

## Visa, asylum and statelessness policies regarding human rights defenders and citizens of Belarus and the Russian Federation

Oslo 30 May 2024

The document provides the main views of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) regarding Norway's visa, asylum, and *de facto* statelessness policies regarding human rights defenders (HRDs) and citizens from Belarus and the Russian Federation. The addressee is Norwegian authorities, but Norwegian policies should be aligned with those of other countries in the Schengen area to have maximum supportive and protective effect.

### 1. Aim of NHC engagement

Norway, EU Member States, and other Western states have, in recent years, welcomed and provided security for many persecuted members of Russian and Belarusian civil society, in particular journalists, human rights defenders, and members of the political opposition. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine increases the need for such support, as a Russian and Belarusian restart of democratic developments after the war depends on the strength of their democratic forces. They need support from democratic countries now.

At least the following points should be part of Norway's response to the extraordinary situation caused by Russia's war. Norwegian authorities should fully realise that this is not ordinary times. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and persecution of domestic opposition have created a new situation which demands democratic governments reinvent measures of support and protection of democratic forces in Russia and Belarus, where repression of civil society and opposition intensifies.

- a. *Strengthening of visa policies:* In its foreign policies, [Norway recognises HRDs](#) as people who take peaceful action to promote and protect the human rights of others. Norway has played a leading role in the UN in promoting resolutions recognising the role of HRDs and underlining the obligations of states to secure an enabling environment for their work.<sup>1</sup> Still, HRDs experience refusals when applying for visas, particularly multi-entry Schengen visas, which enable HRDs to travel to a safe country on short notice if security conditions deteriorate. The result is a discord between Norway's human rights and visa policies, which should end.
  - Norway should provide multi-entry one-year or longer Schengen visas to HRDs working in repressive environments.
    - i. Such visas could be named 'human rights defenders visas'.

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<sup>1</sup> [Agreement at the UN to recognize the efforts of human rights defenders - regjeringen.no](#)

- ii. Experience from Ireland and other European countries shows that such visas are not channels for seeking asylum but enable HRDs to remain active in their home country while being able to relocate temporarily if conditions deteriorate.<sup>2</sup>
  - iii. Such visa issuing can be operationalised with NHC and/or other CSOs' assistance. A select group of CSOs can be invited to propose candidates for receiving visas.
    - Family members of HRDs should also receive a Schengen visa, enabling them to relocate at short notice together with the HRD or as a security precaution while the HRD continues to work inside the country. Authoritarian leaders frequently target family members of HRDs.
    - Norwegian embassies should have contingency plans for HRDs to apply for Schengen visas from an embassy outside the HRD's country of origin. For example, a Russian HRD should be able to apply for a Schengen visa at the Norwegian Embassy in Tbilisi, Georgia.
    - Norwegian embassies should have the capacity to relocate vulnerable HRDs.
    - In line with UN definitions<sup>3</sup>, a broad definition of HRDs should be applied, including human rights activists, youth human rights activists, LGBTQ+ and environmental human rights activists, lawyers and journalists working on human rights cases and other people that can be considered most at risk due to their human rights work or characteristics.
- b. Norway should strengthen its role in providing *HRD and democracy shelter schemes* in line with proposals in the European Parliament:
  - A dedicated mechanism should be established for issuing “special residence permits, multi-entry visas, and travel documents, for example, in the form of a laissez-passer” to Russian and Belarusian opposition leaders, civil society activists, and otherwise politically persecuted persons to allow them to continue their work in Norway or an EU member state. This will permit them to stay in a country of exile after their Russian or Belarusian travel documents expire.<sup>4</sup>
  - Norway should develop and strengthen programs to provide visas and support temporary stays to HRDs facing deteriorating conditions in their home country.<sup>5</sup>
    - i. Norway should expand programs with scholarships, guest professorships, and internships for HRDs at universities, research institutes, and organisations.

