MAPPING DIGITAL LANDSCAPES

OF TRANS ACTIVISM IN CENTRAL ASIA AND EASTERN EUROPE

Astraea LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE

TGEU Transgender Europe

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The Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice is the only philanthropic organization working exclusively to advance LGBTQI rights around the globe. We support hundreds of brilliant and brave grantee partners in the U.S. and internationally who challenge oppression and seed social change. We work for gender, racial, economic, and social justice because we all deserve to live our lives freely, without fear, and with profound dignity.

Transgender Europe (TGEU) is a European-based umbrella organization supporting, fighting, and advocating for the rights of trans people across Europe and Central Asia. TGEU is committed to intersectional justice and trans rights through advocacy, campaigning, researching, community building, and networking with alliances. TGEU represents more than 100 member organizations in 42 countries and coordinates global projects such as Trans Murder Monitoring. TGEU's vision is a world free from discrimination where every person can live freely according to their gender identity or expression without interference.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1   For security purposes, the list of the interviewed activists is not included. The report contains quotes from the interviews, and the names of activists who prefer to remain anonymous have been changed. More detailed information about the interviewees can be found in the methodology section.

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TGEU
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KEY FINDINGS

Through research with trans activists in Central Asia and Eastern Europe (CAEE), we have identified eight key findings:

A myriad of geopolitical forces are at work to limit freedom of expression and suppress dissent.

Efforts to restrict internet freedom, close civil society spaces, crack down on human rights, and limit freedom of expression do not operate in isolation in the CAEE region. Regardless of the key players behind them—the state, corporations, religious institutions, or the community at large—they aim to ensure that powerholders maintain or expand their power. Trans communities and human rights activists often become political scapegoats to gain support for populist causes.

The internet is as life-saving as it is life-threatening for trans communities.

Trans activists in the region consider the internet a life-saving resource, but under certain circumstances they experience it as life-threatening. Trans activists recognize that the internet offers much needed trans-produced knowledge otherwise unavailable and inaccessible. The wide range of online resources connects trans people both within and across countries. At the same time, being online poses increasing risks for trans people such as exposure to hate speech, threats of physical violence, blackmail, and administrative charges. Trans people can rarely rely on adequate tools and complaint systems to protect them from threats experienced online. Moreover, trans people rarely feel protected by social media user safety policies and encounter a number of problems and they feel overexposed and vulnerable from sharing information about their gender identity online. They are also often the target of hate speech and experience threats of physical violence online. In some countries, trans activists report being fearful of blackmail and being charged with administrative fines for their online activity.

The internet is an essential tool for connecting trans activists.

The internet continues to be the main medium connecting trans communities and trans activists playing a key role in building a global trans movement across borders. Trans activists report using the internet as a site of resistance and movement building. They conduct a number of essential organizational activities online, using various social media platforms to reach out to trans communities with adequate information and services; using online campaigns to raise awareness about trans rights in their respective countries; and using the internet for regional and international networking and solidarity building. For many trans activists, the internet is very much the real world where work, friendship, activism, learning, and other meaningful exchanges happen.

Trans lives in the CAEE region are endangered by homophobic and transphobic legislation.

Homophobia and transphobia are on the rise in the entire CAEE region. Many of the stereotypes and much of the violence are reinforced through oppressive state policies such as the "gay propaganda laws," constitutional bans on same-sex marriage, and the rhetoric of sexual health and rights being a Western import forced onto national contexts by foreign donors. This setup makes community building and the provision of basic services to trans people an everyday struggle.

Internet control is a tactic in government oversight over civil society that endangers trans lives.

Increased surveillance and lack of internet freedom—in the context of closing space for civil society, rising authoritarianism, and religious fundamentalism—has only exacerbated the repression of LGBTQI and feminist activism. Trans activists, who already face multiple challenges including high levels of stigma, discrimination, and violence, are particularly vulnerable. The internet poses additional risks, such as rising surveillance, censorship, and online hate speech.

Online activism can lead to physical violence, exhaustion, and fatigue.

Trans activists' experiences are multidimensional and must be viewed holistically. Digital security threats are intimately connected to the physical threats, trauma, fatigue, exhaustion, and broader human rights violations that trans people face in this region. Given these lived realities, trans activists lack capacity and skills to duly counter digital threats and lack the adequate resources and skills to manage online activity and threats so as to avoid fatigue. Digital security threats and attacks have a tangible negative effect on trans activists' well-being and health, and the sustainability of their work. It is thus critical to employ a holistic approach to security when working with trans movements in CAEE.

Trans activists are eager to improve their digital security skills and practices.

In order to grapple with an increasingly restrictive and controlled internet space, trans activists consider it important to have access to digital security skills and resources to address how to securely access government censored content, store sensitive data, protect one's identity online, produce and share trans knowledge, navigate third-party monitoring and associated risks, and efficiently manage online social media groups. Secure communications tools and practices are increasingly important for trans activists in countries with closed or closing civil society spaces.

Trans activists use creative means to bypass digital restrictions.

Trans activists, while greatly in need of increased digital and holistic security support, are using unique resistance strategies to counter these threats, including creative digital tactics. Many of them invest in digital infrastructure such as VPN services and server storage abroad, and in creative online campaigns via social media to mobilize popular and community support, access blocked online content, and bypass censorship. Most of these strategies are small-scale and self-funded.

INTRODUCTION

This mapping report provides a regional overview of digital organizing for trans activists in 26 countries of Central Asia and Eastern Europe (CAEE)[1], emphasizing shared patterns of digital usage, barriers to free and safe use of the internet, and a number of resistance strategies to homo/transphobic-motivated censorship, surveillance, and online attacks. The report ends with examples of resistance strategies tactically deployed by trans activists[2] to counter these threats.

The region under review is a heterogeneous one with diverging political contexts and a variety of historical and cultural backgrounds. The report intends to focus on the general trends and common challenges experienced in online activism, rather than providing a thorough contextual analysis of trans activism more broadly. Included in this regional analysis are new EU member states, countries of the Western Balkans, countries in South Caucasus and Central Asia, other former Soviet Republics, the Republic of Turkey, and the Russian Federation. Most of these countries share a common Soviet/former Eastern Bloc legacy, and all, with the exception of Turkey, have undergone decades of "transitions" from the Soviet model of political and economic systems to democratic and market-oriented societies. Due to the numerous reforms, the countries in the region adhered to international human rights standards and basic legal instruments to support marginalized groups, including minimal recognition for trans people. In some countries (most notably the two influential trendsetters, the Russian Federation and Turkey), even these minimal gains are under threat, while progress seems to have stalled in the entire region due to constant backlash associated with institutional homophobia and transphobia, and closing space for civil society.

Movements and civil society organizations for trans rights are relatively nascent in the CAEE region, having emerged primarily in the late 1990s and early 2000s as part of larger LGBTQI umbrella organizations. In the past five years, trans-led and trans rights civil society organizations[3] increased in number across the region and became more visible in the public sphere. Trans activism in the region follows a similar trend with more visible actions claiming public spaces, especially around the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOT).[4] It is important to note that while the region has an increasing number of trans activists and trans-led groups, it is also witness to greater victimization of trans and LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual) activists. In the region under review, TGEU Transrespect Versus Transphobia Worldwide project documented 141 hate crime cases, with only nine non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing information and basic services for trans people who were survivors of hate crimes.[5]

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1   We use this acronym to include countries in Central Asia, Caucasus, Post-Soviet Eastern Europe, South-East Europe and Central Europe; countries under review are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, FYROM/Macedonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

2   In this report, the term trans activists refers to trans people who are actively working towards empowering trans communities and fighting for trans rights either in formal structures such as trans rights NGOs or LGBTQI NGOs, or in less formalized settings such as initiative groups, or as individual voices visible and known to trans communities within their respective countries.

3   Howe, E, Frazer, S, Dumont, M. and Zomorodi, G. (2017). The State of Trans Organizing (2nd Edition): Understanding the Needs and Priorities of a Growing but Under-Resourced Movement. New York: American Jewish World Service, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice and Global Action for Trans Equality. Retrieved from https://transactivists.org/the-state-of-trans-organizing-report-2017/

4   Ibid

5   Transgender Europe. (2017). Anti-trans hate crimes in

LGBTQI Association Temida, Tbilisi, Georgia, 2017. Credit: LGBTQI Association Temida

In some Central Asian countries (particularly Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan), same-sex acts remain criminalized, with police authorities routinely enforcing the law while humiliating and abusing LGBTQI people.[6]

A recent report[7] by Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, American Jewish World Service, and Global Action for Trans Equality notes that trans-led civil society organizations (CSOs) are generally small in size, with limited resources. They rely heavily on volunteer work, while simultaneously struggling with societal prejudice and exclusion. Nonetheless, these organizations and trans activists are engaged in lobbying and advocacy work with government officials, organizing public events such as Transgender Day of Remembrance and Transgender Awareness Week, organizing or participating in prides, supporting community members, developing coping strategies, and demanding that trans rights be recognized. However, as trans people have become more visible through their organizing, they have increasingly become the focus of cultural and political battles in many countries in the region.

The internet has proven to be instrumental for trans activism[8], as it provides much deeper access to knowledge and information produced by and for trans people. It enables activists to connect with trans people who are isolated, linking them to vibrant online communities, which compensates for the marginalization experienced in their offline lives. The internet is also a key medium that allows trans people

Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2DMPhBP

6   Human Rights Watch. (2017). World report (events of 2016). Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2j6F1uJ

7   Howe, E, Frazer, S, Dumont, M. and Zomorodi, G. (2017). The State of Trans Organizing (2nd Edition): Understanding the Needs and Priorities of a Growing but Under-Resourced Movement. New York: American Jewish World Service, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice and Global Action for Trans Equality. Retrieved from https://transactivists.org/the-state-of-trans-organizing-report-2017/

8   Binnie, J., Klesse, C. (2013). "Like a bomb in the gasoline station": East-west migration and transnational activism around lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer politics in Poland. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.

to freely express themselves and assume their gender without brutal confrontation from society, such as the experience of discrimination and violence that results from holding legal documents that do not reflect one's gender. The internet provides a gateway to accessing necessary medicine, items of clothing, and grooming unavailable or unaffordable in some of these countries, or for which trans people could be harrassed for buying in a physical store. For some trans people, the internet is a much needed workplace, with jobs performed online ranging from activism, to community support, to translation and online media jobs, to sex work.

