

# Draft legislation in Ukraine targets same-sex relationships

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## **A Ukrainian MP has introduced legislation to criminalise same sex relationships and protect traditional values.**

Earlier this month, Oleksandr Vilkul, an MP from Ukraine's Opposition Bloc party, the successor to Viktor Yanukovych's Party of Regions, registered [draft bill No.9183](#), "on the introduction of changes in certain legislation in Ukraine relating to the protection of public morals and traditional values".

This is Vilkul's first legislative foray into LGBT and gender issues. Most of Vilkul's [draft bills](#) since Ukraine's 2014 parliamentary election have concerned pensioners' social welfare, the rights of temporarily displaced persons, education, budget amendments, taxes and land regulations. In June 2018, however, the MP filed several draft bills on the same subject areas as those he has revisited now — public morality and family values, changes to the Action Plan for the implementation of Ukraine's national Human Rights strategy up to 2020, and creating a basis for the country's family policies.

In the explanatory note to draft bill No.9183, Vilkul stresses the need for such a law, given that the state is paying particular attention to "the artificially created problem of discrimination against people with non-traditional sexual orientation". The accompanying documentation to the bill makes no reference to attacks faced by LGBT activists in Ukraine or how the police classify these attacks. Ukraine's Penal Code contains a specific article on hate crime, but it often remains unused in such cases, and most attacks are qualified under "hooliganism". Vilkul also explains why equality marches, Pride events, gay parades and queer culture festivals must be banned as forms of "deviant behaviour".

The bill proposes to remove the terms "sexual orientation", "gender identity", "gender equality" and "gender-based legal assessment" from Ukrainian legislation

The MP's draft bill provides for a fine of an amount between 1,000 and 1,500 non-taxable minimum incomes for "demonstrating same-sex relationships", which is to be raised to the amount of 3,000 non-taxable minimum incomes if the "offender" is a public official of any kind. A repeat offence may result in a three to five year custodial sentence, with officials liable to a four to six year sentence. Importing publications that "promote same sex relationships", their distribution and possession will entail a prison term of up to three years. The bill also proposes to remove the terms "sexual orientation", "gender identity", "gender equality" and "gender-based legal assessment" from Ukrainian legislation. Vilkul dismisses these terms as anti-scientific and ideologically biased. He would like to replace them with "equal rights and opportunities for men and women", "a legal assessment to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women" and "a culture of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for men and women".

Vilkul's draft bill would provide different rights to balance its restrictions on LGBT rights: financial aid during pregnancy, childbirth and maternity leave and after the age of three (at present, women are entitled to partially paid leave until their child's third birthday); social grants and financial help for students from large families and orphaned students and free school meals and transport for pupils in school classes 1-4 (7-11 year olds - ed.). The bill would also allow existing schools to be closed down only if the communities in their local villages and towns agree to this step. According to the MP, all the social welfare initiatives he proposes are designed to support families and the children growing up in them. But the bill's logic, and evidently also Vilkul's, excludes any connection between LGBT people and families, as if children, and consequently maternity leave and benefits, can only happen in heterosexual families.

The bill will be examined by a number of parliamentary committees, including the Committees on Family Issues, Youth Policies, Sport and Tourism and Freedom of Speech and Information Policies. But the most pertinent committee is the Committee on Human Rights, Ethnic Minorities and Inter-Ethnic Relations. This is how a frankly homophobic bill designed to work on the "carrot and stick" principle, where criminal charges for same-sex relationships are matched with free school meals, will progress through hearings by a committee which is forbidden to permit any kind of discrimination in legislative initiatives. March of equality, 2018, Kyiv. Source: YouTube. This particular initiative of Vilkul's will probably not pass the first hurdle and will be sent off for reworking, if not rejected out of hand. But it's worth taking not just the antidemocratic views of its creator into account, but the time at which it was registered in parliament.

There's just over half a year left before Ukraine's next presidential election and a year before its parliamentary elections. The approach of these dates is evident in the infinite variety of pre-election political PR and propaganda. The opposition is exercised by the number of potholes in the roads around the country, while the government stresses the number that have been resurfaced. For many years now, candidates have been buying voters' support with food parcels containing buckwheat kasha, sunflower oil and preserves. Some parcels also contain election leaflets, to remind people who they should vote for. But while the free food is still a few months away, the Opposition Bloc MP has decided to target the voters with tales of the differences in value systems between Ukraine and the EU, which continues to "inflict propaganda of homosexual relationships" on the former. It's easy, after all, to say that the government and media are hung up on the country's LGBT issues, while forgetting the plight of children who require assistance.

One of the most vulnerable groups in society has become a punch bag, to be bashed at the slightest opportunity. Political propaganda, even in wartime, continues to polarise a society that is already divided by the physical borders of the occupying "governments" in Donbas and Crimea. Meanwhile, gay people [take part in art projects](#), showing that they too are volunteers, whether civil or military, and soldiers. In return, they face possible arrest and prison. And the people who are proposing this are former members of the party of fugitive president Viktor Yanukovich, whose case is currently being heard in Kyiv's Obolonsky courthouse.

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