

# Russian Federation

## **Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to forced displacement**

Joint submission prepared by Coming out, Crisis Group "Marem", NC SOS Crisis Group, Quarteera e.V. and Sphere Foundation and for the UN Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity

**Coming Out** ([comingoutspb.org/en/](http://comingoutspb.org/en/)) is a regional nonprofit initiative group founded in 2008 in St. Petersburg, Russia. The Coming Out LGBTQ+ initiative has been working since 2008 to secure equal rights for everyone in Russia, regardless of their sexuality or gender identity, both institutionally and socially. It provides free legal and psychological support for LGBTQ+ people and raises awareness about the situation regarding LGBTQ+ rights in Russia by collecting real statistics on the status of queer lives in the country, and works with authorities on cases of discrimination and violence. When using information from this input, attribution is highly recommended.

**Crisis Group "Marem"** (<https://maremgroup.com/>) is a project created by women from the North Caucasus to support women from the North Caucasus who have suffered from violence. The project provides legal and psychological assistance, and when necessary, helps women evacuate to a safe location.

**NC SOS Crisis Group** (<https://ncsos.io/>) is a project helping LGBTQ+ people to flee from the regions where they face discrimination, violence and mortal danger. An integral part of NC SOS work is gathering proofs and spreading information that would force Russian authorities and the international community to take action, to ensure that LGBTQ+ people in the North Caucasus are no longer persecuted, to bring to justice the responsible.

**Quarteera e.V.** (<https://www.quarteera.de/>) is a German non-governmental organization for Russian-speaking LGBTQ+ migrants. It monitors human rights violations against migrants in Germany and provides social, psychological, and legal support to migrants from Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and other Eastern European and Central Asian countries, while also fostering a community.

**Sphere Foundation** ([spherequeer.org/en/](http://spherequeer.org/en/)) is a human rights organisation that has been advocating for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community in Russia since 2011. We possess expertise in developing and coordinating programs for psychological, emergency, and legal assistance, as well as monitoring discrimination and engaging in national and international advocacy. We actively assist and support LGBTQ+ individuals and collaborate with other organisations that share similar objectives in various regions of Russia. Additionally, in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Sphere Foundation has taken an active stance against the war.

# CONTENT

## **ON DRIVERS OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT / FOR REGIONS THAT LGBT+ PERSONS ARE COMPELLED TO FLEE** ..... 4

**1. Are there drivers (root causes) of forced displacement in your region that impact the broader population? Which of these drivers, in your opinion, tend to impact LGBT+ persons disproportionately?** ..... 4

**2. What are the prevalent drivers of forced displacement for LGBT+ individuals in your region?** ..... 4

*2.1 Such drivers could include, but are not limited to legal frameworks, government policies, violence and hate crimes, erosion or lack of anti-discrimination protections, social stigma and exclusion, religious and cultural intolerance and denial of healthcare.* ..... 4

*2.2 Are there specific instances of political scapegoating of LGBT+ individuals for electoral gains, or harmful rhetoric driven by malevolent actors, that have contributed to the forced displacement of LGBT+ individuals? Are certain communication channels more susceptible to being used for the spread of homophobic and transphobic messaging?* ..... 12

*2.3 In countries where legislation criminalizes consensual same-sex relations between adults, are there documented instances where the mere existence of such laws has created barriers to public participation for LGBT+ individuals or contributed to an increase in gender-based violence? If so, could you provide examples illustrating how these laws have been leveraged to justify discrimination, persecution, or other forms of violence?* ..... 12

**3. How do other identities (race, ethnicity, disability, religion, etc.) intersect with SOGI to exacerbate risks for LGBT+ forcibly displaced individuals? Please provide examples of cases where intersectional discrimination played a role in forced displacement.** ..... 13

**4. Is there any data, formal or informal, that indicates instances of violence or discrimination related to real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity? If yes, how is this data collected, and are there any challenges or limitations in capturing the full extent of challenges faced by LGBT+ individuals?** ..... 14

**5. What measures or initiatives are being implemented in your country to address violence and discrimination against individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity? Please include any relevant policies, programs, or community efforts aimed at redressing these challenges.** ..... 15

**6. Are there any specific challenges that local LGBT+ rights organizations are facing in your region? This could include challenges with respect to registration, funding, regulation or prosecution. Are defenders of LGBT+ people’s human rights being targeted, scapegoated or penalized by governments on account of their work?** ..... 15

## **IN TRANSIT AND UPON ARRIVAL IN HOST COUNTRIES** ..... 16

**7. What forms of violence, discrimination, prejudicial treatment or other human rights violations do LGBT+ forcibly displaced persons experience during transit or upon arrival in host countries?** ..... 16

**8. What is the protection environment for Russian LGBT+ IDPs? Is access to protection and basic services adequate?** ..... 17

**9. What are the obstacles LGBT+ individuals face during asylum procedure? What are specific measures can host countries, countries supportive of LGBT+ rights and international organizations implement to improve the protection of LGBT+ forcibly**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>displaced persons, particularly in the areas of RSD, resettlement, and long-term integration?</b> .....   | 18 |
| <i>9.1 Obstacles LGBT+ individuals face during asylum procedure</i> .....  | 18 |
| <i>9.2 Measures that should be taken</i> .....   | 23 |
| <b>10. Gender-responsive and sensitive to SOGI-specific needs approach: recommendations</b> ..   | 25 |
| <b>11. How do State asylum systems and related services in host countries address the challenges faced by LGBT+ asylum seekers and refugees, particularly in the contexts of criminalization or broader discrimination?</b> .....  | 26 |
| <b>12. Are LGBT+ individuals who are forcibly displaced able to access formal or informal support systems?</b> .....   | 27 |
| <i>12.1 Do they have access to legal assistance to help navigate and articulate their asylum claims?</i> .....   | 27 |
| <i>12.2 What barriers exist for family reunification in host countries? Are there documented instances where the evidentiary requirements for family reunification have been excessively high?</i> .....   | 27 |
| <i>12.3 Are local LGBT+ rights organizations or CSOs in your country equipped and prepared to provide support in formulating SOGI-based asylum claims?</i> .....   | 28 |
| <b>13. What are the barriers to fair and efficient RSD procedures for LGBT+ individuals considering both State-conducted and UNHCR-conducted processes? Are certain subsets of the LGBT+ community more likely to receive protection than others?</b> .....  | 28 |
| <b>14. What has been your experience with resettlement and complementary pathways for protection (e.g., humanitarian visas, community sponsorship, etc.)? In your view, should UNHCR focus on expanding resettlement and complementary pathways, or should greater efforts be made to strengthen, expand and expedite the existing international protection regime (such as RSD and legal stay, but also freedom of movement, and enjoyment of socio-economic rights) in the host countries?</b> ..... | 28 |
| <b>15. Recognizing that protection of forcibly displaced LGBT+ persons requires multi-stakeholder and multi-agency coordination and collaboration, what are the steps that can be taken to foster and augment such collaboration in your region?</b> .....   | 29 |
| <b>16. Good practices, policies or interventions</b> .....   | 29 |

## **ON DRIVERS OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT / FOR REGIONS THAT LGBT+ PERSONS ARE COMPELLED TO FLEE**

### **1. Are there drivers (root causes) of forced displacement in your region that impact the broader population? Which of these drivers, in your opinion, tend to impact LGBT+ persons disproportionately?**

The factors driving mass emigration from Russia in 2018–2025 were political repression and the restriction of civil liberties which included increased pressure on political activists, journalists, and human rights defenders; the adoption of laws on "foreign agents," "undesirable organizations," and the fight against "extremism"; the persecution of opposition politicians and the arrests of protest participants; stricter internet control, with criminal penalties for likes, reposts, and criticism of the government.

In 2022 the emigration increased disproportionately and the war in Ukraine became the main driver of emigration. It included the announcement of "partial mobilization" in 2022, leading to a mass exodus of draft-age men, forced military contract signing and increased restrictions on citizens leaving the country and political repressions against anti-war movement which included politicians as well of hundreds of usual citizens arrested and condemned for speaking out against the war, donations to the armed forces of Ukraine and Ukrainians affected by the war.

Some of these common factors disproportionately affected Russian LGBT+ people. LGBT+ people were one of the first if not the first group affected by the authoritarian interim policy by adoption in 2013 of the **law banning "propaganda of same sex relationships among minors"**, restrictions on freedom of association and freedom of expression, access to information and corresponding increase of violence.

The speeches for LGBT+ rights is one of the meaningful reasons for acknowledging organizations and individuals as foreign agents. Almost all the LGBT+ organizations were acknowledged as "foreign agents" even before the war and before criminalization of the "International LGBT Public movement". Homosexual, bisexual men and transgender women are especially vulnerable to the practice of forced military contracts signing, especially in certain regions and among conscripted soldiers. In case of mobilization they face the serious risks of violence from fellow servicemen or in case of refusing to participate in war - from administration and detainees in penal institutions.

### **2. What are the prevalent drivers of forced displacement for LGBT+ individuals in your region?**

***2.1 Such drivers could include, but are not limited to legal frameworks, government policies, violence and hate crimes, erosion or lack of anti-discrimination protections, social stigma and exclusion, religious and cultural intolerance and denial of healthcare.***

Besides the above mentioned factors of forced displacement since February 24, 2022, the situation for LGBT+ people has significantly worsened and continues to deteriorate rapidly as of 2025.

In Russia there is **no separate anti-discrimination law**, LGBT+ people are not protected from discrimination, usually the access to fair trial is not fully guaranteed for them due to stigma, state violence against LGBT+ people and existing discriminatory laws described below.

## “LGBT+ propaganda” law

In December 2022, administrative [legislation prohibiting so-called "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" was tightened](#), extending the restrictions to encompass all age groups rather than just minors.

On December 5, 2022, a revised version of the Russian Code of Administrative Offenses came into effect. It introduced administrative liability for any public actions that could be interpreted as creating interest in non-heterosexual relationships or changing one's gender assigned at birth.