As we are now witnessing, the internet plays a major role in the increased visibility of trans activism. But the online presence of the trans community also raises a lot of dilemmas and concerns.

To start with, trans people face hate speech and physical threats online as well. Moreover, with increasing surveillance of the digital space by state actors, trans activists fear that the right to privacy of trans people is under question as third-party monitoring can potentially use confidential information related to a person's gender identity. Trans activists in some countries fear the increasing surveillance of social media by the state will be used to out or blackmail them. In some countries, such as Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan, online content related to trans lives is sometimes blocked, making it difficult for people to access much needed information.

This report presents a number of recommendations aimed at limiting the digital concerns in this hostile political environment. The recommendations are based on in-depth dialogue with trans activists from the region, in the form of a strategy meeting in November 2017 organized by the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice and Transgender Europe, as well as a number of one-on-one interviews.
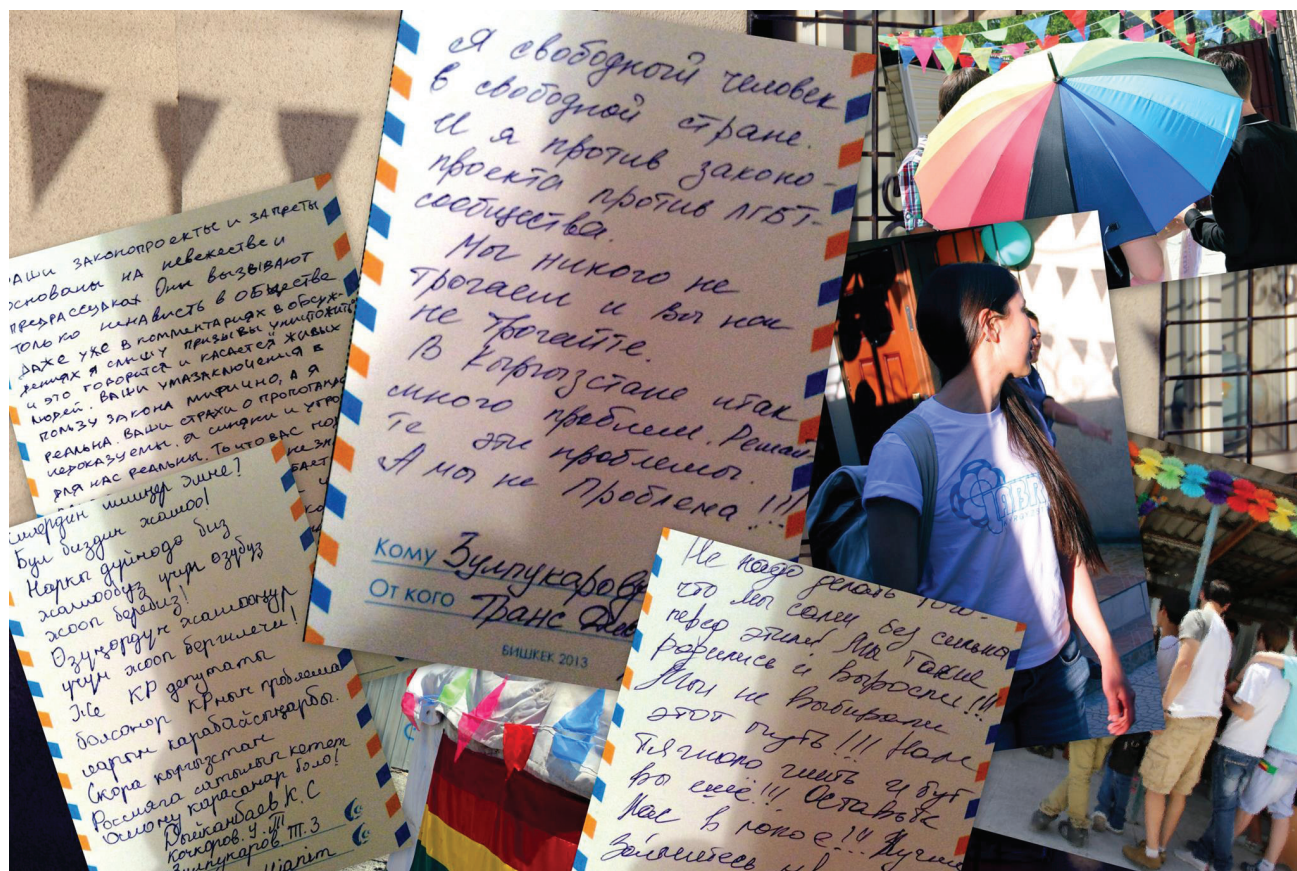
LGBT Organization Labrys Kyrgyzstan celebrates International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, 2014. Credit: LGBT Organization Labrys Krgyzstan

METHODOLOGY

The region under review is quite broad and varied in terms of its current politics, yet all countries in this report, except for Turkey, share a similar history of Soviet-style communism in the pre-1989 era. While this report examines the above mentioned countries, most of which are members of the Council of Europe (CoE), it is worth noting that a broad systematization of these countries was used based on the relationship and adherence to European Union standards versus Russian influence.

For example, a number of countries are EU member states (such as Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland) and their internal politics are influenced to various degrees by EU legislation. Standard funding for NGOs is often limited to national- and EU-level funding, while EU avenues for advocacy and lobbying can yield good results for national trans communities.

The group of countries generally referred to as the Western Balkans (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia) also hold a particular relationship to the EU, while being less influenced by Brussels politics than actual member states. Countries of the EU Eastern Partnership agreement (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Republic of Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine, and Georgia) signal a pro-EU path, yet with a lesser degree of act conversion toward EU laws and standards.

The former Soviet republics, some of which are members in the Eastern Partnership Agreement, recognize the international standard decision of CoE institutions including the European Court of Human Rights. The

Russian Federation and Turkey have a special status within the region itself, not only because of their size and economy, but also because of their political regimes where authoritarianism has permeated all aspects of daily life for their own citizens as well as those of their neighboring countries. If overall countries in the former Soviet Union are also witnessing policies leading to shrinking spaces for civil society, the phenomenon is increasingly prevalent in new EU member states such as Poland and Hungary.[9]

When it comes to recognizing trans people's rights, countries in the region experience similarly high levels of reported violence against trans people and few institutional protections for trans rights. Indeed, in Central Asia, acts of violence and discrimination faced by trans people are dealt with impunity and in some instances, state actors are even perpetrators of such violence. However, a generalized intolerance and discrimination towards trans people is also noted in new EU member states.

This report gives special attention to the voices of trans people in Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans, Russia, and Turkey along with those in new EU member states who are the most marginalized, both in terms of international attention and funding.

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9   Balcer, A. (2017). Beneath the surface of illiberalism: The recurring temptation of "national democracy" in Poland and Hungary—with lessons for Europe. WiseEuropa. Retrieved from https://pl.boell.org/sites/default/files/beneath_the_surface_illiberalism_national_democracy_poland_hungary.pdf

DATA SOURCES

This report is based on a number of data sources, which include:

- Desk reviews of recent reports on media and internet freedom, as well as country and regional reports concerning the rights and status of trans people

- Interviews with 17 trans activists from the region[10]:

  - Four activists from the broad region of Central and Eastern Europe—Romania, Hungary, Serbia, and Czech Republic

  - Three activists from the Russian Federation

  - Three activists from Belarus

  - Six activists from the Caucasus and Central Asia—two from Georgia, two from Tajikistan, one from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

  - One activist from Turkey

  - Four interviews with digital security and holistic security experts based in the CAEE region

  - In-person consultation with 15 trans activists from the region during a two-day facilitated strategy meeting organized by Astraea and TGEU.

KEY QUESTIONS

Below are some of the key questions that guided the research:

1) What is the broader context in which trans activists work in the CAEE region?

2) What are the main challenges that trans people face in their online activism?

3) What are the digital security experiences and needs of trans activists in the region?

4) How do trans activists currently use digital tools and strategies in their activism?

This report considers some of the broad issues raised by trans activists with regard to online use in the context of the gendered nature of closing space for civil society. While the shrinking of civil society impacts all human rights advocates, several people[11] have noted that current semi-authoritarian regimes present in the region depict sexual minority rights and gender equality as a threat to the survival of the nation. Moreover, these regimes make use of nationalist ideas about the "family" to attack human rights, emphasizing the rights and interests of "traditional" families over those of individuals and minorities. Women's rights and LGBTQI rights are erased and replaced with family issues that shift the focus.

The qualitative report is exploratory and aims to encourage further research and analysis while also providing funders with some comprehensive recommendations on how to support trans activists in this region. Due to project scope and time limitations, interviews and case studies have been narrowed to 11 countries from the region.

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10   Some of the interviewees asked to remain anonymous for the purpose of this study. These activists are only referred to by pseudonyms.

11   Peto, A., Grzebalska, W. (2016). "How Hungary and Poland have Silenced Women and Stifled Human Rights" The Conversation. Retrieved from https://theconversation.com/how-hungary-and-poland-have-silenced-women-and-stifled-human-rights-66743

BACKGROUND

1. HOSTILE ATTITUDES TOWARD TRANS PEOPLE

Trans people across the CAEE region face overwhelming hostility and prejudice and this is one of the many challenges that trans activists have to face both on a personal level and when advocating for their communities. There is a high level of discrimination and intolerance across the CAEE region and trans people suffer from marginalization, and violence. Systemic exclusion is common, regardless of the sub-region they live in, be it part of the new EU member states, Western Balkans, Russian Federation, the Caucasus, or Central Asia.

According to a 2016 opinion poll surveying 23 countries from all regions of the world on attitudes towards trans people, Russia, Hungary, Poland, and Turkey[12] ranked as highly transphobic countries. The study evaluates respondents' answers on a trans rights scale and it lists four countries in the CAEE region with the lowest scores. The results of the survey show that the CAEE region is one of the most transphobic regions in the world. The survey shows that the highest public opposition to gender affirming surgery is expressed in Russia, with 59.2% strongly opposing the availability of the procedure. In Hungary, 28% of respondents oppose the right of individuals to access this surgery. Moreover, when asked whether trans people should be protected from discrimination by governmental laws and policies, respondents in Russia and Turkey ranked the lowest. The bias against trans people is also expressed with respect to fundamental rights of marriage and family life. In Russia, almost half of respondents opposed the right of trans people to marry, while in Poland, Hungary, and Turkey, more than one third the respondents supported the rights of trans people to marry.

