



2020

# ANNUAL REPORT

**BILITIS RESOURCE  
CENTER FOUNDATION**

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16 YEARS OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

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# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear friends,

As we reach the end of this most difficult of years, it's easy to focus on the negatives. But I want to focus on what we at Bilitis and our movement in Bulgaria achieved, in spite of the global pandemic and its impact.

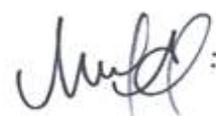
We proved once again our adaptability by moving all physical events to digital formats to help keep the community spirit alive and maintain the safe spaces we offer. Despite the closing of the Rainbow Hub, the digital communication allowed for LGBTI people all across Bulgaria and Europe to become part of our activities, including the digital editions of Sofia Pride and Sofia LGBTI Community Fest, and we couldn't be happier. Our main priority is the wellbeing of the community and so from March on we offered a series of psychological support meetings, humanitarian support, conducted a survey on the effects of COVID-19 and based on the experience gained, we are constantly adapting our approach.

In times when people were losing their jobs, we attracted two new people in our team – Manuela and Martina! Together with their help, we launched the Live Without Bullying online platform and re-started Welcome, Human! We expanded not only our team but also our networks by joining the U-Report Bulgaria Steering Committee and the Eurocentralasian Lesbian\* Community (EL\*C). We participated in numerous Zoom calls trying to keep touch with all our partners and community members from all over the world.

2020 won't be defined by what we lost to the virus but by how we responded to it. And I am proud to say that together with my team we tried our best to support and empower the community during the pandemic. We now have the opportunity to determine how we will rebuild our lives as a society. The LGBTI community has proven time and time again our resilience and I am hopeful that we will heal in kindness and in pride.

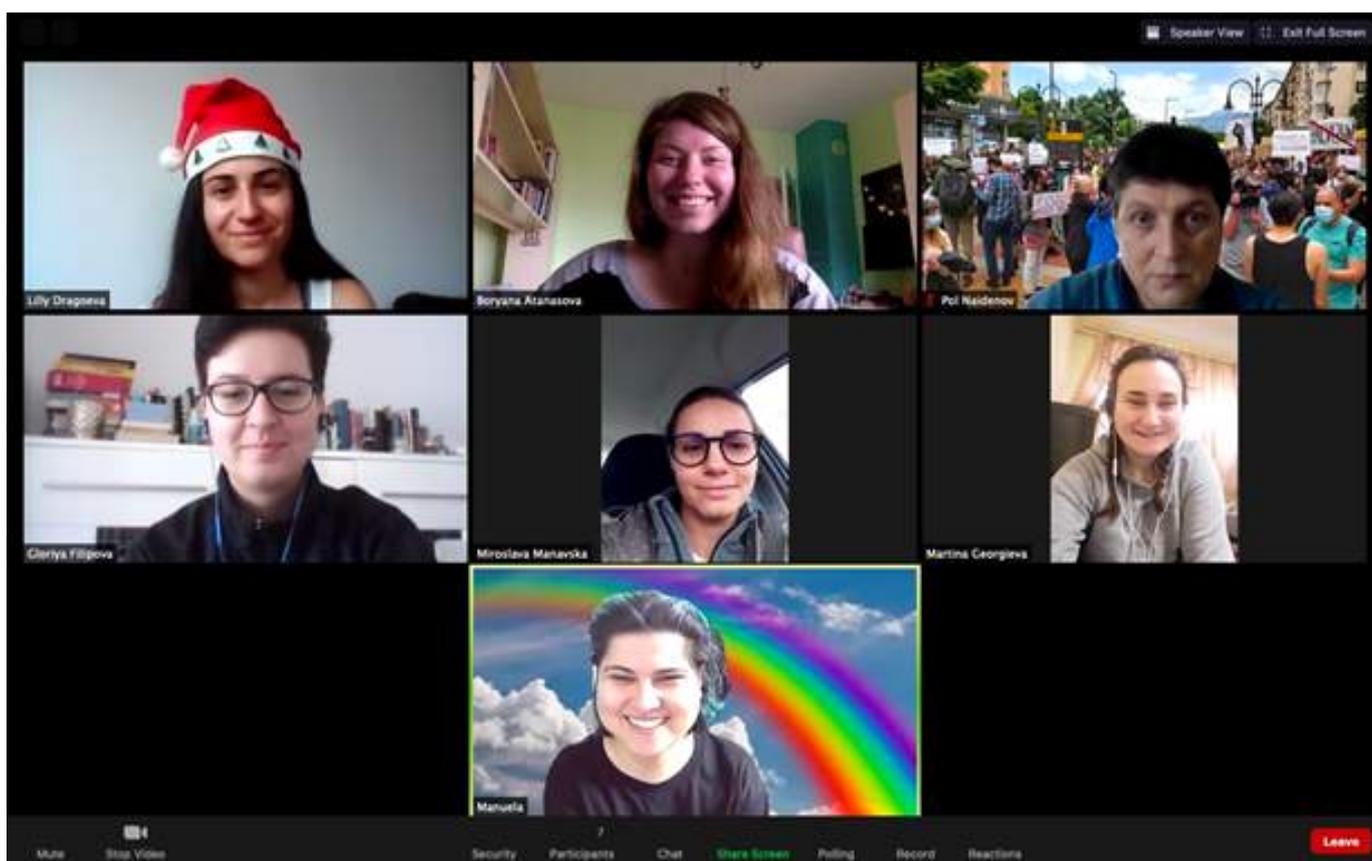
Sincerely,

Lilly Dragoeva  
Executive Director



# BILITIS IN DEVELOPMENT

Bilitis began its activity as a self-support group of lesbians and bisexual women in 2004. Today, Bilitis advocates actively for eliminating all forms of discrimination and achieving full equality of LGBTI persons in Bulgaria. Bilitis is a lesbians and bisexual women, trans and intersex people-led organization. Bilitis uncompromisingly defends equality, unreservedly supports and encourages the community and shares its solid intersectional expertise. We combine human rights based approach and participatory approach.



Bilitis team during a Zoom meeting

# BILITIS IN DEVELOPMENT

2020 was a challenging year for all of us. Although socially distant, we continued our work with and for the community. We are proud to say that the pandemic did not stop us from reuniting with the LGBTI community virtually, to support each other.

Although the pandemic forced the closure of the beloved community center for all LGBTI people – Rainbow Hub and the office of Bilitis, GLAS and Deystvie, this did not affect our motivation to continue working to improve the situation for LGBTI people in Bulgaria, even from our homes.

It's worth mentioning that this year was also a successful one for us – we continued developing our work and launching new initiatives, in addition, we continued expanding our staff and thus strengthened the capacity of Bilitis to be at the forefront of social change towards full equality of LGBTI people in Bulgaria.

In 2020 we officially welcomed two more people in the team – the Communications Manager Manuela Popova and Martina Georgieva as our Psychological Support Coordinator. We can proudly say that by the end of 2020 we achieved the goal to have a team of 6 people paid staff.

We are more than happy to see our wishes from last year come true.

# MISSION, VISION & VALUES

## MISSION

Our mission is eliminating all forms of discrimination and achieving full equality for LGBTI people in Bulgaria.

For achieving its mission, Bilitis has designed the following Strategic Priorities:

1. Development, empowerment and support for the LGBTI community throughout the country.
2. Advocacy for full respect of the rights of LGBTI people, equal inclusion in all spheres of public life, recognition of LGBTI families, legal gender recognition, prevention of anti-LGBTI hate crimes.
3. Change in public attitudes and increasing the levels of acceptance of LGBTI people in Bulgarian society.
4. Work at the international level to raise awareness about the state of LGBTI rights and democracy in Bulgaria.

## VISION

A society in which all people have equal rights and no one is discriminated against for who they are.

## VALUES

Our values are human dignity, freedom, democracy, rule of law, equality, solidarity, justice, inclusion, non-discrimination and human rights. Bilitis shares and affirms the values of the EU.

# 2019 IN NUMBERS

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

28 Community mobilizing events  
82 Number of participants  
40 Volunteers who supported us

## TRAININGS

28 Conducted trainings  
240 Number of participants

## RESEARCH

1 Completed qualitative research projects  
6 Publications

# 2019 IN NUMBERS

## ADVOCACY

1 Advocacy campaigns

7,300 Participants, supporters and allies

## MEDIA APPEARANCES

10 Mainstream media  
appearances

## SOCIAL MEDIA

25 Facebook events

9895 Event responses

954 New Facebook likes

367,990 Facebook reach

43,256 Facebook engagement

# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN MAKING THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE

Already 16 years we have been working towards eliminating all forms of discrimination and achieving full equality for LGBTI people in Bulgaria, building communities and thus making a significant change for LGBTI people in the country.

## **1. BUILDING COMMUNITIES & STRENGTHENING THE LGBTI MOVEMENT IN BULGARIA DURING THE PANDEMIC**

We offered a handful of tools to support the community during the pandemic, incl. a series of free online psychological support meetings and humanitarian support. We continued our work in the sphere of community building by managing the regular community meetings, but this time mainly online. We started a new community group - BInonymous, for bi+ people. We facilitated the process of self-organizing providing resources, and helping the most disempowered to feel welcome during these difficult times.

