



2021

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

**BILITIS RESOURCE
CENTER FOUNDATION**

17 YEARS OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear friends,

The year that we are leaving behind has not been an easy one. From health challenges within the team to an unprecedented escalation of aggression towards the LGBTI community in Bulgaria, 2021 has put to a test our personal and professional resilience and strength. At the same time, the past year has been a year of solidarity, support and empowerment for us at Bilitis and for the LGBTI community in Bulgaria.

The reopening of the Rainbow Hub community center on June 1, which had to close down due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, was a big milestone to celebrate. But instead of joyful celebration, it was rather a much needed breath of fresh air - in the midst of an unparalleled coordinated attack on every single LGBTI event over the past two months and after a year of physical distancing. The fact that we could be together once again comforting each other's fears was a moment to remember. The resistance of the community has been tested once again and the response was unconditional - over 10 000 people joined the 14th edition of Sofia Pride on the 12 of June, stating firmly that no one should be afraid to be their true self.

With the passing of the second Parliamentary elections things have eased up, opening a space for creativity and community empowerment. Little did we know that the biggest challenge was still to come. The attack on the Rainbow Hub was the most shocking act of hatred towards the LGBTI community in recent years. And although it created fear, it also provoked rightful anger in the society - anger against injustice and against hatred. It also sparked a huge wave of love, support and compassion, and for that we are humbled and grateful.

And last but not least, I would like to thank my team who have once again proven their outstanding qualities in the most difficult of years. They have been fearless and determined, they have been a role model in the midst of a crisis. And they did it with compassion and kindness and with the firm belief that the time is always right to do the right thing. It is a privilege for me to be part of this team.

Sincerely,
Lilly Dragoeva
Executive Director

MISSION, VISION AND 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:

- Development, empowerment and support for the LGBTI community throughout the country.
- 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.
- Change in public attitudes and increasing the levels of acceptance of LGBTI people in Bulgarian society.
- 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.

2021 IN NUMBERS



COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

115 Community mobilizing events
721 Number of participants
30 Volunteers who supported us

TRAININGS

29 Conducted trainings
349 Number of participants

RESEARCH

33 Publications

2021 IN NUMBERS



ADVOCACY

12 Advocacy campaigns

9,326 Participants, supporters and allies

MEDIA APPEARANCES

100+ Mainstream media
appearances

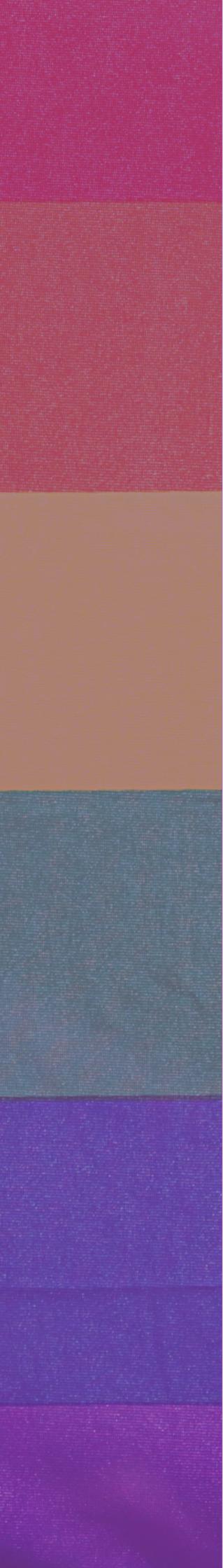
SOCIAL MEDIA

26 Facebook events

948 New Facebook likes

540,507 Facebook reach

59,202 Facebook engagement



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN MAKING THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN MAKING THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE



Although 2021 was proven quite challenging, it was also a year in which we furthered our work 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. Showing resilience & attracting support for the LGBTI community after the attack on the Rainbow Hub.

