



# Russia

*Situation For LGBT+ Persons*



Centre for Documentation  
and Counter Extremism

**DRC** DANISH  
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This report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service or of DRC Danish Refugee Council.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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## Executive summary

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Following the abolition in 1993 of Soviet-era sodomy laws, Russia has progressively reintroduced anti-LGBT+ measures. The 2013 nationwide “anti-propaganda” law prohibited the portrayal of “non-traditional sexual relations” to minors. In 2022, this law was extended to include adults. In 2023, gender transition was outlawed entirely, denying transgender persons both medical and legal recognition.

The November 2023 ruling by the Supreme Court, which designated an undefined “international public LGBT movement” as an extremist organisation further escalated the situation by potentially criminalising any form of LGBT+ advocacy, association, or public expression.

While there is no legal prohibition against being an LGBT+ person, since 2023, prosecutions of LGBT+ persons under propaganda, extremism, and other legal provisions have increased. Administrative proceedings are conducted with minimal procedural safeguards and often result in fines or short detentions, while criminal prosecutions can lead to long prison terms.

The Russian state appears to enforce the law selectively and arbitrarily, seemingly with an intent to spread fear and to suppress LGBT+ visibility. LGBT+ persons may be subjected to raids on clubs and private gatherings, confiscation of electronic devices, or online surveillance. Displaying rainbow symbols, wearing colourful clothing, or expressing views with LGBT+ content on social media or in private communications can lead to charges. Individuals may face fines or short detentions according to administrative convictions for actions deemed “non-traditional,” contrary to “moral values,” or extremist. Actions may also lead to criminal convictions.

The Russian authorities do not appear to apply any clear thresholds for what constitutes a punishable act, leaving LGBT+ persons vulnerable to arbitrary enforcement. Public gestures such as holding hands, same-sex affection, or expressing gender nonconformity may provoke police attention or public denunciation.

Conditions in detention facilities are severe: LGBT+ inmates face physical violence, sexual abuse, and isolation. Transgender prisoners are placed according to legal rather than lived gender and are generally denied medical care.

Beyond state repression, societal hostility, blackmail, and vigilante attacks against LGBT+ individuals remain pervasive. LGBT+ persons have been reported by civil society actors to the police, and they face limited and often unreliable access to state protection.

LGBT+ individuals in Chechnya face severe treatment, including physical abuse, conversion therapy, abductions, and extrajudicial killings, with families often complicit. Relocation within Russia is largely impossible due to state and familial networks.

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Russian returnees may face border checks, surveillance lists, interrogations, and phone searches. There is a lack of documentation and judicial practice concerning the situation for LGBT+ returnees. However, general border procedures may potentially result in uncovering information about an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity.

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## Introduction and methodology

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This report examines the situation of LGBT+ persons in Russia following the November 2023 Supreme Court ruling declaring the “international public LGBT movement” an “extremist organisation.” It begins with an overview of the legislation, outlining the main offences affecting LGBT+ individuals as defined under Russian law, along with the corresponding legal implications.

Following the presentation of the legal framework, the report describes the treatment of LGBT+ persons by the Russian authorities since the Supreme Court ruling, with a particular focus on developments in reported arrests, detentions, and prosecutions.

This report reviews the conditions for LGBT+ detainees, noting violence, abuse, isolation, and the denial of adequate medical care, particularly for transgender inmates.

The report analyses the situation of LGBT+ persons within civil society, addressing trends in violence and abuse, as well as patterns of stigma and discrimination in urban and rural areas.

The report further explores the availability of protection mechanisms for individuals fearing harassment or violence.

It also recounts the existence and operational capacity of civil society groups advocating for LGBT+ rights, including their ability to provide protection and support. Furthermore, the phenomenon of LGBT+ persons being reported by civil society actors is addressed. Finally, the report discusses the phenomenon of public outings of LGBT+ persons through media platforms, such as newspapers and social media.

The report at hand investigates the situation for LGBT+ persons in North Caucasus and, specifically, the severe treatment of LGBT+ persons in Chechnya—ranging from physical abuse to killings—and the limited prospects for safety through internal relocation.

This report explores the potential situation for Russian citizens returning to Russia, particularly activists and LGBT+ individuals, including surveillance, questioning, and short detention.

The report is written in accordance with the EU Agency for Asylum’s (EUAA) COI Report Methodology<sup>1</sup> and follows the basic concepts introduced in EUAA’s research guide, where LGBT persons are defined as persons who are attracted to persons of their own gender (lesbian, gay) or any gender (bisexual) or whose gender identity or expression does not align with the sex assigned to them at birth (including trans and non-binary individuals).<sup>2</sup>

The terms of reference (ToR) for the mission were drawn up jointly by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), in consultation with the defined target

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<sup>1</sup> EUAA, Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> EUAA, *Country of Origin Information: Research Guide on LGBTIQ*, 2023, [url](#), pp.13, 17

users of the report, in particular the Secretariat of the Danish Refugee Appeals Board and the Asylum Division of DIS. The ToR is included in annex 1 of this report.

In the process of compiling this report, the delegation conducted 14 interviews with a total of 15 sources representing different types of expertise. In alignment with the EUAA Research Guide on LGBTIQ type of sources,<sup>3</sup> care has been taken to include specialised organisations representing the LGBT+ community in Russia. The list of sources also includes organisations specialised in LGBT+ rights, journalists and human rights organisations. Finally, informal meetings with relevant academics were held in Denmark to get a better understanding of the history and the context. The delegation selected the sources interviewed based on their expertise, merit, and experience relevant to the ToR.

The present report is based on information from publicly available written sources, comprised of carefully selected news reports by credible news outlets, books, academic articles, and reports published by other Country of Origin (COI) units, other international organisations, NGOs and humanitarian organisations to ensure a high level of validity and balance. The objective of including a variety of sources is to present a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to ToR at the time of publication.

These sources complement the information obtained through 14 interviews, which were conducted during a mission to Riga, Latvia, and Vilnius, Lithuania, undertaken by DIS and DRC from 1 to 5 September 2025. The minutes of the meetings with the consulted sources are listed in annex 2.

The interviews were conducted in English. Prior to the interviews, all interlocutors were thoroughly informed about the purpose of the mission and the fact that their statements would be included in a report made publicly available. The interlocutors were asked how they wished to be referred to, and all sources are introduced and quoted according to their own wishes. Three out of 15 sources preferred anonymity. All meeting minutes were forwarded to the interlocutors for their approval and amendment, allowing them the opportunity to offer corrections or make comments on their statements. All sources were informed that in case the delegation did not receive a response to its request for approval within a specific deadline, the delegation would consider the meeting minutes approved. All sources, with the exception of one, responded and confirmed their statements. The meeting minutes are included in the report. Care has been taken to present the views of the interlocutors as accurately and transparently as possible.

For the sake of reader-friendliness and transparency, paragraphs in the minutes of the interviews have been numbered in a consecutive order, used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes. During the interview, the source may have highlighted issues that are not addressed in the ToR. As these issues could be relevant to refugee status determination, they are included in the meeting minutes, but not in the report.

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<sup>3</sup> EUAA, *Country of Origin Information: Research Guide on LGBTIQ*, 2023, [url](#), pp.34-43

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The report has been peer reviewed in accordance with the EUAA COI Report Methodology.<sup>4</sup>  
The research and editing of this report was finalised in November 2025.

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<sup>4</sup> EUAA, *Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, February 2023, [url](#)

## Abbreviations

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AI	Amnesty International
COI	Country of Origin Information
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
FSB	Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti <sup>5</sup> (the Federal Security Service)
HRW	Human Rights Watch
LGBT+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, with '+' encompassing additional sexual orientations, gender identities, expressions, and sex characteristics
MCC	Moscow Community Center
NC SOS	North Caucasus SOS Crisis Group
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NHC	Norwegian Helsinki Committee
OVD-Info	Organy Vnutrennykh Del Informatsiya <sup>6</sup> (Bodies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs)
SIZO	Sledstvennyy Izolyator <sup>7</sup> (Remand prison)
ToR	Terms of Reference
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VPN	Virtual Private Network

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<sup>5</sup> In Russian: Федеральная служба безопасности

<sup>6</sup> In Russian: Органы внутренних дел

<sup>7</sup> In Russian: Следственный изолятор

## Glossary<sup>8</sup>

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**Bisexual:** Sexual orientation of a person who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to both men and women.

**Cisgender:** Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

**Gay:** A person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. In the context of this report, the term gay denotes a male person.

**Gender:** Refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men.

**Gender expression:** Refers to a person's presentation of their gender through physical appearance – including dress, hairstyles, accessories, cosmetics – and mannerisms, speech, behavioural patterns, names and personal references. Gender expression may or may not conform to a person's gender identity.

**Gender Identity:** Refers to a person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.

**Homosexual:** Sexual orientation of a person whose sexual and romantic attractions are toward people of the same sex.

**LGBT+:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender persons. Sometimes the term is used for groups and identities and sometimes associated with “sexual and gender minorities,” with ‘+’ encompassing additional sexual orientations, gender identities, expressions, and sex characteristics.

**Lesbian:** Sexual orientation of a woman whose sexual and romantic attraction is toward other women.

**Outing:** The act of disclosing a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person's sexual orientation or gender identity without that person's consent.

**Queer:** An inclusive umbrella term covering multiple identities, sometimes used interchangeably with “LGBTQ.” Also used to describe divergence from heterosexual and cisgender norms without specifying new identity categories.

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<sup>8</sup> This list of terms has been developed with inspiration from glossaries used in EUAA, *Country of Origin Information: Research Guide on LGBTIQ*, 2023, [url](#), p. 10

**Sexual orientation:** Refers to a person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction to individuals of a different gender or the same gender.

**Transgender (also “trans”):** Denotes or relates to a person whose assigned sex at birth does not match their gender identity - the gender that they are most comfortable with expressing or would express given a choice. A transgender person usually adopts, or would prefer to adopt, a gender expression in agreement with their gender identity, but they may or may not wish to permanently alter their bodily characteristics to conform to their preferred gender.

# 1. Recent legislative developments

This chapter provides an account of the historical context of legislation targeting LGBT+ persons during the USSR, as well as the more recent legislative developments in the Russian Federation that have shaped the current situation of LGBT+ persons in Russia.

No new legislation directly aimed at LGBT+ persons has been introduced since the Supreme Court ruling in November 2023.<sup>9</sup> However, the authorities have expanded the reach of general extremist provisions in ways that disproportionately affect this community.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.1 Historical criminalisation of LGBT+ persons

At the end of 1933, a decree was issued by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, which was enacted as law in March 1934. Sodomy<sup>11</sup> was punishable by imprisonment from three to five years, or up to eight years in cases involving the use of physical violence, threats, or sexual acts perpetrated against a minor.<sup>12</sup>

While public expression of sexuality was limited in the 1970s, and individuals often concealed their sexual orientation out of fear, the environment was relatively less repressive. Male homosexuality was criminalised, whereas homosexual women were not subject to criminal penalties. Instead, LGBT+ women were often confined to psychiatric institutions, as lesbianism was classified as a psychiatric condition. By the 1980s, lesbian women were rarely admitted at psychiatric hospitals anymore.<sup>13</sup>

An intense period of repression on the basis of sexual orientation occurred in particular under the leadership of Yuri Andropov, Konstantin Chernenko, and during the early years of General Secretary Mikhael Gorbachev, namely in the 1980s. The greatest number of convictions for sodomy was recorded in 1986, totalling 1,620.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A human rights lawyer: 1; Memorial: 1; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 5; OVD-Info: 1

<sup>10</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 5; OVD-Info: 1

<sup>11</sup> In Russian called Muzhelozhestvo (Мужеложество), which specifically refers to male homosexual acts (sodomy) and does not include female homosexuality.

<sup>12</sup> Forbes, *Расходование биологического ресурса нации»: как в СССР преследовали за «мужеложство*, 4 December 2023, [url](#); Meduza, *За последние два века (!) ЛГБТК-людей в России всего два десятка лет не преследовали по закону. Теперь история сделала полный круг Но нынешние законы — еще более жестокие, чем в Российской империи и СССР*, 2 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 38

<sup>14</sup> Forbes, *Расходование биологического ресурса нации»: как в СССР преследовали за «мужеложство*, 4 December 2023, [url](#)

Criminal sanctions for sodomy were abolished less than two years after the dissolution of the USSR, in the spring of 1993, when the liberalisation of legislation became a prerequisite for accession to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2 Prohibition of LGBT+ propaganda

In 2006, the Ryazan Regional Duma became the first in Russia to prohibit “public actions aimed at promoting homosexuality (sodomy and lesbianism) towards minors.” The maximum fine was set at 2,000 roubles (≈ 20 euro) for individuals and 20,000 roubles (≈ 200 euro) for legal entities. This legislation was soon adopted in over a dozen other regions across Russia.<sup>16</sup>

In 2013, Russia introduced a nationwide ban on the “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships” to minors.<sup>17</sup> The new Article 6.21 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offences provided for fines of up to 100,000 roubles (≈ 1,000 euro) for individuals who were found guilty of offences under these charges and up to 1 million roubles (≈ 10,000 euro) for legal entities.<sup>18</sup>

In 2022, the Russian authorities imposed a comprehensive ban on the propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships, including among adults. The maximum fine was raised to 400,000 roubles (≈ 4,000 euro) for individuals and up to 5 million roubles (≈ 50,000 euro) for companies. All forms of “LGBT+ propaganda” are now fully prohibited in Russia.<sup>19</sup> Propaganda cases concern instances in which an individual is deemed to promote non-traditional sexual relationships. Reported examples of propaganda include a statement claiming that it is preferable to be a homosexual man rather than a heterosexual man, wearing makeup [as a man], or publicly kissing a person of the same gender.<sup>20</sup>

Pursuant to **Article 6.21 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offences**, the promotion of non-traditional sexual relations or preferences, gender transition, or refusal to have children—through information dissemination or public actions that present these as attractive, foster interest in them, or distort their social equivalence with traditional sexual relations or childbearing—unless otherwise exempted under Article 6.21.1, constitutes an administrative offence if it does not amount to a criminal act — shall incur an administrative fine ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 roubles (≈ 500–1,000 euro) for individuals; from 100,000 to 200,000 roubles

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<sup>15</sup> Forbes, *Расходование биологического ресурса нации*: как в СССР преследовали за В«мужеложство

, 4 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> Meduza, За последние два века (!) ЛГБТК-людей в России всего два десятка лет не преследовали по закону. Теперь история сделала полный круг Но нынешние законы — еще более жестокие, чем в Российской империи и СССР, 2 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> Sphere Foundation: 16

<sup>18</sup> Meduza, За последние два века (!) ЛГБТК-людей в России всего два десятка лет не преследовали по закону. Теперь история сделала полный круг Но нынешние законы — еще более жестокие, чем в Российской империи и СССР, 2 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>19</sup> Meduza, За последние два века (!) ЛГБТК-людей в России всего два десятка лет не преследовали по закону. Теперь история сделала полный круг Но нынешние законы — еще более жестокие, чем в Российской империи и СССР, 2 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>20</sup> Sphere Foundation: 8; Russian LGBT Network: 6; Mediazona: 2

(≈ 1,000-2,000 euro) for officials; and from 800,000 to 1,000,000 roubles (≈ 8,000–10,000 euro) for legal entities, or may result in administrative suspension of activities for up to 90 days.

Majority of such cases concern video services or online cinemas.<sup>21</sup> For individuals, the fines imposed are considerably lower. Substantial fines apply exclusively to legal entities. A legal entity may be prosecuted on multiple occasions, resulting in cumulative penalties that can exceed one million roubles (≈ 10,000 euro). In cases involving the dissemination of propaganda among minors, fines for legal entities may reach up to four million roubles (≈ 40,000 euro).<sup>22</sup>

### 1.3 Ban on gender transition

In July 2023, a law was enacted abolishing the formular called [Form 087/u](#), which had previously allowed for the alteration of gender markers on birth certificates and for gender reassignment to serve as a basis for obtaining a new passport. Medical interventions aimed at gender transition (i.e. gender-affirming healthcare), including those aimed at treating congenital anomalies of sexual development in children, were also prohibited.<sup>23</sup>

Form 087/u had been in effect since 2017. Between late 2017 and summer 2023, Russia offered some of the most accessible conditions for gender transition in Europe. With the 2023 amendments, transgender individuals in Russia are now denied access to essential medications and to both medical and legal transition procedures.<sup>24</sup>

According to a human rights lawyer, gender-reaffirming surgery and the legal recognition of gender reassignment has thus become prohibited, whilst the publication of information regarding gender reassignment is punishable under the provisions concerning the “propaganda of homosexuality,” Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Consultant, *КоАП РФ Статья 6.21. Пропаганда нетрадиционных сексуальных отношений и (или) предпочтений, смены пола, отказа от деторождения*, 6 September 2025, [url](#); Sphere Foundation: 4

<sup>22</sup> Kodeks ob Administrativnykh Pravonarusheniakh RF, *Статья 6.21.2 КоАП РФ*, n.d. [url](#); Kodeks ob Administrativnykh Pravonarusheniakh RF, *Статья 6.21 КоАП РФ*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> Meduza, *За последние два века (!) ЛГБТК-людей в России всего два десятка лет не преследовали по закону. Теперь история сделала полный круг Но нынешние законы — еще более жестокие, чем в Российской империи и СССР*, 2 December 2023, [url](#); A human rights lawyer: 1; [Federal Law N323 “On the Foundations of Healthcare”](#): (1) introduces art. 45.1 “Prohibition of sex change” to prohibit “any medical interference, including application of medication, enabling sex change, including forming primary and secondary sex characteristics of another sex”; (2) permits surgeries “related to congenital anomalies (developmental defects), genetic and endocrine deceases associated with impaired formation of the genital organs in children,” the decision for which is done by a special medical committee formed by a state medical facility, which effectively allows surgeries on intersex children without their consent (art. 45.1 part 2).

<sup>24</sup> Meduza, *За последние два века (!) ЛГБТК-людей в России всего два десятка лет не преследовали по закону. Теперь история сделала полный круг Но нынешние законы — еще более жестокие, чем в Российской империи и СССР*, 2 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>25</sup> A human rights lawyer: 1

## 1.4 November 2023 Supreme Court ruling

In November 2023, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation declared the “International LGBT Public Movement”<sup>26</sup> an extremist organisation. Following the court ruling, participants of the LGBT+ community may face up to 10-12 years’ imprisonment, depending on the degree of participation.<sup>27</sup>

The designation of the so-called international LGBT movement as extremist by the Supreme Court makes LGBT+ persons liable to prosecution under administrative and criminal provisions. LGBT+ persons convicted under these articles face legal sanctions, possible imprisonment, and exclusion from fundamental socio-economic, civil, and political rights.<sup>28</sup>

Following the Supreme Court ruling, any subsequent amendments to the extremism framework necessarily exert direct consequences upon the LGBT+ community.<sup>29</sup>

According to consulted sources, the Supreme Court ruling indirectly seeks to remove LGBT+ content and expressions from the public sphere and to compel organisations to delete online material or risk closure. Meanwhile, any legal entity engaged in the defence of LGBT+ rights has effectively been prohibited from operating.<sup>30</sup>

Several sources expressed concerns related to the fact that the Supreme Court decision is highly vague and indeterminate, which allows for various interpretations of what constitutes participation in the extremist LGBT+ community. As a result, it is difficult to predict which actions may be subject to prosecution (see also [section 2.4 predictability of legal procedures](#)).<sup>31</sup>

## 1.5 Prohibition of extremism

This section outlines Russian legislation governing the production, dissemination, and public exhibition of extremist materials and symbols, focusing on provisions under which LGBT+ persons may be subject to legal sanctions.

According to consulted sources, legislation on extremism has continuously been subject to change and modification, with each iteration introducing more restrictive provisions than its predecessors.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The so-called “International LGBT Public Movement” is not a genuine organisational entity; no such body is known to exist in practice.

<sup>27</sup> Meduza, *За последние два века (!) ЛГБТК-людей в России всего два десятка лет не преследовали по закону. Теперь история сделала полный круг Но нынешние законы — еще более жестокие, чем в Российской империи и СССР*, 2 December 2023, [url](#); Coming Out, *Report on the Situation of LGBTQ+ People in Russia*, 5 June 2025, [url](#); Sphere Foundation: 1; NHC: 4

<sup>28</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 5

<sup>29</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 2, 5; OVD-Info: 1

<sup>30</sup> MCC & Revers: 4; A human rights lawyer: 10

<sup>31</sup> OVD-Info: 1, 11; Mediazona: 14; Freedom House: 3; Memorial: 13

<sup>32</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 2-3; OVD-Info: 1

Once a person is registered as extremist as the result of either an administrative or criminal conviction, the person is barred from opening or maintaining bank accounts, and employers are prohibited from paying salaries to such persons. The state-maintained registry of persons convicted of extremism may also be shared with employers and medical institutions. According to one source, in practical terms, convicted LGBT+ persons are denied the ability to participate fully in civic life, and the cumulative effect of these restrictions may render LGBT+ persons effectively second-class citizens.<sup>33</sup>

Cases of extremism in Russia may result in either administrative or criminal proceedings. Administrative cases are seen to primarily concern the display of extremist symbols. By contrast, the grounds for criminal proceedings are more difficult to ascertain, although it is suggested that many such cases relate to participation in, or organisation of, an extremist community. Consulted sources claim that amongst affected individuals are managers of LGBT+ clubs or saunas, or simply people belonging to the LGBT+ community (for more on these cases, see section [2.2.1.1](#)).<sup>34</sup>

Extremist activity includes the violent alteration of Russia's constitutional order or territorial integrity, incitement to terrorism or hatred, discriminatory propaganda, obstructing citizens' rights or the work of authorities through violence or threats, as well as the production, dissemination, organisation, or financing of such acts.<sup>35</sup>

**Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offences** of the Russian Federation establishes that the mass production, distribution, or storage for widespread dissemination of extremist materials included in the federal list, or other extremist materials as defined under Federal Law, if not constituting a criminal offence, is punishable by an administrative fine of 1,000–3,000 roubles (≈ 10–30 euro) or up to 15 days' administrative detention for individuals, with confiscation of the materials and equipment used. Officials face fines of 2,000–5,000 roubles (≈ 20–50 euro) with confiscation, while legal entities may be fined 100,000–1,000,000 roubles (≈ 1,000–10,000 euro) or subjected to administrative suspension of up to 90 days, also with confiscation of materials and equipment.<sup>36</sup>

Pursuant to **Article 20.3 on the Code of Administrative Offenses** of the Russian Federation, propaganda or public display of nazi symbols or insignia, symbols resembling them to the point of confusion, or symbols of extremist organisations, as well as other symbols whose propaganda or display is prohibited by federal law, if not constituting a criminal offence, is punishable by an administrative fine of 1,000–2,000 roubles (≈ 10–20 euro) for individuals,

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<sup>33</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 4, 6, 8

<sup>34</sup> Sphere Foundation: 6; NHC: 7

<sup>35</sup> Garant.ru, *Федеральный закон от 25 июля 2002 г. N 114-ФЗ "О противодействии экстремистской деятельности" (с изменениями и дополнениями)*, 11 August 2020, [url](#); Sphere Foundation: 7; Federal law FZ-114 On Extremist Activities, dated 17 June 2006, with revisions and amendments 7 July 2025, [url](#); A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 3

<sup>36</sup> Consultant, *КоАП РФ Статья 20.29. Производство и распространение экстремистских материалов*, 6 September 2025, [url](#)

1,000–4,000 roubles (≈10–40 euro) for officials, or 10,000–50,000 roubles (≈100–500 euro) for legal entities, with confiscation of the items used in the offence. Individuals may face up to 15 days of administrative detention or up to 100 hours of compulsory labour, also with confiscation.<sup>37</sup>

Pursuant to **Article 280 in the Criminal Code** of the Russian Federation, public calls to engage in extremist activity are punishable by a fine of 100,000–300,000 roubles (≈ 1,000–3,000 euro) or an amount equivalent to the offender's income over one to two years, compulsory labour for up to three years, detention for four to six months, or imprisonment for up to four years, with disqualification from certain positions or activities for the same period.<sup>38</sup>

The article also states that the same acts committed through mass media or information and telecommunication networks, including the internet, carry penalties of compulsory labour for up to five years, with or without disqualification from certain positions or activities for up to three years, or imprisonment for up to five years, with disqualification for up to three years.<sup>39</sup>

**Article 282.1 of the Criminal Code** of the Russian Federation provides that the creation, leadership, or organisation of an extremist community, or recruitment into such a community, is punishable by fines ranging from 300,000–800,000 roubles (≈ 3,000–8,000 euro), compulsory labour, or imprisonment for two to ten years, with potential restrictions on positions or professional activity. Participation alone carries lesser penalties of 300,000–600,000 roubles (≈ 3,000–6,000 euro) or imprisonment for two to six years.<sup>40</sup>

**Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code** of the Russian Federation provides that the organisation or leadership of an extremist organisation, excluding those designated as terrorist, is punishable by fines of 400,000–800,000 roubles (≈ 4,000–8,000 euro) or imprisonment for six to ten years, with possible disqualification from positions or activities for up to ten years and restriction of liberty for one to two years. Recruitment into such organisations carries fines of 300,000–700,000 roubles (≈ 3,000–7,000 euro), compulsory labour, or imprisonment for four to eight years. Participation alone is punishable by fines of 300,000–600,000 roubles (≈ 3,000–6,000 euro) or imprisonment for two to six years. Offences using official authority are punishable by

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<sup>37</sup> Consultant, *КоАП РФ Статья 20.3. Пропаганда либо публичное демонстрирование нацистской атрибутики или символики, либо атрибутики или символики экстремистских организаций, либо иных атрибутики или символики, пропаганда либо публичное демонстрирование которых запрещены федеральными законами*, 6 September 2025, [url](#); NHC: 3; Memorial: 5

<sup>38</sup> Consultant, *УК РФ Статья 280. Публичные призывы к осуществлению экстремистской деятельности*, 31 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> Consultant, *УК РФ Статья 280. Публичные призывы к осуществлению экстремистской деятельности*, 31 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> Consultant, *УК РФ Статья 282.1. Организация экстремистского сообщества*, 1 September 2025, [url](#)

seven to twelve years' imprisonment with fines. First-time offenders who voluntarily withdraw may be exempt.<sup>41</sup>

**Article 282.4(1) of the Criminal Code** of the Russian Federation establishes that the repeated promotion or public display of Nazi symbols, insignia resembling them, or the symbols of extremist organisations, when committed by a person previously penalised for a related administrative offence, is punishable by a fine of 600,000–1,000,000 roubles (≈ 6,000–10,000 euro), up to 480 hours of community service, corrective or compulsory labour for up to four years, or imprisonment for the same term.<sup>42</sup>

**Article 282.4**, provides that: “Propaganda or public display of Nazi attributes or symbols, or attributes or symbols resembling Nazi symbols to the extent that they may cause confusion, or attributes or symbols of extremist organizations, or other attributes or symbols the propaganda or public display of which is prohibited by federal law, if these acts are committed by a person who has previously been subjected to administrative punishment for any of the administrative offenses set out in **Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offenses** of the Russian Federation.”<sup>43</sup>

## 1.6 Other legal measures affecting the lives of LGBT+ persons

Some LGBT+ organisations have been designated as “undesirable organisations” or “foreign agents,”<sup>44</sup> meaning that attending events organised by such groups could place participants at risk of being targeted.<sup>45</sup>

On 17 July 2025, Russia enacted a new law criminalising the intentional search for or access to online content deemed “extremist.” While the legislation primarily targets individuals seeking such material, it is expected to affect a broader population.<sup>46</sup> The law encompasses a wide range of content, including materials produced by organisations such as the so-called international LGBT movement, which has been designated as extremist. Penalties include fines for individuals accessing or searching for prohibited content, as well as for those advertising VPN services, while the use of VPNs in the commission of a crime is treated as an aggravating factor. Human Rights Watch has noted that authorities have already blocked tens of thousands

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<sup>41</sup> Consultant, УК РФ Статья 282.2. *Организация деятельности экстремистской организации и участие в деятельности такой организации*, 1 September 2025, [url](#); NHC: 4

<sup>42</sup> Consultant, УК РФ Статья 282.4. *Неоднократные пропаганда либо публичное демонстрирование нацистской атрибутики или символики, либо атрибутики или символики экстремистских организаций, либо иных атрибутики или символики, пропаганда либо публичное демонстрирование которых запрещены федеральными законами*, 1 September 2025, [url](#); Russian LGBT Network: 2

<sup>43</sup> Memorial: 7

<sup>44</sup> For further information on ‘foreign agents’ and ‘undesirable organisations’ in Russia, see European Parliamentary Research Service, “*Foreign Agents*” and “*undesirables*,” 2022, [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> Freedom House: 1

<sup>46</sup> NHC: 9; HRW, *Russia Clamps Down on Online Searches*, 24 July 2025, [url](#); HRW, “*Disrupted, Throttled, and Blocked*”, July 2025, [url](#)

of resources, raising concerns about restrictions on free expression and access to information, particularly for those attempting to access LGBT+ related content or other censored materials.<sup>47</sup>

With the new law concerning extremist content online, users' search and history details could be handed to the authorities by search engine owners, telephone companies, or any public company. Moreover, law enforcement authorities will be able to seize phones and find search and history data in Google accounts and YouTube.<sup>48</sup>

In September 2025, these internet regulations came into effect along with restrictions on the use of VPNs. According to OVD-Info, LGBT+ persons are expected to be among the first targeted, as all LGBT+ related material will likely be classified as extremist. However, there is no judicial practice in this area as of September 2025, and it remains impossible to predict how the law will be applied.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> HRW, *Russia Clamps Down on Online Searches*, 24 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>48</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe, *Extreme fines*, 19 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>49</sup> OVD-Info: 2, 32

## 2. Legal practice

This chapter provides an insight into the trends and changes in legal proceedings against LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court ruling declaring the international LGBT movement an extremist organisation. It also examines the underlying grounds for prosecution and considers whether LGBT+ persons have access to legal representation in such cases.

### 2.1. Availability of data on LGBT+ cases

Several of the consulted sources noted that available data on court cases, including LGBT+ cases, is limited.<sup>50</sup> Extremism trials are often closed to the public for reasons of national security,<sup>51</sup> and public access to court cases and databases (e.g. *GAS RF Pravosudie*<sup>52</sup>) has been closed or restricted.<sup>53</sup> Accessing information for the public on specific cases is challenging because the justice system's webpages do not function properly,<sup>54</sup> and court decisions are only available from certain levels of the Russian court system.<sup>55</sup>

Lack of available records makes it difficult to obtain a comprehensive overview,<sup>56</sup> thus restricting the ability to verify and analyse cases<sup>57</sup> and providing limited indication of what forms the basis for prosecution.<sup>58</sup>

Some insight into proceedings and court cases, however, can still be gained through media outlets and through individuals and organisations monitoring court proceedings.<sup>59</sup>

Most available data derive from Russia's district courts, which primarily adjudicate in criminal cases and certain serious administrative offences. Their websites generally allow access to decisions, including those involving LGBT+ persons prosecuted under extremism legislation, though coverage and provided details are limited in those cases. Other cases, such as disinformation or discrediting the army, are easier to access for the public and count. While most published decisions include the defendant's name, date, case number, and relevant

<sup>50</sup> NHC: 2; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 14 and 26; Sphere Foundation: 3; Mediazona: 14; OVD-Info: 3-6; A human rights lawyer: 3-4

<sup>51</sup> NHC: 2

<sup>52</sup> GAS RF Pravosudie is an automated state information system in the Russian Federation designed to digitise court and judicial data.

<sup>53</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 14, 26; OVD-Info: 3; Mediazona: 9, 14; See overview from Current Time here: *Nastoyashchee Vremya, Уголовные дела, рейды в клубах и заявления Путина. Как изменилась жизнь ЛГБТК-людей в России в 2024 году*, 10 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> Sphere Foundation: 3

<sup>55</sup> OVD-Info: 3

<sup>56</sup> Sphere Foundation: 3

<sup>57</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 14

<sup>58</sup> Mediazona: 14

<sup>59</sup> Sphere Foundation: 3; AI: 3; Citizens' Watch, Судебное преследование ЛГБТ+ по закону о "пропаганде" в России, 22 August 2024, [url](#); Mediazona: 16; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 26

article, some courts are inconsistent, and certain personal information is often redacted. Not all court cases are published.<sup>60</sup>

To identify extremism cases involving LGBT+ content, it is necessary to examine the details of all extremism prosecutions. Official court statistics group all cases under Articles 280, 280.1, and 282–282.4 of the Criminal Code as extremist crimes, without differentiating between specific articles or indicating which cases relate to LGBT+ issues. As a result of the limited details, some cases may be missed, though it is not clear how many.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, the available data illustrates that, while Russian authorities regularly publish overall conviction statistics for extremism, the underlying grounds for conviction are not specified. Consequently, the category of extremism encompasses a broad spectrum of conduct, ranging from LGBT+ related activities to actions associated with the war in Ukraine.<sup>62</sup>

Accessing data on administrative convictions, particularly for LGBT+ propaganda is notably limited. These cases are often heard in magistrate courts,<sup>63</sup> whose decisions are largely inaccessible online and difficult to analyse. According to one source, this significantly constrains the ability to assess judicial practice in administrative LGBT+ cases. Accessible decisions mostly come from lower-level courts in Moscow and other major cities. Consequently, decisions are predominantly available from these jurisdictions. The source concludes that a considerable number of administrative decisions may be missed.<sup>64</sup>

## 2.2 Procedural differences between administrative and criminal prosecution

Procedural differences exist between administrative and criminal prosecutions in Russia. In practice, administrative proceedings operate as a form of summary justice, with a lower evidentiary threshold and fewer procedural safeguards compared to criminal prosecutions; witnesses and defence counsel are not required, and the standard of proof is minimal compared with that demanded in criminal proceedings. One source suggested that authorities frequently use administrative charges as a means of securing convictions against LGBT+ persons.<sup>65</sup> As a result, prosecutions for extremism are primarily initiated under administrative proceedings, unless the alleged violation involves serious violence.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> OVD-Info: 4

<sup>61</sup> OVD-Info: 5; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 9; Mediazona: 11

<sup>62</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 9

<sup>63</sup> In Russian called *mirovoy sud/мировой суд*. These courts serve as the first instance

<sup>64</sup> OVD-Info: 6

<sup>65</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 15; Memorial: 18

<sup>66</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 13

## 2.3 Development of prosecutions against LGBT+ persons

While exact numbers on administrative and criminal charges are generally unclear, they have increased since the 2023 Supreme Court ruling,<sup>67</sup> though administrative cases generally remain more numerous than criminal ones.<sup>68</sup>

There was a significant rise in cases brought under the ban on so-called non-traditional values, pursuant to Article 6.21 of the Administrative Code (propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations) immediately before and after the Russian Supreme Court decision in November 2023.<sup>69</sup> Charges related to propaganda continue to be enforced as of September 2025, with dozens of new cases reportedly initiated each month.<sup>70</sup>

Since the Supreme Court decision, sources suggest that prosecutors and investigators have increasingly applied the law on extremism<sup>71</sup> rather than the propaganda legislation previously applied, including for seemingly minor acts.<sup>72</sup> Although data on extremism and propaganda cases is unclear, there appear to be no marked disparity between the application of propaganda and extremism legislation as basis for prosecutions.<sup>73</sup> As of September 2025, the direction of legal practice remains unclear.<sup>74</sup>

Outside Russia's major urban centres, judicial discretion tends to be more restrictive and view LGBT+ appearance and activity as extremist, and judges tend to use Article 20.3 more frequently.<sup>75</sup>

### 2.3.1 Criminal prosecution against LGBT+ persons

The examples provided in this section are included to illustrate how the relevant practices manifest in concrete cases. They are not exhaustive and should be understood as indicative rather than comprehensive.

Criminal prosecution can be pursued under the law on extremism (see [section 1.5](#)). As of September 2025, interviewed sources estimate that between 12 and 24 criminal cases are

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<sup>67</sup> AI: 2; Media Hub Riga: 1; Sphere Foundation: 1

<sup>68</sup> Sphere Foundation: 3; Memorial: 4; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 9; OVD-Info: 6-9

<sup>69</sup> Mediazona: 1. The source noted that numbers are not precise and sometimes they come in bulk, making concrete counts difficult; A human rights lawyer: 4; NHC: 1; Sphere, *Количество дел по «пропаганде» ЛГБТ+ за 2023 больше, чем за прошлые годы*, 5 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>70</sup> Mediazona: 1

<sup>71</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 7; Sudyebnaya statistika RF, *Административные правонарушения*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>72</sup> A human rights lawyer: 4; NHC: 18

<sup>73</sup> OVD-Info: 9

<sup>74</sup> OVD-Info: 13

<sup>75</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 10

ongoing against LGBT+ individuals in Russia for alleged participation in an extremist organisation.<sup>76</sup>

Ten of the accused are either in pre-trial detention or under house arrest. Many of those prosecuted since the November 2023 court ruling had organised community activities, such as managing nightclubs.<sup>77</sup> It has been reported that at least 20 individuals have been charged between January 2024 and June 2025 for alleged participation in the international LGBT movement.<sup>78</sup>

As of July 2025, Russian courts have handed down three criminal convictions related to extremism for allegedly participating in the so-called international LGBT movement or displaying its purported symbols.<sup>79</sup> Some of the involved individuals in extremism cases are reported to have received lengthy sentences of between 10 and 12 years in prison.<sup>80</sup>

Sources have presented estimates of approximately 700 pending criminal prosecutions for extremism, involving between 800 and 900 individuals.<sup>81</sup> An unknown number of these cases are directed against LGBT+ persons. While most extremism-related cases remain in the administrative proceedings, a small proportion have advanced into criminal conduct.<sup>82</sup>

One source indicated that the increase in criminal charges was not as high as anticipated, which could be related to the law not being widely applied. The source compared the extremism law to the foreign agent law, stating that it took several years for it to come into full effect.<sup>83</sup>

Another source suggested that law enforcement officers and investigators may have a substantial backlog of cases awaiting trial, and it takes a period of time before cases reach the court.<sup>84</sup>

### 2.3.1.1 Known LGBT+ cases under criminal prosecution

Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code has been applied in several public cases, but not all extremism cases or all details are publicly known. Specific cases are referred and discussed by media and the public. As of September 2025, none of these have led to convictions.<sup>85</sup>

A well-known case concerns the Pose Club in the city of Orenburg, which was initiated in 2024 but as of November 2025 was still pending. Organisers are accused of coordinating

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<sup>76</sup> A human rights lawyer: 2; Memorial: 4, 9; NHC: 5; Russian LGBT Network: 2; Mediazona: 12; OVD-Info: 8; Sphere Foundation: 1; OVD-Info, *Repression in Russia in 2024: OVD-Info Overview*, 12 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>77</sup> Memorial: 9

<sup>78</sup> NHC: 5; HRW, *Россия: все больше жертв признания «движения ЛГБТ» «экстремистским»*, 3 July 2025, [url](#); OVD-Info: 8

<sup>79</sup> OVD-Info: 7

<sup>80</sup> Sphere Foundation: 1

<sup>81</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 13-14

<sup>82</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 13-14; OVD-Info: 5

<sup>83</sup> Media Hub Riga: 1

<sup>84</sup> Mediazona: 15

<sup>85</sup> Mediazona: 13

participation in the so-called LGBT+ extremist movement. Due to the collective nature of the alleged conduct, the matter was treated as a criminal offence and classified as a case of serious violence, as the participation of several individuals was deemed to have advanced into criminal conduct.<sup>86</sup>

In another case, an alleged LGBT+ tour guide, Andrei Kotov, who had been charged with organising tourist tours for LGBT+ individuals, was found dead in pretrial detention. Reports suggest that he committed suicide while in custody, with some sources indicating that this followed acts of torture.<sup>87</sup>

A third matter concerns publishing houses targeted for distributing books containing LGBT+ content.<sup>88</sup> On 15 May 2025, investigators charged three employees of two publishing houses with “organising the activities of an extremist organisation” (Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code) through the distribution of literary works with LGBT+ themes, allegedly indulging readers in the activities of an international LGBT+ movement. They face up to 12 years of imprisonment.<sup>89</sup> One of the cases concerning publishing houses involves a Moscow-based publisher of queer-themed books.<sup>90</sup>

In another recent case concerning a book with queer content, three individuals face criminal charges and potentially up to five years’ imprisonment for participation in extremism. Prior to this, the manager of the publishing house had been declared a foreign agent and subjected to ongoing scrutiny, subsequently being forced to sell the publishing house to a larger entity. Both the managers of the publishing house and the author of the book fled the country before the criminal case was initiated.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> OVD-Info, *В Оренбурге в суд поступило первое в России уголовное дело о «международном движении ЛГБТ»*, 10 July 2025, [url](#). See official press release on the case from the regional court here: Investigation Department of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation in the Orenburg Region, *В Оренбурге завершено расследование уголовного дела по факту организации и участия в деятельности экстремистского движения*, 9 July 2025, [url](#); Mediazona, Russia’s pioneering “LGBT extremism” case. In Orenburg, Pose bar raid and criminal case set precedent for future repression, 5 April 2024, [url](#); Mediazona, *В суд передали дело об «ЛГБТ-экстремизме» против сотрудников и владельца оренбургского бара Pose*, 9 June 2025, [url](#); A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 13; Mediazona: 13; Memorial 12

<sup>87</sup> Memorial PZK, Котов Андрей Евгеньевич, п.д., [url](#); BBC, «Большой ребенок». Как жил и погиб обвиненный в проведении «турнов для геев» Андрей Котов, 27 January 2025, [url](#); Memorial: 10; Russian LGBT Network: 2; Mediazona: 13; OVD-Info: 8

<sup>88</sup> Mediazona, «Первый отдел»: троим сотрудникам издательств «Эксмо», Popcorn Books и Individuum предъявили обвинение по делу об экстремистской организации, его возбудили из-за квир-литературы, 15 May 2025, [url](#); Media Hub Riga: 2; Sphere Foundation: 14; OVD-Info: 16

<sup>89</sup> HRW, Россия: все больше жертв признания «движения ЛГБТ» «экстремистским», 3 July 2025, [url](#); OVD-Info: 16

<sup>90</sup> Mediazona: 13

<sup>91</sup> Mediazona, «Первый отдел»: троим сотрудникам издательств «Эксмо», Popcorn Books и Individuum предъявили обвинение по делу об экстремистской организации, его возбудили из-за

A 2024 case in Tula, brought to court in August 2025, involves charges of participation in an extremist organisation, alongside allegations of distributing pornography. The case arose after a young individual shared an image of two men kissing on social media. The defendants, previously active in human rights advocacy, are being prosecuted under the criminal code.<sup>92</sup>

Two further matters have attracted attention in Russia. The first concerns a conviction against the transgender and LGBT+ activist, Mark Kislytsyn, for anti-war stance.<sup>93</sup> The second matter relates to Oleg Grannikov, who ceased activist work ten years ago. However, during a trial concerning his right to maintain contact with his child following a divorce, it emerged that he had previously been employed at the LGBT film festival Side by Side and had worked as a journalist specialising in LGBT+ rights. He was subsequently placed in pretrial detention in August 2025.<sup>94</sup>

A case was reported in which a woman in 2022 contacted the police after her child claimed to have seen two men engaging in sexual activity by the window of their apartment. The individuals were in September 2024 ultimately sentenced to 5.5 years' imprisonment for indecent assault.<sup>95</sup> One source noted that a heterosexual couple could have been prosecuted under similar circumstances.<sup>96</sup>

In a 2024 case from Samara, a former leader of an LGBT+ organisation was arrested and charged with organising an extremist community, facing a potential ten-year prison sentence. In another case from 2024, a medical doctor from Ulyanovsk was arrested for private communications on VKontakte regarding same-sex relationships, despite having no public LGBT+ activity, and was charged with participation in an extremist organisation.<sup>97</sup> The individual received a sentence of three and a half years' imprisonment.<sup>98</sup>

### *2.3.2 Administrative prosecution against LGBT+ persons*

Administrative prosecution can be pursued under both the law on propaganda and the law on extremism (see sections [1.2](#) and [1.5](#)).