## **2. ATTRACTING NEW VOLUNTEERS & SUPPORTING OUR VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY**

Our dedicated volunteers are the people who make many things possible. That is why it is important for us to support the community of volunteers we work with involving them in various events and providing them with opportunities for development. 2020 we managed to further expand our volunteer community by attracting many new volunteers who share our cause and who got involved in various ways in our activities.

# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN MAKING THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE

## 3. DYNAMIC WORK & NEW INSPIRING PROJECTS

2020 was a success for Bilitis in terms of new projects. We are delighted to share that we launched a new project led by Bilitis – Not Just Words, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014–2020). We are proud with the support from the San Diego Community Grant Program and the Global Resilience Fund for Girls and Young Women to maintain our multi-year community organizing program.

We are also part of a number of successful coalitions, both national and international, which successfully launched the projects Let’sGoByTalking, funded by the European Union’s Justice Programme (2014–2020, School’s Out and Bring-In, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014–2020).

Bilitis obtained small grants from FARE Network and Meet and Code, and partnered in a number of Erasmus+ projects offering opportunities to LGBTI youth to participate in international activities and training.

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

Given the declared state of emergency caused by the proliferation of COVID-19, Bilitis had to make some changes to our planned annual activities. In our team we believe we have a duty to do our best to preserve the health of our community, so as of March 13 we have cancelled all our in-person events, as well as all events at the Rainbow Hub Community LGBTI Center.

Nevertheless, the cancellation of physical meetings did not mean that we weren't there for our community! We believe that in times of crisis it is more important than ever to support one another, so we quickly introduced new ways to meet each other in the socially distanced environment. In response to the crisis, we also launched new initiatives to support the LGBTI community in Bulgaria and its urgent needs. In this section you will find more about our direct work with the LGBTI communities in response to COVID-19 in Bulgaria.

## **THE CLOSING OF RAINBOW HUB - OFFICE OF THE LGBTI ORGANIZATIONS & HOME OF THE COMMUNITY**

Opened in April 2018 as a result of the joint effort of Youth LGBT Organization "Deystvie", GLAS Foundation and Bilitis Resource Center Foundation as well as other independent activists, the first LGBTI community center in Bulgaria - Rainbow Hub, became the place where everyone from the community could call their home. Two years in a row Rainbow Hub provided a safe space for all LGBTI+ people in Bulgaria, where they received useful information about their rights and health, were able to make contacts and gather in interest and support groups. The location also served as the Sofia Pride headquarters as well as the office of the three national LGBTI+ organizations.

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

Rainbow Hub supported and mobilized the emerging LGBTI+ community in Bulgaria. It hosted a variety of events and initiatives geared toward the needs of the LGBTI+ people with a special focus on young and disadvantaged people.

The Center served as a uniting force for the Bulgarian LGBTI+ community and helped strengthening the relationship between the members of the community and between the community-based organizations. The space also provided an opportunity for direct contact between activists and other community representatives from all parts of Bulgaria.

So much has happened in the Rainbow Hub in two years, and we've been through it all together. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our beloved community center closed its doors in April.

Nevertheless this couldn't break our spirit and we are motivated more than ever to find a new, even more wonderful place, which will again attract the LGBTI community in Bulgaria and which we can call our home.

## **OFFERING PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT**

As the health, social and economic impacts of COVID-19 hit Bulgaria, we pivoted to supporting members of the LGBTI community not able to cover their basic humanitarian needs because of the pandemic and people who were in need of psychological support during the lockdown.

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

Aimed at relieving some of the stress, anxiety and depression caused by the pandemic, within two weeks of the pandemic being declared we launched a series of free online psychological support meetings for community members in need. The sessions, called #WithCareForThyself, were led by Elza Kaloyanova - an experienced psychologist and psychotherapist and the 9 meetings that were organized covered topics ranging from adapting to change to managing fears, anxieties and taking care of yourself during the lockdown. All topics have been chosen by the participants themselves, through our social media channels. This way we guaranteed that we are as useful as possible and are able to adequately respond to the needs of the community. More than 40 people took part in the meetings.



**#С ГРИЖА  
ЗА МЕН**

**ЗАПИШИ СЕ!**

Поредица от  
срещи-дискусии за  
помощ и самопомощ



# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## **HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT**

### **IN SUPPORT OF MAYA**

At the beginning of May, just at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were contacted by a friend of ours who was about to lose her home due to negative attitudes towards trans people in Bulgaria. That's why we decided to launch a financial aid campaign, as we have always believed in the strength of the community and our ability to reach out to others.

Maya is a trans girl who has not been able to find a job for months. The transphobia in her hometown severely limited her opportunities for a stable income, and the current market situation further narrowed her options to find a job. The first thing we wanted to do to support her was to help find her a secure job in her town, for which we sought the help of all our friends and like-minded people who follow us and who would help.

The lack of work logically led to a lack of income for Maya, who was about to lose her apartment in just two weeks. In order to support her and give her more time to find a job, we turned to the community for help.

In just a few days we managed to raise the great amount of BGN 1,000, with which we reached our goal, so that we could cover 3 months of rent and provide food and medicine for Maya, who was in poor health.

We are more than happy to share that at the current moment Maya lives in the capital and has a stable job.

We cannot describe our gratitude to everyone who joined the campaign and helped Maya! This is another proof that our community is strongest when it is united and can really work wonders!

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

While we were trying to find ways to support Maya, we realised that the problem was much bigger and there were many other people in similar situations. Therefore we pivoted to supporting members of the LGBTI community not able to cover their basic humanitarian needs because of the pandemic. We specifically focused on providing humanitarian support to people who have become homeless or are living in very poor conditions and in need of medicines, food, or temporary shelter. We also purchased vouchers for food and medicines which can then be distributed to people from the community in the winter months.

## **THE BILITIS AND G(ENDER)SWAP BINDER SCHEME**

In April 2020 we discovered that some of the companies that sell binders don't provide safe shipping options to Bulgaria anymore, because of the COVID-19 related postal restrictions. After lost packages we decided to find a new way to deliver binders for the Bulgarian trans community. In Bulgaria, there is no company for producing binders and purchasing one from abroad is too expensive for the Bulgarian life standards and many trans people can't afford it. We asked for support our partners from G(end)erSwap, a UK-based organization which works to provide accessible clothing and accessories for trans and gender non-conforming people. G(end)Swap suggested that we start a join binder scheme for delivering free binders for the Bulgarian trans community and in between September and December 2020 we've received and disseminated 20 binders.

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## COMMUNITY MEETINGS AND SUPPORT

One of the most important activities that Bilitis has been developing since the very beginning are our community groups. The most important aspect of our community groups is that they provide a safe space for the participants to come together and offer each other understanding, support, advice or simply good time with friends. Therefore shifting out community meetings to an online environment posed a number of challenges but the group participants soon felt comfortable sharing a Zoom call together. At the same time, we noticed a positive change. New visitors, from outside Sofia where we used to hold our regular meetings, started joining the online sessions. Many people who could not join our meetings because they live in other cities or abroad suddenly became regular visitors. This was such a positive trend that we have decided to maintain our online group activities even after the lockdown was lifted. Below you will find the highlights of 2020 for each of our 4 community groups.

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## QUEERFEMME GROUP

In February 2020, the QueerFemme Group - the first self support group for LGBTI women in Bulgaria turned 1 year. Together for a year now we have been giving space to LBT and queer women, where they can be absolutely open to be themselves, to talk about issues and topics important to them, to do things together, to share joy and happiness with each other. At the moment this is one of the safest spaces for LBT women to discuss important topics, that are free of sexism, homo-, bi- and transphobia, and other types of oppression. The purpose of the group is to empower and unite the queer women community in Sofia. The group meets twice a month in Rainbow Hub Community Center to discuss topics such as coming out, dating, feminsim & gender equality, trans & non-binary.



Photo credit: Bilitis archive

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## T.I.A. GROUP

The mission of T.I.A group is to achieve equality and non-discrimination of trans and intersex people in Bulgaria, access to adequate health-care, free and fast administrative procedure for gender recognition, based on self-identification.

The group also had meeting with specialists in different fields such as lawyers and safe sex experts.

TIA group is mostly trans-led, and all of the people who come to the community meetings self-identify as trans, non-binary or intersex. However, they work in close collaboration with Pol Naidenov (Co-chair of Bilitis), the first visible intersex rights activist in Bulgaria, who has already achieved remarkable media presence. Pol has helped to frame the trans community development work in a strategic way. The regular bi-monthly topic-based discussion events and workshops engaged the trans people in sharing, needs assessment of the trans movement, goal setting, and planning specific actions, which are trans-led.



# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## **BRAVELAB'S TWO YEAR ANNIVERSARY!**

In January 2020, the first self-support group for LGBTI youth - BraveLab, turned two!

For us as organizers and facilitators and for all the members of the group these two years have been extremely special because they've been filled with so many emotions, fun, sharing and support, as well as learning new things about ourselves, others and the LGBTI movement.



BraveLab celebrating its second birthday  
Photo credit: Petia Spasova

BraveLab started in January 2018 as the first safe space for young people from the LGBTI community in Sofia. Since then young LGBTI people aged 15-29 have regular meetings at the Rainbow Hub to meet and discuss important topics such as awareness of LGBTI identity, coming out, family relationships, workplace and mental health issues, HIV/AIDS prevention and other STIs. BraveLab's goal is to become a sustainable incubator for building confident, capable, and empowered young leaders of the LGBTI community, giving them space to develop their skills, share ideas with peers, and most importantly, build up belief in their own strengths.

