

Report: Situation of the LGBTQ+ Community in Belarus



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The report is based on data provided by TG-House and human rights LGBTQ+ organizations operating in Belarus. It will include inappropriate terms presented as direct quotes with references to the original sources.

The report examines the state of LGBTQ+ rights in the context of recent legislative changes, increased stigmatization at the state level, and the active enforcement of discriminatory policies. The report aims to identify key human rights violations related to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as to examine the impact of such measures on members of the LGBTQ+ community in Belarus.

Key Findings

The analysis indicates that recent legislative changes contribute to the escalation of social stigma, the legitimization of violence, and the violation of fundamental human rights, including the rights to equality, freedom from discrimination, and personal security. The report also examines numerous cases of human rights violations, highlighting the deliberate policy of the authorities to suppress the LGBTQ+ community.

Earlier, Legal Initiative, in collaboration with the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, prepared a report on torture perpetrated by the regime against the LGBTQ+ community¹. The document highlights the increase in state-level homophobic sentiments, which have been intensifying since 2010. The report also presents evidence of torture and ill-treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals following the 2020 presidential election, including physical and psychological abuse during detentions, as well as the use of LGBTQ+ identity in propaganda to portray it as a negative phenomenon. The report notes that after 2021, when virtually all independent LGBTQ+ organizations in the country were dismantled, the community lost its capacity to defend its rights, leaving it even more vulnerable to the regime's homophobic policies.

In September 2024, between 15 and 20 members of the LGBTQ+ community were detained in Belarus. Reports indicate that eight transgender individuals were detained: the majority faced fabricated administrative charges of "hooliganism," while two were criminally charged under Article 343 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus for "producing and distributing

¹ Report by the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus in collaboration with Legal Initiative. Based on data collected by the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus and Human Rights Center Viasna. – <https://torturesbelarus2020.org/katavanni-lyudzej-lgbt-k-i-gamafobnaya-palityka-rezhymu/>

pornographic materials or items of a pornographic nature."² This legislation is used as a method of persecuting the LGBTQ+ community.

This report aims to draw attention to the situation of the LGBTQ+ community within the country and to highlight the new repressive tools employed by the regime to persecute and discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals.

Recent Developments: An Overview

In March 2023, Alexander Lukashenka, in his annual address, emphasized the need to suppress any ideas that, in his view, "depopulate" the country. This included references to the promotion of a childfree lifestyle and "non-traditional relationships."³

In the summer of 2023, the Prosecutor General's Office of Belarus proposed introducing penalties for the propaganda of "non-traditional relationships", childfree lifestyles, and pedophilia.⁴ Specifically, the agency proposed amendments equating the "promotion of non-traditional sexual relationships, gender transition, pedophilia, and the childfree lifestyle."

In March 2024, amendments were introduced to legislation, including the resolution by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus dated May 8, 2007, No. 18, titled *"On the Approval of the Instruction on the Procedure for the Production, Duplication, Display, Rental, Sale, and Advertising of Erotic Products, Products Containing Elements of Eroticism, Violence, and Cruelty, Products on Sex Education, and Sexual Upbringing, as well as Sexually Oriented Products, and the Repeal of the Resolution of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus dated April 13, 2000, No. 8p"* (hereinafter referred to as Resolution No. 18). This document enhances censorship and control over the dissemination of information on LGBTQ+ topics and sex education. The Ministry of Culture equated the depiction of "non-traditional sexual relationships" with pornography, effectively banning any positive or neutral discussion of LGBTQ+ issues. These legislative changes are accompanied by a large-scale campaign by the regime aimed at discrediting gender diversity

² <https://www.svaboda.org/a/33136292.html>

³ "First. The Western trend of being childfree. Any promotion of ideas advocating for childless families in our informational and cultural space must be stopped! Any veiled attempts to disseminate such calls, along with all non-traditional influences, are nothing less than efforts to depopulate and weaken the state. Nothing less! This ideology must be outlawed! Second. We raised children who lacked nothing, and now they want to live for themselves as long as possible, delaying the birth of a child. Not all, but the trend exists. It is dangerous. The paradigm of such thinking must be changed... Therefore, first and foremost, mass media, filmmaking (Lord, where is this filmmaking?..), cultural projects, and advertising should promote the idea of reviving the traditions of a big, happy, complete, CLASSIC family. — <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/poslanie-aleksandra-lukashenko-belorusskomu-narodu-i-nacionalnomu-sobraniyu-sostoitsya-31-marta>

⁴ <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/belarus-kastraziya-pedofilov/32465842.html>

and the childfree lifestyle, which are framed as threats to national security and the country's demographic policy.⁵

Analysis of Resolution No. 18

The amendments to Resolution No. 18 introduced new terminology into the legal framework, including the concept of "non-traditional sexual relationships," and equated it with "pornography".

