The situation of LGBTI people in Armenia remains very bleak as they face extensive discrimination and harassment in different areas of life. During the year, several violent attacks against LGBTI people were reported, but remained unpunished. There were also several cases of homophobic speech by Members of Parliament, the representatives of the Mayor of Yerevan’s office and other influential public figures. At the same time, there were cases of violation of the freedom of expression of LGBTI people. In view of this, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called on Armenian authorities to address the situation, which call was widely ignored.
Bias motivated speech

- In February, in response to the arguments of environmental activists and residents who protested to preserve the remaining green spaces in the Armenian capital, public relations representatives for the Mayor’s office in Yerevan used homophobic language on the mayor’s Facebook page, referring to a park in downtown Yerevan as ‘gay-park’ and making homophobic reference to men who are considered gay if they have long hair.

- In March, Slaq.am, an internet-TV project, conducted a video survey in the streets of Yerevan on people’s attitude towards homosexuality, headlining the video report with the question: Homosexuals have no right to live? The report was biased and inaccurate, and the issue was introduced with the statement “Psychologists consider homosexuality as a disease due to deviations which occurred during the early childhood”.

- The editor-in-chief of daily newspaper Aravot, Aram Abrahamyan, started the title of his editorial with “Blue-coloured”, a derogatory term to refer to gay people in post-Soviet states. He drew parallels between gay men and sex workers expressing his contempt for both and unwillingness to be ‘politically correct’. In an editorial two years previously, Aravot’s editor expressed his dismay at what he considered false displays of “European values” and called homosexuality “disgusting” and a “disorder”.

- In May, the arson attack on an LGBT friendly bar, mentioned below, was characterised by a Member of Parliament (MP) Eduard Sharmazanov as “completely right and justified.” He also claimed that those who support the rights of LGBT Armenians “are perverting our society, and defaming the Armenian national identity.” Another MP, Artsvik Minasyan, stated that the young men behind the attack “acted in accordance with our society’s values and national ideology, and in an appropriate manner.” “It was wrong to cause material damage, but I have repeatedly said that Tsomak (the owner of the bar) and her like are destructive for our society,” he added. In an interview with the editor of local Aravot daily, MP Minasyan called for a fight against the “spreading of homosexuality” as a “threat to national security”. The chief of staff of the Public Council of Republic of Armenia, a consultative body of the Armenian President, created a Facebook page in support of fire bombers of DIY club, calling for the attackers to be freed from prosecution. The president of the Football Federation, former MP of the ruling Republican Party, reflecting on the fire bombing of DIY club, said he was “in favour of punishing gays and ready to do it myself”. In a written declaration in June, 28 Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) condemned the above mentioned statements by Armenian MPs and called upon Armenian authorities “to publicly repudiate such statements, to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice, to put in place measures to protect LGBT people against violence and discrimination and to counteract homophobic and transphobic attitudes in society”. The Ombudsman has also condemned the violent attack against the LGBT friendly bar in Yerevan and the homophobic rhetoric of the political figures, pointing out that LGBT events are examples of lawful expression to which everyone is entitled.

- In May, a Diversity March was organised by PINK Armenia and Women’s Resource Centre in order to mark the UN World Day for Cultural Diversity. A group of extremist-nationalist counter-demonstrators, who outnumbered the marchers four times over, dubbed the march a ‘gay pride’ and attacked the participants while chanting nationalistic songs and slogans referring to gay people as a disease and a threat to children. Police allowed close proximity between the two groups but prevented the skirmishes from escalating into wider violence. Some participants of the march reported that remarks by certain police officers sanctioned the hate speech chanted by violent protesters.

- In July, in response to the Armenian Catholic Church cleric’s statement “it is not in our culture to accept homosexuals”, some Members of the European Parliament reiterated that respecting the rights of LGBT people is a condition every country aspiring to become an EU member should meet.

- In October, the host of the public television programme Tesnakyun discussing a survey conducted by PINK Armenia on public opinion and attitude towards
LGBT people said that gladly it was negative, adding that LGBT rights are a threat to Armenian nation.

