

Activity Report

NOV 2019 - OCT 2020

Introduction

In March, when the COVID-19 crisis hit Europe and we all went into lockdown, my immediate thinking was towards keeping the ILGA-Europe team going. How could I protect and support our staff? How could I look out for our board members across Europe, taking into account what they were experiencing? Then there was an immediate added layer, which was about asking who else do we have a commitment and a responsibility towards? Who depends on us continuing to do the work?

Unbeknownst to myself, I was implementing part one of what would become our three-step plan for COVID-19, 'Protect, Adapt, Rally'. This plan has underpinned much of our work over the past seven months, and now it's the theme for The Gathering Online, the replacement for our annual conference, which was supposed to take place in Sofia this year but, for obvious reasons, cannot.

Since the COVID-19 crisis went global, it has become an undeniable fact that we are at a crossroads for our societies in so many different ways, from the fact that governmental responses to the pandemic pushed all the structural and socio-economic inequalities that exist in our societies to the forefront, to the fact that we are finally acknowledging structural racism and there's no going back, to the fact that the pandemic has hugely amplified all of the political challenges that were there already, populism, authoritarianism, questioning of democracies, and so on.

So, we are in this dramatic moment in history, and yet at the same time I feel calm when I look at ILGA-Europe. The reason for this is that our response to the crisis, and the fact that our other work didn't falter, have demonstrated how we've built this organisation, and how we've built our organisational capacity to be resilient, and to adapt, which significantly is the second part of our plan for the crisis.

We've built our capacity to be agile. We've built our capacity to cope with change, and to deal with the uncertainty that is brought about by change. We're more and more able to handle the difficulties amidst that uncertainty, to accept that there are unknowns and to not try and find solutions everywhere. This doesn't necessarily make the work always nice, easy and pleasant, but the COVID-19 crisis has showed that we're able to do deal with that fact too.

This report is structured under our Strategic Framework for 2019 – 2023, but when I began putting it together I wondered if, because of the enormous disruption that has happened since March, I should report completely outside the Framework. What I came to understand is that in the current context, our Strategic Framework still makes complete sense. The paths are the same paths in how you achieve change, even if we have found ourselves doing the work differently. We might be paying attention to different issues or we might be addressing the issues differently, but the paths remain the same and the roles that we've carved out and identified for ILGA-Europe remain intact.

Introduction

We keep on having to reinvent and be creative, to adjust and do things slightly differently or very differently, but it's still fundamentally about playing the same function. The fact that we solidly continue to play that function is a positive we can take from all that has happened.

We've proven this year that ILGA-Europe is still relevant. We have been doing what we needed to do, and we continue with steady intent. We continue to support people to the best of our ability and every signal is that whatever we've offered, and are offering is relevant and meaningful. We've played our role in activating and pushing the institutions and governments, and they are, to a large extent, listening and taking the action they need to take.

At the same time, the ways in which we work have fundamentally changed, and arising from that is the trickier question of how this will affect us in the long run. Seven months after the first Western lockdowns, we are all coming to the conclusion that we can't replace social interaction, or that there's only so much that you can replace with digital interaction. The move to online work has opened up a few unexpected opportunities in terms of reach, in terms of the creativity that comes from using different tools, but what does it mean in terms of ILGA-Europe's ability to stay connected with the lived realities of the community and of our members? That is clearly something we have to look at as we go into 2021, because connection is the fuel that drives ILGA-Europe's work. The connections that existed are still there and we need to maintain them, but creating new ones is, and will be challenging.

Our annual conference is a core example of how the European and Central Asian LGBTI movement, and in turn ILGA-Europe thrives on connection. For so many people every year, it's an absolutely exhausting few days, but also extraordinarily reinvigorating and re-energising, because the conference is a place where people indeed get connected, reconnected, challenged, pushed, have fun, and realise that they have a lot in common. For the ILGA-Europe team it's also the moment where vital conversations take place, which end up as the building blocks for our work. These conversations take place not only at the structured sessions, but in the less structured social spaces too, where unexpected discussions can spring up.

In this way, I don't think anything can ever replace the physical conference. This said, we can't predict what The Gathering Online will bring us. Some members have told me that they're dearly looking forward to feeling a sense of connection with others, even if it's just through Zoom. We all long for that sense of connection, so all at ILGA-Europe are hoping that whatever we're offering people will bring, at least for a moment, that sense that they're still part of that larger movement and they're not alone.

Introduction

In itself, The Gathering Online is an illustration of where we're at in the world right now. In many ways the challenge is in bringing diverse experiences of a common phenomenon together in order to ask the questions that will help us move forward. There are some core developments happening in our world which are pretty much affecting everyone, so that's where we need to focus our time and energy, whilst at the same time making sure we're bringing the diversity of experiences of how these major events and elements are impacting people.

Early on in the lockdown I went through a moment of optimism, thinking that maybe we had come to a moment in which to reinvent the world. Hopefully we could turn this crisis into an opportunity. Looking back, I think that was a kind of naive optimism, in that I thought this might happen overnight, the same way I thought we might soon return to our normal ways of living. I still firmly believe that we are at one of those moments in history where we can make profound choices that will radically change the course of our societies, but clearly we need to go through a really difficult time in order to recreate.

The Gathering Online constitutes the third part of our 'Protect, Adapt, Rally' plan. Part of that rallying is in acknowledging that we don't have answers now, and that we won't have answers for a while. But we need to rally around a common vision and steer the course, with hope and clarity, even though we understand that things will not be easy in the coming time.

