

CommHR(2025)39

**International Human Rights Conference  
on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Budapest Pride**

**Speech by Michael O'Flaherty**  
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Budapest, 25 June 2025

Good afternoon. Thank you for the invitation! It is a great pleasure for me to be here.

President of Budapest Pride, mayors and deputy mayors, ambassadors, dear friends:

I am here:

- in solidarity with the Hungarian LGBTI communities,
- in respect for the members of those communities in all their diversity,
- in celebration of that diversity,
- in repudiation of the violation of their human rights in this country.

I also come in appreciation of their courage, tenacity, and initiative, including the initiative to convene this event. I extend that appreciation to the Mayor and the City of Budapest.

The immediate context for our gathering is the impeding of the Pride Parade. This is clearly a violation of human rights, including the rights to assembly, association and expression.

The rationale for objecting to Pride is preposterous. Worse: it is calumnious in its association of Pride with danger to children.

It does not begin to meet the international human rights legal requirements of legality, necessity, proportionality, and non-discrimination.

In terms of the normative basis for the blocking of the Pride Parade, I remain deeply concerned regarding the relevant provisions of the 2021 Child Protection Act, the legislative amendments of 18 March this year affecting the right to assembly, and most recently, the 15th Amendment to the Fundamental Law, passed on 14 April.

Beyond law and rights, let me add this: a state that blocks Pride deprives itself of a life-affirming celebration of diversity.

I have attended many Pride events across the continent, and it is very clear to me that a well-organised Pride is a glorious celebration of, and for, everyone.

But allow me to return to the specificities of the situation of the LGBTI communities in Hungary. I draw on the 2024 findings of a Europe-wide survey of LGBTIQ people, conducted by the agency I used to direct: the EU Fundamental Rights Agency.

In Hungary:

- 14% of respondents reported experiencing at least one physical attack in the past five years.
- 57% reported experiencing harassment in the past year.
- 40% said they experienced discrimination in at least one area of life in the past year.
- Only 3% reported violence or harassment to the police.
- Just 6% filed a discrimination complaint to a relevant authority.

Turning to ILGA-Europe's 2025 LGBTI rights ranking, Hungary recorded its lowest ever score, ranking 37th out of 49 countries.

Looking beyond Hungary, we see a worrying and deteriorating situation in some European countries, something I can attest to from my work.

I am particularly worried about the major rollback on the human rights of trans people, and the extent to which they are vilified and othered.

I see the persistent and irrational prohibition on schools facilitating discussion around issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

I am disappointed by the number of countries that refuse to recognise and respect the reality of same-sex couples.

In light of all of this, it is hardly surprising that, according to the Fundamental Rights Agency, nowhere in Europe do more than 51% of same-sex couples feel safe holding hands in public. In Hungary, that figure is just 28%.

Friends, as we engage the great challenges across Europe, we must frame them correctly.

For sure, it is about violations of human rights. Most definitely, it is about deeply unethical disrespect for human dignity. But it is also about erosion of rule of law and democracy.

How else can we characterise the repeal of laws that allow people to be who they are; the adoption of laws that violate bodily integrity; the undermining of the rights of the child; the mandating of security services to act against the well-being of those they serve?

What is more, the repression appears to be in service of political goals, and it is certainly fuelled by disinformation.

This deliberate erosion of the rule of law today targets LGBTI people - and indeed migrants. Which other vulnerable group will be next?

So, what is to be done? Allow me to suggest action across three clusters: law, people, and data.

[I am not naïve, nor am I a reductionist. I know these are only part of the wider response required. But they are essential.]

First, law. We must continue to invoke the law, insist on the law, and demand respect for human rights under binding international standards.

We must test national laws, and indeed constitutions, against these international standards: those of the EU, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations.

Beyond that, we must insist on full implementation of, and respect for, the judgments of both the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union. When these courts issue interim measures, those must be respected.

We must also defend the courts themselves, especially the European Court of Human Rights. I say this deliberately, because recent discourse threatens to subject that Court to inappropriate political pressure.

And it is no less important that we vociferously defend the European Convention on Human Rights, particularly at a time when even this foundational document is being questioned by several governments.

Second, people. Delivering on the law-related recommendations recalls how we must foster a large and broad coalition in order to bring about change. At the heart of this coalition must always be LGBTI communities and their leaders.

They must guide us. Following their lead, we need, at the national level, the necessary discipline, skills, and expertise. And we also need the full engagement of our national human rights institutions, including human rights commissions and ombudspersons.

At the international level, this coalition must include not only the actors I have already mentioned, but also, importantly, the United Nations Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, who will be joining us tomorrow.

I raise this role because the mandate of the Independent Expert will shortly come before the United Nations Human Rights Council for renewal. Each of us must do what we can to encourage states to vote in favour of its renewal.

At every level, national and international, we need young people. I spent much of today with young people and was reminded of their extraordinary energy, their fresh ideas, and their willingness to take on impossible odds.

We must find ways to meaningfully include them in every aspect of our work.

And all of us, young and old, must do a much better job of working together. We must attract new allies, identify shared causes, deepen our cooperation, and, above all, offer each other mutual solidarity.

Now, I turn to data as the third area. It may seem odd to mention something as dry as data in this context. But while at the Fundamental Rights Agency, I saw how essential it is.

I have seen how data can influence policy, shift perspectives, and make real improvements on the ground.

So, this evening, I encourage the EU and the Fundamental Rights Agency to remain strongly committed to their periodic LGBTIQ survey.

I also call on every state and entity capable of supporting non-EU countries in Europe to help them collect such data. Many want to do so but lack the resources. Maybe, the Council of Europe is well-placed to assist in this area.

And across the continent, within and beyond the EU, we need deep, detailed investment in data at local and national levels. We cannot rely solely on external surveys.

To close, what final words would I offer? I do not want to sound banal or condescending, but I do believe we must choose hope.

In a context like this, despair is easy and tempting. But we have a duty to be hopeful.

We must believe in a better future. Or else, what is the point?

Belief in a better future is not just idealism. It can be evidence-based.

I have seen how much our societies have changed, how fast, and in so many places. That alone is a foundation for hope, wherever we are.

I come from Ireland, a country where, until I was well into my thirties, same-sex sexual relations were still criminalised. Yet in 2015, that same country voted, by popular referendum, for marriage equality.

That is an extraordinary change in a short time. It is a powerful, empirical reason for hope.

Even if that does not convince you, I find comfort in the words of Albert Camus. Reflecting on the Greek myth of Sisyphus – who is not the most optimistic figure in mythology – Camus wrote:

“A person devoid of hope, and conscious of being so, has ceased to belong to the future.”

Let us ensure that we do not become that person.

Thank you.