# COVID-19 RESPONSE



BraveLab's second birthday cake  
Photo credit: Petia Spasova

We can safely say that the group has proven itself as a successful platform for the development of young LGBTI leaders in Bulgaria. Many of them have become some of our bravest volunteers, while others attended international LGBTI youth camps where they could further develop their leadership and activist skills.

BraveLab, QueerFemme and T.I.A are part of the Rainbow Hub project, implemented with a financial support of EUR 110 147 provided by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Financial Mechanism.



Liliya Dragoeva, Boryana Atanasova (in drag) and Gloriya Filipova from Bilitis cutting the birthday cake  
Photo credit: Petia Spasova

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## **BINONYMOUS**

Blnonymous – a self-support group for bi+ people, was created in the beginning of 2020 after a thematic workshop was held as part of the 15th edition of Sofia LGBTI Community Fest in December 2019. Blnonymous is a space for bi and bi-curious people as well as everyone who feels a part of the bi+ community.



This is the newest community group, created by the need to give space to all people who identify as bisexual, bi-curious or pansexual to find others like themselves, to seek support, to share experiences and to talk about important topics.



First meeting of Blnonymous in  
January 2020  
Photo: Bilitis archive

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## ENSURING FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC

Bilitis quickly realised that the new situation needed finding new solutions to providing proper support to the emerging leaders of the LGBTI community. Therefore we applied before the The Global Resilience Fund for Girls and Young Women and we are delighted that we were among the ones who received support. The QueerFemme & BraveLab: A collective response to the COVID-19 crisis project is aimed at addressing some of the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic through organizing an activist Academy for the members of two of our self-support groups: QueerFemme and BraveLab, on being activists during the Covid-19 pandemic. The main goal of the Academy is to multiply the number of people who are motivated to come up with new ways of engaging LGBTI youth and queer women during the pandemic.

### ПОСЛЕДИЦИ ЗА ЛГБТИ ОБЩНОСТТА ОТ COVID-19



This report presents an analysis of the data from a survey conducted online by the GLAS and Bilitis foundations in September-October 2020. The purpose of the survey was to collect data from LGBTI people in Bulgaria on the effects of COVID-19 on their lives. The report summarizes the responses of 176 people of different ages, representatives of different subgroups of the LGBTI community in Bulgaria.

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

23.4% of the respondents share that they have experienced difficulties with food costs and rent/mortgage costs. 12.6% people have experienced financial difficulties related to the cost of medicines. And 10.8% indicated that they had to change their living situation due to COVID-19. 10.5% reported they lost their job as a result of anti-epidemic measures.

27.8% of the respondents report deterioration in their mental state and 21% report a definite deterioration in their mental state as a result of the pandemic and the social distancing measures that were introduced in mid-March.

Many LGBTI people report they had to return to their parents' homes and live with them during the lockdown, others, such as students and young people still living with their families, have been restricted from going out and meeting people.

*“Restrictions during the lockdown deprived me of the opportunity to be in a safe environment most of the time, as I had to spend more time with my relatives, who do not accept or support my different sexual orientation. This has led to a significant deterioration in my mental health and triggered a panic disorder”, a respondent shared.*

# NEW COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

## THE ONLINE PLATFORM LIVE WITHOUT BULLYING

In August, we launched the Live Without Bullying Platform which offers anonymous support from trained psychologists to young people and teenagers, victims of bullying at school, as well as their parents and teachers. The platform is chat-based and offers free of charge consultations from experienced psychologists and psychotherapists. Live Without Bullying platform is part of the CHOICE project, funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020) aimed at preventing and combating all kinds of intolerance and discrimination in schools, as well as the resulting violence and abuse.



Since the start of the platform in September 2020, more than 150 young people asked for help and shared their bullying problems. Also, more than 30 parents/teachers have looked for our expert advice. The majority of the youth share cases of physical and emotional bullying. All 26 psychological volunteers believe that one youth helped is equal to the saving of the whole world.

# NEW COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

## WELCOME, HUMAN!

Earlier this year we re-launched Welcome, Human! – a social initiative founded by Bilitis activists in 2015. The initiative was active until late 2017 and since then has been on hold. With the expansion of our team and group of volunteers we rebranded and re-launched our old activities. The mission of “Welcome, human!” is to encourage Bulgarian businesses, formal and informal organizations and collectives to support the human rights of all their customers, guests, members and users and take a clear stand against discrimination.

Participating organizations and businesses “sign” a declaration on the website of the initiative by adding their logo. By doing so, they declare their commitment to accept diversity, and uphold anti-discrimination values. As a next step, they will receive a sticker stating that no forms of discrimination are tolerated in their establishment, which they can place at the entrance door or window.

We are happy that around 50 businesses and organizations have already joined the initiative and we hope to continue spreading the message of our cause.

## Welcome Human!

A Campaign Against Racism, Sexism & Homophobia



# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS

## SOFIA PRIDE LIVE 2020 – A DIFFERENT KIND OF PRIDE

Like in most cities around the world, this year's physical march of Sofia Pride was canceled by the Organizing committee. Nevertheless, Pride is an integral part of our movement and is here to stay regardless of the many forms and shapes it might take.



GLAS



This year's Pride was preceded by a very special campaign called "Love flies over Bulgaria" ran by the GLAS foundation. As part of the campaign, 1000 flags in the colors of the rainbow were requested by hundreds of people from all over the country, through the site [www.loveis.bg](http://www.loveis.bg). Flags have been ordered in all major district cities, as well as in many small towns, including villages. Like in any other year, Sofia Pride received overwhelming support from embassies and foreign missions to Bulgaria who this time issued a joint [video statement](#).

# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS

The highlight of the activities took place on June 13, when the physical procession was to take place, but in the spirit of the time, the Pride prepared an digital concert, which was broadcasted on Sofia Pride's Facebook channel and on the pages of GLAS Foundation, Bilitis and the LGBT Youth Organization "Deystvie", which are the LGBTI organizations behind Pride.

The concert started at 20:00 with the participation of some of the most loyal musicians supporting the annual march for equality, such as Ruth Koleva, Mila Robert, Preya, Ivo Dimchev, as well as several new names. Besides them, other celebrities, drag queens, dancers and many others joined the event with video messages.

The online activities in June, the traditional month of Pride continued with video greetings from ambassadors, live DJ party from an unusual location, presentation of a thematic video clip of a famous Bulgarian artist.

Sofia Pride also participated in the online event Global Pride on June 27, which included hundreds of prides from around the world, again in the form of online live concerts.

Due to COVID-19, the international Pride community led by the European Pride Organizers' Association decided to organize Global Pride - a 26-hour online stream of Pride content from all over the world. Sofia Pride also participated in the event, issuing a special Pride statement and featuring Ruth Koleva.

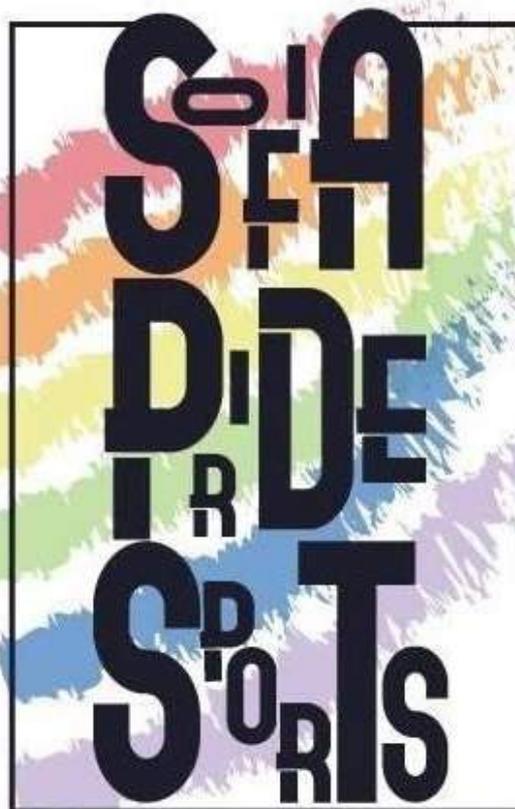
# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS

## SOFIA PRIDE SPORTS 2020 – ONLINE EDITION

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all physical events of Sofia Pride had to be cancelled along with its sports program. As the team started to adjust in the new environment, we saw that with a little bit of imagination we didn't need to cancel life and sport and fun overall, we simply needed to come up with a new form of it. And that is how the idea of online sport challenges was born and shaped Sofia Pride Sports 2020. We used social media to engage people to be active at home, to move, to share experiences by posting how they complete our weekly challenges during the Pride Month of June.

