

RUSSIA

As a result of more restrictive anti-LGBTI and anti-NGO laws adopted in the past year, 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 issues. Activists and organisations working for equality are facing increased risks in their safety and freedom, especially since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, which contributes to making access to information more difficult.

ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

In September, a St. Petersburg court sided with a taxi company whose driver harassed a queer person in 2021.

ASYLUM

Many LGBTI people, including activists and those working in LGBT* organisations, have left Russia since the war against Ukraine broke out (see under *Foreign Policy*) and the new ‘propaganda’ law was adopted (see under *Freedom of Expression*). Several LGBTI organisations provided country-specific information on what resources are available in neighbouring countries and shared stories of those who had already left.

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.

In September, four sisters from Dagestan tried to flee from Russia to Georgia because of domestic violence; one of them was an LGBTI person. Russian border guards held and interrogated them for several hours, but, after wide media coverage, let them go.

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Anti-LGBT hate speech was a severe issue throughout the year, including in the context of the new ‘propaganda’ law (see also under *Freedom of expression and Participation in public, cultural and political life*). For instance, in March, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church endorsed Ukraine’s invasion and identified one of its causes the struggle of the “people of Donbas” against Pride marches. MP Vitaly Milonov co-launched a homophobic reality TV show

‘I’m Not Gay’ where contestants have to guess who among them is gay. In July, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov mocked trans representatives of NATO. These are just a handful of examples of many.

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 January, a young gay man was severely beaten by a group of men in a Kuban village.

In February, the St. Petersburg court found a man who killed and dismembered a trans woman guilty of murder committed in excess of the limits of necessary self-defense. He was released in the courtroom - his time spent in custody credited to him as punishment.

Coming Out published its 2021 annual report finding unprecedented crackdowns on civil society and human rights. The Anti-Discrimination Centre Memorial echoed similar findings in its report in May.

Several people became victims of fake dates again this year. Coming Out launched a webcomic and webinars to share information about the issue. In January, two men were sentenced to two years in prison and a fine for luring a trans woman on a fake date in 2021. In March, two men received two years and two months probation and a fine for extortion against a gay man in 2019. In July, a man was detained during a fake date in Chechnya. There has been no information about his whereabouts since. Human rights activist Igor Kochetkov filed an application with the Investigative Committee, the prosecutor’s office and the Ministry of Internal Affairs with a demand to investigate the situation. This was ignored.

Implementing a decision by the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Ministry of Internal Affairs was ordered by the court in January to pay damages to a lesbian couple, who were victims of a physical assault that the police refused to investigate. An appeal is in progress to demand higher compensation.

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.

BODILY INTEGRITY

Coming Out launched a campaign and petition calling for a ban on so-called 'conversion therapies' and collected over 4,000 signatures. In one case, a victim of forced treatment turned to the Prosecutor's Office but has not received a response.

DATA COLLECTION

Coming Out published several important reports this year, including their annual report on discrimination, a study on the situation of LGBT* teenagers, and a report on the situation of LGBTI migrants who left the country after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began.

The Yesli byt' tochnym ('To be Precise') project published an overview of studies about LGBTI people in Russia and beyond, affirming that anti-LGBTI stigma does not in any way help "demographics". The November propaganda law (see under *Freedom of Expression*) was justified, inter alia, by suggesting that LGBTI people are a threat to traditional values and demographics.

EDUCATION

The deputy principal of Yekaterinburg Lyceum No. 12, Lilia Ardasheva was found guilty of 'LGBT propaganda'. She received a hefty fine for allowing a dance competition to be held in the school in May, which some politicians condemned. Several parents stood in support of Ardasheva, who was fired.

In June, students of the Perm state university were threatened with expulsion for posting an LGBT-themed video on a student media platform.

Five students in grades eight and nine were accused of 'LGBT propaganda' for playing truth or dare.

EMPLOYMENT

Coming Out's report found that 20% of the respondents faced discrimination in employment because they were LGBT*.

In February, a trans woman working at the Moscow police was forced to file a letter of resignation after

changing her legal gender.

In July, a photographer in Moscow was fired because of his sexual orientation.

Coming Out restarted its career counselling program. In 2022, specialists conducted more than 180 consultations and over 60 people found work. The organisation also launched a job search stream for LGBT* migrants in Georgia and Kazakhstan.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In July, Coming Out published the findings of its study on the lives of LGBTQ+ teenagers in the St. Petersburg and Leningrad regions, finding that 87% felt unsafe.

FAMILY

Several trans parents shared their stories this year.

Coming out restarted its programme for LGBT parents and organised several events, including a meeting on the new 'propaganda' law and its impact on rainbow families.

