

Russian Federation

Human rights of LGBT+ and women: 2025 trends

Submission prepared by Sphere Foundation for UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation



INTRODUCTION

This report is prepared by Sphere Foundation for UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation in the light of preparation annual report.

Sphere Foundation (spherequeer.org) is a human rights organization that has been supporting LGBT+ individuals and organizations in Russia since 2011. Beginning in late 2024, in addition to our existing work, we also provide psychological support to cisgender heterosexual women. Sphere's core mission is to counter the anti-gender movement in Russia and to advocate for systemic change in the country so that no one faces violence or discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Sphere possesses expertise in developing and coordinating programs for psychological, emergency, and legal assistance, as well as monitoring of discrimination and engaging in national and international advocacy. It actively assists and supports LGBT+ 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.

2025 Trends

1. Intensification and spread of anti-gender movement(s) in Russia and beyond

In 2025 Sphere Foundation has launched **2 key research projects**:

1. *"Historical development of the anti-gender movement in Russia (1991–2025): framing the problem"* (Историческое развитие антигендерного движения в России (1991–2025): формулирование проблемы), a historical study of the evolution of anti-gender ideologies in post-Soviet Russia, and
2. *"Anti-gender movements in Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, and Kazakhstan: feminist and queer resistance to anti-gender narratives"* (Антигендерные движения в Беларуси, Молдове, Грузии и Казахстане: феминистское и квир-сопротивление в ответ на антигендерные нарративы), a comparative analysis of regional dynamics and resistance strategies, and checking out hypothesis whether Russian is considered as a trendsetter and anti-gender ideology importer to the listed countries.

By 15 February 2026, we have got the results that could be shared privately with you, as the researchers have not been completely finished and publicated (we aim to publish it in Spring 2026), however, **if needed** – we could share with you the link to the texts in Russian.

Key conclusions on the research "Historical development of the anti-gender movement in Russia (1991–2025): framing the problem":

- In today's Russia, anti-gender discourse works as a single, consistent system of ideas rather than separate attitudes toward different groups.
- **Both queer people and women are treated within the same framework** that promotes the traditional family, fixed gender roles, and state involvement in private and family life.
- The approaches differ, but the goal is similar: to shape how people live, identify, and form families in ways that fit state-approved norms.
- LGBT+ people are often portrayed as a social or moral threat, while women are more often presented as a demographic or family resource important for the nation's future.
- As a result, queer communities tend to be pushed outside acceptable social norms, while women are included in society mainly through expected roles such as motherhood and caregiving.
- People who do not fit these expectations—such as feminists or those who choose not to have children—can also face criticism or stigma.
- Laws and public statements reflect these patterns: policies toward LGBT+ people often focus on restrictions, while policies toward women combine encouragement and pressure to follow traditional roles.
- Overall, both approaches limit individual freedom in matters of gender roles, family life, and sexuality.

Thus, anti-gender discourse functions as part of a broader political and social project aimed at preserving traditional gender norms and limiting gender and sexual diversity in Russia.

Key conclusions on the research “Anti-gender movements in Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, and Kazakhstan: feminist and queer resistance to anti-gender narratives” (relevant to discussion on Russia):

- A comparative study of Belarus, Georgia, and Kazakhstan shows that anti-gender politics has become an important part of state policy, public rhetoric, and methods of controlling civil society in all three countries.
- Despite differences in political systems, anti-gender narratives are used in each country to mobilize society symbolically, justify more authoritarian practices, and restrict the rights of women and LGBT+ people.
- Across 2020–2025, all three countries show a conservative shift and a shrinking space for rights and freedoms.
- Anti-gender policies commonly rely on narratives about protecting children, defending traditional family values, protecting national sovereignty, and resisting so-called “Western ideology.”
- **Russia serves as an important source of anti-gender narratives and legal models**, but each country adapts these influences according to its own political interests rather than simply copying Russian policies.
- Understanding these developments is essential for designing effective strategies to support women’s and LGBT+ rights in the region.

