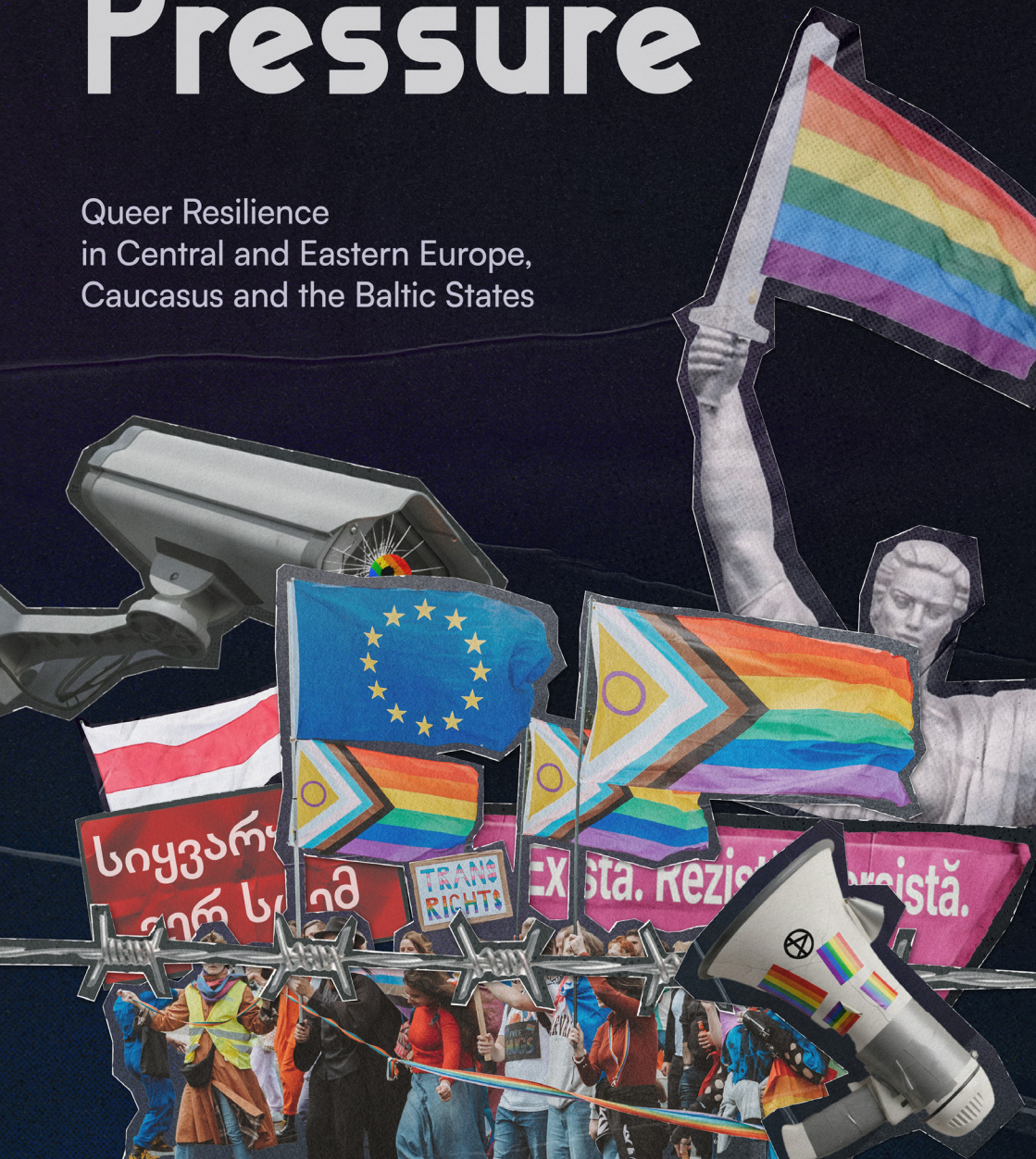
Pride Under Pressure

Queer Resilience
in Central and Eastern Europe,
Caucasus and the Baltic States



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Foreword

Since the first Marzahn Pride was organised in Berlin in 2020, the world has noticeably changed over the past five years. The effects of the pandemic, Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, the rise of the extreme right, and the increasing fragmentation of democratic states are putting civil societies worldwide under pressure and pose a danger, especially to vulnerable groups. The LGBTIQ+ community is being deliberately targeted in many regions, and in some countries their rights are being massively restricted through anti-queer legislation. In Europe as well, the progress achieved in recent decades is increasingly coming under pressure. In Germany, we observe that Pride events and queer spaces are being threatened or attacked more frequently (1). Particularly affected are LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants who are becoming targets of right-wing extremists and conservatives that oppose both migration and sexual as well as gender self-determination.

Quarteera e.V. is a non-profit organization that has been advocating since 2011 for the rights and visibility of LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants from Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus in Germany. In many of their countries of origin, queer hostility is not only socially rooted but also institutionally supported. Despite these adverse circumstances, LGBTIQ+ activists and organizations have developed remarkable resilience. This report aims to give these LGBTIQ+ activists a voice and, through personal accounts, to provide an authentic insight into the current situation, the challenges, and the perspectives of LGBTIQ+ communities who, despite growing threats from right-wing extremist and anti-queer forces, authoritarian regimes, and the devastating impact of Russia's full-scale war against

Ukraine, continue to resist. We want to share their experiences, particularly in the organisation of Pride events, make their strategies for prevention and protection against queer hostility visible as well as share recommendations for international solidarity. Their struggle is part of a broader, global fight for human rights and freedom - one that reaches far beyond queer communities and speaks to the fundamental values of democratic and open societies.

We thank all those whose contributions made this publication possible.

Quarteera e.V.

Summary

This publication presents firsthand perspectives on the challenges, threats, and strategies of resistance employed by LGBTIQ+ activists and organizations in Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and the Baltic states. Key threats include far-right extremist violence, repressive laws, and targeted disinformation that are often fueled by Russia to strengthen anti-gender movements (2). At the same time, queer communities demonstrate resilience through creative Pride strategies, mutual support networks, and cross-border solidarity. These experiences offer concrete lessons for Germany, where similar challenges are intensifying and where proactive measures for prevention and protection are increasingly necessary. Their experience-based insights provide best practices, inspiration, and new perspectives for strengthening activism.

Far-right violence and intimidation have intensified. In Georgia, far-right groups were behind dozens of documented attacks on queer people in 2024—2025 (3). In Ukraine, while Russia is the main threat, around 75 cases of anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes were reported in 2024, many linked to far-right activity amid the war (4). In Belarus and Russia, queer organisations are branded “extremist,” and hundreds of administrative or criminal cases have been opened against activists (5). Disinformation via Telegram channels, state-controlled TV, and religious institutions spreads narratives about “foreign influence” and “protecting children.” Russia exports this playbook, backing anti-gender coalitions in countries like Georgia and Belarus (6). Reflecting these trends, ILGA-Europe’s Rainbow Map 2025 shows sharp declines in legal and policy equality scores for Georgia, Russia, and Belarus (7).

In the Baltic region, Russia's proximity and media influence amplify the threats. Russian-language outlets label Baltic Pride marches as "NATO propaganda," helping incite attacks and hybrid threats, such as cyber disruptions around Baltic Pride 2025 in Vilnius. Rainbow Map scores present a mixed picture: Estonia advanced by legalising marriage equality in 2024, while Latvia and Lithuania lag under strong conservative - and often Russian-fueled - opposition. In Latvia, efforts to revive "gay propaganda" bans modelled on Russia's 2013 law resurfaced in 2025, directly threatening the rotating Baltic Pride event.

Despite these challenges, queer communities remain resilient. In Ukraine, activists organised a wartime charity Pride in 2025 with about 1,500 participants, raising funds for drones despite counterprotests. In Moldova and Georgia, organisations operate via encrypted communications and hold smaller, closed events to stay safe. In Belarus, underground networks provide psychosocial support and help at-risk individuals relocate. Initiatives like Georgia's incident-free "micro-march" in 2023 show how communities adapt and fight back. Public attitudes are also shifting: in Ukraine, roughly 70% of the population now supports equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people, helped by the stark contrast with Russian oppression and the visible role of queer soldiers and volunteers in the war. In the Baltics, Baltic Pride 2025 in Vilnius drew over 20,000 participants under heavy security, turning the event into a symbol of regional unity against external threats (8).

Germany is not immune to these dynamics. In 2023, 1,785 queerphobic hate crimes were recorded nationwide. Far-right parties and youth groups have been at the centre of this hostility. Berlin's Marzahn-Pride 2025, held under tight police protection and confronted by a coordinated far-right counterdemonstration, mirrored patterns seen in Eastern Europe and the Baltics (9). The experiences from Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, the Baltic states, and Belarus offer practical resilience

tactics - from secure participant registration and safe gathering zones to countering disinformation and building international cooperation - that can strengthen Pride events and queer communities as anti-gender narratives spread.

Methodology

Attacks on human rights and on so-called “gender ideology” do not appear in isolation. Similar arguments, laws and campaigns show up in very different places and follow recognizable stages - from media panic and pressure on public space to legal restrictions and, in some cases, open repression.

We chose the countries in this publication to show these stages next to each other. Some of them are democracies with functioning institutions, where rights formally exist but are constantly challenged by far-right actors, conservative churches and organised anti-gender campaigns. Others are moving towards more tightly controlled systems, where “foreign agents” laws, restrictions on assembly and targeted attacks on LGBTIQ+ organisations become part of the political toolkit. One context is shaped by full-scale war, where questions of equality, security and basic survival are closely connected. Another represents a consolidated authoritarian regime, where independent organisations are dismantled and many activists continue their work from exile. Germany is not outside of these dynamics: strong legal protections and large Pride marches coexist with growing far-right mobilisation and a clear rise in queerphobic incidents.

By placing these different situations side by side, we wanted to show that they are not separate national stories, but different points on the same curve. Communities work under very different constraints, but they face related narratives and tactics - and their experiences are relevant for queer movements in Germany and internationally.

Several qualitative methods were employed to capture these

experiences. In-depth online interviews via video calls were conducted with some participants, then transcribed and converted into text. Other participants preferred to write their contributions themselves. Drafts were edited for clarity and structure; participants had the opportunity to review, correct, or remove any details before publication. In parallel, desk research was carried out on legal changes, court cases, attacks on Pride events and disinformation campaigns in Eastern and Central Europe and Caucasus.

The material in this publication is not statistically representative and does not claim to speak for all queer people and activists in these countries. We focused on situations where pressure is high and where communities had to react quickly to new threats. The main aim was to identify patterns and practical lessons: what helped, what failed and what others can realistically adapt in their own work.

The report is organised into two main parts. In the first part, we present a cross-country analysis of how anti-rights agendas develop, which tools are used against LGBTIQ+ communities and their allies, and which forms of resistance appear again and again in different political settings. In the second part, we bring together country reports and case studies based on a shared framework. Each chapter briefly outlines the history of queer organising and Pride in that context, the current legal and political environment, the main risks and the ways people respond in practice.Taken together, these texts are meant to help readers see how situations in different countries are connected and to use this knowledge when planning and acting in their own context.

Country Reports

Belarus

History of Queer Activism and the Pride Movement in Belarus

Belarusian LGBTIQ+ history reflects the country's political transformations, beginning in the early 1990s under a cautious public health framework and gradually evolving into a struggle for dignity, visibility, and the right to live openly. The path runs from improvised safe spaces and tentative cultural formats to human rights advocacy, creative protest, and, today, a survival mix of concealment, exile, and care.

The first stage started in 1992 with "STOP-SPID Belarus" and the magazine "Sex-AntiSPID-Plus", which created early safe spaces for gay and bisexual men while operating under the socially acceptable framework of HIV prevention. That same year, the magazine "Vstrecha" introduced the section "The Blue Lounge," a small but unmistakable doorway into community: personal ads, stories, and the suggestion that a queer social world existed, even if it had to speak quietly. In 1994, homosexuality was decriminalized - a landmark that enabled cautious community building and the emergence of venues where

people learned they were not alone. By 1996, Minsk had “Vstrecha”, a gay club that was more than a venue: it quickly became a hub and a statement of existence.

In the second stage (late 1990s—early 2000s), it was experimented with in terms of visibility and public naming. In 1998, Edward Tarletski founded the Belarusian League for Sexual Minorities “Lambda.” Though never registered, it became a focal point. In September 1999, Minsk hosted the first Belarusian Pride Festival, which continued annually until 2002. In 2001, the “Parade of Love” marched through central Minsk with several hundred participants - the first pride march in the country’s history. Lesbian organizing took form with “Yana” (registered 2002). Magazines such as “Forum Lambda” and “Taboo” attempted to incorporate queer issues into broader debates on democracy and human rights, but by the mid-2000s, censorship and moral conservatism had pushed these initiatives underground.

With the third stage, attention shifted toward human rights and protest. The initiative “GayBelarus” (2007) documented discrimination, engaged international institutions, and staged actions such as “Slavic Gay Pride” (2010), which police violently dispersed. Creative tactics continued through 2011—2012, including a “Pride Tram” that symbolically crossed Minsk. By 2015, the group rebranded as “Identity” (Identychnasc) before closing under pressure. What endured was a repertoire of courage and a memory of methods: documentation, coalition-building, symbolic presence in public space, and an insistence on dignity even when visibility carried high risks.

Between 2014 and 2020, a significant cultural and educational shift took place. “MAKEOUT” was launched in 2014 as an online platform on gender, sexuality, and equality. The “DOTYK” Queer Film Festival (from 2015) became the first and only annual queer cultural event,

building an audience and a shared language. After the homophobic attack and death of Misha Pishcheuski (2014—2015), the campaign "The Pi Case" confronted hate crime and impunity. "Identity and Law" (2016) and the "Community Centre" (2017) offered psychological and legal support to queer people and their families. Public actions, including the 2019 campaign "Together We Are Stronger than Fear," sought to reclaim space despite surveillance and to include queer life as an integral part of the country's society.

In 2018, the movement redirected its efforts toward developing leaders outside Minsk. The group "MAKEOUT" launched "Outloud", a year-long program designed to decentralize and diversify queer organizing by developing local leaders and supporting regional activism. The program also strengthened connections among queer and feminist initiatives. Through "Outloud", several new projects were sparked: "New Regions" (which transitioned to "Prismatica") began as a regional queer-feminist organization, while "Closet Free" in Vitebsk and "Inter" in Grodno emerged, alongside the "Exhale queer festival". In 2019, "TG House" emerged as the first trans-led organization in Belarus. These collective developments shifted activism beyond Minsk and brought trans* advocacy visibly onto the agenda.

The 2020 fraudulent elections reshaped the landscape entirely. Queer activists joined mass protests with a visible column under the rainbow flag as part of the broader democratic movement. The ensuing crackdown brought arrests, torture, forced emigration, and the closure or suspension of key projects. By 2021, "MAKEOUT", "Community Centre", "Inter", and "Closet Free" had closed. "Today, the Belarusian LGBTIQ+ movement exists in a paradoxical state - silenced at home yet more visible internationally than ever before." Activism began to operate through exile and hidden channels, with documentation of repression, emergency support networks, and cross-border advocacy

becoming central to its operations.

Before August 2020, the movement maintained a fragile space for cultural and educational work. “DOTYK” and small public formats were possible if they avoided direct criticism of the state. After the election, the situation changed dramatically: the repressive machinery widened to target all civil activism, including LGBTIQ+ initiatives. Activists were detained, beaten, subjected to torture and forced outing,offices were raided, and independent media covering queer topics were shut down. What had been a cautious public presence shifted into a state of survival and exile.

Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine in February 2022 escalated an already hostile climate. The regime’s alignment with Moscow intensified the rollback of civic freedoms. It also amplified culture-war rhetoric that framed queer identities as foreign and morally dangerous. Domestically, repression deepened. Externally, exile networks and transnational solidarity expanded, creating lifelines for documentation, emergency support, and advocacy.

Legal Situation of LGBTIQ+ in Belarus

Since 2020, law and policy have been re-engineered to institutionalize queerphobia and restrict visibility. In 2022, the constitutional amendment defines marriage exclusively as a union between a man and a woman, excluding same-sex couples from any form of recognition. Criminal Code Article 343 and Instruction No.18 were expanded in 2024 to broaden the definition of “pornography” to include “any depiction of non-traditional sexual relations or behavior,” thereby equating homosexuality, bisexuality, polyamory, and transgender

identity with pedophilia and zoophilia regardless of nudity or erotic content. In 2025, an amendment to the Law on the Rights of the Child introduced the notion of "propaganda of homosexual relations, sex change, pedophilia, and childlessness" as harmful to children, a Draft Code of Administrative Offences (2025) proposes Article 19.16, which would impose administrative liability for distributing information that shapes the "attractiveness" of homosexual relations, sex change, or childlessness - with penalties equated to "recognizing pedophilia as acceptable." There is no comprehensive anti-discrimination law, and SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) is not a protected ground.

Restrictions on legal gender recognition (LGR) and gender-affirming healthcare (GAH) have tightened. Individuals must be over 18, undergo lengthy observation, and submit to a single state commission, with no possibility of appeal. Since 2023, an estimated 70—80% of applicants have been denied transition-related care or legal gender recognition, compared with 0—20% before 2020. The result is an administrative limbo that undermines access to healthcare, employment, education, and personal safety.

Legislation targeting NGOs has effectively erased the legal space for civil society altogether. Since 2022, all independent LGBTIQ+ organizations have been liquidated. In 2024, the trans-led "TG House" was designated as "extremist," and in 2025, queer media "DasHip" received the same label. Repressive rules governing "foreign gratuitous aid" and donor interactions have compromised finances and communications, as donor accounts have been hacked, reports obtained, and grant-recipient lists exposed, creating personal risk and a climate of fear surrounding collaboration. Partnership status is fixed by the Constitution's definition of marriage: no recognition of same-sex marriage, civil partnerships, or unions, and no recognition of such unions performed abroad. There are no established police protocols

specific to LGBTIQ+ events; in practice, authorities rely on arbitrary enforcement, surveillance, raids, preventive summons, and coerced collaboration. The broader political climate is one of authoritarian consolidation aligned with Russian repressive playbooks, with state media framing queer identities as foreign, immoral, or dangerous.

