Tools for LGBT people in small and medium cities

divercity

preventing and combating **homo** and **transphobia**
in small and medium cities across Europe

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Index

Why this guide?

LGBT people in the European Union experience discrimination, harassment, and violence in different areas of their lives. Since big urban environments have become favoured locations for identity expression, community safety, associational activity, anonymity, and leisure, the experiences of LGBT people are commonly reduced to whatever is taking place in big cities. In contrast, in small and medium-sized cities, access to LGBT resources is much more problematic because local agencies are smaller and the associative structure or strength of the LGBT communities is less. Consequently, LGBT experiences in these areas have their own dynamics, which are not normally taken into account by service providers.

This guide presents a set of tools gathered from research carried out across six small and medium-sized cities in Europe (Charleroi, Girona, Nottingham, Sabadell, Thessalonica and Wroclaw). Among other things, you will find ways to combat LGBTphobia and where to find affinity spaces and places to socialize; you will also get to know your rights and the ways you can address any violation of such rights.

Inclusion for everybody

The diversity of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIGE) is present in all social environments. This diversity needs to be valued because it introduces new perspectives, points of view, and life experiences that enrich social relationships.

The diversity of SOGIGE is usually equated with people who identify as LGBT but in fact, diversity encompasses all kinds of sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions. However, in Europe, for centuries, heterosexuality and conforming to the sex assigned at birth have been the only legitimate orientations, which has led to a considerable degree of contempt, discrimination and aggression towards many people, especially LGBT people.

All social contexts should respect diversity and value it. We should work towards family, friends, and work colleagues or classmates recognizing this value so that workplaces, educational centres and leisure areas become safe spaces for everyone.

LGBT people are individuals with rights and liberties and should be able to feel safe everywhere, including outside of big cities. Small and medium cities should be fostered as places where one can be happy regardless of one's sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

In Wroclaw, Poland:
The LGBT Film Festival, hosted by New Horizons Cinema, presents thematically and formally differentiated pictures to promote diversified LGBT culture.

In Sabadell, Spain:
The Commission of Coexistence gathers together civil society organisations, police forces, jurists, the City Council and local political parties in order to deal with hate crimes and discrimination, and offer comprehensive assistance to victims.

LGBTphobia as a hate crime

A hate crime is a kind of violence and offence motivated by hostility or prejudice toward someone because of their perceived or actual race, ethnic group, religion, (dis)ability, sexual orientation and/or gender identity, among other social groups. Hence, LGBTphobia can motivate hate crimes.

> Since 1950, the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees rights and freedoms without discrimination on any grounds.

Sometimes hate crimes are very easy to recognize, such as when you get physically attacked. However, at other times you may suffer other kinds of aggression which are not so easy to identify. Being insulted, mocked or denied access to a service or space because of your sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression are also a result of LGBTphobia and in several countries they are considered hate crimes. If you are not sure that what you suffered is a hate crime, you can still turn to an LGBT organization or a reporting centre to talk about it.

In Catalonia, Spain:
Prosecutors specializing in hate crimes and discrimination take on LGBT-based cases, amongst others.

In Thessaloniki, Greece:
The Ombudsman Office department is the main body promoting the principle of equal treatment, in cases where it is violated for any reason of discrimination

In Nottingham, United Kingdom:
Nottinghamshire Police has been at the forefront of engaging with hate crime and developing innovative measures such as a new hate crime perpetrator programme with local authority partners.

Transgender Europe's *Know Your Rights!* Guide for Trans people in the European Union is available in English, Italian and Polish. It provides an overview and summary of EU law that is relevant for trans people living, working, visiting or claiming asylum in the EU.

Hate speech against LGBT people

Hate speech are any kind of expressions which aim for the humiliation, contempt, and undermining of the dignity towards a specific group, such as immigrants, people of colour, people belonging to low class, or LGBT people. It is manifested through insults, production of degrading messages, defamation, mocking, gestures, mimicking camp manners, or negative stereotyping, to name a few. This kind of messages can cause several effects, such as discrimination, hostility or bigotry, which reinforces prejudices and, in general, contributes to a general climate of violence.

