

# Turkmenistan

## ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the complex and difficult social and economic situation in Turkmenistan, having a dire impact on many, including LGBT people. Many joined anti-government actions to protest food shortages, hunger, and a lack of adequate workplaces and salaries.

## ASYLUM

The number of LGBT people trying to leave Turkmenistan has grown over the past number of years, but it is unknown how many have managed to relocate. As part of a 2020 study (see under **Data collection**), LGBT people expressed a need for international support that would allow them to flee and obtain asylum in a safer country. Regrettably, many were denied visas and others were forcibly detained when caught attempting to leave.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Kasymberdy Garaev, a gay man who made headlines in 2019 after facing extortion, detention, torture and ill-treatment from the police was last heard from on 31 December, 2019. Kyrgyz Indigo's contacts reported that Garaev disappeared. He is not the first LGBT person this has happened to. Kyrgyz Indigo also learned about the unlawful detention of LGBT people by the police.

Of the five cisgender men in Kyrgyz Indigo and ILGA-Europe's study (see under **Data collection**), three had been prosecuted, blackmailed, beaten and detained by the police. In several cases, the police threatened and extorted money from them. Most interviewees cited Article 135 of the Criminal Code, criminalising same-sex relations, and a lack of legal and medical assistance, as the reason for the closedness of the LGBT community.

*"Being gay in Turkmenistan is both difficult and dangerous. I want it to at least become just difficult." - Murod, 35 (name changed)*

Unfortunately, lesbian and bisexual women did not agree to share information and the researchers could not identify any trans interviewees.

## DATA COLLECTION

In April, ILGA-Europe and Kyrgyz Indigo published a report featuring stories of nine LGB people in Turkmenistan (see under **Bias-motivated violence**). The researchers reported hardships in establishing trust in community, with many interview candidates withdrawing from the research process.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In May, civil society organisation Anti-Discrimination Centre published a comprehensive report on situation of LGBTI people in Central Asia, covering in detail the situation in Turkmenistan.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Following worldwide protests against the dictatorial regime, the government introduced a number of policies restricting human rights. Social media sites, including YouTube, Facebook, Google, Instagram, are now blocked in the country. The availability of TV channels is now controlled, with political channels being turned off. The right to file complaints with the police have also been restricted. Several activists were harassed and arrested.

## FREEDOM FROM TORTURE, CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

Article 135 of the Penal Code criminalises consensual same-sex relations between men ("lying with men"), making them punishable with up to two years of imprisonment or placement in a psychiatric institution for two-to-five years. Local informants reported that the government detained several men this year, who were assumed to be members of the LGBT community. In March, a number of public figures, including performers, fashion designers and business people, were arrested and charged with sodomy. Many bought their way out of the criminal proceedings. In May, several people from the group were sentenced to two years in prison.

## HEALTH

The 2020 study (see under **Data collection** and **Bias-motivated violence**) found that almost all interviewees chose not to use healthcare and social services for fear of discrimination and stigmatisation. They also reported a lack of awareness about HIV-related services in the country. One interviewee said that gay men in prison are held separately and many end up contracting HIV in detention.

For the entire year, the government held its position that the COVID-19 pandemic had not impacted in Turkmenistan and no cases were recorded. This denial has gravely affected those living in the country.

\*Some of the information about Turkmenistan was shared with ILGA-Europe by activists who for safety reasons need to stay anonymous.

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