Throughout this forthcoming journey, the staff and board of ILGA-Europe will continue to stand firmly and compassionately, working for and in solidarity with every one of our member organisations, and with activists and communities across Europe and Central Asia.



Evelyne Paradis,
Executive Director

Report on ILGA-Europe's Strategic Framework 2019-2023

Highlights and Achievements

This section aims to report on the work done by ILGA-Europe towards achieving the goals set out under our Strategic Framework 2019-2023.

This report covers work carried out between November 2019 and October 2020

Pathway 1: Empowered and inclusive LGBTI communities

The first pathway towards achieving our vision is having an “Empowered and inclusive LGBTI communities”. This pathway is about how LGBTI people – including those who are underrepresented and/or marginalised – have safe(er) spaces to come together, can access services and support that respond to their needs, feel empowered to exercise their rights, have a voice in decision-making processes that impact their daily lives, all aspects which were profoundly challenged by the measures taken to respond to the pandemic across the region.

Pathway 1

WHAT'S CHANGED?

One of the things that changed most drastically and suddenly this year for everyone is the way we go about community organising and community support, which depend to such a large extent on people being able to meet and connect in person. Where ILGA-Europe had been contributing to strengthening existing capacities of LGBTI groups and organisations to engage in community organising in the past, what we could offer this year was to support exchange of practices and experiences of moving community organising online, including through a webinar and other tools. (as part of our 'Protect, Adapt and Rally' package, see Pathway 2).

We have been going through this learning ourselves. We've said before that the Annual Conference is the closest we get at ILGA-Europe to creating a community space. And so, like so many community spaces this year, we had to rethink and reinvent it.

Deciding to cancel the in-person conference originally planned in Sofia was a difficult decision to make but an important one. Organising The Gathering Online 2020 involved completely rethinking what it meant to create a safe space and how to make people feel connected and engaged when we're online; how to be able to have meaningful conversations about complex issues while figuring how to use new technical tools; how to overcome new barriers to participation and inclusion of those whose voices are not heard. Through The Gathering and other online events, we are ourselves learning about both the advantages and the disadvantages of online organising, and sharing this learning whenever possible.

WHAT WE LEARNED

We are acknowledging that significant learning has to be done as online work becomes a new normal, and a feature of our world likely to remain beyond the pandemic. Beyond building our technical skills, it is about understanding how digital tools and platforms can contribute positively to community organising, but also about naming challenges and limitations of connecting virtually. We're also fully aware of how easily most marginalised communities become even more marginalised and vulnerable in a world largely gone digital. How we can support the thinking going on when it comes to online organising and reaching out to everyone is an important question for ILGA-Europe as we move forward.

Pathway 2: Strong, resourced, skilled, accountable and sustainable LGBTI movements

The second pathway towards achieving our vision is “Strong, resourced, skilled, accountable and sustainable LGBTI movements”. This implies that LGBTI groups and organisations have access to sufficient, appropriate and sustainable resources to carry out their work – resources in terms of money, skills and knowledge, people (within the movement and outside), in a way to drive change, and enable them to effectively respond to emerging threats to their communities, or to seize opportunities that emerge to drive change.

This pathway is one that did change quite a bit in form, but certainly not in terms of objective. Our work remained more than ever aimed at responding to emerging needs within LGBTI movements in Europe and Central Asia, and at supporting LGBTI activists by bringing together knowledge and resources. So, while there were changes in our activities, most went forward as planned, though maybe in a slightly different format and with a bit of delay.

Pathway 2

WHAT'S CHANGED?

In April, as a response to the particular challenges posed by the pandemic for LGBTI groups and organisations, ILGA-Europe launched our three-part plan 'Protect, Adapt and Rally' to support LGBTI organisations in Europe and Central Asia in continuing their crucial work at the frontline through a rapidly changing landscape. With the 'Protect, Adapt, Rally' plan, we:

Provided advice and resources to enable LGBTI organisations adapt to new working situations and conditions, including on: managing organisations and teams through the crisis; working remotely; transitioning to online campaigning and community organising; communications in times of crisis; digital security; online management of finances and online fundraising events. We also provided details on legal service providers that are offering their services pro bono to LGBTI organisations. This was done through blogs, Instagram Live broadcasts, downloadable booklets and website.

Facilitated exchange of learning amongst LGBTI activists on how to meet new needs of the LGBTI community which arise as the COVID-19 crisis continues and beyond. This was done through series of webinars (communications; community engagement during the pandemic; community outreach; and organising Prides online), Instagram Live broadcasts and online peer support groups.

RESOURCE MOBILISATION FOR LGBTI ACTIVISM

Another important part of our work has been turned to the impact of the pandemic on resources for LGBTI work in our region. Firstly, we have been monitoring the situation by launching a survey on the impact on funding for LGBTI groups, which we have shared with a range of funders/donors. We also continue to share information about funding opportunities for LGBTI activists on a rolling basis. Secondly, we looked at how to support LGBTI groups and organisations to meet their emerging and longer-term needs, and created the "No One Left Behind" fund.

We launched this new initiative to support the LGBTI movement's capacity to effectively address socio-economic inequalities within LGBTI communities at this critical moment. We made 25 grants (out of 66 applicants) to support LGBTI groups and organisations to strengthen skills and knowledge, build alliances and relationships, and/or test new types of activities. These grants were made with a view to developing longer-term responses to underlying causes of social and economic inequalities, which increase the vulnerability and marginalisation of LGBTI people, especially in times of crisis. Importantly, the majority of these grants have been awarded to groups representing communities that are most affected by the impact of the crises, including LGBTI sex workers, migrants and trans groups.