Current Risks, Threats, and Key Incidents Affecting LGBTIQ+ Communities

Belarus now combines legal repressions with arbitrary policing. People face criminal cases under the expanded "pornography" laws and administrative penalties for alleged "propaganda." Arbitrary detention, torture, and forced outing are common. People are pressured to cooperate with security services and denied healthcare and legal recognition. They are exposed on propagandist Telegram channels that publish names, images, and personal data. The KGB, police, and GUBOP sit at the center of this system. Pro-government "activists," religious figures, state media, and Russia-linked proxies amplify it and supply the ideological playbook. Together, these actors create a multi-layered regime of legal, social, and media coercion.

Recent cases illustrate how these tools are used. At least three transgender people were arrested on allegations of "distributing pornographic materials," where personal photos without nudity were reclassified as pornography - showing how identity itself can be treated as evidence. The case of blogger and former political prisoner Vadim Yermashuk demonstrates the intersection of privacy, politics, and homophobia: he was secretly filmed at home with his partner, imprisoned for political reasons, publicly outed, and subjected in detention to sustained physical and psychological pressure, including threats, intimidation, and forced confessions. In 2024, over twenty

people connected to queer initiatives were forced to evacuate after threats linked to small community events such as film clubs or workshops. Denial rates for legal gender recognition and gender-affirming healthcare have risen to an estimated 70—80% since 2023, leaving many trans* people without safe options.

Regional differences persist: Minsk remains the traditional hub, offering somewhat more anonymity and infrastructure. In the regions, a narrow "grey zone" permits micro-initiatives to operate under the radar, sustained by low visibility and trust networks but constrained by surveillance, informants, and social conservatism. There are no effective engagement channels with local administrations, and no functioning human rights ombudsperson. Public gatherings are rarely safe or feasible; activists face intimidation, burnout, and exile.

Disinformation follows familiar frames: "protecting children/morality," a "Western conspiracy," and the portrayal of queer visibility as a public danger. State TV remains the most influential medium, with pro-Kremlin outlets and propagandist Telegram channels reinforcing narratives and exposing individuals who dissent from these narratives. Coordination with Russian resources appears as model transfer and agenda alignment - the same "gay propaganda" scripts and moral-panic tactics adapted to the Belarusian context.

Strategies for Prevention, Protection, and Resilience

Before 2020, success had visible markers: "DOTYK" screenings, receptions, conferences, festivals, and community gatherings, campaigns like "Together We Are Stronger than Fear", and a slow but real

broadening of media coverage. After 2020, success meant continuing with activism against all odds - sustaining psychological and legal support, documenting violations for international mechanisms, keeping a leadership pipeline alive, and maintaining diasporic support structures. One lesson from the election cycle is double-edged: refusing to engage in manufactured debate reduces manipulation in the short term, but when silence becomes a survival strategy, it becomes hard to speak again. Re-entry must be planned.

Self-protection now rests on anonymization and strict information hygiene. “The most effective self-protection practice has been complete anonymization of my activist work.” Events are held online or abroad,organizational social media is closed and private, with every follower verified. Lecturers and team members are anonymized; no personal data is stored, and all information is deleted immediately after the event. For offline activity, participants receive digital security training; photos and external sharing are prohibited, and pseudonyms are used. Communications avoid group chats altogether, given the risk of arrests for mere membership, where communication is necessary; in such cases, encrypted channels are used.

Engaging the authorities is inherently risky. If contact is unavoidable, do it with trusted third-party witnesses, record everything, and rely on an independent security plan that assumes there will be no protection in place. Build plans with professional security advice, choose venues and routes carefully, train volunteers and marshals, define evacuation procedures, and prepare alternatives in case a public event cannot proceed. The aim is to reduce harm without giving up the principle that public space also belongs to queer people.

Safety work at events and in the community follows the same logic: keep formats strictly invite-only with manual verification and whitelists,

use “clean” phones, minimize data, separate entry and exit logistics, and enforce a no-photo/no-video rule. This model suits a small country like Belarus, albeit with limitations on scale and personal connection.

Diaspora spaces, including trainings, residencies, retreats, and cultural events abroad, offer safety and a place to reconnect. Closed chats have largely been abandoned; the loss of convenience is an acceptable trade-off for enhanced safety. Communications now run on encrypted platforms, with sensitive information immediately deleted. Documentation is kept for international advocacy and for possible asylum or relocation cases.

Community resilience centers on care, with psychological support, legal hotlines, and micro-grants being the most effective tools in a hostile environment. Burnout is severe -“we have been working almost without funding... most of our work is done on a voluntary basis” - so group sessions with a psychologist, art therapy, and informal gatherings help sustain motivation and reduce isolation.

Requests to EU and German partners focus on flexible core funding, confidentiality-safe grantmaking, emergency response, and programs for rehabilitation and recovery. Solidarity is not only a statement, but also resources that can adapt quickly and do not expose recipients to additional risk. Managing the narrative remains essential. Pride and visibility test democracy, but under the current regime, they can also be traps. The movement refuses to let opponents dictate the language; instead, it grounds Pride in the concepts of belonging, dignity, social justice, and democratic values. This keeps queer life tied to the broader struggle for rights, preventing it from being framed as foreign or marginal, and shapes what allies feel able to say and do, thereby protecting future possibilities.

Key Conclusions

Belarus's LGBTIQ+ movement has been pushed from a fragile public presence to clandestine and diasporic survival. The shift is not accidental but the outcome of a post-2020 legal and administrative package that closes space step by step: constitutional change, expansions of pornography/"propaganda" directives, restrictions on legal gender recognition and gender-affirming healthcare, liquidation of NGOs, and the routine use of "extremist" designations. Together, these measures institutionalize discrimination and legitimize hostility, while signaling to public and private actors that exclusion is state-sanctioned. Repression is not a single policy but a multi-layered system: security services, state media, pro-government groups, religious actors, and Russia-linked structures act together, targeting both organizations and individuals and too often treating identity itself as grounds for persecution.

Under these conditions, activism persists by becoming less visible and more protective. Public formats give way to invite-only or cross-border events, identities are masked, data are minimized and erased, group chats are abandoned in favor of encryption, and participants learn to assume surveillance as the default. This survival architecture does not mean retreat from principle. It reflects a disciplined calculation of risk that preserves people, skills, and networks for the future, while keeping basic services and support available in the present.

What counts as success has therefore changed. Instead of large festivals or marches, success is measured by the continuity of care, the operation of psychological assistance and legal hotlines, and the documentation of violations that can be used for international advocacy, protection, asylum, and relocation. It is visible in safe micro-events that maintain community without creating mass targets, and in

the practical ability to relocate people at risk. These are quiet metrics, but in a closed environment, they are decisive: they keep people alive, connected, and able to organize tomorrow.

The movement's diasporic dimension is now at the forefront. Work conducted from abroad, including trainings, residencies, cultural programs, and coordination hubs, creates a safer perimeter for leadership development and collective recovery. It also sustains channels for rapid response when threats escalate at home.

International solidarity has become a structural condition for survival. What matters most is not episodic attention but flexible core funding, mechanisms that protect confidentiality, and structured recovery for exhausted teams. When resources can adapt to rapidly changing risks and do not expose recipients to additional danger, the space for equality work remains open enough for people to thrive and for organizations to function effectively.

In this landscape, the movement is "silenced at home yet more visible internationally than ever before." That paradox captures both the damage done and the resilience that endures. Even under extreme repression, networks of care, documentation, and culture continue to uphold a simple truth: the right to exist together can be defended, and the knowledge, relationships, and dignity preserved today are the foundations on which future public life will be rebuilt.

by **Alina P.,**

"Prismatica", intersectional queer feminist organization from Belarus.

Estonia

Context and History of the Pride Movement in Estonia

Estonia regained independence in 1991, leaving behind Soviet-era criminalisation of homosexuality, which had prevented any form of queer organising. The quiet removal of homosexuality from the Criminal Code in 1994, a pragmatic rather than political act, made it possible for Estonia's queer community to begin to emerge.

The first public milestone for visibility came a decade later. In 2004, Tallinn hosted the first Pride march in the Baltic states. Around 200 people walked through the city centre, a small number in absolute terms but a bold step in a society still marked by post-Soviet stigma and silence. From then on, Baltic Pride, rotating between Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius, became the main structure: every third year, Estonia hosted a larger regional event with activists, diplomats and media attention coming from abroad.

In 2006, this fragile space was tested. The Pride march in Tallinn faced violent attacks from far-right protesters. Eggs, bottles and stones were thrown at the participants; some people were injured, and the police struggled to keep order. The shock was strong enough that organisers

decided not to hold street marches for a period. From 2007 to 2016, Pride shifted into indoor formats. Instead of a march, there was a week of events, including film screenings, discussions, exhibitions, concerts, and parties.

A turning point came in 2017. Public attitudes had improved, cooperation with the police was better, and organisers decided to return to the streets. Around 3,000 people marched in Tallinn. For a country of 1.3 million, this was a remarkable number. The event was peaceful and joyful, and for many, it felt like proof that Estonia had genuinely changed since 2006. The march also signalled that a new generation was less afraid of being seen as part of the queer community.

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted this course. In 2020, there was no march because of health restrictions. However, the momentum did not disappear. In 2023, Baltic Pride returned to Tallinn and became the largest LGBTIQ+ demonstration in Estonian history. More than 9,000 people marched in Tallinn city center. The exceptional turnout was directly linked to the parliamentary debates on marriage equality happening at the same time. Thousands of heterosexual allies joined to send a visible signal to lawmakers that Estonia was ready to recognise same-sex marriage. The bill was passed later in 2023 and entered into force on 1 January 2024.

In 2024, Pride moved to Tartu, which that year held the title of European Capital of Culture. The city included Pride in its official programme, an important symbolic gesture that placed queer visibility inside mainstream cultural policy rather than at its margins. Around 1,500 - 2,000 people took part in the march. The atmosphere was calmer and more family-oriented than in Tallinn, showing how Pride can adapt to different local contexts while keeping its core message.

The next year marked the start of a new pattern. In 2025, Tallinn hosted a local Pride event, even though Baltic Pride took place in Vilnius that year. Organisers deliberately kept this event smaller, with about 1,500 participants and a shorter programme. The idea was to create a community-focused Pride that belonged primarily to local people, while keeping the larger regional mobilisation for Baltic Pride 2026 in Tallinn. This decision turned Pride from an occasional event with a three-year cycle into a more regular presence in Estonia's public calendar.

Across these two decades, Pride in Estonia has never been just a single day of marching. It has typically been a week, and sometimes ten days, with a wide range of events: film festivals, academic conferences, poetry readings, drag shows, children's workshops with rainbow families, sports events, religious services, exhibitions and club nights. This broad cultural programme has been essential to reaching people who would never attend a political demonstration but are willing to go to a movie, a concert or a discussion. It has also helped to connect different parts of the community and to build long-term relationships with allies.

Supporters and partners have changed over time. In the early years, the most visible backing came from foreign embassies, including those of the Netherlands, the Nordic countries, the United Kingdom, and later Germany and the United States. Their flags in the march and their financial contributions sent a clear message to both the community and the authorities that Estonia was not isolated. In recent years, major banks, like Nordea, Wise and Swedbank, have become regular sponsors. For most companies, however, open support for Pride is still considered too sensitive. There is no structural state funding for LGBTIQ+ organisations, so almost all work relies on short-term project grants and occasional donations.

Cooperation with municipalities reflects this mixture of progress and caution. The City of Tallinn consistently handles technical aspects such as street closures, cleaning and electricity for stages. In 2025, the tone was noticeably warmer than before. At the same time, the city has refused every proposal for symbolic gestures, such as rainbow flags on official buildings, painted crosswalks. Officials insist on "neutrality" and avoid visible identification with Pride. This ambivalence mirrors the broader situation in Estonia: visibility and support for Pride and the LGBTIQ+ community rise year by year, while the groups that oppose Pride remain relatively small but become increasingly radical in their language and behaviour.

Threats and Risks to Pride and Queer Communities

Compared to many other countries in the region, Estonia is still a relatively safe and liberal place for LGBTIQ+ people. Pride events have gone ahead in recent years without serious disruption, and there are no official bans on marches or festivals. The sense of security, however, is fragile. Organisers closely monitor developments in neighbouring states and are aware of how quickly situations can deteriorate.

The most visible source of risk comes from small, far-right and openly homophobic groups. These groups are limited in size but have grown more radical in tone. Their members borrow symbols, rhetoric and tactics from wider European far-right networks and culture wars. Pride is described as a threat to national culture, "traditional family", and children. These narratives are often imported, more or less intact, from the United States or Russian-aligned media, then adjusted to the

Estonian context. For now, the number of active opponents on the streets is not high, and counter-demonstrations usually have a few dozen people. The concern lies in the direction of travel: each year, the language becomes harsher and the willingness to provoke seems higher.

Legal protection against hate remains weak. Estonia has provisions in the Penal Code that formally address incitement to hatred, but there is no clear, consistent practice for applying them in LGBTIQ+ cases. There are no specific hate crime or hate speech mechanisms that explicitly recognise sexual orientation or gender identity. As a result, many forms of harassment or violence are either not reported or are handled as ordinary offences without recognising the biased motive. Activists point out that this legal vacuum sends the wrong signal. If there were to be a serious attack on Pride or on visible community members, it is far from certain that the response from police and prosecutors would set a strong precedent. This uncertainty undermines trust and leaves people feeling exposed.

Funding is another persistent source of risk, even if it does not attract headlines like protests or attacks. Organising a public event requires money for logistics, security, communication and staff. Each year, it becomes harder to assemble a basic budget. The state offers no stable core support for LGBTIQ+ organisations or Pride events. Sponsors are more difficult to find. On the international level, EU funds have become more competitive, and global shifts in attitudes towards "ESG branding" also affect how willing firms are to be seen as backing LGBTIQ+ causes. If these trends continue, the scale and quality of Pride weeks and community activities will shrink, and visibility will erode quietly rather than through a single dramatic ban.

The state itself is not an active persecutor, but it is increasingly passive.

Ministries cooperate less with LGBTIQ+ organisations than they did a few years ago and often cite budget constraints or a lack of specific mandates. Formal cooperation with police at events remains professional and is based on trust built over several years. At the same time, there are no written, dedicated protocols for protecting Pride or queer gatherings. It depends heavily on personal contacts and goodwill within the institutions.

Concrete incidents illustrate both strengths and weaknesses of the current situation. During Baltic Pride 2023 in Tallinn, there was at least one serious assault when a participant was beaten by a counter-protester. The perpetrator was identified and fined, which showed that the system can respond when needed. In 2025, during Tallinn Pride, an administrative case was filed after a counter-protester entered a restricted zone and refused to leave. In 2024, in Tartu, there were no registered incidents during the official programme.

A more troubling case happened outside the official Pride framework. In 2023, a performer was attacked with a knife at a small LGBT-friendly Christian meeting. The attacker was stopped, and the police took formal steps, but from the activists' point of view, the case then disappeared from public view. They felt it had been "hidden", and a chance to send a clear message against such violence was missed. This incident was particularly disappointing because, in general, relations with the police around Pride events had been good in the previous years. It raised questions about how consistently anti-LGBTIQ+ motives are taken into account when a case is politically sensitive.

The information environment adds another layer of risk. Far-right and pro-Russian Telegram channels and so-called alternative news sites regularly target Pride with disinformation. During Pride season, they push narratives that "LGBT propaganda" is being forced on children,

that foreign embassies are buying Estonian sovereignty, or that queer activism is a foreign project aimed at destroying local culture. These messages circulate mainly in certain algorithmic bubbles, and for people inside those bubbles, they form the dominant picture of Pride. Mainstream media coverage is mostly neutral or positive, yet they do not fully counterbalance the volume of targeted online messaging.

The regional context matters as well. Developments in Latvia and Lithuania quickly echo in Estonian debates. A recent example is the attempt in the Latvian parliament to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention on preventing violence against women. Right-wing actors in Estonia immediately used this as a model and tried to open a similar discussion. There are no direct legal links between Baltic Pride and these broader human rights trends, but the political climate in one Baltic country can embolden hardliners in the others.

All these factors affect how safe people feel and how much capacity organisers have. Limited funding forces smaller events and fewer security measures. Legal gaps discourage reporting and hide the true scale of harassment. Constant disinformation and harsh rhetoric create a background noise that normalises hostility. Activists are clear that progress is reversible. If organised work slows down, rights and social acceptance can move backwards much faster than they were won.

Legal, Political, and Societal Environment

Legally, Estonia has made one of the most significant advances in the region by adopting marriage equality. Since 1 January 2024, same-sex couples can marry and have the same rights as different-sex couples,

including adoption. Registered partnerships remain available and are open to all couples, so heterosexual partners also use them when they do not want marriage. This combination makes Estonia the first ex-Soviet republic with full marriage equality, and many people in the community rightly see it as a historic shift.

The achievement of marriage equality does not mean that the legal landscape is complete. Trans rights remain one of the weakest points. Procedures for legal gender recognition and access to gender-affirming care are bureaucratic, medicalised and lack clarity. There is no self-determination model, and non-binary identities are not recognised in law. Compared to many Western European states, Estonia's regulations are outdated. The Estonian Trans People Association, created a few years ago, has strengthened advocacy in this area, but the gap between the overall liberal image of the country and the reality for trans people is still striking.

