Russian gay family flees to Spain after threats

August 5, 2021

BBC News

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-58103833>

A Russian lesbian family who featured in a controversial health food ad say they have left Russia after suffering online abuse and death threats.

The mother, Yuma, said on Instagram "we're safe, we're resting".

The family were targeted in a hate campaign after appearing in an ad for grocery chain VkusVill. The firm later apologised and replaced the photo with one of a heterosexual family.

Yuma's daughter Mila wrote in an online post that they are now in Barcelona.

Both Yuma and her oldest daughter Alina are in same-sex relationships.

Mila said "now my family and I really need to get settled in Barcelona, these are not easy times for us and we need friends".

Yuma's post showed herself and family members looking happy in a park with palm trees, and waving a rainbow LGBT flag.

She thanked their social media followers who had supported them, and said fleeing the Russian hate campaign had left them shaken.

"This was a tough ordeal for all of us, we're all in a fragile psychological state," she said.

A later post shows them in what appears to be a metro station in Barcelona, with Yuma's caption explaining that they had to leave Russia "so that my daughter could marry her girlfriend". Yuma voiced her own pain at having been rejected by her parents "because I'm a lesbian".

"In Russia we're denied the basic right to have a family. No matter who we are, we should all have that right!"

Last month VkusVill apologised after its original ad, showing the same-sex family, had triggered strong reactions on social media.

"There was an article here that hurt the feelings of many of our customers, staff, partners and suppliers," the organic health food chain said.

A 2013 law in Russia - widely condemned in the West - bans any promotion of gay values and lifestyles to minors.

Homophobia is widespread in Russia, where many supporters of President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church identify LGBT+ activists with Western liberal values, seen as contrary to Russian tradition.

In a YouTube interview, recorded just before their departure, the family described the hate campaign directed against them. They spoke to YouTuber Karen Shainyan, who discusses LGBT issues on his channel.

Yuma said "I was just knocked back by comments to my granddaughter, where some people wrote that they wanted to rape her, kill her, stab a child who is just sitting and smiling in the photograph". She added: "I'm most afraid for my granddaughter."

She said they had experienced previous homophobic attacks, including ones targeting the Bok o Bok (side by side) LGBT international film festival in Russia.

"In Moscow it was hell, there was an ambush, some chemicals were thrown at our volunteers," she said, referring to Bok o Bok.