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квир-литературы, 15 May 2025, [url](#); HRW, *Россия: все больше жертв признания «движения ЛГБТ» «экстремистским»*, 3 July 2025, [url](#); Mediazona: 13; NHC: 6

<sup>92</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 24

<sup>93</sup> AI, *Russia: Lengthy prison term for transgender activist a punishment for anti-war stance*, 12 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>94</sup> Mediazona, *Москвича Олега Гранникова отправили в СИЗО по делу о госизмене*, 1 September 2025, [url](#); AI: 4

<sup>95</sup> Sphere Foundation: 20; Memorial: 28; Mediazona: 24; Meduza, *Двух студентов в Москве посадили на срок до пяти с половиной лет по делу о развратных действиях. Дети, живущие по соседству, якобы увидели их в окне обнаженными*, 12 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>96</sup> Memorial: 28

<sup>97</sup> A human rights lawyer: 5

<sup>98</sup> SOVA, *В Ульяновской области экс-директору медцентра вынесли приговор по ст. 133 и 282.2 УК*, 21 March 2025, [url](#); Sphere Foundation: 2

As defined in [section 2.1](#), the notable limitations with regard to accessing data on the accurate judicial practice concerning particularly administrative convictions should be kept in mind when reading through this practice section. For instance, it is not possible to determine precisely how many of the propaganda and extremism cases specifically concerned LGBT+ issues, and estimates may be underrepresented.<sup>99</sup>

### 2.3.2.1 Extremism cases

Russian courts are reported to have issued around 100 convictions under administrative proceedings in cases concerning extremism for alleged participation in the so-called International LGBT Movement or for the display of symbols attributed to it.<sup>100</sup>

One consulted source pointed to the fact that, in the immediate aftermath of the Supreme Court decision, the number of prosecutions for extremism increased threefold. By January 2025, a total of 6,812 prosecutions had been initiated under the category of extremism, all of which fell within administrative jurisdiction. Of these, 5,875 had resulted in convictions. Prior to the Supreme Court decision, extremism convictions evolved around nazi-propaganda or links to far-right groups or the Islamic State. According to the source, a substantial proportion of the total 6,812 prosecutions have been directed against LGBT+ activities, though the category of extremism encompasses a broad spectrum of conduct.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, another source noted that no subject-matter breakdown is provided for the slightly over 5,000 administrative offence convictions related to extremism more broadly. Cases are geographically distributed across Russia, with a substantial number occurring in the provinces, including Chita, Kirov, Samara, Tula, and Ulyanovsk.<sup>102</sup>

### 2.3.2.2 Propaganda cases

Official statistics published by the Supreme Court's Judicial Department indicate that 214 administrative decisions were issued in 2024 under various propaganda provisions. In 2023, the number was 186. These figures may include unrelated cases, such as propaganda of paedophilia or child-free ideology, not directly related to LGBT+ propaganda.<sup>103</sup> According to Mediazona, a few hundred propaganda cases have been registered in 2025.<sup>104</sup>

Under propaganda law, Russian courts have imposed 188 fines totalling almost 30 million roubles (≈ 300,000 euro) between 2023 and the first half of 2024.<sup>105</sup> Institutions and

<sup>99</sup> OVD-Info: 6, 9; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 9

<sup>100</sup> Memorial: 2; Mediazona: 10; Sphere Foundation: 12; NHC: 5; HRW, *Россия: все больше жертв признания «движения ЛГБТ» «экстремистским»*, 3 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>101</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 8-9; Sova, *Антиэкстремизм в 2024 году: регулирование публичных высказываний и организованной деятельности*, 14 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>102</sup> A human rights lawyer: 2

<sup>103</sup> OVD-Info: 6, 9; Supreme Court 2024 statistics at Sudebny Departament, *Данные судебной статистики*, n.d., [url](#), see report 1-АП for 2023 and 2024

<sup>104</sup> Mediazona: 4

<sup>105</sup> Meduza, *За полтора года в России назначили 188 штрафов на 30 миллионов рублей за «пропаганду нетрадиционных отношений»*, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

organisations have faced substantial fines for propaganda and for other violations, sometimes receiving multiple fines in a single day, including penalties for refusing to remove LGBT+ related content. In 2025, fines for such offences have continued to rise, with total amounts collected exceeding 60 million roubles (600,000 euro) over the past two years, reflecting a significant increase compared with previous years.<sup>106</sup>

## 2.4 Predictability in legal procedures in LGBT+ cases

It is emphasised by consulted sources that Russian LGBT+ related legislation is generally vague, granting authorities considerable discretion in determining the grounds on which to initiate prosecutions, making it challenging to assess and interpret which actions may be subject to prosecution.<sup>107</sup>

Regarding the Supreme Court decision of November 2023, the details of the case were initially unknown and were only partially leaked to the press months later. The ruling remains vague, particularly because the so-called International LGBT+ Movement does not formally exist. The broad and imprecise wording of “participation in an extremist organisation” could, in principle, allow for extremely wide interpretations—for example, that a homosexual couple walking hand in hand might be considered participation in the extremist LGBT+ community. However, to the knowledge of the sources, no such administrative or criminal cases have been reported.<sup>108</sup>

The concrete application of the Supreme Court decision of November 2023 remains unpredictable, and judicial practices witnessed as of September 2025 often lack a strong legal basis and do not appear fully consistent with the principle of the rule of law. Decisions seem to depend to a large extent on the individual judge, with a wide range of available provisions that can be selectively applied or combined as deemed appropriate.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Mediazona: 4; Mediazona, Онлайн-кинотеатр Okko оштрафовали на миллион рублей из-за показа фильма «Ив Сен-Лоран» с поцелуями людей одного пола, 21 May 2024, [url](#); Mediazona, На «Кинопоиск» и Wink составили протоколы о «пропаганде ЛГБТ», 8 May 2024, [url](#); Mediazona, Mangalib оштрафовали на 14 млн рублей по протоколам о «пропаганде ЛГБТ» из-за семи манг на сайте онлайн-библиотеки, 25 August 2025, [url](#); Mediazona, Суд оштрафовал Google на 4,6 миллиарда рублей за отказ удалить из ютуба видео о войне и ЛГБТ, 20 December 2023, [url](#); Mediazona, TikTok оштрафовали на 3 млн рублей из-за отказа удалять «пропаганду ЛГБТ»; Twitch — на 4 млн из-за интервью Арестовича, 4 October 2022, [url](#); Mediazona, Apple в России оштрафовали на 7,5 млн рублей по трем протоколам о «пропаганде ЛГБТ», 19 May 2025, [url](#); Mediazona, Московский суд оштрафовал Apple и WhatsApp по протоколам о «пропаганде ЛГБТ» и отказе от удаления информации, 10 June 2025, [url](#); Mediazona, На Apple и «Кинопоиска» составили протоколы о «пропаганде ЛГБТ», 24 June 2025, [url](#); Meduza, За последние 10 лет количество дел по статьям, связанным с «пропагандой ЛГБТ», выросло в 18 (!) раз, 18 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> Memorial: 13; Mediazona: 14; OVD-Info: 1

<sup>108</sup> OVD-Info: 1, 11, 26; Mediazona 14; Freedom House: 3

<sup>109</sup> OVD-Info: 13

Consulted sources stated that it can be difficult to predict whether a particular action falls under legislation on LGBT+ propaganda or extremism.<sup>110</sup> Further, it can be difficult to predict if extremism cases are processed in either the administrative or criminal procedures.<sup>111</sup> Two sources have stated a certain degree of arbitrariness with divergent judicial interpretations when judges and investigators do not consistently distinguish between propaganda and extremism.<sup>112</sup> One individual may be charged under the propaganda law, whilst another may be charged with criminal liability under extremism law for the same conduct.<sup>113</sup> Sphere Foundation elaborated that the lacking distinction between propaganda and extremism, may lead to individuals being charged with serious criminal offences and imprisonment.<sup>114</sup>

Sources point to the following acts as grounds for extremism cases: displaying extremism symbols such as rainbow flags,<sup>115</sup> participation in or organisation of extremist movement,<sup>116</sup> or even ordinary members of the LGBT+ community.<sup>117</sup>

Finally, sources have suggested that LGBT+ legislation has been used to target politically active individuals or dissenters,<sup>118</sup> or when individuals have been vocal about certain rights, civic activities, or information to the public.<sup>119</sup>

### *2.4.1 Application of other legal provisions against LGBT+ persons*

The Russian authorities' methods of resorting to other legal measures to pursue prosecutions are by one of the consulted sources described as an approach reminiscent of Stalinist practices—thereby maintaining an atmosphere of fear.<sup>120</sup> In the absence of a relevant legal charge, authorities may fabricate one. For instance, police reportedly entered a private birthday party including an LGBT+ group. They were suspected of subjecting minors to propaganda, but no minors were present. Instead, the authorities charged the LGBT+ group with defamation of religious feelings.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> NHC: 10; OVD: 9; Media Hub Riga: 2; Sphere 5; Russian LGBT Network: 3; Memorial: 11; An LGBT+ organisation: 3, 5; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 10

<sup>111</sup> OVD 10

<sup>112</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 10; NHC: 10

<sup>113</sup> Sphere Foundation: 5; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 10

<sup>114</sup> Sphere Foundation: 5

<sup>115</sup> OVD-Info: 12; Sphere Foundation: 6; A human rights lawyer: 4; An LGBT+ organisation: 3

<sup>116</sup> Memorial 11; Sphere Foundation: 6

<sup>117</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 2

<sup>118</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 3, 4

<sup>119</sup> Memorial: 13; MCC & Revers: 3

<sup>120</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 39

<sup>121</sup> NHC: 13; Mediazona, «Где твой член, куда ты его дел?» Силовики приступили к рейдам по закрытым вечеринкам в поисках «международного движения ЛГБТ», 22 Februar 2024, [url](#)

A case concerning the targeting of gay clubs demonstrates how legislation unrelated to extremism have been applied to LGBT+ persons, broadening the range of legal tools available for repression. In Arkhangelsk, Elena Filippova, owner of the gay club Dark Site, was sentenced to 200 hours of community service under Article 148 of the Criminal Code (offending religious feelings). Authorities argued that displaying an Orthodox cross at an LGBT+ event constituted an insult to religion. A year later, riot police raided the club, questioning approximately 90 guests.<sup>122</sup>

In the recent case concerning activist Oleg Grannikov, he was arrested and charged under Article 275 on state treason. Some sources opined that the underlying motivation for his prosecution relates to his LGBT+ activism.<sup>123</sup>

## 2.5 Repeated offences

Under Article 282.4 of the Criminal Code, a repeat offence becomes criminal if committed by someone who has been subjected to administrative punishment for the same conduct, for example, under Code of Administrative Offenses (CAO) Article 20.3 on displaying extremist symbols.<sup>124</sup>

The statute ties the escalation trigger to prior administrative punishment rather than a specific duration, while a one-year window is derived from CAO Article 4.6, which defines how long a person is legally considered to be “subjected to administrative punishment.” The one-year window is typically counted from the date the penalty was imposed.<sup>125</sup> However, this does not include propaganda, which alone does not trigger criminal liability.<sup>126</sup> After 12 months, this escalation mechanism is formally reset, although such procedures remain largely opaque, as individuals tend to exercise caution and self-censor (see also section [3.1.8 on self-censorship](#)).<sup>127</sup>

According to OVD-Info, as of September 2025, one person was convicted of a criminal offence because of repeated administrative offences and sentenced to six months of compulsory labour after posting the rainbow flag on a social media page. Reference was made to HRW research

<sup>122</sup> НС: 12; PostNews, *Владелицу гей-клуба Dark Site приговорили к 200 часам исправительных работ*, 25 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>123</sup> MCC & Revers: 2; Fontanka, *В Москве новый арест по госизмене. Фигурант ранее поддерживал ЛГБТ\* сообщество*, 1 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>124</sup> Memorial: 7; OVD-Info: 14; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 16; an LGBT+ organisation: 6; Consultant, УК РФ Статья 282.4. Неоднократные пропаганда либо публичное демонстрирование нацистской атрибутики или символики, либо атрибутики или символики экстремистских организаций, либо иных атрибутики или символики, пропаганда либо публичное демонстрирование которых запрещены федеральными законами, 1 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>125</sup> Memorial: 6, 8; OVD-Info: 14; Consultant, КоАП РФ Статья 4.6. Срок, в течение которого лицо считается подвергнутым административному наказанию, 22 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>126</sup> OVD-Info: 14

<sup>127</sup> Memorial: 6; Sphere Foundation: 13

showing that many people, who were administratively prosecuted, deleted posts and sometimes social media accounts altogether. OVD-Info suggested that this behaviour may help explain the absence of documented cases of repeated offences.<sup>128</sup> Another source also noted the lacking available data to confirm how this cumulative approach is applied.<sup>129</sup>

There was some uncertainty among the consulted sources regarding the number of consecutive administrative extremism cases required to trigger criminal liability for repeated offences. Some indicated that a second repeated offence would suffice,<sup>130</sup> whereas others suggested that it would take a third offence for the case to be converted into a criminal one.<sup>131</sup>

In cases related to extremism, prosecutors also have the option of proceeding directly with a criminal charge. There are several options how one may be prosecuted for extremism. This can include the repeated demonstration of extremist symbols, which necessitates repeated character, but it can also be participation in or leading of extremist organisation, or financing such, which does not require repeated acts.<sup>132</sup>

According to a researcher on LGBT+ rights, criminal liability for repeated administrative offences permits the systematic criminalisation of individuals.<sup>133</sup>

## 2.6 Acquittals

The number of acquittals in LGBT+ cases is reportedly insignificant, and in extremism cases, only one acquittal has been reported. One source, referring to Human Rights Watch, noted one initial acquittal under Article 20.3, administrative case, by a court of first instance in January 2024 in Krasnodar. The court held that the defendant had not committed an offense because the person had published an LGBT+ flag on a private social media page at a time before the Supreme Court 2023 decision. However, the authorities appealed the decision, and the regional court ruled in their favour finding that the defendant had not deleted the flag after the Supreme Court decision, thus committing the offense by omission.<sup>134</sup>

A concrete example of acquittal involves a young man whose photo, showing him wearing makeup, was found on a Telegram channel with 40 subscribers. He was initially charged with an administrative offence and fined 100,000 roubles ( $\approx$  1,000 euro). Ultimately, he was acquitted after it was established that the authorities had committed procedural violations.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> OVD-Info: 15

<sup>129</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 16

<sup>130</sup> OVD-Info: 14; Memorial: 6

<sup>131</sup> Sphere Foundation: 13; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 16; Mediazona: 7

<sup>132</sup> OVD-Info: 16

<sup>133</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 16

<sup>134</sup> OVD-Info: 17

<sup>135</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 5

## 2.7 Access to legal representation and assistance

According to the interviewed sources, LGBT+ persons do have access to legal representation.<sup>136</sup> However, the Russian judicial system has been characterised as lacking independence, further compounded by a criminal justice system biased in favour of the prosecution, which undermines equality of arms.<sup>137</sup> The courts are therefore regarded as politicised, providing lawyers with limited scope to influence the outcome of proceedings.<sup>138</sup>

In this regard, access to legal representation does not necessarily provide significant assistance from a legal point of view.<sup>139</sup> State-appointed lawyers tend, in practice, to assist investigators in the efficient compilation of the case file against the defendant, irrespective of the charges or the defendant's personal circumstances. While exceptions exist, the general rule is that defendants cannot rely on the advice of the lawyer.<sup>140</sup>

There are LGBT+ friendly lawyers, willing upon request to provide legal assistance.<sup>141</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights noted that the quality of lawyers available to LGBT+ persons is generally regarded as competent and qualified.<sup>142</sup>

According to one source, qualified legal assistance is of crucial importance when seeking protection from the authorities or reporting incidents of violence. However, there may be regional variations in the situation for LGBT+ individuals. While access to legal support is particularly vital in this context, it should be noted that the significance of such assistance is not unique to LGBT+ issues.<sup>143</sup> Legal support from organisations, human rights lawyers, or activists remains crucial, offering strategic guidance on avoiding self-incrimination, identifying viable options, and adopting protective measures in navigating a repressive legal environment.<sup>144</sup>

Access to support from LGBT+ organisations and lawyers in Russia is increasingly limited, as many groups have been forced to shut down their social media platforms, and lawyers risk professional repercussions or harassment when collaborating with individuals perceived to be foreign agents or extremists.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 17; Memorial: 18; a human rights lawyer: 8; An LGBT+ organisation: 7

<sup>137</sup> Council of Europe, *As long as the judicial system of the Russian Federation does not become more independent, doubts about its effectiveness remain*, 25 February 2016, [url](#); Memorial: 19

<sup>138</sup> Memorial: 19

<sup>139</sup> Memorial: 18

<sup>140</sup> A human rights lawyer: 8; Sphere Foundation: 26

<sup>141</sup> A human rights lawyer: 8

<sup>142</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 17

<sup>143</sup> OVD-Info: 56

<sup>144</sup> OVD-Info: 57; Russian LGBT Network: 7

<sup>145</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 7-8; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 17; Council of Europe, *As long as the judicial system of the Russian Federation does not become more independent, doubts about its effectiveness remain*, 25 February 2016, [url](#)

On the other hand, one source indicated that independent legal practitioners are primarily fulfilling a communicative role with the outside world and offering moral support—functions that are typically not undertaken by state-appointed defenders.<sup>146</sup>

Some LGBT+ individuals on trial may decline support from LGBT+ organisations for strategic reasons to avoid exacerbating their situation. Pleading guilty or accepting the charges can result in a more lenient sentence or a more favourable prison placement, whereas contesting the charges may have the opposite effect.<sup>147</sup>

If the accused's mother tongue is not Russian, they are entitled to an interpreter in court. This is common, as many citizens from regions such as the North Caucasus, Buryatia, or Yakutia do not speak Russian fluently. In practice, however, defendants may not always receive interpretation, especially if unaware of this right, which can lead to misunderstandings of the charges or unintentional admissions.<sup>148</sup>

In **administrative proceedings**, legal representation is not mandatory and is therefore not automatically provided, although an accused person may retain a lawyer if they wish.<sup>149</sup>

In **criminal cases**, the state may appoint a lawyer for the defendant, or the individual may engage one privately, including by seeking support from LGBT+ organisations.<sup>150</sup> However, those who defend LGBT+ persons may themselves face harassment or even prosecution on the grounds that they are representing an extremist.<sup>151</sup>

LGBT+ persons did not always have the opportunity to select their own legal representation, as in some cases the FSB did not permit human rights lawyers to take on the cases. Instead, the individuals were assigned public defence lawyers. It remained unclear to what extent these public defenders were of adequate quality. Moreover, even where the quality of the lawyers was satisfactory, they are known to have close cooperation with the prosecutor's office.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Memorial: 19

<sup>147</sup> Memorial: 20

<sup>148</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 19

<sup>149</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 18; Memorial: 18; Russian LGBT Network: 8

<sup>150</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 8; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 17

<sup>151</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 17; An LGBT+ organisation: 7

<sup>152</sup> Sphere Foundation: 26

### 3. Treatment of LGBT+ persons by authorities

This chapter explores how Russian authorities monitor and restrict the lives of LGBT+ persons, both in public and online. It highlights selective enforcement, surveillance, censorship, and police raids. It also considers differences in vulnerability between homosexual and bisexual men and women, and transgender persons, as well as regional variations.

#### 3.1 Behaviour and expression likely to trigger state action

While being part of the LGBT+ community in itself is not illegal, openly admitting to this is often construed as affiliation with the International LGBT movement.<sup>153</sup> The consulted sources opined that if a person openly displays a non-heterosexual orientation or non-cisgender identity or appears to belong to the LGBT+ community, this may attract attention<sup>154</sup> and pose a risk of prosecution from the authorities,<sup>155</sup> non-contingent upon any particular action they may have taken or the degree to which they express themselves.<sup>156</sup>

It is difficult to identify clear thresholds for when and for what reasons an individual becomes a person of interest to the authorities.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, members of the LGBT+ community find it difficult to navigate the invisible red lines, as there are no explicit rules or laws prohibiting actions such as holding hands or kissing in public.<sup>158</sup> Public engagement—such as organisational work, participating in dissent or rallies, displaying symbols like a rainbow flag, or openly expressing LGBT+ affiliation through makeup, clothing, or behaviour—can be sufficient to attract scrutiny.<sup>159</sup>

The situation in Russia is described as escalating since the Supreme Court decision, making future consequences for individuals difficult to predict.<sup>160</sup> One fine could possibly be followed by another, and there is a chance of prosecution under criminal extremism laws—a procedure sometimes applied in cases such as ‘discrediting the army’ or ‘foreign agent’ status—which might in the near future also be extended to the LGBT+ area.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>153</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 22

<sup>154</sup> MCC & Revers: 5; NHC: 23; Freedom House: 6-7, 10; A human rights lawyer: 13, 15; Russian LGBT Network: 12; Sphere Foundation: 46; An LGBT+ researcher: 20; An LGBT+ organisation: 15

<sup>155</sup> NHC: 23; A human rights lawyer: 13, 15; An LGBT+ researcher: 20

<sup>156</sup> An LGBT+ researcher: 20

<sup>157</sup> Mediazona: 21 and 24; OVD-Info: 10, 27; Media Hub Riga: 7; NHC: 23; Freedom House: 13; Sphere Foundation: 17-18

<sup>158</sup> Media Hub Riga: 6; NHC: 23; An LGBT+ organisation: 15

<sup>159</sup> Freedom House: 4-5, 7; MCC & Revers: 5; NHC: 18, 46; Russian LGBT Network: 6; Memorial: 13; An LGBT+ organisation: 12

<sup>160</sup> NHC: 24

<sup>161</sup> Mediazona: 7

### 3.1.1 Raids on clubs and private gatherings

Following the Supreme Court decision in November 2023, raids on clubs and private LGBT+ gatherings have been conducted by law enforcement, with some raids resulting in detention and administrative charges.<sup>162</sup>

Such police raids may be used to intimidate guests, check their identity documents, and potentially identify individuals residing in the country illegally.<sup>163</sup>

Police raids targeting LGBT+ individuals have become increasingly routine, with at least 24 raids carried out on clubs throughout 2024. These operations were frequently accompanied by detentions, acts of violence, humiliation, and fines. Following such raids, the organisers of the targeted events often faced criminal charges linked to activities associated with an extremist organisation.<sup>164</sup>

Simply visiting LGBT+ nightclubs was by one source not considered sufficient grounds for such charges, but being caught engaging in a same-sex relationship could trigger an administrative penalty. The source was not aware of criminal cases arising from such an incident. In Yekaterinburg in June 2025, police raided a gathering of people who had assembled to write letters to political prisoners. While most attendees were only threatened, the organiser faced administrative charges after police discovered an LGBT+ symbol, suggesting that their LGBT+ affiliation was used as a pretext for enforcement action.<sup>165</sup>

In Krasnodar, two women were detained at a nightclub and accused of promoting non-traditional sexual relations.<sup>166</sup> In Moscow, police have repeatedly raided clubs and bars, checking IDs and detaining guests under the vague pretext of LGBT propaganda. These actions appear to lack a clear legal basis and serve primarily to intimidate the LGBT+ community.<sup>167</sup>

In March 2024, Russian authorities raided the LGBT+ friendly club Pose in Orenburg, charging its art director, Alexander Klimov, and administrator, Diana Kamelyanova, with organising the activities of an extremist organisation. Police cited costumes, wigs, and other stage props found during the raid as evidence.<sup>168</sup>

Most LGBT+ nightclubs in Russia have been officially closed. However, such nightclubs still exist in Russia, not only in Moscow and St Petersburg but also in other cities and towns. Since the Supreme Court decision, these clubs now operate largely in secret, frequently changing their

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<sup>162</sup> OVD-Info: 19; Russian LGBT Network: 9; Mediazona: 18; Media Hub Riga: 9; Memorial: 16; AI: 5

<sup>163</sup> Media Hub Riga: 9

<sup>164</sup> AI: 5

<sup>165</sup> Memorial: 16

<sup>166</sup> NHC:21; Gazeta.ru, *В краснодарском ночном клубе задержали двух девушек — сторонниц ЛГБТ, 17 February 2025, [url](#)*

<sup>167</sup> NHC: 17

<sup>168</sup> OVD-Info: 19

names and programmes, and are open to heterosexual patrons, while venues that previously featured “dark rooms” have closed.<sup>169</sup> Even venues not explicitly identifying as nightclubs may serve as a space for LGBT+ individuals to socialise openly.<sup>170</sup>

Authorities reportedly also target completely private parties.<sup>171</sup> In one example, police raided a private party in Leningrad region in February 2024. Participants were forced to lie on the ground for several hours, interrogated about their views on LGBT+ issues, and had their personal data collected.<sup>172</sup> Although none were subsequently prosecuted, the raid caused significant fear, and several LGBT+ individuals involved have since left Russia, uncertain of what might happen next. To the knowledge of Sphere Foundation, there have been no reports of these individuals being targeted again.<sup>173</sup> In another case, police violently raided an LGBT+ party, which resulted in ten individuals being charged with propaganda.<sup>174</sup>

Several sources indicated that it is possible for LGBT+ individuals to hold private parties or gatherings, particularly if they remain out of public view, such as at home. However, there is an inherent and ever-present risk that attendees could be reported to the authorities, potentially leading to a raid.<sup>175</sup>

Under standard procedure, police would generally require a court order to enter a private residence, but extremist legislation allows them to break in if they suspect extremist activity.<sup>176</sup> During searches, all electronic devices may be confiscated and examined, creating a risk that authorities could discover LGBT+ content. As of September 2025, there are no known cases in which this has occurred.<sup>177</sup>

### 3.1.2 *Displaying rainbow symbols*

LGBT+ related charges in Russia are frequently brought under provisions banning propaganda or for displaying so-called extremist symbols, most commonly rainbows. Incidents have included a wide range of rainbow-related depictions,<sup>178</sup> such as Pride flags, rainbow-themed

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<sup>169</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 9; MCC & Revers: 10

<sup>170</sup> MCC & Revers: 10

<sup>171</sup> OVD-Info: 19; NHC: 19

<sup>172</sup> NHC: 19-20; Sphere Foundation: 25; Mediazona, «Где твой член, куда ты его дел?» Силовики приступили к рейдам по закрытым вечеринкам в поисках «международного движения ЛГБТ», 22 Februar 2024, [url](#)

<sup>173</sup> Sphere Foundation: 25

<sup>174</sup> NHC: 19-20; Mediazona, «Где твой член, куда ты его дел?» Силовики приступили к рейдам по закрытым вечеринкам в поисках «международного движения ЛГБТ», 22 Februar 2024, [url](#)

<sup>175</sup> Sphere Foundation: 24; A human rights lawyer: 19; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 30

<sup>176</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 30; An LGBT+ organisation: 18

<sup>177</sup> OVD-Info: 22

<sup>178</sup> Mediazona: 3; NHC: 18; Memorial: 4; Mediazona, *Rainbow hunters. What “extremist” LGBTQ+ symbols are Russians being fined for (even if they’re right-wing)*, 1 July 2024, [url](#)

clothing, earrings,<sup>179</sup> emojis,<sup>180</sup> and even depictions like a Pink Floyd rainbow<sup>181</sup> or Pepe the Frog in a rainbow wig.<sup>182</sup> In some cases, individuals have been prosecuted for combinations of LGBT+ and other symbols, such as Nazi imagery.<sup>183</sup>

The precise definition of what constitutes an extremist symbol remains unclear.<sup>184</sup>

Wearing rainbow-coloured clothing or displaying overt LGBT+ symbols may lead to administrative charges and possibly short-term detention, though it is not a certainty.<sup>185</sup> LGBT+ persons tend to avoid publicly displaying any symbols associated with the community.<sup>186</sup>

Simply wearing an earring is reportedly not in itself sufficient to attract attention, as there must be a sort of symbol associated with the LGBT+ community.<sup>187</sup>

### *3.1.3 Expressing same-sex relationships and public appearance*

Interviewed sources stated that LGBT+ persons are at risk of prosecution if they display views or visible indicators of their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>188</sup>

Although it is uncertain which actions may trigger state attention, even seemingly minor behaviour — such as two men walking hand in hand or for someone to maintain friendships with LGBT+ persons — could result in prosecution, depending on how the situation is perceived and recorded by the authorities.<sup>189</sup> However, there are no known cases of arrests made solely for holding hands in public.<sup>190</sup>

There have been cases where police were summoned and has imposed fines on individuals and couples because they appeared to be a same-sex couple, or because they stood out due to their coloured hair or wore clothing that was considered too informal.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> An LGBT+ organisation: 13; Meduza, *Russian woman jailed under anti-extremism law for wearing rainbow earrings*, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>180</sup> Mediazona, *Екатеринбургская художница Алиса Гориценина вышла из спецприемника после ареста за эмодзи с радугой*, 4 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>181</sup> Mediazona, *Магнитогорскую активистку оштрафовали за эмодзи с обложкой Pink Floyd в нике в телеграмме; ее признали «символикой ЛГБТ»*, 28 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>182</sup> Mediazona, *Жителя Новгородской области оштрафовали по протоколу об экстремистской символике из-за мема с лягушонком Пепе в радужном парике во «ВКонтакте»*, 15 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>183</sup> Mediazona: 8; Mediazona, *Rainbow hunters. What “extremist” LGBTQ+ symbols are Russians being fined for (even if they’re right-wing)*, 1 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>184</sup> Mediazona: 8

<sup>185</sup> Mediazona: 3; Memorial: 5, 17

<sup>186</sup> Media Hub Riga: 7

<sup>187</sup> An LGBT+ organisation: 5

<sup>188</sup> Memorial: 4; A human rights lawyer: 13, 15

<sup>189</sup> OVD-Info: 10; An LGBT+ organisation: 15; A human rights lawyer: 13

<sup>190</sup> Media Hub Riga: 7; AI: 23

<sup>191</sup> A human rights lawyer: 13

Many members of the community fear persecution for personal expression, such as brightly coloured hair, piercings, or tattoos, which authorities may interpret as violating traditional values or promoting non-traditional sexual relations.<sup>192</sup>

In a reported case of 2023, a same-sex female couple kissing in public was issued administrative charges under the propaganda law. One of the women additionally received three days' detention for disobeying the police. The result of the case remains unknown.<sup>193</sup>

Public expressions of affiliation with same-sex relationships, including the use of certain pronouns or feminine forms of traditionally male-coded words, may be interpreted as indicative of an extremist LGBT+ organisation. While no cases have been recorded in which this alone led to prosecution, and officials have stated it would not, the broad and vague nature of the legal framework creates uncertainty.<sup>194</sup>

### *3.1.4 Publication and distribution of LGBT+ material*

Some publishing houses have faced threats from the authorities for distributing material containing LGBT+ content.<sup>195</sup> For example, the NGO Moscow Community Center, which has been active since 2015 in producing and distributing materials to raise awareness about the LGBT+ community, can no longer do so, as by September 2025 no printing house in Moscow is willing to produce such content, which is considered extremist under Russian law.<sup>196</sup>

As of August 2025, Russian cultural outlets—including literature, films, poetry, and visual arts—are being reviewed to remove LGBT+ content and rainbow symbols. The book *Pioneer Summer*, which tells the story of two young pioneers in a same-sex relationship and became a bestseller with over 200,000 copies of the first edition sold, exemplifies this trend. Its publisher has been arrested for LGBT+ activity, charged with participating in extremist activity, and placed under house arrest.<sup>197</sup>

In general, any depiction of same-sex relationships in literature is now subject to censorship. The book *Pioneer Summer* is being produced in Kazakhstan, for distribution in Russia.<sup>198</sup>

As a consequence of the Supreme Court decision, if a media outlet publishes a story concerning LGBT+ activists – for instance, an arrest – the outlet is required to include a disclaimer stating that the LGBT+ movement is designated as an extremist organisation in Russia.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 13

<sup>193</sup> Mediazona, *Ночь в полиции за поцелуй на лавочке. Прогулка по Сочи окончилась для двух туристок промоколами о «пропаганде нетрадиционных отношений»*, September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>194</sup> OVD-Info: 26

<sup>195</sup> Media Hub Riga: 8

<sup>196</sup> MCC & Revers: 9

<sup>197</sup> A human rights lawyer: 17

<sup>198</sup> A human rights lawyer: 17

<sup>199</sup> MCC & Revers: 6

### 3.1.5 Publishing and communicating LGBT+ content online

This section outlines how online communication and social media activity expose LGBT+ individuals in Russia to prosecution risks, intensified by extensive state surveillance and censorship technologies. It further describes how outdated posts may still trigger legal action and how public expression of LGBT+ identity or content has become effectively impossible.

According to the consulted sources, online communication, including being active on social media, exposes LGBT+ persons in Russia to the risk of criminal prosecution for alleged participation in an extremist organisation. This applies both to social media activity and to participation in online group chats.<sup>200</sup> According to one source, the risk of criminal prosecution does not arise solely from an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, but rather from publicly sharing information or asserting certain rights.<sup>201</sup>

The majority of administrative cases against LGBT+ persons involve convictions for online activities, with individuals being sentenced for posts, images, or information shared on social media.<sup>202</sup> Such cases may be initiated by the police, investigators, or other departments, including divisions specialising in extremism within the Ministry of the Interior. The FSB is also involved in certain cases, and although it does not always initiate proceedings, it participates in various capacities.<sup>203</sup>

Therefore, communication about gatherings and social events now takes place through private, encrypted channels such as Telegram, Signal, and WhatsApp, where participants undergo verification processes,<sup>204</sup> since Russian social platforms like VKontakte and Odnoklassniki are accessible to the authorities.<sup>205</sup> When using encrypted services, the level of risk depends on the recipients of the messages.<sup>206</sup> One source noted that LGBT+ individuals now resort to using internal and hidden signs in chats when discussing LGBT+ matters.<sup>207</sup>

Restrictions on communication means have been further exacerbated by the blocking of Instagram and Facebook, as well as the restrictions on VPN usage, leaving LGBT+ individuals with severely limited means of safe online communication.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Mediazona: 17; Freedom House: 8; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 32; AI: 6; Memorial: 14; An LGBT+ organisation: 13, 16

<sup>201</sup> Memorial: 13

<sup>202</sup> OVD-Info: 28; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 32; AI: 6; Meduza, '*What even is propaganda?*', 19 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>203</sup> OVD-Info: 28

<sup>204</sup> Sphere Foundation: 23; Mediazona: 17; A human rights lawyer: 18; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 34

<sup>205</sup> Sphere Foundation: 23; OVD-Info: 31; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 32; Mediazona: 34

<sup>206</sup> Mediazona: 17

<sup>207</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 12

<sup>208</sup> Sphere Foundation: 23

### 3.1.5.1 State monitoring of online communication and social media

Monitoring of internet communication and social media allows authorities to collect information on LGBT+ content.<sup>209</sup> The extent to which automated technology routinely analyses data remains unclear.<sup>210</sup>

Human Rights Watch has in a report of July 2025 described how mandatory equipment is installed on Russian internet service providers, allowing for direct and non-transparent state censorship and manipulation of internet traffic. The effect of the state's interception and decryption of data is reported to be surveillance on a mass scale.<sup>211</sup>

One source explained how Russian authorities are seen to increase internet monitoring and employ code words and algorithms to identify content deemed extremist.<sup>212</sup> Such methods could potentially lead to an increase in prosecutions for extremist activities under both administrative and criminal codes.<sup>213</sup> Targeted topics include protest sentiment, criticism of the government, so-called LGBT propaganda, memes, and negative coverage of officials.<sup>214</sup>

As of August 2025, Russian authorities are attempting to increase internet monitoring and restrict access to communication applications such as Telegram and WhatsApp, primarily because the platforms' developers have refused to provide encryption keys, preventing state monitoring of content. Authorities are now seeking to replace these services with the domestically developed application Max, which enables the state to monitor user content and track online activity.<sup>215</sup>

Internal documents from Roskomnadzor<sup>216</sup> revealed plans to develop artificial intelligence systems for large-scale monitoring and censorship of Russian-language online content. Two key systems are described: MIR, which scans large volumes of text and images for prohibited themes and tracks their spread, and Vepr ("Boar"), designed to detect "points of informational tension" and anticipate protest-related or destabilising activity. The plans are extensive, though many of the systems' capabilities remain only partially implemented. These technologies may have been in use as of September 2025; however, a consistent increase in related cases has not been reported.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> A human rights lawyer: 18; OVD-Info: 29

<sup>210</sup> OVD-Info: 29; Mediazona: 35

<sup>211</sup> HRW, "*Disrupted, Throttled, and Blocked*", July 2025, [url](#) pp. 2-3

<sup>212</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 33

<sup>213</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 33; Freedom House: 8

<sup>214</sup> OVD-Info: 30

<sup>215</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 32

<sup>216</sup> Roskomnadzor constitutes the federal executive authority of the Russian Federation vested with the mandate to supervise, regulate, and enforce state control over the mass-media sector.

<sup>217</sup> OVD-Info: 30-31

### 3.1.5.2 Limitation periods for online content

Although prosecutions vary in scope and target individuals of all kinds, some cases have involved charges based on social media posts, including material published several years earlier, such as fines for images depicting two women kissing.<sup>218</sup>

Although Russian legislation sets limitation periods of 90 days to one-year, online content is reported to be treated as a continuing offence, with the period starting from when the content is discovered. This means long-forgotten posts can still form the basis for prosecution. Cases have been reported with individuals being convicted for content dating up to 11 years back. In practice, even if the formal limitation period has expired, publications with LGBT+ content may remain accessible to authorities and influence their assessment, leaving legal risks effectively open-ended.<sup>219</sup> According to the source, one administrative conviction, such as for displaying a rainbow flag on social media, can carry lasting significance in any potential future case, as it remains on the individual's record.<sup>220</sup>

In this regard, if the authorities were to identify content deemed to violate the new laws, regardless of how old the post might be, the individual could potentially face charges of extremism or propaganda.<sup>221</sup>

### 3.1.6 LGBT+ persons involved in other activism

Individuals previously on the police's radar, for example due to pro-Navalny protests or prior records of administrative offences, are more likely to be targeted.<sup>222</sup> Past involvement in LGBT+ activism may also heighten legal risks, even when the charges are unrelated. Amnesty International cited an example of a journalist recently arrested for criticising Putin's war in Ukraine. Although the case was not related to LGBT+ issues, his previous open support for LGBT+ rights has complicated his situation, as Russian media drew attention to his LGBT+ identity.<sup>223</sup>

### 3.1.7 Arbitrary enforcement practices

According to the consulted sources, the Russian authorities often employ selective and arbitrary enforcement to maintain control and instil fear within the LGBT+ community. They do not have the capacity to prosecute every individual, thus, some are targeted while others are

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<sup>218</sup> Mediazona: 2; Russian LGBT Network: 10; OVD-Info: 23; AI: 6; Mediazona, На центр исторической реконструкции «Кауп» в Калининграде составили два протокола о «пропаганде ЛГБТ» из-за фото с дилдо и целующимися девушками, 21 August 2025, [url](#); Mediazona, Суд в Сочи оштрафовал треш-стримера из Тулы на 150 тысяч рублей из-за видео с двумя целующимися девушками, 16 May 2025, [url](#); Mediazona, «Верстка»: на жительницу Уфы составили протокол о «пропаганде bisексуальности» из-за видео 14-летней давности, 30 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>219</sup> OVD-Info: 23-24

<sup>220</sup> OVD-Info: 25

<sup>221</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 10

<sup>222</sup> A human rights lawyer: 16; An LGBT+ organisation: 12

<sup>223</sup> AI: 9

not, creating unpredictability and anxiety. Large-scale arrests on arbitrary grounds reinforce this climate, compelling LGBT+ persons to go underground or flee.<sup>224</sup>

A selective enforcement generates widespread fear among LGBT+ individuals. Even those not actively under scrutiny may feel threatened, particularly when acquaintances have faced prosecution for being reported by others or due to material posted on social media. The unpredictability of this practice generates a climate of uncertainty, as no one can anticipate who might be singled out next, which in turn fosters widespread anxiety.<sup>225</sup>

### *3.1.8 Self-censorship*

As it is generally impossible to anticipate which actions may provoke a response from the authorities, LGBT+ individuals often resort to self-censorship in an effort to avoid drawing attention. As a result, many refrain from openly disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity, and the public display of LGBT+ symbols, such as rainbows, is generally avoided. The limited availability of information on these practices further conceals the full scale of repression, with some incidents remaining unreported as a precaution against more severe repercussions.<sup>226</sup>

One source stated that the purpose of the legislation is to force people to compel self-censorship, and that even small number of publicised criminal cases could potentially instil fear in thousands of people. The extremism cases known to the source did not concern LGBT+ persons.<sup>227</sup>

Given the large number of potential LGBT+ cases, it is impossible for the authorities to prosecute everyone.<sup>228</sup> According to one source, the repressive Russian authorities do not need to prosecute everyone, as LGBT+ persons live under a constant fear of surveillance and prosecution, whether in the form of administrative fines or criminal proceedings.<sup>229</sup>

## 3.2 Registry with the government

Individuals convicted of extremist activities, also in administrative jurisdiction, are listed in a state-maintained register. While this registry formally is accessible only to law enforcement, it could also be shared with employers and medical institutions, thus, reaching consequences beyond pecuniary sanctions when potentially restricting rights.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> NHC: 15; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 35; Freedom House: 13; Memorial: 17; Media Hub Riga: 3; Mediazona: 17

<sup>225</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 35; An LGBT+ organisation: 6; OVD-Info: 13

<sup>226</sup> Media Hub Riga: 3, 7; Mediazona: 19; Memorial: 6

<sup>227</sup> Media Hub Riga: 2

<sup>228</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 33; Mediazona: 17; OVD-Info: 33

<sup>229</sup> Mediazona: 17

<sup>230</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 8

According to one source, even convictions for LGBT+ propaganda might place individuals under close scrutiny, effectively adding them to a watchlist.<sup>231</sup>

Police and other law enforcement agencies are also reported to collect data on LGBT+ individuals more broadly.<sup>232</sup> The FSB reportedly gathers information on all organisations deemed extremist, in the same way as the police, partly to meet internal quotas for prosecutions. This may include groups associated with the LGBT+ community, neo-Nazi organisations, groups affiliated with Navalny, as well as others that could potentially be designated as extremist in the future. LGBT+ organisations, such as gay clubs, may remain relatively easy targets, and such clubs operate in an underground mode, as they might face prosecution at any time.<sup>233</sup>

In some cases, officers have photographed identity documents during visits to nightclubs or private gatherings.<sup>234</sup>

Even prior to the Supreme Court ruling, officers of the FSB had begun collecting intelligence on LGBT+ activities. There is no indication that such practices have ceased, and further evidence is expected to surface only in future proceedings. In 2024, this intelligence was reportedly used to target the nightclub in Orenburg.<sup>235</sup>

### 3.3 Quotas - law enforcement performance indicators

Law enforcement agencies are required to report monthly or quarterly on the number of crimes in their district,<sup>236</sup> and, reportedly, the police are generally under pressure to deliver results.<sup>237</sup> This means that if the police in a given district fail to meet their quotas, and someone reports suspected wrongdoing, it is more likely that the authorities will press charges to fulfil the quota, identifying an offence—whether it involves incorrect residence registration (propiska), alleged social media propaganda, or other possibilities.<sup>238</sup>

Other methods the police may apply to meet such quotas reportedly include actively searching for people to target (for example by trawling online activity and identifying shared images), pursuing business-related issues that can be turned into grounds for investigation, and acting on reports from private individuals who encounter and notify the police about an LGBT+ person.<sup>239</sup> According to a source, it seems impossible to predict the authorities' approach. If an

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<sup>231</sup> Mediazona: 6

<sup>232</sup> Sphere Foundation: 15; A human rights lawyer: 12

<sup>233</sup> A human rights lawyer: 12

<sup>234</sup> Sphere Foundation: 15

<sup>235</sup> A human rights lawyer: 6

<sup>236</sup> Sphere Foundation: 19; Mediazona: 21

<sup>237</sup> NHC: 22

<sup>238</sup> Sphere Foundation: 19; An LGBT+ organisation: 9-10

<sup>239</sup> Mediazona: 21; Mediazona, Суд в Москве утвердил сроки до 5,5 лет колонии строгого режима двоим студентам, которых дети увидели обнаженными в окне, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

individual calls the police to report on a neighbour, and the police need to meet their quotas, they can easily identify an offence.<sup>240</sup>

One source mentioned that a regional police unit, which is required to report indicators of their law enforcement work, reportedly resort to fabricated charges against LGBT+ individuals, such as propaganda offences. No official documentation from within the Russian police system is available. The legislation is drafted in a way that allows for very broad and arbitrary interpretation, which could create opportunities for fabricated or exaggerated accusations against LGBT+ individuals, including charges of propaganda.<sup>241</sup>

### 3.4 Public and well-known members of the LGBT+ community in Russia

Certain high-ranking individuals in Russia, including members of the government and their families, are known to belong to the LGBT+ community. However, they often refrain from disclosing their LGBT+ identities, partly to avoid attracting attention from the authorities. By remaining silent, they reduce their risk of being targeted.<sup>242</sup>

There are also openly LGBT+ figures within the Russian establishment—individuals who do not conceal their sexual orientation—such as the pro-Kremlin journalist Anton Krasovsky. Their security, however, depends on judicial discretion, and prosecution could theoretically be initiated at the discretion of a judge. Nevertheless, individuals in such positions are likely to benefit from connections and protections that help shield them from legal consequences.<sup>243</sup>

### 3.5 Situation for LGBT+ families

Interviewed sources stated that LGBT+ families in Russia face significant risks, particularly regarding the custody of their children. There have been cases in which children were removed from the care of same-sex parents once authorities became aware of the family situation.<sup>244</sup>

Many families conceal being part of the LGBT+ community in daily life, including during visits to hospitals or other public institutions such as schools, and some affected families have ultimately left the country.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Sphere Foundation: 18

<sup>241</sup> NHC: 22

<sup>242</sup> Freedom House: 11

<sup>243</sup> A human rights lawyer: 11; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 23; Media Hub Riga: 4

<sup>244</sup> Sphere Foundation: 16; MCC & Revers: 7

<sup>245</sup> MCC & Revers: 7; Sphere Foundation: 16

### 3.6 Consequences for relatives of LGBT+ persons

Consulted sources stated that relatives of LGBT+ individuals might experience indirect consequences, although there are no confirmed reports of them being specifically targeted or formally penalised by authorities.<sup>246</sup>

Many persons retain their official residency registration, or *propiska*, at their parents' address, the family home often becomes a target for searches in the event of a criminal investigation. Such searches may involve the confiscation of personal belongings from all household members.<sup>247</sup>

Relatives of LGBT+ individuals may experience pressure from both law enforcement and vigilante groups. In some instances, the police have directly pressured relatives to provide information for criminal cases involving their family members. Parents are reported to feel a heightened sense of vulnerability, living in a constant state of alert due to the fear that their family may be targeted by prejudice or abusive actions.<sup>248</sup>

If the individual in question is simply a member of the LGBT+ community, it is possible that their relatives might face some degree of pressure from neighbours or local authorities.<sup>249</sup>

If a family member of someone accused of extremist activity—who is subsequently placed on an extremist registry—transfers any funds to that individual, they might be regarded as an accomplice. While there have been documented cases of relatives being prosecuted on such grounds, these have primarily involved support for Ukraine. As of September 2025, there are no documented instances of relatives of LGBT+ persons facing prosecution in this way.<sup>250</sup>

### 3.7 Disparities in treatment of homosexual men and women, bisexual and transgender persons

This section outlines the differences in the treatment of transgender and homosexual persons in Russia, noting heightened risks for transgender individuals due to restricted healthcare access, visibility, and legal limitations. It also highlights differing vulnerabilities among homosexual men and women.

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<sup>246</sup> OVD-Info: 41; Mediazona: 29-30; A human rights lawyer: 20

<sup>247</sup> Mediazona: 29; OVD-Info: 41-42; An LGBT+ organisation: 17; OVD-Info, *К родителям уехавшей из России активистки из Владивостока пришли с обыском*, 14 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>248</sup> AI: 11

<sup>249</sup> MCC & Revers: 23; Freedom House: 15

<sup>250</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 31

### 3.7.1 Transgender persons

Transgender persons are among the most vulnerable in the LGBT+ community,<sup>251</sup> as it is often more difficult for them to conceal their identity.<sup>252</sup> At police stations, the groups considered at highest risk of abuse are transgender persons and homosexual men.<sup>253</sup>

Furthermore, transgender persons often require access to gender-affirming healthcare, including hormone therapy or related medication, to maintain their appearance and identity.<sup>254</sup> Recent restrictions and legislation have placed them in a particularly difficult position, as access to such essential treatment has become more limited and risky.<sup>255</sup> Some transgender individuals are now hesitant to seek medical assistance for fear that disclosing their identity could lead to surveillance or prosecution.<sup>256</sup> As of September 2025, no systematic targeting has occurred.<sup>257</sup>

Moreover, one source noted that Russian authorities also target those professionals on whom transgender individuals rely on for their transition processes, such as hormone treatment or surgery. There have been attempts to prosecute retroactively those who assisted with gender transition before the amendment of the law.<sup>258</sup>

However, it is still possible in Russia to undergo gender-affirming surgeries, such as sex-change operations. Likewise, individuals may still change their gender in official documents, provided that gender reassignment treatment began prior to abolition of gender reassignment in 2023. These services are believed to be available in hospitals located in Moscow.<sup>259</sup> Although gender reassignment was previously permitted in Russia, the authorities continue to exercise oversight over those who completed the process while it was still allowed.<sup>260</sup>

The level of risk for LGBT+ persons depends largely on appearance, specifically the extent to which an individual stands out. In this context, being transgender is associated with greater risks of attracting attention than a homosexual or bisexual man or woman, particularly for those who have undergone gender transition, as any legal change of name must be processed

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<sup>251</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 40; MCC & Revers: 11; Sphere Foundation: 50; Freedom House: 16; NHC: 45

<sup>252</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 40; MCC & Revers: 11

<sup>253</sup> NHC: 47

<sup>254</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 8; Sphere Foundation: 50; Freedom House: 17

<sup>255</sup> Sphere Foundation: 50; NHC: 8, 45

<sup>256</sup> NHC: 8

<sup>257</sup> Freedom House: 17

<sup>258</sup> NHC: 45

<sup>259</sup> A human rights lawyer: 24

<sup>260</sup> Freedom House: 16

through government institutions such as the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>261</sup> Moreover, transgender persons have since July 2023 been prohibited from adopting children.<sup>262</sup>

One reported case concerns a cisgender man and a transgender man who gave birth to a child but were initially unable to obtain a birth certificate, as Russian documents only recognise a father and a mother. The child remained undocumented for approximately a year. With the support of two LGBT+ organisations, they successfully challenged the case and have since left Russia.<sup>263</sup>

### *3.7.2 Homosexual men and women*

Public displays of affection, such as holding hands, would attract more attention for male couples, while female couples may be perceived simply as friends. This is reinforced by the view that lesbian relationships may be seen as a response to men being insufficient, a perspective reflected in Russia and Belarus.<sup>264</sup> According to one source, the known criminal extremism cases are all directed against homosexual men.<sup>265</sup> At police stations, the groups considered at highest risk of abuse are transgender persons and homosexual men.<sup>266</sup>

Homosexual men living with HIV are reluctant to attend health clinics, as the individual will be required to disclose their presumed route of infection. Revealing same-sex contact may expose them to additional stigma or even association with extremist activity. This combination of medical vulnerability and fear of legal consequences makes these individuals particularly cautious about seeking healthcare.<sup>267</sup>

Historically, authorities tended to pay relatively little attention to women, as long as they were neither activists nor highly visible. However, women are increasingly being subjected to measures as well.<sup>268</sup>

According to one source, LGBT+ minors and youth are highly vulnerable in Russia, as violence against children—including domestic abuse—has been decriminalised or treated as an administrative offence, with no protection or support mechanisms in place.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Freedom House: 16; Russian LGBT Network: 40

<sup>262</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 41

<sup>263</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 42

<sup>264</sup> Freedom House: 18, 20

<sup>265</sup> A human rights lawyer: 23

<sup>266</sup> NHC: 47

<sup>267</sup> NHC: 8

<sup>268</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 40

<sup>269</sup> NHC: 48

### 3.8 Geographical differences

The international human rights organisation Memorial noted that state tolerance for LGBT+ persons appears to be higher in larger cities such as Moscow and St Petersburg than in rural areas such as Krasnodar.<sup>270</sup>

In Moscow, judicial practice tends to be relatively consistent, with judges generally delivering rulings in a uniform manner. By contrast, in regional areas there is considerable variation in judicial approaches, leading to significant differences in the interpretation and application of the law.<sup>271</sup> In regions outside major urban centres such as Moscow and St Petersburg, the implementation of extremism legislation appears to involve a higher degree of arbitrariness. Judicial interpretations can vary, with one judge applying Article 6.21 (propaganda) and another using Article 20.3 (extremism) for the same conduct. This inconsistency can pose challenges for defence lawyers, who often attempt—frequently without success—to have charges reclassified under Article 6.21. Judicial discretion in the regions also tends to be more restrictive, and judges may be more likely to treat any LGBT visibility or activity as extremist.<sup>272</sup>

In Russian regions with predominantly Muslim populations, particularly those in the North Caucasus, including the Republic of Tatarstan, there appears to be marked discrepancies in the enforcement of legislation and practices relating to LGBT+ persons. Extrajudicial violence against LGBT+ individuals is reportedly more prevalent in these areas and often goes largely unpunished by the courts. At the same time, courts in these regions seldom prosecute LGBT+ persons themselves, nor do they bring charges against perpetrators of violence targeting members of the LGBT+ community.<sup>273</sup> (for further on North Caucasus, see [chapter 6](#))

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<sup>270</sup> Memorial: 30

<sup>271</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 11

<sup>272</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 10

<sup>273</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 12

## 4. Treatment of LGBT+ persons in places of detention

This chapter examines the treatment of LGBT+ individuals in Russian prisons, highlighting risks of harassment, violence, and social marginalisation. It also considers differences in experiences among homosexual men, women, and transgender prisoners, as well as available protection mechanisms.

The Russian penitentiary system consists of remand prisons (SIZO) and correctional colonies, which are divided into 3 distinct categories: Red, black, and green. In short, red colonies are prison facilities where authorities are in control, while black prisons are prison facilities where the authorities settle for controlling the perimeter, while the inmates regulate themselves. Green prisons are characterised by having a significant Muslim population.<sup>274</sup>

### 4.1 Remand prison (SIZO)

According to one source, there have been numerous reports of torture and violence towards LGBT+ activists in SIZO.<sup>275</sup> One such case concerned an owner of an LGBT+ travel agency, who allegedly died by suicide in SIZO in Moscow following reported torture and humiliation during the investigation.<sup>276</sup> LGBT+ persons in SIZO are generally at risk of violations such as physical attacks, but one source noted that the numerous reports on abuses and violence against male remand prisoners make it difficult to determine whether LGBT+ inmates are disproportionately disadvantaged compared to other inmates in SIZO.<sup>277</sup>

Intimidation aimed towards LGBT+ prisoners in SIZO originates from both prison staff and from prison inmates.<sup>278</sup>

One source stated that LGBT+ persons happen to be kept separately from other inmates while in remand prison. However, the law does not contain such requirements. It is unclear whether formal provisions of this kind exist in the internal regulations of detention centres.

