Keep Calm and Communicate: LGBTI Activists Share Crisis Communication Tips

Blog, Inclusion and Equality, Communications, Event, Strategic Communications

> Last month we brought together 25 activists from over 15 countries to discuss and learn all about communicating in times of crisis. With Pride season upon us, and the challenges Pride events can bring for queer activists and organisers, this blog presents the key takeaways.

Pride season is here, and the LGBTI community is busy getting ready to both celebrate and assert visibility across Europe. But we are living through a time in many countries when LGBTI people are being scapegoated, which brings challenges amid the celebrations for many Pride organisers.

In May, ILGA-Europe hosted a two-day learning event on crisis communication for LGBTI organisations from across Europe and Central Asia, which we entitled ‘Get Ready!’. This gathering was an opportunity for 25 activists from over 15 countries to come together and address the complex challenges they face when communicating to their communities, the media and other stakeholders at times of crisis.

The group of passionate activists from diverse backgrounds demonstrated the power of collaboration during our time together. This created a profound sense of solidarity and mutual understanding and the room was alive with the exchange of expertise, self-care tips, and strategic ideas, leading to new collaborations and strengthened networks.

During our discussions we learned that the diversity of challenges faced by LGBTI organisations in crisis communication is vast and complex, but the participants highlighted five key issues that are similar across different countries and contexts. They are:

Balancing conflicting interests

Organisations often operate in regions with significant political and social tensions. This requires carefully navigating their messaging to address both local and international audiences without alienating either.

Fragmentation and internal conflicts

Many movements suffer from internal fragmentation, making unified communication difficult. Differing priorities and approaches within the community can lead to inconsistent messaging and weakened responses during crises.

Targeted campaigns and opposition

Advocacy campaigns frequently attract opposition from various groups, including TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists) and anti-gender movements. These groups often launch coordinated attacks, which leads to the necessity of having both proactive and reactive strategies to mitigate their impact and protect the community.

Social media and digital threats

The digital landscape presents unique challenges, from social media posts being reported and accounts being

suspended to full-blown smear campaigns. Organisations must be adept at digital crisis management, swiftly countering misinformation and protecting their online presence.

Polarisation and backlash

In many regions, the rising tide of anti-gender rhetoric and the instrumentalisation of LGBTI issues by political actors create a highly polarised environment. Navigating this landscape requires not only strong messaging but also the ability to build and maintain alliances in a hostile atmosphere.

These challenges illustrate the layered nature of crisis communication within the LGBTI activism and advocacy space. Organisations are called upon develop tailored strategies to address unique circumstances in their own contexts, while drawing on shared experiences and collective wisdom. It's also important to acknowledge that security risks, particularly around public events like Pride marches, heavily burden activists. Although these are not primarily crises, they significantly impact the overall environment in which LGBTI organisations operate.

Key Tips and Tricks for Effective Crisis Communication

During the training, activists shared a wealth of strategies for tackling these challenges, which we captured on video. We asked participants to remember the moments of stress, panic and hard times they experienced, and then to envision talking to a young activist facing a communication crisis for the first time. The result is a collection of universal and empowering tips by activists for activists to help keep your head up during a crisis.

1. Define your audience

Tailor your message to ensure it resonates with your specific target audience, such as sympathetic media outlets, supportive community groups, and potential allies within the general public.

2. Know your community

While it's important to communicate with the broader public, never forget that your primary responsibility is to support and uplift the LGBTI community. Your people need to know you have their back.

3. Rely on your support network

The strength of the LGBTI movement lies in its solidarity. Your chosen family, friends, mentors, and colleagues are invaluable resources in times of crisis. They can mentor you, talk things through, offer help and comfort, and step in if you need to step back. Sharing the burden of these responsibilities can lighten the load significantly.

4. Stand in solidarity with other LGBTI organisations

In a crisis, consider others who are also impacted and their potential responses and strategies. Collaborating with other LGBTI organisations, showing solidarity, mutual support, and a unified response will strengthen our collective resilience.

5. Maintain a healthy distance

LGBTI activism often intertwines with personal identity, making it essential to keep a clear boundary between doing the work and living your life to avoid burnout. Remember that you are more than your work and activism, and it's okay to step back when necessary.

6. Take It step-by-step

Crisis situations can be overwhelming, but it's crucial to stay focused on your message. Clear, calm

communication is key to navigating through the storm.