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<sup>2</sup> Position Paper: concerning EU visas as a protection tool for human rights defenders, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, <https://srdefenders.org/resource/position-paper-concerning-eu-visas-as-a-protection-tool-for-human-rights-defenders/>, pg. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders A/RES/53/144, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-human-rights-defenders/declaration-human-rights-defenders>, that provides a very wide definition: “...individuals, groups and associations ... contributing to ... the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of peoples and individuals”

<sup>4</sup> *EU-Russia political relations: a draft report of the European Parliament*, Brussels Dialogue, 19 April 2024, <https://bit.ly/3UZVlzH>, pg. 12, paragraph 16. The dialogue includes the major political groups in the European Parliament as well as representatives from Russia’s democracy movement.

<sup>5</sup> Unlike the previous point, this point is meant for the HRDs that currently do not reside in Norway or a EU country.

- ii. NHC has occasionally hosted human rights defenders who can temporarily leave their home country for security reasons without applying for asylum. We have also allocated funds for "emergency measures" in some projects. However, such arrangements need to be scaled up and coordinated.
  - iii. To create an effective HRD protection mechanism, a procedure for identifying particularly vulnerable defenders must be established. Recognised international human rights organisations and national CSOs can provide expert information and should be invited to present cases.
- c. *Clarification of asylum policies:* The Ministry of Justice should clarify Norwegian asylum policies regarding citizens from Russia and Belarus, including draft evaders, enabling the Directorate of Immigration (UDI) to start processing applications from such asylum seekers. Ministry guidelines should clarify that:
- *Draft evaders* from Russia have a right to protection as a main rule. This will align with the UNHCR interpretation, which states that draft evaders may have a right to refugee status if the service entails a risk of forced participation in a conflict that the international community has condemned for war crimes, such as Russia's war against Ukraine.<sup>6</sup>
  - Professional soldiers, including those from private military groups, who have refused to participate in the war should get protection.<sup>7</sup>
  - LGBTIQ+ individuals and activists should be prioritised for protection, based on recent Russian legislation, which declares LGBTIQ+ individuals as extremists, stripping them of fundamental rights and necessitating protection.
  - Anti-war activists, *i.e.* the minority of citizens who protest and sabotage the war, are likely to be persecuted. Even if protests in Russia (and Belarus) are not so visible, they still occur. Research indicates that about 27 anti-war-related criminal cases are initiated daily.<sup>8</sup> Such activists should get protection.
  - NHC will assist with information and verification in individual asylum cases upon request from Norway's immigration services.
- d. *Measures to support de facto stateless persons:* Belarus has ceased issuing passports to its citizens outside the country, requiring them to apply from within Belarus. This policy poses significant risks for critical-minded Belarusians who cannot return to Belarus due to the threat of arrest. Russian authorities are planning to implement similar legislation.

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<sup>6</sup> UNHCR's Position on Certain Types of Draft Evasion, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 1991, <https://bit.ly/49eMbVd>.

<sup>7</sup> NHC participated in the Brussels Dialogue in June 2023 (note 4 above). The negotiated draft recommendations "[i]nvites the EU institutions and Member States to coordinate their asylum policies for deserters from the Russian Federation's military service and to agree how the right to conscience objection to military service could be enforced and how the EU could grant objectors further protection; invites the EU institutions to develop recommendations to Member States to address the threat of persecution for anti-war beliefs and refusal of military service in the Russian army, as well as for a refusal to work in law enforcement agencies." (page 12, paragraph.20).

<sup>8</sup> A study into repression under Putin, Proekt, <https://www.proekt.media/en/guide-en/repressions-in-russia-study/>. The study provides that more than 50 000 people have been repressed for speaking out between 2018 and 2023. The daily rate based on this number is around 27 people on average.

These policies by the Belarusian and Russian governments may create a significant issue of *de facto* stateless persons.

- Norway should proactively develop its solution, in cooperation and/or coordination with the EU, akin to the “Nansen passport”, to address their needs. Nansen passports, originally and officially stateless persons' passports, were internationally recognised refugee travel documents from 1922 to 1938. First issued by the League of Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees to stateless refugees, they quickly became known as "Nansen passports" for their promoter, the Norwegian statesman and polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen.<sup>9</sup>

## Appendices:

### A. Background and justifications for NHC's views

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has altered the lives of millions of people in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia and changed the security map of Europe. The war is causing thousands of deaths and damage to houses and infrastructure. Inside Russia, persecution of anti-war activists and critical voices has increased. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced to leave their homes. Human rights defenders (HRDs), representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs), journalists, lawyers, anti-war activists and critical-minded people are targeted, with sentences of up to 15 years imprisonment. CSOs have been forced to make difficult choices – to stay and risk organisational liquidation and personal harassment and imprisonment of their staff or to leave and work from exile.