Thus, anti-gender movements across the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) region have increasingly become part of broader political strategies aimed at reinforcing conservative social norms and strengthening state control over individuals. These movements commonly frame gender equality and LGBT+ rights as external or destabilizing influences, using narratives about traditional values, national sovereignty, and the protection of children and families.

Russia plays an important role in this regional dynamic by providing influential narratives, policy models, and discursive frameworks that are adapted in different national contexts. However, anti-gender mobilization in EECA countries is not simply imposed from Russia; it develops through a combination of Russian influence and local political interests, institutional structures, and social conditions. As a result, anti-gender movements in the region reflect both transnational ideological circulation and country-specific political agendas.

2. Tightening of women’s rights in Russia

Microtrends:

- **Academic freedoms. Erosion of gender studies in Russia**

Starting from 2022 till November 2025, there were several administrative cases before the court against **Ivanovo Center for Gender Studies**, which was added to the foreign agents registry in September 2021. The center had not conducted any financial activity since 2022; however, in July 2025 several administrative cases were initiated against the organization under Article 19.34

of the Administrative Code (“Violation of procedures regulating the activities of a foreign agent”) due to the center’s failure to submit certain reporting forms. 7 November 2025, historian and gender studies scholar and director of the center Olga Shnyrova has passed away¹.

In 2023, pressure began to mount on [the European University at St. Petersburg](#): its Faculty of Sociology underwent two extensive prosecutor’s inspections, which included the seizure of documents and the review of master’s theses. Following the inspections, the university was instructed to remove all information related to gender studies from its official websites and was prohibited from promoting events on social media. By the end of 2023, the Faculty of Sociology at the European University had been dissolved. Many faculty members and the dean resigned and emigrated, and all research centers affiliated with the faculty, including the Center for Gender Studies, were closed².

[In detail, on erosion of gender studies in Russia – see here³.](#)

- [Shrinking space for women’s NGOs and initiatives](#)

Majority of grassroots women initiatives/organization continue to live [undercover](#) (started from 2022).

Those NGOs who are visible, for instance, [“Nasiliu.net,”](#) a support center for victims of domestic violence, has announced its [closure](#) due to the “foreign agents” law in October 2025.

In December 2025, the Russian Ministry of Justice added [Pussy Riot](#) to its list of extremist organizations⁴.

- [De facto ban on abortion](#)

The trend on limiting access to abortion for women started in 2024, continued in 2025⁵. The current trajectory of abortion policy in Russia represents a systematic erosion of women's reproductive rights under the guise of demographic and moral policy. While abortion remains technically legal, a combination of restrictive legislation, administrative pressure on private clinics, religious influence, and regional interventions is creating a de facto shrinking of access to abortion, particularly for vulnerable and low-income women. Women’s right to health, the right to privacy, the right to bodily integrity, and the right to be free from degrading treatment are all limited disproportionately.

[3. Shrinking space for LGBT+ rights work](#)

Micro trends:

- [Decreasing access to information in and about Russia](#)

¹ <https://www.forbes.ru/forbes-woman/549433-umerla-gendernaa-issledovatel-nica-ol-ga-snyrova>

² <https://glasnaya.media/2026/01/31/nikakih-zhenshhin/>

³ <https://glasnaya.media/2026/01/31/nikakih-zhenshhin/>

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/russian-anti-kremlin-punk-band-pussy-riot-designated-an-extremist-organisation-2025-12-15/>

⁵ <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2025/04/24/i-lost-control-of-my-life>

Cleansing of the media space from undesirable information reached its peak in 2025. Unprecedented for modern Russia, the level of both direct censorship and state-induced self-censorship leads to the situation when it is harder to find mentions of queer people in the media outlets working from within Russian borders.

- Crisis of resources for human rights work affects the programmes of direct aid to vulnerable groups, which further increases the pressure on the remaining ones.

Both these trends are mirrored in a drastic decrease in the number of cases of discrimination documented by Sphere in 2025, which is combined mainly of the data aggregated from the open resources and the emergency support programme: 293 cases documented in 2025 (contra 432 cases documented in 2024).

