From numbers to stories: How LGBTI activists can use data visualisation

[Blog](#), [Strategic Communications](#)

In our last [Skills Boost](#) session, over 70 LGBTI activists learnt how to find and tell a story from the data that speaks about their own work. Take a look at the impressive charts developed as part of the session and learn more about how to use data visualisation in your daily communications.

In today's visually-driven world, communicating with images is more important than ever. That's why LGBTI activists are seeking ways to transform complex figures and dry data into visual representations that tell a captivating story.

To support them in their mission, in May we hosted a Skills Boost session focused on data visualisation. The response was enthusiastic, with over 70 LGBTI activists from across Europe participating in the workshop. Using data from our [Rainbow Map & Index](#) and with no previous design skills, the participants unleashed their creativity and harnessed the power of visualisation to craft their own compelling charts.

The first half of the session opened with our facilitators sharing some advice from Minami Funakoshi, a non-binary awarded graphics journalist for Reuters:

> "Instead of starting with the data and trying to find the story in it, you treat data as something that can help explain a question".

Funakoshi's [visual story on Gender and Language](#) has received several prize nominations and awards, and it served as an inspiration for ways of thinking of data beyond numbers.

During the rest of session, participants generously shared these important tips with one another:

- **Finding the data** – Participants shared ways of extracting data from owned sources but also from open sources like [Our World in Data](#), the [FRA LGBTI survey](#), and alternatives like [Google Trends](#).
- **Finding the story** – Our Senior Communications Officer, Mehmet Akin shared his experience filtering through a vast data set of criteria across 49 countries in ILGA-Europe's 2023 Rainbow Map and Index in order to tell a [coherent story in 2023](#), and what other stories they thought might still need to be told.
- **Creating the visual –** Activists examined the pros and cons of tools like [Tableau](#), [Adobe Express](#), and [Canva](#). They also learnt from a live crowd-sourced demonstration of how we could make a draft graphic in ten minutes using the Rainbow Map data for graphics showing either comparisons, or trends. **Check out the templates provided during the session** [here](#) **and** [here](#)**.**

Using our Rainbow Map & Index to learn data visualisation

[Our Rainbow Map](#) is a benchmarking tool of the laws and policies that have a direct impact on LGBTI people's

human rights. From the collected data we show the situation in 49 countries under 74 and in seven categories. However, the data can be presented in many other ways. We asked the Skills Boost participants to find and tell the following stories:
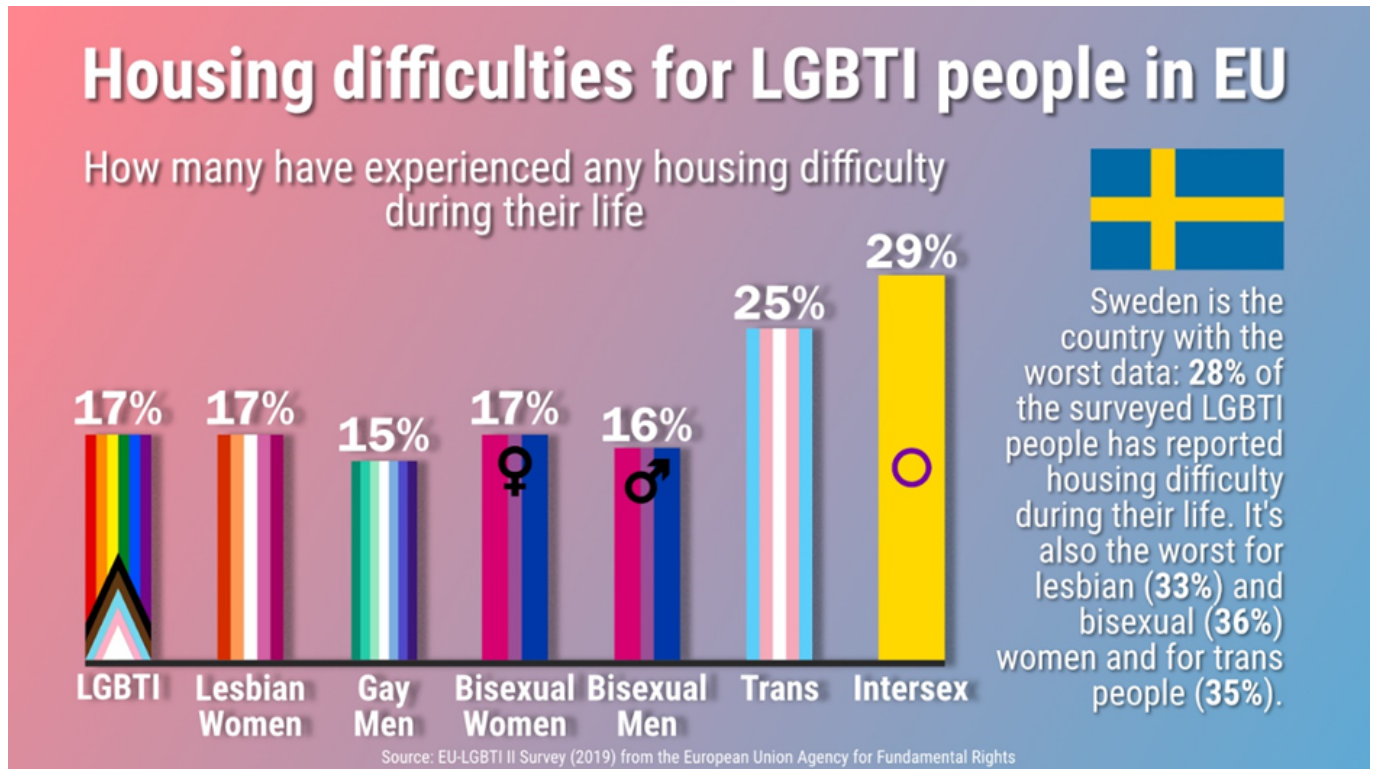
1. Show **the journey of the UK from No '1 to No '17:** The United Kingdom was the No.1 country on the ranking in 2013 but has fallen to No.17 by 2023. This is a story that is captured by many followers of ILGA-Europe on social media but has never been visualised. All the data is available as to why [at this link](#).

