



# CYPRUS

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In August, following international public outcry, the Attorney General called for an investigation of the Bishop of Morfou's statements, that gay men give off a "particular odour" and can be identified by "holy men". The police dropped the case, finding no element of hate speech. Accept LGBTI was later invited to a discussion on reforming the hate speech legislation, held by the Parliamentary Committee of Human Rights and Gender Equality. Accept LGBTI highlighted the failure of the law to address public homophobic speech since it came into effect in 2015. For instance, Accept LGBTI's calls for an investigation by the Attorney General for similar comments made by the Archbishop of Cyprus in 2017, were left unanswered.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In February, a gay man was attacked in Nicosia. Despite multiple witnesses, the police failed to establish it was a hate crime. Another gay man was attacked by three men in a cruising area in Nicosia on 24 June. The case was reported to the police, who failed to take action. The victim reported this to Accept LGBTI.

## EDUCATION

The educational programme 'HOMBAT-Combating HOMophobic and trAnsphobic Bullying aT schools' ended after two years and more than 250 teachers and professors trained. The programme was the first of its kind to be supported by the Ministry of Education.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

As part of its Universal Periodic Review, Cyprus received seven recommendations on SOGIESC issues and accepted them all. States urged Cyprus to combat discrimination and violence against LGBTI people, to criminalise incitement, to adopt an action plan against homophobia and transphobia, and to adopt the gender recognition law.

## FOREIGN POLICY

Cyprus joined the European Governmental LGBTI Focal Points Network and attended its first meeting in October.

In April, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent instructions for the first time to all Embassies, requesting support for local LGBTI communities.

On IDAHOT, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs raised the rainbow flag, a first for a government building in the Republic. The rainbow flag was also raised in a number of Cypriot Embassies around the world for the first time.

For the first time, the Government of Cyprus allocated money to support international LGBTI organisations, through ILGA-Europe's Annual Conference Diversity Fund.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The government provided important assistance for the organisation of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region LGBTI conference 'NEDWA 2019', held in Cyprus in September. The conference, usually held in Lebanon, was moved for safety reasons. 200 human rights defenders joined the event, and were welcomed by the government at an opening event at the Presidential Palace.

The first bicomunal festival was held on 5 October. "United by Colours" was organised by Accept LGBTI and Queer Cyprus Association as part of the 'Open Door Civil Society Festival'. Following years of cooperation, the two organisations started a process aiming to produce and sign a memorandum of understanding, setting out their common vision for the LGBTI community on the island.

## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Following NEDWA 2019 (see under **Freedom of assembly**), the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE) applied to register its Cyprus branch in December, focusing on training MENA region LGBTI activists in Cyprus.

## HEALTH

The first conference on PrEP took place in Nicosia in May, organised by the AIDS Solidarity Movement Cyprus and Accept LGBTI, and sponsored by the government.

## LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

The legal gender recognition reform process continued to be stalled this year. On 10 June, four parents of trans children addressed the parliamentary Human Rights Committee, calling for speedy adoption of the law. This was the first time parents of trans children spoke out in such a public way.



*"A lot of my friends think it is pointless for me to be here today [...]. Nonetheless, I have decided to come and talk here today, believing that if myself and other citizens [...] believed in you [...] and fought collectively, there is a hope for [...] change". - A parent speaking to the parliamentary Human Rights Committee*

The meeting was attended by the Commissioner for Children's Rights, the Ombudsman, the Officer of the Legal Service of the Republic, the Advisor to the President on Multiculturalism, Acceptance and Respect to Diversity, and Accept LGBTI. The Chairwoman affirmed that Cyprus is ready to follow other European countries and put an LGR law in place.

The LGR guidelines, adopted in 2018 by the Ministry of Interior, were sent to the District Registry Offices in August. Since the adoption, practice had been ad hoc: the formal dissemination was helpful to remedy this. The guidelines establish that trans people over 18 can have their legal gender and name changed on the basis of self-determination, without a diagnosis, hormonal treatment, or surgeries. These are now only optional. The decision on the change of gender and name must be made by the District Registry Office within 30 days. Some trans people successfully used the procedure this year, without having to present any medical documents.

## PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Prior to the European Parliamentary Elections, Accept sent a questionnaire to MEP candidates on their position on key LGBTI rights issues. 10 of the 36 candidates answered, but notably none from the ruling party DISI (EPP). Two of the ten were elected: Niyazi Kizilyurek, founder of Queer Cyprus Association (QCA) in north Cyprus and Giorgos Georgiou both from AKEL (GUE/NGL). Both had agreed to join the LGBTI Intergroup in their responses.

## NORTHERN CYPRUS\*

\*Areas not under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

On 17 May, the night before this year's IDAHOT march, activists of QCA were verbally and physically assaulted. One person received verbal threats at the IDAHOT march after-party. The

victims reported the cases, but the police failed to initiate any investigation. Although the Criminal Code of north Cyprus was amended in 2014 to protect LGBT+ people from hate crimes, it is not being effectively implemented.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Gender Equality department of the Northern Cypriot Ministry of Labour and Social Security, was finally made operational early this year. The department, established in 2014, is mandated to address discrimination based on sex and SOGI and empower vulnerable groups.

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

In January, QCA received a complaint from a gay man held in Central Prison that he was sexually assaulted by other inmates, and the prison authorities did not help him. He was moved to a different ward, but guards threatened to take him back should he not comply with the rules.

## PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Following QCA's advocacy work, seven MEP Candidates joined ILGA-Europe's Come Out pledge. Niyazi Kizilyurek, the founder of QCA, was elected as MEP.

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

A number of people, with a student visa or work permit, were deported from the north part of the island due to their HIV+ status.

## SOCIAL SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

QCA continued providing social services to LGBTI+ people and LGBTI+ sex workers who are victims or vulnerable to trafficking, and started research work on the situation.

QCA also set up a network of trained psychologists and lawyers this year, who provide support for LGBTI+ people on the Solidarity Line. The line can be reached by phone, text, or online.

QCA was invited to support the new police unit focusing on combating violence against women, established by the Gender Equality Office in 2018.