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RUSSIA

As a result of more restrictive anti-LGBTI and anti-NGO laws adopted in the past two years, it should be noted that access to information about developments in the country has been increasingly difficult. There is no public information available on LGBTI communities and organising. Activists and organisations working for equality are facing increased risks in their safety and freedom, both since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, which contributes to making access to information more difficult, and since the outlawing December of the international LGBT movement as 'extremist'.

ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

A fitness club in St. Petersburg refused to allow a trans man to use the men's changing room even though he had a male gender marker in his documents. The club's administration cited the new transphobic and homophobic legislation and demanded a certificate of gender reassignment surgery.

ASYLUM

Many LGBTI people, including activists and those working in LGBT* organisations continued leaving Russia this year, particularly since the adoption of the 2022 propaganda law. Several LGBTI organisations continued to provide information on options and support for those who have left. Following the entry into force of the laws banning medical and legal transition (see under Health; and Legal Gender Recognition), civil society launched a petition asking European leaders to ensure smooth asylum procedures for trans people from Russia.

LGBTI people leaving Russia faced difficulties with getting a visa and crossing borders because of visa and entry restrictions for Russian citizens in several countries.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Anti-LGBT hate speech was a severe issue throughout the year, including in the context of the 2022 'propaganda' law (see also under Freedom of Expression; and Participation in Public, Cultural and Political Life). Coming Out published an analysis of the government's continued crackdown and anti-LGBT rhetoric.

Lawmakers continued to refer to LGBT rights and trans rights as Western imports that try to "infiltrate the country". In January 2023, State Duma deputy Adam Delimkhanov (United Russia party) pledged to "destroy LGBT people".

During the debates on the ban on trans healthcare and legal gender recognition, the deputy chair of the Duma, Vladislav

Davankov (New People Party) said the law was "yet another step to protect national interests" from "perversions." The Minister of Justice, Konstantin Chuichenko (Independent) said in May that trans people should receive "forced treatment".

A minor, who received death threats, reported that the police failed to intervene and harassed him instead.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Hate crimes against LGBTI people, including murder, physical violence and extortion were committed again this year (see here, here, here, here, here, here, here, and here). The authorities failed to classify them as anti-LGBTI hate crimes. UCD Dublin published 'A decade of violence: monitoring anti-LGBTQ hate crimes in Russia', documenting over 1000 attacks between 2010-2020.

Coming Out published its 2022 annual report finding unprecedented crackdowns on civil society and human rights and highlighting the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Russian LGBT people.

Several people became victims of fake dates again this year. One such victim told Coming Out privately that a group of young men had assaulted him on a fake date and also accused him of paedophilia.

Coming Out filed a case at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) concerning the failure of the authorities to investigate the death of Yelena Grigoryeva, a well-known LGBT activist who was murdered in St. Petersburg in 2019. The case was rejected. In August 2023, the media reported that Yelena's murderer had been buried with honours in St Petersburg, after dying in the war with Ukraine.

Russia recognised the view of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as binding for the first time. In 2016, a homophobic attack was committed against two women in St. Petersburg. It was not investigated. CEDAW recognised this as a violation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Russia paid 30,000 rubles each to the two women, recognising the view of CEDAW.

BODILY INTEGRITY

The law banning trans healthcare provision (see under Health) sets out an exception for some medical interventions on intersex individuals. Interventions related to intersex variations that aim to form sex characteristics of the "other sex"



aren't prohibited if they are authorised by the state medical commission, including in relation to children.

DATA COLLECTION

In just one month of the existence of the new law “On the Prohibition of Gay Propaganda” (from December 2022 to January 2023), Russian authorities blocked about [300 LGBT websites](#).

In 2023, several LGBT initiatives faced blocking of their resources on the Internet, including the Russian LGBT Network, the Guys Plus portal, and Center T.

In September 2023, Russian authorities began to apply ‘[criteria](#)’ by which they would identify “gay propaganda”. The criteria have a very broad interpretation. In September 2023, on the website of Roskomnadzor (a government agency), a [form](#) for reporting sites with “gay propaganda” on the Internet appeared. These requests become grounds for blocking LGBT websites.

EDUCATION

St. Petersburg State University [refused](#) to change a trans man's diploma and give him a new document with a new gender marker.

High school students in Moscow, who made a film about gay-straight conflicts in school, were [detained](#).