While a majority of respondents from 14 countries agreed that trans people should be allowed to adopt children, in Russia and Poland, the majority of voices disagreed. Aligning with those numbers, the countries from the CAEE region that were represented in this survey ranked very low on tolerance in everyday interactions with trans people. The majority of respondents in Russia (54%) disagree that trans people should be allowed to use the restroom associated with their gender. Strong percentages of opposition were also being recorded in Poland (33%) and Hungary (41%).[13]

The on-going negative perceptions of an uninformed public toward trans people is maintained and reinforced by an array of state policies that promote hatred toward the LGBTQI community and seek to limit their possibilities for self-representation and organizing. A few

> **"The on-going negative perceptions of an uninformed public toward trans people is maintained and reinforced by an array of state policies that promote hatred toward the LGBTQI community and seek to limit their possibilities for self-representation and organizing.**

12   Flores, A., Brown, T., Park, A. (2016). Public support for transgender rights: A twenty-three country report. The Williams Institute UCLA, IPSOS. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2BmH7hp

13   Ibid

Scenes from a(n Equality March), Poland, 2011. Credit: Anna Spies; obtained from Flickr Creative Commons. https://buff.ly/2DEBalS

studies[14] [15] assessed the impact of what is termed the "closing space for civil society" on women's and trans rights organizing, and this report aims to build on that work and show how these policies curtail access to the most efficient medium of trans activism: the internet.

2. HOMOPHOBIC LEGISLATION

The 1990s saw the region debating over decriminalization of homosexuality and granting minimum provisions against discrimination for LGBTQI people. Today, opposition against progressive policies safeguarding the rights of LGBTQI people have taken new forms. The most popular instrument used to stir homophobia

and to force societies into polarizing debates is commonly referred to as the "gay propaganda law," and it is being labeled as one of the most popular contemporary Russian exports. Another equally pervasive tool—stemming more from ultra-conservative faith-based groups from the U.S. and modeled after the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)—is commonly known as the "constitutional same-sex marriage ban." In an unholy alliance, president Vladimir Putin's Russia and the U.S. have shaken hands under the auspices of the World Congress of Families with other leaders from the region, most notably the Hungarian prime-minister Victor Orban. Together, they are unapologetically supporting a backsliding of fundamental rights of LGBTQI communities in the region. Across all the countries of the CAEE region, legal initiatives on the gay propaganda law and the same-sex marriage ban pop up, seeding societal debate and division. It is worth noting that draft bills concerning gay propaganda and constitutional banning of same-sex marriage also emerge in politically charged contexts, such

14   Mama Cash and Urgent Action Fund. (2017). Standing firm: Women and trans-led organizations respond to closing space for civil society.

15   Global Philanthropy Project. (2016). The perfect storm: The closing space for LGBT civil society in Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia, Kenya, and Hungary.

as election cycles, as in the cases of Georgia, Romania, and Moldova. These legislative wars antagonize society, raise the level of homophobia and transphobia, and divert organizational and personal resources to opposing these bills and participating in zero-sum debates.

Against the backdrop of local municipalities opposing and denying permits to organizers of gay pride marches since 2006[16], homophobic Russian politicians devised a legal instrument that rendered such events illegal. In June 2013, President Putin signed a new federal law seeking to penalize propaganda of homosexuality under the pretext of protecting minors. The law banning "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships" is actually a handful of amendments to the federal law on the "protection of children from information harmful to their health and development" and the Code of Administrative Violations. In the federal law, propaganda is defined as: "distribution of information that is aimed at the formation among minors of non-traditional sexual attitudes, attractiveness of non-traditional sexual relations, misperceptions of the social equivalence of traditional and non-traditional sexual relations, or enforcing information about non-traditional sexual relations that evokes interest to such relations." The law sets administrative fines for homosexual "propaganda" at 4,000 to 5,000 rubles for individuals (approximately $120 to $150 U.S.) and up to 800,000 to 1 million rubles (approximately $14,000 to $17,500 U.S.) for NGOs, corporations, and other legal entities. More severe administrative fines are allowed for propaganda transmitted via the internet or other media networks with fines ranging from 50,000 to 1 million rubles (approximately $900 to $17, 500 U.S.). The gay propaganda law has had a serious psychological impact on trans activism in Russia. Although the content and information connected to trans people can be considered against the law and activists sharing and producing such

content can face administrative charges, so far, no reports mention trans activists being charged with distribution of gay propaganda, but other members of the LGBTQI community have already been targeted by the government.[17]

In short order, Armenia (2013), Ukraine (2014), Moldova (2014), Kazakhstan (2015), and Kyrgyzstan (2014) all saw similar legislative proposals debated in their respective parliaments. The only other country with an active law "banning gay propaganda" is Belarus, whose president signed a law that prohibits the dissemination of information that "encourages habits contradicting the development of a healthy lifestyle" or "that discredits the institution of the family and marriage."

The gay propaganda law has grave impact on the possibilities of online trans activism, since online content related to trans people can be considered an administrative offense. Interviewees from Russia and Belarus voiced it as the main challenge to their work and even to their lives. Katia from Trans Initiative shares: "Whenever we post something on unsafe platforms, we pay much attention to what we share because of the laws that exist in Russia, like 'gay propaganda law.'" Says Sasha, a trans activist from Belarus: "Although I am active in social networks, and I am open about my gender identity, I don't put out my personal/private information online, for instance, home address or telephone number. However, everyone knows where I am studying, so it is a bit scary."

Legislation similar to the gay propaganda law did not gain supporters in Central European countries or in the Balkan states due to clear infringements of EU core values such as freedom of assembly and freedom of speech. However, homophobic conservatives used the other legal initiative at hand—the constitutional ban on same-sex marriages. In countries such as Croatia (2013), Slovakia (2014), Hungary

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16   The European Court of Human Rights fined the Russian government for banning the organization of over 160 pride events on Russian territory in between 2006 and 2011.

17   Knight, K. (2017). Russian activist in court on 'gay propaganda' charge. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/19/russian-activist-court-gay-propaganda-charge

(2012), Macedonia (2014), and Kyrgyzstan (2016), the constitutional bans were instituted via referendums. Constitutional bans on same sex marriages have also been under discussion in other former Soviet Union States such as Georgia and Armenia. In the run-ups to these referendums, the level of public displays of homophobia peaked with political parties gaining political capital through hate speech targeting LGBTQI communities and portraying members as foreign/Western dupes. Meanwhile, Hungary (2007) and Croatia (2015) paradoxically recognize same-sex partnerships while also having in place constitutional bans against same-sex marriages.

> **The more a trans person is visible, the more violence and discrimination the person faces—violence in the street, bullying at school/university, violence in the workplace.**

The reinforcement of public resentment toward the LGBTQI community and especially a stigmatization of trans people was often echoed in interviews as the main societal barrier for trans activism. For example, Alexander Ksan, from Trans* Coalition explains how little public awareness on trans issues coupled with discriminatory practices at the government level, results in violence against trans community members: "Discriminatory laws and regulations are what affect most the trans community across former soviet countries. The more a trans person is visible, the more violence and discrimination the person faces—violence in the street, bullying at school/university, violence in the workplace. Transphobia is expressed in laws and in police practices in the majority of these countries, but its form differs from one to the other, be it the gay propaganda laws in Russia and Kyrgyzstan, be it that same-sex remains a crime in Uzbekistan, or the police brutality that was circulating on a video in Turkmenistan. This is the context that we face here."

3. CLOSING SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Since 2010 "closing space for civil society" or "shrinking space for civil society" has become a useful framework to analyze state policies in different parts of the world that are aimed at raising barriers for human rights organizations, pro-democracy actors, and wider civil society movements. The legal and logistical barriers vary across countries, but reach similar outcomes—NGOs are restricted when they attempt to hold public gatherings, express their views, and set up new organizations. Restrictions on funding and support for democracy programs and human rights defenders are part and parcel of a larger drive to regulate and suppress independent civil society organizing. Moreover, individual human rights defenders and activists are often subjected to intimidation and harassment, sometimes facing arbitrary detentions, imprisonment, and criminal and administrative charges. Closing space for civil society is described as a feature of semi-authoritarian regimes, where strong political leaders attempt to balance maintaining sufficient control over the political process to secure an indefinite hold on power, while also allowing enough pluralism and openness to preserve at least some international political legitimacy.[18] They usually concede limited space for independent civil society and opposition parties, but reduce that space whenever they perceive any significant challenge to their political grip. Another tactic employed is to manipulate the remaining civil society space so as to promote divisive social issues to further elicit popular support for the regime and weaken human rights.

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18   Carothers, T., Brechenmacher, S. (2014). Closing space: Democracy and human rights under fire. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Retrieved from http://carnegieendowment.org/files/closing_space.pdf

Governments generally use the following tactics to tighten control over civil society:	
Limit freedom of association	Restrict freedom of association by limiting access to legal functioning and funding, including imposing administrative barriers to registration of new NGOs, forcing re-registration of existing NGOs that receive foreign funding, imposing disclosure clauses for sources of funding and spending, undertaking invasive auditing procedures, suppressing the functioning of non-aligned NGOs, creating a plethora of government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs), and forcing registration with certain governmental platforms or associations to control programs and actions of independent civil society.
Limit freedom of expression	Restrict freedom of expression and assembly by the adoption of anti-defamation laws, restrictive internet regulations, and surveillance policies and laws that undermine the right to demonstrate. Authorities come down hard on public protests; persecute independent voices; harass, censor, or close independent media; extend state ownership of media outlets; impose political control over media outlets; and engage in many other forms of repressive governance that reduce the independence of civil society.
Delegitimize human rights work and human rights activists	Delegitimize causes, organizations, and activists by describing their work as playing into the hand of anti-national forces. Human rights groups are framed as foreign steered and potentially dangerous for national sovereignty. Sometimes the causes and the vulnerable groups served by NGOs are deemed as an import of Western ideology, an "invented" problem that is alien to the national reality. NGO workers are often depicted as foreign agents supporting financial or political interests of other governments or secret organizations.
Deploy security narratives to restrict human rights	Use security narratives to legitimize a disregard for plural civil society. Governments with a deficit in human rights harness legitimate concerns about terrorism and their wide latitude on national security issues as an excuse to target domestic actors they consider opponents, including civil society.
Policing and censoring social media	Restrict online communication through policing and censorship of social media such as via internet and social media blackouts in times of political protests, banning access to certain social media, monitoring social media users and their activities, trolling, and disseminating fake news.

