



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
FOUNDATION For Freedom.

# CHALLENGES OF QUEER COMMUNITY IN GEORGIA

INCREASING ACCEPTANCE OF LGBTQI+ PEOPLE

Nino Bolkvadze

ANALYSIS


# Imprint

## Publisher

Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit  
Truman House  
Karl-Marx-Straße 2  
14482 Potsdam-Babelsberg  
Germany

/freiheit.org

/FriedrichNaumannStiftungFreiheit

/FNFreiheit

## Authors

Nino Bolkvadze

## Contact

Phone: +49 30 22 01 26 34  
Fax: +49 30 69 08 81 02  
email: [service@freiheit.org](mailto:service@freiheit.org)

## Date

December 2023

## Notes on using this publication

This publication is an information offer of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom. It is available free of charge and not intended for sale. It may not be used by parties or election workers for the purpose of election advertising during election campaigns (federal, state, or local government elections or European Parliament elections)

*Please scan the QR code to access the Friedrich Naumann Foundation South Caucasus webpage.*



# Table of contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Executive Summary                              | 4  |
| 2. The status of the LGBTQI+ community in Georgia | 5  |
| 3. Legal Status of LGBTQI + Community             | 6  |
| 3.1. Breaking the Stigma                          | 6  |
| 3. Significance of Human Stories                  | 8  |
| 5. Conclusion and Recommendations                 | 9  |
| 6. Bibliography                                   | 10 |

# 1. Executive Summary

In Georgia, the decriminalization of relations between men occurred only in 2000. However, advocacy for the rights of the LGBTQI+ community began around 2010. A small group of activists initiated it; Over the years, the visibility of the LGBTQI+ community and related issues in Georgia has significantly increased, leading to frequent and heated discussions within the country. Homophobic attitudes persist in Georgia, fueled by state ignorance, politician-propagated hate speech and a lack of public acknowledgment of challenges faced by the LGBTQI+ community. State agencies neglect these issues, leaving NGOs and research organizations to address legal status and negative attitudes.

A 2016 study highlights society's markedly negative attitude toward legal equality for the LGBTQI+ group. Age and education impact individual rights attitudes, with 18-24 age group respondents showing higher receptivity. Education, myths, stereotypes, and religious fundamentalism influence individual rights attitudes. Politicians' hate speech contributes significantly to negative attitudes.

A 2020 UNFPA survey reveals high levels of shame and reluctance among men and women regarding having a homosexual child. Negative attitudes persist, with a majority opposing homosexuals working with children or being friends. CRRRC survey notes homosexuals rank third as undesirable neighbors.

Moreover, a Council of Europe study indicates a low positive response to the importance of protecting LGBTQI+ rights, with 42% stating these rights are not important. Regression analysis shows gender influences support, with men less likely to support LGBTQI+ rights than religious minorities' rights. Knowledge about minorities' rights correlates with prioritizing LGBTQI+ rights.

Overall, studies emphasize a persistent negative bias toward the LGBTQI+ community, leading to discrimination and hate crimes, putting them at constant risk, and resulting in social and economic exclusion.

This paper examines the challenges and prospects for improvement for the LGBTQI+ community in Georgia.

## 2. The status of the LGBTQI+ community in Georgia

As an emerging democracy, Georgia faces various challenges, including the notable influence of its northern neighbor, Russia. Georgia fell one step behind Ukraine and Moldova, Georgia in receiving candidate status for EU membership due to significant democratic backsliding. This development is confirmed by the annually published "Rule of Law Index" (World Justice Project, n.d.), which measures the quality of the rule of law worldwide. Based on this Index, a steady slight decline can be observed over the last few years.

In recent years, the ruling political party, "Georgian Dream," has been accused of politically instrumentalizing LGBTQI+ issues. They have opportunistically used societal queerphobic attitudes as a means to divert attention from pressing social and economic problems and potentially shift the country's trajectory towards a more pro-Russian one.

For example, the ultra-nationalist organization "Alt-Info," which reformed itself into a political party, now "Conservative Movement," attacked participants and journalists during the "March for Dignity" planned on July 5, 2021, during the Tbilisi Pride Week. Counter-demonstrators physically assaulted 53 people, most of whom were journalists (the attack occurred before the march participants gathering), and one journalist, Lekso Lashkarava, died a few days after being beaten. The criminals also ransacked the offices of the event organizers and followed members of the LGBTQI+ community, as well as anyone perceived to be queer, including minors, on the streets. Law enforcement officers remained completely neutral and rarely intervened in these shocking episodes of violence.

