

ALBANIA

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

Aleanca provided food packages to at least 120 community members this year, including transgender sex workers and people living with HIV.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Media and journalists have increasingly been positive towards the LGBTI community. Although the community was under continuous attack from religious groups, media, and public figures, some media provided space for debate and to question negative perceptions towards LGBTI persons.

Commissioner Against Discrimination, Robert Gajda presented his annual report to parliament in May and highlighted that his office received several anti-LGBTI hate speech reports.

In May, the National Platform ISIGURT.AL and PINK launched a national platform where hate speech incidents can be reported. The Council of Europe's report previously found that 97% of hate speech cases go unreported in Albania.

In July, Ombudsman candidate Altin Goxhaj said, "If it were me, LGBT people would not set foot in Albania's schools until the age of 18. This is Soros' agenda. They want to replace us in 20 years". A new Ombudsman has yet to be appointed.

In November, Bislim Ahmetaj, the Secretary for Human Rights in the Democratic Party, called LGBTIQ people "Soros propaganda", said that his party would always protect traditional family values, made hostile statements about rainbow families, called the children's movie 'Strange World', "poison", and "propaganda".

Evangelical pastor and leader of the Coalition for the Traditional Family, Akil Pano, organised a protest outside a cinema in Tirana, which had to cancel the screening of 'Strange World'. The Coalition also launched a poster campaign against the film.

In December, Fatmir Merkoçi, one of the founders of the Democratic Party and party candidate in the primaries for the Municipality of Tirana, said that if

elected, he would not support LGBT people or the rainbow flag on government buildings.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Vodafone, UN Women, and CSOs launched an initiative in April to enable victims of violence to report cases, providing cell phones and an app for women with disabilities, Roma women, and LBTQI+ women in five municipalities. The app BrightSky was launched last year by Vodafone and is available for download nationally.

On 17 September, seven Albanian activists were physically attacked while walking back to their hotel after participating in the EuroPride march in Belgrade. After the police refused to escort the activists back to the hotel, the group was attacked by 10 people. Two of the activists ran to the police asking for help – yet the officers did not react. Only when a traffic police officer intervened minutes later, did the riot police eventually intervene. Two of the seven victims had to be hospitalised.

EMPLOYMENT

UNDP and Aleanca organised training for 25 business representatives to encourage them to implement the UN Standards of Conduct for Businesses.

Aleanca organised a career counselling session where 25 young LGBTI community members learned how to write and improve their resumes with the assistance of an expert. Aleanca also provided four small grants for young community members as a subsidy to their small businesses.

Aleanca's study found that two-thirds of the 237 LGBTI respondents were not out at work due to fear of discrimination, less pay, or losing their job.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

After being adopted in late 2021, the National LGBTI Action Plan (2021-2027) was formally launched in September. PINK had previously called for a coordination and monitoring body to oversee the implementation and also for the establishment of a Transgender Support Fund. The implementation of the previous National LGBTI Action Plan remained



flawed, with only the Ministry of Health and Social Protection fulfilling its responsibilities and cooperating with CSOs.

Aleanca's survey on discrimination and hate crimes found that 46% of the 237 respondents had experienced discrimination and violence, and 80% of them thought this was due to their SOGI. Discrimination and violence were most common in public places (64%), online (49%), and at school/university (42%). In 66% of the cases the perpetrator was unknown, 31% were friends and 15% were family members. Just 19% reported the incident to the police and only five victims had a satisfactory response.

FAMILY

In the spring, the government backtracked on its commitment to amend the Family Code and the Adoption Law after backlash from religious leaders and some of civil society. The Ministry of Justice had launched a consultation on the proposed changes in 2021. The legal reform would have granted rights to rainbow families, including through legal recognition for cohabiting same-gender couples and allowing unmarried couples to adopt.

In May, Commissioner Against Discrimination, Robert Gajda called for legal recognition for same-gender couples, including in the form of cohabitation.

In June, the authorities refused to register two women, who are a same-sex couple, as parents of their two children. The Administrative Court of Appeal upheld the decision.

FOREIGN POLICY

In May the European Parliament adopted its report on Albania which called for proper resolution of hate crime and hate speech cases against LGBTI people, full implementation and budgeting of the LGBTI action plan, and collection of LGBTI disaggregated data, among others.

Marking a historic step, Albania opened accession negotiations with the EU in July.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

After two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, Aleanca LGBTI, Pro LGBTI, Streha, PINK and Open Mind Spectrum Albania (OMSA) were able to hold the annual Tirana Pride on 21 May. The 13th Festival of Diversity was opened on 16 May under the slogan 'We are Family', but events were held throughout the entire month. Events included lectures, the third edition of the film festival 'Queer Film Marathon Tirana', installations of the 'Being Transgender in Albania' exhibition, and other events. No incidents were recorded.

HEALTH

PrEP and PEP continue to be unavailable to LGBTI people. Viral load tests are unavailable at public hospitals and private clinics remain unaffordable for most. Lastly, civil society organisations are calling for the proper implementation of the National Strategy for People Living with HIV 2020-2025, adopted in 2019.

Aleanca provided rapid HIV testing to 1,485 people this year, reimbursed costs for health check-ups and medication for 35 community members, and offered 392 individual psychological sessions with Aleanca's therapist. In 2022 there was an increased need for mental health care as a result of living in severely oppressing and stigmatising environments.

Streha provided medical care for 58 LGBTI people this year.

HOUSING

Aleanca LGBTI has supported through rent reimbursement ten LGBTI community members.

Streha supported 30 LGBTI people with housing this year, 15 of them with rent support and 15 with accommodation.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders remained targets of hate.

Long-time LGBTI activist Xheni Karaj received the Civil Rights Defender of the Year 2022 award in April and was named one of the world's most courageous LGBTI+ human rights defenders.

INTERSECTIONALITY

In July, the Albanian Foundation for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Aleanca, and the Roma Women's Rights Centre held a training on media and social inclusion of excluded groups.

Aleanca organised a photo exhibition with portraits of Roma and LGBTI young people and the theatre performance, 'Who am I?', which shares the stories of four young people who were bullied on the basis of their race, ethnicity, SOGIESC or disability.

Aleanca and The Women Network (Awen) organised the monodrama, 'Nothing', on the impact of patriarchal oppression, which premiered in June.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

In the spring, the government backtracked on its commitment to codify legal gender recognition.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

The exhibition, 'Construction', on solidarity among vulnerable groups, opened in April in Tirana.

To mark IDAHOT, PINK held a mobile exhibition in six major cities.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

NGOs Aleanca, OMSA, PINK, PRO LGBT and Streha held training for the police across the country.

PUBLIC OPINION

Euronews Albania's Barometer found that the vast majority of people in Albania continue to be hostile towards LGBT+ people, including among younger generations.

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