Western countries introduced various sanctions against the Russian state, individuals, and businesses, as well as strict border control and visa restrictions. The EU introduced regulations that resulted in restrictive visa and asylum policies for Russian and Belarusian citizens. Norway has primarily followed the EU.

**a. Supporting HRDs with Schengen visas.** The policies also had consequences for HRDs. In the Norwegian NGO Forum for Human Rights alternative report to the Universal Periodic Review of Norway, Norwegian CSOs criticised Norway's restrictive policies concerning visas for Russian HRDs:

Norway recognises HRDs as people who take peaceful action to promote and protect the human rights of others. Norway has played a leading role in the UN in promoting resolutions recognising the role of HRDs and underlining the obligations to protect them. Still, HRDs experience refusals when applying for visas, particularly multi-entry Schengen Visas. Such visas enable HRDs to travel to a safe country on short notice if

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<sup>9</sup> Berit Lindeman og Aliaksandra Safonova, “Gi belarusere et “Nansen-pass”” [Give Belarusians a “Nansen Passport”], Vårt Land, 28 November 2023, <https://bit.ly/3WY950I> and “League of Nations passport”, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/League-of-Nations-Passport>.

security conditions deteriorate. The result is a discord between Norway's human rights and visa policies.<sup>10</sup>

There seems to be a lack of consistency between the Norwegian Ministry of Justice (MJ) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) policies. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for visa and asylum procedures and, unfortunately, puts them against each other.<sup>11</sup> Providing HRDs with long-term multi-entry visas is being rejected due to the threat of an influx of asylum seekers.

The MFA, on the other hand, has [declared](#) Norway's readiness to support HRDs and CSOs. In our view, the MFA's policies of support to HRDs do not go hand in hand with the MJ's rejection of visa applications for HRDs and CSOs, which focuses on national security and the need to control migration on general grounds that can miss the individual conditions and applications of HRDs and CSOs. To be serious about supporting HRDs working in difficult environments in Russia and Belarus, Norway should help equip them with Schengen visas, enabling them to leave for Europe on short notice.

Since 29 May 2024, Russian citizens with a tourist visa, a Schengen visa type C received prior to May 30, 2022, are not allowed to enter Norway. Yet Norway does not have any other types of long-term visa. National visas are provided for a maximum of four weeks. National visas do not provide the kind of security and flexibility that a long-term Schengen provides.

The overall political situation must be considered to show solidarity and flexibility for vulnerable groups, CSOs, and HRDs. Unlike Germany, France, Czech Republic, and some other EU countries, Norway has no specific programs to support and legalise CSOs that are persecuted in Belarus or Russia and need to leave their countries while continuing their human rights work from outside. They do not want asylum but a safer and more enabling environment.

***b. Norwegian visa policies in a European context.*** Following the full-scale Russian war in Ukraine, visa practices for Russian citizens have tightened across the Schengen area.<sup>12</sup> EU visa regulations, however, contain provisions allowing for the issuing of a visa on humanitarian grounds, for reasons of national interest or because of international obligations. The visa fee may be waived or reduced by Article 16(6) of the EU Visa Code to

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<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Concerns in Norway: The Norwegian NGO Forum for Human Rights' stakeholder report to Norway's 4<sup>th</sup> UPR cycle review in 2024, Norwegian NGO-Forum for Human Rights, <https://www.nhc.no/rapport-om-norge-til-fns-menneskerettighetsrad-2024/>, Section 27, pg. 17.