4. Persecution according to anti-LGBT laws

Microtrends:

- Despite the wide choice of repressive instruments, the so-called “LGBT-propaganda” remains the top reason for persecution according to our database.

We documented at least 64 incidents related to the use or a threat to use the “propaganda” articles. It can be explained with the deteriorating economic situation in the country, as the least possible fine for the “propaganda”-related offences constitutes 50 000 RUB (approx. 545 EUR) which is higher than the monthly salary for many of the queer people remaining in the country.

The main difference from the prior year is the shrinking of the share for persecuted legal persons (mainly streaming platforms and book publishers): less than 25% of the documented protocols and court decisions consider them (contra to half of the prior year’s cases). This may show the market’s adaptation to the changed legal landscape, mainly by harshening the internal censorship.

Kinopoisk-related cases summary:

Since July 2023, Kinopoisk.ru, the oldest and the most popular Russian platform-analog of IMDb and a streaming service, has been fined at least 12 times under the “propaganda” articles. The fines were no less than 1 million RUB. For streaming Gaspar Noe’s “Love” it was fined with 7 millions RUB for “propaganda of pedophilia” and for 3 millions RUB for “LGBT-propaganda”. Therefore, in May 2025 the Yandex-owned streaming started to “lose in translation” the content related to queer identities and relationships. In August 2025 Kinopoisk removed the pages for queer themed films entirely from their streaming platform.

Cases against bookstores and publishers:

An administrative offense report (“protocol”) for “LGBT+ propaganda” was drawn up against the bookstore *Podpisnye Izdaniya* on 30 April 2025 in connection with feminist books by Olivia Laing and Susan Sontag⁶; on 21 May the store was fined RUB 800,000 under a “propaganda of LGBT”

⁶ <https://zona.media/news/2025/04/30/podpisnye>

charge⁷. Also in May, searches were conducted at the *Kata Mira* bookstore in Novosibirsk with the stated aim of finding “extremist” literature⁸. On 22 August 2025, an administrative offense report for “LGBT propaganda” was drawn up⁹ against the publisher *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* (*New Literary Observer*) over Per Faxneld’s book “*Infernal Feminism*”. On 8 September 2025, a similar report was drawn up against the publisher *Ad Marginem*, reportedly due to Olivia Laing’s feminist book “*Everybody: A Book About Freedom*”¹⁰.

- The legal praxis on the “demonstration of the extremist symbols” for LGBT-related offences remain hard to grasp.

The article 20.3 of the Code for Administrative Offences covers all the symbols deemed as “extremist” from Nazis’ swastika till the Pride flag. Thus, it is near impossible to monitor the entire scope of its use against just the “rainbow” symbols. The documented cases confirm the prior year’s tendency for the courts’ to rule for the lowest possible fines (1000 RUB). However, there are at least two cases of arrest being ruled as a punishment: the case of the prominent dissident artist [Alisa Gorshenina](#) in Ekaterinburg and the case of a non-binary person A (anonymised, the name is known to Sphere).

A’s case description summary:

A was violently attacked by a prominent homophobe in the city park. The attack was filmed and the video went viral. After the incident was reported to the police and A was interrogated by a responsible police officer, they were invited to the “Centre for combating extremism”, known as “Center E”. Two months later, A was charged under both the article on “LGBT-propaganda” and the article on “demonstration of the extremist symbols”. The latter charge led to a court’s decision on 5 days administrative arrest for publishing a picture of the Pride flag in Telegram, conveniently discovered by the “Centre E”’s officer at their office. The punishment for the “propaganda” offence remains unknown as the local court has not published the decision despite the legal obligation for transparency, but the minimal punishment under the Part 3 of the article 6.21 is a fine for 100 000 RUB.

- Continuation of the persecution under the “LGBT+ extremism”

Criminal cases: by February 2026 there are minimum 27 individuals involved in criminal LGBT+ extremist cases opened before the Court.