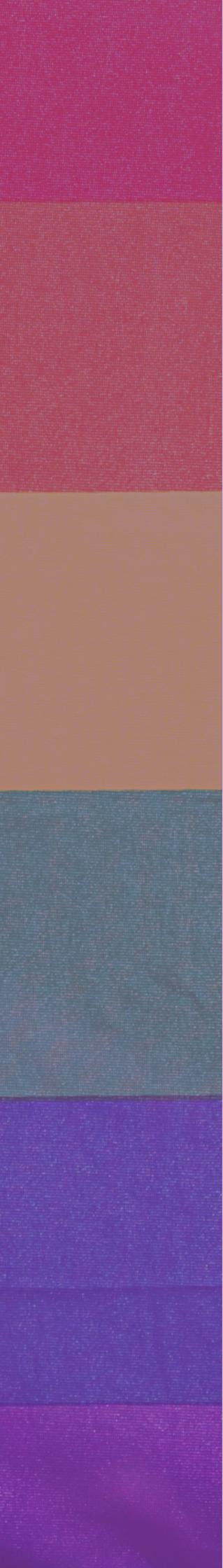
In the hours following the attack we managed to re-group and quickly mobilised much needed support - from engaging the media, through informing key international partners and institutions requesting their help, to organizing events of support. In the upcoming weeks we witnessed an unprecedented number of actions in solidarity with the LGBTI community, incl. a number of political statements of support condemning the attack from Bulgaria and across Europe, a worldwide media coverage and a record number of donations to aid the restoration of the Rainbow Hub. We are utterly grateful for the overwhelming support!

2. Strategizing & advancing the LGBTI movement in the country

2021 was the year in which we finalized a groundbreaking effort - drafting the first ever Strategic Framework of the Bulgarian LGBTI movement! Such a milestone document, giving an overview of the current context and outlining the 5 priorities around which the LGBTI movement and community have agreed upon, hadn't been created before. The Strategic Framework will from now on serve as a starting point to a more consolidated and well-organized LGBTI movement, including for various actors such as LGBTI NGOs but also non-formal groups and individual activists.

3. Dynamic work & new inspiring projects

We are delighted to announce that in 2021 we received core support from the Sigrid Rausing Trust, thus ensuring flexible and timely response to the quickly changing situation with regards to LGBTI rights in Bulgaria. In 2021 we also launched a new project led by Bilitis – Rainbow Hub Voice, funded by ILGA-Europe. We are also part of a number of inspiring national coalitions, which successfully launched the projects Community Voices, Children on Focus and Fair Play, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA. Bilitis partnered in a number of Erasmus+ projects offering opportunities to LGBTI youth to participate in international activities and training.



RESISTING SECURITY THREATS

RESISTING SECURITY THREATS



In May and June 2021, all Bulgarian LGBTI organizations and informal groups have experienced dangerous and unprecedented escalation of coordinated nationalist and populist actions and provocations, at a number of community events in three different cities in the country, incl. Sofia, Burgas and Plovdiv. Our office and LGBTI community center Rainbow Hub was vandalized on numerous occasions, and events have been attended by far-right provocateurs. The escalation was fuelled by the upcoming national elections on July 11, 2021, in preparation of which nationalist parties have been scapegoating the LGBTI community in an attempt to mobilize voters. In the context of increasing hostility towards LGBTI people in Bulgaria, a divisive and misleading debate around LGBTI people and their rights endured.

