



ERA Annual Conference Report

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

[ERA – LGBTI Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Turkey](#) is an umbrella regional association operating in nine [\(9\) countries](#) with a membership of 57 LGBTI organizations. ERA was founded in September 2015 with the objectives to a) strengthen capacities of LGBTI organizations in the region, b) lobby and advocate nationally, regionally and internationally for LGBTI rights and c) strengthen the visibility of the movement across the region and beyond.

ERA's Annual General Assembly is the biggest LGBTI event organized in the region since 2015. The conference is a lobby, advocacy, capacity building and visibility event which brings together more than 160 participants from across the region, Europe and beyond. LGBTI activists, state officials (governments, Parliaments, equality bodies etc.), donors, researchers, journalists, diplomatic community, representatives of international organizations and members of the local community attend the event.

The ERA Annual Conference 2018 was held in Skopje on 3-6 October. The event was planned and implemented in close partnership with ERA's member organisations in Macedonia: LGBTI Support Centre, Macedonian Helsinki Committee, Subversive Front, Coalition Margins and HERA. The conference was held in close cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Macedonia and the Inter-Party Working Group of the Parliament of Macedonia for LGBTI Rights.

ERA's conference was financially supported by the European Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Hirschfeld-Eddy Foundation, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Macedonia and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Macedonia.

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

Main objectives of this Annual Conference were to:

1. Increase political will and engagement of governments of Macedonia and the region on LGBTI rights;
2. Increase dialogue and cooperation between state institutions and other stakeholders of the region with LGBTI organizations and activists;
3. Increase dialogue among LGBTI organizations in the Western Balkans and Turkey region;
4. Strengthen capacities of LGBTI activists on important topics;
5. Contribute to an increased and improved visibility and position of LGBTI people in Macedonia;

In addition, the Conference Organizing Committee (with strong emphasis on the needs and priorities of the Macedonian LGBTI movement, decided on the following specific objectives as thematic and strategic focus of the conference:

1. Secure and improve engagement of state institutions – both in Macedonia and other countries of the region on:
 - a. **Access to education**: by increasing engagement of Ministry of Education and Science of Macedonia on the LGBTI topic with regards to equality and safety in the school environment, revision of homophobic and transphobic school books and curricula, addressing violence and bullying etc.;
 - b. **Legal Gender Recognition**, in order to ensure safe and accessible legal recognition of gender.
 - c. **Regional cooperation** by pushing for an Increased engagement and role of the Republic of Macedonia (cooperation with Regional Intergovernmental Platform, Council of Europe, Membership in the European LGBTI Focal Points Network etc.) which are also optimal platforms for policy reform and government initiatives;
2. Improve dialogue and cooperation of state institutions with LGBTI organizations;
3. Address issues faced by the LGBTI communities across the region particularly:
 - a. Access to Justice (protection from violence and discrimination) improved legal services;
 - b. Access to crucial services (education, health, economic empowerment);
 - c. Improved public perceptions towards LGBTI people;

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

3 October 2018

The Annual General Assembly, was held on 3rd October and took place at the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia. It is the most important annual event, where the most pressing issues and topics are discussed and decided for. The Assembly was attended by ERA member organisations as well as members of the Steering Board and Advisory Board of ERA.

CONFERENCE RECEPTION: WELCOMING PARTICIPANTS

3 October 2018

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Macedonia co-hosted a conference reception.

Conclusions from the opening remarks

- To building alliances between the governments and CSO's working on advancing the rights of LGBTI people
- The presence of the government at this conference was applauded once more and encouraged to continue in the future.
- To continue working with media on sensitization of media,
- To focus on revision of the textbooks in education,
- To start working and cooperating with trade unions

THE REGIONAL MINISTERIAL MEETING AND STAKEHOLDE'RS DIALOGUE MEETING

4 October 2018

On October 4th, the Regional Intergovernmental Platform on LGBTI rights held its 3rd regional ministerial meeting. The event was chaired by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and was attended by representatives of 4 governments of the Western Balkans region.

Macedonian Minister of Labour and Social Affairs chaired the meeting. She expressed the full support of the Macedonian government for LGBTI rights emphasizing the concrete political support from several members of the cabinet.

Representatives from the governments of Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro also shared their support to the LGBTI cause and the work that these governments have done so far.

Main conclusions of the inter-governmental regional platform were the following:

- The governments of the region, present at the meeting, are all dedicated to advancing the rights of LGBTI people in their countries and they plan to continue with that practice;
- In order to achieve this, they oblige to strengthen the structure of the Inter-regional governmental group with appointing Chairmanship;
- The first Ministry to take the Chair role is the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy from Macedonia;
- ERA will take the role of technical secretariat and will provide continues support to the Chair and the members of the Group;
- Attempts will be made to Include the Members of Parliament in this group, since they are the one who are voting and adopting laws;
- Governments represent at the meeting meeting, pledged to work together with the CSOs in improving the legislation but also in changing the hearts and minds of the people in our societies;

Two Days Open Space Technology Regional Conference

5-6 October

The rest of the conference focused on strengthening capacities of LGBTI activists in the region as well as increase dialogue and cooperation between 150 participants from civil society, state authorities, academia, media, diplomatic community, donors and members of the local community.

The format of the conference was [Open Space Technology](#) for the second year in a row which has been rated very positively by all participants. The format allowed for participants to contribute to the agenda of the conference with their own ideas and needs and everyone was able to choose among a big variety of sessions and workshops. In addition, several main plenaries were held, with distinguished speakers from the region and globally with focus on specific issues such as rights of trans and non-binary persons, access to education, protection from discrimination, working with Parliaments etc.

Strategic Preparatory Meeting (09.00 – 11:00)

4 October

This first session of the conference served to get an update from activists across the region on the recent development in their countries. Activists shared their inputs and concerns as well as priorities for the coming year:

Albania: The key word for Albania in 2018 is stagnation. There has been no concrete development or improvements in passing important legislation such as that on same-sex registered partnerships or legal gender recognition. Currently the Albanian government has an open door policy of cooperation with LGBTI organisations, including a national action plan on LGBTI rights (2016-2020). However, this year, the movement suffered a backlash following cooperation between LGBTI organisations and Ministry of Education and Sports which consisted on open lectures on LGBTI topic in Tirana's high schools. Meanwhile, the community continues to remain marginalized and access to services as well as employment remains an issue.

Croatia: Many things took place in Croatia during 2018 but they cannot be called positive. Hate crimes against LGBTI persons have increased, law enforcement does not react, prosecutors fail in recognizing hate crimes, judges release perpetrators very easily. Such cases are actually taken to misdemeanour courts and they do not vent go to criminal courts. One activist called the current government as fascist, which is openly supporting the infamous Ustaše. Overall there has been a decline and regress in supporting and protecting human rights of LGBTI persons for the first time in years. Some newly adopted laws are also endangering the rights guaranteed by the same-sex partnership act.

