ILGA-Europe’s 10th Annual Review shows that as a result of the unprecedented events of 2020, LGBTI people and communities in Europe have been pushed to the brink

Press Release, Civil Rights and Freedom, Annual Review

> After an extraordinary year, Europe has been awoken to the acute fragility of the human rights situation for LGBTI people across the region, says ILGA-Europe.

Reporting from every country in the ILGA-Europe ‘Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of LGBTI People in Europe and Central Asia 2021’ is a glaring clarification that progress which has been taken for granted is not only increasingly fragile, but particularly vulnerable to exploitation by anti-human rights forces.

According to Evelyne Paradis, Executive Director of ILGA-Europe: “Our Annual Review shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted all of the gaps in terms of lived realities of LGBTI people across Europe and Central Asia. In reports from country after country, we see a stark rise in abuse and hate speech against LGBTI people; many of whom became vulnerable to homelessness have been forced to move back into hostile family and community situations. LGBTI organisations have had to skew their work towards provision of basic necessities like food and shelter as many governments left LGBTI people out of their relief packages; and there has been a resurgence of authorities and officials using LGBT people as scapegoats while authoritarian regimes are empowered to isolate and legislate without due process.”

Overall there has been a crackdown on democracy and civil society, and not just in Poland and Hungary, which made all the headlines in 2020. Contributors to the Review in several countries have expressed fears of their governments following in the footsteps of Poland and Hungary, while attacks on freedom of assembly continue to be a growing trend with brutal crackdowns and attacks, and court cases against people who took part in Pride events in 2019. Concurrently the Review shows a substantial rise in hate speech across the regions, both from official sources, in the media and online. The trend of politicians verbally attacking LGBTI people has grown considerably and spread widely, while many religious leaders have directly blamed LGBTI people for COVID-19.

Says Katrin Hugendubel, Advocacy Director at ILGA-Europe: “In this worrying context, it was important in 2020 to see the European Commission resetting its commitment to protect and advance LGBTI rights with the EU LGBTIQ Strategy 2020-2025, and the Commission President finally finding very clear words condemning persistent discrimination and ongoing attacks on LGBTI people. These are steps in the right direction, but they need to be followed by similar actions at national level, and the Strategy needs to be meaningfully implemented.”

The ILGA-Europe Annual Review 2021 shows a significant growth of opposition towards trans rights across Europe, which is beginning to have a wide and negative impact on legal gender recognition. There is legal regression and stagnation in 19 countries, many of which have seen opposition forces become louder, saying that advancing the protection against discrimination and self-determination for trans people would harm women’s rights or ‘the protection of minors’.

For much of this annual report's ten years, reporting on family rights has generally focused on same-sex partnership registration or marriage rights and in this context there continues to be stagnation in several countries. However, markedly in 2020, Montenegro became the first Western Balkans country outside the EU to introduce civil partnership; while in Serbia the government promised steps toward introducing civil partnership in 2021. We also see a growing number of countries moving on parenthood rights and paying more attention to the protection of children's rights.

Evelyne Paradis concludes: "With this review, our message to governments and institutions is that we have to acknowledge how fragile the situation is for LGBTI people across Europe and Central Asia. It is essential to take bold and decisive action at multiple levels, so that the human rights of LGBTI people in all their diversity will continue to advance across the region, and the promise of equality will be experienced in their lived realities."

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