The Higher School of Economics [changed](#) its ‘gender studies’ course to “men and women's studies”.

EMPLOYMENT

Several people were fired this year on grounds of ‘propaganda’ (see [here](#) and under Freedom of Expression). The psychologist recruitment service Teplota (‘Warmth’) [rejected](#) a candidate for a job because of her sexual orientation.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In April, Mariana Katsarova was [appointed](#) UN Special Rapporteur on Russia. The mandate, created in 2022, was [extended](#) in October. In September, the Special Rapporteur [reported](#) about the “significant deterioration” in human rights across Russia since the invasion of Ukraine and a “systematic crackdown” on civil society, including through persecution and detention.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

[issued](#) its concluding observations in April, warning about police violence against LGBTQI+ people who face racial discrimination. During the review of the Russian report, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [asked](#) a number of questions about LGBT rights in Russia, notably about when comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation would be adopted.

In May, Coming Out and Sphere [published](#) a joint report on the situation of the LGBT+ community in Russia, showing that the Russian invasion of Ukraine and mobilisation had a strong negative impact on the psychological state of Russian LGBTQ+ people, their economic situation, and access to medication (mainly gender affirmative hormone therapy and antidepressants). Almost every LGBT respondent has noticed an increase in homophobia and transphobia in the public sphere. One in five respondents (21%) faced threats of physical violence because of their sexual orientation or trans identity in 2022. 15% had experienced domestic violence. 14% have experienced online harassment. LGBTQ+ people encounter diverse violence most frequently in the North Caucasus, the Urals, the Far East, and Siberia. Everyday homophobia and transphobia (discrimination in the workplace/study, conflicts with others, denial of services) are common in the Southern Federal District. Trans persons are the most vulnerable of all respondents. They experience almost all types of violence and discrimination more often than others; war and mobilisation have also affected them more than others.

In November, Russia [underwent](#) its fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The working session of the UPR process [raised](#) the issue of LGBT rights in Russia, with recommendations from many countries stating the need to stop the persecution of LGBT people and LGBT activists.

In December, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe reviewed Russia's implementation of ECHR decisions against Russia on violations of the rights of LGBT people. It [noted](#) deterioration of LGBTI rights in Russia, stressed further the need to change legislation, notably by making discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation a circumstance aggravating a crime, and repealing the “anti-propaganda” laws; to organise awareness-raising activities promoting protection of the human rights of LGBTI persons; to facilitate issuance of the Supreme Court's guidance to the judges and instructions from the relevant executive bodies' to their staff aimed at such protection; and to ensure effective policing and security of the LGBTI public events.

FAMILY

In January, the ECHR [upheld](#) its 2021 ruling on ‘Fedotova and Others v Russia’ reiterating Russia and the Council of Europe’s member states obligation to ensure legal recognition and protection for same-sex couples by putting in place a “specific legal framework”

In June, the Duma [adopted](#) a ban on trans people adopting or fostering children. On the basis of the law, it is also possible to [dissolve](#) a marriage if a spouse had changed their legal gender. Already before the adoption of the law, prosecutors [initiated](#) legal proceedings against married couples, whose marriage was consequently annulled. Attorneys [helped](#) some trans people get married and many families have [remained](#) intact.

FOREIGN POLICY

24 February [marked](#) the one year anniversary of Russian troops [invading](#) Ukraine – the war continues to date. The intensified onslaught on LGBT rights was [tied](#) into the narrative of the invasion this year. The parliament adopted amendments to the law conscription and military duty several times this year (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). Civil society continued providing information to those participating in protests or [objecting](#) to the war and [conscription](#). Trans women have been subject to the draft if they had not changed their legal gender and many were barred from leaving the country. In 2023, the decree prohibiting dismissal from military service continued to be in effect until mobilisation was stopped. [This prevents](#) LGBT people who oppose the war in Ukraine from leaving military service at the risk of being imprisoned.

FREEDOM FROM TORTURE, CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

Salman Mukayev, who was detained, imprisoned and torture for allegations of being gay, [shared](#) his story in an interview. LGBT people in Chechnya continued to be targeted and subjected to enforced disappearances. Idris Arsamikov, a gay refugee, was [arrested](#) in Moscow in February when returning for his father’s funeral from the Netherlands. Arsamikov had previously been persecuted and tortured in Chechnya. He was returned to Chechnya. His whereabouts are [unknown](#), but civil society [reports](#) he may have been sent to the front.

