

RUSSIA

Transgender and gender diverse rights in Russia deteriorating rapidly

Lawmakers on Tuesday expected to give final approval to gender transition ban bill

Published 2 months ago on July 18, 2023

By **Brody Levesque**



Russian President **Vladimir Putin** signs legislation this past Spring. (Photo courtesy of the Office of the President/Russian



In a scene eerily reminiscent of a 1960's cold war era novel, the young woman sat at the outside table of the café not far from the museum district and main railroad in St. Petersburg, chain smoking French Gitanes and toying with the food on her plate. She kept nervously glancing around as if she expected to suddenly be swept up in a secret police raid.



The primary cause of her anxiety and discomfiture she explained to the journalist sitting across the table from her, was that as a transgender woman, she felt threatened and persecuted. Unable to continue to live in her native region in the Sverdlovsk Oblast, [region] in the Ural mountains she had moved first to the Russian capital of Moscow. Then as tensions over the treatment of LGBTQ Russians she fled to St. Petersburg.

“There is no safety anymore, soon they will openly hunt us like swine, we no right they say,” she told Russian freelance journalist Sergei Dimitrov.

The young woman who only identified herself to Dimitrov by the name Elena said the latest passage of laws including expansion of the Russia’s “gay propaganda” include adults last December, coupled with the crackdown by the Russian Federal Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media, abbreviated Roskomnadzor, on any websites and on popular phone apps that cater to LGBTQ has now begun efforts in earnest to leave the country.

Last week the lower house of the Russian Parliament, colloquially referred to as the State Duma, passed on its final reading a bill that would outlaw gender transitioning in Russia. The measure now heads to the Federation Council, or upper House which is expected to pass in the scheduled vote on Tuesday and then transmitted to Russian President Vladimir Putin for his approval and signature which is expected.

State Duma [Parliament] Deputy Speaker Pyotr Tolstoy, a co-sponsor of the legislation, pointed out that banning the “practice of transgenderism” was in the interest of national security.

The diagnosis of “transsexualism,” he added, refers to gender identity disorders on a basis for recognizing a citizen as unfit for military service. In addition, “we must ensure that by changing the sex of one of the partners, a homosexual couple gets the right to have a child. Unfortunately, there are already such cases in Russia,” he said.

The proposed law would bar Russians from changing their gender on official government identity documents including internal and external passports, driver’s licenses, and birth certificates, although gender marker changes had been legal for 26 years since 1997.

Medical healthcare providers would be banned from “performing medical interventions designed to change the sex of a person,” including surgery and prescribing hormones.

In a floor speech prior to the vote last month after the measure’s first reading, Tolstoy

blamed the West for what he deemed a profitable medical industry:

“The Western transgender industry is trying in this way to seep into our country through a window for its multi-billion dollar business,” Tolstoy said. Then he claims already a developed network of clinics in Russia, “it includes trans-friendly doctors, psychologists, and all this operates with the active support of LGBT organizations. In the past six months they have changed their names to more, perhaps harmless-sounding ones, inferring that the recent expansion of the country’s law banning LGBTQ professionals was somehow responsible for those changes.”



*Deputy Speaker of the State Duma **Pytor Tolstoy** speaking during a session of the Duma. (Courtesy of the Russian government/Duma)*

According to Tolstoy, gender reassignment surgery is “a very profitable area of m

services. And it's understandable why a number of doctors defend this area so fiercely, hiding behind academic knowledge, including those obtained abroad while studying in the United States and other countries," he said, "running into" Western medical education.

Provisions to the bill in its second reading, approved on Thursday, also ban trans people from adopting or fostering children, and force them to annul their marriages if one partner in a couple subsequently changes gender.

LGBTQ and human rights organization ILGA-Europe issued a statement condemning the actions of the Russian Duma and offered support and solidarity with the Russian LGBTQ and queer communities.

"We firmly assert that such legislation flagrantly violates fundamental human rights and international standards and principles.