Macedonia: With the election of a new government, the situation has changed in the country but it is not enough. The country is placed 41st in the ILGA Europe Rainbow Map, one of the lowest in the entire European region. Organisations are working for the first time after more than 8 years with the government and members of parliament. In February

2018, Macedonia became one of the very few countries in the region and Europe to have an inter-party working group on LGBTI rights within the Parliament, with representatives of 14 different parties. The movement is working on amending important laws such as the law for protection from discrimination – which still does not include sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics – and the law on media. The movement is hopeful that the amendments and bylaws will be introduced by the end of the year. The movement is also working on legal gender recognition law. A positive development in Macedonia during 2018 was that two trans women won a case that allows them to change their sex marker.

Montenegro: Keyword is partnership. The movement is engaging intensively with the state institutions regarding preparation of new legislation, the one on same-sex registered partnership being a priority. Additionally, organisations are working intensively with municipalities across the country for development of LGBTI action plans;

Serbia: Nothing much changed in the country from last year. Belgrade Pride had less police than participants for the first time, which is really important. Nothing much has changed regarding legal framework. Labris is still advocating on same-sex law. The national strategy on prevention and protection from discrimination is about to expire at the end of the year and most of the provisions related to LGBTI persons were not permitted, including those to same-sex registered partnerships and legal gender recognition.

Slovenia: Some smaller positive changes have taken place during 2018. A legal case was won concerning discrimination on a HIV positive person from a health practitioner. Meanwhile this year two newly elected members of parliament were elected as openly gay and lesbian.

Turkey: Banning of LGBTI events – in Ankara and Istanbul - continued also during 2018 which activists interpret as illegal actions taken by state institutions and which have had very bad consequences for the LGBTI movement, organisations and community. Organisations are trying to engage with local governments, for example in cities like Izmir where such official prohibition is not in place, however, in many cases local authorities are afraid to organize events and members of the public are afraid to get engaged in such events from fears of arrests or other repercussions. Despite that, organisations and activists are continuing their struggle and fight for equality and they continue to organise activities, which however have changed after the prohibition, especially in the way they are promoted to the public.

The LGBTI community continues to get organised and many initiatives and grassroots groups are being formed across the country. However, many people are still afraid to come out or to seek help. Even parents of LGBTI people and supporters always meet in different locations due to safety reasons.

In Izmir, staff members in local governments are government are trying to cooperate with the LGBTI community, but again leaders in local governments maintain different views and continue to oppose any such cooperation.

Sex workers organisation Red Umbrella, based in Ankara, is working on local level with the municipality on opening local LGBTI centres. The mayors of the ruling party have a positive outlook, but their superiors have a negative approach, so until now, centres have been formed only when mayors came from the opposition.

As a positive development in Turkey, this year for the first time two trans persons had costs of their sex reassignment surgeries as well as all related services (such as psychiatric examination etc.) covered by the state. However, this does not mean that the situation of trans persons is positive in Turkey. For instance, a parent of a trans man said that after his son had a gender reassignment procedure

My son had a gender affirmative procedure and this has caused many issues for us, as he was rejected in many instances due to that fact.

PLENARY ON NON-DISCRIMINATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

Contributors: Jovana Jovanovska Kanurkova (LGBTI Support Centre) Skopje, Marco Mantovanelli, World Bank, Gjulten Mustafafova, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Macedonia, Pavle Bogoevski, Member of Parliament Republic of Macedonia, Antonio Mihajlov, Subversive Front Macedonia, Antonina Vykhrest, Council of Europe,

Plenary on non-discrimination started by highlighting how research shows high levels of discrimination and bullying against LGBTI persons. There is a lack of systematic support related to this such as psychological services, harassment of young persons as well as frequent reports of misconduct by state officials and services providers such as police officers, psychologists etc. Hate crimes against LGBTI people are high in Macedonia. Many cases of hate speech have been reported by NGOs but they are not being responded to adequately by state institutions.

State institutions need to respond adequately to the high levels of homophobia, hate crimes and discrimination. They need to increase efforts to be trusted by the community in police stations, penitentiary centres, social centres etc.

An important step forward in 2018 was the establishment of the inter-party working group on LGBTI rights in the Macedonian Parliament. Important achievements were also the establishment of the National Coordination body for non-discrimination. Sexual orientation and gender identity were added in the new law on media. LGBTI CSOs can now operate more freely and dialogue as well as cooperation with institutions has been established. There are small developments overall but they are not sustainable. There is an expressed political will and the inter-party group of the Parliament has been established. However, as the government is a coalition it makes consensus on important legal changes difficult. Elections might happen soon in Macedonia. Priorities on non-discrimination should be agreed upon prior to set-up of coalition, so that they are not subject to bargaining. For instance, right now, the law on protection from discrimination changes are stuck in parliamentary procedures, due to non-friendly MPs blocking access.

Significant changes need to happen in legal reform and introducing non-discriminatory and positive measures and policies. In the case of Macedonia, the draft law on the

Commissioner needs to be amended, particularly with regards to the professionalization of the Commissioner, protection and prevention from discrimination, acting on all cases submitted, burden of proof on the discriminating party, the fines, new evidence such as situational testing and statistical data. Gender identity needs to be included in all legal clauses in addition to sexual orientation. More concrete results are needed. Political entities and institutions need to step up efforts by putting pressure on manifestation of political will and legal improvements.

Changes need to happen also in terms of approach. More needs to be done to understand the needs of different community members within the LGBTIQ spectrum. More data is needed to understand exclusion of LGBTI people from an economic perspective and provide tools for informed decisions to policy makers. Education activities need to be implemented with different state institutions. Increasing reporting of cases needs to be addressed and law enforcement agencies need to act on it. The justice system needs to work, and we need to engage with prosecution on how they are addressing those issues. State impunity needs to be challenged and there are still no resolutions to what has happened on those cases. Campaigns need to be conducted by the government for sensitisation and to change public attitudes.

Trans community faces many challenges. Roma trans persons faced multiple discrimination, especially from law enforcement and health care providers. The Ministry of Health of Macedonia has invited a surgeon from Belgrade, to work with the state clinic. The surgeon has also been invited to be guest professor at the university in order to educate new medical personnel.

Conclusions from the Panel on Non-discrimination in the Western Balkans and Turkey

- In the case of Macedonia, amending the law for protection from discrimination, to add sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristic is of primary importance;
- Political will per se is not enough. Macedonian LGBTI movement needs for this political commitment to be expressed in concrete actions;
- State institutions need to establish mechanisms of collecting and documenting cases of discrimination and hate crimes against LGBTI persons;
- There is still lack of data on the lived realities of LGBTI persons. The small data that there is so far, show a gap between different community members. For example, trans persons experience 5-7 times more violence compared to cis-persons. Research needs to be conducted with more disaggregated data on the lived experiences, needs and demands of the community and to create programs of CSO's but also the government to adequately utilise these findings;
- Capacity building and awareness raising activities should be conducted with law enforcement as well as other state institutions, such as centres for social work both at national and local levels, which are responsible for protection from discrimination and affirmative policies;
- Cooperation with international institutions and mechanisms such as the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the World Bank etc. needs to continue, as such

partners have a great deal of influence on human rights issues and they are strong and reliable partners of countries of the region.

