

Support Bulgaria's LGBTI community in their fight against draconian anti-LGBTI law

[statement & call to action](#), [non-discrimination](#), [lgbti](#), [trans children](#)

TGEU is deeply concerned about the recent anti-LGBTI propaganda law passed by the Bulgarian Parliament, which bans references to LGBTI identities and people in schools and educational institutions. Passed last week, the law not only marginalises LGBTI people but also has a detrimental impact on children, young people, parents, and teachers. The law encourages exclusion and misinformation about LGBTI people in educational settings. We express our solidarity with LGBTI people in Bulgaria and condemn attempts to silence the right to freedom of speech and expression.

This law is unworthy of a Member State of the European Union as it contravenes its fundamental shared values of equality, non-discrimination and freedom of expression and undermines the core values of the European Union of human dignity, freedom, and human rights. We call on the European Commission and all EU Member States to express their strong opposition to this discriminatory legislation. We urge the Commission to take immediate action to ensure that Bulgaria upholds the fundamental rights enshrined in the EU treaties. Similar to its actions against Hungary's anti-LGBTI legislation, we ask the Commission to prepare an infringement procedure against Bulgaria for violation of EU law principles and values, including human dignity, freedom of expression and information, the right to private life and the right to data protection are upheld for LGBTI people in Bulgaria.

A threat to human rights in Bulgaria

On 7 August 2024, the Bulgarian Parliament rushed through an amendment to the Pre-School and School Education Act, which was subsequently confirmed by the President of Bulgaria on 15 August. The law bans "propaganda, promotion or incitement in any way, directly or indirectly, of ideas and views related to non-traditional sexual orientation and determination of sex identity other than biological". The amendment was drafted and introduced by the far-right Revival party and is similar to anti-LGBTI laws in Russia and Hungary.

The amendment violates various international human rights laws, including the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), EU law, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Going further, in cases relating to [Russia](#) and [Lithuania](#), the European Court of Human Rights has ruled that anti-LGBTI propaganda laws and actions violate the right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In addition, this law follows several restrictions on the rights of LGBTI people and civic space in Bulgaria, including banning same-sex marriage and the [2023 ban on legal gender recognition](#). In 2022, the Revival Party introduced a Foreign Agents Registration Bill, similar to the law passed in Russia, which tightens constraints on civil society by restricting access to foreign sources of funding, among other things. Restricting LGBTI rights has become a definitive early signpost of illiberal regimes.

All of this makes it even harder for LGBTI people with intersecting identities to exist safely in Bulgaria. For example, children and students with an asylum and immigration background already face significant barriers in Bulgaria. Human rights NGO [ReliefWeb](#) published a report that found many refugee and asylum-seeking children in Bulgaria lack knowledge of the Bulgarian language, preventing them from accessing an education. According to the FRA survey 2023, every fourth LGBTI person belonging to another minority group considered leaving school because of

their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics. This is double the rate for the rest of the EU.

Impact on LGBTI people in Bulgaria

Laws such as the one passed in Bulgaria, otherwise known as “anti-LGBT propaganda laws” perpetuate the stigmatisation of LGBTI people’s identities, encourage a culture of bullying, discrimination and violence, and restrict the rights of LGBTI people to express themselves freely. The law will make it impossible to mention LGBTI people or educate students to be accepting of different sexual orientations and gender identities in Bulgarian schools. Children who face bullying and discrimination in schools because of their (perceived) sexual orientation or gender identity will not receive the support they need. Already, sadly, every second LGBTI pupil “never” or “rarely” (28%) received support in school. For young trans people in particular, there will be little space to live their true selves in schools. Receiving age-appropriate sexual health information and education will further be limited.

Every second LGBTI person in Bulgaria reported discrimination in the 12 months before the survey, the highest value in the EU, according to the EU FRA Survey 2023, and [80% of Bulgarian LGBTI respondents said they had experienced bullying by peers when being in school](#). Only 2 per cent [said](#) they heard about LGBTI issues in school in a positive way (EU average 7 per cent), whereas more than double the EU average had LGBTI people addressed in a negative way in education (17 per cent v. 8 per cent). Bulgaria has been at the bottom of the league in terms of acceptance of LGBTI people in the EU for years, [confirmed by last year’s Eurobarometer](#). Bulgaria needs more, not less education about LGBTI people.

Therefore, the new law is completely at odds with the urgent need to educate the public on sexual orientation and gender identity in Bulgaria. According to the latest [2023 Eurobarometer Survey](#), only 34 per cent of Bulgarians agree that school lessons and materials should include information about sexual orientation (EU average: 71%) felt school lessons and materials should include information about the existence of multiple gender identities (EU average 68%). This is the worst result for any EU country.

How to support LGBTI people in Bulgaria

- **Donate to Bulgarian civil society:** If you can, donate to LGBTI and human rights organisations such as [Bilitis](#), [Deystvie](#), and [Bulgarian Helsinki Committee](#) that protect and support LGBTI people in Bulgaria.
- **Attend a demonstration:** There are demonstrations planned in cities around the world, including the Hague, London and Paris. Visit [Queer Bulgarian’s Abroad’s](#) Instagram account for the most up-to-date information.
- **Urge your government to hold Bulgarian officials accountable:** Ask that your government summon the Bulgarian ambassador and make it unmistakably clear that this abuse of fundamental rights and values is unacceptable and will not go unchallenged.
- **Sign the petition:** Use your voice to urge the European Commission to take action. [Sign the petition](#) started by the Bulgarian LGBTI community to help them fight back.