

**AS THE SOCHI WINTER
OLYMPIC GAMES ARE ABOUT
TO BEGIN LGB & T PEOPLE IN
RUSSIA CONTINUE TO FACE
PERSECUTION. THIS BRIEFING
EXPLAINS WHAT CAN BE
DONE AND WHY A BOYCOTT
OF THE GAMES OR SPONSORS
IS NOT BEING CALLED FOR.**

BACKGROUND AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS:

The Russian President Vladimir Putin has reassured the International Olympic Committee and the watching world that LGB & T athletes and visitors will be welcomed in Sochi. However, at the same time he still maintains that Western states are seeking to undermine a 'traditional and independent' Russia by challenging its record on LGB & T equality. Human rights organisations in Russia continue to report appalling homophobic and transphobic attacks.

Russia decriminalised same-sex sexual activity in 1993. However, in June 2013 the Russian Parliament adopted a federal law banning the 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships' accessible by minors. This law effectively superseded similar existing laws in place in ten regions.

Although the law does not define 'non-traditional', it is widely understood to mean lesbian, gay and bisexual relationships. Penalties for breaking the law include severe fines for Russians. Foreigners are also liable to fines, administrative arrest of up to 15 days and deportation. Any organisation breaking the law faces varying penalties of up to one million roubles (approximately £20,000) and a shut-down of their activity for 90 days.

In November 2013 the Federal Media Monitoring Service stated that 'non-traditional sexual relations' damage children as much as exposure to pornography and violence. An independent poll in Russia shows that 68 per cent of Russians support the anti-gay 'propaganda' law.

In 2012 the Russian Parliament also passed a law known as the 'foreign agents' law. This means that non-governmental organisations that receive

funding from abroad and are deemed to be involved in political activity must register as 'foreign agents'. They must then undergo frequent inspection and publicise the fact that they are 'foreign agents'. Failure to register can result in prosecution and fines. The law is meant to tarnish – and presumably silence – civil society groups and has been used against some LGB & T groups in Russia.

In September 2013 a bill intended to deprive LGB & T people of all parental rights was tabled in the Russian Parliament. The bill was withdrawn a month later in order to be redrafted. Russian LGB & T activists believe that the new version of the bill will be introduced after the Sochi Olympic Games.

WHAT HAS THE IMPACT OF THE LAWS BEEN ON THE LGB & T COMMUNITY?

The laws effectively sanction the homophobia of state controlled media, leading politicians and extreme right wing groups. There has been a notable increase in violence and physical attacks towards the LGB & T community. All of these developments have seriously affected Russian LGB & T organisations and citizens, making them one of the most marginalised groups in the country.

WHAT RUSSIAN LGB & T EQUALITY GROUPS ARE DOING

The recent developments in Russia have led LGB & T equality groups to come together to stand up for their human rights.

- In October 2013 a coalition of Russian LGB & T organisations was formed. The coalition aims to coordinate the work of national and international human rights organisations around the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.
- LGB & T organisations continue to deliver services in Russia but say the negative laws make it harder for people to seek support due to increased stigma and the risk of violent attack if they are found out.

WHAT IS THE UK GOVERNMENT DOING?

The UK Government has raised its concerns about the situation for LGB & T individuals and organisations in Russia on many occasions. Prime Minister David Cameron and Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs William Hague have both talked about the issues with their Russian counterparts. Maria Miller, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport who will be attending Sochi has also raised concerns about the anti-gay 'propaganda' laws in Russia.

WHAT IS STONEWALL DOING?

- We remain in regular contact with human rights groups in Russia, providing them with advice and support as requested. Significant change will take a long time in Russia so we have started to build long-term partnerships which will last beyond the Winter Olympics. We are exceptionally mindful not to rush into any short-term action that may have negative, and possibly dangerous, consequences for the LGB & T community on the ground.
- In December 2013 we partnered with VICE to launch their new documentary, [‘Young and Gay in Putin’s Russia’](#). The film investigates how gay young people in Russia are being affected by the anti-gay ‘propaganda’ law and shines a light on the severity of the situation.
- We are working with the UK Government to help identify opportunities where it can put pressure on the Russian Government and we are pressing them to take care around how they talk about these sensitive issues in the media.
- In December 2013 we launched [‘Engaging with the UK Government: A guide for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activists worldwide’](#). This guide supports human rights defenders in Russia and elsewhere by detailing how they can leverage the UK Government’s support for their own campaigns.

WHAT CAN BUSINESSES WHICH OPERATE IN RUSSIA DO?

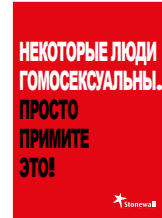
Businesses have a responsibility to their staff worldwide and can be influential in Russia. Through Stonewall’s [Diversity Champions](#) and [Global Diversity Champions](#) programmes we now work with over 120 international employers to help them improve the working environment for their gay staff and promote equality more broadly. You can:

- Raise concerns privately with politicians and officials about the negative impact these laws are having on your business interests in Russia. Engage with local LGB & T groups and other businesses in Russia to coordinate activity.
- Do all you can to treat all your staff equally. Although laws in Russia may make it hard to provide certain benefits, you can make it very clear that LGB & T people should be treated with respect in your workplace.
- Use materials such as posters and internal communications to reiterate your support for equality for all. LGB & T equality groups tell us that they appreciate positive demonstrations of support. Be careful sharing such materials or messages outside of the office or sharing information through the media.
- If you are not already a member, consider joining [Stonewall’s Global Diversity Programme](#), and learn how you can support your gay staff in Russia and around the world.

WHAT CAN INDIVIDUALS DO?

The opportunities for individuals outside Russia to have significant influence on the Russian Government are limited. Leading LGB & T groups there have told us that they do not want people to boycott the Sochi Winter Olympics or leading sponsors as this might backfire and result in a greater crackdown. Instead they have asked people to share messages of support. You can:

- Let the LGB & T communities in Russia know you are standing with them. Share messages and images by changing your social media profile to our Russian translation of [Some People are Gay. Get Over it!](#) Highlight that in Russia such openness would risk prosecution.
- Send messages of support to Russian LGB & T equality groups (for example via their [Facebook page](#)). Urge them to keep working for their human rights by reminding them of how long it has taken in Britain. Only 25 years ago Section 28 outlawed the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ in Britain and today we have full legislative equality for gay people.
- Watch the new VICE documentary ‘[Young and Gay in Putin’s Russia](#)’ and share it via social media with your friends and colleagues to raise awareness about the situation in Russia.
- If you plan to go to the Sochi Winter Olympics or travel to Russia then make sure you check the [Foreign & Commonwealth Office’s travel guidance](#) before you go.
- Finally, be committed for the long haul and not just while the media spotlight is on Russia. Stay in touch with Stonewall and receive updates on our work on Russia and other countries. To support our work text RUSSIA to 70500 to donate £5 or visit www.stonewall.org.uk/donate



For more information on the groups working on the ground, and Stonewall’s work, follow updates on www.stonewall.org.uk/russia

**STONEWALL'S VISION IS OF A BRITAIN, AND A WORLD, WHERE
ONE DAY EVERY SINGLE PERSON WILL NOT ONLY BE ENTITLED
TO FAIR TREATMENT AND RESPECT BUT WILL BE AFFORDED
FAIR TREATMENT AND RESPECT.**

USEFUL LINKS

- www.stonewall.org.uk/international
- www.facebook.com/stonewalluk
- Twitter: @stonewalluk
- www.lgbtnet.ru/en
- www.comingoutspb.ru/en

Note: This is an update of our 2013 briefing on Russia