



**journalists
for tolerance**

E-NEWSLETTER: LGBTQ+ IN BELARUS

January – March 2024

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1. CURRENT SITUATION OF BELARUSIAN LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

The beginning of 2024 brought new risks of criminal prosecution and new threats of harassment at the governmental level not only for Belarusian queer activists, but, generally, for every representative of LGBTQ+ community in Belarus.

Belarusian queer Web-resource labeled as "extremist"

The Website of "TG-HOUSE" Belarusian civil initiative in support of transgender people as well as its social media and even its logo were recognized as "extremist" by decision of the Central City District Court of Minsk dated March 28, 2024. This is the first precedent when a queer Web-resource is labeled as "extremist" in the Republic of Belarus.

Информационная продукция	Интернет-ресурс с названием "TG HOUSE", имеющий идентификатор https://www.tghouse.org , его аналоги в социальных сетях: https://www.facebook.com/groups/2722007911212975/ ; https://www.facebook.com/groups/2722007911212975/user/100087860432855/ ; https://www.instagram.com/tghouseby/ ; https://vk.com/club191148648?t2fs=ffefd158d082d9666f_3 ; Telegram-канал с названием "Tg House Belarus", имеющий идентификатор https://t.me/tghouseby и идентификатор (id), содержащий последовательность цифр 1001244820712, привязанный к нему чат с названием "Tg House Chat", идентификатор (id), содержащий последовательность цифр 1001256361507; логотип (водяной знак) в виде дома и двух латинских букв "Т" и "G" зеленого цвета.	процессуального кодекса Решение суда Центрального района г.Минска от 28 марта 2024 года. Подлежит немедленному исполнению в соответствии с 314 статьей Гражданского процессуального кодекса
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According to Article 19.11 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, distribution or storage for the purpose of distribution of "extremist materials" in Belarus is punished with a fine or arrest with the seizure of "instruments of offense" (phone, laptop, etc.).

The Ministry of Culture of Belarus equated LGBTQ+ with pornography

The Ministry of Culture of Belarus amended the concept of "pornography" in its [decree No. 24](#), dated March 19, 2024. Accordingly, the updated notion of "porn" includes "non-traditional sexual relations and (or) sexual behavior". Among other things, the ministerial officials believe that the notion includes sexual relations between:

- people of the same sex (homosexuality, lesbian love),
- one person with people of different sexes (bisexual relations),
- one person simultaneously with several people of the same or different sexes (polyamory).

Also, according to them, the notion refers to:

- putting on clothes of the opposite sex mainly in order to achieve sexual arousal and evoke the image of an individual of the opposite sex (fetish transvestism),
- the desire to live and be perceived by others as a person of the opposite sex (transsexualism).

The Ministry of Culture of Belarus placed depictions of LGBTQ+ people alongside those of necrophilia, pedophilia, and zoophilia on the list.

Public displays of pornography are punishable in Belarus with up to four years in prison. Child pornography is punishable with up to 13 years behind bars.

Administrative prosecution announced for sharing information about LGBTQ+

Andrei Shved, the Prosecutor General of Belarus announced the development of changes to the Code of Administrative Offenses [on February 19, 2024](#). Thus, "propaganda of non-traditional relationships, gender reassignment and voluntary refusal to have children" will be punished in accordance with these provisions.

Among other, the pro-government regime plans to introduce the following articles into the Administrative Code of Belarus:

"Any kind of deliberate dissemination of information with the purpose of forming the attraction of homosexual relations or gender change among the undefined circle of individuals" will be punished with a fine of up to 20 base amounts (approx. EUR 240) for individuals, up to 100 base amounts (approx. EUR 1200) for individual entrepreneurs and up to 150 base amounts (approx. EUR 1800) for legal entities.

The sanctions will be more serious in the case of such "propaganda" among minors with a fine of up to 30 basic amounts (approx. EUR 360), forced labour or arrest for individuals, up to 150 basic amounts for individual entrepreneurs, and up to 200 basic amounts for legal entities.

Transgender people are denied gender reassignment

According to the Belarusian transgender activist Alisa Sarmant, the Interdepartmental Commission for Medical, Psychological and Social Rehabilitation of People with Gender Denial Syndrome at the National Scientific and Practical Center of Mental Health is under pressure. Over the past year, the number of permits for gender correction issued by the NSPC has noticeably decreased. In 2023, 70% of applications were rejected. During the second meeting of the commission in 2023, only one person took part in it. As it turned out, the previously issued gender reassignment permission was revoked from the person during this meeting. The commission has not convened in 2024 yet.

