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**Alternative information
for the review of Russia's implementation
of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**

For the 80th session of UN CEDAW
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**Violation of the labor rights of women;
persecution of female activists and journalists;
the situation of women in prisons and other closed institutions;
discrimination of female members of vulnerable groups – LBT women,
women from ethnic and religious communities**

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The problem of gender inequality in the workplace

Since CEDAW's last review of the situation in Russia, several restrictions on women's labor have been lifted, primarily thanks to the battle women waged to revoke job bans and the Committee's crucial decision in the case of Svetlana Medvedeva (2015), which found proof of gender discrimination and has served as a guide for female activists and human rights defenders. As of January 1, 2021, almost all restrictions on jobs in public and freight transport (by land or water) were removed for women (RF Labor Ministry Order No. 512n of July 18, 2019); it was also announced that women would be allowed to work as air mechanics and technicians beginning March 1, 2022 (RF Labor Ministry Order No. 313n of May 13, 2021). However, the list of banned occupations has not been fully revoked and is only gradually being shortened. Another 100 professions/activities, i.e., over 300 occupations, remain out of reach for women.

The Russian government has not launched a wide-ranging campaign to notify potential female workers, employers and officials that the bans on certain professions are no longer in effect, so even after the changes in the law, women are not always aware of new professional opportunities, and it is still quite likely that they will be rejected for openings.

A huge gender pay gap persists and amounted to 27.9 percent in 2019 ([Voluntary National Review](#) of the progress made in implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which Russia submitted at the UN Political Forum in July 2020). The gender pay gap varies from region to region: it is 12 percent in Moscow; much higher in Saint Petersburg (23.6 percent); 22.7 percent in Tambov Oblast and 22.7 percent in Ivanovo Oblast (Central Russia); and 15.2 percent in Dagestan. The numbers are similar in the country's remote regions: For example, the gender pay gap stands at 21.9 percent in Chukotka Autonomous Okrug and is much lower in Magadan Oblast (17.2 percent) ([Women in the Economy. An International Overview and the Russian Agenda. March 2021](#)). Russia also has a significant pay gap for mothers and childfree women, which stands at 14.7 percent (ILO data, Global Wage Report 2018/19). Clearly, the main reasons for these pay gaps are the unacceptable practices of occupational and gender segregation in various branches and sectors of the economy.

We recommend revoking the complete list of banned professions for women; conducting a wide-ranging campaign to attract women to jobs traditionally held by men; and implementing programs to provide a work-life balance for men and women (guarantees of equal opportunities during training and career development and guarantees of paid childcare leave and access to daycare facilities).

State repressions against politically and socially active women

Political persecutions have meant that socially active women – politicians, journalists, human rights defenders, feminist activists – cannot continue their work and often have to leave Russia.

The opposition politicians Yulia Galyamina and Lyubov Sobol and Aleksei Navalny's press secretary Kira Yarmysh have all been the victims of criminal prosecutions and forced to leave. Members of the performance art group Pussy Riot (Maria Alyokhina, Lucy Shtein, Rita Flores, Anna Kuzminykh, and Nika Nikulshina (who left Russia)) are facing repeated extended prison terms, while Anastasia Vasilyeva, head of the independent union Doctors' Alliance, is on trial. BBC journalist Sarah Rainsford and director of the NGO Justice Initiative and women's rights defender Vanessa Kogan were expelled from Russia. Both had been living and working in Russia for many years, so the refusal to extend their visas/residence permits was particularly painful for their professional and personal lives.

Recent years have seen an increase in pressure on NGOs and female activists working to protect Indigenous rights and the environment. Mining companies, which are often affiliated with government representatives, receive subsoil permits by circumventing legal regulations and ignoring the opinion of the Indigenous population, all while committing multiple violations of environmental protection laws. The absence of any viable mechanisms for participation or opportunities for having an impact on the situation have forced Indigenous communities and environmental activists to resort to various forms of peaceful protest, which gives rise to persecutions and harassment on the part of various security agencies and aggressors presumably connected with them.

Example 1. Protests of residents of villages making up the Kuibyshev rural settlement in the Republic of Khakassia (southern Siberia) against the construction of a new coal mine in the fall of 2018 transformed into the persecution of journalists and environmentalists and the application of pressure on local residents by officers from the police and other security agencies during public hearings. In one case, in November 2019, local Indigenous environmentalists and activists in Khakassia organized a meeting

against coal companies' illegal activities. A few days after the demonstration, an active participant in the protests, Yevgeniya Pruss, was summoned to the Center for Combatting Extremism, where she was questioned and threatened with an FSB interrogation if she participated in any future protests. The pressure continued for several months, when she received anonymous threats on social media. The authorities also [attempted](#) to prosecute Pruss for saving clips on her personal social media page, even though these clips were not classified as banned and could be freely accessed on the Internet.

