



# RUSSIA

## ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FOOD

Several NGOs continued supporting LGBTI people most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, by raising funds, supporting relocations, or distributing groceries. For instance, the Moscow Community Center for LGBT + Initiatives provided food and medication. The Center also published a report about the situation of LGBT people during the pandemic.

## ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES

Coming Out collected countless testimonies of LGBT people this year who were harassed by taxi drivers and launched a campaign called #НОЛЬЗВЁЗД: [Eng: #zerostars].

## BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Coming Out launched a temporary helpline for LGBT\* people during the European Football Championship, which took place in Russia in July.

Dunja Mijatović, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights issued a Human Rights Comment in August on the worrying trend of anti-LGBTI backlash across Europe, highlighting the increasingly hostile political rhetoric in a number of countries, including Russia.

The courts ordered the removal of six Telegram channels, which shared the private information of LGBT\* people and exposed them to hate and threats.

In October, the Yeltsin cultural centre issued a statement in support of human rights and equality after a performers during their music festival made anti-LGBT+ statements on stage.

## BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

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

Coming Out published its 2020 annual report of hate crimes in St. Petersburg, finding a steady rise in numbers.

Helping queer women in the North Caucasus (QWNC) published a monitoring report on violations of the rights of non-heterosexual women and transgender persons

in the North Caucasus. Most violations were recorded in Dagestan and Chechnya; those most vulnerable were between 18-30; and a sharp increase in physical violence has taken place since 2013.

In May, TikTok users who filmed a drag scene in St. Petersburg were assaulted. Activists holding signs that men can also wear dresses were attacked in September.

Several people became victims of fake dates again this year. For instance, two men were detained for assaulting a trans woman on a fake date in February.

A number of positive court judgments were issued this year. Members of a criminal ring abusing LGBT people on several fake dates were sentenced to four and six and a half years, respectively. Another perpetrator in a 2020 fake date case received three years and nine months. A perpetrator in a case of extortion on a set-up date was sentenced to a four and a half year prison term and to pay compensation to the survivor of the crime.

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

Stimul LGBT's 2020 annual report documented five cases of conversion therapy just in the Moscow region.

The Moscow Community Centre for LGBT+ Initiatives conducted a survey and interviews with 17 survivors this year and published 'Practices of Conversion Therapy in Russia' in September. The study finds that conversion therapy to change one's sexual orientation or gender identity was most often carried out through religious, psychiatric or medical practices, and sometimes also by school staff.

## EDUCATION

On 5 April, President Putin signed the amendments to the Law On Education, which add the concept of 'educational activities' in formal and informal education and place them under state control. 'Educational activities' are defined very broadly in the law and could cover podcasts, YouTube and other outreach platforms. The law was first tabled in 2020 and caused outrage among academia, scientists,



and civil society. Several NGOs condemned the law and a petition against it gathered close to 250,000 signatures.

In June, the Russian LGBT Network released their findings on school bullying on the basis of 2,000 responses from LGBTI youth aged 13-20. The final study found that many experienced bullying directly from their teachers; that bullying resulted in the plummeting of academic performance; and that students rarely received help - due to the 2013 'propaganda law', teachers and social workers are scared to step up.

## EMPLOYMENT

In February, the courts upheld a 2020 court ruling, which said that firing a trans woman because of her identity and her having changed her gender marker is discrimination.

Coming Out published a resource for employers on the impact of the propaganda law, entitled 'Business as an Ally: A Guide to Creating Inclusive Jobs for LGBT + People in Russia'.

+ QWNC published a study on barriers for LBT people in employment in the North Caucasus.

## EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The fifth Trans\* Camp took place in Krasnodar in June, bringing together 20 people.

T\*Revers made a number of resources available this year, including for parents of trans people, medical professions working with trans people, and others. In May, Revers also published the book 'Helping Competently, Helping Meaningfully, Helping Carefully, Helping Everyone', for mental health professionals.

Coming Out released a study on the needs of the most vulnerable LGBT\* communities in St. Petersburg with a focus on poverty and access to humanitarian aid. The study included sex workers and people who use drugs, and featured 50 in-depth interviews.

The annual report of the St Petersburg Ombudsman for human rights mentioned human rights violations against LGBT+ people, highlighting threats and insults, the restriction of freedom of expression and assembly, domestic violence, and discrimination as the most common violations.

Stimul LGBT's 2020 annual report documented 74 cases of hate crimes and discrimination based on SOGI in the Moscow region.

QWNC published a study on the coping strategies for non-heterosexual women and transgender people in the North Caucasus, where living conditions and survival paths were recorded.

## FAMILY

On 6 July, the ECtHR ruled in favour of a trans woman in Russia who was denied the right to see her children because of her gender identity and transition. The A.M. and Others v. Russia case marks a landmark in the Court's jurisprudence, being the first case where the Court found a violation of the prohibition of discrimination (Article 14) because of a person's gender identity.

