

# WORLD: Merriam-Webster adds nonbinary 'they' pronoun to dictionary

*The new entry explicitly refers to nonbinary people – those who identify as neither exclusively male nor female.*

By Liam Knox

NBC News (18.09.2019) – <https://nbcnews.to/2knJHR0> – Merriam-Webster's dictionary is adding a new entry to the definition of the pronoun "they": a way to refer to a nonbinary individual, one who identifies as neither exclusively male nor female.

It's been a year of heightened visibility for nonbinary people, from the popularity of MTV's "sexually fluid" season of the dating show "Are You the One?" – which counted nonbinary folks among its cast members – to the Grammy-winning artist Sam Smith's recent decision to use gender-neutral they/them pronouns. Merriam-Webster's addition is yet another recognition of the cultural relevance and growing acceptance of nonbinary identity, and it gives new credence to the increasingly common use of they/them pronouns.

Emily Brewster, a senior editor for Merriam-Webster, said factors like the growing practice of soliciting or giving out one's pronouns, the growing number of people who identify as nonbinary, and the acceptance of the nonbinary "they" pronoun

in a wide variety of texts all coalesced to make the new addition an obvious choice.

“We are always aiming to reflect usage,” she said. “It’s very clear that this is fully established in the language at this point.”

The nonbinary “they” is one of 530 new words and definitions already added to Merriam-Webster.com and will appear in its next printed edition, alongside words like “fabulosity” and cultural references like “dad joke.”

The singular “they” pronoun has been in use since the 1300s, according to Merriam-Webster, and it had already been included in the company’s dictionary as a gender-neutral way to refer to someone whose identity is unknown or whose existence is hypothetical. What’s new is its use as a pronoun for individuals who identify as nonbinary.

To those who are reluctant to embrace the singular “they” for grammatical reasons, Brewster pointed out that this kind of shift in the use of a pronoun has happened before. If people could adapt to it then, she said, they can learn to embrace it now.

“The word ‘you’ used to be only plural, which is why we still use the plural verb. We say ‘you are’ even though we’re only speaking to one person,” she said. “We also must adapt to the ‘they are’ for an individual person, and we can.”

Sam Brinton, head of advocacy and government affairs for The Trevor Project, an LGBTQ youth crisis prevention organization, identifies as nonbinary and uses they/them pronouns. They said Merriam-Webster's addition of the nonbinary definition will hopefully help bolster a better understanding of nonbinary identity.

"My day-to-day life consists of helping those around me understand that my pronouns, they and them, are a part of my identity," Brinton wrote in an email to NBC News. "To have Merriam-Webster so openly educate others on the simplicity of the nonbinary use of they and them pronouns is going to make each coming day a little easier for thousands if not millions of LGBTQ youth."

On Twitter, reactions were a predictable mix of excitement from the LGBTQ community and allies, and disdain from grammar purists and those who do not support gender-nonconforming identities.

Brewster said she's glad nonbinary people feel validated by the dictionary's decision, but she stressed that Merriam-Webster doesn't legitimize language – people do, and the singular, gender-neutral "they" has been a legitimate term in that sense for a long time.

"The word exists. You don't actually need a dictionary to legitimize the words," she said. "But of course if it can serve that function I'm happy for it to do so."

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# Transgender people tell us why India's newly proposed rape laws are discriminatory

*The fact that punishment for rape against cis-gendered women is more than seven years, but for the trans community, it ranges from six months to two years, has led to the #RapeIsRape campaign.*

By Pallavi Pundir

Vice (11.09.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2moIoTp> – In 2017, as part of a nation-wide survey, an anonymous transwoman recalled going to the doctor right after being gang-raped. She didn't get the dose of Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (an emergency HIV medicine to be taken within 72 hours of sexual violence). Instead, she encountered one searingly invalidating question from the doctor: "How can you be raped?" The woman was a part of a study that exposed extreme transphobia among the medical community, and a complete disregard for the violence meted out to the transgender community in India. But even though there's no big data on the enormity of sexual violence the community faces in India at the moment, or the impunity with which they're dealt with, it's safe to say that the doctors aren't the only erring ones.

