



 **ВЫХОД**

 **сфера**

LGBT+ Community in Russia in 2024 Human Rights Defenders' Perspective

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LGBTQ+ Non-Profit Organization

Coming Out

Since 2008, Coming Out has been protecting the rights of the LGBTQ+ community and helping queer people feel safer in Russia.

Our main goal is to establish equal legal and social rights for everyone regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Our psychologists and lawyers provide free consultations for LGBTQ+ people and their loved ones. We monitor discrimination to collect evidence of the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in Russia and work with the authorities on cases of discrimination and violence. We educate journalists to use inclusive language when reporting on LGBTQ+ issues and consult medical professionals, psychologists, and HR specialists on how to engage with queer communities.

All services we provide are free of charge.

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- * [Legal assistance](#)
- * [Career consultation](#)

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 contact@comingoutspb.org

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Our social media

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Sphere Foundation




[Sphere Foundation](#) — Sphere Foundation is a human rights organization that has been supporting the rights of LGBT+ people and organizations since 2011. In 2024, we expanded our mission to include psychological services for straight cisgender women.

We strive to resist the anti-gender movement in Russia and make changes that would protect all people from violence and discrimination motivated by sexuality and/or gender identity.

We provide free psychological and legal consultations, publish reports for international institutions (both individually and in partnership with other organizations), provide legal aid in courts on all levels, run educational events for professionals, and develop our own media.

For legal assistance, mental health support, and emergency services, please use our [Telegram Bot](#)

Our social media:

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Methodology

This research is based on interviews conducted with a diverse range of experts working with LGBT+ individuals: human rights defenders, lawyers, staff members of LGBT+ initiatives, activists, and journalists. We discussed with them the key developments in 2024 affecting LGBT+ people, the enforcement of repressive legislation and its wider implications, levels of violence and discrimination stemming from homophobia and transphobia, as well as regional variations.

We conducted a total of 19 interviews with distinct experts. Most of our experts (n=12) resided outside Russia, continuing their work in support of the Russian LGBT+ community remotely. Seven experts continue to operate within Russia. Our objective was to engage with human rights professionals addressing various issues within the LGBT+ community across different regions of Russia. However, individuals based outside Russia were generally more willing to participate in interviews, and their contact information was more accessible. The clandestine or semi-clandestine nature of work within Russia imposed constraints on our ability to interview individuals currently working in various regions of the country. Nevertheless, we were able to conduct focused discussions with experts regarding specific regions, including the North Caucasus (Chechen Republic, Republic of Dagestan, Karachay-Cherkess Republic, Republic of Ingushetia), the Far East (Primorsky Territory, Sakhalin Region, Khabarovsk Territory, Kamchatka), Sverdlovsk Region, Tambov Region, Tyumen Region, Saint Petersburg and Moscow.

As with any research method, expert interviews possess inherent limitations. Expert responses may be influenced by their personal experiences, perspectives, and beliefs, potentially introducing subjectivity into the findings. We anticipate that the most comprehensive understanding of the situation facing LGBT+ individuals in Russia can be achieved by triangulating these expert assessments with each other, as well as with our quantitative data gathered via survey.

To ensure the safety of the experts interviewed, names, organizational affiliations and locations were disclosed only with their explicit permission.

All interviews were conducted online using Google Meet. The duration of each interview ranged from one to three hours. All interviews were completed during February 2025.

The interviews were semi-structured and covered the following thematic areas:

- General assessment of the situation in 2024 (compared to 2023);
- Regional specifics and variations;
- The state of the human rights sector overall and the specific situation of the expert's initiative/organization/independent activism;

- Consequences of the designation of the “international LGBT social movement” as extremist;
- Application and enforcement of the law prohibiting “LGBT propaganda”;
- The situation of transgender individuals and the consequences of the ban on legal and medical gender reassignment;
- Raids on clubs and their repercussions;
- Denunciations against LGBT+ individuals;
- Censorship and the state of queer culture;
- The economic situation of LGBT+ individuals;
- Discrimination in employment and education;
- The situation of LGBT+ individuals engaged in sex work;
- Hate-motivated violence;
- Access to healthcare;
- The situation of LGBT+ parents;
- The situation of LGBT+ adolescents;
- The impact of the war on LGBT+ individuals;
- Forecasts for 2025.

Key Developments in 2024

Characterizing the past year in broad terms, experts converge in their assessment of a pervasive atmosphere of constant fear and anxiety experienced by LGBT+ people in Russia. This condition, ongoing for several years, adversely affects quality of life and mental health, leading to social isolation and complete withdrawal.

“People continue to live in fear, people are going underground and are forced to content themselves with less. The issue is not representation, nor is it about somehow raising awareness or developing collective pride, but simply about survival.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

As a consequence of the continuing repression, LGBT+ individuals have been deprived of the possibility of visibility and any form of public representation, which further contributes to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

“The key words for 2024 for me are ‘isolation,’ ‘loneliness,’ ‘fear,’ and ‘the erasure of queer culture,’ unfortunately.”

(Maria Lacinska, journalist, founder of the Lesbian Lobby Channel)

Feelings of isolation and fear are also fueled by state propaganda, which intensifies hateful sentiments.

“Generally speaking, describing the situation, it's as if you are alone, while this whole propaganda narrative is disseminated from all sides and it seems to you that everything is utterly dreadful, everything is frightening and everyone around wishes you harm. This exerts immense pressure. It is intensely oppressive. There is a sense of shrinking space.”

(Sasha, queer activist, Ural Federal District)

Simultaneously, as no new repressive measures specifically targeting LGBT+ individuals were introduced in 2024, they had an opportunity to adapt to the existing restrictions, learning to survive under the conditions established over the preceding two years.

“On an everyday level, people are scared, people are anxious, but it seems that after several years of constant fear and anxiety, people have partly learned to ignore it. They have started making plans.”

(Sasha, queer activist, Ural Federal District)

“It seems to me the trend is that people have simply adapted. One cannot say it's a healthy adaptation, but everyone understands that things won't improve soon. This situation is set for the long term.”

(K., Far East)

This year marked the first full year operating under the Supreme Court's decision recognizing the “LGBT+ movement” as extremist, which significantly worsened the socio-legal status of LGBT+ people. Enforcement practices related to this and other repressive anti-LGBT+ measures began to take shape. On one hand, this fuels the atmosphere of pressure and constant risks; on the other hand, it allows human rights defenders and lawyers to develop protection strategies for LGBT+ individuals and formulate safety measures. New grounds for extortion and blackmail against LGBT+ people emerged, including threats of accusation related to extremism and the distribution of pornography.

The designation as “extremists” has rendered LGBT+ individuals more vulnerable to discrimination across various spheres of life, as well as to pressure and harassment. One expert remaining in Russia reported that individuals within their social circle have become significantly more fearful of visiting queer spaces or displaying affection in public places. They note that some people hesitate even to discuss LGBT+ topics in public settings or on transport, resorting to whispers or avoiding the subject entirely.

The impact of the Supreme Court's decision will be discussed in greater detail below in the relevant section.

“2024 is the year in which we lived entirely under the Supreme Court's decision declaring the so-called ‘international LGBT movement’ extremist. And we were trying to understand how this would actually

manifest in practice and what it would signify, both in terms of enforcement practices and for people in general.”

(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

The Supreme Court's decision itself precipitated greater concealment among LGBT+ people and severely constrained the operational capabilities of support organizations, leading to the closure of queer spaces and events, forcing them into clandestine modes of operation.

“Effectively, this is the year following the adoption of the [ruling regarding] extremism, which impacted support initiatives, among other things; due to it, a number of in-person events were shut down, [and] receiving donations in rubles became impossible. Some organizations were unable to continue their work, while others curtailed their activities. Transgender people themselves began leading more concealed lives, speaking less about themselves, and anonymizing their social media profiles. For transgender individuals, this often intersects with the issue of transition, as commencing transition makes hiding one's trans status practically impossible. Consequently, many are fearful and postpone transition until after emigration, which they aspire to achieve. Thus, their situation becomes increasingly socially isolated and characterized by diminished resources.”

(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

A significant problem highlighted by numerous human rights defenders, particularly lawyers, concerning the entire body of repressive legislation, is the arbitrariness and ambiguity of legal enforcement, alongside the vagueness of legal norms. This results in an inability to predict precisely who will be targeted for persecution and on what grounds.

“Legal uncertainty constitutes a distinct factor of discrimination. It is profoundly difficult... It permeates all aspects of life. It frequently entails the inability to access social services, fear of contacting human rights organizations, [and] challenges for service organizations in rendering aid. It leads to individuals fearing reporting incidents to the police, uncertain of what specific actions a particular officer might construe as criminal. Thus, this legal uncertainty is not merely rhetoric about legislative imperfections.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

Another ongoing trend pointed out by many experts is the normalization of violence — both against LGBTQ+ people as a result of state persecution, and in society as a whole under the influence of prolonged war (more on the increase in violence and the impact of the war will be discussed further below).

“There is a normalization of violence. That is, people are becoming accustomed to it. Raids on clubs no longer shock people as intensely.”
(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

Several experts observe that 2024 is marked by an intensified (or at least sustained) flow of LGBT+ emigration; some organizations experienced a substantial rise in requests for assistance with departure, processing humanitarian visas, seeking asylum and emergency evacuation under circumstances of persecution. Demand for psychological support has also escalated due to constant pressure, raids, news concerning extremism cases, and similar factors.

“There has been a surge in requests for psychological assistance, help with humanitarian visas, and asylum applications. Comparing years 2023 and 2024, a significantly larger number of individuals filed asylum cases in 2024.”
(Irina, head of the “Advocacy” program, Sphere Foundation)

Against the backdrop of sustained pressure on LGBT+ individuals, some experts note a mobilization within the community, a readiness to establish new forms of association and to participate actively in community life and the activities of LGBT+ organizations.

“Concurrently, I also observe attempts to create horizontal communities, efforts to unite within these small communities, interact with one another, collaborate, [and] seek out like-minded individuals. People are now simply undertaking these activities in small groups and employing such 'partisan' methods.”
(Maria Lacinska, journalist, founder of the Lesbian Lobby Channel)

“There has been an increase in volunteers; it feels like a form of mobilization. In 2023, the situation seemed bleak, utterly dire. Now, it still seems bleak and dire but there is a sense that something can be done about it.”
(K., Far East)

Regional Differences

In our research, we aimed to encompass the regional specifics of the situation for LGBT+ people in Russia, although, as noted in the methodology description, we were unable to obtain a complete picture across all regions of Russia. Nevertheless, some experts shared with us their general perspective on the situation across regions.

“It is necessary to distinguish between state persecution and non-state persecution. And in this respect, regions can be divided into three categories.

The first category comprises regions without a dominant Muslim culture. This is a group of regions where domestic violence, non-state violence, and state violence are all present at a certain level. It occupies the minimal, first tier, although it remains high.

Next are regions with Muslim specificities. According to my observations, the level of non-state violence is higher there. Examples include street beatings and domestic violence. Rehabilitation centers operate, purportedly used for the ‘treatment’ of SOGI [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity]. So-called ‘exorcisms of jinn’ [to correct SOGI] occur, and so forth. Infrequently but they do happen. However, the level of direct state violence there is comparable to that in the first group of regions.

And there is a third group of regions: the North Caucasian regions, among which Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan are most prominent. And now also the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, where the level of state violence is high, significantly higher than in other regions. That is, the level of non-state violence in these regions exceeds that in other Muslim regions. Furthermore, the level of state violence is also higher there than in other non-Muslim and Muslim regions. There exists a direct threat to the lives [of LGBT+ people], honor killings, torture in police custody and abductions. This includes abductions from other regions of Russia if an individual leaves the region and even abductions from other countries. This is in addition to beatings, widespread forced marriages, some of which involve underage girls.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

We discussed the particular situation in the North Caucasus in detail with Lyusya Shteyn, who is involved in international advocacy at SK SOS, an initiative that assists LGBT+ people and their family members facing persecution in the North Caucasus. The specificity of this region is such that, as Lyusya Shteyn notes, new repressive measures – such as recognizing the “LGBT movement” as extremist and banning gender transition – have not altered the circumstances for LGBT+ people in the region, as the situation was already dire:

“Extremism has not impacted the situation [in the region] in any way because everything was already worse there previously. The only consequence, it seems to me, is that this decision legitimizes the persecutions occurring in Chechnya.” However, the expert emphasizes that the new repressive laws increase the risks for the initiative's staff and everyone associated with its work in any capacity.

A distinctive feature of the persecution of LGBT+ people by authorities in the North Caucasus is the non-application of articles directly related to LGBT+ issues (e.g., the ban on LGBT propaganda, extremism). This is done

deliberately to avoid acknowledging the presence of LGBT+ people in the region: “LGBT+ people do not exist [in the region]; therefore, these articles also do not exist [in enforcement practice].”

(Lyusya Shteyn, SK SOS)

A new trend observed in the North Caucasus in 2024 is the prosecutions of LGBT+ individuals for the distribution of pornography, in cases where the accused were merely sending intimate photographs to their partners via private correspondence.

“They were detained. Intimate photos and videos, sent only to one person, were discovered on their phones within private messages. That is, the detainees had no connection whatsoever to the pornography industry. Yet they were charged with distributing pornography.”

(Lyusya Shteyn, SK SOS)

According to information from SK SOS, at least four such cases involving the distribution of pornographic materials were known in 2024.