FOREIGN POLICY

On 24 February, Russian troops invaded Ukraine - the war continues to date. Anti-war protests broke out across the country and thousands were detained. In early March, the UN established an Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, which concluded in October that Russia had committed an array of war crimes. On 16 March, the Council of Europe ceased Russia's membership. The war has impacted LGBTI people in Russia in numerous ways. Many LGBTI activists fled the country after the authorities held police raids to monitor anti-war activities. Trans women have been subject to the draft if they had not changed their legal gender; many were barred from leaving the country. Civil society provided information to those participating in protests or objecting to the war and conscription.

In February, high-profile basketball player Brittney Griner was detained at the Moscow airport after the authorities found a vape with cannabis oil on her possession. Griner is a black lesbian and a US citizen. In August, Griner was sentenced to nine years in



prison for 'drug trafficking' and was [transferred](#) to a penal colony in November. In December, Griner was [released](#) in a prisoner exchange between Russia and the US, and travelled home safely to reunite with her wife.

In June, the parliament [adopted](#) a law establishing that Russian court rulings will take precedence over rulings of the European Court of Human Rights and that the government will not execute the Court's rulings.

FREEDOM FROM TORTURE, CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

In [April](#) and [October](#), the courts upheld the prison sentences for Chechen brothers Ismail Isaev (17) and Salekh Magamadov (20) who had been arbitrarily [arrested](#) in 2021 and subjected to psychological torture and physical abuse and held without access to a lawyer. The brothers are members of the LGBTI community. [UN human rights mandates](#) and the European Court had [previously called](#) for the brothers' release.

LGBT people in Chechnya continued to be targeted and [subjected](#) to enforced disappearances.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

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

The queer art festival, Open Art was [held](#) successfully in January, despite difficulties to find a venue willing to host the festival and extremists showing up at some of its events.

QueerFest was [held](#) online this year.

COVID-19 [restrictions](#) on holding mass events, including protests and even single [pickets](#), [remained](#) in force, despite all other pandemic rules having been lifted. In December, rallies near public state buildings, churches, schools, and train stations were [banned](#).

Between February and the end of the year, a record number of 19,443 people were [detained](#). Several people protesting against the new 'propaganda'

law were also detained (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). Demonstrations have become more dangerous.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The authorities [continued](#) adding NGOs, media outlets, activists, and journalists to their [foreign agent](#) registry (see also under *Freedom of Expression*) (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

In February, the Ministry of Justice [filed](#) a lawsuit against the Sphere foundation claiming its work counters traditional family values. Sphere's appeals were [unsuccessful](#) and although it was legally dissolved, it continues operations.

On 14 June, the European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) that the foreign agent law violates human rights law and ordered Russia to pay the applicants over one million euro. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov [said](#) they would not bother with implementation.

Russian LGBT initiatives cooperated with anti-war groups throughout the year. For example, Coming out and Helpdesk media issued a joint [publication](#).

In December, the [new](#) 'foreign agents' law was adopted, expanding the definition of foreign agents to individuals and organisations who are "under foreign influence", not just those that receive funding. 'Foreign agents' are now also banned from teaching minors, joining the civil service, organising assemblies, or participating in electoral commissions.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

(see also under *Bias-motivated Speech and Education*)

In April, a Moscow court [fined](#) Meta and [TikTok](#) tens of thousands of euro for refusing to take down what the authorities considered 'LGBT propaganda'. TikTok was [fined](#) in October as well. Several other 'propaganda' rulings were passed down this year (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) and books were also [targeted](#).

Two men were [put](#) in pre-trial detention for engaging in sex that was [witnessed](#) by a 14-year-old neighbour through a window. The men could face more than ten years in prison. The outcome of the case is



not known, as the victims turned down LGBT+ organisations' assistance over fears of reprisals.

In July, Coming Out's [study](#) found alarming rates among LGBTQ+ teenagers who were unable to access information about SOGIESC. The report showed the detrimental impact of the 2013 propaganda law on young people's lives and well-being.

In July, MP Alexander Khinshtein [suggested](#) introducing a stricter propaganda law that would also extend to adults. Khinshtein [called](#) shows like 'Peppa Pig' and Southpark "a tool of war" and LGBT 'propaganda'.

In October, the [new](#) 'propaganda law' was [tabled](#) in parliament. The law, which prohibits positive and also neutral information about LGBT people to minors and adults, was [unanimously adopted](#) in late November. The ban also [covers](#) "gender reassignment" and the "promotion of paedophilia". Individuals can be fined roughly 6,000 euro and organisations 75,000 euro. In December, the UN Human Rights Committee [called](#) on Russia to [revoke](#) the 2013 propaganda law and to protect LGBT people from discrimination and violence. Despite civil society [advocacy](#) and international outcry, on 5 December, President Putin [signed](#) the law.

