

***The Eastern European for LGBT+ Equality’s****[[1]](#footnote-0)* **Input *to* Inform the Independent expert’s report on practices of so called ’’conversion therapy’’**

*The Eastern European Coalition for LGBT+ Equality* welcomes the Independent Expert’s decision to explore challenges posed by the so called ’’conversion therapy’’. The questions posed in the call for submissions are important, albeit mostly not applicable to the Eastern Partnership[[2]](#footnote-1) countries and Russia. Namely, while the problem exists, there is no political stance, narrative or action to tackle different practices associated with conversion therapy in our region.

In the Coalition, we understand ’’conversion therapy’’ as a spectrum of practices applied to LGBT+ people and guided by the harmful and scientifically incorrect (and long-disproven) belief that one’s sexual orientation and gender identity can (and must) be changed or ’’cured’’ if it does not fall within the hetero and cisnormative binary. While always accompanied by psychological and emotional abuse, such practices often feature physical and sexual violence as well as different kinds of unnecessary medical interventions.

Not unlike other types of violence against LGBT+ people, conversion therapy and practices associated with it remain, to a broad extent, under-reported in the Eastern Partnership Countries and Russia. It is often the case, that the ’’treatment’’ takes place based on a request from the family, which makes seeking help and justice even more difficult. At the same time, even the limited amount of cases collected through the years, alongside with the analysis of gaps in legislation as well as practices applied and public attitudes around the matter, allow us to outline problematic areas and possible solutions.

Main spheres in which Coalition member organizations have encountered practices associated with conversion therapy are medicine (including sexology, psychiatry and endocrinology), psychology/psychotherapy and work of some religious organizations. There are also separate cases of ’’corrective’’ and/or ’’punitive’’ sexual violence instigated by perpetrators’ conviction that homosexuality is abnormal and can be ’’reversed’’[[3]](#footnote-2). While information is generally scarce, member organizations of the Eastern European Coalition for LGBT+ Equality confirm the following:

* Openly known cases of medical establishments practicing conversion therapy have been documented in Russia. In their treatment programs, practitioners such as Yan Goland[[4]](#footnote-3) and brothers Nikitenko[[5]](#footnote-4) use hypnosis and aversion therapy among other tools and publicly guarantee ’’positive results’’;
* In Georgia, in 2015, head of a Tbilisi-based sexological clinic, Archil Bakradze publicly stated his intention to ’’treat’’ a gay person. The statement caused outcry from human rights activists and the relevant part of the article was removed[[6]](#footnote-5). In follow up to this incident the State Regulation Agency for Medical Activity in Georgia was addressed, however the response stated that it is beyond the agency’s competence to assess the doctor’s comments on the issue of homosexuality[[7]](#footnote-6). Given the fact that the same doctor (who’s also one of the most famous sexologists in the country), had stated that homosexuality is not ’’normal’’ on other occasions too, there is a chance, that he might have continued to engage in similar ’’treatments’’[[8]](#footnote-7). Two other cases documented in Georgia (by WISG) in 2012[[9]](#footnote-8) and 2018, involve sexologists and an endocrinologists.
* Online platforms that provide medical advice can easily spread pseudo-scientific information and misconceptions about LGBT+ people without being held accountable. For example, a highly popular Georgian website [www.mkurnali.ge](http://www.mkurnali.ge), has on numerous occasions referred the users concerned with whether or not homosexuality can be cured, to endocrinologists in order to check their hormone levels and/or to psychotherapists to receive help in overcoming their ’’condition’’[[10]](#footnote-9).
* Ukraine-based organization Insight also states, that they, with certain regularity, receive reports from people who have been offered to be ’’cured’’ from homosexuality by various psychologists. Due to lack of legal regulations, however, these practitioners cannot be held accountable.
* In many countries in the region (particularly in Georgia, Armenia and Ukraine), we encounter the phenomenon of medical doctors and individuals specialising in psychology, some of whom are associated with or support the rhetoric of religious organizations or conservative groups. They often speak out publicly insisting that their education allows them to say that homosexuality can be ’’cured’’ (for instance Ukrainian psychologist Lyudmila Gridkovets[[11]](#footnote-10)).
* Alongside with reliance on the so called christian psychologists, many religious institutions in the region insist that homosexuality is something that can be ’’prayed away’’. In Georgia, for instance there is a practice of confining a person to a convent to pray for atonement. In Ukraine, baptist churches seem to be more active in promoting the idea of homosexuality as something that can be changed, alongside with organizations like ’’love against homosexualism’’ and ‘’’all together’’ ( «всі разом») movement. Russian organizations have also documented cases of exorcism-like rituals against LGBT+ people in North Caucasus, particularly targeting women[[12]](#footnote-11)

