



ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH

Sunday, 17 May 2020

English only

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia aims to draw attention to the violence and discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex people, and all other people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, and sex characteristics. The date of 17 May was specifically chosen to commemorate the World Health Organization's decision in 1990 to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder.¹

Although the WHO's decision was taken more than 30 years ago, the situation is still troubling across Europe and the globe, the LGBTQI community faces massive challenges, discrimination and abuse on a daily basis. Especially in times of crisis, this becomes publicly visible when different actors instrumentalise LGBTQI people to manufacture consent by creating an artificial "Us" vs. "Them" in society. By vilifying LGBTQI people, these actors engage in marking what is "normal" and what is not in the public discourse, further legitimising hatred and violence against LGBTQI people. Verbal violence materialises, too: in modern-day Europe, we still read about physical attacks against LGBTQI people in public spaces, about concentration camps for gay and transgender people, or about programmes aimed at "converting" LGBTQI people.

The Advisory Council on Youth condemns any kind of violence against LGBTQI individuals as well as the failure of some national institutions, including the police, to address this problem on the individual and national level. We urge policymakers to publicly condemn hate speech against LGBTQI people and structurally empower citizens to access their rights and to redress abuse.

Young people in particular often face the challenge of being caught in their own shells, experiencing distinct and chronic stress that is related to their stigmatised identities. Studies into LGBTQI youth consistently show "elevated rates of emotional distress, symptoms related to mood and anxiety disorders, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behaviour when compared to heterosexual youth".²

The Advisory Council urges policymakers to take the problems of young LGBTQI individuals seriously, and work towards creating a climate of acceptance and diversity for all citizens *without exception*. In the same vein, we strongly condemn the use of conversion therapies, which is unfortunately not illegal in all member states. Such therapies are nothing more than a frail attempt by states and individuals to discipline those who do not conform with the heteronormative structures. **We ask all member states of the Council of Europe to make conversion therapy illegal.**

The Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe stands with LGBTQI individuals and communities in this struggle for a tomorrow where we can all live in dignity, and where sexual orientation, gender identity and expression are regarded as diverse and vibrant. **We will continue to highlight the challenges faced by the LGBTQI community and call on Council of Europe member states to take our claims seriously.**

The opinions expressed in this statement are those of the Advisory Council on Youth and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Council of Europe or its member states.

¹ <https://may17.org/about/>.

² Russell, S. T., & Fish, J. N. (2016). Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 12(1), 465–487.