While such restrictions have affected all of civil society in countries where such policies were put in place, a recent report from Mama Cash and Urgent Action Fund shows that the closing space for civil society is a gendered phenomenon as attempts to control civil society have a disproportionate effect on women and trans political voices, leading to their marginalization. Gendered violence is used to intimidate and silence women human rights defenders.[19] The Global Philanthropy Project report describes the effects of closing civil society space on LGBTQI activism as a "perfect storm," carrying organizations and activists into a public sphere enticed with government-led homophobic resentment. Some dimensions of the closing civil society space also had different impacts on trans activism, as this report shows.[20]

19   Mama Cash and Urgent Action Fund. (2017). Standing firm: Women and trans-led organizations respond to closing space for civil society.

20   Global Philanthropy Project. (2016). The perfect storm: The closing space for LGBT civil society in Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia, Kenya, and Hungary.

International Day Against Homophobia event, May 17, 2008, Kyrgyzstan.
Credit: LGBT Organization Labrys Kyrgyzstan

4. CONTINUED DECLINE OF PRESS AND INTERNET FREEDOM

Press Freedom

According to a recent Freedom House report[21], global press freedom declined to its lowest point in 13 years in 2016, due to unprecedented threats against journalists and media agencies in major democracies. According to the same report, out of the seven countries that suffered the greatest decline throughout the world, four are from the CAEE region: Poland, Turkey, Hungary, and Serbia.

Of the countries under review, the Freedom House global review listed only two countries in the CAEE region as having free media (Czech Republic and Slovakia), with the rest of the countries ranking between "partially free" and "not free."[22] The Freedom House report assessed the freedom of press across 90 countries, using a complex methodology that takes into account three key elements: the legal landscape, the political landscape, and the economic factors that impact media freedom. Media is a key opinion shaper, and media independence is the first step toward creating the window of possibility for adequate self-representation of trans people in the region. However, given the social and political context, such possibilities are precluded in many of the countries where political pressure influences media reporting. Journalists in the region face several constraints from overt political control through limiting laws that define media content

21   Freedom House. (2017). Freedom of the press 2017. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2017

22   Ibid

and render journalists vulnerable to charges of libel and spreading terrorist, anti-government, or gay propaganda in countries such as Turkey, Russia, Belarus, and Tajikistan, to more subtle ways of economic and political control leading to self-censorship, as in the case of Hungarian media, where ownership is limited to supporters of the government.[23] In many cases, even when authoritarian regimes do not use the media to promote their own fear-inducing agendas, they use it to edit out topics that go against professed ideology.

As Sasha,[24] a trans rights activist in Belarus describes: "I worked for a teen magazine in Belarus. When I decided to write about topics related to gender identity or feminism, the editors did not welcome my suggestion. They told me teenagers have no interest in these topics and that they won't be able to understand such materials. Once I wrote a section about feminism in one of my articles, but the editors cut that section. My reading of it all was that editors and publishers in Belarus don't really have the luxury to publish what they want; they know that any piece touching on LGBTIQ rights or the political opposition will be noticed by the government and will have consequences."

Political and economic pressures leading to self-censorship are a common feature across the region,[25] and when trans lives are not erased, the media reporting follows tabloid and sensationalist recipes. Lolita[26], a trans activist from Belarus shared with us a recent experience: "I had an interview recently, the interview went well, the journalist also looked sensitive, but later on wrote an article full of prejudice and used vulgar pictures that would irritate the society."

Independent media outlets, often online, have proven to be a more appropriate environment for recognizing trans lives, as Romanian trans activist Patrick Braila from NGO Transform describes: "Mainstream media doesn't tell me much, as an activist you don't really have any control over what's happening with your words. I prefer independent media and I have to say that the piece produced by DoR [Decat o Revista], an independent magazine, actually changed my life. Many people started to contact me from outside the community and told me that they understand much more about what it means to be trans. I think with DoR material, the success story had to do both with my own style of honest explaining, but also with the sensibility of the journalist and the format (narrative journalism) which gave us a bit of time to get to know one another and build trust and actually share more than a story but more a state of being."

Internet Freedom

Another factor that emerges as paramount for trans activists in the CAEE region is the extent to which the internet is available, free from censorship, and safe from surveillance and disclosure of data to third parties.

In 2017, CAEE region was home to approximately 324 million internet users[27], which represented 9.3% of all internet users worldwide. In spite of over 10% growth in total number of users, almost half of the population is still not connected to the internet. Digital divides build across lines of rural/urban, minority belonging, level of education, and socio-economic background, with the most important being the rural/urban divide. According to the regional breakdown from "Digital in 2017: Global Overview,"[28] the internet penetration rate[29] in Eastern Europe is 67%. It's lower for Central Asia, at just 40%. Disparities in access to the internet range

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23   Reporters Without Borders. (2017). Hungary—Prime minister and press baron. Retrieved from https://rsf.org/en/hungary

24   Due to security concerns, the interviewee's real name is replaced by a pseudonym.

25   The Freedom House report lists the majority of countries in the region as "partially free" and explains how economic and political pressures lead to self-censorship.

26   Due to security concerns, the interviewee's real name is replaced by a pseudonym.

27   We Are Social. (2017). Digital in 2017: A Global Overview. Retrieved from https://wearesocial.com/special-reports/digital-in-2017-global-overview

28   Ibid

29   Internet penetration rate is the ratio between internet users and the total population in a country.

Digital Chains. Credit: Stan Jourdan; obtained from Flickr Creative Commons. https://buff.ly/2rJtIjN

from Czech Republic and Hungary with almost 80% of the population having a subscription to the internet to countries such as Turkmenistan (15%) and in Tajikistan (19%) where only a minority of people are connected to the internet.

Levels of internet censorship and control also vary across the region. The most populous countries from the region under review—Turkey with 46 million internet users and Russia with 102 million users—are also the countries where the internet is most censored and where user activity is most monitored. LGBTQI content is one key filter for blocking websites for governments in both countries[30] making it difficult for trans activists to access trans knowledge.

Moreover, it is these two countries that are experimenting with regulations that instate a

de facto censorship of internet users in their respective countries, as well as with new forms of online warfare targeting users in other countries such as misinformation (through fake news and social media bots) and trolling of inconvenient content. Increasingly more countries in the region are tempted to censor internet user activity via new legal provisions. State censorship of internet users is exercised in a variety of ways, including: through legal provisions allowing discretionary blocking of various information deemed threatening to national security or non-compliant with governmental values and traditions[31] (for example: the anti-extremism laws in Russia and the internet Law in Turkey, the new law on counter-terrorism in Poland, the Ukraine block on Russian social media platforms), and legal provisions that give authorities immediate

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30   Freedom House. (2017). Freedom on net 2017. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTN_2017_Final.pdf

31   Ibid

(without the necessity of a court order) and increased access to user data by requiring telecom and internet providers to store the content of users' online communication for prolonged periods of time.[32] An additional new development is that countries such as Russia and Turkey are now trying to censor VPN access through both technical and legal measures.

5. LIMITED ACCESS TO FUNDING

In a civil society space in CAEE where there are more and more restrictions on trans-produced information sharing and a decrease in avenues for organizing, the trans movement in post-Soviet states is impacted to varying degrees by Russian-inspired legislation that limits formal organizing and access to funding. Following the 2012 Russian Foreign Agent Law, civil society in Central Asian countries grappled with legal proposals aimed at stigmatizing NGOs that receive foreign funding. In Tajikistan, a regulation was approved in March 2016 stating that all foreign grants must be registered with the Ministry of Justice's Registry of Humanitarian Aid. Bills on foreign agent laws were repealed in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan parliament, yet softer measures of control over NGOs have been reported, while negative attitudes toward NGOs and activists continue to rise.

NGOs are currently the target of semi-authoritarian regimes in new EU member states as well, with Hungary adopting, in 2017, laws that require non-governmental organizations that receive foreign funding to join a registry of foreign organizations. That same year, Poland introduced legislation limiting access to public funding for NGOs. The government created a new institutional structure under the name of The National Institute of Freedom—Centre for Civil Society Development, that will now decide

which domestic NGOs receive public funds.[33] The rules for funding competitions are not explicitly spelled out by the legislation, but an immense amount of discretion in this area is given to the director who is appointed by the prime-minister's office, thus linking public funding for NGOs to the government's political agenda. A similar draft law regarding the public funding of NGOs and the sharing of NGO funders' and contributors' data is currently under discussion in the Romanian Parliament, which finds inspiration from its Polish and Hungarian neighbors.

> " Governments are not giving money to civil society and not to trans organization[s] at all.

A recent report[34] showed that trans organizations in the region are small and rely on volunteer work with little secure funding for project activities. Tina Orban from Transvanilla Transgender Association in Hungary said during an interview: "There is no money available for Central/Eastern Europe. It is a hole. Governments are not giving money to civil society and not to trans organization[s] at all. As we are part of EU, there is money for human rights, but not for trans organizing and for trans-led groups."

32   Ibid

33   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (2017). Draft act on the National Freedom Institute–Centre for the Development of Civil Society of Poland. Retrieved from http://www.osce.org/odihr/336551

34   Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice. (2017). The state of trans organizing, second edition. Retrieved from http://s3.amazonaws.com/astraea.production/app/asset/uploads/2017/10/Trans-REPORT-for-the-web-Update d.pdf

TRANS ACTIVISM: DIGITAL ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

CENTRAL ASIA | EASTERN EUROPE | CENTRAL EUROPE

1) LGBT CAMPAIGNS EXCLUDE TRANS PEOPLE

Organize independently, offer training to trans folks, encourage LGBT orgs to include trans folks on their board.

2) ACCESS TO LOCAL LANGUAGE RESOURCES

Use translation tools like Google translate, translate the basic knowledge about gender identity and sexual orientation professionally, share resources with similar language countries, seek support from LGBT friendly companies.

3) LACK OF TECH SKILLS AMONG ACTIVISTS

Organize workshops for activists, online tutorials, and activism school. Collaborate with companies who are LGBT friendly like Facebook and Google to access these skills.

4) GOVERNMENT MONITORS THE INTERNET

Increase knowledge of digital security, create closed forums, avoid low security platforms like Facebook and Skype.