Example 2. In 2018, Yana Tannagasheva, an activist with the unregistered organization Resurrection of Kazas and the Shor People, was forced to flee Russia with her husband and children and apply for asylum in a European country. They felt they had to leave because of persecution from the authorities of Kemerovo Oblast and coal companies affiliated with them, the police, and special services, which lasted for several years. Prior to this, Yana Tannagasheva was fired from her job as a schoolteacher; the ancestral home belonging to Yana's family, which stood on a place of traditional residence of the Shor, was burned down along with other Shor homes by unidentified persons (2013–2014) – no one was ever prosecuted. The family's phone was tapped and they were under constant surveillance; the police came to their home to warn them against participating in human rights activities; and FSB officers conveyed threats by summoning their relatives and acquaintances for "discussions." Some of these threats related to their children. Yana Tannagasheva has protected the rights of the Shor and other Indigenous peoples both within her region and at the international level by helping to prepare a number of ADC Memorial reports for various UN committees, and she has spoken several times at UN events.

Example 3. Natalya Zubkova, a journalist and founder of the website Novosti Kiselyovska (Kemerovo Oblast, Siberia), also had to leave Russia because of persecutions and threats by security officers and unknown persons. Her work revealed urgent environmental problems caused by illegal coal mining. In August 2019, the Kiselyovsk mayor filed a complaint about Zubkova with the prosecutor's office because of an interview with local residents. She and her children received death threats, and she was attacked twice. When Zubkova moved to another region of Russia, the local police and the head of the Kiselyovsk Department of the Investigative Committee paid her a visit right away (Zubkova believes that this visit was connected with an attempt to take her child away from her and punish her for protesting the activities of the coal-mining companies). Her numerous statements to the police and the Investigative Committee regarding instances of slander and threats were rejected outright or responded to belatedly. In late April 2021, Zubkova fled Russia, and the independent website Novosti Kiselyovska shut down.

The tightening of the "foreign agent" law has adversely impacted female journalists. In 2021, the names of individuals began to be entered in the registry of "foreign media outlets performing the functions of a foreign agent." These individuals are now responsible for adding a phrase about being "foreign agents" to any public statements they make. They must also report on their personal expenses and create legal entities registered as "foreign agents." Violators face large fines and, in the future, criminal prosecution. For independent media outlets and journalists, these restrictions amount to being squeezed out of the profession: Some well-known publications have been forced to close (for example, Vtimes), while journalists have had to look for other jobs. And it's not just journalists who end up on this list. For example, the feminist activist and artist Darya Apakhonchich was added to the "foreign agent journalists" list, even though her activities in the media were limited to her own social media accounts. She was forced to leave Russia.

Encouragement of the illegal activities of radical misogynistic groups

The Russian authorities have not taken sufficient measures to end the activities of radical misogynistic networks. For example, the Male State movement, which promotes racism, homophobia, and extremist patriarchal ideas (for example, that women "have fewer rights than animals") online has continued to operate unpunished, which leads to crime in real life. Over 97,000 people are subscribed to the Telegram channel Pozdnyakov (named after the movement's founder), and the group had over 150,000 readers before it was blocked on Vkontakte. With help from his supporters, Pozdnyakov amplifies crude insults, threats, and calls to violence, shares personal information, and organizes provocations during public actions. The victims of his harassment include women in relationships with foreigners or members of other ethnic groups (the wives and girlfriends of African immigrants; the adoptive mother of a Black child; the wife of an ethnic Armenian; soccer fans; and others), feminists and activists (female participants in pickets and actions of solidarity with victims of domestic violence), survivors of domestic violence who were able to stand up for their rights (Margarita Gracheva, whose husband cut off her hands); public figures promoting a feminist agenda (the politician Alena Popova, the television journalist Anna Mongayt, and others); LGBTIQ+ people; women models; and others.

In 2018, Pozdnyakov was sentenced to probation for inciting hatred of women, but his criminal record was expunged in 2019 because Article 282 of the Criminal Code was partially decriminalized. In

2020, he was fined 10,000 rubles for an administrative violation. Law enforcement agencies explain that Pozdnyakov himself has never been properly prosecuted because he is in hiding abroad. The authorities have never made any attempt to block his Telegram channel. Four supporters of Male State were sentenced to actual prison time in 2018, but their sentences were overturned by a court of appeals.

In 2021, Male State attacked the Tanuki restaurant chain for its ads featuring a dark-skinned man with a rainbow flag. The company resisted the attack, saying in public that it supports equality regardless of gender, race, or sexual orientation and filed a complaint with law enforcement bodies. In other cases, businesses have also adopted discriminatory attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ people: In the summer of 2021, the VkusVill chain apologized to shoppers for featuring an ad with a lesbian couple, calling the ad a “mistake” that “offended the feelings of shoppers, workers, partners, and suppliers” (this same-sex family was also harassed by Male State).

The Russian government must put an immediate end to the political persecution of female activists, protesters, public figures, and politicians. The law on “foreign agent” NGOs and media must be revoked. The activities of radical, misogynistic networks must be suppressed. Their participants must be prosecuted, and their victims must be compensated for damages.

