

Autumn 2006

ILGA  
EUROPE



# NEWSLETTER

[www.ilga-europe.org](http://www.ilga-europe.org)

vol 6 issue 2



# Younger and older

» annual conference:  
celebrating families and 10 years of ILGA-Europe

» is EU social policy relevant to LGBT people?

» challenges for young and older LGBT Europeans



## Message from Patricia

### A very warm welcome to the autumn edition of our Newsletter!

Many of us are about to gather in Sofia for our annual conference. This year we concentrate on the issue of families. We are going to explore further progress on the legal recognition of same-sex unions and their children, challenging and changing perceptions of the traditional family model and celebrating the diversity of families. During the Conference we continue strengthening the capacity of our member and will offer a number of useful and practical workshops on improving various skills and techniques of lobbying, fundraising and work with media. There will also be a celebration as ILGA-Europe marks its 10th anniversary!

The main topic of this Newsletter is age and sexuality. We continue exploring how the EU social policy, and particularly the EU's commitment to address social exclusion of various excluded social groups and on-going anti-discrimination policy, are relevant to LGBT people. Although we identified various areas of relevance, in this issue we concentrate on two areas – younger and older age.

Youth is our future and in order to achieve an inclusive and equal Europe we need to invest in our future. ILGA-Europe and IGLYO just completed and launched a report which highlights the problems and issues young LGBT Europeans face on a daily basis. Other contributions explore the need and ways organisations working with and for young people can and should include LGBT people.

While investing in youth, we cannot forget our senior citizens. Very often elderly people are abandoned by the states and social services. Elderly LGBT people struggle with many additional problems related to their age and sexuality. Some articles identify the need for age and LGBT organisations to work together to tackle social exclusion and discrimination against older LGBT people and offer concrete examples of how such work is being carried out in various parts of Europe.

**I hope you will enjoy this Newsletter!**

**PATRICIA PRENDIVILLE**

ILGA-Europe's Executive Director

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Equality for lesbian, gay,  
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## Table of Contents

<b>Celebrating 10 years of ILGA-Europe's family!</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>EU social agenda: what is in it for LGBT people?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Nasty procedural wrangling at ECOSOC</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Representing all young people at European level</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Building LGBT young people's capacity</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Let the voices of European LGBT youth be heard!</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Latest ILGA-Europe's publications</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Discrimination on the grounds of age and sexual orientation</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Visibility and Voice for Older LGBT People in Scotland</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>They need to know they are not forgotten</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Sofia Conference social programme</b>	<b>20</b>



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# Celebrating 10 years of ILGA-Europe's family!



***Sofia's conference theme will be "We are Family – Our families in Europe and the European family". Next to a special panel session and workshop about family, this conference will also be the occasion to celebrate the birthday of a very special child of ours.***

This year is in fact the tenth anniversary of ILGA-Europe. Ten years! It is sometimes surprising how time goes by and then one looks back and sees how much our "baby", ILGA-Europe, has grown. It has grown in the number of members, especially in South and Eastern Europe; in its funding, thanks to the European Commission and to generous donors such as the Sigrid Rausing Trust and Open Society Institute; in its staff, grown in number but most important in skills and capacities – in a word, in fabulousness!; in office space, when in Brussels you should come and check our new premises that we now share with ILGA; in the scope of its activities, in effectiveness and in its capacity to deliver, even in the number of board members!

Our organisation, this baby, has several mothers and fathers, as well as many foster parents, and the annual conference will be the occasion to pay them a tribute.

At the same time ILGA-Europe is also our family. And as in all families we get along well together but we also argue. Oh, yeah! We definitely argue... But there is always something that keeps us together, a shared dream of a different, better future that helps us mediate our differences and move the work forward. Because there is certainly still a huge lot to do, so much that sometimes we are not sure if we will make it, if we will have the strength, the determination, the skills, to manage such changes that need to happen as we would like to see them... So from time to time it is good to stop for a second and see where we have come from, what a long way we have gone in a short time, in fact, just ten years –

*Read more on the Sofia Conference social programme on the back cover.*

how much Europe has changed, how much of Europe we have changed. And so yes, we definitely can make it, "we shall overcome".

As we are the promoters of changes, we should be quite open to changing ourselves as well. In the past few years, since the Glasgow conference in fact, we have identified the need to put a greater effort into making ILGA-Europe a more diverse organisation, where women are equally represented and all groups in our constituency feel fully considered and recognised. We will continue this year the discussion started in Paris on diversity and inclusion within ILGA-Europe, building on a year's experience and on the contributions of our members. We will try to move the discussion forward and to continue implementing a strategy to make ILGA-Europe an open house for all.

However, the challenges ahead of us are also great and we want to be equipped in the best way to face them! We have started, some time ago, a review of our structures that have led to some changes in our constitution and standing orders. Taking up the learning points from Paris (first of all that proposals need to be as clear and as simple as possible!), we have a few more changes to our constitution and standing orders to discuss.

But in the past years, sometimes, the discussion has focussed even too much on the specific changes in our rules to respond to some specific needs of the organisation, and we have lost sight of the broader, more general discussion. What can be the best structures for the organisation to achieve even more in the next ten years?! We have thought to re-open this broader debate with a specific workshop, to take the time to look ahead and think of the ILGA-Europe of the future, the one that we imagine could better answer to the needs of our communities and build the fairer world we strive for.

So, come, and join our debate! As the Romans said "Rome was not built in a day but stone by stone" – we may have half a Coliseum, but we need to finish it with your stone too!

**RICCARDO GOTTARDI**

**Co-Chair of ILGA-Europe Executive Board**

ILGA-Europe Conference



## Celebrating 10 Years of ILGA-Europe!

Advancing equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Europe

[www.ilga-europe.org](http://www.ilga-europe.org)

# What is in it for LGBT people?



***The European Union is increasingly engaging in social issues. This article examines how the EU social policies are relevant to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Europe.***

Engaging with European Union social policy-making is often a challenging task. Amidst talks of “growth and jobs”, of modernising social protection systems, of increasing flexibility of the labour market, one might ask: How is European Union policy-making relevant to a lesbian woman who faces harassment in her workplace, to a gay man who cannot talk openly to health professionals, or to a gay teenager who is bullied at school? Given that the EU adopts policies that deal with issues ranging from access to health and social security to quality of employment, the answer is that we have to pay attention to European social policy.

Just as European Union (EU) legislation helped to advance legal protection against discrimination in employment, the EU plays a role in shaping social policies adopted by Member States. Whether it is through legislation, policy guidelines or strategies, European institutions can either require governments or encourage them to take measures that would better address the needs of LGBT people and protect their rights. As such, the European social agenda offers a number of opportunities for LGBT people to be considered and involved in the development of European policies.

## **Social Inclusion**

One of the policy areas that bears promises for LGBT issues is the EU’s “social inclusion process”. This strategy is aimed at tackling forms of exclusion that can lead to, or result from, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and the inability to access education or health services at the national level.

A key feature of this European process is that it takes shape through the national action plans (NAPs) developed by each EU country, and not through programmes designed in Brussels. In these action plans, governments identify priorities for their country in relation to poverty and exclusion, and list measures that they agree to put into action. And as the Swedish and Irish NAPs demonstrated, there is room to include explicit reference to LGBT people in these plans.

