

Foreword

The lived reality of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people in Europe and Central Asia is complex, diverse, multi-faceted. In a world where attention-grabbing headlines and short social media feeds too often gloss over this complexity, the work of documenting the political, legal and social developments – both positive and negative – which affect the lives of LGBTI people becomes essential. For it is indeed essential for policy-makers, for civil society, for any person who cares about advancing equality to grasp that positive change for LGBTI people can take many forms, and often actually needs to take different forms if the specific needs of people are to be met. It is crucial to realise that change is not a linear process but that the road to equality, sadly, can take us backwards and that we therefore always need to be vigilant. This is why the ILGA-Europe team has been so committed to producing this annual documentation of the human rights situation of LGBTI people across the region since 2011.

This 2019 edition of the Annual Review perfectly captures the multiple layers of the “state of play” for LGBTI people in Europe at the moment. In recent years, trans and intersex activism has provided much optimism. In 2018 again, thanks to the tireless work of advocates for the human rights of trans people and of intersex people, the number of governments adopting legal gender recognition laws moving towards respecting the on principle of self-determination again increased and more and more governments are starting to discuss how to ban intersex surgeries. It was also the year of the landmark Coman case on freedom of movement of married couples within the EU, a powerful marker of progress when it comes to the recognition of same-sex couples in Europe.

While we celebrate such achievements, our movement is all too aware of the multiple challenges that lie ahead. As you'll read in this Review, the negative impact of the so-called “anti-gender” groups is seen in several countries, as it pollutes public discussions and political advances on trans equality legislation, on equal recognition of diverse forms of families, on inclusive education or access to information about LGBTI issues. Asylum is another clear thread in this publication. While the number of LGBTI people who have to flee their countries (within and outside Europe) is not decreasing, still too few European countries are taking all the necessary measures to ensure that LGBTI refugees and asylum-seekers are treated with the dignity, care and safety they deserve. It is also concerning to see that some trends feature so prominently year after year: including widespread hate speech by public figures and religious leaders which goes unpunished, public authorities banning or failing to protect prides and other public events, and attacks against human rights defenders.

We invite you – whether you are a government official, an activist, a journalist or anyone concerned with equality – to make time to delve into the richness of this report, from which emerges a full picture of what has been accomplished and what remains to be done. We do hope that this Annual Review will inform many conversations, especially between civil society and political actors, and will contribute to political decision-making which puts the needs of people at its core.

Evelyne Paradis, Executive Director