5) CROSS-BORDER COMMUNICATION

Use a third party country to communicate, use a proxy and hide IP address. Consider communicating offline like SMS or mail.

6) AGE BARRIER FOR INTERNET USE

Use mail and P.O. boxes to communicate with older folks. Create events to communicate in person. Create an intergenerational dialogue; young people can help seniors access internet.
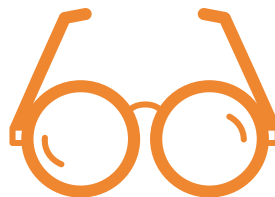
TRANS ACTIVISM: DIGITAL ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

CENTRAL ASIA | EASTERN EUROPE | CENTRAL EUROPE

7) RURAL AREAS LACK ACCESS TO INTERNET

Use traditional mail or phone calls and SMS. Arrange to meet people in person and visit their communities.

8) PRIVATE GROUPS CAN BE EXCLUSIVE

Assigned admins and moderators for groups to review requests to join. Create snowball effect by word of mouth. Hold regular open meetings to let people know about groups. Use social media to advertise the existence of the group.

9) PAID PROMOTION IS EXPENSIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Communicate needs to companies like Facebook and Google; they can offer scholarships. Include costs in grants and project proposals.

10) SOCIAL MEDIA OVERLOAD

Divide responsibilities of checking social media. Control privacy settings on personal accounts. Hire a communications person. Set clear boundaries and expectations.

11) CERTAIN WEBSITES ARE BLOCKED

Use Tors, VPNs and other proxies to get around blocks. Opera has a built in VPN.

12) WITH VISIBILITY COMES VULNERABILITY

Use silent advocacy techniques. Do not involve the press/media. Hold private meetings with stakeholders and change-makers. Protect one another.

DIGITAL CHALLENGES

During the strategy meeting held in Warsaw in November 2017, 15 trans activists from the region spent a day and a half discussing digital security threats, existing strategies, gaps, and possible solutions. Group discussions highlighted 12 main digital security challenges that trans activists face in their day-to-day work. For each identified problem, participants collectively brainstormed for solutions. The following section looks in more detail at some of the issues raised during the meeting: online visibility and vulnerability, online hate speech and physical threats, blackmailing and administrative charges against trans people for online activity, and internet fatigue. These four pressing issues were frequently mentioned in interviews and are intertwined with the geopolitical context where trans activists are working.

1. VISIBILITY AND VULNERABILITY

Most trans activists interviewed said that the Internet gives them a chance to express their true gender identity and connect with other trans people on a shared basis of trust. However, depending on the local context, having a social media profile that reflects one's gender identity can also be a source of fear and attacks.

For Patrick Braila from NGO Transform in Romania, having a Facebook profile was "the first possibility to have my gender identity spelled out for a wider public. My Facebook profile reflects more who I am than my identity papers do." Similarly, for Viktor Heumann from Trans*Parent in Czech Republic, having a personal profile on

their organization's social media is part of the daily work. "I am public about my gender identity on all social media. I also tend to comment on posts related to trans issues, also disclosing my identity while trying to explain to others what it means to be trans."

Dodo[35], a trans woman from Georgia, used social media like Odnoklassniki in the past to work as a sex-worker. She shared how common it is for trans people who engage in sex work (due to the discrimination and exclusion they face in the work field) to use social media platforms to stay in touch with clients, and points out that there are additional specific digital security needs that must be considered for sex workers, as they face discrimination and a higher risk of violence since they belong simultaneously to two vulnerable groups. Dodo suggests that sharing personal information on social media is an effective way to reach out to younger trans people: "Teenagers who are women, but assigned male at birth usually approach me on Facebook for an advice. They share with me their problems and usually want to find out more about issues connected to gender identity or sexual orientation. I try to help and I advise them where or whom to seek out for more info."

Other trans activists also point out the many risks that publicly sharing one's gender identity can pose. For example, in Kazakhstan, Alexandr Ksan, a trans activist recalls: "I share my information only with my subscribers. With others, I don't share my gender identity. I have different privacy settings for different posts. I don't do open posts.

35   Due to security concerns, the interviewee's real name is replaced by a pseudonym.

Within Trans Coalition in Post-Soviet Space, there are activists who post publicly and are visible online, but their public information and photos are used by hate groups to attack them or make them a target of hatred." Quite a similar feeling is echoed by a trans activist, Farukh, from Tajikistan: "I can't openly publish on social media because in the future I want to work as a cardiologist and our society is not ready for who I really am yet. Before posting anything on my social media, I think twice and I have a good internal self-censorship about what can be detrimental to me."

Lolita, a trans activist from Belarus, a country where sharing information online or offline on "non-traditional sexual relations" became an administrative offense in July 2017, uses their Vkontakte profile to share information on trans rights. But they also edit out all information relating to their gender identity. Earlier in the year, Lolita was the victim of police questioning related to their online use, yet as Lolita comments, "This information needs to be out there."

Reluctance to share one's gender identity online is closely related to activists' experience of threats and hate-speech as the following sections illustrate. In addition to these concrete threats, stigmatization and discrimination from offline contexts also translates into the online space. Dodo from Georgia captures the chain of discriminatory experiences that mark trans activists' interactions with transphobic society both online and offline: "Once someone knows that you are a trans person, then automatically a mix of stereotypes take place: immediately you become sex worker, HIV positive, the most immoral person, and so on."

> **"There are activists who post publicly and are visible online, but their public information and photos are used by hate groups to attack them or make them a target of hatred.**

2. HATE SPEECH AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Commonly, trans activists who disclose information about their gender identity online face serious threats and are often the victims of hate speech and harassment. They also frequently become the targets of doxing

Trigger warning: mention of violence against trans people

and attacks by right-wing groups; photos and other personal details (such as home address, email, and telephone numbers) are circulated on websites belonging to these groups. In Hungary, Tina, an activist from Transvanilla Transgender Association, reported several instances where pictures of trans people as well as personal contact data was placed on right-wing websites. The main targets of right-wing intimidation are trans rights activists and trans sex workers. "My personal home address was put out there and it was on a list of activists to be attacked. Sex workers are most at risk, since these websites download their pictures and them put them up on their websites as hate targets. There was nothing we could do about it because the servers hosting these websites were in the U.S. and the Hungarian law was not applicable to them."

Salima[36], a trans activist from Tajikistan, described her experience on dating websites where, in spite of not publicly sharing her gender identity, she is still the target of attacks, receiving text messages with death threats. "I use dating sites for socializing and usually about 80% of the cisgender men that contact me don't guess that I am a trans woman. About 10 to 15% of them get it and then they offer me money in exchange for sex and about 5% of these men end up texting me directly with hate messages saying

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36   Due to security concerns, the interviewee's real name is replaced by a pseudonym.

Fatima Romanova of LGBTQI association Temida. Credit: Nino Baiduri

that I should be killed or cut." These constant threats echo the transphobic societal milieu where fear of transphobic violent attacks shapes the lives of trans people. As Salima continues, "The fear of death, of being killed just for being trans is the greatest fear we all share."

In Georgia, the two trans activists contacted for this report have both had online encounters with right-wing groups. Dodo, a trans activist and social worker, says that for her, "Problems started from newly formed neo-Nazi groups who are very active online. I have been the victim of various online harassments, which in a number of cases ended up in stalking and actual physical violence. These neo-Nazi group members found my photos on Facebook and then they even came to look for me [to beat me up] in my neighborhood and then turned up also at my workplace." For Nia[37], a trans activist and sex-worker from Georgia, the main space of violence

remains on the streets. But she has also been the target of right-wing groups. "Someone stole my pictures from Facebook, where I am wearing a dress and makeup, and then they put up these pictures on right wing Facebook groups and their blogs. After that, I started to receive a lot of hate speech from Facebook contacts."

Threats, malicious comments, and the distribution of photos or other personal information without consent are sometimes examples of interpersonal violence within the community or perpetrated by acquaintances. This is a phenomenon rarely discussed and addressed in the region with few organizations dealing with domestic violence reaching out to discuss intimate partner violence with trans community members. At this point in time, few if any studies look at this phenomenon, even though of the 17 interviews conducted, nine activists reported having been targeted by people within the community.

37   Due to security concerns, the interviewee's real name is replaced by a pseudonym.

3. BLACKMAIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHARGES

Trans persons in the region are often targets of blackmail from state officials and private individuals.

In Tajikistan, trans activist Farukh described how in the past year, police officers started conducting raids targeting the LGBTQI community, especially trans people. The technique used by police officers is to infiltrate online communities and make suggestions to meet trans people face to face. At the offline meetings, authorities have tried to blackmail trans people, threatening them with disclosure to family or workplace, criminal prosecution or administrative charges. From Farukh: "There are no safe spaces to meet, we don't have clubs or even "pleshki" [public dating spots for LGBTQI people]. The internet is the only place where we meet new people, but even here we need to use it with precaution. I think this is also why a lot of trans people leave Tajikistan and move to Russia."

Nia, a trans activist from Georgia shared her personal story of being blackmailed by someone from the LGBTQI community in two separate instances. The first time, a community member showed old screenshots of Nia to her then-boyfriend, disclosing Nia's involvement in sex work. A second story of attempted blackmail was when a trans community member "took a photo of us girls all dressed up and later on told me that he would show this picture to people in my village."

Lolita, a Belarusian trans activist, shared how a trans woman faced criminal or administrative charges after liking several posts on VKontakte related to erotic movies. Belarusian authorities classify "liking" erotica on social media as distribution of pornography.

4. INTERNET FATIGUE

Using the internet for trans activism and for socializing and dating not only poses threats relating to one's gender identity, but can also harm one's personal well-being. Viktor from Trans*Parent in Czech Republic was the first interviewee to mention internet stress and internet fatigue: "I try not to be on too many apps and not to use too many groups because then one can never relax." The same problem was echoed by Kristian Randjelovic, from Serbian organization XY Spectrum, who, when asked about access to internet, commented that they feel like they have too much access. They are online 24/7 and feel responsible to always reply to requests from fellow trans people looking for help or from other activists requiring support for their causes and activities.

The concern was also raised during the Warsaw Strategy Meeting, where the majority of participants expressed a feeling of internet exhaustion, issues with addictive usage of social media, and stressful pressure to respond immediately to social media messages. Internet fatigue is part of a larger issue of activist fatigue, but is a difficulty that needs to be addressed with targeted measures. With the fast paced growth of internet use, health best practices have not yet fallen into place in organizations or among individual activists, and the community feels that security plans need to include specific measures addressing internet exhaustion. Participants feel that internet fatigue is also connected with the shortage of human resources in trans activism, where most work is done on voluntary basis or with little paid staff.

