

Advancing LGBTI Equality in the EU: from 2020 and beyond

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Charlemagne building

Welcome

The Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission are honoured to welcome you to the High-Level Conference on Advancing LGBTI Equality in the EU: from 2020 and beyond. The purpose of today's high-level meeting is to take stock of the achievements so far and to discuss how to advance LGBTI equality in the years to come.

The need for an EU approach to combat discrimination against LGBTI people

The European Union is committed to combat discrimination against LGBTI people. In 2013, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) presented the results of a survey¹ that showed that LGBT people across the European Union experience discrimination, harassment, hate speech and violence, to the detriment of the full enjoyment of their fundamental rights. The survey indicated that the discrimination suffered by LGBT individuals is multifaceted and covers several aspects of life, such as employment, health, education and access to goods and services. Almost half of the respondents to the survey had felt discriminated against or harassed on grounds of sexual orientation in the preceding year, one in three were discriminated against when accessing goods or services, one in four were physically attacked, and one in five were discriminated against in employment or occupation. In 2014, the European Parliament recognised the FRA survey findings in a Resolution on the EU Roadmap² against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity and called on the European Commission to develop a comprehensive multiannual policy to protect the fundamental rights of LGBTI people. In addition, a group of 15 Member States had asked the Commission to develop a comprehensive EU approach to combat the discrimination of LGBTI people.

The 2015 Eurobarometer on discrimination³ in the EU indicated that almost 60% of EU citizens regarded discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity as widespread. Yet, the majority of respondents expressed a positive attitude towards equal rights for LGB individuals, same-sex relationships, same-sex marriage, working with an LGBT person, or having an LGB individual in the highest political office. A majority furthermore supported the ability for transgender people to change their civil documents. However, respondents were less comfortable with having a transgender person in the highest political office, accepting one's child being in a relationship with a transgender individual or someone of the same sex, or seeing gays or lesbians showing affection in public. Moreover, the 2015 Eurobarometer clearly demonstrated that large variations remain between the Member States.

The List of actions to advance LGBTI equality

Within this context, the European Commission presented the 2015 List of actions to advance LGBTI equality⁴, endorsed by the Council of the European Union in 2016⁵. The list of actions presented the concrete measures the Commission committed to undertake between 2015 and 2019 in order to expand and enforce EU legislation,

1 <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2013/eu-lgbt-survey-european-union-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-survey-results>

2 www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A7-2014-0009+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN

3 https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2077_83_4_437_ENG

4 https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/lesbian-gay-bi-trans-and-intersex-equality/list-actions-advance-lgbti-equality_en

5 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/06/16/epsco-conclusions-lgbti-equality/>

make progress in important policy fields and improve the social acceptance of LGBTI people. The List of actions covers many of the policy areas that are of particular concern to LGBTI people: non-discrimination, education, employment, health, free movement, asylum, hate speech, enlargement and foreign policy. The Commission has also sought to ensure that EU law and policy comply with the fundamental rights framework, including in particular the general prohibition of discrimination in Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Among the achievements are the adoption of key legislation, such as the Regulation facilitating the free circulation of public documents between EU countries, and the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive, which is designed to step up efforts to combat LGBTI-phobic hate speech. The Commission has implemented several awareness-raising activities such as illuminating its headquarters in the colours of the rainbow flag, organising awareness-raising events in European Commission Representations, participating in Prides and developing a series of video testimonies of LGBTI people and their allies across Europe. A specifically designed #EU4LGBTI toolkit to support the Commission Representations in the EU received the European Ombudsman Award for Good Administration. Arguably the most important actions have been the Commission's support to many LGBTI civil society organisations through the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme and the Erasmus+ Programme.

The above is just a short summary of all actions implemented. A full overview can be found in the annual reports that the Commission publishes yearly to report on the implementation of the List of actions. A final annual report covering 2019 is expected in the first half of 2020.

Today's conference

Now, 4 years after the presentation of the List of actions to advance LGBTI equality, it is time to re-evaluate. Discrimination, harassment, hate speech and violence continue to be a daily reality for many LGBTI people in the EU. In December 2018, a group of 19 Member States⁶ presented a Joint Non-Paper⁷ on the future of the List of actions, asking for the adoption of an LGBTI strategy. In February this year, the European Parliament also called on the European Commission to adopt a new strategic document to foster equality for LGBTI people in the coming years⁸. Accordingly, the European Commission and the Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union took the initiative to organise this High-Level Conference. The aim of today's meeting is to assess past actions, re-evaluate the situation of LGBTI people in today's EU, identify ongoing and new challenges and discuss how to tackle them.

In the first part, the new 2019 Eurobarometer data with regard to LGBTI equality will be presented, followed by a high-level panel discussion on the current challenges and continued discrimination experienced by the LGBTI community in the EU today. The second part, after the break, focusses on how to advance LGBTI equality in the coming years.

The debates and discussions of today's conference will inform future policies aiming at advancing LGBTI equality in the EU. All speakers, panellists and participants are thus encouraged to really grasp the opportunity to share ideas and experiences, and to voice concerns. In this way, each person present today has the potential to contribute to assembling the building blocks for a future policy to advance LGBTI equality and to pave the road towards a more just and inclusive Europe.

6 Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

7 <https://meae.gov.mt/en/Pages/Media/Policy%20Documents/LGBTI.aspx>

8 www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0129_EN.html