PLENARIES ON RIGHTS OF TRANS AND NON-BINARY PERSONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

Contributors: Linn Julian Koletnik, TransAkcija, Slovenia, Lila Milik, TransForma, Macedonia, Slavco Dimitrov, Coalition Margins, Macedonia, Asmira Topal, TransAid Croatia, Kardelen Ilerisu, Pembe Hayat, Turkey, Biljana Ginova, ERA Steering Board Co-Chair, Janset Kalan, ERA Steering Board Member, Rita Nowak, Member of Green Party Germany, Hana Konatar, Spektra Montenegro.

TESTIMONIES

*Hana Konatar, Montenegro: "I was attacked one week after the Pride in Podgorica. Two men came across me and started yelling at me, calling me f****t. They pushed me to the ground. I saw a grocery store close by, so I called the police over the phone and tried to go inside the store but the people there did not let me in because I had a dog with me. The attacker pulled me out of the store entrance and kept yelling at me, insulting me. Another man approached us and asked what was happening, assuming that the man was beating a woman, so then he just left. When I went to the E.R. I did not get proper treatment from the medical staff. When I went to the police however, they officers treated me well and allowed me to use the pronoun I prefer. I found the person who attacked me and sent the information to the police. The inspector said he knows the attacker and that he is a nice person and he will never do such a thing again. I was advised not to press charges, which I refused. The court procedure is still pending and I was not invited to the first hearing. They said, they could not find my exact address."*

Rita Nowak, Germany: "I am a woman recognized as such by the state, and I am also the father of two children. I am in the council of a city in Germany, so I am visible and politically active. On my way to becoming a woman, there were significant challenges in terms of family relations, everyday life and employment. In Germany we have a gender recognition law from 1980, according to which transgender people are considered sick, based on ICD 10, so you need therapy and a certificate to take hormones. Then you have to go to court in order to change your gender. The experts provide opinion on the sex change which can take up to three years to get. The procedure costs about 2000 EUR. The law on trans persons in Germany is in contradiction with the Constitution, which was confirmed by the Constitutional Court. The current law stipulates that you are automatically divorced if you are married and do the sex confirmation procedure and you need to undergo sex reassignment surgery to have your sex changed legally as well. Changes to the law will be effective from 1 January 2019. The new law allows for persons to self-identify with a third gender, but this is applicable only to intersex persons. We demand for this to be allowed also for trans persons based on the principles of self-determination. There are challenges within the family environment. I was never personally attacked or had any issues and as a city council member I go to churches and mosques and other public places. I was in Kosovo recently, where I meet with the Kosovo government, and was asked to set up infrastructure of LGBTI CSOs there and that is how I got in touch with ERA"

Janset Kalan, Turkey: “Last year I spoke about some dramatic stuff, like being attacked by 8 men, being kicked out of my apartment etc. Yesterday, we talked about legal gender recognition and medical procedures in the region. I want to talk about this regarding Turkey. I started getting estrogen hormones in May 2015, by myself everyday. I worked for a trans CSO at the time but still felt scared to come out. However, someone from my organisation decided to out me to the group. Some people laughed at me. One of the activists, who was later kicked out from my CSO, shared a post about me saying: “this English speaking bald parrot thinks he is a woman”. Another activist, who used to be my roommate and left abroad, exposed parts of my private life. I realised this when I was contacted by an unknown person asking me about private matters of my life, such as my passport name. I asked my organisation for an investigation and to find a solution. It ended up being a privately led investigation, keeping information about me and that activist. Eventually I resigned from my organisation and felt bad in terms of safe spaces. I thought this was my safe space, but it was not anymore as we were talking bad things about each other. Last year, some CSOs questioned my identity saying that I am not woman enough and some volunteers insulted some trans participants. All the procedures we make are not enough if we do not implement them in our everyday life.”

Lila Milik, Macedonia: “Trans persons in Macedonia face daily challenges and they are not encouraged to approach state institutions or to report their cases of discrimination or violence. I was the subject of a major TV show in my country. I was recorded without my knowledge from a friend at home and the video was published on television where the host made public our names, phone numbers, addresses etc. The programme was about trans women and sex work. The friend who had videotaped everything was kicked out of the apartment she was renting within fifteen minutes. We both received countless hate messages and threats. We took the case to court but we received false deposition, as I changed my personal documents and was not recognised as the person who filed the lawsuit. The case is now pending with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. I was not physically attacked, but was insulted and attacked verbally by officials in several state institutions, including the civil registry, when I was getting my new personal documents. The process took longer and eventually when I asked for the manager him and other clerks laughed at me when I presented them with my ID which has a male sex marker. Police officers also ridiculed me, calling me a f****t and a man. I filed a complaint about their behavior but was rejected. On another occasion, when three trans persons were attacked, the policemen took some photos of them without their knowledge, and these photos ended up all over the neighborhood of one of the persons. Police often takes money from trans sex workers. I was advised by one medical professional to stay at home for six months and not to contact anyone, which left me with nothing. I went to see another psychiatrist who managed to give me a proper diagnosis, but when I got back, I was said the doctor was not there. I never got a chance to see her again, as they were always saying she is not available.

CONCLUSIONS

- Legal gender recognition is not regulated in Macedonia and several other countries of the region. Current procedures are arduous, invasive and harmful to the health, well-being and bodily integrity of trans persons. A specific law on gender recognition based on principles of self-determination is needed. Administrative procedures need

to be easy and understandable by everyone. In addition, states need to stop practices which are violating the human rights of trans persons such as mental health diagnosis, forced sterilisation and forced divorce among others. Trans persons need to be included in the process of preparing the law. Legal gender recognition should be kept separate from health care services provided to trans persons;

- Trans persons should have free access to psychological help, hormones and endocrinologists. It is advised for all services to be placed in the same clinical center.
- Trans persons do not pursue higher education or career paths, because they do not want to have documents which misgender them. Additionally, without proper documentation and ID they cannot access employment market, because most people will not hire them upon seeing their documents;
- Third gender marker, particularly important for intersex persons, which is currently under discussion in Parliament should be introduced into legislation by spring 2019;

PLENARIES ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND GROWING UP LGBTI IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

Contributors: Dona Kosturova, Youth Educational Forum Macedonia, Jovana Ananievska, HERA Macedonia, Irena Cvetkovic, Coalition Margins Macedonia, Gordana Blazevska Spiridonova, School Psychologist Macedonia, Petar Atanasov, Ministry of Education and Science Macedonia, Juliana Nikolova, Member of Parliament Republic of Macedonia, Antonio Mihajlov, Subversive Front Macedonia, Livia Zotrija, Alliance against Discrimination LGBT Albania, Kristian Randjelovic, XY Spectrum Serbia, Lina Kostarova, Centre for Psychosocial and Crisis Action Macedonia, Frank Morawietz, Franco-German Youth Office.