2. **Show countries with self-determination based LGR for trans people in Europe:** Self-determination is only available in 11 countries in Europe and can easily be seen on our interactive module by choosing "All countries" and "Self-determination" in [the Rainbow Map dropdown menu](#). There is a good example of data visualisation of [this story here](#).

3. **Create a timeline with IGM bans in Europe:** There are only six countries that have banned IGM so far, which [can be seen here](#). It would be interesting to see these bans in a timeline. Similar thing could be done with [bans on conversion practices](#).

4. **Re-chart the Map based on different categories:** We do our country ranking based on the total score that is calculated under seven categories. However, the online module shows a menu where you can choose a different category and gets a new ranking based on your selection. For example, Montenegro is [12th place in the overall ranking](#). However, if you choose "Legal gender recognition" as category, you'll see they're on the 30th place.

Our Skills Boost participants delivered wonderful visualisations

At the end of the first half of the Skills Boost session, we invited the participants to work on their own graphics and send them to us, and three people took the challenge! Two used data from ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map and one used the EU Fundamental Rights Agency's LGBTI Survey results.
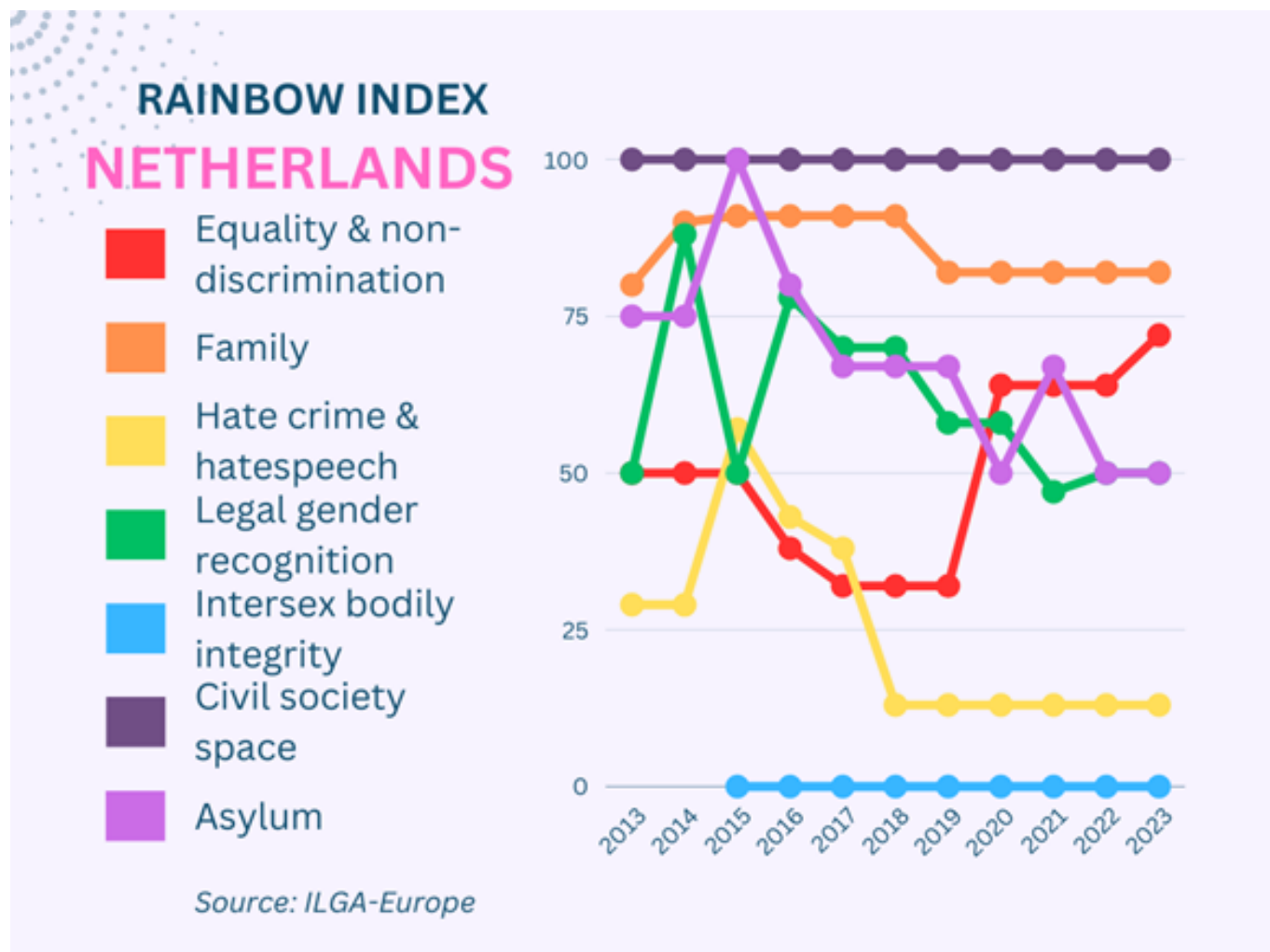
Jae, whose association collaborates with a shelter house for trans people, wanted to explore the experience of having housing difficulties across the LGBTQIA+ community in Europe. This is what Jae said:

"I used the data from the EU LGBTI Survey II and I found lots of interesting things. I focused on the broad concept of having experienced housing difficulties, without differentiating right now between more mild events (having to sleep at a friend's place) and more extreme cases (sleeping in a public space). I could have stopped there, but I also thought to underline a worst-case scenario, in this instance Sweden, the worst country for LGBTI people and for some of the surveyed categories when it comes to this problem".
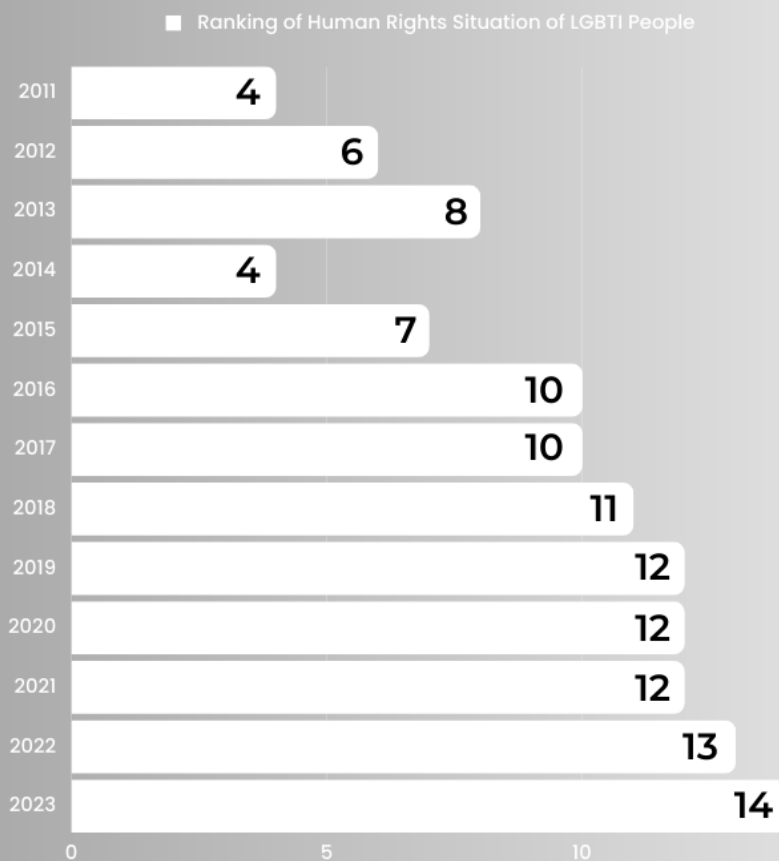
Housing difficulties for LGBTI people in EU