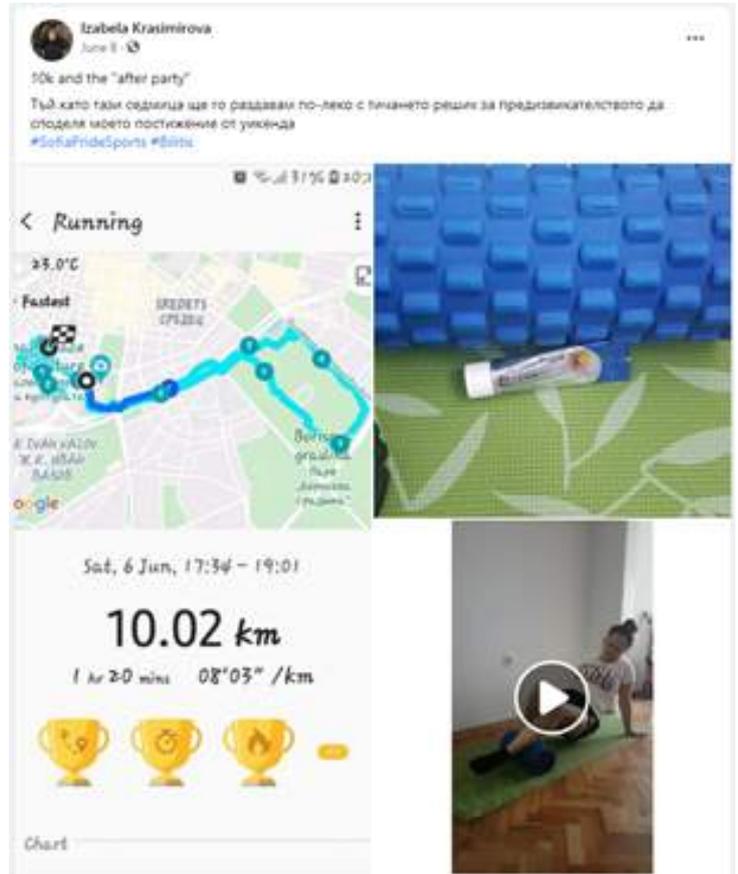
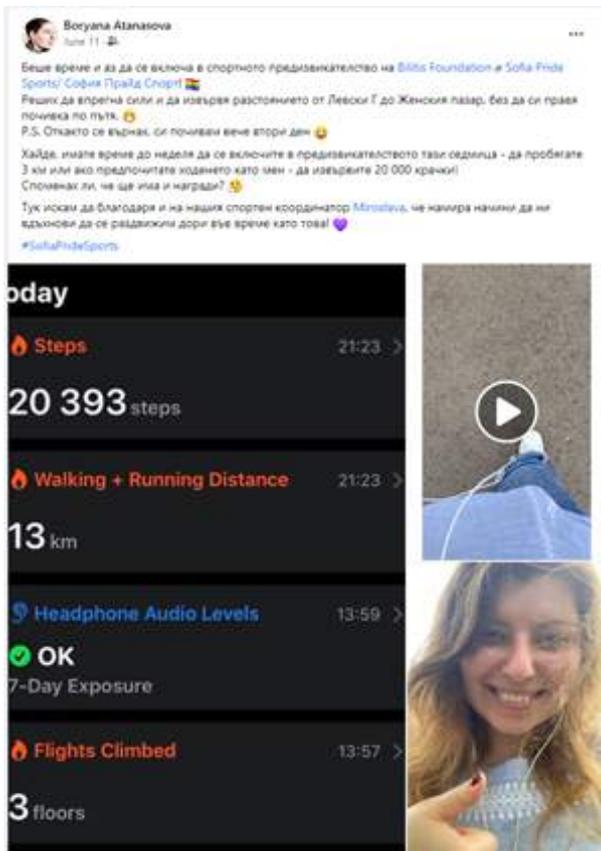
A total of 4 challenges have been extended to the LGBTI community – a warm up of 1-minute plank, a 3 km run, a football challenge of 10 keepy-uppies and, lastly, 10 pushups or 20 squats.

We were extremely glad that over 50 people took part in our challenges and that there were comments under the posts with healthy lifestyle pieces of advice that was again part of our program. The challenges have been promoted via social media posts in Facebook and Instagram with a total reach of over 12.000 views. The most active participants received special awards.



# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS

Sofia Pride Sports is a sports festival which includes variety of sports and wellbeing events as part of Sofia Pride Month. Sofia Pride Sports aims on addressing important for the LGBTI community topics through sports and introducing sports as part of the queer community life in Bulgaria in order to fight stigma and promote wellbeing.



# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS

## **WOMEN'S FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT V3.0 AS PART OF THE #FOOTBALLPEOPLE WEEKS CAMPAIGN**

In October 2020 Billitis organized a football tournament with a focus on women interested in and practicing this type of sport. On October 18th, the Women's Football Tournament was held on the football field at the Sports Complex "Mir i Druzhiba" in Sofia, which brought together different women, some of them professionally engaged, others – just football lovers. The tournament aims to give more women the chance to play and at the same time to raise the awareness against inequality in sports. The tournament became a fact thanks to the support from FARE Network as part of the largest campaign for social change and diversity in global football – #FootballPeople.



Photo credit: Petia Spasova

# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



Photo credit: Petia Spasova

FARE Network is an umbrella organization that brings together individuals, informal groups and organizations driven to combat inequality in football and use the sport as a means for social change. Fare's commitment to tackle discrimination through football's inclusive power is based on the principle that the game, as the most popular sport in the world, belongs to us all and can propel social cohesion. Fare combats all forms of discrimination, including racism, far-right nationalism, sexism, trans- and homophobia and discrimination against disabled people.

# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS

## **SOFIA LGBTI COMMUNITY FEST: QUEER IN THE TIME OF CORONA**

In 2020 Sofia LGBTI Community Fest was organized under the motto “Queer in the time of Corona”. For the first time in its sixteen-year history, the festival was held online. Together we went through an online journey, where we aimed at preserving the community spirit of the festival and giving as many opportunities for communication and entertainment. The Festival was held between the 7th and the 19th of December and included 9 different events on LGBTI and feminist topics and 1 challenge!

As every other year, at the festival we brought together both local and international activists and artists to present their art, hold workshops and discussions. As the theme suggests, at the opening of the festival we addressed the ways COVID-19 affects our community by presenting the results of an online survey on the effect of COVID-19 on the LGBTI community in Bulgaria. After the presentation we discussed with the participants of the event the possible ways to develop activities online in order to keep the community life still vibrant during the pandemic.



# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS

One of the key events at the 16th edition of the festival was the workshop "The Power of our Stories", where we focused on dramatic writing and developing stories on LGBTI topics. The workshop was led by Erika Coleff, an Argentine-Bulgarian director and screenwriter. Another one was the "Living LGBTI Library", where we adapted the format of the living library in an online version to share our stories and better get to know the experiences of the different subgroups in the LGBTI community.

This year's edition of Sofia LGBTI Community Fest was organized with the support and ideas of our volunteers! We express our gratitude from the bottom of our hearts for all the work and inspiration they put into our common cause!

## **PROTESTS**

### **IN SUPPORT OF LGBTI AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

In 2020, Bilitis joined the organizing committees of one of the main women's rights initiatives in Bulgaria. In March, we co-organized the annual Women's Rights March. Being part of this initiative allowed us to address the issues around LBT women's rights and violence against LBT women, topics that are often invisible in the Bulgarian society.

We believe that being part of such initiatives is an important step forward towards building an intersectional women's rights movement in Bulgaria and joining forces between the LGBTI and women's rights causes.

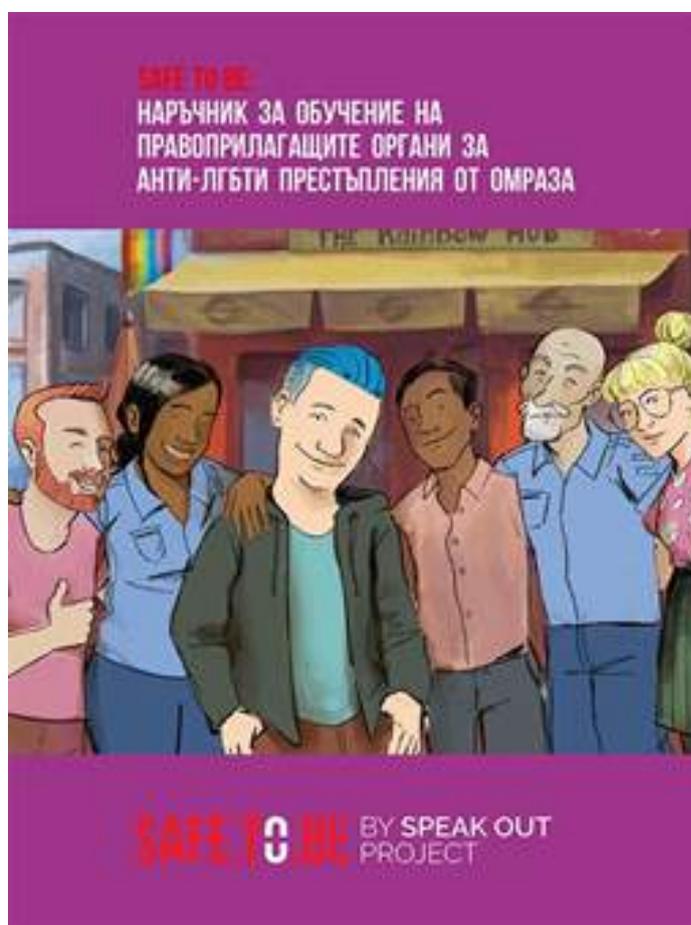
# RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION ACTIVITIES

## SAFE TO BE TOOLKIT: A WORKSHOP GUIDE FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT ON ANTI-LGBTI HATE CRIMES

Much work has been done by NGOs across the European Union on the topic of hate crimes against the LGBTI community. However, the scale of hate crimes against LGBTI people and their impact on the community remain underestimated. More often, these crimes are either not recognized or remain unreported. Many victims who choose not to report a crime against them do so because they do not believe that law enforcement will take action on their complaint because they are afraid of the reaction of the police or because they relive the crime in front of a stranger who may not react well and this causes additional psychological trauma.