Pathway 2

WHAT WENT FORWARD?

CAPACITY BUILDING

A significant part of our activities focused on strengthening the capacity of LGBTI groups and organisations on security, safety and well-being issues. In partnership with the Dignity for All consortium, we continued to provide direct support to members in countries where LGBTI rights are under threat and where the sustainability of the work of LGBTI organisations is at stake. This collaboration supports LGBTI activists to continue their work. For instance, during the lockdown activists who couldn't continue their work from their (family) homes were supported to continue their work elsewhere.

We have also supported physical and digital security work, for instance by running an online training course on security for Central Asian activists. A series of webinars organised over the past months was designed to support organisations in strengthening their approach to wellbeing. This work will continue over the next little while, as wellbeing is a vital aspect of organisations' sustainability these days.

In addition to ongoing work on strategic communications (see Pathway 4), this year ILGA-Europe explored what good governance means in the context of LGBTI organisations and groups. In addition to building on our knowledge about different models of organisational structures and practices, we launched a survey for members and partners to collect information about the challenges and solutions LGBTI groups have in developing their approaches to good governance and accountability. In the coming months we will be publishing the results of this work and will start offering a few peer-learning opportunities for organisations on priority issues. We also held several training and webinars on financial and administrative management and on reporting for grantees.

Facilitating exchange of knowledge within the region is one of the most important functions ILGA-Europe can play. We are very excited to be launching The Hub – ILGA-Europe's LGBTI Resource Sharing Centre in early November. The Hub will significantly expand our ability to share knowledge and make learning more widely available. It will bring together learning and tools that IE gathers from within the LGBTI movement and make it more widely available, so it reaches out to more activists throughout the year. A very exciting feature of this platform is that activists will be able to upload best practices, so that peer-learning comes within reach of a growing number of activists. The Hub will be secured, so that more strategic information can be shared with verified users.

Pathway 2

ONGOING RE-GRANTING FOR LGBTI ORGANISATIONS

In addition to the "No One Left Behind" Fund, we maintained our regular re-granting activities. Over the past 12 months, in total, ILGA-Europe made 72 new grants totaling an amount of €758 173. The smallest grant made was €200 whilst the largest grant made was €25,000. 48 of these grants have been awarded to organisations working in places where their rights are under attack, and 26 grants specifically address needs of communities underrepresented in the LGBTI movement.

Overall, these grants supported LGBTI groups and organisations in maintaining and strengthening their resilience: supporting organisational development, community building, awareness-raising within communities, monitoring and advocacy work; campaigning; hate crimes reporting; message testing (see more under Pathway 4); security and emergency support for human rights defenders and communities at risk, etc. In a number of countries our engagement is part of multiple-year projects to support movements over a longer period of time.

Over the past year we've continued to invest particularly in underrepresented and under-resourced groups, including those who combine financial resources with additional capacity building, through coaching (e.g. on campaigning, security, organisational and financial management). Over the past months, we've made it a priority to support grantees as they had to adapt their projects because of COVID-19, giving them as much flexibility and guidance as possible.

MAPPING NEEDS OF THE MOVEMENT

In 2019, we carried out a survey to better understand the current existing capacities and needs of the LGBTI movement in Europe and Central Asia in the field of strategic communications. Building on this work and in collaboration with various funders, we further zoomed in on a few case studies in 2020, with the view of developing a better understanding of how to best strategically support the enhancing of strategic communication capacities. The results will not only inform ILGA-Europe's capacity-building work in the coming years but also contribute to on-going conversations amongst funders about funding needs and gaps. Although the work was a bit delayed, it will be launched towards the end of this year.

Pathway 2

WHAT WE LEARNED

Moving most of our work with the movement online is proving to be a real learning experience. It is, of course, about adapting and getting familiar with the use of new tools. While we do see some opportunities – reaching new people, not requiring people to travel, connecting more quickly etc., working online also raises a few challenges: digital security, people’s access to internet, screen fatigue, the limits of online interactions in building trust and getting to know people.

There is no doubt that we are going through a clear transition – some of the new ways are here to stay, beyond the pandemic. On an ongoing basis, this will be about identifying what is positive about online work and where we need to privilege in-person work.

This year, we were also reminded in a rather abrupt way how quickly needs can shift. This only reinforced the importance of ILGA-Europe being able to identify where needs are, to connect with those who can best support rapidly, and to be able to mobilise resources and bring together those with expertise and experience to share. The past year also re-confirmed for us the importance of working on resource mobilisation for the LGBTI movement, especially considering there are already negative signals of the impact of economic consequences of the pandemic on the funding landscape for LGBTI and human rights work. Over the coming year, we will continue to work with funders not only to maintain funding for LGBT work, but also to ensure that new resources are mobilised and reach more marginalised parts of the LGBTI communities

Pathway 3: A legal and policy framework which protects and promotes human rights and equality at local, national, regional and international levels

The third pathway towards achieving our vision is: “A legal and policy framework which protects and promotes human rights and equality at local, national, regional and international levels”. This is about our work on adopting strong legislation and policies to protect the human rights LGBTI people, public policies are in place to make sure those laws are effectively implemented and that public authorities are fully equipped to contribute to the equality of all LGBTI people.

