



LGBTQI communities are increasingly under threat in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

The Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity (ECOM) has published the results of its unique study [Invisible Voices](#), a regional report on the violations of the right to health of LGBTQI people in eight countries in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region: Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine.

The rights of LGBT people in EECA is worsening

According to the general summary in ECOM's 2022 report, the regional picture is a gloomy one and shows a downward trend. In 2022, a total of 508 cases of human rights violations against LGBTQI people were recorded in the eight countries. Often one case might include several separate types of rights violations, and, accordingly, different types of violators. The largest number of cases was documented in Ukraine (217), the smallest in Moldova (10), which can be explained by the different scale and resources of projects for identifying cases of rights violations in relation to the target group, the ability of activists to work openly in the country, as well as by other limitations indicated in the report.

The three most common types of violations are hate speech directed towards LGBTQI people (235 cases), physical violence (153 cases) and abuse of power, including blackmail and threats (132 cases).

ECOM experts note a number of alarming trends, which are aggravated by the instability of the region due to Russia's war in Ukraine and a number of border conflicts in Central Asian countries. These worsening developments can be seen when you compare the new data with that in ECOM's previous reports (using the same methodology of recording the cases of human rights violations against LGBTQI people), showing no significant improvement in human rights abuses: [119 cases in 2020](#) and [103 cases in 2021](#).

ECOM notes that the situation began to worsen during the COVID-19 pandemic, when a number of restrictions were introduced affecting civil society and the powers of states were significantly expanded. For instance, during the lockdown in 2020, Kyrgyzstan abolished the possibility of changing one's gender marker without holding any public hearings, and in 2023, the law "on the protection of children from harmful information" was adopted, which separately establishes liability for LGBTQI propaganda. Countries in close proximity to and in the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation duplicate discriminatory laws in the field of human rights. [Kazakhstan has adopted an order on foreign funding](#) which says that NGOs have to register any foreign financing they receive (in fact, just another way of controlling civil society). There were similar attempts in Georgia, but the adoption of such a law was blocked by the public.

In a number of Central Asian countries, human rights defenders and LGBTQI activists are facing increasing persecution, both by the State and due to hatred. This makes it much more difficult to collect data and record cases of rights violations. LGBTQI people increasingly feel unsafe.

No or weak enabling legislative environment

The lack of anti-discrimination legislation or legislation on hate crimes and hate speech in most countries is one of the key problems.

The situation is especially critical in countries where LGBTQI people are criminalized. For instance, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan criminalize voluntary sexual relations between men. In addition, in Uzbekistan, a criminal provision on "putting a person at risk of contracting HIV" is also actively used against gay men.

The need for legislative reform should become a focus point for additional efforts. The analysis clearly shows that as long as discriminatory legislation exists, key populations will be subjected to blackmail, violation motivated by hatred, and abuse of power by the police. For example, in Uzbekistan, ECOM recorded a particularly high number of violations committed by law enforcement agencies.

Transgender people are most at risk

It is also clear from the report that trans people are the most vulnerable group in the EECA region. This is due to both the existence of legislation that regulates changing one's gender marker, and the existence of separate medical protocols describing the use of hormonal drugs. For example, among the reasons for refusing antiretroviral (ARV) treatment, trans people cite side effects that are caused by the incompatibility of hormones and ARVs. In the absence of national protocols and due to the ignorance of doctors, trans people are forced to buy what they can themselves. From this perspective, international support programs, including funding from the Global Fund, could be significantly expanded to advocate for amendments to legislation related to trans people.

Social media facilitates the spread of hatred

Separately, ECOM notes that it has become very easy to spread hatred with the help of modern technologies. Moreover, in a number of countries, primarily in Central Asia, human rights defenders and activists do not want to be associated with LGBTQI people for fear of having their professional reputation tarnished and because they want to maintain good relations with the current government. International organizations could pay more careful attention to this problem. For example, in Uzbekistan, cases have been recorded where employees of AIDS centers (whose activities are supported by the Global Fund program) have disclosed clients' sexual orientation and HIV status. This has resulted in criminal prosecution and imprisonment for the client.

“Effective HIV prevention programs are impossible without respect for human rights. If you are afraid of criminal prosecution simply because of who you are, if you are afraid of disclosing personal data, you will live in the shadows. Our report is called “Invisible Voices”. Thanks to the support of the Global Fund, we help to talk about the lives of people who do not have the opportunity to do so themselves. We see how important it is to devote more effort and resources to decriminalizing homosexuality and HIV transmission, and to making national laws trans-inclusive. At the international level, we need to speak out more loudly about the difficult situation related to the rights of LGBTQI people in the EECA, and how it needs to be changed. This will help make the Global Fund's investments aimed at stopping the HIV epidemic in the region more effective,”

Vitaly Djuma, Executive Director of ECOM, alternate member of the Global Fund Board from the Developed Countries NGO Delegation

All information about the nature and reasons for violations and recommendations for countries are available at: <https://ecom.ngo/library/regional-report-violations-right2022>

* Yuri Yoursky is ECOM's Programs Lead

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