Ksenia Mikhailova, the lawyer from LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out, suggests that this practice could rapidly extend beyond the region:

“Prosecution for pornography distribution has now become an ‘adjunct’ to extremism cases. There have already been several instances where an individual is charged with extremism, all their devices are searched, and merely finding an exchange of intimate photos between men even with their own partner is sufficient grounds. For this exchange of intimate photos, they are prosecuted as if for distributing pornography. We are aware of a conviction in Dagestan where an LGBT person was detained, and grounds for prosecution were fabricated. This is occurring, firstly, in conjunction with extremism cases. Secondly, it has become a distinct element in extortion schemes. For instance, while previously staging an entrapment date might have been necessary, now orchestrating a fictitious exchange of intimate photos suffices.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

It is important to note that the pornography distribution cases in the Republic of Dagestan were initiated following police-orchestrated entrapment operations. Police officers deceptively lured a Moscow-based gay blogger to Makhachkala and utilized him to arrange meetings with local men. Through threats and coercion, the police compelled the victims of these entrapment encounters to file denunciations against one another, which subsequently formed the basis for initiating criminal cases.

“There was also this scheme where they would detain a person, then arrange an entrapment date involving him. He would attend a meeting with another man, who would then be detained and coerced into testifying against the first individual, alleging pornography distribution. Subsequently,

the first individual would face prosecution.”

(Lyusya Shteyn, SK SOS)

Another region discussed specifically was the Far East. An expert working there highlighted particular operational challenges, including the significant time difference relative to the western part of the country, the geographical dispersion of the population, societal atomization within the region, difficulties in disseminating information and challenges in reaching the target audience due to censorship, as well as the region's isolation from major urban centers and media hubs.

“The primary difficulty to appreciate is that we are the sole openly operating LGBTQ+ organization within this time zone. One might assume everything is online now, which is advantageous. However, when events occur at 2 a.m. Vladivostok time, participation is naturally precluded. Consequently, we resolved that while all our online activities are open to everyone, they are primarily oriented towards the Far East. Thus, we select a more convenient time zone: evening hours, prime time.

The second factor is considerable societal atomization in the Far East. For instance, relying on word-of-mouth makes it challenging to reach certain individuals. Attracting a large audience via this mechanism is difficult. Media resources are also limited because, again, the population is smaller, and prominent media figures and bloggers tend to focus on the western audience—essentially, Western Russia. Population density is another factor. To illustrate, the nearest large city to Vladivostok, with a population of 600,000, is Khabarovsk. The distance between them approximates that between Moscow and St. Petersburg. It is a further 1,000 kilometers to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, with a population around 180,000. While settlements exist between these points, they are small and scattered. There is a sense of vast distance and disconnection; communication among people is poor. Consequently, attracting substantial numbers to events proves difficult.”

(K., Far East)

Simultaneously, the expert from the Far East assesses the region as comparatively tolerant towards LGBTQ+ individuals, citing the absence of large-scale cases involving LGBTQ+ propaganda or extremism, and the lack of raids on queer spaces. This relative tolerance, according to the informant, might stem from local authorities' reluctance to adhere strictly to directives from Moscow, coupled with insufficient law enforcement personnel to dedicate to such matters.

“It seems the city is simply freer. And there is invariably a degree of self-distinction from Moscow here. As in, ‘those Muscovites conceived this [anti-

LGBT+ legislation], did they?’ Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that there is a serious insufficiency of police personnel here.”
(K., Far East)

However, data gathered from our survey indicates that non-state violence targeting LGBT+ people is widespread in the Far East.

Experts operating in the Tyumen and Sverdlovsk Regions similarly reported no heightened hostility towards LGBT+ individuals in their regions; rather, they described a somewhat calm, or at least indifferent, societal attitude. Regarding the Tyumen Region specifically, one expert attributed this relative calm to the region's economic prosperity.

“Tyumen Region, in this regard, resembles major metropolitan areas, however paradoxical that might sound, because it is relatively affluent. After all, substantial revenue flows from here to the metropolises, derived from agricultural resources, oil, and gas. This positively impacts the oblast; it is one region that, at least historically, was not reliant on federal subsidies. In Tyumen itself, the situation is nuanced: certain districts are unsafe for individuals with, shall we say, an unconventional appearance. Nevertheless, there appears to be a considerable number of accepting people here.”
(Sasha, Ural Federal District)

Several experts cautioned against overemphasizing regional specificity in the persecution of LGBT+ people, noting its sporadic nature and the tendency for practices to disseminate across regions.

“If persecution of LGBT+ people exists in even one region of Russia, it possesses the potential to spread nationwide. The persecution assumes a large-scale dimension that transcends regional particularities. Setting aside the specific context of the North Caucasian republics, this is indeed occurring. The specific region has become largely irrelevant. Moreover, we observe cases emerging in atypical locations. We are accustomed to associating such incidents with Moscow and St. Petersburg, but the reality is that numerous unexpected cases now arise, including in small towns and urban-type settlements, not just major cities.”
(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

Furthermore, experts contend that the persecution of LGBT+ individuals and the initiation of cases against them may be contingent less on regional cultural or geographical factors and more on the motivations of law enforcement officials in specific locales:

“The geography of persecution exhibits significant variation. Some regions are devoid of it, while in others it is rampant. This does not always correlate with population size. More likely, it operates according to the principle of

officials seeking to curry favor or advance their careers.”

(Anna Eroshenko, queer-fem activist)

“I believe these cases are pursued merely for appearances, contingent on the level of motivation within a given region. Tula, for instance, demonstrates high motivation. They are reportedly making their third attempt to initiate a case there.”

(Vladimir, lawyer, Moscow)

Application of Repressive Legislation

All experts with whom we spoke concur that the application of repressive anti-LGBT+ legislation is arbitrary and chaotic. Under such circumstances, any LGBT+ individual can become a victim of state persecution, and law enforcement officials themselves are often uncertain about what exactly might constitute grounds for prosecution on the next occasion, yet proceed from the necessity of initiating a case.

“I am certain that those involved in this [cases against LGBT+ people] (both the prosecutor's office and investigators) are not entirely sure themselves how it operates, but they need to create a case. And ordinary people become the victims.”

(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

“How the situation will develop further is completely unclear, because it is impossible to predict in our state. Even for lawyers who work with law enforcement agencies. And even law enforcement agencies themselves know nothing; they simply coordinate everything with their superiors.”

(Natalia, Ural Federal District)

Recognition of the “LGBT Movement” as Extremist

Many experts reported that following the entry into force of the Russian Federation Supreme Court's decision recognizing the “LGBT movement” as extremist in January 2024, there were widespread expectations of mass persecutions targeting LGBT+ activists and organizations. Given that the names of several LGBT+ organizations were mentioned in the rationale section of the decision, human rights defenders and activists sought to restructure their work, develop new strategies, and ensure the safety of organizational staff, volunteers and partners.

“The moment we saw that Sphere was on that list [in the rationale of the Supreme Court decision], of course, the entire team was in shock.

We took a pause. Everyone considered what each of us should do individually. What the organization should do. But then somehow it coalesced into the understanding that we must continue our work.”
(Irina, head of the Advocacy program, Sphere Foundation)

However, these expectations did not materialize; the extremism article began to be applied against LGBT+ individuals differently: the initial cases were brought not against activists but against employees of queer clubs following police raids.

“We were completely mistaken about who it is applied against. Because everyone, of course, expected it to be a law primarily against activism - against civic activism. Certainly, I, among others, expected that cases would primarily target activists.”
(Itil Tyomnaya, Crime 6.21 project)

Simultaneously, persecution and raids on LGBT+ spaces also exhibit an inconsistent, arbitrary character. Many establishments continue to operate, while owners and employees of others face criminal charges under the article on extremist activity. Concurrently, new criminal cases are emerging, prompted by the private actions of LGBT+ individuals, such as publishing personal advertisements for dating¹.

“Initially, when there were no cases, everyone expected them to go after the activists remaining in Russia. When Orenburg happened [the criminal case against employees of a gay club in Orenburg], everyone shifted focus, thinking that now all gay clubs were under threat. This is true, they are under threat. But it's not the case that all gay clubs were simply shut down. Now, everything has shifted towards private individuals. Already two people are in pre-trial detention because they posted personal ads. It's difficult to ascertain any consistent practice here.”
(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

“Answering your question, is it possible to predict what actions will lead to prosecution? No. Moreover, I am sincerely convinced that their objective is to prosecute absolutely random individuals. As a result, we have a situation where the criminal cases are completely diverse. Anyone can be prosecuted, not necessarily for [displaying] a rainbow. And this, in turn, is broadcast quite widely, so that people also develop the understanding that anyone can be imprisoned if desired.”
(Vladimir, lawyer, Moscow)

¹ For example, a resident of Tula is [accused](#) of participating in the activities of an extremist organization on the grounds that, among other things, he “actively sought casual sexual encounters.” In Cherkessk, a case was [initiated](#) against a man who was searching for homosexual men on social media.

Analyzing the criminal extremism cases initiated against LGBT+ individuals in 2024, experts note a broad interpretation of the elements of the crime. The most common instances involve the organization of events in gay clubs and bars, which law enforcement agencies and courts classify as extremism based on two criteria: the organization of the event itself and the alleged LGBT propaganda taking place at these events. Notably, the initial judicial formulations did not imply that clubs or similar establishments would automatically be considered extremist; however, law enforcement agencies began applying this interpretation.

However, according to experts, enforcement practices are considerably broader. There are known cases where any form of LGBT+ activism, even actions expressed through isolated internet calls to fight for one's rights, has been deemed extremist. Furthermore, precedents exist where an individual's sexual orientation itself is equated with extremist activity. Below is a detailed analysis of existing court cases, provided by Ksenia Mikhailova, a lawyer with LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out.

“The majority of cases relate to the operation of gay clubs, gay bars and events. In such instances, the elements of the crime consist of the fact of organizing the event and the occurrence of propaganda at this event. These two elements are what constitute extremism in the eyes of law enforcement and judges.

But, unfortunately, this is not the only basis upon which people are accused of extremism. Naturally, we know about the case involving the prosecution of individuals for LGBT activism. One of the first cases was initiated against the leader of an LGBT initiative [referring to the Samara initiative Irida].

We are aware of a criminal case initiated because a person wrote something, had some isolated call online to fight for their rights. But this still somehow falls under the umbrella of LGBT+ activism. And one could have assumed that such actions might be designated as extremism, based on the wording of the Supreme Court decision. However, inferring from the formulated Supreme Court decision that gay clubs constitute extremism was impossible to predict.

And there are some cases linked simply to sexual orientation, where orientation itself is equated to extremist activity. For example, the Zhuravlev case², where he is accused of coercing individuals dependent on him into engaging in sexual acts. For this, he is prosecuted under Article 133 of the Criminal Code [Coercion into sexual acts]. He is further accused of participation in the activities of an

² Ilya Zhuravlev, the head of a medical center in Ulyanovsk, was accused of participating in the “LGBT extremist organization,” as well as inducing a subordinate into a homosexual relationship; this subordinate subsequently filed a complaint against him. On March 21, 2025, he was [sentenced](#) to three years in a general regime penal colony.

extremist organization. From the entire description of his actions, the only element pertaining to the activities of the ‘extremist’ LGBT organization is that he proposed specifically same-sex sexual acts. Thus, if we remove the fact that he proposed sex, coerced [engagement in] this sex, which constitutes the elements of Article 133, then for [Article] 282.2, all that remains is that these relations were same-sex.

Then again, the Kotov case³, where a criminal case was initiated under two articles. Under part one of Article 282.2, this again involves organizing the activities of an extremist organization. The structure there was similar to the club cases: he organized certain events, trips... But besides allegedly organizing events where propaganda supposedly occurred, according to the investigation, he was also charged under part 2 of Article 282. Which is participation in extremist activity. For participating in these events. He organized them himself, he participated himself. So, it turns out that the mere fact of an LGBT+ person participating in certain events already criminalizes their actions.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

In addition to criminal cases concerning organizing and participating in an extremist organization, there are also numerous administrative cases regarding the display of extremist symbols. Experts note that in this regard, enforcement practice is more uniform and predictable: the rainbow flag is predominantly recognized as such a symbol, and any images featuring it on social media are prosecuted. Many experts also suggest that cases related to the display of extremist symbols often serve to meet formal law enforcement performance indicators and simulate anti-extremism efforts.

“It's simpler to talk about the display of prohibited symbols. The rainbow flag has become an extremist symbol. [Law enforcement] finds it more or less randomly. This is the quota system [палочная система]; these are the kinds of cases needed to show a simulation of activity.”

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

Experts emphasize that the boundary between “LGBT propaganda” and “LGBT extremism” is blurred and constantly shifting, which complicates human rights defense activities and the defense of the accused. The very same actions can be deemed propaganda in some instances and extremism in others.

“After judicial practice began to form, this boundary [between propaganda and extremism] changed. How enforcement practice will change further in some irrational way, I do not know. And therein lies

³ Andrei Kotov was accused of creating an extremist organization for [organizing](#) tourist trips allegedly for gay men. He was arrested in early December 2024; on December 29th, he was found dead in a pre-trial detention center. An investigator reported that the death was a suicide. He will be tried [posthumously](#).

the pain. For a lawyer, there is particular pain in this. In the lack of understanding where propaganda ends and extremist activity begins.”
(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

Experts highlight the ambiguity and situational nature of the application of legislation concerning extremism and propaganda cases, noting that the choice of a specific article is often determined less by objective circumstances and more by the subjective interests of law enforcement officials and their desire to demonstrate operational effectiveness:

“We have cases involving extremism and sufficient cases involving propaganda. Sometimes they are merged, sometimes one [charge] remains while the other disappears. Mostly, it's a question of what serves as the grounds for one and for the other. This issue is non-trivial. There are cases where different articles were applied for the exact same actions. There were cases where attempts were made to pursue both [charges], but only one remained. In one instance, it might only be an administrative prosecution; in another, it could also be criminal. It's a matter of the desire of those involved to curry favor to one degree or another. Overall, it's about what can successfully be applied to achieve this goal. To force things to fit in each separate case, akin to the Russian idiom ‘stretching an owl onto a globe’ [To force something to fit in an obviously unnatural, illogical, or absurd way, similar to ‘fitting a square peg in a round hole’]. Fundamentally speaking, these are simply additional tools.”

