Our municipalities are the ultimate game changers for LGBTI equality

Blog, Equality

> Equality advocates strive to influence positive change at national levels, but it's in our towns, villages and cities where these changes are experienced.

Positive change for LGBTI people is often thought of on the macro scale. Civil society organisations work hard alongside institutions, representatives and governments so we all push together in the right direction. But these efforts must boil down to the day-to-day lives of LGBTI people. Ultimately, it's the safety and freedom of LGBTI people to be who they are in the villages, towns and cities they live in what is at stake.

Municipalities, often an overlooked level of government, is the level that is closest to people's daily lives. It is the place where all the significant legal recognitions are implemented, where change is filtered down and becomes real. Whether it is altering your gender marker on your documents, whether it is where you are educated or want to have your children educated, whether it is the health services you access, or how your communities are shaped, city level is where so much of it comes together.

So, the importance of engaging municipalities on LGBTI rights and equality is enormous. It's particularly important in the localities of countries where many of the positive legal developments have happened. But how does a local government translate the full ambitions of a law that sets out to give LGBTI people rights so that they actually change lived realities?

We have seen a recent example at the second edition of the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards, where two ILGA-Europe board members participated on the jury. The city of Gda?sk in Poland won a special recognition for fostering LGBTIQ equality with its numerous initiatives involving inclusive public services and support for victims of discrimination. This Polish city shows us that even in difficult national contexts for LGBTI people, positive leadership at a municipal level can enhance instead of limiting lives. It teaches us how important these kinds of tools are for local governments who wish to foster inclusion.

The municipal level is not only about politics and legislation though; it is also where community happens. At a time when democracy and human rights come under challenge in so many parts of our region, cities have a crucial role to play in ensuring that LGBTI people, who are active citizens contributing to the community, can be protected and cared for in their daily lives.

This blog is adapted from our Executive Director, Evelyne Paradis's foreword to 'Rainbow Cities in Action: Policy Guidelines for Municipalities' by Rainbow Cities Network.

Rainbow Cities Network (RCN) is an international network of municipalities who have adopted a dedicated LGBTIQ policy, actively working against discrimination and for equal rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and other queer people (LGBTIQ) in their cities. Founded in 2013, its goal is to bring together cities engaged in implementing municipal LGBTIQ policies and to strengthen local LGBTIQ work through the exchange of

experience, expertise and good practices.