The social inclusion process looks at three policy areas that are pertinent to LGBT people, i.e. social inclusion, pensions and health care. ILGA-

Europe is currently lobbying for inclusion of the needs of young people in the Member States’ plans of action, in particular problems like bullying and marginalisation at school, which make LGBT youth more vulnerable to poor mental health and lower school performance.

The social inclusion process also offers opportunities to raise the issue of discrimination of older LGBT people, such as the availability of pensions to same-sex couples. More generally, the strategy on health care should be used to work towards equal access to health services for LGBT people. For example, Member States can be encouraged to take concrete measures on matters like providing LGBT-friendly health services where LGBT people feel safe to go, or ensuring the involvement of same-sex partners in medical treatment decisions.

## **Health**

Health is another area of EU policy where LGBT issues can be brought up. First, there is potential to raise visibility of LGBT-related health issues in the context of the development of a European mental health strategy. By contributing to the elaboration of a Europe-wide strategy, we can help develop public health policies that take into account the impact of discrimination on a person’s mental health. This strategy can lead to the adoption of an EU-led prevention programme targeting risk factors of mental health, and further research on these risks. It is thus important to push for explicit recognition of sexual orientation discrimination as a determinant of mental health to make sure that policy guidelines followed by countries are LGBT-friendly.

Secondly, discussions over the regulation of health services also require our attention. A key issue of the European legislative agenda, the adoption of a legal framework regulating social, educational and health services will have an impact on the quality of services provided to everyone in the EU. It will also influence the standards that health care providers will have to implement when dealing with those in need of care. Thus, not only does this particular debate offer possibilities for improving access to health services; it is also one discussion in which it is important to participate if we want to ensure that health services in the EU are accessible to LGBT people without discrimination.

In short, the EU social policy agenda offers possibilities to increase visibility of issues of concern to the LGBT community and to ensure that they are considered in the policy-making process. It’s all about keeping our eyes open for opportunities and making the most of them to raise awareness about LGBT-related issues and, ultimately, establish ground for new legal standards.

# Nasty procedural wrangling at the ECOSOC

ILGA and its members keep struggling for recognition at United Nations.



***In Spring 2005 ILGA led a campaign to have several LGBT groups apply to gain observer status at the United Nations. The full 53 governments' members of the ECOSOC gathered in Geneva last July. On the table, the applications of ILGA, LBL, LSVD, and ILGA-Europe. In its sittings in January and May, the 19 members' New York based NGO Committee, which primarily reviews the applications, recommended the ECOSOC to reject them all.***

**The bottom line:** ILGA has been denied consultative status. The ECOSOC rejected proposals to deny status to the Danish group LBL, the German group LSVD and ILGA-Europe. The ECOSOC could not agree however on whether to affirmatively grant these groups status, and substantive consideration has been deferred.

## ILGA

The first group up for consideration was ILGA. We already knew that our margin of support on any of the groups was very narrow, that the USA and Australia would vote against ILGA but in favour of the other 3 groups (primarily because they still associated ILGA with the decade-old NAMBLA/paedophilia debate), that Costa Rica would only support 1 of the 4 groups, and that these factors combined meant that we had a chance with LBL, LSVD and ILGA-Europe, but did not have sufficient support to win the vote on ILGA. What we did not know was how intense and nasty the procedural wrangling would become... Under consideration was a draft decision/recommendation by the NGO Committee proposing "that the Economic and Social Council decides not to grant consultative status to the International Lesbian and Gay Association." Germany on behalf of the EU proposed an amendment to delete the word "not" and grant status to ILGA. China objected that this was not a valid amendment because it would reverse the intent of the original motion. The Chair was inclined to the view that the German proposal was a valid amendment, but Russia moved a no-action motion to prevent further consideration of the German proposal. After (much) debate, the Russian motion was carried 25-21, with 5 abstentions. The ECOSOC then voted on the Committee recommendation to deny ILGA consultative status, and this recommendation was adopted by a vote of 22-19, with 9 abstentions.

## LBL

(i) Consideration was then given to the NGO Committee recommendation that LBL not be granted consultative status. Again, Germany proposed the deletion of the word "not", again Russia proposed a no action motion on the German proposal, and again the motion was adopted, this time by a narrower vote of 23-21, with 6 abstentions. Again the Council moved on to consider the Committee

recommendation to deny LBL consultative status, but this time the recommendation was rejected by a vote of 19-22, with 9 abstentions. *And that's where confusion really set in: the ECOSOC had voted no-action on the German proposal to grant status, but had also rejected a motion to deny status. Where did that leave LBL? Guinea-Bissau was first off the mark with a proposal to send it back to the NGO Committee (where LBL would certainly be rejected a second time); Germany also made a proposal that the ECOSOC vote to accord status to LBL. The Guinea-Bissau proposal was voted on first, and rejected by a tied vote of 20-20, with 9 abstentions. Germany then pointed out that having rejected a proposal to deny status, and having also rejected a proposal to send it back to Committee, it was time to vote on the only substantive issue remaining: whether to grant status to LBL. This caused no end of consternation. Russia complained that it needed more time to review the application of the NGO, that it would need to consult with capital and vowed "to do everything we can to prevent this". Ultimately, a motion to adjourn and enable the application to be reconsidered was adopted by a vote of 28-20, with 4 abstentions.*

## LSVD

The Committee recommendation to deny LSVD consultative status was rejected by a vote of 20-23, with 7 abstentions. Immediately after the vote, Russia proposed sending it back to the NGO Committee, and Germany proposed an adjournment, which was carried.

## ILGA-Europe

The Committee recommendation to deny ILGA-Europe consultative status was rejected by a vote of 22-22, with 6 abstentions. As with LSVD, Russia proposed sending it back to the NGO Committee, and Germany proposed an adjournment, which was carried.

So, three of the four NGOs are still in the running, and many States are committed to ensuring that LGBT groups have a voice at the UN. The ECOSOC is expected to resume consideration of these groups at its December 2006 meeting, and we will keep up the fight to bring to our issues the attention they deserve.



Image by Arnis Balcius

# Representing all young people at European level

*In this article the European Youth Forum introduces its work and identifies how it embraces LGBT issues.*

Independently established by youth organisations, the European Youth Forum is a pan-European platform of 94 national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations, which are federations of youth organisations in themselves. It brings together tens of millions of young people from all over Europe, organised in order to represent their common interests.

Through representing its Member Organisations, the European Youth Forum aims to improve the living conditions of all young people in Europe. To that end, the European Youth Forum's role is to channel the flow of information, interests and opinions between young people and international institutions - the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations - and to promote the development of youth

work in Europe and internationally. The Youth Forum indeed aims to empower all young people to participate actively in the shaping of Europe and the society in which they live.

Unifying the active participation of European young people, the European Youth Forum represents the youth in Europe in all its diversity. In other words, the European Youth Forum does not intend to represent the particular interests of specific groups within society but rather those of young people and youth organisations in general.

Equal access to education and to employment for all young people, a significant level of social protection and the respect of Human Rights and dignity of all young people in Europe are part of our main priorities.