How many have experienced any housing difficulty during their life

17% LGBTI
17% Lesbian Women
15% Gay Men
17% Bisexual Women
16% Bisexual Men
25% Trans
29% Intersex

Sweden is the country with the worst data: **28%** of the surveyed LGBTI people has reported housing difficulty during their life. It's also the worst for lesbian (**33%**) and bisexual (**36%**) women and for trans people (**35%**).

Source: EU-LGBTI II Survey (2019) from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

Jochem Verdonk from Principle 17 (a collective of activists from the Netherlands that promotes customised trans* health care) designed four graphics to illustrate the Human Rights Situation of LGBTI People in the Netherlands.

He started with a data graphic with all seven categories in one graphic, but "that turned out to be quite chaotic".

RAINBOW INDEX NETHERLANDS

Legend:
- Equality & non-discrimination (red)
- Family (orange)
- Hate crime & hatespeech (yellow)
- Legal gender recognition (green)
- Intersex bodily integrity (blue)
- Civil society space (dark purple)
- Asylum (magenta)

Source: ILGA-Europe

So he decided it's better to make three separate data graphics with similar tendencies.

![ILGA EUROPE — Equality and human rights for LGBTI in Europe and Central Asia]

■ Ranking of Human Rights Situation of LGBTI People

Year	Ranking
2011	4
2012	6
2013	8
2014	4
2015	7
2016	10
2017	10
2018	11
2019	12
2020	12
2021	12
2022	13
2023	14

Ranking **NETHERLANDS** in Rainbow Europe

In 12 years the Netherlands drop from 4th to 14th place.

Source: ILGA-Europe

RAINBOW INDEX
NETHERLANDS

■ Equality & non-discrimination

■ Civil society space

2 out of 7 categories improve

Source: ILGA-Europe
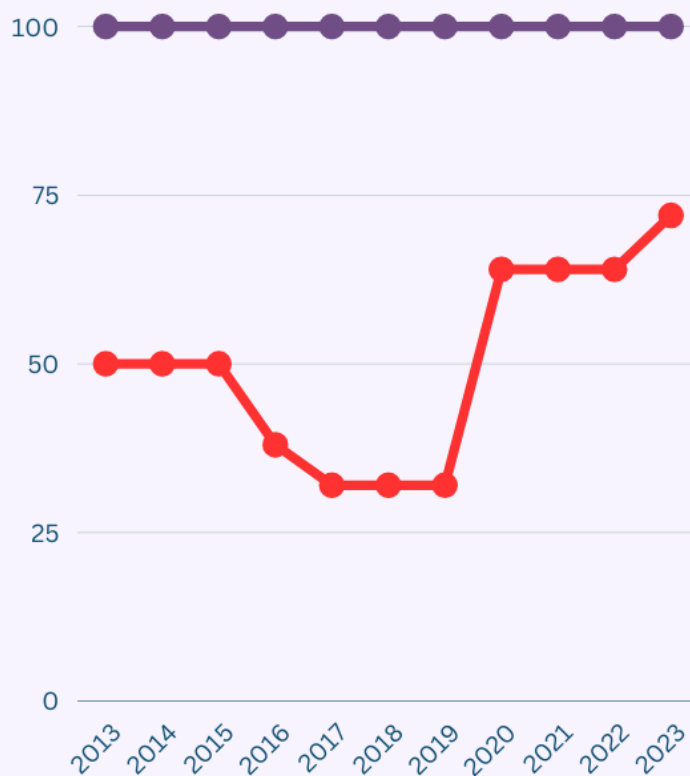
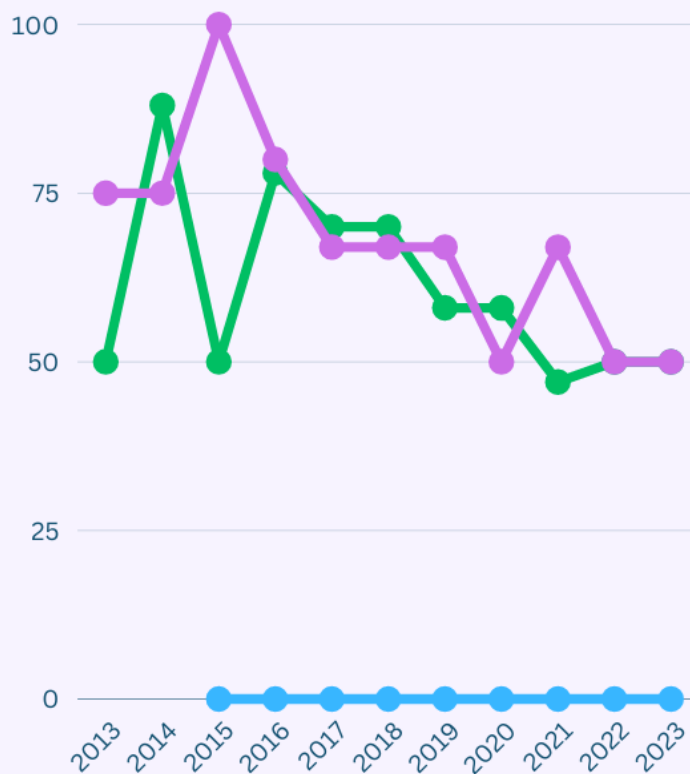RAINBOW INDEX
NETHERLANDS