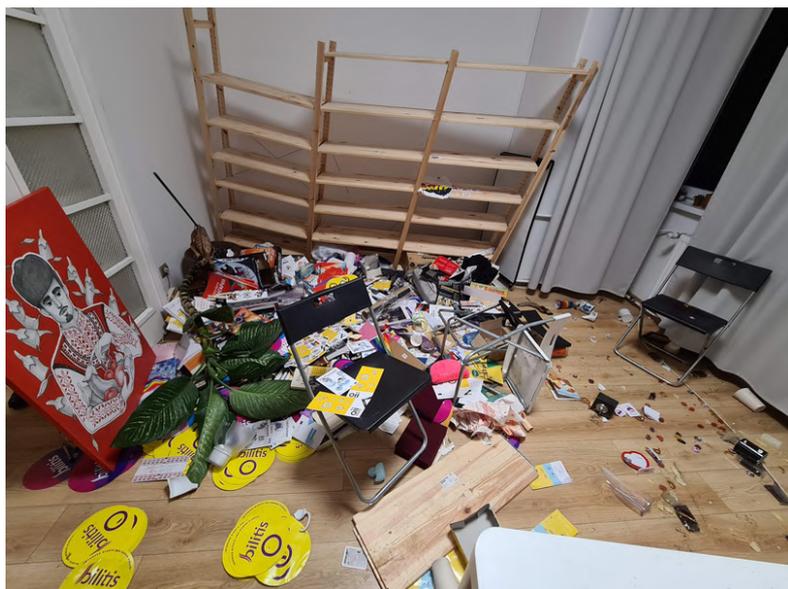


RESISTING SECURITY THREATS



In response to the organized attacks, all four LGBTI organizations joined efforts and with the support of ILGA-Europe, managed to provide physical security at all remaining events during the Pride month, increased the security at the Rainbow Hub and launched a national campaign “Vote with Love”. We are grateful to ILGA-Europe for their urgent and flexible support in a critical time for the safety of the community!

Unfortunately, the events around Sofia pride were not the only escalation of aggression towards the LGBTI community and the Rainbow Hub community center which is co-managed by Bilitis and GLAS foundations. In fact, the most shocking event took place towards the end of the year when the events from the spring have already been somewhat forgotten. On October 30th 2021, the nationalist leader and then presidential candidate Boyan Rasate led an attack on the Rainbow Hub along with around 10 others who stormed in during a trans community event. The mob destroyed property and vandalized the space, smashing equipment and furniture and physically hurt our project coordinator Gloriya Filipova.



RESISTING SECURITY THREATS



The case has generated unprecedented levels of political and media attention with major political parties firmly denouncing the attack (even actors who have historically been either silent or unsupportive to LGBTI rights). The attention also sparked a reaction of solidarity and support among influencers and civil society, as well as a strong community consolidation.

In the following days we organized a series of events, incl. a meeting with supportive Ambassadors who expressed their solidarity, a meeting initiated by the Prosecutor General where we discussed much needed amendments to the Criminal Code, and organized a protest demanding that the Prosecutor General lifted the immunity of Rasate. The “No Hate” protest held on November 1 was organized by Bilitis together with other LGBTI organization and collectives. Its aim was to stand up against the hateful attack and to ask for the removal of the political immunity of Boyan Rasate, who was running for President at the time. Over 1000 people gathered at the Palace of Justice in Sofia, where the Prosecutor General’s office is located. During the protest we received the news that the Prosecutor General asked the Central elections commission to remove the immunity of the attacker and by the end of the protest it was announced that the commission voted in favour of this request.



RESISTING SECURITY THREATS



In a matter of days, community members, allies and supporters from the general public denounced the attack and supported a fundraising effort to renovate the Rainbow Hub. Over 30 000 leva have been raised just 5 days after the attack making it the biggest wave of support and solidarity with the LGBTI community! There has not been a similar positive response to an LGBTI-related incident and this brings hope. We are extremely humbled and grateful to everyone who supported us!

In addition to the individual support we have received, three donor organizations also expressed their solidarity and support by providing urgent funding for the restoration of the Rainbow Hub. ILGA-Europe supported mental health and wellbeing efforts along with urgent legal aid for the victims of the attack. The Bulgarian Fund for Women funded urgent restoration needs and replacement of broken equipment and furniture. Front Line Defenders ensured better security for the Rainbow Hub and the LGBTI community. A huge thank you for offering help in a time of great need!

Sadly, towards the end of the year we got the news that the neighbours in the building have signed a petition for the eviction of the Rainbow Hub. Thankfully, our partners from the Organization of the Bulgarian Jews “Shalom” have been kind enough to host us until together with GLAS Foundation we find another home for the Rainbow Hub. We remain determined despite all challenges to re-open the Rainbow Hub which is the only safe space for the LGBTI community in Sofia!