> **"** Internet fatigue is part of a larger issue of activist fatigue, but is a difficulty that needs to be addressed with targeted measures.

DIGITAL NEEDS

1. ACCESSING CONTENT

Only two out of 17 interviewees mentioned using a web proxy to access blocked sites or browse the web anonymously. In the regional context where governments block websites (such as Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Belarus, and Tajikistan) or can control IP information directly and discretionally (Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Hungary, Russia, Belarus, and Turkey), information and training about it is essential, if not lifesaving.

As trans activist Elvan from Turkey shared: "Even if it can sound as a joke, in Turkey the government blocked Wikipedia since May." Reports on internet blocking of social media such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter have also been noted in Turkey in the short aftermath of the coup attempt in 2015 and during terrorist attacks in 2016 and 2017. The new Freedom House report "Freedom on Net 2017[38]," shows that by November 2016, the Turkish government had doubled the number of blocked websites, reaching almost 114,000 websites with over 90 percent of them were blocked due to "obscenity," which includes any site with certain sexual keywords in the domain. That resulted in the collateral blocking of several websites related to the LGBTQI community. So far, the blocking of websites has proven most detrimental for trans people who also engage in sex work, especially for those who find their clients online. On the ground, the situation looks grim. "The most hazardous part is for trans sex

workers. A new law says that it is strictly forbidden to work online and the government shuts down the websites of sex workers providing services online or advertising online, as well as the escort service websites," says Elvan.

Belarus authorities also harass trans people for browsing online erotica, as Lolita, one of our interviewees, shares. "I have a friend who is a trans woman and liked several posts on VKontakte related to erotic movies and authorities pressed criminal charges against her. Apparently now liking content with erotica might be considered as distribution of pornography." Sasha from Belarus says: "There is no direct evidence of surveillance, but everyone knows that it happens. There are strict regulations towards mass media, but internet media get stricter regulations and restrictions. Now, a lot of online platforms or webpages are blocked and shut down; if you don't comply with government's ideology, you get closed down."

Salima, a trans activist from Tajikistan, also shares a sense of constant fear derived from their browsing history. "Fear is present always. I know that if security services want, they could easily find me via IP address, and knock on the door. If security services really want to find me they will. Yes, I have a fear that everything I like, post, or write might be used against me, but I cannot stop doing it only because this might happen to me. Someone needs to show online that we exist and we are also people, we also have our own needs and desires."

Two trans digital security activists, Katia and Darya in Russia shared with us their approach to internet browsing safety, as the country has an impressive track record of blocking access to websites and social media. "Whenever we post

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38   Freedom House. (2017). Freedom on net 2017. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTN_2017_Final.pdf

something on unsafe platforms, we pay much attention to what we share, because of the laws that exists in Russia, including gay propaganda law and Yarovaya Law," says Katia. "We use proxy, not only for 'hiding' purposes, but most for accessing the data/information as there are strong internet content regulations in Russia, and a lot of innocent websites are blocked. Therefore, proxies are used to reach blocked websites," adds Darya.

2. PRODUCING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE

The internet helps connect trans activists with community members across country borders and also facilitates the sharing of trans-specific information and trans-produced knowledge. All the trans activists interviewed said that sharing information and staying in touch with trans people are the main reasons for using the internet. Viktor from Czech Republic describes the role of information online in the following way: "There is a lack of information about transgender issues in our societies and people turn to one another for information, support, advice, and recognition. The internet makes this learning process easier."

It is via the internet that many of the trans activists interviewed became familiar with the very notion of gender identity. Online information proves key in learning about transitioning, and sharing support strategies about how to cope with family members and their reactions. For example, it is from the internet that trans people in the CAEE region learned about hormone treatment and found ways to procure it. Websites of human rights NGOs provided guidance and support when members of the trans community struggle with mental health problems and violence.

Yael Demedetskaya from Transgender Foundation, a Russian organization working internationally,

captures the connection between the role of producing trans knowledge, distributing it online for credentials as well as readership, using this knowledge toward bettering the lives of trans people in Russia in very concrete terms: "One of our websites, Transgender.team, we put together a research team that conducts scientific research among trans people in Russia and publishes scientific papers that we can use for advocacy purposes. We referred to these publications during court cases."

However, in an increasingly controlled internet where content related to the LGBTQI community is blocked and filtered as extremist or pornographic, the obstacle remains figuring out how to safeguard relevant websites. How can they produce and share online content that is trans relevant in a way that does not place them at risk of criminalization or blackmail for those who post, share or read it? The same obstacle also impacts outreach work, since in some of the countries under review (most notably Tajikistan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Georgia) trans activists use fake social media accounts to reach community members instead of disclosing their personal information out of fear of government interference. An activist from Georgia said that if they were better equipped with information about digital security, they would improve their activist work since they would be able to contact others through their own account, rather than create fake accounts to reach people.

3. DATA MONITORING AND STORAGE

All of the 17 interviewees shared a concern that their online communication is monitored by governmental authorities. Darya, a trans activist from Russia, best captured this situation: "I think whatever we post online is monitored. I think there is someone monitoring us always, but they have not been contacting us yet." There is, however, an important difference between

how trans activists from Romania, Czech Republic, Serbia, and Hungary interpret Big Brother surveillance and the level of anxiety this monitoring brings into their professional lives, and how trans activists from Turkey, Belarus, Russia, Georgia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan experience the situation.

Viktor from Czech Republic, who quite openly shares personal information about their gender identity online, is mostly concerned with protecting their private information from big corporations that can profit from their digital footprint. Patrick, a Romanian trans activist, is also convinced that their digital information is monitored and used by third parties for both political and economic purposes. However, they said: "I don't really care since I have nothing to hide, I am actually glad to share with people who I am and what my problems look like. My only concern is that I don't disclose personal information of others with my carelessness." Tina Orban shares a similar view, noting that the current Hungarian government is monitoring the activities of all human rights defenders and NGO staff, but at the same time the monitoring does not yet have a day-to-day impact and therefore activists continue using social media and browsing the internet without any extra security measures.

The picture looks very different for trans activists in Turkey, a country where the government regularly censors online activity of human rights defenders. Elvan, a trans activist from Turkey, says: "Our website is still based in Turkey, which means we are giving our website to the government's hands. It is not safe for us. We know it, but we don't know what to do. We don't have digital security experts working in our association or anyone who could help us protect ourselves." Digital security expertise proves essential for the very functioning of the organization and the threat of monitoring and storage of user data from governmental institutions is very present.

That is the case even in contexts where governmental monitoring of trans communities'

online communication is less evident, like in Georgia, where trans activists suspect foul play around key international events celebrating trans rights. "We need online protection; especially, during May 17 [IDAHOT] period or during Transgender Day of Remembrance. We feel that our phones are listened to and communication surveilled. We need digital security tools, especially while organizing various campaigns or demonstrations, and also to secure our personal information," says Dodo. Ensuring that the communication with other activists is secure is also echoed by a digital security expert based in Central Asia. Their assessment is quite explicit about how government surveillance works: Those people who represent a direct threat to the ruling regime are usually targets of surveillance. The government might use different justifications like "terrorism" or "pornography," or it might just deny the surveillance to begin with. For example, in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, whenever the government blocks certain social media apps or websites, it first denies doing so. It is only mass media and human rights activist pressure that sometimes pushes government officials to admit the blockage.

4. SHARING DIGITAL INFORMATION SECURELY

Most of the respondents (13 out of 17) expressed that they don't have enough skills or knowledge about sharing information using secure channels. "I think I don't have the skills for ensuring digital security of my communication," says a Viktor, trans activist from Czech Republic. Even trans activists placed in contexts where internet censorship is high and where browsing or sharing of LGBTQI content is criminalized, trans activists find themselves without the adequate knowledge - "Honestly, I don't use secure tools for internet browsing or for sharing stuff online and I am not

much aware about such tools. For my activist related stuff, I used to do a two-step verification for Gmail, but I don't do it anymore because it was not comfortable," says Sasha, a trans activist from Belarus.

Trans activists also struggle with the safe usage of instant messaging apps. Trans activist Salima from Tajikistan shares: "Even when we write on Viber, we don't use words like community, LGBTIQ." But apart from self-censorship on key words, few other security measures are known. Trans activists use Facebook for an important part of their digital activism, and it is with Facebook content that trans activists struggle the most. The issues are varied and range from whether or not to disclose their personal identity, to filtering what content reaches which people in their list. "When sharing pictures, for example in makeup or in dress, I pick people with whom to share and from whom to hide these posts," says Dodo from Georgia. They also have to manage situations where personal Facebook content (like photos) is used without their consent.

Securing digital data is key for trans activism in the region, and trans activists want to learn how to protect information online by using secure applications, how to encrypt information, and what secure apps can be used for day-to-day activities such as calls and messages. At the same time, however, trans activists say that they are unlikely to stop using popular apps such as Facebook, Skype, and VKontakte because these are the apps that community members use. This is a dilemma echoed by some activists, while others were unaware of the concept of digital security and what it entails. Dodo, a trans activist from Georgia, shared with us her takeaway from a two-hour seminar on digital security organized by a national NGO: "The two-hour workshop was about protecting yourself to online threats and that's where I heard about apps like Signal. I tried to use them, but I had to delete them as they were not popular among my contacts. I think we don't have yet a culture of online security, even though we are somewhat aware that it is dangerous to lose control over your personal or activist info."

Kristian, an experienced trans activist from Serbia, also shared with us his concern about using safer platforms for reaching out to community members: "People in our community are looking online for information and contacts. They want to reach us and this is why we engage with them in the social media apps that they use. We also offer counseling via Skype, which of course is not the most secure tool to use, but it is what everyone knows about and what everyone uses."

While there is a shared understanding of an unsafe environment trans people face in the region, trans activists are more cautious with their physical security, but less aware of online protection tactics. "I think, we [trans community] need to become more aware about the usefulness and necessity of having online protection. I need to be told about it more," says Dodo from Georgia.

5. FACILITATING COMMUNITY DIALOGUE ONLINE

Another area where trans activists feel that they don't have sufficient skills is that of moderating social media groups and forums. Most activists interviewed were members of various secret Facebook and VKontakte groups or present in Odnoklassniki, with the last two social media platforms being more popular in Russian-speaking countries. As Tina from Hungary said, "A lot of our activism has moved online, more precisely on Facebook."