■ Legal gender recognition

■ Intersex bodily integrity

■ Asylum

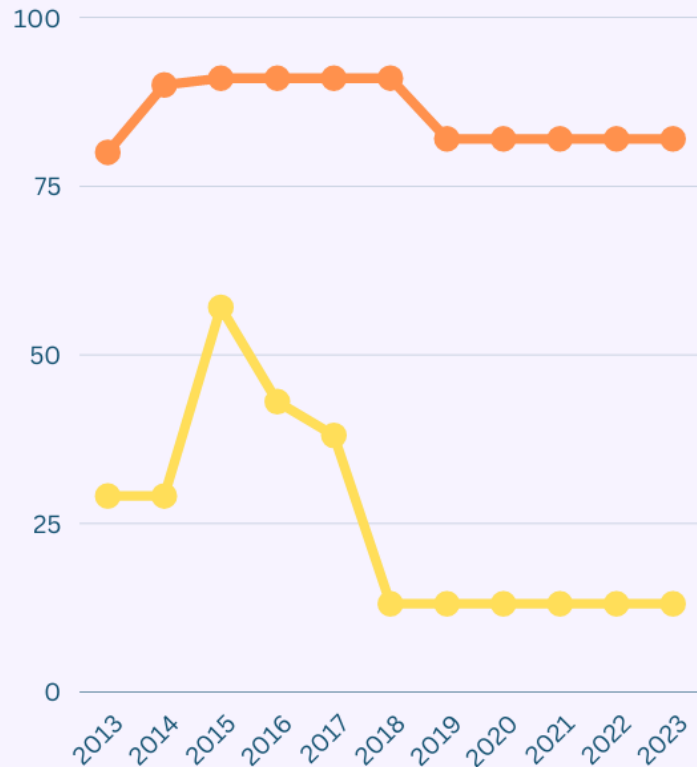**3 out of 7 categories decrease**

Source: ILGA-Europe

ILGA
EUROPE
Equality and human rights for LGBTI
in Europe and Central Asia

RAINBOW INDEX
NETHERLANDS

■ Family

■ Hate crime &
hatespeech

**2 out of 7 categories
stagnate**

Source: ILGA-Europe

After ILGA-Europe's team and guests' feedback in the second half of the session, Jochem tried several alternatives but decided to keep the graphics the way they were. However, he did make the lay-outs of the several images more equal by using the same fonts, sizes and lay-out. He also decided to separate the Intersex Bodily Integrity into another graphic, to emphasize the complete lack of rights. He even published an article about the deterioration of LGBTI people's rights in the Netherlands attaching all the graphics. Have a look!

