Russia Adopts New Anti-LGB and Anti-trans Law

article, non-discrimination

On 24 November 2022, the Russian parliament adopted a new law further limiting freedom of speech for LGBTI people. A similar bill has been in place since 2013 and introduced civil liability for ‘propaganda’ among minors. This time, lawmakers have banned talking about homosexuality or gender identity publicly among all ages. Moreover, they have explicitly prohibited educating children on gender transition. TGEU is concerned about this new, explicitly anti-trans legislation, and calls for solidarity with the Russian trans and LGB communities.

> “In times of increasing resistance against trans rights and rising authoritarianism in our region, another anti-LGB and anti-trans law adds to the list of countries that have been aggressively removing rights from LGB and trans people in the past years. The new law adopted by the Russian parliament is alarming and will have disastrous consequences for freedom of speech in Russia and beyond. We firmly condemn this law and call upon the international civil society to support trans and LGB communities in Russia.”
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> Anwar Ogrm, TGEU’s Acting Co-Director

The law adopted today introduces administrative fines of 50 thousand to 10 million roubles (790 to 160.000 Euros) for disseminating LGBT-related information. Besides prohibiting information on non-heterosexual relations, it also explicitly bans raising awareness on gender transition among children. According to lawmakers, any positive or neutral information on LGBT people can be considered propaganda. The law’s authors continue to refer to LGBT rights as ‘Western values’ and frame the new discriminatory bill as an element of the ‘culture war’ Russia is supposedly waging against the ‘West’.

This new gag rule is likely to have a drastic impact on LGBT people and all society in Russia. It introduces censorship on an unprecedented scale and will affect creating and distributing books, movies, and all other cultural products that mention LGBT people. It will create even more barriers for the trans and LGB human rights defenders in Russia, since it outlaws all public awareness-raising. The new law further stigmatises LGBT people and is likely to fuel anti-trans and anti-LGB violence. Research has documented a surge in hate crimes after the 2013 ‘propaganda’ ban; a similar development is to be expected this time.

TGEU strongly condemns this move to further stigmatise LGBT people in Russia. In the midst of its aggressive and increasingly failing war against Ukraine, we consider this new law as yet another attempt to instigate more hate in Russian society by targeting one of the most vulnerable populations. We find it deeply appalling that the Russian state chooses to pursue symbolic politics and oppose the imagined “collective West” at the expense of real people and their lives.

Trans people are among the most vulnerable communities in Russia and have already suffered disproportionately as a result of the Russian aggression on Ukraine. Due to massive stigma and encompassing discrimination, trans people in Russia are particularly affected by poverty, homelessness, and lack of access to healthcare. The disproportionate impact of the economic crisis and political repression puts trans people at higher risk of depression and suicide, as local activists have emphasised. Since Russia announced military mobilisation, trans people find their survival at immediate risk: not only are they being forced to participate in committing war crimes in Ukraine or

dying on the frontlines, but they are also exposed to high risks of hate-motivated physical violence up to murder in the army.

In the face of this new level of anti-trans and anti-LGB persecution, we are in solidarity with our members in Russia and with all Russian trans and LGB communities. We acknowledge their resilience and praise their efforts to fight for their lives and human rights in these difficult times.

We call upon the Russian government to immediately revoke all anti-LGBT legislation.