(Anna Eroshenko, queer-fem activist)

The consequences of recognizing the “LGBT movement” as extremist are very broad, affecting diverse spheres of LGBTQ+ people's lives. All experts concur that this decision has created an atmosphere of fear and significantly heightened anxiety among LGBTQ+ individuals. Some experts suggest that this was precisely the state's objective in taking this action, considering the chaotic application of the extremism article.

“Returning to the matter of the Supreme Court's decision, its goal is not mass repression. Its goal is terror. The objective is to stage something demonstrative [показательное], and this is often palpable.” (Vladimir, lawyer, Moscow)

“Mostly, cases are initiated against absolutely ordinary people who are not activists or human rights defenders... They were just living their lives, running their businesses, attending to their own affairs. And this is utterly monstrous because the authorities are using this instrument of terror. That is, [using] targeted punishments of completely random people without any system, both in regions and in small towns. It's all

very frightening.”

(Maria Lacinska, journalist, founder of the Lesbian Lobby Channel)

Experts also note that the extremism ruling has far-reaching indirect consequences for the public perception of LGBT+ people, for the intensification of censorship and self-censorship (this will be discussed further in the relevant chapter) and also for how many Russian media outlets now report on LGBT+ individuals, incorrectly applying the label “LGBT recognized as an extremist movement in Russia” to any mention of LGBT+ topics.

“The most absurd consequence of the extremism [ruling] is that the media began placing the extremist label everywhere it's not needed. [...] And I want to think that this contributes to informing [the public], strange as it may seem – these absurd labels, which the media apply not at all to emphasize the absurdity. They do this in ordinary society columns, in tabloid gossip. They write, for example, that some singer was said to be dating men, then [they add] an asterisk and the disclaimer below.”

(Itil Tyomnaya, Crime 6.21 project)

Lawyers emphasize that this is an erroneous interpretation of the Supreme Court's decision. Some believe that such incorrect labeling intensifies the fears of LGBT+ people and disorients them. Although Itil Tyomnaya believes that such blatantly absurd formulations in the press might lead the broad audience of these media outlets to contemplate the absurdity of the Supreme Court's decision itself.

Furthermore, experts note an increase in hateful sentiments within Russian society overall and in the online space as a consequence of the extremism ruling.

“I assess this as genuinely effective anti-gay propaganda, anti-queer propaganda, because people [expressing hatred towards LGBT+ people] feel emboldened. They think: “Nothing will happen to me for this; I might even be praised for it.” And this has become much harsher than it was before.”

(Mily Oli, queer- and fem- activist)

Police Raids

As noted above, a number of criminal extremism cases against owners and employees of queer spaces were preceded by raids. Raids occurred even before the Supreme Court's decision recognizing the “LGBT movement” as extremist; however, they became regular following its entry into force. Experts frequently described raids as a phenomenon linked to this decision and the entire complex of anti-LGBT+ repressions.

“It seems to me these phenomena are connected: the database [of LGBT+ people, the LGBT+ registry, discussed later], extremism,

propaganda, and raids – these are all like links in the same chain called ‘extremism.’”

(Irina, head of the Advocacy program, Sphere Foundation)

Police raids on queer spaces and queer events occurred throughout the year in various regions of the country. At least 24 raids are known to have taken place in 12 regions of Russia during 2024. While not every raid resulted in administrative or criminal cases, this phenomenon produced a significant effect on the LGBT+ community in Russia, a point on which most experts we spoke with agree.

Primarily, the raids led to the intimidation and traumatization of LGBT+ people. Experts from various organizations and regions noted a spike in requests for psychological assistance following the raids.

“Typically, these raids are accompanied by rather harsh treatment of the people present on site. For instance, at some party, people are searched, their data recorded; sometimes documents are forcibly taken from them. In some situations, there were even quite humiliating actions: forcing people to partially undress, [forcing them] face down on the floor. All of this leaves a mark on people.”

(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

Raids came to be perceived as organized and legitimized violence against LGBT+ people by law enforcement agencies, significantly impacting perceptions of vulnerability. The large volume of news about raids contributes to the normalization of violence against LGBT+ people.

"This has strongly affected the community because it demonstrates the vulnerability of every LGBTQ person to police violence. Raids show that this violence may not just be, as it was before, out of homophobia. It can be organized and considered legal."

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

On the other hand, many experts suggest that LGBT+ people in Russia interested in queer parties continue to attend them, either accepting the inherent risks or overlooking them for the opportunity to escape and spend time within their community. Yaroslav Rasputin even spoke of a peculiar fatalism among LGBT+ people in the context of police raids:

“I see a certain fatalism in this. There's also definite stress involved. People do watch this news, they know about it, and there's some tension but they don't stop going to gay clubs. I wouldn't be surprised at all if they started going more often. I don't even know what to call it when a person is like: yes, it's scary, yes, it could happen but what can I do about it?”

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

Experts working on trans issues noted the particular vulnerability of transgender individuals during these raids due to heightened scrutiny and cruelty towards them from police officers. Furthermore, those affected during raids often seek to leave Russia, sensing risks of further state persecution.

“Trans people were also present at those parties. Security forces exerted intense pressure on them, forced them to undress and humiliated them and often filmed them on camera; video recordings were later disseminated online. For many, it became unsafe to remain in Russia afterwards and they tried to leave following these raids.”
(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

Mass police raids led to a significant reduction in safe spaces for LGBT+ people and, consequently, to feelings of isolation and an information vacuum. Some clubs closed down, while others changed their operational format (no longer positioning themselves as gay clubs or LGBT+ friendly, canceling drag queen shows). Any LGBT event came to be viewed by law enforcement as potentially extremist, which undermined the possibility of holding offline events.

“A gay club is also a place where one can feel safe, which makes these raids particularly vile. People go there behind closed doors to feel safe, but the police come and kick those doors down. [Some spaces] have already closed. They are bought by homophobic individuals who then literally expel queer people from the bars.”
(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

“[In our city] there haven't been raids, it seems, but our gay club closed some time ago. Other clubs where, for example, some shows and so on used to take place, they, let's say, just tried to look more respectable.”
(Sasha, queer activist, Ural Federal District)

People are forced to seek alternative, more private and secure formats for socializing, organizing apartment gatherings or highly exclusive meetings “only for insiders”, information about which is disseminated solely through closed channels. Organizers expend considerable effort on verifying attendees. However, all these measures do not always ensure safety, as risks exist from informants or surveillance of participants. Experts draw attention to raids that occurred at private events during 2024.

“Actually, last year there were many raids not only on clubs but on various events, including, if you recall, a birthday celebration in a privately rented cottage. And this is something that is quite quickly forgotten. But it belongs in the same category as raids on clubs. And it's simply terrible; this is something that began in greater numbers precisely after the Supreme Court's extremist ruling. LGBT+ events were disrupted before, of course. But private parties were not usually

disrupted previously. And these are my personal suspicions, but regarding that specific party in the rented cottage – I'm not 100% certain but I had a suspicion – the attendees were not random people, but individuals connected with LGBT+ activism. It wasn't an LGBT event; people just gathered to celebrate. But I suspect the police were monitoring them and suddenly noticed that activists had gathered in one place.”

(Itil Tyomnaya, Crime 6.21 project)

Registry of LGBT+ People

In early 2025, Meduza published an article suggesting that authorities might be planning to create a unified electronic registry containing data on all LGBT+ individuals who have come to the attention of the state. This became a high-profile, widely discussed news item. We consulted experts about the likelihood of such a database being created. Opinions were divided. On one hand, experts acknowledge that personal data is systematically collected by law enforcement during raids, as well as in the course of initiating various administrative cases concerning LGBT propaganda and the display of extremist symbols.

“Police officers record the data of everyone they deem suspicious, including LGBT+ people. Our events in Vladivostok, when I was still there, were repeatedly disrupted by the police, and back then, the stated goal wasn't just to disrupt the event. The last time, for instance, they arrived with the sole purpose of recording data. They didn't even try to hide anything.”

(Itil Tyomnaya, Crime 6.21 project)

On the other hand, the prevalent view among most experts was that a unified electronic registry does not yet exist and is unlikely to appear in the near future, as it represents a technically complex task for which resources would be insufficient, especially considering the state has yet to prepare a unified registry of military conscripts.

“They are unlikely to introduce a registry because it is labor-intensive. It's important to understand that a truly unified one most likely won't exist. The police are very fond of collecting any information about people. And, for example, every raid concludes with people's data being recorded. If a person is caught again, there will already be information that they were detained in a gay club. Or if [authorities] become interested in them and need grounds for a fine, there's a high probability that this person will be fined for propaganda.

So, a unified registry is unlikely in the near future. But at the regional, and especially the city level, this already exists. Perhaps not a formal registry, but maybe an Excel spreadsheet or even some paper printouts. Police also like to retype things. But they [local records] exist; they are incomplete, they don't aim to record everyone; they simply make this notation in the course of their routine activities.”

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

At the same time, some experts note that if such a registry were to exist in some form, it could entail significant risks for LGBT+ individuals.

“And the very fact that your personal data is being collected (your full name, where you live) could potentially end very badly... because either it gets compiled into some large extremism case, or into [cases] involving extremism with various, let's say, branches across Russia. Or this data is collected into a separate database and suddenly you're barred from leaving the country... or the data is collected to later blackmail you, forcing you again to inform on other LGBT people, recruit them, and so on. Or, if you are a person of male gender, you could be coerced into going to war. In short, there could be many, many options for how they might use this data. It feels as though there is no restraining factor for law enforcement. They can use any data, any methods to intimidate you, to find you. Therefore, we hope for the best but prepare for the worst, so to speak.”

(Irina, head of the Advocacy program, Sphere Foundation)

Meduza's publication about the registry elicited an ambiguous reaction among experts. Most regarded it critically, considering it emotionally overwrought, manipulative and likely to provoke unnecessary panic.

“It seemed to me that it [the publication] was very manipulative. It just seems the journalist encountered this story, and it astonished her. And therefore, a very strong, emotional text was made out of all this. And the headline is actually very manipulative and overly sensationalist. It seems many people didn't read the article [itself].”

(K., Far East)

The publication generated broad discussion on the ethics of covering queer topics in the media and on media literacy.

“I am simply furious. As if there isn't enough frightening news already! But this is a question of journalistic ethics... Why are you writing this? Why are you writing it like this, specifically with this component?”

(Natalia, Ural Federal District)

Thus, the informants predominantly reacted critically to the Meduza publication, perceiving it as creating additional stress and panic within the LGBT+ community

without offering solutions. At the same time, they all acknowledge the problem of mass collection of personal data during raids, although they doubt the existence of a fully centralized registry. Raids themselves are perceived as systematic and organized pressure on the community, significantly worsening its situation and psychological state.

The Law on LGBT Propaganda

The expanded 2022 version of the law prohibiting LGBT propaganda was actively applied in 2024 and, as legal experts note, its scope has become clearer than before. Propaganda now encompasses virtually any public display or discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity, excluding private conversations in private settings; meanwhile, any public statements or online publications can be construed as propaganda.

“The boundaries of the law's application have become more or less defined. It includes any demonstration of another person's or one's own sexual orientation or transgender status, and any conversations [about it], except in private life. Because regarding private life, there have been acquittals and refusals to initiate cases. So, it has more or less solidified that you cannot discuss this on your internet page, but you can at home.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

The concept of LGBT propaganda is interpreted very broadly and vaguely, which allows for prosecution based on highly diverse manifestations, including online publications made long ago and in different contexts, as they are recognized as “ongoing offenses.”

Most frequently, legal entities (especially online cinemas and streaming platforms) are held accountable for LGBT propaganda, facing substantial fines. Several experts noted that imposing high fines on legal entities for LGBT propaganda serves as a method for the state to replenish its budget, potentially including for military purposes.

“From what I've noticed, and from what we've analyzed with colleagues, propaganda has become a strong lever of pressure on legal entities, on various online cinemas and the like. On everything related to content censorship, because it seems large sums of money can be extracted through this.”

(Irina, head of the Advocacy program, Sphere Foundation)

“If we're talking about the expanded law adopted at the end of 2022, it seemed the legal community believed it was passed in order to generate revenue, cleanse the information space, and extract funds

from television channels.”
(Natalia, Ural Federal District)

Simultaneously, there is an observation that while legal entities were actively fined in 2023, law enforcement agencies shifted their focus to individuals in 2024. Yaroslav Rasputin connects this shift to the limited market of online cinemas and the successful purging of the information space of LGBT+ content.

“Roskomnadzor can no longer fine indefinitely for the same films. They were fined for those, the online cinemas removed them, [and] Roskomnadzor looks for the next thing. And gradually, the number of grounds for fines is decreasing after all. Because it's a limited market. How many of these cinemas are there? Maybe around ten. But individuals are inexhaustible. Online cinemas, again, clearly exchange this information among themselves [about what triggered the fines].”
(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

Thus, the application practice of the expanded law prohibiting LGBT propaganda acquired clearer outlines in 2024; however, the problem of the broad and vague interpretation of the concept of “LGBT propaganda” persisted. The law became not only an instrument of censorship but also a means of replenishing the state budget through large fines. Ultimately, the vagueness and selective approach to enforcement create conditions for the arbitrary use of the law, while also intensifying the sense of insecurity among LGBT+ individuals.

Impact of the Ban on Gender Reassignment on the Lives of Transgender People

All experts agree that transgender people constitute one of the most vulnerable groups within the Russian LGBT+ community. Their situation was already difficult and the ban on gender transition in 2023 significantly exacerbated the situation, further stigmatizing trans individuals and compelling them into a legal gray area.