Transgender people—an umbrella term for those whose sense of

gender doesn't sync with the gender assigned to them at birth, with some 4,900,000 of them in India (according to the latest census in 2011)—often face sexual violence in more frequency than can be evidenced. In an interview with South China Morning Post, Salma Khan of Mumbai-based NGO Kinnar Maa Trust, which supports 5,000 transgender people in India, said that at least one in four of the people registered with them has been a victim of rape, gang-rape or other sexual violence.

So, on August 5, when the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha (it's yet to be passed by the Upper House to become the law of the land), despite a large wave of protests since the bill was first introduced in 2014, there was great uproar again. Out of the many flaws of the bill was this glaring one: violence, abuse, and rape against transgender people can be punishable with jail time from six months to two years, and a fine. Compare that with the punishment for rape of cis-gendered women, which can give the offender from seven years of jail time to even life sentence—and you can see how unfair the proposed law reads.

In response to this, transgender people in India have begun a campaign with the hashtag #RapeIsRape, a response that simply states that rape is degrading to all. The movement, which started on August 15, is a part of years and years of struggle by the community to be visible, acknowledged and treated equally in a homophobic and transphobic society. (The transgender community in India got recognised as the third gender only in 2014.)

“Rape is the fourth most common crime committed against women. Trans women are women, whereas trans men are forced to

experience femininity by the patriarchal society we live in,” says Neysara, a Netherlands-based trans person of Indian origin, who is documenting this online campaign, and runs Transgender India, an organisation for transgenders in India. VICE reached out to a few members of the community to find out why the bill causes more harm than good:

**“This increases the chances of us getting targeted even more.”**

Now that the bill has been passed, this is the reality we have to live with. The main problem in the bill is that of harassment. If a trans woman is abused and harassed, the strictest punishment is that of two years and a fine of Rs 10,000 (approximately 128 EUR). If a woman gets raped, the minimum penalty is much more. This increases the chances of us getting targeted even more. We feel that we’re second class citizens who have no value like a regular person. If the government wants to make the bill more inclusive, then make it all-inclusive, and not conditional. – Shakti, 25

**“It’s a clear way of telling us that we’re less than women, or sub-human in the country”**

The law calls itself a transgender person’s protection bill, but, especially in the crimes committed against the community, instead of making it more severe, it dilutes the punishments for offences against the trans community. One such offence that is very gendered is rape. In a country where rape of cis gendered women ranges from seven years to life, it’s a clear way of telling us that we’re less than women, or sub-human in the country. It’s legally writing in the constitution that we’re not legally human. – Neysara, 36

**“In the eyes of the family, trans men are women who need to be fixed”**

The trans community is prone to physical and verbal abuse, even if you compare it with women in India today. Why would you not value the life of the trans community the way you value everyone else's? If you rape, you're taking the dignity of the person. It doesn't matter if the identity of the person is a male, female or trans person. Physical and emotional trauma is the same for everyone. Among a lot of trans people, especially trans men, a lot of corrective rape takes place from the family. In the eyes of the family, those are women who need to be fixed. This is an invisible violence that happens on a very regular basis. Often, there's inappropriate touching and if you say anything, the abuser says, 'Oh, I thought you're a male'. This bill is going to aggravate these kind of situations even more. Article 14 of the Constitution says that all humans have equal rights, but this doesn't look like it, no? – Vinod, 30

**“I do feel the bill is one step forward”**

There's no equality in this bill. Rape is rape, be it with cis-women or trans women. However, I do feel the bill is one step forward. It shows that there is some development and we're working towards more. Earlier, even this provision wasn't there, and having something is better than nothing. The only thing discriminatory here is that it impedes our fundamental right to equality, which is our prerogative irrespective of our gender, caste, sex and so on. – Nia, 42

**“So must crimes against us be seen as petty crimes?”**

There should be a punishment for at least three to five years. If you look at the LGBTQ community, they suffer, almost every day, with some kind of violence or the other. So must crimes against us be seen as petty crimes? This will only push us further to the margins. – Ibra, 25

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## **Mexico trans women fight for justice as killings go unpunished**

By Associated Press

The LA Times (09.09.2019) – <https://lat.ms/2m5wei0> – Months after Kenya Cuevas' friend was killed in front of her, a funeral wreath with Cuevas' name on it arrived at her doorstep. The implication was clear: Keep making noise about slain transgender women and you'll be next.

