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TURKEY

ASYLUM

Hevi LGBT published “[LGBTI+ refugees and their rights violations during the Covid-19 pandemic](#)”, finding that LGBTI+ individuals without legal residence are almost never able to access healthcare services except for cases of emergency.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Political leaders and pro-government media outlets continued [reporting](#) about LGBTI people with hate. On 2 February, Justice Minister and the Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu [called](#) LGBT people “perverts” on Twitter. Others called LGBTI people a “disgrace” or “dirty”. These remarks prompted a wave of hate speech on social media. This continued hate campaign took place in the context of rising hateful rhetoric against the LGBTI+ community by representatives of high-level religious and political institutions, as well as actions and legislation attacking human rights defenders and civil society organisations.

In March, a defamation case [ended](#) in settlement and compensation for the victim, who was targeted by homophobic hate speech after posting about Ali Erbaş’s COVID-themed sermon in 2020. The imam, Turkey’s Religious Affairs Directorate blamed ‘homosexuality’ for the pandemic, [saying](#) that it “brings illness.”

Olympian Ebrar Karakurt was [targeted](#) by lesbophobic comments and threats after posting a photo with her girlfriend.

Kaos GL’s Annual Media Watch for 2020 [observed](#) that more than half of the news about LGBTI people on printed national and local media amounted to hate speech, marking an increase from 2019.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Countless hate crimes took place against LGBTI people again this year. For instance, a trans woman, a refugee from Syria, was [attacked](#) by her ex-girlfriend in Beyoğlu and suffered severe burns on her face in March. A trans woman, who was reported missing by her family, was [found](#) murdered in her home in Izmir in March. Trans women were assaulted in the street in [March](#) and [July](#). A group of LGBTI+ activists were severely [assaulted](#) in March in Newroz. In July, several gay men were [attacked](#) by violent groups – one person was [stabbed](#).

In November, four trans women were [attacked](#) in two separate incidents, three survived with injuries, and one died.

A video of a homophobic assault was [posted](#) by the perpetrator on social media – he was later identified and [detained](#) by the police.

A number of court cases, focusing on anti-LGBTI attacks or murder, continued to be [pending](#) or [stalled](#) this year – some for over 10 years.

EDUCATION

On 1 January, President Erdoğan appointed Melih Bulu as the new rector of Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. Academic staff and students held a series of protests, as Bulu is the first appointed rector from outside the University, which marks a next step of the government’s crackdown on academic freedom in Turkey. Bulu is a long-standing ally of President Erdoğan, who has supported anti-LGBTI+ statements over the past years. The university’s LGBTI+ student group was shut down, students were detained, and the police assaulted many demonstrators. In February, 328 civil society organisations in Turkey issued a [joint statement](#) to support the students and staff. 12 students [stand](#) trial for violating the law.

The European Commission [condemned](#) the violent repression of the protests, the mass detention of students, and the Istanbul governor’s ad hoc ban on all meetings and protests in the university’s neighbourhood. In July, the new acting rector of the university [dismissed](#) professor Can Candan, an avid supporter of LGBTI rights. Candan directed the film “My Child”, a documentary about LGBTI+ families in Turkey. Candan’s supporters launched social media campaigns to stand with him in solidarity.

In March, Genç LGBTI+ published “[Monitoring LGBTI+ Equality in Universities](#)” and found that institutions in Turkey score alarmingly low. The report recommends universities to support students in their freedom of expression, to provide safer and inclusive spaces for LGBTI+ and specifically for trans students, to mainstream SOGIESC issues in the curriculum, provide counseling, and other key measures.

During the graduation ceremony of Dokuz Eylül University in October, two students were [forcibly removed](#) from the event and beaten up for wearing face masks with the



slogan “Istanbul Convention Stays Alive”. Turkey withdrew from the Convention earlier this year (see under **Equality and Non-Discrimination**).