ILGA-Europe firmly believe in the inherent dignity and equal rights of all individuals regardless of their gender identity or expression. International human rights standards, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, emphasize that everyone has the right to self-determination, privacy, and the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Denying trans and gender diverse individuals access to trans-specific healthcare and legal gender recognition blatantly disregards the international human rights framework. ILGA-Europe wrote.

Sympathetic physicians and trans rights advocates have warned that the ban is likely to create a black market for hormone substitutes, some of which likely will be dangerous. It may also lead to an increase in attempted suicides among trans youth unable to access medical care.

ILGA-Europe's statement also warned: "Furthermore, the bill invalidates all current legal gender recognition for individuals who have undergone transition-related medical procedures but not yet changed the gender marker in their passport. This is a violation of their right to privacy, places trans people in legal limbo, and creates unnecessary burdens on them by forcing them to disclose their private and medical history and exposing them to discrimination, harassment and violence."

According to Dimitrov, that particular provision of the legislation is specifically a
 Elena, who while having completed transition-related surgery, has been unable to

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 SHE TOLD DIMITROV THAT THAT PARTICULAR PROVISION OF THE LEGISLATION IS SPECIFICALLY A
 under her former name and gender, was yet another reason she had fled. Now she
 trapped and unable to legally leave, entertaining the option of illegally entering
 asking for asylum, most likely to neighboring Latvia, or Estonia.

Independent news outlet Mediazona reported in February 2023 that the number
 issued due to “gender change” has more than doubled in 2022 compared with two
 earlier — from 428 in 2020 to 936 last year, according to Russia’s Interior Minister

In justifying the provision, lawmakers cited concerns that men are using the rela
 simple procedure of changing gender in official documents to dodge the military

Another point was raised by a lawmaker who asked what to do with 3,000-plus tr
 who have already managed to change their gender and documents. Tolstoy resp
 that the law does not have retroactive effect.

State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin called gender transitioning “pure satani



*Duma Speaker **Vyacheslav Volodin** standing at the podium calls for the first vote on the pro-ban gender-affirming surgeries in Russia (Photo courtesy of the Russian government/Duma.)*

Akram Kubanychbekov, a senior advocacy officer for ILGA-Europe, this past week “dear colleagues” request for assistance detailing specific needs and actions that crucial to assisting trans and gender diverse Russians.

Kubanychbekov wrote:

“Discrimination, violence and the enactment of oppressive laws have made it increasingly unsafe for trans people to live their lives authentically and without fear. In light of these circumstances, we have reached out to local trans organizations to ask them of support and community need at the moment.”

“To address the urgent needs of trans people who wish to leave Russia, there is a facilitating support for broadening the criteria for humanitarian visas. By expanding eligibility criteria, we can ensure that those facing persecution and threats to their lives have a viable pathway to seek refuge in other countries. It is crucial to work together and advocate for this change with governments at the national level to extend our support to trans people seeking a safer environment in safer countries.”

“In addition to humanitarian visas, trans organizations [inside Russia] asked to be able to secure multi-entry, long-term (preferably Schengen) visas for activists, who do their important work within Russia but may need to swiftly leave in case of escalating danger. By facilitating the necessary visa support, activists are enabled to carry out their vital work with the knowledge that they have an emergency exit if required.”

“We would like to encourage you to stand in solidarity with the local trans organizations in Russia and support their requests.”

Political fallout

Yulia Alyoshina, the country’s first trans politician, had made plans this past year to become the governor of Russia’s Altay region, an area bordering the former Soviet republic and independent nation of Kazakhstan.

Yulia Alyoshina (Photo courtesy of Yulia Alyoshina)

Alyoshina, who had been the head of the regional Civic Initiative party, resigned after Putin signed the expanded anti-LGBTQ law last December. With gubernatorial elections set for this September in the Altay region, party officials had urged her running.