Under this pathway, although the political context in which we work was certainly upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, our advocacy response stayed its course. Our role is to gather information about what is affecting LGBTI people, to identify priorities and main needs, and to work with European institutions, national governments and relevant allies to ensure necessary actions are taken.

Pathway 3

WHAT'S CHANGED?

Understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on LGBTI people and communities, and bringing this information to European policy-makers obviously became a core of our work in the spring. After producing a first impact paper to list the potential and real impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting crisis measures on LGBTI people and communities in the region, we prepared a rapid assessment report based on our survey of members and ongoing communications with organisations about the impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTI communities in countries throughout the region. The report details the impacts across eight areas including: health and access to health; hate speech by political and religious leaders; domestic violence; and access to public relief programmes. We also gathered evidence of violations of LGBTI rights during COVID-19 for advocacy and strategic litigation purposes, and briefing documents on obligations of states in the field of human rights in the context of COVID-19

Our aim was to make sure that institutions and governments were informed about the impact of the pandemic on LGBTI people, and that policy responses to the pandemic would take their needs into consideration. These reports became the basis of our engagement with the EU, Council of Europe and the UN, and national governments. In addition to ongoing engagement with the LGBTI Intergroup and EU Commission officials, we met with several Commissioners (Dalli, Jourova, Kyriakides, Reynders) and with Fundamental Rights Agency Director, Michael O'Flaherty, over spring and summer to address the main concerns and issues in the context of the pandemic. We also met with the Council of Europe Secretary General, Marija Buric, to discuss the impact of the pandemic and work of the Council. We also kept in close contact with the Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović, the SOGI Unit at the Council of Europe, and the European governmental focal point network, as well as the UN Independent Expert on SOGI, to keep them informed about developments. We took part in numerous webinars, Instagram lives and Facebook lives with policy-makers and relevant NGO partners relating to the effect of COVID-19 on the LGBTI community and its vulnerable populations, as well as related to international action, law, and recovery plans.

A top priority for us since March has been to ensure that equality, including LGBTI equality, would not fall off the EU's political agenda. Through high-level engagement with high-level decision-makers, including engagement with EC President von der Leyen's team, we made the case for the adoption of the LGBTI Equality Strategy to remain on the 2020 EU work programme, and for strong new measures to be announced as part of it. The work we did with our many allies within EU institutions led to President von der Leyen announcing new legislation to combat hate crimes and mutual recognition of families in her State of the EU speech before the European Parliament.

Pathway 3

WHAT WENT FORWARD?

In addition to the pandemic, we continued the work of identify common trends in political opportunities and challenges which impact the LGBTI movements across the region, and working to strengthen our collective movement capacity to respond to these trends. Sadly, much of our attention and energy has been going towards responding to negative trends in our region again this year. We worked on attacks on democratic institutions and the rule of law which affect LGBTI communities in multiple ways, from ongoing pressure against civil society organising and mobilising and violations on fundamental freedoms, to growing scapegoating of LGBTI people by political and public actors, which leads to rapidly growing LGBTI-phobic violence and speech. We saw governments using the moment of the pandemic to pass harmful legislation like the ban in Hungary and blaming the community for the spread of the pandemic in a number of countries.

Throughout the year, we did our best to bring human rights violations against LGBTI people and LGBTI groups (such as ban of legal gender recognition in Hungary; LGBTI-free zones and Family Charters in Poland; banning gender studies and LGBTI phobic violence during local election campaigns Romania; violence during Plovdiv Pride and control over NGO funding in Bulgaria; trials of METU Prides and homophobic statements by the government in Turkey; Prides in Ukraine, the harmful family law in Russia) to the attention of EU and Council of Europe, actively pushing for appropriate responses.

Poland and Hungary have become real test for the EU when it comes to fundamental rights and democracy. Beyond our ongoing direct support for LGBTI groups in those countries, a good portion of time was dedicated to getting EU institutions to take action. In addition to keeping MEPs, EU officials and Commissioners informed about developments in real-time, we also activated EU legal mechanisms this year. On Poland, we submitted a formal legal complaint to the EU Commission against Poland together with Campaign Against Homophobia (Kampania Przeciw Homofobii), and Równość.org.pl Foundation. We hope this will lead to a formal infringement procedure against Poland and are working on ensuring these violations of LGBTI rights are adequately reflected in the Article 7 procedure which is considering limiting Poland's rights as an EU member. On Hungary, we wrote to the Vice-President of the Commission, highlighting that the ban on legal gender recognition is not only a violation of the rights of trans and intersex people, but also a rule of law breach, giving the EC ground to react.

Pathway 3

In addition to direct engagement on specific developments which require immediate response, we also raised issues more structurally in the context of European policy processes. As part of NGO coalitions, we advocated for the creation of a new strong Rule of Law monitoring mechanism of fundamental rights in the EU and more accessible and better EU funding for civil society in the next EU budget. During the year, we raised the challenges faced by LGBTI activists and community members in the region at different human rights consultations organised by the EU and the Council of Europe. Core to this work has been our alliance-building with other NGOs working at regional level, to join forces in our advocacy to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe and Central Asia.

We also continued our work with members and allied organisations in how to best counter the attacks on women's rights, sexual and reproductive rights and LGBTI rights, driven by the so-called anti-gender movement. A focus of this work was on the increasing attacks against gender and trans rights in this context. More specifically, we worked on countering anti-trans rhetoric, including through a paper on inclusive gender equality policies, which helped us shape conversations with allied organisations regarding the EU gender equality strategy.