As the representative body of young people in Europe, age discrimination is an important concern for the European Youth Forum. This is because despite the existence of the employment equality directive, which forbade age discrimination in the labour market already in 2000, the European youth is still bearing much higher levels of discrimination in the labour market, either when acceding to jobs or when working under precarious contractual arrangements.

But the European Youth Forum also fights strongly against all other forms of discrimination, including discrimination grounded on sexual orientation. The European Youth Forum therefore defends Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people's rights, notably through the active participation of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Student and Youth Organisation (IGLYO), which is one of our members, in our daily work. The European Youth Forum is indeed a passionate promoter of Human

Rights and of Human Rights Education. We strive for the respect of human dignity in Europe and as such are natural defenders of LGBT issues and rights.

*1. The European Youth Forum urges international institutions and their member states to develop policies able to embrace diversity in Europe.*

We believe that Europe's diversity is an asset for its further political, economic and cultural development and therefore condemn the persisting levels of discrimination borne by the most vulnerable minorities of Europe, among which LGBT people stand. In its latest Policy Paper on Equality and Diversity, the European Youth Forum highlighted the important role that education can play in order to make decisive progress against discrimination.

Moreover, deeply involved from its outset in the Council of Europe Campaign "All Different – All Equal", the European Youth Forum is engaged into resolved actions to make progress towards the democratisation and institutionalisation of diversity in Europe. We are asking our institutional partners and their respective member States to develop policies and set up adequate mechanisms to make sure that the diversity of the population is reflected at all levels of society. To that end, we believe that participation is the missing link able to bridge the gap between existing diversity in Europe today matched with high levels of discrimination and the aim to offer equal opportunities to all people whoever they are. In this process, the European Youth Forum welcomes

the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All as an important momentum to make progress in this area.

While we advocate for more diversity at the level of the society, we are also working on setting up mechanisms aiming to make sure that youth work is indeed inclusive of all young people. Youth work inclusiveness is for us an essential ingredient to build up youth organisations' legitimacy to participate in decision making at all levels, when young people are concerned.

*2. On the other hand, we are involved in different ways for the promotion and protection of LGBT people's rights.*

Our policy work on Human Rights, the fight against discrimination and on social inclusion usually encompasses chapters addressing the needs of the LGBT community. Particular emphasis was given to LGBT people's needs and expectations in the Policy Paper on Equality and Diversity but they were also present in the Policy Paper on Social Inclusion through Youth Participation both adopted by the European Youth Forum in April 2006.

In order to develop policies, which are relevant to the needs of LGBT people, the Youth Forum always keeps updated on the needs and realities of LGBT first and foremost through our membership and the participation of IGLYO representatives in various events organised by the Youth Forum. The European Youth Forum is also having a continuous dialogue with ILGA-Europe on LGBT issues, as both organisations are members of the Social Platform, but also both take part in the newly created NGO working group on multiple discrimination. The European Youth Forum indeed believes that working effectively on discrimination implies to consider all forms of discrimination on an equal footing, find out what unify the different forms of discrimination, and build up coalitions able to generate social inclusion for all groups in society. That is why we see it so important to collaborate with other civil society actors working specifically on LGBT issues.

Through such collaboration, the European Youth Forum gets the opportunity to understand LGBT people's challenges and expectations more deeply. In that, the European Youth Forum has very much appreciated the quality of the report jointly written by IGLYO and ILGA-Europe in 2006 on "Social exclusion of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT) in Europe". The European Youth Forum shares the findings of the report and may have a role to play in further lobby actions aiming to encourage institutions to deploy more efforts towards young LGBT people's social inclusion.

Lastly, when Human Rights violations infringing the rights of LGBT people occur, the European Youth Forum immediately reacts to the institutions concerned as such happenings and positions constitute serious attacks to the humanist values and foundations at the core of the European construction. For example, the European Youth Forum was extremely shocked when the Polish government decided to censor the Human Rights Education manual COMPASS and to dismiss the Director of the Central Teachers Training Centre (CODN) of Poland, alleging that the manual would promote homosexual behaviour.

**RENALDAS VAISBRODAS**

**President of the European Youth Forum**

# International Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Youth & Student Organisation

## Building LGBT Young People's Capacities



"Past, present, future" by IGLYO

### Why?

LGBT individuals often cannot count on the support which they need within their close environments. Unlike some communities like that of a religious minority, or a ethnic minority, young LGBT people must journey through an individual coming-out, often lacking 'peers' with whom they can share feelings and experiences. LGBT Youth groups can serve as a place where these young people can meet 'like-minded' people. Coming-out together eases the isolation and pressure of the lives of young LGBT's, and enables them to react stronger to the pressure from society. Community building of young people also enables them to represent their own needs, which is unfortunately not a luxury.

From an EU-policy perspective

one could say that the general lack of young people's inclusion in the decision making process contributes to a remarkable gap between anti-discrimination measures; a good example is the existence of EU anti-discrimination directives as in the employment directive, and the lack of equal protective measures in schools. Isn't practising anti-discrimination in schools more likely to contribute to a more inclusive and productive job market in the future? Not to mention the affect that the increased mental health situations of thousands of LGBT young people would have on society.

***IGLYO is the main network of LGBT youth organisations in Europe. In this article IGLYO highlights the importance of strengthening capacity of LGBT youth organisations, identifies difficulties for young LGBT activists and provides suggestions on addressing them.***

Being a European network of organisations working with young LGBT people, IGLYO has over twenty years experience in building capacities of young activists. In fact there is probably a good chance that you are a predecessor of the people currently active in IGLYO, as many people that were once active in IGLYO are now working in national LGBT organisations, or active in European institutions. All of these people carry the knowledge that working with young people requires an understanding of the lives and situations of young LGBT people. It also needs an appropriate understanding of policies addressing young people. Bringing young people together and enabling them to exchange experience by means of non-formal education is still a core activity of IGLYO.

At the same time young LGBT activists are often perceived by their older colleagues as less knowledgeable and less experienced. Consequently they remain excluded in the policy development and decision making processes, often even in the field of youth issues. "I know how it is to be young because I've been young too!" is an often heard comment. It again illustrates the lacking opportunity for young people to represent their current needs, even if it is in their own environment. The 'greyer character' of the LGBT movement is one that maybe mainly characterises the Western movement: the relatively young LGBT movement in Eastern Europe is often led by young people.

## ILGA-Europe Pilot Human Rights Violations Documentation Fund

ILGA-Europe announces second call for proposals within its Small Pilot Human Rights Violations Documentation Fund with support of the Sigrid Rausing Trust. The goal of the fund is **to promote documentation of cases of discrimination, hate crimes and other human rights violations against LGBT people according to the international human rights standards.**

The small pilot fund will support small-scale projects (up to 2,000 euros) intended to document (cases of) discrimination, hate crimes and other human rights violations committed on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

### Priority areas:

- > hate crimes and hate speech (including in media)
- > brutalities of law-enforcement authorities
- > legal position of LGBT people in an eligible country
- > freedom of assembly and association

The information contained in the documentation reports will subsequently be used by ILGA-Europe in its lobbying activities with the European institutions: European Union, Council of Europe and the OSCE.