In September, the European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) in [Lapunov v. Russia](#) that Russia violated the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment (Art. 3) and non-discrimination (Art. 14) based on sexual orientation, when arresting, detaining, and torturing an openly gay man in Chechnya in 2017. In the same month,

the Court [ruled](#) in [Romanov and Others v. Russia](#) that Russia violated Art. 3, Art. 5, Art. 11 and Art. 14 when the police failed to protect LGBT rights activists from private individuals assaulting them at a peaceful protest in 2013.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Organisers and participants of public events on LGBTI rights continued to face harassment and violence (see under Freedom of Expression).

The police detained several people who protested against the ban on trans healthcare and legal gender recognition (see [here](#)). In June 2023, activist Aleksandr Sinko [went to protest](#) against the adoption of the law banning gender reassignment with a poster reading “Save the right to be myself”. On the same day, he was detained and a report was drawn up on him for “propaganda of non-traditional relations”. The case was reclassified from an article on LGBT propaganda to an article on violation of COVID-19 restrictions. In the end, Sinko was fined just 40,000 roubles (about 40 EURO).

Clubs and events were also raided (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). The queer art festival Open Art was [cancelled](#) after warnings from the prosecutor. Other events were also [cancelled](#). QueerFest was [held](#) online again.

COVID-19 [restrictions](#) on holding mass events, including protests and even single [pickets](#), [remained](#) in force this year. Several people who protested this year were detained (see a list [here](#)).

In November, the European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) in favour of LGBT activist Vyacheslav Vereshchagin, who was fined by the court in 2018 for participating in Pride in St. Petersburg.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The authorities continued adding NGOs, groups, websites, media outlets, activists, and journalists to their foreign agent registry (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), also under Freedom of Expression). According to Coming Out monitoring data, 10 individuals and eight organisations were identified as foreign agents for so-called LGBT propaganda in 2023. In 2022, the European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) that the foreign agent law violates human rights law, but Russia [made](#) it clear it would not implement the judgement.

In November 2023, the Russian LGBT Network, Mayak, LGBT activists [filed](#) the first complaint against the law on “foreign agents” to the UN Human Rights Committee.

The Ministry of Justice [demanded](#) that the ‘International LGBT Public Movement’ be [recognised](#) as an extremist organisation and its activities banned in Russia. On November 30, in a hearing that took place behind closed doors with no defence present, the Supreme Court ruled that the “international LGBT social movement” is to be added to the country’s list of “extremist” organisations. The Supreme Court decision declared any LGBT activism in Russia [criminal](#). Participation in such activities is punishable by fines or imprisonment. Under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code, individuals considered to be “organisers” and “participants” may face up to [12 years](#) in prison, and participants of the activities of such organisations may face from two to six years in prison. Symbols of “extremist” organisations (including the rainbow flag) are banned, and display of these symbols may lead to administrative arrest of up to 15 days detention under Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences. The human rights initiative First Department reported that in January 2024, Russian authorities [opened](#) the first administrative case against an artist for posting a “rainbow flag” on the Internet. Other possible consequences for those who are investigated or prosecuted include having their bank accounts blocked and facing restriction of various rights. In connection with this court decision, public offline activities of LGBT initiatives were stopped, and many LGBT initiatives and LGBT activists relocated abroad. LGBT initiatives continue to work in Russia, hiding it and seeking other, non-public formats for their activities within the country.

On December 1, less than 48 hours after the Supreme Court banned the “international LGBT movement” as “extremist”, security forces raided gay clubs and bars across Moscow, including a nightclub, a male sauna, and a bar that hosted LGBTQ+ parties, under the pretext of a drug raid. Eyewitnesses told journalists that people’s documents were checked and photographed by the security services.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

(See also under Bias-motivated Speech; and Education)

The 2022 [propaganda law](#) had a detrimental impact on the community this year (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#)). The law prohibits positive and also neutral information about LGBT people to minors and adults, information about “gender reassignment” and the “promotion of paedophilia”. Individuals can be fined roughly [4,200 EURO](#) and organisations [52,000 EURO](#). In March, MP Vitaly Milonov (United Russia) [proposed](#) to create a register of all materials that contain ‘LGBT propaganda’ and previously suggested introducing a special unit to detect such materials.

