

Strengthening Gender-Based Violence Protection for LBQ¹ Women in Albania

Gaps, challenges and policy
recommendations for inclusive responses

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¹LBQ women as a term inclusive of lesbian, bisexual and queer women, including cisgender, trans and intersex women, and all non-binary or genderqueer people on the gender spectrum who relate to an LBQ identity.

Executive Summary

In Albania, LBQ women face daily threats of violence and discrimination in a system that formally promises protection yet fails to acknowledge or serve their specific needs. While legal and policy frameworks align with international standards on gender equality and anti-discrimination, implementation mechanisms exclude the lived realities of LBQ women.

Same-sex intimate partner violence is not formally recognized, leading to denial of essential services and legal remedies. Survivors face discrimination from family members and institutions, with many experiencing corrective practices, forced outings, or psychological violence without institutional response. The lack of inclusive shelters, trained staff and confidential reporting procedures leaves survivors without recourse, reinforcing a cycle of invisibility and harm.

This policy brief addresses essential gaps to develop a specific plan that will enhance protection and justice access and support services for women.

This brief draws its findings from the “Analysis on Gender Equality and Prevention of Violence against LBQ Women in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia” which combined a desk review of laws and policies, focus group discussions, and an assessment of compliance with the Istanbul Convention.

Legal Protections without Recognition

Albania's Constitution and anti-discrimination laws recognize sexual orientation and gender identity as protected grounds, and the Istanbul Convention is ratified. However, the national legal and policy frameworks do not recognize same-sex relationships or address same-sex intimate partner violence.

This legal silence means LBQ survivors cannot access restraining orders or emergency support on equal terms. Police, social workers and health providers operate under gender-neutral laws that fail to capture the specific forms of violence LBQ women face, from corrective practices and psychological coercion to exclusion from shelters due to their identity.

National strategies reference "intersectionality" but lack any targeted, resourced actions for LBQ women. Strategic plans are often vague and lack implementation monitoring, while partnership with civil society organizations remains informal, donor-driven and underfunded.

Services that Exclude by Default

State-funded shelters and psychosocial services are not equipped to support LBQ survivors. There have been cases where women were turned away or outed in shelters, facing further harm. There are no service standards, referral pathways, or accountability mechanisms to ensure safe access for LBQ women.

Healthcare workers often lack training or awareness on SOGIESC-related violence and survivors may be sent to "conversion" therapy, which is not explicitly banned. Mental health support is limited, and survivors must navigate hostile or untrained systems to access help. Most rely on civil society organizations, who work with minimal support and often without formal recognition.

Invisibility in the Data System

Public institutions do not collect data on the experiences of LBQ women. Without disaggregated data, the scale and nature of violence remain hidden, and LBQ women are absent from national reports, evaluations and funding decisions. Civil society remains the main source of data, but their contributions are rarely included in official monitoring frameworks.

Recommendations for Inclusive Protection

To close the gap between rights on paper and real protection, the Government of Albania must implement urgent reforms.

1. Legal and Policy Reform

Amend laws and protocols tackling gender-based violence to explicitly include same-sex intimate partner violence. All protective measures, including restraining and emergency barring orders, should be accessible regardless of marital or cohabitation status.

Adopt the Law on Same-Sex Partnerships to ensure legal recognition and equal protection for LBQ families under domestic violence laws, inheritance rights, and access to services.

Ensure that national strategies on gender equality, gender-based violence and LGBTI rights include specific, time-bound, and budgeted measures targeting LBQ women, with clearly assigned institutional responsibilities and monitoring indicators.

Over the long term, the state should guarantee full legal equality for same-sex couples by removing discriminatory legal and policy barriers in family law.

2. Inclusive and Accessible Services

All shelters and crisis services should be required to implement anti-discrimination protocols and adopt inclusive intake procedures tailored to the needs of LBQ women.

At least one specialized and fully funded LGBTIQ shelter and crisis support center should be established to serve as a safe space for those excluded from mainstream services.

Trauma-informed psychosocial and reproductive health services must be expanded and made inclusive of LBQ women.

Conversion practices in healthcare and social services should be explicitly prohibited.

3. Institutional Capacity and Training

Mandatory training programs should be introduced for police officers, social workers, prosecutors, judges, and healthcare professionals, focusing on SOGIESC-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches to gender-based violence.

This training should be institutionalized through integration into public sector induction programs and linked to professional development and performance evaluation systems.

Protocols for safe, confidential referrals between civil society organizations and public institutions should be established to ensure survivor-oriented access to support.

4. Data Collection

Civil society data and research findings should be formally recognized and integrated into national monitoring and reporting systems.

A national prevalence survey on gender-based violence should be conducted with indicators specific to LBQ women and non-binary individuals, and the results should be publicly accessible.

5. Partnerships and Public Awareness

Long-term partnerships with civil society organizations that support LBQ women must be formally established and supported through public funding.

Referral systems between civil society organizations and public institutions should be coordinated and operationalized to guarantee inclusive service delivery.

National awareness campaigns are needed to promote bodily autonomy, dignity and diversity, and to reduce societal stigma.

Public officials and political leaders should face consequences for hate speech and discriminatory rhetoric through appropriate legal and disciplinary mechanisms.

A Call to Action

Albania must fulfill its obligations under the Istanbul Convention by ensuring protection for all women, including LBQ women, without exception. Survivors must not be denied justice or safety due to the invisibility of their relationships or the stigma surrounding their identities.

We call for urgent inter-ministerial cooperation between the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the Ministry of Justice to implement inclusive shelter policies, explicitly ban conversion practices and recognize same-sex intimate partner violence.

The full analysis “Analysis on Gender Equality and Prevention of Violence against LBQ Women in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia” contains the detailed research findings.

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