This legislation is currently used to prosecute LGBT+ individuals for a **public activities** like managing LGBT+ communities on social media, running online channels or podcasts with any audience size, or other forms of public engagement as well as **private life** like expressing one's sexual orientation or gender identity outside their residence, including in public places or private events, even without third-party witnesses, posting personal advertisements seeking same-sex partners or photographs with a same-sex partner on personal social media pages, even if those pages are private.<sup>1</sup>

According to data collected by LGBTQ+ group “Coming Out” there were 134 cases on “propaganda” in 2024 and already at least 9 cases in 2025.

This legislation also is used to block social media accounts focused on LGBT+ topics en masse; label organizations and individuals as “foreign agents,” resulting in loss of rights, administrative fines, and criminal prosecution.

The fines for propaganda for individuals raise to approximately 5000 EUR, detention and deportation for foreign citizens.

Although the number of administrative and criminal cases is disproportionate to the total number of LGBT+ individuals in Russia, every person who openly expresses their homosexuality or gender identity is at risk. The vast majority of administrative and criminal cases related to LGBT+ “propaganda” result from denunciations made by private individuals or homophobic organizations.

In July 2023 **anti trans legislation was introduced**. Due to amendments to different laws it is impossible to change the gender marker in documents; gender-affirming surgical interventions as well as gender-affirming hormone therapy are prohibited also to those who have already changed the gender marker. Thus, people are forced to interrupt therapy, which threatens their health and sometimes - their life. The inability to bring the appearance in line with the documents creates a daily high risk of state and non-state violence. There is no legal way to purchase gender-affirming hormonal drugs, ordering these drugs from abroad online risks criminal prosecution. As a consequence, transgender individuals are denied access to medical care in accordance with internationally recognized standards, including mental health care. Transgender individuals are outside of the legal system in Russia.

On January 10, 2024, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation [issued a ruling designating the "International LGBT Public Movement" and its subdivisions as extremist organizations](#) and ordering their dissolution within Russia. It has significant legal consequences on the territory of the Russian Federation, as well as for Russian citizens, regardless of their location.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the provisions of Russian legislation, specifically Articles 282.2 and 282.3 of the Russian Criminal Code, and the practice of enforcing anti-extremism laws, leaders,

---

<sup>1</sup> According to data of Monitoring program of “Comingout” publications in the media and requests for legal assistance.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Article 12 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

participants of such associations, employees, volunteers, members, attendees of events and support groups, as well as individuals who made donations of any amount, [are subject to criminal prosecution](#) for leading, participating in the activities of an extremist organization, or financing extremist activities.

The Supreme Court's ruling defines extremist activities broadly, including: creating artistic works that mention same-sex relationships involving minors, producing any content promoting equality of rights or the equal value of same-sex relationships compared to heterosexual ones, providing psychological, social, or legal support to LGBT+ individuals, hosting or participating in LGBT+ events, managing online LGBT+ communities.

Under Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code: participation in the activities of an extremist organization is punishable by 2–6 years of imprisonment, organizing such activities carries a penalty of 6–10 years of imprisonment, financing of LGBT+ activity is punishable under the article 282.3 of Criminal code by 3-8 years of imprisonment and repeated demonstration of extremist symbols by 4 years of imprisonment.

### **Extremism and jurisprudence**

Currently, there is a growing practice of using Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code to prosecute any activity related to the LGBT+ community, including: operating gay clubs and bars; LGBTQ+ activism **but sometimes the main reason of prosecution is the mere sexual orientation**. For instance, [one criminal case](#) was initiated solely because the accused allegedly offered sexual relations to someone of the same gender. In [another case \(Andrey Kotov\)](#), the defendant was accused not only of providing services to LGBT+ individuals under Article 282.2, Part 1, but also of participating in events he organized (Article 282.2, Part 2).

**Currently, 8 criminal cases have been initiated under this article**, and there are 14 defendants in criminal cases. Many suspects and accused are in custody, some are under house arrest, and a person involved in one of the criminal cases [died](#) in a pre-trial detention center. Based on the detailed information which LGBTQ+ group “Comingout” has, there is no effective verification of the circumstances of his death by law enforcement agencies and he was subject of torture during his arrest with the aim to receive details of his clients.<sup>3</sup>

The criteria for what constitutes a criminal offense under Article 282.2 remain vague. LGBT+ individuals cannot predict whether their public or private actions might lead to criminal prosecution.

### **Extremism and administrative offences**

The decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation dated November 30, 2023, also establishes administrative liability for the display of LGBT+ symbols under Article 20.3 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offences (Hereafter - CAO RF), which provides for a punishment of up to 15 days of detention.

However, neither the Supreme Court's ruling nor Russian legislation defines what constitutes such symbols. Judicial practice interprets the content of this symbolism in the broadest possible terms. The application of Russia's criminal anti-extremism laws has created a situation in which LGBT+ individuals cannot sufficiently predict the consequences of their actions to avoid criminal liability. For example, if a person at any point in the past uploaded an image to the Internet that can be interpreted as LGBT+ symbolism and that image is still accessible after Supreme's Court decision dated on 30.11.2023, they can be held administratively and criminally liable at any time.

---

<sup>3</sup> According to the report of the attorney working in the field and criminal trial materials.

As of now, based on the data available to LGBTQ+ group “Coming Out”, there have been at least 61 cases under Article 20.3 of the CAO RF specifically related to the display of symbols deemed to be LGBT+ symbols in 2024.

### **Financial monitoring registry**

The initiation of a criminal case under any anti-extremism article—regardless of the court's verdict—or being held administratively liable under Article 20.3 of the CAO RF results in the individual being added to the list of persons involved in extremist and terrorist activities, maintained by the state agency overseeing financial operations in the Russian Federation. Being added to this list leads to severe restrictions on rights, including the inability to manage one's financial assets. Such individuals are only allowed to withdraw up to 10,000 rubles (approximately 100 euros) per month in cash from their bank accounts, and only if the funds were received as wages. These individuals are also prohibited from selling or otherwise disposing of their real estate without the consent of state authorities. If permission is granted, they cannot access the proceeds from the sale without restrictions. Being included in this list pushes individuals to the brink of poverty and survival.

### **Criminal prosecution for sexual orientation unrelated to anti-extremism legislation**

There have been cases where individuals were prosecuted for manifestations of their homosexual orientation without any connection to anti-extremist laws. For instance:

A criminal case [was initiated](#) under Article 148 of the Russian Criminal Code (offending religious sentiments) for posting a video on the Internet that included a kiss between two men with part of a church building visible in the frame.

In September 2024, two young homosexual men were sentenced to five years of imprisonment for “indecent acts against minors.” The charges [were based on](#) the fact that the two men were naked in their own apartment, and they were seen through a window facing the courtyard.

### **Law enforcement agencies' attempt to create a database of LGBT+ individuals**

In Spring 2024 there was an attempt to create **a database of LGBT+ people**, at the end of 2024 - beginning 2025 the discussion was opened again. There are clear evidences that personal information of LGBT+ individuals have been collected throughout 2024 (even in 2023 after anti-trans legislation came in force): during raids to private and public LGBT+ events, with the help of informants (according to our data, there is minimum 1 informant, organiser of LGBT+ events, who voluntary gathered personal information of its participants to law enforcement agencies, other organisers did it under pressure).

For now, it is not clear how this information will be used by state law enforcement agencies, yet it might become more evident in 2025. There are multiple scenarios: 1. such information collected would be used to open a major criminal extremist case against “International LGBT Public movement” with divisions in dozens of regions in Russia; 2. it would be used as a means for silencing of queer people, creating constant fear, 3. creating a database of LGBT+ people and using it as a tool for persecution, for pressuring, for instance, those with male gender markers in official documentation to participate in the war with Ukraine, 4. Moreover, such a database could be used as a way to recruit LGBT+ people as "voluntary" informants for being removed from it.

### **State violence: torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment**

Until 2024, instances of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment by state authorities against LGBT+ individuals in Russia were largely confined to the North Caucasus region with sporadic cases in police departments in other regions.

However, the designation of the International LGBT Movement as an extremist organization has extended this practice to other regions of the country.

For instance, Andrey Kotov reported to his lawyer and in court during the hearing on pretrial detention that he was subjected to violence by police officers to gain access to his laptops and phone, which qualifies as torture.

The detention of a gay man in Tula in January 2025 [was accompanied by degrading treatment](#), as evidenced by a video that was disseminated in the media.

According to monitoring conducted by the LGBTQ+ group "Coming Out", at least **19 police raids**<sup>4</sup> on LGBT+ clubs and events, including those held in private spaces, were recorded in 2024. During each raid, between 10 and 40 people were subjected to physical violence, humiliation, threats, and abuse by law enforcement officers. Victims were forced to perform physical exercises, sing, or assume specific poses.

In some raids, all male attendees were issued draft notices for military service. Additionally, participants were photographed, and these images were later published online or sent to their workplaces.

In 2024 "Cmingout" registered a few cases when the LGBT+ were arrested by police without any even formal reason and were forced to inform about other LGBT+ he knows. Earlier such a practice existed only in Northern Caucasus regions of Russia.

For a long time, anti-extremism police departments have been **gathering information on LGBT+ individuals**, primarily activists. Previously, in the North Caucasus, there was a practice of detaining LGBT+ individuals and "extracting" information from them about other LGBT+ persons. Now, this practice is spreading to other regions: authorities are recording the identities of those detained during police raids and forcibly checking the electronic devices of LGBT+ individuals to obtain their contacts.

### **Non-state violence and lack of access to legal protection**

In 2023, 43.5% of the people who participated in the research carried out by Comingout and "Sphere Foundation" experienced hate violence, which is 13% more than in 2022.<sup>5</sup>

In 2024 according to monitoring by Comingout in 2024 53 cases of non-state physical violence, threats, blackmail, and other hate-motivated crimes have been documented, including one murder which was investigated by the authorities but was not qualified as a hate crime.