This manual focuses specifically on this aspect. It provides the trainers of law enforcement authorities interactive step-by-step workshop that has the aim to raise awareness on the psychological impact of reporting a hate crime.

The Safe To Be project partners began work in 2018, conducting interviews with police and judicial services across Europe. A total of 45 people were interviewed. The main findings of these interviews can be summarized as follows:



# RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION ACTIVITIES

- There is a lack of knowledge about what is a hate crime among police officers working on the field, although these are the people who often need the best understanding of this (unlike high-ranking officials, police officers from diversity departments or special services). units, judges and prosecutors, who are often well educated on the subject). The reason for this has three aspects:
- Low levels of legislation.
- Lack of knowledge about the legislation.
- Insufficient reporting

This guide is distributed in 9 European countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. As hate crimes and LGBTI legislation, as well as the social acceptance of the LGBTI community, differ in different national contexts, the section on the national context is different for each country involved in the creation of this guide.

## **SAFE TO BE: HANDBOOK FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND ANTI-LGBTI HATE CRIMES**

The Safe To Be Handbook examines the possibilities of administering restorative justice in cases of anti-LGBTI hate crimes. It contains five articles that look at restorative justice and its development in a historical and theoretical context, as well as present good practices for its application in cases of anti-LGBTI hate crimes. The handbook also provides an overview of the development of restorative justice in Bulgaria and presents the legal framework and good practices in the field.

The crime is more than breaking the law – it is breaking the relationship between people. Restorative justice considers not only punishment – this is what criminal justice does, but also the causes and consequences of the crime and what can facilitate recovery.

# RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION ACTIVITIES

Non-profit organizations and government departments must continue to investigate whether restorative justice can be applied in cases of hate crimes against LGBTI people based on hate messages or discrimination. Provided that certain conditions are met, mediation between the victim and the perpetrator may have a better long-term effect than a simple penalty or fine. Although a recovery-oriented approach is not always possible, it should at least be presented as a valid opportunity for the people involved in the process.



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## **THE SAFE TO BE AWARENESS RAISING WEBSITE**

With many incidents of hate speech occurring in the online environment, the Safe To Be awareness raising website is a “one-stop-shop” for LGBTI people that have faced anti-LGBTI expressions and hate speech or are willing to learn more on the topic.

# RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION ACTIVITIES

The Safe To Be awareness raising website provides information on anti-LGBTI hate speech and hate crimes to the LGBTI community. Its aim is to raise the awareness of LGBTI people on recognizing the different forms of online and offline hate speech and hate crimes and how to report them. The website also gives information about local resources and support services which can provide help to victims or witnesses of anti-LGBTI violence. Besides providing practical information, the website also aims at breaking stereotypes and empowering the LGBTI community by sharing inspirational personal stories of people who faced anti-LGBTI hate and managed to overcome it.

It is available in all 9 languages of the "Speak Out" project partnering countries (Bulgaria, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary and the UK)

## **ATTITUDES TOWARDS LGBTI STUDENTS IN BULGARIAN HIGH-SCHOOLS**

The current survey aims to give a snapshot of the experience of a specific group of high school students, namely lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) students. This is the target group of Bilitis Resource Center Foundation and Single Step Foundation, the coordinators of the survey, as both organizations are focused on providing support to, and working with, LGBTI youth in Bulgaria.

This is the first such national quantitative survey conducted in Bulgaria, covering all 28 regions of the country, with a clear goal of examining the experiences of these students in high school, with regard to safety, as well as the attitudes of both their peers and school staff.

The findings of the report show a school environment in which homophobic and biased language is prevalent, tolerated and is still not perceived as a problem that needs addressing by both students and school staff.

# RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION ACTIVITIES



This trend contributes to a hostile environment not only for LGBTI students, but for any student outside of the accepted social norms. The study found some alarming trends - 71% of LGBTI student respondents have been verbally harassed, 34% physically harassed and 19% physically assaulted. The vast majority (82.9%) of LGBTI students reported hearing other students use homophobic remarks (such as "fag", "faggot" or "homo") often or frequently in school, and more than half (57.4%) of students reported hearing such remarks on one or more occasions from their teachers or other school staff.

## CHOICE NATIONAL REPORT

The needs of students, parents and school professionals related to improving measures to prevent and combat violence in Bulgarian schools



# RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION ACTIVITIES

CHOICE national report presents data from a study of the needs of students, parents and school professionals related to improving measures to prevent and combat violence in Bulgarian schools. The survey was conducted in three stages in the period November–December 2019 and included a desk research and review of existing research and secondary data collection, an online survey among 106 adults (teachers, school principals and parents) and 48 young people (students aged 14 up to 19 years) and 6 focus groups with students, teachers / school staff and parents in Sofia and Plovdiv.

The desk and field research described in the report demonstrated many deficiencies of the current school system in Bulgaria, which lead to ineffective addressing of the issue of bullying, especially identity-based bullying. In summary these are the following:

- Inadequate policy framework: the national mechanism for addressing bullying does not pay attention to identity-based bullying, consequently, this kind of bullying is not recognized by the school staff;
- Negative stereotypes of minorities reiterated at school: The majority of teachers, school staff and parents share many of the wide-spread negative stereotypes of minorities (especially Roma), and tend to downplay discrimination in the school environment;
- Invisibility of LGBTI at school: There is very low awareness of the actual experiences of LGBTI students at school, and the latter remain an “invisible” minority;
- Little collaboration between school staff, parents, and students in prevention and addressing violence at school;
- Lack of internal support systems for the ones most severely affected by bullying at school (LGBTI students are among the most common victims).

On the positive side:

- Interest in training on effective methods for prevention and addressing of bullying at school expressed by all target groups;

# RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION ACTIVITIES

- Understanding the importance of collaboration between all stakeholders in the school system also underlined by the participants from all target groups;
- Interest in learning more about the LGBTI identities expressed mainly by the young people involved in the research.

## **NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS LGBTI PEOPLE IN BULGARIA**

More than half of Bulgarians fully agree, and another quarter generally agree that human rights should be guaranteed to everyone, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. Thus, the total number of supporters of this statement is 79% of the respondents. This is shown by the data from a national representative survey, conducted among 963 people at the end of 2019 by Noema Marketing Agency as part of the BrinkItOn project. Its main goal is to provide reliable information about public attitudes towards LGBTI people in Bulgaria.

Half of the respondents are not aware of whether the country's Constitution actually recognizes the equality of LGBTI people or not. Another 24% believe that the Constitution guarantees equality, while 26% understand that equality is not guaranteed, the data show. One example of the lack of equal rights is the regulation of marriage, which in the Constitution is limited to a union between a man and a woman. This has a number of consequences for unequal treatment of homosexual people in Bulgaria.

Significant proportions of Bulgarians do not feel well informed on key issues related to LGBTI people, as sexual orientation and gender identity are often confused. Many are unaware of the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity and as a result confuse homosexuality with gender reassignment, transgender with non-binary, homosexual with non-binary.

# RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION ACTIVITIES

The weakest awareness is related to specific terms such as "gender", "transgender" and "intersex".

The majority of Bulgarians - nearly 60% - misinterpret the term "gender" as a synonym for "gay", and about a fifth of these 60% openly admit that for them it is an insulting word. One in five is informed about the actual content of the concept.

## **SURVEY AMONG THE LGBTI PEOPLE IN BULGARIA**

The LGBTI community in Bulgaria still faces daily misunderstanding, rejection and even manifestations of aggression. In order to provide up-to-date information about the experiences and evaluation of the people from the community, in the period 22 February-28 March 2020 Noema Marketing Agency conducted an online survey among 420 respondents from the LGBTI community as part of the BrinkItOn project.

Many of the indicators in the survey repeat those used in the national representative survey in order to compare the positions of people in the community with those of society as a whole. Other indicators replicate those used in previous international surveys to get a real idea of possible changes in the fundamental rights of LGBTI people in the country.



**ПРОУЧВАНЕ СРЕД ЛГБТИ ХОРАТА В БЪЛГАРИЯ**  
Резултати



Този доклад е произведен в рамките на проекта „На ръба на приемането“, финансиран по Програма „Права, равенство и гражданство“ (2014-2020) на Европейския съюз. Съдържанието му представлява единствено възгледите на автора и е негова отговорност. Европейската комисия не носи никаква отговорност за използването на информацията, която съдържа.

## FOCUS ON BULGARIA DURING ILGA-EUROPE ANNUAL REVIEW LAUNCH

In February, Lilly Dragoeva, Executive Director of Bilitis, participated in the launch of the Annual Report for 2019 of ILGA-Europe in the European Parliament in Brussels.

In her speech, Lilly Dragoeva shared more about the situation in Bulgaria over the last year outlining the rise in fake news and hate speech against LGBTI people. She called upon the present MEPs and representatives of European Union institutions to pay attention to the situation in Bulgaria and to urge the Bulgarian government to stand their ground, to protect civic space and stand against hate campaigns targeting progressive legislation.