RESISTING SECURITY THREATS



Svobodna Evropa



BTV Radio



BTV News



Nova TV



BG OnAir



COVID-19 RESPONSE

COVID-19 RESPONSE



Humanitarian Fund

In February 2021 Bilitis launched an LGBTI Humanitarian Fund aiming to provide humanitarian support to the LGBTI people in Bulgaria who are severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is our direct response to the rising challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic which have affected the LGBTI communities in Bulgaria disproportionately. So far the Fund supported 18 LGBTI people with a total amount of 5400 BGN.

The Fund provides humanitarian support in the form of food and medicine coupons, as well as funds for housing costs for LGBTI people in need. Every LGBTI person who is in need to cover their basic needs of food, housing and medicine is free to apply for support. Their applications are being assessed by a committee of two representatives of Bilitis Foundation and one external expert from another LGBTI organization. All procedures of the Fund are set in its Regulations, available on Bilitis' [website](#). The Fund prioritizes applications by lesbian and bisexual women, trans and intersex people, as well as LGBTI youth, elderly LGBTI people and LGBTI people who belong to other vulnerable groups, based on ethnicity, religion, disability or other.

In order to sustain the Humanitarian Fund and support more LGBTI people in need, we continue our fundraising efforts. Donations are being collected [here](#) all year round.

Activist Academy

In June Bilitis organized an in-person Activist academy for young LGBTI people on how to be active and support the community during the pandemic. Within 3 days the 8 participants were trained in different activist tools and were given the opportunity to come up with follow up activities for supporting the community during the pandemic. The Academy was funded by the Global Resilience Fund with the aim to support active people from our two community groups BraveLab and QueerFemme.



KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS

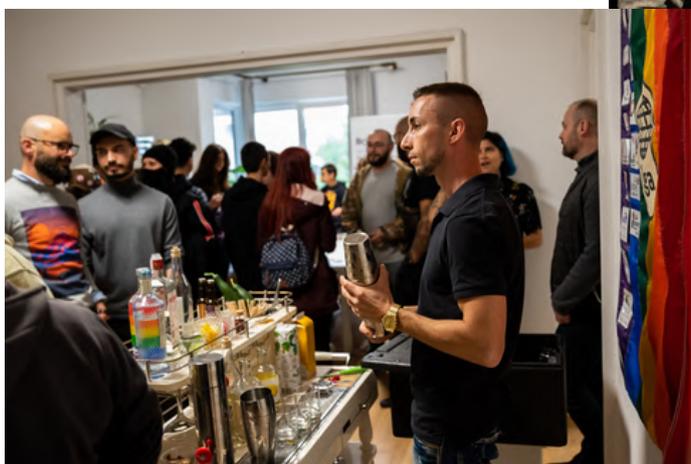
KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



Re-Opening of the Rainbow Hub

The only LGBTI community center - the Rainbow Hub - which Bilitis co-manages jointly with the GLAS Foundation, was closed in April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We started 2021 with the hope that we will be physically together again and in the first half of the year we made our dream come true - Rainbow Hub opened its doors once again, a year after the beginning of pandemic! The LGBTI community once again had a safe space to call home. The grand opening was on June 1, to kick-off the Pride month celebrations.

The Rainbow Hub was reopened with the financial support of the Bulgarian Fund for Women who understood best the importance of having a safe space for the LGBTI community in Sofia. We are extremely grateful for their ongoing partnership and support!



KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



Sofia Pride 2021

The theme for this year's edition of Sofia Pride was "Together Again". After a year full of challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and a digital Pride in 2020, it was much needed for the LGBTI community and their allies to once again come together to protest and to celebrate. Family and its importance was central to this year's Sofia Pride campaign - from coming out in front of parents and loved ones, to starting their own families that are as diverse as the community itself. Bulgaria remains one of the six countries in the European Union that have not provided any legal regulation for same-sex families. [Here](#) you can hear several queer people and friends of Sofia Pride sharing their coming out stories because we believe that acceptance comes with being your true self.

