



E-newsletter: LGBTQ+ in Belarus

April – June 2024

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1. CURRENT SITUATION OF BELARUSIAN LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Subjected to intimidation and harassment, lacking opportunities for socialization, facing real risks of criminal prosecution for publicly asserting one's sexual orientation and gender identity – these are today's realities of life, experienced by the LGBTQ+ community in Belarus.

The recently adopted [decree of the Ministry of Culture of Belarus](#), according to which any "intentional demonstration of non-traditional sexual relations and (or) sexual behavior" is considered to be "pornography", drives the queer community of Belarus deep into the underground, because punishment even for public display of a kiss of a same-sex couple in social media can result in four years of imprisonment at the very least.

The administrative prosecution for spreading information about LGBTQ+ is about to be integrated into the law in the near future. The relevant bill has been developed by the Belarus Prosecutor General's Office. It is currently at the stage of [approval](#).

The lack of punishment for inciting hatred towards LGBTQ+ by state and pro-regime propagandists remains a sad reality in Belarus. In the absence of an independent judicial system, the LGBTQ community representatives feel completely defenseless against verbal aggressors. The queer community of Belarus is further stigmatized. Propagandists incite both representatives of government and marginalized community groups to social enmity and committing hate crimes against LGBTQ people.

There is no information in public sources about the political prisoners who were outed in propagandist social media channels and messengers after their brutal detention. This situation creates an even greater atmosphere of fear among the Belarusian LGBTQ community representatives. Quite a few of them prefer to leave Belarus as soon as possible and seek refuge in safer and more civilized countries in order to avoid abuse and torture in prison.

2. COVERAGE OF LGBTQ+ ISSUES IN BELARUSIAN MASS MEDIA

The "Journalists for Tolerance" Human Rights Initiative monitored the coverage of LGBTQ+ issues in Belarusian media in the first half of 2024. 16 websites and 16 Telegram channels of state and non-state media, as well as national and regional media were analyzed within the research study. The sampling of publications was continuous, and it was carried out with the use of keywords.

Main findings

The relatively increased number of publications on LGBTQ+ issues compared to 2023

508 publications on LGBTQ+ issues were found and analyzed in Belarusian media in the first half of 2024 to be compared to 441 publications, included in the last year's monitoring study for the period from January to October 2023.

Apparently, the quantitative growth of publications is associated with the increased number of topical newsbreaks, including the novelty in law that criminalized the public demonstration of LGBTQ+ relations in Belarus (see above - [Decree No. 24 of the Ministry of Culture of Belarus](#), adopted on March 19, 2024).

The law on banning "LGBT propaganda" was adopted in the first reading in Georgia in June 2024. The event caused another significant newsbreak on the issue in Belarusian media.

Manipulative techniques and disinformation

Propaganda kept discrediting LGBTQ people as a phenomenon harmful to society in the pro-government media. They used manipulative techniques and disinformation to meet their goal. E.g., claims were made that the legalization of same-sex marriage in Estonia would cause demographic problems. This narrative ignored successful examples from other countries that demonstrate that same-sex marriage can strengthen the family after all.

Propaganda and discreditation

LGBTQ+ issues were actively used by state media to discredit opponents and the West. The latter were labeled as LGBTQ+ representatives or supporters. This way the propaganda machine constructed the image of the enemy to strengthen the division line between "us" and "them".

The stigmatized LGBTQ+ community was used by propagandists to divide Belarusian society and to create the effect of unity of their supporters around the banner of anti-Western and "traditional" values.

Differences in media coverage approaches

State media and pro-government Telegram channels pursued the goal of discrediting, while covering the LGBTQ+ issues. Moreover, Telegram channels often used harsh rhetoric and even obscene vocabulary. They mostly dedicated entire publications to LGBTQ+ issues. The traditional state-owned media used more cautious wording at that.

Non-state media and Telegram channels covered LGBTQ+ issues in a neutral manner as a rule.

