

HIGHLIGHTS AND TRENDS

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD & GOODS AND SERVICES

Systemic discrimination in accessing goods and services remains a persistent issue for LGBTI people across Europe, with cases reported in Andorra, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, and Italy.

In response, civil society organisations (CSOs) have stepped in to address these gaps. Notable initiatives have been recorded in Andorra, Northern Cyprus, France, and Italy, highlighting the crucial role of grassroots efforts in challenging systemic inequalities. Positive efforts by state institutions to promote access to goods and services have also been documented in Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, and the United Kingdom.

However, in seven countries across the region, legislative proposals targeting alleged 'LGBTI propaganda' have raised serious concerns about potential restrictions of access to fundamental goods and services for LGBTI people. Such proposals could jeopardise individuals' access to information by, for example, banning websites dedicated to raising LGBTI awareness, or limit access to adequate support by curbing the capacities of civil society organisations working to protect and promote LGBTI rights.

ASYLUM

With governments across Europe limiting support and protections for asylum seekers and refugees, LGBTI asylum seekers are often left without adequate support, safe accommodation, and proper assessment of their asylum claims. Reports of such challenges have emerged from countries including Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, and the Netherlands. In Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Moldova, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, numerous cases have been documented where LGBTI asylum seekers had their appeals rejected as the assessments relied on inaccurate and unenforceable metrics that reduce sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) to quantifiable data, failing to capture their complex and personal nature.

This troubling pattern has been recorded in both Germany and Ireland, where several LGBTI asylum seekers from Ghana were denied asylum and international protection despite facing significant threats to their lives. In one such case in Ireland, a Ghanaian national who claimed persecution due to his sexual orientation had his application rejected as the tribunal questioned the credibility of his account, highlighting inconsistencies in his narrative and arguing that it lacked emotional depth, failing to reflect what they considered the 'typical' experiences of such a personal journey. Meanwhile, in the context of Russia's recent wave of harsh anti-LGBTI laws, activists and LGBTI people are fleeing the country, yet challenges with their asylum requests have been reported in Finland, Moldova, and Sweden.

However, in Italy, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Latvia, local courts stood firm against the challenges of asylum procedures for LGBTI asylum seekers. Notably, in Latvia, an administrative court overruled the position of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, granting asylum to an LGBTI applicant who had initially been denied on the basis of the alleged lack of credibility of his claims.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Hate speech targeting LGBTI people has become increasingly normalised, often fuelled by public figures and state institutions. This has led to policies and legislation that further restrict or limit the fundamental freedoms of LGBTI people (see also under Freedom of Expression; Foreign Policy; and Health). This trend has been consistently observed across the region, with only 12 countries reporting no such incidents.

In Albania and Italy, conservative coalitions are perpetuating harmful narratives, accusing the LGBTI community of undermining family values and destabilising society. Similarly, in Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Moldova, and Romania, several instances have been recorded where conservative groups have weaponized discriminatory narratives against LGBTI people during election periods.

Despite these challenges, efforts to combat hate speech have gained momentum. Civil society organisations and state bodies in Latvia, Moldova, Spain, and Romania are increasingly addressing the issue through regulatory frameworks and judicial action.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Bias-motivated violence against LGBTI people remains alarmingly on a steep increase across Europe, with incidents reported in the vast majority of examined countries.

Throughout the year, both public and private authorities in Finland, Germany, The Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal have released reports highlighting a significant increase in crimes motivated by perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression. Furthermore, in Belgium, France, and Moldova, attacks on LGBTI people are increasingly documented, particularly in urban areas where visibility is higher. An extremely worrying trend has also emerged in Belgium, Croatia, France, and Turkmenistan, where perpetrators use fake profiles on popular dating apps to lure victims into ambushes. In Turkmenistan, authorities have gone further, using these apps to entrap LGBTI people and coerce them into providing information about others within the community.

EDUCATION

LGBTI people face significant discrimination and hostility in educational settings across Europe, with challenges reported in Albania, Armenia, Denmark, France, Italy, and Spain. In seven countries across the region, 'anti-propaganda' laws have been increasingly weaponised, restricting or entirely preventing the inclusion of LGBTI issues in educational curricula and awareness-raising initiatives.

In addition, attempts to introduce legislation excluding LGBTI topics from sex education were recorded in Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and Turkey, with Turkish authorities going as far as removing references to "gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity," from their Physician's Oaths. Nonetheless, there has been progress in the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in educational programmes in Czechia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Switzerland.

EMPLOYMENT

Discrimination in employment continues to pose significant challenges for LGBTI people across Europe. This is being reported in many countries, where many LGBTI employees conceal their identities at work to avoid prejudice, with little to no recourse for addressing workplace discrimination.