On Friday, June 11, the day before Sofia Pride, together with our partners from AllOut, the Organizing Committee of Sofia Pride made a projection on the building of the Bulgarian Parliament. The action was a call to the institutions not to ignore the increased hatred and attacks on the LGBTI community over the several weeks prior to the Pride Day. In addition to lighting the building in the rainbow colors, the message "United we stand strong. Hatred makes us weak" was projected on the façade. Before the projection, a petition signed by almost 18,000 All Out members from around the world was submitted to the Minister of Interior Boyko Rashkov urging him to ensure the safety of Sofia Pride and to publicly condemn all acts of violence, especially by members of the government or public authorities.



KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



This year's Sofia Pride received the biggest support coming from political figures to this day. In the weeks leading up to the Parliamentary elections in April, the Sofia Pride Organizing Committee prepared a declaration to engage the candidates for MPs with a promise to the LGBTI voters that they will work for visibility and in defense of the interests of the LGBTI people in Bulgaria. A total of 17 MP candidates signed the declaration.

Following the tradition, the Pride Day on June 12 offered a real festival atmosphere to all its guests! From 4 pm until the beginning of the street March at 7.30 pm at the gathering point in front of the Monument of the Soviet Army, the record 10 000 participants were offered a variety of attractions to attend – information booths with materials and merchandise of the LGBTI organizations and partners, beverages, limited edition products of the businesses who support Pride and various other attractions. A number of companies and businesses also attended Pride with their own stands. For the first time on the stage of Sofia Pride we saw the famous Bulgarian singers Desi Slava and Rushi, as well as the Bulgarian participant of Eurovision Song Contest 2021 Viktoria Georgieva. The surprises in the music program did not end there. The North Macedonian participant at Eurovision - Vasil Garvanliev, who shortly before the song contest revealed that he is gay and caused controversy in his country, came to Sofia to participate in the Pride concert. Sofia Pride was again supported by Mihaela Fileva and Ivo Dimchev, as well as Ruth Koleva, Mila Robert and Preyah. The three singers also had a special surprise for their fans - a tribute to the famous girls band Destiny's Child and their song I'm a Survivor.

The start of the Pride march was given by an amazing a cappella performance of the Bulgarian national anthem by Ruth Koleva. The end of the Pride march was in no way less spectacular as a beautiful rainbow followed the participants all the way from the "Triangle of Power" (the square enclosed by the buildings of the Council of Ministers, the Presidency and one of the buildings of the National Assembly) through the Parliament building to the end point.

Here you can see the full live streaming ([part 1](#) and [part 2](#)) and [pictures](#) from Sofia Pride 2021.

KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



Sofia Pride Sports 2021

A total of 5 events have been organized in person in 2021 engaging in direct sports actions over 100 participants. On May 9, a group of 25 runners who formed the Sofia Pride team took part in the Wings for Life World Run, supporting spinal cord research and helping to find a cure for spinal cord injury. The idea behind it was by running in branded Sofia Pride T-shirts to show solidarity between different social groups and showcase that LGBTI people also support other causes. The team ran a total of 160 km and raised 254 euros. The team ranked 1174th out of 5752 teams that took part in 195 countries!



On June 6, the first table tennis tournament was organized as part of the Sofia Pride Sports program. A total of 14 participants took part in the tournament, enjoying fun times in a half day of table tennis. The winners received medals and goodies. Following the tradition, a holistic health seminar was organized, gathering 9 people on June 9 who engaged in a lively conversation around healthy habits, wellbeing and how to find work-life balance. Again, keeping up with the tradition from previous editions, on June 25 a mobility class was organized gathering some 15 participants, most of whom decided to join the class after attending the previous Sofia Pride Sports events.

KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



A group of sports enthusiasts is being built. The last event of this year's program was also the most awaited one - the Women's Football Tournament! 8 teams and another 5 individual players have signed up for the tournament, enjoying the game and the good weather. The three winning teams received medals and all participating teams got their small souvenirs from the event.



KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



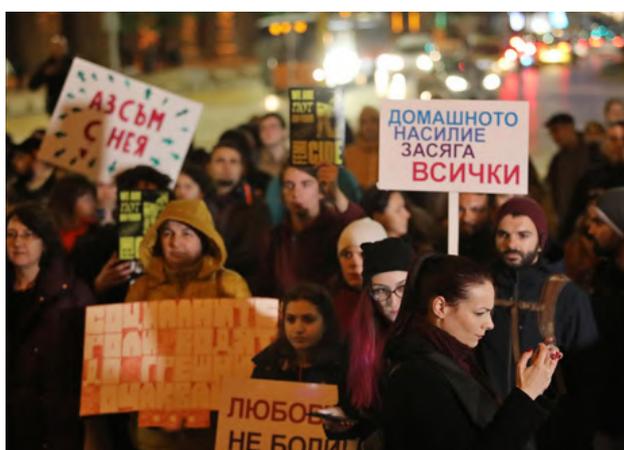
Protests and marches

Women's Rights March

Bilitis had the role of a fiscal grantee for the Women's Rights March, funded by the Bulgarian Fun for Women and supported the organization of the march with administrative support. Bilitis' team member Gloriya Filipova held a speech at the beginning of the march, addressing the importance of fighting for the rights of lesbian, bisexual and trans women. The march is organized by the non-formal collective Feminist Mobilization, which Bilitis is part of.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against women

On the 25th of November Bilitis supported and participated in the annual Women's rights March. Gloriya Filipova held speech at the protest, addressing the importance of intersectionality and including lesbian, bisexual and trans women in the fight against violence against women. The protest is organized by the non-formal collective Feminist Mobilization, which Bilitis is part of.



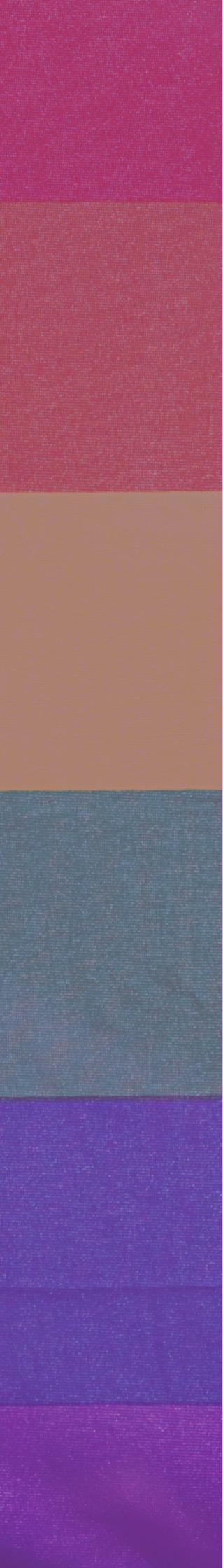
KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



Action in solidarity with the Hungarian LGBTI community

On 24th of August Bilitis organized Action in solidarity with the Hungarian LGBTI community around the plans of the Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban to launch a national referendum on a legislation forbidding any material that may be viewed by minors, which includes gay characters, or any support for the LGBTI community. The event in Sofia was held in front of the Hungarian embassy and gathered around 50 protesters. The action was part of All Out's international initiative to show solidarity with the Hungarian LGBTI people.





COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING



In October 2021, the “On the Brink of Acceptance: Fighting Discrimination By Strategizing and Empowerment for the LGBTI Community in Bulgaria” (BrinkItOn) project, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), came to an end. The BrinkItOn project was the first EU-funded project coordinated by Bilitis and our team is very proud of its results.

The project was designed in a broader context aimed at consolidating efforts and laying the grounds for the development of the LGBTI movement in Bulgaria. It successfully fulfilled its purpose to serve as a basis for upscaling the national alliance of the three LGBTI organizations – Bilitis, GLAS and Deystvie, and to lay the grounds for current and future activists’ and organizations’ work.