Nevertheless, according to the mentioned source, the separate detention of openly homosexual male prisoners is common practice. This is primarily due to security risks arising from discrimination against homosexual men within the prison subculture. In detention centres, ensuring security is generally considered more important than during the serving of a sentence and may be relatively easier to achieve. The source was aware of two known LGBT+ persons who, as of September 2025, were incarcerated in SIZO.<sup>279</sup>

<sup>274</sup> A human rights lawyer: 28

<sup>275</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 51

<sup>276</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 51; Russian LGBT Network: 2; Memorial: 9; Memorial PZK, *Комов Андрей Евгеньевич*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>277</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 53

<sup>278</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 52

<sup>279</sup> Memorial: 23, 25

Homosexual women are reported to feel particularly vulnerable in SIZO, as they are subjected to sexual violence from staff.<sup>280</sup>

Information on the conditions for transgender persons in SIZO is scarce, but there have been ongoing discussions in Russia on the placement of transgender persons within the penal system, including SIZO. Initially, authorities assigned transgender persons according to the gender listed on their official documents. As a result, incarceration in women's prisons proved feasible, while placement in men's prisons proved unsuitable. Subsequently, authorities resorted to placing transgender individuals in isolation.<sup>281</sup>

### 4.2 Russian prisons - correctional colonies

The general conditions for LGBT+ persons in Russian prisons are bad, as they are not separated from the general prison population, and as there are no legal protective measures based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The only statutory provisions for separation apply to women and children; women are housed in facilities separated from men, while pregnant women are entitled to additional care including hygiene and health considerations.<sup>282</sup>

In the 2000s, sexual violence was widespread within Russian prisons; however, one source explained that it has become less common over the past decade.<sup>283</sup> Nonetheless, sexual violence and cases of torture continue to occur.<sup>284</sup>

Russian penitentiary culture is generally characterised by internal hierachal systems, in which inmates hold varying levels of social status. The hierarchical social structure is founded upon a distinction between male and female roles, often understood as the dominant and the receptive sexual roles. LGBT+ persons are reported to belong to the lowest caste within the Russian prison culture, exposing them to discrimination and risk of violence.<sup>285</sup> This prison hierarchy legitimises sexual violence.<sup>286</sup> One source described that the violence is also encouraged from prison staff.<sup>287</sup>

It is generally the case that LGBT+ prisoners attempt to conceal their sexual orientation. Whether an LGBT+ person suffers discrimination, depends on the circulation of information, whether the other prisoners are aware of the person's sexual orientation.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 54

<sup>281</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 48; A human rights lawyer: 30; NHC: 38

<sup>282</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 46-47, 50; AI: 13

<sup>283</sup> AI: 16

<sup>284</sup> AI: 17-18; NHC: 35, 37

<sup>285</sup> A human rights lawyer: 27-29; Memorial: 21-22; Sphere Foundation: 27; NHC: 36; A researcher on LGBT rights: 53

<sup>286</sup> NHC: 36; Sphere Foundation: 27

<sup>287</sup> NHC: 36

<sup>288</sup> AI: 15

LGBT+ persons serving in red prisons are by one source described to serve under comparatively better conditions than in black prisons.<sup>289</sup>

### 4.2.1 *Homosexual men*

Prison conditions for known homosexual men are generally extremely harsh and violent. They may be subjected to lethal violence, and they tend to occupy the lowest social position within the penitentiary hierarchy, cf. above.<sup>290</sup>

Prisoners with the lowest status levels, such as homosexual men, are typically tasked with the dirtiest duties such as cleaning toilets. They are also prohibited from eating with other prisoners and use separate cutlery.<sup>291</sup> They may also be subjected to sexual violence.<sup>292</sup>

Interviewed sources described LGBT+ persons as *untouchables*, meaning that any co-inmate who touches an LGBT+ person risks losing their own social status.<sup>293</sup>

Citing a news outlet, one source provided an example of a jailed Russian mathematician who was outed as homosexual while imprisoned, which led to him being relegated to the lowest status level in the prison hierarchy. He was then tasked with performing the menial tasks and faced a lack of protection from inmates and prison staff.<sup>294</sup>

### 4.2.2 *Homosexual women*

The situation in prisons for homosexual women differs significantly from that of homosexual men. It is reported that generally the conditions for homosexual women are less severe than those for men in terms of exposure to violence.<sup>295</sup>

Homosexual women are generally not subject to stigma or discrimination in prisons.<sup>296</sup> It is common for incarcerated women to form lesbian partnerships, which is reported to confer certain social advantages.<sup>297</sup> These couples often exercise a degree of influence and cooperative relations with prison staff. They form part of the prison social order, and due to their cooperation with prison staff, often occupy the top of the prison social hierarchy.<sup>298</sup>

### 4.2.3 *Transgender prisoners*

Unlike homosexual men and women, transgender prisoners are typically unable to conceal their identity, and as a result, their situation is particularly difficult in prisons.<sup>299</sup> They may also

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<sup>289</sup> Sphere Foundation: 32

<sup>290</sup> Memorial: 21-22; Sphere Foundation: 27; A human rights lawyer: 27; NHC: 34

<sup>291</sup> AI: 13; Sphere Foundation: 27

<sup>292</sup> Sphere Foundation: 27

<sup>293</sup> AI: 14; A human rights lawyer: 27

<sup>294</sup> AI: 13

<sup>295</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 54; A human rights lawyer: 29

<sup>296</sup> Memorial: 22; Sphere Foundation: 28

<sup>297</sup> Memorial: 22; A human rights lawyer: 29

<sup>298</sup> A human rights lawyer: 29; AI: 21

<sup>299</sup> Sphere Foundation: 29; AI: 16

be in need of specialised medical treatment, which is generally not available in the penitentiary system.<sup>300</sup>

Transgender persons are not placed in prisons of their own preference and will be sentenced to serve in either a male or female prison, depending on the gender provided in their official documents.<sup>301</sup> In one instance, a transgender woman, who was being prosecuted for the distribution of pornography, was forcibly de-transitioned by the court which annulled all previous decisions of the medical commission. Consequently, the transgender woman was sentenced to serve in a male prison.<sup>302</sup>

Transgender persons imprisoned in correctional colonies are also reported to be kept isolated from the general prison population for their security, often through solitary confinement.<sup>303</sup> This is due to both safety and reputational concerns. There have been reports of homicides of transgender individuals in prison, which can negatively affect a prison's reputation.<sup>304</sup>

As an example provided by a researcher on LGBT rights, in 2016, a transgender person was placed in isolation and subsequently raped by prison staff. Although the incident was not publicly reported and received little attention, it prompted an internal investigation, which ultimately led to the prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators.<sup>305</sup>

Prior to the 2023 Supreme Court ruling, lawyers would frequently petition for safer conditions for imprisoned LGBT+ persons and, in practice, if a lawyer requested safer conditions due to a prisoner's transgender status, these requests would generally be granted. After the 2023 Supreme Court ruling, such provisions have ceased to be applied.<sup>306</sup>

### 4.3 Protection mechanisms

As described above, LGBT+ persons are at the bottom of the internal hierarchy in Russian prisons, which means less protection inside prisons.<sup>307</sup>

It is reported that, in practice, protection is not always available, though prison staff is obliged to protect inmates. In some cases, prison staff are also perpetrators of aggressive behaviour or violence.<sup>308</sup>

Seeking protection from prison staff can be challenging for LGBT+ prisoners. Filing a complaint regarding abuse by fellow inmates may be perceived as a betrayal, potentially resulting in

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<sup>300</sup> AI: 16

<sup>301</sup> Sphere Foundation: 29-30

<sup>302</sup> Sphere Foundation: 31

<sup>303</sup> A human rights lawyer: 30; Sphere Foundation: 29-30; NHC: 38

<sup>304</sup> A human rights lawyer: 30

<sup>305</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 49

<sup>306</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 50

<sup>307</sup> NHC: 36; AI: 13

<sup>308</sup> AI: 13, 19; Memorial: 24; A human rights lawyer: 31

punishment from other prisoners. While it is possible to submit a complaint via a lawyer, this too carries risks, including the possibility of being placed in solitary confinement.<sup>309</sup>

With regard to remand prisons specifically, prison staff are obliged to ensure the safety of those subjected to harassment, but in practice they frequently fail to provide such protection. There are complaint mechanisms, and the source stated that there are numerous documented cases of LGBT+ persons reporting harassment or intimidation in SIZO.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Sphere Foundation: 33-34

<sup>310</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 52

## 5. Situation for LGBT+ persons in civil society

This chapter explores harassment, stigmatisation, and violence against LGBT+ individuals in civil society in Russia. It also addresses the phenomenon of reporting by civil society actors as well as protection mechanisms and conversion therapy.

### 5.1 Prevalence of harassment, stigmatisation, and violence

The risks encountered by LGBT+ persons are largely contingent upon their appearance, behaviour, and place of residence. Those whose conduct and attire conform more closely to societal norms generally attract less attention.<sup>311</sup> It is suggested that the degree to which it is possible to live open as LGBT+ person is dependent on the very concrete and local surroundings in civil society, and the degree of risk depends on visibility.<sup>312</sup>

Individuals who are visibly identifiable as members of the LGBT+ community or engaged in related activism face heightened risks of harassment, vigilante violence, and both administrative and criminal prosecution.<sup>313</sup> Openly expressing one's sexual orientation or gender identity tends to attract unwanted attention, as societal attitudes towards LGBT+ persons have become increasingly hostile and, in some cases, violent.<sup>314</sup> According to Mediazona homophobic behaviour is encouraged by authorities.<sup>315</sup>

One source mentioned an episode from St Petersburg in which two women holding hands were perceived as lesbian by a group of young men and targeted for assault. The perpetrators were subsequently detained.<sup>316</sup>

There are documented cases of acts of violence towards LGBT+ persons.<sup>317</sup> According to OVD-Info's data, eight persons were killed and 46 were injured in 2022. Most of them were homosexual men. After the Supreme Court ruling in 2023, at least 20 killings and 60 injuries have been reported.<sup>318</sup>

Consulted sources mentioned examples of dating apps being used to lure homosexual men into compromising situations, leading to blackmail or assault.<sup>319</sup> In one case, a victim was shot and

<sup>311</sup> NHC: 46; Freedom House 16, AI: 26-27

<sup>312</sup> Memorial: 17; AI: 27

<sup>313</sup> A human rights lawyer: 33, 35; Mediazona: 22

<sup>314</sup> Sphere Foundation: 46; Mediazona: 22; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 61; OVD-Info: 43

<sup>315</sup> Mediazona 22

<sup>316</sup> AI: 22

<sup>317</sup> OVD-Info: 44; An LGBT+ organisation: 20

<sup>318</sup> OVD-Info: 44

<sup>319</sup> NHC: 33; Russian LGBT Network: 15; OVD-Info: 45-46

fell from a second-floor window leading to spinal injuries.<sup>320</sup> In some cases, the perpetrators were convicted following legal assistance to the victims from LGBT+ organisations.<sup>321</sup>

In another case, an anti-feminist activist once called police and held back a girl for wearing a frog-pin with rainbow colours. The individual received a fine for propaganda.<sup>322</sup>

If LGBT+ persons refrain from publishing LGBT+ content on social media or expressing themselves publicly by other means, the primary risk of harassment would stem from the people around them. An LGBT+ person may be able to live without significant problems, but it depends on specific circumstances such as the attitudes of their landlords or their extended social networks.<sup>323</sup>

Russian society is highly atomised, and people in larger cities generally pay little attention to one another in the public sphere.<sup>324</sup> Memorial opined that, as long as an LGBT+ person does not insult their neighbours or attempt to impose their personal values upon them, they might not attract attention.<sup>325</sup>

One source stated that homophobia is not deeply rooted amongst Russians; rather, Russians are inclined to be more anti-western than homophobic.<sup>326</sup> According to a poll conducted by the Levada Centre, the majority of respondents (approximately 60 percent) indicated indifference towards the LGBT+ community.<sup>327</sup>

According to a Levada-Centre's survey from October 2024, negative attitudes toward LGBT+ people in Russia have increased, with only around 30 percent of respondents believing that LGBT+ individuals should enjoy equal rights—a decline from 50 percent over the past two decades. Concerns about gay propaganda affecting children remain widespread.<sup>328</sup> Likewise, statistics suggest an increase in physical abuse or threats of violence for 2024 compared to 2023.<sup>329</sup>

According to Amnesty International, being a member of the LGBT+ community does not automatically place an individual at risk. Some LGBT+ persons such as LGBT+ bloggers and political representatives in parliament are able to live normal lives. Amnesty International claimed it was possible to be an open LGBT+ person and provided the example of a prominent

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<sup>320</sup> OVD-Info: 45

<sup>321</sup> NHC: 33

<sup>322</sup> AI: 23

<sup>323</sup> OVD-Info: 51

<sup>324</sup> Memorial: 26; Media Hub Riga: 12

<sup>325</sup> Memorial: 26

<sup>326</sup> Media Hub Riga: 11

<sup>327</sup> Sphere Foundation: 34

<sup>328</sup> Levada-Centre, *Отношение к гомосексуальности, правам ЛГБТ-людей и «пропаганде гомосексуализма»: октябрь 2024, 18 November 2024, [url](#)*

<sup>329</sup> Meduza, 'We automatically look over our shoulders', 19 May 2025, [url](#)

Russian blogger, Aleksey Zhidkovsky,<sup>330</sup> who reportedly presents and behaves in a manner associated with homosexuality but has not publicly disclosed this. According to the source, he remains unprotected from the risk of denunciation and arrest. Although it remains possible to live openly with an LGBT+ identity, the source noted that it has become increasingly difficult following the introduction of propaganda and extremism laws and to a large extent depends on visibility.<sup>331</sup>

In larger cities, public displays of affection by LGBT+ couples are generally tolerated,<sup>332</sup> as illustrated by an incident in June 2025 where two women kissed on a bridge without attracting attention, demonstrating the broader civil society's indifference to such displays. While tolerance is relatively higher in large urban centres, the source cautioned against publicly provocative behaviour even in large urban centres due to associated risks.<sup>333</sup>

However, homosexual men walking hand in hand in public are more likely to attract attention than two homosexual women. Male displays of affection are culturally considered more unusual than for their female counterparts. Female couples holding hands in public would just as likely be perceived as a sign of friendship and thus not regarded as unusual.<sup>334</sup>

Homosexual women living with children often adopt a so-called "don't ask, don't tell" approach, as their parental status makes it difficult to conceal their relationship.<sup>335</sup> As a consequence, some LGBT+ couples may exercise caution when enrolling their children in kindergartens or seeking medical care, due to fears of being reported to the authorities.<sup>336</sup>

## 5.2 Perpetrators of violence

Perpetrators of violence against LGBT+ persons range from passersby,<sup>337</sup> neighbours, relatives, far-right groups, and ordinary criminal gangs.<sup>338</sup>

Vigilante groups in particular have been identified as perpetrators of violence against LGBT+ persons,<sup>339</sup> with some reportedly perceiving themselves as acting with state approval. However, such actions undermine state authority and control.<sup>340</sup> Among these groups, *Russkaya Obshchina* and *Occupy Paedophilia* are mentioned as particularly active in the harassment and abuse of LGBT+ individuals.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> 24SMI, Алексей Жидковский, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>331</sup> AI: 26-27

<sup>332</sup> Sphere Foundation: 44; A researcher on LGBT rights: 63

<sup>333</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 63

<sup>334</sup> Freedom House: 20; OVD-Info: 50

<sup>335</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 27

<sup>336</sup> an LGBT+ organisation: 21

<sup>337</sup> An LGBT+ organisation: 20; OVD-Info: 44; Mediazona: 22

<sup>338</sup> OVD-Info: 44-45

<sup>339</sup> Mediazona: 23; OVD-Info 46

<sup>340</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 55

<sup>341</sup> Mediazona: 23; OVD-Info 46

Veterans from the war in Ukraine have, in some instances, perpetrated violence against LGBT+ persons and other Russians perceived as excessively Western. While often arbitrary, such acts contribute to the broader phenomenon of vigilante violence.<sup>342</sup>

### 5.3 Availability and effectiveness of state protection

Generally, the role of legal assistance is reported to be crucial when seeking protection from the authorities or reporting on a violent act.<sup>343</sup> There is a widespread lack of trust in the police among Russians more broadly, with authorities often failing to take cases seriously or refusing to pursue investigations and prosecutions. This distrust is particularly pronounced within the LGBT+ community.<sup>344</sup> The Russian authorities are reported not to provide protection to LGBT+ individuals.<sup>345</sup>

According to several sources, an LGBT+ person risks exposure simply by approaching the authorities, though the extent of this risk remains uncertain.<sup>346</sup> Two sources stated that an LGBT+ individual, who lodges a complaint with the authorities following an assault, is unlikely to face subsequent prosecution merely for requesting such help.<sup>347</sup>

According to one source, an LGBT+ person, who reports an instance of harassment or insult to the police, possesses a comparatively high likelihood of obtaining a conviction against the perpetrator, as civil law judges differ from their criminal law counterparts. Civil judges focus primarily on whether harassment or insult has occurred rather than on the identity of the victim. Consequently, it does not matter whether the victim is a member of the LGBT+ community.<sup>348</sup>

If an LGBT+ person experiences an assault in public, they may contact the police. However, it is advisable to do so through a lawyer or with the assistance of an LGBT+ organisation.<sup>349</sup> The likelihood of eliciting a substantive investigation remains limited. Law enforcement authorities frequently demonstrate a lack of preparedness or willingness to pursue inquiries into violent crimes perpetrated against LGBT+ persons.<sup>350</sup> Police may only initiate investigations in instances of extreme outcomes, such as murder.<sup>351</sup>

There exists no legislation explicitly aimed at safeguarding LGBT+ individuals from discrimination. Incidents of discrimination, hate speech, and persecution are typically neither

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<sup>342</sup> A human rights lawyer: 33

<sup>343</sup> OVD-Info: 56

<sup>344</sup> Media Hub Riga: 14; MCC & Revers: 26

<sup>345</sup> NHC: 30; A human rights lawyer: 37

<sup>346</sup> OVD-Info: 57; A human rights lawyer: 37; NHC: 31; Sphere Foundation: 40-41; MCC & Revers: 27

<sup>347</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 58; An LGBT+ organisation: 24

<sup>348</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 58

<sup>349</sup> Sphere Foundation: 40; NHC: 32

<sup>350</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 16; An LGBT+ organisation: 24; Mediazona: 25

<sup>351</sup> Mediazona: 25

prevented nor penalised and may, in certain contexts, be tacitly condoned or implicitly endorsed by the authorities.<sup>352</sup>

Media coverage can play a significant role in prompting accountability. For example, a woman was once harassed and her friend assaulted in the metro for displaying an appearance that did not conform to traditional norms. Although the charges against the perpetrator were initially dropped, subsequent media attention led to his administrative conviction.<sup>353</sup>

According to a researcher on LGBT+ rights, the Russian authorities do not tolerate extrajudicial violence, a principle that applies broadly and encompasses neighbours or others who might physically assault an LGBT+ person. Such behaviour is regarded as unacceptable by the authorities. Russian authorities generally do not tolerate vigilante groups, which are often subject to harsh prosecution. Far-right organisations could also face severe penalties for their activities, including potential attacks on LGBT+ persons. The states position is clear: it does not permit extrajudicial violence, as permitting extrajudicial behaviour risks enabling these groups to turn their violence towards the state itself.<sup>354</sup>

### 5.4 Shelters operated by civil society

According to the interviewed sources, temporary shelters exist for LGBT+ individuals operated by civil society. However, they operate underground and are predominantly concentrated in major cities such as Moscow, St Petersburg, and Krasnodar.<sup>355</sup>

Community centres for LGBT+ persons remain operational and continue to host special events but no longer maintain permanent addresses and typically impose more restrictive access policies. As a result, an LGBT+ person without prior participation in these events is highly unlikely to gain entry.<sup>356</sup>

### 5.5 Reporting of LGBT+ persons by civil society

Reliable statistics on the phenomenon of reporting LGBT+ individuals to the police are not available and cannot be verified.<sup>357</sup> However, consulted sources noted that LGBT+ persons have been seen to be reported to the police by private individuals.<sup>358</sup> Two sources noted that such reporting remains relatively rare.<sup>359</sup> In recent years, the number of such reports by ordinary citizens has reportedly increased.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> A human rights lawyer: 37; NHC: 30

<sup>353</sup> OVD-48

<sup>354</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 55-57

<sup>355</sup> A human rights lawyer: 39; Russian LGBT Network: 14, 22; MCC & Revers: 15-17

<sup>356</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 14

<sup>357</sup> OVD 55

<sup>358</sup> OVD 53; Memorial 5, 28; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 20-21; Sphere Foundation: 38-39; AI: 22; A human rights lawyer: 13, 33

<sup>359</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 72; Memorial 5

<sup>360</sup> An LGBT+ organisation: 19; NHC: 25; Freedom House: 14

According to one source, most reports concerning civilians appear to originate from social media monitoring and police surveillance, rather than from complaints lodged by fellow citizens.<sup>361</sup>

Russian society may be developing an atmosphere reminiscent of the Soviet era, characterised by pervasive fear and suspicion, with individuals potentially concerned about being monitored by their neighbours.<sup>362</sup> One source opined that such fear is largely imagined and does not reflect the current reality.<sup>363</sup>

There have been instances in which LGBT+ university students were reported by their peers to university administrations, leading in many cases to pressure to withdraw their enrolment or to comply with conventional appearance norms.<sup>364</sup>

Private gatherings or cohabitation can carry the risk of landlords or neighbours observing LGBT+ individuals and reporting them. One reported case from Moscow involved a homosexual couple who were seen engaging in sexual activity through a window by a child. Following a complaint from the child's mother, the couple were charged with sexual abuse of a minor. The maximum sentence for the offence was 12 years, and they were both sentenced to 5.5 years' imprisonment.<sup>365</sup> One source opined that this case was unusual and that a heterosexual couple would have been prosecuted under similar circumstances.<sup>366</sup>

There have been cases in which homophobic vigilante groups or neighbours reported same-sex couples living together to the police. The individuals involved were required to demonstrate that they were merely roommates rather than a couple. In none of the reported instances did the same-sex couples face criminal or administrative charges.<sup>367</sup>

### 5.6 Targeted media campaigns

Russian state narratives and media campaigns promote traditional values and social conformity, frequently to the detriment of the LGBT+ community. Official discourse often relies on a dichotomy that casts Russia as the defender of moral tradition and the West as culturally degenerate, with Europe at times pejoratively labelled "Gayropa".<sup>368</sup> State-controlled broadcasters such as Pervy Kanal and Rossiya reinforce this framing by depicting Western pride events negatively, frequently through leading questions designed to elicit disapproval. Public

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<sup>361</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 72

<sup>362</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 71; An LGBT+ organisation: 19

<sup>363</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 71

<sup>364</sup> AI: 22; Sphere Foundation: 38

<sup>365</sup> Mediazona: 24; Sphere Foundation: 20; OVD: 47

<sup>366</sup> Memorial: 28

<sup>367</sup> A human rights lawyer: 32

<sup>368</sup> Sphere Foundation: 35-36; MCC & Revers: 28; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 66

messaging aimed at Russians abroad similarly contrasts Russia's supposed moral stability with what is portrayed as Western decadence.<sup>369</sup>

Homophobic campaigns tend to target the LGBT+ community in general rather than specific individuals, situating them within a broader narrative of Western cultural influence.<sup>370</sup> In this context, liberal Russians are routinely stigmatised with terms such as "liberasty," which fuses "liberal" (либерал) with a derogatory slur for gay men (педераст).<sup>371</sup> Although President Putin has not explicitly targeted LGBT+ persons, he has opposed granting them distinct legal protections, and official rhetoric increasingly incorporates homophobic themes under the banner of traditional values. Some narratives further suggest that LGBT+ individuals threaten family structures.<sup>372</sup>

State propaganda contributes to a social climate in which non-conformity is portrayed as deviant, and when police raided LGBT+ clubs in 2024, these venues were presented in state media as evidence of "sodomy, hell, and decadence."<sup>373</sup>

### 5.6.1 Social media campaigns

Campaigns targeting LGBT+ persons persist,<sup>374</sup> though these are reported to originate primarily from far-right organisations' online platforms rather than from state media.<sup>375</sup> While some nationalist groups maintain blogs and media channels that consistently portray LGBT+ communities negatively, they also frame European approaches to gender identity as morally corrosive—often invoking the term "Gayropa"—and criticise practices such as adoption by same-sex couples in European states.<sup>376</sup>

Far-right and vigilante actors additionally run social-media campaigns, including on VKontakte, that publicly out LGBT+ individuals, as well as blackmail operations aimed at professionals such as teachers and medical staff. Such exposure can lead to professional sanctions, including dismissal. Although harmful, these activities are generally conducted by non-state actors, some of whom are themselves subject to state prosecution for extremism.<sup>377</sup>

## 5.7 Geographical differences

### 5.7.1 Larger cities

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<sup>369</sup> MCC & Revers: 32, 36

<sup>370</sup> A human rights lawyer: 38; MCC & Revers: 31

<sup>371</sup> MCC & Revers: 31

<sup>372</sup> Memorial: 29; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 59

<sup>373</sup> Sphere Foundation: 42 - 43

<sup>374</sup> MCC & Revers: 30; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 69

<sup>375</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 69

<sup>376</sup> MCC & Revers: 30

<sup>377</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 70

The situation for LGBT+ individuals is generally considered to be easier in major cities such as Moscow, St Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, and Khabarovsk compared with rural areas. In these urban centres, individuals can remain anonymous, and the attitude from fellow citizens generally tend to be more tolerant toward the LGBT+ community.<sup>378</sup>

In relatively liberal cities such as Yekaterinburg, the LGBT+ community has historically maintained a visible presence and continues to find ways to resist. The city's generally tolerant environment, shaped by diverse migrant populations and inclusive local governance, has made it one of the more tolerant urban centres for LGBT+ persons in Russia.<sup>379</sup>

LGBT+ persons in larger cities may benefit from urban infrastructure, including access to shelters, community centres, and the presence of human rights defenders and legal professionals. Local communities are also generally more inclined to offer support than rural areas. Nonetheless, traditionally considered safe cities, such as St Petersburg, have reportedly become less secure due to raids on LGBT+ events in 2024, suggesting that living openly as an LGBT+ person is not regarded to be safe in any of the cities.<sup>380</sup>

It was noted that tolerance towards the LGBT+ community largely depends on the local context and may be influenced by the characteristics of the neighbourhood, with some areas potentially exhibiting greater tolerance than others.<sup>381</sup> A key contributing factor is also the relative anonymity afforded by urban environments, where individuals are less likely to monitor one another.<sup>382</sup> The risk of police attention and vigilante assaults is generally lower in larger cities.<sup>383</sup>

Civil society organisations continue to work with LGBT+ individuals in Moscow, although their activities are no longer conducted publicly following the Supreme Court decision. It is also still possible to visit LGBT+ clubs in Russia, albeit with reduced safety compared to previous years. Nonetheless, LGBT+ culture remains present in Moscow.<sup>384</sup>

According to one source, an LGBT+ person's ability to live openly largely depends on their personal level of fearlessness. No location in Russia can be considered entirely safe for LGBT+ individuals, and many tend to self-censor and conceal their sexual identity or orientation.<sup>385</sup>

Another source stated that some LGBT+ individuals live openly to the extent that their friends or colleagues are aware of their sexual orientation and identity, while many others are more

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<sup>378</sup> Mediazona: 26; Russian LGBT Network: 24; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 63; Memorial: 26, 30; Media Hub Riga: 15

<sup>379</sup> An LGBT+ organisation: 22

<sup>380</sup> Freedom House: 22

<sup>381</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 26; An LGBT+ organisation: 23

<sup>382</sup> A human rights lawyer: 35; Russian LGBT Network: 35; Mediazona 26; Freedom house 22; MCC & Revers: 18; Memorial: 30

<sup>383</sup> AI: 29

<sup>384</sup> AI: 28

<sup>385</sup> Media Hub Riga: 17

cautious about disclosing such information. In certain cases, same-sex couples may present themselves publicly merely as friends.<sup>386</sup>

The city of Sochi has traditionally been described as a 'relatively vibrant hub' for the LGBT+ community, although most of its gay clubs have now closed. Some private venues continue to operate in both Sochi and Krasnodar, often functioning underground through the payment of bribes to local officials. Authorities occasionally conduct raids on these clubs and issue fines for propaganda violations; however, the venues remain open, as the fines can serve as a source of revenue for local government.<sup>387</sup>

### 5.7.2 *Rural areas*

Rural areas, such as those in the Krasnodar region, are generally characterised by more traditional beliefs and values, alongside a stronger religious presence, which is associated with lower levels of tolerance and less supportive attitudes towards the LGBT+ community.<sup>388</sup> If an LGBT+ couple is seen walking hand in hand in public, it may elicit a more negative reaction than in larger cities.<sup>389</sup>

In some rural areas of Russia, such as Angarsk close to the city of Irkutsk, conditions for homosexual men are notably harsher than in other rural areas.<sup>390</sup>

Providing assistance to LGBT+ individuals is generally more challenging for NGOs in rural areas. Nevertheless, LGBT+ persons are not entirely isolated; through social media and encrypted messaging platforms, they are able to follow LGBT+ influencers and organisations, as such activity is not prohibited by Russian authorities. They may also request emergency support from LGBT+ NGOs.<sup>391</sup>

## 5.8 Disparities in treatment of homosexual men and women, bisexual and transgender persons

According to interviewed sources, transgender persons constitute the most vulnerable group within the LGBT+ community, as they are, unlike the other community members, incapable of concealing their identity and often require hormone therapy treatment or sex reassignment surgery to maintain their appearance and identity.<sup>392</sup>

One source stated that in Russian society, general attitudes towards homosexual men and women are largely similar.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 29

<sup>387</sup> MCC & Revers: 20

<sup>388</sup> Memorial: 26, 30; Russian LGBT Network: 19; Sphere Foundation: 45; An LGBT+ organisation: 23

<sup>389</sup> Sphere Foundation: 45

<sup>390</sup> A human rights lawyer: 25

<sup>391</sup> Russian LGBT Network: 21 - 22

<sup>392</sup> NHC: 45-46; Russian LGBT Network: 31; AI: 24

<sup>393</sup> Sphere Foundation: 51

## 5.9 Conversion therapy

Conversion therapy in Russia began to emerge gradually from 2018-2019 in facilities that previously specialised in treating drug addiction. They began offering services aimed at “sex correction.” Following the 2023 prohibitions on gender transition, these practices intensified.<sup>394</sup>

The scope of conversion therapy in Russia (for conversion therapy in Chechnya, see [section 6.3.1](#)) is difficult to ascertain. According to a researcher on LGBT rights, evidence on this issue remains limited. However, a journalistic project called Sistema investigated the issue by sending undercover reporters to health facilities in Moscow region. They claimed to have discovered facilities that aim at “curing” transgender persons of their gender identity by, among other methods, electroshock. As part of the therapy, transgender individuals were allegedly forced to visit drug dens and locations associated with sex work. The purpose was to show them where they would end up, if they continued to identify as transgender.<sup>395</sup>

Individuals over the age of 15 must provide consent for hospitalisation, which in some cases has prevented parents of young homosexual men from admitting them for conversion therapy. Only a court possesses the authority to hospitalise someone against their will, and there appear to be no documented instances of such interventions.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 75

<sup>395</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 76

<sup>396</sup> A human rights lawyer: 34

## 6. The North Caucasus and Chechnya

This chapter examines the situation of LGBT+ individuals in the North Caucasus, focusing on Chechnya, and outlines the treatment by authorities and families, including physical abuse, conversion therapy, abductions, and killings, as well as risks associated with relocation.

### 6.1 General situation

Generally, communities in North Caucasus engage in traditional practices and customs such as blood feuds and honour-killings as means of restoring family honour and mitigating shame from the family.<sup>397</sup> Available information on the conditions for LGBT+ persons in this region is very limited, with most cases going unreported and remaining unknown. Reliable statistics on honour-based killings are not available.<sup>398</sup>

LGBT+ persons face risks in republics such as Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan: they are threatened not only by legislation and authorities but also clan structures. The boundaries between law enforcement agencies, the political authorities, and the families are often blurred, especially in Chechnya.<sup>399</sup>

Ramzan Kadyrov's government exercises considerable authority and legitimacy within Chechnya, maintaining strict control and continuing to suppress separatist movements. As a result, federal Russian laws are effectively not enforced in Chechnya. The Supreme Court ruling and federal legislation concerning extremism, symbols, or propaganda are not applied in practice, and Kadyrov reportedly operates with a high degree of impunity.<sup>400</sup> Chechen authorities additionally perceive LGBT+ individuals as non-existent within the republic, rendering legislation affecting them largely irrelevant in practice.<sup>401</sup>

In 2023, a court in Makhachkala, Dagestan, sentenced a university student to six years' imprisonment for the murder of an acquaintance, which the court found had arisen from a dispute "caused by the victim's nontraditional sexual orientation." Reportedly, such attacks frequently originate from victims' perceived appearance. In 2021, in Adler, a man killed his neighbour after observing him wearing a dress and a wig.<sup>402</sup>

### 6.2 Treatment of LGBT+ persons by Chechen authorities

The situation for LGBT+ persons in Chechnya remains severe. Since 2017, Chechen authorities have reportedly infiltrated homosexual networks, employing torture against LGBT+ persons to

<sup>397</sup> NC SOS Crisis Group: 15

<sup>398</sup> NHC: 42; NC SOS Crisis Group: 33

<sup>399</sup> NHC: 40; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 43; Coming out and NC SOS, *Input on Killing of LGBTIQ+ persons in Russia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>400</sup> NC SOS Crisis Group: 3, 8

<sup>401</sup> NHC: 39; NC SOS Crisis Group: 10

<sup>402</sup> OVD-Info: 45; IStories, *Внутри машины цензуры*, 8 February 2023, [url](#)

compel them to identify others,<sup>403</sup> searching phones by disclosure of passwords and misusing social media chats to track homosexual men. Subsequently, Chechen authorities conducted round-ups and arrests of homosexual men, reaching upwards of 200 men a day. Arrests were followed by executions. On the night of 25-26 January 2017, more than 40 men were executed, 27 of which have been named. The scope of targeting and arrests of homosexual men has since been widened to include all members of the LGBT+ community.<sup>404</sup>

Following developments in Chechnya, incidents of financial extortion accompanied by physical coercion targeting LGBT+ persons were observed in Ingushetia. However, this trend has reportedly not extended to all Muslim republics within Russia.<sup>405</sup>

To the knowledge of NC SOS Crisis Group, the regions of Ingushetia and Dagestan have not experienced the same level of LGBT+ persecution stemming from the authorities as Chechnya.<sup>406</sup>

Since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a new pattern has reportedly emerged in Chechnya, whereby LGBT+ men are compelled to sign so-called voluntary contracts, obliging them to be sent to the front.<sup>407</sup> In one case, a Chechen man residing in the Netherlands, who had previously been detained in Chechnya due to his sexual orientation, was captured by his family upon returning to the republic for a funeral. He was forced to record a video denying his homosexuality and was subsequently sent to Ukraine.<sup>408</sup>

In two separate cases, LGBT+ Chechens experienced severe abuse at the front. In one instance, a man's sexual orientation was disclosed to his fellow soldiers by Chechen police, and the man was exposed to rapes at the front. In another case, an individual was killed.<sup>409</sup>

In Chechnya, semi-military patrols, known as community patrols, are employed to enforce informal codes (adat), such as dress standards for women in the sense of a pressure on women to wear headscarf in public.<sup>410</sup> These patrols are reported to target individuals in private spaces

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<sup>403</sup> A human rights lawyer: 40; Redress, *European Court Finds Russia Responsible for Torturing of Gay Man "Solely on Account of his Sexual Orientation"*, 13 September 2023, [url](#); Ilga Europe, *Maxim Grigoryevich Lapunov against Russian Federation*, 16 April 2019, [url](#); HUDOC – European Court of Human Rights, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>404</sup> NC SOS: 1-5, 10; Attitude, *Names of 27 men believed to have been executed in Chechnya published*, 11 July 2017, [url](#); OSCE, *Moscow Mechanism rapporteur reports to OSCE Permanent Council on alleged human rights violations in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation*, 20 December 2018, [url](#); BBC, *Chechnya LGBT: Dozens 'detained in new gay purge'*, 15 January 2019, [url](#); PinkNews, *Chechnya: Names of 27 men slaughtered and buried in bloody night revealed as gay purge continues*, 11 July 2017, [url](#)

<sup>405</sup> A human rights lawyer: 41

<sup>406</sup> NC SOS: 12

<sup>407</sup> NC SOS: 11, 18; Coming out and NC SOS, *Input on Killing of LGBTIQ+ persons in Russia*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>408</sup> NC SOS: 11, 18

<sup>409</sup> NC SOS: 34

<sup>410</sup> Memorial, «Несовместимо ни с законом, ни с чеченскими обычаями», 30 October 2025, [url](#)

and have reportedly assaulted persons suspected of being members of the LGBT+ community.<sup>411</sup>

### 6.3 Local community and relatives

In the North Caucasus, LGBT+ individuals are more frequently subjected to pressure or violence from family and local community, who often follow local traditional norms and values.<sup>412</sup>

Honour-based violence and honour-killings has a high prevalence in both Dagestan and Chechnya. LGBT+ persons from these regions may face the risk of honour killings for violating family norms.<sup>413</sup>

Perpetrators of violence towards LGBT+ persons include both authorities and families.<sup>414</sup>

Families are frequently compelled by Chechen police to carry out killings. In one case, a Chechen father was instructed to execute his homosexual son to wash away the shame he had brought upon the family. However, the father allowed the son to escape after convincing his surroundings of the execution. The father also staged a fake funeral.<sup>415</sup>

In Chechnya, homosexual women as well as transgender individuals and bisexual women face immediate life-threatening risks, such as killings and disappearances. Homosexual men are likewise at risk of honour-killings, although women reportedly remain more frequent targets.<sup>416</sup> To the knowledge of one source, there are no documented cases of similar persecution in Ingushetia or Dagestan.<sup>417</sup>

### 6.4 Conversion therapy

Attempts at conversion therapy is applied not only to LGBT+ individuals but also to those perceived as insufficiently religious, such as women who do not wear the hijab. It is reported to occur in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia. In one instance from Dagestan, a woman was subjected to conversion therapy on account of her bisexuality and atheism. Such cases are often driven by pressure from both families and authorities, meaning that, even if parents personally accept their child's sexual orientation or religious choices, they may feel compelled to enforce conformity with local societal norms.<sup>418</sup>

In some instances, LGBT+ individuals are subjected to torture as a method of so-called conversion therapy. Both homosexual men and women have reportedly been exposed to such treatment in Chechnya and Dagestan.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 43-44

<sup>412</sup> NC SOS: 12, 17, 22; NHC: 40, 42

<sup>413</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 45; NHC: 40, 42

<sup>414</sup> A researcher on LGBT rights: 45 NHC: 41; Sphere Foundation: 47; NC SOS: 13

<sup>415</sup> NC SOS: 13-16

<sup>416</sup> NHC: 43; A human rights lawyer: 44

<sup>417</sup> A human rights lawyer: 44

<sup>418</sup> NC SOS: 19-20

<sup>419</sup> NC SOS: 10, 36

## 6.5 Relocation

Relocation to other regions within Russia is generally not an option for LGBT+ individuals, as there have been multiple instances of family members tracking them down and forcibly returning them to Chechnya. The situation is particularly difficult for women and girls<sup>420</sup> from Chechnya and Dagestan, who are typically prohibited from leaving the house without a family member or husband.<sup>421</sup> Furthermore, the Chechen government maintains networks of “ombudspersons” across Russia to monitor Chechen citizens, with documented cases of individuals being returned to Chechnya, where they subsequently faced torture or death.<sup>422</sup>

Non-Chechen Russian authorities cannot be relied upon to protect LGBT+ individuals fleeing persecution in Chechnya according to the interviewed sources. In one reported case, a bisexual woman relocated to St Petersburg with assistance from an LGBT+ organisation and was later located by her relatives. With cooperation from local police, the family apprehended her and returned her to Chechen authorities, who subsequently handed her over to her family, resulting in an honour killing.<sup>423</sup>

In other cases, individuals from Chechnya and Dagestan fleeing persecution have been located by local police, who assisted their relatives in tracking them down. In Chechen society, where most families reportedly include a police officer, the distinction between private disputes and conflicts involving state authorities is often blurred.<sup>424</sup>

In another case, a young Chechen woman who fled to Moscow sought protection at a local police station. She was listed as a missing person at the federal level. Her male family members located her and attempted to get her. With public outcry and assistance from LGBT+ organisations, the local police were able to escort her to safety.<sup>425</sup>

There have been reports of LGBT+ individuals being extradited back to Chechnya from neighbouring countries with which Russia maintains bilateral agreements on criminal matters. In one case, a person suspected of being homosexual was subjected to torture and subsequently released.<sup>426</sup> He later sought refuge in a shelter in Armenia, where he was arrested on allegedly fabricated charges and requested for return to Chechnya by the

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<sup>420</sup> NHC: 44; Sphere Foundation: 49; A human rights lawyer: 43-44

<sup>421</sup> NC SOS Crisis Group: 25-26

<sup>422</sup> NHC: 44

<sup>423</sup> NC SOS Crisis Group: 29

<sup>424</sup> NHC: 40; NC SOS Crisis Group: 30 – 31

<sup>425</sup> NC SOS Crisis Group: 27 – 28

<sup>426</sup> Pink Armenia, *The Administrative Court ordered to grant refugee status and asylum to Salman Mukayev*, 31 January 2024, [url](#); The Moscow Times, *Armenia Denies Extradition Request for Gay Chechen Man Wanted by Russia*, 30 January 2024, [url](#); All Out, *Armenia: Save Salman Mukaev's life!*, 29 January 2024, [url](#)

authorities. With assistance from legal representatives and support organisations, he was ultimately granted refugee status in Armenia after several years.<sup>427</sup>

Relocation or escape can have serious repercussions for relatives, as collective punishment is reportedly practiced within the strong communities. Family members of LGBT+ individuals or those politically opposed to Chechen authorities have been subjected to arrests, abductions, and torture. In one case, the elderly mother of three activists from an organisation called “1ADAT” was imprisoned for 5.5 years and later received an additional four-year sentence.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> NC SOS Crisis Group: 32

<sup>428</sup> NC SOS: 33; The Moscow Times, *Prosecutors Request Additional 4-Year Prison Sentence for Mother of Chechen Dissidents*, 24 July 2025, [url](#)

## 7. Situation for returnees

This chapter examines the situation of Russian citizens returning to Russia from abroad, focusing on border control and interrogations, state surveillance, and associated risks for regular returnees, activists, and for LGBT+ persons.

### 7.1 Surveillance of Russian citizens abroad

Reportedly, Russian authorities monitor mass and local media for information about individuals abroad.<sup>429</sup> Sources noted that this in particular pertains to individuals perceived as activists or public figures; individuals who have been vocal about rights, published articles concerning LGBT+ in Russia, or who have publicly criticised the Russian government or opposed the war in Ukraine.<sup>430</sup>

Those with significant followings on social media are more likely to be monitored and may face repercussions upon returning to Russia, including fines or other penalties, as illustrated by the case of a political activist returning from Chicago who was fined 30,000 roubles (approximately 3,000 euros).<sup>431</sup>

One source noted that it is considered highly unlikely that Russian citizens attending gay pride events in Western countries would be specifically targeted upon return, given the practical challenges of tracking large numbers of participants.<sup>432</sup>

### 7.2 Situation upon return

#### 7.2.1 Surveillance lists at the borders

Border officials reportedly have access to non-public surveillance lists, which may be used to screen individuals crossing the border and potentially take them in for interrogations.<sup>433</sup> One such surveillance list is known as Storozhevoy Kontrol,<sup>434</sup> which is reportedly not a database of wanted individuals but a record of people deemed of interest to the authorities.<sup>435</sup>

Another source had knowledge about an FSB registry, wherein listed individuals may be subject to surveillance upon return. There are reportedly no specific grounds for opening a surveillance

<sup>429</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 76-78; A human rights lawyer: 46; Freedom House: 29

<sup>430</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 76; Sphere Foundation: 55; MCC & Revers: 39

<sup>431</sup> MCC & Revers: 39

<sup>432</sup> Sphere Foundation: 55

<sup>433</sup> Memorial: 36; OVD-Info: 66; An LGBT+ organisation: 27; DW, *Вернуться в РФ и не сесть в тюрьму. Как проверяют на границе*, 9 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>434</sup> In Russian: сторожевой контроль, also known as watchdog surveillance. The database has been made in accordance with the confidential Order No. 047 of the Ministry of Internal Affairs dated April 14, 2005

<sup>435</sup> A human rights lawyer: 46

file, beyond general considerations of national security according to Article 12(b) of the 1995 Federal Security Service Act.<sup>436</sup>

In general, the consulted sources had no knowledge of the scope and content of such lists. Sources suggested that surveillance lists are primarily applied to target known activists and public figures, though the coverage of such lists are reportedly not conclusive, as it had been witnessed that certain high profiled activists did not appear on such lists whereas others did. Sources suggested that a minor action, such as publishing content on social media about the Russian involvement in Ukraine, could be sufficient to have been identified by the Russian authorities and be flagged on such a list.<sup>437</sup>

### 7.2.2 *Interrogations*

Sources have noted that each individual situation is influenced by several factors in the context of arrival, and that there does not appear to be any systematic approach.<sup>438</sup>

However, searches and interrogations may be conducted in a more systematic manner with regards to certain individuals of interest, for instance activists and Ukrainians, or if a person appears on the lists described above. The precise criteria that might release the likelihood of being subjected to interrogations remain unknown.<sup>439</sup>

It is noted that interrogations typically evolve around the individual's whereabouts and activities abroad. Reportedly, in most cases, persons are subsequently released.<sup>440</sup> During interrogations, border officials may attempt to pressure individuals into self-incrimination, although no specific cases of this have been documented.<sup>441</sup>

One source described that those individuals who have been vocal in Western media may, upon returning to Russia, face a formal lecture (беседа) regarding their activities and "how to love the motherland" and may be detained for interrogation for several hours.<sup>442</sup>

Various interrogations and prosecutions of Russian citizens returning to Russia have been reported, with Ukraine-topics and human rights defenders prompting such interrogations,<sup>443</sup> rather than matters linked to LGBT+ identity.<sup>444</sup> There have been reports of Russian citizens returning to Russia and facing prosecution on charges such as treason or for making donations to Ukraine.<sup>445</sup> Similarly, a human rights lawyer has noted a dozen cases in which individuals

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<sup>436</sup> A human rights lawyer: 47

<sup>437</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 79; OVD-Info: 66; An LGBT+ organisation: 28

<sup>438</sup> Freedom House: 30; A human rights lawyer: 47; Media Hub Riga: 20; OVD-Info: 63, 67; MCC & Revers: 46; AI: 31

<sup>439</sup> OVD-Info: 63

<sup>440</sup> OVD-Info: 68

<sup>441</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 80

<sup>442</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 79

<sup>443</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 77-78; Memorial: 35; Mediazona: 31

<sup>444</sup> Memorial: 35

<sup>445</sup> Mediazona: 31

were arrested upon arrival in the country, along with an uncountable number of interrogations.<sup>446</sup> Consulted sources have not encountered such documented cases specifically pertaining to LGBT+ persons.<sup>447</sup>

A Russian citizen returning after some time abroad may face scrutiny upon return if their travel documents have expired or if they are flagged on surveillance lists. Sources suggest that individuals who have resided abroad for a longer period<sup>448</sup> provide a basis for questioning or phone search, as this may attract attention of the authorities. Thus, this may lead to interrogations about their beliefs, their relation to the war in Ukraine, their whereabouts and activities abroad, and reasons for extended absence. Authorities may conduct online searches.<sup>449</sup> On the other hand, one source noted that a prolonged stay abroad would not in itself raise suspicion with the border authorities.<sup>450</sup>

While one source suggested that frequent border crossings may attract less attention than longer stays abroad,<sup>451</sup> another source argued that repeated travel is likely to draw scrutiny.<sup>452</sup> It may increase the likelihood of being questioned upon entering Russia, if the individual is of conscription age (18-30 years old) or has visited Ukraine or other countries of interest to the FSB.<sup>453</sup>

Entering Russia with invalid documents does not automatically trigger questioning or prosecution at the border; however, individuals may be questioned later or placed on a surveillance list, with the circumstances from before their initial departure potentially influencing the outcome.<sup>454</sup>

### 7.2.3 Searches on digital devices

Several sources stated that entering the Russian borders comes with the likelihood of border officials scrutinising the person's digital devices. Particularly in case of interrogations, searches on digital devices are included in the procedure. Authorities are reported to search for anti-war content and FBK donations.<sup>455</sup> There appear to be no official protocols for such procedures, which includes random scrutiny.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> A human rights lawyer: 45

<sup>447</sup> A human rights lawyer: 45; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 78; AI: 32

<sup>448</sup> Sources suggesting periods ranging from six months to several years

<sup>449</sup> Memorial: 35; An LGBT+ organisation: 30; Freedom House: 30; Freedom House: 30; Mediazona 33; A human rights lawyer: 48

<sup>450</sup> Sphere Foundation: 56

<sup>451</sup> Mediazona: 33

<sup>452</sup> Sphere Foundation: 52

<sup>453</sup> Sphere Foundation: 52

<sup>454</sup> MCC & Revers: 45

<sup>455</sup> Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation

<sup>456</sup> Media Hub Riga: 18; Memorial 35; OVD- Info: 63; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 80; AI: 31; Freedom House: 30

Individuals are under no legal obligation to surrender their devices or passwords. According to one source, individuals frequently refuse to grant access to devices, which can consequently be perceived as an admission of guilt and may result in administrative prosecution.<sup>457</sup> Many individuals are said to feel pressured to unlock their phones after several hours of interrogation, thereby risking incriminating oneself to the exposure of sensitive material that could form the basis for criminal or administrative proceedings.<sup>458</sup>

Accessing such information without judicial authorisation would contravene Article 15(1) and Article 23(2) of the Russian Constitution. However, at border crossings, no court order is present. Thus, such actions from authority officials constitute intimidation and possible risk of exposure rather than a lawful search.<sup>459</sup>