We are working on developing more language to help all our allies to counter trans exclusionary arguments used to discredit trans people and attack trans rights. We are also discussing with the LGBTI Intergroup on how to further the protection of trans rights on EU level. On national level, we have contributed to the consultations on reforming the legal gender recognition legislation in the UK and Scotland and are continuing to push the German government, together with TGEU, OII Europe and German trans organisations, to finally reform the German law.

On conversation therapies, we acted as an interlocutor between governments, international organisations, and local civil society to share good practices, discuss the situation in the region and ensure that it is well-documented, and engage in international dialogues on the issue. This included supporting the mandate of the UN IE SOGI on his report this summer, inputting to governmental discussions in the UK, Denmark and Germany, and providing support to the SOGI Unit, the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner and the EP LGBTI Intergroup on the topic.

Amidst these turbulent developments, there were significant positive developments at the level of European institutions. In November 2020, the EU Commission will be publishing its first LGBTI+ Equality strategy, which will anchor the EU's commitment to advancing equality and will provide a clear, coherent and strong policy framework for the EU institutions and for NGOs to work in the coming years.

Pathway 3

Our team was very actively engaged with the Commission over the year, providing written input on several occasions, facilitating participation of LGBTI organisations in meetings with EU officials, and meeting with Commissioners to support wide commitment from across the Commission. In the context of this strategy, important new pieces of legislation are expected to be presented: one on mutual recognition and one of expanding the protection against hate crimes to include LGBTI-phobic violence. The strategy will also become the framework to advance the rights of LGBTI people and their families when it comes to freedom of movement, the protection of LGBTI refugees in the new asylum package, implementation of existing EU legislation (on employment, victims' rights, work-life balance, to name a few), but as well introduce new initiatives regarding the protection of intersex rights, as well as in the area of socio-economic inequality.

It has also been important for us to feed into the development of other EU equality strategies this year – the gender equality strategy, the disability strategy, Roma strategy, the children's rights strategy. This is essential to help make sure that EU policy actions take into consideration at all the many ways in which intersecting identities increase marginalisation and affect people's lives. In this first year of the new mandate, the EU Commission has launched several consultations towards develop new policies. We've contributed to consultations on the EU asylum package, the EU cancer plan, the digital service act (looking at measures to combat online hate speech).

There was also good news at the Council of Europe (CoE), with the creation of the new Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion. Having advocated for the creation of a stronger mechanism on SOGI within the CoE over the past decade, we warmly welcomed this development, an important step to anchor the work most sustainably. We are now working to obtain observer status, which will enable us to play an active role in the work of the Committee in the years to come. We also continued working very closely with the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, which is expanding its country monitoring work on SOGI to include intersex, and more generally looking at how it can contribute to developing clearer human rights standards on LGBTI issues. ILGA-Europe also continued to actively engaged with Commissioner for Human Rights.

STRATEGIC LEGISLATION

The importance of strategic litigation in standard-setting and strengthening legal protection on SOGIESC issues increases year on year. In 2020, there were four important positive judgments at the European Court of Human Rights, in three of which ILGA-Europe had intervened: **ECtHR. Beizaras and Levickas v. Lithuania** (online hate speech), **Rana v. Hungary** (LGR of asylum seeker), and **Y.T. v. Bulgaria (LGR)**, and one positive judgment from the Court of Justice from the EU.

Pathway 3

Developments with European and national courts confirm that this work is impactful – hence our nine third-party interventions to the European Court of Human Rights in the past year, one with a national court, and one with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC). We also made a submission and provided an oral briefing to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on implementation of one case, because the impact of litigation does not end on ‘judgment day’; the spirit of the legal decision must be brought to life and its benefits felt by LGBTI people in their daily lives. This is why we continue to engage actively in the implementation of the Coman and Rete Lenford judgements of the European Court of Justice by working with the EU Parliament and LGBTI organisations to make sure there are awareness and knowledge on how to initiate complaint procedures at the European Commission, in the event of improper application of the judgment in an EU Member State.

While our capacity to get involved in cases at national level remains limited, we have supported a few strategic cases by facilitating pro bono support for litigants, giving advice on cases which could have an impact at European level, and giving input about existing case law to inform national courts. Beyond our legal expertise, ILGA-Europe also contributes to coordination among litigation actors in Europe, from litigation NGOs and legal experts to equality bodies and government officials responsible for the implementation of case law.

BENCHMARKING LEGAL AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE

ILGA-Europe continued to develop and implement benchmarking of legal and policy standards on SOGIESC, to strengthen the movement’s ability to hold governments and institutions accountable on their commitments and actions to make equality for LGBTI people a lived reality. Here are some of the ways in which we did this:

Rainbow Europe Map and Index:

In 2020, it was as important as ever to remind governments of their responsibilities and commitments, and to hold them accountable, challenging them to keep up with the work in context of pandemic. In May, we combined the launch of our Rainbow Map with the launch of the results of the 2nd LGBTI Survey of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, as both created a uniquely comprehensive picture of the state of affairs for LGBTI people in Europe, with data on the legal and policy landscape complemented by data about the lived reality of LGBTI people in Europe. We brought together FRA, Commissioner Dalli and Equinet for an online round-table event to exchange on the state of play for LGBTI people in Europe, especially in the current global context, and to explore how to continue to make progress happen in each country and across the region. Given the annual Intergovernmental Forum to mark IDAHOBIT was canceled, we also invited Ministers from different countries to send us video messages commenting on their country’s ranking and telling us about their commitments for the coming year.