Most interviewees shared their difficulties in managing these online micro-communities, due to the wide diversity of a community that is too often presented as one homogenous group. Due to differences of generations, politics, beliefs, gender expression and gender identity, and the on-going transphobia to which trans people are exposed, the circle of violence can be perpetrated within the movement between

members of the community. These conflicts are difficult to mediate due to prejudice and transphobia, but also the isolation, violence, and lack of support that trans people face puts them in precarious states, emotionally, mentally, and physically. There are additional difficulties with mediating conflicts among people who do not have a chance to meet regularly or at all offline for face-to-face interaction. Trans activists noticed that conflicts fire up quickly, last for lengthy periods, and bear a heavy psychological burden to all members, especially since people don't want to disconnect from these secret groups that also are tools for their survival. Viktor, from Czech Republic, who is a member of a group, reported having participated in conflicts lasting weeks, which drained their energy due to the nonstop, rapid exchange of messages between members.

Dodo, a trans activist from Georgia, provided an example of how transphobia adds extra labor in online communities and targets those who are gender non-conforming: "I know one trans woman who started transitioning at the age of 45 and has attempted to look and behave feminine. However, this person is a target of psychological violence, not only from the homophobic society and family, not only from the LGB community [having prejudices towards trans people], but also from the trans community itself, criticizing her for not looking feminine enough."

Activists attend a CommsLabs strategy meeting in Warsaw, November 2017. Credit: Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice

FIGHTING BACK:
STRATEGIES FOR RESISTANCE

1. RUSSIA: INVESTING IN DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Foundation Transgender is a Russian-based NGO working with trans people, crossdressers, and genderqueer people. The NGO runs a community center in Moscow and administers several websites focusing on trans people and their needs. Each website has a specific function:

Transgender.ru provides information for trans people, including medical information with names of clinics and doctors. This website also hosts a discussion forum and chat app.

Lovetrans.ru is a dating service website.

Transgender.team is a website presenting gender, transgender, and queer research developed by Transgender Foundation.

Gendergames.org is an LGBTQI performance art and media production studio.

This network of websites is visited by up to 7,000 users daily. The forum and chat require registration as a means of securing access. The servers hosting the websites are situated outside Russia, with backup content distributed amongst different computers, making the system more resilient.

Recognizing the political changes happening in their midst, the founding members and board of Foundation Transgender were well ahead of the curve. They decided to strategically invest in digital infrastructure and to host their websites on servers based outside of Russia, and the move couldn't have been more timely. By the time the gay propaganda bill, which made owners of websites liable to fines and lawsuits, passed in 2012, they had ensured that all of their organization's documents were safe, their work and leaders safeguarded. Per Yael: "The idea of having servers outside of the country came from within our organization and from my own experience working with Western companies based in Russia. At the beginning, we took this decision being worried about possible censorship, but hoping that the situation in Russia will change for the better. Now it has come to worse, and luckily we store all Word/Office documents remotely so we don't have to have any physical documents on our desktop."

For now, Yael is confident that the work of the organization is not on the radar of authorities since the organization is not receiving any external funding and their website do not contain any anti-government content, focusing instead on materials that specifically address the Russian trans community. Yael sees the Foundation system as a legitimate protection shield. "It is safer that project activities are not in Russia and it might be violating current laws, but why can't we secure ourselves?"

However, the most challenging part of the websites' server system is to maintain it financially, as is the case with all projects run by the Foundation. As Yael says: "There was time when online office was seen as unreal thing, but now it is widely used. The only problem is to have the adequate resources, information about safe technology, and time. Everything else is implementable."

Solidarity with Turkey's LGBT community at the London Pride Parade - 25 June 2016.
Credit: Alisdare Hickson; obtained from Flickr Creative Commons. https://buff.ly/2FGvcxP

2. TURKEY: TRANS PARADE UNDER GOVERNMENTAL BAN

Public protest was very important for creating awareness about trans people in Turkey, as Elvan[39], a trans activist from Turkey, told us: "In 2014, at Gezi Park protest, trans people were participating actively and people saw that we are not monsters. We had the chance to present ourselves; we were hand in hand with other people together protesting the government." The following year, an organization[40] where Elvan works as a coordinator of a hotline service participated in organizing the Trans Parade in Istanbul, but the success was short-lived given the ban on public protest after the 2016 coup attempt against president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The coup attempt, and the ensuing retaliation of the government against human rights activists and journalists, left LGBTQI activists

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39   Due to security concerns, the interviewee's real name is replaced by a pseudonym.

40   Due to security concerns, the organization chose to be anonymous.

afraid to go out on the streets and reclaim their space. An attempt to organize a new parade that year never received an official approval.

However, in 2017, a group of trans activists decided to plan a new strategy to counter the government monopoly of public space. For this purpose, activists met in a more structured form as a Trans Parade Committee planning a day program of panels and workshops. "At the Committee, we thought, let's divide the power of the police into two: one group of activists would go to the typical parade location and a separate group chose another site in an area known for having many sex workers and high police presence at night. We wanted to show that we are not here only during the night, but also during the day," says Elvan.

The Trans Parade was held in July 2017. Inspired by the famous TV series Game of Thrones, trans activists used the hashtag #GameOfTrans on various social media platforms (from Facebook Live, to pictures on Instagram, to Twitter) to share their action with a wider audience. The hashtag helped to mobilize the trans community and bring trans people out to march in the streets of Istanbul. Elvan describes the event as a success: "It was good to show the government that we have power to organize in spite of their surveillance and pressure. We were able to have our small celebration even if the police caught on us at the second location." Out of the 40 participants who were demonstrating, seven people were arrested, but "we were organized for this too: we had lawyers with us in both destinations." These safety precautions lead to the release of the detained protesters the same evening. However, the detained activists were humiliated by police officers right after their arrests. Elvan says, "The police took our friends in a police car, forced them to listen to Quran in a handcuffed position, and then after hours sent them to the police station."

Another key element of success for this demo was the playful and subversive hashtag, which captured the spirit of the protest, "made people smile, and sent the message that there is still hope for us." Moreover, the hashtag drew media attention with

several outlets reporting on the protest and on the hasty detentions. The catchy hashtag also boosted social media outreach, with people sharing pictures and messages from the street protest and amplifying the offline protest.

3. KYRGYZSTAN: ONLINE APPLICATIONS FOR OFFLINE ACTIVISM

Labrys is an NGO registered in Kyrgyzstan that provides services to LGBTQI people and advocates for trans and LGB rights. Labrys was instrumental in designing and advocating for the adoption of clinical protocols for trans healthcare in Kyrgyzstan.

In spite of this latest success, Labrys faced critical moments in 2014, when a draft bill was introduced in the Parliament to criminalize "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations"—effectively an "anti-gay propaganda" bill. Strategic campaigning against the bill involved substantial use of digital tools both in mobilizing LGBTQI communities and in facing ever more violent opponents.

As the law was put forth in the Parliament, almost 30 hate groups mushroomed in the Kyrgyz scene promoting homophobic and transphobic hate speech offline and online under the so-called discourse of defending "traditional family values." The groups were not only well organized but also supported by authorities and mass media. Public rallies defending traditional family values were given ample media coverage, with some journalists drawing parallels between the LGBTQI community and extremism. This context led to direct violent attacks. In one incident, the headquarters of Labrys was attacked with Molotov cocktails. Another time, members of hate groups stormed another private event organized by Labrys celebrating IDAHOT.

In spite of violent circumstances, the Labrys team and the wider community developed an efficient approach to counter the anti-gay propaganda law

LGBT Organization Labrys Kyrgyzstan on the organization's 13th birthday, 2017.
Credit: LGBT Organization Labrys Kyrgyzstan

and make the voices of the community heard. As Sanjar Kurmanov, a trans activist and executive director of Labrys, told us, the Central Asia context is very different from both Asia and Europe and so far, the best advocacy strategy has been to engage with people one to one rather than to have a more visible public presence given the lack of sympathetic media and a homophobic and transphobic public opinion.

Labrys members shared information about the homophobic and transphobic incidents with the wider European and Central Asian community of activists via email and listservs and invited activists from other countries in the region to respond with experiences and practices on how to respond. Online communications facilitated Labrys' involvement of community members in an advocacy campaign. "We gathered at Labrys and we all wrote postcards with personal

messages explaining to the members of Parliament how our lives will change if the law was passed. The important part was for each community member to present his/her/their personal message. We then collected all the messages and sent them out to the Parliament and to the president," says Sanjar.

The postcards reached their addresses and one of the initiators of the anti-gay propaganda law told the media about Labrys' campaign and how upsetting it was to him and to his proposal, making himself visible to the campaign and its supporters. Sanjar Kumanov believes this strategy was very successful, as the messages sent out were open and sincere, emotional and infuriating for the initiator. "We responded with kindness and with personal stories," and this is what produced a lasting effect while also protecting community members and the organization staff from exposure to hateful media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the funding community

Identify and invest in trans-led groups and organizations in the CAEE region. As this report shows, trans activists are doing remarkable work under alarming circumstances. Funding for trans-led groups and organizations should be designed to bypass barriers connected to the closing space for civil society, especially as some of the governmental tactics involved target advocates for sexual health and rights.

Provide flexible core support for trans-led groups in order to allow these groups to invest in secure digital infrastructure, including computers, VPN access, website storage in third-party countries, encryption tools, and the establishment of peer-to-peer networks under the radar of the internet.

Provide funding to trans-led groups to assist them with strategizing and implementing holistic security plans. These plans should include at a minimum key points on personal safety online, managing digital fatigue, and organizational security offline and online. Activists need to be aware of the risks and possible mitigators encompassed by their digital lives.

Provide learning opportunities for trans activists in the CAEE region on digital security skills. Find facilitators and trainers from among trans people or at least trainers with a solid experience on working with trans people. Ensure that the digital practices shared are adequate for trans people's needs as well as to the needs of trans people involved in sex work.

Fund safe spaces for trans activists to network among each other to facilitate the exchange of experiences, strategies, and resources that each group has used so far to counter the closing spaces for civil society in the region. These spaces should prioritize self-care and well-being of participants as a built in feature. They should also assist participants with controlling online fatigue via awareness on digital consumption.

