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# LGBT in Kyrgyzstan: struggle for visibility

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## What is Labrys

LGBT Organization ‘Labrys’ is a non-governmental organization in Kyrgyzstan that has worked to empower Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people and protect their human rights since 2004.



‘Labrys’ provides services for over 1000 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT) in Kyrgyz Republic.

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## Kyrgyzstan: an introduction



## Kyrgyzstan: behind the curtains

- 18 years of 'democracy' – 18 years of failure to fulfill international human rights obligations with regards to issues of interethnic understanding, freedom of speech and assembly, equal rights and opportunities
- 18 years of independence – 18 years of return to deeply traditional society with rigid gender stereotypes and social behaviour norms specific to the Central Asian region as a whole.
- 18 years of existence – 18 years of refusal to hear, see, talk about sexual orientation and gender identity of its own citizens

## What is it like to be LGBT in Kyrgyzstan?

- Looking, behaving, and *living* not “like everybody else” is severely punished both in Bishkek and rural areas of the country
- Labrys has documented cases of violence toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, including rapes, thrashing and psychological pressure, as well as forced marriage and bride kidnapping

## Some statistics

- One out of 4 interviewed lesbians and bisexual women have been victims of sexual violence against them for their sexual orientation ('curative' rape)
- Every second of interviewees mention rejection, alienation and physical violence by their families in response to their sexual orientation/gender identity as their main concern
- Every third one actively tried to 'change' their sexual orientation or gender identity in response to social pressure
- For half of them, their parents were responsible for sending their children to psychiatric hospitals for 'cure', arranged meetings with men, married their daughters off, or used violence/house arrest to try to force them to change

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## Problematic areas

- Invisibility of LGBT with the State
  - Hate crimes against LGBT
  - Homo- and transphobia in the media
  - Maladjusted legislation for gender marker change for transgender people
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## Invisibility of LGBT with the State

- 'Sexual orientation' and 'gender identity', as well as other terms denoting or referring to LGBT are not present in Kyrgyz legislation
    - Consequent lack of mechanisms of protection in a traditional society, where even Ombudsman and police are guided by 'traditional' views
  - Kyrgyz government has a record of systematically refusing LGBT activists of Kyrgyzstan to raise issues of SOGI on governmental level:
    - Justification: "The people of Kyrgyz Republic are not *ready* to accept these modes of life"
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## Hate crimes against LGBT

- No hate crimes legislation in principle
- Hate crimes against LGBT not registered by police due to homo- and trans-negativity, and even perpetrated by them
  - A transwoman gang-raped by four men with a bottle, burned cigarette tips all over her body and genitals, and threatened to be killed. Case not registered by police (although all necessary steps were taken), offensive and humiliating terms used with regards to the victim.
  - Two gay men arrested on false accusations and forced to have sex with each other in front of police, who made videos of them – in exchange for their freedom (which belonged to them originally)

## Homo- and transphobia in the media

- Majority of media coverage of SOGI – negative or extremely negative
- Marginalization of the subject:
  - Exoticization
  - «O tempora! O mores!»
  - Social disease that comes from the West
  - Gay mafia
  - «Shameful» details of life of a public person
- Personal homo- and transphobia of journalists
  - Article in republican newspaper calling for violence against LGBT after Labrys press conference (October 2008)

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## Maladjusted legislation for gender marker change for transgender people

- Lack of clear procedures for gender marker change for transgender people in accordance with international human rights standards, also recommended by WPATH
  - Misreadings of the law by decision making persons – often towards the negative end
  - High rate of unemployment, lack of access to healthcare, education and even minimum standards of living, violence and hate crimes due to lack of adequate IDs
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## Labrys recommendations

1. To apply international best practices (eg the Yogyakarta Principles on the application of international law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity) **to recognize the rights of transgender people** to change gender and name in passports and other official documents in accordance with their self-defined gender identity and without the need to undergo surgeries.
  2. Develop and implement relevant **legislation to prevent discrimination, violence and hate crimes** based on sexual orientation and gender identity and train civil servants and law enforcement bodies to address these.
  3. Create **enabling environment for NGOs** working on sexual orientation and gender identity and encourage state and civil society cooperation on promoting tolerance and non-discrimination based on these grounds.
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