The most significant impact of the project is the legacy it leaves for future generations of LGBTI activists. Along with a number of community meetings held in 2021, the first ever Bulgarian LGBTI Movement Strategic Framework and its Action Plan have been elaborated by Bilitis and as a joint effort of nearly 500 LGBTI people who have been consulted in the process. This is not only a milestone for the BrinkItOn project but also a milestone for the entire LGBTI movement in Bulgaria. Such a document, giving an overview of the current context and outlining priorities, hadn’t been created before, neither from civil society actors, nor from institutions. In the absence of political will to improve the situation of LGBTI people, the Strategic Framework will from now on serve as a starting point to a more consolidated and well-organized LGBTI movement, including for various actors such as LGBTI NGOs but also non-formal groups and individual activists. The Strategic Framework indicates a direction for the future work and the Action Plan already provides concrete steps that different actors will take in the next 5 years to start the implementation of the strategy. These two documents are a cornerstone for the development of the LGBTI movement in Bulgaria and are the greatest legacy of the BrinkItOn project.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING



The Final Conference organized by Bilitis on October 1 is another activity with a greater impact, especially on political actors. With historical participation of active Bulgarian MPs and MEPs, the Conference laid the grounds for an in-depth political dialogue with representatives from different political parties. The first part of the conference discussed the Bulgarian LGBTI Strategic framework and what are the priorities that the movement needs to focus on in the upcoming 5 years, and the second part of the conference dove deeper into one of the set priorities - ensuring the rights of same-sex families in Bulgaria. A total of 18 speakers and moderators participated in the 4 panels of the conference, among which two MEPs - Petar Vitanov and Terry Reintke, and two Bulgarian MPs - Borislav Sandov and Nikolay Hadjigenov. It is the first conference on LGBTI in Bulgaria which has such a high political presence. The event was fully accessible to audiences from Bulgaria and international guests who use English language thanks to the English-Bulgarian and vice-a-versa simultaneous interpretation. Furthermore, the conversation was fully translated into Sign language making it accessible to the deaf community. [The full 8-hour recording from the conference is available here.](#)



COMMUNITY ORGANIZING



In 2021, Bilitis continued its work under the “Rainbow Hub” project, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA. Its main goal is to increase the capacity and mobilize the LGBTI community for advocacy actions by supporting 7 community groups at the Rainbow Hub community center. Three of the groups - BraveLab for young LGBTI people aged 14-29, QueerFemme for LGBTI women and non-binary people, and TIA for trans and intersex people, are supported and facilitated by Bilitis’ team. In 2021, a total of 72 meetings of the groups were held bringing together 77 participants in a hybrid format. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, all group meetings have been organized either entirely online or in a hybrid format. This ensured a safe environment for the group members while at the same time provided accessibility to all participants from across the country and abroad.

In 2021, all three groups focused on developing their own advocacy campaigns, and invested their time in coming up with creative approaches to the advocacy needs they have identified. All three groups will launch their advocacy campaigns in early 2022.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZING



In April 2021, Bilitis launched a new project called “Building leadership in the trans community to counter anti-trans narratives in Bulgaria”, funded by ILGA-Europe. The aim of the project was to attract, train and empower new trans activists in order to create a campaign giving a face and a voice to the trans community in Bulgaria and address the anti-trans narratives spreading around the country in recent years. Bilitis attracted two trans coordinators who started the new group for young trans activists called TransMission. The group underwent three capacity building trainings: media training, legal training and mental wellbeing training. Following the trainings, TransMission launched its own social media campaign, including the video “Trans, but before all a person” and a series of photographs with empowering messages called “Live your own truth” that will turn into an exhibition in 2022. This was a milestone for the trans community, because for the first time in Bulgaria such a campaign was created for trans people by trans people, sharing the stories and multiplying the voices of the trans community.