Advocate with tech and internet freedom funders for trans' activists needs that are parallel to and intersect with the larger issues of internet and media freedom.

Tailor donor funding to reflect sub-regional contexts related to homophobia and transphobia as well as with the state of internet and press freedom.

Support creative collaborations and partnerships with existing trans-friendly media outlets in order to reduce transphobic societal stereotypes and draw attention to the links between LGBTQI rights and internet freedom.

Make digital and information security a priority when communicating with trans activists in the CAEE region to ensure that your digital and information sharing practices do not increase risk for trans activists.

Recommendations for the tech community

Conduct region- and country-specific, targeted research about the tools (viruses, spyware, phishing, etc.) being used to target the trans communities to support the creation of well-informed strategies and protection mechanisms for trans activists.

Provide pro bono consulting on secure and accessible, user-friendly technology that can help trans activists secure their communication, protect sensitive information, and share trans-produced knowledge. Help trans activists build their tech skills in order to safely use the internet.

Help trans-led organizations and other vulnerable sectors of civil society create easy to use holistic security plans with matching technology.

Recommendations for social media corporations

U.S.-based corporations which services are widely used in CAEE region - Twitter/Facebook/Instagram

Respond to hate speech content perpetrated against the trans community and improve moderation tools. Have a universal, standard hate speech response system that is available in the languages of CAEE region.

Increase the level of protection during key online activist campaigns and events (e.g. TDoR).

Cease any cooperation with governments and third-party groups that endangers trans activism. In addition, increase transparency and accountability by notifying users when there are private user data requests from governments and third parties.

Make platforms more secure by providing open source end-to-end encryption.

Better inform users on how to enlist help in cases of stalking and threats.

Facebook: repeal the "real name policy" and allow users who have already been suspended under this policy to reopen their accounts or to register new accounts with the name of their choosing.[41]

Russian-based corporations whose services are widely used in CAEE region - VKontakte, Odnoklassniki

Corporate leadership of these two social networks should take steps to ensure user data protection and privacy by using their connections in the Russian parliament to advocate for a decrease in government surveillance aimed at users.

Make security and privacy policies of Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki public, including the requirements of the Yarovaya Law and how this law impacts privacy on these social media platforms.

Recommendations for governments

Lead by example: Moldova and Georgia—as the only two CAEE governments engaged in the Freedom Online Coalition—should implement and share best practices with regards to internet freedom policies with the other countries in the region and convince other countries to join the coalition through their diplomatic missions.

Recommendations for internet service providers (ISPs) and telecom companies

Oppose amendments and draft laws that governments seek to use to facilitate censorship, surveillance, and violations of users' rights.

Demand broad consultations with all stakeholders and facilitate dialogue with human rights and freedom of speech activists on internet regulations and internet governance.

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41   The "real name" policy introduced by Facebook in 2012, which requires users to prove their identity in order to create an account, directly affects the most marginalized groups, including trans persons, survivors of violence, and activists. Due to pressure, Facebook adjusted the policy in 2015, but the policy continues to fall short. (Source: https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2015/12/changes-facebooks-real-names-policy-still-dont-fix-problem)

GLOSSARY

CAEE - An acronym for Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The report uses this acronym to include countries in Central Asia, Caucasus, Post-Soviet Eastern Europe, South-East Europe and Central Europe; countries under review are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, FYROM/Macedonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

Digital security - A holistic approach to security in the online world that includes technical measures of protection including proper password hygiene, encryption protocols, and safe data transfers, as well as behavioral techniques to limit exposure to risks from one's social media presence and digital footprint, and knowledge of the legal aspects of online activity and the pros and cons of various platforms. Digital security is a key aspect that is necessary to include in considering efforts to minimize risks and mitigate threats for modern activists worldwide.[42]

Doxing - From "dox," abbreviation of "documents," this is the internet-based practice of researching and publishing private information about an individual or organization. The methods employed to acquire this information include searching publicly available databases and social media websites, hacking, and social engineering. Doxing may be carried out for various reasons, including to aid law enforcement, business analysis, stalking, harassment, online shaming, and stalking.[43]

Encryption - A method by which any type of data is converted from a readable form to an encoded version by using a system of letters, numbers, or symbols that can only be decoded by another party by using decryption key. Encryption is one of the most important methods for providing data security, especially for end-to-end protection of data transmitted across networks.[44]

Gender affirming surgery - Involves surgeries to adapt sex characteristics to allow one to feel more comfortable and at ease with one's body and/or gender identity.[45]

GONGO - An acronym for government-organized non-governmental organization, this is a non-governmental organization that was set up or sponsored by a government to further its political interests.[46]

Holistic security - An approach that seeks to integrate all the elements designed to safeguard an organization or an individual by highlighting interrelatedness of digital security, psycho-social well-being, and physical integrity.[47]

IDAHOT - International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia, which is celebrated on May 17.[48]

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42   Freedom House. (2014). Digital security: Basics and best practices. Retrieved from https://asianhrds.forum-asia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/DigitalSecurityBasicsManual.pdf

43   Newman, L.H. (2017). What to do if you've been doxed. Wired. Retrieved from https://www.wired.com/story/what-do-to-if-you-are-being-doxed/

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46   Naim, M. (2009). What is a GONGO? How government sponsored groups masquerade as civil society. Foreign Policy. Retrieved from http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/13/what-is-a-gongo/

47   Tactical Technology Collective. (2016). Holistic security: A strategy manual to help human rights defenders maintain their well-being in action. Retrieved from https://tacticaltech.org/themes/digital-security/holistic-security/

48   International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, Biphobia. What is May 17? Retrieved from: http://dayagainsthomophobia.org/

Equality March 2011, Poland. Credit: Anna Spies; obtained from Flickr Creative Commons: https://buff.ly/2E9q9pH

LGBTQI - An acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Intersex.

LISTSERV - An application that distributes messages to subscribers on an electronic mailing list.[49]

NGO - An acronym for non-governmental organization, this is usually a nonprofit organization independent from government that works on a local, national, or international level.

Odnoklassniki - (Russian: Одноклассники, meaning Classmates) A social network service developed in 2006. It is mostly popular in the Russian Federation and other former Soviet Republics with more than 200 million registered users and 45 million daily unique visitors. In 2008, Albert Popkov, the founder and key shareholder in Odnoklassniki sold controlling interest in the network to Digital Sky Technologies (DST), the owner of Mail.ru.[50]

Closing spaces for civil society - Also known as "shrinking spaces for civil society," this is characterized by state-sponsored restrictions on the fundamental rights of freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of peaceful assembly.[51]

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49   Tech Terms. Listserv. Retrieved from: https://techterms.com/definition/listserv

50   Mail.Ru Group (commonly referred to as Mail.Ru) is a Russian-based online social media and social networking service. It was started in 1998 as an email service and became a major corporate figure in the Russian-speaking segment of the Internet. Mail.Ru's sites reach approximately 86% of Russian internet users on a monthly basis and the company is in the top five of the largest internet companies. Mail.Ru controls and operates the three largest and most popular Russian social networking sites, VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, and Moi Mir. Mail.Ru Group is majority-owned by Russia's richest man Alisher Usmanov who is a close ally of Putin.

51   Mama Cash and Urgent Action Fund. (2017). Standing firm: Women and trans-led organizations respond to closing space for civil society. https://www.mamacash.org/media/publications/mc_closing_space_report_def.pdf

CSOs - An acronym for civil society organizations. CSOs include NGOs, trade unions, faith-based organizations, indigenous peoples movements, foundations, and many others.

Signal - An encrypted communications application for Android, iOS, Linux, Windows, and macOS. Signal uses standard cellular mobile numbers as identifiers, and uses end-to-end encryption to secure all communications to other Signal users. [52]

Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDoR) - An annual observance on November 20 to remember and honor the memory of trans and gender-diverse people who have been murdered as a result of transphobia and to draw attention to the continued violence committed toward the trans community. [53]

Two-Step Verification - An extra layer of security that requires not only a password and username, but also a code that you receive via SMS or a code generator app. An alternative is to use a security key, which is usually regarded as the safest method.[54]

Viber - An instant messaging and voice over IP (VoIP) application operated by Japanese multinational company Rakuten. Viber became more secure when it introduced end-to-end encryption in 2016.[55]

VKontakte (VK) - (Russian: ВКонта́кте, meaning InContact) A Russian-based social networking service that is available in several languages, but it is especially popular among Russian-speaking users. According to market intelligence tool SimilarWeb, VK is the sixth most popular website in the world. Even though

VK's origin story is very similar to Facebook's (a university student named Pavel Durov created it for other students to stay in touch with classmates), it had a much more complicated trajectory. In 2011, Russian authorities asked Durov to shut down several pages dedicated to activist groups within Russia. After Durov refused, complicated backroom deals and external pressures resulted in him selling his shares in VK, which is now primarily controlled by corporations and individuals who are more cooperative with the government.[56] As a Russian company, it adheres to Russian copyright and IP laws.

VPN - An acronym for virtual private network, this is a technology that creates a safe connection over a less secure network. It is used as a way not to not expose yourself by revealing your actual IP address location. It is designed to provide a secure tunnel through encryption in which the data between the remote users can be transmitted without interception. [57]

Yarovaya Law - Also known as Yarovaya package, this is a pair of Russian federal bills, 374-FZ and 375-FZ, passed in 2016. Among other amendments, the law requires telecommunication industries to assist the government in breaking into encrypted messages. [58]

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52   Signal. Technology preview: Private contact discovery for Signal. Retrieved from https://signal.org/blog/private-contact-discovery/

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54   Google. 2-step verification. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/landing/2step/

55   Viber. Giving our users control over their private conversations. Retrieved from https://www.viber.com/blog/2016-04-19/giving-our-users-control-over-their-private-conversations

56   Toor, A. (2014, January 31). How Putin's cronies seized control of Russia's Facebook. The Verge. Retrieved from https://www.theverge.com/2014/1/31/5363990/how-putins-cronies-seized-control-over-russias-facebook-pavel-durov-vk

57   Alan Henry (2012, May 9). Why you should be using a VPN (and how to choose one). Retrieved from https://lifehacker.com/5940565/why-you-should-start-using-a-vpn-and-how-to-choose-the-best-one-for-your-needs

58   Definition of Yarovaya Law retrieved from https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoypizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/Yarovaya_Law.html

TGEU

Transgender Europe

tgeu.org

Astraea LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE

astraeafoundation.org