Hate speech and hate crime are another unresolved field. The Penal Code contains articles that could in theory be used to address incitement to hatred, but prosecutors and judges rarely apply them in cases involving LGBTIQ+ people. There is no clear understanding that bias-motivated crime should be treated differently from ordinary offences. This weakens the deterrent effect of the law and reinforces the impression that the system does not see homophobic or transphobic motives as a particular problem.

Education and public services show a similar pattern. On paper, there is a commitment to equality and non-discrimination. In practice, many teachers, officials and professionals completed their training at a time when sexual and gender minorities were not discussed at all. Human rights and diversity topics are not systematically integrated into curricula. According to activists, the biggest problem in schools

is not so much the students, but teachers who lack knowledge and feel unprepared to deal with LGBTIQ-related questions or bullying. Without targeted training and institutional support, formal principles do not translate into inclusive environments in classrooms or offices.

Politically, Estonia has until now followed a broadly liberal path. Alignment with European norms helped to pass the Cohabitation Act and later marriage equality. The state does not mount active campaigns against LGBTIQ+ people and has not rolled back rights that have been granted. At the same time, there is a clear sense of fatigue. After the intense debates of 2023 and the entry into force of marriage equality, many politicians and members of the public treat the "LGBT issue" as solved. When activists raise questions about hate crime legislation, trans rights or education, they often hear the answer that other topics now have priority.

Local politics has become more complicated since the October 2025 municipal elections, when right-wing parties increased their share in major cities. In Tallinn, members of the new city coalition include openly homophobic voices. They cannot simply ban Pride or other queer events, because they are bound by national law, but they can slow down procedures, refuse symbolic support or create an unfriendly atmosphere. Organisers of Baltic Pride 2026 in Tallinn expect more difficult negotiations with the city than in 2023 and are preparing for the possibility of legal disputes to ensure equal treatment.

Estonia's membership in the European Union has had a broadly positive impact on LGBTIQ+ rights. The EU does not have direct tools to force progressive legislation on gender recognition or hate crime, but it creates a background of expectations and a sense of belonging to a certain family of states. Estonia has long wanted to be seen as part of the Western world, and that desire has been an argument in

favour of reforms. After the full-scale war against Ukraine, the contrast with Russia has made this orientation even sharper. For activists, this geopolitical narrative is a useful frame: they can point out that equality and respect for minorities align with the same direction as alignment with Europe. EU funds have also provided concrete support for projects run by LGBTIQ+ and other human-rights organisations.

Strategies, Adaptation, and Community Resilience

Despite these challenges, Pride in Estonia remains possible and relatively safe. The model of interaction with the police is based on regular meetings and open exchange of information. Before each Pride march, organisers and police representatives meet to review routes, timing, potential counteractions, and specific security needs. There is also cooperation with the diplomatic police, because ambassadors and embassy staff often march in the front rows. The presence of diplomats makes any escalation politically costly and reinforces the seriousness with which security planning is treated.

Conditions imposed by authorities are mostly technical. The police and municipalities request standard measures for traffic management, cleanliness, and public order. They have not used these requirements to block Pride. Instead, the main limits come from elsewhere: a lack of written protocols, unstable funding, and political reluctance to offer symbolic support.

For physical security, the organisers rely on what they describe as classical methods. They hire private security where necessary, recruit and train volunteer marshals from within the community, and conduct basic screening before events to detect potential agitators. So far, police risk assessments have classified Pride as low risk, so the

organisers have not needed heavy perimeters or strict access controls. They understand, however, that the global environment and domestic politics are changing, and it may become necessary to develop more detailed security concepts for events like Baltic Pride 2026.

Alongside the marches, a broad network of cultural and community activities contributes to resilience. Pride weeks include a full programme of screenings, exhibitions, discussions and concerts. Some elements, such as conferences, are streamed or held in hybrid format, but purely online campaigns have not become the main tool in Estonia. Outside Pride season, Festheart continues to bring queer cinema to smaller cities, Q-Space organises discussion groups mainly for non-Estonian-speaking community members, and the Estonian LGBT Association runs various support groups, including one for parents of trans children. A separate organisation focuses on trans topics, and a new group has recently begun to work on mental health in the LGBTIQ+ community.

The situation of vulnerable groups is uneven. Since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine, Estonia has received more refugees, including LGBTIQ+ people from Ukraine and Russia. General refugee programmes exist, but specific support for queer refugees remains weak. One NGO focuses on this population, yet without stable funding, its work is limited. The creation of the Estonian Trans People Association has clearly strengthened the trans segment of the movement and made advocacy in that area more visible and structured.

Support structures for activists themselves are mostly informal. There is no dedicated legal aid fund, psychological support programme, or financial safety net for those who come under pressure at work. People rely on personal relationships, informal supervision in core teams and occasional retreats funded by friendly embassies. Burnout is a real problem. Many activists leave after a few intense years because the

combination of emotional pressure and financial insecurity is too much.

Communication and counter-disinformation work follow a similar pattern of improvisation. There is no dedicated unit or full strategy for dealing with disinformation campaigns. When there are more serious attacks, activists sometimes respond with factual corrections and work with other human rights organisations. In particularly worrying situations, they involve the police. Many smaller provocations go unanswered, a deliberate choice to conserve energy. Over the years, activists have learned not to argue with every online troll. A conscious "ignore and delete" approach has become common. The reasoning is simple: energy is limited, and it is better invested in concrete tasks than in endless online quarrels.

One characteristic feature of Estonian activism is its pragmatic style. Campaigns rely heavily on facts, legal arguments and practical proposals rather than emotional appeals. This approach aligns with the country's general political culture and helped achieve reforms such as the Cohabitation Act and marriage equality. At the same time, it has meant that visibility and storytelling have sometimes been neglected. Activists themselves admit that they have not done enough to show the everyday lives of queer people or to celebrate community culture publicly.

International cooperation plays an important role in resilience. Embassies in Tallinn provide legal backing, political support and sometimes financial help through cultural programmes. Their involvement sends a message to state and local authorities that queer rights are being watched not only domestically but also by international partners. Through Baltic Pride and other regional networks, Estonian activists exchange experiences with colleagues facing similar challenges in

Latvia, Lithuania and further afield. They learn from others' practice and share their own lessons, including the emphasis on practical, low-drama activism and careful management of limited resources.

Key Conclusions

The story of Pride and queer activism in Estonia over the last twenty years is one of rapid progress combined with clear fragility. The country has moved from a context where homosexuality was criminalised and public organising was impossible to a situation in which same-sex couples can marry, large marches can take place in the capital, and Pride weeks feature dozens of events. Internationally, Estonia stands out as the first ex-Soviet state to recognise same-sex marriage and as a place where Pride has become a regular, largely peaceful part of public life.

Beneath these achievements lie significant vulnerabilities. Legal protection against hate is incomplete. Trans people face outdated procedures and a lack of recognition. Funding for organisations is unstable and project-based. Political will for further reforms has declined after the victory on marriage equality, and right-wing forces have gained ground in local governments. A small but radicalised opposition uses imported culture-war narratives to attack queer visibility, and disinformation spreads through online channels with little systematic counter-strategy.

The response of the Estonian LGBTIQ+ movement has been to make the most of the available space through careful planning, pragmatic advocacy and a dense network of community events. Pride is organised in close cooperation with the police, with embassies adding

a layer of political protection. Cultural festivals, discussion groups and support meetings build social ties that outlast individual campaigns. New organisations for trans people and mental health show that parts of the community that were previously marginalised are gaining their own voice.

At the same time, activists are under no illusions that their work is finished. There is a strong awareness that human rights are never fully secured and that complacency after a big victory can quickly lead to backsliding. The main challenge over the coming years is to defend existing gains, address unresolved issues, and improve visibility beyond the familiar urban groups. Stable funding, clear hate-crime legislation, modern trans rights and better communication with the wider public are all part of that agenda.

Estonia demonstrates that substantial progress is possible even in a small post-Soviet country, but it also shows how dependent that progress is on continuous, organised effort. The distance between a success story and a warning example can be short. What will determine the direction is less the size of Pride marches in any given year and more the movement's ability to keep working quietly, consistently, and professionally when media attention has moved on.

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Georgia

History of queer activism and the Pride movement in Georgia

The Pride movement in Georgia, led by Tbilisi Pride, is one of the most visible and symbolic struggles for equality and democratic freedoms in the country. It represents not only the fight for LGBTQI+ rights but also a broader test of Georgia's commitment to human rights, democracy, and European values.

In recent years, Georgia has faced a sharp authoritarian turn marked by intensified repression of civil society and NGOs, alongside the extreme demonization of LGBTQI+ issues and groups. As a result, Tbilisi Pride has been forced to largely suspend its activities; there is no longer a safe space to organize Pride Week. Today, the LGBTQI+ movement in Georgia is focused on preserving essential community services and safeguarding the very existence of activism amid an increasingly hostile environment.

Pride in Georgia used to be a multidimensional movement, encompassing Pride Weeks, strategic litigation, advocacy, digital campaigns, and international outreach. It played a dual role: as a visibility platform, affirming that queer people are an integral part of

Georgian society; and as a democracy indicator, testing the state's willingness to uphold the rights to freedom of assembly and expression.

Early LGBTQI+ mobilization in Georgia dates back to small-scale actions organized around the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHOT) in 2012 and 2013. These were the first attempts by LGBTQI+ organizations and activists to exercise their right to assembly and claim visibility in public space. Both efforts were met with violence from clergy members and ultra-conservative groups, while the police failed to protect the demonstrators. The violent attack on May 17, 2013, when around 25,000 counter-protesters mobilized by priests and the Georgian Orthodox Church assaulted peaceful activists, remains one of the most infamous events in Georgia's recent history. This day left a deep collective trauma but also became a defining moment and a catalyst for more organized and structured LGBTQI+ activism.

In 2017, the Georgian LGBTQI+ movement achieved an important milestone by uniting and jointly organizing a May 17 (IDAHOT) demonstration in front of the Government Administration building to denounce violence and demand concrete steps toward equality. In 2018, divisions emerged within the movement: part of the community argued that it was no longer viable or safe to organize public assemblies, while others insisted on continuing protests. Activists from the latter group, together with several new activists, later co-founded Tbilisi Pride, launching a new phase of the movement's development. Unlike previous years, when events centered around May 17, Tbilisi Pride introduced a new tradition, organizing Pride Week in June to align with international Pride celebrations.

In 2019, the first official Tbilisi Pride Week faced intense opposition from far-right and religious groups. During the same week, Russian MP Sergei Gavrilov's visit to the Georgian Parliament, where he took the

speaker's chair, triggered widespread public outrage and mass protests in Tbilisi. This created an unstable and highly charged environment, forcing Pride organizers to postpone and adapt their plans for political and security reasons. While the international conference and several community and cultural events were successfully held, the Pride March itself could not take place.

By 2021, Pride had become a national flashpoint for democratic freedoms. The events of that year marked one of the most severe outbreaks of anti-LGBTQI+ violence in Georgia's modern history, accompanied by widespread impunity and lack of accountability for the perpetrators. The "March of Dignity" was violently disrupted when far-right groups stormed the Pride office, injuring dozens of journalists and activists, and the event was canceled. The death of journalist Lekso Lashkarava after being attacked, the violent suppression of the pride march, and the ransacking of NGO offices triggered international condemnation and highlighted impunity for violence.

In 2023, far-right mobs again attacked a Pride Festival near Lisi Lake. Protesters stormed the site, destroyed equipment and decorations, and forced the evacuation of Pride organizers and volunteers under police supervision. Despite prior warnings and repeated public calls for protection, the authorities once again failed to prevent the violence. By 2024, under an intensifying anti-LGBTQI+ and "foreign agents" legislative agenda, Tbilisi Pride suspended the entire Pride Week with all physical events, citing state hostility and the criminalization of queer visibility. The Tbilisi Pride office entrance was vandalized twice during the year, and the private homes of two co-founders of Tbilisi Pride were also targeted with posters displaying their photographs and defamatory slogans. These incidents reflect the ongoing climate of hostility, intimidation, and insecurity faced by civil society in Georgia.

Pride organizers, activists, and community members are regularly targeted through intimidation, surveillance, online harassment, and public vilification. Public gatherings have become impossible due to security risks and direct state hostility. Many activists experience burnout, trauma, or exile, as maintaining visibility or continuing advocacy work now carries severe personal consequences.

The Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) plays a central and influential role in shaping public attitudes and political discourse around LGBTQI+ issues in Georgia. Over the years, the Church has maintained close ties with pro-Russian and ultra-conservative political actors, reinforcing anti-Western narratives that depict LGBTQI+ rights as part of "Western moral decay." As the most trusted institution in the country, the Church wields significant moral and social authority, which it has frequently used to promote anti-LGBTQI+ narratives, oppose equality initiatives, and justify discriminatory policies.

Since the early 2010s, the Church has consistently positioned itself as the main ideological opponent of the LGBTQI+ movement. It portrays LGBTQI+ visibility and advocacy as a threat to Georgia's "traditional values," national identity, and religious heritage. Church leaders have publicly condemned Pride events, gender equality policies, and anti-discrimination reforms, framing them as foreign impositions that undermine the Georgian nation and faith. Clergy members have actively participated in or endorsed anti-LGBTQI+ rallies, frequently organized alongside far-right nationalist groups.

While in earlier years the government outsourced violence to far-right and ultra-conservative groups, today the state itself has become the main initiator of violence and repression. The Georgian Dream government directly fuels and legitimizes hate through coordinated propaganda, disinformation campaigns, and the use of law enforcement

against activists. Far-right groups and parties still play a role, but now they largely operate in the shadows of the government which has become the main far-right stakeholders during last few years.

In recent years, the government and its affiliated actors have either tolerated or directly encouraged far-right groups that target queer people and human rights defenders. The repeated failure of law enforcement to protect Pride events and LGBTQI+ gatherings, combined with the impunity granted to perpetrators of violence, has further normalized hate and intimidation. Public spaces that once served as platforms for visibility have become unsafe, forcing activists and community members back into private, closed settings.

Legal and Policy Framework

Since 2021, Georgian Dream has accelerated its crackdown on human rights and democratic freedoms. Between 2022 and 2025, the country experienced significant backsliding, including gross violations of human rights and the adoption of restrictive anti-LGBTI legislation that bans trans-specific healthcare, legal gender recognition, peaceful assembly, and freedom of expression. These developments align Georgia with broader authoritarian trends seen in countries like Russia, Hungary, and Belarus, where governments use similar instruments — state-controlled media, propaganda, and moral panic — to consolidate power and erode pluralism.

What makes Georgia's situation particularly concerning is that this regression is taking place in a country that once stood out in the region as a reform-oriented, pro-European democracy. The backlash against human rights and liberal values is therefore not only a local issue but part of the global struggle between democratic resilience

and authoritarian resurgence.

Over the past years, steadily intensifying democratic backsliding and political crisis in Georgia have been widely linked with political homophobia. Anti-gender narratives that surfaced in governmental discourse since 2022 have gradually transformed into institutional changes. Examples include full removal of LGBTI issues from policy documents such as the National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights of Georgia for 2022—2030 and the respective Human Rights Action Plan for 2024—2026. Moreover, "Gender identity" was removed from the protected grounds from the anti-discrimination and hate crimes legislation in 2024.

A cascade of legislative changes aimed at severely restricting civil society organizations has significantly weakened LGBTI community organizations, which serve as the primary source of support for the community. Demonizing campaigns framing CSOs and human rights activists as "foreign agents" culminated in the adoption of the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" in May 2024, disregarding mass protests and directly contradicting the Venice Commission's recommendation to repeal the law in its current form. The law labels non-entrepreneurial legal entities and media outlets that receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad as "Organizations Pursuing the Interests of a Foreign Power" and grants the state extensive control mechanisms over them, including the possibility to request access to confidential data of beneficiaries.

Another major step was the adoption of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), which took effect on May 31. The law introduces a risk of criminal prosecution for employees of civil society organizations and media outlets, potentially leading to the closure of many of them. The state of human rights in Georgia has also significantly deteriorated due

to sudden amendments to the Law on Grants in April 2025, which require government approval for the issuance of grants. Receiving a "prohibited" grant results in the grantee being fined twice the amount received. Further amendments stipulated that activities such as signing an ordinary service contract to share knowledge and/or technical assistance are to be treated as equivalent to issuing a grant. These changes have effectively suspended fundraising by international donors and significantly reduced the pool of professionals able to support the LGBTIQ+ community.

As part of a broader political strategy aimed at constructing a narrative of cultural protectionism against "Western liberalism", the ruling Georgian Dream party also introduced a draft constitutional law stipulating that "the protection of family values and minors shall be ensured by the constitutional law". In this context, a "Law of Georgia on the Protection of Family Values and Minors" was adopted prior to the parliamentary elections, significantly undermining the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals in terms of both family life and personal freedoms. Serving the purpose of portraying the LGBTIQ+ community as a threat to children, it bans same-sex marriage and prohibits community members from adopting or fostering minors.

Particularly alarming are the provisions targeting the rights of transgender individuals: the law criminalizes access to trans-specific healthcare, including gender-affirming surgeries and hormone therapy, and prohibits legal gender recognition. Georgian courts are even forbidden from granting or recognizing such decisions made by foreign jurisdictions. Moreover, the law contains vaguely worded provisions eroding the employment rights of transgender individuals and seeking to exempt employers from anti-discrimination obligations related to respecting a person's gender identity.

The law's impact extends beyond the LGBTIQ+ community, as it severely limits the right to assembly and restricts manifestations deemed to "popularize" LGBTIQ+ issues. Many legal terms, such as "popularization", are drafted in a way that makes it difficult to ascertain their precise meaning, scope, or mechanisms of enforcement. Furthermore, the law imposes censorship on LGBTIQ+ content across education, broadcasting, advertising, and the arts. Even direct communication with minors on these topics is explicitly banned.