Hate speech can take place in many different spaces, like media, online networks, public discourses or everyday life. Anybody can produce hate speech in proximity spaces, such as workplace, family or friend circles. Sometimes, discourses by media or public personalities are more visible, and we have to confront them. However, we should also focus on eliminating discourses produced in these proximity spaces.

When hate speech is targeted at LGBT people there are several tools which can help.

A good way to confront discourses from media or public personalities can be through social organizations, NGOs, citizenship pressure and some public bodies. Civil society organizations have ways of addressing complaints and collectively resist hate speech. On the other hand, to confront hate speech at proximity level the first step is recognizing it as hate speech, even if it is addressed to someone else. Also, alliances with other people, such as workmates, classmates or family members can be very useful in producing new discourses capable of burying hate speech in everyday life. Finally, getting together with other people interested in fighting discrimination can help with both personal wellbeing through safe spaces and communal reflections and resistances to LGBTphobia.

> Hate speech against LGBT people is very present in online networks. It has its particular ways of functioning, but it is only another expression of LGBTphobia.

European campaign against hate speech https://www.nohatespeechmovement.

You have the right to express your sexual orientation and gender identity without being discriminated because of it. These rights concern different spheres of your life, such as health, education or work, among others:

• **Health:** you have the right to receive medical assistance and not be discriminated against on the grounds of your sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, it is discrimination when a lesbian woman is told by her doctor that there is no need to have a gynaecological examination because "you aren't having real sex".

• **Education:** you have the right to be treated with respect by your peers, teachers and professors. For example, it is discrimination if classmates use slurs or offensive language against you, such as calling you "immigrant faggot".

• **Work:** you have the right to work in a comfortable environment free from discrimination. For example, it is discrimination if an employer allows a man whose female partner is pregnant time off work to go to ante-natal appointments with her, but refuses a similar request from a woman whose female partner is pregnant.

In Catalonia, Spain:
The Catalan Observatory of Homophobia was created by LGBT social movements to fight LGBTphobia and to report hate crimes based on sexual and gender expression, as well as to provide support for victims.

In Nottingham, United Kingdom:
The city council flies the rainbow flag quite regularly. They support the local PRIDE and promotes International day against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia (IDAHOT).

In Western cultures, SOGIGE are usually associated with the sex assigned at birth, i.e., one is assigned either a male or female gender. This contributes to the binary thinking, learnt through socialisation, that there are only two genders (female-male), and two sexual orientations (same-sex attraction – opposite sex attraction). Anyone who falls between the gaps of this binary norm because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression commonly face censure and discrimination in various areas of their lives.

However, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are not restricted to a binary form but to a spectrum of possibilities. For this reason, we need to create a context in which people can feel comfortable in this diversity, including those living in small and medium cities. Many LGBT people living in such cities across Europe report uneasiness and discrimination, especially transgender people, who report persistent problems in access to health services and work place equality.

Acknowledging that sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression exist on a continuum and can be expressed in many different ways contributes to the wellbeing of everybody, especially of those people who have long been discriminated against because of they do not fit in with the societal norm. Respecting everybody's identity is key to building an equal sociality for all of us.

In Charleroi, Belgium:
A good practice in the police was noted. They ask transgender people to indicate by whom (a man or a woman) they would prefer to be dealt with in the police station.