According to paragraph 2, subparagraph 3 of Resolution No. 18, *"non-traditional sexual relationships and/or behaviors" are defined as: sexual relationships between people of the same sex (homosexuality, lesbian relationships), between an individual and people of various genders (bisexual relationships), an individual engaging simultaneously with multiple people of the same or different genders (polyamory), involving one person under the age of 18 (pedophilia), relationships between a human and an animal (zoophilia), relationships between a human and a corpse of a human or an animal (necrophilia), as well as sexual behaviors involving the immobilization, infliction of pain, and humiliation of a partner (sadism), deriving sexual pleasure from pain inflicted by a partner (masochism), observing naked individuals and/or those engaging in sexualized relationships (voyeurism), repeated or persistent tendencies to expose one's genitals to strangers (usually of the opposite sex) or to people in public places without intent for close contact (exhibitionism), wearing clothing of the opposite sex primarily to achieve sexual arousal or to evoke the image of an individual of the opposite sex (fetishistic transvestism), the desire to live and be perceived as a person of the opposite sex, often accompanied by discomfort with one's anatomical sex or a sense of incongruence with one's gender (transsexualism).*⁶

Thus, the legislator has established that homosexuality is equated with pedophilia⁷, zoophilia⁸, and necrophilia⁹ — essentially categorizing it

⁵ <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&po=W22441365>

⁶ The paragraph was introduced by the decree of the Ministry of Culture dated 19.03.2024 No. 24 – <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&po=W22441365>

⁷ Article 169 of the Criminal Code. Acts of Sexual Abuse

1. Acts of sexual abuse committed by a person who has reached the age of 18 against a person known to be under the age of 16, in the absence of signs of offences stipulated by Articles 166, 167 and 168 of this Code, shall be punishable by arrest or deprivation of liberty for a term of one to three years.

2. The same acts, if committed with the use or threat of violence, against a person known to be a young minor, or by parents, educators, or other individuals responsible for the upbringing of the minor, or by a person who has previously committed crimes under this article or Articles 166-168 of this Code, shall be punishable by imprisonment for a term of three to six years. <https://etalonline.by/document/?regnum=HK9900275>

⁸ Article 339-1. Cruel treatment of an animal

1. Cruel treatment of an animal, resulting in its death or mutilation, committed out of hooligan, mercenary or other base motives, or in the presence of a person known to be a young minor, shall be punished by community service, or by a fine, or by corrective labour for a term of up to one year, or by arrest.

2. The same act committed repeatedly or by a group of individuals - shall be punished by arrest or restriction of liberty for a term of up to one year, or deprivation of liberty for the same term.

<https://etalonline.by/document/?regnum=HK9900275>

⁹ Article 347 of the Criminal Code. Desecration of a corpse or grave

1. Desecration of a corpse or a grave, or theft of a corpse, or theft of objects located in a grave, -shall be punishable by a fine,

alongside criminal offenses. It can thus be concluded that the regime regards non-heterosexual relationships between consenting adults as criminal acts, as underscored by the use of the term "non-traditional sexual relationships." This contributes to the intensification of social stigma and, consequently, the legitimization of violence against the LGBTQ+ community.

This rhetoric violates fundamental human rights, such as the right to freedom from discrimination; the right to private and family life (the restriction and stigmatization of personal aspects of life, such as sexual orientation); the right to freedom from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (the stigmatization of homosexuality and transgender identities may encourage violence); the right to freedom of opinion and expression (the prohibition and condemnation of certain personal relationships suppress self-expression, creating a threat to the human right to freely manifest one's identity and views); and the right to equal protection under the law (the stigmatization of certain groups creates obstacles to their legal protection and may undermine guarantees of fair and equal treatment)¹⁰. It is also worth noting that this rhetoric blurs the boundaries between serious offences and personal aspects of life, creating a threat to vulnerable groups in society.