<sup>11</sup> In 2023, the Minister of Justice was twice asked in the Parliament about the visa and protection policy regarding citizens of the Russian Federation, including LGBTIQ+ individuals. In both cases, the Minister defended rejections of visas for CSOs and HRDs, citing the fear of many asylum seekers. See <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Sporsmal/Skriftlige-sporsmal-og-svar/Skriftlig-sporsmal/?qid=94289> and [Skriftlig spørsmål - stortinget.no](https://www.stortinget.no/Skriftlig-sporsmal)

<sup>12</sup> "Commission presents guidelines on stricter visa processing for Russian citizens", EU Commission, Press Release 9 September 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_5430](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_5430) and "Communication from the Commission", EU Commission, 30 September 2022, <https://bit.ly/4ecqSr0>.

promote cultural or sporting interests, foreign policy, development policy and other areas of vital public interest or because of international obligations.<sup>13</sup>

Such provisions could facilitate the travel of independent journalists, dissidents, pupils, students, and researchers. These categories of travellers will now have to pay a visa fee of EUR 80 instead of EUR 35 unless the fee is waived or reduced by Article 16(2), (4), or (5) of the Visa Code.

Article 19(4) allows acceptance of applications that do not meet the requirements to be considered admissible. Article 25(1) will enable visas to be issued with limited territorial validity despite the entry conditions not being fulfilled. This is relevant, for instance, in the case of visa applications lodged by dissidents, independent journalists, HRDs, representatives of CSOs, and their close family members, which the Russian government does not control.

Recommendations to amend the EU Visa Code to provide flexible long-term visas for CSOs and HRDs have been discussed extensively in EU member states, Brussels and Norway. Mary Lawlor, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation for human rights defenders, underlined in a Position Paper of December 2023 the need to update and provide specific provisions for HRDs in EU's visa regulations:

Human rights defenders should be able to benefit from flexibility (...) concerning travel documents and their validity for human rights defenders (...) and their families, (...) in particular for LGBT defenders and (...) shall be able to benefit from multi-entry visas.<sup>14</sup>

In June 2022, Norwegian CSOs sent the Minister of Justice a letter arguing for more flexible and supportive policies regarding Russian HRDs and CSOs.<sup>15</sup> However, this and other advocacy efforts by CSOs and opposition politicians have not led to change.

On different occasions, NHC has underlined the importance of supporting CSOs and HRDs who continue their work in Russia. During the August 2022 Arendal week, NHC encouraged Norway to:

Step up support for 'the other Russia', *i.e.*, the democratic opposition, human rights groups, democratic movements, professional organisations that adhere to international standards, etc. The Kremlin's making such support more difficult and, in many cases, criminalising international cooperation, including funding, should not deter Norway from supporting democratic forces within Russia and in exile.

The existence of this 'other Russia' and its refusal to yield to government pressure are among the most promising factors for a democratic Russia in the future. Our

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<sup>13</sup> The EU Visa Code is available on the website of the EU. See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/visa-code.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Position Paper: concerning EU visas as a protection tool for human rights defenders, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, December 2023, <https://bit.ly/3wVtljf>.

<sup>15</sup> Uheldige endringer i visumpraksis bør reverseres [Unfortunate changes in visa practices should be reversed], Norwegian Helsinki Committee et.al., 25 June 2022, <https://www.nhc.no/uheldige-endringer-i-visumpraksis-for-russiske-borgere-bor-reverseres/>.

support should be comprehensive, including financial support, creating safe havens for activists, using international mechanisms to challenge Russia's repression, exposing Russia's repression in international organisations and media, using diplomatic means to challenge repression, etc.

Scapegoating of all 'Russians' should stop, and we should distinguish between those who represent and support the regime, those who are neutral or silent, and those who actively oppose it or criticise its policies.

Unfortunately, two years later, Norwegian visa policies are not getting more supportive. There is still no particular visa program for HRDs and CSOs. Several countries, such as Lithuania, Germany, and the Czech Republic, have programs for HRDs issuing Schengen visas. NHC and other Norwegian CSOs have experienced Russian partners not getting visas when invited to our events. This practice contradicts Norwegian and European support for democratic forces in Russia.

According to a legal review by the Norwegian law firm [Selmer](#), which provides NHC with *pro bono* legal services, there are no legal restrictions on issuing Schengen visas. However, Selmer concludes that Norway should challenge its legislation regarding national visas:

"A real opportunity for national visas on humanitarian grounds supports Norway's stated goals of supporting the work of human rights defenders and is a natural supplement and further development of the Norwegian Foreign Service's guide for 'Norway's efforts for human rights defenders.'"