EMPLOYMENT

In May, a trans man reported having been rejected when applying for work as a trained physiotherapist. The clinic argued that they “wanted a male employee”.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In March, Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, sparking outcry among local civil society and the Council of Europe. Turkish civil society organised under the United 4 Istanbul campaign, expressing grave concern about the spillover effects of the government’s regressive move. Several rallies took place on 1 July, which marked Turkey’s official withdrawal. The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November) was marked by women’s rights and LGBTI+ activists protesting in various cities in Turkey. In Istanbul protesters were met with police violence, including rubber bullets and tear gas.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Turkey continued to severely violate the right to freedom of assembly in the country this year, with bans, violent attacks on demonstrations, mass detention, and violence.

“We Are Here, Get Used to it, We Are not Going Anywhere! Release our activists!”

A number of Women’s Day marches, held were censored (see under **Freedom of Expression**), dispersed and/or attacked by the police this year. On 6 March, the demonstration in Kadıköy was dispersed by the police after some of the speakers introduced themselves as trans. The police followed several trans women activists afterwards, physically assaulted and detained them.

The Istanbul Pride event was repeatedly banned and then violently attacked and dispersed by the police on 26 June. 50 participants were detained and assaulted, in what some activists said was the most violent crackdown in years. The police staged violent interventions on Pride marches in Izmir, Ankara and Eskişehir as well, arresting many activists and journalists. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović called for an absolute ban on restrictions on freedom of assembly and urged the

Turkish government to protect LGBTI people’s human rights.

The court case against 19 students and teachers who participated in the Middle East Technical University (METU) Pride March in 2019, continued this year, with hearings taking place in July and October. At the hearing on 8 October, all defendants were acquitted, and only one was given a financial penalty for insulting a police officer.

In 2020, the court lifted the ban on Izmir Pride events, except for the march – the judgment has been criticised by civil society. In January 2021, ban on the Parade was also annulled, and the court affirmed the participants’ right to freedom of assembly and stated that the march “contribute[s] to pluralism and peaceful coexistence in a democratic society.”

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

On 5 March, the Adana Security Directorate announced that any display of signs about LGBTI+ rights or the Boğaziçi University protests, are banned for the duration of the 8 March Women’s Day demonstration. The police in Kadıköy and Beşiktaş enforced the same censorship on Women’s Day marches.

In May, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) fined Acun Ilıcalı’s digital platform Exxen for streaming an episode featuring trans woman Çağla Akalın. RTÜK ordered the removal of the piece.

In July, MP Oya Ersoy (Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP)) made a statement in parliament in support of Pride and LGBTI+ people’s rights, and showed a picture of the rainbow flag.

A number of INGOs launched a billboard campaign in July, calling for freedom from violence and equality for LGBTI+ people.

A British young adult novel “Heartstopper”, whose protagonist is gay, is being sold in envelopes in Turkish bookstores, with the sign “Harmful for children” upon the order of the Family and Social Services Ministry. On 10 September, the Ministry of Family and Social Services Protection of Minors officially classified the book as “obscene”.



Boğaziçi University trials involving LGBTI+ students continued: two are for the general protests against appointed Rector Melih Bulu, one is against the LGBTI+ Club for the LGBTI+ themed artwork, another is for students holding rainbow flags during a protest, and another for students protesting the arrest of those holding rainbow flags.

Hornet, a dating and partnership network, was removed from the Turkish App Store by a court ruling.

have lacked access to social services and experience discrimination on the basis of their SOGI. SPoD also launched a manual on positive and inclusive social work practice with LGBTI+ people.



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

HEALTH

SPoD's annual report on their LGBTI+ hotline found that the need for psycho-social support significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

HOUSING

The police evicted a number of trans women in Istanbul's Bayram Sokak and Küçük Bayram Sokak in July.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders continued to be targets of police violence (see under **Freedom of Assembly**) and hate campaigns by the media. Some activists received death threats.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

On 22 April, the Constitutional Court passed a positive ruling, stating that the rejection of a trans person's name change, because they had not undergone any surgeries, was a violation of private and family life. The Court cited the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. SPoD released a FAQ guide on legal gender recognition.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

The 10th Queer Fest Film Festival took place in the autumn, in Istanbul and Ankara.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued placing unprecedented hardships on LGBTI people, in employment and healthcare, and amidst growing levels of violence at home during lockdown. SPoD's "LGBTI+ people's access to social services during the pandemic", on the basis of over 800 responses, found that LGBTI+ people by large

