



# LGBTI Inclusion and Equality Initiatives for the Intercultural City

## Policy Brief

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Cities are melting pots of diversity. For this reason, they have long drawn people from all walks of life and backgrounds, where acceptance can be found in this community united by difference. Of course, this is not without its challenges, and city officials have an extremely important role to play in the inclusion and integration of individuals from vulnerable minority groups into the broader community. With our increasingly globalised world and fast paced change occurring all around us, Council of Europe Member States have seen a rise in resistance to the unfamiliar and a shift to the right which has been associated with anti-LGBTI sentiments. Cities therefore have a moral and legal obligation to protect these citizens who are at risk of structural and physical violence.

In order to support cities in this endeavour, the Council of Europe and its partner cities endorse an intercultural approach to integration and inclusion which enables cities to better serve their communities, maximise the benefits and minimise the risks inherent in having communities with rich cultural diversity. This includes:

- The creation of dedicated spaces and opportunities for meaningful interaction and collaboration between people of diverse origins and cultural backgrounds, building trust and harnessing the creative potential of diversity;
- Power-sharing – involving people of diverse origins in decision-making in urban institutions, be they political, educational, social, economic or cultural;
- Fostering intercultural competence in public, private and civil society organisations;
- Embracing cultural pluralism and the com-

plexity of identities through leadership discourse and symbolic actions; and;

- Developing inclusive narratives and managing conflict positively, busting stereotypes and engaging in a debate about the impact and potential of diversity for local development.

It is important to note that intercultural integration approach is *rights-based*. In practice, this means that at their core, all actions have the principle that human rights belong to all those who reside in states parties to the European Convention of Human Rights, without exception. It also takes an asset-based approach to public policy, embodying the idea that mobility and diversity are resources for human and social development. Today more than ever, there is a need for cities to which persons can feel citizenship beyond nationalism, protection of rights as well as physical safety and a sense of collective belonging strong enough to encourage the embrace of difference. Increasingly, the make-up of modern cities in Member States challenges the coherence of homogeneity of national identity.

The migration flows and increased acknowledgment of diverse identities across Europe (including migrant, refugee and LGBTI identities) which have been experienced in recent years have also allowed those who historically were constituted as “other” to traditional perceptions of the accepted cultural identity to occupy spaces which may have transformative potential for how diversity is perceived on a municipal (to a lesser extent national) level.

However, this has in many cases been met with a backlash in the public debate and in the ballot box. Cities can play an enormously important role in demonstrating LGBTI people are not a threat to the culture and vitality of the community, and assert their right of respect and protection as any citizen.

## 1.2 Rationale

The intention of this policy brief is to provide concrete, relevant and directly applicable planning and policy perspectives for how cities can positively impact the lives of LGBTI individuals, touching on a range of issues for policy makers and city officials regarding the LGBTI population living in urban settings. We offer practical examples of how other cities have planned initiatives inclusive of a broader diversity of LGBTI populations. City-level policies shape the lives and opportunities of the LGBTI community and can have direct impacts on health outcomes, safety, wellbeing and quality of life for all residents. Initiatives to achieve these ends are as diverse as the populations they aim to serve and might include policies to ensure provision of bespoke LGBTI social services, housing provision and the creation and/or preservation of LGBTI cultural areas or facilities.

Cities can draw inspiration and helpful guidance on policies and practices from the principles outlined in [CM/Rec\(2010\)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States](#) on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender iden-

tity. The Recommendation lays the foundations for working with the LGBTI community itself, as well as the population at large. It is important that LGBTI issues are not seen as something which only affects a very small group of people as equality benefits us all. Until full national and European equality is realised, cities will play a vital role in leading the way on initiatives for LGBTI citizens, visitors and business people and employees.