In 2023, only 4% of cases were effectively investigated. Contacting law enforcement agencies in a large number of cases not only does not entail an effective investigation, but also leads to humiliation and discrimination on the part of police officers, and may also entail checking whether there are grounds for bringing the victim to administrative responsibility for "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations", for "participation in extremist activities." or

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.24liveblog.com/live/UVYdX?n=3518183141075559098>;  
<https://parniplus.com/news/v-lenoblasti-politsiya-nakryla-lgbt-den-rozhdeniya/>;  
<https://parniplus.com/news/chita-lgbt-extremism>; <https://parniplus.com/news/yaroslavl-rejd>;  
[https://ovd.info/story/vecherinki-v-noske-i-goryaschie-pasporta-gosudarstvennoe-davlenie-po-soobrazheniem-morali?news\\_id=65057&utm\\_source=tg\\_live&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=news&utm\\_term=02\\_12\\_24](https://ovd.info/story/vecherinki-v-noske-i-goryaschie-pasporta-gosudarstvennoe-davlenie-po-soobrazheniem-morali?news_id=65057&utm_source=tg_live&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=news&utm_term=02_12_24);  
<https://www.24liveblog.com/live/UVYdX?n=3520479816108450494>;  
<https://ovd.info/express-news/2024/05/18/policiya-zaderzhala-uchastnikov-dvukh-meropriyatij-v-otkrytom-prostranstve>; <https://t.me/lentachold/77857>;  
[https://ovd.info/story/khronika-davleniya-na-lgbt?news\\_id=65041&utm\\_source=tg\\_live&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=news&utm\\_term=30\\_11\\_24](https://ovd.info/story/khronika-davleniya-na-lgbt?news_id=65041&utm_source=tg_live&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=news&utm_term=30_11_24); [https://t.me/parni\\_plus/15401](https://t.me/parni_plus/15401).

<sup>5</sup> Report on the life of LGBTQ+ people in Russia in 2023 – LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out, Sphere Foundation, <https://comingoutspb.org/en/books/lgbt-people-in-russia-2023-full-report/>.

interference with privacy through verification of mobile communication facilities. Thus, in 2023, 44% of LGBT+ people who contacted the police in connection with homophobic and transphobic crimes against them were subjected to pressure from police officers. 73% of the respondents reported that they would not contact the police because of fear of police officers.<sup>6</sup>

In 2024, a new trend emerged that further complicates access to legal protection from the Russian state. The ban on the "International LGBT Public Movement" has been perceived by the population as the criminalization of sexual orientation. Consequently, there has been an increase in cases where victims of violence have faced counterclaims from their attackers, alleging that the victims were engaged in extremist activities or "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" (Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offenses).<sup>7</sup> These counterclaims are treated by police and courts much more effectively than claims of LGBT+ persons about violence or discrimination and result in administrative cases, deportation, etc.

Obtaining professional legal assistance is also a challenge. Those lawyers who are not affiliated with human rights organizations often refuse professional assistance to LGBT+ people for fear of being accused of participating in extremist activities. There is no open work of LGBT+ organizations. The provision of legal assistance to LGBT+ persons by organizations creates risks of bringing both the lawyer and the client to criminal responsibility.

### **Mental health, forced institutionalization and subjection to conversion therapy**

In February 2024 Russia [suspended the ICD-11](#), which had been in force since 2022 in Russia. The reason behind the suspension is that the approaches to treating LGBT+, pedophilia, and transgenderism proposed by the WHO contradict "traditional values" enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation. It is virtually impossible to openly discuss LGBT+ mental health issues in Russia following adoption of legislation banning the so-called "promotion of homosexuality" and the 2023 decision of the Russian Supreme Court declaring "international LGBT Public movement" [an extremist organization](#). As a consequence, access by LGBT+ persons to quality mental health services are limited.

While there have been a number of alarming reports [documenting](#) the so-called **"conversion therapy"** in Russia, Russian psychiatry has never officially denounced such practices. At the request and expense of their relatives, LGBT+ individuals are often placed in so-called rehabilitation centers for drug and alcohol addiction treatment,<sup>8</sup> where they are subjected to cruel treatment and forced labor intended to "cure" their sexual orientation and gender identity.

When such individuals refuse to comply, they face threats of involuntary hospitalization in psychiatric institutions. Attempts by partners or human rights organizations to appeal to law enforcement in such cases rarely lead to investigations or the release of the individual. Police usually rely solely on the testimony of family members who arranged for the person to be placed in the "rehabilitation center."

In 2023, cases of conversion therapy during visits to psychiatrists increased significantly. These therapies often involve the use of religious rhetoric. In Muslim regions, conversion therapy may take the form of so-called "exorcism of jinn." In the North Caucasus region, there are even dedicated "Muslim hospitals" where LGBT+ individuals are held and "treated." Similar practices are also found in other Muslim regions of Russia.

---

<sup>6</sup> Report on the life of LGBTQ+ people in Russia in 2023 – LGBTQ+ Group Coming Out, Sphere Foundation, <https://comingoutspb.org/en/books/lgbt-people-in-russia-2023-full-report/>, pp. 54-55.

<sup>7</sup> According to monitoring data collected by "Comingout" and reports of lawyers working "in the field".

<sup>8</sup> <https://cherta.media/story/lgbt-conversion-therapy/>; monitoring by "Coming Out", reports of lawyers working "in the field".

As was mentioned above, in 2023 the Russian Federal Parliament passed legislation explicitly prohibiting medical interventions aimed at changing sex and legal recognition of gender reassignment<sup>9</sup> despite the fact that for many years the Soviet and Russian medical profession recognized gender-affirming treatments as an essential component of health care for transgender individuals. Following the adoption of this law the Russian Psychiatric Society adopted clinical guidelines for gender identity disorders which completely excluded any interventions aimed at supporting gender transition and instead confined itself to psychotherapy to reconcile the individual with his or her legal gender<sup>10</sup>. As a consequence, transgender individuals are denied access to medical care in accordance with internationally recognized standards, including mental health care.

The risks of **involuntary hospitalization** are also connected to ban to gender marker change. Under Russian law, the possibility of exercising the right to work is related to compliance with the rules of military registration. After the ban on gender marker changes, military registration offices now require transgender men to undergo mandatory psychiatric evaluations in inpatient facilities as a prerequisite for registration. Similarly, transgender women must meet the same requirement to be removed from military registration. As a result, transgender individuals are forced to undergo compulsory medical evaluations to access their right to work. In most regions, these evaluations are accompanied by degrading treatment from medical personnel.

### **Vulnerability of LGBT+ parents is a separate reason for same-sex couples to escape from Russia**

LGBT+ parents in Russia constitute a particularly vulnerable group. The situation in this area significantly worsened in the summer of 2024.

#### *Threats of losing custody*

LGBT+ parents frequently face threats from child protection services to remove their children from their families. These threats are often followed by legal actions toward this end.

Child protection authorities interpret a child's residence in a same-sex family as "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations," equating it to abuse of parental rights. This serves as a basis for revoking parental rights.

#### *Particular vulnerabilities of transgender parents*

Transgender parents, especially those who have previously changed their gender markers, are especially unprotected. Current legislation prevents them from being listed as parents on their own children's birth certificates.

#### *Risks when reporting crimes*

LGBT+ parents are also particularly vulnerable when they become victims of crimes or other violations. Reporting such incidents to the police places their parental rights at risk.

#### *Risks for families of transgender minors*

In 2024, families of transgender minors entered a new high-risk category. The parents of transgender minors lost their parental rights and were held administratively liable for "failure to fulfill parental duties." This administrative action creates legal grounds for future revocation of parental rights.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Federal Law of 24 July 2023 no. 386-FZ.

<sup>10</sup> Russian Society of Psychiatrists. Gender Identity Disorders. Clinical Guidelines. 2024.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. <https://www.24liveblog.com/live/UVYdX?n=3556738207306720979>;  
<https://www.dp.ru/a/2024/10/08/sud-v-peterburge-lishil-roditelskih>.

## **Regional Northern Caucasus contributions to the causes of forced displacement of LGBT+ individuals inside and outside of Russia**

Northern Caucasus region includes six national republics inside Russian federative state: Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia and Northern Ossetia.

Systematic violence against women and LGBT+ persons takes place mostly but not only in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan and includes: killing of honor of LGBT+ and women who threaten the honor of the family by violating religious and ethnical norms. It also includes forced disappearances, a forced treatment of such people in Muslim “hospitals”, “expulsion of the jinn”, severe beatings, kidnapping, deprivation of freedom and communication with the outside world, forced labor, forced marriage, forced signing of military service contracts by homosexual and bisexual men to participate in military operation in Ukraine.

The republican authorities also persecute LGBT+ people, they are subjected to torture and murder. If they are detained for same-sex relationships, which are not illegal in Russia, then after torture, police hands them over to their families with a demand to commit an honor killing. In 2017-2018, a campaign against gay men took place in Chechnya, during which hundreds of people were tortured and killed. 27 gay men were killed in one night in January 2017. Currently, torture by police is not systemic but is present in everyday life.

Based on the quantitative analysis of the available database of the NC SOS, 116 requests for help to escape from the life threat were documented from 2017 to 2022; in 2023 – 47 appeals, in 2024 31 appeals. At the same time, most of the appeals for the period 2017-2022 fall on 2017 or on 2022.

Of these, there're 43 fully documented cases of torture in the Argun prison Grozny (Chechnya) in 2017. Argun prison was the center of the Chechenian security forces campaign aimed at identifying homosexual men in Chechnya or Chechenian homosexual men living in other regions. The essence of the campaign was to search for homosexual men, extrajudicial deprivation of their liberty, torture in order to further identify other homosexual men and then transfer the identified and intimidated in prison persons to their relatives with a requirement to commit an honor killing. Some of the men died as a result of torture in prison or their murder by security forces.

Thus, for the period from 2017 to 2022, excluding a specific raid by security forces, there were 73 documented appeals. 10 cases of torture were documented in 2023, 5 cases in 2024. These figures don't include other illegal actions of police, such as arrests, beating and etc.

Taking into account the information company against the Argun prison operation in 2020 and the change in the political situation in 2022-2024, there are no significant changes in the dynamics of the number of requests for assistance.

