

MONITORING OF THE HATE SPEECH

against LGBTQ+
in the media
of Belarus in 2022

*Results
for January-October
2022*



Human rights initiative
"Journalists for Tolerance"

Minsk, 2022

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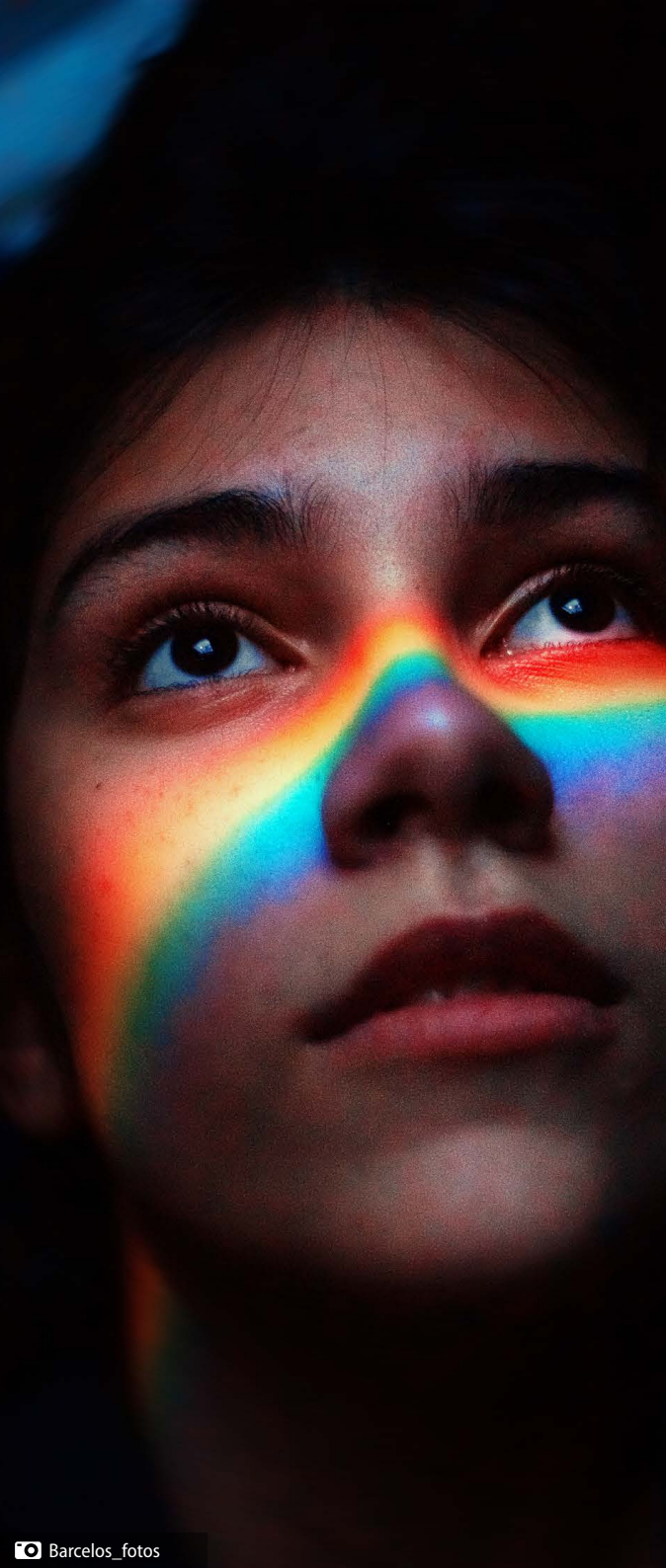
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Introduction

Journalists for Tolerance regularly monitor hate speech against vulnerable groups in the Belarusian media, including annual monitoring of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric. For the ten months, from January to October 2022, we observed rhetorical fallacies against LGBTQ+.

The purpose of the monitoring is to provide a systematic review of the use of incorrect vocabulary and manifestations of hate speech in the Belarusian media against vulnerable groups, paying special attention to statements that stigmatize LGBT persons.



What is hate speech?

We understand the "hate speech" as a special way of linguistic construction of models and practices of social inequality¹ and take it as an axiom that incorrect rhetorical strategies can strengthen (and, at the extreme, generate) discriminatory practices. We believe the opposite is also true: correct rhetoric can help build relationships between representatives of different social groups based on the principles of equality and mutual respect.