LGBTI human rights are increasingly considered a litmus test for a city's broader human rights record. As Kenneth Roth (2014), executive director of Human Rights Watch, so eloquently articulated:

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*“The status of the LGBT Community is a good litmus test for the status of human rights in a society more broadly, precisely because it is such a vulnerable minority - similar to the proverbial canary in the coal mine. Where the rights of LGBT people are undermined, you can be sure that the rights of other minorities and critical members of civil society will soon also be in jeopardy”*

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## 2 Essential Service Provision

It is essential that public services are conceptualised to fit the bespoke needs of LGBTI people. In determining what these needs are at a local level, cities should ensure that there are effective structures in place to consult LGBTI people directly on what their needs are, as even within the community there is considerable variation and will depend heavily on context, while taking account of intersecting identities. This is vastly preferable to relying on assumptions or generalisations, or even reports designed on a global or pan-European basis.

Intercultural Cities advocates the “Intercultural Council” approach, which brings together diverse members of Civil Society, as well as public representatives and local authorities to ensure that all voices are heard.

As a starting point, cities should ensure that adequate infrastructure and spaces are designed to address the LGBTI community's needs, especially when this comes to physical safety. This might be as practical as ensuring access to gender-neutral or all-gendered bathrooms in civic spaces or developing policies to ensure safety in public transport or in the

streets. The city might consider financial support of an LGBTI community centre, or other forms of inclusionary spaces where LGBTI people are expressly welcome. Counter-intuitively to the overall intercultural approach which is

## 2.1 Inclusive Municipal Practices and Policies

Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights prohibits discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status. Honouring the Convention and ensuring that such discrimination does not occur requires dedication to mainstreaming human rights of LGBTI persons in all municipal practices and policies. Practical ways to do this might include the appointment of an LGBTI Liaison to the City Executive, and/or the nomination of LGBTI Liaison in specific departments, institutions and organisations, eg. LGBTI Police Liaison.

### Rainbow Cities Network

A consortium of cities dedicated to improving the lives of LGBTI citizens, The Rainbow Cities Network's members exchange good practices, seek collaboration on projects and share campaign materials. The Mayor, or Deputy Mayor, of a member city needs to guarantee political backing by signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), committing to the goals and activities of the Network. The Network meets once a year, each time hosted by another member city. On March 30, 2020 the Rainbow Cities Network had 30 members from 14 countries.

The public sector is often one of the biggest employers at a city level, and as a result, there is great potential to lead the way on inclusive

geared towards mixing, interaction and de-segregation, this may sometimes mean provision of 'exclusionary' safe spaces or events for LGBTI people to be together, where they do not have to be a minority in at least that space.

employment practices. As an employer, cities can make visible commitments to diversity and inclusion and adopt stringent anti-discrimination practices which will lead to working conditions in which people can thrive and be themselves without fear of negative consequences. This has very positive impacts on creative, progressive working environments as a whole, beyond the LGBTI employees themselves. A collaborative, consultative design of an agreed anti-discrimination and harassment policy will make it clear to staff that prejudice and bullying will not be tolerated, inside or outside the office. Anti-discrimination policies are most effective when the prejudicial behaviours are clearly defined and are backed up with manager and staff training. When conceiving these policies, it may be most effective to bring together all policy departments and officers dealing with diversity and inclusion, and with different equality issues such as migrants, minorities, Roma, refugees, LGBTI, gender equality, under one roof and build capacity and intercultural competence to conceive policies in a comprehensive, all-encompassing way rather than in silos. Intersectionality is critical to ensure that nobody is left behind and that multiple discrimination issues, and therefore the most vulnerable, are effectively represented.

## 2.2 Support Health Initiatives and Interventions Beyond HIV/AIDS

Despite being accepted as a fundamental human right, a significant proportion of the LGBTI community encounter challenges when accessing healthcare. Frequently, this is due to a lack of information on the part of policy makers and the medical professionals on their specific needs and circumstances, other times it is

due to restrictions on access to services at a national policy level, notably when it comes to access to sex- and gender-related surgeries or hormones for transgender people who require these services. Where homophobia is present in our communities, this translates to stigmatisation and discrimination and these have a negative impact on mental and physical health. As a result, the LGBTI community has consistently been found to suffer disproportionately from mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety.