Current Risks, Threats, and Key Incidents Affecting LGBTIQ+ Communities

Although the law on the protection of family values and minors has not yet been actively enforced, bylaws have not been issued and nobody has been fined, its chilling effect is already evident. Local LGBTIQ+ community organizations report that even before the law's enactment on December 2, 2024, key professional groups had already started to adopt self-censorship practices. Doctors and clinics are increasingly reluctant to provide services to LGBTQI+ people, university staff avoid discussing gender and sexuality topics, and media outlets self-censor content to avoid potential repercussions.

The law has contributed to a growing number of SOGI-based hate crimes and discrimination. As documented by the Equality Movement, due to the increasing sense of impunity, individuals who previously refrained from bullying, discriminating against, or oppressing LGBTIQ+ people out of fear of legal consequences have begun to act openly, resulting in the escalation and diversification of violent behaviors. The rise in homophobic intimidation and the respective legislative changes have led to a severe deterioration in the community's overall mental

health, resulting in a sharp increase in demand for psychosocial support services.

The law on the protection of family values and minors has also intensified the already widespread social and economic vulnerability of the LGBTIQ+ community. Anonymous sources report dismissals of transgender individuals from workplaces due to their gender identity, as well as violations of academic freedom, including the rejection of theses focusing on LGBTIQ+ topics by supervisors and universities. Due to the severe deterioration of LGBTIQ+ rights in Georgia, coupled with significantly intensified challenges related to violence and physical insecurity, an alarming number of LGBTIQ+ individuals have fled the country. According to Equality Movement, the number of individuals willing to migrate to safer countries rose around tenfold in 2024, which can be seen as an initial result of anti-LGBTIQ+ laws.

The "Foreign Agents Law" and related regulations pose an existential threat to the operations, visibility, and legitimacy of CSOs/NGOs, including LGBTQI+ organizations in Georgia. They stigmatize civil society groups receiving foreign funding as "agents of foreign influence", effectively framing them as disloyal or hostile to national interests and fueling anti-NGO and anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric. For LGBTQI+ organizations, already operating in a climate of social hostility, disinformation, and violence, this further delegitimizes their work in the eyes of the public and institutions.

Given the specific vulnerability of LGBTQI+ groups, whose advocacy and community support in Georgia are often funded almost exclusively through international assistance, the risk of closure or forced marginalization is extremely high. These laws have been dismantling years of progress in equality advocacy, community building, and protection of marginalized groups. Nonetheless, civil society actors

are exploring strategies for collective resilience, including regional cooperation, legal challenges, and alternative forms of organizing to sustain human rights defense despite the shrinking civic space.

Strategies for Prevention, Protection, and Resilience

The history of the Pride movement in Georgia mirrors the broader struggle for democracy, human rights, and civic freedoms in the country. From its roots in the early IDAHOT demonstrations and the collective trauma of May 17, 2013, to the founding of Tbilisi Pride and the establishment of Pride Week as a platform for visibility and resistance, the movement has continuously evolved in response to both progress and repression. While recent years have brought an unprecedented authoritarian backlash and the near-erasure of public Pride events, the spirit of the movement endures through solidarity, international advocacy, and the creative power of queer culture. Pride in Georgia has transformed from a public celebration into an act of defiance — a testament to resilience, dignity, and the unwavering belief that equality and freedom remain worth fighting for.

Under these circumstances, the movement has adapted its strategies to focus on:

- Providing essential community services, including mental and physical health support, legal aid, and small-scale, closed, and discreet community gatherings;
- International advocacy, through engagement with the UN, Council of Europe, and other international human rights mechanisms;
- Strategic litigation at the international level, with LGBTQI+

organizations preparing to submit a case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) challenging the Law on the Protection of Family Values and Minors; and

- Queer culture and art, which remain among the few active and resilient spaces for expression, resistance, and community connection.

One of the most important lessons learned from last year was how the activist community and civil society responded to the initiation of the so-called "anti-LGBTIQ+ propaganda law" in Georgia, and what strategic choices we made in opposing it.

This initiative followed the adoption of the so-called "Russian law," officially the "foreign agent" or "foreign influence" law. Despite massive public resistance, including unified messaging from NGOs, coordinated advocacy, and unprecedented street protests, the government still passed it, followed by several other repressive laws and amendments. The process was accompanied by severe police violence, intimidation, and political repression.

When the government announced the anti-LGBTQI+ law shortly before the elections, it became clear to many of us in civil society that this was part of a broader propaganda strategy — a deliberate trap. The ruling party sought to provoke public debates on "LGBT propaganda" in order to dominate the pre-election information space and polarize society further. They wanted to draw us into defending ourselves on their terms — to make "LGBT issues" the central theme of the elections rather than democracy, Russian influences, failure of EU-required reforms, socio-economic crises, and mass emigration.

We analyzed the situation carefully and concluded that, regardless of how strongly we opposed the initiative, the government would adopt

the law anyway — just as they did with the foreign agent law. Therefore, a visible campaign or active engagement in media debates would only serve their agenda.

Many of us were directly invited , even pressured by pro-government outlets to go on air and debate the topic. It was obvious they wanted to frame the entire pre-election discourse around "LGBT propaganda." So we made a strategic short-term decision: not to engage publicly, not to enter that propaganda trap. Instead, we focused inward, supporting the community — hotlines, talks, services. We avoided public confrontation and refrained from launching new campaigns or media appearances. Our reasoning was clear: we would not help the government weaponize queer identities for their electoral benefit. In the short term, this strategy worked. The ruling party could not exploit LGBTQI+ issues to the extent they had hoped. They were visibly frustrated that we did not take the bait and engage in their manufactured debate.

However, there were also unintended consequences. Once silence becomes a survival strategy, it is difficult to return from it. The topic became taboo. Public discussions about LGBTQI+ rights disappeared almost entirely from the political and media agenda. Today, even progressive civil society groups and political parties hesitate to speak about it, often saying, "Now is not the right time."

This self-censorship is partly a result of the chilling effect created by the new anti-LGBTQI+ law — many organizations and media outlets avoid the topic to protect themselves from persecution. But it also reflects a broader trend in Georgia and across the region: the idea that LGBTQI+ rights are "divisive," "secondary," or something to be postponed until "better times." This phenomenon is already familiar to activists in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe, but it may soon

spread further — even to parts of Central Europe. In today's polarized political climate, more actors may start framing LGBTIQ+ rights as an inconvenient or polarizing issue that can wait.

That is why one key lesson from our experience is the need for ongoing solidarity within civil society itself. LGBTIQ+ organizations must continuously engage with broader civic movements to ensure that equality and human rights remain shared priorities — not postponed or sacrificed in the name of "unity" or "timing."

Other lessons learned include the importance of always having a Plan B — anticipating multiple scenarios and ensuring security plans do not rely solely on the police. It is crucial to engage professional security consultants, choose strategic and secure locations, mobilize sufficient volunteers, and clearly define exit routes in case of an attack. If a Pride parade or march cannot proceed at a specific site due to safety risks, an alternative event, such as a Queer Solidarity Rally or another form of gathering, should be pre-planned and ready to implement at an alternative location.

For events, we use a so-called "verification system" for Pride participants. This is a two-step process: first, participants register and answer certain questions. Second, the organizers' team goes through the registrations, scans each participant, and either verifies them or not.

Strategy and movement framing:

- Pride is a democracy test: the ability to hold Pride safely reflects the state's commitment to rights of assembly and expression, respect for minorities, and the capacity to reject homophobic populism.
- Visibility vs. safety is a moving target: when conditions worsen, Pride might move from street visibility to survival work (services,

culture, international advocacy).

- Avoid propaganda traps in election cycles: refusing to engage on adversaries' terms can reduce their ability to dominate the agenda, but it creates a "return from silence" problem later.
- Narrative ownership matters: grounding Pride in national belonging, social justice, dignity, and democratic values broadens its relevance beyond identity politics.

Working with police and authorities:

- Never negotiate alone: always include third-party witnesses (UN, embassies, INGOs) in meetings with the Ministry of Interior and police.
- Paper trails protect: designate a trusted third party to take minutes and secure post-meeting approval by all sides.
- Ad hoc protection is political: without formal protocols, police protection tracks the government's agenda rather than rights standards.
- Training is not enough without independence: past human-rights and LGBTQI+ trainings did not translate into practice once authoritarian consolidation advanced.
- Plan for non-protection: assume police may restrict rather than protect; design events and safety protocols accordingly.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

Georgia shows how quickly a formally democratic, EU-aspiring state can slide toward authoritarian control when anti-LGBTIQ+ rhetoric

is coupled with “foreign influence” narratives. Attacks on LGBTIQ+ communities and rights are early warning signs of deeper democratic backsliding and of futher crackdows on wider civil society and freedoms.

For LGBTIQ+ communities, Pride has turned from a tool of public visibility into a high-risk activity and has pushed much of the work back into semi-closed or informal formats. When Pride cannot safely take place, this is not only about one event, it is a visible indicator that space for dissent, independent media, and critical civil society is shrinking more broadly.

A second key lesson is the long-term cost of enforced silence. In the short term, avoiding direct engagement with hate-driven government framing can help prevent elections from being fully captured by “LGBT propaganda” debates. Over time, however, this silence hardens into self-censorship: allies hesitate to speak, institutions avoid LGBTIQ+ topics, and it becomes harder to bring these issues back into public debate even when opportunities appear.

Finally, Georgia underlines that movements cannot assume effective state protection. When law enforcement follows political signals rather than legal standards, communities must plan for non-protection as the default scenario and invest in their own safety, legal defence, and psychosocial support structures.

Against this background, international partners can have the most impact by:

- Providing flexible core and emergency funding so organisations and initiative groups can retain staff, cover security, legal and psychosocial costs, and continue operating under shrinking civic space.

- Supporting strategic communication and counter-disinformation to keep LGBTIQ+ rights visible as part of the broader democracy and rule-of-law agenda, in cooperation with independent media.
- Strengthening safety and legal infrastructure, including risk management, digital security, documentation of violations, and strategic litigation against repressive measures.
- Ensuring visible political and diplomatic backing, treating the safety of Pride and other LGBTIQ+ events as a concrete indicator of Georgia's democratic health in all discussions about its European path.

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Germany

Pride and Queer Migration

The first Marzahn Pride took place in June 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, while most events in Germany were being cancelled and public life had shifted mainly into the private sphere. Under the motto "Be proud with us — Proud of Marzahn," it was important to the organizers from Quarteera e.V. to show that queer life is not limited to Berlin's center. Marzahn-Hellersdorf is a district located in the northeast of Berlin, just outside the city center. It is home to one of the largest diasporas of people who migrated from countries of the former Soviet Union after its collapse. For many activists, Marzahn evoked ambivalent feelings: on the one hand, memories of home and neighborhood; on the other, associations of exclusion, gray high-rise buildings, and right-wing extremist violence. To us, it was essential to break down prejudices on both sides: between the LGBTQI+ community and the district's residents who came from the same countries of origin. The event demonstrates that collective experiences related to migration, exclusion, and identity can foster connections. At the same time, Marzahn Pride is a space of self-empowerment: a place where people from Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus feel seen and heard, where dialogue emerges, and where solidarity becomes tangible.

Organizing Pride is an enormous challenge for a small, mostly volunteer-based team. It requires time, energy, financial resources, and above all, a security plan, especially in light of growing far-right threats. Nevertheless, year after year, the team has managed to organize a safe, open, and diverse celebration. Marzahn Pride is organized by and for members of the LGBTQI+ community with migration and refugee backgrounds from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. While many members migrated to Germany in the 1990s or early 2000s following the collapse of the Soviet Union, often as so-called Spätaussiedler*innen (late repatriates) or Jüdische Kontigentflüchtlinge ("Jewish quota refugees"), others have arrived in recent years, especially since Russia launched its full-scale war against Ukraine. LGBTQI+ refugees have fled their countries of origin due to war and occupation, or because of persecution and the spread of anti-queer laws.

The event brings together queer migrants, refugees, local residents, activists, politicians, and families. Also present are the parents and family members of queer people who attend Pride to support their children, as well as queer youth and young adults who were born in Germany but have a family migration history. The local district's queer community is also represented; for example, the oldest participant is 85 years old and attends Marzahn Pride every year.

The experience of migration, as well as belonging to the LGBTQI+ community, creates a bond; Marzahn Pride is a space where these experiences can be seen and shared. Queer refugees face concrete challenges, especially in times of a strong far-right movement and stricter migration policies. Many queer refugees live with an uncertain legal status in Germany. Learning German is difficult, as is getting foreign degrees recognized or finding work in one's own field. On top of that, they often experience multiple forms of discrimination, as well as queerphobic, sexual, and racist violence. Loneliness and isolation

frequently accompany this journey, making it even harder for them to build a new future.

The first Marzahn Pride took place without high expectations, as it was primarily organized by volunteers and the community itself, and was held away from the city center during the pandemic. Nevertheless, Marzahn Pride quickly became an open and inclusive event for people from all over Berlin. Despite the conditions created by the pandemic, around 500 participants came together for visibility and acceptance. From the very beginning, the main goal was to make the perspectives of queer migrants visible, especially those who came from countries in which individuals are persecuted based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Since then, Marzahn Pride has stood for solidarity with all those who cannot live safely and freely in their countries of origin because of their LGBTQI+ identity, and who, at the intersection of being queer and a migrant, experience multiple forms of discrimination in Germany.

With a manifesto, we mobilize not only in advance of the event, but also to make clear what we stand for. While we want to use Marzahn Pride to celebrate diversity within the queer community, it is important to us that Pride is also a protest and a demonstration for the rights of the LGBTQI+ community. This includes raising awareness of those who cannot organize Pride in their countries of origin or can only do so under extensive security measures.

An excerpt of the 2023 Marzahn Pride manifesto states: “We stand in solidarity with all people who are affected by war, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and dictatorial regimes. We stand with all LGBTQI+ people who face violence and discrimination in their countries of origin, while fleeing or in supposedly safe countries. We demand that all people can live their lives in safety, freedom, and dignity. LGBTQI+ rights were, are, and will remain human rights!

Marzahn Pride 2025. Photo by Johannes Pøl.

Since 2020, Marzahn Pride has continued to evolve each year, adapting its focus to address political challenges.

1. In 2022, the event took place under the motto “Pride statt Leid” (Pride instead of suffering). It was characterized by solidarity with the Ukrainian LGBTQI+ community against the backdrop of Russia’s full-scale war. Ukrainian music, flags, and speeches set the tone for the event.
2. In 2023, a full Pride week was organized for the first time in Marzahn-Hellersdorf. The street festival had over 1000 participants. Politicians, activists, and artists made a clear statement in support of tolerance and diversity.
3. In 2024, Marzahn Pride received more media attention, but also more hostilities from far-right groups, who placed stickers and hateful symbols along the way.
4. In 2025, Pride took place under the motto “We are different. We stand together.” With over 2,000 attendees, it became the largest event of its kind, marking a milestone in the history of Marzahn Pride. Despite a registered far-right counter-demonstration, the event remained peaceful, largely thanks to a broad network of supportive groups.

In recent years, Marzahn Pride has demonstrated that queer life is present all around us, even outside urban centers. Many residents now respond with curiosity and openness, waving to the demonstrators, supporting the event, or actively participating in it. Local institutions, such as libraries, youth centers, and social initiatives, often help by distributing flyers and posters.

Today, Marzahn Pride is a symbol of dialogue, diversity, and solidarity. Over the past six years, an increasing number of rainbow flags have appeared on the doors of social and youth centers,

in public transport, and even at the local university. During this period, new initiatives have been established for queer youth, FLINTA+ individuals, and rainbow families. Information about various workshops on gender and sexual identity, sex education, self-help groups, and community meeting points in Marzahn-Hellersdorf is now available online. Another key milestone was the opening of our queer community center, which provides a local safe space and a wide range of events.

Despite occasional attacks, such as verbal insults, spitting, or the tearing down of rainbow flags, the community's courage and determination to remain visible prevail. It is a platform where people from diverse countries and cultures show that peaceful and respectful coexistence is possible. In just six years, what began as a small idea has become an important symbol of equality, visibility, and hope.

Current Risks, Threats, and Key Incidents Affecting LGBTIQ+ Communities

While homosexuality was criminalized under the Nazi regime, leading to prosecution, imprisonment, and murder in concentration camps, its criminalization under Section 175 of the German Penal Code continued well beyond the end of World War II, lasting at least until 1969 in the Federal Republic of Germany. Ten years later, in 1979, the first CSD took place. Same-sex marriage has been legal since October 1, 2017 (19,20). Since November 2024, Germany has had a Self-Determination Act, which replaced the previous Transsexuals Act. It allows trans*, inter*, and non-binary individuals to change their first names and gender markers in the civil register without the need for psychological evaluation or court procedures.

The LGBTIQ+ community has fought hard for its rights over the past decades - for its existence, freedom, and equality. With the rise of far-right and conservative forces, the spread of anti-queer disinformation, and the normalization of right-wing narratives, the LGBTIQ+ community in Germany currently faces the challenge of defending the rights it has already won against this backlash, including in regional areas and smaller outer districts. In 2025, of the 245 CSD events held across Germany, 110 were disrupted. 43 of those disruptions were organized far-right counter-demonstrations (1). Right-wing extremists particularly target queer-migrant events, as their counter-demonstrations are directed both against migrants and refugees, and simultaneously against members of the LGBTIQ+ community. Right-wing extremists draw on ideologically similar narratives to those used in the context of Russian disinformation, such as the fight for "traditional values" and the "protection of children." Hatred is specifically directed at trans* people, and queer content is broadly labelled as "gay propaganda." Anti-queer hate violence is rising. In Berlin, 588 anti-queer crimes were recorded in 2023, a significant increase compared to previous years (483 in 2022 and 229 in 2018) (21).