Women in places of detention

The number of women in places of detention

According to [data from the Judicial Department of Russia’s Supreme Court for 2008-2020](#), the number of female convicts has fallen (from 140,002 in 2008 to 73,325 in 2020), but the percentage of convicts who are women has not changed significantly and registered a slight drop from 15.1 percent in 2008 to 13.8 percent in 2020). As of August 1, 2021, 39,154 women were being held in places of detention. This includes 29,192 in correctional facilities, medical correctional facilities, treatment facilities, and juvenile facilities and 9,962 in pretrial detention centers and places serving as pretrial detention centers. Within these women’s facilities, there are 13 children’s homes, which are home to 336 children ([data from Russia’s Federal Penitentiary Service](#)).

It is difficult to analyze this data because the Federal Penitentiary Service only publishes aggregate data (for Russia overall or for several years). The statistics published by the Judicial Department of Russia’s Supreme Court do not make it possible to assess how often restrictive measures involving deprivation of liberty are applied to women or how often petitions for postponing service of a sentence are granted to women with children under the age of 14, pregnant women, and so forth, since separate data is not provided for women and men.

Roadmap for the development of the penal system: risks for female convicts

In 2021, the Russian government [approved](#) a roadmap for the development of the penal system until 2030 that proposes major changes to the structure and nature of places of detention. It proposes creating so-called integrated facilities and moving places of detention “outside of cities, to areas that have utility connections and transportation infrastructure” by 2024. These integrated facilities would combine correctional institutions and pretrial detention centers. It also proposes creating an integrated facility for one region or one facility for several regions.

The very idea of a large, remote place of detention that holds both convicts and people under investigation or on trial, i.e., a place where there are innocent people, poses a threat to the right to a fair trial and the right to privacy. The remote location of interregional integrated facilities will make it difficult for attorneys, relatives, and members of public monitoring commissions to visit, and transportation to court or investigative procedures will require tremendous resources. Some of these problems will most likely be resolved by video conferencing with the court and, possibly, with attorneys and/or relatives, but video conferencing cannot ensure confidentiality and makes it difficult to identify signs that prisoners have been subjected to pressure. In this way, it poses a threat to human rights and does not solve the problem of the facility’s remote location. On top of this, video conferencing cannot solve the problem of remote location for public monitoring commission members, who monitor conditions in places of detention to prevent torture; this monitoring must be done directly on the facility’s territory.

Women in particular could suffer from the creation of these facilities, since geographical remoteness limits access to medical care in civilian medical facilities, including maternity hospitals, which are particularly important for women.

Pregnancy and birth in places of detention

Detention facilities rarely create special conditions for pregnant women, and detention conditions are often degrading (for example, [cells for pregnant women with bunk beds](#)).

During its visit back in 2001, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture noted the problem of separating children from their mothers for no good reason and [recommended](#) supporting breastfeeding and not separating newborns from their mothers. This recommendation is not being implemented. A [report on the situation of vulnerable groups](#) in places of detention (2016) notes that women are subjected to inhuman treatment during labor and in the postpartum period: They are handcuffed when they are taken to the hospital to give birth, but the handcuffs are removed during labor, they are separated from their newborns for several days to a month after birth, which makes breastfeeding impossible, and they are even sometimes forced to give up their babies ([information from the project Women. Prison. Society, 2016](#)). The Health Committee of Saint Petersburg, which is responsible for maternity hospitals in Saint Petersburg where women from places of detention also give birth, confirmed that one of the reasons why newborns are separated from their mothers is that the administration of the pretrial detention center demands that women be quickly returned to the facility after giving birth.

[The standards](#) for issuing sanitary products to women (no less than 10 per month) are not always followed, and women complain of their poor quality.

Children in places of detention

Sometimes female convicts prefer to give up their children or place them in foster care. One of the reasons for this is that it is important for a woman to be in an institution that is closer to the place where her family lives, and the number of correctional facilities with children's homes are limited (a total of 13 such places of detention, see this [interactive map](#)).

But not all places of detention that have children's homes can offer conditions for children's full-fledged development: They often lack exercise yards. Prison administrations frequently do not supply children with diapers, which are not sold in prison stores, and women [have complained](#) that the administrations of correctional facilities do not provide proper nutrition for children.

There are no special conditions for transporting women with children. [They are transported in regular prison vans](#), under conditions that the European Court of Human Rights found violated Article 3 of the Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in its judgment in the case of Tomov and Others v. Russia (2019).

Separation of mothers from children during arrest

During the investigation of non-violent crimes, it is common to apply the restrictive measure of deprivation of liberty to women who are breastfeeding (for example, [in a case in Zlatoust in 2017](#)) or who have young children. In contravention of the norm of Russia's Administrative Offenses Code stating that administrative arrest cannot be applied to women with children under the age of 14, such women were placed under arrest in police departments when the police were suppressing public protest actions.