The temptation over the years has been to focus on sexual health as it relates to MSM (men who have sex with men), especially given the living memory of the HIV/AIDs crisis which claimed the lives of so many of the LGBTI community and beyond. Funding, where it has existed on a city level, has been directed towards minimising the spread of these diseases. However, as necessary as this work has been both in the past and today, it has meant that often research into the needs and targeted services for the rest of the LGBTI spectrum have been chronically under-researched and under-funded.

### **Bologna, Italy**

Bologna is distinguished as one of the most “LGBTI friendly” cities in Europe and for years has been ahead of the curve in terms of the bespoke services transgender people. Marcella Di Folco, founder of MIT and local councillor in Bologna since 1995, was the first transgender person in the world to hold public office. In accordance with the health system in the region, Di Folco also founded the first clinic for the health of transgender people, which now provides care and support qualified in the path towards transition and sex- and gender- related surgeries.

Cities can take positive steps by financially supporting and facilitating training opportunities in the healthcare sector on LGBTI needs to deliver on improved medical services provisions and reduce homophobia, as well as addressing prejudice in healthcare workplace settings. Targeted training which touches sensitively upon respect for gender identity would make a positive difference in ensuring that elderly or disabled service users are able to do so while maintaining their dignity.

### **2.3 Provide Bespoke Training for Law Enforcement**

Safety is one of the most critical and pressing issues for LGBTI people who frequently find themselves singled out and targeted as victims of physical violence. Close co-operation with national and municipal police forces can empower officers with the skills and knowledge they need to better serve the community and lead to increasing the reporting of hate crime where trust is built with the LGBTI community, especially where there may have been tensions as well as actual or perceived discriminatory practices in the past. City-level authorities can draw up provisions within the overarching framework of their respective national legislation and to adopt anti-discrimination policies and strategies which augment their work either as additional measures expanding existing national laws, or trailblazing new policies and practices where national legislation is not as developed as it could be. The Council of Europe has developed a training module [on Policing Hate Crime against LGBTI persons](#) which has been rolled out both on city, regional and national levels to assist Member States to adopt progressive practices in addressing hate crime motivated by homophobia or transphobia. This training can be delivered upon request of city or national authorities. The Intercultural Cities [Manual on community policing](#) can complement the training and provide

guiding principles for the establishment of an intercultural police service at local level.

### ***Hate Crime Training for Police Services in Podgorica***

In Montenegro, the national government has drawn up a national strategy for 2013 to 2018 to improve the quality of LGBT persons' lives. The strategy specifically names local and regional authorities as partners in implementing policies to increase social acceptance and on non-discrimination measures and supports the involvement of LGBT NGOs. It also aims to design and organise training programmes for, inter alia, representatives of local authorities.

## **2.4 Work with School Boards to Produce Inclusive Relationship and Sexual Education (RSE) Policies**

Mostly, decisions on school curricula are taken at the national level in Council of Europe Member States, but there is also a significant amount of devolved power to local or regional authorities. Research increasingly shows that young people are not only much more progressive and accepting of LGBTI people in their communities, they have a greater desire to learn more and see a more nuanced, inclusive approach to sex education in school settings. This is an important opportunity to enhance equality and non-discrimination practices. Seeing LGBTI people included in an ordinary school setting by extension normalises and integrates students of minority sexual orientation and gender identities within the school setting, which extends outwards into attitudes outside the school walls. Making sure that schools have the tools, training, resources and adequately funding to teach inclusively on both inclusive sexual education and human

rights is a worthwhile investment. A sophisticated understanding of gender, LGBTI and other identity issues, an open and inclusive attitude and behaviour, are essential elements of intercultural citizenship.

### **New York City, United States of America - Inclusive Curriculums**

The school curriculum is both a window and a mirror, allowing students who are not LGBTI to see the experiences of others and providing a reflection for LGBTI students. These efforts include incorporating LGBTI history, reading books by LGBTI authors, and ensuring sexual health curriculum is inclusive of all identities. More information [here](#).

Knowledge of human rights and fundamental freedoms helps to ensure respect for the rights of others, even in the face of difference. Providing teaching at all levels with adequate adjustments to the progression of the children through the various stages of their education provides them with the tools they need to go out into their homes and communities able to speak up for the rights of others.