In accordance with the methodological recommendations of human rights organizations in Belarus², within the framework of this monitoring, we distinguish between 'hate speech' and 'incorrect vocabulary'.

By 'incorrect vocabulary' we mean stereotypical formulations regarding vulnerable groups of the population that do not pose a threat to security, do not contain calls for violence and do not dehumanize people from vulnerable groups. The uncritical use of stereotypes by journalists can create a breeding ground for the manifestations of more dangerous forms of 'hate speech'. At the same time, there should be no legal responsibility for such statements.

By 'hate speech' we mean statements that pose a threat to public safety, incite hatred and dehumanize certain groups of people. We conditionally divide hate speech manifestations into three groups, which differ in the threshold of seriousness in the expression of hate:

- direct calls to incite hatred, incitement to genocide, discrimination and violence;
- threats or insults motivated by a discriminatory attitude;
- statements containing discriminatory and stigmatizing attitudes.

Thus, individual publications included in the monitoring may be encoded as containing incorrect vocabulary or as containing hate speech. We believe that even certain signs of incorrect rhetoric, being widespread, acceptable and accepted by default, are able to support existing discriminatory practices. Therefore, we strive to fix and pay attention to any manifestations of incorrect rhetoric, regardless of their severity.

If during the monitoring we classify a publication as containing hate speech, it means that this journalistic material contradicts the corporate standards of the Belarusian media sphere and requires a response from the journalistic community.

¹ Индекс (ин)толерантности прессы. Э. Понарин, Д. Дубровский, А. Толкачева, Р. Акифьева // Язык вражды против общества/ Сост. А. Верховенский. – Москва: Центр «Сова», 2007.

² Hate Speech. Методические рекомендации правозащитных организаций в Беларуси.

Which media are monitored?

The monitoring focuses on the texts circulating in the media space of Belarus. The list of media outlets is formed in accordance with the following criteria:

1. The media has a website or a telegram channel.
2. The media appeals to a wide audience (i.e., the magazine 'Glavnyi Bukhgalter' (Chief Accountant) and the like were removed from the list; male and female publications remained, a newspaper for teenagers remained on the list as directed towards an audience sensitive to the topic of sexuality and gender identity).
3. The media publishes materials on socio-political topics (i.e., a newspaper of advertisements or jokes could not get into the list).

We identified 216 media outlets that meet these criteria and divided them into 4 clusters depending on the scale (national and local) and the average monthly number of publications (up to 300 publications, 300 or more publications).

From the entire list divided in this way, 7 media outlets were selected to each cluster, for a total of 28 resources.

After August 2020, the media space of Belarus has changed a lot: the Lukashenka regime closed the largest Internet portal tut.by, recognized as extremist and blocked the work of other

media, independent of the government. More than half of the media that were included in our monitoring are currently blocked and are only available on social networks/messengers or via VPN.

What questions does the monitoring answer and whom its results are addressed to?

Within this monitoring, the following issues are analyzed in detail:

1. Which categories of media are more likely to use incorrect rhetoric against LGBTQ+ (and, consequently, which media authors should be the main target group of educational events)?
2. Which incorrect rhetorical strategies are the most common (and, therefore, what should be the content of educational seminars, manuals for journalists, etc.)?
3. How has the use of incorrect rhetoric against LGBTQ+ in the Belarusian media changed compared to previous years (and, consequently, how effective are educational events, educational seminars, manuals for journalists)?

The monitoring results are addressed to the journalistic community, human rights defenders, representatives of vulnerable groups (in this particular case, the LGBT community), as well as educational organizations and initiatives working with the topic of hate speech.

Methodology and data collection

The study is based on a cluster stratified sample representing online media in Belarus. Both websites and telegram channels are considered as online media.

In 2022, the following outlets were included in the list of monitored media:

- Websites

[Sputnik Belarus](#)

[SB. Belarus today](#)

[Onliner](#)

[aif.by](#)

[mensby.com](#)

[Brest Courier \(Brest\)](#)

[Hrodzienskaya prauda \(Hrodna\)](#)

[Vecherniy Mogilev](#)

[/s13.ru/](#)

[Minsk-news](#)

[Homiel'skaya prauda \(Homiel\)](#)

[Svetlaye zhyt'stsio \(Lelchytsy\)](#)

[Selskaya prauda \(Zhabinka\)](#)

[Ranak \(Svetlahorsk\)](#)

[Astravets'kaya prauda \(Astravets\)](#)

[Luninetskiya naviny \(Luninets\)](#)

- Telegram channels
- Zerkalo
- Tea with raspberry jam
- Radio Svaboda
- Nash Niva
- Pool pervogo
- Nick and Mike
- Strong news (Homiel)
- Couloirs of KUKU
- Yellow plums
- Nasty Kokobai
- NEXTA Live
- Typical Belarus

In the materials published in these media from January to October 2022, a keyword search was conducted. After the initial selection of all publications on the topic of LGBTQ+, all materials were analyzed for the content of incorrect vocabulary. Each publication containing incorrect vocabulary was additionally analyzed to find hate speech manifestations.