Al Jazeera (July 5, 2021) reported that Irakli Gharibashvili, Prime Minister of Georgia, made a statement suggesting that public gatherings of the LGBTQI+ community should not be allowed, as he believed it promoted discrimination against minority representatives. It is worth noting that public officials have increasingly normalized such homophobic public statements in recent years.

Victor Madrigal-Borloz, UN Independent Expert on Sexual

Orientation and Gender Identity, indicates in his report (Human Rights Report, 2019) during his visit to Georgia in 2018 systemic factors denying the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals, perpetuating a vision of a society exclusively composed of heterosexual, and cisgender persons. Widespread societal beliefs label the sexual orientation and gender identity of LGBTQI+ individuals as sinful or pathologic, leading to a need for concealment to be recognized as "good" citizens. The church, politicians, law enforcement, and media contribute to the reinforcement of these convictions.

Consequences include the threat of violence and exclusion from essential elements of social life. According to a study conducted by the UNDP in 2021, seven out of ten members of the LGBTQI+ community were victims of a hate-motivated crime at least once in the last two years, and 68.7% of the respondents were victims of psychological violence (Jalaghania, 2021).

LGBTQI+ individuals employ intricate networks for support, but survival strategies are necessary, with many facing the choice between revealing their true selves and experiencing violence or living in the shadows. Official data often overlooks their needs, leading to constant fear of exposure. It is difficult to live authentically in a society that forces constant deception. Hence, the struggle for freedom is a common theme.

The quality of life of members of the LGBTQI+ community living in Georgian small towns and villages and ethnic minorities is even lower. Internalized homophobia remains a significant challenge here. In recent years, members of the LGBTQI+ community have been actively leaving Georgia and seeking asylum in other countries.

There is no mention of the rights of the LGBTQI+ community in government policy documents created to protect their human rights. The ruling party, "Georgian Dream," openly supports violent activities of far-right criminal groups, which are focused on the persecution of LGBTQI+ people. It is fair to conclude that the government of Georgia pursues a policy based on the oppression of the LGBTQI+ community.

### 3. Legal Status of LGBTQI + Community

According to the Georgian constitutional framework, specifically Article 5, Georgia operates as a social state, assuming responsibility for public health and social protection. The commitment to ensuring the well-being of citizens is explicitly outlined in Article 28, where the first paragraph guarantees a citizen's right to accessible and high-quality healthcare services, solidifying this entitlement by law.

Moreover, the Patient Rights Law in Georgia, as articulated in its Article 6, emphasizes that patients should not face discrimination on various grounds. This includes but is not limited to race, skin color, language, sex, genetic heritage, belief and religion, political and other opinions, national, ethnic, or social origin, property and social status, place of residence, illness, sexual orientation, or negative personal attitudes. The explicit inclusion of these factors aims to foster an environment where healthcare services are accessible and equitable for all individuals, regardless of diverse backgrounds.

This commitment to non-discrimination is further echoed in the Law of Georgia on Health Care, emphasizing the prohibition of discrimination in the healthcare sector. These legislative measures collectively reinforce the principles of equality and inclusivity within Georgia's healthcare system, aligning with the broader constitutional values of a social state and the explicit right of citizens to affordable and high-quality healthcare services. Georgia has undergone significant legal transformations in recent years to acknowledge and protect the rights of the LGBTQI+ community. This shift has been motivated by the country's commitment to international organizations and the requirements of the Association Agreement with the European Union, which necessitated the adoption of legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual

orientation and gender identity.

What is more concerning is that when the Government of Georgia submitted the 2023-2030 National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights to the Parliament, it omitted LGBTQI+ rights. The document serves as a blueprint for consolidating the national infrastructure supporting fundamental human rights, freedoms, and institutional democracy. It guides the planning of subsequent actions, highlighting the importance of addressing the challenges and requirements of various social groups. The government's Human Rights Action Plans, starting in 2014 and continuing through 2018-2020, have incorporated measures aimed at ending discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Despite this inclusion, the actual implementation of these measures has often been merely formal. Notably, a specific sub-chapter addressing LGBTQI+ rights was added to the plan in 2020. In 2023, the government approved the new strategy, where any mention of LGBTQI+ individuals as a distinct social group is absent.

The 2014 Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination marked an initial step, encompassing sexual orientation and gender identity, among other protected grounds. However, the law's enforcement mechanisms were initially limited, resulting in inadequate protection for discrimination victims. Recognizing this shortfall, the law was amended in 2019, reinforcing enforcement mechanisms and empowering the public defender to address discrimination more effectively.