## **3 Visibility of People and Issues**

### **3.1 Encourage Visible, Vocal Leadership**

The importance of visible, vocal leadership on human rights of LGBTI persons from city authorities cannot be underestimated in its importance. Not only does it send a clear welcoming message to city residents, numerous surveys and research have shown that it actually makes cities more attractive to live and work, allowing cities to set themselves apart when seeking to attract the best talent, events and welcome tourists. When politicians include LGBTI people in a positive way in their

campaigns and messaging, take part in Pride, speak out against injustice or when a public space is dedicated to an LGBTI civil rights leader, or even raises the rainbow flag above city hall during pride month, it sends a clear message to the LGBTI community that they are protected, welcomed and valued in the city.

### LGBT Hall of Fame

The Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame was created in June 1991. The hall of fame is the first "municipal institution of its kind in the United States, and possibly in the world. "The first ceremony took place during Pride Week and was held at Chicago City Hall. The city Mayor hosted the ceremony and afterwards, photos of the inductees are displayed in city hall. It currently has no physical facility but maintains a website, which allows anyone to visit the Hall of Fame at any time. Inductees of the Hall of Fame can be any individuals or organizations who have contributed to the LGBTI community in Chicago.

Within the Intercultural Cities Network, the city of Lublin in Poland has installed rainbow fountains on the main square (in addition to their quite comprehensive policies on human rights of LGBTI persons).

### 3.2 Preserve LGBTI Histories and Establish Archives

In the vast majority of cases, unlike other marginalised groups LGBTI people are born into families and communities where they are perceived as being different from those around them. Coming out can be a slow process and finding a sense of belonging and community is something that is usually solitary and self-directed. Opportunities for LGBTI people to explore their heritage, identity and history are rare and are rarely included in educational

contexts. Therefore, in order to have an understanding of legacy, cities can play an important role in showcasing the place and contributions of the LGBTI community in their own specific contexts. This offers LGBTI people who may have been alienated from family or friends to sense of place in the world, increase wellbeing and community integration, while demonstrating to local communities are not a foreign 'import' and have always existed locally.

In her 1995 essay, the Irish author Emma Donoghue wrote: *"(gay) 'history' is not a luxury for arty types, nor just a vague feeling that we queer folk have been around for some time. It is crucial advice passed from one generation to the next. Scrabbling around in libraries for glimpses of our history and literary heritage is just as important as the more obvious kinds of activism. Knowing our past brings confidence, wisdom, an ability to laugh at our enemies and ourselves"*.

### City Funding, Promotion and Endorsement of LGBT History Month - Cambridgeshire, UK

The city of Cambridgeshire provides specific funding for the celebration of LGBT History month while also contributing to and promoting the program events on the [City website](#).

### 3.3 Promote LGBTI-Friendly Tourism

The application of human rights standards extends to the assurance of protection to LGBTI visitors and tourists from discrimination and violence. With the promotion of LGBTI tourism in mind, a number of cities in Member States have placed anti-discrimination policies centrally in their promotional strategies. These initiatives are sometimes dismissed as being motivated primarily out of motivation for financial gain for the cities, and while this is certainly

one encouraging aspect, these kind of motives do drive positive results which cannot be dismissed, such as encouraging events, festivals, local businesses and services to consciously consider the needs and safety of LGBTI people. This targeted attention results in positive messaging coming from city authorities sends a clear message to the community as a whole that LGBTI people are welcome, respected and valued.

#### **Cape Town, South Africa**

Cape Town Tourism offers bespoke advice and promotional materials to LGBTI visitors, including details of LGBTI friendly accommodation, a Cape Town Gay Guide and “Pink Map” as well as chapters of the official city guide having been dedicated to LGBTI travellers. Cape Town Tourism has estimated that 12% of tourists are from the LGBTI market and are therefore of significant interest.