On 13 July, the ECtHR delivered a judgment in the case Fedotova and Others v Russia reiterating states' positive obligation to establish a legal framework for the recognition of same-sex unions, to ensure the effective enjoyment of the rights of private and family life under Article 8. The judgment acknowledged the social reality of same-sex couples' lives in and the conflict the existing legislation creates due to lack of recognition of their relationships: access to rights for a minority cannot be dependent on the acceptance of those by the majority.

In February, the Moscow City Court upheld the legality of the police searching the apartment of a rainbow family in July 2020. In September, Coming Out filed a complaint to the ECtHR concerning the continued persecution of the family, two fathers and their two children, who have since fled to the US.

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

On 4 February, brothers Ismail Isaev (17) and Salekh Magamadov (20) were arbitrarily arrested at a shelter in Western Russia, where they had fled to from Chechnya in 2020. Back then, the brothers were detained because of their Telegram channel Osa! Nakh 95, critical of the Chechen authorities, and also because of their perceived SOGI. The brothers were detained and transported back to Chechnya and have been held since - under false terrorism charges and without proof. They have been subjected to psychological torture, physical abuse and held without



access to a lawyer. The case received close international attention: on 8 February, the ECtHR ordered Russia in an urgent appeal to allow the men access to their lawyers and family, and have them examined by independent medical professionals. Isaev and Magamadov were briefly given access to their lawyer, but were later forced to sign a waiver form refusing contact with them, and memorise confessions. On 17 February, six UN Special Procedures mandates questioned Russia on the arrest, detention, abuse, and torture of the two men. In March, their mother turned to the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, Tatyana Moskalkova. In late March, some of the two men's relatives were also briefly detained in Chechnya.

A similar abduction happened in June, when Chechen police ambushed Khalimat Taramova at the domestic violence shelter and took her back to Chechnya. Taramova fled because of domestic abuse she suffered due to her sexual orientation. On 14 June, the ECtHR requested the authorities to provide information about Taramova's whereabouts and condition. It is feared that she is subjected to abuse and 'corrective rape' and may become a victim of 'honour killing'. In a video, Taramova said she was fine, but she is thought to have been pressured to speak. Taramova is the daughter of a close associate to long-time Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov.

The Russian LGBT Network and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) launched a criminal complaint against five officials who have taken part in the 'anti-LGBT purge' in Chechnya.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Organisers and participants of public events on LGBTI rights continued to face harassment and violence (see under **Freedom of expression**). Activists report that COVID-19 restrictions have become a tool for political repression against human rights organisations and events. In March, 20 teenagers were detained at a cosplay event in St. Petersburg for taking pictures with rainbow flags.

Trans\*fest, organised by T-Action in Saint Petersburg in April, faced harassment when member of parliamentary Committee for the Development of Civil Society, Nikolai Georgievich Zemtsov requested the Prosecutor General to investigate whether the event amounted to propaganda.

Anti-LGBT extremists threatened and then showed up the ArtDoc film festival in Moscow in April, which ended up cancelling their screening of 'Silent Voice', a documentary about a Chechen gay mixed martial arts (MMA) fighter from Chechnya, who fled to Belgium. Authorities and anti-LGBT activists showed up at the opening evening of the St. Petersburg part of the festival, which was later cancelled in its entirety.

Several of Alyona Shvets's concerts were disrupted in different cities by anti-LGBT activists. In July, an LGBT football tournament in Saint Petersburg was disrupted by the police.

On 13 October, the ECtHR 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 20 July, ECtHR ruled in the Yartsev v. Russia case that Russia violated Article 10 of the Convention by an unlawful interference with the activist's right to freedom of expression and assembly. 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 ASSOCIATION

For Russian LGBTI groups, along with the rest of the civil society in the country, 2021 started with the arrival of new barriers to their work. On 30 December 2020, several amendments to the existing 'foreign agents' legislation were signed into law. It includes new restrictions to civil society, such as extending the law on 'foreign agents' to individuals and unregistered groups and bringing criminal liability for those repeatedly failing to comply with this law.

Those failing to comply with the law can be sentenced to a maximum of five years in prison. The same day, President Putin signed another law and thus amended the current federal laws on public assemblies which regulate fundraising and spending for public events by law.

On 27 January, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution that urges to "repeal and/or amend legislation that interferes with NGOs' ability to work freely and independently", highlighting Russia as an example.



On 19 February, the Expert Council on NGO Law of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe published an [opinion](#) warning that the new legal changes and those still planned fail the test of compatibility with European standards.

The authorities added numerous NGOs, media outlets, and journalists to their foreign agents registry in the following months. Over 260,000 people [signed a petition](#) against the new provisions of the foreign agents law.

In November and December, the Ministry of Justice [labelled](#) four non-registered LGBT groups as ‘foreign agents’: [Russian LGBT Network](#), [Mayak \(Lighthouse\)](#), [Coming Out](#), and [Revers](#).

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

There were several attempts again this year to block LGBTI-themed websites, including the Russian LGBT Network’s [social media accounts](#), the news and health site [Parni PLUS](#), and social media of the Alliance of Heterosexuals and LGBT for Equality. Parni PLUS was [fined](#) 300,000 rubles. The blocking of Alliance’s social media was successfully appealed in court by Stimul LGBT group. Their social media pages had to be [unblocked](#); the case continues in a local court.

