

Interview with a Queer Person from Russia (ENG)

How was your life as a queer person in Russia? In what way did you experience discrimination in Russia?

“First, I need to make a disclaimer that my experience is based on life in Moscow, which is extremely different from the rest of the country. In other regions, people experience much harsher conditions. I was still trying to be as open as possible, yet I remained cautious about whom I told openly that I was gay—you never know if someone might want to out you or blackmail you. Everything you say about your private life must be filtered to avoid mentioning your orientation to the ‘wrong person.’ I personally know people who were excluded from my university’s student council (a very administration-dependent group, although you could still positively influence life at the university) because ‘their values and lifestyle were not aligned with those encouraged by university policy.

Leaving aside all the quirky comments from USSR-educated professors, you always have to think carefully about what to say, and that was incredibly exhausting. I could never share my worries with my parents since they frequently expressed hatred towards LGBTQ+, but luckily, I had my friends and a close environment that I had been building up for years, where I could trust people.”

When and why did you leave Russia? When and why did you decide to live in Germany?

“I left Russia in October 2022, starting to prepare for it in the summer of that year. The trigger was the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent political restrictions in the country. Not only was I LGBTQ+, but I was also actively participating in anti-Putin protests and campaigns. However, with the introduction of new censorship laws, it became too dangerous for my own safety. The psychological pressure kept increasing. To preserve myself, I started searching for temporary opportunities to leave the country and do something more productive than just hiding in my flat after reading in chats that another colleague of mine had been arrested for an anti-war post on Instagram.

I came across volunteering opportunities through the European Solidarity Corps project and found one in Stuttgart. I applied for it in the summer of 2022 and was invited to participate in the volunteer year there. Initially, I wasn’t planning to stay permanently, but shortly afterward, new legal restrictions against LGBTQ+ public appearances were introduced in Russia. That was a clear signal that I should start preparing to stay in Germany after the project.”

What worries and conflicts would be associated with living/staying in Russia? Would you need to fear criminal consequences because of your sexual orientation?

“First of all, there are legal prosecutions. The law prosecutes actions aimed at ‘demonstrating homosexual behavior and relationships in a positive manner,’ so it doesn’t prohibit being homosexual itself. Still, a positive appearance, or as they call it, ‘propaganda of non-traditional relationships,’ is a very vague notion. This means that any kind of approval or support for homosexual relationships might be interpreted as propaganda and could lead to prosecution. The first punishment is a fine of €1,000, which is a lot in a country where the

average salary is €400 per month. If you're charged a second time, it could lead to imprisonment."

When and how did you marry your partner?

"My husband and I first met in December 2022. In March 2024, while planning our future, we concluded that marrying would be a good idea to secure our relationship. It ensured that we were no longer dependent on my residency status in the country and allowed us to plan our life together long-term, which had not been possible before. We got married in June 2024 in Copenhagen, Denmark, as it was easier in terms of bureaucracy. It was a small celebration with my friends from Copenhagen, but in November, we held a larger celebration with all our friends and his family here."

In what way do you experience discrimination regarding your sexual orientation in Germany?

"Over these two years, I have never experienced anything close to what I had to face daily in Russia. I feel very welcomed and free to express myself and be honest with those around me. However, I am aware that in some places in Germany, it's still not as safe to be as open as I am now. Of course, I am also closely monitoring the statements of right-wing parties and their leaders, as I do see potential danger in their rhetoric."