One documented case at the intersection of gender and sexuality concerns activist and sex educator Sasha Kazantseva¹¹, reportedly sentenced to 9 years’ imprisonment under extremism provisions and Article 330.1 CC RF (“foreign agent” non-compliance)¹². Her prosecution demonstrates the use of extremism legislation in conjunction with “foreign agent” law against LGBT+ activists.

⁷ <https://t.me/mediazzzona/21565>

⁸ <https://rtsaeyosvmqzjmxw.7vnlllyl7h7og.xyz/news/2025/05/14/v-novosibirske-prishli-s-obyskom-v-nezavisimyy-knizhnyy-magazin-karta-mira>

⁹ <https://t.me/mediazonalinks/46564>

¹⁰ <https://t.me/meduzalive/131808>

¹¹ https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2597766/russian-far-right-grup-visited-lgbtq-activist-s-home-in-vilnius-media?srsId=AfmBOor1ZbQZ1Ytz62RcrhU1sii6_12yRvUWxyUYZnvZNF5hgipckNe8

¹² <https://t.me/meduzalive/135859>

Eksmo case, publisher:

On 15 May 2025 Three employees of *Eksmo*, *Popcorn Books*, and *Individuum* have been accused of involvement in an “extremist” organization. The press service of the Investigative Committee stated¹³ that from November 2023 to September 2024 three employees of the publisher *Individuum*, “for pecuniary gain,” published and sold books “promoting the activities of the LGBT movement,” which has been designated an extremist organization. The agency claims that the defendants sold more than a thousand copies of “prohibited” books to an unlimited circle of persons¹⁴. From private sources we know that state authorities possess lists of individuals (email addresses and names) who ordered certain queer and feminist literature online. Accordingly, we may expect that such individuals could be targeted in the near future, simply because it is possible to do so.

Administrative cases: According to Sphere Foundation monitoring database, between January 2024 and April 2025, there are 46 administrative cases on LGBT+ extremism.

- **Recent developments and specific target of LGBT+ NGOs: shrinking space**

1. On 2 February 2026, the Saint Petersburg City Court registered administrative lawsuits filed by the regional Ministry of Justice seeking to recognize and ban the activities of the interregional public movement “Russian LGBT Network” and the LGBT initiative group “Comingout,” both already designated as foreign agents. According to private information, we know that minimum 1 case more against other LGBT+ NGO in Russia takes place, but it has not being announced publicly.

Thus, the trend is clear: shrinking space for LGBT+ NGOs and specifically targeting of LGBT+ NGOs. If previously there was no clear logic who are targeted under LGBT+ extremism (individuals, activists, owners of queer businesses, book publishing, there were cis hetero people as well), now we could see clearly that in the end of 2025-2026 queer NGOs and activists are in focus.

2. On 1 January 2026, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation added **ILGA World**¹⁵ to the list of foreign and international non-governmental organizations whose activities are recognized as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation.

Thus, any association, cooperation with ILGA World or ILGA Europe create risks for Russian queer activists, human rights defenders and NGOs.

5. Widespread limitation of access to information

Micro trends:

- **Continuation of targeting bookstores and online streaming platforms** for “gay propaganda”; but at the same time targeting book publishers sometimes under

¹³ https://t.me/sledcom_press/21193

¹⁴ <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2025/05/14/v-moskve-po-podozreniiu-v-propagande-lgbt-zaderzhali-direktora-po-distributsii-izdatelstva-eksmo-i-eshche-desiaterykh-chelovek-news>

¹⁵ <https://sdinfo.ru/?p=21421>

administrative offence, sometimes – persecute under LGBT+ extremism and open criminal case against people who worked at bookpublisher Eksmo (see information above).