When foreign women are arrested for violating immigration laws, they are separated from their minor children, which in one case [led to the death of a five-month old baby in 2015](#). There have been other similar cases without such tragic outcomes ([a case in Moscow in 2017](#)).

The situation of women in foreign national detention centers

Foreign national detention centers (FNDCs) are not able to accommodate parents and their children; children are always separated from their parents and sent to special institutions that care for children without parents on a temporary basis.

Couples are also separated, because there are no conditions for husband and wife to live together. In the Saint Petersburg FNDC, for example, husbands and wives are housed on different floors and cannot see each other for the entire duration of their stay (which can last from several months to two years), because the law does not provide for meetings in FNDCs.

FNDCs also do not provide medical care, except for emergency medical care, and do not have gynecologists or other doctors available, which poses a risk to women. For example, in July 2021, a pregnant woman from Cuba was being held in the Saint Petersburg FNDC. She had a serious case of early-stage preeclampsia, but was not provided with any medical care.

The situation of LGBTIQ+ people in places of detention

LGBTIQ+ people are in a particularly vulnerable position. Under Part 1 of Article 116 of Russia’s Penal Enforcement Code, “homosexuality and lesbianism” are gross violations of the established order for serving a prison term and are a ground for penalties (fines, transfer to a cell, single-cell type facilities, or isolation cells, as well as placement in penalty and disciplinary cells). This is a way to pressure prisoners; in addition, a prisoner who has been subjected to penalties may be denied parole.

Transgender women face systemic discrimination because the penal system has no regulations or instructions about how to work with them.

For example, the transgender woman K., who entered the prison system during her transition, was sent to serve her time at a male facility. A caste system is flourishing in men’s prisons in Russia. As a transgender woman, K. fell into the lowest caste of “the offended,” who do the dirtiest jobs, are deprived of a number of rights, live in the worst conditions, and are often subjected to sexual exploitation. K. suffered from the fact that she was addressed as a male and that, in spite of all her requests, she was deprived of hormone replacement therapy. It was only after her release that she was able to complete her transition and obtain new documents (interview of the project “Woman. Prison. Society,” September 2020, Vladivostok).

The situation of women in closed institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe is currently tracking the execution of a number of European Court judgments (violation of Article 3 – the right to freedom from torture and other degrading treatment) concerning overcrowding at temporary detention facilities and pretrial detention centers (the group of cases [Fedotov v. Russia](#)) and in correctional facilities (the group of cases [Kalashnikov v. Russia](#) and [Buntov. v. Russia](#)). This problem has still not been resolved because people in overcrowded places of detention have been especially vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture advised states to “Conduct urgent assessments to identify those individuals most at risk within the detained populations, taking account of all particular vulnerable groups” during the pandemic. Women are a vulnerable group. They are in greater need of meetings with their families, children, and close friends, so they need to be granted more meetings and other opportunities for contact ([Female Prisoners: Guidelines for Gender-oriented Monitoring](#), 2015). The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture recommended giving preference to alternative measures to deprivation of liberty ([Body of Principles](#) for treating persons in detention in the context of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), 2020). CEDAW also called on states to follow this recommendation ([Guidance Note on CEDAW and COVID-19](#), April 22, 2020).

Russia has not followed these recommendations. The Federal Penitentiary Service has not completed the recommended assessment or taken any measures to protect convicted women during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics show that women’s petitions for parole have not been granted more frequently since anti-pandemic measures were introduced:

Year	Indicator	Number of petitions	Granted	Rejected	Percent granted	Percent rejected
2020.	Concerning parole, confinement in a disciplinary military unit, forced labor	83,147	38,912	29,971	46.0.	36.0.
2019.		92,545	45,387	33,468	49.0.	36.0.
2020.	Concerning replacement of unserved time with a lesser type of punishment	68,380	24,902	27,713	36.0.	40.0.
2019.		79,804	27,758	34,429	34.0.	43.0.
2020.	Concerning postponement of a sentence due to illness, grave consequences, or other exceptional circumstances	1,645	486	398	29.0.	24.0.
2019.		1,365	460	346	33.0.	25.0.

Using the pandemic as a pretext, many places of detention have closed for visits from relatives and attorneys and stopped accepting packages ([monitoring report](#) on the coronavirus in prisons conducted by Russia Behind Bars). In such a situation, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture recommended “provid[ing] sufficient **compensatory alternative methods**, where visiting regimes are restricted for health-related reasons, for detainees to maintain contact with families and the outside world, including

telephone, Internet and email, video communication and other appropriate electronic means” ([CAT/OP/10](#), April 7, 2020). Russia does not have compensatory alternative methods, and it is only recently that some facilities have started offering “video meetings” that last no longer than 15 minutes ([Federal Penitentiary Service press release](#) about Ulyanovsk Oblast, August 2021).

Inmates are being vaccinated at a very slow rate: As of March 31, 2021, 17,934 convicts had been vaccinated ([Federal Penitentiary Service press release](#)), which was 3.8 percent of all inmates as of that date (479,400 people).