Mexico has become the world's second deadliest country after Brazil for transgender people, with 261 transgender women slain in 2013-2018, according to a recent study by the LGBTQ rights group Letra S.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who took office Dec. 1, has promised his government will carry out "effective"



investigations into LGBTQ hate crimes, but the grisly rate continues. Sixteen transgender women were reported killed in the first four months of 2019 and at least six more since then, according to an Associated Press count of cases reported in local media.

Like most crime in Mexico, nearly all such slayings go unsolved and unpunished – less than 3% of the killings of LGBTQ members have resulted in convictions since 2013. So transgender community leaders and activists are largely on their own in pursuing long-denied justice.

Cuevas became an activist on Sept. 29, 2016. That night, her friend and fellow transgender sex worker Paola Buenrostro got into a client's Nissan and was shot multiple times. When Cuevas ran to the car's passenger side, the man pointed the gun at her head and pulled the trigger. The weapon jammed.

Cuevas grabbed the man and held him until police arrived, at which point she began recording on her cellphone. But despite multiple witnesses to the killing and Cuevas' video, the man was released from custody a few days later.

An angry Cuevas soon quit sex work and founded the organization Casa de Muñecas, Spanish for "house of dolls," to campaign for protections for transgender women. She is now one of the most visible transgender activists among a growing chorus of women seeking change from Mexico's government.

Death threats have followed, and Cuevas now has security

cameras installed at her home and is accompanied by two bodyguards provided by a governmental program that tries to protect activists and journalists.

“When that happened to Paola, I protested and I did it publicly, asking for justice the entire time,” Cuevas said. “I don’t want special treatment. Just give me justice – do your job.”

Lina Perez, president of the pro-LGBTQ organization Cuenta Conmigo, said slain transgender women rarely receive justice because authorities often look down on them.

“It’s easier to grant impunity because the same people that oversee the law think that they’re sick, that there is something wrong with them,” Perez said.

Activists do point to some victories in recent years. A major one came in 2014 when Mexico City became the first place in the country to let transgender people change their gender and names on their birth certificates, a law that has since been adopted by six of Mexico’s 31 states.

That change was pushed for in part by the activist group ProDiana, which is led by Diana Sanchez Barrios.

Sanchez Barrios said that before the law, transgender people had to go through expensive judicial processes to amend identifying documents. She was forced to undergo tests on her

mental state, produce a litany of witnesses from throughout her life and spend thousands of dollars to legally change her gender and name a decade ago.

“It’s like you were on trial being made guilty just for being a trans woman,” Sanchez said.

About 4,000 transgender women have changed their official documents since Mexico City’s laws became more accepting, but violence persists.

“We’re always the most vulnerable,” Sanchez said. “We’re the perfect target for discrimination.”

ProDiana now is pushing for institutional reforms to prevent discrimination by key areas of the government, like the police.

Sanchez said police “have not been a great ally for trans women.” She described years of extortion and violence suffered at the hands of officers who are supposed to protect citizens.

A common thread of vulnerability runs through the lives of transgender women, who are often shunned by their own families and forced into the streets. Cuevas and Sanchez both ran away from home at a young age to begin their transitions.

“We went to the funerals of murdered friends and the families didn’t want us there,” Sanchez said. “We have to be very far from certain relationships in our friends’ lives.”

Many employers also refuse to hire transgender women, forcing them to rely on sex work and exposing them to the dangers of the streets, activists say.

Killings of transgender women mirror Mexico’s broader struggle against cartel and gang violence, with homicide totals setting new records several years running.