Bart Andersen from Britain decided to use infographics to:

> "Remind ourselves that no country should take human rights for granted, that they are all won with effort and can de-evolve, or develop quickly"

Bart also wanted to "point to countries that Britain and others perceive as not advanced on human rights but which are actually overtaking," as well as to undermine the narrative of Britain's Conservative party when it presents itself as an advocate of LGBTQ+ rights".
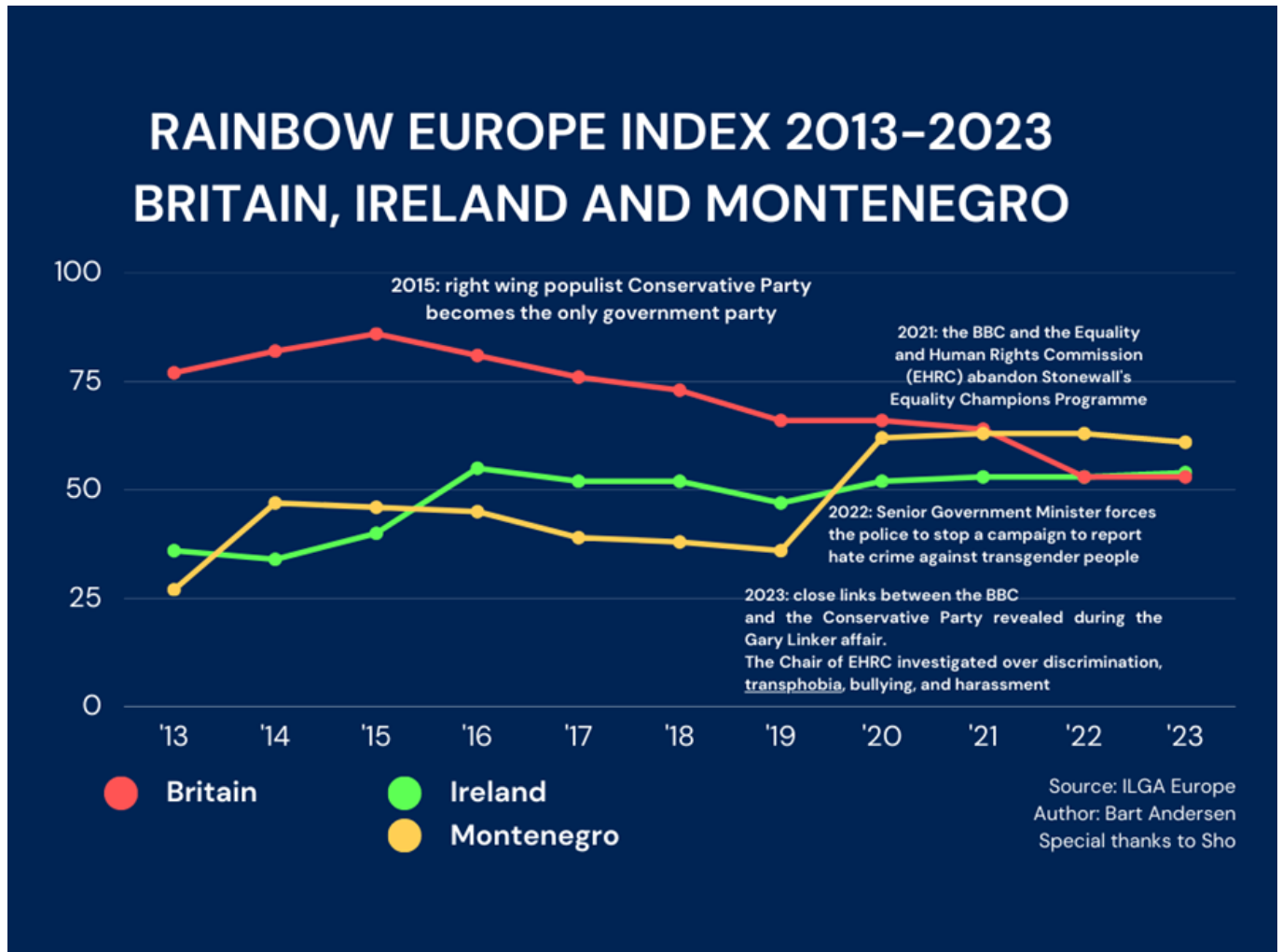
Bart was curious if the events path would be nicer in another slide of the same project. And if he shall remove all notes and let the reader do some independent investigation?

Want to stay in touch and learn more about communications for LGBTI activists? Join our closed Communications support group for LGBTI activists on Facebook and check our Resource Hub. There you can also find resources from our previous sessions on crisis communication, how to make home-made campaign videos, making graphics with free tools, and fundraising during crises.