The cases listed above show, that the ethical standards and acts that regulate activity of specialised doctors (including psychiatrists) are not enough to prevent the practice of conversion therapy, due to lack of enforcement mechanisms. Furthermore, since the regulations of non medical mental healthcare providers are missing across the region, there is no way of holding them accountable for such actions. If these gaps are coupled with generally repressive legislation and high level of homo/bi/transphobic rhetoric as well as impunity on the part of religious organizations (and groups associated with them), the ground for medical institutions and individual healthcare practitioners to apply the so called conversion therapy becomes fertile.

One of the underlying causes of the problem is lack of accurate information on gender and sexuality, that doctors receive during their medical training. In fact, none of the countries in the region has updated the educational curricula to include correct information (including terms and concepts) about sexual orientation and gender identity. It is symptomatic then, that a research conducted in Georgia in 2015, analysing the knowledge and attitudes of medical workers (352 people interviewed) towards LGBTI people showed, among other things, that 39.3% of respondents believe that homosexuality is a disease, which can be cured[[13]](#footnote-12).

While information brought to your attention is more specific to some countries in the region, all the member organizations of the *Eastern European Coalition for LGBT+ Equality* agree that it is relevant for the region as a whole and agree on following recommendations to the States :

* In cooperation with LGBT+ organizations and relevant civil society groups in the field of psychology and mental health, ensure the regulation of mental healthcare provision by medical and non medical practitioners in a way that includes specific accountability and service quality management mechanisms;
* In cooperation with civil society and relevant experts, ensure the revision of medical and psychological textbooks in order to eradicate stigmatizing and discriminatory definitions and include correct information on sexual orientation/gender identity in the qualification/requalification or certification programmes, as well as the higher education curricula for the personnel of healthcare sector;
* Make sure that social and health needs of LGBT+ persons are studied and reflected at the action plans and healthcare strategies;
* Make sure that LGBT-sensitive codes of conduct and guidelines for the clinics are developed;
* Openly condemn any claims by medical, religious or other organizations or associated individuals about possibility to ’’cure’’ homosexuality and ensure that relevant legislation is introduced and properly enforced when it comes to hate crimes, discrimination and ill-treatment of LGBT+ people in every sphere of life;

We also recommend that the international donor/development aid organizations:

* Understand that often, psychologists and mental health practitioners working with the LGBT+ organizations are the only only providers of non-stigmatizing and high quality assistance to LGBT+ community members. We urge you to continue directing funding to this field.
1. The Coalition features the following organizations: PINK Armenia, GENDERDOC-M, Insight (Ukraine), Gay Alliance Ukraine, Women’s Initiatives Supporting Group - WISG (Georgia), the Russian LGBT Network <https://www.facebook.com/LGBTEasternCoalition/> [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. The information presented in this report revolves around 4 EaP countries - Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. However, there are no known and documented cases of state officials and agencies in Belarus and Azerbaijan taking a stance against conversion therapy. Such practices are not normatively defined or addressed in either of those countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Such cases have been documented by the Russian LGBT Network. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-39706014> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. <https://sobesednik.ru/obshchestvo/20190306-doktor-u-menya-eto> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/liberty-diaries-archil-bakradze/27229761.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. <https://netgazeti.ge/life/43961/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. <https://mkurnali.ge/daavadebebi-mkurnaloba/seqsologia/2261-2010-12-02-19-38-52.html?start=1> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. <https://www.women.ge/data/docs/publications/WISG_situation-of-lgbt-persons-in-Georgia_GEO-www.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. <https://mkurnali.ge/kithkhva-pasukhi.html?view=question&id=221537>;<https://mkurnali.ge/kithkhva-pasukhi.html?view=question&id=204731>; <https://mkurnali.ge/kithkhva-pasukhi.html?view=question&id=199029>; <https://mkurnali.ge/kithkhva-pasukhi.html?view=question&id=160081> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. <https://incarnatewordsistershouston.org/what-to-do-with-lgbt-persecute-recognize-or-help-learned-at-the-roundtable-your-bible/>; <https://uofa.ru/en/chto-takoe-lgbt-kak-perevoditsya-kak-rasshifrovyvaetsya-lgbt/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. <https://www.nhc.no/content/uploads/2019/02/Violence-against-LBT-women-in-North-Caucaucasus.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. <https://women.ge/data/docs/publications/WISG-CMREC-2013-18-ENG.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)