“I believe that still today, the most dreadful law is the so-called law banning gender transition. It is truly terrible because this group of people is now marginalized even further... I genuinely believe that trans people are under the greatest attack because, speaking very bluntly, whereas previously gender-conforming individuals could at least work somewhere and somehow build their lives, now trans people with unchanged documents face a horrific situation, truly forced to exist almost entirely within an illegal sphere.”
(Anna-Maria, head of Queer Svit)

Experts also note that the ban on gender transition and the resulting situation affect various groups of trans people differently:

“There are several categories of people who find themselves in different positions. But if looking for commonality among them, it is isolation and a low-resource status.”

(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

Experts report that some possibilities for obtaining trans-specific assistance still remain, although many exist in a gray area. However, the accessibility of assistance and medical services varies among different groups of trans people.

“In reality, some possibility to receive trans-specific help remains. The issue is rather that doctors cannot issue specialized diagnoses and, consequently, cannot conduct therapy based on these diagnoses. Meanwhile, this [limited access to medical care and hormones] does not equally affect different parts of the trans community in terms of medication needs. That is, understandably, the need for medication is the same for transfeminine and transmasculine people but the medications differ and the dispensing conditions differ.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

Transfeminine individuals can still acquire hormonal medications, albeit with minor complications. The primary problem for them is that doctors refuse to provide them with medical care.

“Regarding the Form №107 prescription needed for estradiol, it's a prescription that isn't confiscated and de facto isn't checked in the system. This means estradiol preparations can be bought openly and easily – oral, transdermal preparations – everything available on the market, all these are generally accessible. They can be purchased without prescriptions. Understandably, difficulties have arisen here; some [pharmacies] are overly cautious, some are afraid – quite a few. The main harm for transfeminine people is that doctors themselves have begun refusing this patient group. But essentially, acquiring the medication itself, getting a consultation – this is possible. With certain risks but possible.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

The situation regarding access to hormone therapy for transmasculine individuals appears different and is characterized by significantly stricter restrictions, especially concerning testosterone preparations. Anna Eroshenko describes this situation as follows:

“As for transmasculine people, the situation here is different. Getting a consultation is also possible. Testosterone is a specially controlled substance... Purchasing injectable forms of testosterone is likely not possible [legally]. Transdermal forms, again, in some cases, yes, can be obtained without a prescription. So, it is still possible to buy

transdermal forms. Although there are some problems with supplies and availability on the Russian market.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

Meanwhile, only those transgender individuals who managed to change their gender marker in documents before the ban can now legally obtain hormone therapy. Experts note that the ban on gender transition has led to growth in the illegal market for hormone therapy, as legal pathways to obtaining medication became inaccessible to most people. This increases health risks and compels individuals to make difficult decisions under conditions of limited resources, as evidenced by the words of one specialist:

“Legal means of obtaining hormone therapy exist only for those who previously changed their documents. Transgender people resorted to illegal means of obtaining hormone therapy before, of course, but we actively fought against this, educating doctors so people would use licensed medications under the supervision of a supportive specialist. Since the legal route of consulting a doctor became unavailable, the practice of obtaining illegal medications is expanding. Besides the fact that taking medication without medical supervision and timely lab tests can be dangerous to health, these could also be drugs made in clandestine conditions or transported to Russia violating transport conditions, which can cause harm.

Furthermore, people's financial situation worsens; for them, starting hormone therapy is often very expensive. I have periodically witnessed the choice when a person decides what is more important to him or her. That is, they might be able to buy, for example, only antidepressants or only hormonal medications, and that's it. So they have to choose one or the other. The person tries to calculate which option will lead to a more normal state. And this low-resource state and choice without a choice occurs ubiquitously. And unfortunately, in this situation, people also often choose the cheapest medications, which, as a rule, are the least legal and carry the highest risks.”

(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

A significant problem is the refusal to provide medical care to transgender individuals even in cases where the reason for seeking care is entirely unrelated to their transgender status or hormone therapy. An expert emphasizes that such situations have become more frequent, and access to medicine now largely depends on the human factor and the personal views of the specific doctor or institutional staff:

“We have, for example, a case in our discrimination monitoring where a person simply came to get a dental filling at the same clinic they had previously attended under their old passport data. The administrator

saw this in the database and said: 'We don't treat "such people" here,' asking them to leave the clinic. So, transphobia and discrimination are becoming very widespread. And people who have managed to change their documents are also not in a protected position.

Of course, the human factor also plays a role; there are stories where trans individuals encounter a good specialist, perhaps one even trained in working with trans people who have all the current information. Such a doctor will be professional and try to do everything possible to provide help. But one can also encounter a doctor who starts threatening conversion therapy, assigning a psychiatric diagnosis, or humiliating and stigmatizing in various ways. Have the latter become more numerous? I think yes, certainly. Have doctors become more afraid to work with transgender people? Yes, certainly. But supportive specialists also remain, and we carefully share their contacts with patients."

(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

Trans-specific surgeries are performed either illegally within Russia (with high risk and diminished quality) or abroad, which can be more expensive and less accessible for many trans individuals.

"There are still ways to have surgeries done in Russia, but the quality has dropped, and it's difficult to contest the results because it's all done clandestinely."

(Skat, legal aid)

"People try to find ways. If documents weren't changed previously, they try to find options for surgeries abroad. This makes surgeries more expensive, perhaps twice as much in the best-case scenario, plus travel and accommodation costs need to be covered. Whereas previously trans people might save for surgeries for a long time – a year, two, even 10 years – now, for many, undergoing surgery has simply become unattainable."

(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

At the same time, Anna Eroshenko emphasizes that these were always highly specialized and expensive medical services, not intended for widespread access:

"Surgeries themselves weren't exactly a mass phenomenon. Meaning, one must understand they were not economically accessible to everyone from the start. It's not even that they became super expensive. They did become more expensive but not drastically so. Not like 2-3 times more. But this was initially something that did not imply mass scale."

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

The situation regarding access to trans-specific assistance and general medical care for transgender people varies depending on the region:

“The situation differs from region to region. And understandably, in large cities, the situation is significantly easier. Again, because large cities, irrespective of the transition ban, have more trans-friendly doctors. Simply statistically, the chance is higher that someone will do something if you consult 10 doctors, compared to going to the one doctor in your small town who won't do anything at all. In large cities, there's a community effect for doctors, where they can share information and so forth. In small towns, in small communities, they encounter [such cases/networks] less often.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

Despite the official ban, transgender individuals still attempt to change their gender marker in documents through the courts. Individual cases are being considered in courts, although the process has become considerably more difficult.

“Some workarounds are being found... In general, human rights defenders, lawyers are working. It's not to say there are any universal strategies, but we are learning.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

That is, the legal community is attempting to develop strategies that allow for changing the gender marker.

“Judicial processes are possible, but it has become very hard. It results in a Catch-22: to change documents, one needs to ‘pass’ [have an appearance conforming to the gender marker] but to ‘pass,’ one needs documents [implying access to transition resources].”

(Skat, legal aid)

Transgender individuals who managed to change their documents before the legislative restrictions were introduced are also in a vulnerable position. Despite their formally more protected status, they experience constant fear of their transgender status being disclosed, leading to avoidance of seeking medical help and systematic stress in daily life. Yan Dvorkin describes their situation as follows:

“There is a category of people who managed to change documents before the ban on gender transition. Yes, their position is much better now, but living in such a transphobic reality, they can constantly experience fear: 'What if someone finds out about me?' They might fear going to the hospital, for example, or avoid calling an ambulance. And when dealing with various state institutions, the system will show that a gender marker change occurred; civil servants in such cases often begin to behave inappropriately, discriminating against the applicants.

This, of course, also applies to the police, whom a transgender person would find very difficult to approach in situations of violence or rights violations unrelated to their trans status.”

(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

Against the backdrop of the sharply deteriorating social and legal climate in Russia, especially following the adoption of the law banning gender transition, detransition, or reverse transition, has become a noticeable social trend among transgender people. In the interviews conducted, experts emphasize its relevance and report an increase in the number of related inquiries.

“For trans people, the possibility of social reverse transition is an extremely relevant issue. Many want to go ‘back’ because they cannot withstand societal pressure. All the stories are roughly the same: ‘I faced transphobia from relatives, close circles, neighbors. I cannot endure the societal pressure.’ They do not consider their choice a mistake but are forced to detransition for survival. We have never before encountered detransition on such a scale. This is a new phenomenon directly linked to increased transphobia, repressive laws, and social pressure.”

(Vladimir, lawyer, Moscow)

Many transgender individuals take this step due to problems with employment and daily discrimination:

“Currently, very many people have started to detransition. Almost all say that their mother forced them, their father forced them, societal pressure, they can't find work. Employers have become afraid [to hire transgender people]. This is truly painful for me. I haven't been able to find work for two or three months now. People have started reverse transitioning to make their lives easier.”

(Skat, legal aid)

An important aspect of the spread of forced detransition is the influence not only of the individual's immediate environment but also of the general political and social climate created by repressive laws and propaganda. An expert emphasizes that while parental pressure and work difficulties are primary reasons for reverse transition, the roots of these problems inevitably lead back to legislative restrictions and negative rhetoric in the media:

“Understandably, they [repressions] act as a catalyst [for detransition]. But for some, the trigger might sound simpler: parents, for example... Well, understandably, parents exert pressure because they live in a world where every outlet, every screen screams that LGBT from NATO wants to conquer us. For understandable reasons, this works. Obviously, in every story of detransition in the current context, there is

the influence of these laws. For some, it's 100%. But mostly people talk about parents, about work, about something else. But if we follow this chain – what influences the parents, the employer – then sooner or later we arrive back at these repressive laws. Detransition is rarely done because a person suddenly felt they were a different gender. The share of such detransitions is less than one percent of the total. And this is international statistics; no one has collected this data for Russia. But in the detransitions I participated in as a helping specialist, not a single case involved the person feeling they were again a different gender.”
(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

The ban on gender transition in Russia has severely impacted the ability of transgender people to find official employment. Due to the impossibility of changing documents and legal gender markers, as well as high levels of social stigmatization, trans individuals face serious difficulties with official employment, pushing them towards illegal work.

“Apart from illegal work, they have very few options. And many of them engage in sex work or drug trafficking activities, or something similar. Many now simply have no opportunity to get any kind of work at all because of the law.”
(Anna-Maria, head of Queer Svit)

Often, the only way out for transgender people proves to be emigration:

“According to my observations, 90-95% of people want to leave, and that is a huge number. Basically, everyone understands that emigration is the only option if you want to live some kind of normal life.”
(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

However, even in emigration, trans individuals encounter problems with employment and involvement in illegal means of earning income, such as sex work. Several experts mentioned the problem of homelessness among trans people in emigration who are left without means of subsistence.

Thus, the ban on gender transition has intensified discrimination, worsened the economic situation, and limited the opportunities for trans people, forcing them to fight for survival under extremely unfavorable conditions. Access to medical care and hormone therapy has become limited and uneven. This increases health risks for trans individuals, compelling them to resort to dangerous illegal schemes. Changing the gender marker has become practically impossible; this exacerbates employment problems and leads to economic instability. Many trans people are forced to work illegally, including in sex work, which deprives them of social guarantees. Emigration remains the only way out for many but is fraught with new difficulties. The ban on gender transition has dramatically worsened the situation

for trans people, intensifying their stigmatization and forcing them into an illegal sphere.

Denunciations

Another important topic discussed with experts is the practice of denunciations against LGBT+ people. Not all experts assert with confidence that denunciations against LGBT+ individuals have indeed become more frequent. However, many acknowledge that the problem is pertinent, and the emergence of repressive legislation facilitates denunciations by providing a legal basis for them.

“In any case, it [denunciation] has now become more meaningful. I think that, yes, they have become more numerous. To say they have increased exponentially is probably not possible. But any denunciation presupposes that it must be written with a formulation intended to cause harm to the person. Since, in the current Russian context, harm can be inflicted for belonging to this community, movement, or for propagating something, such denunciations now have a purpose. Previously, there was less purpose.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

An expert providing legal support to LGBT+ individuals reports a significant increase in requests for assistance related to denunciations made against LGBT+ people or the risks of such denunciations. She attributes this not only to an increase in the frequency of denunciations but also to the heightened fears of LGBT+ individuals themselves, who now perceive greater risks associated with denunciations.

“Yes, they [denouncers] have simply become vicious! Yes, we can say there are more of them because requests for help due to denunciation risks have increased. This is linked both to the increase in grounds for denunciations and to the fact that, in the public consciousness, sexual orientation itself has become a crime, and people inform on someone simply because they are supposedly a criminal for being gay. And also because the risks have increased, meaning that when faced with a denunciation or the threat of one, an LGBT+ person is more likely to feel vulnerable and seek help.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

As our quantitative research indicates, threats of denunciation and blackmail are more prevalent than actual denunciations themselves: Potential denunciations serve as a lever of pressure on LGBT+ individuals in diverse contexts. Experts also confirm that denunciations are now often used in everyday conflicts, and the

authors of denunciations are frequently people from the individual's immediate circle: relatives, former partners, colleagues.

“And in reality, denunciations are written by all sorts of people. Well, meaning, it's not just some nationalists from the internet. I encounter stories where, for example, a child comes out at home and the father goes to the police and files a denunciation against the child, alleging they were recruited into an extremist group. The child is summoned for questioning. And the child, who has just come out and hasn't started any gender transition, appears conventionally gender-conforming; they say their father must have imagined it, nothing of the sort happened. They try to find a way out. Unfortunately, we are receiving such stories more frequently.

There are examples within LGBT couples, for instance, where both individuals are LGBT; they break up after some argument, and one goes and files a denunciation against the other. There's no logic in this, in my view. But people really do it. I've encountered such examples more than once.