Last year, 53 transgender women were killed in Mexico. They include a woman found in a trash bin with her face pummeled beyond recognition by a rock. One was tortured to death by captors while her family heard her last moments over the phone. Another was found naked and strangled in her bedroom. No suspects have been publicly identified in those cases.

Most recently, on Aug. 13, a transgender woman died from eight stab wounds in Mexico City, local media reported. Her attacker escaped and police have named no suspects.

While Lopez Obrador’s government has publicly sided with LGBTQ rights, it’s not clear what protections might be put in place or envisioned to combat violence against the community.

Alexandra Haas, director of the federal National Council to Prevent Discrimination, said the administration wants to

retrain local prosecutors and police in handling cases involving transgender sex workers. She said the government is working with the attorney general's office to establish unified protocols across Mexico.

"It's very important to us that we make it so local prosecutors take these cases seriously," Haas said.

Sanchez said there is a lot of work to be done at all levels of government. She would like to see the federal government pass a marriage equality law, as it is currently governed on a state-by-state case, and challenge other local decisions that may infringe on rights such as legally changing one's gender.

"This leftist government that has majority control of Congress and the Senate and locally in Mexico City has to generate laws in favor of sexual diversity," Sanchez said.

In the capital's Pride parade in June, Cuevas rode down the city's premier avenue on top of a hearse to call attention to the violence against the transgender community.

Death has not stopped following her. Last January, Cuevas' friend Pamela Sandoval became the first known transgender woman to be killed under the new administration.

Cuevas said she is willing to endure the death threats if it means she can help secure a safer world for Mexico's transgender community.

“If I don’t do it, the government isn’t going to do it,” Cuevas said. “And if I wait for the government to do it, how many more people are going to be killed?”

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## **Legal battle over Marvel comic gay kiss in Brazil**

CNA (08.09.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2kDFwku> – In a fresh legal twist, a Brazilian court has allowed the evangelical mayor of Rio de Janeiro to confiscate books with LGBT content he considers “inappropriate” for minors, sparking fears over censorship and discrimination.

Saturday’s (Sep 7) ruling suspends an interim injunction which had blocked the mayor from trying to ban a Marvel comic book on sale at the Rio book fair which shows a kiss between two male superheroes.

Ultra-conservative mayor Marcelo Crivella had ordered the book removed from sale because of its “sexual content for minors.”

Crivella – a former bishop in the giant Universal Church of the Kingdom of God – was elected Rio’s mayor in 2016, promising to bring law and order to a city beset by crime.

The drawing that sparked the mayor's ire showed the Marvel superhero characters Wiccan and Hulkling exchanging a kiss, fully dressed.

Crivella's move backfired as copies of "Young Avengers: the Children's Crusade" quickly sold out after he demanded it be withdrawn from the book fair, organizers told AFP.

Popular Brazilian YouTuber Felipe Neto, who has more than 34 million subscribers to his channel, also bought 14,000 books on LGBT themes and distributed them free at the fair in protest.

The image of the Marvel comic kiss was also on show Saturday at news kiosks across the country, printed on the cover of the Folha de S. Paulo, Brazil's largest national newspaper.

### **'Discriminatory Ruling'**

But on Saturday afternoon, the president of the Rio de Janeiro Court of Justice suspended the injunction, endorsing the actions of the mayor's office.

For Judge Claudio de Mello Tavares, it was not expected that a superhero comic would address issues of sexuality so it should come with a content warning.

“Because it is a superhero work – attractive to a juvenile audience – which addresses the issue of homosexuality it is necessary that parents be duly alerted” before deciding “whether or not the text fits their vision of how to educate their children,” Tavares argued in his ruling.

The organizers of the book fair, which ends Sunday, said they would appeal to the Supreme Court to reverse the ruling.

Publishers and writers accuse the mayor of wanting to censor content.

The mayor’s actions, and the judicial decision, may violate freedom of expression and discriminate based on sexual orientation, said constitutional law specialist Michael Mohallem, of the Getulio Vargas Foundation.

