

Joint Statement: LGBTI people in Uzbekistan are being criminalised. We're calling for legal reform.

[article](#), [non-discrimination](#), [health & depathologisation](#), [lgbti](#)

The undersigned organizations express serious concerns over the continued and intensified enforcement of Article 120 of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan (hereinafter Article 120) that criminalises consensual sexual relations between men and is used to persecute trans women. Violations of Article 120 are punishable by various restrictions on liberty, including imprisonment for up to three years.

In April 2021, Uzbekistan's Ministry of Internal Affairs publicly disclosed for the first time that 44 individuals had been convicted under Article 120 between 2016 and 2020, with 49 people serving prison terms at the time. These figures were followed by data from the governmental National Centre for Human Rights showing 36 convictions under Article 120 in 2021 alone, with 16 of individuals sentenced to imprisonment. Recent data indicate a sharp escalation in prosecutions: from an average of 17 cases per year in 2021–2023 to 48 cases in 2024 and 71 cases in the first nine months of 2025 alone.

We consider Article 120 to be not merely a discriminatory criminal provision but a structural enabler of privacy violations, denial of legal protection, law-enforcement abuse, and the further marginalization of LGBT+ persons. The present paper sets out the international human rights framework violated by Article 120, documents reported violations, analyses development and public health consequences, and calls on relevant stakeholders to take concrete action toward its repeal.

1. International legal framework

Uzbekistan is a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and other human rights treaties. The application of Article 120 violates obligations under each of these instruments, as well as relevant resolutions and standards of United Nations human rights bodies. The 1994 *Toonen v. Australia* decision of the UN Human Rights Committee established that laws criminalising consensual same-sex conduct between adults are incompatible with ICCPR Article 17 (right to privacy) and Article 26 (equality before the law). This precedent is binding on Uzbekistan as a State Party.

Between 2021 and 2026, a significant and accelerating increase in the number of criminal cases opened under Article 120 has been documented. The series of raids in early 2026 in which at least 62 individuals were detained and which led to 34 criminal cases being opened is of particular concern as it appears to reflect coordinated, targeted operations by law enforcement. ECOM's annual regional human rights report documents a pattern of violations linked to the enforcement of Article 120, including law enforcement use of personal data and entrapment tactics on dating applications to identify, arrest, and subsequently extort individuals. TGEU reported systematic cases of law enforcement officials targeting trans women sex workers for the purposes of blackmail, extortion, gathering information on clients and other trans women, physical and psychological violence and torture, arrest, and imprisonment. It should be noted that Article 120 is used against trans women in a context where the Government of Uzbekistan has not yet established trans-specific, non-pathologising support services and where trans persons are unable to obtain legal gender recognition. This practice raises serious concerns regarding the right to privacy under ICCPR Article 17, as well as the confidentiality of health and personal data for individuals who may also be accessing HIV-related or other health services. Forced disclosure of such data creates risks of further harm, including extortion, social exclusion, and violence.

Persons detained under Article 120 are subjected to involuntary invasive examinations, conducted without free and informed consent. The UN Committee Against Torture, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the OHCHR, and the Independent Forensic Experts Group (IFEG) have all determined that such examinations:

- constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment that may rise to the level of torture;
- have no scientific or medical validity as evidence of sexual activity; and
- cannot be conducted with free consent in the context of criminal detention.

These findings are directly applicable to the reported practices in Uzbekistan and require assessment under Uzbekistan's obligations as a State Party to the Convention Against Torture.

2. Public Health Consequences

Criminalisation of consensual same-sex conduct constitutes a well-documented structural barrier to public health, with direct consequences for HIV prevention and treatment outcomes. It has been well documented that:

- fear of criminalisation and law enforcement contact prevents men who have sex with men (MSM) and trans women from accessing HIV testing, prevention services, antiretroviral treatment, and psychosocial support;
- healthcare providers operating in criminalised environments face institutional disincentives to offer non-judgmental, confidential services to key populations;
- The correlation between punitive legal environments and elevated HIV incidence among MSM is documented across multiple regional contexts.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' General Comment No. 22 (2016) affirms that the right to health under International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 12 encompasses non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. Uzbekistan's enforcement of Article 120 creates conditions that are in direct tension with its obligations to provide universal and equitable access to health services. The principle of leaving no one behind, which is central to Uzbekistan's commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals, cannot be realised while key populations are subject to active criminalisation.

3. We Call to Action

We call on relevant stakeholders including Uzbekistan's government, intergovernmental organisations, international financial institutions, bilateral donors, and diplomatic missions to take the following measures:

To the Government of Uzbekistan

- Immediately cease the practice of forced invasive forensic examinations, which lack medical justification, cannot be freely consented to in detention, and are incompatible with Uzbekistan's obligations under the Convention Against Torture.
- Ensure effective legal protection including prompt access to legal counsel, confidentiality of medical and personal data, and accessible mechanisms for individuals to challenge violations.
- Align national legislation with Uzbekistan's international human rights obligations, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention Against Torture and the recommendations of relevant UN treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review.
- Abolish Article 120 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan and associated enforcement practices, including forced invasive examinations, in human rights dialogues and Universal Periodic Review follow-up mechanisms.

To international partners

- Include LGBT+-specific risk assessments within social impact evaluations and environmental and social action plans for country programmes and individual projects.
- Ensure grievance mechanisms are accessible to LGBT+ individuals, including through anonymous reporting channels and protection of complainants from criminal exposure.
- Engage in dialogue with the Government of Uzbekistan regarding the compatibility of enforcement practices under Article 120 with International Financial Institutions safeguard requirements and do-no-harm principles.
- Fund and support HIV and care services as well as health services that can reach key populations safely, including through community-based organisations operating in the current environment.

To Diplomatic Missions and Bilateral Donors

- Call on the Government of Uzbekistan to abolish Article 120 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan and associated enforcement practices, including forced invasive examinations, in human rights dialogues and Universal Periodic Review follow-up mechanisms.
- Support civil society organisations documenting violations and providing legal, medical and psychosocial assistance to affected individuals.
- Engage UN mechanisms, including the Independent Expert on SOGI and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, in follow-up on the Uzbekistan situation.

Conclusion

We consider that the criminalisation of consensual same-sex conduct, the reported use of forced invasive examinations, and the systematic enforcement of Article 120 of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan represent clear failures to respect, protect and fulfil human rights obligations; pose structural obstacles to the achievement of public health targets; and adds practical risks for development programming that cannot be adequately managed while the legal environment remains as it stands.

The principle of leaving no one behind requires that the most marginalised populations, including those whose marginalisation is actively maintained by criminal law receive specific attention and protection. The undersigned organizations stand ready to engage in constructive dialogue with all relevant stakeholders and to support efforts toward legal and policy reform in Uzbekistan.

This joint statement is endorsed by:

[ECOM — Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity](#)

[EHRA — Eurasian Harm Reduction Association](#)

[ILGA-EUROPE](#)

[MPACT Global Action for Gay Men's Health and Rights](#)

TGEU — Trans Europe and Central Asia

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through research, advocacy, and community-building.

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