

BCSDN Condemns the Criminalisation of LGBTI+ Civil Society in Türkiye and Calls for Timely Action to Protect Civic Space



Balkan Civil Society
Development Network

The Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) strongly condemns the escalating targeting of LGBTI+ organisations and human rights defenders in Türkiye. The raids, detentions and criminal investigations that began in September 2026 represent a serious attack on the safety, dignity and fundamental rights of LGBTI+ people and human rights defenders, protected under the European Convention on Human Rights and international human rights law. These developments raise concerns beyond the activists and organisations directly affected, as the **criminalisation of legitimate civil society activities undermines the enabling environment for independent civic action**.

Beginning on 12 September, coordinated operations across Türkiye targeted LGBTI+ and HIV organisations, activists, journalists and others. At least 116 people were detained, with more than 80 placed in pre-trial detention, while investigations extended to over 160 people. Offices and homes were searched, digital equipment seized and peaceful protesters detained. The Ministry of Justice circular issued on 14 September, instructing prosecutors to investigate activities considered contrary to “public morality”, raises further concerns about the potential expansion of these restrictions.

These developments reflect a broader pattern of pressure on LGBTI+ civil society, including restrictions on public expression, excessive auditing of associations, threats of dissolution and stigmatising narratives. **The scrutiny and portrayal of legitimate international funding as potentially unlawful is particularly concerning**, as it risks discouraging organisations from seeking support, deterring donors and criminalising legitimate international cooperation.

BCSDN calls on Turkish authorities to release all individuals detained solely for their legitimate human rights activities, guarantee their fundamental rights and end the use of legislation and administrative measures to intimidate or obstruct civil society organisations. We urge the **European Commission, Council of Europe, UN human rights mechanisms and diplomatic missions** to build on existing statements and commitments, take concrete action through political dialogue and monitoring processes, and press for an end to restrictions on civic space.. **International donors and civil society partners** should maintain flexible funding, legal assistance and protection for affected organisations, guided by their needs and assessments.

The developments in Türkiye signal an unprecedented crackdown in the wider Balkan region, where anti-LGBTI+ rhetoric and other forms of pressure on independent civil society are increasingly visible. While circumstances differ across countries, restrictions targeting particular groups can establish dangerous precedents for other civil society actors. **The protection of civic space cannot be selective:** fundamental freedoms must be guaranteed for all, both in law and in practice, regardless of the communities they represent or the issues they address.

These developments underline the need to identify emerging restrictions early and respond before they become entrenched. BCSDN stands in solidarity with affected organisations and human rights defenders and will continue working with its members and partners to monitor emerging threats, strengthen regional solidarity and advocate for timely institutional responses.

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