### 4. Hostile Environment

The general attitude towards LGBTQI+ people in Georgia is still far from acceptance. According to a report (MIA, 2020), from October to December 2020, the Ministry of Internal Affairs initiated investigations into 246 crimes driven by intolerance and discrimination. Among these cases, seven were based on gender identity and six on sexual orientation as the grounds for discrimination. Notably, during this period, three individuals were convicted for crimes related to gender identity, and six

were convicted for crimes related to sexual orientation.

The Prosecutor's Office website provides statistical data on crimes motivated by intolerance, though the information is incomplete. Graphs illustrating this data reveal a consistent annual increase in the number of criminal cases and prosecutions related to potential crimes based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. However, it remains unclear whether this

upward trend is due to increased reporting or a genuine rise in the occurrence of such crimes.

According to the Public Defender of Georgia's report (2021) on the positive obligations of law enforcement officers to protect the equality of vulnerable groups, an analysis of hate-motivated crimes in 2019-2020 revealed that the LGBTQI+ community members were particularly active in reporting such incidents. The report documents instances of hate crimes against the LGBTQI+ community, ranging from verbal abuse, to beatings, death threats, and assaults on the offices of organizations advocating for LGBTQI+ rights.

Notably, the report sheds light on cases of verbal abuse involving police officers, adding a layer of concern. It also underscores instances where law enforcement exhibited inaction in addressing certain cases. This points to an ongoing problem: Despite an increase in reporting, there is still an inadequate response by the law enforcement to crimes against the LGBTQI+ community. The Public Defender of Georgia's report highlights the urgency of addressing this issue to ensure the safety and protection of vulnerable groups in Georgia.

In fact, the government itself, by downplaying hate groups and justifying their actions, has become the primary and most dangerous oppressor of the LGBTQI+ community in the country. Violence against LGBTQI+ individuals is often perceived as legitimate and goes unpunished, while the activities of LGBTQI+ activists are viewed as harmful and damaging.

The LGBTQI+ community in Georgia faces significant limitations when it comes to advocating for their rights on a large scale. The conditions created make it practically impossible to hold public gatherings for the community. Specifically, the exercise of the right to assembly and manifestation poses significant challenges for the LGBTQI+ community, exemplified by events such as the tumultuous occurrences on May 17, 2013, and recurring issues surrounding Tbilisi Pride in subsequent years.

The recent rise in activism by far right, homophobic groups, often fueled by encouragement from Orthodox clergy members, exacerbates the difficulties faced by the LGBTQI+ community. This challenge is further intensified by the government's perceived inaction and inadequate responses to addressing threats from such groups. A glaring example is the 2019 incident during Giorgi Gakharia's tenure as Minister of Internal Affairs (MIA), where the MIA refused to provide protection for participants of the March for Dignity. Homophobic mobs unleashed violence by smashing tents outside the Parliament of Georgia, raiding the offices of the Shame Movement and other civic organizations, and physically

assaulting numerous journalists.

The government's indifference persisted with the March for Dignity scheduled for July 5, 2021. Despite clear indications from homophobic groups of their intent to disrupt the march, the government failed to take adequate measures and ensure the safety of participants. This pattern of inadequate response underscores the ongoing challenges faced by the LGBTQI+ community in exercising their fundamental rights, emphasizing the pressing need for comprehensive and proactive measures for the safety and rights of assembly of LGBTQI+ individuals.

Additionally, legal advocacy requires the cooperation and willingness of law enforcement officials to take action against criminals and address issues sensitively, which seems to be an unattainable task in the current situation.

The involvement of individuals in LGBTQI+ community rights advocacy in Georgia is closely tied to their affiliation with the group. This affiliation often leads to marginalization, difficulty in finding employment, strained family ties, and increased risks of physical harm or destruction. These factors contribute to a low number of individuals actively engaged in advocating for LGBTQI+ rights.

Moreover, hate groups and far-right organizations systematically organize discrediting campaigns against those involved in the advocacy work. These campaigns involve distributing materials online and in public spaces, displaying images of activists, and portraying them as enemies of the nation and traditional values. Such hostile environments pose physical and mental challenges for LGBTQI+ activists to fulfill their duties, and perform daily functions. Indeed, it makes it impossible to feel comfortable with their own identity and build up a life. Many LGBTQI+ activists and other community members choose to leave Georgia for Europe (Another House, 2023). This outflow of individuals weakens the LGBTQI+ movement in the country.