The definition of "pornography" has also changed. According to paragraph 2, subparagraph 4 of Resolution No. 18, pornography is defined as the vulgar-naturalistic, disgusting-cynical, and indecent depiction of sexual intercourse; the self-purposeful, deliberate demonstration of predominantly naked genitals; aesthetically offensive scenes of sexual acts; sexual perversions; *non-traditional sexual relationships and/or behaviors* [newly introduced], or life-drawn depictions that do not meet moral standards, insult the honor and dignity of an individual, reducing them to manifestations of animal instincts.¹¹

In this case, "non-traditional sexual relationships" are categorized as pornographic content, explicitly associating LGBTQ+ relationships with "violations of moral norms," as interpreted by the authors of the resolution. Thus, the resolution does not present "non-traditional sexual relationships" separately but rather incorporates them as part of the broader negative characterization of pornographic content.

It is important to highlight the term "propaganda of pornography," which has not been amended but warrants clarification. The legislative act defines

or arrest, or restriction of liberty for a term of up to three years, or deprivation of liberty for the same term.

2. The same acts committed in respect of a mass grave or the grave of a defender of the Fatherland shall be punishable by arrest or restriction of liberty for a term of up to five years or deprivation of liberty for the same term.

<https://etalonline.by/document/?regnum=HK9900275>

10 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/declarations/declhr.shtml

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/pactpol.shtml

11 As amended by the resolution of the Ministry of Culture dated 19.03.2024 N 24 – <https://pravo.by/document/?guid=12551&po=W22441365>

"propaganda of pornography" as the production, duplication, display, rental, sale, advertising, or other dissemination of pornographic materials.¹²

Thus, based on the definition of "pornography" in Resolution No. 18, which includes "non-traditional sexual relationships," it can be inferred that the definition of "propaganda of pornography" could encompass any public expression of support for LGBTQ+ individuals, including films, events, and even statements about one's identity as a member of the community.

Since Resolution No. 18 classifies LGBTQ+ relationships as "non-traditional sexual relationships" and includes them in the category of "pornographic content", any actions related to disseminating information about LGBTQ+ issues may be considered as "propaganda of pornography." This may include filmmaking (for example, a documentary about the life of a homosexual woman), organizing events, or making public statements, which poses a significant threat to freedom of speech and expression.

Therefore, it can be inferred that public endorsement or discussion of LGBTQ+ topics could be interpreted under Resolution No. 18 as "propaganda of pornography," potentially leading to criminal prosecution (cases of criminal charges associated with the adoption of Resolution No. 18 are outlined below).

Let us examine the penalties for the production, possession, and dissemination of pornography. According to Article 343 of the Criminal Code, the production and dissemination of pornographic materials or items of a pornographic nature are punishable by community service, a fine, corrective labor for up to two years, arrest, restriction of liberty for a term of two to four years, or deprivation of liberty for the same term.¹³

These legislative and propaganda measures have serious social and legal consequences for the LGBTQ+ community in Belarus. Primarily, these measures intensify the stigmatization and hatred toward LGBTQ+ individuals, increasing the risk of violence based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

¹² subparagraph 12 of paragraph 2 of Resolution No. 18.

¹³ Article 343. Production and Distribution of Pornographic Materials or Items of a Pornographic Nature

1. Storage with intent to distribute or advertise, as well as the distribution or advertising of pornographic materials, printed publications, drawings, films, videos, or scenes of a pornographic content, or other items of a pornographic nature, committed within a year after an administrative penalty for the same violations; as well as the production with intent to distribute or advertise, or the broadcast or public display of pornographic materials, printed publications, drawings, films, videos, or scenes of a pornographic content, or other items of a pornographic nature — shall be punishable by community service, or a fine, or corrective labor for up to two years, or arrest.

2. Production or storage with intent to distribute or advertise, or the distribution, advertising, broadcast, or public display of pornographic materials, printed publications, drawings, films, videos, or scenes of a pornographic content, or other items of a pornographic nature, committed for profit or by an organized group; as well as the distribution, advertising, broadcast, or display of pornographic materials, printed publications, drawings, films, videos, or scenes of a pornographic content, or other items of a pornographic nature to a known minor, committed by an individual aged 18 or older — shall be punishable by restriction of liberty for a term of two to four years or deprivation of liberty for the same term.