- **Treatment of feminist literature as queer “extremist” literature.**

Under the pretext of materials related to the “extremist LGBT movement,” fines are often imposed for feminist literature rather than queer literature. This supports the troubling conclusion that the state equates or fails to distinguish between feminism, women’s rights, and the so-called extremist LGBT+ movement. We can forecast that in the near future the feminist movement may also be declared extremist, or labeled a destructive ideology contrary to “traditional values,” or that enforcement actions ostensibly targeting “extremist LGBT literature” will quietly extend to feminist literature. This places people in a position where legal boundaries are uncertain, and any action or what one reads, searches for, or watches may become grounds for administrative or criminal liability in the current Russian realities of lawlessness.

- **Continuous limitation of access to information**

As of 1 September, 2025 amendments entered into force establishing fines of RUB 3,000–5,000 for the **intentional search for extremist materials on the internet, including when using a VPN**. The initiative was adopted despite criticism even within the State Duma¹⁶. Search-engine providers (e.g., ya.ru), telecom operators, and Wi-Fi access-point administrators (e.g., in metro systems, cafés, or hotels) can know what users search for and which websites they visit if traffic is not protected. In addition, one can use Google account search history where there is access; and if a user’s device comes into police hands, officers can simply view browser history and autocomplete. Russian search services and social networks are, by law, required to cooperate covertly with law-enforcement authorities, collecting and transmitting statistics on search queries¹⁷.

State promotion of the national messenger “MAX”¹⁸. The app is to be preinstalled on every phone offered for sale in Russia. Following a mass campaign to promote “MAX,” Russians were blocked from making calls via Telegram and WhatsApp¹⁹, and widespread disruptions have affected Google Meet ²⁰. There is also discussion of blocking Zoom in Russia²¹. Most VPN services are blocked or function with difficulty. As of 1 September, liability has been introduced for advertising VPN services.

WhatsApp was blocked in Russia completely in February 2026²².

Threats of the blocking of Telegram in Russia. On 17 February 2026²³, according to Baza, a media

¹⁶ <https://www.rbc.ru/society/01/09/2025/68b03edf9a79470b449c7b8e>

¹⁷ <https://t.me/NetFreedomsProject/1180>

¹⁸ https://t.me/novaya_europe/52470

¹⁹ https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/13/08/2025/689cab709a7947a32eb24afb

²⁰ https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/22/08/2025/68a82be29a7947fa179b8f6d

²¹ https://zeh.media/novosti/7805624-v-rossii-sobirayutsya-zablokirovat-zoom?utm_source=telegram&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=7805624-v-rossii-sobirayutsya-zablokirovat-zoom

²² <https://t.me/doxajournal/45236>

²³ <https://t.me/holodmedia/37782>

outlet close to Russian security services, Roskomnadzor will begin a “total blocking of the messenger” on April 1, 2026 similar to the bans imposed on Instagram and Facebook.

It is reported that the blocking will apply across the entire territory of Russia. The application will not be accessible either via mobile internet or through Wi-Fi connections.

Blocking Telegram and replacing it with a state-controlled alternative such as “Max” would significantly increase surveillance and control over online communication. This threatens not only access to information and relatively safe communication but also **access to support services provided by queer, women’s, and other human rights organizations**, many of which rely on Telegram to communicate with their audiences and provide assistance. Such measures would further stigmatize marginalized communities and deepen the isolation of queer people inside Russia, cutting them off from sources of support and solidarity.

- **Universities, schools and forceful recommendation to install MAX**

In February 2026 media Groza, based on messages from readers, found that the administrations of more than 10 large Russian universities are, in one way or another, pressuring students to install MAX for academic communication²⁴.

6. Conscription Register, queer man and the war

On 14 September 2025, it became known that, for the first time, departure from Russia was prohibited due to the “register of draft summonses.” Russian border guards did not allow a 28-year-old man, who had been entered into the conscription register a few days earlier, to leave the country, as he himself reported on the Telegram channel Pogranichny Kontrol²⁵. He stated that he received a summons on 8 September to appear for a medical examination on 22 October. Thereafter, a ban on his departure from Russia appeared on the “register of summonses” website.

This register imposes significant restrictions on gay and bisexual men, as well as trans women, seeking to leave the country, particularly where individuals are being persecuted for anti-war positions or for sexual or gender identity.

