account when drafting the regulations.



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