<https://etalonline.by/document/?regnum=HK9900275>

The potential introduction of administrative liability for "propaganda of non-traditional relationships" and the decision not to have children places individuals' personal choices under state control, violating their rights to privacy, freedom of expression, and protection from discrimination.

Given the aforementioned, it is important to note that, while the state has not explicitly enacted a law banning "LGBTQ+ propaganda," it has effectively done so indirectly by equating it with other crimes. Details regarding the early enforcement of this act, including the initiation of criminal cases against LGBTQ+ community members on charges of "pornography," are provided later in the report.

Thus, the new legislative initiatives foster a climate of fear and intolerance, constituting a violation of Belarus's international human rights obligations. According to experts, Belarusian law enforcement authorities are already actively applying Resolution No. 18 to initiate criminal cases under articles related to the production and distribution of pornographic materials or items of a pornographic nature (Article 343 of the Criminal Code). Although the Resolution itself does not have the status of a law, it establishes a strong foundation for repressive actions against the LGBTQ+ community.

Recent Examples of Repression

A series of repressive actions targeting the LGBTQ+ community have taken place across the country; some of these include:

1. In the spring of 2023, the Ministry of Information sent 500 warning letters to publishers and bookstores, stating that "administrative measures" would be applied if "LGBT+ literature was found on sale".¹⁴
2. In July 2023, two homosexual men were detained on political grounds, subjected to psychological and physical violence, and forced to appear in a video that degraded their honor and dignity.¹⁵
3. In October 2023, raids were conducted in Minsk nightclubs using

¹⁴ "We have already taken sufficient measures to restrict the distribution of such materials in our country," stated Uladzimir Perstsau. "Although we do not have a specific law banning LGBTQ+ propaganda, gender changes, and other manifestations of the kind. Undoubtedly, a comprehensive approach is needed in drafting such a bill, where legislators must play a pivotal role by bringing together various ministries and agencies to ensure the creation of a truly comprehensive, far-reaching, and effective legal framework," he added. "For our part, we are not merely waiting to enforce a legislative act once it is published and enacted; we are continuing this work proactively," he emphasized. We already have certain tools at our disposal. Our Russian counterparts, who have such a law in place, acknowledge that we are, in some ways, working more effectively than they are, even without having a formal law," he noted. — https://www.tvr.by/news/obshchestvo/pertsov_belarus_effektivno_boretsya_s_propagandoy_netraditsionnykh_tsennostey/

¹⁵ <https://t.me/belsat/104218>

service dogs, during which law enforcement officers gained access to the personal correspondence of visitors. This method has been used for years in Belarus to create so-called "LGBTQ+ databases" based on pseudo-scientific "profiling" theories, whereby an entire social group is automatically deemed socially dangerous.¹⁶

4. In July 2023, a youth talk show titled "Yes, But" aired on Belarusian state television, equating LGBTQ+ identities with pedophilia and portraying LGBTQ+ culture as a "weapon of the West." This project was developed and funded by the National Assembly of Belarus as part of a "social prevention" initiative aimed at intimidating LGBTQ+ individuals, forcing them to conceal their identities or leave the country.¹⁷
5. In August 2024, Parliament Member Mikalai Buzin published an article in Belarus Today¹⁸ claiming that the LGBTQ+ movement is an "artificially induced social epidemic" and that queer individuals are "executing the Dulles' Plan in Belarus under the guidance of the Club of Rome."¹⁹

It is worth noting that the situation concerning LGBTQ+ individuals is deteriorating year by year across all areas of life. According to the "Journalists for Tolerance" initiative, Belarus is currently experiencing a record peak in hate speech. The situation with the representation of the LGBTQ community in the Belarusian media remains dangerous. Before the coronavirus pandemic, only one in 25 articles on this topic supported narratives that stigmatized or discriminated against LGBTQ+ individuals. Following the onset of the first wave of the pandemic, one in seven publications on the topic contained instances of hate speech; after the start of the political crisis, this increased to one in five; by 2021, it was one in four, and in 2022 and 2023, nearly every second article exhibited such language.²⁰