In 2023, there were documented 27 cases of severe beating, 17 cases of freedom deprivation, 10 cases of “jinn expulsion” and 4 – of conversion therapy in “rehabilitation center”, 4 cases of sexual violence based on SOGIESC, 1- killing, and also acts of kidnapping by police officers, blackmailing, threats to LGBT+ persons and their families and forced marriages for women as well as for men and transgender persons, search for LGBT+ people living in the republic through contacts and interrogations of detained LGBT+ people with the aim of their subsequent abduction, intimidation and blackmailing of them and their families. The figures for 2024 are: 19 severe beating by police and/or family members, 9 freedom deprivation, 9 cases of jinn expulsion or conversion therapy and also killing, kidnapping, blackmailing, multiple threats, etc.

Homosexual and bisexual men, as well as transgender women of North Caucasian origin, are particularly at risk of being forcibly conscripted into military service to participate in the war

in Ukraine. In 2022, NC SOS documented seven cases in which homosexual men were detained due to their sexual orientation, subjected to beatings and humiliation, and their families were extorted for ransoms of approximately €20,000. In three cases, the ransom was paid, while the remaining four, after severe beatings and mistreatment, were forced to sign military contracts and were sent to fight in Ukraine against their will. One of them reported being sexually assaulted by fellow soldiers.

In 2023, five homosexual men were detained in Chechnya due to their sexual orientation. After enduring beatings and cruel treatment, they were coerced into signing military contracts and were forcibly sent to fight in Ukraine. In 2023 NC SOS also received a report from sexual Cecenyan man been deported from EU after applying for refugee status that he was illegally sent to Ukraine as soldier directly from the airport when he arrived i n Russia as well as an unknown number of other chechenian men being with him.

In 2025, a homosexual man from Chechnya who had signed a contract under torture by Chechen security forces reported that, in one of the basements of a police department in Grozny, homosexual men had been held for several months and were being tortured to force them into signing military contracts. He was unable to provide the exact number or location of the detainees.

Crimes against LGBT+ people and women in the North Caucasus are not investigated by police. Federal police, prosecutor's offices are effectively ignoring related extrajudicial and judicial complaints.

***2.2 Are there specific instances of political scapegoating of LGBT+ individuals for electoral gains, or harmful rhetoric driven by malevolent actors, that have contributed to the forced displacement of LGBT+ individuals? Are certain communication channels more susceptible to being used for the spread of homophobic and transphobic messaging?***

Homophobia and transphobia in Russia is a large part of state interim policy literally prescribed in official ideology as "traditional Russian spiritual and moral values".<sup>12</sup> This state ideology is enshrined in laws and is constantly broadcast to society through state propaganda and the rhetoric of government officials. The primary sources of hate speech in the country are all television channels, as well as numerous homophobic groups on social media that incite violence based on homophobia and transphobia. Members of these groups also engage in forced outing and blackmail of LGBT+ individuals.

According to the article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, hate speeches are a crime. But this legislation does not and never has functioned to protect LGBT+ individuals.

***2.3 In countries where legislation criminalizes consensual same-sex relations between adults, are there documented instances where the mere existence of such laws has created barriers to public participation for LGBT+ individuals or contributed to an increase in gender-based violence? If so, could you provide examples illustrating how these laws have been leveraged to justify discrimination, persecution, or other forms of violence?***

The legislation about "extremism" and "LGBT+ propaganda" **obstruct LGBT+ individuals from obtaining effective protection and access to justice (In detail - see 2.1).**

---

<sup>12</sup> In the "Fundamentals of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values," approved by a presidential decree in Russia, the "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships" is listed as one of the main threats and risks to the Russian value system.

### **3. How do other identities (race, ethnicity, disability, religion, etc.) intersect with SOGI to exacerbate risks for LGBT+ forcibly displaced individuals? Please provide examples of cases where intersectional discrimination played a role in forced displacement.**

In the cases that come from Russia's ethnic republics and the Central Asia region, intersection of **ethnicity, language and SOGIESC** severely amplifies discrimination from both countries of origin, transit countries and host countries.

LGBTQ+ people who live or even were born in non-Northern Caucasus region but the origin of their families is Northern Caucasian face almost the same threats as LGBT+ people residing in Northern Caucasus. They face the same level of homophobia and transphobia within their families, as well as conversion therapy in Muslim rehabilitation centers through so-called "exorcism of jinn." It is not uncommon for them to be forcibly relocated to the North Caucasus, where they may be subjected to honor killings, imprisonment, forced marriage, and intervention by security forces—often accompanied by torture, inhumane treatment, deprivation of liberty, and other practices characteristic of the North Caucasus.

In one of the Sphere Foundation's cases in 2024, a queer couple from Caucasus region, after having fled Russia to Armenia, found out themselves to be hunted by unknown men, allegedly seeking them on behalf of their relatives, who have ties within the Sunni community in Armenia. After fleeing to Spain, that couple faced social workers and police officers who were reluctant to address their needs, most likely due to them being queer and non-white in appearance.

**HIV-positive status (and an STI+ status in general)** as a multiplying risk factor is specifically emergent in Russia, where non-citizens and citizens alike are outed as tested positive, which can lead to deportation. But this risk persists in transit and host countries as well.

In one of our cases, a queer man from Tajikistan, representing an ethnic minority, having HIV-positive status, fled to Russia to seek shelter and opportunity to apply for French visa/asylum. For 10 months, his application has been ignored by the French authorities, presumably because of his ethnicity and nationality.

In the other case, a young queer man whose **SOGIESC status intersected with being poor, having STI+, having a history of drug addiction, and having survived detention and torture** by Russian police who leveraged these identities against him, made it to Spain seeking refugee. Upon arrival there, his refugee request application faced delays, which left him on the street and unable to access the medication he needed to battle his disease. We are led to believe that his STI+ status and related requests alienated local authorities and social workers from addressing his needs in due time, as he's been homeless and mostly shelterless for months and is still there at the time of the report.

**Mental health issues** combined with lack of available, safe and qualified psychological support among displaced LGBT+ individuals in transit and the states where they seek asylum pose a serious threat to their own lives due to harsh psychological conditions of waiting for decisions on their legal status.

We are aware of [3 cases of suicide in temporary centers for asylum seekers in Netherlands](#) committed by LGBT+ Russian citizens. Moreover, we are aware of a suicide attempt of a queer person in a shelter in a transit country on their way from Russia to safety.

**Mental disabilities** that come as a result of physical abuse are also emergent as serious risk factors at all stages of transit and accommodation in the host countries.

For instance, in one of our cases, a **neurodivergent trans woman who was severely beaten a year prior** (her jaw was crushed and she has had trouble eating and speaking during the treatment) and also survived an attempt to burn her, became so traumatized by these events and the impending state of helplessness against the rising repressions that it has become nearly impossible for her to commit to endangering herself via passing border control, questioning and search during the trip.

In another case, **a queer cis woman with the intersection of SOGIESC with being poor, having an experience of combating mental health problems, and having an experience of severe physical and mental abuse** in the transit country where she was violently attacked by a homophobe, has found herself in peril upon arriving to the host country, which was Canada. She couldn't get attainable treatment, was unable to find a stable job due to not having the needed resume in the country, and the odd jobs she was running were jeopardized by her declining mental state. In the end, she had to leave Canada first to France and then to Poland, each time starting over and facing institutions reluctant to understand her need for mental treatment.

**4. Is there any data, formal or informal, that indicates instances of violence or discrimination related to real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity? If yes, how is this data collected, and are there any challenges or limitations in capturing the full extent of challenges faced by LGBT+ individuals?**

Official data on violence and discrimination against LGBT+ individuals is not collected. The only official source is judicial statistics on administrative prosecutions under Article 6.21 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offenses ("propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations"), compiled by the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. This data includes the number of cases initiated and their outcomes.

Statistics on other articles of the Criminal Code and Administrative Code used to persecute LGBT+ individuals do not specify whether they were applied specifically against LGBT+ persons. Hate crime statistics do not reflect homophobic or transphobic crimes, as even in rare cases when such crimes are investigated, they are not classified as hate-motivated.

LGBT+ organizations like the Sphere Foundation and Coming Out conduct independent monitoring of rights violations. However, their databases remain fragmented and are not consolidated into a single resource across various human rights and LGBT+ initiatives. Efforts to create a unified monitoring database are hindered by financial constraints, the criminalization of LGBT+ organizations in Russia, and international sanctions limiting funding access for Russian initiatives.

Thus, such human rights organisations strive to monitor the cases of discrimination, state persecution and violent attacks against the LGBT+ community. The sources of our data vary from official court decisions published online to media outlets and social networks or even to our direct aid programme work statistics. For instance, as of February 2025, Sphere Foundation's Monitoring Database consists of almost 2000 documented incidents since 2012. One of the main challenges in this work is the fact that the Sphere Foundation was forced to exile in 2022 among other civil society organisations, which was a final accord in a decade long gradual offence against the dissent voices in the country started with adoption of the law on the "foreign agents" in 2012.

Moreover, Russian LGBT+ initiatives, such as the Sphere Foundation and Coming Out, conduct annual studies on discrimination and violence against LGBT+ individuals in Russia<sup>13</sup> and of [LGBT+ people's needs](#). These research studies are based on surveys distributed

---

<sup>13</sup> Eg. <https://comingoutspb.org/en/books/lgbt-people-in-russia-2023-full-report/>; <https://comingoutspb.org/en/books/lgbt-people-in-russia-2022-full-report/>.

through human rights organizations, bloggers, and dating apps used by LGBT+ individuals. Additionally, research is conducted on other topics, including the situation of [transgender people](#), [the impact of war on LGBT+ individuals](#), and other related issues. These data are accessible in Russian and mainly in English but their mere existence is illegal in Russia.

Since the full scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Russian authorities strive to make information exchange between Russia and the outside world as little as possible. It requires regular technical upgrades in order to gain access to the official websites where the court rulings are published and a reliable VPN-service provider for our audience in Russia in order to access LGBT+ organisations in Russia. On top of that lies serious security risks both for the human rights organisations and their teams and for the audience due to various repressive tools utilised by the Russian state, such as the ruling of the Supreme Court on 30 November 2023 which designated the so-called “international LGBT Public movement” an extremist organisation.

