



# Uzbekistan

## ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on LGBT people in Uzbekistan in 2020, with many losing their source of income and struggling to cover food costs.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In June, a well-known Islamic scholar made hateful remarks against the US Embassy in Tashkent for posting a video on its social media about LGBT people. The scholar warned of “homosexual propaganda” and said that the spread of the “homosexual disease” must be stopped.

In August, a well-known blogger started posting anti-LGBT content on his site, urging people to “catch gays and lesbians” and beat them up.

As same-sex relations are criminalised in Uzbekistan, LGBT people continued to have no possibility to report such cases to the authorities.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In connection with COVID-19 lockdown measures and the subsequent restriction of the right to work, many LGBT people had to move back in with their families. A stark surge of the number of domestic violence cases against LGBT people was reported, all committed by family members.

In July a group of gay men were arrested in their home in Tashkent for ‘engaging in same-sex relations’ and ‘organising sex work’. The men were detained and charged.

Article 12 of the Criminal Code, criminalising same-sex relations, continued to be used by the police to threaten, intimidate, psychologically and physically torture, and detain LGBT people.

The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) published a report on the dire human rights situation, including police violence and extortion, mob violence, and discrimination in all areas of life. The report highlights with concern that the public usually sides with perpetrators of anti-LGBT violence. The report includes several quotes from LGBT people in the country, or who have sought asylum abroad.

*“Law enforcement officers blackmail the victims and extort money. Otherwise, they threaten to open a criminal case or tell the truth to the family. So, [we] don’t complain about the police if we face blackmail and extortion.”*

*“Then they blackmail, threaten to disclose their identities in public. Sometimes, they don’t stop at extortion. They beat and humiliate the young people.”*

## DATA COLLECTION

Data collection continued to be very difficult this year, as the LGBT community is criminalised and intimidated when coming forward to others.

## EDUCATION

There continued to be no effort to include content on gender equality in public education. On the contrary, the increased Islamisation of the region continued to foment a general hostility towards LGBT people.

## EMPLOYMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the community, and particularly trans sex workers, whose sudden loss of income exacerbated their social and economic vulnerability.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

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

The government continued to fail putting in place any measures to protect LGBT people from discrimination and violence this year.

## FOREIGN POLICY

Uzbekistan continued lobbying for the protection of the “traditional family” in its foreign policy work.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Uzbekistan proposed a number of restrictive laws this year. The draft law “on meetings and demonstrations” was tabled in August, and makes it mandatory that rallies are announced a month in advance, with information on the time, place, and the number of participants. The law is currently under consideration and is expected to enter into force in 2021. A number of laws relating to the COVID-19 pandemic were also adopted, giving blanket powers to the police to detain and interrogate any group of more than 10 people who gather in one place.

## **HEALTH**

The level of healthcare access decreased significantly as the COVID-19 pandemic reached the country, with many unable to see doctors. LGBT people continued to report that they hid their identity in healthcare settings, fearing for their safety.

## **HOUSING**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the housing situation of the LGBT community was very difficult this year. The lack of shelters available and sensitive to LGBT people's needs was worrying. LGBT people could not access the social assistance they would need due to violence and discrimination.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

Human rights defenders continued to work under difficult circumstances this year, facing state surveillance, intimidation, physical and psychological torture. Activists had to strengthen their skills to manage this situation and operate as safely as possible. As Article 120 of the Criminal Code continued to criminalise the community, all activities were conducted in secret.

## **SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION**

In lack of any state assistance, human rights defenders turned to external funders for support. They secured two grants, one for food and material relief for the LGBT community, and one for mental health training and to support readjustment to the new circumstances due to COVID-19.

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