Security officers reportedly search on devices, in messaging apps, and in e-mails for indications of political disloyalty, donations to Ukraine, or links to organisations designated as foreign agents or undesirable within Russia.<sup>460</sup>

Documented cases of details disclosed during border searches forming the basis for criminal investigation have predominantly related to alleged extremism or terrorism.<sup>461</sup>

As a precaution, many returning Russians reportedly erase potentially sensitive material from their devices before crossing the border.<sup>462</sup>

According to one source, ordinary Russian citizens who have not engaged in activism or criticised the war in Ukraine are generally not considered to be at significant risk of assault upon returning to Russia.<sup>463</sup>

### 7.2.4 LGBT+ returnees

An LGBT+ person who has posted content on social media platforms may be at risk of detention for extremist activities upon returning to Russia. However, the risk of imminent detention is by one source considered to be relatively low, though it is emphasised that it is difficult to determine the extent of which the Russian authorities monitor online activity of citizens abroad.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 80

<sup>458</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 81; OVD-Info: 64

<sup>459</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 81; OVD-Info: 62

<sup>460</sup> MCC & Revers: 42; OVD-Info: 63; DW, *Вернуться в РФ и не сесть в тюрьму. Как проверяют на границе*, 9 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>461</sup> OVD-Info: 64

<sup>462</sup> AI: 31; Memorial: 35; Mediazona: 35; Freedom House: 31; Media Hub Riga: 19; A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 81; DW, *Вернуться в РФ и не сесть в тюрьму. Как проверяют на границе*, 9 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>463</sup> AI: 31-33

<sup>464</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 78

The consulted sources had no knowledge of documented cases with LGBT+ persons being detained or prosecuted directly upon return to Russia.<sup>465</sup> One source noted that the risks of scrutiny and searches at the border are potential rather than documented due to lacking statistics.<sup>466</sup>

Sources underlined that the above-described interrogations for other purposes may pose a risk of uncovering information about an individual's LGBT+ status and potentially give rise to charges for propaganda, extremism, or other offences, although no judicial practice has yet been established.<sup>467</sup>

Border officials may encounter LGBT+ content on social media profiles, apps, webpages, or within social network. For these reasons, lawyers and human rights defenders advice LGBT+ persons to clean the phone, sign out from all social media accounts, and abstain from having VPNs installed.<sup>468</sup>

It is stated that, since the Supreme Court decision, LGBT+ persons have become significantly more cautious when crossing the Russian border than they were previously.<sup>469</sup>

LGBT+ persons may be able to return to Russia without encountering border-related risks when entering from countries that permit travel using internal passports.<sup>470</sup> This form of re-entry does not require disclosure of previous visas or residence permits in countries considered unfriendly by Russian authorities.<sup>471</sup>

There are reports of LGBT+ individuals living abroad who are not publicly critical of Russian government policies and do not maintain social media accounts, but have been able to return to Russia without apparent incident. According to the source, this does not preclude potential future actions.<sup>472</sup>

In 2024, a transgender activist was reportedly detained at the border due to a discrepancy between their documents and gender presentation but was released after three hours. Prior contact with the police may also prompt questioning at the border; however, individuals who have reported assaults and subsequently left the country are by one source considered unlikely to face interrogation upon return.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 78; A human rights lawyer: 45; OVD-Info: 65; AI: 32

<sup>466</sup> OVD-Info: 65

<sup>467</sup> OVD-Info: 63 and 65; AI: 32

<sup>468</sup> A researcher on LGBT+ rights: 81; OVD-Info: 63 and 65

<sup>469</sup> Sphere Foundation: 54

<sup>470</sup> The countries in question are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan

<sup>471</sup> MCC & Revers: 37-38

<sup>472</sup> MCC & Revers: 41

<sup>473</sup> Sphere Foundation: 53

## 7.3 Chechen returnees

Russian citizens who are not ethnic Russian, such as those from Chechnya or Dagestan, are reportedly more likely to face enhanced screening and questioning when entering Russia, particularly when returning to Chechnya. While a border official of ethnic Russian background may not pay interest to a returning Chechen, cooperation between Russian and Chechen authorities means that individuals of interest to Chechen authorities may face a risk.<sup>474</sup>

### 7.3.1 Chechen diaspora

Particularly the Chechen diaspora is widespread and powerful with a network known to contain informants and loyalists to Kadyrov. Reportedly, the network monitors Chechens residing in Europe and can look up individuals.<sup>475</sup>

Unlike other Russian citizens abroad, the Chechen diaspora is subjected to a targeted campaigns of surveillance, digital intimidation, and proxy coercion. Chechen authorities reportedly threaten, arrest, and, at times, torture relatives in Chechnya to suppress dissent abroad. They also recruit or place asylum seekers as agents within diaspora communities. Kadyrov has openly warned that all social media activity is monitored, and that modern technology allows personal records to be unveiled as well as a person's place of residence. Through criminal networks and familial pressure, Chechen authorities, in collaboration with Russian intelligence, maintain effective control, with agents reportedly active in Austria, France, Belgium, and Germany.<sup>476</sup>

Thus, the described work methods for collecting information are a combination of social media searches and word-of-mouth. It was underlined that Chechens abroad resort to only communicate with their closest friends, as it is impossible to know who is part of the network.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> NC SOS Crisis Group: 42; RFE/RL, *Chechen Refugee Forcibly Disappeared Hours After 'Unlawful' Deportation From Poland*, 3 September 2018, [url](#); HRW, *Chechen Asylum Seeker Deported to Russia Arbitrarily Detained*, 13 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>475</sup> NC SOS Crisis Group: 22 and 24 and 37; NHC: 45

<sup>476</sup> NC SOS Crisis Group: 38; RFE/RL, *'Everyone's Asking Who's Next': Chechens In Europe Warn Of More Killings*, 7 July 2020, [url](#); Freedom House, *Russia: Transnational Repression Origin Country Case Study*, 2021, [url](#)

<sup>477</sup> NC SOS Crisis Group: 37 and 39

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## Annex 1 – Terms of reference

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### **Legislative developments**

1. Key legislative acts related to the rights of LGBT+ persons

### **Authorities' treatment of LGBT+ persons**

2. Development since the 2023 Supreme Court decision designating the “international LGBT movement” as extremist
  - o Risk of punishment for propaganda, extremism, or other charges (reported cases)
  - o Regional differences in the situation of LGBT+ persons in the Russian Federation including in Chechnya
  - o Differences in the treatment of homosexual men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transpersons.
3. Consequences for persons, organisations, or activists with ties to individuals perceived to be associated with or supportive to LGBT+ rights
4. Prevalence of discrimination of LGBT+ persons (access to employment, housing, education, and health care)
5. Availability and effectiveness of state protection for LBGT+ persons facing harassment or violence

### **Imprisonment of LGBT+ persons**

6. Treatment of LGBT+ persons in places of detention (by inmates and/or prison staff)
7. Accountability and protection within detention settings

### **Situation for LGBT+ persons in civil society**

8. Recent developments (since 2023) in violence and abuse of LGBT+ persons
  - o Prevalence of harassment, stigmatisation, or acts of violence directed at LGBT+ persons
  - o Regional differences in the situation of LGBT+ persons, including between urban centres and rural or regional areas.
  - o Differences in the treatment of homosexual men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transpersons.
9. Existence of civil society groups supporting LGBT+ persons' rights, and their capacity to offer protection and support (e.g. shelters, legal advice, counselling assistance, health care).
10. Media outings of LGBT+ persons (e.g. in newspapers or on social media)

### **Situation for Returnees**

11. Authorities' surveillance of Russian citizens outside Russia supporting and/or practising LGBT+ rights
12. Monitoring and checking of LGBT+ returnees upon return

## Annex 2 – meeting minutes

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### Memorial

Meeting in Vilnius, 02.09.2025

*Memorial is a network whose members engage in a range of activities, one of which is the Political Prisoners Support project, addressing contemporary political repression. Other initiatives focus on Soviet-era repression, and the Human Rights Centre Memorial has previously documented human rights violations in the North Caucasus.*

*Memorial was declared foreign agent in 2014 by the Russian authorities. Two of Memorial's legal entities were dissolved by court decisions: International Memorial by the Supreme Court in 2021 for violating the foreign agent law, and the Human Rights Centre Memorial was dissolved by the Moscow City Court.*

### The legal system

1. According to the source, no new legislation of direct relevance to LGBT+ persons has been introduced since the Supreme Court ruling. However, law enforcement practices appear to have changed following the ruling.
2. Russian courts have issued over 100 convictions and rulings in cases concerning "extremism" for participation in the "international LGBT movement" or the display of symbols attributed to it.<sup>478</sup> There have also been cases of prosecution under Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, concerning the propaganda or public display of Nazi symbols or paraphernalia, as well as symbols of extremist organisations, or other symbols whose propaganda or public display is prohibited by federal law.
3. Additionally, there have been numerous cases under Article 6.21, relating to the promotion of non-traditional sexual relationships and/or preferences, gender reassignment, or refusal to have children, as well as under Article 6.21.2, concerning the dissemination to minors of information depicting non-traditional sexual relationships and/or preferences, or material capable of encouraging minors to desire a change of gender.<sup>479</sup>
4. The majority of these cases are administrative. As of September 2025, approximately 20 individuals are facing criminal charges. According to the source, the LGBT+ symbols in question usually involve depictions of rainbows, for example earrings or clothing. In addition, persons demonstrating non-traditional values or publicly expressing views on same-sex relations can be charged for propaganda.

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<sup>478</sup> HRW, *Россия: все больше жертв признания «движения ЛГБТ» «экстремистским»*, 3 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>479</sup> Meduza, *За последние 10 лет количество дел по статьям, связанным с «пропагандой ЛГБТ», выросло в 18 (!) раз*, 18 June 2025, [url](#)

5. The source opined that it is not a certainty that Russian citizens will report LGBT+ persons to the police, or that the police will notice individuals wearing rainbow colours. Nonetheless, such incidents do occur. In case of conviction for propaganda or display of extremist symbols, the LGBT+ person may face up to 15 days in prison or a small fine.
6. The source explained that if a person attracted an administrative charge for displaying extremist symbols, the second administrative charge would result in a criminal case if this second charge happens within one year time span of the first administrative charge. According to the source, after 12 months, this escalation mechanism would formally be reset. However, the source maintained that such procedures remain unknown, as people tend to get cautious and self-censor.
7. The corpus delicti of Part 1, Article 282.4, provides that: "Propaganda or public display of Nazi attributes or symbols, or attributes or symbols resembling Nazi symbols to the extent that they may cause confusion, or attributes or symbols of extremist organisations, or other attributes or symbols the propaganda or public display of which is prohibited by federal law, if these acts are committed by a person who has previously been subjected to administrative punishment for any of the administrative offenses set out in Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation."
8. Under Article 4.6 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, a person who has received an administrative penalty is deemed to have been subjected to that penalty from the date on which the decision imposing it comes into legal force, until the expiration of one year following the completion of its execution.
9. The source currently monitors the 20 known criminal cases against LGBT+ individuals in Russia, who are charged with participating in or organising activities associated with an extremist movement. The source noted that there are probably more cases than these 20 known ones. As of September 2025, ten of these persons are either in remand prison (SIZO) or under house arrest. According to the source, many of those who have been prosecuted since the Court ruling in November 2023 have organised activities within the LGBT+ community such as running night clubs.
10. In one case, a man named Andrei Kotov was charged with organising tourist tours for LGBT+ persons. Reportedly, he committed suicide in SIZO.<sup>480</sup>

#### Differentiating between extremism and propaganda

11. The source observed that it is not possible to determine, on the basis of legislation alone, whether a given action could be regarded as propaganda or extremism. However, in practice, it has been observed that participation in so-called extremist communities lead to extremism charges.
12. In one case, a nightclub in Orenburg was raided and three people were arrested and charged with extremism.<sup>481</sup> In another recent case, a publishing house in Moscow was targeted for publishing books with LGBT propaganda. Three persons were arrested on

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<sup>480</sup> Memorial PZK, *Котов Андрей Евгеньевич*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>481</sup> Memorial PZK, *Дело клуба Pose*, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

charges of participation in an extremist organisation. The punishment for this act can amount to 10-12 years in prison.<sup>482</sup> As of September 2025, these cases are still pending.

#### Behaviour and appearance triggering state action

13. The source opined that individuals are not prosecuted solely on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity but rather for spreading information publicly or for asserting certain rights. According to the source, legislation is generally vague, and authorities may choose between many grounds when they prosecute.
14. Social media posts are often seen to attract attention, also posts dating back in time. All of these cases are administrative. In total, there are approximately 200 administrative cases concerning propaganda, as noted in the Meduza article, although it is unclear how many of these cases involve internet publications.<sup>483</sup> The source provided a recent example from St Petersburg, where a poet was arrested and charged for writings containing non-traditional values and suicidal tendencies. He was likely charged under Article 110.2 of the Criminal Code.<sup>484</sup>
15. The source opined that identifying as an LGBT+ person, in itself, does not necessarily attract attention. The authorities tend to focus on publicly visible outliers such as behaviour or appearance that does not correspond with so-called traditional values. The source noted that not acting in accordance with traditional values may attract attention from authorities or violent individuals, who may either report this behaviour to the police or physically bring the person to a police station, where administrative charge could then be imposed in connection with either propaganda or the display of extremist symbols. However, the source was not aware of concrete examples of such incidents.
16. Regarding the possibility to assemble freely for LGBT+ persons, there have been reports of police raids on private LGBT+ gatherings, which have resulted in administrative charges. The source mentioned that simply visiting these nightclubs was not grounds for administrative charges, but if person were caught in the act of a same-sex relationship it may trigger an administrative charge. The source was not aware of criminal cases arising from such incidents. According to the source, in Yekaterinburg in June 2025, the police raided an assembly of people, who had gathered to write letters to political prisoners. Individuals were threatened but not detained, with the exception of the organiser, who was charged administratively because the police discovered an LGBT+ symbol. In this case, LGBT+ affiliation was used as a pretext for bringing charges against the organiser.

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<sup>482</sup> Memorial PZK, Дело издателей, 1 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>483</sup> Meduza, За последние 10 лет количество дел по статьям, связанным с «пропагандой ЛГБТ», выросло в 18 (!) раз, 18 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>484</sup> Memorial PZK, В Петербурге арестовали поэта Гликерия Улунова по делу о «побуждении к самоубийству». Ему грозит до 15 лет, 1 September 2025, [url](#)

17. According to the source, actions drawing attention depends on a range of circumstances. A person can be unlucky, be seen at a restaurant or the subway by a passerby who dislikes the LGBT+ community and sees signs hereof. This could potentially result in being taken to a police station and drawing unfavourable attention from law enforcement officers. Dressing in rainbow colours could also draw attention, but the source opined that simply wearing rainbow-themed earrings might carry no consequences; while wearing full rainbow-coloured clothes could result in prosecution by the first or second police officer encountered. The source noted that no individual wears such clothes in present Russia.

#### **Access to legal representation**

18. The source noted that LGBT+ persons formally have access to legal representation, although such access does not necessarily provide significant assistance from a legal point of view. In administrative cases, legal representation may be available, but the authorities are not obliged to provide a detainee with a lawyer, as such cases are treated as procedural matters. In criminal cases, however, the source observed that it was possible to obtain support from LGBT+ organisations in order to secure legal assistance. Otherwise, the individual is appointed a lawyer, provided for by the state.
19. Nonetheless, the Russian judicial system was by the source described as lacking independence and facilitating unlawful prosecutions. Courts were described as politicised with limited scope for lawyers to influence the outcome. The source described the role of the independent lawyers as more of a channel of communication with the outside world and provider of moral support, which the appointed defenders generally do not provide.
20. The source highlighted that some LGBT+ persons on trial - for strategic reasons – decline support from LGBT+ organisations in order to avoid worsening the situation for themselves. Pleading guilty or accepting the charges may lead to a more lenient punishment or more preferable prison, whereas contesting the charges could have the opposite effect.

#### **Prison conditions for LGBT+ persons**

21. The source stated that LGBT+ persons experience violence in Russian prisons. Both Russian criminal culture and prison culture stigmatise LGBT+ persons and especially target homosexual males, who are suppressed and discriminated against. Homosexual men assume the lowest status in Russian prisons and thus humiliated and typically tasked with the worst manual jobs, such as cleaning toilets.
22. The source opined that the situation for homosexual men in Russian prisons was worse than for homosexual women. The patriarchal structure of Russian prison culture stigmatises men who are assigned female roles in sexual relationships, while it does not similarly stigmatise women who are assigned male roles. In some cases, this status may

even confer certain advantages for women in prison due to a different social status within the prison hierarchy, as far as current knowledge indicates.

23. The source mentioned that LGBT+ persons happen to be kept separately from other inmates while in remand prison (SIZO). However, the law does not contain such requirements. It is unclear whether formal provisions of this kind exist in the internal regulations of detention centres. Nevertheless, the separate detention of openly homosexual male prisoners is common practice. This is primarily due to security risks arising from discrimination against homosexual men within the prison subculture. In detention centres, ensuring security is generally considered more important than during the serving of a sentence and may be relatively easier to achieve.
24. The source stated that prison staff does not treat LGBT+ inmates in the same manner as fellow prisoners, and cannot necessarily protect them in red prisons. The situation is even worse in black prisons, and LGBT+ inmates can be killed for not following the rules prescribed by prison subculture. The source opined that there is always a risk of being killed, though all inmates are subject to these harsh conditions. The source was not aware of any examples of LGBT+ persons being killed in prison.
25. There are approximately 20 known individuals facing criminal prosecution. Of these, only six are deprived of their liberty, and only two are held in remand prisons (SIZO), while the remaining four are under house arrest.

#### **Civil society's treatment of LGBT+ persons**

26. According to the source, Russian society is highly atomised, and individuals generally pay little attention to one another. The source opined that as long as an LGBT+ person does not insult their neighbours or attempt to impose their personal values on others, they might not attract attention. This is particularly the case for larger cities, but not so much for villages and small towns with stronger traditional values, where levels of tolerance are lower.
27. The source stated that levels of tolerance in Moscow were previously high. Before the Supreme Court ruling, it would be considered unusual for two men to walk hand in hand, yet gay nightclubs existed, and they were widely known. LGBT+ persons could even go there and kiss. However, this changed following the Supreme Court ruling. The source opined that since the ruling, public display of LGBT+ behaviour has largely ceased.
28. The source did provide an example where two homosexual men engaging in intercourse were observed through the window by a neighbour. The two men were subsequently charged with abuse of a minor. The source followed up noting that this was an unusual case, and a heterosexual couple could have been prosecuted under similar circumstances.

#### **Media**

29. The source noted that it was difficult to assess the extent to which state propaganda affects conditions for LGBT+ persons. The media focuses on displaying a world view based on traditional values. LGBT+ persons are not singled out and accused of attempting to “destroy families” on a daily basis, though such narratives do appear intermittently.

#### **Regional differences**

30. The source mentioned that the level of state tolerance was higher in larger cities like Saint Petersburg and Moscow than in rural areas like Krasnodar, while in Chechnya there is no tolerance of LGBT+ persons. In Chechnya, LGBT+ persons may not necessarily be formally prosecuted, but could be subject to severe persecution through extrajudicial means. The source knew of no one who was openly homosexual in Chechnya and stated that many had been killed or tortured in the republic.
31. The source opined that a Chechen member of the LGBT+ community might relocate to Moscow or St Petersburg and avoid drawing attention from local authorities, provided they abstain from activism or human rights defence and in general live quiet. However, the source stated that there were cases where Chechens abducted LGBT+ Chechens and brought them back to Chechnya.
32. The source was aware of reports suggesting that such cases may occur in relation to both men and women, although no specific examples could be provided, as this is not within the source’s professional remit. These appear to be informal practices rather than formal legal procedures, to the best of the source’s knowledge.
33. The source was not aware of any cases of prosecution in Russia involving a same-sex couple who lived together and did not publicly demonstrate their LGBT+ orientation.
34. According to the source, nobody usually cares about each other in larger cities, whereas in smaller towns the social culture is different. The likelihood of being prosecuted is lower in urban centres than in the regions.

#### **Situation for returnees**

35. According to the source, individuals may have their phones searched or be interrogated at the airport about their beliefs, their relation to the war in Ukraine, or the activities they have conducted abroad, in particular if having stayed abroad for a long period. The primary focus is on issues connected to the war in Ukraine, such as donations, and, reportedly, not so much on LGBT+ issues. The source informed that persons tend to erase sensitive content of their phones before entering the country.
36. The source noted that formal procedures around this remain unknown. To the knowledge of the source, various lists exist, upon which individuals may be listed. These lists are largely not public; however, it is well established that border guards check individuals crossing the border against their databases.
37. The source opined that if a person, who formerly held a residence permit in a country not considered friendly by Russia, returned to Russia, this could attract the attention of

## RUSSIA: SITUATION FOR LGBT+ PERSONS

the authorities. However, the source mentioned that universal rules do not apply to Russia and it was not possible to say with certainty. A residence permit was not a crime but can be grounds for suspicion.

## Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC)

Online, 21.08.25

*The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is a non-governmental organisation working to ensure that human rights are respected in practice, regardless of race, creed, gender or sexual orientation. Human rights defending work is done through monitoring, reporting, teaching and democracy support.*

*The organisation was designated undesirable in the summer 2025 by the Russian authorities.*

### The legal system since the Supreme Court decision in November 2023

1. Right before and right after the 2023 Supreme Court decision there was a significant rise in charges related to the propaganda law, about 600 percent.<sup>485</sup>
2. NHC emphasised that it is difficult to monitor the actual practice for LGBT+ cases, as extremism cases are closed to the public for reasons of national security.
3. As of August 2025, there are some administrative cases for displaying extremist symbol under the Code of Administrative Offenses (KoAP), such as display of flags, posters, and other symbols of organisations designated as extremist. The penalty is usually limited to a fine or up to 15 days of administrative detention.
4. Other crimes fall under the Criminal Code (article 282.2) which criminalises systematic participation in the activities of an extremist organisation, e.g. membership, organising meetings, or financing. The penalties for these offenses are more severe and include larger fines, restrictions of freedom or imprisonment for up to 10 years depending on the degree of participation.
5. NHC stated that, according to a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), there have been 101 extremism-related convictions for alleged participation in the “International LGBT movement”. Cases are found via review of court websites and other official channels. HRW also concluded that between January 2024 and June 2025 at least 20 persons were charged with criminal offences due to their alleged participation in the “international LGBT movement”. One of the accused committed suicide in pretrial detention. Two persons were sentenced to various prison terms. Seventeen cases are pending, or their outcomes are unknown.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> The number is based on an internal document counting initiated cases. According to the source, the concrete amount of cases varies, depending on where in the process cases are counted from. Another public report can be viewed for numbers, see: Sphere, *Количество дел по «пропаганде» ЛГБТ+ за 2023 больше, чем за прошлые годы*, 5 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>486</sup> HRW, *Россия: все больше жертв признания «движения ЛГБТ» «экстремистским»*, 3 July 2025, [url](#)

6. One case concerns a Moscow-based publisher of books with queer content. Others are against management of gay clubs.<sup>487</sup> Historically, night clubs' management have had the impression that if they abstain from activism, they would be safe.
7. The 2023 Supreme Court decision was quite expected. NHC's initial assessments implied that the decision was going to be used against activists. However, this has not been the case. The court decision has had the effect of specifically targeting and impacting LGBT+ individuals, whether associated with clubs, saunas, or simply belonging to the broader LGBT+ community.<sup>488</sup>
8. One particular consequence of the Supreme Court decision is that some members of the LGBT+ community are more reluctant to seek medical assistance. They fear for the consequences. Transgender people often require access to gender-affirming healthcare, which is now seen as highly risky under the current legal environment. They fear that disclosure of their identity could lead to surveillance or prosecution. Similarly, homosexual men living with HIV are hesitant to go to clinics, because they are obliged to state their presumed route of infection. Disclosing same-sex contact, may expose them to additional stigma or association with "extremist activity". This combination of medical vulnerability and fear of legal consequences makes these groups especially cautious in seeking health care.
9. A new law adopted on 17 July 2025 bans access to extremist information on the internet. NHC expects that this amendment will also affect individuals who do not belong to the LGBT+ community.
10. NHC found that Russian law agencies resort to a range of different accusations against LGBT+ persons. LGBT+ individuals may be charged with propaganda, extremism, disinformation, or other related offences. The result is that LGBT+ persons may face charges of an arbitrary nature. Furthermore, NHC noted that LGBT+ persons may be charged with a combination of applied charges.
11. A Russian journalist and openly homosexual activist named Karen Shainyan was designated as a foreign agent in 2023. After the Supreme Court banned the so-called "LGBT movement" in 2024, he was criminally charged with participation in an extremist organisation. The source noted that this is an example of how multiple charges can be combined; administrative and reputational restrictions linked to the "foreign agent" label, together with criminal prosecution for "extremism."
12. In Arkhangelsk, the owner of the gay club Dark Site, Elena Filippova, was sentenced to 200 hours of community service under Article 148 of the Criminal Code ("offending religious feelings"). Authorities claimed that placing an Orthodox cross at an LGBT+

<sup>487</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe, *В СИЗО нашли мертвым главу турфирмы Андрея Котова, арестованного по делу об организации путешествий для квиров*, 29 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>488</sup> Nastoyashchee Vremya, *Силовики в России провели 51 рейд с момента признания ЛГБТК+ людей "экстремистским движением"*, 26 May 2025, [url](#)

party was an insult to religion, and a year later riot police raided the club, questioning about 90 guests. This case shows how laws unrelated to “extremism” are used against LGBT people, expanding the range of legal tools for repression.<sup>489</sup>

13. In the absence of a relevant legal charge, the authorities may fabricate one, the source noted. As an example of fabricated charges, NHC mentioned a case where the police had entered into a private birthday party of an LGBT+ group. They were suspected of doing propaganda to minors, though no minors were present. Instead, the authorities charged the LGBT+ group with defamation of religious feelings.<sup>490</sup>
14. Aside from known cases, the Russian authorities are targeting random LGBT+ persons who are not part of the activist community, which means that the scope and details remain unknown.

#### **Authorities' treatment of LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court decision**

15. A tendency of the Russian authorities is to instil fear within the LGBT+ community. This has been observed in the previous extensive application of the propaganda law. Moreover, large-scale arrests carried out on arbitrary grounds also serve to instil fear, compel LGBT+ individuals to go underground, or prompt them to flee.
16. The source noted that LGBT+ persons in Russia have increasingly been arrested on arbitrary grounds. In Orenburg, two staff members of the Pose nightclub were arrested and charged under extremism laws after the Supreme Court banned the “international LGBT movement,” with accusations for organising and filming a drag show.
17. In Moscow, police have raided several clubs and bars, checking IDs and detaining guests under the vague pretext of “LGBT propaganda.” According to the source, these law enforcement actions lacked clear legal basis and served mainly to intimidate the LGBT+ community.
18. Following the Supreme Court ruling, individuals have also faced prosecutions for seemingly minor acts, such as wearing rainbow earrings or displaying a pride flag, indicating how administrative charges are increasingly escalated into extremist cases.
19. In one example, police raided a private party in Koltushi in Leningrad region and detained the participants, who were subjected to interrogation on their views on LGBT+ issues.<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> PostNews, *Владелицу гей-клуба Dark Site приговорили к 200 часам исправительных работ*, 25 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>490</sup> Mediazona, «Где твой член, куда ты его дел?» Силовики приступили к рейдам по закрытым вечеринкам в поисках «международного движения ЛГБТ», 22 Februar 2024, [url](#)

<sup>491</sup> Mediazona, «Где твой член, куда ты его дел?» Силовики приступили к рейдам по закрытым вечеринкам в поисках «международного движения ЛГБТ», 22 Februar 2024, [url](#)

20. In another case, police violently raided a LGBT+ party, where ten persons were charged with “LGBT propaganda”.<sup>492</sup>
21. In Krasnodar, two homosexual women were detained at a nightclub and charged with promoting non-traditional sexual relations.<sup>493</sup>
22. NHC pointed to the fact that the police generally are under pressure to deliver results. For instance, one regional police unit, which has to deliver indicators of their law enforcement work, may resort to fabricated charges on LGBT+ individuals, such as propaganda offences. No such documentation from within the Russian police system can be provided. However, according to the source, legislation is drafted in a way that allows for very broad and arbitrary interpretation, which creates opportunities for fabricated or exaggerated accusations against LGBT+ individuals, including charges for “propaganda.”
23. NHC emphasised that it is difficult to ascertain the basis of the authorities’ prosecution of LGBT+ persons. There is no visible threshold that triggers a response from law enforcement in Russia. Lesbian couples, for instance, do live together in Moscow. However, they can never predict what might provoke action from the authorities. It is difficult to argue that anyone could live without a risk.
24. Although the Supreme Court decision was issued in November 2023 and is relatively recent, Russia is experiencing an escalating situation, making the future consequences impossible to predict.

#### Civil society’s treatment of LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court decision

25. In Russia, there exists a trend of a widespread reporting system that dates back to Soviet times. Citizens adhering to traditional social norms report to the police, for instance concerning neighbours or random people they encounter. Police may use such information if they have the capacity and lack results of their law enforcement work.
26. A new extremism case was initiated by a civilian having filmed a couple in a private meeting in a coffee shop. The persons in question were wearing symbols of the Ukrainian flag and earrings with a rainbow flag.
27. In another reported case, a man attacked two women on the subway in St Petersburg, because he believed they appeared to be LGBT+. The perpetrator was sentenced to 80 hours of community service.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Mediazona, «Где твой член, куда ты его дел?» Силовики приступили к рейдам по закрытым вечеринкам в поисках «международного движения ЛГБТ», 22 Februar 2024, [url](#)

<sup>493</sup> Gazeta.ru, В краснодарском ночном клубе задержали двух девушек — сторонниц ЛГБТ, 17 February 2025, [url](#); Lenta.ru, Двоих подростков обвинили в пропаганде ЛГБТ после посиделок на траве в Москве, 5 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>494</sup> Sever.Realii, Житель Петербурга напал на двух женщин из-за их "вызывающей внешности", 25 January 2024, [url](#)

28. Several cases of violence and attacks by homophobic groups have been reported. The groups attack individuals, LGBT+ or not, simply for appearing to be gay.
29. The source opined that it is not without risk of reporting, assault, harassment, or arrest to publicly appear to be LGBT+ person. As a consequence, LGBT+ persons adapt their daily routines to continue living safely. For example, a couple may always leave and enter their flat separately and avoid visiting friends or family together, so that neighbours and relatives remain unaware of their LGBT+ identity.

#### **Availability and effectiveness of state protection**

30. NHC argued that an LGBT+ person can never know when or from whom he or she might be attacked. The police do not provide protection. In most cases, the police are likely to side with those committing the violence or abuse.
31. In cases of violent attacks by vigilante groups upon LGBT+ persons, it has reported that police often end up prosecuting the victim under propaganda law. NHC noted that being alone at a police station presents danger for individuals disclosing their LGBT+ identity. As a consequence, people are reluctant to turn to the police for help.
32. Some LGBT+ individuals have succeeded in reporting hate crime or violence to the police. However, to the knowledge of NHC, such cases have occurred only with support from LGBT+ organisations.
33. Another commonly reported practice involves fake dating scenarios, in which LGBT+ individuals are lured into abusive situations by perpetrators. Photos are often taken and used for online posting or blackmail. In some individual cases, LGBT+ organisations have provided legal assistance, resulting in convictions of the perpetrators. NHC noted, however, that the operations of LGBT+ organisations have become increasingly restricted, leaving the support network effectively limited.

#### **Prison**

34. Being a homosexual man in a prison in Russia entails daily exposure to violence. This stems both from the structure and practices of the Russian prison system and the fact that the person belongs to the LGBT+ community.
35. Imprisoned LGBT+ persons are viewed as political prisoners, which means that the prison staff will use methods such as torture and isolation. Practise of isolation confinement is widespread in Russian prisons and does not comply with international standards, which stipulate that isolation should be employed solely as a protective measure for the individual.
36. The concrete situation depends on the prison, but one common thing is the fact that an LGBT+ individual belongs to a lower class, which means less protection inside prisons. The prison hierarchy legitimises sexual violence, including violence encouraged from

the prison guards. This means that LGBT+ persons face a constant threat of violence and abuse from both prison staff and other prisoners.<sup>495</sup>

37. NHC assessed that sexual abuse of LGBT+ persons in prisons constitutes a reinforcement of an already existing practice. Not only homosexual men are subjected to rape in prisons – all men may be subjected to sexual violence in prison. Transgender and non-binary individuals face an even higher risk, partly due to rumours about them being known to do sex work.
38. NHC had observed reports of transgender persons being held in isolation for extended periods, including cases lasting several years.<sup>496</sup> One example, which was being monitored, involved a transgender person who had been charged with extremism – not on basis of affiliation with the LGBT+ movement but because of a monetary donation to Ukraine. He often spends days or weeks in isolation, which is regarded a common practice.

### North Caucasus and Chechnya

39. NHC has been monitoring the North Caucasus since 2017. Prior to the 2023 Supreme Court decision, the situation for LGBT+ persons in North Caucasus was considerably worse than in the rest of the country. The conditions for LGBT+ persons in this region have not changed significantly since the 2023 court decision. The impact and the transition after the ruling have been more significant in other parts of Russia.
40. LGBT+ persons face risks in republics such as Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan. They are threatened not only by legislation and law enforcement agencies but also their families. In particular, they are at risk of honour killings. NHC noted that while not all families engage in this practice, the local community plays a significant role upholding this tradition. From NHC's monitoring, it is evident that the boundaries between law enforcement agencies, the political authorities, and the families are often blurred, especially in Chechnya. The police are seen to outsource law enforcement to families, particularly concerning women and domestic issues. The police might release a man or woman to the family and leave the actions to the family.<sup>497</sup> The source provided another example of a woman suspected of homosexuality, where the police chief had handed over a gun to the family and a message that they knew what to do with it. The source noted that such cases are not public, due to risk for the individual and his/her family.

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<sup>495</sup> Zhenshchina. Tyurma. Obshchestvo, ИЗГОИ, n.d. [url](#); Zhenshchina. Tyurma. Obshchestvo, Изгои-2. Сломанные люди, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>496</sup> Mediazona, Женская колония и отмена гормонотерапии. История транс-активиста Марка Кислицына, которого осудили на 12 лет за перевод 865 рублей в Украину, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>497</sup> SK SOS, Седа Сулейманова, n.d.[url](#)

41. According to the source, the authorities are not the only perpetrators in this region. North Caucasus is characterised by a combination of federal law, religious laws, and customary law.
42. It is impossible to provide reliable statistics on honour killings. The Russian registration system does not record deaths and disappearances, and the police often protect the families. In 2018, NHC conducted a number of qualitative interviews with women living in Chechnya, where finding that 30 percent of the interviewees were aware that their families were practising honour killings.<sup>498</sup>
43. Transgender persons, homosexual women, and bisexual women face the highest risk of honour killings and violence in the North Caucasus. Homosexual men are likewise at risk of being subject to honour killings, although women remain the more frequent targets.

*Possible relocation*

44. NHC assessed that it would be impossible for a person at risk to flee to other regions of Russia, including Moscow. Both families and Kadyrov's government have facilitated Ombudspersons<sup>499</sup> in various regions to 'take care' of Chechen citizens, which in practice meant locating and pursuing escaped family members. NHC has documented cases in which fleeing persons have been apprehended in other parts of Russia, returned to Chechnya and subjected to torture or killed. There is effectively no safe escape. NHC observed cases in which refugees were tracked down in Norway. NHC has first-hand knowledge on this as the organisation is involved in safety counselling in these cases. The organisation informed that Russia – namely Chechnya – is amongst top five nationalities in Norway's registry of negative social control.<sup>500</sup> Within this spectrum of cases, there are multiple cases every year where persons are being held back in Chechnya against their will – without Norway being able to help them home. Most often, these individuals are young women. The reason for being held back is not disclosed in the statistics, but among them are LGBTIQ individuals.

**Differences in the treatment of homosexual men and women, bisexuals, and transpersons**

45. Transpersons are the most vulnerable in Russia, where legal gender reassignment has been abolished. Moreover, Russian authorities also punish the people upon whom transpersons depend for the transition processes, such as hormone treatment or

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<sup>498</sup> The "Queer Women of the North Caucasus" Project, *Violence Against Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender women in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation*, 2018, [url](#)

<sup>499</sup> Ministry of the Chechen Republic for National Policy, External Relations, Press and Information, Представители Главы ЧР в субъектах и федеральных округах РФ, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>500</sup> IMDi, *Frifet fra negativ sosial kontroll og æresrelatert vold*, maj 2024, [url](#)

surgery. The organisation has seen attempts to retroactively prosecute people who assisted in gender transitioning.

46. The risk faced by an LGBT+ person in public largely depends on the appearance and behaviour. If an LGBT+ person appears more conventional in terms of behaviour and clothing, the person generally is less vulnerable to violence and persecution.
47. At police stations, the risk of abuse is highest for transpersons and gay men.
48. LGBT+ minors and youth are extremely vulnerable in Russia. Violence towards children, including domestic violence, has been decriminalised or treated as an administrative offence, and there are no protection or support mechanisms for this group.
49. In North Caucasus, female members of the LGBT+ community are more vulnerable than male members due to the described customs, although men also risk persecution on basis of sexual orientation.

## Amnesty International (AI) - Russia office

Interview with Natalia Z, Riga, 04.09.25

*Amnesty International employs two researchers specialising in Russia. They review reports from organisations as well as complaints and communications from both organisations and individuals, and contribute to a chapter of the annual report on Russia, in which LGBT issues have increased each year. Further, they attend events and report presentations hosted by colleagues, including those from LGBT organisations, as well as presentations of their reports, and organise meetings with LGBT individuals for consultations. Two or three LGBT+ cases from Russia receive support from Amnesty supporters worldwide; unfortunately, there are more requests than can be accommodated.*

## The legal system since the propaganda law and Supreme Court decision of November 2023

1. Amnesty International does not systematically record or monitor administrative and criminal cases involving LGBT+ persons.
2. AI noted that comprehensive reports with statistics on court cases involving LGBT+ persons in Russia are available. The organisation observed that the number of court cases against LGBT+ persons had increased dramatically following the Supreme Court decision. Furthermore, the cases have become more severe compared with those prior to November 2023.
3. The statistics have been compiled by organisations engaged in monitoring court proceedings and LGBT rights—Sfera and Civil Control—in their joint report on the dissemination and propaganda of LGBT+ issues.<sup>501</sup>
4. AI is currently monitoring two cases in Russia. One concerns the proceedings against anti-war activist and transgender individual Mark Kislytsyn.<sup>502</sup> Given both the details in his passport and his physical condition, his situation is considered highly dangerous. The second case relates to Oleg Grannikov. He stopped being an activist 10 years ago, but during the trial for the right to communicate with his child after the divorce, information came to light that he worked at the LGBT film festival "Side by Side" and specialised as a journalist on LGBT rights, and he was placed in pretrial detention.<sup>503</sup>

## Authorities' treatment of LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court decision

5. In 2024, the Coming Out group documented 279 cases of violations of LGBT+ rights. Police raids targeting LGBT+ persons have become a regular occurrence. At least 24

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<sup>501</sup> Citizens' Watch, Судебное преследование ЛГБТ+ по закону о "пропаганде" в России, 22 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>502</sup> AI, Russia: Lengthy prison term for transgender activist a punishment for anti-war stance, 12 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>503</sup> Mediazone, Москвича Олега Гранникова отправили в СИЗО по делу о госизмене, 1 September 2025, [url](#)

raids were conducted on clubs in 2024, often accompanied by detentions, violence, humiliation, and administrative fines. Organisers of these events subsequently became defendants in criminal cases related to activities associated with an extremist organisation.<sup>504</sup>

6. Attracting attention of Russian authorities as an LGBT+ person does not necessarily require physical activities. One of the most severe ways of attracting attention from the authorities is by posting LGBT+ content on Russian social media platforms such as “Vkontakte” or “Odnoklassniki”. Posts made even ten years earlier can be retrieved and used against an LGBT+ individual. AI stated that also deleted posts can be scrutinised. For example, the Russian social network VKontakte reportedly retains user data even after deletion and shares it with the police.<sup>505</sup> Prior to the decision of the Supreme Court, publishing LGBT+ content on social media was not problematic. However, most administrative cases from 2025 originate from such activities.
7. It may be a specific trigger that draws the authorities' attention to an individual. For example, a person might lodge a complaint with authorities about construction in the back yard, and this may prompt the authorities to examine the individual's social media activity.
8. The source provided the example of Liza Sturova from Voronezh. In 2012, she had defended activists' right to freedom of assembly. Although she later retired from activism, in 2023 her past activities reportedly resurfaced: compromising material was published, apparently to attract police attention when she sought to participate in a land auction as an entrepreneur. This reportedly prevented her from purchasing the land.<sup>506</sup>
9. In a recent case, a journalist was arrested. Although, the case itself was not related to LGBT+ issues, the journalist, who was a member of the LGBT+ community, had openly supported LGBT+ rights in Russia many years previously. For the past decade, he had not spoken about the subject. He was arrested for criticising Putin's war in Ukraine. But because the Russian media outlet Mediazona published a profile mentioning his LGBT+ identity, his case and conditions have become more difficult. In this instance, criticism of the war in Ukraine served as the trigger.
10. Regarding the question of whether police specifically target LGBT-persons, the source indicated that the police do not generally differentiate between people. However, some officers hold homophobic views and support anti-LGBT+ ideas.

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<sup>504</sup> OVD-Info, *Репрессии в России в 2024 году. Обзор ОВД-Инфо*. 17 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>505</sup> Nasha Niva, *Белорус удалил аккаунт в VK, но к нему все равно пришли из-за комментариев. Как нашли?*, 25 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>506</sup> 4 Pera, *Странный аукцион. Известная в Воронеже ЛГБТ-активистка Струрова-Лаптева проиграла суд новоусманскому фермеру Андрею Плоскину*, 28 February 2023, [url](#)

## Relatives of LGBT+ persons

11. Relatives of LGBT+ persons may also face pressure from police and vigilantes. In certain cases, the police have exerted pressure on family members to provide information to criminal cases initiated against one of their relatives. According to a 2024 report on LGBT+ rights in Russia, parents are reported to feel heightened vulnerability and live in a constant state of alert, fearing that their family may become the target of prejudice or misconduct.<sup>507</sup>

## Prison conditions for LGBT+ persons

12. Natalia Z. previously served on a public monitoring commission in Voronezh, which oversaw prison conditions in Voronezh region, including remand prisons (SIZOs) and FSB detention facilities near the border. At that time, the legislation was robust, and prisons could be monitored under the same mandate as the CPT (European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) (2008–2018)).
13. The Russian penitentiary system is characterised by an internal hierarchical system, in which inmates hold varying degrees of statuses. This caste system was established by the KGB in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a means of controlling the prison population. LGBT+ persons are typically assigned lowest status. Inmates in this category are relegated to the dirtiest tasks such as cleaning toilets, are prohibited from eating with other inmates, and are required to use separate cutlery. For example, Novaya Gazeta Europe reported that the jailed Russian mathematician Azat Miftakhov was given an additional four-year prison sentence for allegedly ‘justifying terrorism’ while in prison. According to the report, he was outed as homosexual in custody and is now considered to occupy one of the lowest positions in the prison hierarchy, performing menial tasks and facing a lack of protection from both other inmates and prison staff.<sup>508</sup>
14. Furthermore, the culture is marked by the idea that if co-inmates touch LGBT+ persons, they themselves become lower in hierarchy.<sup>509</sup>
15. Whether an LGBT+ person suffers discrimination, depends largely on the circulation of information, specifically whether other inmates are aware of their sexuality. As a result, LGBT+ persons attempt to conceal their sexual orientation.
16. Transgender persons cannot conceal their identity and are not eligible for transfer to a prison of their choice. Their situation is particularly difficult, as they require specialised

<sup>507</sup> Sphere Foundation, *Положение ЛГБТ+ людей в России в 2024: оценка правозащитников*, 15 May 2025, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>508</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe, *Jailed Russian mathematician given 4 more years in prison for ‘justifying terrorism’*, 29 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>509</sup> Meduza, «Отделившись от „мужиков“, я не стал хуже них. Мой путь стал труднее, но и только», 9 August 2025, [url](#)

medical treatment which is generally unavailable in prison. Prison authorities previously had protocols and attempted to minimise risks to transgender persons. However, the source had not been involved in monitoring current prison conditions and was therefore not aware of the current situation. No recent reports had been observed by the source.

17. The source did not have knowledge of any cases of abuse over the preceding 12 years. Two decades ago, rape was a widespread culture in Russian prisons, but for the past decade, rape has “ceased to be a normal occurrence”. The source was not aware of any registered complaints in Voronezh over the past seven years. However, there are ongoing reports concerning working conditions, beatings, difficulties in meeting with relatives, and challenging transfers to other prisons. Serious instances of torture and sexual violence have reportedly been documented by victims following their release. Journalists such as Merkacheva, working with the Public Monitoring Commission (POC) in Moscow, continue their oversight, although she reportedly does not document such cases on a large scale. Nevertheless, individual cases from other regions have come to light and have been reported in the media and on blogs—for example, reports of mass violence and mass rapes in Irkutsk.<sup>510</sup>
18. In general, sexual harassment continues to occur in Russian prisons, and there have been isolated cases of torture, for example using a soldering iron. However, the source emphasised that this does not reflect the general prison culture in Russia. While such cases exist, they are not widespread.
19. Prison staff attempt to protect inmates as much as possible but cannot provide protection in all situations. Perpetrators of aggressive behaviour may be cellmates and, in some cases, may also include prison staff.
20. The situation is similar in both red and black prisons.
21. Lesbians generally fare slightly better, as the prison hierarchy and associated culture are less pervasive in female prisons.

### Civil society's treatment of LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court decision

22. There have been instances in which LGBT+ individuals were reported to the police by members of civil society. For example, a university student was summoned before the university administration and instructed to conform to conventional appearance norms. In another case, a minor was detained in a Moscow park for promoting LGBT+ content during a youth event.<sup>511</sup> In St Petersburg, a group of young men attacked a company of

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<sup>510</sup> BBC, «Развяжу тебе руки, будешь писать». Крупнейший пыточный скандал в России прячут по различным судебным делам, 19 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>511</sup> Rambler/Novosti, 112: подростка задержали за пропаганду ЛГБТ в московском парке Об этом сообщают "Рамблер", 5 September 2025, [url](#)

women, severely beating one of them, reportedly because the women were holding hands and were perceived as lesbians; the suspects were subsequently detained<sup>512</sup>.

23. The source had no knowledge of cases of law enforcement officials stopping homosexual couples walking hand in hand in public. However, the source was aware of a case, where a conservative or anti-feminist activist noticed a frog-pin with rainbow colours. The activist held back the girl and contacted the police, who subsequently opened an administrative case against her for propaganda, resulting in a fine.<sup>513</sup>

24. Transgender persons are at greater risk of being reported by members of civil society, as their identity is more visible. Previously, transgender persons enjoyed some rights and had access to free medication and surgical procedures. However, the situation has changed dramatically after the Supreme Court decision. The lives and health of transgender individuals have been significantly affected by difficulties in accessing healthcare. Additionally, the general population faces risks due to raids on clubs and the harassment of LGBT+ persons in public spaces and on social media.

25. LGBT+ persons may face restrictions when seeking employment. Some corporations (both public and private) are able to check people against police databases, and if a precious administrative charge is discovered, this might impact the LGBT+ person's employment. The source was aware of one case in which a librarian was prevented from obtaining a position at a library. The individual was not publicly known as an activist. The case was reported to AI via social networks from Voronezh and is therefore not publicly available. According to the source, the lesbian individual involved has since left the city due to the situation and subsequently located the librarian in another city, Krasnodar.

26. According to the source, being a member of the LGBT+ community does not automatically place an individual at risk. Some LGBT+ persons, such as LGBT+ bloggers and political representatives (MPs), are able to live normal lives. Furthermore, it is possible to be an open LGBT+ person. The source provided the example of the prominent Russian blogger Aleksey Zhidkovsky,<sup>514</sup> who reportedly presents and behaves in a manner associated with being homosexual but has not publicly disclosed this. According to the source, he remains unprotected from the risk of denunciation and arrest.

27. It is still possible to live with an LGBT+ identity, albeit with greater difficulty following the introduction of the propaganda and extremism laws. The degree of risk of persecutions largely depends on visibility. If an LGBT+ person manages to keep the

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<sup>512</sup> RUS TVNET, *В Петербурге молодые парни избили девушек за то, что они держались за руки*, 12 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>513</sup> Mediazona, *Охотники за радугой. За какую символику ЛГБТК+ штрафуют россиян (и даже правые телеграм-каналы)*, 1 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>514</sup> 24SMI, *Алексей Жидковский*, n.d., [url](#)

sexual orientation or gender identity concealed from close friends, colleagues, and classmates, then the individual does not face the same risk than if being open. Sexual identity remains a sensitive issue in most communities.

#### **Situation in larger cities and in rural areas**

28. There are still organisations working with LGBT+ persons in Moscow. They organise groups for people who stay there, but activities are no longer public as they were prior to the Supreme Court decision – names of such organisations include Delo LGBT and the Moscow community centre, which has since been renamed the Moscow Cosmic Centre. It is still possible to visit LGBT+ clubs in Russia, although they are not as safe as they once were. Nevertheless, LGBT+ culture remains present in Moscow.
29. The risk of police attention and vigilante assaults is generally lower in larger cities such as St Petersburg, Moscow, or Yekaterinburg.
30. In rural areas, the situation may differ, as LGBT+ culture is far less visible outside larger cities. The source had no concrete cases on this.