Several experts have voiced concern over this issue, asserting that it places the most vulnerable groups within the LGBTQ+ community at heightened risk: transgender individuals, queer adolescents, LGBTQ+ persons living with HIV, queer parents, and LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities and/or mental health conditions. The atmosphere of fear, mistrust and pervasive danger prevents LGBTQ+ people from seeking help in situations of violence, while the regime's persistent hate speech normalises discrimination in the eyes of queer people. A number of organizations claim that this policy particularly affects young LGBTQ+ people, who have been living for four years in an

16 <https://gpress.info/2023/10/09/v-minskih-gey-klubah-proshli-reydy-silovikov/>

17 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqPtRrcU3kA>

18 It is important to emphasize that Belarus Today serves as the principal state-run print media outlet in the country. The newspaper is founded by the President's Administration, while the author of the article holds the position of the Chair of the Human Rights and Media Commission in the House of Representatives.

19 <https://www.sb.by/articles/nenormalnaya-normalnost.html>

20 Monitoring report on hate speech against LGBTQ+ in the Belarusian media in 2023: <https://j4t.info/2023/12/29/monitoring-yazyika-vrazhdyi-v-otnoshenii-lgbt-k-v-smi-belarusi-v-2023-godu/>

artificially created "sterile" environment imposed by the regime, shaped by the Russian agenda and the constant dissemination of hate speech.

As the situation continues to deteriorate, the Belarusian transgender support organisation TG-House launched a petition in August 2024 calling for an end to the repression of LGBTQ+ people and the aggressive marginalisation of transgender people.²¹

Repression of the Trans Community

We have decided to highlight repression against the transgender community as a separate issue, as the level of repression has increased by several orders of magnitude. In recent years, transgender individuals have become one of the most vulnerable groups within the LGBTQ+ community in Belarus. The intensification of stigmatization at the legislative level, mass rejections by gender transition committees, disruptions in access to hormone therapy, forced hospitalizations, and degrading conditions during medical procedures have become part of a systematic policy of pressure. Repressions also include threats of parental rights deprivation, illegal demands for DNA samples, as well as arrests and torture. A significant signal was the sharp increase in rejections by gender transition committees and the apparent synchronization of Belarusian policy with Russia's anti-LGBTQ+ measures. Transgender individuals are being widely denied access to legal surgeries, subjected to violence, and exposed to constant emotional and psychological trauma.

Below, we provide information based on data from specialized human rights organizations, which illustrate the actual situation of transgender individuals.

A striking example of the regime's policy of stigmatizing LGBTQ+ individuals at the legislative level is the story of a transgender activist who was arrested multiple times for her political views. After escaping from Belarus, she spoke out about the torture she had suffered.²² Additionally, in June 2023, a transgender woman was beaten on the streets of Minsk for wearing pins with rainbow and Ukrainian flags.²³ After reporting the incident to law enforcement, she was arrested "for protest activities".²⁴

TG-House reports, in the fall of 2024, transgender communities were "raided"

²¹ <https://action.allout.org/en/m/7e534af6/>

²² <https://www.tbeltarus.com/post/t-belaruska-podrobnosti-pytok>

²³ <https://t.me/viasna96/19811>

²⁴ <https://t.me/viasna96/19837>

in Belarus. In 2023-2024, numerous cases of persecution of transgender people were registered. Below are some of these examples:

1. The first case occurred in late 2023 – early 2024, involving a transgender man in Minsk, who had legally undergone surgery and updated his documents. However, he later faced pressure from government authorities, who demanded that he revert to his previous documents. There were also attempts to strip him of his parental rights (the man has got four children).
2. The second case involves a transgender woman from a regional center who was forced to emigrate. On November 30, 2023, and February 22, 2024, she was subjected to humiliation and threats while submitting documents due to her gender transition. On April 24, 2024, she began receiving calls demanding that she appear at the passport office, accompanied by threats of arrest.
3. Another case occurred in September 2024. A transgender woman and her partner were detained on charges of possessing extremist materials. During the detention, she was beaten and psychologically abused based on her gender identity and was later forced to sign a protocol that included Article 343 of the Criminal Code of Belarus (production and distribution of pornographic materials or objects of a pornographic nature).
4. In September 2024, in one of the regional cities of Belarus, a transgender woman was summoned to the dean's office during a lecture and detained for the distribution of extremist materials. She was also humiliated based on her gender identity and threatened with violence. In the end, she was fined 10 base amounts. Her persecution was initiated by the university and supported by law enforcement agencies.
5. Also in September 2024, in a small town, a transgender man who worked as a teacher was detained without explanation and subjected to humiliation because of his gender transition. The police report contained no evidence other than his gender identity. Later, under pressure from the prosecutor's office, the man was dismissed from the position of a schoolteacher.
6. Another incident took place in September 2024 in a small town, where three transgender women were raided and beaten. At least one of them was accused of distributing pornographic materials. She was charged under Article 343 of the Criminal Code.
7. In September 2024, police detained a transgender woman on the street, subjecting her to acts of violence during the arrest.