"The gynaecologist told me that I did not need cytology because I hadn't had sex. But I did have had sex, with another woman".
(Lesbian, 40, Girona, Spain)

"For me having lesbian friends saves many therapy hours! It's like, I'm normal, nothing is wrong".
(Lesbian, 31, woman, Girona, Spain)

"There are not friendly or unfriendly areas in one city, but people friendly or unfriendly to LGBTs".
(Transgender, 25, male, Thessaloniki, Greece)

"Even though the education services are aware of sexual and gender diversity issues, I think that they are not devoted to these issues".
(Lesbian, 38, female, Thessaloniki, Greece)

"Nottingham is seriously very white...it is not intersectional, we cannot speak about race and ethnicity. Being LGBT and foreign is an occupational hazard... There is no attention to equality and diversity".
(Gay men, 36, Nottingham, United Kingdom)

"I moved to Nottingham due to my sexuality, this was a considerable reason. I needed to live in the city... There are more services in Nottingham, it also had a gay scene and decent population of gay men".
(Gay men, 27, Nottingham, United Kingdom)

"There are screams that gay men are trying to get some rights. But these are ordinary human rights."
(Gay man, 35, Wroclaw, Poland).

"I generally do not believe that identifying oneself through sexual orientation is something that ultimately defines us."
(Lesbian, 20, Wroclaw, Poland)

"When I was a teenager, I did not exist. Trans-identities did not exist. It was not possible to conceive that a man could be a woman at his birth. When I was in Charleroi in my teenage, I was in a conscious masculinization phase but not very assumed. I then went through re-feminization phases because it was more comfortable. I then went out with a boy because I found it so much easier at home, in the street, everywhere."
(Transgender man, 28, Charleroi, Belgium)

"I do not feel that in Charleroi there is a LGBT community, defined as people who are united around a common identity and looking to being together. People are quite open and LGB people do not feel the need to join and be apart."
(Gay man, 34, Charleroi, Belgium)

"I don't understand why I have to speak to a psychiatrist when it's not an illness."
(Transgender woman, 30, Sabadell, Spain)

"Nowadays, there are laws and institutions that protect the rights of LGBT people, but at the same time many people do not accept the LGBT expressions".
(Gay man, 64, Sabadell, Spain)

In our everyday lives, we have different kinds of relationships: family, friends, workmates, classmates, etc. Although we should feel safe in all spheres of life, there are some in which we may feel insecure. Nevertheless, at other times, these same areas can also provide us comfort.

• **Families** can be a great place for support. In most cases, these are the people we grew up with, who raised us; they are people we have spent a great deal of time with and with whom we share a large part of our lives. On the other hand, families are also a place of control, supervision and socialization of gender and sexual norms. For this reason, many people delay coming out to their families until they have a degree of economic independence. You are the best expert on your family and you more than anyone else will know how they relate to sexuality. Coming out is not mandatory; you can decide whether or not you want to do so; and when and how.

• **Friends** can also be highly supportive. Unlike family, friends are usually chosen, and for this reason some LGBT people explain that coming out has helped them distinguish between good and not-so-good friends. Sometimes, LGBT people may have to educate their non LGBT friends on certain issues. Ideally, of course, any group of friends must respect the sexual and gender options of everybody in the group. At the same time, some LGBT people declare that having LGBT friends is a valuable asset in the process of socialization.

Workplace and educational centres are places where we spend a great deal of our time. Usually, they are organizations based on hierarchies within which are various kinds of relationships. Regardless of this hierarchy, everyone's sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression must be respected. This includes economical discrimination on any grounds. Of course, some of the relationships established at both workplaces and educational centres become friendships, and they can also become places of support and alliance.

Health is an area where a lot of LGBT people have suffered discrimination, including some transgender people being denied assistance. Many health workers do not have training in LGBT issues, which is necessary for the correct treatment of all people regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. However, there are also many health professionals who are highly committed and well trained, and who are of great help for LGBT people who require their services. They are usually well-known by local LGBT organizations and communities, and if you need a referral you may ask them for help.

In Wroclaw, Poland:
The Festival of Equal Rights, culminating in the Equality March, is organized yearly by the Culture of Equality Association to foster acceptance of diversity and a sense of community among LGBT people in the city.