Or, for example, there's some conflict over copyright, inheritance, or something similar, which previously would have been resolved within legal norms. But now one of the parties might decide: ‘Why don't I just file a denunciation?’ And that's it. It seems to be becoming such a simple method of pressure: if you're dissatisfied with someone, angry at someone, or want to prevent them from acting in their own interests, you just file a denunciation against him or her for LGBT propaganda or extremism.”

(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

Some experts note a new practice – retaliatory pressure on LGBT+ individuals who attempt to seek justice by filing a complaint or lawsuit against someone. The defendant in the lawsuit files a denunciation against the LGBT+ person to compel them to withdraw their claim and abandon attempts to achieve justice. This practice indicates that it has now become even more difficult for LGBT+ individuals to defend their rights.

“The ability to defend oneself against various offenses, crimes committed against LGBT+ persons themselves, has significantly decreased. Because, firstly, they generally fear being held accountable for extremism simply due to their SOGI. Well, these fears are not necessarily strongly substantiated, generally speaking. But very often, they encounter counter-claims. For example, they file a report about a crime or a violent offense. And those against whom they filed the report write a counterclaim accusing them of extremism, sometimes propaganda. And generally, even if this counterclaim doesn't result in

the person actually facing consequences for extremism, they are often prosecuted for propaganda, even if extremism isn't found. And these claims are used for pressure, to make the person withdraw their original request for protection from the state."

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

A number of experts mention so-called "professional denouncers" (such as Vladimir Pozdnyakov, Vladimir Kushnerik, Timur Bulatov), who write mass denunciations against LGBTQ+ individuals and call on their supporters to do the same. Some note that such activists have begun acting in a more organized manner. At the same time, LGBTQ+ people have also become better at assessing their risks and striving to protect themselves, while LGBTQ+ initiatives aim to disseminate information on safety measures.

"People have always feared denouncers. Yes, Bulatov, Pozdnyakov. All this has always existed. People feared this back around 2013-2017; they feared it, just the risks were lower then. Now these individuals have systematized this activity; they have their own teams of copywriters who write denunciations. Understandably, the quantity has increased. But to say this is something new for queer people is not accurate. It's a question of the ultimate risks. Yes, they have increased. But queer people are taking measures."

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

Another expert notes that the highly publicized activities of professional denouncers actually illustrate the ineffectiveness of these denunciations: although they publicize all the denunciations they write, it can be seen that few of them lead to actual investigations or proceedings.

"I believe that most denunciations lead to nothing, because we have Vladimir Kushnerik and Timur Bulatov, professional denouncers who occasionally get lucky, and their denunciation coincides with some raid. And they have become so convinced of their own power that they shout very loudly about every denunciation they make. Especially Kushnerik, he goes straight to all the LGBT blogs and media outlets to report, 'I filed a denunciation there-and-there.' And by doing this, he actually inspires hope, because he churns out an incredible number of these denunciations. And this is the second year now, he churns out these denunciations endlessly, but nobody reacts to them."

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

Although denunciations do not always lead to real consequences, they strongly affect the psychological state of LGBTQ+ individuals because, firstly, it is impossible to assess the potential consequences of a possible denunciation and one's own risks in advance, and secondly, it has become harder to trust those around, who might use such leverage in a conflict situation at any moment. The uncertainty in

the application of laws and the arbitrariness of denunciations compel many people to preemptively adjust their behavior, resort to self-censorship and hide their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Violence

Most experts were hesitant to assert with confidence, based on any statistics, an increase in violence against LGBT+ people; however, they were inclined to believe that violence is becoming more prevalent. Experts inferred a rise in hate-motivated violence based on personal impressions from the dynamics of assistance requests, public sentiment, the political context and media reports.

“This question needs to be answered based on statistics. I do not have such statistics. It seems to me that the level of violence is growing; here, my intuition is the primary indicator. I am speaking not based on figures, but on feelings. Based on what I see, on the reactions of beneficiaries, the community, and so on. It is growing, growing as a natural consequence. Because our social conditions are such that, relatively speaking, it goes unpunished or is even encouraged to a certain known extent.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

Some experts associate the presumed increase in violence with military personnel returning from the front line, who are prone to aggression and homophobic/transphobic hatred.

“In my perception, yes, [violence is increasing]. But again, to speak precisely about dynamics, professional research is certainly needed. For me, there is a very direct correlation here with the fact that when, firstly, soldiers return from the front, they are charged with hatred towards anyone different from them, they have state support for a transphobic and homophobic agenda – all this inevitably culminates in violence.”

(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

At the same time, none of the experts encountered cases in 2024 where military personnel actually used violence against LGBT+ individuals, although threats from parents of LGBT+ adolescents were reported in families where the father is participating in military actions.

“Regarding domestic violence specifically, yes, we had several inquiries from adolescents experiencing domestic violence; they specifically note, among other things, that they particularly fear [violence] from a father or stepfather who has returned from military action. And sometimes they simply say that the father isn't present now, but the

mother reports that the father said, allegedly, that he'll return and kill [them] if they don't stop.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

Many experts believe it is most likely domestic violence that has increased, especially towards transgender people.

“Regarding domestic violence among transgender people, yes, of course, it is growing. They lack the ability to change documents, find work; they are forced to depend on their families. This reduces chances for emancipation and increases the risks of domestic violence.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

Experts also note the problem of conversion therapy in Russia – the forcible “correction” or “treatment” of sexual orientation or gender identity. Among common methods, experts mention forced isolation, “re-education” through confinement in closed institutions (psychiatric facilities, so-called rehabilitation centers offering such services, “exorcisms of jinn” in religious centers), attempts at “treatment” in the form of forced consultations with psychologists, or pseudo-medical interventions. Experts unequivocally emphasize the negative role of the state and law enforcement agencies in this situation. Conversion therapy is not only not prosecuted under law but is also indirectly supported by state policy aimed at suppressing LGBTQ+ identities. Some experts suggest that the ban on gender transition may have contributed to the spread of conversion therapy practices targeting transgender people.

“This trend towards conversion therapy seems to exist, and I think it could have intensified after the ban on gender transition back in 2023. In 2024, we are seeing more inquiries that mention conversion therapy.”

(Irina, head of the Advocacy program, Sphere Foundation)

Furthermore, experts note an increase in police violence, as already mentioned in the section on police raids in queer spaces.

According to most experts, violence has become not only more frequent but also more legitimized, both by the state and in the eyes of parts of society. Victims of hate-motivated violence find themselves even more unprotected than before, as they now fear reporting incidents to the police, who are themselves a source of violence against LGBTQ+ people. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ individuals fear that if they report, they themselves will be found guilty of LGBT propaganda or extremism. The fear of violence leads to greater secrecy among LGBTQ+ people, self-censorship, increased social isolation and a deterioration of their psychological state.

LGBT+ People's Access to Healthcare

This chapter will not address transgender people's access to healthcare, as that topic is covered in the chapter dedicated to the situation of transgender individuals. Here, we will describe the situation concerning HIV services, psychological and psychiatric assistance and briefly, gynecology.

In 2024, the HIV situation in Russia continued to deteriorate amidst drug shortages, increasing repression, and tightening censorship. As Yaroslav Rasputin, who works partly in the sphere of HIV services, explains, the annexation of Ukrainian territories increased the number of people needing therapy (Antiretroviral Therapy - ART) but state procurement remained at previous levels, leading to serious supply interruptions. Due to drug shortages, people's treatment regimens were changed without medical indications, causing side effects and stress for patients. Some patients were told to purchase medications at their own expense, but these drugs are expensive and difficult to obtain through retail channels. All of this ultimately leads to risks of abandoning HIV therapy.

“[In 2024] the trends that began back in 2022 continued. The fact is, with the annexation of Ukrainian territories, the number of people living with HIV who need medication increased. The Ministry of Health was already procuring insufficiently for the Russian population. The supply system experienced interruptions. In 2023, towards the end of the year, the Ministry of Health began purchasing drugs using 2024 funds. But it did not request additional funds for 2024. And in 2024, the Ministry of Health faced a huge deficit of funds for purchasing medications. This was all rectified using regional budgets. But regional budgets are not that large. The Ministry of Health simply lacks the political will to request additional funds. And they handled this very poorly.

Very many people had their therapy regimens changed. Changing a regimen is medically possible. If a person has no resistance, the regimen can be switched at any moment to another effective one. It's not so much a question of effectiveness against HIV; that will remain the same. But regimens are selected not only for effectiveness but also for patient convenience in administration and for fewer side effects. Everyone's body is very individual; the main search is for a regimen that will be well tolerated. Due to supply interruptions, people's regimens are changed without medical indications, and this still leads to side effects because it's a new medication. Even if these side effects pass after a month, for at least the first week or two, a person can experience quite serious side effects because the substance is new. When medication is suddenly changed, it's additional stress for the person.

Plus, they might be switched to a regimen that needs to be taken twice a day instead of once. This might seem trivial, but there's a greater risk

of missed doses. Some people were openly told to buy medications with their own money at the pharmacy. Because the region simply had no money; certain therapies weren't procured. It's important to understand that most regimens are, firstly, hard to find in retail because there's no demand for them in regular pharmacies. In Russia, by law, the state supposedly provides everything. So pharmacies seemingly have no reason to keep such stock. Secondly, they are quite expensive. Since the state purchases in bulk, it works out many times cheaper than retail. Therefore, not everyone can afford it. Cannot afford to spend 5, 7, sometimes 10 thousand [rubles] per month on medication. There are, of course, more expensive ones, but we're not even considering those. People had to switch to some very cheap regimens with more side effects. You can find a therapy regimen for 2,000 rubles a month, but this regimen has side effects like a state akin to intoxication. You can't drive a car on it. It turns out it affects the brain like a small dose of alcohol. People have to face such difficulties.”

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

The intensification of anti-LGBT+ repression has also impacted the work of HIV service organizations. They no longer publicize their work with LGBT+ people and adapt their language: instead of “men who have sex with men” (MSM), they now say “people with risky sexual behavior.” This phrasing can hinder attracting the target audience, dilute the focus of prevention programs, and reduce the effectiveness of information dissemination. Individuals who previously understood that the discussion concerned men who have sex with men may now not identify with the vague concept of “risky sexual behavior” and consequently may not seek testing and support:

“And this is just madness. Not everyone even responded to the term MSM. And ‘risky sexual behavior’ – what even is that? Try explaining anything [with that term].”

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

Targeted advertising campaigns for LGBT+ communities (e.g., posters depicting same-sex couples) are now also impossible, which further hinders information dissemination and testing.

It has become more difficult for HIV-positive LGBT+ individuals to seek medical help due to increased distrust of doctors, fear of judgment and the threat of denunciations. Furthermore, AIDS centers, where testing is conducted, may be perceived as LGBT+ spaces or places where being present “reveals” a person's sexual orientation:

“There are people who don't go for testing, and there were such people before. Because ‘I'll be taken for gay.’ They are gay themselves but hide it. This is less common in the capitals but it happens in the regions. And

now this is becoming more common.”

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

All this could lead to an increase in the number of undiagnosed HIV infections.

Experts participating in the study note a deteriorating situation regarding LGBT+ people's access to psychological and psychiatric assistance in Russia. The main problems are related to increased stigmatization and repressive measures, due to which LGBT+-friendly specialists cannot publicly identify themselves as such. Consequently, LGBT+ individuals do not know which specialists can be trusted. Furthermore, LGBT+ people's access to psychological help in Russia has become significantly more difficult due to rising homophobic sentiments within the professional community of psychologists and psychiatrists.

“Our organization, for many years, thanks to the efforts of our psychological service, conducted work related to professional advocacy within the community of psychologists and psychiatrists. And therefore, in principle, such cases [of discrimination by referred specialists] are quite rare for us. Because we generally know whom to refer people to. Nevertheless, I would say that if before 2022 and before all these anti-LGBT laws, the attitude in the professional environment was such that it had become quite strange when, say, some old-fashioned gentleman might stand up at some conference of psychologists or psychiatrists, come out and say that LGBT is a perversion. That was unacceptable; it was strange. But now it seems, again, a green light has been given; yes, if someone had internal homophobia, it's really coming out. Including being manifested towards clients.”

(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

However, the problem lies not only in the quality of care provided but also in its economic accessibility. Free services are limited, and finding a tolerant and qualified specialist within the state system can be challenging. And although private specialists exist who are willing to provide quality care to LGBT+ people, not everyone has the financial means to use such services, especially when considering particularly vulnerable categories within the LGBT+ community: trans people, LGBT+ individuals with psychological disorders, LGBT+ adolescents.

“From what I hear from people, there are still more adequate specialists [than inadequate ones]. That is, in most cases, people can consult a psychologist or psychiatrist and receive adequate help. Understandably, if you go to a psychologist at the polyclinic, likely nothing good will come of it but finding a specialist is possible. The only thing is that obtaining free psychological help is more difficult. But it's possible for money. Meaning, people prone to depression, if they have

money, can get treatment. If they don't have money, they cannot.”
(K., Far East)

Queer women also frequently encounter prejudiced attitudes from doctors, especially when visiting gynecologists.

“Regarding medical assistance, we received several such complaints related to situations where, for example, when young women visit a gynecologist and perhaps confidentially share that they do not have relationships [with men], they may encounter an ambiguous reaction, including harshly negative, quite homophobic ones. In principle, this happened before too, but now it seems to have become more widespread again, a more acceptable attitude from professionals – whom I, personally, do not consider professionals [if they act this way]. The homophobia and transphobia that already existed at a systemic level in Russia have been exacerbated. This, of course, is definitely a result of the anti-LGBT+ laws and state rhetoric.”