“Since the decision seems to be specifically aimed at prohibiting the circulation of magazines that show gay kisses (rather than any other), my interpretation is that it is motivated by discrimination, both by the mayor and the judge,” Mohallem said.

Brazil’s Supreme Court in June voted to criminalize homophobia, classifying it as a crime similar to racism.

It was an important step for sexual minorities in one of the most dangerous countries for LGBT people in the world but was criticized by far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who has a



history of homophobic remarks.

Brazil had already legalized same-sex marriage.

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# **Lebanon: End systemic violence against transgender women**

*Protect against discrimination, simplify legal gender recognition*

HRW (03.09.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2lUU67W> – Transgender women in Lebanon face systemic violence and discrimination, Human Rights Watch, Helem, and MOSAIC said in a report and [video](#) released today. Transgender women face discrimination in accessing basic services, including employment, healthcare, and housing, as well as violence from security forces and ordinary citizens.

For the 119-page report, “‘[Don’t Punish Me for Who I Am’: Systemic Discrimination Against Transgender Women in Lebanon](#),” Human Rights Watch, in collaboration with Helem and MOSAIC, interviewed 50 transgender women in Lebanon, including 24 Lebanese trans women, 25 trans refugees and asylum seekers from other Arab countries, and one stateless trans woman, as well as human rights activists, representatives of international agencies, lawyers, academics, and healthcare

professionals who work with trans individuals in Lebanon.

“This groundbreaking report shows the ever-present violence and discrimination against trans women in Lebanon,” said Lama Fakih, acting Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Confronted by ignorance and hostility from society, trans women also face violence and abuse from the security forces and government that are meant to protect them and their rights.”

Exclusion of trans people is exacerbated by a lack of resources tailored for their needs and by the difficulties they face in obtaining identification documents that reflect their gender identity and expression. Discrimination is often worse for trans refugees, who are already marginalized.

The report shows that the discrimination transgender women face begins at home. Interviewees reported incidents of family violence, including physical and sexual assault, being locked in a room for extended periods, and being denied food and water. Many trans women were pushed out of their homes, and in the case of refugees and asylum seekers, their countries, yet they felt they had no recourse to the law. There are no shelters providing emergency housing for trans women, leaving them to navigate the informal, expensive, and often discriminatory Lebanese housing market on their own. Trans women reported facing discrimination by landlords, flatmates, and neighbors, in addition to being forcibly evicted by the police because of their gender identity.

Many trans women said that they do not feel safe in public.

They told the researcher that security forces often subject them to harassment at checkpoints, arrest, or violence because of their appearance, in some cases amounting to torture. While Lebanese law does not criminalize being transgender, article 534 of the penal code, which criminalizes “any sexual intercourse contrary to the order of nature,” has been regularly enforced against trans women. Trans people are also arrested on charges such as “violating public morality” and “incitement to debauchery.” Trans women detained under such laws reported being placed in men’s cells and made to give coerced confessions.

Further, members of the public harass and physically assault trans women with impunity, the report found. Many transgender women said they are forced to hide who they are to survive. One trans woman said that walking through Beirut in daytime “feels like boiling water is being poured on me.”

Nearly all interviewees recounted being denied jobs because of their appearance. For trans refugees and asylum seekers, this discrimination is compounded by their lack of legal residency, which limits their ability to work in Lebanon.

Many transgender women also face discrimination when seeking medical care, including being denied treatment because of their gender identity. One trans woman said: “I got really sick and had to be taken to the hospital. When I got there, I was spitting blood, but they refused to let me in because I am trans... I could have died at the hospital door.”

Trans women said one of the main obstacles to being able to

access basic services was their inability to get identification papers that reflect their gender identity and expression. Trans people in Lebanon can only change their names and gender markers on official documents through a court ruling, often following a “gender dysphoria” diagnosis and surgery, which is expensive and sometimes unwanted. Many trans women are also deterred from seeking rulings due to high fees, lack of legal assistance, and protracted court proceedings.

