

Answering the call to courage: What happened at the 2024 ILGA-Europe Conference

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At this year's ILGA-Europe Annual Conference in Romania, we had three dedicated activist reporters attending sessions across the event, so they could reflect on what was happening right now for the LGBTI movement in Europe and Central Asia. Here is what they found.

The 26th ILGA-Europe Conference, held in Bucharest this October, was a vital meeting ground for activists, leaders, and changemakers from across the LGBTI community, at this particular time in our world. Beyond its extensive sessions and networking opportunities under the theme, The Call to Courage, this year's event featured the reintroduction of conference reporters—three dedicated activist voices tasked with connecting the threads of reflection, insight, and shared experience throughout the event. These reporters, Rina Rybalko from Ukraine's Gender Stream, Sarah Arsane of Pride des Banlieues in France, and Andrea Ruggeri from Italy's Gruppo Trans, shared their expectations, reflections, and key takeaways over the course of the packed three days.

Hope and expectation

Rina approached the conference with hope, acknowledging the uncertainties facing activists but focusing on the potential for solutions. "Since this is my second time at the conference, I know that we will talk about challenges a lot," she shared. "And I hope that in these discussions we will find together decisions and solutions that we will bring back home to our communities." This outlook was a testament to the resilience that Ukrainian activists have shown, especially amidst Russia's ongoing full-scale invasion and its impact on LGBTI communities.

As the conference began, Sarah expressed excitement at the rare opportunity to connect with likeminded people. "I'm really looking forward to meeting LGBTQ+ activists from all over the world and hearing the unique stories and struggles," she said. Her anticipation highlighted the conference's role as a space for exchange, learning, and mutual empowerment.

Andrea, acknowledging both the gravity of their work and the community's strength, spoke with poignant honesty. "Yesterday was not a good day for my country," they remarked, referring to a newly passed law in Italy that criminalises seeking surrogacy abroad, a move that threatens LGBTI families and sets a concerning precedent. This difficult reality highlighted their hope to find emotional and political support while drawing strength from shared experiences.

Reflections during the conference

As the conference unfolded, each reporter shared insights into their evolving experiences. For Sarah, moments of connection stood out. Reflecting on the importance of unity and exploring vulnerabilities to promote growth, she said, "I particularly enjoyed the discussions on the various issues facing our communities. Being a Muslim woman, a racialised lesbian, and from working-class neighbourhoods, this particularly moved me."

Rina was moved by the power of collective communication. "The highlight for me was communication—panel

discussions, workshops, and networking, which was meaningful, fruitful, and sometimes challenging,” she noted. This understanding emphasised the importance of shared spaces where LGBTI voices can overcome barriers, address urgent needs, and build alliances.

Andrea’s reflections captured the diverse and layered nature of the Conference. “In one room, people are getting pragmatic by discussing how to tackle disinformation campaigns; in another, others are sharing how resilience keeps them grounded,” they observed. This collection of experiences showed how different strategies and discussions come together to strengthen our shared determination.

Courage as a takeaway

As the conference drew to a close, the atmosphere was charged with renewed determination. Rina spoke of courage as a verb: “It means to act, even when we are in a state of maximum uncertainty, for your own sake, for the sake of others.” She left the conference inspired by the dedication of fellow activists and motivated by the focus on meaningful change.

Sarah, in her closing words, summed up the spirit of solidarity at the Conference and within the movement. “What I take away is the strength of our community and the power of alliance... even in difficult times, we are stronger together,” she affirmed. Her speech served as a reminder that collective resilience, empathy, and unity are vital for progress.

Andrea concluded by highlighting a lesson learned year after year: “Queer people are taking care of themselves and teaching others how to take care of their communities.” This ongoing truth showed the depth of support and self-sustainability within the LGBTI movement, despite outside challenges.

A unified future

The conference reporters’ voices were a strong reminder that, while activists in our LGBTI movement may come from different contexts, the shared fight for dignity, safety, and rights binds them together. As they return to their home countries from this year’s Conference—whether grappling with legislative struggles, seeking innovative advocacy strategies, or rebuilding communities torn by war—they carry with them the shared knowledge, strength, and hope forged in Bucharest.