Overall, the amendments to Resolution 18 have provided a basis for widespread

arrests, dismissals and the use of torture against the LGBTQ+ community, with a particular focus on members of the transgender community.

TG-House reports that since the start of full-scale war in Ukraine, access to hormone therapy has plummeted and the cost of medication has risen significantly. The situation is further exacerbated by falling living standards, disproportionately affecting transgender and non-binary people who are already vulnerable. The legal procedure remains unchanged and involves a lengthy process that includes regular visits to a sexologist, a two-week hospital stay and review by an interdepartmental commission.²⁵ Since 2024, however, the rejection rate by the commission has increased dramatically. According to estimates by Belarusian transsexual rights initiatives, the rejection rate has risen from 10-15% (2-3 rejections per 20 applications) to 80%. In May 2024, the Commission rejected 15 out of 20 applicants.²⁶

Despite the state's nominal provision of free hormone therapy, transgender people can only begin treatment after receiving approval from a commission — a process that can be lengthy, sometimes taking up to 1.5 years. This approval is heavily dependent on the individual's appearance matching the desired gender, such as the degree of feminisation for transgender women. Because of the bureaucratic hurdles and the low rate of positive decisions, many transgender people begin therapy illegally, at personal risk. Previously, commissions averaged about 20–25 attendees; however, the December commission anticipates approximately 50 applicants. Currently, around 450 individuals are registered for transgender transition in Belarus, although official data on this matter is not publicly available.²⁷

According to a specialized organization, transgender individuals are particularly vulnerable to repression because their identity is nearly impossible to conceal. For instance, identification numbers in passports reflect the gender assigned at birth, which remains unchanged even after transitioning. Patriarchal structures perceive transgender identities as a threat to their fundamental principle of clear gender division, making the transgender community one of the most vulnerable groups.

²⁵ <https://www.transcoalition.net/trans-and-nonbinary-people-in-belarus-2022/>

²⁶ The questions asked during the commission hearings were standard: Are you planning to undergo surgeries? What is your relationship with your parents and friends? Do you have a job? Do you have or have you had a partner? Which restroom do you use? What name do you prefer?etc. The focus was placed on the alignment of a transgender person's appearance with their desired gender and their ability to socialize. <https://www.tb Belarus.com/post/komissija2024-1-otkazy>

²⁷ According to the human rights organization that works with the rights of trans people - TG-House.

The Status of the LGBTQ+ Community: Insights Based on Data from Representatives of Specialized Organizations

Following legislative changes, the LGBTQ+ community in Belarus has faced intensified pressure. Now, personal correspondence and relationships can be interpreted as pornography, violating the right to privacy and creating additional fear within the community.

The situation for the LGBTQ+ community in Belarus has deteriorated sharply since 2020, driven by political repression and increasingly harsh legislation. Previously accessible events, meetings and social connections have been replaced by fear of law enforcement agencies, which actively target community members with vague accusations of extremism, hooliganism or distributing pornography. Personal communication and networking, especially online, have become dangerous, further exacerbating feelings of isolation and vulnerability.

According to one expert, prior to 2020, the well-established network of civil society organizations provided the LGBTQ+ community with a diverse cultural life and access to communication, informal education, and recreation. However, concerns about the potential risks associated with online social interactions have intensified. Experts note that differences in the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community by law enforcement were already evident in 2020, but at that time, arrests were politically motivated. It has now become clear that LGBTQ+ individuals are being targeted for arrest solely because of their affiliation with the community. Law enforcement agencies often mask these discriminatory actions by citing charges such as 'hooliganism' or 'extremism,' while the underlying motivations are rooted in the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of the detainees. It is crucial to note that criminal proceedings are now being initiated under Article 343 of the Criminal Code, which pertains to the production and distribution of pornographic materials or objects of a pornographic nature.

