

National



POLICY BRIEF



PROMISE POLICY BRIEF: RUSSIA (4 OF 4)

Grassroots initiatives, conflicts, and solidarities of the LGBTQ scene of St. Petersburg

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INTRODUCTION

PROMISE explores the ways young people with a history of stigmatisation or conflict participate in society. In Russia our research focused on young people who are engaged in different activities against gender-based discrimination.

This policy brief is concerned with risks and dangers for participants, understanding of gender and sexualities and ways to fight stigmatisation of LGBTQ people. The policy recommendations are directed towards LGBTQ activists and people working with topics of gender, sexualities and human rights. The aim of the recommendations is to bring LGBTQ issues into the public space. This is an important element in the development of civil society.

The empirical data is based on 14 in-depth interviews with LGBTQ activists and 16 days of participant observation in Saint-Petersburg. LGBTQ people are fighting against gender-based discrimination by organising protests, educational projects and other activities. The participants represent a decentralised, informal social movement, interacting in a flexible communication network.

KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutional support of practices and activists projects

The practices that activists choose to achieve their goals are based on allocated funding. It caused conflicts between the leaders of organisations, and further between employees about 'unfair' distribution of funds between organisations or about how to spend the allocated money. It is worth noting that activists invest their own resources in the creation of local projects and events.

For example, almost all informants who said that they are involved in public activism and associate themselves with it, believe that LGBTQ organisations spend money allocated to the community on things that are not important or necessary.

Local activities aimed at supporting community members are recognised as more effective at the moment. The chances for changes at the structural level are considered to be a long way in the future.

- Youth organisations, partner organisations and other public areas should assist in the organization of local events as much as possible and use their resources where possible.

Increase knowledge about gender, sexuality and human rights among LGBT+ youth

The space of LGBTQ activism in St. Petersburg is a heterogeneous space of different organisations, places and initiatives aimed at different groups of people with non-conventional sexual and gender identity. According to the activists this separation does not allow the community to become stronger. One of the reasons for this fragmentation of the community is the different understanding of 'new' gender identities.

Intersex, asexual and people with non-binary gender identities are 'new' gender identities in the Russian context. Based on the analysis of the interview and the participant observation it can be said that there is a tension between people with non-binary gender, etc. identities and cisgender people. Cisgender homosexual people are accused of a privileged position in a common culture in relation to 'new' identities, monopolising the space for speaking and acting on the scene, and ignoring the specifics and problems of non-binary, queer, etc. people.

For example, the project 'queer_day' holds regular discussion and meetings for people with non-binary gender identities. These meetings are held on the last Wednesday of the month usually. These initiatives oriented primarily towards trans-, intersex- and queer-people.

For each meeting, a topic for discussion and a group of people who want to share their experiences and thoughts on the topic set by the organisers. The peculiarity of these meetings is that they take place in a space for transgender people, including people with non-binary gender identities and people who are searching for their gender.

Our respondents were afraid of homophobic attacks, physical violence and symbolic pressure from the homophobic population and were fearing of other consequences.

For example, one of the activists, assuming that she wants to teach in the future, tries not to participate in public actions. So she will be able to protect and not to expose her future plans to the risks of being associated with this type of action.

- LGBTQ organisations and others should conduct educational workshops and seminars to increase the level of knowledge about gender identities, sexuality, human rights and other important issues among the LGBTQ youth.

Providing security for participants as a general aim

Carrying out public actions and events is impossible in the present political situation in Russia as organisers cannot ensure security for participants, either during the actions (for example, there are risks of arrest) or after them (for example, harassment and violent outing).

For example, there are people who help with legal and psychological assistance (advice, support in court) on their own initiative. Offering concrete solutions to problems and moving away from the level of abstract goals in the LGBTQ scene is seen by a number of participants as an opportunity to achieve changes in the present or near future.

- Improve the competence of police officers. Organisers of the event must pay attention to the safety of all participants.

Developing a community of professionals to help with human rights issues

The LGBTQ people find solidarity in the face of symbolic, mental and physical violence by the state and social institutions and by the homophobic-minded population. The answer to social exclusion is the struggle for the rights of LGBTQ people. According to our respondents the LGBTQ organisations have lawyers, but they don't always react quickly to what is happening. As mentioned above, carrying out public actions and events is seen to be impossible in the present political situation in Russia.

- Improve the protection in court and representation of LGBTQ people at the state and international level.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

This policy brief is based on 14 in-depth interviews with LGBTQ activists and 16 days of observation with 5 activists initiatives and organisations. The duration of the participant observation was 58 hours.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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FURTHER READING	http://www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Grassroots-initiatives-conflicts-and-solidarities-of-LGBTQ-scene-of-St.-Petersburg.pdf