

'Men Only': Largest Pool in Russia's North Caucasus Bans Women

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A different public pool in the Dagestani city of Makhachkala had turned away a female visitor in 2011 because other clientele were “embarrassed by the presence of half-naked women.” **Sergei Bobylev / TASS**

A swimming pool in southern Russia has banned women without explanation, according to its announcement [published](#) by the popular listings magazine Afisha on Monday.

The Anzhi Arena spa in Russia’s republic of Dagestan did not say what prompted the abrupt rule change. Afisha reported that a different public pool in the Dagestani city of Makhachkala had turned away a female visitor in 2011 because other clientele were “embarrassed by the presence of half-naked women.”

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“Pool attendance is for men only starting Jan. 20,” the curt message reads on the Anzhi Arena spa’s now-private Instagram page.

Afisha provided a screenshot of the post, which had gained 158 “likes” and no comments.

The spa later [switched](#) its Instagram page to private, limiting access to its 6,000 followers.

It is common in the North Caucasus region to find sports facilities offering men and women access on separate days of the week. But a complete ban on women using the pool goes against the Russian constitution, activists said.

Fatima Abdulkhalimova, 31, said she could no longer use the pool despite working there as an instructor.

"I do demonstrations, show people the correct technique, and now I'm not allowed to enter the water," Abdulkhalimova, a former professional swimmer, said.

"I think it's to do with religion, I believe it is because a lot of religious guys come here," she said.

Access to the pool had initially been permitted for both men and women, she said, before being restricted to Fridays only for women.

If having women-only days was not financially viable, then why not simply return to the earlier, mixed-gender system, Abdulkhalimova questioned.

Three women from Dagestan have now filed a complaint to the regional Prosecutor's Office accusing the sports complex of unconstitutional gender-based discrimination, a copy of the document, shared by Olga Gnezdilova, a lawyer with the Rights Initiative Project, showed.

Anzhi Arena described its 50-meter swimming pool as the North Caucasus region's largest when it [opened](#) in the summer of 2019.

Human rights groups have for years criticized women's rights violations in the region, which local authorities dismiss as a misunderstanding of local traditions.

Reuters contributed reporting.

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