Pathway 3

Annual Review 2020:

We published our 2020 Annual Review early in the year during an event in the EU Parliament in the presence of activists from Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and OII-Europe. We presented the main developments for LGBTI equality across the region to EU parliamentarians and EU officials. This year again we included country chapters for some Central Asian countries.

While most of our advocacy work this year has focused on European/regional level, ILGA-Europe continued to support national advocacy and peer learning among LGBTI organisations where it could make a difference in accelerating legal change. In addition to the work we did in responding to the backlash named above, we engaged actively in the Western Balkans. We supported members calls in North Macedonia to reinstate anti-discrimination legislation including the grounds of SOGIESC, and activated the Commission and EU Parliament to support the same-sex partnership vote in Montenegro. We are also working with the EU's external action service to use different mechanism to call for de-criminalisation of same-sex relationships in Uzbekistan.

Pathway 3

WHAT WE LEARNED

Like everything else this year, how we engage with policy-makers, our access to decision-makers, the way policy-making happens is changing. In some cases, we have found that moving online is giving more access; it is easier to have meetings with high-level officials, and easier to have them join online events when no travel is involved. But there are also real limitations, including no possibility to hold study visits, events in the EP, or one-to-one meetings with policy-makers during which we get to know each other and keep each other informed. Also consultations with civil society are falling off the radar more easily. We will be keeping a watchful eye on how the move towards online engagements evolves. The shift requires us to be extra vigilant and proactive, to make sure we don't lose our contacts and engagement.

One thing that changed this year is a shift in focus of our thematic priorities to family/domestic, economic precarity, mental health, homelessness, services, and access to labour market. We had been wanting to turn our attention more to socio-economic issues, but in the context of COVID-19 the change is taking place a lot more quickly. At the same time, we note that even more of our attention focused on the political backlash and upholding democracy and human rights, and much less on specific LGBTI campaigning aimed at seizing political opportunities and continuing to make positive legal and political change.

This said, we also learned that it is possible to make a successful case for equality, even in the most complicated times. There was success in keeping the LGBTI equality strategy on the 2020 EU agenda, engaging with many Commissioners, and getting strong commitments from the Commission President, all at a time when equality could have been side-lined because of a focus on the health and economic crises.

We did not do this alone, though. The final learning of this year, and not the least, is that we need to work cross-movements, and we need to build strong and meaningful alliances. Addressing deep-seated structural inequalities – be it based on race, class or gender – require us to work with all those who are affected. This work makes our action so much more impactful and powerful, but it requires time and resources, time to build relationships build on mutual respect and trust, to educate ourselves about each other's issues and draw up common and inclusive projects together. A lot of our time will continue to go there in coming years.

Pathway 4: Deeply-rooted social acceptance and inclusion of diversity related to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics in societies

The fourth pathway towards achieving our vision is: “Deeply-rooted social acceptance and inclusion of diversity related to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics in societies”. Over the past year, our attention has focused largely on keeping public attention on equality and LGBTI issues amidst the many headline-grabbing news stories about pandemic and economic crisis.

We also continued to look at the contribution which allies – whether from civil society or private sector – can make to greater social acceptance and inclusion, including how we can equip them with the tools to help make the case of equality politically and socially. This is particularly true when it comes to strengthening our collective ability to defend trans rights against attacks.

Pathway 4

WHAT'S CHANGED?

As the pandemic lockdowns began, it became clear to us that much of our work in the forthcoming months would be tilted towards communications, given that we would not be able to go out to meet activists in the region, or bring them to us, nor would be able to hold in-person trainings, or meet politicians and policy makers in person. At a time when the focus was singularly on health and the economy, we also knew we would have to make greater use of the communications tools available to us to focus some of the conversation, not only on the impact of COVID-19 on LGBTI people and communities, but to keep the issues that were already to the forefront from falling by the wayside.

Much of our communications during the first months of the lockdowns were channeled through our 'Protect, Adapt, Rally' three-part plan for COVID-19, through which all of ILGA-Europe's teams shared their expertise via various platforms and resources. These included downloadable booklets and guides, blogs, web-pages, webinars, Instagram live sessions, and a Facebook communications peer support group. A social media campaign was launched at the same time as the 'Protect, Adapt, Rally' plan, which was ongoing as new resources were added to the package.

As the crisis continued, we began to apply ILGA-Europe's nuanced approach to our communications about what was happening. Our aim was to keep LGBTI issues visible. We published an opinion piece with Reuters about the specific impacts of COVID-19 on the most marginalised within LGBTI communities, and the need for institutions to embed equality measures in any forward planning. We used Instagram Live events to discuss topics including LGBTI youth homelessness in Europe and the state of play for LGBTI people in EU enlargement countries. As the situation for LGBTI people in Poland came to a head, we created a comprehensive timeline charting the rise of anti-LGBTI hatred in the country as a resource for journalists and politicians. We launched our new podcast, The Frontline, to discuss what was happening from the perspective of Polish activists, community members in so-called 'LGBT-free Zones', and strategic ways forward from the ILGA-Europe perspective. The second episode of our podcast, to be published just after The Gathering, will discuss the ongoing rise of anti-LGBTI fake news and hate in Bulgaria, how it is impacting on lives, and ways forward for the movement there.