**5. What measures or initiatives are being implemented in your country to address violence and discrimination against individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity? Please include any relevant policies, programs, or community efforts aimed at redressing these challenges.**

As was stated above (see - Section 1,2,3 of the Report), in Russia there is no anti-discrimination law, no explicit reference in law to protect LGBT+ rights. On the contrary, since 2013 **the regime step-by-step has disproportionately limited the human rights of LGBT+ individuals.**

However, to support and protect LGBT+ rights, the majority of Russian LGBT+ organisations continue their work in exile, some of them operate within Russia, placing themselves under constant risks of being persecuted.

**6. Are there any specific challenges that local LGBT+ rights organizations are facing in your region? This could include challenges with respect to registration, funding, regulation or prosecution. Are defenders of LGBT+ people’s human rights being targeted, scapegoated or penalized by governments on account of their work?**

The work of LGBT+ organizations was criminalized in 2024. Earlier almost all of them were acknowledged “foreign agents” and since that worked as unofficial associations. Many LGBT+ initiatives relocated to neighbor countries in 2022-2023 and hid the identities of employees and volunteers who remained in Russia.

In 2024 those LGBT+ initiatives which remained in Russia declared termination of their work<sup>14</sup> There are now virtually no openly functioning LGBT+ human rights organizations left in the country.

All the employees, associated specialists (like lawyers) and volunteers of Russian LGBT+ organizations, even those who stay abroad, face a direct risk of criminal prosecution. Those who stay in Russia hide their connections with LGBT organizations under direct risk of immediate arrest.

Some of them assist LGBT+ people forced to displacement by repressions or violence consulting them, providing humanitarian visas support or evacuation.

---

<sup>14</sup> E.g. <https://doxa.team/news/2024-01-09-perm>;  
[https://ovd.info/story/khronika-davleniya-na-lgbtk?news\\_id=64490&utm\\_source=telegram\\_live&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=news&utm\\_term=21\\_10\\_24](https://ovd.info/story/khronika-davleniya-na-lgbtk?news_id=64490&utm_source=telegram_live&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=news&utm_term=21_10_24).

There are some small offline LGBT+ initiatives in Russia which conduct small LGBT+ events. They operate underground, disguising their activities under the pretense that their events have no connection to LGBT+ issues. However, state persecution also targets initiatives and events that are unrelated to LGBT+ matters but are perceived by Russian authorities as linked to the LGBT+ movement. This includes BDSM events, heterosexual sex parties, and similar gatherings.

When it comes to the work of LGBT+ organizations, human rights defenders, and lawyers in the **North Caucasus** is complicated not only by the risk of criminal prosecution but also by the direct threat of violence against those providing legal support or assisting in the evacuation of LGBT+ individuals.

Legal assistance from lawyers residing in the region is impossible, as defending LGBT+ cases, investigating hate-motivated murders, or enforced disappearances would put their lives at immediate risk. Volunteers involved in evacuations also face life-threatening dangers. Human rights defenders visiting the region encounter direct threats of physical violence<sup>15</sup> or arrest on fabricated charges.

## **IN TRANSIT AND UPON ARRIVAL IN HOST COUNTRIES**

### **7. What forms of violence, discrimination, prejudicial treatment or other human rights violations do LGBT+ forcibly displaced persons experience during transit or upon arrival in host countries?**

#### **Russian LGBT+ refugees: in transit**

During their transit, **LGBT+ forcibly displaced people** face risks of abuse as well as risks of neglect. The accessible routes of their journey to host countries are liminal and lack safety measures, as they are designed to suppress immigration and refugee flow rather than to sustain it and provide minimum human rights rights and guarantees according to international human rights treaties, including the 1951 Refugee Convention at the universal level and Dublin regulations at the regional EU level.

When **crossing borders on foot on the way to the EU**, people who receive our help report being harassed both by the authorities and by other migrants; often they are required to wait for days or even weeks to pass the border during which time they are susceptible to “clocking” and therefore harassment and abuse. When waiting in transit countries, LGBT+ people are an easy target for homophobic attacks.

#### **“Safe” third countries**

Attacks by the conservative and homophobic groups against openly queer people in the third transit countries in Central Asia and South Caucasus countries became an issue. Since the Russian full scale invasion of Ukraine it became nearly impossible for ordinary Russian citizens to enter safe countries directly across Russian-EU borders. As the visa issuing proceedings become more and more complex due to the state security reasons in the safe countries, Russian LGBT+ people have to await the paperwork in Armenia, Kazakhstan or Georgia.

Due to uncertain timeframe for their transit stay, generally high homophobia level in these regions and lack of local language skills, some of LGBT+ refugees struggle to find a temporary job and some of them end up in sexual exploitation which makes them even more vulnerable

---

<sup>15</sup> E.g. <https://en.zona.media/article/2023/07/04/grozny-trl>; [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Нападение\\_на\\_Елену\\_Милашину\\_и\\_Александра\\_Немова#:~:text=Нападение%20на%20журналистку%20Елену%20Милашину.побрили%20голову%2C%20Немова%20ударили%20ножом.](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Нападение_на_Елену_Милашину_и_Александра_Немова#:~:text=Нападение%20на%20журналистку%20Елену%20Милашину.побрили%20голову%2C%20Немова%20ударили%20ножом.)

for violence and abuse. If they attempt to seek help from the local police they may be treated just as degrading as they were in the country of origin: with the degrading comments and denial in submitting their complaints.

During 2024, we've recorded more than two dozens of assaults/assault attempts in Armenia and Georgia which included stalking, following, doxxing, throwing stones, damaging doors of a staying place, and beating. The collected data is far from comprehensive, as it is accumulated based on media reports and isolated cases of Sphere Foundation's direct aid programme work. Those who suffered violent and other attacks often are often not prepared to share this information in detail and usually do not consent to disclose the details of their cases due to their vulnerable position both in the country of origin and in the new country of residence.

## **Russian LGBT+ refugees: in host countries**

### **Living conditions**

In the host countries, queer people are not safe either. For instance, one of our contacts, a trans woman who is held at the Ter Apel refugee camp **in the Netherlands**, allegedly survived an attempt to kill or maim her by her inmates, was searched and illegally deprived of her phone by the camp personnel, and was ignored by the said personnel despite her pleas for medical help. Our other contacts, a Lesbian couple, has spent more than 18 months there awaiting for the decision on their application. During the time they experienced harassment and abuse from both their inmates and the personnel, no psychological support was provided, including one time they were placed at the outskirts area of the camp where people were living on the ground without any kind of accommodation. Several days later, they were moved back and they were explained that "queer people don't go there", as it is a place for the non-white refugees fleeing war.

**In Spain**, despite this country is being regarded as a safe heaven by the queer community, queer migrants face months-long queues for the initial application registration and then some undisclosed period of checks/sorting, during which time they are left on their own. In the large cities to which the refugees usually arrive the local capacity and budgets for accommodation are inadequate, so even after receiving help, people starve or live in very poor and crowded conditions. Moreover, with the local refugee services overworked, it is becoming common for the social workers to find an excuse to withdraw the already provided accommodation, leaving people on the street without food and shelter. Of more than 10 cases that we are aware of, in which people were initially provided with state-funded or charity-funded shelter, this happened in all of them at least once.

### **Humanitarian visas for Russian LGBT+ people**

We are aware of cases where LGBT+ individuals holding Russian passports, who were legally residing in the EU with humanitarian visas, were denied the opening of a bank account.

During 2023-2025 **the waiting period for getting humanitarian visas in France, Germany** on average has been extended from 2 months to 6 and more for LGBT+ activists and human rights defenders.

## **8. What is the protection environment for Russian LGBT+ IDPs? Is access to protection and basic services adequate?**

The life threatening situation contributes to internal forced displacement of LGBT+ people from Northern Caucasus to other Russian regions. However, the survivors of the violence in Northern Caucasus don't receive legal protection in other regions as well as any social support from the authorities.

They can receive support and shelters only from NGOs but providing any help to them is connected with multiple threats for NGOs and their beneficiaries.

The level of state support to people seeking refugee status in the Russian Federation is not very high but it at least exists: they receive some money, very poor living conditions and they have the legal protection from the violence. The internally displaced LGBT+ people have nothing and have no legal protection.

The threats to LGBT+ people are not limited to the territory of Northern Caucasus. If LGBT+ people or women escape from their family or from a republic, they are searched for by the family and/or by the republican police in other regions and even abroad and are forcibly returned to the family. The authorities of other Russian regions often assist them in this, they search for LGBT+ people from the Northern Caucasus according to requests of republican authorities, illegally arrest them and transfer them to Northern Caucasus police officers or their families.

## 9. What are the obstacles LGBT+ individuals face during asylum procedure? What are specific measures can host countries, countries supportive of LGBT+ rights and international organizations implement to improve the protection of LGBT+ forcibly displaced persons, particularly in the areas of RSD, resettlement, and long-term integration?

### 9.1 Obstacles LGBT+ individuals face during asylum procedure

#### 1) Review of asylum requests by host state migration authorities

Based on reports received by the LGBTQ+ group "Coming Out" and Sphere Foundation from LGBT+ individuals who obtained decisions on their refugee status applications in 2024 from the migration authorities of Finland, Norway, Austria, and the United States, it is evident that the information about conditions in the country of origin (Russia) presented in these decisions is outdated.

Specifically, authorities often claim that in Russia, **only LGBT+ activists and LGBT+ rights defenders are at risk**, while those who are not involved in public activities are considered safe. A standard rejection statement includes the conclusion that the asylum seeker's level of activism was not significant enough to attract the attention of Russian authorities—even in cases where their online content had already been blocked.

**However, this statement is not accurate.**

In Russia, **LGBT+ individuals face persecution simply for belonging to the LGBT+ social group**. Out of 14 people prosecuted for "extremism" under Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization), only one was a political activist. The man who died in a detention center was not only **not a visible activist**, but he had also never posted political statements on social media.

A significant number of people prosecuted under administrative charges for "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" have been targeted solely for expressing their sexual orientation in private life. LGBT+ individuals in Russia are persecuted for who they are—not for their actions, nor even for actions attributed to them.

The Russian state has created **an extensive legal framework** under which any LGBT+ person can be imprisoned at any moment. Everything in their everyday and personal life can be interpreted as a violation of the law.

Although the number of administrative and criminal cases is disproportionate to the total number of LGBT+ individuals in Russia, every person who openly expresses their homosexuality or gender identity **is at risk**.