*"In the last two years, Bulgaria became a playground for the so-called anti-gender movement and their smear campaigns against the CSOs, the increase in anti-EU propaganda and rise in hate speech against LGBTI people. [...] But in addition to the worsened social climate and the deep division in the Bulgarian society, the most tangible outcome so far is also the most worrying – the Bulgarian Government failed to adopt all three documents that were under attack:*

- *First, the Constitutional Court proclaimed the Istanbul Convention unconstitutional,*
- *Then, the adoption of the National Child Strategy was frozen,*
- *And last, the entry into force of the Social Services Act was postponed by 6 months.*

*This is a clear signal that the Bulgarian Government is either not capable or not willing to stand against the attacks. Whichever of the two is the reason, it is undoubtedly disturbing and could potentially lead to even more damaging outcomes."*

# ADVOCACY

## **LILLY DRAGOEVA MEETING MICHAEL O'FLAHERTY, DIRECTOR OF FRA**

In February 2020, Bilitis' Executive Director Lilly Dragoeva met with the Director of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) while he was having a working visit in Sofia. The meeting was fruitful and in light of the upcoming publication of the results of findings from FRA's 2019 survey on LGBTI people in the EU and North Macedonia and Serbia, the two discussed possibilities for future collaborations.

FRA is the independent centre of reference and excellence for promoting and protecting human rights in the EU. They help policy makers understand how they can do more for their citizens, collect and analyse law and data, provide independent, evidence-based advice on rights, identify trends by collecting and analysing comparable data, help better law making and implementation, support rights-compliant policy response and strengthen cooperation and ties between fundamental rights actors.



## **COUNCIL OF EUROPE: STRONGER COMMITMENT NEEDED TO COMBAT RACISM, FIGHT GENDER STEREOTYPES AND INCREASE MEDIA FREEDOM IN BULGARIA**

In April, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, published a report on the visit to Bulgaria she carried out in November 2019. The report focuses on racism, intolerance and discrimination; violence against women and domestic violence; and media freedom. As part of her visit, Commissioner Mijatović held a series of stakeholder meetings and as part of them met with Bilitis' Executive Director, Lilly Dragoeva.

The Commissioner considers that there is a need for a political and cultural shift in the way minority groups are treated and portrayed in Bulgaria, where hate speech, discrimination and hostility against Roma, LGBTI people and persons belonging to other minority groups remain an issue of acute concern. She calls on the authorities to react vigorously to incidents of hate speech, including by high-level politicians, enhance legal protection against discrimination and hate crimes, and effectively investigate and prosecute such crimes.

## **ADDRESSING HOMOPHOBIC VIOLENCE AMONG CHILDREN**

On the last weekend of September, a group of teenagers called on others on social media to "clean up" Plovdiv and assaulted a group of young people because of their perceived sexual orientation. They verbally and physically assaulted several girls because of their appearance. No official response to the open letters has been received.

Right after the attack, Bilitis together with the other co-organizers of Sofia Pride appealed to state institutions for urgent changes in the Penal Code to provide for proportionate penalties for crimes committed on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

The call came on the day of the 12th anniversary of the death of Mihail Stoyanov, a 25-year-old medical student killed on September 30, 2008 in Borisova Gradina by a group of young people who justified their actions to the police by "cleaning" the park from gays.

Furthermore, an international petition urging the Prosecutor's Office for prompt reactions has been launched. The petition gathered over 7,300 signatories. The case is being investigated by the Prosecutor's Office.

## **BULGARIA'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD WAS EXAMINED BY UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

Bulgaria's human rights record was examined by the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group for the third time on Friday, 6 November 2020 in a meeting that was live streamed on [webcast live](#). Bulgaria's [first and second UPR reviews](#) took place in November 2010 and May 2015, respectively.

The documents on which the reviews were based are: 1) national report - information provided by the State under review; 2) information contained in the reports of independent human rights experts and groups, known as the Special Procedures, human rights treaty bodies, and other UN entities; 3) information provided by other stakeholders including national human rights institutions, regional organizations and civil society groups.

Bilitis, together with GLAS, Deystvie and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, prepared a [joint statement](#) that was screened during the session in Geneva, outlining 4 priority areas - hate crimes and hate speech, recognition of same-sex families, gender recognition and bodily integrity.

# ADVOCACY

Bilitis' Executive Director Lilly Dragoeva took part in the session on October 12th, during which civil society representatives made recommendations and answered questions. During the closing remarks of the session, Lilly addressed the recent incident among students in Plovdiv showcasing the need for urgent changes in the Penal Code of Bulgaria:

*Distinguished guests,*

*Two weeks ago, a group of 14-15-year-old students from the city of Plovdiv organized and carried out a violent attack on other youngsters because of their perceived homosexual orientation.*

*Their goal was to "clean up the city garden" of boys and girls with the "wrong" sexual orientation. Several girls were viciously harassed, insulted, and finally beaten because of their short hair.*

*This Saturday, a demonstration against this violent act of homophobia took place in Plovdiv. The day prior to the demonstration and the day after, two human rights defenders from Plovdiv woke up to see the facades of their homes covered in graffiti of their names and direct threats for their life and safety.*

*Our hope is that such acts of hatred will receive an adequate legal response.*

*Therefore, we once again urge the Government of Bulgaria to include hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the Criminal Code.*

*Thank you!*

# ADVOCACY



Photo credit: UPR Info Twitter

# ADVOCACY

## **RAISING AWARENESS OF THE CONSPIRACY THEORIES AGAINST LGBTI PEOPLE IN BULGARIA**

In December 2020, Lilly Dragoeva participated in the second episode of The Frontline - ILGA-Europe's new podcast series which aims to bring you to the core of queer activism and give you an understanding on the complexities of what's happening, why it's happening, the wins and the losses, the challenges and commonalities, and the extraordinary ways in which the work of those on the frontlines continues in a rapidly changing world. The topic of the conversation was centered around Bulgaria and the spread of anti-democratic, anti-LGBTI anti-gender narratives.

"Attitudes towards LGBTI people are changing and changing fast," says activist, Lilly Dragoeva from the Sofia-based Bilitis Foundation, in this episode of The Frontline, which delves into the current situation in Bulgaria, a country we don't often hear about as Poland and Hungary's governmental persecution of LGBTI people grabs the headlines. There may not be LGBT-free zones in Bulgaria, but it's a country with almost no protections for LGBTI people, a growing, so-called 'anti-gender' movement, a successful spreading of demonising fake news stories, and an alarming advance in societal rejection of LGBTI people", reads the intro to the episode.

You can listen to the full episode [here](#).

# TRAININGS

## IBM OPEN FORUMS

On August 13, Bilitis' Executive Director Lilly Dragoeva led a special session on the topic of LGBTI for employees of IBM Bulgaria. The session covered the basic LGBTI terminology and focused on anti-LGBT+ bullying and harassment, especially in the workplace. Lastly, Lilly shared some advice on how to become an LGBTI ally and create a more inclusive environment for LGBT+ colleagues and employees. The forum was the first of its kind at IBM Bulgaria and attracted more than 40 participants.

Due to the great success of the first event, IBM Bulgaria invited Lilly Dragoeva for a second event, this time dedicated to gender equality in the workplace. The session took place on December 10 and aimed at challenging the common understanding that everything has already been said about gender equality and there is nothing more to discuss. More than 45 people participated in the event sharing their experiences and opening up a space for an honest discussion.



The two open forums were initiated by Mira Chavorska, Be Equal ambassador and LGBT Ally at IBM Bulgaria. We are proud that she agreed to partner with us and start the #LGBTallyWithMira campaign aimed at sharing tips and advice on how to be a better ally for the LGBTI community in the workplace and beyond.

# TRAININGS

## **RAINBOW OVER HATE TRAININGS FOR POLICE OFFICERS**

Bilitis and Deystvie held four regional training events for a total of 53 police officers early in 2020. The trainings aimed to improve the skills and knowledge of investigating police officers on combating anti-LGBTI hate crimes. The trainings were organized within the Rainbow over Hate project, funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme.

The agenda of the training was constructed with the aim to give the participants the basic understanding of what prejudices and discrimination is, different vulnerable groups and victims of hate crimes, basic LGBTI terminology, specifics of investigation of LGBTI-related hate crimes, learning through cases and through sharing and discussing best practices of guest police officers from neighbouring countries. The well-prepared interactive approach of the trainer Maria Marinova-Alkalai who has a rich experience in the field of humans rights and with training law enforcement was appreciated and gave space to the participants to learn sensitive information while being supported by the safe space created. The participants of the trainings will have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge in a national build-up training that will take place in 2021.

# TRAININGS

## RAINBOW SHIELD COMMUNITY TRAININGS



Enhancing the legal protection  
of LGBTI people in Bulgaria

In July, October and November 2020 as part of the Rainbow Shield project, funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, Bilitis Foundation together with LGBTI Youth Organization "Deystvie" organized 5 two-day trainings, aimed at the LGBTI community with the main goal of attracting, mobilizing and building new young LGBTI leaders. The subject of the trainings were various topics such as LGBTI terminology and how to properly use it; what activism is and how to be actively involved in the LGBTI movement; how to organize events, as well as what are discrimination and hate crimes, how to recognize and report them.

As a result of the trainings, about 30 active young people from the community were trained with the main idea to get involved in organizing future LGBTI events and initiatives in Bulgaria.

# TRAININGS

## **RAINBOW HUB ADVOCACY TRAININGS**

As part of the Rainbow Hub project, implemented with a financial support of EUR 110 147 provided by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Financial Mechanism we were able to conduct a 6-module training to members of the eight groups aimed at enhancing their advocacy skills. Among the discussed topics at the training meetings were topics such as advocacy and advocacy planning; community building and building coalitions; strategic communication; leadership, teamwork and working with volunteers and others. We were able to train a number of people from the groups that are part of the project, including three of our four community groups - BraveLab, QueerFemme, T.I.A.

