

Albania psychologists barred from conducting gay 'conversion therapy'

By Rachel Savage

Thomson Reuters Foundation (18.05.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3c1Z4nU> – Albania's leading psychologists' organisation has barred members from carrying out so-called "conversion therapy" which aims to make gay people straight, as countries around the world consider laws to ban the controversial practice.

The Order of Psychologists said members would face disciplinary proceedings if they carried out the treatment, which is based on the belief that being gay or transgender is a mental illness that can be "cured".

All registered psychologists in Albania must be members of the Order of Psychologists which has given licences to about 600 psychologists since it was set up by parliament in 2017.

Only three countries – Brazil, Ecuador and Malta – have nationwide bans on "conversion therapy", but earlier this month Germany outlawed the treatment for minors. The United States, Canada, Chile and Mexico are among nations seeking bans.

Xheni Karaj, executive director of the Alliance Against Discrimination of LGBT (Aleanca LGBT), an Albanian advocacy group, said the move was “very, very positive”.

“We know psychologists work a lot ... in schools and we have had many cases of school psychologists (telling LGBT) kids that this is a disease and you should be turned back to ‘normal’,” Karaj told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The Order of Psychologists issued its ban after a request from Albanian LGBT+ advocacy group Pink Embassy on May 11.

“Our professionals appreciate that conversion therapy is an archaic, unethical practice that categorically contradicts fundamental human rights and freedoms,” president of the Order of Psychologists, Valbona Treska, said in a statement.

Albania’s government did not respond to requests for comment.

Discrimination against LGBT+ people is illegal in Albania, but Aleanca LGBT documented almost 450 anti-LGBT+ hate crimes in 2019. The report found only 34 cases were reported to the police, due to mistrust and fears of being outed.

There were “a growing number of hate speech incidents in the media ... most targeting trans people,” in the Balkan country in 2019, according to ILGA-Europe, a regional advocacy group.

Practices that aim to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity have been condemned by numerous medical associations globally. The European parliament denounced conversion therapy in 2018 and urged member states to ban it.

Brutal and extreme conversion methods including torture, forced internment, electroshock therapy and sexual violence have been documented in Ecuador, South Africa, the Dominican Republic and China.

A 2019 survey by advocacy group The Trevor Project in the United States, where 19 states ban conversion therapy for minors, found 42% of LGBT+ youth who underwent the treatment said they had later attempted suicide.