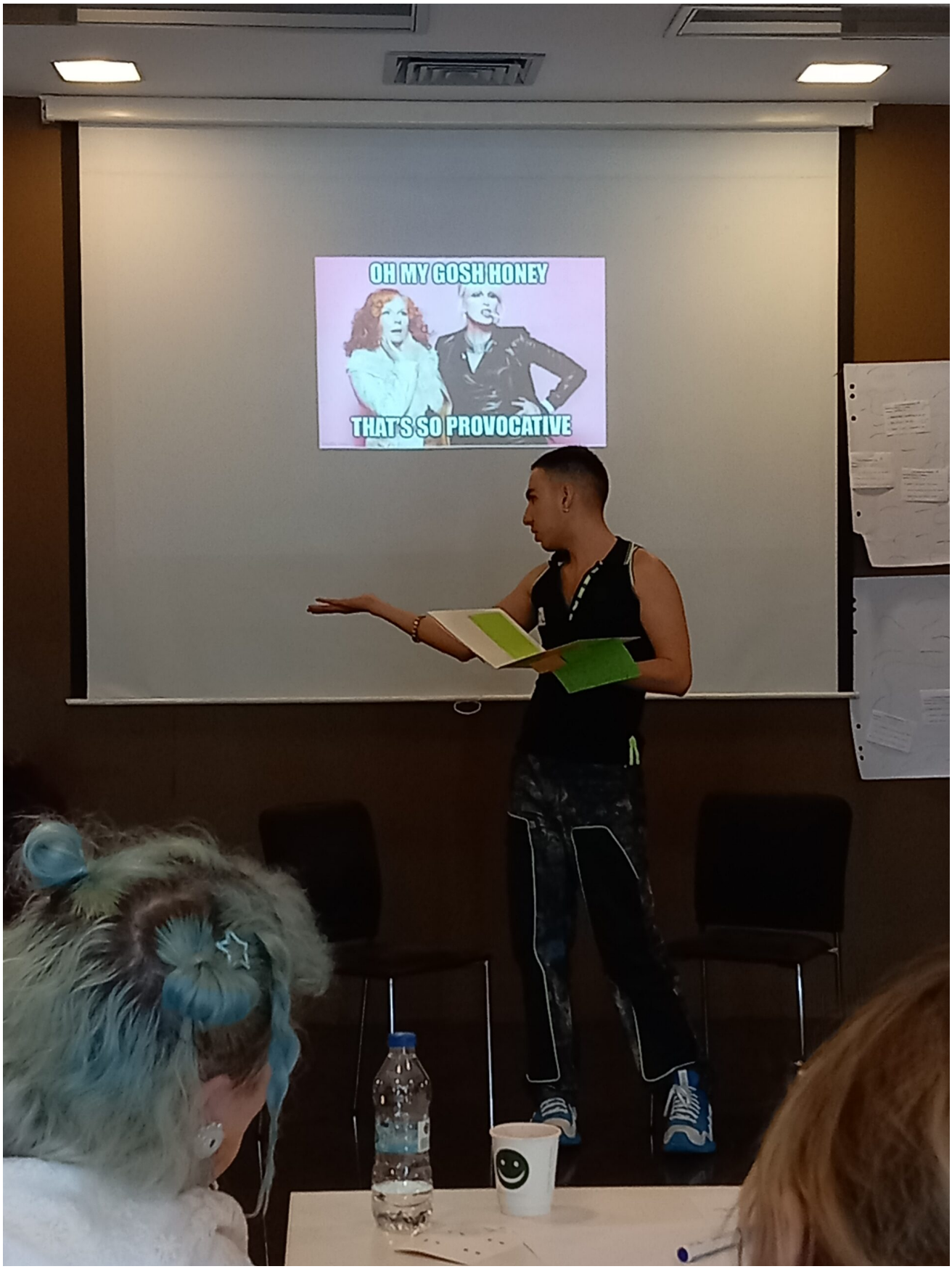
7. Practice in private, be prepared in public

Doing a roleplay of a likely communications crisis situation can help you practice and take some stress out of a real situation. The Get Ready! participants took part in an exercise which tested their preparation, monitoring, diagnosis, and response to a hypothetical crisis. ILGA-Europe is developing this exercise to provide a resource to more LGBTI groups who want to prepare for communications crises. Join our Facebook group Communications support group for LGBTI activists to be up to date with any upcoming opportunities.

I want to know more about
Risk
CHAMPION
NEW YORK
EST. 1919

PROTECT
QUEER
YOUTH
PRIDE
BANLIEUES
PRIDE
BANLIEUES
PRIDE
BANLIEUES

communications risks too.
damla


OH MY GOSH HONEY
THAT'S SO PROVOCATIVE

CHAMPION
NEW YORK
EST. 1919
THIS IS A SAFE SPACE