

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	868
Land:	Rusland
Kilde:	Amnesty International
Titel:	Russia: Book publishers arrested in anti-LGBTI campaign
Udgivet:	19. maj 2025
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	25. juni 2025



Document #2125422

Amnesty International (Author)

Russia: Book publishers arrested in anti-LGBTI campaign

Reacting to the Russian security forces' detention of at least 10 book publishing professionals in Moscow on "extremism"-related charges over alleged "LGBTI propaganda" in books published by affiliated printing houses, Natalia Zviagina, Amnesty International's Russia Director, said:

"In their ruthless campaign against LGBTI people, Russian authorities have now come after book publishers, accusing them of 'extremism' for merely doing their job: bringing books to readers. This shameless heavy-handed use of state apparatus against literature is as absurd as it is terrifying.

"One thing is clear: no amount of bans, arrests or prosecutions will erase the existence of LGBTI people in Russia, or anywhere else. History has shown that attempts to suppress identity and censor knowledge are ultimately futile. Love and knowledge will always endure over hatred and repression.

"The detained publishing professionals must be immediately released, the criminal charges against them dropped and the ongoing persecution of LGBTI people, organisations and initiatives in Russia must be brought to an end."

Background

On 14 May, Russian security forces detained at least 10 individuals in Moscow as part of a criminal investigation into alleged "involvement in the activities of an extremist organization," "participation in the activities" of such an organization, and "organizing its work using official position" (Article 282.2(1.1), (2), (3) of the Criminal Code) for publishing LGBTI-themed books. At least 10 individuals were taken in for questioning, including Anatoly Noroviyatkin, distribution director at EKSMO, as well as *Popcorn Books* co-founder Dmitry Protopopov and former sales director

Pavel Ivanov. On 15 May, three people were formally charged, their names are not yet disclosed. If convicted under these charges, they could face prison sentences of up to 12 years.

According to the lawyer, the case is based on the alleged distribution of over 900 copies of ten LGBTI-themed titles, none of which have been officially banned or labelled “extremist.” Among the books named in the case is *The Summer in a Pioneer Tie* (translated in English as *Pioneer Summer*), a bestselling novel by Elena Malisova and Katerina Silvanova depicting a same-sex romance between two Soviet teenagers. The authors were arbitrarily designated “foreign agents” by the Ministry of Justice in February 2024. Other titles include Alice Oseman’s *Heartstopper*, Benjamin Alire Sáenz’s *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, and Becky Albertalli’s *Leah on the Offbeat* and *Love, Creekwood* – all published by *Popcorn Books* between 2019 and 2022.

The arrests take place against the backdrop of an accelerating crackdown on LGBTI rights following a November 2023 [decision](#) by Russia’s Supreme Court to ban the so-called “International LGBT Movement” as “extremist,” enabling the persecution of anyone associated with LGBTI identities or advocacy under anti-extremism legislation. Since the ban came into force in January 2024, Russian authorities have launched at least 12 criminal cases, conducted [raids](#) on LGBTI venues, issued administrative fines and short-term detentions for displaying rainbow-themed symbols and forced the closure of LGBTI advocacy groups.

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ecoi.net description:

Moscow: At least 10 book publishers and booksellers arrested on "extremism" charges as part of campaign against LGBTI people

Country:

Russian Federation

Source:

[Amnesty International](#) (Author)

Published:

15 May 2025

Original link:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/05/russia-book-publishers-arrested-in-anti-lgbti-campaign/>

Document type:

Appeal or News Release

Language:

English

Available on ecoi.net since:

19 May 2025

Document ID:

2125422

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Country of Origin and	T +43 1 589 00 583	F.A.Q.
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Documentation	info@ecoi.net	
(ACCORD)		

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

