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Russia

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

Several NGOs provided support to LGBTI people most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic by raising funds, supporting relocations, or distributing groceries. NGO, Coming Out conducted a study on LGBT* people's needs for humanitarian assistance in terms of food, housing, clothes, and other basic needs.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In February, President Vladimir Putin said Russia would not introduce marriage equality as long as he was in power.

A video spreading misinformation and hate about same-sex couples was posted on Youtube, in response to the proposed Constitutional amendment (see under **Family**). It was later removed by Youtube.

Renowned anti-LGBTI activist Vladislav Pozdnyakov created a website this year, listing LGBT* people's social media profiles, and exposing them to hate messages and threats.

In July, Pozdnyakov's online community on the Vkontakte social network was blocked for "incitement to violence".

In July, a blogger was found guilty and fined for homophobic hate speech.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Hate crimes against LGBTI people, including murder, physical violence and extortion were committed again this year. The authorities failed to classify them as anti-LGBTI hate crimes.

In February for instance, journalist Yelena Milashina, who broke the story of the "gay purge" in Chechnya a few years ago, was attacked by a mob in the Chechen capital of Grozny.

In June, a trans sex worker from Uzbekistan was brutally murdered in Leningradskaya oblast.

In September, in response to the first-ever Ural Pride Week in Yekaterinburg, 50 extremists roamed the Yekaterinburg's streets harassing people they thought were LGBT.

A number of positive court judgments were issued this year. In August, a Moscow court sentenced a man to three years in prison for assaulting, blackmailing, and extorting money from a gay man in 2019. In September, the acquittal of the perpetrator in a homophobic murder case was annulled by the Moscow City Court and the case was sent for retrial. In June, a police officer was fired for his ineffective investigative work in a 2017 hate crime case, where a gay man was assaulted and blackmailed by a group of eight.

FAMILY

In March, as part of a package of anti-democratic amendments,

President Putin tabled a proposal for the Constitution to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman. The proposal was adopted in July.

A draft bill was submitted to the Parliament on 14 July, seeking to amend the Family Code with "traditional family" protections and further limiting LGBTI people's rights. The amendments set out that same-sex marriages registered abroad would not be recognised in Russia and that legal gender recognition would be banned. Local and international civil society pleaded to the government not to pass the law. Following continued criticism from civil society, the Presidential Human Rights Council, the State Committee on Legislative Activities, and international NGOs, the bill was withdrawn on 16 November. Russian LGBTI activists are cautiously optimistic about the move. The bill may be resubmitted in parliament.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

During a protest against the proposed amendments to the Family Code (see under **Family and Legal gender recognition**), eight people were detained by the police.

On 13 October, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in the Sozayev and others v. Russia case that Russia violated the right to freedom of assembly of LGBT+ activists by arresting, detaining, and fining them in 2013 at a protest against the "propaganda" law. On 1 December, the Court ruled in the Berkman v. Russia case that Russia failed to ensure the peaceful conduct of a public meeting in St. Petersburg on Coming Out Day in 2013 and that activist Yelena Berkman's arrest and detention was arbitrary, unlawful, and discriminatory.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The sentence of a trans woman, who posted her own Manga creations online and was convicted for 'pornography of minors', was successfully overturned in January, amidst protests by human rights organisations. Michelle would have been sent to a male prison.

On 20 January, three participants of a demonstration in Moscow were charged under the propaganda law, for holding signs says "LGBT against repression", "Freedom to Tsvetkova" and "Freedom to Michelle".

In January, the police detained Pussy Riot and members while shooting a music video, accusing them of spreading "gay propaganda".

Yulia Tsvetkova, artist and activist, continued to be persecuted this year for her drawings of rainbow families, and the feminist blog and social media group she ran. Her social media work focuses on bodies, menstruation, and other harmless topics. Tsvetkova was released from four months of home arrest in

March, but is not allowed to leave town. On 6 July, she was fined for “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations” for the second time. She has appealed in three cases filed against her, and she may face up to six years in prison. She continues to regularly receive death threats, and her formal complaints to the police are met with indifference and inaction.

On 27 June, over 50 media outlets launched a media strike in Tsvetkova’s support and many joined the #forYulia (#заЮлю) and #FreeYuliaTsvetkova (#СвободуЮлииЦветковой) hashtags. An online [petition](#) calling for an end to her harassment, has collected almost 250.000 signatures. Police [detained](#) over 40 people in a Moscow protest held in Yulia’s support. On 29 June, Russia’s human rights commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova [said](#) she would examine and monitor Yulia’s case. A screening in solidarity with Yulia was [raided](#) and shut down by Russian military in September.

Schools in St. Petersburg were [ordered](#) to monitor their students’ social media profiles in September, to see if they post propaganda in the form of rainbow symbols.

In August, the St. Petersburg Public Prosecutor [asked](#) that the Russian LGBT Network’s website be blocked for featuring a survey on bullying experienced by LGBT students. The Prosecutor argued that the survey amounts to “LGBT propaganda”. On 17 September, the District Court upheld the Prosecutor’s position.

The first “propaganda” case was [opened](#) in Yekaterinburg in September, against “Alice Fandom”, who started the V Kontakte dating site for LGBT+ people a few years ago. In November, Tatyana Ivanova [the activist’s name was changed] was arrested in Khabarovsk for “propaganda”.

FREEDOM FROM TORTURE, CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

Aminat Lorsanova, a young bisexual woman filed a report with the authorities in January, for having been forced to undergo five month of conversion therapy by her parents. The authorities [decided](#) in September that they would not pursue the case. Civil society is appealing the decision. A similar testimony by a gay man [emerged](#) in August.

A horrendous video was [posted](#) in September of torture against a man who was accused of spreading lies about the anti-LGBT purge in Chechnya.

HEALTH

COVID-19 lockdowns have dramatically [impacted](#) LGBTI people, and particularly young people. A helpline that used to run for six hours a day, now needs to stay available around the clock, as the

number of LGBTI people and minors reaching out for support has significantly increased since March.

T-Action [started](#) providing free consultations on hormonal therapy, led by endocrinologists who can email prescriptions. The Trans* Coalition in the Post-Soviet Space [launched](#) a program to support trans people during the pandemic in the form of humanitarian aid and mental health support.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Organisers and participants of public events on LGBTI rights continued to face harassment and violence. In December for instance, a creative activism workshop was brutally [disrupted](#) by a police raid. 11 participants were detained, forcibly tested for drugs, and questioned. The victims filed a complaint.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Trans people have experienced more difficulties accessing legal gender recognition during the the COVID-19 pandemic. In April, Coming Out and T-Action [launched](#) a letter campaign for the simplification of the legal gender recognition (LGR) process, addressed to the Justice Department and the Prime Minister. In particular, the current law obliges trans people to travel back to their regions of origin, which has been extremely difficult since the onset of the pandemic.

Following the example of Hungary, Russia [vowed](#) to ban LGR. The draft [amendments](#) to the Family Code (see under **Family** and **Freedom of assembly**) aimed to [abolish](#) LGR, but were withdrawn on 16 November.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

The Arctic Winter Games [announced](#) that Russia would host the games in 2026, sparking fear and criticism among LGBT+ athletes and allies. A film about the persecution of LGBT people [premiered](#) in January.

PUBLIC OPINION AND ATTITUDES

In April, the Levada research center’s poll found that public attitudes towards LGBT people have softened, with more people being undecided, and fewer being in favour or isolating or “eliminating” LGBT people. Despite the positive results, the wording and approach of Levada has been criticised by many.



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