In January 2016, an appeals court ruled that a transgender man could change his name and gender marker, overruling a lower court, and citing the right to privacy under article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The court found that gender affirming surgery should not be a prerequisite to gender identity recognition, but this does not set a binding legal precedent.

Lebanon should act swiftly to end the systemic discrimination and violence against transgender women. Lebanese security forces should stop arresting trans women based on their gender identity and instead protect them from violence, including by holding the perpetrators to account. The Lebanese government should enact legislation protecting against discrimination on the grounds of gender identity and establish a simple, administrative process allowing transgender people to change their names and gender markers on documents based on self-declaration, as is the practice in countries ranging from Argentina to Malta to Pakistan.

Donors and international agencies should fund trans-led initiatives to provide much needed services such as health care, legal aid, and income-generating activities. They should also fund emergency shelters for transgender women across

Lebanon.

“Trans women in Lebanon have been forced to hide who they are just to survive, but the government can no longer claim ignorance of the violence and discrimination they face,” Fakhri said. “By sharing their stories, trans women are demanding that the government see them and give them equal access to livelihoods, services, and protection.”

### **Selected Evidence**

Randa, a 25-year-old Syrian trans woman, told Human Rights Watch that she spent five months and five days in detention, much of it underground in Roumieh – “no sun, no air” – after Internal Security Forces officers arrested her for sodomy:

*They interrogated me from midnight until 5 a.m. They beat me nonstop and kept trying to make me tell them names of other LGBT individuals. They barely gave me food or water for 10 days. They didn't let me call a lawyer or assign me one. They shaved my head. They tied me up to a chair with my hands cuffed behind my back. Every time the officer would ask me a question and I said, 'I don't know,' he smacked me across the face. Another officer would come and put out his cigarette on my arm. I got sick while I was detained and I could barely stand up, and I asked for a doctor. They said, 'Leave him to rot and die.' Not only was there harassment from the police, but also other detainees. They cursed me and verbally harassed me the whole time I was there – they referred to me as 'the faggot.'*

Trans women face immediate discrimination when seeking employment due to the mismatch between their gender expression and the name and gender on their identity documents. The barriers to changing gender markers on official documents reinforce trans women's economic marginalization. Elsa, 50, said:

*My problem is my ID, they would never hire me, because I look like a ciswoman [a person who identifies as a woman and was assigned female at birth], no one would doubt that, but my ID says male. I went and applied for retail jobs everywhere in Beirut, they say, 'Okay madame, bring your papers tomorrow and you can start.' As soon as they see my ID, they don't hire me. If I could explain my situation to them, that would be easier, but no one here knows or accepts what it means to be transgender. I tried four times in Bourj Hammoud, twice in Dekweneh, and for a woman my age, the embarrassment and humiliation are just too much.*

While trans women's access to formal employment is limited, their participation in the informal labor market denies them any protection when they are abusively dismissed. Lola, a 42-year-old Lebanese trans woman, said:

*At my last job, at the airport, my hair was very long, but I put it in a bun and wore a cap, but they still insisted I cut it all off, and I just couldn't, so they fired me. The security officers at the airport were not okay with me having long hair, that's the reason they gave me. This was after three months of waking up at 5 a.m. to get to work at 6 a.m. and I worked until 7 p.m. every day, they paid me \$400. I accepted that so that I can work and not be on the streets, and then they fired me.*

In Lebanon, trans people struggle to obtain documents that match their identities. Diana, a 27-year-old Lebanese trans woman, said:

*I threw my ID in the trash and applied for a new one. I told them I lost it. I had to go to my hometown, to the mukhtar, I swear around a dozen times just to have them put my picture on an ID as I look now. I got so much harassment, they asked me, 'Why do you look like this? Aren't you a man? You are disgusting.' The mukhtar said he won't start my papers until I cut my hair, and I had to bribe him so he would accept. Finally, after months of running around, they put my picture on my ID as I look now, but my name obviously stayed the same.*

Lina, 28-year-old Iraqi trans woman, said:

*Changing gender markers and names should be a normal process that doesn't even require lawyers or medical professionals. I don't need to 'prove' to anyone that I'm a woman, it's just an internal feeling.*

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**UK: Home Office refused  
thousands of LGBT asylum**

# claims, figures reveal

*Exclusive: 'culture of disbelief' excludes at least 3,100 nationals from countries outlawing same-sex acts*

By Jamie Grierson

The Guardian (02.09.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2jSZx6I> – The UK Home Office has refused at least 3,100 asylum claims from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) nationals from countries where consensual same-sex acts are criminalised.