In Nottingham, United Kingdom:
Notts LGBT+ Network is a supporting service to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and associated communities of Nottinghamshire. It produces an annual report with an analysis of contacts.

In Girona, Spain:
There is a Municipal LGBT Committee that relays the demands of LGBT people to the city council

In Thessaloniki, Greece:
On World AIDS Day awareness campaigns are organised at central parts of the city with the collaboration of public institutions along with LGBT organisations.

In Charleroi, Belgium:
A student NGO, Les *CHEFF*, has developed a course designed especially for schools, in collaboration with GRiS Wallonia, a volunteer group of gays and bisexuals. They offer to meet young people at schools and other community groups to answer questions about their sexual orientation. The goal is to make young people more aware of LGBT issues through the testimony of two young LGBT community members

Public spaces

Many LGBT people report having been discriminated against or attacked in public spaces across Europe. Also, the mass media sometimes use discriminatory language, which you can address by making official complaints or writing to editors and broadcasters.

In public spaces, gender expression is highly controlled and regulated on the social level; transgender people and gender non-conforming people in general, are often stared at, insulted and may even suffer physical aggression. On the other hand, public spaces are places of visibility in which the existence of non-normative genders and sexualities can be manifested.

LGBT people usually identify certain areas throughout their towns as safe or not, commonly based on their experiences. However, this identification is sometimes based on racial or classist prejudice rather than on experiences of aggression. It is important to identify where you can feel safe, but it is also important to avoid prejudice when doing so. Many cities have LGBT socialization spaces –organizations or friendly businesses, for instance – which can work as safe spaces.

Whenever you witness an aggression, you can accompany the victim, offer them support and ask them what they need in order to make them feel as comfortable as possible.

Thessaloniki Pride festival is organised every June, since 2012 with the official support of the City of Thessaloniki. On the days of the Pride Festival, the city's symbol – monument, the White Tower, is lighted with the colours of the rainbow flag.

In Wroclaw, Poland:
The Contemporary Museum in Wroclaw supports increased LGBT visibility by means of political and cultural events that create a space for discussion.

Online networks

Online space is becoming more and more important for many LGBT people. It is a space for socialization, offering possibilities for meeting people, creating networks and dating. This can all be done anonymously, which can generate a feeling of safety. The way lesbians, gays, bisexual, and transgender people use the Internet can be rather different, but for all four, online spaces are highly important and are used for a myriad of reasons.

However, some people use it to discriminate, humiliate or mistreat other users.

Internet can be a safe place, but it is also used by some people to offend, harass, and promote hate speech against LGBT people. Even within LGBT networks, there often are diverse aggressions against transgender people, HIV positive people, mature people, or fat people, to name but a few.

In Nottingham, United Kingdom:
There is an excellent LGBT+ network with LGBT+ database, newsletter, Facebook page and website with basic information.

When navigating the web, it is important to be careful and to promote a safe space for other users.

How to find affinity groups

Many LGBT people have reported that getting to know other LGBT people has helped them greatly by allowing them to share experiences, desires and expectations. There are various specialized organizations which bring LGBT people into contact with each other while providing areas for socialization and offering a wide range of support services.

In Wroclaw, Poland:
A Human Library project conducted by the *Diversja* Association includes LGBT people among participants, and aims to counter stereotypes and prejudices.

In Thessaloniki, Greece:
The "Thessaloniki International LGBTIQ Film Festival" is co-organized by the "SYMPRAXI – Partnership for Gender issues" and the Thessaloniki International Film Festival Organisation since 1999.

In Catalonia, Spain:
The LGBTI Network of Local Councils in Catalonia facilitates the exchange of experiences, tools, and resources among local governments.

European Level Organizations
• ILGA Europe http://www.ilga-europe.org/
• Transgender Europe http://tgeu.org/
• IGLYO www.iglyo.com
• NELFA www.nelfa.org

Ethical code of good practice to combat LGTB-phobia
Proposal to ensure respect towards sexual and gender diversity

We, as members of public and private services, are aware of the role that we can play in combating discrimination, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia against LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) people.