A day after the parliament adopted the law, bookstores across the country [added](#) age-limit labels on books that might fall under the ban. Publishers [feared](#) that 50% of books would need to have the label, including books like Tchaikovsky's biography. The children's play 'The Princess and the Ogre' was [cancelled](#) in Novosibirsk. In early December, the academic journal Logos [retracted](#) a translated article on lesbian images in lifestyle magazines. Later in the month, Russian online streaming services censored scenes in '[The White Lotus](#)', '[Gossip Girl](#)', and '[The Sex Lives of College Girls](#)'.

LGBT+ organisations and [activists vowed](#) to [continue](#) their work, but face an unprecedented crackdown. The Kazan Kazan Center for LGBTQ+ Support 'Acceptance', the online VKontakte support group, and other support groups for queer people [suspended](#) their activities. In September, two VK groups were [blocked](#) by a St. Petersburg court. VK

introduced notifications in LGBT groups that warn of "controversial content" that "may be considered inappropriate under Russian law".

Coming Out [published](#) a resource for LGBTI people on how to avoid prosecution and information, specifically for [trans people](#), on the foreseeable [impact](#) of the law.

There were several attempts again this year to block LGBTI-themed websites (see [here](#) and [here](#)). On 27 December, Russia's media regulator was [granted](#) blanket powers to ban all websites that feature 'LGBT propaganda'.

In July, a St. Petersburg court [found](#) a photographer guilty and fined him 15,000 rubles (200 euro) for insulting the feelings of believers after a video showing two men kissing in front of a church.

In November, the appeal court in Komsomolsk-on-Amur [upheld](#) the acquittal of Yulia [Tsvetkova](#), artist and activist who has stood trial for 'distribution of pornography', for her drawings of rainbow families and the feminist blog and social media group she ran. Yulia could have faced up to six years in prison. Earlier in June, the Ministry of Justice [listed](#) Tsvetkova as a 'foreign agent'. She [left](#) Russia a few days after the ruling.

The Side by Side LGBT Film Festival [turned](#) into the Q space project and is run in Estonia.

HEALTH

Coming Out's report [found](#) that 27% of the respondents who disclosed their SOGI in clinics faced discrimination in healthcare and 18% faced threats from medical professionals.

The St. Petersburg mobile HIV prevention program for trans people had to [close](#) down in February, due to [threats](#) and intimidation. Civil society [fears](#) that the new 'propaganda law' will make HIV prevention much harder.

Since the outbreak of the war, trans people have [faced](#) a shortage of hormones and a significant increase in prices.



The Orthodox Church proposed banning gender-affirming surgeries in November.

HOUSING

Coming Out's annual report highlighted that LGBT* people regularly face difficulty finding housing and report conflicts with neighbours.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

With the outbreak of the war, many human rights activists were forced to leave Russia and have faced problems with getting visas, crossing borders (see here and here), banking and money transactions. Those who left in the spring were also impacted by high exchange rates. Human rights defenders continued to be harassed and prosecuted. Following the adoption of the new 'propaganda law', intersex activists asked LGBT groups to avoid using the term 'LGBTI' as it places them at additional risk.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Trans people continued to experience difficulties accessing legal gender recognition. The government has not responded to Coming Out and T-Action's 2020 plea for the simplification of the LGR process. In February, online applications for a name change or a new passport became available again, making access smoother.

The new 'propaganda law', adopted in November, poses new barriers for trans people as one of its centrepieces is a ban on promoting information that could encourage minors to change their gender. The law does not directly ban LGR, but will possibly make access harder.

In November, Vitaly Milonov, deputy chairman of the State Duma Committee on Family, Women and Children known for his anti-LGBT views, said LGR should only be available based on medical reasons and otherwise be banned.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

In June, St. Petersburg's municipal deputy Sergey Troshin came out as gay.

Olympic tennis player Daria Kasatkina came out as a lesbian in July and encouraged other Russian celebrities to come out. Several MPs spoke out against Kasatkina and suggested she should get another citizenship. In September, she received a national sports award regardless.

Political activist and member of the youth branch of the Yabloko party, Vadim Vaganov, came out as gay, in response to the adoption of the 'propaganda' law.

Trans politician Yulia Alyoshina quit in response to the new propaganda law's adoption.

The head of the National Cross-country Ski Association called trans people "disgusting" and stated that LGBT people should be banned from the Olympics.

PUBLIC OPINION

In August, the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Centre's study found that over 50% of Russians think sexual orientation is biologically coded. 86% of the respondents indicated that they had never encountered 'propaganda of non-traditional values.' Between 2015 and 2022, the rate of those who know LGBT people in their environment doubled from 8 to 15%.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In December, Putin signed a law prohibiting surrogacy arrangements between foreign citizens and Russian men, which makes surrogacy inaccessible to gay men.

A St. Petersburg clinic denied a trans woman the service of freezing her sperm, as she is legally female.

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