(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

Income, Employment and Education of LGBT+ People

The economic vulnerability of LGBT+ people in Russia has intensified as a result of repressive measures and increased discrimination in employment. This has particularly affected transgender individuals, for whom finding stable employment and financial independence has become even more difficult:

“LGBT+ people have become more vulnerable; there are now more reasons for people to lose their jobs due to discrimination, more grounds for dismissals based on sexual and gender identity. Consequently, if people experience instability in their employment and professional activities, their income is unstable, impacting their economic situation. Moreover, regarding transgender people, as I've mentioned, they face the greatest difficulty adapting and finding work. Accordingly, it seems to me they are in the most vulnerable economic position.”

(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

Those whose earnings directly depended on a queer audience or on public venues where they could previously feel relatively safe have been particularly affected. As one expert explains:

“Fewer people will attend gay clubs anyway. After each raid, those who were forced face down on the floor won't return there. People who love drag shows won't go watch the same performer, but in men's clothing. People who sold queer handmade items can no longer sell anything.

So, people whose income was somehow tied to the LGBT+ community will undoubtedly suffer financially.”

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

The economic situation of LGBT+ people also worsened due to the departure of many international companies from the Russian market. Previously, such employers, albeit implicitly, often tried to support employees from the community, creating relatively safe spaces for them. Now, individuals who could previously speak openly about their identity are forced either to conceal it or face obstacles when seeking new employment.

“Companies that supported LGBT employees left the Russian market back in 22. They did it implicitly but they existed. The most common example – Starbucks coffee shops. That was the ‘gayest’ place to work. In every coffee shop, at least one lesbian or one gay man worked. Starbucks left; those jobs are gone. People are looking for something else. If a person was open because their job allowed it, then finding further work becomes scarier and harder.”

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

Threats of denunciation from colleagues and employers compel many LGBT+ individuals either to leave their jobs or agree to clearly unfavorable working conditions. LGBT+ individuals are also expelled from educational institutions due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, which affects their opportunities to receive education and build a career later on.

“We have numerous stories of people being expelled from educational institutions because of their transgender status or fired from work. Alternatively, they are forced to work under unfavorable conditions, as the transgender person understands it will be very difficult to find another job. I know stories where transgender people were blackmailed with threats of denunciation.”

(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

Another reason for dismissal or expulsion from an educational institution is detention during a police raid on an LGBT+ space; experts reported such cases.

“The risks [of dismissal and expulsion for LGBT+ people] are high. Since acts of state violence and pressure have increased, repression in the education sphere has grown. Raids appeared in these clubs. Consequently, young people caught in raids face a higher risk of being expelled or fired. Educational institutions mostly do not want to get involved with this topic entering the public sphere, where the state will see it.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

Forced emigration also undermines the economic well-being of LGBT+ people. As noted in the chapter on trans people, individuals sometimes find themselves homeless in emigration:

“If we talk about Russian LGBT people in emigration, despite the fact that the economic level of the countries they move to is often higher, their standard of living usually declines after relocating. Many find themselves in a situation where they didn't plan the move but were forced to leave, lacking the necessary skills to find work in the new place. They might find some remote work, but it may not be highly paid. Moreover, I have already mentioned the problem of homelessness.”
(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

In situations where official employment opportunities are closed off to LGBT people, or they constantly face prejudice at work, they are often forced into illegal sectors of employment, among which sex work proves to be one of the most common options. This manifests social vulnerability, which, lacking social support and legal guarantees, can easily escalate into more radical forms of exploitation, up to situations bordering on trafficking. When individuals see no other avenues for earning income, they are at risk of becoming dependent on unscrupulous “employers” and pimps, who can exploit their vulnerable position for personal gain.

“Another problem we observe, although we cannot assess its scale, is the potential issue of involvement in sex work – not when people choose it but when they find themselves forced to start working there because they cannot find any other job. And I potentially see risks of involvement almost bordering on trafficking; these are simply risks that potentially exist.”
(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

This problem is particularly relevant for transgender individuals:

“I don't have statistics, but my feeling is that the number of transgender people involved in sex work has now grown. And this is logical. Because with such levels of discrimination and social isolation, sex work often becomes the only available option. It's a place where they aren't asked to match their passport data. And if we talk about transfeminine persons, due to their transgender status, they might attract more attention, enjoy greater popularity and their services might cost more. And, unfortunately, I periodically meet people who are happy with this work and say it's the only place where they are treated with respect, where they have been accepted by both colleagues and clients. According to them, how they were treated in office jobs versus in sex work are incomparable things. And it's appalling how little choice people have and how inaccessible legal work becomes. And

unfortunately, when a person relocates alone, having very limited opportunities to find work, we often understand in advance: after some time, we will learn that this person is engaged in sex work.”
(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

LGBT+ individuals engaged in sex work find themselves in an even more vulnerable position: they face high risks of violence from clients and the police. Itil Tyomnaya reports that there are regular news reports about raids on brothels aimed at identifying sex workers and prosecuting them, organized partly by the well-known State Duma deputy Vitaly Milonov. Often during these raids, he specifically seeks out LGBT+ individuals involved in sex work.

A particularly vulnerable category among people involved in sex work are transgender migrant sex workers. They are prosecuted for LGBT propaganda and subsequently deported from the country. Furthermore, Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out, notes that police sometimes mistake transgender migrants for sex workers, even if they are not engaged in that sphere:

“Just as they were previously accused of propaganda and deported, they are accused and deported now if they are foreign citizens. And sometimes, for example, transgender migrants who are not engaged in sex work in Russia are accused of sex work anyway, because police officers assume they are involved by default. That's how [police] think about them and treat them accordingly, disrespectfully.”
(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

Thus, the economic vulnerability of LGBT+ individuals in Russia has significantly increased due to state repressive measures and discrimination in employment, which is particularly noticeable among transgender people, for whom finding stable income and a safe workplace has become even more difficult. Growing homophobia and transphobia from colleagues and employers, as well as the possibility for them to manipulate LGBT+ individuals by threatening them with denunciations, forces many LGBT+ people either to hide their identity, agree to unfavorable working conditions, or withdraw entirely into illegal employment. Cases are common where LGBT+ individuals, especially transgender people, are forced to resort to sex work as the only option for survival which creates fertile ground for exploitation and trafficking. The situation is further complicated for transgender migrants, who are often deported after being accused of LGBT propaganda.

LGBT+ Parents

LGBT+ parents are among the most vulnerable groups within the LGBT+ community. Some experts note that in 2024, the risks of child removal and other

problems for LGBT+ parents increased further. Furthermore, even though cases of child removal from LGBT+ families are not numerous, the psychological and social climate surrounding LGBT+ parenthood is such that LGBT+ parents feel heightened vulnerability and are forced to live in a state of constant vigilance, fearing their family will become a target of prejudice or unlawful actions.

“Cases where [children] were taken away [from LGBT+ parents] have not occurred [in our practice], but these risks have increased, and it seems the fears, including among LGBT parents, have grown, because ultimately, it involves children. And children see nothing wrong with how their family looks. They have two moms, two dads and they might talk about it. But how various external people react to this – social workers in schools, or teachers, or kindergarten staff – that's a different conversation because reactions can be quite unpredictable. This is precisely where these additional risks arise. Besides the possibility of simply an attempt to take the child away, these are just additional complications.”

(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

Transgender parents are in a particularly vulnerable position following the 2023 ban on adoption by transgender people. Ksenia Mikhailova mentions cases of trans individuals being stripped of parental rights, while also noting that guardianship authorities generally strive to act in the best interest of the child.

“Transgender parents – it's a sad story. But this has been ongoing since 2023. The risks of children being taken away persist, just as before. Cases where parental rights are terminated exist, just as before. But it must be said here that guardianship authorities have this perception that they are obligated in this situation to shield the child from the influence of the transgender parent. But the guardianship authorities do not aim for brutality. They provide opportunities to ensure the possibility of restoring guardianship over the child, so the child continues to be raised within the family. Let's say, the legislators and their superiors leave them no choice regarding whether to pursue such families. But the guardianship authorities themselves, as far as I can see, try to act as carefully as possible, to the extent permitted by law and the interpretation of that law by higher officials.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

As Anna Eroshenko explains, it is most often transmasculine individuals who encounter problems related to LGBT+ parenthood. Among these problems is heightened scrutiny from staff at educational institutions and from parents of other students, who may file complaints that guardianship authorities are compelled to respond to:

“Meanwhile, I know several cases where trans parents were actively monitored at school. This most often concerns transmasculine people. Because children more often remain with them. In general, it often turns out that transmasculine individuals, when they have a child, more frequently face situations where they need to explain themselves to various educational authorities. This exists. There is a case where a child was removed for 15 days following an investigation but guardianship ultimately sided with the father. Because objective grounds were ultimately lacking. Therefore, locally, this can work non-trivially. And the human factor can play a role.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

Thus, LGBT+ parents remain one of the most vulnerable groups within the community. The situation is particularly complex for transgender parents, primarily transmasculine individuals: they often face heightened scrutiny from teachers, parents of classmates and guardianship authorities. Such attention can lead to additional investigations and even temporary removal of children in isolated cases.

LGBT+ Adolescents

LGBT+ adolescents represent another extremely vulnerable group within the LGBT+ community. They are in a dependent position, cannot make decisions independently and are subject to domestic violence and peer violence.

As noted by Roman, who spoke with LGBT+ adolescents for his project, fear and distrust often become a familiar background for these young people. Access to information, restricted by state censorship, significantly exacerbates the situation, preventing adolescents from receiving timely help or finding answers to important questions about their identity.

“They are frightened. They often distrust their parents because, so to speak, they are judged for lesser things. They don't understand how to safely engage in activism or other activities. It's as if at the moment they were growing up and becoming interested in the topic, part of the information was already restricted and somehow marginalized. That's why. It's surprising to me that people aged 16-18-20, with whom I had to communicate for interviews, also didn't know where to look for information about what is or isn't 'right' with them. Just like I didn't know 15-20 years ago. Although they have all the access. A few years ago, a VPN wasn't even necessary. Yet already at that age, they mostly stumbled upon something completely by chance. It's an incomprehensible story for me, honestly. But in the current situation, of course, it will worsen, because access to information is becoming more difficult, and the danger is increasing. Therefore, probably, the global

feelings I see are rather confusion and fear. But again, this is among the percentage of adolescents who actually reach the point of interaction.”
(Roman, Queerorama project)

The well-being of LGBT+ adolescents largely depends on their parents and the extent to which they are prepared to accept their child's sexual orientation or gender identity. However, even supportive families find themselves in a difficult situation, as they are forced to confront discriminatory attitudes from others, such as school administration or teachers.

“There were situations where, for example, the school administration contacted parents because the child dresses ‘inappropriately,’ uses ‘incorrect’ pronouns. The LGBT adolescent is trying to find themselves, understand who they are and so on. This manifests somehow externally, and it becomes known to the school administration, to certain circles, and this is brought to the parents. The parents somehow have to resolve this. And even if the parents are supportive, [problems arise]. The parent needs to figure out how to handle this delicately, both to avoid bringing additional risks upon the child and to ensure their own parental rights are not taken away, while still maintaining at least some level of [trust] with the child. These are the kinds of dilemmas faced now by those parents of LGBT adolescents who are accepting [of their children].”

(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

Transgender adolescents, whose condition is compounded by gender dysphoria, are especially vulnerable and they are unable to take any action to alleviate it.

“Transgender adolescents are in a very difficult legal and psychological situation, which appears, and most often is, hopeless for them. And it is associated with a large amount of violence from family and from other adolescents. They very often face dissemination of their personal data due to their age and inability to plan their actions carefully. Not only because of age-related characteristics but also because of the current situation where the legal landscape is constantly changing; it's incomprehensible to them. They cannot plan their actions in a way that would alleviate dysphoria. And this leads them to commit various acts of self-harm against themselves. That is, attempts at performing gender-affirming surgery independently occur periodically among adolescents. And the result is [some teens] started doing it, didn't finish. [Then they] are afraid to go to a doctor. Are afraid of ending up in a psychiatric hospital. And so they sit there, injured from the self-attempted procedure, everything inflamed. They are afraid to turn to their parents for help. They cannot seek medical help independently because medical staff require parental presence.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

LGBT+ adolescents face numerous factors exacerbating their vulnerability during the period of maturation. Among the most significant problems are violence and prejudiced attitudes from family, society, and state institutions. Limited access to information about SOGI generates feelings of fear and disorientation, while the inability to make independent decisions results in a high degree of dependence on parents and the immediate environment, which often proves to be homophobic or transphobic. Even with family support, significant difficulties arise from pressure from educational institutions and discrimination within the social environment. Transgender adolescents experiencing gender dysphoria find themselves in an especially difficult position, lacking reliable mechanisms for accessing safe medical and psychological assistance. LGBT+ adolescents are often trapped in a vicious circle of distrust, fear, social isolation and a lack of opportunities for any actions that could alleviate their situation.

Censorship and Queer Culture

Censorship and the visibility of queer culture in 2024 were important themes in discussions with experts. All experts spoke of the reduced visibility of LGBT+ people in the public sphere due to increasing censorship and the negative consequences of this process.

“Speaking broadly, what is happening now is simply the complete excision of all queer people from any media; [LGBT+-related content] began to be removed by default. This restriction of visibility plays a large, negative role in future representation, because it is primarily through media and art that we have representation [of LGBT+ people] and that public acceptance occurs. It seems this will have a very strong impact, and it feels like we all need to think, including LGBT+ organizations, precisely about how to maintain a presence anywhere, how to create positive representation of queer people.”

(K., Far East)

Roman Polyakov, who discusses various manifestations of queer culture in his project *Queerorama*, notes that various forms of queer content are disappearing before his eyes, affecting his ability to report on them:

“About some things I planned to cover, I will no longer be able to, because the content manages to get deleted [before I can]. Or, for example, there are items I did cover and then a few months later I see that this content is no longer there; the rights holders have deleted it permanently.”

