Civil Rights and Freedom

For a long time, LGBTI people and allies have been fighting for civil rights and freedom. And to date, the achievements have been significant.

Civil Rights and Freedom

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From freedom of expression to freedom of association, things look different than they did years ago – in some countries, at least. But the fight for those rights continues today – and LGBTI people must be protected against forces which aim to take those rights away or stop them in their tracks.

LGBTI people's civil rights achievements can and will be targeted in periods of anti-democratic backsliding and attacks on the rule of law.

We often see this happening in times of crises, including economic, health or security. Or, threats to LGBTI people's civil rights and freedom can emerge when leadership changes – and suddenly, those in power aren't in favour of LGBTI people's human rights. Moreover, the LGBTI community is often specifically targeted as part of broader attacks to undermine civil society and sow further divisions.

At ILGA-Europe, we're committed to ensuring that LGBTI people gain and retain their civil rights and freedom. For example, we provide emergency grants to LGBTI organisations to find ways to respond to backlash – or to step up security in the case of threats. But overall, we focus on ensuring freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression.

Photo by Delia Giandeini

Here is how we work with each of these focus areas:

1. Freedom of Assembly
2. Freedom of Association
3. Freedom of Expression

Freedom of Assembly

When it comes to freedom of assembly, ILGA-Europe advocates for LGBTI people's right to gather publicly – whether it's to demand political action, organise LGBTI Pride manifestations or organise events.

At the same time, we monitor and alert international institutions if we notice that LGBTI people's freedom of assembly in certain countries is at risk. Last but not least, when possible we attend high-risk Pride events and work with the European Parliament to ensure LGBTI people's political representation.

To do this work effectively, we embrace a number of strategies. First of all, we work with international institutions and governments to develop laws which protect LGBTI people's freedom of assembly.

As part of that, we bring the LGBTI perspective into monitoring exercises and policy development for international institutions working with freedom of assembly. And we create space for the movement to find ways to work around laws that limit their right to freedom of assembly.

In addition, we monitor Prides across the region – and encourage those in power to support and attend them alongside us. Finally, we bring strategic cases to European courts.

Freedom of Association

At ILGA-Europe, we work to ensure that governments enable LGBTI groups to flourish and support their development. Part of that means advocating against laws that limit organisations' abilities to receive funding or to exist at all – especially in countries where legislation hinders LGBTI organisations from forming legally. We also advocate towards international institutions and donors – asking them to offer sufficient, flexible and accessible funding to LGBTI organisations.

To do this work effectively, our team advocates for implementing international human rights standards of freedom of association. We also monitor and alert international institutions when threats to freedom of association arise, and bring the LGBTI perspective to international monitoring processes.

Moreover, we demand that LGBTI organisations are included in internationally-funded projects that have to do with democracy and human rights. We also gather qualitative and quantitative data about LGBTI civil society in the region, and use it to build a case that backs up our ask for support.

Last but not least, ILGA-Europe strives to enable the movement to come up with strategies to work also in a context where laws are still limiting their right to freedom of association, and towards changing such laws.

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression refers to the right to communicate one's opinions and ideas. For LGBTI people, this goes from the ability to come out publicly and talk openly about sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), to the ability to speak in public about their issues and promote their human rights.

Across the region, we see attacks on the freedom of expression of LGBTI people, with the strongest form being so-called anti-propaganda laws or restrictions on including information about SOGIESC, for example in education. We alert international institutions when threats to this right appear in the form of restrictions or laws, and work towards clear European and international standards, including case law, to protect the freedom of expression on LGBTI rights.

We also support national-level efforts to combat restrictions on freedom of expression for LGBTI people – especially in places where people are criminalised for speaking out about LGBTI people and rights in the first place, through supporting and amplify national-level campaigns and supporting strategic litigation. On a European level, we are bringing the LGBTI perspective to international processes around standard setting on freedom of expression, both off- and online.

We also work with international institutions to implement international standards around freedom of expression, and team up with international NGOs to share knowledge, develop common strategies and create safeguards. (For example, we are a member of the Coalition against SLAPPs in Europe.)

