



Resolution

Integrated approach to combat homophobia

*Adopted by the General Assembly, 9-11 November 2006,
Vilnius, Lithuania*

Young Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people across Europe continue to be the victims of homophobia, manifesting itself in many different forms such as discrimination, bullying and social exclusion at various levels. Existing policies often fail to effectively address the specific problems that LGBT youth face in many areas of their lives.

Continuously, new outbreaks of homophobia take place in our societies, as confirmed across Europe in 2006 by the banning of several gay pride marches and events. The positive expression of homosexuality is strongly impeded upon in different European countries by the attitude of States, who often forbid lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people to enjoy the rights they are entitled to. The violation of fundamental Human Rights—when governmental representatives qualify LGBT people as “deviants”, for instance—cannot be tolerated. For some European countries, it is still the case that policy makers openly condemn expressions of LGBT identities, legislating or ruling against them, thus making their open existence difficult, or even unlawful.

LGBT rights are not an “advanced Human Right”, or a “modern Western value” as several politicians have lately claimed they were. LGBT rights are an indivisible and nonnegotiable part of Human Rights as outlined by world-known documents.

In all spheres of their lives, be it public, such as in education and employment; or within private circles of life such as family circles, amongst friends or in religious environments, LGBT young people are faced with the dual complexity of coming to terms with their own identity and “coming out” to those around them. It is commonly recognised that throughout this period of life, many young LGBT people face significant obstacles, be they interpersonal or institutional, deriving from both their status as young people and from their minority status as LGBT people, to attaining full and active participation in society.

Societies today fail to recognise, accept or positively affirm LGBT young people’s sexual orientations or gender identities. It is still the case in Europe that young people are raised in a heteronormative society, portraying heterosexuality and traditional gender stereotypes as the norm, with little portrayal of positive LGBT individual and familial role models. The level of invisibility and lack of power faced by most LGBT young people often has many negative consequences, both for the individual and the community, with many young people fearfully “remaining in the closet”. Research has shown that the forced silencing or suppression of one’s identity can result in harmful mental health states, and increased levels of suicide. Young LGBT people are at risk from society’s discrimination and intolerance, and the YFJ and its members call for this situation to end.

The European Youth Forum recognises that while the issue of sexual orientation is more and more discussed within European institutions and European countries, in many cases there is an apparent lack of willingness amongst politicians and policy makers to proactively start taking measures to prevent and bring an end to discrimination against LGBT people. Whilst proactive work is undertaken by the European Commission in the fight against other forms of intolerance such as racism and xenophobia, there remains an unacceptable quantitative difference with the work against homophobia. The Youth Forum also notes what appears to be a great lack of leadership amongst key political figures in providing meaningful reactions, and implementing effective solutions. Additionally, the European Youth Forum reiterates that the freedom of assembly and the freedom of expression are the foundation of different Human Rights conventions.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- A clear message to be sent from the Youth Forum and its Member organisations, stating that more concrete work has yet to be done to challenge and eradicate discrimination and prejudice towards LGBT youth, in order to improve their situation.
- Its Member organisations to explicitly emphasise that it welcomes LGBT youth in its activities and work, and for Member organisations to proactively engage in the much needed work against homophobia. Projects such as the All Different All Equal campaign can be used for this purpose by its member organisations to establish clear mechanisms for the prevention and reporting of discriminatory and intimidating behaviours.
- Schools to be identified as a key-area in shaping young people's lives, and as such must be a welcoming place for LGBT people to live their sexual orientation or gender expression openly. They should be guaranteed safe from internalised homophobia (self-rejection), interpersonal homophobia (bullying from students to students, rejection from teachers to students), and institutional homophobia (non-inclusive or heteronormative curricula, taboo from the teachers, etc.). Governments must be responsible for implementing campaigns against homophobic bullying.
- For gender-related policies to acknowledge the discriminations and difficulties that all forms of gender identities and gender expressions face, and the focus should be broader in its perspective to include non-traditional gender identities.
- European political leaders to continuously and clearly speak out against all forms of homophobia. Clear political leadership demonstrating no tolerance towards homophobia is needed, and should be explicitly shown, in an equal character as reactions against racism, xenophobia, etc. Organising awareness-raising activities, such as repeat the organisation of a mini-conference during the International Day Against Homophobia by the European Parliament as was done in 2006, would strengthen such political attitude.
- The development and implementation of an integrated policy addressing homophobia throughout the European Union and all of its member states. The successes of anti-discrimination approaches used within the field of other minority groups should influence the LGBT-specific strategies. The European Commission should actively encourage Member states to formulate measures to tackle social exclusion of LGBT people
- The assured implementation of directives and policies at all levels protecting all minorities in an equal manner, and which reaches out to all spheres of life.
- Recognition that LGBT youth work and the financial support to LGBT youth work is evidently needed in order to successfully contribute to the above mentioned measures. Actors such as the European Commission should provide an adequate response to this need, by making available adequate resources both on national and international levels.

- The rectifying of current gaps in academic and community-based research on the situation of LGBT people, especially considering the constraints and obstacles to the effective enforcement of legal instruments providing protection against discrimination, and the collection of information and data on social exclusion of LGBT people.

On the basis of this resolution, the European Youth Forum shall develop a briefing paper to be delivered to its next Council of Members.