Having an archive of monitoring regarding LGBTQ+ topics in previous years³ allows us to compare the situation in 2022 with the data of 2019-2021.

A database consolidation of all the publications selected for monitoring is attached to this report — see the file Appendix. Hate Speech Monitoring, 2022.xlsx.

Coverage of LGBTQ+ topics in the Belarusian media

In January–October 2022, 25 out of 28 Belarusian online media selected for monitoring wrote at least once on the topic of LGBTQ+. In total, 290 materials published during the specified period were monitored.

This is 6.6% more than in the same period of 2021. At the same time, in 2020-2021, we recorded a decrease in the number of publications, first due to the influence of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and then, starting from August 2020, because of the political crisis in Belarus.

- Interestingly, the topic of LGBTQ+ in the Belarusian media appears more often in a non-Belarusian context: the life and situation of LGBT people in Belarus is touched upon only in 19% of all publications on this topic. Another 12% are talking about the opposition of traditional values in Belarus to LGBT propaganda, At the same time,

most publications on the latter topic appear in the context of Russia.

- It is also important to keep in mind that only 39% of the monitored publications were completely devoted to LGBT people or LGBT topics, whereas in the absolute majority of materials this topic was touched upon only in one or two sentences.
- In January-October 2022, media with national coverage published 3.5 times more materials on LGBTQ+-related topics than local media. In 2021, the gap was smaller, which indicates that the topic of LGBTQ+ is going out of regional media attention.
- In 2022, the share of incorrect materials exceeded the share of correct ones for the first time after 2018: 53% of publications contain incorrect vocabulary regarding LGBTQ+, while only 47% — correct. Our monitoring showed a steady decline in the share of correct materials already in 2020-2021, but then their share still exceeded the share of incorrect ones.
- 60% of incorrect vocabulary cases were found in the materials in which the LGBTQ+ topic was discussed in full or in a significant part. At the same time, earlier incorrect vocabulary was more common where LGBTQ+ was only one of several topics discussed or only one or two sentences were devoted to this topic. Thus, if earlier the problem was insufficient attention

³ См. раздел «Наши исследования» на сайте правозащитной инициативы «Журналисты за толерантность»: <https://j4t.by/category/issledovaniya/>

to the topic, now, on the contrary, it is because of too much attention.

- Almost three out of every four publications that contain incorrect vocabulary also contain hate speech manifestations in the form of stigmatizing or discriminating statements.
- Moreover, 7% of publications that contain formally correct vocabulary nevertheless contain hate speech manifestations. This is the first time we have observed such a situation during the entire monitoring period.
- Thus, in 2022, 44% of publications on LGBTQ+ in the Belarusian media contain hate speech manifestations. This is significantly more than in 2021, when hate speech manifestations were found in 24% of publications. The political crisis continues, and the rate of increase

in hate speech manifestations in the media is really frightening.

Since the second half of 2020, we have seen that the predominance of correct vocabulary over incorrect in the Belarusian media space has become less stable and continued to weaken in 2021, until the picture changed to the opposite in 2022. In relatively recent waves of monitoring (before the 2020 political crisis), we have seen that the national media use correct vocabulary in relation to LGBTQ+ more and more often, while in local media the use of incorrect vocabulary remained unchanged. However, now we note that there are no differences between the media with national and local coverage, and the proportion of incorrect publications prevails in both.