DISCUSSION

Ireva Cvetkovic, Coalition Margins: Textbooks in elementary and secondary education of Macedonia contain discriminatory and derogatory content. In psychology textbooks homosexuality is described as unhealthy and unnatural and a disease. Students are fed with such prejudices during their education. Additionally there are high levels of bullying and harassment in schools. More than half of students report having been discriminated against or harassed in school. 30% of students have thought at least once about committing suicide compared to 20% among heterosexuals. Most students report such cases of violence and harassment to the psychologists but not to the school security. There are high levels of violence occurring in high school dormitories.

Gordana Blaževska, school psychologist: We had a case concerning a trans child entering first year of secondary education. He was open about his identity and spoke openly about his needs as well as the cases of harassment he endured. We had to address this issue as a staff and with the school superiors. It is important to mention that no guidelines or regulations are in place about such cases. Discrimination and transphobia were obvious in this case, as well as a lot of misgendering and addressing the child in wrong ways. We had to also work with the other children and the parents and inform them adequately about trans identities. This case was very difficult also because the child was subjected to violence during elementary education and had not received help or support in those years. Due to the violence endured he was also quite defensive as well as aggressive towards other students. Eventually, the student transitioned as he had desired, but unfortunately did not

manage to graduate due to pressure and conflicts within the school environment. Nowadays, children speak to school psychologists openly about their sexual orientation and ask for help in coming out to their peers.

Petar Atanasovski, Deputy Minister of Education: Three basic things are crucial for education: legislation, textbooks and programmes. Anti-discrimination laws are important to be adopted, as well as modern laws on primary and secondary education. Legislation is good overall however we are lagging behind in terms of changing discriminatory textbooks and combating violence and harassment within schools and dormitories. Response of violence also requires adequate reporting and documentation. Introducing sexual education is also important. We have to make youth understand better the world we live in and how to respect each-other.

Julijana Nikolova, Member of Parliament, Macedonia: I hope that ideas and plans of the Ministry will be established and properly implemented. Macedonia is still a country of myths and prejudices. The inter-parliamentary group on LGBTI rights was necessary and so far has had good cooperation with CSOs as they have important expertise. However, setting up the group was not easy. The first question we were asked by everyone was why did we make up this working group, assuming that to work on this subject you have to identify with the topic you stand for. However, it should be quite the opposite - we should stand for everything that is relevant to our citizens. Sexuality is still a taboo topic in Macedonia. Discrimination against LGBTI persons is found everywhere. The biggest prejudice is that LGBTI persons choose to be as such, which constitutes the biggest stereotype producing discriminatory behavior. The Ministry of Education must take good care of this and not just by organising trainings. When reading examples of violence indicated in the Istanbul convention, I myself realised I was not aware of the victim of violence at some point. That is why it is important to educate youth about this.

Jovana Ananievska, HERA: We have been working on comprehensive sexual education. This involves also cognitive, social and psychological aspects, not just physical. Children are not taught to be sexual beings, as our critics state, because they are already that. Sex topics are still a taboo. Our education is very old-school. The educational sector is mostly conservative. Children need more interaction and a voice to tell what they want to know. It is possible to change attitudes, not just levels of knowledge. Young people need to know more about gender and responding to violence. No girls and boys should be victims of violence because we act in the way - boys will be boys and girls should be girls. We need to think about how to make sexual education more efficient, not just to introduce it.

Frank Morawietz, Franco-German Youth Office: One part of our office's work is to develop exchange programmes between youth from France, Germany and the Western Balkans. I was born in 1960, and I grew up in a society where you only had a man and a woman. Anything else was criminalized or tabooed. That changed dramatically with the 1968 riots and onwards, when society started to be more open and liberal. I have a son, who at the age of 16 came out as a trans man and asked us and his school that from now on he needs to be treated and addressed as such. He wanted us to call him Alex. We were confused and the school decided to hold a conference on the matter. There are only two clinics in Germany which are specialized in supporting minors who are in the position of my son. It

was a stressful time for all of us but it was also a learning experience. I am very proud of my son for stepping forward and telling the school how he wants to be treated. The first thought we had in our minds was how to protect our son from bullying and other problems. My son suffered also from depression and suicidal thoughts. I can say that there is no real discrimination from institutions, however we did have the need to work with teachers, as they also need information, and clarifications and cannot do a good job based only on good will. As far as the region of the Western Balkans is concerned, there is a real concern that many children and youth are completely isolated and they still do not get the help and the support that they need. I believe that the role of Regional Youth Cooperation Office is very important.

Livia Zotrija, Alliance against Discrimination LGBT, Albania - Albanian politicians are very eager to adopt laws for the purpose of EU integration, such as the law for protection from discrimination, but their implementation is very poor. The same goes for the National Action Plan on LGBTI (2016-2020). We faced many problems when starting to provide trainings in Tirana's high schools, in the framework of the action plan. We faced resistance, rejection and backlash from all sides. Politicians and government people did not protect us, when it was needed. We had to face everything on our own. The responses of the Minister of Education and Sports and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination came only after one week as the public debate had culminated in hate speech. We did not manage to complete our programme of trainings in schools and we consider this as one significant step back.

Lina Kostarova, Centre for Psychosocial and Crisis Action Macedonia - My first meeting with a transgender person was 25 years ago at a university hall after lecture. The person confessed me that she is actually a man. I have to admit that I was shocked, even though I was a professional for a very long time at that point. He wanted my help on how to approach this as he was going to a long process from self identification to self acceptance. It took almost four years to get to a place where he became a strong person. This was taking place in a very conservative country and without much available information. For me it was very important to understand even though we live and work in an environment of complete denial where teachers even refuse to discuss the topic. Our teachers and partners still think that the less children know the better it is for them. This think that this will keep them protected. It is a very worrying approach. Parents can be very stubborn and uncooperative and can make matters even more complex. Official policies are also problematic, as it is not clear how LGBTI children are treated. There are no clear standings on transgender children, which puts them in a particularly difficult position.

CONCLUSIONS

- The education system is still old fashioned and outdated. There is still no mention of LGBTI rights in the education system. Modern ways of education need to be introduced which are inclusive and where the students will take active role in creating the curriculum;
- The primary task of psychologists should be well-being and mental health of pupils; More work needs to be done to educate students on violence and harassment and identify ways for prevention;

- Violence against LGBTI youth is prevalent, not only within the school environment and needs to be addressed properly;
- Good laws are not enough and more needs to be done to change public awareness; In addition, the current legislation on education needs to be improved, in close cooperation with CSOs and by taking into account the needs of LGBTI students;
- Children should be given a chance to adopt modern values;
- Textbooks must be revised and homophobic and transphobic content needs to be replaced. At the moment, there is not one text book that is mentioning LGBTI;
- It is important to understand the influence of informal education which today has extensive influence on careers of young people;
- To create safe space for LGBTI youth within schools and faculties to freely express themselves and this is something both the state and the CSO's should work.