Recommendations regarding women in places of detention

Review legal norms and end degrading treatment of pregnant women, newborn children, and women with children in places of detention, include guarantees that the right to medical assistance will be observed; ensure that children have the right to free development, the right to education, and the right to contact with their mothers in places of detention; end the practice of separating mothers from their newborn babies; take measures to reduce the number of pregnant women and women with minor children in places of detention; introduce the practice of providing alternative means of communication while anti-pandemic measures are in effect; collect and publish disaggregated data on women in places of detention and judicial statistics.

Do not separate the families of migrants/foreign nationals, select alternative detention conditions instead of detention in closed institutions for foreign nationals; ensure that medical assistance is available in foreign national detention centers, ensure that convicts can access legal assistance, means of communication, and meetings with relatives.

While reforming the Federal Penitentiary Service, eliminate risks to ensure the rights to a fair trial, medical assistance, and privacy inherent in the creation of remote integrated facilities for various categories of deprivation of liberty (convicted and accused people).

Violations of the rights of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women

The legal situation of LBT women in Russia

The situation of lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LBT) women in Russia is complicated by the existence of legal restrictions, a high level of violations motivated by sexual or gender identity, the lack of a system to register these violations, the politicization of the equality discourse, and the state’s lack of political will to support the full exercise of LGBTIQ+ rights.

Data from an annual poll on the topic of discrimination among LGBTIQ+ people in Russia shows that the level of violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) jumped from 16.6 percent in 2014 to 78.4 percent in 2020 ([Quantitative data of a monitoring survey of discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people, 2020](#)). The share of respondents reporting psychological violence shot up from 47 percent to 65 percent in comparison with the results of studies conducted six years ago. Seventy percent of respondents were assigned female at birth, with the majority (60 percent) identifying as cisgender or transgender women with various sexual identities.

LBT women are in the grey zone of the law. On the one hand, a ban on discrimination is guaranteed by the Russian Constitution and is reflected in most industry-specific statutes and regulations governing labor relations, education, access to social benefits, and so forth. The list of grounds for discrimination, which, if committed, entails liability in accordance with Russia’s Administrative Offenses Code and Criminal Code, includes various characteristics, including gender and “other circumstances.” On the other hand, sexual and gender identity are not mentioned once in any of these documents. Russia’s Constitutional Court ruled (N24-P, No. 24-R of September 23, 2014) that sexual orientation may be implied under the umbrella term “other circumstances,” but law enforcement practices show that the executive branch has refused to separate the LGBTIQ+ community into its own social group when investigating violations. Thus, incidents where homosexual, bisexual, or transgender women are victims cannot be investigated on the motive of hate, which means that justice is thrown into question.

The law banning promotion of a non-traditional lifestyle to minors was adopted at the federal level eight years ago (No. 436-FZ, 2013) and is the main barrier to eliminating discrimination against lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women. The consequences of this law, which is intended to protect children’s health by shielding them from information about the diversity of sexual norms, have put LBT women in especially vulnerable positions. The law gives only a vague understanding of their liability and continues to be used selectively to restrict rights. In 2017, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that this law is discriminatory. The number of administrative cases opened in connection with “distributing

propaganda” has grown annually since 2018. However, in 2021 only several dozen people were fined, which shows that this law is only applied rarely ([official data of the Judicial Department, Justice state information system](#)). These statistics confirm that the state has no intention of using this law to protect children from “harmful information,” but is instead using it as a tool to pressure activists and the LGBTIQ+ community in general.

The case of Yulia Tsvetkova is a glaring example of this kind of pressure. An activist, artist, and political prisoner, Tsvetkova became the victim of repressions because of her projects to break down gender stereotypes and support equality and body-positive optics. Tsvetkova began to receive attention in 2018 because of productions she led at the Merak Children’s Theater, which she was forced to shut down after regular denunciations and summonses to the police. By 2021, she had been officially charged with breaking the “propaganda law” three times; she was also twice found guilty of and fined (50,000 rubles and 70,000 rubles) for publishing information about LGBTIQ+ rights and drawings in support of LGBTIQ+ families. A criminal case on the production and distribution of pornography was opened against her. Tsvetkova has been harassed, provoked, and threatened repeatedly; the investigation of the criminal case has been intentionally drawn out and has had to be reopened a total of three times. When she was under house arrest, she went on a hunger strike, but the authorities did not react to this. Single-person pickets in support of Tsvetkova have been held in several cities throughout the country and have ended with the arrest of female activists. From the cases files of Yulia Tsvetkova and other activists prosecuted under the “propaganda” law, we know that the FSB systematically works to identify the promotion of non-traditional sexual relationships on the Internet. These include four cases initiated by the FSB, but the list of this service’s responsibilities does not include identifying similar administrative violations. The FSB could not provide any meaningful response to questions from the Sphere Charitable Foundation.