### **The role of denunciations in persecution**

The vast majority of administrative and criminal cases related to extremism and LGBT+ "propaganda" **result from denunciations** made by private individuals or homophobic organizations.

As a result, life for every LGBT+ person in Russia is a lottery—one in which they can lose at any moment.

- 2) Misunderstanding of Russian context: the idea that in Russia LGBT+ people may face homophobic behavior only from certain individuals, and that such isolated manifestations of homophobia can be encountered in any other country

This is outdated information. Homophobia and transphobia in Russia is a large part of state interim policy literally prescribed in official ideology. This state ideology is enshrined in laws and is constantly broadcast to society through state propaganda and the rhetoric of government officials. This is why the police do not protect LGBT+ people from crimes but instead support the perpetrators. LGBT+ people face violence and humiliation not only from ordinary citizens but also from law enforcement authorities and other officials. According to a sociological survey, 13 in August 2023, 62% of Russians supported legislative restrictions on the rights of LGBT+ people, while 11% of this number wanted to ban LGBT+ people from living in Russia.

- 3) Migration authorities claim that LGBT+ individuals can return to Russia and expect protection and assistance from the authorities are contrary to the actual situation

This information is outdated since the Supreme Court adopted the decision that International LGBT movement is an extremist organization. In 2024, a new trend emerged that further complicates access to legal protection from the Russian state. The ban on the "International LGBT Public Movement" has been perceived by the population as the criminalization of sexual orientation. Consequently, there has been an increase in cases where victims of violence **have faced counterclaims from their attackers**, alleging that the victims were engaged in extremist activities or "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" (Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offenses). These counterclaims are treated by courts and police much effectively than claims of LGBT+ persons about violence or discrimination (for example dismissals motivated by homophobia or transphobia, physical and sexual violence).<sup>16</sup>.

No protection of hate speeches exists as well as no anti-discrimination law.

Migration authorities acknowledge the existence of the Russian Supreme Court's decision recognizing the "International LGBT Public movement" as an extremist organization and its consequences for the work of LGBT+ organizations. However, the information used as the basis for decision-making does not take into account the actual application of this legislation, which primarily **results in the criminal prosecution of ordinary LGBT+ individuals**.

Additionally, this court ruling has led to **numerous police raids on LGBT+ events**, during which LGBT+ individuals have been subjected to **cruel treatment, humiliation, and beatings**. Their electronic devices are searched to identify other LGBT+ persons. Humiliating

---

<sup>16</sup> According to monitoring of LGBTQ+ rights violation by "Coming Out", requests for legal assistance to "Coming Out" and reports of the attorneys working "in the field".

footage of violence is uploaded to the Internet, leading to forced outings and, consequently, issues at work and in private life, as well as threats and blackmail.<sup>17</sup>

- 4) The immigration authorities also ignore existence of the Article 20.3 of the CAO RF which provides a punishment for demonstrating of “extremist symbols” of up to 15 days of detention

As of now, based on the data available to “Coming Out”, there have been at least 61 cases under Article 20.3 of the CAO RF specifically related to the display of symbols deemed to be LGBTQ+ symbols.

At the same time, repeated offenses of this kind result in criminal liability under Article 282.4 of the Russian Criminal Code, which provides for up to four years of imprisonment. This legal regulation and the associated risks remain a blind spot for migration authorities of many countries.

- 5) Additionally, when denying asylum to LGBTQ+ individuals from Russia, migration authorities often base their decisions on the claim that the official mobilization has ended and that there is no real risk of forced deployment to military operations

However, the migration authorities fail to take into account the **ongoing practice of forced military contract signing**, which is particularly prevalent among vulnerable LGBTQ+ individuals who are more susceptible to blackmail and violence, especially in certain regions and among conscripted soldiers.

Furthermore, they overlook the serious risks these individuals face from fellow servicemen or administration and detainees in penal institutions if they refuse to serve in Ukraine.

- 6) Risks of deportation to Russia and assessment of the situation with human rights in Russia by migration authorities. Use of outdated data on LGBTQ+ rights

Usually, **supportive documentation, including reports from Russian LGBTQ+ organisations, international human rights organizations are not used** or paying attention to assess the risks of LGBTQ+ individuals in Russia.

Despite having evidence of personal risks as well as general risks in the countries of origin, queer people **were ordered to be deported back** to Russia, where LGBTQ+ individuals have been selected by the government as a target for internal repression.

Not only that puts them in real imminent danger upon returning, but also the legal expenses required to appeal this decision are orders of magnitude more expensive than what a common queer migrant can afford. For example, for one of Sphere Foundation’ cases which took place **in Sweden**, the legal expenses for filing an appeal with a Swedish attorney cost 1200 euros for a queer couple who got there seeking asylum. In the end, one of them was deported to Kazakhstan where he was captured by his relatives and who now is forced to stay in a remote location with little to no ways to communicate with his partner.

---

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.24liveblog.com/live/UVydX?n=3518183141075559098>;  
<https://parniplus.com/news/v-lenoblasti-politsiya-nakryla-lgbt-den-rozhdeniya/>;  
<https://parniplus.com/news/chita-lgbt-extremism>; <https://parniplus.com/news/varoslavl-rejd>;  
[https://ovd.info/story/vecherinki-v-noske-i-qoryaschie-pasporta-gosudarstvennoe-davlenie-po-soobrazheniem-morali?news\\_id=65057&utm\\_source=tg\\_live&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=news&utm\\_term=02\\_12\\_24](https://ovd.info/story/vecherinki-v-noske-i-qoryaschie-pasporta-gosudarstvennoe-davlenie-po-soobrazheniem-morali?news_id=65057&utm_source=tg_live&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=news&utm_term=02_12_24);  
<https://www.24liveblog.com/live/UVydX?n=3520479816108450494>;  
<https://ovd.info/express-news/2024/05/18/policiya-zaderzhala-uchastnikov-dvukh-meropriyatiy-v-otkrytom-prostranstve>; <https://t.me/lentachold/77857>;  
[https://ovd.info/story/khronika-davleniya-na-lgbt?news\\_id=65041&utm\\_source=tg\\_live&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=news&utm\\_term=30\\_11\\_24](https://ovd.info/story/khronika-davleniya-na-lgbt?news_id=65041&utm_source=tg_live&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=news&utm_term=30_11_24); <https://t.me>

Moreover, according to Sphere Foundation data, **the Baltic states and Finland** refuse to grant asylum to Russian LGBT+ individuals, arguing that people can choose not to disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity in Russia.

According to the report of the German NGO “Quarteera” in 2024–2025, Quarteera e. V. identified **a systemic issue: German authorities** are denying asylum to queer refugees from Russia, **citing the absence of risks** of persecution in Russia.

The refusals of German authorities, as well as in the Baltic region and Finland, to grant asylum are linked to the decision-making bodies' **lack of reliable information about the actual situation of queer individuals in Russia** and the risks of their persecution.

In August 2024, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees denied asylum to **Andrey, a board member of Quarteera e. V.** When making its decision, the agency relied on internet publications **from 2016–2020** about varying attitudes toward queer individuals in Russia. Furthermore, the agency required Andrey to provide proof of his homosexual orientation. It rejected his claim of leading an openly gay lifestyle in Russia and did not take into account his active participation in the queer community in Germany since his arrival in 2022.

German authorities ignored the fact that, due to the designation of the "International LGBT Public movement" as an extremist organization in Russia, Andrey could face criminal prosecution under Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code, carrying a sentence of up to 10 years in prison—solely for leading an LGBT+ organization in Germany. In August 2024, nine months after participation in LGBT+ activism was criminalized in Russia, German authorities failed to recognize this risk of persecution as real. Meanwhile, as of August 2024, several criminal cases had been initiated in Russia for participating in the activities of the "International LGBT Public movement" (punishable by up to 6 years in prison) or for managing such an organization (punishable by up to 10 years in prison). The authorities failed to take into account the provisions of the Article 12 of the Criminal Code of Russia according to which the Russian citizens are subject to criminal liability for actions committed abroad if these actions violate the provisions of the Russian Criminal Code and if the citizens have not been convicted for these actions by a foreign court.

A similar assessment was applied by German authorities in the **case of Grigory Gustov**. In November 2022, he fled Russia, fearing persecution by the state for his homosexual orientation. In Russia, unknown individuals and his former partner systematically sent him threats of physical violence due to his sexual orientation. In 2021, Grigory contacted the Russian police, but law enforcement officers did not investigate his reports. Instead, they suggested that he resolve the conflict on his own or call an electrician—when unknown individuals had cut the power cable supplying electricity to his apartment. In January 2023, he applied for asylum in Germany. By that time, he was already an active participant in Quarteera e. V. Russian authorities consider such peaceful activism extremist, and in Russia, Grigory faces criminal prosecution for participating in Quarteera e. V., with a sentence of up to 6 years in prison (under Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code). In November 2024, German authorities denied his asylum application, citing the absence of grounds for his persecution in Russia as a queer individual. The German authorities failed to take into account changes in legislation and law enforcement practices that have criminalized participation in the "International LGBT Public Movement."

The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees assumes that, although isolated cases of persecution of LGBT+ individuals occur in Russia, there is no evidence of a state-led persecution program targeting every homosexual individual, and the number of attacks is not high enough for every LGBT+ person to have reasonable grounds to fear becoming a victim of violence.

In all cases of asylum denial, German authorities rely on an outdated assessment of the situation of queer individuals in Russia. This assessment is made despite the fact that German authorities have access to modern sources of information.

**In some cases, only the 2013 law banning "LGBT propaganda" is considered** (while a new law banning "LGBT propaganda," which prohibits any dissemination of information on LGBT+ topics, has been in effect in Russia since December 2022).

In other decisions, German authorities fail to consider that, on November 30, 2023, the Russian Supreme Court declared any participation in the "International LGBT Public Movement" a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment.

In practice, the decision to grant refugee status often depends on the particular federal state in which a queer individual from Russia applies for asylum and the subjective assessment of the case officer handling the request. In Germany, in identical situations, some queer individuals receive refugee status, while others do not.

