

# BELARUS

*ILGA-Europe introductory note: It should be noted that access to information about developments in the country has been increasingly difficult, as a result of the increasing repression against civil society. There is no official public information available on LGBTI rights and communities. While activists and organisations working for equality continue to collect evidence, they are facing significant risks in their safety and freedom, and there are few currently in the country, which contributes to making access to information more difficult.*

## ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

Trans people are facing prolonged homelessness and unemployment (see under Employment; and Housing). Since 2019, activists have provided food kits, consistently receiving more applications than expected.

## ASYLUM

Thousands, including LGBTI people, continued leaving the country this year to seek asylum.

LGBTQ people are concerned about the possible introduction of a law banning LGBTQ propaganda and gender reassignment in Belarus and continue to flee the country. However, LGBTQ Belarusians are not granted asylum based on SOGI grounds as the country is wrongly considered safe for LGBTQ people. For example, Moldovan authorities denied asylum to a queer Belarusian claiming that “there is no evidence that Belarus violates human rights”.

Supported by anonymous initiatives, a trans individual who had suffered persecution could flee the country and is now safe in the EU.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Belarusian state media continued to propagate hatred towards LGBTQ+ people in newspapers, websites and on TV channels. Government agencies regularly employ hate speech against LGBTI activists, including calls for their imprisonment.

Societal and political discourse continued to be anti-LGBT and chauvinistic. In his annual speech to the nation in March, President Aleksandr Lukashenko said that the ideologies supporting childless families should be banned and that non-traditional and childless families threaten the state. Lukashenko also said there was no excuse for men to be in a same-sex relationship, which he called a “despicable perversion”. The Minister of Labor and Social Protection later called for a nationwide movement for large traditional families.

In February, Journalists for Tolerance (J4T) published its

periodic report monitoring hate speech in 2022 in Belarus. J4T found that every second piece of media coverage on LGBTQ+ people amounted to hate speech. The following report, covering January to October 2023, found that 46% of LGBTQ+ stories contained hate speech, 2% more than in 2022.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Several gay clubs were raided by the police in October. The police searched people’s bags, looked through their photos and messaging apps, and detained several people.

In August, a queer person in Vitebsk reported an assault to the police but was detained and held for 24 hours. The person was later released pending trial.

Violence, corrective rapes and police mistreatment against trans people remain serious issues this year. In June, a trans woman in Minsk was physically assaulted for displaying a Ukrainian and a rainbow flag on her backpack. After seeking help from the police, she was imprisoned for 14 days.

A trans person faced correctional rape, intimidation and death threats. Medical assistance was denied, and the person was sent to a psychiatric clinic. A month later, the police rejected their complaint.

Anonymous initiatives reported several cases of corrective rape against trans individuals who, fearing reprisals didn’t report to the police and sought crisis psychological support.

## EDUCATION

Following this year’s developments (see under Freedom of Expression), the Ministry of Education is planning to introduce Fundamentals of Family Life classes, to “protect” children from the influence of so-called Western values, i.e. non-traditional sexual relationships, gender reassignment, paedophilia and childlessness, as well as courses to promote traditional families and increase the birth rate.

In October, the Ministry of Education banned a popular blogger from participating in school events after being accused of ‘LGBTQ propaganda’.

## FAMILY

Several trans minors were kicked out of their homes by their parents.

Rainbow families, particularly trans parents, continue to face multiple difficulties due to the lack of legal protections and fear



the consequences of future 'LGBTQ+ propaganda' legislation on their right to adoption. Currently, LGBT people are not explicitly prohibited from adopting. (see more under Freedom of Assembly and Sexual and Reproductive Rights)

An ex-partner threatened to expose a queer woman's LGBT identity to the court, to put her custody rights at risk. She sought legal advice from LGBTI organisations.

## FREEDOM FROM TORTURE, CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

A joint report by the International Committee to Investigate Torture in Belarus and the Human Rights Centre "Viasna", published in May, documents that LGBTQ+ detainees continue to be subjected to severe beatings, rape, threats of rape against them and their family members, humiliation, harassment and verbal insults. Clothing, hair colour and length, and painted nails have been grounds for torture and violence. A former trans detainee for instance, recalled guards saying "let's take him out into the yard and shoot him".

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY, ASSOCIATION, AND EXPRESSION

(See also under Freedom from Torture, Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment)

Since the historic protests against the government in 2020, the government has continued its brutal crackdown on protesters, journalists, and civil society, through unlawful arrest, detention, violence, and ill-treatment. Freedom of expression, assembly and association continued to be extremely restricted.

A possible LGBT 'propaganda' law remained on the agenda this year. In April, a possible amendment of the Media Law was discussed in Parliament. The Ministry of Information however stated that the government's restrictions in place are already as effective as the propaganda law in Russia. The Minister reported that they had already sent hundreds of letters to publishers and bookstores to clarify that in case of books with LGBT content, the Ministry will take administrative measures.

In May, MP Igor Zavalei said that stopping LGBT-themed films from circulating is difficult, but said that such films are very low quality and have poor ratings.

