

Uzbekistan's LGBT community is under threat: Escalating human rights violations continue amid legal and social repression

[article](#), [protection from violence and hate](#), [health & depathologisation](#), [lgbti](#), [sex workers](#)

The Republic of Uzbekistan is one of two countries in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus where the law on “sodomy” is still in force. According to a Human Rights Watch [report](#), the human rights situation in Uzbekistan has gotten worse. Bloggers and journalists are increasingly persecuted in the country, human rights violations go unpunished, independent human rights initiatives continue to be denied registration, and [torture and mistreatment](#) of gay, bisexual men and trans women continue without consequences.

Between 2020-2022, researchers documented 297 cases of human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in Uzbekistan. Of these, 32% were cases of domestic violence by relatives against LGBT people because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In 2023, 241 cases of SOGI-based LGBT rights violations were documented, with 92 involving violence by relatives. HIV status and employment in sex work also served as overlapping statuses and causes of violence. To date, in 2024, Central Asian activists have registered 45 cases of discrimination, violence and persecution on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Failure to get fair punishment for aggressors

According to Central Asian human rights activists, even LGBT people who have been granted refugee status outside of Uzbekistan don't feel safe. Community members are unlikely to report cases of discrimination or violence because they have relatives and friends in Uzbekistan and are worried about their safety or loss of social status, as well as fears for their own safety.

Lawyers in Uzbekistan are afraid of associating with people who have been convicted under Article 120 and therefore do not assist the few people who request legal representation. The Uzbek state says it provides free lawyers to people in need, but free lawyers can make things worse by telling people to declare their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, which automatically leads to criminal prosecution.

Trans people in Uzbekistan

So far in 2024, human rights defenders note a relatively high number of prosecution cases against trans people. Fourteen trans women from Samarkand have suffered violence or are currently imprisoned under Article 120 ‘Sodomy’ of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The majority of the 14 trans women are sex workers. Trans sex workers are forced to have HIV or STIs tests. It's not clear what will happen to them, as there are no NGOs in the country that trans women can turn to. Furthermore, LGBT community members cannot conduct visible human rights work for fear of prosecution. Trans people are held in prisons and stay in hospital wards according to their gender assigned at birth, which greatly increases the risk of violence and harassment against them, especially trans women.

“Propaganda” in the Information Code

Uzbekistan’s [draft Information Code law](#) was published in 2022 and remains in the finalisation stage. It contains vague wording, restrictions on the media and bloggers, and subjective, non-legal language. The draft law includes an innovation in Article 54, “How to avoid abuse of media freedom”, which prohibits “propaganda of pornography, unnatural relations between same-sex couples”.

If this law is adopted with a reference to “propaganda” in Article 54, it will worsen the situation for LGBT people and undermine democracy in Uzbekistan.

Health

LGBT people are highly unlikely to be open with medical professionals and are reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation, gender identity, or same-gender sexual practices. This can lead to deteriorating health and progression to a chronic condition. This is also the case in private health clinics where open homophobia is also present.

In Uzbekistan, lesbian women face forced marriages at a young age, rape and sexual abuse. Lesbian, bisexual women are subjected to so-called “corrective rape” primarily by close family members and law enforcement officials. Human rights defenders note that lesbian women may be prevented from accessing specific forms of healthcare such as IVF. According to the Ministry of Health, a woman must be officially married to a man to undergo IVF procedures.

HIV

“If you are heterosexual there is one treatment, if you are gay there is another treatment”, – community members say this is the message used by HIV medical professionals to get people to say about their partners.

Between 2020 and 2022, researchers documented 130 cases of rights violations against gay, trans and MSM people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. The cases show regular and systematic violations of rights by AIDS Centres in Uzbekistan and include violations such as: sharing data with law enforcement agencies, which resulted in community members being subject to criminal prosecution under Article 120 of the Uzbek Criminal Code. [Cases included:](#)

- Outing and disclosure of sexual orientation and HIV status
- Intimidation
- Threats, blackmail, and misrepresentation during official procedures (epidemiological commission) that investigate the causes of HIV infection
- Stigmatisation and discrimination by staff at AIDS centres because of gender identity or sexual orientation
- Denial of services to people living with HIV because of their gender identity or sexual orientation

AIDS centre staff may use manipulative and blatantly deceptive scare tactics to find out how a person contracted HIV. Community members report that staff say there is one treatment for heterosexual people with HIV and another for gay people with HIV. Staff say that they need to know how the person got HIV to prescribe the right treatment. Some gay or bisexual men believe this and disclose their sexual orientation or sexual practices, and then they are usually prosecuted under Article 120.