Discrimination

Given the unpredictable application of the law banning the promotion of non-traditional sexual relations, people are afraid and assume that they risk prosecution, all the way up to possible criminal liability, even though the law does not envisage criminal punishment. This means that LBT women are forced to practice self-censorship and carefully hide their identities to avoid threats that could come from anywhere. When a person is open about their identity or their identity is revealed without their permission, this leads to external restrictions and bans that are imposed on the basis of spurious violations, which allow people in a position of power to illegally apply sanctions against LBT women. In the age of COVID-19, female activists are prevented from holding public events, from film festivals ([the opening of the Side by Side film festival was disrupted](#), November 2020) to single-person pickets (for example, [43 participants in single-person pickets in support of Yulia Tsvetkova were arrested](#) in June 2020). Under the pretext of sanitary restrictions, the police have broken up LGBTIQ+ events even as they have done nothing to break up other overcrowded events, which is evidence of the spurious motivations for the bans.

Violation of labor rights

Cases where female education workers have been fired demonstrate the longstanding practice of undisclosed discrimination. Because of the air of illegality surrounding LGBTIQ+ people created by the “propaganda” law, state and private educational institutions do not allow LBT women to work with minor children. In an attempt to avoid risks to their reputation, employers often propose the least controversial way of ending their relationships with LBT teachers or professors, i.e., voluntary resignation. This is a popular approach, since for women with careers in education, charges of offenses against public “morals” (violation of the “propaganda” law falls under Chapter 6 of the Administrative Offences Code “Administrative offences endangering the health and sanitary and epidemiological well-being of the population and endangering public morals”) or termination for “committing an immoral act” (Article 81.8 of the Labor Code “Termination of a labor contract at the employer’s initiative”) will make it much more difficult for these women to find jobs in the future and might even end their careers in education.

LBT women can be outed and harassed by their colleagues on the basis of SOGI, which can force them to change jobs. Belonging to or showing sympathy for the LGBTIQ+ community can become unofficial grounds for a refusal to hire a person or to extend a labor contract. There have been cases where employers forced their subordinates to describe LBT colleagues in negative terms and write “anonymous” denunciations and misrepresented voting by committees that make decisions on employment status. In 2020, 280 cisgender women reported problems at work due to bisexuality or homosexuality ([Quantitative data of a monitoring survey of discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people, 2020](#)). Transgender women who have not changed their gender marker in their passport at the time they are hired are essentially deprived of decent and legal earnings. In order to avoid transphobic violence and

harassment, transgender women look for jobs that do not require official documentation, thus depriving themselves of basic social guarantees.

Violation of family rights

In 2020, constitutional amendments proposed by President Putin were adopted. These included a definition of marriage as “a union between a man and a woman.” This amendment focuses on protecting “the traditional family”; it says same-sex marriages are not possible in Russia and does not recognize same-sex marriages entered into abroad. Even though this amendment had no effect on the legal situation of same-sex families, it enshrines state homophobia and inevitably leads to discrimination. In one case, female Russian citizens who entered into marriage abroad filed citizenship applications for Russian citizenship for their daughter, who was born in Argentina. Both mothers are listed as parents on the child’s birth certificate. The Russian consulate rejected their application on the basis of this.

Single-sex parents raising children must be on their guard against ill-wishers. In general, these ill-wishers are former husbands or relatives who threaten the female parent with removal of children or deprivation of parental rights for not agreeing that the child is being raised in an “incorrect” family. The vulnerability of same-sex families leads to blackmail and speculation, including on the part of relatives and extorters pursuing goals unrelated to the child’s situation. In 2020 alone, 22 women concerned about threats and attempts to restrict their parental rights or deprive their partners of custody rights turned to the Russian LGBT Network for assistance. Respondents to the quantitative survey said that their parental rights were impinged in 76 cases (data from the Psychological Services, Discrimination Monitoring, and Legal Aid programs of the Russian LGBT Network). These fears are reinforced by instances where agencies focus on LGBTIQ+ families. In July 2019, the Investigative Committee [opened a criminal case](#) against workers at the Moscow Department of Social Protection, who “allowed” a gay couple to raise adopted children. The Investigative Committee believed that the same-sex parents were promoting “non-traditional relations” and thus “harming their [children’s] health” only based on the fact that the children had two fathers.

Hate speech and violence

In addition to the direct and indirect effects of the “propaganda law,” this law’s definition of LGBTIQ+ people as second-class people has helped sharpen the conservative turn in Russia. Politicians set traditional values against the values of LGBTIQ+ people, corrupting the concept of human rights. State and pro-government media outlets support the state’s homophobia by demonizing members of the community and legitimizing inequality and hatred of LGBTIQ+ people. This rhetoric is picked up by leaders of nationalist movements, and more and more groups bringing radicals together on the basis of xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia are cropping up on social media.