(Roman, Queerorama project)

As many noted, the strictest censorship exists on streaming services and online cinemas: any mentions of LGBT+ topics or allusions to queer themes are removed from films and series, although the works themselves remain on platforms in an expurgated form, even if the plot has suffered significantly due to censorship. Users are not warned about the cut scenes.

“I think they’re acting in a very underhanded way by not notifying people about the censorship and by carrying it out so crudely.” (Maria Lacinska, journalist, founder of the Lesbian Lobby Channel)

“One of the adaptations [of a Chinese novel], which had passed Chinese censorship, turned out to be cut so much under Russian censorship that it became half as long. Moreover, they cut it without changing the text or anything else. They simply removed almost all segments of interaction between the main characters, causing the plot to lose any meaning. And this version was left on Kinopoisk [Russian popular online cinema]. As a result, some episodes became 5-8 minutes long. Whereas they were either half an hour or slightly less. This is the world we end up living in. Chinese censorship, it turns out, is milder than Russian.”
(Sasha, queer activist, Ural Federal District)

According to experts, on unofficial, pirate platforms distributing content illegally, it is easy to find the complete original, although the translation may be inaccurate or amateur. This serves as an alternative source of LGBT+ content for the community; however, some pirate sites, fearing prosecution and fines for LGBT propaganda, are also introducing restrictions: cutting or not translating scenes mentioning LGBT+:

“Pirate sites have started censoring. And this is very funny. That is, people choose what they see as more dangerous. And they're like: well, distributing content without a license is normal in Russia, no questions asked, but there shouldn't be any LGBT in it. Therefore, in my opinion, it is becoming harder [to find LGBT+ content].”
(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

Marketplaces, such as Ozon and Wildberries, actively remove any goods with LGBT+ symbols or related to LGBT+ themes to avoid fines for LGBT propaganda.

Despite strict restrictions, some books with LGBTQ+ themes can still be found in offline stores or bought second-hand.

“There are lists of banned books. But they don't work perfectly, and in fact, these books regularly appear on various channels. And still, from time to time, someone finds them in some smaller retail chains, although I cannot vouch that there's absolutely nothing [in large chains] either. And in some, I don't know, small neighborhood bookstores, absolutely any books might be found. Furthermore, there are books that

mention LGBT+ people, including positively, about which generally nobody knows.”

(Itil Tyomnaya, Crime 6.21 project)

“Somewhere, in any case, something will remain. There will be ways to find under-censored versions of certain books, buy them second-hand, third-hand and so on.”

(Sasha, queer activist, Ural Federal District)

The blocking of various social networks that occurred previously, and the throttling of YouTube starting in 2024, also affects people's access to LGBT+ content actively hosted on these platforms, although it does not completely eliminate it, as noted by experts, including creators of media projects. Importantly, many experts point to the limited impact of anti-LGBT+ censorship:

“It seems to me censorship is not pervasive. Censorship has mainly affected major platforms. And that seems to be it.”

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

According to Itil Tyomnaya, although the state attempts to restrict access to certain content by blocking platforms, throttling services, and implementing technical restrictions, total control is absent in the Russian internet space. Users master tools to circumvent blocks, enabling information about LGBT+ issues to keep circulating. Many experts noted that LGBT+ people have extensive experience in bypassing censorship, so many possess the necessary skills.

However, there are also those who believe that far from everyone possesses the necessary technical competencies and knows how to use VPNs. Furthermore, state propaganda plays an important role, convincing people that censorship works effectively.

“When I just talk to people, it unexpectedly turns out that for many, this is difficult. Meaning, not everyone has a normal VPN, although overall it's quite easy to get one, even for free now. People face difficulties now. Many go to Kinopoisk, watch cut scenes there. It all depends on technical literacy. Technical literacy perhaps depends on wealth. I regularly encounter people with varying technical literacy, both younger and middle-aged. I constantly encounter people who don't know how to turn on a VPN, don't know how to enable two-factor authentication in Telegram. That is, for many people, it's a revelation that you can google a VPN service that works. I think propaganda also plays a role here, with very active pronouncements about everything being blocked, nothing working anymore. Well, I think this is also one of the tools – to say that nothing works, even though in reality, everything works just as it did before.”

(K., Far East)

Mily Oli also speaks about the lack of technical literacy, including regarding security matters:

“You need to think about your security. And specifically in terms of technical literacy, there's a significant lack of information, and people ignore it because it's complicated. You need to sit down, change passwords everywhere, install a password manager, etc. Not even reconfigure two-factor authentication but set it up for the first time. I've encountered situations where many people, at the point of setting up security, are like: ‘Oh, forget it.’ But it seems to me this is necessary for all queer people, simply to reduce the likelihood of being detected online, on the one hand and caught in clubs or even at a house party, on the other. Simply, you get detained somewhere, they access your Telegram, and you have all this stuff there. And it's precisely these kinds of real things that can be done, that people often don't do. From what I see.”

(Mily Oli, queer- and fem- activist)

Many experts emphasize the special role of Telegram as the primary and almost universal channel for accessing information and support:

“It seems to me they [LGBT+ people in Russia] rely heavily on Telegram and just continue using it; you don't need a VPN there, and all the human rights organizations are quite active on Telegram. That's why you don't even need Instagram or TikTok. You can get everything on Telegram.”

(Irina, head of the Advocacy program, Sphere Foundation)

One way or another, many experts note that despite all existing censorship restrictions, queer culture continues to exist and develop. Many mentioned new projects that appeared in 2024 or are preparing for launch, the creation of new communities, blogs, media. A new voice-over studio appeared, translating foreign content and refusing to censor mentions of LGBT+. New publishing houses are launching inside and outside Russia; samizdat and tamizdat⁴ are developing. New books with queer plotlines continue to be released, which may not be advertised but are nevertheless present and remain unnoticed by censors.

“We see how some books and journals continue to be published and people unite, despite all repressive mechanisms. Nowadays, coming out with a rainbow flag is a huge risk and requires incredible courage. And even being an admin of some Telegram channel while living in Russia, posting a rainbow flag would also be dangerous. But queer

⁴ Samizdat refers to the unofficial, independent publishing and distribution of any texts, bypassing state censorship. Tamizdat refers to the publication and distribution of books, articles and other materials abroad in situations where it is impossible to print them domestically due to censorship or political prohibitions.

culture itself and people's connections will not disappear anywhere.”
(Maria Lacinska, journalist, founder of the Lesbian Lobby Channel)

“I am confident that these [new grassroots] projects will continue to appear, and appear more actively, because, again, we are increasingly getting used to the nature of our law enforcement, what new tools we have. I think the story with queer content, this semi-underground kind, will also continue and perhaps grow.”
(Roman, Queerorama project)

Anti-LGBT+ censorship in Russia complicates access to LGBT+ content and the very existence of queer culture. Nevertheless, circumventing censorship is possible, especially with technical skills (VPNs, knowledge of alternative sources). Strict bans and fines primarily affect those who officially release content within Russia; however, complete “total” censorship has not been achieved: methods of circumvention exist, as do pirate resources, and books with LGBTQ+ themes can be found. All this indicates that access to LGBT+ content remains, but requires a readiness for additional effort and special skills.

Impact of the War in Ukraine on the LGBT+ Community

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the war has exerted a profound and multi-level impact on the lives of LGBT+ people in Russia. Experts participating in the study concur that the war and the intensifying repression against LGBT+ individuals are linked. State rhetoric continues to be built around the opposition between “traditional values” and “threats from the West,” the latter category including LGBT+ rights. LGBT+ people are cast as the “internal enemy,” in the fight against whom state propaganda attempts to unite Russian society. Although some experts note that such propaganda is working poorly:

“It's clear that everything [state rhetoric] is built around traditional values and all that. But emphasizing this as intensely as from 2022 to 2023 is now pointless. Russians' problems are accumulating; cultural antagonism [with the US] is diminishing. These very LGBT people are becoming less visible in the public sphere. They've all moved away. A new scapegoat needs to be found.”
(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

The war leads to the normalization of violence and an increase in aggression within society:

“The war, it seems to me, has greatly hardened people. In principle, the level of tension in society is rising and the desire to attack vulnerable

groups also exists.”

(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

Military personnel returning from the front line are perceived as a source of danger to those around them, and especially to LGBT+ individuals, as mentioned previously in the chapter on violence.

Many experts speak of fatigue from the war and repression throughout Russian society, including the LGBT+ community.

“Overall, everyone is a bit tired of this. Tired of both the repression and all this military activity. There are many people who are living their own lives and are indifferent to how you live yours. Whether you paint your nails or not. Who you sleep with, who you go out with, who you socialize with in bars somewhere. It doesn't matter to them. Because everyone just wants to live well.”

(Sasha, queer activist, Ural Federal District)

The war impacts psychological well-being, leading to depression, increased anxiety, apathy and burnout among vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the war has worsened the economic situation of LGBT+ people.

“The war affects everyone negatively but, as always, vulnerable groups suffer more from any crisis.”

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

An important aspect in the context of the war's impact on LGBT+ people involves the high risks of mobilization. Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer within LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out, discusses this in detail:

“The more vulnerable a person is, the fewer resources they have to avoid serving. Due to their greater vulnerability. Well, we're not even talking anymore about the tactic of serving draft notices during raids. They served summons in a gay club, not in a hetero club. And in this respect, they simply exploit people's greater vulnerability. They had a pretext to conduct a raid specifically in this club, not another.

A homosexual or transgender person faces more difficulties; it's harder for them to get into state-funded university places because their SOGI poses a risk of expulsion. Consequently, they lose their deferment and have a higher chance of ending up in the army. And ending up in the army is now much scarier for them than before. Again, due to their vulnerability, they will find themselves in a male collective, subject to various forms of violence, and there's a higher probability they will sign a contract with the Ministry of Defense.

Again, [problems can arise] due to conflicts with family. This affects whether a person can study because they lack financial support. Plus, military registration for transgender persons now involves psychiatric hospitalization – not for conversion therapy purposes but for assessment. A person does not want to undergo hospitalization and might conceal, for example, something that could have been grounds for receiving that deferment. For example, autism.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

The ban on gender transition increased the risks of being mobilized for transgender women:

“Previously, transgender women facing conscription could manage, before being called up, to undergo the commission to receive a diagnosis of ‘transsexualism,’ change their documents, and disappear from the draft board’s database. Or, at the military medical commission, they could disclose their transgender status and be sent to a psychiatric inpatient department, where after observation they might be diagnosed with ‘transsexualism’ and exempted from conscription. Now they no longer have this possibility. But going into the army for a transgender person, especially if hormone therapy has already begun, is life-threatening.”

(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

The war has created new threats for the LGBT+ community and exacerbated pre-existing ones related to repression, propaganda and the general increase in violence. State rhetoric continues to be based on confronting an “external threat” and “non-traditional values,” which casts LGBT+ people as a convenient “internal enemy” for mobilizing public indignation. Simultaneously, growing fatigue with repressive measures and military actions is noticeable within Russian society. The war carries particularly severe consequences for transgender, homosexual and bisexual individuals of conscription age: obtaining deferment is harder for them and they are at greater risk of ending up in the army, where they face discrimination and violence. Furthermore, the decline in living standards and general social instability disproportionately affect LGBT+ people, as they often lack family support and are forced into low-paid positions. Collectively, all these factors form a new cycle of vulnerability for the LGBT+ community under conditions of military and ideological pressure.

State of the Human Rights Sector

In 2024, the LGBT+ human rights sector in Russia continued to experience a large-scale and protracted crisis that began back in 2022, driven by a combination of

the constant tightening of repressive legislation, an exodus of personnel, loss of resources and, for some, forced emigration.

Most organizations shifted to an anti-crisis mode of existence: the priority became not development and growth, but self-preservation and survival amidst shortages of staff and funding, and employee burnout.

“We continue to work, but we now need to implement a number of changes. To recruit, let's say, people. Currently, we are working in spite of, not because of, the circumstances.”

(Sasha, queer activist, Ural Federal District)

For many LGBT+ organizations, 2024 proved calmer than 2023 and 2022: the state did not introduce new, unexpected repressive measures, and this year became a time for strengthening internal structures and security. However, the general mood remained cautious: everyone understood that this respite could end abruptly, and there was no full readiness for unexpected turns.

“In 2024, there was a small respite for consolidation, reorientation, internal changes regarding horizontal-vertical management; everything was operating routinely.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

“We were on something of a plateau. We are just doing our work and come what may, in relative safety. Many steps were also taken to ensure employee security, both digital and physical security.”

(Irina, head of the Advocacy program, Sphere Foundation)

“In 2024, LGBT organizations were practically left untouched. We, of course, feared things would develop according to a much worse scenario. But I think the situation could change at any moment and we need to be prepared for that.”

(Yan Dvorkin, head of Center T)

At the same time, it should be understood that the lull occurred more in the second half of the year, while at the beginning of the year, many organizations expended significant effort ensuring the safety of staff and partners, anonymizing their materials and removing the names of those who could come to the attention of Russian law enforcement. Meanwhile, anonymization and other work aimed at security can significantly complicate the work of human rights defenders, especially those remaining in Russia.

Heightened requirements for security and privacy compel NGOs and activist groups to limit the publicity of their collaborations. On one hand, this helps protect participants and prevent unwanted attention from hostile forces. But on the other hand, it leads to a situation where the wider audience (and sometimes potential allies) may not be aware of the existence of other queer initiatives with which they

could collaborate or turn to for help. This “invisible” nature of interaction, where organizations deliberately “hide” each other, complicates the exchange of experience and resources, which in the long term may limit the effectiveness of overall human rights activities.

“The most noticeable thing for me is joint publications with other groups. We are not always credited and we ourselves do not credit everyone we collaborate with, for security reasons. This complicates collaboration. An organization's audience might be completely unaware of the existence of other queer initiatives that could potentially be very useful and simply interesting to them.”