PLENARY ON INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION WITHIN THE LGBTI MOVEMENT

Contributors: Nenad Micov, Stronger Together Macedonia, Andrej Senih, HERA Macedonia, Serkan Ilaslaner, Red Umbrella Turkey, Hilmi Jashari, Ombudsman of Kosovo;

Serkan Ilaslaner, Red Umbrella Turkey - When I first heard about this topic, i realised that there are two parts in it: the movement and the community. In Turkey, inclusion and exclusion, has been been political and ideological as well as community based. LGBTI people have never been excluded from other major movements such as the anarchist or leftist movements. In the 2000s we met with feminists and Kurdish movements. Collaboration with these movements was hand in hand. We have had a struggle within feminist movement, concerning trans persons. Through the late 2010s we started noticing migrants and LGBTI refugees movements in Turkey and defining their role in the movement. At one point sex worker organisations also showed up. LGBTI politics is on the margins in today's Turkey, but so are some parts of the LGBTI community within the LGBTI movement such as sex workers or refugees.

Turkish activist: There are LGBTI people in Turkey who cannot reach us properly, many of them being Syrian refugees who faced strong opposition from many citizens in Turkey. The same went for LGBTI sex workers from Syria who were rejected by domestic LGBTI sex workers who claimed "ownership" over sex work. Rejection and opposition was very visible in social media as well. Many of them were even reported to the police in order to erase competition. Refugees are allowed to live in pilot areas in Turkey and there the majority of the population faces a lot of problems. We have tried to organize them in better ways, through meetings, social media groups etc. We have been trying to improve their overall position.

Andrej Senih, HERA Macedonia - There are always two sides to a coin. When there are grounds for discrimination, then we have also new communities being created. HIV is obviously a basis for exclusion from the general population. Our organisation is composed of diverse memberships, reflecting the diversity of our society and country. Men who have sex with men are mostly affected by HIV in Macedonia. Those who do not belong to the LGBTI community have always been very accepting to LGBTI persons as they share HIV as same basis of discrimination. We cannot say that HIV is still properly perceived in Macedonia or within the LGBTI community. It is seen as something dirty and disgusting. It is

a vicious circle that we witness in our everyday work: because of fear of exclusion and discrimination, people living with HIV do not openly show their statuses, not even to their friends or within the LGBTI community. They remain invisible.

Hilmi Jashari, Ombudsman of Kosovo - The first time that the Ombudsman made a ruling relating to LGBTI was in 2012 when the institution stood strongly with a case involving the LGBTI community. Secondly, we have been working on several important cases involving LGBTI persons who were victims of a hate crime. On that occasion, police failed to provide proper investigation. We also issued a legal opinion on how to approach the LGBTI community relating to a court case. Our third approach has been the *amicus curiae* role of the Ombudsman by providing legal opinions on LGBTI rights. We have sent our opinion to the Constitutional Court regarding a trans man who was rejected sex change markers in their personal documents, and whose case is now pending in front of the Court.

PLENARY ON THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ADVANCING LGBTI RIGHTS

Contributors: Julie Ward, Member of the European Parliament, Maja Morachanin, Member of Parliament Macedonia

Julie Ward, Member of European Parliament: We have designated roles but we can go beyond that in our parliamentary work. We can contribute through our memberships in different committees and working groups. Other parties might be afraid of feminists or gender politics. They are pushing an agenda of Europe being a Christian society as an excuse to deny people's rights. I am active on gender equality issues because many people are not.

There are many ways parliamentarians contribute to the subject. For example I am member of the regional development committee in the EP, not an obvious area. There was a report that came to Parliament on the EU's agenda in rural areas and I spoke on the importance of women and LGBTI communities to have access to regional development funding that goes to poorer regions. You can influence agendas if you are explicit about what you are demanding, which I always do in reports by making concrete suggestions for amendments and additions. I am in the lookout to see if our policies and laws are as inclusive as they should be. Just this week we were very busy on discussing LGBTI rights. We joined activities concerning the murder of Greek activist Zac Kostopoulos. An MEP hosted a photo campaign in his support. Secondly we worked to raise awareness on the human rights urgency concerning gay and bi men in Chechnya. We passed a resolution on the matter. When I speak in Parliament I do not speak in abstract. I call people by their names, because that can save people's lives. We have helped people not getting murdered or executed. We also prepare and sign papers and important resolutions. One of those concerned the recent Romanian referendum. It is an attack, a very homophobic attack on our diverse communities. It doesn't just affect rainbow families but also single parents, grandparent families etc.

I just came from a meeting in Bosnia and Herzegovina where a discussion on EU enlargement process was taking place. There I said I was going to a regional LGBTI conference. I was in a room full of right wing politicians who love power, and love speaking about being European. It was good to be there and to speak to some EU members and let them know how some Balkan countries are doing better. We host joint conferences with

trade unions inter-group, anti-poverty intergroup within the Parliament. We can come together with those groups. I pointed out that the current chairman of the European Parliament used to be an openly homophobic politician. You remind politicians what they signed for by being MEP as opposed to national parliament.

Maja Morachanin, Member of Parliament Macedonia and coordinator of inter-party working group on LGBTI rights of the Parliament of Macedonia - I believe in importance of human rights and I am in several commissions addressing human rights including the inter-group for LGBTI rights. Discrimination against LGBT persons has been persistent and through the pushing and close dialogue with local CSOs we decided to create this inter-party group. Slowly we obtained the support of MPs from other parties. So now we have 13 MPs from all political parties as well as independent MPs and one member from a conservative party. We are pushing for some issues. Our first initiative was with law on audio-visual services. Secondly on misdemeanor provisions on hate speech. Additionally we are monitoring implementation of laws in practice. The public is not expressing hatred as it used to. On the occasion of IDAHOBIT this May, we as an intergroup prepared a press release which was posted on the Parliament website. For our country, it is important that MPs condemn homophobia.

OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY SESSIONS **5-6 October**

Time	Congress Hall 4/1	Congress Hall 4/2	Mezzanine Hall 2	Mezzanine Hall 3	Mezzanine Hall 4
14.00 – 15.30	Meeting of RFSL and Activists from Turkey	LGBTI Structures in Political Parties	/	The Story of Safe House - Towards Resilience and Safety	LGBT Teachers + LGBT Approach in Books
15.30 – 17.00		/	Changing Hearts and Minds – Experiences from the World	LGBTI Political Participation in the Western Balkan	Using Data to Promote LGBTI Inclusive Schools

	Congress Hall 4/1	Congress Hall 4/2	Mezzanine Hall 2	Mezzanine Hall 3	Mezzanine Hall 4
10.45 - 12.00	Parents group	Influencing LGBTI Rights at Local Political Level	Violence: Let's Make the UN Aware of What's	Is LGBTIQ Sport Political? The Future is Now!	Storytelling Workshop on LGBTIQ+ Migrants and

	meeting		Happening		Refugees
12-00 – 13.00		/	Arts & Culture (Cooperation, Exchange, Community Events)	ICD 11 and the Future of Trans Depathologisation	Global LGBTI Developments in the Era of SDGs and Agenda 2030
16.00 – 17.00	Rainbow Families in the Region	/	Fear No More - Turn the Tide on HIV	Trans 101 – Ask Away!	Simplifying the Language of Communication with the Public on LGBTI+ issues
17.00 – 18.00	LGBT+ Teachers Struggles + Man sex workers + LGBT+ Soldier	/	ChemSex Sex and Drugs in LGBTI Community	Non Binary Pride and Acceptance	Pride Should Be a Protest or a Celebration?