Broader labor market discrimination is reported in Albania, Andorra, Georgia, Montenegro, Romania, and Russia, where systemic barriers persist. However, positive developments have emerged in countries such as Germany and Luxembourg, that have made meaningful strides in enforcing workplace protections and fostering inclusive policies. In Luxembourg, civil society organisations have played a pivotal role by developing a guide to improve understanding and communication between trans employees and their employers, helping to bridge gaps and promote equality.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Equality and anti-discrimination protections for LGBTI people vary widely across Europe. Despite these disparities, there has been notable progress in strengthening institutional commitments to LGBTI equality. Countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, and Sweden have implemented more comprehensive approaches through the development of LGBTI action plans and policies aimed at addressing legislative gaps.

However, the effectiveness of anti-discrimination laws is often hindered by gaps in enforcement and prevailing societal attitudes. These barriers leave many LGBTI people without full access to legal protections or equal opportunities, underscoring the need for stronger implementation measures to ensure genuine equality. Moreover, the introduction of legislative proposals targeting alleged 'LGBTI propaganda' in seven countries across the region has further intensified these critical challenges. Proposed measures such as imposing administrative and criminal penalties on individuals advocating for LGBTI rights, creating governmental databases to identify and classify LGBTI people, and establishing monitoring systems to scrutinise the international connections of NGOs underscore alarming threats to fundamental freedoms.

FAMILY

The legal acknowledgment of same-sex relationships and family rights remains highly inconsistent across Europe. This year, progress has been noted in some countries. In Albania, the first strategic litigation case for the legal recognition of a lesbian couple was filed in 2024, seeking marriage rights through the Civil Registry Office. In Kosovo, Prime Minister Albin Kurti announced plans to introduce legislation on same-sex partnerships as part of the country's bid to join the Council of Europe. Latvia also marked a milestone with the registration of its first same-sex couple under its new civil union law.

However, efforts to advance same-sex marriage rights have faced resistance in several countries. In Latvia and Romania, attempts to legalise same-sex marriage were blocked by political opposing forces. In more alarming developments, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey implemented legal reforms aimed at codifying LGBTI-phobic interpretations of family structures into their legislative frameworks, signaling a troubling entrenchment of discriminatory ideologies.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

While attacks on LGBTI Pride marches are increasing, the number of these marches is also growing, highlighting a stark contrast between rising hostility and a surge in LGBTI activism. Despite at least eight attacks being recorded across the region throughout the year, and counter-demonstrations taking place in countries such as Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Moldova, Serbia, and Switzerland, 2024 saw a significant rise in such events. Cities like Pula (Croatia) and Kyiv (Ukraine) hosted their first Pride marches, underscoring the continued expansion of LGBTI visibility and advocacy across the region.

Despite facing bans, attacks, mass detentions, police obstruction, and targeted opposition, Turkish activists, community members, and allies continued to demonstrate resilience by organising and participating in Pride events across the country.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND EXPRESSION

The ability of LGBTI organisations to operate freely and of LGBTI people to express their views varies significantly across Europe, reflecting differing levels of support and acceptance for LGBTI advocacy. A notable trend is the adoption of foreign agents laws modeled after Russia's law, which increasingly stigmatise and suppress LGBTI organisations. In Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, and Montenegro, proposed foreign agents laws pose a direct threat to civil society by labeling organisations that receive foreign funding as foreign-influenced, effectively targeting those advocating for LGBTI rights.

The European Union took a stance against such measures. In April 2024, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning Georgia's proposed 'foreign agent' law, warning of its dangers to civil society and LGBTI advocacy. The EU's annual Enlargement Package also raised concerns over the Georgian government's democratic backsliding and its impact on human rights defenders, including LGBTI groups. Meanwhile, the European Commission took legal action against Hungary's so-called 'Child Protection Act', arguing before the Court of Justice of the European Union that it violates EU laws by restricting LGBTI content in education and media. Eleven Member States intervened in support of the Commission's case, highlighting widespread EU opposition to the law and its broader implications for fundamental rights. Additionally, the European Commission questioned Bulgaria's 2024 law banning "LGBTQ+ propaganda" in schools and is currently assessing whether it breaches EU principles of equality and non-discrimination, with potential infringement proceedings under consideration.

Alongside these developments, restrictions on freedom of expression have intensified in several countries. In Hungary, further legislative bans have been imposed on educational materials and media content related to LGBTI identities, effectively erasing representation under the guise of child protection. Similar rhetoric has been used to justify censorship measures elsewhere, contributing to an increasingly hostile environment for LGBTI voices in public discourse.

However, positive developments have also been recorded where freedom of expression was upheld. For instance, in Poland, the Supreme Court dismissed cassation appeals in cases involving activists accused of offending religious feelings by using rainbow-halo images of the Virgin Mary, reinforcing the principle that such symbolic expressions are protected under the right to free speech.