Pathway 4

Early on in the Covid-19 lockdowns, it became clear that we were not the only ones for whom communications would be key. Most LGBTI organisations also were asking themselves “how can we communicate clearly within our organisation, with our communities, with politicians about how LGBTI people and communities were affected?” We created a number of tools and Q&A calls to support activists in communicating clearly in times when the situation was changing every day. We also provided support to members in a few countries in testing new messaging in times of COVID.

Another significant change this year has of course been the cancelling of Pride celebrations across the region. Our ongoing work to support LGBTI activists and Pride organisers, mainly by helping build political support and monitoring events in more challenging contexts, was also put on hold. We did however contribute to sharing experiences on how to organise Prides online through a webinar and a series of blogs.

WHAT WENT FORWARD?

ILGA-Europe has a clear role to play in identifying trends in public discourses and narratives around LGBTI people and SOGIESC issues in the region. In 2020, we continued to support the movement’s efforts to develop effective responses to anti-LGBTI attacks. We did this with the dissemination through various channels (webinars, report, summary report, blog, etc.) of the results of a message testing research conducted in four countries in partnership with member organisations. We also provided coaching to groups and organisations working on messages to respond to transphobic attacks. We supported through grants, coaching, campaigning and messaging projects in Serbia, Italy, Estonia and Georgia and we created a communications support group for LGBTI activists on Facebook, facilitated by ILGA-Europe and stimulating peer support among members.

We also ran two larger social media campaigns this year, aimed at raising awareness and support for national issues through social media actions. Our #drop33 campaign, rolled out via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok in May, was created to raise awareness of the Hungarian Article 33, which effectively banned legal gender recognition in the country. We asked people to film themselves crushing a piece of paper with the number 33 on it and throw it away. Our #NeverGiveUp campaign in September sought to activate expressions of solidarity with Russian LGBTI activists for their ongoing work, as the Russian government introduced its ‘traditional values Bill’, which will further limit the rights of LGBTI people in the country. We asked people to photograph themselves with a sign saying ‘Never Give Up’ and post with a message of solidarity. Both campaigns gained large, region-wide traction.

Pathway 4

Engaging the Private Sector for Political and Social Change

Over the past year, the ILGA-Europe team continued our conversation with the private sector, especially on the role of corporate actors in bringing political and social change. Since the beginning of the pandemic crisis and in response to the deteriorating situation in Poland, we have witnessed increased interest and willingness from the business community to engage in and support LGBTI advocacy and draw on the expertise of LGBTI civil society. Here we have played a role in making connections between businesses and local activists. With the number of private sector actors reaching out to ILGA-Europe growing rapidly, we engaged more significantly with other LGBTI organisations in Europe to explore how this work can be better coordinated and how we make the best use of the existing expertise that exists within the LGBTI movement.

Building on our relationships with key players in the field of LGBTI business inclusion, we facilitated a session at the Workplace Pride Online Symposium 2020 on the future for LGBTI progress in Europe and how the private sector can play an impactful role. ILGA-Europe is represented on the advisory board of a new Open for Business programme aiming to make the economic case for LGBTI inclusion in the Central and Eastern European region. We have taken the lead in creating dialogue with the key players in the European region to look at how we strategically engage with private sector in the European region, and how we can work together on this. Throughout it all, our main questions have been: How do we best build genuine partnerships between civil society and the private sector? How do we support private sector in advancing equality in meaningful and genuine way?

WHAT WE LEARNED?

The spotlight on inequalities brought about by the pandemic, as well as the political backlash in a growing number of countries is actually pushing allies to take clearer positions and to want to be more active. It is shaking up the complacency and leading to more people wanting to be better equipped to be stronger allies, to feel more confident in how they can argue for LGBTI equality and human rights, and to take 'bolder' steps. We have hooks to get new audiences informed and encouraged to actively and concretely support LGBTI people and communities. With this come more opportunities to build new and/or stronger alliances over the coming years.

This said, we are also in a context in which the pandemic and resulting economic and social impact all but obliterated so many more issues in the media. Getting our messages across and keeping them on the agenda requires even more work than before. Continuing to invest in our collective ability and knowledge to develop strong messages and to know how communicate clearly is crucial at this moment in time, as there is a risk that visibility of LGBTI people is lost and voices are not heard.

Pathway 5: Fair, just and equal societies and economies

Our fifth and final pathway towards achieving our vision is that LGBTI people live in “Fair, just and equal societies and economies”. This pathway is about recognising that the struggle for LGBTI equality is interconnected with the struggles for human rights more broadly, as well as social justice and climate justice. When we named it as a core objective in our five-year framework, we did not anticipate just how crucial and pressing it would become to get at work to combat structural inequalities, especially those rooted in race and class.

Pathway 5

WHAT'S CHANGED?

In the midst of a global health crisis, structural social and economic inequalities within LGBTI communities and beyond became more visible than ever. For the most part, it was clear that the aggravated impact of the pandemic on LGBTI people was the result of pre-existing social and economic exclusion. In ILGA-Europe, we chose to see this challenging moment as an opportunity for our movement to start strengthening our capacity to address profound socio-economic inequalities within LGBTI populations. That is why ILGA-Europe launched the 'No One Left Behind' fund as a first step to provide support to LGBTI organisations to understand the root causes and impact of poverty, homelessness, lack of access to education, basic health and social services on LGBTI people's lives, and to take action to effectively address these inequalities. (See also under Pathway 2).

As mentioned in other sections, one significant change in 2020 has been how prominent socio-economic issues and other structural inequalities became in our conversations with LGBTI activists when documenting the impact of COVID-19, but also with policy-makers and with funders.

WHAT WENT FORWARD?