Hate gives rise to violence. According to [statistics](#) derived by human rights defenders on the basis of indicators from a quantitative survey conducted by the Russian LGBT Network and a qualitative monitoring survey of discrimination, physical violence against LGBTIQ+ people is invariably in the range of 16 percent to 20 percent. In terms of percentage, transgender women are the most vulnerable to sexual and physical violence. Among [cisgender respondents](#), women are the most likely to face psychological (61 percent) and sexual violence (9.8 percent). Dozens of LBT women report homophobic and transphobic violence every year. Young women encounter violence at home and in public places – for example, on city streets, which is what happened to Ekaterina Likhikh in Saint Petersburg, when a group of young people beat her after taking her for a lesbian. Another victim – Sobi – recounted how a passerby aimed a gun at her after asking about her identity. In the latter case, the victim filed a complaint with a court regarding failure to act on the part of the police.

LBT women in the North Caucasus

LBT women from the republics of the North Caucasus experience the most pressure on the basis of SOGI. The situation of the female population in the Caucasus depends on the wishes of the male line of relatives, who essentially control the fate of Caucasian girls and women. Failure of women to obey the local principles could lead to persecution by the police and punishment by relatives, all the way up to legitimized murder (so-called “honor killings”).

In 2020, with the support of the Sphere Charitable Foundation, an advocacy group provided assistance to a 23-year-old LBT woman from the North Caucasus who had been subjected to domestic violence and persecution by the Chechen police because of her sexual identity. Because relatives have to all intents and purposes banned free movement for adult women, some victims need help leaving the

region. In one case, the Chechen police held volunteers for several days and forced the woman to testify against the human rights defenders. The detained human rights defenders filed a complaint with the Investigative Committee saying that the victim who asked for help had been kidnapped. The Investigative Committee refused to open a preliminary investigation, and the human rights defenders filed an appeal in court in response.

Special “Islamic medical” centers have been created in Chechnya and Dagestan. These centers offer the service of “expelling jinns” (exorcisms), including for the purpose of “eliminating homosexuality.” Private clinics in Central Russia specializing in medical and psychological care offer similar services. This procedure is usually accompanied by readings from the Koran and violent acts: loud screams in the patient’s ears, suffocation, and beating with sticks.

In 2018, Aminat Lorsanova was twice illegally placed in a psychiatric hospital, where she spent a total of five months and was subjected to beatings and torture. She filed a request with the Investigative Committee to open a criminal cases against those involved in her illegal “treatment,” but no measures were ever taken (see [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania. Statement on the Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation – Two Years after the Publication of the Moscow Mechanism Report](#)).

Attempts were also made over the course of several months to cure 22-year-old Khalimat Taramova of bisexuality. She partially lost her hearing after taking preparations [to “cure” her]. Because the Chechen police gained access to her correspondence with her lover, Khalimat left the republic for a safe haven apartment in Dagestan. She sent the Russian police a video where she stated that she left home voluntarily to save herself from regular beatings and threats and asked the police not to put her on the missing persons list or share information about her location with her relatives. Several days later, Chechen and Dagestani security officers broke into the apartment and kidnapped her. The people there were taken by brute force to the local police precinct, where they were written up for failing to obey the security officers and prevented from taking pictures of the bruises they received during their arrest. The Dagestani police did not react to a statement from attorneys about a kidnapping. The ECtHR asked Russia to provide information about Taramova’s location and asked questions about the grounds for her detention in Dagestan and her transfer to Chechnya. No one knows where Khalimat is right now or if she is even alive.

Recommendations regarding observance of the rights of LBT women:

Immediately revoke Article 6.21 of the Administrative Offences Code, which is discriminatory. List sexual orientation and gender identity as aggravating circumstances in Russia’s Criminal Code. Conduct effective investigations into hate crimes motivated by sexual or gender identity.

Make national security agencies stop classifying the activities of activists working to educate the population about LGBTIQ+ matters and human rights as threats requiring the interference of law enforcement agencies.

End the persecution of Yulia Tsvetkova and other political prisoners.

Investigate the statements of Aminat Lorsanova concerning violence against her and of attorneys for the Russian LGBT Network concerning the kidnapping of Khalimat Taramova. Establish Khalimat’s location in the shortest time possible and guarantee her safety.

Work to end the practice of forced treatment for homosexuality that residents of the North Caucasus are subjected to.

In the near future, prepare a draft antidiscrimination law that stipulates the characteristics of groups especially vulnerable to discrimination. Include in this draft a plan to protect LBT women from intersectional discrimination on the basis of sex and sexual and gender identity.

Take measures to reduce the level of violence against LGBTIQ+ people by developing programs promoting equality and respect.

Stop the selective and disproportionate application of restrictions related to the sanitary and hygienic situation in the era of COVID-19 at public events.

Discrimination of women from ethnic and religious minorities

Roma women and girls

Female residents of dense Roma settlements face multiple discrimination attributable to a high level of xenophobia and the negative impact of the patriarchal values and gender stereotypes of a closed community.

