

The best moments of the European Equality Gala Online

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Because we couldn't gather in Brussels this year for ILGA-Europe's annual Gala celebration, we decided to hold a virtual event instead. The boost that right-wing forces have been given by the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the enormous impact of the crisis on individuals the LGBTI community, makes the work ILGA-Europe does for profound change through inclusive activism more important than ever. Here's what happened at our first ever European Equality Gala Online...

As an alternative to our popular annual gathering in Brussels, ILGA-Europe hosted its first Equality Gala Online on June 25. [The decision to adapt our yearly fundraising event was not easy](#), but it also brought a creative opportunity our way. Guests attending from home joined activists in Romania and Poland, European institution representatives Helena Dalli, EU Commissioner for Equality, and Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, a fabulous activist and drag queen from Berlin, and our two elegant hosts live from ILGA-Europe's office.



Our Gala's photobooth, thanks to our sponsor, Google.

We thank all donors who contributed before and on the night to the Gala itself. Remember you can still contribute to the Gala fundraiser [until July 9](#), helping ILGA-Europe to do our vital work for positive change through inclusive activism at a time when it was never more needed. In the meantime, here are the best moments of the first ever

European Equality Gala Online.

At 7pm, LGA-Europe's Executive Director, Evelyne Paradis kicked off the proceedings. "Many of you have been coming to the Gala since the very first year, and over the years have grown into a family of supporters for the LGBTI movement," she said. "The COVID-19 pandemic has hit marginalised communities disproportionately hard, and we're witnessing halted progress, and a rollback of rights and scapegoating of LGBTI people. This is why we feel it is imperative to go ahead with our Equality Gala in this, no less vital format."

By Evelyne's side, Robbie Stakelum, coach and policy officer at [FEANTSA](#), and longtime friend and supporter of ILGA-Europe, co-hosted the event. "I know from first hand experience how important the work you do is, and how important tonight is to be able to fundraise for those campaigns," he said. "I'm delighted to be here."

Helena Dalli, EU Commissioner for Equality, officially opened the European Equality Gala Online 2020.

"One-in-four European citizens still do not support equality, regardless of a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics," she said. "I know the difficulties the LGBTI community are facing are as diverse as the community itself."

Commissioner Dalli continued with a powerful message: "I want to pay tribute to organisations like you, ILGA-Europe... It is crucial that civil society organisations like yours have a voice in shaping the measures that support you and improve the lives of LGBTI people in Europe."

Commissioner Dalli's speech was followed by a conversation with Polish activist Miroslawa Makuchwoska of [Campaign Against Homophobia \(KPH\)](#).

On the evening of the Gala, Poland was a few days away from a presidential election, with incumbent Andrzej Duda of the PiS party scapegoating LGBTI people in his campaign. "People are scared and there is more violence," Miroslawa said of the fallout from Duda's campaign. "It is not possible to say, 'I respect people and at the same time I don't think you are a human being.' You just make people more vulnerable to violence." Miroslawa also talked about the rising of people on the streets with rainbow flags, and about how you can support the LGBTI community in Poland. The election run-off, between Duda and his more liberal rival, Warsaw mayor Rafał Trzaskowski, takes place next Sunday.

Members of the European Parliament spoke out.

"I believe that if we stand together as a community, if we fight together for our rights, then we can really create societies that are based on equality, freedom and diversity." said MEP Terry Reintke, President of the European

Parliament's LGBTI Intergroup and no stranger to ILGA-Europe's Equality Gala. Sophie in 't Veld, Vice-president, is a regular guest at the Gala also. "I'm very happy that finally the European Commission is ready to work with the European Parliament on an overall strategy for LGBTI rights," she said, "because that is necessary, because there are homophobic forces on the rise, and that is why we speak out loudly."

Dunja Mijatovi?, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, praised the work of grassroots organisations amid the COVID-19 crisis.

"We will need to be organised and resolute to defend human rights... LGBTI NGO's can help give a voice to victims, you collect data, denounce violations, you speak truth to power and push for progress, and when it comes to this, my voice will always be joining your voice."

Commissioner Mijatovi?, who also joined us at ILGA-Europe's Annual Conference last year in Prague, spoke to Evelyne Paradis at the Gala, assessing the impact of the current crisis on minorities. "LGBTI people are among the most vulnerable in this pandemic, because of the discrimination and exclusion they face in general in our societies," Mijatovi? stated.

A conversation with Romanian activist Teodora Ion-Rotaru of [ACCEPT](#).

ILGA-Europe's [Rainbow Map](#) showed that we are living a critical time for LGBTI equality in Europe, the regression is most visible where civil and political rights are eroded. Romanian activist Teodora Ion Rotaru joined us for a remarkable interview. "The extreme right is taking advantage of the [COVID-19] pandemic to take aim at human rights and trying to dismantle the weak protections that are already there. We just last week saw a bill pass in parliament that is prohibiting discussion about gender, gender equality and trans people across educational environments," Ion-Rotaru said. She also talked about how organisations like ACCEPT have adapted during the pandemic crisis to help individuals in our communities who are suffering.

Drag artist and YouTuber, Candy Crash talked about the struggles of young LGBTI people in Europe.

Last but not least, drag diva Candy Crash joined us from Germany. "Organisations like ILGA-Europe are working tirelessly on visibility and representation," she said. "Without these organisations, many queer kids would not have a safe space where they could connect with others outside the Internet.... They would not be seen, they would not feel seen, they would not be heard."

After an hour and a half of eye-opening and important discussion and messages, the Equality Gala Online came to an end. ILGA-Europe would like to thank all guests for their virtual presence and contributions. You can help us to continue our vital work strengthening and supporting LGBTI activists across Europe and Central Asia at this crucial time by contributing to the Gala fundraiser by [July 9](#). A toast to you!