- 7) Living conditions in the camps, provision of medicamentation needed, provision of psychological support, legal assistance

The living conditions for individuals seeking refugee status in host countries vary significantly. Even in countries where one might expect favorable treatment of LGBT+ individuals—such as the Netherlands, Norway, Finland or Germany—they are often housed in refugee camps, where they encounter homophobia and transphobia from staff members, denial of medical care, and placement in shared rooms with refugees from traditionally homophobic countries who hold the same prejudices as their compatriots.

In our experience, the forcibly displaced LGBT+ individuals are in high need of psychological support during their waiting time for decision on their asylum case in the host country (usually in the camps).

Trans persons who are receiving GAT require access to their medicine as fast as possible. Thus in order to comply with the local laws of the destination country they may need immediate access to the medical specialists.

- 8) Prolonged asylum procedure, delays in interviews

According to the Sphere Foundation data, for instance, **in the Netherlands the waiting period for decision** on the asylum case could take 2.5 years and more. Moreover, in one of the cases of 2 lesbian women from Russia, 2.5 years passed already, but the second **interview has not been scheduled yet**, which constitutes the violation of the right to fair trial.

**Finnish community** of LGBT+ asylum seekers and refugees from Russia, *Queer Asylum: FI* describes the situation as follows: **The Finnish migration authorities** take longer than the standard six months to review asylum applications from Russian LGBT+ individuals, often exceeding even the 21-month period, which can be extended only under exceptional circumstances. This delay specifically affects LGBT+ applicants with Russian citizenship and does not apply to asylum seekers from other countries.

- 9) Right to study, right to work

In Finland the temporary identity document issued to asylum seekers does not fully grant the right to study or work in Finland, nor does it allow them to open a bank account. This is particularly critical for applicants from Russia, as their Russian bank cards are blocked due to sanctions, just like those of all other Russian citizens. The primary sources of hate speech in the country are all television channels, as well as numerous homophobic groups on social

media that incite violence based on homophobia and transphobia. Members of these groups also engage in forced outing and blackmail of LGBT+ individuals.

Additionally, the mandatory adaptation language courses for unemployed asylum seekers have proven to be largely ineffective.

In the majority of the EU countries asylum seekers face difficulties to integrate into society. They should wait some time (at least 6 months) to get permission to work, but then they face difficulties to find a job as there is a language barrier and stigma around the legal status of being an asylum seeker.

## **9.2 Measures that should be taken**

1. Host countries should recognize Russia as an unsafe country for all queer individuals at the national level. Obtaining accurate up to date information on human rights developments in Russia, in particular, with LGBT+ rights

According to “Quarteera”, the solution to the use of outdated data on LGBT+ rights by migration authorities is the recognition of Russia at the federal level in Germany as an unsafe country for all queer individuals. Russian LGBT+ organizations share this assessment of the situation in Russia. Such recognition should proceed in each country.

It's crucial for all the cases of asylum appeals review for national authorities and the UNHCR office to obtain more accurate information about the fast deteriorating situation in Russia.

- **Migration authorities must rely on updated, verified reports from** local LGBT+ organizations, international human rights groups, and independent monitoring bodies when assessing the risks faced by LGBT+ individuals in their home countries.

Outdated information of country of origin should not be used as a basis for denial, particularly when states like Russia have intensified criminalization and state-sponsored homophobia.

For instance, the LGBTQ+ initiative group “Comingout” drafts a detailed report every two months on the evolving and current practices of LGBT+ persecution and provides it upon request to civil society organizations, asylum seekers, and their lawyers.

The organization is willing to provide this information upon request to **any migration authorities** and to **proactively submit** it to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), provided that communication between the UNHCR and national authorities is structured in a way that ensures these authorities will actually receive and be able to use this information in their decision-making processes.

- **A special country of origin review unit should be established in asylum authorities** to track emerging trends in persecution, including changes in legal frameworks, police practices, and informal persecution such as forced outings and blackmail.

2. Host countries should recognize that people of North Caucasian origin, including LGBT+ individuals, belong to a high-risk group

- Given the specific risks faced by individuals from the **North Caucasus** regions of Russia (see Section 11), host countries should recognize that people of North Caucasian origin, including LGBT+ individuals, belong to a high-risk group.

When reviewing asylum applications, it is crucial to understand that the life-threatening situation for these individuals persists in every region of Russia.

Moreover, their families may actively seek to locate them for forced repatriation or honor killings, even outside of Russia. Such searches are particularly effective in the South Caucasus countries (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan), in Muslim-majority countries, and in areas with strong North Caucasian diasporas.

- **Additionally**, host countries must ensure legal protection not only for asylum seekers but also **for individuals of North Caucasian origin already residing in the country**, even if they hold citizenship or a residence permit. It is essential to conduct thorough investigations into reports of domestic violence from women and adolescents, educate them about existing risks, and monitor the intentions of North Caucasian individuals entering the country if they are not permanent residents.

When individuals—especially women and girls—of North Caucasian origin who have been granted international protection, hold residency permits, or have already obtained citizenship, plan to leave the host country, border officers should ask questions about the voluntariness and purpose of their departure. These questions should be asked in a setting where the individual can respond freely, separate from accompanying persons.

- It is also necessary to inform those leaving that if they travel abroad, the host country will no longer be able to provide them with legal protection.
- When providing social support to LGBT+ individuals who have obtained refugee status or are seeking asylum and originate from the North Caucasus regions of Russia, it is essential to consider that, due to prolonged life-threatening situations, likely torture, constant threats, and, in most cases, ongoing physical and psychological abuse, **they often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** and require professional medical assistance. Because of PTSD and social maladaptation resulting from the specific social norms in the North Caucasian republics, their integration into society is particularly challenging. Additionally, they may remain vulnerable to threats from North Caucasian diasporas.

### 3. Living conditions

- Host countries, ideally at the level of the EU, should **create safe housing programs for LGBT+ asylum seekers**, separate from general asylum camps, where they frequently experience homophobia and transphobia from both staff and other asylum seekers.
- **Develop LGBT+ refugee shelters** in host countries, supported by state funding and partnerships with LGBT+ organizations.
- Provide immediate safe relocation for LGBT+ individuals facing violence or threats in asylum centers.

### 4. Medical access, particularly for transgender asylum seekers

- **Fast-track access to hormone replacement therapy (HRT)** and gender-affirming care for transgender asylum seekers should be granted at host countries.
- Host countries should ensure asylum-seekers have **access to specialized doctors** familiar with trans healthcare needs.
- Host countries together with local LGBT+ organisations should establish clear legal pathways for the import of **personal medical supplies**, as restrictions often prevent trans asylum seekers from accessing essential medication.

## 5. Legal and psychological support

- Host countries should provide **state-funded legal aid programs** and partner with LGBT+ rights organizations to provide LGBT+ asylum seekers with free legal assistance to navigate complex asylum procedures.
- **Mental health support should be mandatory and accessible**, particularly for asylum seekers who have experienced forced outings, police brutality, or sexual violence.

## 6. Long-term integration: education, employment and social inclusion

- Host countries must **remove restrictions preventing asylum seekers from working or studying** while their application is pending.
- Special **scholarships and vocational training programs** should be established for LGBT+ asylum seekers who may have had disrupted education due to persecution.

## 7. Deportation

- Automatic **suspension of deportation orders** for LGBT+ individuals to countries where they face criminalization, forced psychiatric treatment, or extrajudicial violence must be assured.
- **An opportunity to leave freely the host country to the third safe country must be guaranteed** and supported by the host country in case of deportation decision.
- International organizations (Council of Europe, UN) together with local NGOs must monitor cases of LGBT+ deportees to ensure their safety and provide mechanisms for reintegration in a safe third country if deportation occurs.

## 8. Address processing of asylum claims

- Compliance with EU timelines and legal guarantees must be enforced to prevent further delays.
- EU asylum authorities should **hire more caseworkers and create specialized LGBT+ asylum units** to ensure competent and efficient processing of claims.
- Increase funding to reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies and ensure that applications do not remain pending due to lack of personnel.
- If an asylum case takes longer than one year, the applicant should be automatically granted **a temporary residence permit**, ensuring access to healthcare, social benefits, and employment. This would prevent asylum seekers from being stuck in legal uncertainty.
- LGBT+ asylum seekers, particularly trans persons in need of gender-affirming care, **should be prioritized under EU asylum procedures.**

## 10. Gender-responsive and sensitive to SOGI-specific needs approach: recommendations

At all stages of processing asylum applications, including temporary placement in detention centers for asylum seekers, it is crucial to recognize that LGBT+ individuals may face violence, discrimination, and hate speech not only from the authorities of their home country but also from other asylum seekers. Many come from countries where homophobia and transphobia are socially accepted norms.

Upon arrival in a host country, LGBT+ individuals are especially vulnerable to the same forms of persecution that forced them to flee. Authorities must properly train staff responsible for the temporary accommodation of LGBT+ asylum seekers to ensure both their physical and psychological safety, and respond to complaints of homophobia and transphobia quickly and effectively.

It is also essential to implement effective programs to combat employee burnout in temporary accommodation centers for asylum seekers. Staff burnout significantly contributes to LGBT+ displaced persons facing homophobia, transphobia, and the dismissal of their complaints about such incidents.

LGBT+ asylum seekers from Russia have reported numerous instances of homophobia and transphobia, not only from fellow asylum seekers but also from government and social service employees in countries such as the Netherlands and Germany.

LGBT+ individuals from Russia also face negative treatment or deportation immediately after requesting asylum, in violation of international law and national regulations, solely based on their nationality.

## **11. How do State asylum systems and related services in host countries address the challenges faced by LGBT+ asylum seekers and refugees, particularly in the contexts of criminalization or broader discrimination?**

In 2022-2024 NC SOS together with Crisis group Marem<sup>18</sup> have worked on cases involving 20 homosexual and heterosexual women who were forcibly relocated from their countries of residence (primarily Austria and Germany, as well as France, Sweden, Norway, Poland, and Australia) to Chechnya, where they were held against their will. These women were forcibly deprived of their identity documents and means of communication, coerced into marriage or already forcibly married, and some—including minors—were subjected to sexual violence by their relatives.