7. Right to health

Recent developments. From 1 March 2026, **a federal registry of patients with psychiatric diagnoses is to become operational**. Medical organizations and social funds will have access to the database. The police and the Ministry of Internal Affairs will obtain access to portions of personal data for monitoring potentially dangerous persons. Roszdravnadzor and Rosstat will also have access for statistical analysis. In the context of queer people, this database could become a resource for locating transgender individuals who have sought medical assistance or who have been involuntarily placed in closed institutions .

8. Queer migrants in Russia: persisted challenges

²⁴ <https://t.me/doxajournal/45217>

²⁵ <https://t.me/doxajournal/44158>

After the Crocus events, law enforcement agencies started to target migrants and in particular those from Central Asia, specific attention to the migrants persists as of 2026; legislation tightened opportunities for migrants to stay legally in Russia, if you are queer and migrant you face additional challenges, **for instance:**

- **HIV-positive persons.** Since 1995, Russian law has required all foreign nationals entering the country for more than three months to take an HIV test. If the result is positive, entry is denied. If HIV is detected in a foreign national already in the Russian Federation, that person is expelled. In such cases, the state of nationality learns of the positive status and methods of transmission. This presents a separate problem: in some countries, for example Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan, criminal statutes for “sodomy” still exist, therefore, Russia while expelling queer HIV positive people to their home country violates non-refoulment principle under international law. **By February 2026, we have a long term case with HIV positive gay men from Tajikistan, who right now face risks of expulsion, moreover, he was blackmailed by law enforcement officers to give them money.**
- In June 2024, the State Duma adopted at first reading a draft law amending the jurisdiction over administrative offences committed by foreign nationals, including offences under the so-called “gay propaganda” provisions. Under this bill, the police may now issue decisions on the expulsion of a foreign national without judicial review.
- A further measure in the sphere of migration policy was signed into law in August 2024. It obliges migrants to adhere to the State’s officially prescribed “understanding of marriage as a union between a man and a woman, of family, of motherhood and of fatherhood.” Failure to comply with these requirements may serve as grounds for expulsion.

9. Human rights of Russian queer (and not only) people outside Russia

Microtrends:

- **Transnational persecution of queer people**

The case of Russian LGBT+ activist and blogger **Sasha Kazantseva** in Lithuania became emblematic. Living in Vilnius for over three years, Kazantseva faced coordinated harassment from participants of the Telegram community “Империя Целителя”—a group that promotes “traditional values” and supports Russia’s war in Ukraine. In mid-2025 her social media faced a bot attack analogous to attacks on Russian LGBT+ human-rights channels Sphere Foundation, NC SOS. she received threats such as “we will put you on a bus and take you back to Russia”. Unknown individuals came to her residential building, left threatening messages (“Привет от Целителя”) and circulated videos of their visit online. Lithuanian police concluded there were “no signs of a crime,” raising concerns about gaps in host-country protection for exiled activists.

This incident illustrates a critical new trend of 2025: Russian actors or aligned ideological groups operating physically and digitally across borders to intimidate and potentially endanger exiled queer (but not only queer) activists and human rights defenders. It also exposes vulnerabilities in EU security responses, especially in cases where perpetrators are not Russian state agents but sympathetic non-state actors.

Importantly, **transnational repression endangers not only activists but just queer people, who run away from persecution from Russia**. We see such cases with those who left North Caucasus and reside temporarily in Armenia, Georgia. Lately 22 October 2025, in a rented apartment in Yerevan, 23-year-old Chechen woman **Aishat Baymuradova**, who had been missing since October 15, 2025, was found dead. She, as we know from private sources, is a transgender woman who run away from home escaping from domestic violence.