It is no secret that using dating sites carries the risk of encountering law enforcement officers working under disguise. This risk has now increased significantly. People increasingly prefer to communicate only through trusted acquaintances or avoid new contacts altogether. The notion of "private life" has become increasingly tenuous, as the regime's pressure and a propaganda-fueled society encroach upon even the most intimate aspects of existence. For the LGBTQ+ community, fear of discrimination, repression, and violence has become a constant companion.

Since 2022, law enforcement's aggression and brutality have escalated, with searches marked by deeply degrading practices: sex toys wielded as tools of humiliation and the recording of videos that are both violent and overtly sexualized.

New forms of threats are emerging, becoming troubling "trends." When an arrested individual is identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, their personal correspondence is increasingly interpreted by law enforcement agencies as politically dangerous. A casual group chat with 3, 5, or 10 participants can be construed as a criminal conspiracy, particularly if LGBTQ+ individuals are involved. It's worth mentioning that during arrests, searches, and interrogations, LGBTQ+ individuals frequently face threats of being charged under pedophilia-related articles, as well as threats of violence from both law enforcement officers and "future cellmates."

The regime's propaganda amplifies these sentiments, broadcasting narratives about the so-called "pedophile conspiracies" and other conspiracy theories.

Additionally, the regime's propaganda machine often exploits the images of LGBTQ+ individuals to justify repression against dissenting citizens. State media and television continue to publish and air content linking the LGBTQ+ community to protests, and protests to alleged Western influence.

The pressure on the LGBTQ+ community in Belarus has thus shifted from political persecution to an open state-driven campaign aimed at suppressing and eradicating any expression of gender and sexual diversity.

Minors within the LGBTQ+ community remain particularly vulnerable. The challenges faced by LGBTQ+ teens are largely invisible and meaningful support is virtually non-existent. Isolation, loneliness and fear are far more prevalent among adolescents than adults, significantly increasing the risk of self-harm and suicide among minors.

It is worth noting the latest suicide statistics in Belarus: The Prosecutor General's Office reported a 50% increase in suicides among minors in the first half of 2024. However, these causes remain superficial and do not reflect broader levels of stress and anxiety within society. For example, key factors such as repression are not directly mentioned. More than 1,300 political prisoners are currently in jail and, according to the human rights center Viasna, more than 65,000 people have been detained since 2020. Over the same period, more than 74,000 cases of repression have been registered, including searches, short- and long-term detentions, interrogations and other forms of pressure.²⁸

²⁸ <https://spring96.org/ru/news/115957>

Additionally, schools have intensified the ideological control of education, creating further pressure on children and adolescents, particularly those who do not conform to official ideological norms.²⁹

It can be assumed that repressive policies are increasingly affecting minors, creating intolerable conditions for their growth and development.

It is important to note that the challenges that existed before 2020 also remain in the picture. For instance, rejection by parents following a coming out often leaves young people homeless. Specialized organizations report a significant decrease in requests for help from minors. When they do seek assistance, their primary concerns are related to strained relationships with parents and navigating the commission processes.

Thus, following the introduction of new discriminatory legislation, the private lives of LGBTQ+ individuals in Belarus have been transformed into a space of fear, insecurity, and constant risk.

The Influence of Russian Propaganda on the LGBTQ+ Community in Belarus

A separate issue is the influence of Russian propaganda on the Belarusian community. Experts note that both law enforcement officials and some members of the LGBTQ+ community believe that a law against propaganda has been enacted in Belarus. An example is the case of V., who was explicitly told, "If it is banned in Russia, then it must also be banned in Belarus".³⁰ Further evidence comes from Natalia Kachanova's statement suggesting that Belarus should align itself with Russian practices.³¹

²⁹ According to a survey, 37.7% of Belarusian schoolchildren reported that their teachers instructed them on the "correct" perspective regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The responses also included statements such as: "A prosecutor came to the school and conducted a lesson," and "Representatives of the administration visited and warned about the consequences if children did not attend a pro-government rally. They mentioned the death penalty." Representatives of the Orthodox Church also hold regular talks in schools, emphasising the key message that opposition to state authority is a sin. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/prihodil-prokuror-provodil-urok-shkolniki-v-belarusi-vernulis-v-sssr/32029749.html>

³⁰ According to the human rights organization that works with the rights of trans people – TG-House.