In April, the Ministry of Justice [approved](#) a set of criteria for “LGBT propaganda, pedophilia and gender reassignment”, which entered into force in September.

The law [was used against](#) several LGBT people and organisations this year (see [here](#), [here](#), and a list [here](#)), including minors. People were fired from their jobs, expelled from school, arrested, and deported (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). TV channels and streaming platforms were also fined (see [here](#), and [here](#)). Cinema screenings, theatre plays, books and bookstores were also targeted (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

There were several attempts again to block LGBTI-themed websites and some faced prosecution for groups on social media/messaging sites or for blogging (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Search functions started [failing](#) on VKontakte. Channels on messaging apps were also [shut](#) down and dating apps [blocked](#). In May, a (German) man was [deported](#) from Russia for messages sent on a dating app.

HEALTH

In June, the Duma [adopted](#) a [ban](#) on trans-specific healthcare provision by [amending](#) the [Federal Law](#) On the Fundamentals of Protecting the Health of Citizens. President Putin [signed](#) the law in July. The Ministry of Health voiced concern about the law and several protests were held. The Deputy Minister of Health however [asserted](#) that the law did not violate the Constitution.

The ban received significant [attention](#) from [INGOs](#) and human rights bodies. In September, a group of doctors and healthcare specialists [started](#) preparing clinical recommendations on trans healthcare, with input from trans communities, according to the standards of the Ministry of Health. Civil society also shared they would [appeal](#) against the law to the Constitutional Court. Hormonal therapy and surgeries are no longer possible as ‘treatment’ for an F64.0 diagnosis, but hormones and mastectomies could theoretically be accessed in other ways.

Getting a diagnosis is still possible, but until October, no treatment protocol was in place. In October, the government [released](#) a draft order that would allow a [total](#) of five institutions to issue certificates authorising trans-related surgeries. The law set an exception for medical interventions on intersex children (see under Bodily Integrity). A commission consisting of doctors in various fields will be responsible for making each decision. LGBT organisations submitted an appeal to the UN

In response to the appeal, the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian



Federation, the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls issued [recommendations](#) to Russia, expressing their concerns and requesting clarification on how the adopted law complies with Russia's international obligations.

Due to the law, an intersex person was [denied](#) cancer-related surgery in September.

Civil society fears that the new 'propaganda law' will make HIV prevention much harder. Russia now [accounts](#) for over half of new infections in Europe and Central Asia.

A [survey](#) by Kilkota found that since the outbreak of the war, trans people continue to face a shortage of hormones and a significant increase in prices.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In January, Russia's oldest human rights group, the Helsinki Group (MHG), was [shut](#) down by a court order. Throughout the year, human rights defenders continued their work but under [difficult circumstances](#) and with the constant [threat](#) of [prosecution](#) and [detention](#).

In 2023, Russian authorities included [227](#) organisations, activists, journalists, politicians and bloggers in the register of "foreign agents."

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

In June, the Duma [adopted](#) a ban on legal gender recognition, by [amending](#) the Federal Law On Civil Status Acts. President Putin [signed](#) the law in July. The amendments also allow for marriages to be annulled if a trans person had transitioned.

Civil society [helped](#) hundreds of trans people apply for LGR in the weeks leading up to the ban. A number of trans people were able to change their legal gender as part of court procedures (see [here](#) and [here](#)), as they had started the process before the law entered into force. At the same time, several such applications and requests for updated passports were [denied](#) by the authorities.

Future applications will all be [denied](#). It will still be [possible](#) to change first and last names. After ARSI and the Russian intersex community [advocacy campaign](#), deputies made an [exception](#) for LGR for intersex people after a procedure of approval of medical interventions and verification of an intersex person's

sex characteristics by a state medical commission.

In the ban's aftermath, at least six trans people committed suicide, one of them a minor, as reported to CSOs.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Bisexual writer, Sveta Lukyanova [released](#) her debut novel, *I'm Not Doing Anything Bad*.

PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion about LGBT has worsened over the past years as anti-LGBT state propaganda has intensified (see [here](#) and [here](#)). 80 percent of respondents to a survey by the independent research group Russian Field [said](#) that the non-heterosexual orientation of a hypothetical candidate for the Russian presidency would rather repulse them.



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