HEALTH

Across the region, one of the most significant challenges LGBTI people face is limited access to trans-specific healthcare. Issues related to this type of care have been reported in Andorra, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Moldova, Romania, Russia, and the United Kingdom. In many of these countries, legislation that ensures access to gender-affirming care for both minors and adults is either lacking or actively being restricted.

Indeed, following the publication of the Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People (commonly, the Cass Review), attempts to introduce legislation aiming to restrict the access of minors to trans-specific healthcare has been recorded in Austria, France, Ireland, Poland, and the United Kingdom, with varying degrees of success.

However, positive developments have been noted in some countries. In Albania, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Czechia, Kyrgyzstan, and Malta, protocols are increasingly being developed to support trans and non-binary patients, marking progress in improving access to trans-specific healthcare and healthcare services for gender-diverse people. Furthermore, total or partial bans on blood donations from LGBTI people were lifted in Czechia, Estonia, and Iceland.

BODILY INTEGRITY

Bodily integrity is frequently compromised for LGBTI people due to inadequate healthcare or exposure to harmful medical practices. In countries such as Iceland and Portugal, significant progress has been made with the enactment of legislation banning conversion practices. However, reports of such practices continue to surface in countries like Albania, Armenia, Czechia, Greece, Kazakhstan, and Romania.

In addition, persistent issues related to the imposition of 'intersex genital mutilation' (IGM) have been recorded across the region. In Denmark, the Committee Against Torture (CAT) has expressed concern over the continued use of unnecessary and irreversible surgeries on intersex children, performed without their consent. Similarly, in Austria, IGM remains a concern, with more than 1,000 intersex children expected to undergo surgeries annually. In Romania, corrective surgeries on intersex children are still present, with no regulations in place to prohibit such interventions.

At the European level, efforts to combat harmful medical practices continued. The Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity, and Inclusion (CDADI) advanced work on a draft Recommendation on the rights of intersex people, addressing concerns around non-consensual medical interventions. Meanwhile, the PACE Equality and Non-discrimination Committee held hearings on banning conversion practices, reinforcing the growing European consensus that such practices violate fundamental rights. The European Commission has also continued to urge Member States to take action against harmful practices affecting LGBTI people, including conversion therapy and IGM, as part of the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy.

FOREIGN POLICY

European countries have demonstrated varying levels of commitment to incorporating LGBTI rights into their international relations, with some taking active steps to promote these rights, while others have shown resistance or reluctance.

While Spain and Germany stand out for their proactive approaches to LGBTI advocacy, by increasing funding for LGBTI-related projects and passing legislation aimed at prosecuting international crimes against LGBTI people, other actors have lagged behind.

In June, Italy refused to support a European Union letter condemning LGBTI discrimination in Hungary, despite it being backed by 37 diplomatic representatives. Additionally, the final communique of the G7 summit, hosted by Italy, diluted its commitment to LGBTI rights, highlighting the country's reluctance to take a firm stand on certain LGBTI-related issues.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS & FREEDOM FROM TORTURE, CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

Across the region, freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment continues to be a significant concern for LGBTI people, with numerous reports of abuses recorded in Armenia, Belarus, Poland, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and

Turkmenistan. For instance, in Turkmenistan, LGBTI people face serious violations at the hands of law enforcement, including torture and extortion, often aimed at forcing confessions or revealing their sexual orientation and gender identity. Similarly, in Belarus, trans activists have reported severe mistreatment, such as beatings and the use of stun guns upon arrest and during detention, with some coerced into making false confessions.

Human rights defenders advocating for LGBTI rights face some of the highest risks, including intimidation, harassment, and violence. In Georgia, the introduction of the “Transparency of Foreign Influence” law has empowered authorities to take direct action against non-compliant organisations, often employing tactics of intimidation and harassment. In Montenegro, LGBTI human rights defenders have been targeted with death threats, yet many are reluctant to report such threats due to a lack of trust in authorities’ ability to offer protection.

In Turkey, LGBTI rights activists continue to endure police repression, including arrests and the disruption of Pride events. The harassment is further exacerbated by legal restrictions on freedom of assembly, which severely limit their ability to organise and advocate for LGBTI rights. Overall, human rights defenders have been under attack in several countries, including Albania, Andorra, Belarus, BiH, Romania, Russia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, reflecting a widespread pattern of repression against those working to advance LGBTI rights.

The combination of increasing public scrutiny and impunity for attacks has placed LGBTI human rights defenders at greater risk. A lack of accountability encourages further harassment and violence, forcing many into increasingly unsafe conditions.

HOUSING

The housing access for LGBTI people, especially trans people, continues to present significant challenges across Europe. Rising rents and the broader housing crisis have made it increasingly difficult for young LGBTI people, particularly those rejected by their families due to their gender identity, to secure stable housing.