³¹ "When I was on an official visit to Moscow, the State Duma happened to pass the law banning LGBTQ propaganda that day. We will probably have to adopt one as well. And that would be the right thing to do. This cannot be promoted. We have family values and traditions that we pass down from generation to generation: the traditions of family and Orthodoxy." — <https://belta.by/society/view/zakon-o-zaprete-propagandy-lgbt-mozhet-pojavitsja-v-belarusi-542513-2022/>

The Psychological State of the LGBTQ+ Community After 2020

Since 2020, the number of requests for psychological support to specialized organizations has significantly increased, particularly regarding anxiety and depressive episodes. Frequently, there are also requests for assistance in preparing for potential situations such as detention, arrest, or torture.

Additionally, following the public introduction of Resolution No. 18, the private lives of the LGBTQ+ community members in Belarus have deteriorated substantially. People face heightened risks and uncertainty in forming new relationships due to an increase in provocations by law enforcement agencies. Loneliness has become increasingly prevalent, while fear and pressure have forced some to resume abusive relationships with former partners, despite previous experiences of domestic violence.

Human rights organizations warn of the potential for increased social isolation and vulnerability among the LGBTQ+ community. In a statement issued on July 4, 2023, they called on Belarus to comply with its international obligations regarding sexual and reproductive rights.³²

Restricted access to information about sexual orientation and gender identity, particularly among young people, leads to marginalisation and exacerbates psychological challenges. It also contributes to higher rates of risky sexual behaviour, increasing the potential spread of STIs and HIV. Opposition to LGBTQ+ people is framed as a defence of traditional values, fostering aggressive attitudes in society and worsening the situation of vulnerable groups.

In addition, the number of requests for evacuation from the country has increased, particularly in late 2023 and early 2024, as the level of repression continues to escalate.

According to experts, many individuals express a strong desire to emigrate but lack the necessary resources due to the deteriorating situation. Another important aspect to highlight is that while cisgender heterosexual individuals can emigrate relatively easily to countries such as Poland, Lithuania or Georgia (the most 'popular' destinations), the process is much more challenging for non-cisgender and non-heterosexual individuals. There are far fewer countries with low levels of homophobia, and the prospect of moving from one homophobic society to another, equally hostile one, is often a deterrent.

³² <https://spring96.org/ru/news/112101>

Experts note that individuals are confronted with a "choice without a choice," as high levels of homophobia and fear persist both in Belarus and in neighboring countries.

It is worth noting that following the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, violence against transgender people has intensified, made possible by the regime's "legalization" of violence. Violence has now become overt, targeting numerous members of the community. Law enforcement officers and propaganda supporters increasingly view such actions as justified, leading to the normalization of social inequality.

To Conclude

The report highlights the escalating pressure and repression faced by the LGBTQ+ community in Belarus. In recent years, the regime has taken active steps to suppress gender and sexual diversity, employing legal tools and propaganda to discredit LGBTQ+ individuals.

The introduction of Resolution No. 18, which equates the discussion of LGBTQ+ topics with pornography, effectively bans any positive or neutral references to LGBTQ+ issues in the public sphere. This creates a legal basis for the persecution of people for expressing their sexual orientation or gender identity, which can be interpreted as a form of legislatively sanctioned discrimination.

State propaganda actively employs rhetoric about protecting children and combating pedophilia to discredit the LGBTQ+ community. This creates a false association between LGBTQ+ individuals and criminal acts such as pedophilia, necrophilia, and zoophilia, reinforcing biases and normalizing violence against LGBTQ+ people within society. Such rhetoric fosters a perception of violence as justified and permissible in the defense of "traditional values." Notably, there is already a practice of prosecuting LGBTQ+ individuals under Article 343 of the Criminal Code, which targets the production and dissemination of pornographic materials or items of a pornographic nature. Experts anticipate that the number of cases brought in under this article will continue to rise.

As a result, while the laws do not explicitly legalize violence, they create legal and social conditions that facilitate repression, discrimination and violence against members of the LGBTQ+ community.