***b. Adapting asylum policies to war realities and domestic persecution.*** Unlike authorities in some European states, Norwegian immigration authorities have not decided on how to assess applications for protection based on military service in Russia. Russian asylum seekers seeking protection based on military service experience extended waiting times. This also affects journalists, activists and lawyers with minors.

The adverse effects of protracted waiting periods at asylum camps without being interviewed are made worse by a lack of information and permission to work. Human rights groups in Norway have urged authorities to start processing such cases, particularly if children accompany the applicant.

According to the UNHCR, draft evaders do not have a general right to protection. However, they may have a right to refugee status if the service entails a risk of forced participation in a conflict that the international community has condemned for war crimes.<sup>16</sup>

The context of this issue is Russia's illegal war against Ukraine, which has created a situation Europe has not faced since World War II. Russian asylum seekers in Norway have previously included Russian citizens who fled the wars in Chechnya (1994–1996 and 1999–2009). The

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<sup>16</sup> UNHCR's Position on Certain Types of Draft Evasion, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 1991, <https://bit.ly/49eMbVd>.

current war against Ukraine resembles the wars in Chechnya in terms of human suffering, mass killings, torture and rapes.

In 2003, the UNHCR issued specific guidelines for handling war refugees from Chechnya. However, no new guidelines for Russian citizens have been issued since 2003. Norwegian policy regarding asylum seekers from Russia changed during the same period. Almost all applicants from Chechnya received protection during the wars and the first years after. Since 2007, few applicants have received protection. The change in policies took place despite grave human rights violations continuing to occur.

NHC's Natalia Estemirova Documentation Centre has collected thousands of documents, audio and videos providing evidence of human rights violations and international crimes during the wars and up to the present time. The methods of human rights violations practised in Chechnya have since spread to other parts of Russia.

After 2007, Norwegian immigration authorities described Russia as a "lawful, safe country," denying protection in Norway by referring applicants to the "internal flight alternative." A perception prevailed that applicants from Chechnya could be safely returned to other parts of the Russian Federation.

NHC repeatedly stated it disagreed with these policies and reported two cases where rejected asylum seekers, upon return to Russia, were found dead after being subjected to torture.<sup>17</sup>

Since 2020 a series of events have led to increased migration from both Belarus and Russia. The number of asylum seekers from Belarus increased after August 2020 due to the brutal crackdown of CSOs and protesters against election fraud. Russia's illegal attack on Ukraine resulted in a steep increase in Ukrainians seeking protection in Norway (as elsewhere in Europe). The attack also increased the number of asylum seekers from Russia.

Norwegian immigration statistics show, however, that the number of Russians and Belarusians seeking protection remained limited. From 1 March 2022 until May 2024, 494 Russians and 50 Belarusians applied for asylum. That means that 4.2 % of the asylum seekers to Norway in this period were Russian citizens. According to our knowledge, only 10 of them were HRDs.

This low number contrasts with the total number of people leaving Russia. Since the start of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, up to a million or more Russian citizens have left the country.<sup>18</sup> A study by the WOT Foundation mentions fear of repression as a main reason for leaving, not only among HRDs, who the authorities have pressured for several decades but

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<sup>17</sup> "Lost in Russia", the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2019, [Report\\_LostInRussia\\_web\\_oppslag\\_skygge.pdf \(nhc.no\)](#), pg. 43-44.

<sup>18</sup> Estimates vary, but according to several sources, around 900,000 had left the country by early October 2022. People fleeing Russia are mostly young and educated. Many go to neighbouring countries where they can stay without seeking asylum for long periods. For different estimates and calculations, see Russian emigration during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Wikipedia, <https://bit.ly/456hQYj>.



also among ordinary people daring to call Russia's actions in Ukraine by their proper name — as a war.<sup>19</sup> Many left Russia for fear of being mobilised and sent to the frontline.

As of 1 May 2024, almost 20.000 people were detained in Russia due to their participation in anti-war demonstrations, while more than 900 faced criminal charges.<sup>20</sup> On 26 May 2024, there were at least 1401 political prisoners in Belarus and 728 in Russia.<sup>21</sup> The numbers of political prisoners in both countries are regularly growing, as arrests and court processes against critically minded persons take place daily.