The signatories of this ethical code commit themselves to the following five principles:

1. To treat everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity equally
In particular:
• To take into account the diversity of the public at a large;
• To counter heteronormativity and cisnormativity by not assuming that everyone around us is either straight or cisgender (not trans).

2. To guarantee fair and respectful treatment of transgender people
In particular:
• To respect the self-defined gender of transgender people and use the personal pronouns, name, and denomination that is requested by the transgender persons themselves;
• Not to reduce trans identities and experiences to medical procedures;
• To avoid clichés and any demeaning reference to transgender people;
• To avoid using offensive expressions towards transgender people.

3. To promote diversity and take into account the plurality of LGBT communities
In particular:
• To promote and provide access to services that are inclusive of the needs and demands of LGBT population;
• To take into account all ages, disabilities, ethnic origins, genders, religions and legal status within the LGBT population.

4. To create a LGBT Discrimination-Free environment
In particular:
• To implement measures to prevent and combat discrimination against LGBT population;
• To take appropriate actions against any LGBT-phobic attitude;
• To identify LGBT-phobic acts and regularly refer them to the equality body;
• To measure progress and share good practices to improve conditions in the general working environment.

5. To ensure equality among all employees in the organisation
In particular:
• To create an inclusive environment for LGBT employees;
• To ensure equality of rights and treatment of all employees regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression;
• To support employees who have been discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender expression, and/or gender identity.

Cisgender is a person whose gender identity matches the one assigned at birth.

Cisnormativity refers to the cultural and social system where the norm is that individuals live according to the gender that they were assigned at birth, and everything that falls outside of this norm is to be censured.

Coming-out is the process of revealing the identification of a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person.

Gender Expression relates to the external manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice or body characteristics. Society generally identifies such cues as either masculine or feminine, although what is considered masculine and feminine changes over time and varies by culture.

Gender Identity is a person's inner sense of their gender. For transgender people, their own personal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Most people's gender identity is that of a man or woman (or boy or girl), but for some people it does not fit neatly into one of those two choices. Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others.

Gender reassignment refers to the process through which people re-define the gender in which they live in order to better express their gender identity. This process may, but does not have to, involve medical assistance including hormone therapies and any surgical procedures that transgender people undergo to align their body with their gender.

Heteronormative refers to cultural and social practices where men and women are being led into believing – and behaving as if – heterosexuality is the only conceivable sexuality. It also implies the positioning of heterosexuality as the only way of being "normal", which makes it the key source of social reward.

Homonormative refers to a set of hierarchies, privileges, social norms and expectations that cause oppression within the LGBT community leading to the assimilation and reinforcement of the dominant structures.

LGBT: Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. There may be other formulations that include other identities, for example LGBTI, LGBT+, LGBT*, LGBTQ, etc.

Homophobia/ Transphobia /LGBTphobia is a matrix of cultural and personal beliefs, opinions, attitudes and aggressive behaviours based on prejudice, disgust, fear and/or hatred directed against individuals or groups who do not conform to, or who transgress societal norms and expectations on gender and/or sexuality.

Queer is now used as an academic term for people who are not heterosexual, cisgender people – the term includes lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people. Queer theory aims to challenge heteronormative social norms concerning gender and sexuality, and claims that gender roles are social constructions. Traditionally the term "queer" was an abusive term and therefore, for some, still has negative connotations. Many LGBT persons however have reclaimed the term as a symbol of pride, some using it as a synonym for LGBT, and many others use it as a term that helps to transcend such labelling.

Sexual Orientation describes an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. For example transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Transgender is an umbrella term which includes those people who have a gender identity which is different to the gender assigned at birth, and those people who wish to portray their gender identity in a different way to the gender assigned at birth.

Transition includes some or all of the following personal, medical and legal steps: telling one's family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person.

[Adapted from an original text by Transgender Europe]