5 of these women were citizens of EU countries, and three were born in the EU.

**The most common scheme of abduction is as follows:** A young woman grows up in an EU country within a Chechen family that strictly adheres to Chechen traditions and experiences domestic violence. As a teenager, she seeks help from social services. Appealing to Chechen concepts of family honor and the importance of family ties, her relatives persuade her to retract her statements about the abuse. Following this, social services return her to her family, after which she is forcibly taken to Chechnya—either as a child or, if she has reached adulthood, under the pretext of a family member's illness. Once in Chechnya, her documents and means of communication are confiscated, and she is forced to live according to Chechen ethnic and religious customs.

---

<sup>18</sup> Marem is a project created by women from the North Caucasus to support women from the North Caucasus who have suffered from violence. The project provides legal and psychological assistance, and when necessary, helps women evacuate to a safe location.

## 12. Are LGBT+ individuals who are forcibly displaced able to access formal or informal support systems?

### *12.1 Do they have access to legal assistance to help navigate and articulate their asylum claims?*

In most of the cases that we know of, **the access to formal support systems is limited**. Whereas the basic bureaucratic processes that involve administering support (registration, housing, allowance) are brought forward, more dedicated needs like medical help, immediate help with dire situations like homelessness, and overall requesting to help with the particular obstacles are rarely met with sustainable answers. That is most evident in Spain, where people rely on other **(informal support from the community)**, more experienced refugees for guidance in abundance of clear ways to receive timely aid.

**As for legal aid**, it often does not go beyond explaining basic requests that the applicant should fulfill. All the detail that is required to do this is left out, and then the refugees are unfit or unable to research it on their own, they can come to a dead end that might result in homelessness, disease, starvation and being vulnerable against abuse. According to the emergency program of Sphere Foundation, we face requests from **France**, where trans youth might not receive the needed level of representation for their needs. For example, one of our applicants, a legally independent 17 years old trans woman, was denied independence and put in a special closed facility together with some orphan youth who might have posed danger to her. It is only with great pressure from French queer organisations that she was given separate housing and accommodation until she's 18, and she is yet to receive financial independence from her state-mandated caretaker, which has already resulted in her starving and putting herself in debt. **In the Netherlands**, in the refugee camps the legal assistance is rather enforced than offered, and the processes which the queer refugees undergo seem to be systematic violations of their basic rights. People inside these camps have little to no advocacy accessible to them, and they can only rely on cries for help in the media and independent investigations to improve their situation.

### *12.2 What barriers exist for family reunification in host countries? Are there documented instances where the evidentiary requirements for family reunification have been excessively high?*

A lot of the time people "outside" the EU, especially when they have different citizenship, are left out of the question of attaining legal **marriage recognized by the host country**. To be considered married they either need to travel or to pay, and when neither is possible they are likely unable to connect and migrate together.

Another significant issue is **parental rights for transgender individuals in Russia**. In some cases, children of transgender parents leave the country accompanied by guardians appointed by child welfare authorities, as travel with their biological parents is not permitted. In certain instances, upon the child's departure, Russian authorities revoke the previously granted guardianship.

**In host countries**, transgender parents encounter major bureaucratic obstacles in obtaining legal documentation for their children. Such cases have been documented in France, which is considered a favorable destination for transgender individuals from Russia in all other aspects.

It is also crucial to standardize and make accessible information on the **possibility of mixed Russian-Ukrainian LGBT+ couples** obtaining international or temporary international protection. This is especially important given that same-sex marriages are not recognized in either Russia or Ukraine, and many couples are physically separated due to the war, preventing them from entering a host country together.

"Comingout" receives dozens of inquiries annually from such couples, some of which are further complicated by the need to establish guardianship arrangements for children in case of the death or arrest of one partner.

**Moreover, there are cases when a host country denies LGBT+ asylum seekers the right to apply in one joint submission.** For instance, a queer couple of [a prominent Russian journalist Alex Bachinskiy and his husband Andrey Sarom, Belarusian citizen](#), was denied joint submission of their application for asylum despite the ECtHR decision on the similar matter. The marriage was constructed in Denmark in 2014. As Bulgaria does not recognise same-sex marriage the pair's application [was processed](#) as two separate ones, resulting in asylum granted to Bachinskiy and denied to his husband. Mariana Katzarova, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation, testified as a witness during the court procedures.

### ***12.3 Are local LGBT+ rights organizations or CSOs in your country equipped and prepared to provide support in formulating SOGI-based asylum claims?***

To some degree, Russian LGBT+ organisations could support and consulate on asylum cases for LGBT+ persons from Russia, however, the number of such NGOs is limited.

### **13. What are the barriers to fair and efficient RSD procedures for LGBT+ individuals considering both State-conducted and UNHCR-conducted processes? Are certain subsets of the LGBT+ community more likely to receive protection than others?**

Please see the Sections 7 and 9 of the report.

### **14. What has been your experience with resettlement and complementary pathways for protection (e.g., humanitarian visas, community sponsorship, etc.)? In your view, should UNHCR focus on expanding resettlement and complementary pathways, or should greater efforts be made to strengthen, expand and expedite the existing international protection regime (such as RSD and legal stay, but also freedom of movement, and enjoyment of socio-economic rights) in the host countries?**

Only a few European countries offer humanitarian visa programs for asylum seekers from Russia, including LGBT+ individuals.

There are Russian-led initiatives and NGOs in host countries like France and Germany that assist with obtaining humanitarian visas. However, these opportunities primarily apply to individuals actively engaged in human rights work and activism, making humanitarian visas largely inaccessible to most LGBT+ people from Russia.

Additionally, obtaining tourist visas or transiting through countries that grant asylum based on sexual orientation and gender identity is often impossible due to visa restrictions and entry bans for Russian citizens, even those holding valid Schengen visas.

A potential solution could be granting LGBT+ individuals from Russia, who have fled to countries with easier entry requirements but that remain unsafe for them (such as Kazakhstan, Georgia and Armenia), access to international protection procedures through UNHCR offices located in these countries.

## 15. Recognizing that protection of forcibly displaced LGBT+ persons requires multi-stakeholder and multi-agency coordination and collaboration, what are the steps that can be taken to foster and augment such collaboration in your region?

Close and sustainable partnerships should be established between Russian local LGBT+ NGOs, LGBT+ NGOs in the host states working with LGBT+ rights and Ministries of foreign affairs of the host countries to assist LGBT+ people with humanitarian visas and lobby (if needed) specific emergency refugee cases (at some point Russian NGOs have these partnerships, but the mutual work should be done to deepen it and make it sustainable).

Moreover, as was recommended in the Section 9 of the Report, there should be established development of LGBT+ refugee shelters in host countries, supported by state funding and partnerships with LGBT+ organizations. Host countries together with local LGBT+ organisations should establish clear legal pathways for the import of personal medical supplies for transgender asylum seekers, HIV positive asylum seekers and those, who have specific diagnosis, to fast and effective prescription of necessary medications and confirmation of the diagnosis in the host country even in case of transmission of an asylum seeker to a third country.

Host countries should provide state-funded legal aid programs and partner with LGBT+ rights organizations to provide LGBT+ asylum seekers with free legal assistance to navigate complex asylum procedures.

International organizations (Council of Europe, UN) together with local NGOs must monitor cases of LGBT+ deportees to ensure their safety and provide mechanisms for reintegration in a safe third country if deportation occurs.

## 16. Good practices, policies or interventions

Majority of existing Russian LGBT+ organisations (within Russia and those in exile) provide psychological, emergency, and legal assistance, as well as monitoring discrimination and engaging in national and international advocacy. Many of them, such as Sphere Foundation, Center T, Coming out, NC SOS Crisis Group, Quarteera e.V., EQUAL PostOst e. V., (the list is not closed) provide support with humanitarian visas and asylum cases.

Among the positive practices, **France** stands out for recognizing transgender identity as sufficient grounds to deem Russia unsafe for transgender individuals.

Additionally, there have been significant improvements in **Israel's legal practice**. Between 2022 and 2025, repatriation to Israel became a vital means of rescue for many LGBT+ couples from Russia with Jewish ancestry. One major challenge in the repatriation process is proving pre-existing marital relationships, as this determines the status of a non-Jewish spouse.

Since same-sex marriage is not legally recognized in Russia, and **marriage abroad** is inaccessible to most due to visa and financial barriers, online marriage in **Utah, USA**, has become the only widely available option. Thanks to Israeli LGBT+ organizations and lawyers, who initiated strategic litigation on cases involving displaced same-sex couples from Russia and mixed Russian-Ukrainian couples, Israel has evolved from fully rejecting Utah marriages to recognizing them for citizenship purposes, regardless of the spouses' nationality or physical location at the time of marriage. It was a significant and remarkably dynamic journey.

Moreover, in light of good practices and the importance of granting greater **agency** to displaced LGBT+ individuals in determining their own fate, it is necessary to highlight the

positive approach adopted in **Finland**. The community of LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugees from Russia, *Queer Asylum: FI*, conducted a study on living conditions, violations of national law during asylum case reviews, and the reasons for asylum refusals, and subsequently published their findings. Following this, they sent a letter to the Finnish Minister of Social Protection, outlining specific problems, instances of legal violations, and concrete proposals for improving the situation.

An even better practice would be if Finnish authorities actively listened to forcibly displaced LGBTQ+ individuals who are striving to share responsibility for their fate with the authorities of the host country.

For any additional information on the legal status of LGBTQ+ individuals in Russia and statistical data please contact:

**Ksenia Mikhailova**

Monitoring and advocacy officer

**"ComingOut" LGBTQ+ group**

[lawyer@comingoutspb.org](mailto:lawyer@comingoutspb.org)

For any additional information on the the legal and social status of LGBTQ+ individuals and women of North Caucasian origin please contact:

**NC SOS**

[ksenia@sksos.work](mailto:ksenia@sksos.work)

For any additional information on human rights of LGBTQ+ individuals in Russia, statistics data please contact:

**Irina** (surname is hidden due to safety issues)

Head of Advocacy Program

**Sphere Foundation**

[advocacy@spherequeer.org](mailto:advocacy@spherequeer.org)

*When using information from this input, attribution is highly recommended.*