### Eligibility criteria:

- > proposals will be accepted from officially registered with local authorities LGBT organisations or initiative groups (in countries, where there are no registered LGBT NGOs);
- > countries eligible are Western NIS (Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus), Southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), the Western Balkans (Albania and former Yugoslavia), the 10 new EU member states and the EU accession countries;

**To apply, please fill in the application form containing the following information:**

- > short description of your organisation and its achievements
- > goal and objectives of the proposal
- > short description of the scope and methodology of documentation of human rights violations
- > description of planned documentation activities
- > expected outcomes (long-term results) and outputs (short-term results)

A budget should be annexed. It should not exceed 2,000 euros. A maximum of 20% of the budget can go to overhead expenses (office costs). All other costs are eligible if justified by the needs of the project.

You can submit your application or ask any questions in relation to the Fund by e-mail: [maxim@ilga-europe.org](mailto:maxim@ilga-europe.org). The deadline for the second round of applications is **31 October 2006**. The decision will be made by a board of independent experts within maximum 1 month from the time the proposal was submitted.

ILGA-Europe looks forward to your applications!

Application form is available at our website:

[www.ilga-europe.org](http://www.ilga-europe.org)

### Difficulties

Capacity building can take place within LGBT organisations, however the majority of LGBT young people choose not to be part of such formal structure. Reasons for this are plentiful; some young people don't want to be associated as a member of a LGBT organisation, often organisations have youth not included as a priority area which results in not attracting young people, many youth structures can not count on structural support and depend on the dedication of volunteers, who mostly leave the organisation after a few years.

Political youth groups and other minority groups often can rely on structural (financial) assistance from their 'mother' organisations. For LGBT organisations this is often not the case, for the simple reason that LGBT organisations often do not have the means to provide such support. Additionally, their political agenda's concentrate on 'same-rights' issues, which often do not directly address current young people's needs. Thus young people remain dependent on governmental (or foreign) support, which in many cases, if it exists at all, does not meet the needs of the community.

### What to do?

Young people should actively be included and engaged in decision making, leading by example in LGBT organisations themselves. By making policies and processes of policy-making understandable and accessible for young people, they become able to address their own issues. Similar to political youth organisations which support their (independent) youth structures, LGBT organisations have an important role in assisting youth structures too. Young LGBT people that are encouraged to present their needs and rights are the potential community leaders of the future. Therefore investing in young people is a remunerative investment. Such an approach eventually contributes to a sustainable LGBT movement, in which young people feel welcomed and in which activism is not just an activity of the liberators who grew up decades ago, in a different society whilst dealing with different problems.

IGLYO aims at bridging the gap between young people performing grass root activism and European Policy makers. Conferences and study sessions financed by the Council of Europe enable young people to meet policy makers and to address the everyday issues that they deal with. This is an effective strategy because the powerful messages are brought by the young people that are directly concerned by these policies. In the European Youth Movement LGBT young people relatively easy establish contact with European Youth Leaders, which contributes to a good understanding on the lives of young LGBT people amongst these political leaders of the future. It is for this reason, most likely that the youth movement takes a notable lead in developing policies on inclusion, diversity and anti-discrimination.

BJÖRN VAN ROOZENDAAL  
IGLYO

**IGLYO**





Launch of ILGA-Europe and IGLYO Social Exclusion of LGBT Youth in Europe report at the European Parliament. From left to right: Raül Romeva i Rueda (MEP); Michael Cashman (MEP); Sophie In't Veld (MEP); Björn van Roozendaal (IGLYO); Proinsias De Rossa (MEP); Piia-Noora Kauppi (MEP); Jean Lambert, MEP; Evelyne Paradis (ILGA-Europe) and Judit Takács (researcher & author of the report); image by ILGA-Europe.

# Let the voices of European LGBT youth be heard!

*This article summarizes main findings of the report conducted jointly by ILGA-Europe and IGLYO and identifies areas where young LGBT Europeans face discrimination and prejudice.*

**>> [My parents] consider homosexuality an immoral, dirty, perverted thing and think it's a great sin, a practice that breaks all of society rules and norms, bringing shame. So I've been asked to hide the fact I am homosexual from all the relatives, acquaintances and colleagues of theirs in order not to damage their personal and professional image. – I was called a disgrace to the family, faced lack of understanding and threats of being thrown out of the house. <<**

On 13 September we proudly presented a report on the *Social exclusion of LGBT youth in Europe* to members of the European Parliament – including the findings of the original survey research conducted by the ILGA-Europe and IGLYO social exclusion research team.

Our main goal was to uncover regular patterns of social exclusion mechanisms affecting young LGBT people in different European countries, as in our view discrimination can be prevented only if there is a clearer picture of the existing situation – and if we listen to those who are often completely silenced. By collecting descriptions of real life personal experiences, we wanted to let the voices of European LGBT youth be heard as we believe in the importance of combining research and solidarity: our work has therefore been prepared for young LGBT people, about young LGBT people and with their valuable help.

On the basis of international research findings, we have identified five main areas where young LGBT people can and often do encounter prejudice and/or discrimination: 1) family, 2) school, 3) peer group, 4) religious and other community life, and 5) media. Subsequently, questionnaires were designed to highlight typical cases and causes of social exclusion as well as good examples of fair treatment of LGBT youth. These questionnaires were sent to the member organisations of ILGA-Europe and IGLYO, who were asked to

**>> [My father] says he believes me that I am gay and I was born that way but he still wants me to have a wife, family, and children – at the worst I can also have a male-lover. >>**

collect answers. The questionnaires were also made available on the homepages of ILGA-Europe and IGLYO in seventeen different languages.

Between January and March 2006, ILGA-Europe and IGLYO received **754 responses** from **37 European countries** as well as 41 responses from European – mainly LGBT – organisations. The strength of this survey was exactly the motivation of several hundred young people (most of them younger than 25) to answer

our questionnaires from which similar patterns of mechanisms of social exclusion emerged from different countries.

According to our findings young LGBT people have a lot of trouble with the main agents of socialisation: with their family, school, peer group and media products they encounter. As school and family seem to be the social contexts where it is particularly problematic for LGBT youth to fit into (indeed, almost two-thirds of our respondents experienced prejudice and/or discrimination in school, and more than half of them in their own family), I would like to summarise the main findings regarding rejection in family and isolation in school experienced by young LGBT people. The rest of our observations can be found in the full text report published on the website of ILGA-Europe.