Three out of four venues cancelled on [QueerFest](#) after receiving threats from anti-LGBT activists.

The Russian LGBT Network [reported](#) in January that the Federal Security Service (FSB) was involved in launching at least four ‘propaganda’ cases, including that against Yulia Tsvetkova (see below). Such actions fall clearly outside the mandate of the FSB. The Network filed a complaint to the Prosecutor. The reports also flag that the FSB has requested that its mandate is extended to cover “activities to ensure the information security of the Russian Federation in the information and psychological sphere”, which remains undefined as of now.

On 10 March, a Moscow District Court ordered the blocking of a video about same-sex adoption. In July, the Moscow City Court [overturned](#) the ruling and returned the case to the District Court. In September, the District Court [agreed](#) and the prosecutor dropped the charges.

The UK film ‘Supernova’ was first [censored](#) by a number of Russian cinemas, by cutting a three-minute sex scene

between a married gay couple, but due to public pressure was then re-released in its original form in April. A film about the Swedish author Tove Jansson was [released](#) in cinemas this year - no difficulties were reported.

In May, a prosecutor [filed charges](#) against Dolce & Gabbana, asking the courts to ban their ad, which featured two women kissing.

The food shop VkusVill featured a rainbow family on their ad for ‘Family Happiness Recipes’ and received serious backlash from customers and commenters. The family itself received countless death threats and [fled](#) the country soon after. VkusVill [published](#) an apology to its customers in July saying the ad was a “mistake”, which was criticised by LGBTI people and allies.

On 1 July, the President [signed](#) into law an amendment that introduces criminal liability for links with ‘undesirable organisations’. Previously, only leadership or repeated activity was punishable, but the new amendments also cover any ‘participation’ and ‘financing’.

[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. Yulia’s social media work focuses on bodies, menstruation, and other harmless topics. On 12 January, she was [again](#) charged with ‘distribution of pornography’ in connection with online dissemination of her feminist drawings. This is the fourth time that the Investigative Committee indicted Yulia on these charges. Yulia spent several months under house arrest in 2020, and was put through dozens of interrogations and a psychiatric examination. She is still under gag order and cannot leave her town. In May, Yulia went on a six-day hunger strike to demand a speedy and fair trial after two years of investigation. During the latest hearing on 6 May, the judge denied Yulia’s request to bring in a public defender. The trial was once again postponed due to absence of prosecution’s witnesses. Yulia could face up to six years in prison. She continues to regularly receive death threats, and her formal complaints to the police are met with complete indifference and inaction. Over the past few years, Yulia’s case was closely followed by national and international [media](#), the public, and human rights organisations (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

In November, TV channel Muz-TV [was fined](#) 1 million roubles for “propaganda” during a live-streamed Muz-TV Award ceremony. The expert statement that informed the court decision referred to appearance, clothing, and



statements of some of the celebrity guests of the ceremony as “promoting non-traditional sexual relations”. In November, the website and online movie theatre by Side by Side LGBT Film Festival were blocked in Russia by the Russian media monitoring agency. Later the Ministry of Culture denied the Festival’s request to be listed among accredited international festivals of 2022. Festivals outside of this list need to apply for rental licences for each film separately - a barely implementable procedure. Side by Side will appeal both decisions in court.

## HEALTH

Mayak held four training sessions for doctors throughout the year on working with LGBT clients and made a number of resources (see here and here) available.

COVID-19 lockdowns continued to dramatically impact LGBTI people, and particularly young people. CSOs continued providing mental health support.

T\*Revers launched a helpline for LGBT people in January, providing psychological and legal aid.

From 1 September onwards, sexology is no longer listed as a medical activity in Russia, which means that those with non-medical training can also provide services. Civil society expressed concern about the new regulation, fearing it will result in substandard care, for instance for trans people who need an expert opinion of a sexologist to access legal gender recognition. NGOs filed an appeal.

T-Action continued partnering with state institutions to run professional training courses for medical professionals, psychologists, sexologists, and other helping professionals. Dozens of professionals across Russia and neighbouring countries have participated and learned about trans-ethical care.

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Journalist Anna Mongait faced threats after she released an interview with a lesbian couple.

Human rights defender Valentina Likhoshva received death threats after receiving the 2021 Stoltenberg Prize. The police refused to investigate.

Co-founder of the Russian LGBT Network and former director of its partner - Sphere Foundation, Igor

Kochetkov, was designated a ‘foreign agent’ by the Ministry of Justice and was subject of a smear campaign in state-funded media.

## LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Trans people continued to experience difficulties accessing legal gender recognition during the pandemic.

The case of a trans woman in Yekaterinburg was reported in August, who was denied the right to change her first name. Russian regulations allow for name change, and does not prohibit name change prior to legal gender recognition. The authorities argued that not everything is allowed that is not prohibited by law.

The government has not responded to Coming Out and T-Action’s 2020 plea for the simplification of the LGR process.



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