



# UZBEKISTAN

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

On 16 October, the National News Agency of Uzbekistan published an article claiming that recent discussions on Article 120 of the Criminal Code are aiming to normalise homosexuality and introduce it in Uzbekistan via “social manipulation”. The author Mirkomil Sobitov stated that “homosexuality is a call to end the human race”.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

A gay man was attacked by a group of homophobic attackers in the province of Samarkand in April. One of the perpetrators had been chatting with the victim for two months on a Russian social media site, often used by LGBTI people in Central Asia for dating. When the victim arrived at the set-up date, he was forced into a car by the attackers and brought to a canal where he was undressed, beaten and video-taped naked. The victim managed to escape by jumping into the canal and risking his life. Since same-sex relations are criminalised in Uzbekistan, he did not go to the police to report the attack. He also feared he would be disrespected and mocked if the case went public.

In August, a Telegram channel called @tashgangs spread videos where LGBT people were outed, beaten, threatened with rape or tortured, for instance by being forced to sit on bottles. The perpetrators are also visible in the videos, and call on others to join them in “punishing” LGBT people. A similar channel, called @ANTI\_GAY, was blocked by Telegram previously.

On 12 September, a trans woman sex worker was brutally murdered by two clients she previously reported to the police. The police forced her to report the two men so they could blackmail and extort money from them.

In November, the news platform Kun.Uz released an audio-recording of the Tashkent mayor threatening two of their journalists:

*“I can do it in six seconds! Do you doubt it?! I can easily make you gay. [...] I’ll put you in a gay taxi and take a picture. [...] You can disappear from home without a trace and no one will look for you! Not a single living soul! They may write that you drowned somewhere. Now life is like that.” - Mayor of Tashkent, Jahongir Artykhodzhaev*

The incident took place in August when the journalists accused the deputy mayor of corruption and abuse of power. On 17 November, the Agency for Information and Mass Communications (AIMC) confirmed that the case was referred to the Justice Ministry and Prosecutor General’s Office to investigate the threats. The Prosecutor did not press charges against the mayor. Authorities using Art. 120 of the Criminal Code (see under **Equality and non-discrimination**) for threats and blackmail remain common in Uzbekistan.

## EDUCATION

A teenage boy committed suicide in Kashkadarya in October, following bullying, physical abuse, and humiliation by teachers and the deputy director.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Uzbekistan is one of the two Central Asian countries, along with Turkmenistan, which retained provisions criminalising same-sex relations from the Soviet (RSFSR) Criminal Code. Accordingly, Article 120 of the Criminal Code stipulates that “bezakalbazlyk” (sodomy) is punishable by placement in a mental health institution from one-to-three years, or up to three years of imprisonment. As a consequence of criminalisation, LGBT people are routinely subjected to arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment, persecution and surveillance. They are unable to register organisations, report cases of violence and discrimination to the police, or have access to the court system.

Article 120 is also applied against LB women, who have reported being detained, raped, and humiliated by the police. LB women are often subjected to forced marriage by their families. In August, the government adopted the law “On Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence”, but failed to define marital rape, leaving LB women in forced marriages without protection.

Since President Mirziyoyev took over as President in 2016, the country has seen unprecedented reforms. These were continued in 2019, but as before, were mostly economic and rarely related to human rights. Local activists report that human rights related reforms are mostly “cosmetic” and aim to present a positive image of the country, but fail to create meaningful and systemic change.



*“Uzbekistan has become an ‘open box’, but it is still a ‘box’” - a local LGBT activist to ILGA-Europe\**

On 1 March, the European Parliament adopted a report on the new comprehensive agreement between the EU and Uzbekistan, which had been negotiated for over a year. The report recommends Uzbekistan to decriminalise consensual same-sexual relations and foster a culture of tolerance for LGBTI people. It is hoped that as part of the ongoing reform process, the government will implement the recommendations.

Uzbekistan had expressed interest in becoming a GSP+ country, for which it has to implement 27 UN conventions. Although Uzbekistan has started to speedily ratify some, ILGA-Europe and other human rights partners remain concerned that LGBT people remain unprotected, including due to criminalisation.

On 24 July, the Uzbek bureau of Radio Free Europe received a letter in which anonymous LGBTI activists called on the government to decriminalise same-sex relations. A video appealing to the President was also published in August. Mirziyoyev has not stated his position on the issue of decriminalisation, but Uzbekistan rejected its LGBT-related UPR recommendations last year.

Following these appeals, the police launched an internal operation called “Oriyat” in August and September, detaining several LGBT people and sex workers.\* On 10 September, police raided a nightclub popular among gay men and detained at least ten people.

In September, the government responded to the List of Issues published by the UN Committee against Torture and stated it has no record of violence against LGBT people.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

On 20 August, in an interview with Radio Free Europe, an activist in exile called upon the President to decriminalise same-sex relations. Following the interview, the police called to his relatives’ houses. Local activists also reported\* that LGBT people have been increasingly persecuted since the interview.

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

The UN Committee against Torture recommended Uzbekistan to investigate all allegations on torture against LGBT people and repeal Article 120.

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