

Good practices for LGBTI activists on engaging with local and regional authorities Workshop organised by the Council of Europe at the ILGA Annual Conference 2015

Thank you very much for inviting me to this panel. My name is Juul van Hoof, coordinator of the Rainbow Cities Network. I work as a program manager on LGBT issues at Movisie, the Netherlands Centre for Social Development and I am the founder and have been the coordinator of the RCN since 2010. The RCN currently consists of 22 members from all over Europe and Mexico City as the only non-European city. In this network, local policy makers exchange experiences and good practices in the field of LGBT policy issues and they cooperate in international projects. The representatives of the cities

Any city can join, as long as they commit to explicit inclusion of LGBT people and issues in their policies. Of course, there are preconditions from the Network for new members, the most important one is signing the Memorandum of Understanding, in which commitment to the RCN is asked. This commitment entails explicit policies for LGBT people and a political leadership to equality and social inclusion. Moreover, 1 or 2 Administration staff members on LGBT issues as delegates for exchange via a closed mailing list and attendance at annual meetings. This way, the current members want to prevent cities joining who solely want to because of the purpose of city marketing. Window dressing or pink washing are all too common and would in this case basically be an insult to the LGBT people living in these cities.

As Yoomi just explained, the situation is very grim in certain countries, region and cities within the Council of Europe. However, there are examples where local authorities do take responsibility for their LGBT citizens. I would like to share some examples from the RCN with you this morning.

Where some national governments are lagging behind when it comes to equal rights for LGBT people, some of their cities have stepped up and they have taken all possible provisions to include LGBT citizens in local legislation and services. We see this development in Italy and Germany, for instance. Certain measures can be taken at the local government level to enhance social inclusion of LGBT families or couples, or to make sure the local police force guarantees safety for LGBT people as well.

In the “Land” of Berlin, the LGBTI Unit consists of 3 policy makers. With national legislation not yet in place, they lobby for equal marriage and other civil rights at the regional level. They execute projects, support local NGO’s and provide information to the general public on LGBTI issues on various themes, such as LGBTI elderly, asylum, health care, sports, violence and work. The Senate Department for Labour, Integration and Women’s Issues

executed the project 'Transgender at Work': creating equal opportunities on the job market, ensuring that working conditions are not discriminatory and promoting the value of diversity in the world of work. The responsible Senator and Secretary of State and other government officials explicitly commit themselves to these goals. Sharing experiences, knowledge transfer, raising of awareness and empowerment of transgender individuals were important aspects of this project, which was funded by the Progress Programme of the European Union. Key stakeholders in the work and professional sphere were invited to take part in the project: managers and staff from company HR departments, public administration and other organisations, diversity and equal opportunities officers, employees' representatives, staff in job centres and employment agencies and transgender people and their organisations. The issues addressed by Transgender in Work were disseminated among a wider audience through discussions, workshops and project presentations. Key individuals from the fields of employment and careers and transgender organisations came together, got acquainted and shared questions and knowledge. Recommendations for action were developed jointly through interdisciplinary work and covered job application procedures, transition guidelines as a code of practice and trans mentoring programmes. The experiences and outcomes are available online, in German and in English.

[<http://www.berlin.de/lb/ads/schwerpunkte/lgbti/themen/>]

Another good practice I would like to share with you, is the approach by the City of Ljubljana, Slovenia. On a national level, legalisation of same-sex marriage is pending as of March 2015. A referendum is planned, but the outcome is yet unsure. The City of Ljubljana didn't wait for things to be arranged on the national level; they stepped up long before that to create a society accessible to all – explicitly including LGBT people. Their local Department of Health and Social Security supports LGBT NGOs and executes awareness-raising activities, programmes and public events. Ljubljana provides personal counselling and information, lectures and workshops and forms of mutual support in diverse groups, such as health and education. The City is the Patron of the annual Gay Pride parade and they assist NGOs by letting them make use of City premises and by (co-)financing their public work.

The City also sees a task for themselves in raising public awareness on LGBT issues. The City published the Rainbow Ljubljana booklet, in which all information on the LGBT community in Ljubljana and Slovenia generally was collected, intended for both local citizens and tourists. They also came up with an LGBT certificate for LGBT-friendly institutes and organisations. To mark major events – such as the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (17 May) and at the time of the Pride parade in June each year – the Rainbow flag is hoisted at the City Hall.

LGBT issues are included in the Strategy for the Development of Social Care in the City of Ljubljana 2013–2020, in which NGOs actively co-operated in preparation of the Strategy. In this Strategy, the City of Ljubljana commits to support new and existing social care programmes for LGBT people, programmes for parents of LGBT individuals, educational programmes for anti-discrimination of LGBT people in public institutes and it set up programmes for raising awareness in schools.

There are many examples of cities taking responsibilities for their LGBT citizens; in some countries these cities join forces and form regional or national networks. This is the case in Italy, where around 70 big and small cities from the north of Italy form the READY Network; bringing together local governments and equality bodies committed to combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. In the Netherlands, 42 cities take part in the national Rainbow Cities Programme, in which they exchange good practices on care and welfare, education, security and sports. An important part of their cooperation is with local LGBT NGOs, annual conferences bring them together to exchange interventions, projects and local initiatives. This saves time and money: the wheel doesn't need to be reinvented but can be adapted to the local situation.

I hope these examples gave you some insight into how local governments can play a role in combating discrimination of LGBT people and promoting social inclusion. In case you know of cities that might be eligible to join, please let me know!

Juul van Hoof

Movisie

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