#### **Returnees**

31. Upon returning to Russia, for example at one of the airports in Moscow, it is common practice for the authorities to take random individuals to a separate room for questioning. To AI's knowledge, there is no system or protocols for this border procedure. If a person is taken in for interrogation by the authorities, the traveller's telephone might be scrutinised to examine the content. As a consequence, many persons delete sensitive content of their phones before entering the country.
32. If LGBT+ apps are discovered during such phone searches, the authorities could potentially open an administrative case, e.g. for the search of extremist-related information. Legally, the risk of criminal prosecution for participation in an extremist community on basis of such search on the individual is real, although no judicial practice has yet been established. However, the source was not aware of any cases of this occurring upon return.
33. Regarding failed asylum seekers, it is generally considered safest not to return individuals. Nevertheless, if a person is not an activist or has not criticised the war in Ukraine, and is just an ordinary citizen, the source did not consider the risk of assaults to be significant.

## A researcher on LGBT+ rights

Online meeting, 27.08.25

### About the source and source of knowledge

*The source has, since the 1990s, been engaged in academic research and policy work with public institutions and civil society actors. This source' professional experience focuses on the human rights of LGBT+ persons, including issues of discrimination and persecution, alongside broader work on women's rights, gender equality, and related human rights concerns.*

### **Recent legislative developments**

1. There is nothing of significant novelty in federal legislation. The most recent changes occurred in 2023, when the Russian government enacted legislation prohibiting gender-affirming operations and related medical care for transgender individuals, whilst also prohibiting certain surgeries for intersex persons—namely those aimed at treating congenital anomalies of sexual development in children. These amendments manifest within the legal framework governing medical services.<sup>515</sup>
2. The legislation on extremism has been subject to continual modification, each iteration introducing more restrictive provisions than its predecessors. Following the Supreme Court ruling designating the so-called “international LGBT movement” as an extremist organisation, any subsequent amendments to the extremism framework necessarily exert direct consequences upon the LGBT+ community. In the wake of this ruling, LGBT+ persons are now liable to prosecution under both the Administrative Code and the Criminal Code in relation to extremism-related offences.

### **The courts and the legal system**

3. Amendments to the provisions governing extremism in the Russian Federation have been primarily of a socio-economic character, encompassing not only overtly violent acts but also so-called “propaganda” and other expressive conduct deemed extremist. The legislation sets out a detailed catalogue of activities defined as extremist. According to the Federal Law FZ-114 On Extremist Activities, extremist activities are defined as following (art.1):

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<sup>515</sup> [Federal Law N323 “On the Foundations of Healthcare”](#): (1) introduces art. 45.1 “Prohibition of sex change” to prohibit “any medical interference, including application of medication, enabling sex change, including forming primary and secondary sex characteristics of another sex”; (2) permits surgeries “related to congenital anomalies (developmental defects), genetic and endocrine deceases associated with impaired formation of the genital organs in children,” the decision for which is done by a special medical committee formed by a state medical facility, which effectively allows surgeries on intersex children without their consent (art. 45.1 part 2).

- Violent alteration of the foundations of the constitutional order and/or violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation (including the alienation of part of the territory of the Russian Federation), except for the delimitation, demarcation, or redemarcation of the State Border of the Russian Federation with neighboring states;
- Public justification of terrorism and other terrorist activities;
- Incitement of social, racial, national, or religious hatred;
- Propaganda of exclusivity, superiority, or inferiority of a person based on their social, racial, national, religious, or linguistic affiliation, or attitude toward religion;
- Violation of the rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests of a person and citizen depending on their social, racial, national, religious, or linguistic affiliation, or attitude toward religion;
- Obstruction of citizens' exercise of their electoral rights and the right to participate in a referendum, or violation of the secrecy of voting, when accompanied by violence or the threat of its use;
- Obstruction of the lawful activities of state bodies, local self-government bodies, electoral commissions, public or religious associations, or other organizations, when accompanied by violence or the threat of its use;
- Commission of crimes motivated by the grounds specified in paragraph "e" of part one of Article 63 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation;
- Use of Nazi attributes or symbols, or of attributes or symbols similar to Nazi ones to the point of confusion, or of attributes or symbols of extremist organizations — except in cases where such use is intended to form a negative attitude toward Nazi and extremist ideology and shows no signs of propaganda or justification of Nazi or extremist ideology;
- Public calls for the commission of the above acts, or mass distribution of knowingly extremist materials, as well as their production or storage for the purpose of mass distribution;
- Publicly known false accusation of a person holding a state office of the Russian Federation or a state office of a constituent entity of the Russian Federation, alleging that they committed, during their official duties, acts specified in this article and constituting a crime;
- Organization and preparation of the aforementioned acts, as well as incitement to commit them;
- Financing of the aforementioned acts or other assistance in their organization, preparation, or commission, including through the provision of educational, printing, or logistical resources, telephone or other communications, or information services.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> Federal law FZ-114 On Extremist Activities, dated 17 June 2006, with revisions and amendments 7 July 2025, [url](#)

4. For individuals, including LGBT+ persons, who are convicted of extremist offences, the consequences extend well beyond criminal or administrative sanctions. Those designated as extremists face severe civil and socio-economic restrictions. Once they are entered to the registry of extremists or terrorists as the result of either administrative or criminal conviction, they are barred from opening or maintaining bank accounts, and employers are prohibited from paying them salaries through the Russian financial system, they might have difficulties with leaving the country.<sup>517</sup>
5. Although the authorities have not, since 2023, enacted legislation overtly and directly discriminating against LGBT+ persons, they have instead expanded the reach of general extremist provisions in ways that disproportionately affect this community. The designation of the so-called “international LGBT movement” as extremist by the Supreme Court (November 2023) ensures that LGBT+ individuals may now be prosecuted under both Article 20.3 of the Administrative Code and under corresponding provisions of the Criminal Code (art. 280 and 282.1-4). As a result, LGBT+ persons convicted under these articles face not only legal sanctions but also exclusion from fundamental socio-economic, civil, and political rights. However, under Article 20.3, a person accused of extremism is not required to be arrested unless they are facing prosecution for a criminal offence.
6. In practical terms, the cumulative effect of these restrictions is to render LGBT+ citizens effectively second-class. Those branded as extremists are often compelled to consider emigration, having been deprived of the ability to hold bank accounts, receive salaries, or otherwise participate fully in civic life.
7. It should be noted that prosecutions under Administrative Code Article 20.3 have increased. According to a Russian monitoring webpage, the number of convictions has reportedly risen for 30 percent since 2023.<sup>518</sup> By contrast, a conviction under Administrative Code Article 6.21 (propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations) results “only” in a fine, without the broader socio-economic disabilities attached to extremist convictions.
8. At present, there are **6,812** prosecutions categorised as cases of extremism, all of which fall within the administrative jurisdiction.<sup>519</sup> Conviction in such proceedings results primarily in the imposition of a fine. Nevertheless, the consequences extend beyond pecuniary sanctions: individuals are entered into a state-maintained registry of persons convicted of extremist activities. While this register is formally accessible to law enforcement agencies, it may also be shared with employers and medical institutions, thereby creating conditions under which those listed are prevented from exercising rights to which they were previously entitled.

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<sup>517</sup> See information on the webpage of the agency responsible for monitoring – Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) – [url](#). See also a special service – CheckPerson, *Почему важно проверить человека на экстремизм и терроризм*, 10 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>518</sup> See Judicial Statistics RF – Sudyebnaya statistika RF, *Административные правонарушения*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

9. Prior to the Supreme Court ruling of November 2023, the annual caseload of convictions for extremism amounted to approximately 1,000 to 1,500 cases. These were predominantly related to nazi propaganda, affiliations with far-right organisations, or links to Islamic State. However, in the immediate aftermath of the Supreme Court decision designating the so-called “international LGBT movement” as extremist, the number of prosecutions increased threefold. By January 2025, there were **around 6,812** administrative cases, of which approximately 4,000 concerned various forms of “justification of extremism.” According to the source, a substantial proportion of these prosecutions were directed against LGBT+ related activities. The source observed that it is not possible to determine with precision how many of the prosecutions for extremism are directly connected to LGBT+ activities, since the authorities do not disclose disaggregated data. While the Russian authorities regularly publish overall figures for convictions under the articles on extremism, these statistics do not specify the underlying grounds for conviction. Consequently, the category of “extremism” encompasses a broad spectrum of conduct, ranging from LGBT+ related activities to actions associated with the war in Ukraine. Of the **6,812** prosecutions initiated on grounds of extremism, 5,875 have resulted in convictions.<sup>520</sup>
10. Furthermore, the implementation of extremism legislation is marked by a degree of arbitrariness. In practice, this may result in divergent judicial interpretations, whereby one judge sentences an individual under Article 6.21, whilst another imposes liability for the same conduct under Article 20.3. Such inconsistency presents a considerable challenge for defence lawyers, who routinely attempt to have charges reclassified under Article 6.21, which carries less severe consequences. This applied strategy is frequently unsuccessful, particularly in the regions outside Russia’s major urban centres, where judicial discretion tends to be more restrictive. The judges tend to use art. 20.3 more frequently and view any LGBT visibility and activity as extremist.
11. In Moscow, judicial practice tends to be more consistent, with judges in the majority of cases delivering rulings in a relatively uniform manner. By contrast, in the regions there exists a marked diversity of judicial approaches, resulting in considerable variation in the interpretation and application of the law.
12. According to the source, marked regional discrepancies exist in the enforcement of legislation and practices relating to LGBT+ persons in the Russian Federation, particularly between regions with Muslim-majority. In regions with a predominantly Muslim population, extrajudicial violence against LGBT+ persons is reportedly more prevalent and largely unpunished by the courts. At the same time, the courts in these regions seldom prosecute LGBT+ individuals themselves, nor do they bring charges

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<sup>520</sup> Ibid. See also [SOVA Centre](#), which monitors every conviction related to extremism. While they do not provide statistical overviews as such, they publish details of each case brought under the extremism legislation that comes to their attention. In practice, they make publicly available references to all such cases: Sova, *Антиэкстремизм в 2024 году: регулирование публичных высказываний и организованной деятельности*, 14 July 2025, [url](#)

against perpetrators of violence directed at members of the LGBT+ community. Consequently, there is limited availability of official statistics or court records from these areas. The majority of Muslim regions are situated in the North Caucasus, although the Republic of Tatarstan was also cited by the source as falling within this category.

13. With regard to criminal prosecutions for extremism, the source observed that these are significantly fewer in number compared with administrative cases, amounting to approximately 700 cases with 800–900 people under prosecution.<sup>521</sup> This is primarily because prosecutions for extremism are generally initiated under administrative proceedings, unless the violation in question involves serious violence. Nevertheless, a small number of cases have advanced to the level of criminal prosecution. The source pointed to the well-known case concerning the Pose Club, initiated in the previous year, in which the organisers were accused of coordinating participation in the so-called LGBT+ extremist movement. Owing to the collective nature of the alleged conduct, the matter was treated as a criminal offence.<sup>522</sup> It was regarded as a case of serious violence given the participation of several persons, since it advanced into criminal conduct.
14. Unlike in administrative proceedings, it is possible to identify the specific form of extremism at issue in criminal prosecutions. According to the source, half of the 700 criminal cases were directed against LGBT+ persons. However, public access to the relevant court database (*GAS RF Pravosudie*) has since been closed, restricting the ability to verify and analyse such cases independently.<sup>523</sup>
15. The source further noted procedural differences between administrative and criminal prosecutions in Russia. Administrative proceedings function in practice as a form of summary justice, characterised by a lower evidentiary threshold, and reduced procedural safeguards: neither witnesses nor defence counsel are required, whilst the standard of proof is minimal compared with the demanded in criminal proceedings. For this reason, authorities frequently resort to administrative charges as a means of securing convictions against LGBT+ persons.
16. Moreover, the authorities reportedly apply a cumulative approach in which repeated administrative convictions can lead to escalation into criminal liability. Specifically, following two administrative convictions – typically resulting in fines – a third conviction, regardless of the precise administrative offence, is automatically converted into a

<sup>521</sup> See Judicial Statistics RF - Sudyebnaya statistika RF, *Уголовное судопроизводство*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>522</sup> OVD-Info, *В Оренбурге в суд поступило первое в России уголовное дело о «международном движении ЛГБТ»*, 10 July 2025, [url](#). See official press release on the case from the regional court here: Investigation Department of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation in the Orenburg Region, *В Оренбурге завершено расследование уголовного дела по факту организации и участия в деятельности экстремистского движения*, 9 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>523</sup> See overview from Current Time here: See overview from Current Time here: *Nastoyashchee Vremya, Уголовные дела, рейды в клубах и заявления Путина. Как изменилась жизнь ЛГБТК-людей в России в 2024 году*, 10 January 2025, [url](#)

criminal charge. This practice enables the authorities to criminalise individuals through the systematic accumulation of administrative penalties. However, no data are available in this issue.

### Access to legal representation

17. According to the source, LGBT+ persons do have access to legal representation, and the quality of lawyers available to them is generally regarded as competent and qualified. Human rights lawyers are appointed only in criminal cases. However, lawyers who defend LGBT+ persons may themselves be subjected to harassment or even prosecution, on the grounds that they are protecting an 'extremist'.<sup>524</sup>
18. In cases involving administrative sentences, legal representation is not mandatory and thus not appointed automatically. However, an accused person may retain a lawyer, should they wish to do so.
19. If the mother tongue of the accused is not Russian, they are in principle entitled to the assistance of an interpreter in court. This situation is not uncommon, as there are many Russian citizens—such as those from the North Caucasus, Buryatia, or Yakutia—who do not speak Russian fluently. However, in practice, defendants may not always receive interpretation, particularly if they are unaware of this right. This might result on misunderstanding the charge and agreeing with something that the defendant did not do.

### Authorities' treatment of LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court decision

20. According to the source, an LGBT+ person could face prosecution solely on the basis of their identity. This is not contingent upon any particular action they may have taken or the degree to which they express themselves. Rather, a person could be prosecuted simply because a neighbour reported them to the authorities for being queer.
21. The source was aware of a case involving a couple who were living together. Their neighbour reported them to the police on the grounds of their perceived queer identity, whereupon the police attended the apartment and arrested them. Subsequently, they were subjected to interrogation, during which one of the individuals admitted to being queer, and prosecution followed on that basis.
22. Although membership of the LGBT+ community is not in itself illegal in Russia, admitting to being queer is construed as an affiliation with the so-called international LGBT movement, which has been designated as extremist.
23. Well-known LGBT+ figures in Russia, such as the prominent pro-Kremlin journalist Anton Krasovsky, are still able to move about freely. However, their position remains contingent on judicial discretion, and it would merely require a particular judge to

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<sup>524</sup> See overview by OVD-Info for 2024 on prosecution of lawyers and human rights defenders: OVD-Info, *Правоохранители против правозащитников: как российское государство преследует правозащитников*, 31 October 2024, [url](#)

initiate prosecution. Individuals like Krasovsky, however, are likely to benefit from the necessary connections and protection to avoid prosecution at the present time.

24. The previously mentioned case concerning the Pose Club in Orenburg may be compared with a more recent case from 2024 in the city of Tula, which proceeded to court in August 2025. These proceedings concern charges of participation in an extremist organisation, accompanied by an additional allegation relating to the dissemination of pornography. The case arose after a young individual on social media shared an image of two men kissing. The defendants are being prosecuted under the criminal code. It is noteworthy that those facing prosecution had previously been engaged in human rights activism.<sup>525</sup>
25. Administrative offences are primarily linked to allegations of 'propaganda', whereas criminal offences generally relate to participation in LGBT+ movement activities, which, pursuant to the ruling of the Supreme Court, has been designated an extremist organisation. This includes propaganda of extremist activities not just LGBT+-related matters, which falls under extremism.
26. As of August 2025, there is a movement in which individuals attend court proceedings on a daily basis in order to document developments. This initiative emerged after the authorities restricted access to judicial databases. Observers attend hearings to establish what is taking place in the courtroom and subsequently report on the number of sessions held and the issues under consideration. In this way, it becomes possible to gain an understanding of developments across many regions of Russia.

### Possibility to assemble

27. There continue to be gay clubs in Russia, some of which remain partially accessible online. The source was uncertain about the nature of these clubs' relationships with the authorities. Many operate underground. Some LGBT+ individuals now perceive certain clubs as potential provocations, and consequently avoid attending them, fearing that authorities might raid the venue while they are present. The source likened the current situation for LGBT+ persons in Russia to that of the 1950s in the United States.
28. On the other hand, civil society organisations remain a primary means of communication within the LGBT+ community. While some organisations were forced to leave Russia following the Supreme Court ruling, many remained, with some operating underground while continuing their activities. These organisations continue to provide legal and medical support, advice, and safe spaces for LGBT+ individuals. Many of these activities are subject to high-security protocols, requiring participants to verify their identity before gaining access.
29. Although, the app Grinder was banned in Russia, the LGBT+ community invented their own application. Grinder was seen by the authorities as a Western instrument and extremist.

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<sup>525</sup> Parni+, СМИ: в Туле новое дело об «ЛГБТ-экстремизме», 18 August 2025, [url](#)

30. The source noted that LGBT+ persons could hold private parties or gatherings. However, if a report is made indicating that such an event is taking place in a particular apartment, authorities could potentially raid the premises. In these situations, the source advised that participants should refrain from opening the door, as the police would not normally force entry without probable cause. Under standard Russian procedure, entry requires a court order. Nevertheless, the extremist legislation provides that if the police suspect extremist activity is occurring in a private residence, they are authorised to break down the door without a court order. The source was not aware of any cases in which the police had raided private gatherings.

#### **Consequences for relatives**

31. According to the source, relatives of LGBT+ persons could potentially face socio-economic consequences. If a relative of a person accused of extremist activity who then ends up on the extremist registry transfers any amount of money into the accused individual's bank account, they could be considered an accomplice. There have been documented cases of relatives being prosecuted on such grounds, primarily in relation to support for Ukraine. As of August 2025, however, there are no documented cases of relatives of LGBT+ persons being prosecuted in this manner.

#### **LGBT+ content in social media**

32. The source noted that there is a high risk associated with being active on social media. Prosecutions of LGBT+ individuals have often been initiated based on their online activity. As of August 2025, Russian authorities are attempting to increase internet monitoring and restrict access to communication applications such as Telegram and WhatsApp, primarily because the platforms' developers have refused to provide encryption keys, preventing state monitoring of content. Authorities are now seeking to replace these services with the domestically developed application Max, which would enable the state to monitor user content and track online activity.

33. However, as of 2025, Russian authorities do not possess the technical capacity to monitor all 153 million Russian citizens. Instead, they employ specific code words in combination with specialised algorithms to identify content deemed extremist. The source anticipated that this approach will lead to an increase in prosecutions for extremist activities under both administrative and criminal codes.

34. On the other hand, many Russians continue to believe in their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of speech. Some individuals actively advocate for these freedoms, though some face prosecution as a result. As of August 2025, there remain relatively safe online spaces in Russia, including secure groups and messaging applications. Much of the LGBT+ community now relies on platforms such as Signal, which is end-to-end encrypted and has not yet been banned.

#### **Behaviour and appearance triggering state action**

35. The authorities do not seek to prosecute every individual encountered in public, as they lack the capacity to do so, both at the state level and within local police departments. Their approach is therefore to resort to arbitrariness: some individuals are targeted while others are not. This resembles a selective punitive practice to control by fear. The unpredictability of this practice generates a climate of uncertainty, as no one can anticipate who might be singled out next, which in turn fosters widespread anxiety. In this way, the authorities cultivate an atmosphere of fear. Even persons who are not actively under scrutiny may nevertheless feel threatened, particularly when acquaintances have faced prosecution simply because they were reported by others or because of material posted on social media platforms such as VKontakte.
36. There are LGBT+ individuals residing in cities such as Novokuznetsk who maintain contact with people outside their locality but, lacking English-language skills, have little awareness of or conceptual framework for emigration. They are, in essence, ordinary people living in relative isolation, who do not perceive themselves as unusual or deviant. While they may occasionally have experienced minor altercations, prior to the Supreme Court ruling, they were in principle able to seek legal redress through the courts, invoking hate speech legislation for protection. Indeed, before 2018, there existed a relatively effective procedure within the Russian Federation through which victims of such attacks could obtain protection under hate crime legislation.
37. However, following the Supreme Court ruling of 2023, such recourse is no longer available. Thus, if an LGBT+ person was to approach the court in August 2025 to report having been assaulted or verbally abused, this would in practice provoke the attention of the authorities. An investigation would then be opened, during the course of which the individual's membership of the LGBT+ community would be disclosed.

#### **Differences in the treatment of homosexual men and women, bisexuals, and transpersons**

38. The source opined that the situation for LGBT+ persons in Russia in 2025 is worse than it was in the Soviet Union during the 1970s and 1980s. While public expression of sexuality was limited at that time and individuals often concealed their sexual orientation out of fear, the environment was relatively less repressive. Male homosexuality was criminalised, whereas homosexual women were not subject to criminal penalties. Instead, LGBT+ women were often confined to psychiatric institutions, as lesbianism was classified as a psychiatric condition. By the 1980s, however, the use of psychiatric hospitals for lesbians had largely fallen into disuse.
39. As of August 2025, Russian authorities are reportedly using alternative categories of criminal activity to prosecute LGBT+ individuals. While official statements claim that human rights are respected, authorities rely on other legislation to pursue prosecutions—an approach reminiscent of Stalinist practices—thereby maintaining an atmosphere of fear.
40. The patriarchy and the Russian state, which is predominantly male in its composition—with the police force largely consisting of men—exert control over male bodies and

behaviour. As a result, men have historically been more vulnerable to harassment and prosecution than women. However, women are increasingly being subjected to such measures as well. Previously, authorities paid comparatively little attention to women, provided they were neither activists nor highly visible.

41. Prior to the Supreme Court ruling, LGBT+ women were still able to adopt children. However, this option has never been available to men in Russia, including heterosexual men.
42. Under the extremist legislation, an increasing number of women have been prosecuted, representing a marked change from the period preceding the Supreme Court ruling. These figures encompass both criminal and administrative offences. Compared with the number of men prosecuted, women currently constitute approximately 17 percent of cases, whereas prior to the Supreme Court ruling, women accounted for only 5 percent of prosecutions.

#### **Situation in North Caucasus**

43. With regard to Chechnya, there have been no improvements for the LGBT+ community. In regions such as Chechnya, interpersonal and extrajudicial violence remain widespread. In such cases, law enforcement agencies often turn a blind eye, permitting semi-military patrols—commonly referred to as ‘community patrols’, which are not police—to monitor the streets, according to adat. These patrols enforce informal codes, such as dress standards for women, including the wearing of headscarves. To the source’s knowledge, such patrols are not present in Ingushetia or Dagestan and represent a distinct phenomenon specific to Chechnya.
44. These patrols actively target individuals in public spaces. There have been reports that they physically assault persons suspected of being gay, lesbian, or transgender. Moreover, they have pursued individuals who attempted to escape to other regions of the Russian Federation, such as Moscow.
45. In both Chechnya and Dagestan, there is a high prevalence of honour-related violence. In this context, all LGBT+ persons from these regions may face the risk of honour killings by relatives for allegedly violating family norms due to their sexual orientation. Consequently, it is not safe for such individuals to relocate outside these regions. One of the most notorious cases is that of Seda Suleimanova who fled Chechnya to avoid forced marriage but was arrested by the police in St Petersburg on a bogus charge of theft and deported back to Chechnya. Suleimanova has been officially missing since January 2025.<sup>526</sup> While Suleimanova is not officially part of LGBT community, she never came out and even married in St Petersburg, but the case is telling.

#### **Imprisonment of LGBT+ persons**

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<sup>526</sup> Kavkaz.Realii, "Откуда столько жестокости?" Продюсер фильма об убийстве чести – о преследовании геев в Чечне, 21 August 2022, [url](#)

46. The general conditions for LGBT+ persons in Russian prisons are bad. They are not segregated from the general prison population, and there are no legal protections specifically for them, as the relevant legislation dates back to the 1990s and essentially continues Soviet-era norms. The only statutory provisions for separation apply to children and women; women are housed in separate facilities from men, and pregnant women are entitled to additional care. However, these measures primarily address hygiene and health considerations rather than protection or safety.
47. Prison authorities (FSIN) also segregate inmates accused of crimes such as paedophilia to protect them from potential violence by the general prison population. However, no such provisions exist for LGBT+ individuals, leaving them unprotected and integrated within the general population.
48. In Russia, there have been discussions regarding the placement of transgender individuals within the penal system, including in remand prisons (SIZO) and correctional colonies. Initially, authorities attempted to assign transgender persons according to the gender listed on their official documents. This approach was tried in two cases: placement in women's prisons was feasible, but placement in men's prisons proved unsuitable. Subsequently, authorities resorted to placing transgender individuals in isolation. However, in the Russian penal system, isolation is generally reserved for heinous offenders, making it an inappropriate and unsafe form of incarceration.
49. By placing transgender individuals in isolation, authorities further exacerbate their vulnerability within the prison population. Moreover, once an individual is confined to isolation in a Russian prison, prison personnel have increased opportunities to abuse them. The source reported a case from 2016 in which a transgender prisoner was placed in isolation and subsequently raped by prison staff. Although this case was not publicly documented, it prompted an internal investigation, resulting in the prosecution and punishment of the responsible staff. Normally it would require public attention to a case for investigation to start or for perpetrators to be held responsible.
50. Lawyers frequently petition for safer conditions for LGBT+ persons in prison. While the legislation does not formally provide for protective measures based on sexual orientation or gender identity, it previously allowed for improved conditions on medical grounds for transgender prisoners. In practice, if a lawyer requested safer conditions due to a prisoner's transgender status, these requests were generally granted. However, such provisions have reportedly ceased to be applied following the 2023 ruling of the Supreme Court.
51. Numerous reports document torture and violence against LGBT+ activists held in remand prisons. One of the latest cases is the death of Andrei Kotov, owner of the travel agency MenTravel in SIZO 'Vodnik' in Moscow. Kotov was tortured and humiliated during investigation. He allegedly committed suicide.<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Nastoyashchee Vremya, "Он даже не понял, почему за ним пришли, начали бить и довели до смерти". Как в СИЗО погиб директор турфирмы "Мен Тревел", 6 January 2025, [url](#)

52. According to information from lawyers and human rights organisations, intimidation in remand prisons often originates from the general prison population, including both prison personnel and other detainees. Technically, prison staff are obliged to ensure the safety of those subjected to overt harassment. In practice, however, they frequently fail to provide such protection. It is possible to file a complaint, and there are numerous documented cases of LGBT+ persons reporting harassment and intimidation in remand prisons.
53. Imprisoned LGBT+ persons are often regarded as political prisoners, a designation with historical precedent dating back to the Soviet Union. The designation of LGBT+ persons as political prisoners can place them in a more precarious position, potentially exposing them to violations such as physical attacks. However, it should be noted that there are also numerous reports of such abuses against other male prisoners, making it difficult to determine whether LGBT+ detainees are disproportionately disadvantaged compared with the general population in remand prisons.
54. Experts monitoring women's prisons generally report that the conditions for homosexual women are less severe than those for men in terms of exposure to violence. This may be attributed to the fact that many women in prison are incarcerated as survivors of domestic abuse, often having reacted to assaults by injuring or killing their partners, which is a common scenario in Russia. Nevertheless, homosexual women in remand prisons are reported to feel more vulnerable than gay men. Reports of such incidents were mostly made to their lawyers. Women are subject to sexual violence from guards not fellow inmates.

#### **Situation for LGBT+ persons in civil society**

55. LGBT+ persons can file complaints with the police if they feel threatened by others, such as vigilante groups. The Russian state does not condone violence carried out without the state's authorisation. According to the source, although some vigilante groups may perceive themselves as having implicit state approval to target LGBT+ persons, this is not the case, as such actions interfere with the state's control.
56. The Russian authorities do not tolerate the actions of vigilante groups, and such groups are typically subject to harsh prosecution. For instance, far-right organisations have received severe sentences for their activities, including attacks on LGBT+ persons. In this context, the nature of the groups' actions is largely irrelevant. According to the source, the state's position is clear: it does not permit extrajudicial violence, as allowing such behaviour could ultimately enable these groups to turn their violence against the state itself, which is unacceptable to the authorities.
57. The source concluded that same principle applies to neighbours of LGBT+ individuals: if they engage in physical assault against an LGBT+ person, this is similarly unacceptable to the authorities.
58. With regard to harassment and prosecution for such, the Civil Code of the Russian Federation contains provisions addressing reputational damage and insult. Civil Code

art. 152 reputational damage; art. 133 Criminal code sexual harassment. The source opined that the likelihood of obtaining a conviction for harassment is relatively high, as civil law judges in Russia differ from their criminal law counterparts. Civil judges focus primarily on whether harassment or insult has occurred, rather than on the identity of the victim. Consequently, it does not matter whether the victim is a member of the LGBT+ community. It is highly possible that an LGBT+ person complaining to the authorities due to an attack, does not risk drawing the authorities' attention to the fact that they are a member of the LGBT+ community and thereby risk subsequent individual prosecution.

59. President Putin has not made public statements explicitly against the LGBT+ community. According to him, LGBT+ persons are members of society like everyone else. However, he has expressed disapproval of claims by the LGBT+ community for additional legal protections, maintaining that all citizens are equal under Russian law. However, the authorities' rhetoric has increasingly and openly become homophobic within the framework of traditional values, which has impacted public opinion.<sup>528</sup>
60. The general attitude within Russian civil society does not frame the LGBT+ community as a societal problem. Broadly speaking, the public is largely indifferent, unless the authorities actively promote propaganda that casts the LGBT+ community as a scapegoat or as a vehicle of Western ideology. Overall, Russian society has been seen to be relatively tolerant towards LGBT+ individuals. Numerous surveys indicate that the Russian public generally does not concern itself with the LGBT+ community. The problem arises when the state deliberately criminalises LGBT+ persons, creating an atmosphere in which some people adopt a Soviet-era mindset: if these individuals are being criminalised, there must be some justification for it.
61. Following the Supreme Court ruling, surveys indicate that public attitudes have deteriorated. Approximately 60 percent of the Russian population now express the view that LGBT+ persons should be criminalised, while around 40 percent remain uncertain or ambivalent.<sup>529</sup> In this sense, public sentiment appears to be shifting negatively.

### Regional differences

62. Regarding regional differences in the perception of the LGBT+ community in Russia, the source cited a report by the Sphere Foundation, which identified significant variations across different regions.<sup>530</sup>
63. In general, larger cities such as Moscow, St Petersburg, and even Khabarovsk display more tolerant attitudes towards the LGBT+ community compared to rural areas. Among

<sup>528</sup> See analysis of Current Times of Putin's speeches in relation to LGBT community: Nastoyashchee Vremya, Уголовные дела, рейды в клубах и заявления Путина. Как изменилась жизнь ЛГБТК-людей в России в 2024 году, 10 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>529</sup> Levada Center, Отношение к гомосексуальности, правам ЛГБТ-людей и «пропаганде гомосексуализма»: октябрь 2024, 18 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>530</sup> Sphere foundation, Положение ЛГБТ+ людей в России в 2024 году, 15 May 2025, [url](#)

these, St Petersburg is considered the most tolerant city for LGBT+ persons. The source visited the city in June and observed two women kissing on a bridge at midnight; a nearby family with a young child of around seven remarked neutrally, demonstrating the broader civil society's indifference to such displays. While tolerance is relatively higher in large urban centres, the source cautioned against publicly provocative behaviour even in large urban centres due to associated risks.

64. There are significant challenges regarding the perception of the LGBT+ community in regions such as the Far East and the North Caucasus. In the Far East, attitudes have become less tolerant than in the past. Local authorities and presidential representatives are now actively promoting traditional values and related norms.

#### **Targeted media campaigns**

65. When the government intervenes to promote a negative perception of the LGBT+ community, according to the source, this has a direct adverse effect on public attitudes in Russia. In many regions, the perception of the LGBT+ community had previously been neutral. Cultural access remains possible in some areas, for example, one can still view TV series such as *Heartstopper* with Russian dubbing on *Vkontakte*.
66. There are organised state-led media campaigns targeting the LGBT+ community, typically framed around the promotion of traditional values. These campaigns often invoke the notion that everyone loves children and that children must be protected. The underlying message is not that Russians need protection from the LGBT+ community per se, but rather that demographic concerns—such as declining birth rates and women's reluctance to have children—are attributed to the LGBT+ population, framed as "all the best men are gay." An example of such a campaign occurred in the Sverdlovsk region in 2024. Similar campaigns have also linked the LGBT+ community to anti-abortion messaging, alleging that LGBT+ individuals promote abortion propaganda.
67. The source concluded that much depends on the context. The mass media in Russia is not inherently conservative and often seeks to operate freely. However, when the state intervenes, there are significant consequences, including financial penalties, prosecutions, and even the potential shutdown of media outlets. As a result, media organisations adopt a cautious approach, effectively flying below the radar. While they are able to operate to some extent, being noticed by the authorities can rapidly alter the editorial tone of a publication. This applies as much to individuals exercising freedom of speech, who may also face complaints filed against them by private citizens to the police.
68. One consequence of the propaganda law is that the state is highly reluctant to discuss the LGBT+ community publicly. The source noticed a dual effect of this: on one hand, it restricts individuals' ability to express themselves; on the other hand, it limits the scope of public discourse. As a result, even anti-LGBT+ statements are discouraged, as they constitute engagement with the topic. Consequently, it becomes challenging to conduct targeted media campaigns against the LGBT+ community, as such initiatives themselves could be classified as propaganda.

69. There continue to be campaigns targeting LGBT+ persons, although most originate from far-right organisations' websites rather than from the state. The source noted that far-right groups often perceive themselves as morally superior to the state, believing they are pursuing a righteous cause by targeting the LGBT+ community. These groups are also subject to prosecution by the state under extremism legislation.
70. There are campaigns on social media platforms such as VKontakte in which LGBT+ persons are publicly outed. Additionally, blackmail campaigns target professionals, including teachers and medical personnel. These actions are typically carried out by far-right and vigilante groups rather than by state authorities. Vigilante actors often prioritise targeting officials, lawyers, and deputies, rather than teachers; nonetheless, being outed can result in professional consequences, including job loss.

#### **Civil society reporting LGBT+ persons to the authorities**

71. According to the source, Russian society is gradually adopting elements reminiscent of the Soviet era in terms of pervasive fear. This fear originates from a social environment in which neighbours monitored one another. However, younger generations, including researchers and activists, argue that such fear is largely imagined and does not reflect the current reality.<sup>531</sup>
72. Researchers and activists note that the majority of reporting on civilians originate from social media monitoring and police surveillance, rather than from complaints filed by fellow citizens. While there are instances in which private individuals report LGBT+ persons to the authorities, according to the source, such cases remain relatively rare.<sup>532</sup>
73. According to the source, younger generations appear to be more concerned with surveillance and violations of privacy and freedom of expression than with the possibility of neighbours reporting individuals to the police.

#### **Conversion therapy**

74. Conversion therapy in Russia began to emerge gradually around 2018–2019, initially in facilities that had previously specialised in treating drug addiction, which started offering services aimed at “sex correction.” This practice intensified after 2023, following prohibitions on gender transition. Since then, transgender individuals have been effectively trapped in their bodies, while families have been granted, informally, a form of authority to subject their children to conversion therapy.
75. Evidence on this issue remains limited. However, a journalistic project called Sistema investigated the matter by sending reporters undercover to health facilities in the Moscow region. They discovered that these facilities predominantly subjected transgender individuals to conversion therapy aimed at “curing” their gender identity. The journalists documented the methods employed, including electroshock. As part of

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<sup>531</sup> Sphere foundation, *Положение ЛГБТ+ людей в России в 2024 году*, 15 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>532</sup> Telegram, Осторожно, Москва, *Пассажир метро донес на соседку по вагону за пропаганду ЛГБТ из-за цветной ленточки на рюкзаке*, 17 April 2023, [url](#).

the therapy, transgender individuals were also forced to visit drug dens and locations associated with sex work, under the pretext that this would be the outcome if they continued to identify as transgender.<sup>533</sup>

### Situation for returnees

76. According to the source, Russian authorities monitor individuals perceived as activists or public figures who continue their work while living abroad. For example, prominent figures such as Masha Gessen avoid returning to Russia due to concerns about state scrutiny and potential reprisals.
77. Moreover, Russian authorities also monitor individuals who have been vocal in Western media or who have published articles concerning the LGBT+ community in Russia. Such persons may receive admonitions on “how to love the motherland” upon crossing the Russian border and could be detained for interrogation for several hours. The authorities systematically monitor mass media, so any articles published by these individuals are likely to attract official attention. Additionally, Russian embassies monitor local media abroad, meaning that publications in foreign outlets can also come under the scrutiny of Russian authorities.
78. An LGBT+ person who has posted content on Facebook or other social media platforms may be at risk of detention for extremist activities upon returning to Russia. However, the risk of imminent detention is by the source considered to be relatively low. The source emphasised that it is complicated to determine to which extent the Russian authorities monitor online activity of citizens residing abroad. While there have been no documented cases of LGBT+ persons being detained upon return, there have been political cases involving human rights lawyers or individuals connected to Ukraine-related topics. For example, the source was aware of a case where a human rights lawyer was detained upon re-entry but released after a few hours of questioning.
79. The source had knowledge of one surveillance list of the Russian authorities known as Storozhevoy Kontrol, which border guards have access to. When an individual passes through passport control, their name may trigger an alert. If this occurs, border officials initiate a conversation (беседа)—a formal lecture—addressing the individual’s activities or behaviour. This is generally not applied to individuals who have been abroad for several years; it is primarily targeted at known activists and public figures.
80. Border guards may attempt to pressure individuals into incriminating themselves in order to gather material for prosecution. However, the source had not encountered any cases in which individuals actually did so. Guards may also attempt to inspect the contents of a person’s phone. Individuals are not legally obliged to surrender their phones; even under extremist legislation, authorities require a court order to access

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<sup>533</sup> Nastoyashee Vremya, *Журналистское расследование впервые запечатлело сеансы конверсионной терапии ЛГБТК-персон в России. Главное из фильма проекта "Система"*, 4 March 2024, [url](#)

phone content. This right is guaranteed by the Constitution (art. 15.1; art. 23.2). At border crossings, no such court order is present, meaning these actions constitute intimidation and possible risk of exposure rather than a lawful search. However, if the Federal security officers act on the suspicion that the person has committed an administrative or criminal offense (in our case is suspected of extremist activities), they can try to have access to personal data stored on electronic devices.<sup>534</sup> While the person can (and people often do) refuse to grant access to their mobile phones, it is perceived by the security officers as an admission of guilt and may result in administrative prosecution (mostly a fine).<sup>535</sup>

81. Border guards may attempt to inspect an activist's Facebook account on their phone, but this is ineffective in Russia, as Facebook is blocked within the country. Consequently, even if an activist were to provide consent, authorities cannot access the account. Guards can also encounter LGBT+ content on other social media profiles, accounts or pages, but the recommendation from lawyers and human right defenders these days is to 'clean' your phone – sign out from all Social Media accounts; most of them are blocked anyway, and not to have a VPN of any type installed as well as switch off roaming and data transfer altogether.<sup>536</sup> According to the source, these actions at the border serve primarily as intimidation. Nonetheless, not everyone withstands such pressure and few has knowledge about their rights, and some individuals may give in and open their phones for inspection which might lead to self-incrimination.

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<sup>534</sup> Art. 13и of FZ-40 Federal Security Service, from 03 April 1995, with amendments and revisions from 1 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>535</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe, *Как подготовиться к пересечению границы с Россией? Что делать, если потребуют разблокировать телефон?*, 23 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>536</sup> Nastoyashchee Vremya, "Личные телефоны стали основной уязвимостью". Как россиян преследуют из-за переписок и данных в смартфонах, 29 February 2024, [url](#)

**Media Hub Riga, journalist**

Riga, 04.09.25

*Media Hub Riga is a private, non-governmental organisation providing support to the independent media community.*

**The legal system since the Supreme Court decision in November 2023**

1. The source did not provide specific numbers on administrative and criminal charges but assumed that they have risen since the supreme court ruling. The source opined that the increase in criminal charges is not as high as anticipated, but this could be related to the law not being widely applied. The source compared the extremism law to the foreign agents' law, stating that it took several years for it to come into full effect.
2. It is not evident from practice when charges are brought under extremism provisions as opposed to under the propaganda law. The extremism cases that the source recalled did not concern LGBT+ persons, but the source stated that the legislation has the purpose of forcing people to compel self-censorship. It only takes a couple of publicised criminal cases to make thousands of people afraid, the source noted. Publishing houses have been targeted for distributing books containing LGBT+ content.

**Behaviour and appearance triggering state action**

3. The source compared the extremism and propaganda laws to the foreign agents' law, in the sense that there is no clear indication or criteria for what type of actions may breach the threshold of accepted behaviour. The source stated that this is a deliberately applied method of Russian authorities. A person may never know at what point and for what the authorities may be triggered. As a consequence of this inconsistency, people start to self-censor.
4. The source claimed that prominent figures in Russia seem to have a broader room to manoeuvre than ordinary citizens, citing that are several known homosexual persons in Russia who are a part of the state apparatus.
5. In Soviet times, there was a censorship bureau, to which authors or creators could send their writings in order to get them censored prior to publication. In modern Russia, no such bureau exists, making it difficult for creators to navigate in the differences between legal and illegal material.
6. Regarding the LGBT+ community, the source stated that most of it has gone underground. Members of the community also find it difficult to navigate around invisible red lines, as there are no explicit rules or law forbidding, for example, holding hands in public or kissing.
7. The source was not aware of any arrests conducted solely on these grounds but noted that the risk depends on the concrete situation. However, LGBT+ persons generally avoid publicly displaying symbols that could be associated with the LGBT+ movement such as rainbows.

8. Some publishing houses have been threatened by the authorities for distributing books containing LGBT+ content.
9. Furthermore, the source had heard of raids on clubs, including gay clubs, by police, adding that gay clubs can no longer officially acknowledge their LGBT+ orientation. According to the source, these raids are used to intimidate guests, check on their documents, and to see whether there are illegal immigrants among them. According to the source, some administrative charges have been filed in connection with these raids, but the source could not recall anyone cases of imprisonment of LGBT+ persons in relation to the nightclub raids.

#### **Civil society's treatment of LGBT+ persons**

10. According to the source, Russian society has gradually become less LGBT+ friendly since the 2010s, following the propaganda laws and increased censorship. Especially since the full-scale invasion in Ukraine started, this tendency has exacerbated.
11. The source opined that homophobia was not deeply rooted amongst Russians; rather, they are inclined to be more anti-Western than homophobic. This is attributed to the fact that Russia is historically not a religious society.
12. The source compared Russia to the USA, stating that the American right wing of society is far more religious and more homophobic. According to the source, Russian society is atomised, and people generally pay little attention to one another. However, in order to live without fear of repercussions, Russian citizens stick to Putin's and the authorities' official positions on issues such as opposition to LGBT+ rights and support for the war in Ukraine.
13. The source opined that the tendency of citizens reporting on one another is centred mainly around Russians making donations to support the Ukrainian war effort.

#### **Availability and effectiveness of state protection**

14. Russians in general do not trust the police to investigate crimes brought to their attention, especially not women who have been subjected to domestic violence. The source stated that the police rarely take these cases seriously, and, according to the source, it has been reported that police abstain from investigating and prosecuting perpetrators. As a consequence, individuals, especially women, avoid reporting crimes to avoid humiliation. According to the source, the same distrust of the police is evident in the LGBT+ community.

#### **Regional differences**

15. According to the source, larger cities tend to be more tolerant than rural areas. The source highlighted Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Yekaterinburg as more tolerant.

16. By contrast, the Muslim republics of Russia represent the most hostile environments for LGBT+ persons. Particularly in Chechnya, where homosexuals have reportedly been killed.
17. The source did not consider the larger cities as safe to LGBT+ persons. People tend to self-sensor and conceal their sexual identity or orientation, as it is not safe anywhere in Russia to live open as an LGBT+ person. The degree to which LGBT+ persons can live open with their sexual orientation and identity largely depends on the individual's fearlessness.

**Situation for returnees**

18. The source informed that entering the Russian borders comes with the likelihood of border officials scrutinising the person's phone. According to the source, there are official protocols for such procedures, as the authorities specifically search for anti-war and FBK donations. This procedure includes random scrutiny.
19. To the knowledge of the source, most persons completely erase everything from their phones to avoid such procedures.
20. The source underlined that it may be possible to enter border control completely without problems; it depends on the very context and each officer.

## **Moscow Community Center and Revers**

Meeting in Vilnius, 03.09.2025

*Moscow Community Center (MCC) and Revers are two separate non-governmental LGBT+ rights organisations. Both are working inside Russia with support to LGBT+ persons and monitoring of cases of discrimination and violation of human rights within the LGBT+ community.*

*Both Revers and Moscow Community Center have been designated foreign agents in Russia in December 2021 and February 2022, respectively.*

## **The courts and the legal system**

1. No statistical data is available following the Supreme Court ruling in 2023. According to sources in Moscow, various legal provisions have since been applied against a number of LGBT+ persons. In most instances, the LGBT+ persons concerned are not charged with extremism. Rather, the extremism clause appears to be primarily directed at individuals outside the LGBT+ community.
2. According to the sources, prosecution of LGBT+ persons is primarily pursued under the so-called “propaganda law”. A recent case of September 2025 concerned the arrest of activist [Oleg Grannikov](#), who has been charged under Article 275 on state treason, despite it being widely understood that the underlying reason for his prosecution relates to LGBT+ activism.
3. Since the Supreme Court ruling in November 2023, rather than relying on the extremism provision, the authorities have increasingly applied a range of laws that can be used against civic activities more broadly. Given that the majority of LGBT+ activists are simultaneously engaged in civic activism, there are numerous legal provisions under which such individuals may be prosecuted.
4. According to the interviewed interlocutors, the Supreme Court decision serves an indirect purpose: its function is to restrict the publication of any LGBT+ content in Russia and thereby to eliminate such material from the public sphere. This includes compelling organisations either to remove their online content or risk being shut down. Moreover, the ruling is understood as an attempt to erase LGBT+ expressions from the public domain altogether, and, as a consequence, any legal entity engaged in the defence of LGBT+ rights in Russia has long since been prohibited.

## **Behaviour and appearance triggering state action**

5. An LGBT+ person who openly displays their affiliation in public, or even someone who sole— by clothing or behaviour – appears to belong to the LGBT+ community, may attract the attention of the authorities. The same applies to comments made in support of the LGBT+ community on social media, irrespective of whether the author of such

remarks is a member of the community or not. Monitoring is conducted by the departments responsible for combating extremism.<sup>537</sup>

6. If a media outlet publishes a story concerning LGBT+ activists – for instance, an arrest – it is required to include a disclaimer stating that the LGBT+ movement is designated as an extremist organisation in Russia.
7. Certain rights available to heterosexual persons are not accessible to LGBT+ individuals. For example, one interlocutor noted that a child from an LGBT+ family cannot attend school and disclose that the child has two mothers. In such circumstances, the child could risk removal from the family and placement under the custody of the Child Protection Authorities (in Russian: Органы опеки и попечительства). MCC has documented four such cases under different circumstances. All the families involved have since left the country.<sup>538</sup>
8. The same applies to institutions of higher education, where coming out may entail the risk of expulsion from the institution. Although many LGBT+ individuals are enrolled at universities, openness about their identity remains associated with significant risk.<sup>539</sup>
9. The Moscow Community Center has been active in Moscow since 2015, during which time it has printed, published, and distributed materials concerning the LGBT+ community to raise public awareness. As of September 2025, however, no printing house in Moscow is willing to produce such materials, as any content relating to the LGBT+ community is considered extremist under Russian law.

### Possibility to assemble

10. In Russia, all nightclubs with any connection to the LGBT+ community have been closed. Although many of these venues may not have identified explicitly as gay clubs, they served as spaces of diversity, providing LGBT+ persons with a safe environment in which to relax openly. As of September 2025, such spaces no longer openly exist.
11. Transgender individuals face greater difficulties in concealing their identity in public compared with other LGBT+ persons. In this regard, it is generally easier for, for example, homosexual men to conduct their daily lives than it is for transgender persons. Neighbours could report a homosexual couple to the authorities. However, these interlocutors had not encountered such cases. There have been instances, nonetheless, in which neighbours reported a private gathering at the apartment of a homosexual couple, leading to the intervention of the riot police (in Russian called ОМОН) and subsequent charges of LGBT+ propaganda against the participants.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> Meduza, «Медиазона» изучила, как суды штрафуют и арестовывают россиян по делам о демонстрации ЛГБТК-символики Чаще всего протоколы составляют за радужный флаг. К ответственности привлекают даже гомофобов, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>538</sup> Sever.Realii, "Мы не сможем тут жить". Однополая семья покинула Россию из-за давления органов опеки, 20 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>539</sup> Nastoyashchee Vremya, Студента кубанского вуза отчислили из-за его блога про макияж: "Законами против ЛГБТ власти развязали руки хейтерам", 3 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>540</sup> Kholod, По доносу и просто так, 28 February 2024, [url](#)

12. In Russia, there is a strong social interest in the private lives of neighbours. Many Russians are keen to know where others work, who they work with, and with whom they live. Consequently, LGBT+ persons in Russia feel compelled to conceal their identity in public in order to live without fear of consequences of their LGBT+ identity. These consequences encompass harassment, violence, and being reported to the authorities.

