

LGBT Rights Awareness during the Wartime in Ukraine

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Following the full-scale Russian invasion in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, both public and governmental perspectives on LGBT rights have undergone a complex political and cultural shift. In this essay, I will explore the ways the war has affected the LGBT community in Ukraine, the new civic challenges it has presented, and the effect it has had on both public and government views on LGBT rights.

On one hand, the war has brought a number of new challenges for the LGBT community, such as disrupted healthcare access for groups like transgender individuals, and restricted public gatherings (i.e. Pride) due to martial law (Nash Svit; Kyiv Independent). Despite the growing trend of acceptance, the general public, with its shift focused toward national values and war, mostly believes the issue of LGBT rights to be “negligible” in the current context, more so than before (“Prajdparad pid chas vijny.”, DW.com).

On the other hand, general public support of LGBT individuals and their rights has increased in various spheres - both legal and cultural - since the beginning of 2022 (“National report.”, KIIS, 2024). There are a few reasons for that: firstly, LGBT individuals serving in the military have been able to receive increased visibility and support, challenging the stereotypes and pushing for the legal reforms recognizing their partnerships - this being all the more important in the current situation of legally unrecognized partners not being regarded as “relatives” - meaning not being allowed to see their loved ones in case of death or injury without externally authorized access, as well as not having any right of ownership, inheritance and rights in case of the death or disappearance of a partner serving in the armed forces (“Verkhovna Rada [...] Supports Draft Bill.”, Kyiv Independent). Secondly, Ukraine's pursuit of EU membership also encourages legal reforms aligning with European human rights standards (“Ukraine-LGBTI.”, ILGA-Europe), and lastly, in an attempt to distance itself from Russian governmental narrative, the Ukrainian society strives to abolish mimicking its oppressive policies, discrimination against LGBT community being one of such policies.

Civil society plays a crucial role in adapting to this new reality. For example, Nash Svit Center continues its work documenting human rights abuses against LGBT people (constantly publishing relevant reports), including those affected by conflict and occupation. They provide legal and psychological support to displaced LGBT individuals and military personnel. Crucially, Nash Svit advocates intensely for the draft law on registered civil partnerships, engaging with parliament and the public to emphasize its

necessity, especially for those serving in the military. Through this work, groups like Nash Svit maintain focus on LGBT rights amidst national crisis.

If I were in Ukraine right now, to support the LGBT community and raise awareness of the current issues, I could become a volunteer for Kyiv Pride and help organize logistics for the Pride - help to decentralize it, plan the route to include bomb shelters and communicate with regional administration, sign and share an open letter, or just generally raise awareness. I could also help raise money for the equipment for the LGBT people I know who serve in the army. I could organize or take part in the events that raise money for funds supporting the LGBT community, providing them with shelter or psychological and medical consultation - a thing harder to access nowadays in Ukraine.

Overall, while the LGBT rights awareness situation is getting better, I believe that for the most part the living conditions of LGBT individuals are not getting better, especially with displacements, mental strain and scarcity of medical access, as well as society being more focused on war rather than LGBT rights issues. Currently Ukraine is ranked about the same as Hungary, Poland or Slovakia in terms of LGBT equality (Equaldex), which I believe to already be a big step in the right direction, especially considering the strong influence of Russian political narratives in the past and the ongoing war.

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