## Rejection in family

Disbelief, denial and demands for “changing back to normal” were described as typical family reactions to coming out to one’s family: “My mother’s first reaction to my outing was ‘you will die of AIDS’, her second thought was to have an exorcism performed on me by a Roman Catholic priest.” – “It is often assumed that I am heterosexual, and my parents often express thoughts like ‘I wish you would grow up and forget those things’”

Stereotypical misconceptions of what it means to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual greatly contributed to the non-accepting attitudes towards

LGBT family members. Responses showed that homosexuality is often associated with AIDS and HIV infection as well as with drug use: *My father was afraid that even though I am lesbian I will get AIDS infection from my gay friends and in any case he believed that I couldn't be a lesbian as I am not over 100 kg.*

Being rejected as an LGBT person by close family members was shown to force young people into self-denial and/or constructing a double life strategy: *[My father] says he believes me that I am gay and I was born that way but he still wants me to have a wife, family, and children – at the worst I can also have a male-lover.*

In some cases coming out to parents could pose the threat of or actually lead to being forced to leave the family home. Rejection by family members often reflects fear of social stigmatisation affecting the parents and the family as a whole in a heterosexist

**>> In my family it is accepted very well. My aunt from my mother's side is a lesbian and the brother of my father is bisexual. This helps a lot. >>**

environment. When parents are not ready to face this stigma, they try to convince their LGBT family member to conceal their real identity in order to avoid shame. This could lead to young LGBT people’s feeling of being betrayed and contribute to their isolation within their family:

*[My parents] consider homosexuality an immoral, dirty, perverted thing and think it's a great sin, a practice that breaks all of society rules and norms, bringing shame. So I've been asked to hide the fact I am homosexual from all the relatives, acquaintances and colleagues of theirs in order not to damage their personal and professional image. – I was called a disgrace to the family, faced lack of understanding and threats of being thrown out of the house.*

Family rejection targeting partners was also often reported, which for many respondents meant a painful compromise: while their individual LGBT status seemed to be recognised and accepted by family members, at the same time their partners’ existence was symbolically as well as practically denied. Another manifestation of family is demanding from young LGBT people to leave their partners, implying that partners must be the source of the problem, and by getting rid of them, the situation can be “normalised” again.

In contrast with the negative experiences of most of the respondents, there were a few reports on positive, accepting family atmosphere. In some of these families, there were already openly gay or lesbian family members providing positive role models for young LGBT people: *In my family it is accepted very well. My aunt from my mother's side is a lesbian and the brother of my father is bisexual. This helps a lot.*

## Isolation in school

In the school environment bullying seemed to be a real great problem, including a wide spectrum of negative experiences from name calling and ostracism to physical attacks. Most of our respondents who experienced bullying at school reported verbal attacks, while a much smaller number of them suffered physical acts of violence. Longer term or repeated bullying was shown to have serious consequences on the victims: Some of them became withdrawn

**>> I was physically abused every day in school for four years. This was because they found me too butch and that I looked like a boy, and of course, because I am a lesbian. <<**

and socially isolated, exactly during those years when most other young people learn to express themselves socially. In some cases victims of bullying did not see any other way out than leaving school altogether. Most people are aware of the fact that dropping out of school or becoming an early school leaver significantly reduces the chances of any young person of successful social integration later in life. However, bullying can create such an unbearable situation for its victims that they take even this risk, too. Respondents claimed that mostly their peers were responsible for their negative experiences.

**>> In schools there are no clear guidelines about how to present LGBT issues in the classroom, this is why teachers usually skip the topic. Teachers are not trained to deal with this topic. The only occasion I can remember that the topic was discussed was in the religion class where the debate was already oriented, thus providing a partial sight of the topic. <<**

Bullying was often interpreted as being related to gender nonconforming behaviour, character and look – or what was perceived to be such by others: *I was physically abused every day in school for four years. This was because they found me too butch and that I looked like a boy, and of course, because I am a lesbian.*

A lot of respondents reported that they were bullied by peers even before they were out, i.e. before they had consciously revealed their LGBT status in school: *When I was at school, I was bullied for being gay but it was only because my classmates presumed I was gay ... it was before I even told people I was gay.*

This phenomenon can also be related to the strict enforcement of rigidly separated sets of gendered behaviour by peers who seemed to suspect homosexuality when gender role expectations were not “properly” fulfilled. This aspect of anti-gay/lesbian bullying depends more on the perpetrators’ gender socialisation norms than on the actual traits of the victims, thus it can affect anyone irrespective of their “real” sexual orientation or gender identity.

Some respondents reported homophobic and heterosexist manifestations of teachers who *“have spoken against homosexuality without knowing that there are gays in their class”, who “laugh when they briefly talk about this subject”, who “often made me the target of jokes publicly”.* Teachers were also perceived as lacking a better understanding of privacy issues. Uninvited inquiries of teachers into the personal lives of students were interpreted as a lack of respect and recognition. In this respect, transgender students could find themselves in specifically problematic situations – especially if their gender designation was seen by teachers as “ambiguous”.

Language use was shown as an important indicator of teachers’ homo-negative attitudes. However, in certain cases politically incorrect vocabulary was seen as simply reflecting the lack of the teachers’ knowledge on LGBT issues. In this context the lack of teachers’ training

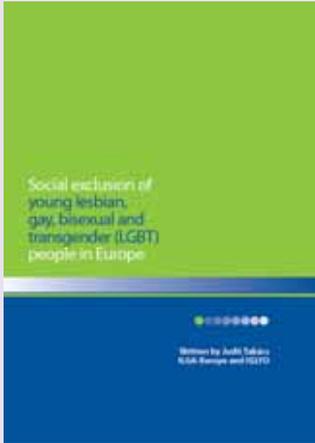
**>> When I was at school, I was bullied for being gay but it was only because my classmates presumed I was gay ... it was before I even told people I was gay. <<**

to present or handle LGBT issues – in a non-judgemental way – was also emphasised: *In schools there are no clear guidelines about how to present LGBT issues in the classroom, this is why teachers usually skip the topic. Teachers are not trained to deal with this topic. The only occasion I can remember that the topic was discussed was in the religion class where the debate was already oriented, thus providing a partial sight of the topic.*

Lack of openly LGBT teachers, who can act as potential positive role models for LGBT students, was also perceived to indicate the general problems of acceptance: *“very few if any teachers are openly gay because it’s not a conducive environment for employees to be out in either”.*

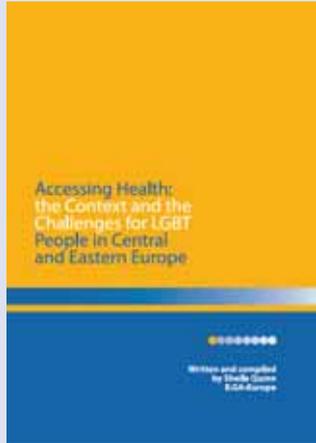
The silencing of LGBT issues in school curriculum, i.e. the fact that LGBT issues are not included, mentioned or covered in school curriculum, was interpreted by many respondents as a tool at the institutional level for maintaining LGBT invisibility in school and as such an instance of discrimination in itself: *The whole curriculum in all disciplines at all levels at secondary, vocational and to a large extent at universities is not gender-sensitive. Even such issues of LGBT as human rights are rarely found in curricula of higher education. The most discriminative element at schools is that LGBT issues are marginalised, omitted, condoned, ignored or presented as deviant, not even worth discussing.*

**Our research proved that LGBT youth had a lot to say about social exclusion. Accounts of personal experiences we have collected show families, schools, religious communities, workplaces, and symbolic media environments as potentially threatening places to grow up and live in for young lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people. We believe that highlighting these threats is a start to combat the spread of discriminatory social exclusion practices.**



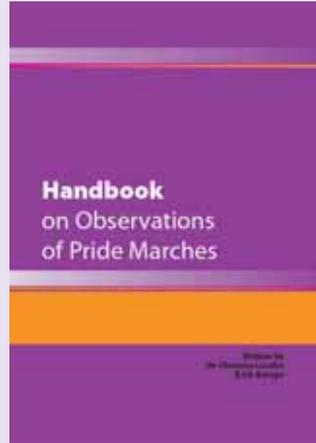
**Social exclusion of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT) in Europe (April 2006)**

This joint report by IGLYO and ILGA-Europe is a response to the need to bring attention to the social exclusion of young LGBT people in Europe and to put the issue on the agenda of national and European policy-makers. This publication highlights the effect that discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation and gender identity has on young LGBT people's capacity to be socially included and to become active citizens. It also raises awareness about the multiple forms of discrimination that interact to put young LGBT people at a particular disadvantage and risk of exclusion.