(Sasha, queer activist, Ural Federal District)

Organizations that continue to hold community events are shifting them to a closed format. This creates new difficulties – the need for verification of each participant, the potential threat from denouncers and informants.

“The primary problem is precisely security. Because, unless these are attendees who have always come to you, and you know for sure they belong to the community, how can you even reach a new audience? And at the same time, not isolate everyone who also belongs to the community, so that already isolated people feel even more isolated? How exactly should the verification procedure be conducted, who should be invited, how can the safety of event venues be ensured, and so forth? It has all become very unsafe now, in my view, and that's why even those community centers that worked before, or places that were simply friendly [have changed]. In principle, any ‘safe space’ for representatives of the LGBT+ community is severely limited now. I would say that overall, one cannot state that any safe offline space exists for queer people in Russia right now.”

(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

An additional difficulty for many LGBT+ initiatives has been engaging with lawyers in Russia. They refuse to defend LGBT+ individuals, fearing for their own safety and reputation, and assuming that working on LGBT+ cases could, in the state's eyes, associate them with an “extremist organization”; consequently, defending the rights of LGBT+ people is becoming more complicated. This is an indirect impact of the recognition of the “LGBT movement” as extremist.

“Lawyers simply refuse to take on public cases. In the regions, lawyers explain, saying like, ‘You only have one gender marker change case but I will be remembered [for it]. And I generally handle divorce proceedings in these courts. I position myself as a family lawyer.’ That was the problem. They simply don't want to bear the risks. They are ultimately afraid that besides them, nobody else is available [implying they are the

only option and thus vulnerable if targeted].”

(Vladimir, lawyer, Moscow)

“Being a lawyer in a human rights organization also carries risk. There haven't been cases yet [of lawyers handling LGBT+ cases being prosecuted]. But in principle, the construct by which one could be accused of participating in extremist activity [from law enforcement's perspective] is conceivable.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

Another problem mentioned by several experts is the disconnect between emigrated LGBT+ activists and those remaining – both the broader LGBT+ community and activists. Primarily, various experts, both those forced to leave Russia and those continuing work within the country, state that it is harder to assess the situation comprehensively and understand the full context from a distance.

“2024 is also dire because initiatives that relocated from Russia in 2022-2023 are drifting further away from the people remaining there. This is inevitably a process of decline, degradation. At some point, we will need a new generation of people to replace us. Because in any case, having moved, we engage in interpretation of interpretations and mythologization. Why else is this process frightening? Because I don't feel it. It actually seems to me that a connection remains. Despite this, you are still immersed in the context. Clearly, this is a thought that needs critique. I communicate with beneficiaries, I follow the news, the legal framework, I know about cases within the community. That is, it's a certain level of expertise necessary for me. It's more than enough to speak with European politicians. But it's another matter that this is not at all the same level of information mastery and risk understanding as those who remain there. They too have their own aberrations, that's normal. But the problem with this distancing is that it happens unnoticed.”

(Anna Eroshenko, fem-queer activist)

“Still, there is a disconnect. Over time it appears; the connection is lost one way or another. I myself lived in Kazakhstan for three months. I realized that even after three months, some connection is lost, and it can't even be explained in words... Simply, in Kazakhstan, I was in my own information bubble. People living in Europe are in their own information bubble... Well, meaning, this disconnect still exists. There is no longer [among those who left] a full understanding of what people feel living in Russia, what their needs are, what their interests are.”

(Natalia, Ural Federal District)

Experts note a certain contradiction in survival and resistance strategies between those who left and those who remained. Emigres, fearing for the safety of those remaining, often suggest they “go into the shadows” as much as possible, refusing public communication with remaining activists. However, such concern for safety from abroad is sometimes perceived as paternalism and a deprivation of agency – the ability to make independent decisions: as if people inside the country are unable to determine for themselves what is better and safer for them. Furthermore, this silences the voices of those remaining in Russia, hindering their ability to speak about their problems and needs and share their perspective on the situation from within.

“There is this problem where people living abroad who write about Russia do not themselves take comments from, or invite to public discussions, people from Russia. Because they say: ‘We fear for you.’ Let us decide for ourselves whether we want to participate.”
(Natalia, Ural Federal District)

“There is some misunderstanding. But not between everyone who left and everyone who stayed. I just see prominent media cases where, for example, people who left talk about the need to close up, go into the 'closet' [шкаф], generally lie low [не отвечать], delete all dating apps, hide all photos. But this is said by people who have left. And for me, for example, this is a very painful narrative, because it seems to me, no, here I can decide for myself. Why frighten people? If there is no visibility, everything will be worse. People will cease to be visible at all. And all facts of rights violations will never be visible. There's a feeling that those who left worry about those remaining even more than those remaining worry for themselves.”

(K., Far East)

One expert remaining in Russia noted a tendency among their circle and colleagues in human rights initiatives to speak of departure as a mandatory action:

“And also this pressure that everyone must leave, leave, leave. But you don't want to, yet you ‘must.’ [Everyone says:] ‘It's dangerous; staying here is dangerous. You must leave.’”

(Skat, legal aid)

Repressive measures, particularly the recognition of the “LGBT movement” as extremist, hinder partnerships within the human rights sector:

“Generally, of course, considering this extremism ruling, any public interaction with us [is complicated]... The community was always highly marginalized anyway, but LGBT organizations and activists did enormous work to overcome this, to say that LGBT rights are also human rights, that one must also fight for them, that any democratic

free society is impossible without all groups being free. And it seemed this had been achieved on some level, but now the work we do is becoming even more marginalized, and association with it can bring risks upon other human rights defenders, including the media. I would say that because of these risks that have appeared – not perhaps because internal attitudes towards LGBT have changed, but because of external risks – there seem to be fewer visible partnerships.”
(Dilya Gafurova, head of the Sphere Foundation)

Thus, in 2024, the LGBT+ human rights sector in Russia found itself in a state of fragile equilibrium between the ongoing crisis and a temporary lull. One of the key challenges of the year was the necessity of functioning under conditions of extreme secrecy and limited publicity. This, in turn, led to complicated coordination, reduced visibility and limited accessibility of assistance for the community. The issue of the disconnect between emigrated and remaining activists arises sharply, intensifying internal fragmentation. The inability to interact openly with other human rights structures within the country due to the “extremist community” status further isolated the LGBTQ+ agenda, despite the level of integration into the general human rights discourse previously achieved.

Forecasts for 2025

At the conclusion of each interview, we discussed experts' expectations for 2025 and possible forecasts. The general tone of the forecasts is pessimistic: most experts do not expect the situation to improve in 2025. Predominantly, experts anticipate either the maintenance of the current level of repression as a “new normal” or even a further tightening of legislation. Many predict a growing financial crisis in the human rights sector (due to funding cuts and the rightward turn in Western countries) and in Russian society, including for LGBT+ people (as a result of military actions). Furthermore, many experts believe that feelings of fatigue and social isolation among LGBT+ people will intensify, while resources will dwindle.

Many experts, including lawyers, expect an increase in the number of criminal cases under the article on extremism. A continuation of fines for LGBT propaganda and police raids on queer spaces is also anticipated.

“I fear there will be new extremism cases. Because the first two cases of 2025 were against people one definitely couldn't have imagined [being targeted]. People looking for sex online. It's simply nonsense. And I fear it might repeat because that ‘achievement’ has already been unlocked, and that worries me. Unfortunately, I cannot predict. The main thing I've understood during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and this homophobic campaign is that it's absolutely impossible to reliably predict anything. Russia knows how to surprise. In a bad sense, but it

knows how. I think the raids will continue. I fear new cases against clubs will appear. I fear this greatly. And I think the fines for propaganda will continue, because they target people who don't read opposition media and are unaware of these things.”

(Yaroslav Rasputin, gay activist, journalist, blogger)

At the same time, a number of experts do not expect a significant deterioration compared to 2024, as some remark, “it can't get any worse”:

“It seems to me the worst thing that could happen, happened in November 2023.”

(Natalia, Ural Federal District)

As the most negative forecasts, experts consider the final criminalization of sexual orientation and gender identity:

“I fear that ultimately, sexual orientation and gender identity will definitely place LGBT+ people in Russia outside the law.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

Experts also fear that emigration for LGBT+ individuals will become more difficult due to anti-migration policies in the West and restrictions for LGBT+ people in “near abroad” countries (such as Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan).

An international crisis in the protection of LGBT+ rights is also anticipated. Experts believe that the “rightward turn” in the West, including the potential return to power of Donald Trump, weakens general democratic principles and undermines efforts to protect LGBT+ communities in various countries. When the USA, previously perceived as a bastion of human rights, itself changes course, it becomes easier for authorities in more authoritarian countries to justify their own repressive actions. Furthermore, right-wing ideas from the USA and other Western countries can be copied by other states, exacerbating the general level of intolerance and complicating the work of human rights organizations.

Despite the overall gloomy tone, several respondents noted certain points of resilience. People are learning to adapt, find loopholes in legislation, use VPNs, restructure forms of communication. New underground projects, educational initiatives, forms of cultural resistance are already emerging, and this trend is expected to develop.

“Regardless, people will continue to unite and create something. Faced with great adversity, one still wants to unite and be saved. And I think, just like with the first propaganda [law], the same will happen with the second one and with extremism – people will adapt. They will adapt the language, adapt communication methods. So, it will all remain; it will simply acquire forms that allow them, if not to fully protect themselves from these laws, then at least to reduce their risks. But the adaptation

period will take time; I think that towards the end of '25, we will see some real adaptation strategy. It is only just forming now, but by the end of the year, I think, it will have already coalesced into some practice.”

(Maria Lacinska, journalist, founder of the Lesbian Lobby Channel)

Furthermore, some experts anticipate legal clarifications that could reduce the chaos in law enforcement:

“From 2025, I expect the Ministry of Health to approve the procedure by which hormone therapy and surgical operations are provided to people who have changed their gender marker. I also expect from 2025 that the Supreme Court will issue clarifications on judicial practice regarding extremism cases, defining the boundaries of law application in this sphere. And I anticipate a similar resolution on handling judicial practice regarding the propaganda law in 2025.”

(Ksenia Mikhailova, lawyer, LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out)

Thus, the overall picture for the future in 2025, according to experts, appears rather grim: most concur that repressive practices will continue or even intensify, financial support for human rights initiatives will decrease, and the global “rightward turn” will complicate the fight for the rights of LGBT+ communities not only in Russia but worldwide. Nevertheless, amidst fears of the complete criminalization of sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as a new wave of prosecutions, there are also glimmers of hope: people are learning to adapt, unite, launch new clandestine and cultural projects, and some respondents expect that by the end of 2025, activists will have formed clearer defense strategies and that legal clarifications capable of reducing arbitrariness in enforcement practices will emerge.

Conclusion

For the LGBT+ community in Russia, 2024 became a time of intensified pressure and adaptation to new realities. The experts we interviewed unanimously note the atmosphere of fear, anxiety, and isolation in which LGBT+ people live, as well as the lack of legal certainty. The recognition of the LGBT+ movement as extremist fundamentally altered the conditions of the community's existence, making the daily lives of LGBT+ individuals, and activism even more so, increasingly precarious. Incidents of blackmail, threats and pressure became more frequent, and mere presence in public space became risky.

Meanwhile, social and law enforcement practices regarding anti-LGBT+ laws remain chaotic and arbitrary. Persecutions are random in nature; legal uncertainty makes it impossible to predict the consequences of even the most innocuous

actions. Police raids on queer spaces and private events have become an instrument for intimidating the community. The number of criminal cases is growing in which sexual orientation or gender identity itself is interpreted as extremism.

Transgender individuals remain the most vulnerable in this situation, finding themselves in a legal and social vacuum following the ban on gender transition. Access to hormone therapy, surgeries, and even basic medical care is significantly restricted. Transgender people more often than others face economic difficulties, discrimination, forced involvement in illegal sectors, including sex work, and in isolated cases, decide to undergo reverse transition under societal pressure.

The economic situation of LGBT+ people overall has deteriorated. Job loss, difficulties with employment, threats of dismissal, and discrimination in education all make LGBT+ individuals more vulnerable to poverty and exploitation.

Cases of denunciations cause particular concern – both by “professional denouncers” and by relatives, former partners, or colleagues. Threats of denunciation are often used for blackmail and pressure. This increases the isolation of LGBT+ people and reduces their willingness to seek help or defend their rights.

LGBT+ adolescents and LGBT+ parents are also under particular pressure. LGBT+ adolescents suffer from a lack of information and support, and are subjected to violence in the family and at school. LGBT+ parents fear losing their children due to their identity, especially transgender parents. In both cases, state structures (educational institutions, guardianship authorities, law enforcement agencies) more often exert pressure than provide help, although in some instances this may depend on the human factor.

Queer culture in Russia is experiencing a phase of forced clandestine existence. The removal of LGBT+ content from platforms, increased censorship, and blocking hinder access to information; however, the community finds methods of circumvention and continues activity through closed channels and informal organizational formats.

The war intensifies the vulnerability of LGBT+ people. It contributes to the normalization of violence, economic deterioration, and entails risks of mobilization. Mobilization becomes an additional factor of pressure and a threat to life.

The human rights sector operates under conditions of severe pressure and constant risks. Many organizations were forced to restructure their work, go underground, and abandon public events within Russia. Meanwhile, a disconnect arises between emigrated activists and those remaining in Russia, which can create difficulties in mutual understanding.

Forecasts for 2025 remain predominantly pessimistic. An increase in criminal cases, intensified pressure, a financial crisis in the human rights sector, and difficulties with emigration are expected. However, even under these conditions, experts note the growth of adaptive strategies, mobilization within the community, the emergence of new initiatives, and hope for the development of new protection mechanisms.

The LGBT+ community in Russia in 2024 exists under conditions of systematic marginalization, repression, and violence, yet retains the capacity for resistance, mutual aid, and cultural survival.

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