In Albania, BiH, Italy, and Malta, while progress has been made through the adoption of legislation recognising sexual orientation and gender identity as eligibility criteria for social housing, and the creation of shelters and welcome centers, housing remains a challenge for vulnerable LGBTI people. Similar issues have been recorded in Hungary, Lithuania, Romania, and Turkey, where LGBTI people face significant barriers to securing safe and stable housing.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

While some countries in the region have made strides toward greater accessibility and inclusivity, others continue to maintain restrictive practices or have even rolled back their legislation on gender recognition. Countries such as Germany and Sweden have experienced a progressive shift towards more inclusive mechanisms for legal gender recognition based on self-determination rather than medical diagnoses.

However, in countries such as Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, and the Netherlands, procedural obstacles persist. For example, while Montenegro has made some progress by introducing a draft law that would allow legal gender recognition based on self-determination, the requirement for sterilisation remains a significant barrier for trans people seeking to amend their gender marker.

In other countries, legal gender recognition processes have become increasingly difficult. Hardships have been recorded in Belarus, BiH, Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Slovakia, and Uzbekistan, where restrictive practices continue to undermine the rights of transgender people seeking legal recognition of their gender identity.

Following publication of the UK Cass Review, efforts to restrict trans healthcare for minors have emerged in Austria, France, Ireland, Poland, and the UK.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The region has witnessed mixed developments in sexual and reproductive rights, with both progress and setbacks. In Slovenia, a positive development occurred when the Constitutional Court ruled that restricting access to biomedical-assisted reproduction to only heterosexual couples and single women was unconstitutional. In Montenegro, a discriminatory restriction that prevented LBTQ women from accessing reproductive treatments was lifted after

the Ombudsperson's decision on discrimination. France also made significant strides, with the French Congress constitutionalising the right for women to have a voluntary termination of pregnancy and clarifying that this right must also extend to any person who has started a pregnancy, including trans men.

However, challenges remain. In Albania, a new draft law on sexual and reproductive health has faced criticism for restricting access to Reproductive Medicine and Assistance (RMA) to heterosexual couples and single women and limiting surrogacy to married heterosexual couples who cannot conceive naturally. Additionally, in Italy, the Prime Minister condemned surrogate parenthood as "inhuman," leading to the adoption of a law that places surrogacy under Italy's list of crimes covered by universal jurisdiction.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL LIFE

The analysis of public, cultural, and political life across the region revealed positive developments in countries like Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Sweden, which have launched new LGBTI action plans aimed at improving representation and inclusion. France, the host of the 2024 Olympics, also showcased LGBTI identities in both its opening and closing ceremonies. While this move earned widespread praise, it also provoked considerable backlash, with conservative sectors of society and politics voicing hate and threats.

Political hostility toward LGBTI people has intensified in countries like Azerbaijan, Hungary, Montenegro, Russia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Slovakia. This hostility is exemplified by actions such as the Slovakian Ministry of Culture's decision to cut funding for LGBTI initiatives and the removal of a gay diplomat from his UN post in 2024.

PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion on LGBTI issues across the region presents a complex and varied landscape, with notable progress reported in three countries, while attitudes have worsened in four others. In Ukraine, there has been a notable increase in support for LGBTI rights, with recent surveys revealing that 70.4% of Ukrainians back equal rights for LGBTI people, and younger generations show greater openness toward LGBTI communities. This mirrors a broader trend of shifting attitudes in some parts of the region, where public opinion on LGBTI issues has become more favorable, especially among younger, educated populations, as seen in countries like Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, and Hungary.

However, in other countries such as Georgia, Cyprus, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, and Romania, progress has been slower, with LGBTI issues remaining more polarised. For example, research in Moldova found that only 9% of respondents held a positive view of LGBTI people.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

The treatment of LGBTI people by police and law enforcement across the region varies significantly, with significant instances of discrimination and abuse recorded in countries such as Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan.

In many of these countries, law enforcement remained a major source of harassment for LGBTI people. Police raids on private homes and businesses, particularly targeting sex workers and LGBTI community members, are routinely reported. These raids often involve severe physical abuse, including forced medical examinations, as well as extortion for money or information from victims.

In Russia, the criminalisation of LGBTI identities has fuelled widespread discriminatory practices by law enforcement. Police have documented exploiting the vulnerability of LGBTI people for personal gain, including extortion, intimidation, and sexual violence. Furthermore, police raids on LGBTI spaces are used to enforce the criminalisation of the LGBTI movement as extremist. These abuses are compounded by systemic failures of the law enforcement system, including arbitrary detentions and the seizure of people.

In contrast, some countries have made positive strides in improving police conduct toward the LGBTI community. In Ukraine for instance, the National Police has collaborated with human rights organisations to foster more inclusive policing practices and combat hate crimes, marking a significant move toward more inclusive and supportive law enforcement.