The loss of dedicated activists and community members, combined with the challenges and risks they face, undoubtedly poses significant obstacles to the progress of LGBTQI+ rights in Georgia. Addressing these issues requires creating a safe and supportive environment that values diversity, protects individual rights, and actively combats discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

LGBTQI+ activists and their supporters find themselves seeking ways to overcome the challenges. Notably, the increased visibility of the community has attracted a significant number of loyal supporters. One crucial task

is to continue growing the number of supporters, as the consolidation of a portion of society represents a powerful force that no government can ignore. Simultaneously, these supporters spread their attitudes

within their own micro-societies, effectively shifting public opinion toward recognizing the need to protect LGBTQI+ rights.

## 5. Breaking the Stigma: Significance of Human Stories

In acquiring support, the LGBTQI+ community can significantly benefit from media coverage focusing on an in-depth exploration of the issues and fostering empathetic attitudes.

Sharing human stories breaks the silence and challenges the stigma surrounding LGBTQI+ issues. By openly discussing personal experiences, individuals within the community can dismantle the barriers of shame and fear that often prevent people from speaking out. Through storytelling, they can reclaim their narratives.

To shed light on their struggles and triumphs, human stories of LGBTQI+ individuals play a vital role. These stories offer a profound insight into their experiences, fostering empathy, dispelling stereotypes, and paving the way for meaningful change. Human stories possess a remarkable capacity to fight misconceptions and break the stereotypes surrounding LGBTQI+ individuals in Georgia.

Human stories are pivotal in cultivating empathy and understanding among a broader audience. When we hear personal accounts of discrimination, harassment, and exclusion faced by LGBTQI+ individuals in Georgia, we become more attuned to the emotional toll these experiences have on their lives.

Human stories act as catalysts for meaningful conversations and educational initiatives surrounding LGBTQI+ rights in Georgia. By sharing stories, LGBTQI+ individuals and their allies create opportunities for dialogue, raising awareness about the issues they face.

Moreover, human stories empower individuals within the community, giving them the confidence to advocate for their rights and engage in educational efforts that promote inclusivity. As a result, the stories become powerful tools for social transformation, contributing to the development of educational programs, awareness campaigns, and workshops that foster a more inclusive society.

Genuine human stories can evoke the best qualities in

people – a sense of justice, compassion, and a desire to help. True stories effectively illustrate the community's challenges and highlight potential solutions, providing guidance for those on a similar path. Sharing personal experiences can empower individuals, knowing that their most difficult experiences were not endured in vain and that their stories can aid others in surviving and finding a better life.

In Georgia, predominantly local media cover LGBTQI+ issues concerning violations of the community's rights. However, real human stories are rarely featured, and stories involving individuals who have left Georgia are even more seldom covered. Those from the LGBTQI+ community who have sought refuge abroad often face their own unique challenges. The public, who may mistakenly assume that their problems cease once they leave the country, often overlooks their struggles. However, this is far from the truth. This path to physical survival has never been easy for queers and has become even more challenging in light of Russia's military attack on Ukraine and the ongoing war.

In European Countries, queer emigrants face significant problems in obtaining refugee status and in satisfying basic needs related to the status. This applies to food, medical care, dwelling places, access to social services, and much more (Another House, 2023). Some queer emigrants are forced to return to Georgia, where an unbearable life awaits them again. The difficulties that they face in foreign countries threaten their mental and physical health. Returning to Georgia poses a direct threat to their lives. This is especially true of transgender women, who have been murdered in the past due to their identity (*Georgian Transgender Woman Dies After Attack*, 2016).

Emigration is a challenging process involving significant stress and various difficulties as individuals seek to establish themselves in a new country and attain stability. For members of the LGBTQI+ community, this path can be even more arduous, as they often navigate it alone, without the support of family or familiar surroundings. Furthermore, being in a foreign country does not guarantee an environment free from hatred or



discrimination.

The influx of refugees resulting from Russia's war in Ukraine has further complicated finding an asylum. Nonetheless, the number of LGBTQI+ individuals seeking asylum from Georgia remains significant.

By sharing these experiences, commonalities can resonate with the experiences of many Georgian citizens. After all, thousands of Georgian individuals have been forced into labor emigration. Society needs to recognize the true underlying causes of these shared challenges and not simply accept the explanations put forth by political groups.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Improving the rights of the LGBTQI+ community in Georgia requires a complex approach. Firstly, the community's political scapegoating should be stopped.

In the field of legislation, the needs of the LGBTQI+ community should be reinstated in prominent policy documents, such as the Human Rights Strategy and Action Plan. This requires collaboration not only by the LGBTQI+ community organizations but also by broader human rights-focused organizations. Strengthening partnerships will contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive legislative framework.