Last but not least, we strive to enable the movement to come up with strategies to ensure they can operate even in countries where laws are limiting their right to freedom of expression. And we regularly bring strategic cases to

European courts to protect the rights of LGBTI people internationally.

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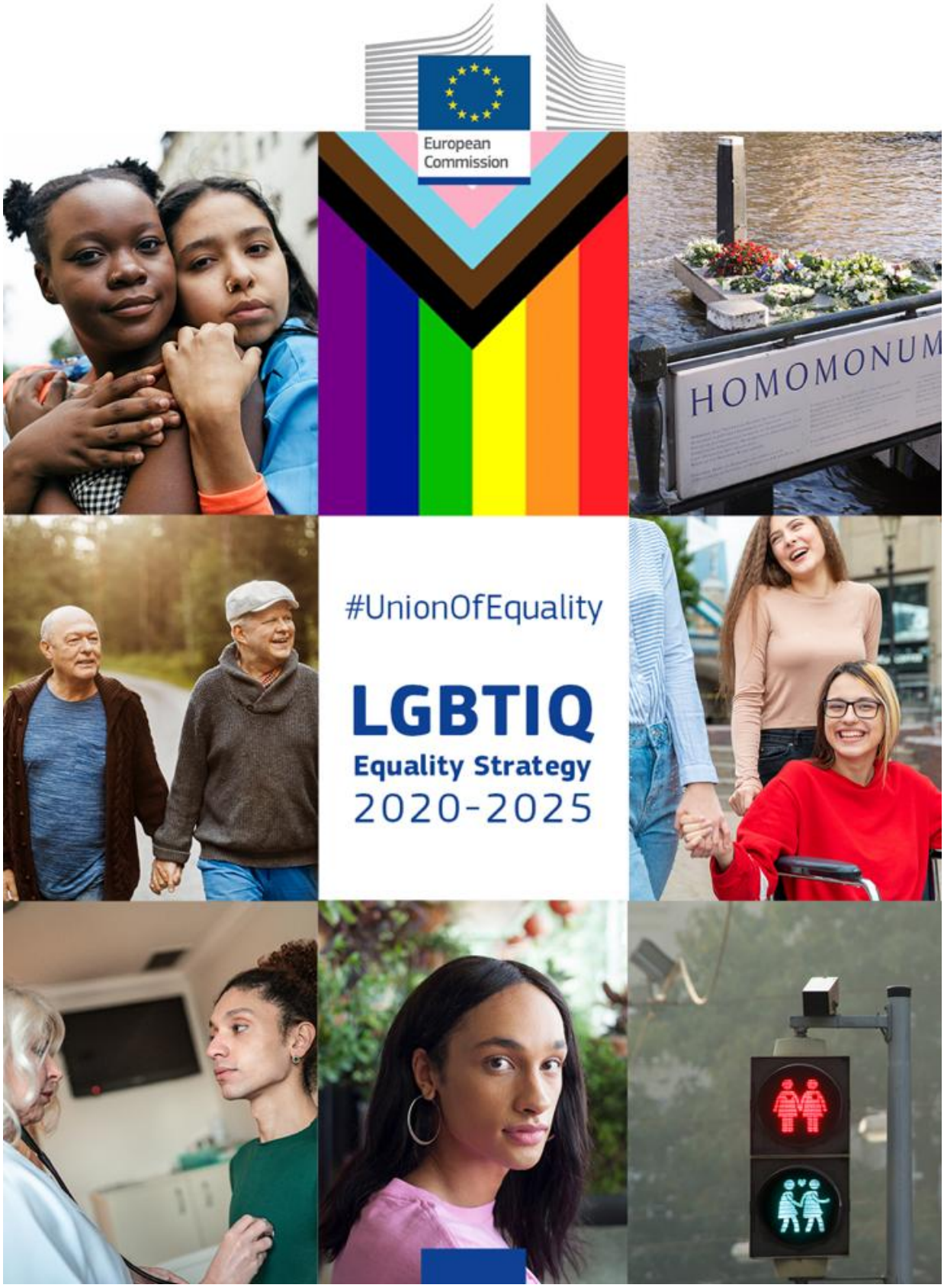
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