#### **Access to shelters**

13. Since 2017, Moscow has hosted shelters for LGBT+ persons whose lives have been complicated by a variety of circumstances. These shelters accept LGBT+ persons from across Russia. Following 2022, the number of requests from members of the LGBT+ community increased significantly, as local communities became aware of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
14. In small villages and towns across Russia, local communities exert significant social pressure on LGBT+ persons, and as a result, some families are compelled to expel LGBT+ family members in order to continue living in the village. Many of these individuals subsequently relocate to Moscow and other big towns from various regions of the country. This constitutes psychological and physical violence. All applications to shelters over the eight years of their operation describe such situations. However, residents do not grant permission for this information to be used.
15. It is difficult to estimate the total number of shelters available to LGBT+ persons across Russia. It is important to note that the use of private apartments for housing such individuals carries a significant risk of attracting attention from authorities or relatives seeking revenge.
16. The Moscow Community Center (MCC) has limited resources and is therefore unable to accommodate all requests for assistance. The MCC prioritises individuals who are assessed as being in greatest need and who have developed a concrete plan of action. For example, this may include a person planning to relocate to Moscow, secure employment, and explore options for leaving the country with a partner. Assistance is provided only when there is a plan that the MCC can support.
17. Revers also has access to hidden safe spaces in the Krasnodar region that can be used by LGBT+ persons. However, these spaces are limited to local members of the regional LGBT+ community and cannot accommodate persons from other regions of Russia. In recent years, a significant number of individuals have relocated to the Krasnodar region from Eastern and Southern Ukraine, necessitating that Revers rent apartments for fixed periods to meet the increased demand for assistance.

#### **Regional differences**

18. There are notable differences in the treatment of LGBT+ persons across Russia. In larger cities, it is generally easier for LGBT+ persons to maintain anonymity and conceal their

identity or sexual orientation. Some regions of Russia are characterised by communities with diverse religious affiliations, which can also influence local attitudes.

19. For example, in the Krasnodar region, a prominent Orthodox cross is present in nearly every village. This is partly attributable to the region's geographic location, bordering predominantly Muslim areas such as Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan. Consequently, local authorities in Krasnodar actively promote Orthodox religious and traditional values among the population. As a result of this policy, many residents adhere to these religious norms and traditions, which has a negative impact on local attitudes towards the LGBT+ community.
20. Revers reported that gay clubs in the city of Sochi, which had been a relatively vibrant hub for the LGBT+ community in the 2000s, have now largely closed. Some private venues still exist in larger cities such as Sochi and Krasnodar, although their number has steadily declined. As Sochi is a major resort city, certain establishments are able to maintain underground activities through the bribery of local officials. While occasional raids on such venues occur and some participants have been fined for LGBT+ propaganda, the clubs often continue to operate, as they also provide a source of revenue for the local administration.
21. In other regions of Russia, managers of private gay clubs have faced prosecution under extremism legislation. Furthermore, tolerance towards the LGBT+ community is very limited in the Muslim-majority regions of the North Caucasus. Revers has collaborated with human rights activists from Ingushetia, some of whom declined to assist LGBT+ individuals due to personal values that did not align with those of the LGBT+ community. According to the interviewed interlocutors, traditional family values are strongly prevalent throughout the North Caucasus, creating a social environment largely incompatible with the promotion of LGBT+ rights.
22. Most movements and organisations advocating for LGBT+ rights in the North Caucasus have withdrawn from the region. For example, the organisation "Sintem" was shut down by the authorities due to its association with LGBT+ rights.

### Consequences for relatives

23. If the individual in question is not an activist but merely a member of the LGBT+ community, relatives could, in theory, face pressure from neighbours or authorities. Such pressure might include the risk of losing employment, the spread of negative rumours about the family, or acts of harassment such as drawings on the family's apartment door. Families could also be excluded from local gatherings, effectively isolating them from the broader community. The interlocutors noted that while they have not systematically recorded such incidents, they are aware of scattered cases occurring across all regions of the country.

### Monitoring the situation of the LGBT+ community in Russia

24. There is an NGO “Russian LGBT network” and Moscow community center that tracks instances of harassment, pressure, and offences against individuals associated with the LGBT+ community. The network collects data on such cases each year.<sup>541</sup>
25. Effective monitoring of the situation requires direct engagement with individuals. However, as of September 2025, contacting communities via social media is not feasible, as it carries significant risks of being charged with extremism for both the organisations collecting information and the individuals willing to engage on LGBT+ issues. Consequently, research of this kind cannot provide a comprehensive picture of the situation, as they risk being accused of participation in an extremist group/community.

#### **Availability and effectiveness of state protection**

26. According to the interviewed interlocutors, complaints submitted by openly LGBT+ individuals would not be accepted by Russian authorities. Law enforcement agencies are widely perceived as the most homophobic institutions within the Russian state. According to the interviewed sources, even ordinary citizens are reportedly fearful of approaching the police for assistance, due to uncertainty about potential repercussions. Allegedly, the police may use physical violence without cause or initiate criminal proceedings without proper legal justification, including the possible planting of narcotics on individuals. The interlocutors described the Russian police as operating in a manner akin to a criminal organisation.
27. If an LGBT+ person was assaulted, for instance, in Alexander Garden in central Moscow, the police would formally arrest the perpetrators. The interlocutors, however, suggested that it is highly likely that the individuals would subsequently be released without any trial. According to the source, reporting an incident to the police may potentially expose the individual to LGBT-related prosecution, though the extent of this risk remains uncertain.

#### **Targeted media campaigns**

28. Media campaigns targeting the LGBT+ community began around the time Vladimir Putin returned to the presidency in 2012. At that time, the Kremlin used the LGBT+ issue to contrast Russia with the West, framing it as evidence of why Russia had diverged from Western democratic principles. The prevalence of LGBT+ rights in Western countries was presented as a rationale for the population to understand the need for Russia to distance itself from Western values.
29. Under the law on propaganda, a media outlet publishing positive content about the LGBT+ community may be subject to fines of up to one million roubles (approximately 10,000 euro). This legal framework explains the absence of positive coverage of the LGBT+ community in Russian media.

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<sup>541</sup> МКС, Мониторинг положения ЛГБТ+ людей в России в 2024 году, February 2025, [url](#)

30. A variety of negative campaigns target the LGBT+ community in Russia. For example, some national groups maintain blogs and media outlets in which they systematically portray LGBT+ persons in a negative light. These platforms frequently discuss the influence of Europe on gender identity, often referring to the continent derogatorily as “Gayropa,” and they criticise the adoption of children by same-sex couples in European countries.
31. The media portray the LGBT+ community as a Western influence and as part of the broader geopolitical struggle between Russia and the West. The West is depicted as opposing Russia’s traditional values, which the state is tasked with preserving. Within this framework, Russians with liberal views are often pejoratively labelled as “liberasty,” a term combining the Russian word for liberal (либерал) with the derogatory term for a gay man, pederast (педераст).
32. State-controlled television channels, such as Pervy Kanal and Rossiya, occasionally broadcast images of gay pride events in Western countries, including Germany, the Netherlands, and New York, framing these events negatively. Coverage often includes rhetorical questions such as “Why are they naked in the streets?” or “Is this the type of behaviour we want for Russia?” The intended answer is implicitly presented as negative.
33. In one media-reported case, an individual killed another person and defended the act by stating that the victim was gay. Neither the media nor the courts critically engaged with this claim. The victim’s LGBT+ identity was implicitly treated as a mitigating factor, with media framing suggesting a degree of social acceptability for targeting LGBT+ individuals. Nevertheless, the perpetrator was prosecuted and sentenced to imprisonment for the crime.<sup>542</sup>
34. The interlocutors noted that there are some openly known LGBT+ figures in Russia, such as Anton Krasovsky, who can move freely without risk, largely because they openly support Putin. In such cases, the individuals face no personal threat. According to the sources, the Russian authorities find it advantageous to maintain a number of LGBT+ persons who support the Kremlin and publicly denounce LGBT+ “propaganda.” These individuals effectively endorse all anti-LGBT+ legislation in Russia, allowing the authorities to demonstrate to critics that they are not opposed to the LGBT+ community per se, as evidenced by the fact that such persons live openly without harm.
35. Within the Russian State Duma, there are a few MPs who are believed to be members of the LGBT+ community. However, these individuals are not publicly open about their sexual orientation, making it impossible to verify their status.
36. The Russian authorities have initiated public campaigns aimed at encouraging Russians living in Europe to return to Russia, promoted as a country free from gay pride events and Western “decadence.” These campaigns target the broader Russian diaspora in the West, rather than specific groups. Interlocutors noted, however, that the authorities

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<sup>542</sup> Kommersant, С убийцы гея сняли побои, 3 November 2021, [url](#)

have little genuine interest in facilitating returns; the campaigns largely consist of slogans designed for television broadcasts. The messaging often portrays Russia as a country embodying traditional values that even Americans and other Europeans supposedly admire and wish to experience.

**Situation for returnees**

37. To the sources' knowledge, it is possible for LGBT+ persons to enter Russia without encountering risks at the border when entering from countries that permit Russian citizens to travel by means of their internal passport. These countries include Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.
38. When entering Russia by means of an internal passport, individuals are not required to disclose visas or residence permits for countries considered unfriendly, which might otherwise prompt questioning by border authorities.
39. According to the sources, LGBT+ persons who are active while residing abroad may be subject to monitoring by the Russian authorities. By "active," the interlocutors refer to persons who publicly criticise the Russian government, oppose the war in Ukraine, or speak out against policies targeting the LGBT+ community in Russia. This monitoring is more likely for individuals with large followings, including prominent bloggers. If such activists were to return to Russia, certain consequences would likely ensue. One interlocutor described a case in which an activist from Chicago returned to Russia for an important event. The day after arrival, the individual received a fine of 30,000 roubles (approximately 3,000 euro). This fine was reportedly issued as a warning, signalling that future violations could result in criminal prosecution under the law on foreign agents. It should be noted, however, that this individual was not an LGBT+ activist but political activist.
40. Once an individual has publicly come out, it is effectively impossible to reverse this disclosure. Therefore, LGBT+ persons who are active in promoting LGBT+ rights abroad and have attracted the attention of Russian authorities cannot simply renounce their identity. Such individuals may have a file maintained by the FSB (due to pursued systematic or sporadic monitoring), and authorities could attempt to coerce them into collaboration. Nevertheless, the interlocutors noted that it is possible for individuals to refuse such requests.
41. The interviewed interlocutors reported knowledge of LGBT+ individuals living openly abroad who are not publicly critical of the Kremlin, do not maintain social media accounts and periodically return to Russia. These individuals have not encountered interference from the authorities upon their return. However, this does not preclude potential future action, as the situation remains uncertain.
42. Security forces (in Russian: siloviki) may compel any individual to unlock their phone and search it for information regarding Ukraine, attitudes toward the war, or opinions on repression. Any manifestation of disloyalty, including donations to organisations designated as foreign agents or undesirable in the Russian Federation, may also be scrutinised. If such information is found, criminal or administrative proceedings may be initiated against the individual.

43. It should be noted that, according to these interlocutors, if the Russian authorities choose to target an individual, they possess the means to do so, including the potential planting of narcotics, reflecting the political will of those in power. The interlocutors described Russia's leadership as comprising criminal gangs and bandits. If a high-ranking official desires the arrest of a particular individual, law enforcement can execute this directive without question.
44. One interlocutor recounted a case in which a member of an LGBT+ organisation, upon returning to Russia, was contacted by phone and instructed to report to the FSB regarding their planned events, ostensibly to ensure the safety of participants. The individual did not comply with this request. Instead, they were summoned to the Ministry of Interior (MVD), where they were compelled to sign a document agreeing not to organise any events or demonstrations on 9 May (Victory Day commemorating the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945).
45. If an individual enters Russia using invalid documents, it does not necessarily cause immediate questioning or prosecution at the border. However, such individuals could later be subject to questioning and potentially placed on a surveillance list. According to the sources, the outcome would depend on the reasons for their departure from Russia, for example, whether they left due to debt or to pursue studies abroad.
46. Border authorities also examine factors such as the stamps in a returnee's passport, the type of visa held, and whether a tourist visa has been overstayed. These elements influence how authorities handle an individual at the border. It is difficult to determine precisely what triggers border scrutiny, as this depends on internal border control procedures.

## NC SOS Crisis Group

Vilnius, 03.09.25

*NC SOS Crisis Group (NC SOS) is an organisation dedicated to safeguarding the rights of LGBT+ persons in the North Caucasus region. The organisation facilitates safe escape and shelter, as well as legal, medical, financial, and psychological assistance. Moreover, the organisation collects information concerning the situation for LGBT+ persons in the region.*

*The organisation started operating in Chechnya in 2017 and expanded in 2021 to cover the wider North Caucasus region. The region comprises seven republics: Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, North Ossetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Stavropol Krai. The primary focus and area of expertise of NC SOS Crisis Group are mainly the republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Chechnya.*

*The organisation was declared foreign agent by the Russian authorities in May 2023.*

### Authorities' treatment of LGBT+ persons in the North Caucasus

1. Historically, the situation for LGBT+ persons in Chechnya has been and remains severe. In 2017, the emerging NCSOS organisation began projects on providing help to victims of LGBT+ persecution in Chechnya. Support to individuals was provided in collaboration with other LGBT+ rights organisations.
2. In 2017, Chechen authorities did round-ups and arrests of homosexual men. A media outlet reported information of 200 homosexual men being detained in a single day. More than 50 men were executed in one night, though only 27 of which those are named<sup>543</sup>.
3. Despite the scope of the persecution, the Russian authorities failed to initiate an investigation. According to the source, the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov's government possesses a substantial amount of power and legitimacy in the Russian Federation, since he continues to ensure suppression of separatist movements in Chechnya. As a consequence, according to the source, federal laws do not apply in Chechnya, enabling Kadyrov to act with impunity.
4. The persecution of LGBT+ persons by Chechen authorities continued in the following years after the massive detentions in 2017. The scope expanded to include not only homosexual men but all members of the LGBT+ community.

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<sup>543</sup> Attitude, *Names of 27 men believed to have been executed in Chechnya published*, 11 July 2017, [url](#); OSCE, *Moscow Mechanism rapporteur reports to OSCE Permanent Council on alleged human rights violations in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation*, 20 December 2018, [url](#); BBC, *Chechnya LGBT: Dozens 'detained in new gay purge'*, 15 January 2019, [url](#); PinkNews, *Chechnya: Names of 27 men slaughtered and buried in bloody night revealed as gay purge continues*, 11 July 2017, [url](#)

5. The source mentioned specific methods applied by the Chechen authorities in terms of chain-detainments, whereby homosexual men were exposed to torture, passwords for social media were disclosed, phones were searched, and chats became misused in order to track other homosexual men.<sup>544</sup>
6. There were also reports of family members being required to pay ransom to release the detained individuals. The source noted that executions were carried out by the law enforcement officers; however, most commonly pressure was exerted on families to undertake such acts themselves, in accordance with the region's pervading traditions related to honour and shame (more on this topic in next section).
7. According to the source, in the wider Russian Federation, the increased legislative amendments, such as ban on gay propaganda and transgender transition, along with the Supreme Court decision on extremism, have made it dangerous for anyone to be affiliated with LGBT+ issues.
8. A person may face up to ten years imprisonment. However, the source emphasised the fact that the situation in the North Caucasus is significantly different from the rest of Russia. Legislation on extremism symbols or propaganda are not seen to be applied at all. Thus, the decision on extremism in November 2023 did not change the situation and risk for LGBT+ persons in the North Caucasus, which, according to the source, was already dangerous. However, the operational environment for organisations such as NC SOS has changed following the court decision.
9. The organisation has been unable to provide assistance to individuals in the region to the same extent as previously. Human rights defenders, lawyers, and others have shown reluctance to cooperate with the organisation due to fear of arrest and criminal cases upon themselves. As a consequence, NC SOS faces difficulties in finding lawyers who can defend beneficiaries. As of September 2025, NC SOS is not designated an extremist or undesirable organisation in Russia.
10. According to the source, the North Caucasus region is marked by the authorities' viewpoint that LGBT+ persons do not exist, thus making legislation towards them unnecessary. LGBT+ persons continue to experience obstacles in attempting to escape the region. Reportedly, LGBT+ persons 'are healed' by means of torture as a sort of

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<sup>544</sup> OHCHR, A/HRC/57/59: Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, 13 September 2024, [url](#); OHCHR, A/79/508: *Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, "Torture in the Russian Federation: a tool for repression at home and aggression abroad"*, 28 October 2024, [url](#)

The Guardian, *Welcome to Chechnya: the harrowing film about the regime's gay purge*, 23 June 2020, [url](#); TIME, *A Victim of the Anti-Gay Purge in Chechnya Speaks Out: 'The Truth Exists'*, 26 July 2019, [url](#); The Guardian, Chechens tell of prison beatings and electric shocks in anti-gay purge: 'They called us animals', 13 April 2017, [url](#); HRW, *"They Have Long Arms and They Can Find Me"*, 26 May 2017, [url](#)

conversion therapy into becoming ‘normal’ again. Even gay purges have affected well-known persons.<sup>545</sup>

11. The source further stressed that, in the context of the war in Ukraine, a new pattern has reportedly emerged in Chechnya, whereby LGBT+ men are forced to sign ‘voluntary contracts’ to go to war. The European Court of Human Rights has in one case recognised Chechen practice of torture upon an LGBT+ person.<sup>546</sup>
12. To the knowledge of the source, Dagestan and Ingushetia do not experience the same level of LGBT+ persecution stemming from the authorities as observed in Chechnya.

#### **Situation for LGBT+ persons in civil society**

13. The source stated that perpetrators behind LGBT+ violence and persecution in the North Caucasus are generally a combination of the authorities and the families in the traditional communities constituted by clan structures.
14. According to the source, the police frequently compel family members to carry out executions.<sup>547</sup>
15. As a consequence, families to LGBT+ persons are often under tremendous pressure, both in terms of consequences if not complying with the police and in terms of shame within the surrounding community. Communities in the North Caucasus – including Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia, though the two latter less frequently adhere to traditional practices and customs such as blood feuds and honour killings as a means of restoring family honour and mitigating shame from the family.
16. The level of pressure was illustrated by the case of a father, who was instructed by the Chechen authorities to execute his homosexual son. The execution was also a means of washing away the shame put upon the family. However, the father allowed the son to escape but convinced everyone else that he had killed him, even going so far as to stage a fake funeral.
17. In Dagestan and Ingushetia, the source indicated that persecution of LGBT+ persons is more frequently carried out by the family than by the authorities. Clan structures also play a crucial role, where the law enforcement is, according to the source, not as

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<sup>545</sup> The Daily Beast, ‘Putin’s Soldier’ Kadyrov Personally Ordered Murder of Gay Pop Star: Report, 25 July 2023, [url](#); RFE/RL, Kadyrov Hints At Antigay Honor Killing Of Chechen Singer, 18 January 2018, [url](#); Wikipedia, Zelim Bakaev, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>546</sup> Redress, European Court Finds Russia Responsible for Torturing of Gay Man “Solely on Account of his Sexual Orientation”, 13 September 2023, [url](#); Ilga Europe, Maxim Grigoryevich Lapunov against Russian Federation, 16 April 2019, [url](#); HUDOC – European Court of Human Rights, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>547</sup> VOA News, Russia Denies Gays Persecuted in Chechnya, 21 April 2017, [url](#); Human Rights Campaign, Five Horrific Testimonies in LGBT Network’s Report Highlights Chechnya’s Atrocities, 2 August 2017, [url](#)

powerful as in Chechnya. Nevertheless, a reported case recounts how law enforcement in Dagestan detained two guys for a shared video.<sup>548</sup>

18. The source reported cases of Chechens abroad, who are pressured to return to their families. Either they are persuaded to return, or they become trapped. In one such case, an LGBT+ person in refuge in the Netherlands, who had previously been detained in Chechnya for his sexual orientation, attended a funeral in Chechnya and was captured by his family, forced to make a video stating that he was not homosexual, cleansing the family's name. He was held in captivity and later sent to war in Ukraine.<sup>549</sup>
19. The source further explained that conversion therapy is not only applied to LGBT+ persons, but also in cases of an atheist or a Muslim not adhering enough to religion, as could be the case if a female abstains from wearing hijab. This can also happen in Dagestan and Ingushetia. In Dagestan a woman was subjected by her family to conversion therapy for her bisexuality and atheism<sup>550</sup>
20. Such situations are characterised by pressure from both families and authorities. The source noted that even if the parents personally had no problem with a child who was LGBT+ or a lacking hijab, they would still act according to societal rules.
21. The source also mentioned that female genital mutilation is a widespread practice in both Dagestan and Chechnya.<sup>551</sup>
22. Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia maintain a strong adherence to traditional norms, which extends to individuals residing abroad. This has been the case with female refugees of the Chechen Wars, who have reportedly been sent on so-called re-education trips to Chechnya. NC SOS recalls 20 cases of women being sent on re-education trips to Chechnya since 2022, including EU-citizens.<sup>552</sup> In one of the cases

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<sup>548</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe, *Gay man in Dagestan charged with distributing pornography*, 27 June 2024, [url](#); the Moscow Times, *Dagestan Man Caught in Gay Entrapment Scheme Flees Russia – Activists*, 1 July 2024, [url](#); Caucasian Knot, *Dagestani gay man leaves Russia after being forced to denunciation*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>549</sup> AI, Russian Federation: *A Chechen arrested in Moscow, disappeared: Idris Arsamikov*, 23 February 2023, [url](#); HRW, *Russia: Man ‘Disappeared,’ Apparently for His Sexual Orientation*, 27 February 2023, [url](#); NHC, *Russia: Man ‘Disappeared,’ Apparently for His Sexual Orientation*, 27 February 2023, [url](#); the Moscow Times, *Russia Detains Gay Chechen Refugee at Moscow Airport*, 16 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>550</sup> Novaya Gazeta Europe, *Woman from Russia’s Dagestan shares her ‘homosexuality treatment’ story*, 6 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>551</sup> Wilson Center, *Harmful Traditional Practices in the North Caucasus*, Russia, December 2021, [url](#); HRW, *Curtailing ‘Depravity’ in Dagestan With FGM?*, 22 August 2016, [url](#); RFE/RL, *Activists Call For Investigation Into Case Of Female Genital Mutilation, Saying It Would Be A First For Russia*, 19 May 2020, [url](#); Caucasian Knot, *Dagestan becomes centre of female circumcision problem in Northern Caucasus*, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>552</sup> Eight persons from Austria, four from Germany, three from France, two from Poland, and one from Norway, Sweden, and Australia, respectively.

from Germany, a Chechen woman who had lived in Germany since childhood was forcibly taken to Chechnya, and was never seen again.<sup>553</sup>

23. In one case, NC SOS provided assistance to a Norwegian citizen with six children, who were sent back to Chechnya, captured by the family, and deprived of their documents. With support from NC SOS and the Norwegian authorities, they were able to return to Norway, which was possible due to their Norwegian citizenship.
24. The source noted that there is strong diaspora from the region in general, but the Chechen diaspora is stronger and more engaged in persecution.

#### **Possible relocation**

25. The source stated that relocation to another region in Russia is not a viable option for LGBT+ persons. There have been several cases of family members tracking down and forcibly returning individuals. Cases have included LGBT+ persons and heterosexual survivors of domestic violence (more on this topic in the next section).
26. Another obstacle to internal flight is that, in Dagestan and Chechnya, girls and women are generally not allowed to leave their homes without a family member or husband, making escape complicated.

#### **Authorities able and willing to protect**

27. The source noted that an LGBT+ person cannot rely on the Russian authorities to protect them from violence or persecution. In a recently reported case, a young woman from Chechnya escaped and sought protection at a local police station in Moscow. The woman was inside the police station, whilst her male family members were striving to get to her from outside. She was already listed as a wanted person on a federal level due to her registration as missing.
28. The source opined that the police did not intend to protect her, despite being aware of the reason she had sought help at the police station, as, supposedly, they did not want to interfere with traditions. The woman managed to be escorted from the police station by the help of public outcry due to LGBT+ organisations and media coverage.<sup>554</sup>
29. In a reported case, an LGBT+ person was relocated from Chechnya to St Petersburg with assistance from NC SOS. The organisation advised her to leave the country, but she declined. The person was a bisexual woman living with her ethnic Russian boyfriend in St Petersburg, sought after by her relatives. She was apprehended and returned to her family with the assistance of the local police, who located her. The police in Chechnya

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<sup>553</sup> RFE/RL, *Woman Fleeing Domestic Violence Missing After Being Forcibly Returned To Chechnya*, 15 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>554</sup> The Guardian, *'I did not want to disappear in silence': Chechen woman livestreamed attempted abduction by her family*, 10 June 2024, [url](#); Novaya Gazeta Europe, *Slipping the net*, 18 June 2024, [url](#); RFE/RL, *Chechen Teen Flees Russia Complaining Of Domestic Violence*, 17 May 2024, [url](#)

had reportedly fabricated charges against her. Despite the woman told the police the true circumstances and requesting protection, the police released her to the family and to an honour killing.<sup>555</sup>

30. The source elaborated that, in Chechnya and Dagestan, there have been several cases where Chechen or Dagestani individuals fleeing persecution have been found by help from local police. They assist with locating individuals, who are sought by their relatives. The police have access to video cameras (CCTV) and phone and locations. In particular in Chechnya, it is not uncommon for families to request the police for concrete assistance. Furthermore, the source stated that in any family in Chechnya, there is a police officer.
31. The source emphasised that cases like this might at first glance look like a private conflict; yet, they easily develop into a conflict with the authorities.
32. There have been reports of LGBT+ individuals being extradited from neighbouring countries, with which Russia has bilateral extradition agreement regarding criminals.<sup>556</sup> In one case, a beneficiary of NC SOS was suspected of being homosexual, exposed to torture, and then released.<sup>557</sup> He had been seeking refuge in a shelter in Armenia, where he was later arrested on fabricated charges and requested by the Chechen authorities to be returned to Chechnya. With help from NC SOS and an Armenian lawyer, the person was after several years in Armenia granted refugee status at last.

#### **Situation for relatives**

33. On several occasions, the source concluded that there is only limited information on the situation for LGBT+ persons in the North Caucasus region, estimating that only two percent of cases are documented. Many cases remain unknown to the public. The source concluded that people are too afraid, also after refuge, in particular of the consequences and safety for relatives, as collective punishment is practised within these strong communities; a mother or a sister may be placed at risk. There have already been reports of persons in political opposition and LGBT+ persons, where relatives have been arrested, kidnapped or tortured. The most prominent case is the

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<sup>555</sup> The Moscow Times, *Young Chechen Woman Likely Murdered in 'Honor Killing,' Rights Activists Say*, 9 February 2024, [url](#); OC Media, *Chechen domestic abuse victim 'abducted and sent to Grozny'*, 24 August 2023, [url](#); Novaya Gazeta Europe, *A friend indeed*, 11 February 2025, [url](#); The Moscow Times, *Interior Ministry Officially Declares Abducted Chechen Woman Missing*, 16 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>556</sup> The source mentioned specifically Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus

<sup>557</sup> Pink Armenia, *The Administrative Court ordered to grant refugee status and asylum to Salman Mukayev*, 31 January 2024, [url](#); The Moscow Times, *Armenia Denies Extradition Request for Gay Chechen Man Wanted by Russia*, 30 January 2024, [url](#); All Out, *Armenia: Save Salman Mukaev's life!*, 29 January 2024, [url](#)

imprisonment of an elderly mother to 3 opposition activists from 1ADAT. She was initially sentenced to 5.5 years, but later received an additional 4-year term.<sup>558</sup>

34. There has been a reported case where an LGBT+ Chechen fighting in Ukraine, had his sexual orientation disclosed to his comrades by Chechen police. As a result, he became a victim of rapes at the front. In another case, an LGBT+ person was sent from Chechnya to the war and was killed.<sup>559</sup>

#### **Differences in the treatment of homosexual men and women, bisexuals, and transpersons**

35. The source noted that there is no huge difference in the situation for the respective LGBT+ persons. Several years ago, persecution primarily targeted homosexual men. However, the situation has since broadened to encompass the entire LGBT+ community. The source suggested that women, in general, may find it somewhat easier to conceal their sexual orientation, thus being less exposed to certain risks.
36. In addition, in Dagestan and Chechnya, it has been reported that both homosexual men and women have been subject to torture, and women are subsequently subject to forced marriages, which remains a widespread phenomenon in the region.

#### **The Chechen diaspora and agents abroad**

37. According to the source, the Chechen diaspora is widespread and powerful. The network is known to contain informants and loyalists to Kadyrov. Reportedly, the network monitors Chechens residing in Europe and can look up individuals.

#### **On surveillance and pressure on the diaspora**

38. The source referred to a report from Freedom House, noting that, unlike other Russian citizens abroad, the Chechen diaspora is subjected to a targeted campaign of surveillance, digital intimidation, and proxy coercion. Authorities exploit threats, arrests, and, at times, the torture of relatives in Chechnya to suppress dissent overseas. They also recruit or place asylum seekers as agents within diaspora communities. Kadyrov has openly warned that all social media activity is monitored, and that modern technology allows personal records to be unveiled as well as the person's place of residence.<sup>560</sup> Through criminal networks and familial pressure, Chechen authorities, in concert with Russian intelligence, maintain effective control, with agents reportedly

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<sup>558</sup> The Moscow Times, *Prosecutors Request Additional 4-Year Prison Sentence for Mother of Chechen Dissidents*, 24 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>559</sup> OC Media, Human rights organisation accuses Chechen Akhmat fighters of using mobilised queer men as sex slaves, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>560</sup> Freedom House, *Russia: Transnational Repression Origin Country Case Study*, 2021, [url](#)

active in Austria, France, Belgium, and Germany — as documented in a 2020 RFE/RL article.<sup>561</sup>

39. As to the knowledge of the source, the work methods of collecting information is a combination of social media searches and word-of-mouth. The source underlined that Chechens abroad resort to only communicating with their closest friends. The impression is that it is impossible to know who is part of the community.
40. In particular, the source had knowledge about the diaspora in Germany, which is widespread and strong. Cases have been reported in Germany about critics of Kadyrov, women, and LGBT+ persons, who all had to conceal their whereabouts and change their names in order to stay safe.
41. The source confirmed that it is not unfounded when Chechen asylum seekers are afraid of interpreters during asylum procedures. The source gained such experiences via questioning from asylum lawyers, who say that their clients are afraid of revealing their LGBT+ identity due to fear of information, which might be communicated back to Chechnya, potentially leading to future repercussions.

### The situation for returnees

42. A person who is not ethnic Russian, such as someone from Dagestan or Chechnya, faces a higher risk of enhanced screening and questioning upon entering Russian borders and especially Chechnya. The source referred in general to the cooperation between Russian and Chechen authorities, which might be of significance if a person of interest to the Chechens enters the country. The source suggested that a random ethnic Russian border guard would not care about a Chechen arriving, but it is another situation if the Chechens find out. The source added that if the Chechen authorities are interested in a person, that person is immediately detained upon arrival.<sup>562</sup>

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<sup>561</sup> RFE/RL, 'Everyone's Asking Who's Next': Chechens In Europe Warn Of More Killings, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>562</sup> RFE/RL, Chechen Refugee Forcibly Disappeared Hours After 'Unlawful' Deportation From Poland, 3 September 2018, [url](#); HRW, Chechen Asylum Seeker Deported to Russia Arbitrarily Detained, 13 April 2021, [url](#)

## **Freedom House**

Vilnius, 02.09.25

*Freedom House is a human rights organisation that engages with suppressed activists and Freedom House maintains that membership of the LGBT+ community does not in itself constitute activism in Russia. Where repression occurs on the basis of a person's identity, such individuals fall within the mandate entrusted to Freedom House.*

### **The courts and the legal system**

1. Some LGBT+ organisations have been designated as “undesirable” or as “foreign agents”, which effectively means that attending an event organised by such a group could place all participants at risk of being targeted. Freedom House has observed the first court cases brought against LGBT+ persons on charges of extremism. However, this development remains at an early stage as of September 2025.
2. The source opined that LGBT+ persons may in future face lengthy prison sentences. As of September 2025, the likely direction of legal practice remains unclear. By reference to earlier precedents – not necessarily connected to the recent Supreme Court ruling – one may reasonably speculate that the authorities could use the ruling to instrumentalise individuals of interest, for example by compelling them to attend events, collect information on particular organisations or persons, and, in effect, to subject them to blackmail. Such practices have been observed previously.

### **Authorities' treatment of LGBT+ persons**

3. It remains unclear what the Supreme Court designation of the “international LGBT movement” as extremist will entail for ordinary members of the LGBT+ community in Russia. As no such international LGBT movement exists, the boundaries of the ruling are undefined. It is therefore uncertain whether actions such as holding hands in public or simply maintaining friendships with LGBT+ persons could be sufficient grounds for targeting.
4. Being an LGBT+ person in Russia may entail risks under the country’s legislation on “propaganda” and extremism. However, as millions of Russians identify as part of the LGBT+ community, the authorities cannot feasibly target everyone. Instead, their focus tends to fall on activists of various kinds, including LGBT+ activists. In this context, the authorities are more likely to concentrate on collective actions rather than on random, ordinary LGBT+ couples.
5. If LGBT+ persons engage in public activities—such as organisational work, participating in rallies, or even simply displaying a rainbow flag—this may be sufficient to attract the attention of the authorities. The Russian authorities are not, strictly speaking, targeting LGBT+ persons as such, according to the source. Rather, prosecutions are more likely to arise from their involvement in some form of collective action.

6. According to the source, the regime does not proactively seek out LGBT+ individuals for repression in the same way it targets civic activists, where networks are specifically identified and individuals are actively pursued to be silenced. However, if an LGBT+ person is very open about their identity, the regime may perceive this as a form of dissent and target the individual accordingly. In the eyes of the authorities, such openness is seen as a vulnerability that can be instrumentalised — whether for propaganda or surveillance purposes.<sup>563</sup>
7. As a continuation of this pattern, the source indicated that the authorities may target LGBT+ persons on the basis of their activities, for instance through participation in community initiatives. The source further assessed that merely disclosing one's sexual identity openly may also be sufficient to pose a risk of attention from the authorities. However, to the knowledge of the source, no such criminal cases involving LGBT+ persons have yet been processed.
8. The source found it likely that the Russian authorities could also resort to the use of LGBT+ related content found on social media. For instance, if they wished to target a particular individual for other reasons, they might identify compromising photographs on that person's social media accounts and employ them as a basis for initiating prosecution.
9. This investigation by proekt<sup>564</sup> illustrates a pattern in how the security services may instrumentalise personal circumstances for their purposes. The source was aware of one individual who was targeted not because he was a journalist himself, but because he was the partner of one — their intimate relationship was used as a means to pressure the journalist.
10. If an LGBT+ person is openly out, this may be used against the person. As a result, members of the LGBT+ community are more vulnerable when participating in protests against the government than non-LGBT+ members of Russian society, since their identity can be employed as an additional ground for targeting. LGBT+ people are more vulnerable to participate in any collective/public action. And even though demonstrations are prohibited, they sporadically happen.
11. On the other hand, the source observed that certain high-ranking individuals in Russia were themselves reluctant to come out. The children of members of parliament and other government officials were known to belong to the LGBT+ community; however, owing to their relatives' positions, they refrained from disclosing their identities. By remaining silent, they also avoid being targeted by the authorities.
12. The source referred to a historical investigation/documentary<sup>565</sup> tracing the development of the LGBT+ community in St Petersburg from the 1980s to 2025. The

<sup>563</sup> There was a particularly thorough investigation on this topic by Proekt: Proekt, *Katin sad*, 22 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>564</sup> Proekt (Russian: Проект) is an independent Russian media outlet specialising in investigative journalism; Proekt, *Katin sad*, 22 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>565</sup> Proekt, *Агенты спецслужб насиловали и вербовали 40 лет | Историческое расследование*, 22 May 2025, [url](#)

study documented how the Russian police and secret services infiltrated the LGBT+ community in the city, which is otherwise known for its vibrancy and is often perceived as more European and modern than other parts of Russia. The investigation further demonstrated how LGBT+ persons could be subjected to blackmail by the authorities.

13. Law enforcement within Russian institutions typically operates in a highly selective manner. The source concluded that the fact that thousands or even millions of LGBT+ persons are not targeted by the authorities does not preclude the possibility that others may be threatened. In this context, it becomes more difficult to discern a clear pattern regarding who is targeted and on what grounds. The source noted that one could only speculate on authorities' practice based on previous suppression methods on other topics.

#### **Civil society reporting LGBT+ persons to the authorities**

14. Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the culture of so-called *donoshiki*,<sup>566</sup> or informers, appears to have intensified, as demonstrating loyalty to the state became increasingly important for certain members of society. In 2020, relatively few people would have paid particular attention to LGBT+ individuals. In the current context, however, a greater number of civil society actors may be willing to report LGBT+ persons to the authorities.

#### **Consequences for relatives**

15. The source had not encountered any cases involving direct consequences for the relatives of LGBT+ persons. However, it was assessed by the source that it is possible that relatives could be subjected to negative commentary or reputational damage. If an LGBT+ person was to flee the country, this could also affect their parents, should parents and child wish to remain together. In such instances, the family would need to leave the country alongside the LGBT+ individual. The source was aware of a number of such cases.

#### **Differences in the treatment of homosexual men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transpersons**

16. In general, the source assessed that the threshold circulates around the matter of appearance – how much the individual is standing out. The source opined that being transgender carries even greater risks than being a homosexual or bisexual man or woman. This is particularly the case for individuals who have undergone a gender transition, as the legal change of a person's name must be processed through government bodies such as the Ministry of the Interior. Although it is no longer possible to undergo legal gender transition in Russia, the authorities still retain oversight over those who transitioned while it was legally permitted.
17. In this context, recent restrictions and legislation have placed transgender persons in a particularly difficult position, as they require access to essential medication. Should the

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<sup>566</sup> In Russian: *Доношки*

authorities seek to target a specific group, transgender individuals could represent an easy target. Although no such targeting has occurred as of September 2025, the source considered it plausible that this could happen in the future if the authorities sought a scapegoat.

18. The source expressed the view that homosexual men are generally worse off than lesbians, as lesbians may be perceived as a phenomenon arising from men being “insufficient” in fulfilling their roles. This perspective reflects the stance of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko, and is, according to the source, in many ways consistent with beliefs prevalent in Russia.
19. In Chechnya, homosexual women are by the source assessed to occupy a particularly vulnerable position, as women in the region generally lack freedom to make independent life choices.
20. Homosexual men walking hand in hand in public are likely to attract more attention than two homosexual females, as male displays of affection are considered more unusual culturally. In contrast, a female couple holding hands would likely be perceived by the general public simply as friends, particularly in larger cities, and would not be regarded as unusual.

#### **Regional differences in the treatment of LGBT+ persons**

21. In more remote areas and smaller towns, LGBT+ persons are particularly vulnerable, as they are more visible within local communities compared to larger cities such as St Petersburg and Moscow. Furthermore, certain regions, including Krasnodar and Chechnya, present additional challenges due to the heightened activity of local security services.
22. The source noted that it is easier for LGBT+ persons to remain inconspicuous in larger cities, which also benefit from these cities’ infrastructure such as access to shelters, community centres, and the presence of human rights defenders and lawyers. Furthermore, local communities in larger cities are generally more inclined to offer support to LGBT+ persons than communities in rural areas of Russia. However, traditionally safe cities like St Petersburg have become less secure, following major raids on LGBT+ events in the city centre in 2024. The source opined that, in larger cities, it is easier to blend in and not to stand out; however, living openly as an LGBT+ person is not regarded to be safe in any of the cities.
23. The source suggested that in Krasnodar, for example, targeting LGBT+ persons by local police officers could be seen not only as a way of upholding traditional values in Russia, but also potentially as a means of demonstrating to authorities in Moscow that they are an effective police force.

#### **The situation in North Caucasus**

24. In Chechnya, conditions for members of the LGBT+ community are extremely severe. For instance, in 2017, a purge targeting LGBT+ individuals took place. There are also

reports of homosexual women being pursued not only by the so-called Kadyrovites but also by relatives, as their sexual identity is perceived as bringing shame upon the extended family—an attitude that, in some cases, can escalate to honour-based violence.<sup>567</sup> The source noted that in particular in Chechnya, there is a general practice of acts with impunity.

25. Within the context North Caucasus, the source noted that there are multiple factors of religion, traditional customs, and families in the local communities. Furthermore, the source assessed those deviations from traditional appearances, for instance by not dressing according to customs, in itself pose a risk to the individual.
26. In this context, a Chechen LGBT+ person may seek refuge by relocating to Moscow. However, the issue of residence registration (propiska) complicates such relocation. For the time being, relocation from Chechnya to other parts of Russia remains possible. The source reported having contacts with a number of organisations that assist individuals from North Caucasus in relocating to Moscow or St Petersburg.
27. Moscow, however, can present certain difficulties, as the Kadyrovites maintain a relatively extensive network within the city. The source noted that this was not only true for Moscow, but they additionally had a base in the city. In such cases, it may be preferable to relocate a Chechen individual to Yekaterinburg, depending on the specific circumstances.

#### **Situation for returnees**

28. There are a few cases in which Russian LGBT+ citizens in exile have formed partnerships abroad. The source recalled, for example, a case involving a basketball player who moved to the USA and subsequently publicly disclosed having a female partner. The source opined that she would be targeted by the authorities upon her return to Russia.
29. According to the source, social networks are being monitored by the Russian authorities, including social media activities undertaken by Russian citizens abroad. Particularly, this takes place if these activities or stories attract significant attention. When certain media outlets publicise individual cases to illustrate the treatment of LGBT+ persons from Russia abroad, such reports are likewise monitored by the Russian authorities.
30. If a Russian citizen has been abroad for several years, the risk of being targeted by the authorities upon return depends on factors such as whether their travel documents have expired or if they are flagged on the internal wanted list. In such cases, this could attract the attention of the authorities and lead to questioning at the border, with enquiries about their whereabouts for such an extended period. The source was aware that individuals were occasionally questioned about their activities, contacts, and the

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<sup>567</sup> RFE/RL, *Chechen Woman's Disappearance Investigated As Possible Murder, Rights Group Says*, 9 April 2024, [url](#); RFE/RL, *Woman Fleeing Domestic Violence Missing After Being Forcibly Returned To Chechnya*, 15 June 2023, [url](#); IMDB, *Welcome to Chechnya*, 2020, [url](#)

reasons for extended absences. Their devices were also checked or screened. While this does not appear to occur regularly, such instances have been reported.

31. The source noted that each case is individual and depends on multiple factors upon arrival. As a consequence, the organisation always advice individuals to delete everything from their phones.
32. The source was aware of a case involving an individual living in the EU, who had previously faced a criminal case in Russia related to Navalny. The case was ultimately dropped, and the person decided to return to Russia. When applying for new travel documents at the Russian embassy, the individual claimed that the documents had been lost. This case illustrates the importance of preparing for different scenarios when planning a return to Russia. In this instance, according to the source, the person was able to return without any problems.

## Russian LGBT Network

Vilnius, 03.09.25

*Russian LGBT Network is a network of people and organisations working together to ensure LGBT+ rights in Russia. It was founded in 2006. Amongst many other things, the Network provides legal and psychological counsel to LGBT+ individuals as well as legal assistance in court cases.*

*Russian LGBT Network was designated foreign agent by the Russian authorities in 2021.*

### The legal system since the Supreme Court decision in November 2023

1. The source stated that the number of administrative charges against LGBT+ persons has risen since 2022. In 2022, there were 22 LGBT propaganda cases, in 2023 there were 182 LGBT propaganda cases, while in 2024, there were 220 LGBT propaganda cases<sup>568</sup>. Official numbers covering 2025 have not yet been published.
2. Since the Supreme Court ruling in November 2023, there have been at least 15 cases of LGBT+ persons being criminally charged with extremism. According to the source, the prosecuted individuals were not activists but ordinary members of the queer community, including businessmen or publishers. In one of the cases, the person charged, Andrei Kotov, committed suicide while in prison, which the source suggested occurred following torture. The source noted that prison terms for extremism range from 4 to 12 years of imprisonment.
3. According to the source, it can be difficult to determine whether a particular action falls under the legislation on extremism or propaganda. The source stated that the government uses the propaganda law to persecute individuals involved in political activities. To this end, they may search for compromising photographs.
4. In one case, a young man who was not LGBT+ worked as an employee of Boris Nadezhdin's opposition political party. He sent a message to a closed Telegram chat group containing a rainbow emoji. The police drew up a report and the court arrested him for six days.
5. In another case, the authorities found a photo of a young man wearing makeup on a Telegram channel with 40 subscribers. He was charged with an administrative offence and fined 100,000 roubles (1,200 euro). In the end, the young man was acquitted because it was proven that the authorities had committed procedural violations.
6. The source opined that individuals face difficulties with authorities simply for wearing make-up, hugging, or kissing persons of the same gender. The authorities consider all such public displays of LGBT propaganda, and courts can impose fines of 50,000 to

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<sup>568</sup> Sudebny Departament, *Данные судебной статистики*, n.d., [url](#), see report 1-АП for 2022, 2023 and 2024.

400,000 roubles ( $\approx$  40,000 euro) for each instance (LGBT propaganda ban law, Article 6.21 of the Russian Federation Code of Administrative Offenses<sup>569</sup>).

7. Receiving support from an LGBT+ organisation can prove beneficial in these types of situations, and, in many parts of Russia, individuals lack access to LGBT+ organisations. According to the source, many LGBT+ organisations have been forced to close their social media accounts, making it difficult for individuals to reach their assistance.

#### Access to legal representation

8. The source explained that LGBT+ individuals have access to legal representation. In criminal cases, the state may provide them with a lawyer, or they may hire one themselves. In administrative cases (in the Western tradition, these are minor criminal offenses), LGBT+ individuals must hire a lawyer themselves or defend themselves without one. The number of lawyers specializing in LGBT+ issues is limited, and their overall number has decreased since 2022. The source expressed the opinion that these lawyers have become less inclined to collaborate with LGBT+ organizations. Collaborating with an organization that has been declared a "foreign agent" can negatively impact a lawyer's career. However, the Russian LGBT Network is open to cooperation with lawyers who collaborate with the organization on LGBT+ cases.

#### Authorities' treatment of LGBT+ persons after the Supreme Court decision

9. Following the Supreme Court decision, raids on LGBT+ nightclubs began. Gay clubs still exist in Russia. They are located not only in Moscow and St Petersburg, but also in other cities and towns. However, since the Supreme Court decision, they have frequently changed their names and programs, and are now also open to heterosexuals. Clubs that previously had "dark rooms" have closed.

10. The source pointed to the problem of LGBT+ content online. In some cases, people are reportedly facing problems due to social media posts that are ten years old. Under Russian law, it doesn't matter when a person published the content. What is important is that once authorities discover content that violates the new laws, the person can be charged with LGBT extremism (for example, a fine of 1,000 to 2,000 roubles or arrest for up to 15 days) or LGBT propaganda (a fine of 50,000 to 400,000 roubles).

11. Some people are showing courage and coming out at work or school, despite the fear that someone might subsequently report them to the authorities or attempt to blackmail them.

12. Furthermore, the source reported that LGBT+ individuals allegedly use internal and hidden signs in their chats when discussing LGBT+ content. Regarding public speaking, the source expressed the opinion that appearing publicly with a homosexual orientation has always been unsafe. However, after the Supreme Court decision, LGBT+

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<sup>569</sup>Consultant, КоАП РФ Статья 6.21. Пропаганда нетрадиционных сексуальных отношений и (или) предпочтений, смены пола, отказа от деторождения, 6 September 2025, [url](#)

individuals have become even more fearful, and public coming out has become impossible.

13. The source noted that the court's decision has also affected other groups. Many fear persecution for brightly coloured hair, piercings, or tattoos, as authorities believe such behaviour violates "traditional values" and "promotes non-traditional sexual relations." Authorities prosecute such individuals for acts of self-presentation under the law banning LGBT propaganda.
14. Safe spaces and several community centers still exist for LGBT+ people. However, most have closed or operate underground. Those community centers that remain open still host special events, but no longer have permanent locations and carefully select participants. An LGBT+ person who has never previously interacted with LGBT+ organizations has an extremely low chance of attending such events. There are shelters for LGBT+ people, but they are mostly located in large cities such as Moscow or St Petersburg, while some NGOs provide short-term (usually one month) financial support to LGBT+ people to enable them to live independently.

#### **Civil Society's Attitude Toward LGBT+ People**

15. A source reported cases of homosexual men being deceived by homophobes and neo-Nazis on dating apps, believing they were meeting for a date. However, after the encounter, they were either beaten or blackmailed to keep their sexual orientation secret.
16. The source expressed the opinion that if these homosexual men had reported the crime to the police, since the crime would not have been recognized as a hate crime, the perpetrator would have been charged with a common criminal offense (without the element of hatred toward the LGBT social group). If the victim reports the crime to the police, they are not held accountable for "LGBT propaganda." However, it is difficult for the victim to obtain an investigation, as law enforcement agencies are not prepared to investigate violent crimes against LGBT people.
17. In Voronezh, a doctor flirted with a colleague, who then reported him to the police, claiming he was a member of an extremist international LGBT movement. Ultimately, the doctor was charged with extremism. Taking into account various circumstances, the court sentenced him to three years in a penal colony.<sup>570</sup>

#### **Regional Differences in Attitudes Toward LGBT+ People**

18. According to the source, the North Caucasus poses a particular danger for LGBT+ people. In some regions of Russia, LGBT+ organizations are non-existent, leaving people either turning to interregional LGBT organizations (such as the Russian LGBT Network) online or without offline support.

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<sup>570</sup> Ульяновск Ekspres, Суд в Ульяновской области вынес приговор за пропаганду ЛГБТ-экстремизма и сатанизма, 24 March 2025, [url](#)

19. In the Russian Far East, including Vladivostok, Kamchatka, and Sakhalin, there is only one active LGBT+ organisation.
20. Rural areas are typically characterised by traditional beliefs and a strong religious presence, whether Orthodox or Muslim. These attitudes are unsupportive of LGBT+ people, and priests attempt to "cure" (conversion therapy) LGBT+ people.
21. The source added that it is difficult for organisations to provide assistance in rural areas, but LGBT+ people do not exist in a vacuum. Most have access to social media and encrypted chats and can follow LGBT+ influencers and LGBT+ organisations online. This activity is not prohibited by Russian authorities.
22. They also ask for help if needed. The source noted that they provide emergency assistance and evacuations.
23. Most criminal charges against LGBT+ people come from these rural areas, but they can be defended by lawyers from LGBT+ organisations.