MEETING OF LGBTI ACTIVISTS FROM TURKEY, RFSL AND ERA Discussing the current situation in Turkey

Background to meeting: This March, ERA had a working visit both in Istanbul and Ankara where they met with representatives of member organisations there (SPoD, Listag, Pembe Hayat, Red Umbrella and KAOS GL) regarding their upcoming efforts in addressing the deteriorating human rights situation in Turkey. They discussed some of the main priorities of the organisations there, in light of the recent bans and increased oppression of freedom of expression, assembly etc.

In the consultations it became clear that some of the main priorities that ERA can help their members with are:

- capacity building on online activism, mobilisation and safety; a sub-topic is mobilisation around visibility events such as pride marches etc;
- addressing well-being of activists (as many of them are abandoning Turkey in big numbers);
- capacity building on addressing emergency situations (such as arrests of activists, attacks etc)
- addressing advocacy priorities such as the repeal of banning events both in Ankara and Istanbul.

ERA reached out to international friends and allies including RFSL in order to brainstorm possible ways of addressing such priorities, be that jointly or in other forms. This meeting

builds on a dialogue that ERA initiated with RFSL in May 2018 following their meeting with the organisations earlier this year.

As a response; RFSL shared a list of possible donors and Informed about the support function

ED of ERA reached out to propose a separate meeting with all Turkish activists present at the conference where we could discuss the current situation in Turkey (especially the recent developments) and how RFSL can be of any help in increasing access to funding in light of recent situation and developments.

Participating organisations: ERA, LISTAG, Board member of ERA in Turkey, Kaos GL, Heinrich Boll Foundation, Anadolu LGBTI+ Turkey, SPoD, Pink Life, Council of Europe, Red Umbrella

Outline of discussion: 1. Background to meeting, 2. Round of introductions, 3. RFSL - who we are, 4. A discussion on the current situation in Turkey, 5. What type of external support you think would be needed ahead in this work and what you assess as needed for the movement to counter the development and/or be able to continue working.

Purpose of meeting is to: - Enable a closer dialogue between organisations, - Introduce the support function, - Collection of info from Turkish org to see what can be done, - Next steps either with me and org. individually, or collectively.

Background analysis shared by participants:

The situation for LGBTI organising in Turkey has become more difficult following the ban on Istanbul Pride that was first issued in 2015. The ban has been re-issued annually since then.

Although the ban only addressed the celebration of pride in Istanbul, the effects have become much more widespread and is now affecting LGBTI organising both in Istanbul as well as in other cities in part due to unclarity on how the ban can be used.

Additionally, on November 2017 the governorate of Ankara issues an indefinite ban on all LGBTI which has made the work and engagement of organisations and community very difficult. Police are shutting down or not giving permission to arrange activities, people are afraid to participate and organisations cannot work on outreach and or awareness raising. Cooperation with public administration around meetings etc is not happening to the same extent. LGBTI groups at universities have cancelled their activities and organisations are changing their way of working. Activities are being moved to other cities or cancelled all together.

The effects of the ban bring severe difficulties in organising as re-planning and organising is both time and resource consuming. Not being able to be as visible on social media, hampers outreach and awareness raising and people choosing not to be visible also hampers organising and participation as well as visibility and outreach. Difficult to engage young people with this current situation.

Responses from the movement; Janset Kalan, ERA steering board Turkey, have requested an investigation from the Ombudsman but so far there has been no action taken. The European court to human rights also just rejected the case on the basis of miss-procedure. KAOS GL; Since last year all events by Kaos in Ankara have been cancelled, moving their events to Izmir. Turned the focus more to the community itself such as capacity development for the organisation and for other organisations.

ERA summary of the discussions in March: International support is needed. Reaching out in the international arena. Pressure on government. Capacity development needed. Security brought up as needed.

Addition by ERA Board member Turkey: ERA proposal on what could be done. Discussion on how to improve this. Period of wanting to be a bit quiet see what will happen - now ready for next steps.

How can RFSL support? There is a need for a more structural approach to Western Balkans and Turkey. Donors are not funding Turkey. Funding does not cover Turkey – not in their portfolios RFSL could advocate for the inclusion of Turkey in funding.

ERA fundraising on data – RFSL could support in outreach to relevant donors to ensure inclusion of Turkey.

Advocacy – Turkey UPR next year. Can RFSL invite organisations from Turkey to partner in advocacy next year?

Include Turkey in training efforts.

Programme and funding.

Suggested plan of action:

1. RFSL address the Turkey situation during ILGA donor pre-conference;
2. RFSL conducts a donor mapping for the region to share with the group;
3. RFSL opens up the call for RAP 2 to Turkey.
4. RFSL considers Turkey as participants as advocacy partners to Geneva 2019 as Turkey is up for UPR review;
5. RFSL continue dialogue with ERA and Turkish org. to try and submit a joint proposal to Creative Force;

WORKSHOP ON CHANGING HEART AND MINDS: EXPERIENCES FROM THE WORLD

This session aimed to discuss experiences of campaigning from the region as well as globally. Session started with a roundtable of participants and their experiences with campaigning. The workshop was divided into three topics: targeting the campaign, defining the message and discussing action tactics.

Targeting:

- Some campaigns have integrated social science and marketing tools to identify a specific segment in society;

- The identification of the “moveable middle” target must sometimes be done on criteria beyond their attitudes towards LGBTI people, especially when those are very negative. Campaigns, in this case, need to identify people who share broader values and/or are supportive of issues that can be connected (eg. women’s rights);
- Targets are different, depending on whether we are speaking about persuasion campaigns or mobilisation campaigns;

Messaging:

- It is important for messaging to be simple and understandable;
- Messages often focus on a few core values. Sometimes these values are unusual (e.g. Irish campaign that targets young people, but is based on rather conservative values).
- It is important for a message to be based on research about what works with the target audience;

Tactics:

- Tactics are not good or bad per se, but their relevance depends on context;
- To reach beyond our online “bubbles”, we need to identify online spaces which bring the conversation to other social circles and communities;
- Participants mentioned online messaging, public actions, TV interviews, stunts, petitions, digital ads, rallies, pride marches, memes, celebrities, animation movies, crowd-funding, campaigns, canvassing, billboards etc;
- Participants spoke about how to build up conversations to canvas people to be supporters. In the Balkans this would not be literally door to door but could start with soft allies.

Sources

Short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5B19in1BkA>

Long video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdjtFRdbAo>

Campaign videos: <https://www.transserbia.org/vesti/1215-video-transparentno>
<https://www.scoopwhoop.com/video-of-a-mother-celebrating-her-daughters-first-womens-day/#.tqmyhnovx>
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFuq22iYfjw>
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBd-UCwVAY>

LGBTI STRUCTURES IN POLITICAL PARTIES

The experience for one participant in Lithuania was that there was hostility to him when he joined the Social Democratic Party. However, he came to make changes within the party, and was able to guide the party on LGBTI issues. ILGA Europe said that they work with parties on Europe-level with S&D, ALDE, Green; thought not EPP despite trying. Heinrich Boll Foundation is affiliated with Green Party in Germany but very few links to local level parties in the Balkans. Not a visible topic on political spectrum in BiH, for example, though awareness of incitement to hatred is growing.