The murder of Alexey Navalny on 16 February 2024 in the corrective colony FKU IK-3 may be seen as signalling *a carte blanche* on the use of violence against the few remaining opposition figures and organisations in Russia. After Russia was excluded from the Council of Europe on 16 March 2022, it became even more difficult for HRDs to ensure that the standards of international law prevail in Russian courts and politics. Yet, CSOs, many of whom are NHC's partners, continue working in Russia.

Mass mobilisation declared in September 2022 has driven men unwilling to participate in the war outside the country, irrespective of their political orientation. Since September 2022, the Russian authorities have adopted a series of law amendments to prevent conscripted individuals from leaving the country.<sup>22</sup> Russian authorities have also introduced long sentences for those who refuse military orders.

Ukrainian authorities, international organisations and civil society organisations have documented tens of thousands of incidents that may constitute war crimes committed by Russia's military.<sup>23</sup> The war constitutes a clear and ongoing crime of aggression, but the International Criminal Court (ICC) or any other national or international court lacks jurisdiction. There is, therefore, an ongoing discussion among Ukraine's allies on creating a special tribunal for the crime of aggression in the Council of Europe or another framework, which the NHC supports.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Supporting Russian Human Rights Defenders in Exile: Best Practices, Current Challenges - A case study of Czechia, Germany, Latvia, Poland and Portugal", WOT Foundation, 2023, pg. 3.

<sup>20</sup> "Persecution of the anti-war movement report. Two years of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. February 2024.", OVD Infor statistics, <https://bit.ly/451785d>.

<sup>21</sup> On Viasna's website, the number of political prisoners in Belarus is updated daily. See Viasna Human Rights Center, <https://prisoners.spring96.org/en>. The Russian human rights organisation Memorial updates a list of Russian political prisoners regularly. See Memorial, <https://memopzk.org/> (in Russian).

<sup>22</sup> Pavel Luzin, «New Draft and Mobilization Rules in Russia: Increased Coercion», The Jamestown Foundation, 27 July 2023, <https://bit.ly/3VfgNSB>.

<sup>23</sup> Documenting the exact number of war crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine is an ongoing and complex task involving various international and local bodies. The exact number fluctuates as investigations continue and new reports surface. "Ukraine has launched investigations into more than 122,000 suspected cases of war crimes since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion nearly two years ago", Ukrainian Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin said on 23 February 2024. "Ukraine probing over 122,000 suspected war crimes, says prosecutor", Reuters, <https://bit.ly/3yALDwh>.

<sup>24</sup> For more information, see i.a., Research Briefing, "Conflict in Ukraine: A Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression", UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, <https://bit.ly/3yJnyml>.

Putin may be seeking to involve as many people as possible in his illegal war, which makes it hard to avoid being drafted. There are specific penalties for those who surrender to Ukraine. Journalists and activists report about “cellars”, “holes”, and “camps” in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions where Russian soldiers are tortured for not following orders.<sup>25</sup>

Discrimination of LGBTIQ+ people in Russia has been steadily “legalised” through the homophobic and transphobic law amendments adopted since 2013. In December 2022, the prohibition of so-called “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships towards minors” – colloquially known as the “gay propaganda law” - was extended to encompass not only minors as in 2013 - but also adults. The legislation justifies prosecutions and violence against LGTBIQ + people. According to Mariana Katzarova, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Russia:

“In an increasingly homophobic society, non-heterosexual persons can face violence, unlawful detention and false accusations of criminal activity. Several cases have been documented, for example, in Chechnya, where police and security forces have been accused of initiating blackmail, abduction and torture against LGBTIQ+ individuals.”<sup>26</sup>

In December 2023, the Russian Ministry of Justice announced a non-existing judicial entity they called The International LGBT Movement for “extremists”. Since 10 January 2024, any person expressing support for LGBTIQ+ people can be sentenced to prison.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> «Смотришь вперед, видно противника, а назад — “яму”» (istories.media) (in Russian)

<sup>26</sup> The quotation is from Special Rapporteur Mariana Katzarova’s first report (p. 41), which is available on her website: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/specialprocedures/sr-russian-federation/mariana-katzarova>

<sup>27</sup> See “Russia: First Convictions Under LGBT ‘Extremist’ Ruling Thousands More at Risk After Top Court’s Decision”, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/15/russia-first-convictions-under-lgbt-extremist-ruling>