In addition to planning the organizational process and creating an additional cultural and political Pride program, ensuring participants' safety is an absolute priority. From the beginning, Marzahn Pride has been defamed and monitored by the far-right scene, with some individuals even attempting to prevent the event entirely. Over the past six years, members of our community have been insulted, spat on, and physically attacked.

Under the 2025 Marzahn Pride motto, "We are different. We stand together," it was important for us to draw attention to the consequences of increasing polarization in our society. Many of us have had to flee authoritarian regimes, wars, and dictatorships.

Today, we see politicians in Germany using fear and hatred as central tools in political discourse. For this reason, this Marzahn Pride holds particular significance, as it demonstrates the importance of solidarity and the need to unite our society rather than divide it. For the first time, we were confronted with a fully registered counter-demonstration by the far-right group "Deutsche Jugend Voran" (German Youth Forward), which mobilized participants across federal states for its event. Given the numerous previous attacks on queer spaces and events, we knew that this year we had to place a special focus on the safety of Pride participants. We were overwhelmed by the many offers of support from diverse groups who wanted to help protect the event.

The local police in the Marzahn district have generally cooperated well with our organization over the past six years, and we maintain direct contact with them throughout Pride. In the past, the police have informed us of imminent threats to Marzahn Pride and explained the procedures for handling various scenarios. In all known cases of aggressive behavior by individuals toward our community, the police responded immediately.

Although we were notified by the police that a far-right counter-demonstration had been registered to take place almost simultaneously and along nearly the same route as our Pride, we were only promised enhanced security measures after significant public pressure, particularly from local politicians. Despite the threat, the far-right demonstration was not relocated, even though there had been a noticeable increase in anti-queer attacks on queer events and facilities in the weeks prior.

Throughout the entire Marzahn Pride, several far-right extremists filmed the march and its participants, an established tactic used by right-wing extremists to intimidate opponents by publishing

photos and videos. Despite our requests that the police remove the individuals filming, this did not occur. Instead, we have initiatives and dedicated groups to thank for shielding participants from being filmed by blocking the view with their umbrellas.

Marzahn Pride 2025. Photo by Johannes Pøl.

Strategies for Prevention, Protection, and Resilience

The measures to ensure the safest possible Pride include safety briefings with the police beforehand and continuous communication during the event regarding any potential incidents or attempts to disrupt it; the recruitment and training of volunteer stewards from within the queer community, who accompany the demonstration and serve as points of contact for participants; and ensuring that at least one person trained in first aid, as well as professional paramedics, are on site. For the past two years, community members and Pride participants have also had the option of receiving support from a qualified volunteer psychologist if needed, with first aid available throughout the entire street festival at the first aid tent.

The biggest threats occur during the arrival at and departure from Pride, with most incidents taking place on the way to or in public transport. One measure that has proven effective is organizing meeting points from which individuals travel together as groups. Before and during Pride, participants have the option to follow a live ticker on Telegram, which provides information regarding the route, schedule, and security measures. For other events, whether in the context of Pride or not, we kindly request that all interested participants sign up. For highly sensitive events, the venue is only disclosed upon registration and shortly before the start. We also started organizing events specifically focused on safety, like workshops on self-defense, informational sessions on individual rights, and guidance on how to file reports with the police.

One of the most important lessons we have learned is the significance of support from civil society organizations and dedicated initiatives. In

Berlin, we are privileged to be surrounded by many engaged groups, including non-profit associations, aid organizations, and various queer and migrant initiatives and groups that show solidarity and participate in Marzahn Pride, whether during the Pride event itself or at the subsequent street festival. There are also various opportunities to connect with other organizations and groups, exchange information on developments, and collaborate on joint statements, action plans, and strategies to protect themselves and their community members. We share the understanding that an attack on one is an attack on all, and we can only counter the real dangers posed by far-right extremism together.

We also receive support from local politicians who participate in Pride with booths and marching in solidarity. In Berlin, a position for a queer commissioner was created to give greater visibility to the concerns of the LGBTIQ+ community and to support those who are particularly engaged in the fight against queerphobia. Additionally, a few federal states, including Berlin, have LGBTIQ+ contact persons within the police who are sensitized to the concerns of the queer community and can support those affected by queerphobic crimes. In the state of Berlin, a roundtable with queer organizations, the police, and public authorities took place in 2024-2025. With the help of additional working groups, strategies and measures to combat queerphobia in Berlin were developed. The recommendations are being made available to the Berlin Senate and to the public, along with a guidance document on how to respond to queerphobic incidents (22).

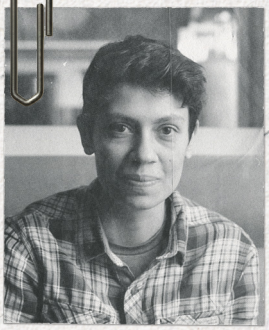
Since 2020, many important actors from local politics in Marzahn-Hellersdorf and representatives of Marzahn authorities have appeared on the Pride stage. Our work has also supported the Berlin Senate, the Berlin Youth Welfare Office, and the district's queer commissioner, a position established in 2023, just like the Queer Advisory Council in the

district Marzahn-Hellersdorf. To successfully organize Marzahn Pride, we have received financial support from the Marzahn district over the past three years. However, the funding is not sufficient to cover all costs and necessary resources. Expenses include, among other things, renting vehicles and booths, technical equipment, the stage, and the festival stage program. So far, Marzahn Pride has received reliable funding from the Marzahn-Hellersdorf district. Securing funding not only for Marzahn Pride, but also for community projects and support services for queer refugees, such as our counseling center, which offers guidance on residence status in Germany, social issues, and psychological needs, is essential. This support is crucial for sustainable, long-term work.

Burnout and exhaustion among volunteers and employees pose a serious challenge, particularly after large-scale events that require substantial resources. Following Marzahn Pride, there were instances of overload, which we analyze annually to prevent them more effectively in the future.

For the second year in a row, our organization has therefore granted all employees an extra week of paid leave after the completion of the Pride months. We also engage in discussions to emphasize the importance of clear task distribution and effective delegation, preventing individuals from taking on an excessive number of organizational tasks on their own. One way to remain resilient is to learn to take care of oneself, take breaks, and prioritize one's mental and physical health. For this reason, we frequently organize community gatherings that serve solely as a means of rest and recharging one's batteries.

The next Marzahn Pride will take place on 20 June 2026.



by **Galina Terekhova,**

board member of Quarteera e.V., since 2020, co-organizer of Marzahn Pride. She has been volunteering with the organization since 2012.

Moldova

Pride Movement in Moldova

The movement in Moldova began quietly with community meetings, peer support, and small cultural events that helped people connect and feel less isolated. Pride was not a march at first. It was a week of closed community events under the name "Rainbow over the Dniester" (2002). That title referred to the entire program of activities, including conferences, discos, film nights, and support circles, designed to build confidence and a sense of belonging. Public assembly was out of reach. Any attempt required a permit from the mayor's office, and permission was routinely denied.

"We did not have the right or the possibility to organize a Pride march. We held indoor events instead, in safe spaces, not on the streets, because the mayor's office refused permission every time."

The legal landscape shifted with the 2008 Law on Freedom of Assembly. On paper, it opened a door. Gatherings of fewer than fifty people required no permit, while larger events needed notification, so police could plan for traffic and safety. It was, and remains, a good law. Practice, however, lagged behind. City halls learned to block marches in a procedural manner. On Fridays, when an event was scheduled for the weekend, the mayor's office rushed to court. A first instance ban

arrived in time to stop the march. On Monday, the appeal was won, but the window had closed. The pattern repeated for years, showing that written guarantees do not protect a right that officials do not want to be used.

In 2013, the approach changed. That year, organizers decided to accept the risks of civil disobedience and to march despite the ban. The starting point was the U.S. Embassy, and with several ambassadors present, the police were required to protect the crowd. The column advanced about one hundred meters before officers ordered evacuation because a hostile group was approaching. It was the first march, and it changed expectations on both sides.

"We discussed it at length and decided not to obey the court decision this time. We would start, even if we had to stop quickly. With ambassadors beside us, the police had to protect us, and for the first time we could show that the street also belongs to us."

The following years were about tactics and methods. From 2013 to 2018, planning meetings with the police were detailed and often tense. The pressure was constant to change the route, date, or format. Each time the team arrived with a lawyer, a written plan, maps, timings, and a clear red line that the right to assemble would not be traded away. Internally, the organizers settled into a steady rhythm. Start and finish times were predetermined. Communications were rehearsed. A fast evacuation plan was always in place. Season by season, both sides built institutional memory. The organizers learned how to document and follow through on their tasks. Police learned to expect discipline and predictability.

In 2019, the relationship crossed a threshold. It was the first well-protected march and the first professional police planning meeting. The discussion covered logistics: addresses, hours, cordons, and

exits. Officers stated that protection would be provided. When counter-protesters blocked the street, police removed them instead of evacuating the march. News channels made it a controversy, but the column finally came to an end, becoming the standard for future marches.

The last few years have confirmed this practice. Organizers have had the legal basis and the practical space to hold the march, and police have stopped following political signals from city hall. Each season begins with the same reminder that the mayor cannot prohibit a march, but only a court can, and only if an assembly is expected not to be peaceful. The Pride marches are peaceful. In 2023 and 2024, despite public statements from the mayor's office, the police protected the event in accordance with the law. In 2025, new complications emerged, but the core principle remained unchanged. The right to march was acknowledged and protection treated as a duty, not a favor.

Around Pride Week, closed community formats for care and culture continue. They provide time to recover, prepare, and meet needs that do not make the news. Public-facing logistics remain disciplined, with evacuation kept quick if needed. This balance, characterized by care inside and discipline outside, has allowed for growth without burning out the people who carry out the work.

Looking back, the movement's path is easy to see, since it shifted gradually: from gatherings in rooms to protests on the streets, from asking for permission to asserting the right to assemble, from evacuations in the middle of the march to completing the route under legal protection. Pride in Moldova remains an annual test of whether freedom of assembly works for everyone, and a measure of how much remains to be done.

Legal Situation of LGBTIQ+ in Moldova

Legally, Moldova sits somewhere between progress and unfinished work. Since 2021, the framework has improved: the law now recognizes who we are and outlines the protections we should have. Yet important gaps remain, affecting everyday life and requiring us to go to court. Our legal journey, then, runs on two tracks: formal guarantees on paper and strategic litigation to turn those guarantees into reality.

In 2021, Parliament added sexual orientation and gender identity as protected grounds to the anti-discrimination law. The Criminal Code and Administrative Code were amended to cover incitement to discrimination and hate crimes. The criminal law now treats it as an aggravating circumstance when a crime is motivated by prejudice. This created a legal floor we did not have before. When we encounter police, prosecutors, or agencies, we point to the text and the court's reasoning and say, 'This applies to us.'

"We do strategic litigation, and we proved that this law protects the LGBTIQ+ community too. 2021 was a very important year for us."

What is missing still shapes daily life. There is no legal gender recognition. Our case is currently before the Constitutional Court, and we are awaiting the decision. Without legal gender recognition, trans people cannot align documents with identity and face constant barriers in healthcare, employment, education, banking, housing, and travel. There is no recognition of same-sex relationships. There is no marriage, partnership, or civil union by same-sex couples recognized by law. After European Court of Human Rights rulings in similar cases, we filed our own cases for partnership recognition. We lost initially and are now appealing. Until this changes, same-sex couples remain invisible in law and cannot access routine protections that others take

for granted. This is why we pair litigation with steady public education, explaining, case by case, what non-recognition means for families.

For Pride, the 2008 Law on Freedom of Assembly remains our backbone. If an event has fewer than fifty participants, no permission is required. If there are more, we send a notification. Since 2019, our working relationship with the police has improved. Meetings focus on logistics, and the standard is clear: peaceful assemblies are protected. Mayors still issue homophobic statements around Pride. We document what was said and rely on the police and courts to apply the statute.

State funding for LGBTIQ+ work is almost zero. The only stable public money we see is for HIV prevention via the Global Fund model. Everything else - legal aid, psychological help, education, and community programs, depends on international support. Those resources keep hotlines open, allow us to prepare cases, and let us offer basic safety and care between one Pride season and the next.

Current Risks, Threats, and Key Incidents Affecting LGBTIQ+ Communities

Our risks come from three directions at once: political warnings, counter-mobilization on the street, and institutions that do not always apply the law they are meant to uphold. Each season follows the same pattern: a statement from City Hall, a wave of talk-show segments and posts, followed by small groups that try to block the route. Before 2019, this often ended with our evacuation in the middle of the march. Since 2019, the police have removed the blockers and kept the route open; however, we still plan for a fast extraction every year. We assume conditions can turn quickly and prepare for that. Media pressure

remains part of the threat. When police do their job, propagandist outlets spin the story as "police protect LGBTIQ+; police are violent against believers." The aim is to control the narrative, signal that our rights are conditional, and warn police against protecting us next time. This cycle shapes how neutral audiences understand "public order" and adds pressure to the next year's Pride.

Russia's influence runs through this ecosystem. The talking points are familiar - "protect the family," "defend children," "foreign ideology," "Western agents." They move from Russian media into local channels and then into municipal politics. The goal is to polarize and make visibility itself appear dangerous. During Pride season, the same frames appear across TV screens and Telegram feeds, often word for word. This is a script, not a debate. It encourages small groups to assemble against us and then treats their aggression as proof that our march threatens "peace." It also turns policing into a loyalty test: protect the law or protect a narrative. We respond by returning to basics - peaceful assembly is protected, and we treat each provocation as a message to manage, not a reason to abandon the route. The effect is real. When officials repeat those frames, they raise the social cost of protection and increase the risk to participants.

Transnistria adds a separate and more dangerous layer. I used to travel there to train specialists on SOGI, but since they voted for this anti-LBGT law, it's dangerous for me to go. Information about LGBTIQ+ people is closed off, and the environment is hostile to outside support. The region's economic crisis, linked to Russia's war and sanctions, the loss of subsidized gas, and Moldova's reduced electricity purchases, creates volatility that authorities can exploit. Under these conditions, we are unable to provide direct assistance to people in Transnistria. When LGBTIQ+ people from the region contact us for help, the only way we can assist them is by advising them to relocate to Chișinău and

then providing support with documents and citizenship. It is not the solution we want, but it is the only safe option now. Russia's pressure is felt here as daily limits: closed institutions, controlled media, and a legal climate that isolates people and punishes contact with us.

Inside the country, the same themes shape public talk. Around elections or referendums, homophobic messaging intensifies, and local actors copy the "moral panic" lines pushed by Russian outlets. The method is simple: blur the line between public safety and moral panic until the right to assemble appears to be a threat to public safety. Our response is patience and documentation. We prepare legal files, keep records of each incident, and show that our assemblies are peaceful, lawful, and protected. We do not chase every insult or rumor, but focus on what changes outcomes: the text of the law, meeting protocols, reliable witnesses, and a route we can complete.

There is also work to be done within the movement. I watch for divide and rule tactics, attempts "to divide LGB from T." As a social psychologist, I call this "the biggest mistake" we could make. Our shared fight should be both against homophobia and transphobia. The same external narratives that tell the public we are a threat try to tell us that we are each other's problem. We refuse that logic and keep an open platform for LGBTIQ+ organizations and activists in Moldova to prevent fragmentation. "Everybody is welcome." We hold common meetings, share basic security practices, and invest in conflict-resolution skills when tensions appear. This platform is also where younger activists learn safety protocols and language about rights, so the next generation does not have to relearn the same lessons under pressure.

Taken together, these risks are manageable because we treat them as patterns rather than surprises. Our answer remains consistent: plan

for extraction, prioritize law over narrative, document everything, and maintain the platform so that no one is isolated. Each year, we start from this reality. Each year we finish the march.

Strategies for Prevention, Protection, and Resilience

Our strategy is simple to name, but difficult to carry out: keep Pride visible and protected, and keep the community safe throughout the year. We organize Pride openly. Announcements are shared through mass media and our social media, and the dates, venue, and start address are made public. Pride is a week-long festival featuring various activities, culminating in the Pride March on the last day. In the days leading up to the festival, we meet with the police, hand over our addresses, and discuss the risks for the entire week and the march.

"We organize it openly, totally openly... we invite through mass media and our social media. Dates, venue, start address - all this information is totally open for all."

Negotiations are part of security. Before 2019, there was pressure at every meeting "to change the route, to change the date, to change everything," so we always came with our lawyer and held the line. Since 2019, the format has become more professional: the agenda focuses on logistics, including addresses, hours, and exits, and the police clearly state that they will provide protection for the event. On the day, their task is to remove blockers rather than evacuate the march, which allows us to reach the finish.

We plan the march to be manageable and as long and continuous as

conditions allow. Start and finish points are clear, timing is agreed in advance, and we are ready to shut down quickly if conditions change. We assume things can turn fast and prepare for that.

A concrete example from 2025 shows how this works in practice. Police said they did not have the mayor's "permission" to stop traffic and asked us to move onto a narrow pedestrian strip. We refused, held the declared space, briefly blocked public transport, and then proceeded with the march. The police protected the event; several organizers were fined; we went to court and won. For security, the route was shifted to a parallel street, and we still reached the planned finish.

"Police said they had no permission from the mayor to stop traffic... asked us to move to the pedestrian part. It's very narrow. We refused, we blocked the designated area, we halted public transportation, and organized our march. After that, the police protected us. They fined us, we went to court, and we won."

Alongside event work, we provide free legal assistance to people who need it, including those arriving from higher-risk areas. Internationally, segments of the US right-wing, including allies of Donald Trump, try to reframe "LGBT rights" as "LGB without the T." They accept rights for lesbians and gay men but target trans people with fear, moral panic, and disinformation. In our movement, we actively monitor signs of this strategy being introduced, check for attempts to split LGB from T, and reject such divisions. We maintain an open platform by organizing joint meetings, inviting relevant specialists to mediate, and fostering ongoing dialogue to ease tensions and preserve unity.