This year, we went ahead with two projects aimed at building our own knowledge on specific intersecting identities and experiences of intersecting inequalities. The first was a project focusing on LGBTI and disability. Building on the work carried out in 2019, we launched a small grants programme to support D/deaf and disabled LGBTI activism. Through the three projects currently going on, we are starting to identify lessons about how LGBTI organisations can be more inclusive of D/deaf and disabled persons, and building more connections with existing groups of D/deaf and disabled LGBTI people. While the pandemic did impact the grantees work and our ability to bring grantees together, there's a lot of learning emerging from this project, which will be shared in 2021.

The second piece of work is our ongoing learning about LGBTI homelessness, which is moving forward thanks to our very good partnerships with the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) and True Colors United (a US-based NGO working on LGBT youth homelessness). As part of this cooperation, we launched a survey with True Colors to map the work going on around LGBTI homelessness in Europe. The findings of this survey will be published early in 2021. This knowledge will contribute to strengthening our advocacy work at European level together with FEANTSA and will help us develop relevant programmatic activities in a near future.

Pathway 5

WHAT WE LEARNED

Two years ago, we committed ourselves to strengthening our knowledge about the impact of structural inequalities on the lived experience of LGBTI people, to building our capacity to advocate more effectively for social justice issues, to investing in our collective ability to address inequalities based on socio-economic status and race. We planned to do this over a five-year period, to have time for it. What has become clear in 2020 is that we need to push this learning to the top of our agenda. The commitment to “leaving no one behind” will be the main thread of our movement’s work over the next decade. We are gladly reckoning with the importance of taking on socio-economic inequalities, racism and other forms of structural inequalities. There is no turning back. Therefore it is crucial we make learning and building our capacity to do this work a priority in the coming years.

Organisational Update

In mid-March, as Europe was overtaken by the COVID-19 pandemic and countries began to go into lockdown, the ILGA-Europe team, as any other team, had to adapt and adapt quickly. After adjusting to remote working, we reassessed our activities and priorities for 2020. We assessed what activities were still possible and relevant, and also identified new needs. A guiding principle was ensuring that our team has the necessary capacity, resources and tools to carry out the work which is needed, especially to continue to support our members.

This has meant creating space for learning on working with new online platforms and online tools. And of course, it's meant supporting our staff team, especially in terms of wellbeing and workload, to the best of our ability, while acknowledging the changes we all had to deal with. As time passes, we've increasingly been thinking about how to develop working methods and practices which will work over time, considering we expect to be working remotely for a good portion of 2021, and what this will change in a more long-term outlook.

These past few months have also accelerated our own internal reflection about what how our governance and staff policies contribute to perpetuating existing forms of inequalities. One step we took was to launch an audit of our recruitment process policies and practices through an intersectional lens, to identify concrete ways for us to address existing barriers in access to employment and to enable ILGA-Europe to become an ever-more inclusive and equal employer.

Fundraising

ILGA-Europe's own fundraising work remained an important priority throughout the year. This work is essential to increase our ability to remain flexible in responding to emerging needs, as well as to meet our own co-funding requirements. It has been heartening to see that our fundraising has been particularly positive amidst the challenges faced this year. The support of individuals, communities and new partners is growing.

Organisational Update

Equality Gala Online

Due to the pandemic, we moved the sixth annual European Equality Gala online. The virtual event held at the end of June was open to anyone to attend, with the option to give a voluntary donation upon registration or during the event. The programme featured EU Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli; Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović; MEPs from the European Parliament LGBTI Intergroup; LGBTI activists; and drag artist and YouTuber, Candy Crash. The event was sponsored by Google. Over 300 guests tuned in and the event raised €25,000 (including sponsorship).

Corporate support and partnerships

We've significantly grown our corporate fundraising over the past year, both strengthening existing partnerships and creating new relationships with supportive companies from different sectors committed to raising awareness and funds for LGBTI equality. In July, digital bank Revolut launched their second Pride campaign in partnership with ILGA-Europe, issuing a limited edition rainbow branded payment card with a minimum donation to ILGA-Europe, raising over €200,000 to date. We also had collaborations with dating app LOVOO, whose first Pride campaign in August raised €10,000 for ILGA-Europe, and U-Earth Biotech, who launched a limited edition Pride facemask, donating all profits to ILGA-Europe. Kraft Heinz and Flywheel both held internal Pride campaigns over the summer, with ILGA-Europe as a suggested organisation for staff donations. We also received support from Precision Medicine Group, Nielsen, Andrew Christian, e-sports organisation Splyce, and over €6,000 was donated through employee giving schemes with contributing companies including Netflix and Google. While we benefited from several successful partnerships and collaborations, we also turned down partnership proposals in cases where we were not satisfied with the prospective corporate partner's ethics and practices, particularly around supply chain.

Community donations

The number of individuals donating to ILGA-Europe continues to grow. 160 individuals made a donation through our website, with the situation in Poland and Hungary and celebrating Pride season most commonly cited as inspiration for giving. Throughout the year we recruited 13 new regular donors, bringing the total number to 37, and more than 30 supporters set up a birthday fundraiser on Facebook. Despite COVID-19, several community events and initiatives to raise funds went ahead, for example an outdoor charity dance class and online crafts sales, and we received donations in lieu of presents on the occasion of birthday and wedding celebrations.



Rue du Trône
1050 Brussels,
Belgium

+ 32 2 609 54 10
info@ilga-europe.org
www.ilga-europe.org