After the end of the training, participants will apply their advocacy skills by organizing real advocacy initiatives planned by each group based on the group's identified needs and opportunities to achieve the greatest impact.

## **PLATFORM: SOCIAL CHANGE**

As part of the Meet and Code project, a special training dedicated to information technology was held on October 14 and aimed at the LGBTI community with an interest in the field.

During the event 12 young people from the LGBTI community met experts in building and distributing sites for social causes, as well as marketing experts with young people from the LGBTI + community. Two of our experts - Anelia Gishina and Manuela Popova, shared their experience in building and distributing sites for social causes, as well as their successful marketing.

The task of the experts was to inspire the young people from our community to develop their potential in the field of information technology, and the meetings aimed to equip participants with practical skills, such as:

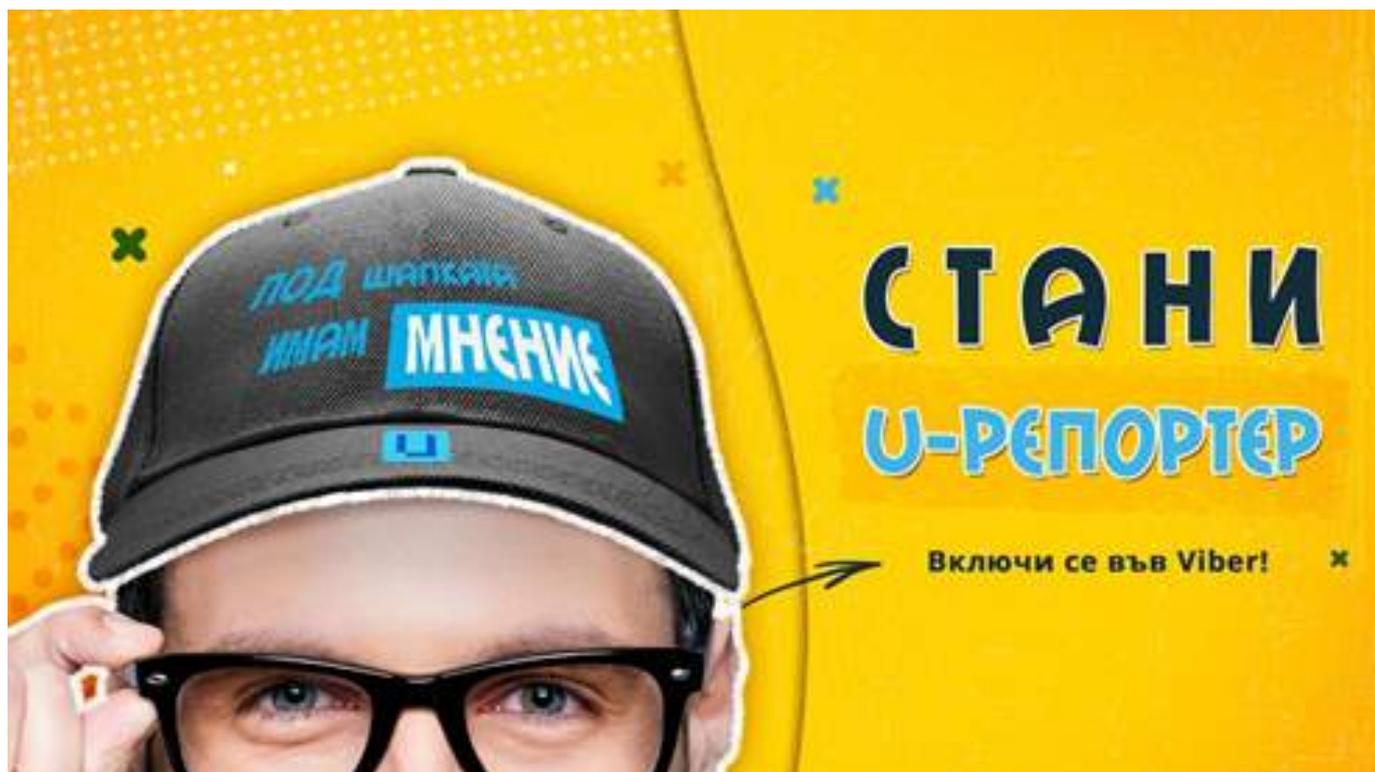
# TRAININGS

- creating an HTML site or via CMS;
- practical creation of a site in the most common CMS - Wordpress;
- search engine optimization SEO;
- color schemes, fonts and UI / UX principles;
- responsive Design;
- work with Photoshop and Illustrator;
- digital advertising;
- distribution on social networks.

The event was open to all young people aged 16-24, and especially to those who have interests in the field of activism and information technology and want to develop in the field of online activism.

# NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIPS

## BILITIS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH UNICEF AS U-REPORT AMBASSADOR



U-Report is a global platform of UNICEF and many partner organizations, launched in 2011 and in 2020 in Bulgaria. It enables children and young people aged 14-29 to express their views on issues important to them in an accessible way. U-Report relies on innovation in the use of modern technologies: through the simple use of the popular Viber chat, registered children and young people receive regular surveys, useful information and referrals to various services suitable for them. The content of each proposed survey and any information, as well as any public event of the U-Report, is discussed in a wide range of organizations experts and children and young people in order to be as useful as possible.

# NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIPS

Bilitis is part of U-Report Bulgaria's Steering Committee together with UNICEF Bulgaria, National Youth Forum, National Network for Children, Bulgarian Youth Red Cross, United Nations Association of Bulgaria, SafeNet Bulgaria, International Award of the Duke of Edinburgh.

Many young people are among the U-Report champions - one of them is Tino - a volunteer of Bilitis and one of the participants in one of our community groups - BraveLab.

## SAFE TO BE CONFERENCE

On 19 and 20 October Bilitis organized the two-day international Safe To Be conference on anti-LGBTI hate crimes and restorative justice.

This was the closing event of the two years long Speak Out project, aiming at combating anti-LGBTI hate crimes. The conference was planned to happen in Sofia, but due to COVID-19 it was conducted online.

However, it gathered over 100 participants from across Europe and worldwide - LGBTI activists, law

enforcement professionals, restorative justice professionals, academics, representatives of institutions and representatives of online social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok. The conference panels focused on sharing good practices and ways forward in the field of combating online and offline anti-LGBTI hate speech and hate crimes by awareness raising, training of professionals and the implementation of restorative practices.



# NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIPS



## **BILITIS IS OFFICIALLY WITHIN FIRST NGOS TO BE FORMALLY PART OF THE EUROPEAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN LESBIAN\* COMMUNITY**

We are more than happy to announce that from December this year we are officially within the first NGOs to be formally part of the EL\*C (EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community) network, whose purpose is to build a movement and a platform for lesbians by lesbians and to assess and address the needs of lesbians throughout Europe and Central Asia, especially in relation to their invisibility.

EL\*C is a lesbian feminist and intersectional network, which started out as a self-organised space at the annual ILGA-Europe conference in 2016. The urge to create such a network was generated by recognizing the multitude of needs surrounding the rights, the visibility and the well-being of lesbians throughout Europe and Central Asia. The EL\*C organized their first European Lesbian Conference in Vienna in 2017 and ever since the conferences are their lighthouses – shaping connections, sharing knowledge, finding common languages and understandings of our diversities, building bridges that reach and impact far beyond the time and space at which they take place.

# NEW PROJECTS

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR LGBTI PEOPLE IN BULGARIA

### Aim

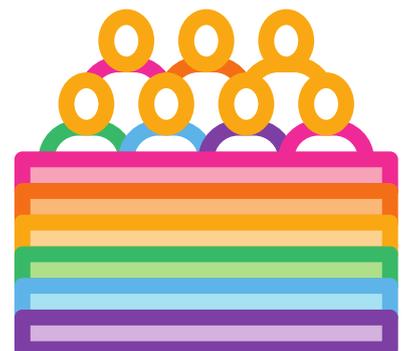
The aim of the project funded by San Diego Community Grants Program is supporting Bilitis' multi-year community organizing program targeted at three specific vulnerable groups - LGBTI youth, LBT and queer women, trans and intersex people. This program creates space for LGBTI community self-organizing activities aimed at unleashing their potential.

### Activities

Holding regular meetings of the three community groups - BraveLab for LGBTI youth aged 14-29, QueerFemme for LBTI and queer women and non-binary people and T.I.A for trans, intersex people and their allies at least twice a month.

### Duration

12 months (January 2020 – December 2020)



# NEW PROJECTS

## **LET'SGOBYTALKING**

Protecting and defending the rights of victims of anti-LGBT hate crimes:  
Innovative paths through restorative justice

### Aim

The overall aim of the project "Let'sGoByTalking", funded by European Union's Justice Programme (2014-2020) is to research and promote the application of restorative justice in cases of anti-LGBT hate crimes. The project will research the attitudes among victims and professionals in the field, as well as the legislation and restorative justice programs in the EU, aiming to enhance victims' rights.