"We oppose homophobia and transphobia, not fellow LGBTIQ+ people."

This combination — open organization, witnessed and lawyered

negotiations focused on logistics, a long, fully protected route that remains controllable and can be closed quickly if needed, careful documentation, legal follow-through, and a united platform — is what keeps Pride feasible and the community safer from one year to the next.

Key Conclusions

The Moldovan case shows that Pride can only be sustained where it is treated as infrastructure rather than a single event. What keeps the march possible is not a moment of mobilisation, but the slow work of building procedures, relationships and habits that can withstand political mood swings and election cycles. This includes the unglamorous parts of organising — drafting letters, keeping records, training new people — that rarely appear in public narratives but make each season less fragile than the last.

At the same time, the model remains exposed. Much of the work rests on a small group of people who combine event management, legal follow-up, advocacy and community care. This concentration of responsibility makes continuity impressive but also risky: illness, burnout or targeted pressure on a few individuals could disrupt an entire season. Any long-term strategy for Pride in Moldova has to include planned succession, skills-sharing and realistic workloads, so that the system does not depend on a handful of irreplaceable organisers.

Moldova also illustrates how external propaganda and local moral panic do not have to succeed in shutting Pride down to have an effect. Their impact is measured in the constant need to defend basic

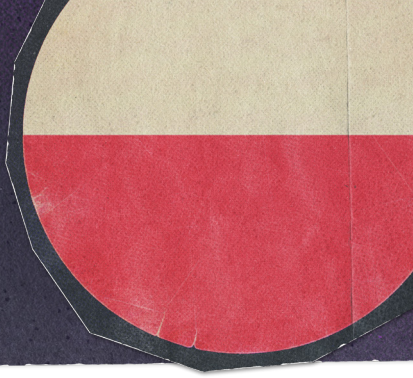
decisions — to hold a march at all, to walk a certain route, to keep LGBTIQ+ work visible between seasons. The response that works here is patient and procedural rather than spectacular: insisting on rules, documenting each attempt to narrow the space, and quietly normalising cooperation with institutions that are willing to apply the law.

For allies and donors, the most useful contribution is therefore not symbolic endorsement on the day of the march, but stable support for the underlying ecosystem: legal aid, psychological assistance, internal training, and the organisational backbone that allows people to come back year after year. Pride in Moldova is less a celebration that happens once and more a recurring check on whether this ecosystem still functions. If it does, a march can be planned, completed and followed up. If it fails, the loss will first be felt in the places that rarely make headlines.

by **Angelica Frolov,**

the director of GENDERDOC-M, Moldova's oldest and largest LGBT+ organization, where she has worked since 2004 in various advocacy roles. One of the country's most visible openly lesbian activists, she represents the Moldovan LGBT movement in dialogue with government, media and civil society and has been involved in organizing Moldova Pride from the very beginning.

Poland



Context and History of the Pride Movement in Poland

Pride in Poland began in a relatively late and hostile environment. The first Equality Marches were organised in Warsaw in 2001, followed by marches in 2002 and 2003. Those early events were small and contested but set a precedent: queer people appeared in public space as a collective political subject rather than an invisible minority.

From 2004 to 2005,repeated attempts to hold marches were met with obstruction. Local authorities used administrative tricks, security arguments and formal bans to prevent events, while far-right groups tried to intimidate organisers and participants. In that period, Poland was still far from the current situation in which prides are regular features of the summer calendar. The memory of those early bans and attacks remains part of the movement's political culture.

Over the following decade, the map changed dramatically. Equality Marches spread from Warsaw to all major and many mid-sized cities. In recent years, Pride events have taken place even in towns with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. Altogether, around fifty different towns have organised marches at least once. In many small places, the pride

organisers later became a local hub for broader activities, including workshops, cultural events, support groups, and informal community spaces. Pride became an entry point into wider local engagement rather than a single annual ritual.

The movement also tried to organise itself nationally. A “Coalition of Marching Cities” was formed to connect pride groups, share knowledge and coordinate dates. Over time, internal conflicts and personal tensions weakened this structure, and it now represents only a part of the movement. Even so, the coalition left behind a web of contacts and shared know-how. Many organisers in small towns learned route planning, media work and basic security from more experienced groups through that network.

The political context shifted with the rise and long rule of the Law and Justice (PiS) government. The most notorious legacy of that period was the so-called “LGBT-free zones” and a constant stream of hostile rhetoric from state media and local councils. Even though these resolutions had limited direct legal effect, their symbolic and psychological impact was deep. A recent study shows that after local anti-LGBT regulations were introduced, young people tended to leave those areas and search for work and study opportunities in regions perceived as more tolerant.

After the change of government, the tone of state institutions and public broadcasters softened. Openly homophobic propaganda from the central level decreased. At the same time, very little changed in law. Attempts to introduce serious hate speech regulations were blocked by the Constitutional Tribunal. Work on a civil partnership bill stalled because the ruling coalition could not agree. Organisations now experience something paradoxical: the atmosphere is less openly hostile, but it has become harder to mobilise people and raise funds,

because the infringement of rights feels less immediate than during the peak of the “LGBT-free zone” campaign.

Today, the Polish pride movement is both more present and diversified than ever, with events widely rooted in communities across the country. However, long-term consequences of the PiS era, such as psychological scars and conservative narratives, still shape everyday

Pride in Lublin, 2024. Photo provided by KPH.

life for queer people, particularly outside larger cities.

Threats and Risks to Pride and Queer Communities

Today, the main threats to organisers do not come from outright bans or mass arrests, but from more diffuse and resource-draining tactics. Targeted hate campaigns and SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) lawsuits are among the most serious. They require time, money and emotional energy to handle, even when legal support is available. For the broader community, the constant hostility in traditional and social media and in many social environments has strong psychological effects. People absorb the message that they are unwelcome or dangerous, which affects mental health and willingness to be visible.

The current government does not actively attack LGBTIQ+ people. The immediate institutional threat is lower than it was a few years ago, but this respite is fragile. Polls show weakening support for the ruling coalition and growing strength of right-wing opposition parties. Activists expect that after the parliamentary elections in 2027, the political situation could again tilt sharply against queer communities. They do not treat the present moment as secure, only as a pause between more openly hostile phases.

The most powerful threat actors are right-wing parties, especially PiS and the far-right Confederation. They have broad electoral support, local structures and strong skills in shaping narratives about queer people and spaces. The Catholic Church adds pressure, particularly at the local level. Priests in smaller towns and villages often act as informal

authorities and openly mobilise against pro-LGBTIQ+ policies. For many MPs, especially from conservative regions, church expectations strongly influence their voting behaviour.

Alongside parties and churches stands a dense ecosystem of conservative legal and campaigning organisations. Foundations such as “Pro—Prawo do Życia”, “Ordo Iuris” and “Centrum Życia i Rodziny” coordinate campaigns against reproductive rights and LGBTIQ+ equality. They promote anti-queer laws, run disinformation campaigns and offer legal defence to right-wing activists in court. Ordo Iuris is particularly visible in strategic litigation and in drafting legal arguments against progressive policies. These groups are well-funded and interlinked, and they maintain a continuous pressure on both local and national institutions. Their tactics have not changed much in recent years; they rely on steady, methodical work rather than sudden escalations.

For pride organisers, almost every march now faces predictable counter-demonstrations, mainly by conservative groups or local right-wing activists. These protests, while mostly non-violent, are characterized by slander such as equating queerness with pedophilia. No strategy has yet prevented such demonstrations; they are a standard feature of Pride.

Physical violence around marches remains limited but not absent. In 2023, there were thirty-six Equality Marches. During one of them, a participant was shot in the head with an airgun; the injury was not permanent, and the perpetrator was never caught. In 2024, there were thirty-four marches and one serious series of incidents after the Opole Pride. A man tore down a rainbow flag at the afterparty, shouted homophobic slogans, stole pins and attacked participants with pepper spray. Later that night, probably the same man returned with several

masked accomplices, again shouting slurs and trying to break into the venue, using pepper spray against people inside. Police detained two of the attackers; the others escaped. In 2025, with twenty-eight marches, no serious incidents were recorded.

Even when violence is rare, the mere possibility shapes participants' sense of safety and decisions about attending, especially in smaller towns and eastern Poland, where tensions are higher. Organisers must weigh the benefits of visibility against the risk of trauma for participants.

Legal, Political and Societal Environment

Legally, Poland is in a state of stagnation. Under the current government, no major reforms improving the situation of LGBTIQ+ people have been passed. An attempt to penalise hate speech more clearly failed when the Constitutional Tribunal blocked it. Work was done on a civil partnership bill, but it collapsed due to insufficient support within the ruling coalition. Marriage equality and joint adoption by same-sex couples remain outside realistic political discussion for now.

The most concrete initiative currently on the table is the proposed Act on the Status of the Closest Person and Cohabitation. It would grant certain rights, such as inheritance, joint property, joint tax filing, and access to medical information, to cohabiting partners. The text is still being drafted and has not been made public. Even if passed by parliament, it is likely to face a presidential veto. This act would offer only a fraction of what civil partnerships were supposed to guarantee, but under present conditions, it counts as an ambitious proposal.

Some legal protections exist in specific fields. Article 183a of the Labour Code explicitly forbids discrimination in employment based

on sexuality and gender. Strategic litigation has brought occasional wins. A notable example is the case W.W. v. Poland at the European Court of Human Rights, where the court held that Poland must allow continued access to hormone therapy for transgender prisoners. This judgment set an important standard for the treatment of trans people in detention. Outside labour law and isolated court cases, however, there has been no serious progress on anti-discrimination in healthcare, education or access to services.

The political environment has shifted from open hostility to passive indifference. Under PiS, state media and many local councils actively attacked LGBTIQ+ communities. Today, the official rhetoric is milder, but the ruling coalition avoids taking risks on queer issues. Any step that could be framed as "ideological" is seen as a potential gift to the opposition. This reluctance blocks reform even in areas where basic legal protections are missing.

The Catholic Church continues to play a central political role, despite declining church attendance. In many regions, particularly in smaller towns and villages, priests function as local opinion leaders and openly endorse far-right narratives. There is evidence of priests pressuring MPs from their parishes to oppose any pro-queer policies. Even when not visible in parliamentary debates, this pressure shapes what politicians believe is possible without electoral punishment.

The "LGBT-free zones" campaign is formally over. All resolutions have been repealed or nullified, the last one in April 2025. The fight against them required a combination of public campaigning, legal monitoring and pressure from the European Union, including the threat of withdrawing EU funds from regions that adopted discriminatory resolutions. Some local governments changed course only when confronted with the risk of losing money; others had to be forced to

back down by demonstrating the illegality of their acts under Polish law.

Even after repeal, the memory of those zones remains. They created a powerful message that queer people were not welcome in large parts of the country. Young LGBTIQ+ people responded by leaving those regions when they could. The “atlas of hatred” that mapped these resolutions is now also a map of places where trust will take a long time to rebuild. At the same time, some conservative local environments continue to explore ways of introducing new discriminatory regulations, even if none currently pose an immediate legal threat.

Societal attitudes are uneven. Pride has spread to many small towns, and local organisers there see real growth potential. Work in eastern Poland is considered particularly important because it can influence national politics and challenge stereotypes about who “owns” queer issues. Access to schools and youth is possible mainly through local grassroots groups that already enjoy trust in their communities. So far, attempts to systematically block this access have not been successful.

Organisation, Safety and Strategies Around Pride

Equality Marches are organised under the Law on Public Gatherings. Organisers must notify authorities at least a week in advance if they plan to march on public roads. Officials can ban an event only if it poses a clear and serious threat to public safety, or if another gathering is already registered in the same place at the same time. In practice, no city has successfully used these provisions to stop a Pride march in recent years.

The day-to-day interaction with the police depends heavily on city size and local tradition. In many smaller towns, the only direct contact is the formal notification of the march's start and end. In big cities such as Warsaw or the Tricity, it is common for organisers to meet police representatives months in advance to discuss routes and security needs. These meetings are based on convention rather than on formal protocols; there are no public, written police guidelines specifically for LGBTIQ+ events. Pride is handled under the same procedures as any other mass gathering.

Typical risks during marches revolve around counter-demonstrations. Non-violent protests are almost guaranteed. Violent incidents are less frequent and occur mainly in the east. The main security tool on the organisers' side is a network of trained volunteers who move through the march, watch for incidents and immediately report anything suspicious. Organisers then decide whether to ask the police to intervene. Routes are chosen in consultation with the police to avoid locations that are difficult to secure. Most prides, regardless of city size, rely on volunteer paramedics on standby during the march.

Not all visibility takes the form of street marches. Some cities, often for financial reasons, have shifted towards festival-style events: picnics with drag performances, stands from queer and allied NGOs, games and family-oriented programmes, but without an actual march. These formats require fewer resources and can sometimes feel safer for participants, especially where open confrontation is more likely. In addition, a wide spectrum of cultural and educational activities has emerged: zine-making workshops, drag shows, self-help meetings, teacher trainings, therapy groups and art exhibitions. A number of national-level organisations do not run these events themselves but provide funding, consultation and legal support to local organisers.

Campaigns to counter disinformation rely on traditional and social media. Public initiatives such as “Equal Families” and “All Families Are Important” present realistic images of queer families and challenge stereotypes. Organisations monitor public debate and respond when politicians or media figures spread harmful claims, seeking to insert their own narratives into mainstream coverage rather than speaking only within activist circles.

The main story told against Pride has barely changed. “Protecting children” is still the key frame used by opponents, accompanied by accusations that LGBTIQ+ people are an ideology or a foreign import that threatens Polish values. Former president Andrzej Duda and other high-profile figures repeatedly spoke in these terms, legitimising them for a wider audience. Claims of foreign influence are less common but remain present. In the media sphere, one important recent change was the rise of the far-right TV Republika after the new government reformed public television. This station quickly gained popularity and became the first widely watched private outlet clearly positioned on the far-right, giving anti-LGBTIQ+ narratives a new megaphone even as state media moved somewhat towards the centre.

Community Resilience and Support for Activists

Activist organisations try to compensate for the hostile environment by strengthening internal resilience. They provide grants for local initiatives, offer advocacy and administrative trainings and give legal assistance in strategic cases or in defending against SLAPP suits. Legal education is considered particularly important; organisers are

encouraged to understand how the law can protect them and how it can be used against them. Knowing that there will be legal help if repression occurs makes it easier for people to take the risk of organising public events.

Work with youth and schools relies on local groups that already have deep roots in their communities. National organisations support these groups but do not replace them. Grassroots actors are better placed to gain the trust of parents, teachers and students and to navigate local politics. Attempts to systematically cut off this access have not succeeded so far, although resistance from conservative environments remains strong.

Support for vulnerable groups is uneven. At present, many resources are directed towards communities in small towns, especially in eastern Poland, where potential for change is seen as high and where local activism can have a disproportionate impact on national debates. Trans people, migrants and refugees also need targeted assistance, but the interview emphasises small-town work as a current focus.

The movement's resilience has been tested not only by external pressure but also by internal conflict. A striking example is the split of Warsaw Pride. In 2024, two rival marches took place in the capital on different weekends following an internal conflict. The dispute spilled into both queer and mainstream media and damaged the public image of the movement. Sponsors, politicians and community members were confused by two competing events, and existing tensions inside the activist scene deepened. This episode exposed weaknesses in accountability mechanisms and conflict-resolution structures. Clear lessons still have to be drawn from it if similar crises are to be avoided in future.

At the same time, there have been important victories. The multi-year

campaign against "LGBT-free zones" combined legal expertise, political lobbying and social mobilisation. It mobilised allies at the EU level and used the conditionality of EU funding as leverage. When funding was insufficient, activists and lawyers demonstrated the resolutions' incompatibility with Polish law. The complete repeal of these zones by 2025 is one of the clearest successes of the movement in recent years.

Key Conclusions and Lessons for Other Countries

The pride movement in Poland has grown from a handful of contested marches in Warsaw to a nationwide network reaching dozens of towns, including very small ones. It has created new local leaders, expanded from marches to workshops, festivals and support groups, and successfully fought off some of the most aggressive symbolic attacks, such as the "LGBT-free zones". At the same time, it operates in a legal and political environment where real progress is rare, where key reforms are blocked and where right-wing parties and conservative organisations remain powerful and well funded.

The interview points to several lessons that may be relevant beyond Poland. Deep roots in local communities are essential. Organisations that are closely connected to local institutions and other civil society actors have proved most resilient in times of crisis. Legal literacy and access to competent legal support are not luxuries but basic tools for survival. When organisers know their rights and have someone to defend them, they are less likely to be paralysed by fear of repression. Small, flexible funds that can reach tiny groups in small towns make a

large difference, because big grant programmes are often inaccessible to them.

Finally, the Polish case is a reminder that the end of open state-led hate campaigns does not automatically mean safety or progress. After a change of government, hostility can shift into more institutionalised, quieter forms: stalled legislation, reduced funding, a “wait and see” attitude that leaves structural problems untouched. Under such conditions, pride remains both necessary and risky. The movement must keep finding ways to stay visible and protect its people, knowing that the next turn of the political wheel could bring a more openly hostile regime again.

by **Alef Wąchalskie**
(they/them),

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Ukraine

History of Queer Activism and the Pride Movement in Ukraine

The Pride movement in Ukraine began with challenging first steps in 2012, when threats from far-right groups disrupted the Equality March in Kyiv and forced police to evacuate participants. This event served as a catalyst for the development of modern security strategies and the establishment of cooperation with law enforcement. From 2016 to 2021, the marches grew into large, peaceful gatherings. In 2019, a record 8,000 people participated in Kyiv, and in 2021, nearly 10,000 attended without serious incidents. Pride has since become a key platform for civic activism, human rights advocacy, solidarity, and a symbol of Ukraine's aspirations for European integration.