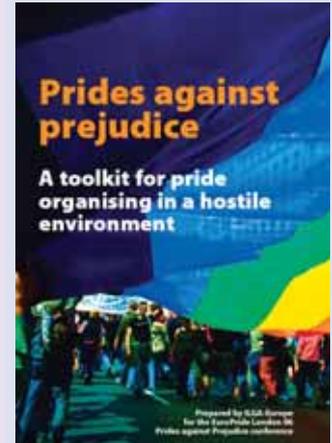
**Accessing Health: the Context and the Challenges for LGBT People in Central and Eastern Europe (April 2006)**

This research project is the first of its size and scope has to be carried out among LGBT communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova and Romania. As such, the initiative is of groundbreaking importance and the data collected will serve to inform ongoing advocacy and policy work. The report presents the findings on health and access to the health care system by the LGBT communities in five Central and Eastern European countries, as well as draws conclusions and makes recommendations to the relevant stakeholders, including international organisations. It also introduces a methodology and lessons learnt, which could be used for further research.



**Handbook on Observations of Pride Marches (June 2006)**

This Handbook is for people and organisations who are thinking of monitoring human rights abuses occurring during Pride marches. The Handbook looks at different aspects of observing Pride marches. It explains briefly the principles of human rights monitoring. It lists relevant human rights instruments which can be invoked when a Pride march is banned or violent. Then it gives some practical advice and tools on human rights monitoring through observation of Pride marches. Once the factual information is collected it is important to gather the information in a report and to send it to the relevant human rights organisation. Information is given on organisations that monitor the implementation of human rights standards and how to approach them. Finally it looks into the possibility of taking cases before courts at national and international level and the challenges attached to this approach.



**Prides against Prejudice. A toolkit for pride organising in a hostile environment (September 2006)**

This toolkit is intended to provide ideas and information resources for those wanting to organise Pride events in a hostile environment. The need for it has been made clear by the intense hostility faced by many Pride organisers in Central and Eastern Europe. In drawing heavily on their experiences and successes, and matching this input with information on support available from the European institutions and the LGBT community internationally, it aims to underpin the consolidation of progress made so far, and provide the initial know-how for those wishing to arrange events in countries and towns where no Pride events have yet been held.

Latest ILGA-Europe's publications

**ILGA-Europe general leaflet (June 2006)**

ILGA-Europe general leaflet provides information about what is ILGA-Europe, its aims and objectives, why there is a need for our organisation and how you can get involved in and support. Thanks to our volunteer translators the leaflet is also available in 30 European languages!

All publications are available in PDF format on our website: [www.ilga-europe.org](http://www.ilga-europe.org) > Publications > Non-periodical

E-mail us if you want to order a printed version: [info@ilga-europe.org](mailto:info@ilga-europe.org)





Image by Arnis Balcius

# Discrimination on the grounds of age and sexual orientation

***AGE, the European Older People's Platform, provides an overview of issues faced by older LGBT people in Europe and identifies how organisation addressing discrimination on the grounds of age and sexuality could work together to tackle multiple discrimination.***

Although people over 50 years of age make-up a large and diverse section of the European Union's population, making a considerable economic and social contributions to society, they face discrimination in many parts of their lives, based on age combined sometimes with other grounds of discrimination such as gender, race, disability and/or sexual orientation.

Age discrimination is experienced as a difference in treatment, the denial of rights, opportunities, and the use of stereotypical images of individuals solely on the grounds of their chronological age. It affects people of all ages, although it is experienced by older people in particular. Age discrimination is based on ageism, the use of stereotypical assumptions about the nature and capability of individuals of specific ages. It is also manifest in a negative construction of the consequences of demographic ageing.

Age discrimination is apparent in many areas of society: employment and income levels, access to health, education and financial services, participation in policy making and civil dialogue and in the allocation of resources and facilities. It exists in all EU Member States in various forms and is often not acknowledged. Multiple discrimination affects many older people including older women, older people from minority ethnic communities, older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT) and older people with disabilities.

The EU and its Member States have identified ageing as one of the key economic and social challenges to be faced. Since the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, the EU has been committed to fight discrimination on the grounds of age, race and ethnicity, disability, religion or belief and sexual orientation, in addition to the established commitment to gender equality. In this context the EU has a transnational Anti-Discrimination Action Programme (2000-2006), as well as two legislative instruments: the Framework Directive on equal treatment in employment and occupation, and the Directive against racial and ethnic discrimination. Since 2003 these Directives have not only to be transposed but also implemented by the Member States. However Member State governments vary greatly in their responses. A few have adopted a comprehensive approach to all forms of age discrimination, others are concentrating entirely on employment, some have adopted legislation without promoting the necessary cultural change and others show a lack of political will to tackle discrimination.

Because of important limitations of the current national and EU anti-discrimination legislative framework, in particular for older people, there is an urgent need to develop practical approaches to mainstreaming equality and diversity in the provision of goods and services.

While AGE is primarily concerned with the situation of older people and ageing issues in society, it recognises that LGBT people are affected by ageism and face multiple discrimination when they grow old. The rapid ageing of the European population makes it even more urgent to address the multiple discrimination faced by older LGBT people.

For that reason AGE organised a plenary session on the issue of multiple discrimination at its General Assembly 2005, which included a presentation on age and sexual orientation.

While concerns expressed by LGBT people about ageing are often the same as other older people typically report, AGE experience shows several issues that are particularly important for this group:

## Housing

Similarly to other older persons, older LGBT people who become dependent may need residential or institutional care. When most senior residences welcome couples, the persistence of homophobic attitudes of staff and residents may often deter older LGBT people from choosing this option. There is a need to promote non discriminatory housing facilities open to all seniors in social policy.

## Social protection

The lack of legal status for same-sex couples in some of the EU countries is the main obstacle to guarantee LGBT people the same income and employment derived rights as are available for heterosexual couples. For example same sex partners are seldom eligible for survivors' benefits in state and private pension schemes; property inheritance rules do not meet atypical situations of LGBT unmarried partners. These are the most common examples of LGBT people's discrimination which affect in particular the older ones. This, in turn, affects negatively their economic security.

## Derived rights for unmarried couples

A full legal recognition for same-sex relationships across the EU is still needed, as this would enable LGBT to claim their rights in a number of areas such as pensions, insurance, inheritance child-care responsibility or next of kin. While this lack of this legal status is discriminatory for all

LGBT, it has even a more negative impact on the older LGBT since this is more often at old age that people have to cope with these family-related issues.