Empowering the LGBTQI+ community members themselves is crucial. Their firsthand experiences equip them with the knowledge to identify specific challenges and propose practical solutions. Supporting their involvement in decision-making processes ensures a more nuanced and tailored approach to addressing their needs.

To combat societal stigma, a concerted effort in information dissemination through media and cinematography is essential. Human stories that highlight the diverse experiences of LGBTQI+ individuals will contribute to dismantling stereotypes and fostering empathy within society.

In addition to community-driven efforts, the government of Georgia plays a pivotal role in advancing LGBTQI+ rights: Eliminating Negative Attitudes and Prejudices:

The government should take decisive measures to eradicate negative attitudes, stigma, and prejudices towards the LGBTQI+ community. This involves a comprehensive examination of the root causes of existing biases and their impact on both the community and society. Equality-oriented education policies should actively integrate LGBTQI+ issues into formal and non-formal educational spaces, encompassing curricula on civic education and human sexuality.

**Establishing an Advisory Group:** The National Governmental Mechanism for Gender Equality, specifically the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women, and Domestic Violence, should create an advisory group specifically focused on LGBTQI+ rights and discrimination reduction. This group will aid agencies within the Commission in recognizing gender equality and intersectional discrimination. It will facilitate the development and implementation of appropriate actions.

The parliament of Georgia holds a crucial monitoring role in overseeing the effective implementation of these measures, ensuring that legislative and policy changes translate into tangible improvements for the LGBTQI+ community.

By adopting this comprehensive approach, Georgia can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society for all its citizens.

## 5. Bibliography

- Al Jazeera. (July 5, 2021). *Georgia: LGBTQ activists cancel pride march after violence*. `March for Dignity`, which PM had called, cancelled after counterprotesters storm campaigners' offices in Tbilisi. [Georgia: LGBTQ activists cancel Pride march after violence | LGBTQ News | Al Jazeera](#).
- Another House. (June, 2023). Friedrich Naumann Foundation South Caucasus [Video] [სხვა სახლი / Another House - YouTube](#).
- CoE, C. (2018). With hatred motivated crime, hate language and discrimination In: Georgia: Society mood and awareness. Tbilisi: Europe Council.
- Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. (November 8, 2016). Georgia: Transgender Woman Dies After Attack. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-transgender-woman-dies-after-attack/28135418.html>
- Human Rights Council. (May 15, 2019). Visit to Georgia-Report of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. United Nations General Assembly. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc4145add1-visit-georgia-report-independent-expert-protection-against>.
- Jalaghania L. (2021). Assessment of the legal status of the LGBTQI+ group in Georgia. Public Defender Office. [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ge/undp\\_ge\\_lgbtqi\\_pdo\\_02\\_geo.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ge/undp_ge_lgbtqi_pdo_02_geo.pdf).
- Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia; Prosecutor's Office of Georgia; Supreme Court of Georgia. (2020). *Joint report of data on crimes committed on the grounds of intolerance with discrimination basis*. Georgian Government. [Hate-crimes\\_2020\\_IV.pdf \(geostat.ge\)](#).
- Public Defender (OMBUDSMAN) of Georgia. (2021). *Positive obligations on law enforcement officials to protect the equality of vulnerable groups*. [სახელმწიფოს პოზიტიური ვალდებულება მონწყვლადი ჯგუფების უფლებათა დაცვის კუთხით \(ombudsman.ge\)](#).
- Aghdgomelashvili, E. and others. (2021). Assessing the impact of anti-pandemic restrictions and anti-crisis measures on the LGBTQI community due to the new coronavirus. Women's Initiatives Supporting Group (WISG). Retrieved from: [https://wisg.org/Data/docs/publications/research-study/WISG\\_Covid-impact-on-LGBTQI-community-EN.pdf](https://wisg.org/Data/docs/publications/research-study/WISG_Covid-impact-on-LGBTQI-community-EN.pdf)
- Human Rights Campaign (HRC). (November 9, 2021). 2021 Becomes Deadliest Year on Record for Transgender and Non-Binary People. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/2021-becomes-deadliest-year-on-record-for-transgender-and-non-binary-people>
- Roth, Andrew. (July 5, 2021). Tbilisi Pride march cancelled after far-right attack on headquarters. Event in Georgian capital cancelled after protesters storm activists' headquarters and attack journalists. The Guardian. [Tbilisi Pride march cancelled after far-right attack on headquarters | Georgia | The Guardian](#).
- World Justice Project. (n.d.). WJP Rule of Law Index. Retrieved: 17.11.2023 from [WJP Rule of Law Index | Georgia Insights \(worldjusticeproject.org\)](#).