Continued harassment of LGBTQ+ people in the mainstream and social media

According to the human rights activists' [reports](#), Telegram channels of Belarusian propaganda spread another message about the detention of an LGBTQ community representative, a transgender person T., on February 3, 2024. The published "repentant video" was accompanied by images of psychological violence, harassment, discriminatory statements, hate speech and calls to ban gender correction in the country. The transgender individual's personal data, medical details of their operation, and a photo of a naked body with genitals were published.

Political analysts note that such purposeful targeting of a certain vulnerable community and interference in the citizens' private life is an indicator of the state's movement towards totalitarianism.

The [analysis of narratives](#) in the Belarusian mass media as part of the J4t [media monitoring study 2023](#) showed that approximately every second publication on the topic of LGBTQ+ in the

Belarusian media contained manifestations of hate speech. Most often, these were either accusations of having a negative impact on society or references to LGBTQ+ to discredit political opponents.

2. COVERAGE OF LGBTQ+ ISSUES IN THE BELARUSIAN MASS MEDIA

The topic of LGBTQ+ appeared quite rarely in both independent and state-owned Belarusian social and political mass media in the first quarter of 2024. Unfortunately, the community stories and pressing challenges were covered mostly in a few niche media. The situation resembled the "calm before the storm".

In most cases, it was a response to legislative innovations and governmental officials' statements on the issue of introduction of administrative responsibility for "promotion of non-traditional relationships, gender correction, and child-free ideas."

The independent media expressed sympathy for the LGBTQ+ community at that. They condemned the attempts of governmental authorities to put LGBTQ+ people on the same level as pedophiles and other criminals, and disagreed with the violation of fundamental human rights and further stigmatization of the Belarusian queer community:

CityDog online publication: ["Instead of creating conditions for the birth of children, they declare LGBT and childfree as enemies. The expert talks about why people believe Belarusian propaganda."](#)

The state-owned and pro-governmental media were actively grooming the public for slander and further demonization of LGBTQ+ people after the expected introduction of penalties for the alleged "propaganda of non-traditional relationships". In some cases, the LGBTQ+ community was straightforwardly represented in the state-owned media as "enemies" and "destroyers of the state":

BelTA News Agency: [Chamadanava about the BelTA exhibition: LGBT in Minsk and attacks on the police – this must not happen again](#)

ANT TV Company: [Legal responsibility will be introduced in Belarus for promotion of non-traditional relations](#)

3. J4t / GPRESS.INFO NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Research of J4t Target Groups' Needs

In order to learn better the priority areas of J4t activity, which should be focused on, the team has conducted a survey among the Belarusian journalists and editors, who represent the human rights initiative's main target groups.

A typical day for respondents working in the media field is associated with regular overwork and professional responsibilities on weekends. This comes along with a flexible schedule, making it difficult to plan ahead and separate work from personal life.

75% of respondents reported professional burnout, 62% of respondents felt limited in the topics they can cover, 56% of survey participants faced financial challenges, and 53% respondents struggled to find subjects and experts for their reporting.

The main **challenges in covering the issues of vulnerable groups** include:

- anonymity of subjects,
- reluctance of subjects to express themselves, even anonymously,
- awareness of risks and difficulties in initiating primary contact (criminal liability for contacts with mass media recognized as "extremist" becomes a serious barrier to establishing contact with potential heroes of publications,

When asked **how the J4t initiative can be useful**, the respondents answered as follows:

- educational projects (publications on the specifics of highlighting vulnerable groups),
- communication projects (supporting connections between journalists and social media editors),
- legal protection (particularly for LGBTQ journalists);
- focusing on values (reminding journalists and editors about the significant challenges of vulnerable groups that may be neglected due to the shift of media attention to other focuses).

The 5th Diversity Camp of 'Journalists for Tolerance' Human Rights Initiative

At the beginning of May 2024, the Fifth Diversity Camp for Belarusian journalists, editors, writers and queer activists took place in Georgia.

Participants of the practice-oriented course got acquainted with the concept of human rights and cross-cutting values, learned how to recognize their own xenophobia and get rid of it, developing tolerance for vulnerable groups.

Also, the Diversity camp participants received knowledge on the topic of hate speech and non-discrimination and practical advice on how to make their language more inclusive.

It is expected that the event participants will share the acquired knowledge and use inclusive practices in their media-related and literary work.

[Gpress.info](#) Development

The [Gpress.info](#) editorial is aimed at broadening the Belarusian audience. Special attention will be paid to the part of Web-audience that remains in Belarus for their psychological support, news coverage on the topics, which are relevant to the queer community, nurturing pro-democratic values among the community representatives, providing updates on education opportunities abroad and the possibility of emigration / evacuation from the country.

[Gpress.info](#) on social media and messengers:

[YouTube](#)

[TikTok](#)

[Telegram](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[VK](#)

[Twitter](#)

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