In Macedonia, you don't have to be politically engaged to meet with an MP. Sharing personal stories and increasing awareness about lived realities of LGBTI people has already had an impact on local MPs. Moves on non-discrimination law now on the cards, as new Government is sensible.

EU Enlargement will have a role in furthering agenda; as in BiH the anti-discrimination law include sex characteristics.

Even in places like Germany, backlash is still present on laws that have already been passed.

ILGA Europe working to influence party manifestos.

WORKSHOP: INFLUENCING LGBTI RIGHTS AT LOCAL POLITICAL LEVEL

Minutes from LGBTI in self-government: Delegates were asked what they need in their countries to ensure LGBTI rights, this included calls for commissions to uphold the rights of LGBTI people, LGBTI support and education, and HIV testing and de-stigmatisation. Practical steps for establishing support at a municipal level included knowing your allies, establishing unusual alliances based on the common ground of oppression, and using past collective struggles to find common ground.

The politics of small towns/cities/communities, prejudice within LGBTI communities, economic factors, and employment are all barriers to participation at a municipal level. Municipalities should dealing with LGBTI issues on more structured and continuous level, not just through small project support.

The workshop recommendations are: ERA should create a structural programme through funding applications and partner organisations to create working relationships and common LGBTI ground with municipalities. Rainbow Rose will support this initiative in any way needed/possible and will establish a Rainbow City network.

More exchanges should be facilitated between municipalities. Local governments should work more closely with equality bodies and other relevant commissions in order to make them functional and to mainstream LGBTI rights. LGBTI persons should be supported and encouraged to join local politics and be part of councils and other important bodies. They should also engage in local elections.

WORKSHOP: THE STORY OF SAFE HOUSE - TOWARDS RESILIENCE AND SAFETY

Objectives:

- To share stories of LGBTIQ+ individuals for their process for asylum seeking;
- To raise the questions and tackle discrimination and exclusion from the local LGBTIQ+ community in their asylum seeking countries;
- To share the support by institutions, cso's and social services regarding their integration to the local community;
- To share the experience and the challenges faced due to integration to the local LGBTIQ+ community in Macedonia as a refugee

Introduction to the topic: Why this topic and what is the connection with the ERA Conference 2018 Skopje. Experience shared by Murat Mislimi from his volunteering period (9 months) in Athens, Greece and what was the situation regarding LGBTIQ+ refugees in Athens. In order to emphasize on refugee aspect of the story and the challenges faced, Anouar Hamidi shared his story of being a refugee and what are the challenges one refugee is facing during the journey from their origin country towards the European territories. Anouar also reflected on the asylum seeking process and the challenges faced during this period, based on his experience as asylum seeker in Macedonia. Especially focusing on the situation in detention center and in Macedonia and how refugees and asylum seekers are treated. He also focused on the point of his origin country and what kind of difficulties he was facing as being part of the lgbtiq+ community there, and how this fact has been treated by the Macedonian asylum seekers office and on the decision made for his case. Later on a open discussion was opened and all the participants were sharing their experiences regarding the refugee situation from around Balkans and Turkey. Different organization their support during the refugee wave in Balkan countries and what were their best practices in supporting them

Following question were asked and were or were not answered during the discussion. Questions: Are you sad and how do you feel for persons and for your life that you left back in Morocco? Do you feel welcomed, not only by LGBTIQ+ community but from the general society? What is the position of the refugees on selling sex? How IOM can influence the current situation with institutions regarding transit centers and shelters for asylum seekers and the decisions of the asylum seekers?

WORKSHOP: LGBT TEACHERS + LGBTI APPROACH IN BOOKS

Representatives from Serbia, Turkey, Macedonia, and the U.S. were all present. For all nations, textbooks and schools in general are a site of discrimination, including homophobia and transphobia. Outside of SOGI-related textbook bias, ethnic bias also appears in different textbooks in different countries of the region which have their own version of history.

Serbia was successful in removing anti-LGBTI content from some textbooks recently, but was unable to include a book in elementary/primary school curriculum that attempted to normalize different types of families. Serbia has an anti-discrimination law from 2009 that includes SOGI language, however bylaws and best practices for implementation in schools – to prevent school-based bullying – have still not yet been finalized. However, at least one program has been taught to students about defining different forms of violence in schools, and how/why this violence is harmful.

In Turkey, Listag – comprised of parents, families, and friends of LGBTI people – has been working to improve schools for LGBTI students, with chapters in major cities in Turkey as well as a phone bank and online contact form, allowing for parents to report SOGI-related bias in schools and for Listag to advocate on LGBTI students' behalf at schools.

It is difficult for teachers in Macedonia to intervene on SOGI-related bullying among younger students, particularly when parents are resistant to teachers discussing or mentioning SOGI issues at all with their children. Ready Set Respect is a resource from GLSEN, which is meant for U.S. audiences, but may help elementary/primary school teachers intervene on this type

WORKSHOP: USING DATA TO PROMOTE LGBTI INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

Overview: Participants had a detailed discussion about challenges that each of the countries have in working to improve education for LGBTI students. They shared resources and strategies. GLSEN shared their plan to conduct research on LGBTI issues in education (experiences of LGBTI students) in the region. They discussed how this research is not only valuable within each country, but it will be useful to have comparisons across the countries in the region and in Eastern Europe.

Key challenges: Ministries of Education are often not willing to make improvements in the secondary schools. Schools are often very concerned about parents making trouble. University departments on pedagogy are not open to LGBTI issues. Countries with a national education system have more difficulties making change, and often have to work in schools through small openings of opportunity - so it can't be widespread.

Possibilities: National data is very important for convincing government. Some international surveys, like HSBC, can include questions about sexual orientation (like in Macedonia). Inclusive anti-bullying/harassment policies in each country. Education workshops for teachers and school staff. Work with the professional groups - like groups of school psychologists, etc.

Next steps: Four countries in the region (so far!) are interested in partnering with GLSEN (U.S.) on conducting research on LGBTI student experiences at schools. A preliminary plan for conducting research this academic year was developed. Participants exchanged and will exchange educational materials. Future meeting to further discuss next steps with research was planned for the next day.

ARTS AND CULTURE: COOPERATION, EXCHANGE, COMMUNITY EVENTS

Participants used this workshop to share their best practices with cultural events within their organisations. They touched on the importance of supporting LGBTI artists in their countries. They create symbolic language, imagery or text, which contributes to the formation and cohesiveness of our communities. They express the pains and joys of our people.

IS LGBTIQ SPORT POLITICAL? THE FUTURE IS NOW!