### **The LGBT+ Situation in Large Cities**

33. In some large cities like Yekaterinburg, where politics were comparatively liberal, the situation for LGBT+ people was different earlier. Until 2022, it was possible to organize public events for the community, although in rare cases.
34. Many LGBT organizations went underground to avoid accusations of being "foreign agents." Since the introduction of the "foreign agent" legislation, Russian authorities have designated at least nine LGBT initiatives as such. Only two of them have been removed from the "foreign agent" registry due to liquidation. At least seven LGBT initiatives are still considered "foreign agents" by the authorities.
35. According to the source, conditions for the LGBT+ community in large cities depend on the characteristics of the neighbourhood they live in, as some areas are more tolerant than others. Moscow and St Petersburg typically enjoy a certain degree of urban anonymity, which sometimes allows people to remain virtually unknown to others.
36. In smaller cities, expressing one's identity can lead to different attitudes. The source noted that homosexual women living with children often adopt a "don't ask, don't tell" approach, as their parental status makes it difficult to hide their relationships, so they simply avoid open discussion. However, LGBT people cannot completely avoid danger in both large cities and rural areas: they face daily risks of prosecution for "LGBT propaganda," extremism, or becoming victims of violence.
37. The strategy of LGBT people moving from one area to another does not create a safe space for LGBT people. The entire territory of the Russian Federation poses a danger to LGBT people; there are no safe places for LGBT people in Russia.
38. According to the source, some LGBT+ people live openly to the extent that their friends or colleagues know about their sexual orientation and identity. However, the source emphasised, many cannot speak openly about their homosexuality, and some couples present themselves publicly simply as friends.
39. Consequently, the source concluded that living openly as LGBT+ in Russia is practically impossible in practice in society at large, including in the workplace. For example,

teachers accused of being LGBT+ are fired from their jobs. For example, such a case occurred in 2023 in Surgut,<sup>571</sup> when a teacher was fired for appearing gender nonconforming. In 2024, a teacher from Khabarovsk,<sup>572</sup> who danced in heels during his free time, was fired for his behaviour.

### **Disparities in Treatment of Homosexual Men and Women, Bisexuals, and Transgender People**

40. According to the source, transgender people are the most vulnerable group in the LGBT+ community because, unlike other members of the LGBT+ community, they cannot hide their identity and require hormone therapy or sex reassignment surgery to maintain their appearance and identity.
41. Furthermore, they cannot change their legal gender on official documents, forcing them to live with this inequality. In one case, a transgender man and a cisgender man had a child and were, initially, unable to obtain a birth certificate for their child because Russian documents only list the father and mother. The child remained undocumented for about a year. They won the case thanks to the support of two LGBT+ organisations and have since left Russia.
42. Furthermore, transgender people are prohibited from adopting children. These bans came into effect in Russia in July 2023.

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<sup>571</sup> Sibir.Realii, Учителя вынудили уволиться из-за "пропаганды ЛГБТ" в Сургуте, 29 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>572</sup> BFM.RU, В Хабаровске учитель уволился из-за старого видео с его танцем на каблуках, 13 September 2024, [url](#)

## Medazona

Vilnius, 02.09.25

*Medazona is an independent media outlet focussing on and monitoring the legal system and law enforcement in Russia. The organisation was designated foreign agent in Russia in September 2021.*

### **The legal system since the propaganda law and Supreme Court decision November 2023**

1. Prior to the Supreme Court decision in 2023, a substantial number of cases had been brought under the ban on so-called non-traditional values, pursuant to article 6.21 of the administrative code, commonly referred to as LGBT propaganda. Convicted persons under this provision are charged with fines. Charges on propaganda are continuously being enforced, and Medazona has estimated that dozens of new cases are initiated each month.<sup>573</sup>
2. Prosecutions vary in scope and are directed against all types of persons. Medazona has reported about examples of charges on the basis of posts on social media, including material published several years ago. The source provided examples of fines for imagery of two women kissing.<sup>574</sup>
3. LGBT+ related charges are often brought either under provisions of propaganda or pursuant to articles on displaying extremist symbols, which may consist of nothing more than a rainbow. The source noted that there have been various such cases in 2024.<sup>575</sup> Reported cases include a Pink Floyd rainbow, which was considered to be

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<sup>573</sup> The source noted that numbers are not precise and sometimes they come in bulk, making concrete counts difficult

<sup>574</sup> Medazona, На центр исторической реконструкции «Кауп» в Калининграде составили два протокола о «пропаганде ЛГБТ» из-за фото с дилдо и целующимися девушками, 21 August 2025, [url](#); Medazona, Суд в Сочи оштрафовал треш-стримера из Тулы на 150 тысяч рублей из-за видео с двумя целующимися девушками, 16 May 2025, [url](#); Medazona, «Верстка»: на жительницу Уфы составили протокол о «пропаганде bisексуальности» из-за видео 14-летней давности, 30 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>575</sup> Medazona, Rainbow hunters. What “extremist” LGBTQ+ symbols are Russians being fined for (even if they’re right-wing), 1 July 2024, [url](#)

extremist,<sup>576</sup> as well as Pepe the Frog in a rainbow wig.<sup>577</sup> Display of such extremist symbols has also led to short arrest due to a rainbow emoji<sup>578</sup> and rainbow earrings.<sup>579</sup>

4. From 2014-2024, 539 administrative cases concerning LGBT+ propaganda had been registered, most of which are finalised.<sup>580</sup> According to the source, a few hundred more have been registered in 2025,<sup>581</sup> though the number is expected to be higher. Institutions and organisations have faced substantial fines for propaganda and for other violations, sometimes several in one day, for instance added fines for refusal to remove LGBT+ related content.<sup>582</sup>
5. Thus, charges are not limited to LGBT propaganda as according to Administrative Code, Art. 6.21.<sup>583</sup> Charges for extremist symbols as according to Administrative Code, Art. 20.3 have also been reported. Financing an extremist organisation could also be a subject matter, though the source had no recalls of such cases.
6. Being convicted of an administrative offence and punished with a fine might be a straightforward procedure for larger institutions. However, the consequences are much more complex for an individual. According to this source, following a conviction for LGBT propaganda, the police and investigators are likely to keep the individual under close scrutiny, effectively placing them on a watchlist. According to the source,

<sup>576</sup> Mediazona, *Магнитогорскую активистку оштрафовали за эмодзи с обложкой Pink Floyd в нике в телеграмме; ее признали «символикой ЛГБТ»*, 28 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>577</sup> Mediazona, *Жителя Новгородской области оштрафовали по протоколу об экстремистской символике из-за мема с лягушонком Пепе в радужном парике во «ВКонтакте»*, 15 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>578</sup> Mediazona, *Екатеринбургская художница Алиса Горшенина вышла из спецприемника после ареста за эмодзи с радугой*, 4 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>579</sup> Meduza, *Russian woman jailed under anti-extremism law for wearing rainbow earrings*, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>580</sup> Meduza, *За последние 10 лет количество дел по статьям, связанным с «пропагандой ЛГБТ», выросло в 18 (!) раз*, 18 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>581</sup> The source has its own internal count of cases

<sup>582</sup> Mediazona, *Онлайн-кинотеатр Okko оштрафовали на миллион рублей из-за показа фильма «Ив Сен-Лоран» с поцелуями людей одного пола*, 21 May 2024, [url](#); Mediazona, *На «Кинопоиск» и Wink составили протоколы о «пропаганде ЛГБТ»*, 8 May 2024, [url](#); Mediazona, *Mangalib оштрафовали на 14 млн рублей по протоколам о «пропаганде ЛГБТ» из-за семи манг на сайте онлайн-библиотеки*, 25 August 2025, [url](#); Mediazona, *Суд оштрафовал Google на 4,6 миллиарда рублей за отказ удалить из ютуба видео о войне и ЛГБТ*, 20 December 2023, [url](#); Mediazona, *TikTok оштрафовали на 3 млн рублей из-за отказа удалять «пропаганду ЛГБТ»; Twitch — на 4 млн из-за интервью Арестовича*, 4 October 2022, [url](#); Mediazona, *Apple в России оштрафовали на 7,5 млн рублей по трем протоколам о «пропаганде ЛГБТ»*, 19 May 2025, [url](#); Mediazona, *Московский суд оштрафовал Apple и WhatsApp по протоколам о «пропаганде ЛГБТ» и отказе от удаления информации*, 10 June 2025, [url](#); Mediazona, *На Apple и «Кинопоиск» составили протоколы о «пропаганде ЛГБТ»*, 24 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>583</sup> Consultant, *КоАП РФ Статья 6.21. Пропаганда нетрадиционных сексуальных отношений и (или) предпочтений, смены пола, отказа от деторождения*, 6 September 2025, [url](#)

such information can only be documented on the basis of criminal case files of individuals convicted under these articles, and potentially also through leaked databases.

7. This poses a future risk to the individual. One fine may be followed by another fine and potentially by future prosecution under the criminal law for extremism. The source elaborated that this is a procedure often applied in cases of 'discrediting the army' and 'foreign agent' status. This is expected to develop in the LGBT+ area as well in the very near future, according to the source.
8. Another means of prosecution is article 20.3 concerning the display of extremist symbols. Mediazona assessed that, from the wording,<sup>584</sup> it is impossible to ascertain precisely what constitutes an extremist symbol; it might range from a Swastika symbol or a rainbow-coloured frog earring. The source noted that there have been instances where persons have been simultaneously fined or arrested for LGBT+ and Nazi symbols.<sup>585</sup>
9. Mediazona informed that not all case information is publicly accessible, and detailed knowledge of the full scope of cases is lacking. In cases of extremist symbols, the extremist element may be hard to define without for instance a precise court decision text, press-release, or a report from the court room.
10. According to the source, there are over 100 administrative cases of guilty verdicts of alleged participation in the international LGBT movement or for display of extremist symbols.<sup>586</sup>
11. When exploring (administrative) court decisions on extremism, it is often difficult to discern from the verdicts whether charges relate to LGBT+ issues, Nazi symbols, the non-existent A.U.E organisation or something else.
12. As of September 2025, approximately two dozen criminal cases have been initiated on charges of extremism in relation to LGBT+ issues. The source had no public data to

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<sup>584</sup> Пропаганда либо публичное демонстрирование нацистской атрибутики или символики, либо атрибутики или символики экстремистских организаций, либо иных атрибутики или символики, пропаганда либо публичное демонстрирование которых запрещены федеральными законами = Propaganda or public display of Nazi attributes or symbols, or attributes or symbols of extremist organisations, or other attributes or symbols, the propaganda or public display of which is prohibited by federal law.

<sup>585</sup> Mediazona, Москвичку за один день оштрафовали 11 раз из-за видео с зигающим Ильей Мэддисоном, полуоголым Пашей Техником, «гейами скинами», а также мультика с Дональдом Даком, 29 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>586</sup> HRW, Россия: все большие жертвы признания «движения ЛГБТ» «экстремистским», 3 June 2025, [url](#)

refer to but, instead, referred to an overview pursued by OVD-Info counting 12 criminal cases in 2024.<sup>587</sup>

13. Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code has been applied in several public cases, but not all extremism cases or all details are publicly known. In particular three specific cases are referred and widely discussed by media and the public at current time, all of which had not been convicted as of September 2025. The cases concern a gay bar in Orenburg,<sup>588</sup> an alleged LGBT+ tour guide, though found dead in pretrial detention,<sup>589</sup> and the case of a publishing house.<sup>590</sup> The latter recent case concerns a book with queer content, where three persons face criminal charges and potentially up to five years in prison for participation in extremism. Prior to this, the manager of the publishing house was declared foreign agent and subject to ongoing scrutiny. Following this, they were forced to sell the publishing house to a larger entity. Both the managers of the publishing house and the author of the book fled the country before the initiation of the criminal case.
14. The terminology *extremist organisation*, as introduced by the Supreme Court decision November 2023, is complicated to concretise. Mediazona found that it is difficult to assess from court records what information is considered essential and forms the basis for prosecution. Courts are becoming increasingly closed, and Mediazona are more frequently informed that they cannot access a court case.
15. Mediazona stressed that, as of September 2025, there is only information concerning the extremist decisions at the courts. For example, it took 1,5 years before the book publisher case was brought to court. Law enforcement officers and investigators may have a substantial backlog of cases awaiting trial.

#### **Authorities' treatment of LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court decision**

16. Mediazona has been monitoring various forms of repression inside Russia, in particular political repression. The last 1,5 years the media outlet has experienced a huge rise in LGBT+ related topics. Even though Mediazona conducts monitoring of repression in the

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<sup>587</sup> OVD-Info, *Repression in Russia in 2024: OVD-Info Overview*, 12 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>588</sup> Mediazona, Russia's pioneering "LGBT extremism" case. In Orenburg, Pose bar raid and criminal case set precedent for future repression, 5 April 2024, [url](#); Mediazona, *В суд передали дело об «ЛГБТ-экстремизме» против сотрудников и владельца оренбургского бара Pose*, 9 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>589</sup> BBC, «Большой ребенок». Как жил и погиб обвиненный в проведении «турсов для геев» Андрей Комов, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>590</sup> Mediazona, «Первый отдел»: троим сотрудникам издательства «Эксмо», Popcorn Books и Individuum предъявили обвинение по делу об экстремистской организации, его возбудили из-за квир-литературы, 15 May 2025, [url](#)

courts, including making court verdicts public, the media outlet emphasised that many actions occur outside the courts, whilst some cases never even reach the courts.

17. Mediazona stated that online communication poses a risk for LGBT+ persons of ultimately being criminally prosecuted for taking part of an extremist organisation. This regards both social media expressions as well as participation in group chats over phone. If communicating via a fully encrypted media, the risk depends on the recipients of the message. However, the number of potential LGBT+ cases in Russia makes it impossible for the authorities to prosecute everyone. Mediazona concluded that the Russian repressive authorities do not need to do so, because, since the Supreme Court decision, Russian LGBT+ persons live in a constant fear of scrutiny and prosecution at any time and in any place, whether through fines or criminal proceedings.
18. Repression remains ongoing, for example, when all types of gatherings of LGBT+ persons are being clamped down on. Mediazona seeks to document raids conducted by the authorities, and especially night clubs and restaurants across the country have reportedly been subjected to a series of raids.<sup>591</sup>
19. Mediazona emphasised that the public has access to only limited information, and the consequence is an incomplete picture of what is going on. Mediazona described that individuals abstain from attracting attention and try to avoid going public with their sexual orientation or gender identity. This means that some cases remain unreported as a means of preventing more severe repression or prosecution.
20. In certain cases, the police have reportedly participated in semi-official vigilante groups, which are on the rise in Russia.<sup>592</sup> They harass individuals who belong to the LGBT+ community.
21. Mediazona assessed that it is difficult to identify concrete thresholds for what leads an individual to become a target of the authorities. One suggestion is that if the local police are required to meet performance indicators, they may actively search to find an individual to target, for instance by searching online and identifying shared images from the past. Business-related issues might also be a trigger for further investigation as has been explored with the Individuum publishing house purchase and declaring its owners, managers, and authors “foreign agents”, though it is not directly related to

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<sup>591</sup> For an overview of raids in early 2024 see: Mediazona, “*Your dick—where is it?*” *Police and special forces are raiding private parties in Russia, in search of the “international LGBT movement”*, 23 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>592</sup> Mediazona, *Vigilante Russian. The rise of far-right “Russian Community”, with anti-migrant and anti-gay raids, assaults, and at least one death*, 9 June 2025, [url](#)

anti-LGBT legislation. Another risk arises from persons, who may encounter an LGBT+ person, and report the individual to the police.<sup>593</sup>

### Civil society's treatment of LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court decision

22. If LGBT+ persons in Russia are open about their sexual identity, they may be subjected to harassment. Homophobic behaviour is encouraged by the authorities, and civil society's treatment is becoming increasingly violent. Apart from the authorities, ordinary people, vigilante groups, and even passersby pose a constant threat of harassment to an LGBT+ person.<sup>594</sup>
23. There has been a rise of the so-called [Russkaya obshchina](#), a vigilante group who also harass LGBT+ persons.
24. Private meetings and living together remain possible for LGBT+ persons. However, Mediazona stressed that the core issue for LGBT+ persons is the difficulty of assessing the concrete level of risk. Any person or circumstance may act as a trigger to onward prosecution from the authorities, hence LGBT+ persons can never be certain where and for what reason they might be targeted. Private meetings or living together may pose a risk of a landlord or neighbours observing and reporting them. This was the case with a homosexual couple living in Moscow, being seen through the windows, reported to the police, and subsequently prosecuted.

### Availability and effectiveness of state protection

25. Mediazona assessed that the Russian authorities are unwilling to protect LGBT+ persons from harassment or violent acts from non-state-actors. The police system is described by the source as being deeply corrupt. The stance of the authorities would not be to protect an LGBT+ person from acts such as physical violence, even though some well-meaning police officers may do their best. Cases of serious violence or murder may, however, be subject to prosecution.

### Situation in larger cities vs smaller/rural areas

26. Mediazona suggested that LGBT+ life may be somewhat easier in Moscow, where individuals can remain more anonymous, in contrast to a smaller village where they are more visible within the community.

### North Caucasus and Chechnya

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<sup>593</sup> Mediazona, Суд в Москве утвердил сроки до 5,5 лет колонии строгого режима двоим студентам, которых дети увидели обнаженными в окне, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>594</sup> Mediazona, *Vigilante Russian. The rise of far-right “Russian Community”, with anti-migrant and anti-gay raids, assaults, and at least one death*, 9 June 2025, [url](#)

27. In North Caucasus, the situation for LGBT+ persons has been dire for many years. It is not possible to relocate to other regions when their relatives are pursuing them.<sup>595</sup> There have been cases in which relatives tracked individuals in larger cities and abducted them. Most of these cases are not public.
28. In North Caucasus, families, conservative traditions, and religion play a central role in the local community.

#### **Situation for relatives**

29. Mediazona stated that any form of criminal prosecution also impacts the LGBT+ person's close family. It is custom to have one's official residency registration, called propiska, to be at the parents' residence. This means that their property is a natural search point in case of a criminal case. During such searches, personal belongings will be confiscated.
30. Mediazona was not aware of any cases in which relatives of LGBT+ persons faced consequences.

#### **Returnees**

31. Mediazona had seen various reported cases about Russian citizens returning to Russia and facing prosecution for a range of reasons. The basis for prosecutions has been reported to be treason, donation and support to the war, amongst others.<sup>596</sup>
32. Mediazona had seen reports of 30-60 Russians being deported from the United States recently. The source was aware of one public deportation case before this 2023 incident, involving Artyom Vovchenko, a Russian who fled conscription and sought asylum in the United States. After his request was denied, he was deported to Moscow via Cairo, despite fears of persecution upon return.<sup>597</sup> As of September 2025, there is no information about the outcome of the deportations and the treatment of the returnees upon their return. However, there are reasons to believe that the initial information about 30-60 people deported as a single group were an exaggeration.<sup>598</sup>
33. Mediazona assessed that it is almost certain that a person will be questioned upon return. A person who travels back and forth while residing in Russia may not raise

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<sup>595</sup> Meduza *Летом 2022 года чеченские силовики похитили Ризвана Дадаева и несколько месяцев пытали в «тюрьме для геев»*, 31 January 2024, [url](#),

<sup>596</sup> Mediazona, “He believed it was his homeland”. An IT specialist’s trip home to Russia ends in a 15-year “treason” sentence for a \$500 donation to Ukraine, 27 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>597</sup> NYT, *He Fled Putin’s War. The U.S. Deported Him to a Russian Jail*, 16 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>598</sup> An earlier example of self-deportation: Mediazona, *Broken by American detention. Russian authorities arrest Leonid Melekhin after failed asylum attempt and “self-deportation” from the U.S.*, 29 July 2025, [url](#)

suspicion. But a person being abroad for several years and then returning may provide as basis for questioning, phone search, and the person may already figure in databases/watchlists of the authorities. Medazona underlined that surveillance lists do exist in Russia.

34. Medazona has done some initial research to explore the level of state surveillance in different online apps. Nevertheless, it has been found that the app *VKontakte* gives the Russian authorities unlimited access to its users, whilst the level of surveillance in the app *Telegram* remains uncertain. The Russian authorities have been trying to restrict the app *WhatsApp*. As of September 2025, installation of the new messenger app *Max* has become mandatory in new phones in Russia.<sup>599</sup>
35. Medazona assessed that the extent of FSB's access to information and the degree to which it is systematically applied remains uncertain. The source concluded that if any person – a returnee or specifically an LGBT+ person – knows how to behave and what to avoid, that person is comparatively safer. According to the source, it is common sense to travel with a new, clean phone and with contact details to a lawyer. The source emphasised that safety at the border does not guarantee safety inside the country.<sup>600</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> RKS Global, Testing for Surveillance in MAX on Android and iPhone, September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>600</sup> For an overview of persons who returned and went to prison see: Memorial, *Should I stay, or should I go (back)?*, 10 September 2025, [url](#)

## Sphere Foundation

Riga, 04.09.25

*Sphere Foundation is a human rights organisation advocating for the rights of LGBT+ persons in Russia. The organisation provides individual assistance and monitors incidents of violence and hate crimes, working in collaboration with regional organisations and volunteers.*

*The organisation was designated foreign agent by the Russian authorities in 2016.*

### The legal system and authorities' treatment of LGBT+ persons

1. Since the Supreme Court ruling in 2023, the number of criminal charges has increased. In 2024, approximately 22–24 criminal cases were brought against LGBT+ persons on charges of extremism in Russia. In some instances, individuals received lengthy sentences of between 10 and 12 years in prison.
2. As of September 2025, the source recorded one case that had been finalised, in which the individuals received a sentence of three and a half years' imprisonment.<sup>601</sup>
3. With regard to administrative cases, it is far more difficult to obtain a comprehensive overview. This is due to the fact that the justice system's webpages do not function properly, making it challenging to retrieve information on specific cases. Nonetheless, it is possible to gain insight into some of the proceedings through media outlets that monitor them. Overall, administrative cases appear to be more numerous than criminal cases.
4. As of September 2025, for organisations, the amounts are even higher, typically ranging from approximately 500,000 to 1 million roubles. The majority of these cases concern video services or online cinemas. For individuals, however, the fines imposed are considerably lower. Substantial fines apply exclusively to legal entities. Nevertheless, a legal entity may be prosecuted on multiple occasions, resulting in cumulative penalties that can exceed one million roubles. In cases involving the dissemination of propaganda among minors, fines for legal entities may reach up to four million roubles.<sup>602</sup>
5. Since the Supreme Court ruling, prosecutors and investigators have sought to apply the law on extremism rather than the anti-propaganda law previously used. However, judges, investigators, and experts alike appear not to distinguish between anti-propaganda and extremism cases. As a consequence, instead of being subjected to administrative prosecution, individuals are charged with serious criminal offences and consequently sentenced to actual terms of imprisonment.
6. Cases of extremism in Russia may result in either administrative or criminal proceedings. Administrative cases primarily concern the display of extremist symbols. By contrast, the grounds for criminal offences are more difficult to ascertain, although

<sup>601</sup> SOVA, *В Ульяновской области экс-директору медцентра вынесли приговор по ст. 133 и 282.2 УК*, 21 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>602</sup> Kodeks ob Administrativnykh Pravonarusheniakh RF, *Статья 6.21.2 КоАП РФ*, n.d. [url](#); Kodeks ob Administrativnykh Pravonarusheniakh RF, *Статья 6.21 КоАП РФ*, n.d., [url](#)

it is evident that many such cases relate to participation in, or organisation of, an extremist community. Several of these cases involved managers of LGBT+ clubs.

7. All cases of extremism are formally defined in the law as targeting changes to the political system in Russia. This is the formulation set out in the legislation:

Article 1 of the Federal Law “On Countering Extremist Activity”

*Extremist activity (extremism) refers to the violent alteration of the foundations of the constitutional order and/or the violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation (including the alienation of part of the territory of the Russian Federation), except in cases involving the delimitation, demarcation, or re-demarcation of the State border of the Russian Federation with neighbouring states. It also includes the public justification of terrorism and other terrorist activities, and the incitement of social, racial, national, or religious discord.*

*Furthermore, it encompasses the propaganda of the exclusivity, superiority, or inferiority of an individual based on their social, racial, national, religious, or linguistic affiliation or attitude towards religion, as well as the violation of the rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests of individuals and citizens on these same grounds. Extremist activity also covers the obstruction of citizens' exercise of their electoral rights and their right to participate in a referendum, or violation of the secrecy of the ballot, when such acts are accompanied by violence or the threat of its use.*

*It further includes the obstruction of the lawful activities of state bodies, local self-government bodies, electoral commissions, public or religious associations, or other organisations, when such obstruction is accompanied by violence or the threat thereof. Extremist activity also includes the commission of offences motivated by the grounds specified in paragraph “e” of part one of Article 63 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.*

*The term further encompasses the use of Nazi attributes or symbols, or of attributes or symbols similar to Nazi ones to the point of confusion, or of attributes or symbols of extremist organisations, except in cases where such use forms a negative attitude towards the ideology of Nazism and extremism and does not display signs of propaganda or justification of Nazi or extremist ideology. It includes public calls for the commission of the acts specified above, or the mass dissemination of knowingly extremist materials, as well as their production or storage for the purpose of mass dissemination.*

*It also includes the public dissemination of knowingly false accusations against a person holding a state office of the Russian Federation or a state office of a constituent entity of the Russian Federation, alleging that, in the course of performing their official duties, they committed acts specified in this Article and constituting a criminal offence. Finally, extremist activity comprises the organisation and preparation of the aforementioned acts, as well as incitement to commit them, and the financing of such acts or other assistance in their organisation, preparation, or execution, including through the*

*provision of training, printing, and material-technical facilities, telephone and other means of communication, or the provision of information services.*<sup>603</sup>

8. Propaganda cases, on the other hand, concern instances in which an individual is deemed to promote non-traditional sexual relationships. For example, this may include a statement claiming that it is preferable to be a homosexual man rather than a heterosexual man.
9. Following the Supreme Court ruling, the new cases initiated thereafter were unrelated to extremism or propaganda in the materials provided for the 22–24 cases mentioned above. Only in one case was the individual concretely charged a member of an LGBT+ organisation. In all other cases, the persons charged had no connection to LGBT+ activism.
10. As to the knowledge of the source, it remains unclear how many of these cases involved members of the LGBT+ community. While some of the individuals were members and others were not, they were employed at LGBT+ clubs and thus had a connection to the community.
11. According to the source, no action was taken against the guests of these clubs. Some guests were fined for failing to comply with police orders, but none were penalised specifically on the grounds of membership in the LGBT+ community. However, the police have in connection with the interrogations collected data on these guests, which, according to the source, may be applied against them at a later stage.
12. There are relatively few administrative cases concerning LGBT+ persons in relation to extremism. Some of these cases involve the display of extremist symbols. According to Human Rights Watch, there have been approximately 98 such cases.<sup>604</sup>
13. In extremism cases, prosecutors can turn to the criminal prosecution immediately. An administrative charge can also be applied in a case of extremism. The source confirmed that if an individual is sentenced in two consecutive administrative extremism cases, a third offence would be converted into a criminal case, provided that a repeated offence happens within the span of a year from the latter one. The source noted that, if no repeated offence occurs within a year, it remains unclear how a previous administrative charge will affect the individual in future cases beyond that year.
14. There is a case concerning a publishing house. The individuals involved were charged with extremism on the grounds of participation in an extremist organisation. These individuals had no record of administrative offences prior to the initiation of the criminal proceedings.
15. Human rights defenders and journalists became aware that law enforcement authorities were collecting information on LGBT individuals and compiling a data registry. By way of illustration, it was noted that local police maintain records of people

<sup>603</sup> Garant.ru, *Федеральный закон от 25 июля 2002 г. N 114-ФЗ "О противодействии экстремистской деятельности" (с изменениями и дополнениями)*, 11 August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>604</sup> SOVA, *Преследование по ч. 1 ст. 20.3 КоАП за символику ЛГБТ-движения. 2024 год*, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

who use drugs or those recently released from prison. During visits to clubs or parties, officers reportedly photographed the identity documents of all attendees.

16. The source was aware of a case in which two mothers were raising a child; however, once the authorities became aware of the situation, the child was removed from their care. According to the source, concealment of the sexual orientation is a necessity but a challenging practice, as a family such as this one during daily life should attend hospitals and other public institutions together. LGBT+ families are unable to live openly, as doing so risks the removal of their children. The first anti-LGBT+ law in Russia was the prohibition of “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors.”
17. The source stated that is difficult to determine what kind of behaviour or appearance could trigger a reaction from the authorities. For instance, those arrested at an LGBT+ club in Orenburg included the owners, managers, and individuals responsible for organising dance performances. These individuals were simply performing tasks they had carried out numerous times prior to the raid.
18. Generally, there appears to be no consistent logic in the authorities’ approach, which, according to the source, seems to be impossible to predict. If an individual calls the police to report on a neighbour, and the police need to meet their quotas, they can easily identify an offence with which to charge the neighbour, regardless of whether the person is a member of the LGBT+ community. In such cases, the neighbour may be arrested or fined. The source referred to the Soviet proverb: *Show me the man, and I'll find you the crime.*<sup>605</sup>
19. Law enforcement agencies are required to report to their management on the number of crimes committed in their district each month or quarter. If the police in a given district fail to meet their quotas, and a person reports suspected wrongdoing, the authorities are highly likely to charge someone in order to fulfil the target. They will identify an offence, whether it involves incorrect residence registration (propiska) or alleged propaganda on social media, among other possibilities.
20. The source mentioned a case in which a woman contacted the police, reporting that her child claimed to have seen two men engaging in sexual activity by the window of their apartment. They were ultimately sentenced to 5.5 years imprisonment; however, under this provision, they were technically facing a maximum prison term of 12 years.<sup>606</sup>
21. Another case involved a 13-year-old boy who posted pictures on VKontakte, including one in which he was wearing red lipstick and another where he was kissing another boy, as well as posts quoting action movies. The prosecutor initially sought to charge him under the criminal code for discrediting the Russian army and for propaganda. However, as the boy was only 13 years old, he could not be prosecuted under the

<sup>605</sup> In Russian: Был бы человек, а статья найдётся

<sup>606</sup> Meduza, Двух студентов в Москве посадили на срок до пяти с половиной лет по делу о развратных действиях. Дети, живущие по соседству, якобы увидели их в окне обнаженными, 12 September 2024, [url](#)

criminal code. A commission was subsequently formed to investigate whether he was promoting non-traditional sexual relationships. The commission relied on one of the quotes from the action movies to argue that the boy was a follower of the Columbine school shooting in the US. He was not sentenced, but his mother was required to register him in a special registry for minors considered inclined to antisocial behaviour. This verdict was appealed.

### **Possibility of assembly and online communication**

22. LGBT+ persons continue to live in Russia and therefore gather in private settings. In Moscow, for example, gay clubs remain operational, although they have been forced to operate underground. Furthermore, there is still a presence of human rights activists in the country. While LGBT+ persons continue to meet, such events are no longer advertised publicly.
23. Communications regarding gatherings and parties are conducted exclusively through private, encrypted online chats, such as Telegram, where participants undergo verification processes. These communications do not occur on platforms like VKontakte or Odnoklassniki, where the FSB has access to all content. LGBT+ persons experience restricted means of communication, since for instance Instagram and Facebook have been blocked. The use of VPN has also been banned.
24. It is possible to hold a private party for LGBT+ participants; however, there is an inherent risk that some attendees may report the participants to the police. This risk is ever-present.
25. For example, there was a case in Leningrad Oblast in February 2024 involving a private party which was raided by law enforcement. All participants were forced to lie on the ground for several hours, were interrogated, and had their personal data collected.<sup>607</sup> Although none of the participants were subsequently prosecuted, the incident caused significant fear. Following the raid, the LGBT+ persons involved have left Russia, uncertain of what might occur next. However, the source was not aware of specific cases in which individuals targeted in such a private gathering were subsequently targeted again.

### **Access to legal representation**

26. The source noted that, unfortunately, LGBT+ persons did not always have the opportunity to select their own legal representation, as in some cases the FSB did not permit human rights lawyers to take on the cases. Instead, the individuals were assigned public defence lawyers. It remained unclear to what extent these public defenders were of adequate quality. Moreover, even where the quality of the lawyers was satisfactory, they are known to have close cooperation with the prosecutor's office.

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<sup>607</sup> LenTV2, В Ленобласти силовики прервали частную ЛГБТ\*-вечеринку с политическим уклоном, 21 February 2024, [url](#)

### Imprisonment of LGBT+ persons

27. In male prisons, there exists a form of caste system, under which lower-caste members, including LGBT+ persons, face systematic discrimination. They are not permitted to interact with other inmates, are required to stand last in queues for food or to purchase items in prison shops, and are routinely assigned menial tasks such as cleaning toilets. They are prohibited from participating in games such as chess with other inmates and are assigned specific dishes to wash in the kitchen. Furthermore, individuals within this caste may be subject to sexual violence.
28. According to the source, the less vulnerable group within the LGBT+ community appears to be homosexual women, as they face discrimination to a lesser extent than men. In women's prisons, they are not considered the lowest caste. Though their relationships are not publicly visible, their existence is generally known and therefore tolerated.
29. Transgender men face particular difficulties in prison, as not all transgender persons in Russia have updated their official documents to reflect their affirmed gender. Following the 2023 amendment to the law on legal gender change, it is no longer possible to change one's legal gender.<sup>608</sup>
30. As a consequence, individuals with a feminine appearance may hold documents indicating a male gender, or conversely, some persons may have updated their documents without undergoing gender-affirming surgery, resulting in female-designated documents but a male appearance. In such cases, these individuals cannot be placed in a women's prison and must serve their sentence in a male facility. For security reasons, they are typically housed in isolation, separated from other inmates, although contact with others may be possible.
31. In one case, a transgender woman was prosecuted for distributing pornography. The prosecutor demanded that she be forcibly de-transitioned, prompting the court to annul all previous decisions of the medical commission. Consequently, she was compelled to serve her sentence in a male prison.
32. There are differences in whether an LGBT+ person is assigned to a 'red' or a 'black' prison. In red prisons, where there are no inmates of higher status within the prison hierarchy (known in Russian as *blatnye*), LGBT+ persons serve under comparatively better conditions than in black prisons.
33. According to the source, it is difficult for an LGBT+ prisoner to seek protection from the prison staff. If an individual submits a complaint regarding abuse by fellow inmates, they are perceived as betraying the other prisoners and risk further punishment from them.

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<sup>608</sup> Consultant, Статья 45.1. Запрет смены пола человека, 24 July 2023, [url](#)

34. The source noted that it is possible to submit a complaint through a lawyer. However, this also carries risks, as the individual may then be placed in solitary confinement (known in Russian as ShIZO<sup>609</sup>).

#### **Situation for LGBT+ persons in civil society**

35. According to a poll conducted by the Levada Centre, the majority of respondents (approximately 60 percent indicated indifference towards the LGBT+ community. Kremlin policies appear to operate by identifying culprits or enemies against whom they can position themselves. This dynamic helps explain legislative amendments in which LGBT+ persons are equated with paedophiles, as the propaganda article was expanded in 2022 to include a newly introduced category concerning the propaganda of paedophilia.<sup>610</sup>
36. Other examples of this dichotomy promoted by the Kremlin include emphasising Russia as a country upholding traditional values, while portraying the West as a place of moral decay—for instance, referring to Europe derogatorily as ‘Gayropa’ or claiming that Ukraine is overrun by Nazis, allegedly supported by the West.
37. Well-known individuals, such as the journalist Anton Krasovsky, who is openly homosexual, are tolerated by the authorities because they support Kremlin policies. Membership of the LGBT+ community is not in itself illegal in Russia; therefore, according to the source, as long as a person remains loyal to the Kremlin and to the policies of President Putin, it is permissible to be openly homosexual.
38. There have been cases of individuals reporting LGBT+ persons to the authorities. The source cited examples from universities, where students reported fellow LGBT+ students to the university administration. In most such cases, the university administration exerted pressure on the students, compelling them to withdraw their documents from the institution.
39. There have also been cases of neighbours reporting LGBT+ persons to the police. In such instances, the LGBT+ individuals could be summoned for questioning at the police station and threatened. Being reported to the police may include fear that criminal proceedings may be initiated against them, that they may be accused of engaging in propaganda, and that such information could become known to their employers and relatives, to name but a few.

#### **Availability and effectiveness of state protection**

40. If an LGBT+ person is attacked on the street, they can contact the police. However, the source emphasised that this should be done with the assistance of a lawyer. If an individual approaches the police alone, it is highly likely that the complaint will not be registered. As of September 2025, the source was aware of several cases in which

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<sup>609</sup> In Russian: штрафной изолятор (ШИЗО)

<sup>610</sup> Consultant, КоАП РФ Статья 6.21.1. Пропаганда педофилии, 6 September 2025, [url](#)

victims were afraid to submit complaints to the police due to the risk of being charged themselves on grounds of extremism.

41. The source was aware of a case in which there was a risk of criminal proceedings being initiated on charges of extremism, following an investigation prompted by the police gaining access to the victim's phone. However, it remains unclear how the case was concluded, or whether it was resolved at all.

#### **Targeted media campaigns**

42. There are no targeted campaigns explicitly instructing how to 'get rid of' a lesbian couple, for example; such cases do not exist. Anti-LGBT+ campaigns on television are more likely framed as the promotion of traditional values, for instance by showing kindergartens and interviewing children about the importance of these values. Other examples include broadcasting children singing patriotic or propagandist songs. In this way, the authorities seek to influence the general population: those who do not conform to these norms are depicted as 'not well.' In this sense, the campaigns do not specifically target the LGBT+ community but rather emphasise the perceived virtue of upholding traditional values.
43. When Russian media covered the raids on LGBT+ clubs in 2024, state media propagandists framed these events as centres of 'sodomy, hell, and decadence.' Furthermore, authorities have been removing LGBT+ content from films, often by cutting entire scenes, regardless of their relevance to the plot. In some cases, the removal of these scenes has effectively erased significant elements of the storyline.

#### **Regional differences in the treatment of LGBT+ persons**

44. In larger cities such as St Petersburg and Moscow, the source noted that the atmosphere remains sufficiently tolerant for LGBT+ couples to walk hand in hand in public. In these major Russian cities, such displays of affection are generally not expected to provoke offence among bystanders.
45. In regions outside the major cities, tolerance towards members of the LGBT+ community is more variable. In rural areas, an LGBT+ couple may elicit a different reaction if seen walking hand in hand in public.
46. The source explained that, for LGBT+ persons living in Russia in general, the safest course of action is to avoid drawing attention to themselves, refrain from openly expressing their sexual orientation or gender identity, or, where possible, to leave the country. However, it is not possible for all LGBT+ individuals in Russia to emigrate.

#### **Situation in North Caucasus**

47. The situation for LGBT+ persons living in the North Caucasus is generally worse than in cities like Moscow. This is largely due to the stronger prevalence of traditional and religious values, rooted in Muslim culture.

48. The source explained that whether a homosexual woman from Chechnya could relocate to St Petersburg would depend on her particular family circumstances. Many young people from the North Caucasus move to larger Russian cities ostensibly to pursue their studies, but according to the source, this often serves as a pretext to seek assistance from organisations that help them leave the country.
49. The majority of cases involving individuals from the North Caucasus are shaped by family attempts to exert strict control over their lives. Relatives are seen to impose highly restrictive measures: individuals are not permitted to make phone calls without prior consent, must provide a list of those they are communicating or meeting with, and for young women these rules are typically enforced more rigorously than for young men.

#### **Differences in treatment of homosexual men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transpersons**

50. Transgender persons constitute the most vulnerable group within the LGBT+ community, as they may be denied access to medical care, including hormone therapy. This presents a significant challenge for this particular group.
51. The source emphasised that in Russian society, the general attitudes towards whether a person is a homosexual man or woman are largely similar.

#### **Situation for returnees**

52. Russian citizens returning from abroad may be subjected to questioning by border guards. According to the source, younger men are generally at higher risk of being questioned than women. Certain factors increase the likelihood of being questioned upon entering Russia:
  - If the individual is a male of conscription age, that is between 18 and 30 years;
  - If the individual is flagged in any way, for example on a surveillance list;<sup>611</sup>
  - If the individual frequently crosses the border;
  - If the individual has visited Ukraine or other countries of interest to the FSB.
53. If an individual is subjected to questioning, the authorities could theoretically seize the personal documents, causing them to miss a flight or even detain them. The source was aware of a 2024 case in which an LGBT+ person was detained at the border and subsequently released after three hours. The case involved a transgender activist whose official documents did not accurately reflect the gender presentation.
54. The source noted that since the Supreme Court ruling, LGBT+ persons had become significantly more cautious when crossing the Russian border than they were previously.
55. The Russian authorities also monitor individuals who are active abroad. However, the source suggested that it is highly unlikely that Russian citizens participating in gay pride

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<sup>611</sup> such information is transmitted to the border guards by the FSB, which obtains it from other governmental bodies, including the Federal Bailiff Service and various others

events in Western countries would be specifically monitored, given the impracticality of tracking the large number of participants.

56. The fact that an individual has been outside Russia for an extended period, whether 8, 10, or even 16 years, would, according to the source, not in itself raise suspicion with the authorities. The key factor is the individual's activities abroad. Simply having lived in the EU, including Denmark, would not by itself give rise to suspicion.
57. In the eastern regions, individuals are typically questioned at the border regarding the duration of their stay abroad, their activities, and their place of residence. Subsequent treatment largely depends on their responses and conduct. The source was aware of cases in which individuals, becoming nervous during such interviews, were subjected to interrogations lasting several hours. According to the source, when exploring returning Russians, it should be noted that Russian media have long propagated the narrative that the government regards those who have left the country as traitors; a stance that was publicly reiterated by the Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin around August 2025.
58. If an individual had prior contact with the police before leaving Russia, this could serve as a reason for questioning at the border. However, as an example provided by the source, if an LGBT+ person had been assaulted on the streets, reported the incident to the police, and subsequently left the country, interrogations from border authorities are unlikely. By contrast, if a person is an activist and continues their activism abroad, this may increase the likelihood of being questioned at the border.

#### **Monitoring of social media**

59. The source opined that monitoring of social media is not carried out by a single individual. Rather, an automated system is in place, which may also include the review of publications dating back several years.

## A human rights lawyer

Online meeting, 25 August 2025

### Legislation introduced since the Supreme Court ruling in 2023

1. Since the Supreme Court ruling, no new legislation concerning LGBT+ persons has been enacted. According to the source, any LGBT+ related activity remains prohibited and criminalised. This includes gender-reaffirming surgery and the legal recognition of gender reassignment, which have been prohibited since 2023, as well as the publication of information regarding gender reassignment, which is punishable under the provisions concerning the “propaganda of homosexuality” (Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences).

### The courts and the legal system

2. As of August 2025, there are approximately 12 ongoing criminal cases against homosexual men for participation in an extremist organisation. In 2024, there were 155 convictions for the administrative offence of “propaganda of homosexuality” (the most recent court statistics available), representing an increase from 106 convictions in 2023. No subject-matter breakdown is provided for the slightly over 5,000 administrative offence convictions related to extremism. These cases are distributed across the country, with many occurring in the provinces, including Chita, Kirov, Samara, Tula, and Ulyanovsk.
3. There are relatively few cases concerning LGBT+ persons accused of extremism, even if available statistics do not allow for a meaningful breakdown. These are primarily administrative cases, resulting in fines ranging from 100-150 euro for the display of LGBT+ symbols such as rainbow flags or rainbow logos. Such symbols are treated in the same way as other symbols of extremism, including the Ukrainian flag or the swastika. This is because Article 20.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences penalises any display of the symbols of extremist organisations, and the “International LGBT Movement” has been classified as such following the 2023 Supreme Court judgment.
4. Prior to the Supreme Court decision, propaganda charges were more frequently used in cases against LGBT+ persons. However, since the Supreme Court ruling, extremism charges have become predominant. The rainbow flag can also be considered the distribution of materials of an extremist organisation. This constitutes a separate offence under the Code of Administrative Offences. In 2024, there were 314 convictions under this provision, although no subject-matter breakdown is available.
5. In Samara in 2024, a former leader of an LGBT+ organisation was arrested, and his trial has now commenced. He has been charged with organising an extremist community and faces a potential prison sentence of ten years. Another notable case was in Ulyanovsk, where a medical doctor was arrested for private communications on

VKontakte, which is generally heavily monitored by Russian authorities, with colleagues regarding same-sex relationships. In this case, there was no public display of LGBT+ activity. Nevertheless, the doctor was arrested and charged with participation in extremist organisation.

6. Even prior to the Supreme Court ruling, FSB officers commenced the collection of information on LGBT+ activities. There is no indication that these practices have subsided, and evidence of them is likely to emerge only in future cases. In one case in 2024, this intelligence was used to target a gay club in Orenburg. 3 or 4 individuals, comprising the managers and staff, were arrested by the FSB. They were initially remanded in detention centres but subsequently placed under house arrest. The trial commenced in early August 2025.
7. To the knowledge of the source, there have been no documented cases in which LGBT+ persons have been arrested on charges that are not directly related to their sexual orientation or gender identity as a pretext for targeting them. Thus, there are seemingly no examples of prosecutions brought under unrelated criminal or administrative offences being used as a cover to punish individuals solely for being member of the LGBT+ community.

#### **Access to legal representation**

8. According to the source, LGBT+ persons do have access to legal representation, and there are gay-friendly lawyers, willing upon request to provide legal assistance on their behalf. State-appointed lawyers tend, in practice, to assist investigators in the efficient compilation of the case file against the defendant, irrespective of the charges or the defendant's personal circumstances. While exceptions exist, the general rule is that defendants cannot rely on the advice of legal aid lawyer.

#### **Authorities' treatment of LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court decision**

9. Since the Soviet times, homosexuality was generally tolerated in Russia (apart from some pressure in the 1970s). The situation for LGBT+ persons did not change when Putin initially came to power in Russia. During the 2000s, there were dozens of LGBT+ NGOs in Russia, all of which held legal status and could operate without problems. However, the Russian government has consistently sought to maintain control over civil society, targeting organisations broadly rather than exclusively focusing on LGBT+ groups.
10. According to the source, the purpose of the Supreme Court ruling is not to punish LGBT+ individuals primarily, but rather to remove LGBT+ content and symbols from the public sphere. The LGBT+ community is seen by President Putin as an ideology linked to the West. According to Putin, political life should be centred around his own political worldview.

11. There are cases of homosexual, pro-putinist men within the Russian establishment, including journalist Anton Krasovsky and others.
12. The FSB gathers information on all organisations deemed extremist, including those associated with the LGBT+ community, neo-nazi groups, or groups affiliated with Navalny, as well as on groups that could potentially be designated as extremist in the future. The FSB monitors activities and initiates criminal cases, partly to meet internal quotas for prosecutions. LGBT+ organisations, such as gay clubs, remain relatively easy targets. Gay clubs may operate in an “underground” mode, as they could become targets of prosecution at any time.
13. LGBT+ persons are at risk of prosecution if they display visible indicators of their sexual orientation or gender identity, such as holding hands in public. This is partly due to the existence of pro-government citizens, who monitor others and report perceived deviations to the police. There have been cases where police were summoned and has even imposed fines on individuals and couples because someone appeared to be a same-sex couple, or because they were standing out due to their coloured hair or wore clothing that was considered too informal.<sup>612</sup>
14. In case of such reporting to the police, the LGBT+ person will not necessarily be arrested. Police will typically conduct a conversation with them, but if any LGBT+ content is discovered on their person or electronic devices, the FSB may be contacted, potentially initiating an extremist case. The source was not aware of any documented cases of this occurring.
15. Visible LGBT+ persons, whether entirely unknown to the authorities or with any previous records of activism, can be targeted by the Russian authorities. Persons with prior cases of activism are more likely to draw attention from law enforcement. This encompasses social media monitoring to identify posts that could result in administrative or criminal prosecutions, home visits by the police to “warn of unlawful activities,” digital surveillance, and similar measures.
16. Those who have already acquired the attention of the police for other crimes, such as participating in pro-Navalny protests, are more likely to be targeted.
17. As of August 2025, Russian cultural outlets, i.e. literature, movies, poetry, paintings, etc., are being reviewed in order to remove LGBT+ content and rainbow symbols. The book “Pioneer Summer” tells the story of two young pioneers engaging in same-sex

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<sup>612</sup> Mediazona, *Ночь в полиции за поцелуй на лавочке. Прогулка по Сочи окончилась для двух туристок промоколами о «пропаганде нетрадиционных отношений»*, September 2023, [url](#); Meduza, *Мы теперь всех вас знаем*, 27 January 2025, [url](#); Parni+, *«Донос за поцелуй». В Сургуте девушки обвиняют в «ЛГБТ-пропаганде»*, 26 January 2024, [url](#); Agenstvo, В Санкт-Петербурге написали первый известный донос на политика по новому закону о «гей-пропаганде», 13 December 2022, [url](#)

relationship. It has become a bestseller with over 200,000 copies sold within the first six months in 2021. It received rewards shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic. The book displays acceptance of homosexuality as an alternative cultural expression, visible to the public. As of August 2025, the publisher has been arrested for LGBT+ activity, and a criminal case has been initiated for participating in extremist activity. He has legal representation, and he is under house arrest. In general, any mentions of same-sex relationships in literature are subject to censorship. The book is currently being produced in Kazakhstan and distributed to Russia. The case of this publisher also illustrates how political repression can be used as a tool to facilitate the takeover of businesses. In Russia, major enterprises are often owned by persons connected to the FSB or the military and takeovers of businesses are relatively frequent. The source stated that business and government are closely intertwined in Russia.

#### **Possibility to express LGBT+ views**

18. According to the source, monitoring of internet communication and social media is a way of collecting information on LGBT+ content. The communication channels Telegram and WhatsApp are, to the source's knowledge, still considered to be secure, as searching through these requires physical access to the device.