## Social exclusion

As older LGBT persons are more likely to live alone than other older people, they may need special attention because they are more exposed to risk of social exclusion, poor nutrition and depression.

## Age-based discrimination versus discrimination based on sexual orientation

Many LGBT people remain invisible within seniors' organisations who usually fail to investigate their needs. This is primarily due to the prejudice many older people still have on the issue on sexual orientation. At the same time older LGBT people have difficulties to be recognised within their own lesbian and gay communities because of their old age. With the ongoing recognition of LGBT people's rights and a greater openness within society, in particular among young people, today's young LGBT people should be able in the future to defend better their citizens' rights in old age but for today's older LGBT this is still a great challenge.

The issues raised above are far from exhaustive, and AGE would welcome opportunities to develop a better understanding of the common challenges AGE and ILGA-Europe face to advance the rights of older LGBT people and where policy initiatives are necessary. AGE argues in favour of a horizontal approach to address discrimination in all relevant policy areas such as: employment, minimum income/ pensions, access to goods and services, health and long-term care, living standards and housing, care giving / family and social support and social exclusion.

Continuing efforts to improve the quality of life for older generations should enhance the well being of all including older LGBT people. Campaigns are needed to raise awareness of both the senior and the LGBT communities of the challenges older LGBT people face and develop the adequate policy response to support them.

This will require more research on older LGBT needs and expectations. Both senior organisations and LGBT organisations should join forces to call for effective policy measures to deal with the multiple discrimination faced by older LGBT and to ensure that a comprehensive and coherent approach to compliance and awareness raising is taken within EU Member States.

AGE - the European Older People's Platform is a European network of organisations of people aged 50 plus and over. It brings together 150 organisations from across the European Union and represents over 22 million older people in Europe through its membership. AGE seeks to voice and promote the interests of the 150 million inhabitants aged over 50 years and to raise awareness of the issues that concern them most.

AGE works at the European level to increase recognition and understanding of the opportunities and challenges that arise from the ageing of our society and to achieve a Europe for all ages.



Image by Arnis Balcus

# Visibility and Voice for Older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) People in Scotland

*This article provides example of how age organisation and LGBT groups in Scotland work together to jointly address multiple discrimination.*

Age Concern Scotland was privileged to be invited to the ILGA-Europe conference in Paris in October 2005 and to give a workshop presentation on older LGBT people. The focus of the presentation was to highlight the partnership working between Age Concern Scotland, the Equality Network (policy campaigning organisation for LGBT people) and the older LGBT policy issues forum in raising the hitherto hidden and unrecognised needs and

concerns of older LGBT people in Scotland. In the main, these issues and concerns have been explored from the perspective of how services should be created and/or mainstreamed to ensure that older LGBT people are fully included in consultations, policy-making and service development. An equally important aspect also relates to the prevalence and impact of ageism on older LGBT within LGBT communities and that this is given due consideration.

For the purpose of this paper, the focus is on how Age Concern Scotland has tackled equality and diversity in ageing, in relation to older LGBT people, and how this approach has led to enduring partnerships between Age Concern Scotland, older LGBT people and the wider LGBT organisations in Scotland. Moreover, this

approach proposes an important synergy because it brings together those with core competences in ageing with the experiences LGBT individuals and groups.

## Age Concern Scotland

Age Concern Scotland is the leading organisation for older people, age and ageing. Its headquarters are based in Edinburgh but there are area offices in Glasgow, Lochaber, Inverness, Aberdeen, Dundee and Dumfries – covering both urban and rural communities. Our principal activities include policy and campaigning, information, community development and research. As a membership organisation, we have some 500 older people's groups in membership which provides important structural means for influencing Age Concern Scotland's policy campaigning priorities.

## Who are Scotland's Older People?

When we talk of older people – who do we mean? Is there some generalised character or accepted norm that we hold when we think of an older person? Does this therefore obscure individual difference and lead to unfair treatment? In reality, we all carry multiple identities – we may define ourselves by our sex, race and sexual orientation, or by religious belief. Age as an equality cutting strand is singularly important because age is not static – we are all getting older and therefore our identities, for example, the roles we play in society as mothers, spouses, partners, workers may change in relation to where we are in the life cycle. Similarly, our self-defined identities, for example, as a gay man or lesbian woman may impact differently when older. Recognising the diversity of Scotland's older population is therefore a major step forward in promoting equality in ageing for all older people.

## Taking the first steps towards

Age Concern Scotland initiated a meeting with national LGBT groups and organisations in order to establish a reference group for discussion of issues relating to older LGBT people. As a first step, it was important to secure this support from the LGBT sector in order to maximise on sharing knowledge, understanding and expertise on older people, ageing and LGBT issues. In particular, it was essential to be able to work with LGBT organisations so that inroads could be made to work directly with individual older people. Three outcomes were therefore sought:

- > **New Partnerships and Alliances** – the setting up of the Older LGBT Scottish Reference Group was meant to be a short life-working group that offered support, in the first instance to Age Concern Scotland and could provide access to older LGBT people.
- > **Forum for Older LGBT People** – this initiative was borne out of discussions with Age concern Scotland and the Equality Network. The aim was to bring together older LGBT people, many of whom were strong LGBT activists as well as those that may not have any affiliations to LGBT organisations or groups. The purpose of the Forum was to identify and prioritise key policy issues and to develop appropriate responses which could include initiating new research or service developments.
- > **Age Concern Scotland membership** – it was deemed important to actively recruit LGBT organisations into the Age Concern Scotland membership. Through this means there would be

structural inclusion into policy consultations at national and local levels affecting older people, but it would also demonstrate that as an organisation we were fully committed to social inclusion, including LGBT groups and organisations: a commitment made by the Board of Trustees of Age Concern Scotland.

## Breaking new ground

Baseline research into housing and social care needs of older LGBT people was prioritised by the older LGBT forum which was then acted upon by Age Concern Scotland and the Equality Network. With funding from Communities Scotland research was commissioned and research findings, along with guidance for older LGBT people, were published in June 2005. The findings confirmed immediate and future concerns of older LGBT people, but also raised important issues about the methodology used, for example:

- The difficulties of identifying LGBT people over the age of 65 and differentiation between L, G and T for housing and social care provision;
- Experience of living with harassment and the fear of abuse;
- Overriding fear of losing LGBT identity if needing to go into residential or nursing care which raised mixed views about the need for specialist or mainstream provision;
- HIV or Aids – fear of declaring status when approaching services, particularly for older people who fear disapproval or condemnation;
- Self-help models – particularly older lesbians in relation to making communal provisions;
- Given that the research findings were largely based on interviews with 'younger' older LGBT people the overriding conclusion was that issues and concerns were more directed towards the future than based on current experiences.

An important development in the research process was the visual inclusion of older LGBT people. It was considered to be essential that the information resources developed out of the research were suitably illustrated by positive images of older LGBT ensuring a targeted and focused marketing approach. This was exceptionally well received by older LGBT people who expressed their heartfelt feelings at the launch event that they were finally being recognised.

## The future

Age Concern Scotland and the Equality Network continue to be committed to developing work around older LGBT issues. A seminar is planned in the coming months for members of the older LGBT forum to determine policy campaigning issues leading on from the housing and social care research. Issues that have already been flagged up include mental health, a concern that has been particularly raised by older transgender people. It is important to look at the sustainability of the Forum itself, and how to keep the momentum of older LGBT people's issues to the fore of policy-makers and service providers.