Case X

A young man, X received a HIV-positive result at an AIDS centre. He was talked to for a long time and was pressured into disclosing the identity of the person who he had slept with. X revealed information about his sexual

partner K. K., who was quickly tried and found guilty under two articles, Article 120, “sodomy”, and Article 113 of the Criminal Code, which criminalises HIV transmission. X was later also prosecuted under Article 120.

HIV diagnosis and intimidation

After a person is diagnosed with HIV, an epidemiological commission is formed. The commission interrogates the HIV-positive person to disclose who they slept with, when and how many times. At the interrogation, a law enforcement officer and medical specialist intimidate the person into giving false information. If they discover the person is from the LGBT community, the interrogation intensifies to obtain an extensive list of their friends, acquaintances and sexual partners.

Representatives of the LGBT community note that [receiving HIV counselling at AIDS centres in Tashkent](#) can lead to criminal liability under Article 120. It can also lead to stigmatisation by medical staff, forced outing to family members, outing to law enforcement agencies, and denial of services.

Article 120 Besoqolbozlik (sodomy)

Consensual sex between two adult men is punishable by imprisonment of up to three years. Article 120 strengthens homophobic attitudes in society, which leads to violations of the rights of LGBT people in their families, at work, and in everyday life. Adult men of legal capacity who have been prosecuted for engaging in consensual homosexual activity under Article 120 of the Criminal Code are subjected to forced anal testing, which eventually leads to criminal prosecution. Human rights defenders note that it is officially possible to refuse anal testing (e.g. if there is pain), but they themselves do not know of anyone who has refused the test. The [Uzbek government acknowledges the use of Article 120](#), but does not talk about the possibilities for humanising the legislation.

There are known cases where people who were in prison under Article 120 and got out came to the labour exchange to look for work. The exchange staff saw that they had been in jail for being gay or for same-gender practices and ridiculed them, denied them social assistance and said that “such people will not find work in Uzbekistan”.

How are LGBT people perceived in Uzbekistan?

Here are a few examples shared by the people of Uzbekistan. During Uzbekistan Fashion Week 2023, a popular designer featured a male model wearing a top and skirt. This sparked a heated online discussion. The designer was summoned by law enforcement officials and was forced to make a written declaration that she was “not making LGBT propaganda”.

Although the criminal code article “sodomy” refers to men, women can be prosecuted and discriminated against under the administrative article on morality and ethics. In 2022, two female models kissed during a product advert. They were forced to apologise in public on camera and say they were “normal girls”. They were tried under the article “petty hooliganism” and fined 900,000 Uzbek sums each (about 80 euros).

The right to education and labour becomes inaccessible if people suspect or learn of a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Several queer students at an Uzbek university reported being bullied by other students. Later, when the Dean learnt that one of the students was queer, he threatened to expel him from the university.

Some young people working in various catering establishments were asked to resign “nicely and at will” after their sexual orientation became known to the staff, and there were cases of physical violence from colleagues. The young people were not able to defend their labour rights because they knew that if they tried to do so, they would be prosecuted under Article 120, “sodomy”.

Queer people in Uzbekistan see a new disturbing trend coming from Russia in the recent months of 2024. Thus, Russian psychiatrists have started to recommend 'sexual orientation treatment' in Uzbek social networks. Russian doctors advertising sexual orientation treatment has existed before, community members say, but then it was advertised as a practice in Russia, now they are offering services specifically for Uzbek residents and on their territory. Queer people worry that conversion practices by Russian therapists will become the norm in Uzbekistan's already conservative and LGBTIphobic society.

Recommendations

- Impose a moratorium on the use of Article 120, "sodomy".
- Remove the phrase "propaganda of unnatural relationships between same-sex couples" in Article 54 of the Draft Information Code.
- End forced anal examinations and, following the ruling of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the inadmissibility of evidence obtained under torture, put an end to the use of the results of anal examinations as evidence of anal sex and 'homosexual behaviour'.
- End compulsory testing for HIV and other STIs for LGBT people and the use of test results as evidence for prosecuting LGBT people under Article 113 of the Criminal Code.

More info

[European Parliament Recommends Improvements to Human Rights in Central Asia](#)

[Human rights groups call for Uzbekistan to decriminalise same-sex relations](#)