At least 1,197 LGBT Pakistanis were refused asylum after making a claim for protection on grounds of sexual orientation between 2016 and 2018, according to an analysis by the Liberal Democrats of figures published by the Home Office. A further 640 LGBT Bangladeshis and 389 Nigerians had their claims on the same grounds refused during the period.

In Pakistan, “carnal intercourse against the order of nature” is punishable with life in prison, while Amnesty reports that “transgender people continued to suffer harassment and violent attacks” there. In Bangladesh, Amnesty reports that “LGBTI activists continued to be routinely harassed and subject to arbitrary detention by state and non-state actors”.

In Nigeria, homosexual acts are punishable by up to 14 years in prison and displays of same-sex affection are also outlawed. After Pakistan and Bangladesh, Nigeria produces the



largest number of asylum claims based on sexual orientation.

Using data from the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, the Lib Dems separated out countries where same-sex acts were criminalised. Applications for asylum on grounds of sexual orientation were also refused for nationals of Cameroon (136), Ghana (144), Iran (124) and Uganda (145) as well as Iraq, Jamaica and Malaysia.

Christine Jardine, the Lib Dems' spokesperson for home affairs, said: "This Conservative government is letting down every LGBT+ person and every individual in this country who cares about human rights. We should be leading the campaign across the world against homophobia and transphobia. Instead we have a government that is turning its back and looking the other way.

"These figures are a disturbing reminder that this Conservative government is failing to stand up for LGBT+ rights by refusing asylum to more than 1,000 people a year who face prosecution at home simply for who they are. The Liberal Democrats demand better for LGBT+ people wherever they live. We will establish a new, dedicated unit to handle asylum claims, free of political interference and without the Home Office's culture of disbelief."

In 2018, the Home Office refused 970 LGBT claims from nationals of countries where same-sex acts were criminalised, down from 1,096 in 2017 and 1,043 in 2016.

Last year, LGBT asylum was brought into focus by the case of a Nigerian man who fled to Britain to avoid prosecution for being gay.

Adeniyi Raji, who was sacked for his sexuality, received threats on social media in Nigeria, which included comments such as, "I really wish you were killed that very day ...", "You know gay practice is an abomination in our land", and "You better stop your gay practice, if not you could get yourself killed in this country".

The Home Office rejected his claim, which was upheld by the first-tier immigration tribunal. He is appealing against the decision but faces deportation.

The challenges faced by LGBT asylum seekers were further highlighted by a case in which a first-tier immigration tribunal judge rejected the claim of a man because he did not have a gay "demeanour".

The judge said he did not accept the man applying to stay in the UK was gay and contrasted his appearance with that of a witness who "wore lipstick" and had an "effeminate" manner, who the judge accepted was gay.

In July, the high court ordered the Home Office to help a woman return to Britain after she was refused asylum on grounds of sexuality and deported to Uganda. The judge on the case said it was "procedurally unfair".

If the judgment stands, the woman would be the first deportee whose case was processed through fast-track rules operational between 2005 and 2015 to return to the UK and appeal against the decision to deport her.

The ruling could encourage similar appeals from thousands of people whose asylum claims were treated under the same system.

A Home Office spokesperson said: "Individuals are only returned to their country of origin when the Home Office and courts deem it is safe to do so.

"Each case is considered on its individual merits against relevant case law and published country information, and all decisions on claims based on sexual orientation are reviewed by an experienced caseworker.

"The UK has a proud record of providing protection to those fleeing persecution. Over 12 months, we gave protection to more than 18,500 people, the highest number since 2003."