In June, the General Prosecutor's Office proposed to introduce administrative measures against the promotion of 'non-traditional sexual relations', gender reassignment, 'paedophilia' and childlessness, and to introduce chemical castration for 'paedophiles'. The bill was adopted in October. Several human

rights organisations condemned the law, which counters international human rights law.

In September, following a warning from the state security service, a company took down an online ad, which featured a man dressed up as a woman.

On a positive note, the Gender Gap program was launched on Euroradio, where Iryna Sidorskaya examines the arguments of state propaganda against LGBT rights and gender.

Civil society organisations continued to be dissolved or forced to dissolve themselves, including several that work on LGBT issues. Several websites were blocked this year, including CSOs.

LGBTIQ+ Belarusians organised contingents in Prides in Warsaw, Berlin and Vilnius.

## HEALTH

Alexandra Kuchinskaya, a sexologist at the Republican Scientific and Practical Centre for Mental Health (RSPC), has been requesting that trans people who are seeking gender reassignment provide a sample of their saliva for genetic analysis, which is not provided for by the law.

Accessing trans-affirming care in Belarus remains highly challenging with regular hormone shortages and a minimum two-year wait for prescriptions. Medical practitioners often lack training on trans issues, leading to discriminatory treatment. Activists continue to offer free psychological consultations, support groups, and meetings for trans and LGBTQ+ people.

According to a survey by anonymous initiatives, 62% of trans and non-binary respondents need hormone treatment and the health state of 64% of respondents is below average.

## HOUSING

(See also under Access to Adequate Food; and under Employment)

Anonymous initiatives helped with temporary housing for trans people struggling with unemployment, discrimination and/or evicted by their relatives.

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

(See also under Freedom of Assembly, Association, and Expression)

Belarus continued making headlines due to the brutal



government crackdown waged against civil society and the opposition. Several journalists, political activists, and others were detained, stood trial and received harsh prison sentences this year (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Thousands continue to be detained and subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

Civil society organisations working on LGBT issues continued being harassed by the authorities. Some initiatives had to close down and several activists fled the country. LGBTI activists and human rights defenders state that refusals on organisations' registering continue to occur outside the existing legal framework.

## LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Accessing legal gender recognition (LGR) in Belarus remains extremely challenging. To request a change of gender markers on passports, trans people endure an 8 to 21-day stay at a psychiatric clinic, must see a sexologist and a psychologist for a minimum of one year, and undergo unnecessary and degrading medical tests. The wait for the first medical appointment alone can extend up to six months.

Even if the requirements are met, the commission granting LGR routinely denies requests, imposing an additional six-month wait. Some individuals have faced discriminatory treatment in the process and repeated denials for over three years.

Complaints to higher authorities pay no results. In September 2023, out of 22 cases, 16 were denied, marking a 70% increase in refusals compared to the last five years. Activists fear that LGR will be further restricted in the years to come.

In September, a police officer present at an LGR commission threatened the trans applicant.

On October 16, a trans man was forced to renounce change of name and gender markers acquired a year ago. Sexologist Alexandra Kuchinskaya had invited several authorities, including the Deputy Minister of Health and RSPC director, to a regular appointment required as part of the LGR procedure for the trans man. During this meeting, he was threatened with the potential loss of access to his children unless he abandoned the changes to his passport and other documents. Eventually, he wrote a letter renouncing his rights and, later, sought legal advice and support from LGBTI organisations.

## PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

[Lesbian activists](#) Volha Harbunova and Nasta Bazar, criminally persecuted in the past for their activism, became part of opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's office.

Belarusian basketball player Ekaterina Snytnina, who lives in London, [came out](#) this year.

[Three books](#) on queer experiences of Belarusians were published in 2023.

## POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

(See also under Freedom from Torture, Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment; under Bias-motivated Violence) The testimonies of two soldiers were [shared](#) in an article, affirming that during enlisting the army [continues](#) to send 'homosexuals' to psychiatric institutions. One man spoke of verbal harassment from hospital staff.

Early in 2023, police authorities forced an LGBTQ person to film a video publicly outing themselves, expressing regret for their sexual orientation and using offensive language. The police then shared the video online, which was taken down after a few days.

In August, two gay men were arrested during protests. Police [subjected](#) them to humiliating treatment and threats, and recorded them partially unclothed in a video disseminated on government-affiliated social media channels.

## PUBLIC OPINION

New [research](#) on the stereotypes held by Belarusian society about LGBTQ+ people showed that 79% of respondents personally know one or more LGBTQ+ person, and 59.5% believe that LGBTQ+ people live under social pressure in Belarus.

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

(See also under Freedom of Assembly)

The upcoming law on 'LGBTQ+ propaganda and child-free behaviour' will further [restrict](#) the dissemination of information on contraception and "non-traditional relations" including fines up to 2,500 EURO.

*\*Some of the information about Belarus was shared with ILGA-Europe by activists who for safety reasons need to stay anonymous. These accounts were not publicly shared online or otherwise.*



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