### Activities

- Transnational analysis on the legislation, as well as research of the perspective of victims of anti-LGBTI hate crimes and key professionals
- Workshops to exchange experiences and promote cooperation between LGBTI organizations, institutions and professionals
- Identification of training needs and development of training for trainers on implementing restorative justice in cases of anti-LGBTI hate crimes
- Awareness-raising and dissemination activities to inform policy makers, criminal justice professionals, restorative justice professionals and LGBTI organizations on the efficiency of restorative justice in cases of anti-LGBTI hate crimes.

### Duration

24 months (January 2020 – January 2022)



# NEW PROJECTS

## Partners

Bilitis Resource Center Foundation, University of Barcelona, EUROPEAN FORUM FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE VZW BE, University of Girona, CAVARIA VZW BE, University of Wroclaw, University of Brescia, Avans University of Applied Sciences



# NEW PROJECTS

## **NOT JUST WORDS**

Not Just Words (Building a national movement against hate speech that triggers Antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance)

Main goal of the project "Not Just Words", funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014–2020), is to improve collaboration between communities, that are affected by hate speech and to create a national movement of allies to prevent and combat antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. Strong focus of the project will be the inclusion of youth in this process.

### Activities

- Exploring the human face of hate by conducting interviews with individuals, affected by hate speech and making videos of 5 life stories, as well as Interviewing users of hate speech, who are not members of radical groups, showing the deeply rooted fear of the unknown as a trigger.
- Awareness campaign with target groups youth and movable middle: Short film "The face of hate" disseminated via YouTube and mainstream media channels, as well as social media campaign and open forums in 5 major cities.
- Targeted work with journalists to build counter-narratives, which stop the dissemination of hate speech, resulting in a follow-up media campaign.
- Building resilience in affected communities and strengthening collaboration among them via workshops for young people (LGBTI, Jews, and other local minorities). Final project forum, gathering communities and allies to create a follow-up plan for the no-hate movement.



# NEW PROJECTS

## Duration

24 months (January 2020 – January 2022)

## Partners

Bilitis Resource Center Foundation, GLAS Foundation, Association of European Journalists, Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria "Shalom"



# NEW PROJECTS

## **BRING-IN: BUILDING PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY TO COMBAT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST AND BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF INTERSEX PERSONS**

Protecting and defending the rights of victims of anti-LGBT hate crimes:  
Innovative paths through restorative justice

### Aim

The overall aim of the Bring-In project, funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, is to promote the equality of intersex people in Greece, Hungary, UK and Bulgaria, by educating social and healthcare professionals on how to recognize, prevent and combat discrimination towards intersex people, while raising public awareness and advocating for actions to combat the human rights violations intersex people face.

### Activities

Analysis of the current situation of intersex people: research on the profile of the intersex population in the four countries, prevalence of intersex discrimination with emphasis on social and healthcare settings and the level of protection of intersex people's human rights.

Set-up of a transnational Working Group on Intersex Equality Policy and Practice.

Development of a training programme including training curriculum on intersex equality and Training of Trainers programme aimed at preparing local trainers to deliver

Development of policy recommendations on intersex equality, relevant to national and EU level.



# NEW PROJECTS

Development of an Interactive Online Learning Resource Platform on Intersex Equality, containing a wide range of resources such as online tests, games, quizzes and courses, that professionals, stakeholders and the general public will be able to refer to, use and further disseminate

## Duration:

24 months (March 2020 – March 2022)

## Partners

PANTEION UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCES, (Greece), SYMPLEXIS (Greece), HATTER SOCIETY (Hungary), Restorative Justice for All International Institute (United Kingdom), INTERNET OF THINGS APPLICATIONS ANDMULTI LAYER DEVELOPMENT LTD, (Cyprus)



# NEW PROJECTS

## **QUEERFEMME & BRAVELAB: A COLLECTIVE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

### Aim

The current project funded by The Global Resilience Fund for Girls and Young Women is aimed at addressing some of the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic through organizing an activist Academy for the members of two of our self-support groups: QueerFemme and BraveLab, on being activists during the Covid-19 pandemic. The main goal of the Academy is to multiply the number of people who are motivated to come up with new ways of engaging LGBTI youth and queer women during the pandemic.

### Activities

- The Academy will gather 10-15 people and within three days they will be trained in general activist skills and knowledge, with the focus on being activists during the pandemic.
- After the Academy, the trainees will develop their own projects, being supported by Bilitis' experienced activists.

### Duration

6 months (16 September 2020 - 16 March 2021)



# NEW PROJECTS

## **PLATFORM: SOCIAL CHANGE**

Platform: Social change - an event to develop skills for creating a website for social change with a focus on the LGBTI + community. This project was funded by SAP as part of the Meet and Code initiative.

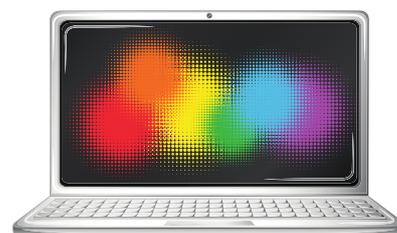
The LGBTI + community is a group that we, from the Bilitis Foundation, have been supporting for over 15 years. Meet and Code provides a great opportunity to empower our community to develop valuable skills in building and disseminating a website aimed at social change and creating a more receptive online environment for LGBTI + people.

### Aim

During the event we will meet experts in building and distributing sites for social causes, as well as marketing experts with young people from the LGBTI + community. The task of the experts will be to inspire the young people from our community to develop their potential in the field of information technology, and the meetings will aim to equip participants with practical skills, such as:

- creating an HTML site or via CMS;
- practical creation of a site in the most common CMS - Wordpress;
- search engine optimization SEO;
- color schemes, fonts and UI / UX principles;
- Responsive Design;
- work with Photoshop and Illustrator;
- digital advertising;
- distribution on social networks.

Target group: socially engaged LGBTI + young people (16-24 years old) who have interests in the field of activism and information technology, and in particular want to develop in the field of online activism.



# NEW PROJECTS

## **SOT. SCHOOL'S OUT**

This project, co-funded by the European Commission, deals with the problems LGBTI and gender non-conforming students face in schools in the 4 participant countries (Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Bulgaria), and aims at training teachers and guide schools on how to implement LGBTI and gender inclusive policies. Teachers play a vital part in working towards a safe school environment. Therefore, several European NGOs are specialized in teacher training courses that help schools to work towards a gender inclusive and LGBTI safe school environment. A lot of these courses are short sessions. Their impact in a school remains limited if there is no time for a decent follow up. This project aims to give a more structured and more evidenced based approach when guiding schools towards a more LGBTI inclusive school environment.

### Aim

- To increase knowledge of teachers on how to include LGBTI topics in classes and how to react to LGBTI bullying in school.
- To provide a more systematic and evidenced based approach on how schools can achieve an LGBTI inclusive school environment by developing the inclusive school cycle with a school inclusion scan.
- To create safer and more inclusive LGBTI schools where LGBTI students are more open to report harassment and bullying.

In the long run this will lead to better mental well-being of all students because there is more knowledge and there are more policies in place on how to work towards a safe and inclusive school environment for everyone

The project results will impact the different target groups of the project: LGBTI students, LGBTI teachers, Teachers, Schools, Policy makers, NGO's who focus on teacher, training partners



# NEW PROJECTS

## Activities

- Gathering data of good practices in Europe on LGBTI teacher trainings and inclusive school policies.
- Develop and test the inclusive school cycle program that includes a school inclusion scan. This scan will contain 2 questionnaires: one for students and one for teachers about present LGBTI or anti bullying policies, current good practices in the school and the overall inclusiveness.
- Develop 6 train the trainer (teacher training) courses and 2 guided meeting scripts on school policy. The 6 train the trainer courses will be developed based on the outcome of the first objective with special attention for transgender and intersex inclusive school policies
- Develop 2 e-learning courses
- Develop the inclusive school cycle toolkit. The inclusive school cycle toolkit is a toolkit where all the information is available on how to use the cycle in your own school or in your own NGO that does teacher training. This toolkit will include the school inclusion scan, a step by step script of the inclusive school cycle and information on the different teacher training courses.
- Test the inclusive school cycle program with the developed teacher training courses in 8 schools divided by 4 different European countries with different regional realities.
- Develop a poster campaign targeted at schools to stimulate them to work on a LGBTI inclusive school environment.
- Organize an international conference on LGBTI inclusive schools to disseminate the toolkit, the inclusive school cycle and the school inclusion scan to policy makers, teachers, LGBTI school activists, EU policymakers etc.



# NEW PROJECTS

## Duration

24 months (November 2020 - November 2022)

## Partners

Cavaria VZW (Belgium), ILGA Portugal (Portugal), Centro risorse LGBTI (Italy), Bilitis Foundation (Bulgaria), Università degli Studi di Brescia (Italy)



# STAFF DEVELOPMENT

## **STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

### **EXPANDING OUR TEAM**

Engaging our first two part-time employees in 2009, over the years Bilitis' team gradually expanded and we are proud that in 2020 we now have six full-time employees and over 30 permanent volunteers. The expert assistance of professional volunteers in various fields such as web design, online marketing, organizing sports events and others is one of the proofs of the institutional growth of Bilitis over the years. The Bilitis team consists of courageous activists working to empower the LGBTI community. Hardened in daily struggles for rights, which they also led as volunteers before taking a paid position in the organization, the members of our operational team Lilly Dragoeva, Pol Naidenov, Gloriya Filipova, Boryana Atanasova, Manuela Popova and Martina Georgieva are now among the most prominent leaders of the LGBTI movement in Bulgaria.