**Bias motivated violence**
- In May, a group of young men attacked DIY club in Yerevan. There were two separate incidents: (i) a petrol bomb thrown through the bar’s window on the 8th of May, which destroyed the interior of the facilities, and (ii) an attack on 15 May, when a group of men destroyed anti-fascist posters and drew a Nazi sign on the wall. The Police reacted to the petrol bomb attack after a 12 hour delay, detaining 2 young men who were later released. One of the individuals arrested by the police in connection with the attack was bailed out by two MPs Artsvik Minasyan and Hrayr Karapetyan from the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). The United Nations and the Council of Europe offices, EU Delegation and US Embassy in Armenia as well as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) have condemned the attacks on DIY bar, disruption of the Diversity March and endorsement of homophobic violence by leading political figures.
- In June, ECRI expressed concern at events in Armenia, which involved leading political figures making statements openly condoning homophobic violence, following the firebombing of an LGBT friendly club in Yerevan. Later that month some PACE delegates adopted a written declaration addressing the same incident, entitled *Homophobic violence openly condoned by certain Armenian members of Parliament*. The delegates called upon Armenian authorities: (i) to publicly repudiate such statements; (ii) to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice; and (iii) to put in place measures to protect LGBT people from violence and discrimination and to counteract homophobic and transphobic attitudes in society.
- In May and in September, local media, News.am reported two cases of bias motivated violence against trans sex workers in Yerevan’s downtown park Kom aygi. In the first case, shots were fired from an air gun causing minor injuries to the victims. Two young male suspects were swiftly identified, detained and questioned by the police. In the second case, trans sex workers were attacked and beaten by a group of youths. The attackers have been questioned by police.
- In November, the activists of PINK Armenia were stalked by young people who attacked the Diversity March in May. The attackers of the march followed activists on the streets and sat next to them in cafes. Activists believe that the motive behind these actions was to intimidate and silence them.

**Data collection**
- During September and October, PINK Armenia conducted a survey amongst the LGBT community with the aim of monitoring and documenting discrimination and harassment against LGBT people. The survey revealed that LGBT people are often subjected to mockery, ridicule and unequal treatment in the workplace. More than half of the respondents did not come out to their families about their sexual orientation and gender identity because of the fear of being discriminated against and alienated. Many respondents reported psychological pressure from their families to change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity amongst others.

**Education**
- In April, the Day of Silence, aimed at drawing attention to discrimination and bullying towards LGBT students and other social groups in educational institutions, was marked by PINK Armenia with a poster campaign *I am erasing my mask of silence*. On this occasion, PINK Armenia organised a press conference to speak about bullying and harassment of young LGBT people in schools.
- In May, three one-day forum theatres for youth on the topic ‘tolerance and homophobia’ were organised.

**Equality and non-discrimination**
- In February, the Helsinki Association in Armenia published its *Human Rights Report* that extensively covered the human rights issues of LGBT people. The LGBT section of the report noted that LGBT people face discrimination and harassment in various fields, especially in education, healthcare, employment, military service, law enforcement authorities, the media and the church.
Freedom of expression

- In October, the screening of the film *Parada*, an internationally acclaimed Serbian LGBT rights comedy film, sponsored and organised by the German Embassy and EU Delegation in Armenia, was cancelled due to the withdrawal of Congress Hotel and other venues from their initial commitment to host screenings. The cancellation was a result of pressure from nationalist groups, such as the Hayazn movement, on the hosts of the screenings. The film screening was part of the EU Delegation activities on non-discrimination and tolerance related to *International Human Rights Day*. The head of the EU Delegation in Armenia said that the reaction towards the film screening indicated that LGBT people in Armenia are “the most vulnerable”. A group of 28 non-governmental organisations published an open letter addressed to the Prime Minister, German Ambassador and the Head of the EU Delegation, expressing their concerns about limitations to freedom of expression in Armenia, illustrated by the cancellation of this film screening.

Human rights defenders

- In September, the International Hrant Dink Award named PINK Armenia as *Inspiration 2012* thereby recognising its work for human rights of LGBT people in Armenia. The award is presented to people/organisations that work “for a world free of discrimination, racism and violence, take personal risks for their ideals, use the language of peace and by doing so, inspire and encourage others”.

- In October, human rights defender and president of PINK Armenia, Mamikon Hovsepyan, was forced to withdraw as a speaker in the panel discussion at the *Armenians and Progressive Politics conference* in Los Angeles, organised by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) Central Committee – Eastern Region, after he was threatened with retribution because of the LGBT nature of his speech. Hovsepyan was later told that the extreme nationalist forces within ARF didn’t want him to speak at the conference.

Public opinion

- Public opinion in Armenia remains vastly intolerant. A survey by PINK Armenia, along with the regional towns of Gyumri and Vanadzor, found that 72% of the respondents believe that the state should take measures to “fight against homosexuals.” A survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Caucasus Research Resource Centre revealed that 94% of Armenians would not want a gay neighbour. CivilNetTV presented this data in an animation based on a compilation of the survey data suggesting very widespread intolerance in Armenia.

Member organisations of ILGA-Europe

- Guarantee Center of Civil Society
  www.guarantee-ngo.blogspot.com
- Public Information and Need of Knowledge NGO
  www.pinkarmenia.org
- We For Civil Equality
  www.wfce.am