



Input on the right to access and take part in scientific progress

“Coming Out” (<https://comingoutspb.com/en/main/>) is a regional nonprofit initiative group founded in 2008 in St. Petersburg, Russia. We have been protecting the rights of the LGBTQ+ community and helping queer people in Russia live more peacefully. Our main goal is to establish equal legal and social rights for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Our psychologists and lawyers provide free consultations for LGBT+ people and their loved ones and host support groups for LGBTQ+ families and parents of queer people. We monitor discrimination to collect evidence of the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in Russia and work with the authorities on cases of discrimination and violence. We teach journalists to use inclusive language when reporting on the LGBTQ+ community and educate doctors, psychologists, and HRs to work with queer communities.

1. Scientific freedom in Russia: general situation

Since the beginning of Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, state censorship and repressions in Russia have intensified and the policies of the Russian authorities have become even more isolationist than before. This has inevitably affected the state of science and scientific freedom in Russia. Russian science is now internationally isolated, not only because of sanctions, but also because university administrations [impose](#) informal restrictions on researchers' cooperation with colleagues from so-called "unfriendly countries". Russia's [withdrawal](#) from the Bologna Process in 2022 will also exacerbate the country's international isolation and [reduce](#) opportunities to develop and support academic freedom in the country.

The ideologization and militarisation of higher education and science in Russia has been [documented](#) by researchers and human rights activists. Russian universities are [introducing](#) a course called "Foundations of Russian Statehood", which supposedly scientifically justifies so-called traditional values and Russia's special historical path of development.

[Laws](#) on 'undesirable organisations' and 'foreign agents' have had a severe impact on the state of Russian science. Many research centres and organisations were liquidated, declared undesirable or foreign agents. Among them were [Memorial](#), [Yuri Levada Analytical Center](#), [Center for Independent Social Research](#), Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Open Society Foundations, and many [others](#). Cooperation with undesirable organisations in any form can also be dangerous for other scientific and educational institutions. For example, the European University in St. Petersburg was [issued](#) two protocols on participation in the activities of an "undesirable organisation" because, during an inspection of the university, the control authorities found books in the library published by undesirable organisations, namely the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Open Society Foundations.

Russian academics are subject to individualised repression by the Russian state. Scientists recognised as foreign agents are [denied](#) the opportunity to teach, including political scientist Ekaterina Shulman, sociologist Viktor Vakhshayn, anthropologist Alexandra Arkhipova,

philologist Yulia Galyamina and many [others](#). Russian scientists and teachers who take an active part in the anti-war movement are [subject](#) to criminal or administrative prosecution by the state. Several physicists were [charged](#) with "high treason" for collaborating internationally with colleagues; one of the defendants died of cancer in prison.

To sum up the situation of science in Russia, the principles of academic freedom are not implemented, science is often used for ideological purposes, and independent research and researchers are persecuted.

2. Censorship in Russian scientific process: ban on LGBTQ+ and gender issues

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Kremlin's anti-Western rhetoric has become more aggressive, targeting phenomena that do not conform to Russia's so-called traditional values. Thus, the new 'propaganda' law [bans](#) positive and even neutral information about LGBTQ+ people for adults, not just minors as in the previous version. Therefore, conducting, publishing and teaching LGBTQ+ and gender studies is extremely limited in Russia now.

The dissemination of any information related to LGBT topics, even of an academic nature, has become difficult. Immediately after the State Duma adopted the 'propaganda' law, the bookstores across Russia [added](#) age-limit labels on books where LGBTQ+ people were mentioned. The Russian online bookstore "Labyrinth" [removed](#) some of the books from sale to check them under the 'propaganda' law. Publishers of LGBTQ+ fiction and non-fiction recognised as foreign agents (this [happened](#) to Popcorn books and Individuum).

In early December 2022, three days before the entry into force of the 'propaganda' law, the academic journal Logos [retracted](#) a translated article on lesbian images in lifestyle magazines explaining this decision by the 'propaganda' law. As the researcher Evgeny Shtorn reported in January 2023, academic sociological journal Sociology of Power [removed](#) an issue about sexuality from their website.

We have evidence that in most Russian universities, dissertations and theses on LGBTQ+ issues are not defensible on informal grounds.

Academic censorship is not always in the form of direct bans, there are many unspoken rules (such as not allowing works on LGBTQ issues to be defended) and mechanisms of self-censorship). For example, at the Higher School of Economics, the course on gender studies was [renamed](#) "Introduction to Women's and Men's Studies". Obviously, this is how teachers are trying to make their subject more acceptable in the eyes of the authorities.

3. Restrictions of the right of LGBTQ+ persons to participate in scientific progress

LGBTQ+ people are restricted to participate in scientific progress in different ways in Russia.

As our quantitative [research](#) on the situation of LGBT+ people in Russia in 2022 shows, Russian LGBTQ+ people regularly face homophobia and transphobia from peers, colleagues and administrators at various educational and academic institutions. Such conditions hinder their educational opportunities and career development in academia. One of our respondents, a 29-year-old cisgender bisexual woman from Tatarstan, described her case of homophobic informal restrictions she faced at her university:

“In March 2022, I spoke out against the war in Ukraine at my university, after which the head of the lab I was on placement at banned me from talking about politics at the university and threatened that they could have easily not offered me a place if they wanted to, and made homophobic comments about me. He told my intersex friend and me that he doesn’t care ‘who’s top and who’s bottom’ and advised me to never show up to class in a bad mood. I asked him for help with emigration, and he suggested that I take a year off, stating that the professors had wasted too much time and resources on me. In October 2022, the head of our department banned me from participating in a study abroad support program for scholars in emergency situations with my dissertation topic.”

Transgender people are one of the most vulnerable groups in LGBTQ+ communities, and their rights to participate in scientific progress are even more threatened. For example, Russian universities refuse to recognise degrees obtained by transgender people after they have changed the gender marker on their documents. For example, in February 2023, St. Petersburg State University [refused](#) to change a transgender man's diploma and give him a new document with a new gender marker.

4. Conclusion

The above examples show that scientific freedom in Russia is in no way protected from damage and interference by political interests. The right of all people to access scientific knowledge and its applications is restricted by Russian state censorship. Russian scientists are denied the opportunity to work in freedom and safety. The right of everyone to participate in scientific progress and decisions about its direction is restricted for LGBTQ+ people. Researchers who conduct gender or queer research and who are themselves LGBTQ+ persons are at even greater risk in Russia. All of this contradicts the UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers.

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