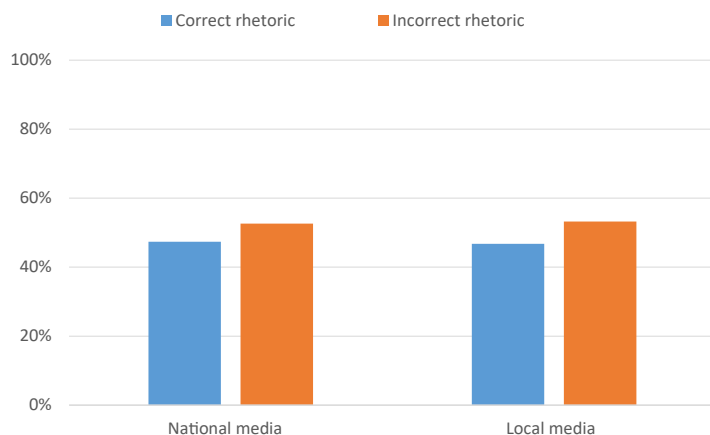


Figure 1. Breakdown of correct and incorrect LGBTQ+ publications depending on media coverage

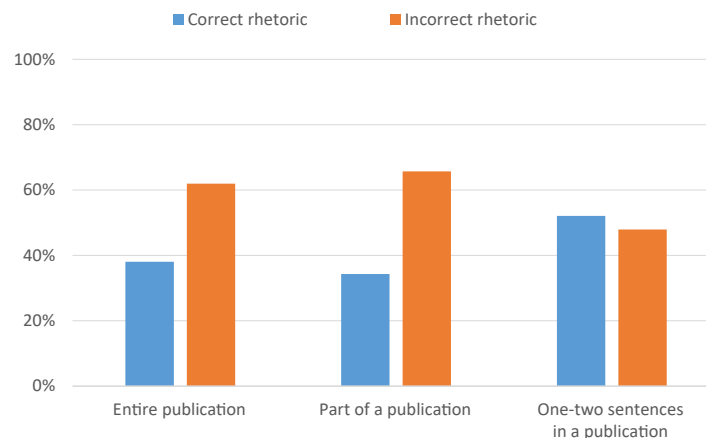


Figure 2. Breakdown of correct and incorrect publications on the topic of LGBTQ+, depending on the volume devoted to this topic

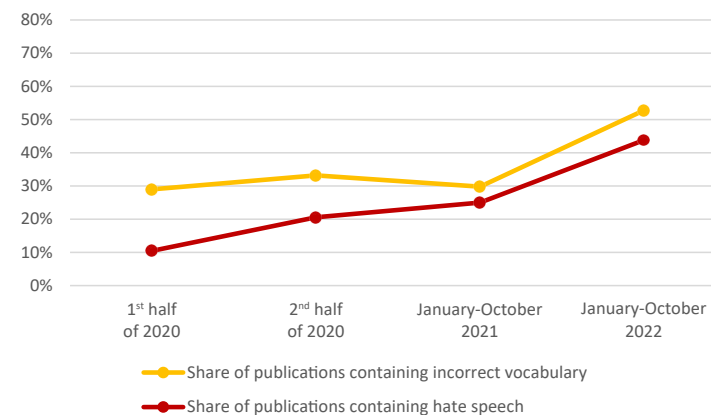


Figure 3. Dynamics of the share of publications containing incorrect vocabulary and hate speech in 2020-2022.

In addition, if earlier publications that were entirely devoted to LGBT people or LGBT topics contained correct vocabulary in almost 90% of cases, in 2022, this share is 2.5 times less and is only 38%. Thus, now manifestations of incorrect vocabulary are found in more than 60% of publications that deeply cover this topic. This is an obvious regression even compared to the situation in 2021.

The decrease in the number of publications on LGBTQ+, recorded by us since the beginning of March 2020, is still accompanied by a simultaneous increase in the share of publications containing hate speech. Moreover, with an increase

in the share of publications with incorrect vocabulary of more than 50%, the share of publications containing hate speech manifestations has also increased dramatically — almost twice when compared to the 2021 result.

Before the coronavirus, only every 25th publication on this topic reproduced and supported stigmatizing or discriminating attitudes towards LGBT people, after the beginning of its first wave, every seventh publication on the topic contained manifestations; after the beginning of the political crisis, every fifth; in 2021 — every fourth, and in 2022 — almost every second.

Visibility of groups within LGBTQ+

We interpret the different frequency of keyword mentions as different visibility of groups within LGBTQ+. Recent monitoring data indicated the consolidation and use as synonyms of two key categories, often representing LGBTQ+ as a whole: LGBT and gays. However, according to the results of monitoring in January-October 2021, it is possible to observe the predominance of the LGBT category over the rest. At the same time, the TOP 5 categories included 'same-sex relationships/marriages', 'non-traditional orientation' and 'transgender' - these categories are actively used by journalists

from state media when criticizing the contemporary lifestyle of Western countries.