- **Asylum challenges in EU countries**

The tightening of repression has pushed thousands of LGBT+ Russians to seek protection abroad, especially in the EU. However, **EU asylum systems remain inconsistent**:

- Limited country-of-origin information creates barriers for Russian queer asylum seekers;
- The length of the asylum process takes more than 2 years which is extend the reasonable time according to international human rights law, which at the end of the day, affects mental health of asylum seekers, which could constate degrading treatment.
- Even though Dublin regulations apply to all EU countries, the conditions in the shelters, the process of applying to asylum, access to shelters, food and money allowance – differ from state to state.

For instance, Spain with its lack of state owned camps/shelters, the need to search for the place to live in the NGOs, including Red Cross. The Netherlands and its conditions in the camps (transgender individuals placed in the same room with men, do not taking into account medical prescriptions – **X' case** (Sphere know the name) – ran away to France in September 2025 from the Netherlands as the officers in the camp threatened her to transfer and close her up in the psychiatric clinic).

- **Business and human rights. Challenges with 19th sanctions package and access to EU bank accounts**

Implementation of 19th sanctions package negatively affected those Russian who are legally reside in the country because of their student status (having long term visa or long-term residence permit), those, who stay in the country under humanitarian visas and those who are asylum seekers.

In late October 2025 the European Union adopted its 19th package of sanctions against Russia, which expanded prior measures by restricting not only asset freezes and travel bans, but also payment services, electronic-money services and access to EU financial infrastructure for Russian and Belarusian nationals unless they hold EU/EEA/Swiss residence or citizenship.

Shortly thereafter, from about 31 October–1 November, **Revolut** began notifying many Russian and Belarusian customers living in the EU that their accounts would be frozen because they did not hold “valid EU residence or citizenship”, even when they held long-term visas or humanitarian status, or asylum seekers. For the persons affected this has meant: inability to withdraw money, no card payments, no transfers, essentially being cut off from banking. Many affected are not sanctioned individuals, but Russian nationals legally resident or seeking residence in the EU.

Because Revolut cited the 19th sanctions package as their legal basis, the bank claims it is obliged to comply with EU sanctions laws.

Consequences for LGBT+ Russians in the EU under humanitarian / asylum status

This development has special impact for LGBT+ people from Russia living in EU countries under humanitarian visas or seeking asylum:

- Many LGBT+ Russians who fled persecution in Russia found one of the few accessible banking platforms to be fintech tools like Revolut. With their accounts frozen, they often lose access to daily necessities, rental payments, income receipt or transfers from family.
- They may lack full residence status precisely because they are asylum-seekers or under humanitarian programmes, hence fail seemingly rigid criteria of “valid EU residence permit” and are treated as higher risk.
- The combination of past persecution in Russia and financial exclusion in the EU escalates vulnerability: inability to pay for lawyers, health services, relocation costs, and escape routes if threatened.
- The freeze creates a chilling effect: LGBT+ asylum-seekers may face exploitation, debt, dependence on informal networks, or push them into underground economies or cryptocurrency, heightening their insecurity.

Current status

As of November 2025, the situation remains unresolved in many cases. Revolut has stated it is reviewing documents and may restore access for some customers who can evidence valid EU residence. However, the immediate effect has already left many accounts frozen for days or weeks. No uniform mechanism for appeal or remedy has been widely publicised. In parallel, the European Commission has acknowledged that banks and fintechs have become over-cautious, effectively excluding legal residents of Russian origin even if not sanctioned. Thus, while the sanctions were targeted at supporting Russia’s war economy, the implementation has led to collateral damage for vulnerable groups, notably asylum seekers, including LGBT+ Russians in exile who depend on financial inclusion.

However, **on 16th February 2026**, according to Meduza, Revolut has begun reviewing even old transfers from CIS countries (including Kazakhstan and others) to Russian who have Revolut and reside in EU that were made one or two years ago, requiring users to confirm the origin of the funds. Revolut is checking transactions in which a bank or individual from a third country may have acted as an intermediary for transferring funds from Russia. In such cases, clients are asked to provide proof of the source of the money. If the documents or explanations are considered insufficient by the compliance department, **the account may be blocked or closed**²⁶.

²⁶ https://t.me/pozor_brno/37870