The fact that they have no personal documents or education results in unemployment and poverty, which is only exacerbated by instability, and, in recent times, the pandemic. Roma women encounter discrimination when they try to receive various services, including government, medical, and social services. Female residents of dense settlements, who are easily discernible by their traditional clothing and

hairstyles, suffer from checks and raids by law enforcement bodies, including checks for “suspicion of violating quarantine.” Women are also traumatized by police measures such as mass photographing, fingerprinting, and groundless interrogations (for example, raids of the Roma population in Leningrad Oblast in 2020 and 2021).

The practice of segregating Roma children living in settlements and creating separate “Roma classes” is widespread in many Russian regions. Roma children receive a low-quality education from being in segregated classes and cannot participate in school life or interact with other children. This practice impacts girls in particular because of the patriarchal values and gender stereotypes that are deeply-rooted in closed Roma communities. Seeing no point in a bad education, parents follow tradition and arrange early marriages for their children, thus depriving girls of independence and forcing them to do only domestic work.

At the same time, schools and local education bodies do not recognize their responsibility for the fact that hundreds of Roma children are not receiving an education in buildings under their jurisdiction and typically shift all the blame onto the parents, who are often illiterate, instead of providing constructive help.

For example, in 2018, 43 students, including 20 girls, were simultaneously expelled from “Roma classes” at school No. 33 in Samara under the pretext of difficult behavior. The real reason for the expulsion was that the school’s rating had dropped because of poor results, Russian parents had a negative attitude towards the Roma children, and the school was unable to find teachers (the Roma children were taught by one teacher, who resigned). From 2018 to 2021, i.e., three academic years, none of these children received any education whatsoever, and their parents had no luck getting them back into the school. At the time of this writing, only eight children from this settlement were able to enroll in first grade; no educational path has yet been found for the children whose educations were interrupted and who are now too old for first grade.

Stateless women belonging to ethnic minorities

Even though over 25 years have passed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has set the task of overcoming statelessness throughout the world by 2024, thousands of people in Russia who are mainly immigrants from former Soviet Republics have no legal status. Female stateless persons are the most vulnerable because of risks associated with losing parental rights and the ability to receive medical care, including during labor. Russian citizenship laws are very slowly changing for the better, just like the practice of their application. In particular, recent amendments allowing stateless persons to gain legal status and the right to live and work in Russia do not allow even those stateless persons who have won cases in international courts to legalize their status.

Many stateless people spend their entire lives trying to break out of this vicious circle of discrimination, which is aggravated by belonging to an ethnic minority.

One example is the case of Anna Lakatosh, a Roma woman from Zakarpattia Oblast, Ukraine, who has no citizenship or personal documents. Anna has been living in Russia without documents or the ability to gain legal status for over 20 years. She has been regularly threatened by the police and risks being arrested for violating migration rules and placed in a foreign national detention center, even though she cannot be expelled to any country. Anna ended up in a such center in 2009 and spent over a year there in extremely difficult conditions. In the ECtHR case *Lakatosh and Others v. Russia* (2011), Russia [admitted](#) violation of articles 3, 5 § 1, 4, and 13 of the European Convention and paid the applicant monetary compensation. Nevertheless, Anna is still an undocumented stateless person 10 years after this judgment. Her fate is the tragedy of being deprived of parental rights, ending up in a shelter, being forced into a life of petty crime and prison sentences, working as a prostitute for a piece of bread, living in a cold tent in an industrial zone on the outskirts of the city, losing family ties, being defenseless in the face of violence and exploitation, and deteriorating health. Ukraine – her country of origin – and Russia – the country where she has resided for years – could have provided her with documents long ago, but her ethnicity and the stigma associated with it became insurmountable barriers for this.

Religious persecution

Criminal prosecutions of followers of the Jehovah’s Witnesses began on a large-scale after this religious movement was labeled an extremist organization and banned in Russia in 2017. Elderly women are among those being persecuted for “participating in the activities of an extremist organization.”

In Crimea, which is under de facto Russian jurisdiction, there is a religious aspect to the protest against Russia’s policies. Human rights organizations have recognized over 70 Crimean Tatars as political prisoners. This includes people under investigation and people already convicted. Administrative arrests, searches, detentions, interrogation, and torture continue. Crimean Tatars have been sentenced to long prison terms—from 10 to 20 years without any reasonable evidence of guilt – for involvement with

Hizb ut-Tahrir, which Russia believes is a terrorist organization. Female activists and human rights defenders coming out in support of political prisoners face arrest: In 2019 alone, the women arrested included Zarema and Alie Mamutova for single-person pickets supporting political prisoners; Mumine Salieva and Luftie Zudieva for speaking out against Russia's repressive policies in Crimea; and the activist and daughter of the political prisoner Gulsum Alieva, who has been detained repeatedly.

Recommendations:

Ensure that Roma women and girls can exercise their right to education as part of comprehensive positive measures to improve the situation of Russia's Roma population.

Take urgent, proactive measures to document stateless persons.

End persecution for religious reasons and ensure the right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion.