EuroPride host, Malta is No’1 on our Rainbow Map, but it’s not all a pretty picture

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> An LGBTI poster vandalised just a few days before the EuroPride in Valletta and an LGBTIphobic attack during Gozo Pride are strong reminders that despite strong legal protections, LGBTI people do not always enjoy full inclusion and safety in Malta.

Shortly before the official opening ceremony of EuroPride, hosted this year by the Maltese city of Valletta, a poster advertising one of the events was vandalised in broad daylight in Castille Square. A few days into the celebrations, in the hours after the second annual Gozo Pride parade, a group of queer people faced verbal harassment on their way to a local bar. The situation escalated and one of the people in the group was physically assaulted. The attack was condemned by a number of ministers.

These are not the types of events that you would typically associate with Malta, an EU country renowned for its strong legal protections for LGBTI people. Thanks to the unwavering efforts of local activists and decision-makers committed to safeguarding the rights of LGBTI people, Malta has topped ILGA-Europe’s Rainbow Map for eight consecutive years. With an exemplary legal framework, ranging from marriage equality to legal gender recognition, and some pioneering measures, Malta stands as a trailblazer and a source of inspiration for its neighbours.

Nevertheless, despite this great work, true equality for LGBTI people has not yet been achieved. These recent events are a reminder that to bridge the gap between law and life, everyone must be part of the journey.

Our Advocacy Director, Katrin Hugendubel, is in Malta to participate in EuroPride. “Despite the country’s robust legal framework, the reality is that discrimination persists,” she says. “While legal protections are a vital ground for equality, they alone cannot ensure that LGBTI people are safe and fully included. Society, with all its complexities, must be brought along, especially in the face of rising anti-human rights forces in the country.”

While Malta has held the number one spot on ILGA-Europe’s Rainbow Map, benchmarking legal frameworks and protections for LGBTI people in European countries, gaps remain in Maltese legislation. The Maltese government is yet to put forward legislation that ensures full protection against discrimination outside employment against, amongst other grounds, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

According to Hugendubel: “It is equally relevant to look at the larger picture and remember that championing the rights of LGBTI people means to advocate for human rights in their entirety. This includes the human rights of migrants and reflecting on sexual and reproductive rights, including the rights to abortion. Moreover, Malta’s leadership in this regard, extends beyond the island, serving as an example for other countries.

“In meetings this week, commitments to present a proposal for the Equality Act were renewed, and Malta has done an extraordinary job in protecting LGBTI people. However, the true test is not just arriving at the top but sustaining this leadership, and translating the legal framework into the day to day life of everyone. Malta must stay vigilant in its commitments to ensure the protection of LGBTI people within its borders, but also as a guiding light for all EU countries and beyond.”

You can learn more about Malta in our Annual Review and Rainbow Map.