



# TURKMENISTAN

## ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

The COVID-19 pandemic continued exacerbating the complex and difficult social and economic situation in Turkmenistan, having a dire impact, including LGBT people. The country is in a serious crisis – people are struggling with food shortages and hunger. There is a lack of adequate jobs and salaries vary between 24 to 45 euro. Many are quarantined without access to work. In addition to the pandemic, poverty and hunger have resulted in deaths. In some regions, a large number of thefts have taken place in food stores.

## ASYLUM

The government has restricted immigration, giving access only to ‘pure Turkmen’ to enter the country. The government control over LGBT people who are trying to leave the country continues to grow. Visa restrictions are also a barrier. It is unknown how many people have managed to leave.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In the end of 2020, the government noted its plans to revise Article 135 of the Criminal Code which criminalises consensual same-sex relations and to study the option of introducing anti-discrimination legislation. The plans were included in a state report to the UN, which has since been removed. Article 135 of the Penal Code, criminalising consensual same-sex relations between men, which has allowed for arrest, intimidation, extortion, blackmail, and violence against members of the LGBT community, including by the authorities, continues to be in place.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In January 2021, Kyrgyz Indigo published the milestone report “Life of LGBT Persons in Turkmenistan”, finding high levels of fear and distrust in the LGBT community and experiences of extortion, blackmail, and harassment by authorities.

Group of men and male couples willing to check-in hotel rooms were reportedly questioned and, in some cases, not allowed to stay together in the same room. An anonymous witness told about the incident when a group of men “representing the cultural sector” came to Daraganata town to participate in the local festival, they were forced to register in separate rooms at one of the local hotels, and were forewarned to be questioned by the police if they decided to room in together.

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

Article 135, criminalising consensual same-sex relations between men, continued to be in place this year, allowing for arrest, intimidation, extortion, blackmail, violence and torture against LGBT people, and particularly against gay men. Most cases remain undocumented, but mass raids on gay people are routinely carried out in the country. Most recently a raid and acts of torture against 30 gay men were reported in September.

In September, several members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a declaration calling upon the European Union and the Council of Europe to ensure that decriminalisation of same-sex relations in partner countries (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) is a cornerstone of the Council of Europe’s Central Asia Rule of Law Programme.

Kyrgyz Indigo’s ‘Life of LGBT Persons in Turkmenistan’ reported several disappearances of LGBT people over the past years.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Most international social media sites, including YouTube, Facebook, Google, Instagram, even messaging apps, such as Whatsapp and Telegram, are blocked in the country. People access these sites through VPNs. The availability of TV channels is controlled.

## HEALTH

The government continued to deny that COVID-19 exists in the country, urging people to wear masks because of “dust” in the air. Turkmenistan has reported zero cases and zero deaths to date. COVID-19 vaccines however are mandatory, but are not free of charge, and restrictions have also been in place. The Prosecutor’s Office has checked vaccine records of government workers and those without a vaccination are fired. It has also been reported that medical workers are forbidden to leave of their own accord.

## POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Following the news about the police raids against gay men in Turkmenistan that became viral on the Internet in September, some news outlets continued reporting about more incidents of gay men being targeted by the authorities. On 2 October the news outlet Mediazona



reported that the police detained and interrogated group of men convening in teahouses. The police were also interrogating men spotted together inside vehicles.

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The government does not tolerate criticism and routinely detains people who expose, or even hint at, its rampant corruption, injustices, and incompetence. Human rights defenders continued to face arrest, detention, and violence again this year (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

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



MORE INFORMATION ON [WWW.RAINBOW-EUROPE.ORG](http://WWW.RAINBOW-EUROPE.ORG)