Alyoshina says she didn't expect anyone in the Civic Initiative party to suggest that she run in the gubernatorial elections. But she figured "well, why not" and agreed. "The fact that I was born in a different body is not as important to voters as my honest and sincere desire to make my native land better," she told Russian media outlet [Gazeta Europe](#).

On the topic of Russian society's relationship to trans people, Alyoshina told [No Europe](#) the current political climate is quite bad. She described losing supporters after the Duma passed and Putin signed the anti-LGBTQ laws last December. She thinks people have been influenced by the authorities' rhetoric on "LGBT propaganda."

In another interview with Russian language media outlet, Meduza, which the Putin government banned in January 2023, Alyoshina reflected on the effects of the bill Meduza that her medical transition took about a year and a half. There were no clinics in her region where she should go for gender care services, so she was sent to a state psychiatric hospital. It took another year and a half after she was first seen with a certificate for changing gender markers [on legal documents.]

In a [phone interview with the Moscow Times](#) just prior to the Duma's impending passage of the law, Alyoshina confirmed the post she had made on her Telegram channel that she had abandoned her effort to campaign as a gubernatorial candidate.

"I was told by municipal deputies and village heads that the [gender reassignment] law was being considered and that they couldn't give me their signatures," Alyoshina said in the [Moscow Times](#).

"They told me: 'How can we publicly support a transgender person if the State Duma prohibits transgender people in Russia?' she said.

"By putting our signatures in your support, we will go against the country's policy. We have families and children, we don't want to fall under repression," Alyoshina told the deputies as she was telling her.

Alyoshina said she was weighing "various options" for her future, but said she would support the passing of the gender reassignment law.

"I'm not ready to dive into [my future plans] until the legislation is passed," she said.

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Putin signs law banning transition therapy and surgery in Russia

Lawmakers approved measure earlier this month

Published 2 months ago on July 25, 2023

By **Brody Levesque**

Russian President **Vladimir Putin** in July 2023. (Photo courtesy of the Russian government/Office of the Russian Pre

Legislation that will effectively ban the existence of transgender Russians was signed Monday as expected by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The new law, which takes effective immediately, was passed earlier this month by the Duma, the lower house of the Russian Parliament, and then last week by the Federal Council, which is its upper body.

The law now bans Russians from changing their gender on official government identification documents including internal and external passports, driver's licenses and birth certificates although gender marker changes had been legal since 1997.

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Bill sponsor says banning 'transgenderism' a national security interest

Published 3 months ago on June 16, 2023

By **Brody Levesque**



Duma Deputy Speaker **Pytor Tolstoy** speaks during a session of the Duma. (Photo courtesy of the Russian government)

A bill that would outlaw gender transitioning procedures in Russia passed through its legislative procedure Wednesday with 400 lawmakers in the lower house of Parliament voting in favor and zero votes against.

State Duma [Parliament] Deputy Speaker Pytor Tolstoy, a co-sponsor of the legislation, echoed the sentiments expressed by Russian President Vladimir Putin during political rallies last fall to bolster public support for his war in Ukraine, referring to transgender people in a highly transphobic way.

“Do we really want, here, in our country, in Russia, instead of ‘mum’ and ‘dad,’ to have

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RUSSIA

Gay TikTok couple arrested in Russia

Haoyang Xu faces deportation to China

Published 5 months ago on April 10, 2023

By **Brody Levesque**

Haoyang Xu and Gela Gogishvili, gay couple and TikTok stars in Russia. (YouTube screenshot)

A young gay couple has been arrested with one facing deportation back to his native China after running afoul of Russia's "gay propaganda" law signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin last December, for their videos on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube.

Gela Gogishvili, 23, a Russian national and his boyfriend, Chinese national Haoyang Xu, 21, live in Kazan, the fifth largest city in Russia located on the banks of the Volga and Kazanka Rivers in southwest Russia. The young couple had been documenting their everyday lives with their 740,000 followers on TikTok and 64,900 subscribers on YouTube.

The couple was arrested this past Thursday and although Gogishvili was released, Xu

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