

# The European Equality Fundraiser 2023: Photo Essay

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Our Equality Fundraiser on June 29 was an evening of unity, reflection and celebration of the power of activism as over 200 participants gathered in Brussels to support LGBTI rights in Europe and Central Asia. Petra De Sutter, Belgium's Vice Prime Minister, was the guest of honour. Drag artist Mocca Bonè, the Mow Quartet and DJ Eliana brought the entertainment, and the focus was on how everyone can play their part in ensuring equality amid the current backlash on LGBTI rights and lives.

Achieving and advancing LGBTI rights is the result of sustained work across our societies. As ILGA-Europe's Executive Director, Evelyne Paradis rightfully pointed out, each one of us has the power to contribute to these efforts by showing up.

"Counteracting backlash and moving onwards towards real social change is deeply collective work," Evelyne emphasised during her speech at our Equality Fundraiser 2023. "This is not the story of one person or one organisation. It's the story of how more and more people have shown up over the years."

We are immensely grateful to the over 200 people who joined us on the special evening of June 29 in Brussels for our annual Equality Fundraiser. These participants came from across EU institutions, civil society organisations, law firms, private companies, and LGBTI activist groups in the region. With so many buying tickets and giving generously on the night, it means we can better support the work of LGBTI activists in Europe, using this unrestricted funding to get money to activists who need it, when they need it, often in regions where there is a backlash on LGBTI lives. By having more people show up, we can better contribute to advancing LGBTI people's rights in the region.

Building on the success of last year's fundraiser, we were happy to return to LaVallée as our venue for the second year in a row. Belgium's Vice Prime Minister, Petra de Sutter opened the evening, honouring some of the brave LGBTI activists she has met and reminding the audience about the importance of European Elections next year. They will be a critical moment when voters will choose whether to continue advancing LGBTI people's rights or make a "U-turn, back to an unequal and exclusionary society," she said.

"I know this might sound dramatic, but looking at today's challenges, I sincerely believe that this is what's at stake. Because even though progress is being made – think of Estonia which just legalised same-sex marriage – we are, at the same time, hearing increasingly loud dissenting voices from conservative groups, who are against equal rights for LGBTQI+ people," she added.

Evelyne Paradis acknowledged this trend. "I've seen the journey we have been on over the years, and what I understand from that overview is that we are at a turning point," Paradis said in what was her last speech at our fundraiser, as she will sadly be leaving ILGA-Europe after 18 years this coming September.

"The opposition wasn't organised in the same way as it was 18 years ago, or even a decade ago. It is now in full force, and it is funded to almost unimaginable levels. It is far from a level playing field."

With your support, ILGA-Europe can continue its vital work in the face of growing opposition. By showing up at our

annual fundraiser you help us to build very much needed flexible funding. This kind of resource allows us to reach places where LGBTI people are at most risk and backlash is fully happening. It allows ILGA-Europe to enable activist organisations to fight back, grow and become stronger.

All photo credits: Ivo Popov.





Vice Prime Minister of Belgium.

Petra De Sutter,













ILGA-Europe's staff







MEP Brando Benifei





DJ Eliana







ILGA-Europe's Executive Director Evelyne Paradis









Delicious food by APUS & Les Cocottes Volantes



The Equality Fundraiser was made possible thanks to our long-standing supporters and sponsors, Google and Diageo























Thanks to MEP Kim van Sparrentak who generously sponsored ten tickets, which were raffled off to lucky winners allowing more people to join the fundraiser!





Executive Director Lenny Emson



Drag Queen Mocca Bone











Mow Quartet