Reference statistics: Inequalities in the visibility of different LGBTQ+ groups

The abbreviation "LGBT" was mentioned most often in publications that indicated the dominance of this notion in the media (227 times). The word "gay" came next (107 times), while lesbians were mentioned much less frequently (29 times). Transgender and bisexual groups were mentioned 44 and 11 times, respectively. These statistics confirm that there exists inequality in the visibility of different LGBTQ+ groups in the Belarusian media space. In general, the previous year's proportion was preserved.

3. RATING LISTS AND INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

- [“Rainbow Map of Europe” – ILGA Europe 2023](#)

In 2024, Belarus took the 45th position in the [ILGA Europe’s](#) annual ranking list. Thus, the country held the fifth position from the bottom among 49 European states. The rating has been decreasing since five years in a row. In 2019, Belarus got the highest indicator for the observance of LGBTQ community rights of the – 15.82% out of 100%. However, since 2020, a significant decline has been observed. This year's indicator has shrunk to 11%. Among other things, ILGA Europe researchers drew attention to the following evidence:

- A joint [report](#) by the International Committee to Investigate Tortures in Belarus and the “Viasna” Human Rights Centre documents that LGBTQ+ detainees continue to be subjected to severe beatings, rape, threats of rape against them and their family members, humiliation, harassment and verbal insults. Clothing, hair colour and length, and painted nails have been grounds for torture and violence,
- The testimonies of two soldiers were shared in a [European Radio’s for Belarus](#) article, affirming that during enlisting the army continues to send ‘homosexuals’ to psychiatric institutions,
- Belarusian state media [continued to propagate hatred](#) towards LGBTQ+ people in newspapers, websites and on TV channels. Government agencies regularly employ hate speech against LGBTI activists, including calls for their imprisonment.

- [The US Department of State: 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Belarus](#)

The authors included the following testimonies in the report that describe the current situation of LGBTQ+ people in Belarus, referring to information from reliable human rights sources:

- LGBTQI+ persons continued to experience discrimination, harassment, threats, and violence at the hands of authorities,
 - instances of rape and sexual abuse by security forces were reported; those appearing to be members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) community were often specifically targeted for abuses,
 - some LGBTQI+ individuals said they were harassed and mocked over their identities and threatened with sexual abuse during interrogations and arrests,
 - human rights advocates working with LGBTQI+ communities reported cases in which school and local authorities threatened to remove children from families with LGBTQI+ parents, claiming the children were in “vulnerable conditions.”
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- **Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

A [special report](#) was delivered during the 44th session of the UN Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath. Among other things, it contained the following testimonies about the state of the LGBTQ+ community in the country:

- *threats and insults against LGBTQ persons underscored hatred based on sexual orientation or gender identity against persons perceived not to conform with so-called traditional values. OHCHR also documented cases of the forced outing of LGBTQ persons or those misidentified as LGBTQ detained on politically motivated grounds by Belarusian security forces, “repentance” videos, recorded under duress and published online or on television, and smear posters disseminated in victims’ neighbourhoods;*
- *the detained LGBTQ persons... were treated in a particularly violent and humiliating manner;*
- *LGBTQ persons in Belarus reported having left the country fearing persecution, as a result, inter alia, of homophobic hate speech from government officials at the highest levels.*

4. J4t / GPRESS.INFO NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

J4t goes beyond

While celebrating the 15th anniversary of ‘Journalists for Tolerance’ Human Rights Initiative, the J4t team is developing an updated strategy of activities for 2025-2027. Among other things, it will include awareness-raising activities not only with Belarusian media workers, but also with small communities and teams of NGOs and public initiatives to prevent xenophobia and hate speech.

[Gpress.info](#) Development

Traditionally, [Gpress.info](#) actively covered [diverse Pride events](#) at the beginning of summer. The range of original publications included text articles, photo reports, and video reels from all over the world, including [Toronto Pride](#) and [PEI Pride](#) in Canada, [EuroPride](#) in Greece, Pride festivals in [Germany](#), [the Netherlands](#), Lithuania, Poland... Thus, the Gpress.info editorial was giving moral support and hope to the Belarusian LGBTQ+ community for equality and non-discrimination in their native country.

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

[TikTok](#)

[Telegram](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[УКантакце](#)

[Twitter](#)

[YouTube](#)

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