## **4 Addressing Anti-Gender Movements and Increasing Nationalistic Discourse**

In recent years Europe has seen a rise nationalist, exclusionary sentiments. In the context of significant economic downturns and influxes of newcomers as a result of economic as well as forced migration, in many countries and as well as on a city-level, the European idea has been intensely debated and has been increasingly polarising. Within this context, we see a rise in ‘othering’ which puts LGBTI people at odds with the national identity and sees the community as an ‘out-group’. Othering is dangerous. When we see LGBTI people as different from other human beings, our empathy decreases, and we are able to treat the ‘othered’ group differently than we expect to be treated ourselves. This has a direct impact on the safety of the LGBTI community, as well as

placing human rights of LGBTI persons at significant risk of harmful politicisation.

### **4.1 Promote Inclusive Messages and Spaces for Constructive Dialogue**

It is worth consideration that only a few decades ago, on a national level as well as on a city-level, the majority of people consumed the same media; that being, they watched the same news, read the same news from a small number of sources. While citizens did of course have differing views and opinions, they typically started from a similar base of information. Today, in a world dominated by targeted news driven by impersonal algorithms designed to appeal to our own interests, people can be increasingly said to inhabit their own media bubbles which reinforce rather than counterbalance their prejudices. As a result, when suddenly faced with difference, people are less accustomed to listening to differing political opinions and experiences and this can make difference seem more marginal than ever.

With short attention spans and fastmoving media, messages are reduced to soundbites which thrive on grievance, division and dissatisfaction. Often news programmes on TV and radio will choose the most polarising or extreme views possible to make for more heated disagreement, which causes audiences to disengage from the content of what is being discussed. LGBTI concerns are often drowned out in the noise. Changing the way we represent LGBTI people, as political leaders or policy officials, can positively influence the way they are represented in media, emphasising shared interests and experiences are crucial. Cities can also increase the positive visibility of LGBTI persons via their selection of representatives on panels, feature and in debates, as this reinforces stereotypes about the community. This might also take the form of thematic debates and cultural events.



## Bergen, Norway

In 2017 the city of Bergen adopted its third “Plan for gender and sexual diversity in Bergen commune”, running until 2021. The plan proposes a number of measures to make the city more inclusive towards the LGBTI population. This comprises increasing the level of knowledge and competence of the city officials on LGBTI related matters, inclusive LGBTI education, avoiding gender segregation at public toilets, paying special attention to the situation of LGBTI refugees, celebrating the Pride every year and increasing the city’s international action in this field.

The Plan opens with a clear political message from the City councilor for social matters, housing and inclusion, Mr. Erlend Horn, who states: “If you want to see the rainbow, you must stand the rain. In Bergen we stand the rain, and we wish to see the rainbow”.

## 5 Intersectionality and Vulnerable Groups

Recognising the overlapping or intersecting of vulnerable minority groups and addressing the relationship between multiple systems of discrimination and prejudice is critical to ensure policies and efforts to promote integration do not miss the mark. Understanding the various degrees of privilege or disadvantage within the LGBTI community ensures policies and practices are fit for purpose and serve those most in need of protection and support and include all voices in the public and policy debate.

### 5.1 Provisions to Address Homelessness Among LGBTI Youth

Access to adequate housing and the risks of

homelessness are specifically mentioned in CM/Rec(2010)5 as this is a serious threat experienced by many LGBTI people and significantly compounds other threats to their human rights. Access to and quality of housing have a profound effect on an individual’s wellbeing. Therefore discrimination and lack of security for those excluded from family settings can impact on mental health and affect a person’s employment prospects as well as bodily safety. In this way, homelessness is a particular threat faced by LGBTI youth who may be excluded from the home or placed at risk of staying in an abusive setting because of their sexual orientation or gender identity after ‘coming out’. This group is of particular interest to city authorities as they will often migrate to urban settings in search of greater tolerance and safety, arriving with scarce material or financial resources and few skills with which to earn a living wage.

## Rome, Italy - Casa Famiglia Refuge LGBT

Casa Famiglia in Rome receives support from the Lazio Region, the City and the Protestant Church, Chiesa Valdese. It is a refuge that specifically serves young LGBTI people who have been victims of mistreatment as a result of sexual orientation or gender identity in family settings or at home. As well as housing, the refuge provides psycho-social support and educational assistance as well as family mediation.