The first KyivPride took place in 2012, before I became involved in activism. At that time, Ukraine was among the most homophobic countries in Europe, making the idea that Pride would soon become a regular part of activism seem unlikely. However, by the mid-2010s, the climate began to shift.

The Revolution of Dignity in 2013—2014 became a turning point not only for the country but also for the LGBTQ+ community, further

shaping the climate for queer activism in Ukraine.

As a volunteer medic on the Maidan, I witnessed a pivotal moment as Ukraine chose its direction. The focus was on pursuing a European future and democracy. Before 2014, Russian influence shaped Ukraine's approach to human rights, including LGBTQ+ rights. The Revolution of Dignity marked a turning point that transformed societal values, including my own.

"In 2016, I came to work at an LGBT organization. At that time, I wasn't openly gay; it was hard for me to imagine myself at Pride. Colleagues joked, 'In a year, you'll go.' I laughed then, but a year later, I was already standing in the square in Kyiv at my first Equality March. Then followed Kharkiv, Odesa, Zaporizhzhia, and countless other Prides."

Kharkiv Pride 2021. Photo provided by Borys Hrachov.

Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, changed everything overnight. For example, those who had been drinking ClubMate at a queer party in Kyiv on the evening of February 23 found themselves by the morning of the 24th filling bottles with flammable mixture and preparing to meet Russian tanks on Kyiv's outskirts. This abrupt transition showed how rapidly life changed for the community.

Photos provided by Borys Hrachov.

Martial law soon made traditional marches in Ukraine impossible, forcing the movement to temporarily shift abroad. In 2022, KyivPride joined Warsaw Pride, and in 2023, participated in Liverpool Pride; these actions helped maintain international visibility and support for Ukraine. During this period, many activists redirected their efforts to humanitarian aid, evacuation, and military support, as the ongoing war required a reassessment of priorities.

February 24 marked a turning point. For many LGBTQ+ individuals, joining the Armed Forces of Ukraine became the only way to protect their rights and lives. I also chose to serve, believing it was the right decision.

Pride returned to Kyiv on June 16, 2024, when KyivPride organized a short march in the capital with about 500 registered participants—the first since the full-scale war began. The event was carefully planned: the location remained secret until the last moment, was near the metro for quick shelter, and was closely coordinated with the police. Due to aggressive counter-demonstrators and security threats, the march was dispersed after 10 minutes. Despite this, the symbolic event had a strong mobilizing effect on the community.

The 2024 return was small, cautious, and brief, but highly significant given the circumstances of ongoing conflict. Russia aims to erase not only territory but also individuals' right to live authentically. Even in this modest format, Pride's reappearance on Kyiv's streets demonstrated dignity and resilience in response to new challenges.

In 2025, KyivPride attracted over 1,500 participants, combining visibility with fundraising for drones despite counter-protests. Regional adaptations included Auto-Pride in Kharkiv, with 13 cars and approximately 60 participants in 2024, and 17 cars with PrideFest in 2025, as well as alternative cultural events. The war has paradoxically increased public support: a KIIS survey in June 2024 found that over 70% of Ukrainians believe LGBTQ+ individuals should have equal rights. This shift is attributed to the contrast with Russia's repressive policies and the visible contributions of LGBTQ+ people to national defense as military personnel, medics, and volunteers.

The Russian war against Ukraine is notable for the broad and visible participation of LGBTI individuals in the military. This has transformed

social perceptions, with the LGBTQ+ community now seen as active contributors rather than passive subjects.

Kyiv remains the center for organizations and diplomatic partnerships, where public events are possible but carry the risk of counter-protests. In Western Ukraine, where church influence is stronger, public events are limited, though smaller gatherings are more feasible. The East and frontline areas, such as Kharkiv, Odesa, and Zaporizhzhia, face greater danger from shelling and radical groups, requiring Pride to adapt to mobile and online formats. In occupied territories, Russian repression makes both visibility and normal life impossible.

Legal Situation of LGBTIQ+ in Ukraine

After the full-scale war began, legal gaps for same-sex couples became more evident. Access to a partner's medical information, decision-making in emergencies, inheritance of joint property, receiving compensation in case of injury or death, and official recognition as a "close relative" are all critical during wartime. For LGBTIQ+ individuals, these rights are either inaccessible or require lengthy and often humiliating court processes, inconsistent hospital practices, and proof of cohabitation.

This situation highlights a clear injustice: LGBTIQ+ individuals serve and sacrifice for the country, but the state does not extend even fundamental rights available to heterosexual people.

That is why, at the center of the agenda, are two legal instruments: Article No. 9103 on registered civil partnerships (for both different-sex and same-sex couples) and No. 5488 on hate crimes.

After a 2022 petition, the president publicly expressed readiness to sign the law if passed. In 2023, the Ministries of Defense and Justice supported registered partnerships as necessary during wartime. In August 2024, the relevant Verkhovna Rada committee recommended No. 9103 for a first reading. In 2025, a vote did not occur due to opposition from conservative and religious groups, who blocked its inclusion on the agenda and lobbied against it in local councils. Meanwhile, the Ombudsman publicly supported including civil partnerships in EU negotiations on "Judiciary and Fundamental Rights," and European institutions have called for legal recognition of same-sex couples. Without this law, partners lack guaranteed access to information, cannot promptly exercise medical powers, and face costly and time-consuming court proceedings regarding property or compensation.

No. 5488 is the second critical measure. Currently, most attacks and abuses are prosecuted under general articles, and hate motives are often not recorded, leading to understated statistics and inadequate protection for victims. Monitoring in 2023—2024 shows an increase in incidents and inconsistent recognition of the SOGI motive. Without a specific law, investigators and prosecutors lack the grounds and skills to properly qualify cases, resulting in lenient sentences and repeated impunity in court.

The European judicial framework reinforces the state's obligations. In the case of Maymulakhin & Markiv vs. Ukraine, the ECtHR directly indicated the obligation to provide same-sex couples with a legal form. In the case of Karter vs. Ukraine of 11.04.2024, the Court found a violation due to investigations of attacks without considering the hate motive, which is a direct signal to change law enforcement and judicial practice, and another argument in favor of No. 5488. At the national level in 2025, a court in Kyiv for the first time recognized

a same-sex couple as a "family," and the appeal confirmed it - an important precedent, but pinpoint; a systemic solution should be given by No. 9103.

While parliament delays, incremental steps can reduce the impact of waiting. These include sub-legislative acts in defense, healthcare, and social protection to enable partners to access information and visit; a unified list of relationship proofs for payments; standard medical forms with a 'civil partner' field; and municipal non-discrimination and event security protocols. While these measures do not replace the law, they help remove the most significant barriers for now.

Current Risks, Threats, and Key Incidents Affecting LGBTIQ+ Communities

With the onset of the full-scale war, traditional risks such as far-right groups and pressure from ultra-conservative religious and political actors were compounded by new security threats, including missile strikes, air alerts, and martial law restrictions.

The war affects every aspect of everyday life, and this immediately has an influence on the infrastructure of visibility and support for LGBTIQ+ communities: some organizations were forced to evacuate from dangerous regions, work along the front line was sharply limited for a long time, resources were redistributed to humanitarian aid, relocation, and basic security.

The public march in Kyiv on June 16, 2024, exemplified this new reality. The short event, with about 500 registered participants, was conducted with maximum caution: the location was kept secret until

the last moment, started near the metro, and included coordinated communication with the police. The march was dispersed about ten minutes after it began due to confirmed risks from counter-demonstrators. Despite its brevity, the event brought the issue of equality back into public discourse and demonstrated the effectiveness of wartime security measures.

In April 2025, during the "Sunny Bunny" film festival near the "Zhovten" cinema, far-right groups attempted to disrupt the event. Police intervened, separating the groups and making detentions. This incident confirmed that organized opposition persists alongside the war. "Escalation from right-wing radicals is a reality we face constantly. Clashes near 'Sunny Bunny' in 2025 showed that the threat has not disappeared, but, on the contrary, has been restored with the return of our events. We need stronger laws against hate crimes because without them, police cannot always respond effectively."

Statistics show an escalation following the partial return of public activity in 2024: 56 homo- and transphobic incidents were documented in 2023, rising to 75 in 2024, many linked to events and activists. Most cases occurred in Kyiv and its region, with other high-risk areas including Kharkiv, Dnipro, Odesa, Zakarpattia, and Zhytomyr. Formats have adapted to conditions; in Kharkiv, "auto-Pride" served as a mobile, controlled event. In 2024, approximately 13 cars and 60 participants participated, and in 2025, 17 cars were joined by educational and memorial activities.

Russian propaganda and disinformation continue to be key negative factors. Through state media, Telegram networks, and bot farms, standardized messages such as "not the time," "child protection," and "foreign influence" are spread, mirroring those used in occupied territories and the wider region. Spikes in online campaigns often

coincide with offline attempts to disrupt events.

These factors have reduced the capacity of civil society organizations: some team members have left, many are mobilized, there have been losses, and security and logistics costs have risen. Despite this, key organizations maintain their operations, adapt their formats, support aid networks, and continue their human rights work under wartime restrictions.

Strategies for Prevention, Protection, and Resilience

Prevention, protection, and resilience strategies during wartime are structured as a managed risk-management system focused on prevention and controlled visibility. Events are carefully planned, with short public segments, predetermined dispersal points near shelters and metro stations, agreed signals for police coordination, and a dedicated communication channel with the responsible officer.

Flexibility is achieved by shifting to mobile formats in high-risk cities. Auto-Prides with agreed routes and time windows maintain public visibility while minimizing contact with aggressive groups. Cultural and educational events are held in smaller settings with controlled access and contingency plans in place for potential provocations or alerts. After each event, teams conduct debriefings, record incidents, provide legal support for victims, and update protocols, replacing improvisation with standardized procedures.

Most organizations now regularly conduct briefings on behavior during shelling, basic first-aid courses, marshal training on de-escalation and

breakthrough scenarios, and coordination with the police. Due to ongoing energy disruptions and Russia's attempts to cut power, many organizations have secured generators, power banks, autonomous lighting, and independent internet access.

Community resilience is supported by the multi-faceted nature of organizations. Those involved in political advocacy often provide additional services, such as hygiene kits, food coupons, temporary housing, legal aid, psychological support, burnout prevention, team rotations, and supervision. Networks of shelters, crisis hotlines, and case management for IDPs and trans* people are in place, along with access to hormone therapy and medical support. This approach addresses both urgent and long-term needs while maintaining a focus on security and stability.

The information network operates proactively. Clear, evidence-based messages about the link between equality and defense are prepared in advance, and positions are coordinated with human rights organizations and media outlets to ensure consistency and effectiveness. Disinformation is promptly refuted, and coordinated attacks are documented.

"No organization can be prepared for all challenges. The real strength is in adaptability: in the ability to quickly change formats, transfer services, rebuild security protocols, build coalitions, maintain reserves, and learn from each incident. Ukrainian organizations have proven that a way out can be found from any situation and adapted to any conditions, from office relocation and readjustment of aid to launching new models of interaction with the police and communities."

Key Conclusions

The experience of the Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ movement during the full-scale war shows a simple thing: activism does not disappear under the pressure of destruction, occupation, and constant danger: it changes form, tools, and rhythm, but continues to work. Civil society organizations have evolved into mobile structures with a high capacity for making swift decisions, relocating between cities, reformulating events within an hour, establishing new partnerships with local authorities and diplomats, and creating shelters and support networks.

Another key lesson is that LGBTIQ+ activism does not exist in isolation. In Ukraine, the movement operates within the broader struggle for freedom and European integration, integrating into wider coalitions and public discourse. Pride is not only about equality within the community; it also reflects trust in democratic institutions, public security, human rights standards, and government accountability. When LGBTIQ+ rights are framed as part of the general human rights agenda, and the voices of military personnel, medics, and volunteers are heard, societal attitudes shift from tolerance to recognition.

The struggle for LGBTIQ+ rights is part of the broader fight for human rights and democracy. The Ukrainian experience demonstrates that visibility of Pride, support for military personnel and volunteers, promotion of partnerships, and legislation against hate crimes are all effective tools for protecting human dignity and upholding the rule of law. For Germany, this means taking a strategic approach: integrating the Pride movement into national discourse, building alliances with media, trade unions, universities, and local governments, and unifying security, legal, and communication efforts. The war has shown that it is possible to adapt and continue working under any conditions - a lesson valuable for democracies facing their own challenges.

by **Borys Hrachov,**

human rights defender, veteran of the Russian—Ukrainian war, expert on Russian disinformation and propaganda.

Cross-Sectional Analysis

This section compares the landscapes for queer communities in the selected countries. Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Baltic region, and Germany. It identifies common threats, e.g.far-right violence, repressive laws, and disinformation, and highlights resilience strategies, drawing out lessons for Germany and international queer activists at risk. A recurring pattern is a ladder of repression: it often begins with disinformation, progresses to "LGBT propaganda" bans, then to "foreign agent" laws and broader crackdowns on civil society. These steps are increasingly amplified and coordinated through online spaces. The weakening of content moderation on major platforms and policy shifts framed as a fight against so-called "woke" or "gender ideology" politics have made it easier for anti-LGBTIQ+ narratives to circulate and gain legitimacy. On networks such as X (18), reduced algorithmic safeguards mean hate speech and conspiracy theories travel faster and reach wider audiences, and the same channels are readily used by Russia and other state and non-state actors as tools for disinformation and propaganda. Russia's influence is a constant threat. Since launching its full-scale war on Ukraine in 2022, the Kremlin has amplified anti-queer campaigns, especially in occupied territories where it quickly dismantles LGBTQ+ rights and rules through fear. (10) At the same time, parts of the US political system that previously positioned themselves as defenders of human rights now openly attack "gender ideology" at home and abroad, weakening international support for LGBTIQ+ equality and giving additional cover to more repressive governments. (11)

In late 2023, the Russian Supreme Court officially designated the "international LGBT movement" as an "extremist organization",

laying the legal foundation for the persecution of LGBTIQ+ people and making any visible queer life or activism effectively impossible. Russia's repressive model is being copied by neighbouring countries and beyond. Its 2013 "LGBT-propaganda" law (expanded in 2022 to outlaw any positive or even neutral LGBTQ+ portrayal in regard to all age groups) set an example for others. In Georgia, the ruling party pushed the 2024 Foreign Agents law mimicking Russia's 2012 version, followed by the 2024 "Law on Family Values and Protection of Minors" law, which bans LGBTIQ+ "propaganda," gender transition, and same-sex adoption. These actions were backed by alliances between pro-Russian politicians and the Georgian Orthodox Church, which helped mobilise anti-LBGTQ+ campaigns and violent protests (dozens of attacks were reported in 2024—2025). (12) In Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime introduced a 2022 ban on "non-traditional relationships" and, in 2024, classified LGBTIQ+ content as "pornography," driving Pride gatherings completely underground and resulting in multiple arrests. In Moldova, pro-Russian political forces spread disinformation and advocate for Russian-style "propaganda" laws, contributing to an atmosphere where attacks on queer people occur with impunity. And in Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia, Crimea since 2014, parts of Donbas and Kherson since 2022, the Russian administration has branded LGBTQ+ advocacy as extremism, employed torture and enforced disappearances, and run "re-education" programs that make open queer life practically impossible. It's a glimpse of the darkest outcome when anti-queer repression goes unchecked.

ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map 2025 reflects this regional regression. Countries like Georgia and Belarus have seen steep declines in their scores, indicating erosion of legal protections and equality measures for LGBTIQ+ people. (7) The worsening climate for queer

communities often intersects with other forms of authoritarianism and scapegoating; immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities, and others are frequently targeted by the same actors and narratives. These domestic backslides are reinforced by transnational networks that now link European far-right parties, Russian state interests and US-based anti-"woke" movements, creating a shared information space in which anti-LGBTIQ+ messages are normalised and repeated across borders.

In the Baltic states, Russia's destabilising tactics are keenly felt through targeted propaganda and minority politics. For years, Latvia and Lithuania considered introducing their own "LGBT-propaganda" bans. Lithuania formally repealed its ban in 2023, but the underlying conservative mindset persists. Russian-language media and online trolls regularly portray the annual Baltic Pride (which rotates between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) as an assault on national values or as Western propaganda. In 2025, when Vilnius hosted Baltic Pride, the event faced not only local far-right protests but also cyberattacks and a barrage of Kremlin-backed disinformation. Estonia, despite its progress (including marriage equality in 2024), contends with Russian disinformation aimed at its Russian-speaking minority, which seeks to undermine support for pro-LGBTIQ+ policies and align with a Kremlin narrative that paints such policies as a civilizational threat.

Amid these challenges, queer communities have developed innovative ways to resist Russian influence and maintain visibility. In Georgia and Moldova, activists use encrypted messaging, thorough risk assessments, and sometimes semi-secret or indoor events to keep Pride traditions alive without falling foul of "foreign agent" laws or hate mobs. Tbilisi Pride's small-scale "micro-march" in 2023 is one example: organisers held an unannounced, secure gathering that avoided clashes and demonstrated that even under hostile conditions, Pride can happen safely. (13) In Ukraine, Pride has adapted to war:

KyivPride 2025 was held as a charity event for the armed forces, drawing around 1,500 people to march for equality and to support the troops. (14) The sight of LGBTIQ+ soldiers and activists marching together sent a powerful message contrasting sharply with the brutal repression in Russian-occupied areas.

Elsewhere, activists are turning to the courts and international bodies. Polish activists have taken cases to the European Court of Human Rights to challenge the lack of adequate protection for LGBTIQ people's rights in Poland, using international legal mechanisms to seek changes in national law and policy. In Belarus and in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine, most organising has had to go underground: clandestine support networks help provide mental health care, run hotlines, and arrange safe passage for those in danger. The war's realities have shaped these strategies - where Russian control is absolute, survival often depends on secrecy and solidarity networks, while in freer areas the participation of queer people in defence efforts has boosted their public standing and given them new leverage to demand rights.