HELENA SCOTT

Head of Policy and Research, Age Concern Scotland

*Helena Scott was the recipient of the Scottish Pride Equality Network 'Friend for Life' award in 2003.*



GenderDoc-M event for elderly LGBT people,  
by Igor Vzorov

# They need to know they are not forgotten

*This article is about uneasy life of elderly gay people in one of the former Soviet counties – Moldova. While the state is struggling for its own survival and abandons its vulnerable citizens, country's leading LGBT organisation remembers older generation and is addressing their needs.*

Have you ever seen a used piece of paper being thrown away? In the same way, the State of Moldova has stamped on and thrown older people out of society, considering them unnecessary. The dying USSR robbed them not only of anything connected with freedom and democracy, but left them without means of existence. It took everything away from them that they had saved for a rainy day. The ruble devalued so much that it transformed into a piece of paper that now is being thrown into the rubbish bin.

## Generation stamped down by state

However, if someone thinks that the new government has changed its attitude towards older people, they are deeply mistaken. Most of those who were building the 'bright communist tomorrow' now survive, rather than live, on a pension of about 30-40 euros per month. That is because all the previous bureaucrats stayed in power and consequently all of the rules remained in place: who is not with us is against us; do not have your own opinion; liberties and freedoms are only for those in power.

In this respect it is interesting to look at Mr B's life story. He is only 58 years old but already does not work and spends long weeks in the hospital. When the ruble devalued he had over 50,000 soviet rubles.

Back then it was a very considerable amount, which could provide a worry-free life for an entire family for decades. One day a person who was wealthy - according to those times - became poor. Naturally, such distress also causes psychological problems. **Taking into account that he is gay and his relatives found this out, you can only image the turmoil he was facing. Nobody needed him; relatives, neighbors and former friends despise him. He is lonely and unprotected.**

Loneliness, repugnance from neighbours and relatives became life companions for practically every elderly gay person in Moldova. Most of the people in our country remain Soviet and still express a lot of interest towards the private life of their neighbours. Once it becomes known that the person next door is gay, the neighbours immediately start rumours. As a result a gay person's life turns into hell. This person is being reminded about who he/she is on each possible occasion: graffiti 'Faggot lives here' or other degrading signs appear in the lift or on a front door, sometimes a phone rings with an offer to have sex. This is not fiction. I am writing about the true experiences of two gay men.

However, these people cannot rely on any help from the state. Economically, the state is struggling on its own. As for the police



GenderDoc-M event  
for elderly LGBT people,  
by Igor Vzorov

authorities, they do not even consider it a crime or accident if on the grounds of sexual orientation. Moreover, the police are often the perpetrators of crimes against LGBT people such as extortion, verbal abuse, brutality. There is still no legislation in the country banning sexual orientation discrimination and homophobia is an everyday occurrence - even politicians and civil servants often come out with homophobic statements and remarks.

Neither do mainstream non-governmental organisations dealing with elderly people's issues show any interest in protecting elderly LGBT people. They can easily be regarded as sexual minorities or their supporters, as happened to Amnesty International. Staff and volunteers of Amnesty were threatened with being included on the 'black list' for trying to protect several women from GenderDoc-M against police abuse.

## Hope dies last

While the younger generation of LGBT people quickly realised advantages of an integrated society, the elderly LGBT people do not rush to join the Information Centre GenderDoc-M and its activities. Having learnt the bitter lesson of lies and betrayal by the communist and other parties and governments, they do not believe promises. And we knew this at our centre as we had some fragile links with the elderly people. Some members of the Centre had elderly friends and from time to time they chatted over the phone. Often we talked about a possibility of getting together.

In the beginning of 2002 we started making lists, searching for addresses and telephone numbers. As a result we gathered over 50 people and invited them to our Centre. In April we organised the first meeting which, without any exaggerations, was an unprecedented event for the Moldovan LGBT community. We marked the 7 years since the criminal code article previously criminalising same-sex acts was repealed, and this day became known in the history of Moldova's gay movement as 'Remembrance Day'.

We heard lots of interesting and sometimes dramatic stories. We were especially stunned listening to stories of the very recent past when

homophobia entered some political parties and when the media started circulating sentiments that being gay equals not being a human. Most of the murders of gay people took place exactly within this period of time. **Since 1990, 14 gay people have been murdered because of their sexuality. This is many times more than during the Soviet time.** We honoured their memories with a minute of silence.

During that meeting we decided to gather at the GenderDoc-M Centre on a more regular basis, once every three months, to discuss the problems faced by elderly LGBT people and to help those in need of assistance. Now the staff and volunteers of our Centre prepare for such meetings well in advance: sorting our meeting with the medical doctors and psychologists depending on the meeting's theme. We normally prepare various games to unwind psychologically, shows or thematic films. Afterwards we provide dinner, those most in need are provided with food packs for such occasions as New Year or Easter celebrations.

Our Centre also collects and distributes clothes and shoes to those LGBT people who are unable to purchase them. Normally the clothes and shoes are donated by wealthier Moldovans or foreign citizens working in diplomatic missions in Moldova. They often also donate money which, together with other sources collected during gay prides and other charity events, is distributed to less fortunate members of the LGBT community in Moldova. Now that the elderly LGBT people have become an integral part of this community, they are regular visitors of our Centre, they are coming to pick up our publications, watch films on Fridays, many of them take active part in our conferences and seminars. However the most visited events are meetings with the medical personnel and psychologists. It is crucial for them to know they are remembered!

ALEXEI MARCHKOV

President of the Information Centre GenderDoc-M

Translated into English by JURIS LAVRIKOV

## We look forward to welcoming you to Sofia!

The programme is promising and challenging not only for you as participants, but for Bulgaria - this diversity week will be the widest LGBT event ever in the country!

Sooo... Are you ready to spend a week of sleepless nights in Sofia and pleasantly exhausting workdays? Our 'week' started already and has turned into months of preparation. **Sports, clubbing and culture** will be the main elements of the social programme we are offering to you.

Can you believe that a small country in Eastern Europe and as Bulgaria could have a gay life? You should, because otherwise you will be surprised by the number of gay clubs in the capital! A dozen of them, joining this initiative, are offering you special discounts, free entrances and dedicated parties.

During the free time, if you can find it, you are welcome to the second LGBT Culture Fest including exhibitions and film screenings, co-organised by the Bulgarian gay organisation "Gemini" and the Center for culture and debate "Red House".

From 27th to 29th our partners from Sport Club Tangra-Bulgaria are organising Sofia Open - International LGBT Multisport Tournament, so challenge your sport personality and join the events! Together with them we welcome you to the Gala Evening Party, with pool party championship.

Reputable Bulgarian experts are looking forward to meet you on the variety of workshops. Recognised as a good practice from the past, we are doing our best right after the presidential elections to have the Mayor of Sofia as our official host, as well as key political figures at our plenary sessions.

**Get ready for the forthcoming Sofia experience – a working and enjoyable opportunity for all of us! May the fairytale come true!**

Organising team – Sofia 2006