Participants shared examples of community building and empowering LGBTIQ+ people through sports groups (as well as dance, singing, knitting groups) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Turkey. Sports actions are very effective in fighting homo/bi/transphobia and misogyny. Community needs exist and can be recognized through community building initiatives. There is a need to address community-specific issues and add them to advocacy agenda of mainstream LGBTI organizations. Community oriented projects are needed, not only funder oriented projects directed by programmatic areas of donors. Organisations need to exchange and cooperate more regionally in the area of sports. Participants suggested for ERA to organise a conference on community building initiatives for the Western Balkans and Turkey.

FEAR NO MORE: TURN THE TIDE ON HIV

There is limited involvement of LGBTI organisations in the field of HIV. Some LGBTI organisations are getting slowly in the field but they are quite shy. In Montenegro most organisations are connected with HIV. LGBTI organisations work on HIV topic quite a lot.

There are clear links between stigma and discrimination, between HIV status and sexual orientation. LGBTI persons continue to hide their identity and their HIV status. Often they refuse to receive treatment and are dying because of stigma and discrimination. They do not want to go to clinics and they do not want to be seen.

Health care practitioners have a long way to go in terms of quality of service. Many times LGBTI people are denied service, in other occasions therapies are invasive. 30% of medical personnel are using gloves and protection.

There is a lack of awareness campaigns concerning HIV and usage of condoms. Only 23% of the general population uses condoms. There are no testing campaigns, no sexual and reproductive health courses in schools, no campaigns concerning HIV.

Most organisations are not working on prevention but rather on harm reduction. Several countries of the region are touristic destinations. A lot of persons come in the region and a lot of people from the region travel in Europe and further. Many foreigners are now also promoting unprotected sex because in their countries there is free access to PReP. Condom use is decreasing significantly in the gay/bi community.

It is time to think of how to make services LGBTI and HIV friendly. PReP use needs to be promoted and organisations from Montenegro for example will promote with the community how to buy PReP online as health institutions are yet to make a decision on this. There need to be campaigns to promote equally use of PReP and use of condoms. It is equally important to work with the general population. Addressing intersectionality within the LGBTI movement is really important, to reduce the stigma and discrimination among the LGBTI community. HIV advocacy should be included in all aspects of the EU accession process.

WORKSHOP: CHEMSEX - SEX AND DRUGS IN THE LGBTI COMMUNITY

Definition: Chemsex is a sexual activity engaged in while under the influence of stimulant drugs such as methamphetamine or mephedrone, typically involving several participants.

This is a very specific MSM and gay/bi phenomenon and chemsex is taking place significantly in some parts of the ERA region too. The ages vary from very young persons (even lower than 18 years old) to much older persons and is being practiced among all types of education, walks of life and takes place mostly in private premises. The types of drugs used vary from city and country and some of the most popular drugs are crystal meth (often called Tina), GLB, GHB etc. In Slovenia there is a frequent use of amphetamines, GBL, ketamines etc.

Organisations across the region (whether they work on drug policies, harm reduction, HIV, LGBT etc.) have yet to catch up with this fastly evolving phenomenon. For instance they need to develop practices on how to take drugs in a safer way. Many people engage in chemsex because they are alone, and such activities give them a sense of connection and adventure.

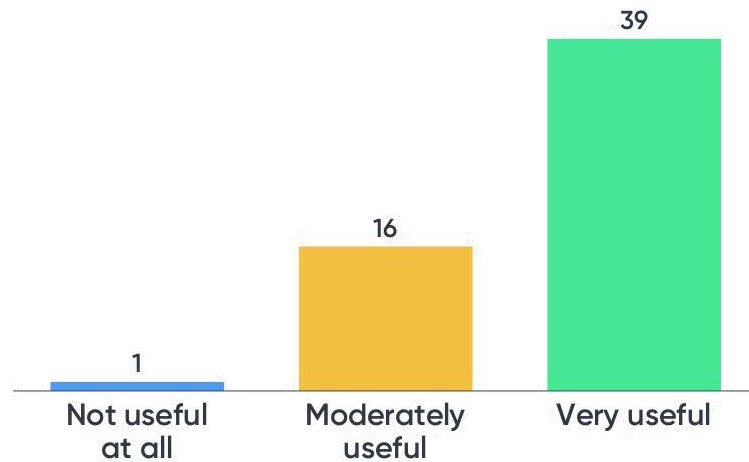
Consent is a huge issue in the chemsex settings, because under effects of drugs people's sense of inhibition is much lower. Many people - especially when they use BGL - pass out and do not remember what happened to them. Another major risk is that of overdose.

Sex work and chemsex is also a grey area. Sex workers are often forced to use drugs so they can be able to work. Usage of condoms is almost rare in chemsex settings and taking PReP is very important.

Providing information on this topic, regional dialogue and cooperation among organisations of all fields are very important. More immediate actions need to be taken. Internet should be used to reach out to as many people and provide good and reliable information. It is important also to engage with donors on this subject and push them to provide funding to address this topic.

CONFERENCE FEEDBACK

How useful did you find this year's ERA conference?



 56

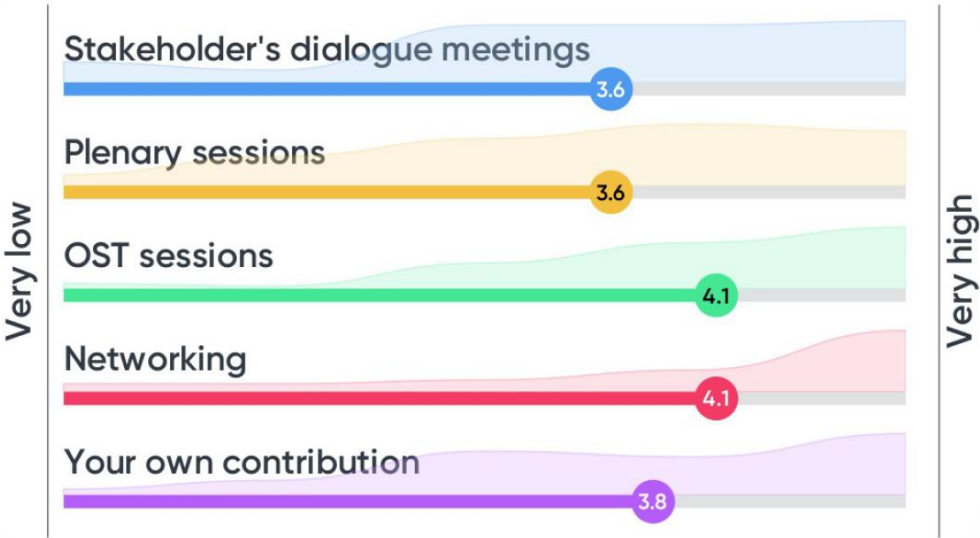
How would you describe this year's ERA conference?

 **Mentimeter**

56

How would you rate the following:

Mentimeter



57

ORGANISERS AND SUPPORTERS

The ERA Annual Conference was organized by ERA – LGBTI Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Turkey in partnership with LGBTI Support Centre, Macedonian Helsinki Committee, Coalition Margins, Subversive Front and HERA.



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Auswärtiges Amt



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