In the Baltic region, Baltic Pride itself has become a key resilience strategy. The 2025 event in Vilnius, despite threats, drew over 20,000 attendees. Organizers employed hybrid online/offline programming and tight security coordination to counter disinformation and potential attacks. The collaboration among activists and officials across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania turned what could have been a high-risk march into a powerful display of unity and commitment to democratic values in the face of an aggressive neighbor.

The lessons from these regions are directly relevant for Germany's queer community as it faces its own far-right resurgence. Events like Marzahn-Pride can draw on the underlying approach developed by KyivPride in 2024: systematic risk assessment, closer coordination

with local authorities and community security teams, clear safety and de-escalation protocols, and rapid communication channels with participants if conditions change. Efforts to combat disinformation, like the coalitions built with journalists in Moldova to rapidly debunk falsehoods, could be replicated to blunt the messaging of far-right groups. Russia's use of anti-LGBTIQ+ ideology as a weapon in its war on Ukraine is a warning for Western Europe: similar rhetoric is seeping into German discourse, from politicians framing queer rights as "ideology" to online trolls attacking "gender ideology." The stark reality in territories under Russian control, where queer people endure severe persecution, illustrates the high stakes of ignoring these threats. It underscores the importance of early and proactive measures. Cross-border solidarity initiatives, like the exchanges in this project, build a shared front against hate. They are increasingly vital, given that Germany recorded over 1,785 queerphobic hate crimes in 2023. By studying how repression escalates elsewhere, Germany and its allies can act sooner, pressuring the EU to crack down on propaganda networks, demanding more responsible platform governance, and bolstering support for local queer organisations, so that the ladder of repression is cut off before it climbs any higher.

The following tables summarise key aspects and offer detailed explanations to illustrate regional dynamics:

Table 1: Status of Same-Sex Partnerships

Georgia	No recognition: Constitutional ban on marriage since 2018 excludes queer partnerships; 2024 Family Values Law further bans adoptions and gender adaptations, fully suppressing queer family rights and amplifying discrimination.
Moldova	No recognition: While anti-discrimination laws exist, legal partnership protections are absent; EU pressure (e.g., through accession talks) may drive progress, but pro-Russian influences block reforms and maintain the status quo.
Russia	No recognition: Constitutional ban on marriage since 2020 and extremism law against LGBTQ+ criminalize queer relationships; this leads to persecutions and isolates communities without any legal acknowledgment or protection.
Ukraine	No recognition: Bill #9103 on civil partnerships in process for 2025, with recognition in select court cases; war has accelerated debates.
Poland	No recognition: Limited rights through courts; bans on hate speech are partial, but "LGBT-free zones" until 2023 showed how local policy marginalizes queer partnerships and fosters discrimination.

Belarus	No recognition: Constitutional ban on marriage since 1994 (strengthened 2022) excludes queer relationships; repressive laws against "non-traditional relations" criminalize partnerships and isolate communities without legal protection.
Germany	Marriage legal since 2017 with full rights: Self-Determination Law since 2024 facilitates gender adaptations and strengthens protections; however, growing far-right influence threatens queer rights
Estonia (Baltic)	Marriage legal since 2024 with full rights: Civil unions since 2016 paved the way; despite progress, Russian disinformation targets Russian-speaking minorities, creating social resistance to full implementation.
Latvia (Baltic)	Civil unions since 2024, but no marriage: Supreme Court ruling in 2023 mandated recognition; high homophobia, influenced by Russian media, limits protections and exposes partnerships to societal backlash.
Lithuania (Baltic)	No recognition: Limited rights through EU courts; conservative policies, echoing Russian models, delay reforms, with partnerships vulnerable to discrimination despite EU pressure.

Table 2: Status of Pride Events

Georgia	Under severe pressure with frequent cancellations: Pride events 2024—2025 often online or canceled due to violence and queerhostile mobilization (e.g., Tbilisi Pride 2021 with 50+ injured); Family Values Law bans public visibility and turns events into high-risk zones for activists.
Moldova	Regularly held but under threats: Chișinău Pride proceeds, e.g., 2025 with 1,500 participants under police protection, but bomb threats in 2024 heighten risks; EU integration helps, but pro-Russian influences create constant tension.
Russia	Complete bans since 2006: Open events impossible due to 2023 extremism law criminalizing LGBTQ+ activity; underground or online formats prevail, but with risks of arrests and isolation.
Ukraine	Hybrid since war in 2022: KyivPride 2024 returned to Kyiv (500 participants, quickly dispersed for safety); 2025 as charity event despite war, emphasizing solidarity with soldiers.
Poland	Regularly held but with counterprotests: Warsaw Pride proceeds, but in former "LGBT-free zones" until 2023 events were heavily limited; hate speech bans help partially, but far-right groups create ongoing conflicts and safety risks.

Belarus	No open Prides since 2010: Events underground or in exile due to repressions and arrests; laws against "non-traditional relations" make public visibility risky and fully isolate communities.
Germany	Regularly held but increasingly threatened by far-right groups.
Estonia (Baltic)	Regularly held with growing participation: Tallinn Pride 2024 drew 5,000; as part of Baltic Pride rotation, events face minor threats from pro-Russian groups but benefit from EU support.
Latvia (Baltic)	Held with police protection: Riga Pride (part of Baltic Pride) in 2023 had 10,000 participants; Russian disinformation incites protests, but legal protections improve visibility.
Lithuania (Baltic)	Regularly held but with disruptions: Vilnius Pride 2025 (Baltic Pride host) with 20,000 participants; cyber-threats and far-right counterprotests linked to Russian influence heighten risks.

Conclusions

This report has traced the mounting challenges faced by queer communities in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Baltic region, and Germany - from rising anti-queer violence and repressive laws to the ways activists are fighting back. The core message is that, despite sustained pressure, queer activists continue to organise, using Pride and community networks as key tools for visibility, rights, and mutual support. In a moment when anti-gender movements and authoritarian leaders are trying to roll back hard-won progress, cross-border exchange is essential for building resilience against future threats. Russia appears repeatedly in these stories as a central agitator, exporting anti-LGBTIQ+ ideology through propaganda, proxy organisations and copycat legislation that weaken democracy and human rights across borders.

The threats are diverse but interconnected: far-right violence fuelled by disinformation, laws that criminalise queer identity, and restrictions that suffocate civil society. In contexts such as Georgia and Belarus, “foreign agent” rules and “LGBT-propaganda” bans push queer communities out of public life. In areas under Russian occupation, repression is total: queer existence is forced underground by the risk of torture, forced outing, or worse. Yet one of the key findings of this project is the persistence and creativity that appear under these conditions. Underground networks in Belarus and occupied Ukraine quietly support those in danger; hybrid online and in-person events in Ukraine show that Pride can adapt to war; small, mobile Pride actions in Georgia keep the movement alive while reducing the risk of mass attacks. Activists have developed new forms of organising instead of withdrawing.

Another central lesson is the role of Pride. Pride is not only a celebration; it is also a protest, a demand for recognition and often an act of personal risk. Even under attack, Pride events bring allies together, confront hostile narratives and keep LGBTIQ+ issues in the public debate. About 1,500 people marched in Chișinău Pride 2025 in Moldova despite threats. In Poland, Warsaw Pride continues to draw large crowds even after some regions declared themselves "LGBT-free zones." In Germany, Marzahn-Pride 2025 went ahead despite far-right youth attempts to disrupt it. These events generate visibility that can translate into change; as seen in Ukraine, where the visible role of LGBTIQ+ soldiers and volunteers in the war effort has helped shift public opinion toward equality. Pride also provides a platform for legal and international advocacy. Activists are using Pride-related cases in European courts to challenge repressive laws, and Baltic Pride's rotating format strengthens a regional coalition that is harder to isolate. When more than 20,000 people gathered at Baltic Pride in Vilnius in 2025 despite bomb threats and cyberattacks, they showed that coordinated organising can counter fear.

Public support, even in traditionally conservative societies, is slowly increasing. In Ukraine, around 70% of people now back equal rights for LGBTIQ+ citizens which is a sharp rise linked to the contrast with Russian repression and the contributions of queer Ukrainians to defence and humanitarian work (15). In Estonia, the introduction of marriage equality in 2024 has been accompanied by growing acceptance, showing that legal change and visibility can shift attitudes even amid a constant flow of hostile messaging (16). But these gains are not guaranteed. The Russian-backed anti-LGBTIQ+ offensive — from laws like Georgia's "Family Values" Act to the hundreds of "extremism" cases against queer people in Russia — underlines how quickly situations can deteriorate and how easily hate crosses borders.

For Germany, where 1,785 anti-queer hate crimes were recorded in 2023 (17), experiences from Eastern Europe and the Baltic region offer both a warning and a set of practical tools. Security practices such as safe zones and advanced participant registration, tested by KyivPride, can help protect events like Marzahn-Pride. Campaigns against disinformation, similar to those developed in Moldova and Georgia, could limit the impact of false narratives in German public debate. The example of Baltic Pride shows how cross-city and cross-country collaboration can build broad alliances in defence of equality.

Resilience is not a slogan here; it is a set of concrete practices that allow communities to continue, adapt and push for change under pressure. Pride, in its different forms, remains a central vehicle for that work. This report is a call for solidarity in practice: to strengthen cross-border learning, support those most exposed to risk, and challenge bigotry where it starts. The fight is far from over, but, as one Ukrainian activist put it, “We will never give up the fight.”

Recommendations

The findings of this report point to a set of shared priorities. Across the country chapters, anti-rights actors appear as highly networked players who treat media and social platforms as key battlegrounds: they spread hate speech, coordinate campaigns, pressure advertisers, sponsors and decision-makers, and take advantage of weaker moderation and shifting algorithms to normalise anti-LGBTIQ+ narratives. At the same time, many contexts in Georgia, Eastern and Central Europe are marked by shrinking civic space, war or open authoritarianism, which makes local movements more dependent on allies beyond their borders. Against this backdrop, investing in serious, long-term work against hate speech and disinformation in social networks and media is not a side issue but a core condition for any progress. Equally, the country reports underline that cross-border cooperation and experience-sharing — between activists internationally, between exiled and local groups, between cities linked by Pride and community projects — is one of the few tools that still works when domestic politics turn hostile. The answer to authoritarian drift and Russian-style influence is not withdrawal, but denser, more protected networks of solidarity and practical collaboration.

For governments and decision-makers

Across the country chapters, one pattern is obvious: where the law clearly protects LGBTIQ+ people and institutions apply it, the space for Pride and queer organising is wider; where protection is vague, selectively enforced or missing, violence and impunity grow. For

governments, parliaments and public authorities, the starting point is therefore not abstract "tolerance", but firm legal guarantees against discrimination and hate crime on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and sex characteristics, backed up by police, prosecutors and courts that recognise anti-LGBTIQ+ violence, record it properly and act on it. Regular, transparent data on hate incidents is part of this, because it shows both the scale of the problem and whether institutions are responding.

The reports also show that Pride and other queer events become a test of whether authorities treat queer people as full citizens. Where marches in Chișinău, Vilnius, Warsaw or Berlin were prepared together with organisers, with agreed routes, communication channels and contingency plans, the risk of serious violence dropped and trust slowly grew. Where police were absent, passive or themselves hostile, as in Tbilisi or during earlier marches in Poland, Pride was exposed to heightened risks and attacks. Treating the safety of such events as a normal question of public order and basic rights — not as a favour or as a provocation — means planning with organisers well in advance, using police presence to deter attackers rather than intimidate participants, and taking complaints about misconduct seriously.

Another thread running through the country reports is the centrality of the digital sphere. Anti-rights actors use social media and online media as multipliers for their campaigns; when platforms like X weaken moderation or change algorithms, hostile content is amplified and quickly spills offline. Governments do not control these platforms, but they do set the rules of the game. Enforcing existing laws on hate speech and incitement, supporting independent monitoring of online trends, insisting on meaningful transparency from large platforms and pushing for standards that protect those targeted by organised hate are now basic elements of democratic governance, not side issues.

The experiences from Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and others underline how closely queer rights are tied to wider questions of war, authoritarianism and forced migration. Asylum and migration systems need to recognise persecution based on SOGIESC and work with queer NGOs to ensure that people are not re-traumatised in shelters, camps and offices. When countries drift towards authoritarianism and adopt "foreign agent" laws or "LGBT-propaganda" bans, democratic governments face a choice: quietly scale down contacts, or find ways to stay engaged with those resisting repression. The reports make a strong case for the latter — through visas and scholarships, support for work in exile, political pressure on those driving the crackdown, and continued cooperation with local and exiled human-rights defenders instead of leaving them isolated.

These findings also highlight the importance of international allyship. In several of the country chapters, the visible presence of embassies and international organisations at Pride marches — from public statements of support to diplomats walking in the front rows — has had a tangible impact on safety, deterrence and media coverage. In contexts like Moldova and Georgia, diplomatic monitoring and behind-the-scenes engagement with governments and police helped to restrain violent actors and keep routes open when domestic politics turned hostile. For Germany and other EU states, this means treating such diplomatic solidarity not as a symbolic extra, but as part of a broader security and foreign-policy toolkit for protecting queer assemblies and those who organise them.

For activists, NGOs and wider civil society

Queer activists, NGOs and broader civil society are already carrying a heavy load in all the contexts described in this report. From underground networks in Belarus to war-time Pride in Ukraine and local migrant initiatives in Marzahn, the same need appears again and again: to make work safer and more sustainable, not just more heroic. One practical lesson is to treat security as a regular part of organising rather than a last-minute reaction. Public events, queer centres and online activities benefit when people routinely do basic risk assessments, agree in advance who will do what if something goes wrong, and briefly review afterwards what worked and what did not. Over time this turns safety into a shared habit instead of an extra burden for a few individuals.

The country reports also show that information space is now one of the main arenas of conflict. Anti-LGBTIQ+ campaigns in Georgia, Moldova, the Baltics or Germany do not stop at physical attacks; they are prepared and amplified through media narratives, Telegram channels and social media platforms. Silence has not stopped these campaigns anywhere. Movements that cope better are those that invest in media literacy inside their own communities, have simple internal rules for how to react when a smear campaign starts, and maintain contacts with journalists, fact-checkers and digital-rights groups. Coordinated responses based on checked information and clear messages work better than isolated statements. At the same time, activists need to protect themselves: secure communication tools, careful handling of personal data and clear boundaries on what can be shared publicly limit the damage from doxxing, hacking and targeted harassment.

Flexibility in organising is another recurring theme. Where large Pride

marches are too risky or simply banned, smaller or different formats, e.g. micro-marches in Tbilisi, indoor events, cultural festivals, online campaigns, have kept queer issues visible and movements alive. Treating these formats as deliberate choices, not as signs of defeat, helps preserve energy and reduce exposure to risk. Stronger links with other movements also matter. When queer rights are embedded in wider struggles for democracy, workers' rights, feminism, anti-racism or migrant justice, and when those allies show up visibly at Pride and in moments of crisis, it becomes much harder for extremists to isolate LGBTIQ+ activists as a marginal group.

For civil society in Germany and other EU countries, one clear implication is that cross-border cooperation should be seen as a long-term commitment, not as a short project. Partnerships with groups in Caucasus, Eastern and Central Europe through joint campaigns, exchanges between staff and volunteers, twin-city Pride projects, shared research help spread concrete know-how and give activists under pressure access to resources and visibility they cannot find at home. When governments in a partner country drift towards authoritarianism, the answer should not be to retreat and wait for better times, but to protect and deepen these links with independent actors, including those forced into exile.

For donors and international partners

This report shows that funding choices can either make queer movements more resilient or leave them exposed. Anti-rights actors invest heavily in shaping the information environment; if donors do not respond on this terrain, the imbalance only grows. Support therefore needs to go beyond "classic" human-rights projects and include work

that tracks hate speech and disinformation, investigates propaganda networks, develops counter-narratives and presses platforms and regulators to act. Long-term backing for media, research and digital-rights initiatives that cooperate closely with queer movements is one of the few ways to shift how debates are framed online and offline.

At the same time, many of the groups described in the country reports, especially those working under "foreign agent" or "LGBT-propaganda" laws, or from exile, cannot survive on short, rigid project grants with complex paperwork. Predictable, flexible and accessible funding is a basic condition for real resilience: multi-year core support, simpler applications and reporting, realistic budgets for security and staff wellbeing, and space to adapt when the context changes. Designing such support requires honest conversation with local activists about how grants can be moved safely and what kinds of requirements might expose them to legal or political risk.

Finally, the experiences from Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, the Baltics and Germany underline that cross-border cooperation is not an add-on but a strategic asset. Fellowships, residencies, joint trainings, visiting delegations and regional gatherings between Germany and movements in Eastern and Central Europe are among the most effective ways to share concrete skills and build trust. When a country slides towards authoritarianism, ending these programmes leaves activists more isolated at the very moment they need backing most. Adjusting and expanding them, so people can travel, meet, plan together and stay connected from exile if necessary, is one of the tools that remains when domestic space closes. At the same time, it needs sustainable funding for urgently needed services such as legal and social aid, psychological support, shelters and health programs - in the respective countries as well as in migration.

If governments, civil society and donors align their efforts along these lines, taking the information battlefield seriously and investing in durable cross-border cooperation, they can slow the current backlash and give queer communities the room they need to organise and live with dignity.

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Since 2020, a rapidly shifting global landscape marked by the pandemic, Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, the rise of the extreme right, and increasing democratic fragmentation has intensified pressure on civil societies and put LGBTIQ+ communities at risk. Under extreme and hostile conditions, LGBTIQ+ activists across Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and the Baltic states have adapted through resourceful and strategic organizing, including underground and exile-based activism. This publication shares their firsthand accounts, highlighting both the challenges they face and the resilience they demonstrate, offering valuable lessons for international solidarity and the broader struggle for human rights and democratic values.

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