#### **Possibility to assemble**

19. LGBT+ persons may attend private LGBT+ gatherings. According to the source, government policy intends to push LGBT+ activities underground. Consequently, private gatherings are tolerated if they remain out of public view and knowledge, e.g. at home.

#### **Situation for relatives**

20. There may be indirect consequences for family members of LGBT+ persons, although they have not been reported to be specifically targeted by authorities.

#### **Typical perpetrators**

21. Prior to the Supreme Court ruling the main threat towards LGBT+ persons originated from orthodox or conservative circles and far-right groups. As of August 2025, the main threat against LGBT+ persons derive from the FSB.
22. The source stated that a member of parliament, Vitaly Milonov, is widely known for being homosexual, whilst also being strongly homophobic. He has organised raids against LGBT+ activities in St Petersburg, a city which used to be a liberal city. In contemporary Russia, expressions of homophobia and anti-Western sentiment are not only tolerated but increasingly aligned with the state's promotion of so-called traditional values.

### **Differences in the treatment of homosexual men and women, and bisexual and transgender persons**

23. All 12 criminal cases on extremism charges are directed against homosexual men. As of August 2025, to the source's knowledge, there have been no recorded instances of homosexual women being arrested or charged.
24. Regarding transpersons, the source stated that it remains possible to receive gender-affirming surgeries such as sex-change operations in Russia. It is likewise still possible for persons to change their gender in their personal documents, provided that gender reassignment treatment commenced prior to 2023 (this exception is provided for in the law). The hospitals that provide these services are believed to be located in Moscow.

### **Regional differences**

25. In addition to the Russian authorities, there are three principal sources of threats to LGBT+ persons in Russia: 1) Muslim communities, 2) far-right or conservative groups, and 3) the Russian prison subculture. According to the source, the prison subculture is particularly hostile towards homosexual men and is characterised by practices of humiliation. The prison subculture is especially entrenched in rural areas of Russia, such as Angarsk close to the city of Irkutsk, where conditions for homosexual men are notably harsher than in other rural areas.
26. The source further explained about a movement called AUE,<sup>613</sup> which emerged from the prison culture. AUE is officially declared an extremist organisation, meaning they are also target of the authorities.

### **Prison conditions for LGBT+ persons**

27. In Russian prisons, there is a social hierarchy in which homosexual men occupy the lowest level of status. It is generally tolerated to perform the dominant sexual role, whilst assuming that the receiving role is associated with humiliation. According to the source, conditions for homosexual men in prison are extremely harsh. They may be subjected to lethal violence and are usually tasked with the dirtiest work in the prison. They are regarded as untouchables in both red and black prisons. This culture can also be present in small rural towns with a pervading prison culture.
28. (Red prisons are facilities where prison staff are in control, while black prisons are facilities where prison staff control the perimeter and the inmates regulate themselves. Green prisons are facilities with a significant Muslim population)

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<sup>613</sup> AUE: *Criminalization of Youth and Moral Panic, for further reading please see: Meduza, 'AUE is an information bubble', 20 November 2021, [url](#)*

29. The source noted that the situation and conditions for imprisoned homosexual women differ significantly from the men. All female prisons are red prisons, and women are typically assigned work in prisons such as sewing. Furthermore, it is a common practice that women live as lesbian couples while in prison, although it is not the case everywhere. These lesbian prison couples often hold a degree of influence and maintain cooperative relations with prison staff. In this way, they form part of a social order, in which lesbian couples are used by the prison staff, and hence occupy the top of the prison hierarchy.
30. The source had come across accounts of homicides of transgender persons in prison. Killings of transpersons in prisons can negatively affect a prison's reputation. Therefore, transpersons are usually kept isolated from the general prison population, often through solitary confinement.
31. According to the source, while prison staff is also part of the prison culture, they do not themselves participate in rape. However, cases have been reported where prison staff has organised such acts in cooperation with inmates. For example, in Saratov in 2017, there was a series of rapes, which were organised by the prison staff. Ultimately, it led to the resignation of the head of the Russian prison service (FSIN).

#### **Civil society's treatment of LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court ruling**

32. The source was aware of cases in which same-sex couples were reported to the police by vigilante groups and homophobic individuals, including neighbours. Subsequently, they had to prove that they were roommates rather than a couple. In the reported cases, there were no criminal or administrative charges. If the LGBT+ couple lives in a building with a tolerant landlord and neighbours, it is easier to maintain a normal life, as such matters are less likely to be reported by homophobic individuals in the immediate vicinity.
33. Returning veterans from the war in Ukraine have perpetrated acts of violence against LGBT+ persons and individuals who appear overly western. Such violence is frequently arbitrary. This contributes to widespread vigilante violence and denunciations by vigilante groups, which monitor and keep track of individuals.<sup>614</sup>
34. In some cases, parents of young homosexual men have attempted to restrict their personal freedoms or tried to admit them to hospital for conversion therapy. According to legislation, anyone above the age of 15 must provide consent for hospitalisation. Thus, persons above the age of 15 cannot be forced by their parents into conversion therapy. Only the courts have this authority. The source was not aware of any documented cases of this.

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<sup>614</sup> Vigilancy, Вигиланты, n.d. [url](#)

35. The source stated that being visibly open LGBT+ person is prohibited anywhere, and LGBT+ persons are more likely to be reported to police in larger cities. At the same time, however, urban anonymity allows LGBT+ couples in metropolitan areas to cohabit with greater safety than in small towns, where social networks are more tightly knit, religious influence is stronger, and level of tolerance is generally lower. Individuals who are visibly members of the LGBT+ community or engaged in activism face risks of harassment, vigilante violence, and administrative or criminal prosecution.
36. The source noted that civil society in Russia has effectively ceased to exist. Local community structures are no longer functioning independently, and the media landscape is fully subordinated to state control. Organisations that previously operated autonomously are now either directly overseen by state authorities or have been forced into exile.

#### **Availability and effectiveness of state protection**

37. Authorities are in general unwilling to provide protection to LGBT+ persons in society. There is no legislation protecting LGBT+ persons from discrimination; on the contrary, discrimination, hate speech, and persecution are generally neither prevented nor punished and may even be welcomed by the authorities. Homophobic vigilante attacks are not investigated, except in cases resulting in the death of LGBT+ victims.

#### **Media campaigns against LGBT+ persons**

38. The source stated that there exist homophobic media campaigns against the broader LGBT+ community, however, such campaigns do not target individuals. Individuals are typically not targeted because they are members of the LGBT+ community but because they promote Western culture.

#### **Support, clubs, shelters**

39. There are a few temporary shelter opportunities available for LGBT+ persons, although they operate completely underground. It remains possible to receive support, for example from the community, including legal assistance or help with leaving the country.

#### **Situation in North Caucasus**

40. In the North Caucasus, a few mobile messaging and dating applications were used by homosexual men. However, in 2017 or 2018 in Chechnya, authorities discovered these apps, which were subsequently used by the Chechen police and other law enforcement agencies to identify and detain homosexual men, who were then subjected to torture.
41. Chechen police apprehended homosexual men, extracted information from their phones and apps about other homosexual men, and subsequently arrest a network of homosexual men in Chechnya. Initially, victims were subjected to blackmail for money

and threats of being outed. Once financial extortion had been exhausted, political pressure (which includes public humiliation, appeals to the traditional values, and even direct calls for violence) and physical violence per se ensued. The head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, wanted to push homosexual men out of Chechnya, and soon similar tactics were observed in Ingushetia, beginning with financial extortion followed by physical coercion.<sup>615</sup> This trend did not extend to all of Russia's Muslim republics, according to the source.

42. The source was aware of a case involving a Chechen transgender woman who, until recently, resided in a neighbouring republic with her spouse. Initially, they faced no issues. However, as information about them circulated, they began contemplating leaving Russia. Attitudes towards transgender persons in Chechnya are extremely hostile.
43. Relocating outside Chechnya is not always a viable option, as Kadyrov's forces may pursue such individuals. People moving from Chechnya to another republic are forced to conceal their LGBT+ identities and preserve their anonymity.
44. The situation for homosexual women in Chechnya is worse than for homosexual men. The source stated that many homosexual women are killed immediately.<sup>616</sup> Disappearances also occur.<sup>617</sup> The source was not aware of any cases from Ingushetia or Dagestan.

### Returnees

45. The source was aware of dozens of cases in which Russian citizens were arrested upon arrival in Russia. No statistics can provide documentation for this but abundant media reports exist. Likewise, cases of interrogation are uncountable. However, the source was not aware of any cases where the individual was specifically a member of the LGBT+ community.
46. The source noted that police can place individuals on a list known as "stорожевой контроль."<sup>618</sup> This watchlist is not a database for wanted individuals but rather a record of people deemed of interest to the authorities. No publicly available regulations govern the operation of this database.
47. The source explained that the situation upon returning is influenced by several factors. For instance, persons who have a file with the FSB are subject to surveillance upon

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<sup>615</sup> Kavkaz.Realii, Усиление ненависти: защитники прав ЛГБТ-людей – о работе на Северном Кавказе, 9 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>616</sup> Nastoyashchee Vremya, "Гомосексуальность это грех, единственное наказание за него – убийство". Чеченские лесбиянки о своей жизни в республике, 16 September 2017, [url](#)

<sup>617</sup> Queer Women of North Caucasus Support Group Initiative, *Survival strategies of homosexual and bisexual women and transgender persons in the North Caucasus*, 2020, [url](#)

<sup>618</sup> In Russian: сторожевой контроль also known as watchdog surveillance

their return and may be interrogated. There are no specific grounds for opening a surveillance file beyond general considerations of national security (Article 12(b) of the 1995 Federal Security Service Act). The FSB also performs border security functions.

48. Moreover, if persons have been abroad for more than six months, they are likely to be questioned about their activities during that period. If a person is interrogated, the person's phone is likely to be examined. Authorities might also conduct an online search of the individual. If authorities find incriminating material on a person's phone or on the internet, they may proceed with an investigation.
49. The source stated that Russian embassies monitor Russians living abroad. Such information gathered might be applied to interrogate individuals at airports, inspect their phones, or attempt to recruit them as informants.

## OVD-Info

Riga, 05.09.25

*OVD-Info is an independent human rights project founded in 2011. OVD-Info documents the human rights situation in Russia. The organisation operates in collaboration with approximately 400 lawyers and 7,000 volunteers across the country. OVD-Info integrates research, journalism, and human rights advocacy.*

*OVD-Info was designated a foreign agent by the Russian authorities in 2021.*

### **Legislative developments since the Supreme Court decision in November 2023**

1. The source noted that no legislative changes have been introduced specifically regarding LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court decision in November 2023. However, there have been several developments and amendments related to legislation on extremism. The changes are not specifically aimed at LGBT+ persons; however, LGBT+ persons are still affected, as the scope of the law encompasses them. The only difference might be in the fact that, arguably, the interpretation of which actions fall under the Supreme Court decision is highly vague and indeterminate, making it difficult to predict what may be subject to prosecution.
2. A recent development concerning regulation of internet activity was introduced in September 2025 and entails a prohibition on searching for extremist content as well as restrictions on the use of VPNs. OVD-Info anticipated that LGBT+ persons will be among the first to be targeted, as, supposedly, this so-called extremist material will include all LGBT+ related content.

### **Availability of data on court cases**

3. In order to assess the practice of the Russian courts, it is necessary take into account the significant limitations arising from lacking access to courts and cases. The source explained that court decisions are available for analysis only from certain levels of the Russian court system.
4. Most available data derive from the district courts in Russia. These courts primarily adjudicate criminal cases and certain serious administrative offences. Nearly all of these courts in Russia maintain websites from which it is possible to parse decisions in general. Thus, LGBT+ persons' conviction cases under extremism legislation, both administrative and criminal, can generally be accessed via the webpage of the district courts. However, the source noted a limitation with regard to LGBT+ extremism cases.

Other types of cases, such as fakes and discrediting the army, can be quickly accessed and enumerated. The majority of the cases are published on the website with details such as the defendant's name, date, case number, and relevant article. Despite the obligation to publish the decisions, some courts are not fully diligent, resulting in only a portion of decisions being published. Some of the decisions are redacted to remove certain personal information.

5. With LGBT+ cases, it is necessary to examine all details of extremism cases to identify LGBT+ content. The source noted that, in this regard, some LGBT+ cases might also be dismissed. It is not clear how many cases may be dismissed. Official court statistics counts all cases under articles 280, 280.1, and 282-282.4 of Criminal Court as one group – “extremist crimes” – without differentiating between specific articles or providing a way to identify which cases relate to LGBT+ issues. In 2024, a total of 784 cases were brought to court under this group of crimes. However, it remains unclear which cases relate to which topics.
6. With regard to accessing data on administrative convictions relating to LGBT+ persons, there are notable limitations. This pertains to cases on “LGBT+ propaganda”. Administrative LGBT+ cases are often adjudicated in the so-called magistrate,<sup>619</sup> which serve as authorities' first instance. These decisions are largely inaccessible due to limited online availability and due to difficulties with mass parsing methods. This significantly constrains the ability to assess the actual judicial practice in administrative LGBT+ cases. The decisions that are accessible primarily pertain to lower-level courts in Moscow and other major cities. Consequently, administrative decisions are predominantly available from these jurisdictions. The source noted that, as a consequence, OVD-Info can miss a considerable number of administrative decisions, including those concerning LGBT+ propaganda. However, some aggregated court statistics are available. For example, in accordance with official statistics, in 2024, 214 cases went to court<sup>620</sup> under articles 6.21, 6.21.1, and 6.21.2.<sup>621</sup> 221<sup>622</sup> decisions were

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<sup>619</sup> In Russian called *mirovoy sud*/мировой суд

<sup>620</sup> Supreme Court 2024 statistics at Sudebny Departament, *Данные судебной статистики - Сводные статистические сведения о деятельности федеральных судов общей юрисдикции и мировых судей за 2024 год*, [url](#)

<sup>621</sup> Propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations and/or preferences, gender reassignment, and refusal to have children; propaganda of paedophilia and dissemination among minors of information demonstrating non-traditional sexual relations and/or preferences or capable of causing minors to desire to change their gender respectively

<sup>622</sup> Sudebny Departament, *Данные судебной статистики - Сводные статистические сведения о деятельности федеральных судов общей юрисдикции и мировых судей за 2024 год*, [url](#)

rendered. In 2023, 198 cases went to court<sup>623</sup> under articles 6.21, 6.21.1, and 6.21.2, and 186<sup>624</sup> decisions were rendered. According to the source, further analysis is needed to discount cases as for instance propaganda of paedophilia cases or unconventional cases like propaganda of child-free “ideology,” etc., as such more inclusive counts would provide a rough indication of the numbers.

### The courts and the legal system

7. As of July 2025, Russian courts have issued 101 “extremism”-related convictions for allegedly participating in the “International LGBT Movement” or displaying its alleged symbols. Approximately 98 of the prosecutions are for administrative or minor misdemeanour offenses, whilst three of the prosecutions are for criminal liability.<sup>625</sup>
8. The source cited that, between January 2024 and June 2025, at least 20 people faced criminal charges due to their alleged participation in the “International LGBT Movement.” One of the accused died by suicide in pretrial detention. Courts sentenced two to prison. Seventeen cases are pending, or their outcomes are unknown.<sup>626</sup> The source noted that the methodology employed in collecting these court cases is associated with both delay and limitations in terms of incomplete or unpublished court decisions (cf. the section above). Another limitation arises from the search method, which renders it plausible that certain cases may have been dismissed. According to the source, this limited availability of information is a crucial factor when compiling cases.
9. The source noted that, since the Supreme Court decision in November 2023, official statistics published by the Supreme Court’s Judicial Department indicate that 214 administrative decisions were issued in 2024 under various “propaganda” provisions. These figures may include cases not directly related to LGBT+ propaganda. By comparison, according to Human Rights Watch, there were 98 cases concerning extremism in 2024. Although it is not possible to determine precisely how many of the propaganda cases specifically concerned LGBT+ issues and while estimates on anti-extremism may be underrepresented, the available data suggest that there is no marked disparity between the application of propaganda and extremism legislation as basis for prosecutions.

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<sup>623</sup> Supreme Court 2023 Sudebny Departament, *Данные судебной статистики - Сводные статистические сведения о деятельности федеральных судов общей юрисдикции и мировых судей за 2023 год*, [url](#)

<sup>624</sup> Sudebny Departament, *Данные судебной статистики - Сводные статистические сведения о деятельности федеральных судов общей юрисдикции и мировых судей за 2023 год*, [url](#)

<sup>625</sup> HRW, *Russia: Rising Toll of LGBT ‘Extremism’ Designation*, 30 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>626</sup> HRW, *Russia: Rising Toll of LGBT ‘Extremism’ Designation*, 30 June 2025, [url](#)

10. The threshold at which an LGBT+ case is classified as either an administrative or a criminal offence is, according to the source, difficult to unveil. Theoretically, two homosexual men walking hand in hand could give rise to both an administrative and a criminal conviction, depending on how the phenomenon is perceived by the authority official and how the decision is written. However, current practice indicates that a “model” administrative case typically results in a fine, and in some cases, administrative detention of up to 15 days. With regard to criminal prosecution, so far only few decisions were rendered, while the remainder are pending, making it difficult to determine typical punishment. The cases decided as of October 2025 resulted in imprisonment.
11. The details of the Supreme Court decision were leaked to the press a few months after November 2023. Until that time, the content and the specifics of the ruling were unknown. As of September 2025, the decision remains unclear, as the so-called international LGBT+ movement does not exist. The source noted that the broad and imprecise wording of “participation in an extremist organisation”<sup>627</sup> could, in principle, allow for the interpretation that a homosexual couple walking hand in hand constitutes participation in the extremist LGBT+ community, as according to the Supreme Court decision. However, to the knowledge of the source, no such cases—administrative or criminal—have been reported. It is worth noting that, in an earlier incident in June 2013 in Saint Petersburg, two young women were detained by police on suspicion of “disturbing public order” after embracing in a metro carriage; however, the outcome and further sanctions were not reported.<sup>628</sup>
12. The source noted that, as of September 2025, established practice has required some form of demonstration, signalling, or expression for behaviour to be deemed extremist. For example, displaying an extremist symbol such as a rainbow flag would typically result in an administrative offence. However, in principle, depending on the written formulation of the decision, such behaviour could also be interpreted as participation in an extremist organisation. The majority of cases have been brought under article 20.3 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offenses for displaying banned symbols. One person was convicted on criminal charges and sentenced to six months of compulsory labour after posting the rainbow flag, as the act constituted a repeated offence.

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<sup>627</sup> Potential types of activities match with criminal articles. Criminal acts include: participation/organisation (CC art. 282.2) up to 6-10-12 years depending on role; repeat display (CC art. 282.4) up to 4 years; financing (CC art. 282.3) up to 8-10 years.

<sup>628</sup> RBC, *В Петербурге двух девушек забрали в полицию за объятия в метро*, 17 June 2013, [url](#)

13. The source further concluded that it is not possible to predict how the extremism ruling of November 2023 will be applied, nor how judicial practice may evolve, which gives rise to concern. Furthermore, the source opined that many of the judicial practices, witnessed as of September 2025, lack a strong legal basis and appear not to be in line with the principle of the rule of law, creating an impression that decisions largely depend on the individual judge. A wide range of potential rules appears to be available, which can be selectively applied or interconnected as deemed appropriate by the judicial.

*Repeated offences*

14. Regarding administrative convictions, the source noted that there exists this ladder-principle in case of repeated offences, whereby persons may be charged with a criminal offence, if they have previously been found guilty of one administrative offence prior to a second incident. Under Criminal Code art. 282.4, a repeat offense becomes criminal if it is committed by a person “who has been subjected to administrative punishment” for the same conduct (i.e., CAO art. 20.3 on displaying extremist symbols). The statute itself ties the trigger to prior administrative punishment, not a specific duration. The one-year window comes from Code of Administrative Offences (CAO) art. 4.6, which defines how long a person is legally considered “subjected to administrative punishment.” The year is typically counted from the date when the punishment was administered. However, this does not include propaganda, which on its own does not lead to criminal punishment.
15. To the knowledge of the source, one such case has been reported as of September 2025. One person was convicted of criminal charges and sentenced to six months of compulsory labour after posting the rainbow flag on a social media page. HRW research shows that many people who were administratively prosecuted deleted posts and sometimes social media accounts altogether. The source suggested that this behaviour may help explain the absence of documented cases of repeated offences.”
16. The source underlined that in cases related to extremism prosecutors also have the option of proceeding directly with a criminal charge. There are several options how one may be prosecuted for extremism. This can include the repeated demonstration of extremist symbols, which necessitates repeated character, but it can also be participation in or leading of extremist organisation, or financing such, which does not require repeated acts. For example, in 2025, Russian investigators filed charges against three employees from two publishing houses, accusing them of involvement in the so-called “extremist” LGBT movement and of allegedly recruiting members by selling fiction books that contained references to LGBT+ people and same-sex relationships. As

of October 2025, all three remain under house arrest and each faces up to 12 years in prison if convicted.

*Acquittals*

17. The level of acquittals in LGBT+ cases is reportedly insignificant, and in extremism cases, only one acquittal has been reported, to the knowledge of the source. The source referring to Human Rights Watch noted one initial acquittal under article 20.3, administrative case, by a court of first instance. In January 2024, a Krasnodar court held that the defendant had not committed an offense because they had published an “LGBT flag” on their social media page before the Supreme Court 2023 decision. However, the police appealed the ruling, and the regional court ruled in their favour finding that the defendant had not deleted the flag after it had been outlawed and committed the offense by omission.” In final statistics, this case is counted as conviction as per the last decision.
18. With administrative charges, there are greater opportunities to dismiss a case on purely procedural grounds, for example due to a missing signature or the authorities’ failure to comply with a limitation period.

**Authorities’ treatment of LGBT+ persons since the Supreme Court decision in November 2023**

*Assemblies*

19. Shortly after the Supreme Court decision in November 2023, for unknown reasons, raids on clubs and private gatherings of LGBT+ persons became the primary target. The source noted that there were cases of completely private parties, where the authorities conducted raids and detained individuals. To the knowledge of the source, only the organisers of these events were subsequently charged. For example, in March 2024, Russian authorities raided the LGBT+ friendly club Pose in Orenburg and charged its art director, Alexander Klimov, and administrator, Diana Kamelyanova, with organising the activities of an “extremist organisation.” Police cited costumes, wigs, and other stage items found during the raid as evidence.
20. The source opined that, during raids, authorities are often reported to identify unrelated items such as religious symbols, on which to base charges that are not related to LGBT+ issues. These outliers are then used as a means to initiate prosecution. Thus, far from all LGBT+ related cases appear in the search for data or statistics when individuals may be charged or convicted for matters unrelated to LGBT+ issues.

21. In political cases, there have been reports of items being planted during a search, providing the authorities with a pretext to initiate an investigation. To the knowledge of the source, this has not been reported in relation to LGBT+ persons.
22. The source emphasised that, since all electronic devices may be confiscated and examined during a search, there is significant potential for the authorities to discover LGBT+ content. As of September 2025, however, the source had no knowledge of concrete cases in which this has occurred.

*Expressions and publishing of LGBT+ content online*

23. In one case, a person has been prosecuted for LGBT+ content dating ten years back. Under the legislation, charges cannot be brought once the limitation period has expired. If content is published online, the violation may be regarded as “continuous” for the entire period it remains posted, and the limitation period starts from when the content was first discovered. The limitation period varies between 90 days up to 1 year, depending on the relevant article. Therefore, long-forgotten posts containing LGBT+ content can serve as basis for prosecution. Current Russian legislation stipulates that once authorities identify offending content under article 20.3, they have three months to prosecute, or the case must be discontinued. One person, who received three administrative fines, argued in court that the publications that had triggered the cases had been posted in 2014–2015. Three others were convicted for posts dating back to 2016. Russian courts consider “unlawful” online publications a “continuing” offense, indefinitely extending the legal risks.
24. In practice, according to the source, despite a potential expired limitation period as according to the law, such expressions or publications may still be accessible to the authorities and may influence an officer’s assessment.
25. The source further noted that a single administrative conviction, for example due to a rainbow flag on social media, would inevitably carry significance in the event of a future case, simply because it remains on the record.
26. According to the source, the vague wording of the Supreme Court decision makes it difficult to define the criteria for assessing activities related to an extremist movement. The source illustrated that public expressions of affiliation with same-sex relationships, as well as the use of particular pronouns or feminine forms of traditionally male coded words<sup>629</sup> may be regarded as “characteristic” of an “extremist” LGBT+ “organisation.” As

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<sup>629</sup> In Russian, the male version of e.g. a profession is traditionally applied. In a recent movement towards the more modern, it is tried to apply the female alternative when relevant.

of September 2025, no cases have been observed in which it alone constituted sufficient grounds for prosecution. In fact, a member of parliament stated that for that alone there will be no prosecutions. However, this showcases the broadness and vagueness of the decision, allowing prosecution under various pretences. As a result, LGBT+ persons cannot reliably determine when they could be held accountable for extremist activities.

27. In addition, law enforcement officers in the streets are purportedly unaware of the content of the Supreme Court decision. Thus, according to the source, the determination of what constitutes extremism is left to their interpretation. A particular law enforcement officer may effectively serve as an LGBT+ person's point of entry into prosecution, meaning that the officer's initial assessment or criteria for what constitutes extremism potentially has significant impact on individuals. The source noted, however, that it is likely that they have received some internal guidelines on this matter.
28. The majority of the cases, which OVD-Info observed, concern prosecution based on social media posts.<sup>630</sup> The source referred the Human Rights Watch stating that 90 convictions have been for online activities; most for posts, images, or user profile information published on social media. While such cases may be initiated by the police, they are also typically initiated by investigators or other departments, for instance the Ministry of Interior's division specialising in extremism. FSB is also involved in certain cases. Although it is not always "initiating" proceedings, it participates in various capacities.
29. According to the source, publishing LGBT+ content on social media carries a high risk, as social media platforms are monitored by the Russian authorities. It remains unknown to which extent the automated technology routinely monitors and analyses data.
30. The source noted that several news reports indicating that automated technologies for online surveillance were being developed. In a 2023 article by "Important Stories"<sup>631</sup> (and occasionally other similar reports), internal documents from Roskomnadzor and its Main Radio-Frequency Centre were revealed, showing plans to build AI-powered systems for large-scale monitoring and censorship of Russian-language internet content. Two key systems are described: MIR, designed to scan massive amounts of text and images for forbidden themes and track their spread, and Vepr ("Boar"),

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<sup>630</sup> OVD-Info does not work with LGBT+ cases, but they monitor and track such cases

<sup>631</sup> IStories, *Внутри машины цензуры*, 8 February 2023, [url](#) /

intended to detect “points of informational tension” and predict protest-related or destabilising activity. The documents list topics targeted for surveillance, including protest sentiment, criticism of the government, so-called “LGBT propaganda”, memes, and negative coverage of officials.

31. The plans are extensive, and many of the systems’ capabilities remain only partially implemented. These technologies may have been implemented as of September 2025. However, there has not been a steady increase in such cases, according to the source. Nevertheless, it is clear that online social networks are monitored, with some providers subject to greater scrutiny than others.
32. Such monitoring is accompanied by the prohibition of certain providers – at least theoretically – and the use of VPNs to access them. As of September 2025, a new ban on searching for extremist material had been introduced, whilst the use of VPNs is restricted and an aggravating factor in such cases. The source noted that there is no judicial practice on this area, and it is not possible to predict how the law will be applied.
33. It was concluded that the Russian state does not possess the capacity to prosecute everyone. Therefore, the concrete risk is difficult to define. The source opined that what holds true today, may be different tomorrow. Nevertheless, according to the source, the combination of several factors may be relevant when assessing the risks faced by LGBT+ persons: both risks of state-led persecution as well as extrajudicial assaults and harassment.

*Exchange of information with employers or universities*

34. There have been several cases in which persons were expelled from universities or dismissed from their job as public sector employee on account of political expression. The source provided a series of examples:
35. In 2013 in Kazan, where LGBT+ rights activists were allegedly fired from their jobs after participating in demonstrations with pro-LGBT+ banners, following the adoption of Russia’s “gay propaganda” law.<sup>632</sup>
36. In 2014 in St Petersburg, a music teacher was dismissed for “immoral behaviour” after being outed by an anti-LGBT+ activist who exposed her same-sex relationship to her employer.<sup>633</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> BBC, Казанского ЛГБТ-активиста уволили из "Сбербанка", 31 July 2013, [url](#)

<sup>633</sup> Meduza, «Моя ориентация — это аморально?», 12 December 2014, [url](#)

37. In 2019, LGBT+ activist Artyom Shitukhin was expelled from the Pyatigorsk Medical and Pharmaceutical Institute after organising a solo picket and publicly supporting LGBT+ rights.<sup>634</sup>
38. In 2023 in Surgut, a young math teacher, Artur Morozov, resigned after anonymous complaints accused him of spreading “LGBT propaganda” due to his dyed hair and manicure.<sup>635</sup>
39. The source noted one case in which a university employee underwent security checks involving a former FSB officer, who informed the individual that the authorities were aware of previous participation in pickets, arrests, and other activities.
40. The source noted that employment within the private sector may also be affected by a charge brought against an individual, if the authorities communicate the details of the case to the relevant employer.

#### Consequences for relatives

41. The source had knowledge of several instances in which relatives of LGBT+ persons experienced consequences. There have been reports of searches conducted in private residences, which affected every individual in the household. This has included the confiscation of devices and personal belongings of everybody in the household.
42. On 14 February 2024, law enforcement officers searched the home of the parents of Itil Temnaya, an LGBT+ rights activist from Vladivostok who had left Russia. She believes authorities are preparing criminal charges against her for allegedly evading obligations as a “foreign agent”. Temnaya was added to the Ministry of Justice’s list of “foreign agents” in February 2023 for distributing materials from other listed individuals and “promoting LGBT relationships.” Earlier, in 2022, she and other activists were subjected to searches related to old chat messages that investigators claimed contained “extremist statements.”<sup>636</sup> The source opined that such measures serve as an additional form of pressure on LGBT+ persons.

#### Situation for LGBT+ persons in civil society

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<sup>634</sup> Radio Svoboda, "На меня объявили охоту". ЛГБТ-активист вынужден скрываться из-за преследований, 17 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>635</sup> Komsomolskaya Pravda, В Югре педагогу пришлось уволиться из гимназии после анонимного обвинения в пропаганде ЛГБТ, 29 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>636</sup> OVD-Info, К родителям уехавшей из России активистки из Владивостока пришли с обыском, 14 February 2024, [url](#)

43. Reportedly, actors within civil society exert pressure and commit acts of violence against LGBT+ persons.<sup>637</sup> This trend has been increasing since the introduction of the first propaganda law in 2012. In particular in 2023, there has been a steady increase in violence against LGBT+ persons, however, no data for 2024 are yet available.
44. According to the source, perpetrators within civil society include neighbours, relatives, far-right groups or ordinary criminal gangs, and even fellow passengers on the metro. According to “Important Stories,” the first major surge in hate crimes against LGBT+ people in Russia occurred after 2013, when the State Duma adopted the law banning “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations” among minors. The peak of such violence came between 2014 and 2018, after which the number of victims began to decline. In 2023, however, the figures rose sharply again amid the introduction of new homophobic laws: at least 20 people were killed and another 60 injured, compared with 8 killed and 46 injured in 2022. Most victims were homosexual men, while about 5 percent were transgender women.<sup>638</sup>
45. The perpetrators ranged from lone actors to organised hate gangs: for example, a criminal network in the Moscow region used a dating app to lure homosexual men, then assaulted and robbed them; in one case, a victim was shot and fell from a second-floor window, leading to spinal injuries. In 2023, a court in Makhachkala sentenced a pedagogical college student to six years in prison for brutally murdering his acquaintance in a conflict “caused by the victim’s nontraditional sexual orientation”. Attacks often begin because of victims’ appearance, sometimes escalating to murder. In 2021 in Adler, a man killed his neighbour after seeing him wearing a dress and wig.<sup>639</sup>
46. There are reports of organised groups targeting LGBT+ persons via dating websites, arranging meetings under the pretext of a date, subsequently end up assaulting the individual. After 2013, Russia saw a rise in street attacks on people targeted for their appearance, as assailants assumed they were LGBT. Hate groups like “Occupy Paedophilia” and similar movements spread nationwide, and from 2015 onward, many serial crimes involved luring victims through dating apps to rob and humiliate them. Offenders often chose homosexual men, knowing they were unlikely to report the assaults out of fear of outing themselves. One gang in Chekhov, near Moscow, used a

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<sup>637</sup> Grey Rainbow, *On the grounds of hate: data from court rulings reveals the rise in crimes against LGBTQIA+ people in Russia, including premeditated group attacks*, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>638</sup> IStories, *Число жертв преступлений против ЛГБТ в России выросло в полтора раза в 2023 году*, 21 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>639</sup> IStories, *Число жертв преступлений против ЛГБТ в России выросло в полтора раза в 2023 году*, 21 May 2024, [url](#)

fake Hornet profile to lure and attack men. A similar case in 2022 in the Khanty-Mansi region, involved two men who used a VKontakte group, “Gays of Nizhnevartovsk,” to extort victims with intimate photos, claiming to act in line with Putin’s statements.<sup>640</sup>

47. A reported case involved two homosexual men, who were observed in their private residence through the windows. In September 2024, the Lefortovo District Court in Moscow sentenced the two persons to five and five and a half years in a strict-regime penal colony on charges Part 3 of Article 135 of the Russian Criminal Code (indecent acts against minors). They were arrested in August 2022 after a child’s mother claimed her child had seen them naked through a window and described what “looked like sex.”<sup>641</sup>
48. Another reported case involved a woman in the metro who had a short haircut and, apparently, a physical appearance that did not conform to traditional female expression. The woman was harassed and her friend assaulted by a passing man. Initially, a charge against the man was dismissed by the investigator. Only following media coverage, the man was convicted with a minor administrative offence.
49. In August 2024, a Moscow court fined Nastya Ermak 15,000 roubles after she posted a video showing a man assaulting and forcibly removing her and her male friend from a metro carriage because he disapproved of her short haircut. The man, Vladimir Safonov, claimed he acted out of anti-LGBT sentiment after allegedly seeing two people with short hair kissing, while Ermak said she had simply been listening to music. Safonov was fined 1,000 roubles for petty hooliganism, but Ermak received a much heavier fine under a law against “information that insults human dignity and public morality,” because her post included the man’s obscene language.<sup>642</sup>
50. According to the source, it is not possible to live openly as an LGBT+ person in Russia. A homosexual couple walking hand in hand, or even kissing in public, may be observed and could be exposed to the risk of harassment, violence, and potential legal prosecution. Generally, female couples are more likely to go unnoticed and avoid detection compared to male couples.

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<sup>640</sup> IStories, *Число жертв преступлений против ЛГБТ в России выросло в полтора раза в 2023 году*, 21 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>641</sup> Nastoyashchee Vremya, *Суд в Москве дал до 5,5 лет колонии двум студентам по делу о развернутых действиях: дети якобы увидели их обнаженными в окне*, 12 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>642</sup> Forbes, *Девушку, которую мужчина выгнал из метро из-за стрижки, оштрафовали на 15 000 рублей*. 28 August 2024, [url](#)

51. If LGBT+ persons refrain from publishing LGBT+ content on social media or expressing themselves publicly by other means, the primary risk they face would be harassment from the people surrounding them. An LGBT+ person may be able to live without significant problems, but this depends on the specific circumstances. Factors such as the attitudes of a landlord, the extended social network, or a university student's parents may play a role, as they may hold homophobic views or be otherwise unreceptive. The source referred to a Sphere report,<sup>643</sup> which recounts cases of parental assaults, harassment, and subjection to conversion therapy.
52. There are instances of well-known figures in state-controlled media and within the government who are openly homosexual. However, according to the source, their ability to do so depends on political views, work area, and connections.

#### **Reporting of LGBT+ persons to the authorities**

53. LGBT+ persons have been seen to be reported to the police by private individuals.
54. OVD-Info previously attempted to analyse denunciations in cases related to discrediting the army. Based on anonymised and abridged court decisions, it has been difficult to determine whether the source or channel for initiating a case was a neighbour, a concerned citizen, or a police officer. In some court cases, the court record may give the impression that the case was simply initiated by a police officer browsing the internet and accidentally came across a post on social media.
55. There are no available statistics on the subject matter, and the extent of the phenomenon cannot be verified.

#### **Availability of state protection and the importance of legal representation**

56. According to the source, there may be regional differences in the situation for LGBT+ persons. The source noted that, according to the Committee Against Torture, instances of torture have been reported both in remote regions as well as in Moscow. In this context, access to legal support is particularly significant. The role of qualified legal assistance is crucial when seeking protection from the authorities or reporting on a violent act. However, the source noted that this observation is not related to LGBT+ matters specifically.
57. An LGBT+ person risks exposure simply by approaching the authorities (self-report). Support from human rights lawyers or LGBT+ activists can significantly shape the

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<sup>643</sup> Sphere Foundation, *Положение ЛГБТ+ людей в России в 2024 году*, 15 May 2025, [url](#)

handling of a case; not necessarily in terms of likelihood of a successful prosecution but in providing guidance on how to avoid self-reporting, which strategic avenues to pursue and other protective measures.

### **Self-censorship**

58. As a consequence of the situation for LGBT+ persons in Russia, the source noted that significant self-censorship occurs. Persons tend to avoid engaging with media outlets or human rights activists, due to fear of potential repercussions and exacerbation of their situation.
59. The source also noted that many LGBT+ clubs in Russia have been closed, operate in the hidden, or have been compelled to rebrand in order to attract a broader clientele.
60. According to the source, for LGBT+ persons in Russia to live entirely free of risk harassment, assaults, and legal persecution, they would have to conceal their sexual orientation and gender identity completely. No one should be aware of their true circumstances, and their outward appearance and presentation would need to conform to heterosexual norms.
61. Even then, the mere perception that a person simply belongs to the LGBT+ community (based on stereotype perceptions) may in itself serve as a trigger. As an example, the source referred to the case of Nastya Ermak, who was harassed in the metro (cf. above).

### **Situation for returnees**

#### *Searches and scrutiny in general*

62. During searches at a private property, typically all digital devices are confiscated. Officially, a court order is required for such searches. A court order is, according to the source, fairly easy obtained, and in some cases, it can even be requested retroactively. There has been reports of searches on digital devices conducted without a court order, which the source regarded as illegal practice. However, theoretically, if the authorities have a proper cause, they can conduct a search of person. Search of premises and search of persons can have very different standards. For a personal search to be conducted, there must still be a valid cause and reasonable suspicion of violation.

#### *Checks and searches upon entry to Russia*

63. A search may also occur as part of the authorities' routine procedures, for example at the border when people are checked upon entering Russia. Checks may be conducted both randomly and in a more systematic manner for certain groups of people e.g. activists, Ukrainians, etc. The precise criteria that might increase the likelihood of being subjected to a check remain unknown. According to the source, searches of digital devices are included in this procedure. Law enforcement officers typically review a person's social network, potentially via apps such as Telegram. Reports indicate that both manual and automated checks of Telegram by border officers occur, with manual checks being more common. Certain keywords have also been reported to be applied in authorities' searches for anti-war sentiments. The source was unaware of such applications of keywords and procedures specifically targeting LGBT+ persons, although, authorities conducting random or routine checks for other matters may pose a risk of uncovering information about an individual's LGBT+ status.
64. In theory, a person can refuse to surrender a device for search. However, many people feel pressured by the authorities, often enduring several hours of interrogation and pressure to unblock their phones. Granting access to a device carries the risk of exposing information that may serve as grounds for prosecution. Such risks are not always fully considered by some persons, according to the source. The source noted several cases, not pertaining to LGBT+ persons specifically, where authorities uncovered details during border searches that formed the basis for criminal investigation, including cases related to supporting terrorism and extremism.
65. The source emphasised that the risks of scrutiny and searches of LGBT+ persons are potential rather than documented. Obviously, no concrete statistics are available; nevertheless, these risks may potentially give rise to charges related to propaganda, extremism, or other offences. This mostly relates to the charges similar to existing case law, e.g. where extremist LGBT+ related materials or conversations are discovered on a phone.
66. Requested of knowledge about existence of certain lists of persons of interest to the Russian authorities, the source acknowledged that such lists do exist. However, the source had no knowledge of their scope or content. The source noted instances of leaked databases, and it remains unclear which lists are compiled by authorities themselves and which by the creators of those databases. As no complete lists are publicly available, it is not possible to check all of them and even know about their existence. The source opined that such lists are not conclusive, as certain high-profiled activists did not appear to be on such lists whilst others were included.

67. Regarding procedures at border control, the source noted that there does not appear to be any systematic approach. Experiences vary considerably at the border, even among individuals with identical backgrounds and activities, such as human rights lawyers. Some are stopped at the border and subjected to interrogation and then released, while others pass through without incident. The source described an approach being different from case to case, whereby it is impossible to see any pattern. However, the source suggested that certain individuals may be at higher risk of interrogation, for example activists, human rights lawyers, and in particular persons who are critical of the war in Ukraine. The source had no specific information concerning LGBT+ individuals, though the source had knowledge of such persons being interrogated.
68. Interrogations typically included questions on the individual's whereabouts and activities abroad. In most cases, persons are subsequently released.
69. Due to the war in Ukraine, the source suggested that there may be slightly less risk of interrogation for an individual having been abroad a significant amount of time prior to the full-scale invasion, compared with those who fled a few years ago.

## An LGBT+ organisation

Vilnius, 03.09.2025

*This LGBT+ organisation provides assistance to individuals, supports cases of discrimination and violence, and documents the situation of LGBT+ lives in Russia. Since February 2022, however, its work has shifted significantly, with an increasing number of requests for help from individuals seeking to leave Russia.*

## The courts and the legal system

1. The first wave of repression against the LGBT+ community emerged in 2012, in the aftermath of the mass protests on Bolotnaya Square in Moscow that followed Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency. Numerous organisations came under intense scrutiny as a consequence of the 'foreign agent' law. Nevertheless, in 2012, it remained possible for private individuals to advocate for LGBT+ rights.
2. Following the Supreme Court ruling in November 2023, the source has observed a rise in requests for assistance, the majority of which pertain to legal matters.
3. The authorities are not only targeting activists but also ordinary individuals wearing earrings or other symbols signifying affiliation with the LGBT+ community. Initially, such individuals are likely to be accused of engaging in propaganda by displaying these symbols. However, the distinction between propaganda and extremism is tenuous, and individuals may also face charges of extremism for publicly exhibiting LGBT+ symbols.
4. In most instances, the display of symbols deemed extremist results in the imposition of an administrative fine.
5. The authorities may subsequently escalate such cases to the level of extremism charges. In this context, there are no clear boundaries as to whether a given action or appearance will be classified as propaganda or as extremism. However, the mere fact of wearing earring is not, in itself, sufficient to attract the attention of the authorities; there must be some form of symbol associated with the LGBT+ community.
6. The source confirmed that a third consecutive administrative offence within a year time span from the previous one would result in the initiation of criminal proceedings. In this context, the source pointed to a new trend among Russian law enforcement agencies. While the law prescribes fixed limitation periods for many charges, depending on their nature, the authorities no longer appear to observe these limitations. As a result, individuals may be prosecuted for offences which, in principle, can no longer be pursued legally. The source, however, was not aware of any such cases involving LGBT+ persons. Following, the source noted that the level of unpredictability is a strategic means of suppression.

## Access to legal representation

7. According to the source, LGBT+ persons are able to obtain legal representation. However, securing a specific lawyer may prove difficult, as there is a risk that lawyers

themselves may be subject to prosecution. For example, the source referred to the case of Aleksey Navalny, in which several of his lawyers were subsequently charged with extremism.

8. The LGBT+ NGO engages a number of lawyers to work on LGBT+ cases and to provide support for LGBT+ persons within the court system. However, the number of lawyers is insufficient to cover the volume of cases arising across the country. According to the source, these lawyers may themselves be at risk of prosecution, although, as of September 2025, this has not occurred.

### **Authorities' treatment of LGBT+ persons**

9. According to the source, if the police wish to pursue a case, they will utilise any available pretext, provided the individual is of interest. For instance, in the spring of 2025, a person wearing rainbow symbols was detained and taken to the police station for questioning; however, the case was not pursued further, as the individual was not considered a priority. The source noted that, ultimately, whether proceedings are initiated, depends on whether the police deem it useful to include the person within their portfolio of cases.
10. If an individual is not considered a case of interest, they are unlikely to encounter difficulties with the police solely on the basis of their membership in the LGBT+ community. Prosecution is deemed to be more likely when the individual serves the statistical interests of the police.
11. In broader terms, minority groups are often instrumentalised by governments as convenient scapegoats for wider societal or political challenges. The source opined that in the Russian context, the LGBT+ community is frequently instrumentalised as a means of explaining or justifying domestic problems within Russia.

### **Behaviour and appearance triggering state action**

12. To some extent, it is possible to anticipate who may face prosecution for LGBT+ related issues. Individuals who are activists and highly public or vocal are more likely to be targeted by the authorities. However, the likelihood of being targeted also depends on the individual's prior record of administrative offences, which the authorities may subsequently use against them.
13. Wearing rainbow-themed earrings could also trigger prosecution if such symbols are classified as associated with an extremist organisation. However, in the absence of designated extremist symbols, the likelihood of being targeted by the authorities depends on what an individual has publicly expressed and, to some extent, on their non-verbal conduct. For instance, posting a statement on Facebook affirming that everyone has the right to love, accompanied by an image of two women kissing, could be sufficient to attract official attention.

14. The source opined that many LGBT+ persons wish to display symbols indicating their affiliation with the LGBT+ community, which may place them at risk of attracting the attention of the authorities for that very reason.
15. A male couple cohabiting in an apartment would not, solely for that reason, be targeted by the authorities. However, public displays of affection, such as holding hands, or visibly wearing rainbow symbols could provoke official attention. Firstly, such actions would put them at risk of being attacked by other civilians. According to the source, even holding hands would be regarded as 'propaganda' in the eyes of the authorities.
16. According to the source, LGBT+ Individuals should avoid publishing LGBT+ content on social media, even when these persons are not activists, as the authorities may use LGBT+ content on social media as grounds for prosecution. The authorities are particularly sensitive to posts containing narratives critical of the war in Ukraine or what the Kremlin designates as 'fakes' about the armed forces.

#### **Consequences for relatives**

17. In 2023, amendments to the legislation introduced the possibility for authorities to target relatives of LGBT+ activists on account of their activities being classified as part of an extremist movement. Relatives — including parents, spouses, and children — of individuals designated by the authorities as extremists may be subjected to searches, including of their residences, without a court order. All electronic devices may also be examined under the law. These provisions can additionally be applied if the authorities merely suspect a person of belonging to an extremist group.
18. In theory, an individual may refuse to open their door to the police; however, if the authorities suspect the person of being an extremist, they are permitted to enter the apartment without consent or a court order.

#### **Civil society reporting LGBT+ persons to the authorities**

19. In Russia, the number of ordinary citizens reporting individuals to the police has increased in recent years. According to the source, the prevailing attitude towards reporting others in 2025 is reminiscent of the 1930s in Stalin's USSR, during the period known as the Great Terror, when denunciations among citizens were widespread.
20. The source noted that there have been reports of violence to LGBT+ persons by random bypassers.
21. Since the Supreme Court ruling, some LGBT+ couples have reportedly been apprehensive about enrolling their children in kindergartens or seeking medical care at hospitals, due to fears of being reported to the police. However, the source had not encountered any such cases as of September 2025.

#### **Regional differences**

22. In relatively liberal cities such as Yekaterinburg, the LGBT+ community continues to find ways to resist. This resilience has historical roots, as the city has long hosted significant LGBT+ communities. Located near the geographic centre of Russia, Yekaterinburg has also been a hub for migrant workers from Central Asian countries. Many of these migrants have been drawn to the city due to its generally liberal and tolerant environment, which extends beyond attitudes towards LGBT+ persons. Yekaterinburg also had a notably liberal mayor, Yevgeny Roizman, who tolerated the LGBT+ community in the city despite personally opposing LGBT+ rights. His stance contributed to making Yekaterinburg one of the more tolerant cities in Russia.
23. With regard to Moscow, the source noted that it functions as a 'country within a country', meaning that tolerance towards the LGBT+ community largely depends on the local context. A couple holding hands in Moscow would probably be possible without difficulties. However, in smaller cities, public displays of affection between same-sex couples could expose them to the risk of assault by anti-LGBT+ groups or individuals, and in some cases, intervention by the police.

#### **Availability and effectiveness of state protection**

24. An individual assaulted by private persons cannot generally expect to receive support or protection from the police. However, the source noted that, in general, those seeking assistance from the police would not themselves be subjected to prosecution merely for requesting such help.
25. The source noted that, as a consequence of the above, individuals do not turn to the police for help. Thus, there are no true figures on the amount of violence and discrimination in society.

#### **Situation for returnees**

26. LGBT+ persons returning to Russia may encounter difficulties at the border.
27. At the border, individuals undergo a security check to verify their identity. During this process, border guards also determine whether the person appears to figure on any wanted lists. If so, the individual is directed to a separate FSB room for questioning.
28. To be flagged on such a list, an individual must have published or spoken on topics deemed contrary to Kremlin policies and, thus, have been identified by the authorities at some point. In principle, this could be a very minor action, such as a social media post stating, for example, 'Oh, the Russians want Mariupol!'-which could be sufficient to attract the attention of the authorities.
29. If an individual is not highly visible, they are unlikely to be detained for questioning; however, the source concluded, it is impossible to know what information the authorities may have collected about a particular person. Conversely, for individuals who are very public—for example, a vocal director of an LGBT+ organisation—the likelihood of being detained for questioning at the border is considerably higher.

30. Individuals who have been abroad for approximately ten years may be subjected to questioning at the border, particularly if they have been vocal about the war in Ukraine or other matters contrary to Kremlin policies. The source noted that a prolonged stay abroad, combined with other factors – including issues related to the LGBT+ community – could prompt border guards to question an individual.