In general, the use of incorrect expressions 'non-traditional orientation', 'sexual minority' and 'homosexuality' occurs in 16% of cases, which is similar to previous year's level. At the same time,

in 2022, we fix the use of the expressions "non-binary" and "rainbow" to define LGBTQ+ representatives. It is also worth noting that, starting in 2020, again, for the first time after a break of several years, the words 'Sodom' and 'sodomite' began to appear in publications. In 2022, these words still occur.

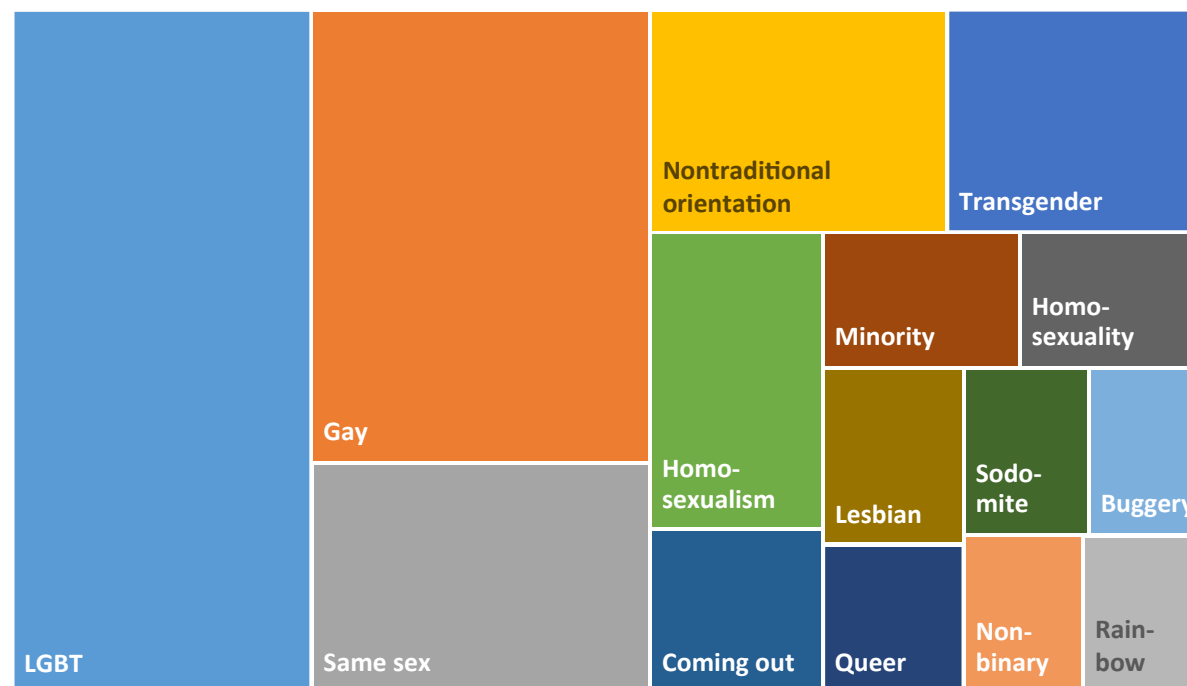


Figure 4. Keywords mentioning⁴ in LGBTQ+ related publications.

⁴ This chart shows the ratio of mentions of individual keywords in publications that touch on LGBTQ+ topics. Information about absolute values for this indicator can be found in the database consolidation, which is an appendix to this report — see the file "Appendix. Monitoring of the "language of enmity", 2021.xlsx».

Summary

In 2022, 53% of media publications contained incorrect vocabulary regarding LGBTQ+, and only 47% — correct. The share of incorrect materials in the media again exceeds the share of correct ones, and the trend is negative.

In 2022, incorrect vocabulary began to occur as often in the national media as in the local media, this is a significant regression compared

to the situation before the beginning of the political crisis in Belarus.

In 2022, almost every second publication on the topic of LGBTQ+ in the Belarusian media contained hate speech manifestations.

In 2022, we are witnessing for the first time a situation where correct vocabulary is used to incite hatred. As for incorrect vocabulary, in most cases it is accompanied by hate speech manifestations.



**Human rights initiative
"Journalists for Tolerance"**
j4t.info



E-mail: info@j4t.by

