

Russian Federation

Human rights of LGBT+ migrants

Submission prepared by Sphere Foundation for UN Secretary-General



INTRODUCTION

This report is prepared by Sphere Foundation for UN Secretary-General in the light of implementation of the [resolution A/RES/78/217](#) entitled "Protection of migrants".

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.

Queer migrants in Russia

Queer migrants form a double-marginalized group: they face not only homophobia/transphobia but also xenophobia, national or migrant-based stigma. Due to the intersection of their identities and vulnerabilities and risks it triggers, queer migrants in Russia are often unable to express themselves freely, or seek help and protect their rights, because they **risk expulsion, arrest, or deportation** if open up their SOGIESC. Combined with repressive legislation, this forces many to live underground, without social support, medical care, or access to rights fearing of being exposed.

It should be noted that **anti-LGBT legislation and practices in Russia** also target migrants who reside, lawfully or unlawfully, in Russia. Over the past decade, the Russian government has built an entire legal and rhetorical framework to legitimise the persecution of LGBT+ people, firstly, under the cover of protecting health and morals of children, later, after the full-scale invasion of Russia to Ukraine, under the cover of protecting “traditional values”.

1. **2013 “gay propaganda law.”** This law, formally about “protecting children from information denying traditional family values,” prohibited the dissemination of “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations.”
2. **2022 expansion of “gay propaganda law”.** In November 2022, the Duma extended this ban to **all age groups**, outlawing any **positive or neutral representation** of queer life. In 2024, 214 cases were opened under the so-called “LGBT propaganda” law in Russia, almost 11 times more than five years ago, according to data from the Russian Supreme Court.
3. **2023 “LGBT extremism” ruling¹.** In November 2023, Russia’s Supreme Court designated the “International Public LGBT Movement” as *extremist* and banned it nationwide. This opened the door to applying Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code “organisation or participation in the activity of an extremist organisation” to any LGBT-related initiative, event, or even online post and to any individual whether activist/human rights defender or LGBT+ person. Since then, law-enforcement bodies have treated “LGBT” not as an identity, but as an *illegal organisation*. 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.

Between 2024 to October 2025 there are **at list 22 known criminal cases for LGBT+ extremism**. The latest case from October 2025 (presumably) is **Sacha Kazantseva**, a queer activist, faces three criminal charges: “spreading military fakes,” “incitement to participate in the activities of an extremist organization,” and violations of “foreign-agent” rules. Her inclusion in the foreign-agent registry was justified by “promoting LGBT relations” and “collecting aid for Ukraine.” Such case illustrates that if you are public figure,

you could be easily accused in LGBT+ extremism, it also shows that the law enforcement agencies do their job and potentially other activists and human rights defenders should be worried about criminal case against them.

Administrative cases (indirect association with LGBT+ extremism)

Interestingly, in April 2025, it became known that the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation regards journalist Vadim Vaganov as an “activist” of the non-existent “International Public LGBT Movement.” This follows from the Ministry’s submission in Vaganov’s case challenging his “foreign agent” status. Vaganov is a former member of St. Petersburg Yabloko and a journalist with the portal Parni+. On the day the State Duma adopted the law banning LGBT “propaganda” in 2022, he came out publicly. In November 2024, the Ministry of Justice entered Vaganov into the register of “foreign agents.”

Such a precedent indicates that, for Russian state bodies, **the principle that a law has no retroactive effect is not observed.** This precedent endangers all openly queer people, especially those who maintain social media presences, have audiences, or work in the human-rights sector.

Together these cases show that prosecutions now target:

- LGBT+ activists inside and outside Russia,
 - human-rights defenders in exile,
 - individuals,
 - publishing houses and clubs.
4. In July 2023 **anti-trans law** was adopted. According to research by Sphere and Comingout, in 2024 25% of non-binary and trans people experienced domestic violence (the average among all LGBT+ people was 13%). 5% of trans people were subjected to conversion therapy (initiated or approved in most cases by relatives). Sphere does not yet have research data for 2025, but according to its Emergency Assistance program, in the first half of 2025 the share of appeals related to violence by relatives, enforced disappearances, involuntary treatment, and conversion therapy initiated by relatives more than doubled compared to the previous half-year.
 5. 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.
 6. **Police raids.** At the time the Supreme Court's decision came into force, there were still numerous clubs, bars, and small initiatives hosting LGBT+ parties openly catering to the LGBT+ audience. However, during 2024 their numbers have rapidly declined following the enforcement of anti-extremist legislation. Police raids to such clubs, private and public events became practice to spread fear around the community. According to estimates by

Current Time and Sphere Foundation, since the Russian Supreme Court designated the "LGBT movement" as an extremist organization, law enforcement **has carried out at least 65 raids** on clubs and spaces in 21 regions of Russia **in 2024**. They were either associated with the LGBT+ community or targeted under the pretext of combating so-called "LGBT propaganda." **From January to July 2025** we documented **14 such incidents in 8 regions**. The decline in the recorded number of incidents may partly be explained by the fact that many venues and private events were forced either to cease operations or to drastically alter their activities in response to mounting pressure from the authorities. Such raids were accompanied by human rights violations, including forced document checks, physical violence, humiliation, and forced exposure. Some detainees were filmed naked or in their underwear, and these videos were later leaked to the media. Moreover, some detained attendees of these events have been handed **military draft summons**. It is also important to note that we documented **at least 2 cases in which police officers extorted money from queer persons under threat of initiating criminal proceedings for alleged participation in an "extremist organisation."**

7. In the beginning of 2025 law enforcement agencies' attempted to create **a database of LGBT+ individuals** (it is not clear for now whether such database was created and how comprehensive it is). 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, private events associated with LGBT+, for instance BDSM parties, with the help of informants (according to Meduza, there is minimum 1 informant, organiser of LGBT+ events, who voluntarily gathered personal information of its participants to law enforcement agencies, other organisers did it under pressure.

Specific challenges of queer migrants, risks of expulsion

8. **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 exist², therefore, Russia while expelling queer HIV positive people to their home country violates **non-refoulment principle** under international law.
9. 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**.

² <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2025/09/09/mne-napisali-cto-mne-stoit-vernutsia-v-muzhchinu>

10. 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.**

One of the recent cases, which was handled by Sphere Foundation in 2025, was about Kyrgyz queer migrant involved in sex work. The story of Aliya, a transgender woman from Kyrgyzstan. Aliya came out at home; her relatives promised to leave her alone only if she left the country. After moving to Russia, she engaged in sex work to pay for costly hormone therapy and was eventually detained by law-enforcement. The court ordered her expulsion. She had to wait nine months for it: Kyrgyz diplomats refused to identify a feminine-presenting Aliya by documents issued in a male name. During this entire time, she was held in solitary confinement at a Temporary Detention Center for Foreign Nationals, treatment that amounts to torture under international law.