### 5.2 Bespoke Employment Initiatives for the Transgender Community

As a vulnerable group within a vulnerable group, the transgender population suffers disproportionately from prejudice and exclusion. Many transgender women remain visibly gender non-conforming and experience high levels

of employment discrimination. Where criminalised, sex work becomes one of the only viable but most risky options available to such persons, placing this marginalised group not only at increased risk of violence and contracting diseases such as HIV/AIDS, but also at odds with city authorities. Being unable to provide details of employment creates and compounds existing problems, such as access to safe housing, banking or credit.

### **São Paulo, Brazil - Transcidadania Programme**

This programme provides access to education in public schools, professional qualification and preparation for the job market for transgender people, especially those living in socially vulnerable or precarious situations. It offers a wide range of capacity-building activities and empowerment activities in the Municipality-run LGBTI Citizenship Centers. It also promotes access to education and coordinates the policy in a crosscutting and intersectorial manner, including health, education, welfare and transport. During the program, the beneficiaries receive an income of up to 2 years of maintenance.

### **5.3 LGBTI- Inclusive Introductions to City Culture for Migrants and Refugees**

Often alienated from their families, friends and even from a great deal of their fellow refugee community, without access to employment, financial resources and often precarious housing, it is essential that measures are put in place to ensure that LGBTI refugees are treated with dignity and respect when they arrive in cities after escaping violence in their own country. LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers are subject to severe social exclusion and violence in various accommodation settings in

countries of asylum by both the host community and the broader community of asylum seekers and refugees. This is so critical that Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU) includes provisions that can be used to tackle problems related to LGBTI applicants in reception facilities, specifically to prevent violence and discrimination related to their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or sex characteristics.

### **Berlin, Germany**

The Berlin Senate has implemented a “Comprehensive Programme for the Integration and Participation of Refugees”, the so-called “Comprehensive Programme”. It is a strategy report that was developed after a participative process with the civil society including LGBTI organisations. The Berlin Senate is putting concrete measures into action to create better prospects for LGBTI refugees and authorities consider the specific situations and needs of LGBTI refugees in their actions and combat any form of discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation and gender identity. They provide bespoke support, care, security and protections. Along with the measures already implemented with the former “Master Plan for Integration and Security”, the safety of LGBTI refugees is considered through violence protection concepts in the shelters and monitored / supported by LGBTI contact persons.

**For non-LGBTI refugees**, in order to facilitate their integration into cities which are promoting a positive management of diversity including from a sexual orientation and gender identity point of view, integration courses should include training on human rights of LGBTI persons.

## 6 Summary and Recommendations

Intercultural policies that place value on diversity protect citizens from harm and recognise the community's contribution for society, promote equality, encourage interaction and are of the utmost importance in efforts to reduce violence against a vulnerable minority. This policy brief in no way claims to be exhaustive of the measures which can be taken to promote integration and inclusion of LGBTI citizens in intercultural cities. However, by mainstreaming LGBTI issues into concrete measures, city authorities can ensure that policies are designed which take all citizens' needs into account and demonstrate that sexual orientation and gender identity are issues of substance that matter in urban policymaking. Taking steps to build effective relationships with LGBTI civil society organisations facilitates information flows to ensure responsiveness, context-sensitive advice and opportunities for

resources pooling in an under-funded field of work.

City authorities that are able to forge strong links with local activists and service providers are better equipped to protect and strengthen the LGBTI community. Input from LGBTI advocacy groups and civil society acts as an extra safeguard to ensure that drafted legislation is comprehensive and respectful of LGBTI people's context-specific experiences and that legislative provisions are fit for purpose. Public provisions such as appropriate funding of education programmes and training, LGBTI specific infrastructure and cultural events add a great deal to the quality of life in any given city and when effectively employing a rights-based approach, whereby inclusion and equity are seen as rights, appropriate care and scrutiny are invested in monitoring programmes designed to promote the community's fundamental human rights.