АЗ СЪМ ТРАНС ЧОВЕК. ЗДРАВЕЙ!



EDUCATION

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EDUCATION



The “**Promoting SCHOOl Environments InClusive of Diversity based on SOGI**” (CHOICE) project, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), was launched in 2020 and is aiming to prevent all kinds of intolerance and discrimination in schools, as well as the resulting violence and abuse.

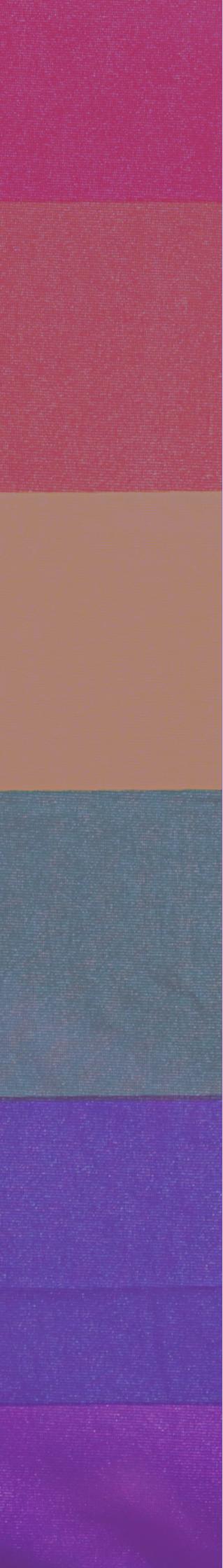
The [Live Without Bullying platform](#) offers free of charge anonymous support from trained psychologists to young people and teenagers, victims of bullying at school, as well as their parents and teachers. The chat-based platform connects victims of online bullying with psychologists and psychotherapists.

In 2021, more than 250 young people registered on the platform and started anti-bullying chats with our volunteer psychologists. Furthermore, more than 50 teachers/parents joined the platform and asked for advice.

As part of the project activities, 20 teachers and 10 parents from Varna participated in a training on creating a safe school environment for all children. The second face-to face training is planned for the beginning of 2022 in Stara Zagora. Additionally, 13 teachers from different towns participated in an online training.

The “**School's OUT**” (SOT) project, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), deals with the problems LGBTI and gender non-conforming students face in schools, by training teachers and guiding schools on how to implement LGBTI and gender inclusive policies.

In January, Bilitis conducted a desk research, including a review of already existing research and collection of secondary data on the structure of the Bulgarian school system, the situation of LGBTI students, the situation of LGBTI people in Bulgaria, the national legal framework on hate crime, hate speech, discrimination and bullying and good practices in the field of education. Following the desk research, Bilitis conducted a field research among school staff and parents, which included a total of 6 interviews with stakeholders aiming to map the challenges and good practices in the field of education, related to the LGBTI students. The report from the research can be found at the [School’s Out project website](#), created by Bilitis.



HEALTH

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The “**Open Doors: Promoting Inclusive and Competent Health Care for LGBTI People**” (OpenDoors) project, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), helped reducing discrimination against LGBTI people in the field of health, increased the number of health professionals providing inclusive and competent health care for LGBTI people in Bulgaria, raised awareness among health professionals on the needs of the LGBTI community, and raised awareness in the LGBTI community on discrimination in healthcare. Last but not least, the project fostered cooperation between LGBTI NGOs, professional organizations and medical universities. Bilitis conducted needs assessment research among health care professionals and decision-makers and developed a national research report. We translated into Bulgarian and published a short guide for health care professionals (500 copies) and a Handbook for e-use.

The project also included trainings for medical students and in-service trainings for practicing health professionals. Bilitis contributed to the development of an e-learning course by developing the module on trans and intersex health. The project also included an online awareness raising campaign via videos and an international conference.

Type and number of persons benefiting from the project

- Health care professionals and students at medical universities: 15 health workers and 30 medical students were trained in 2021

The training materials for health professionals and students at medical universities will be accessible as free open resources for long term use.



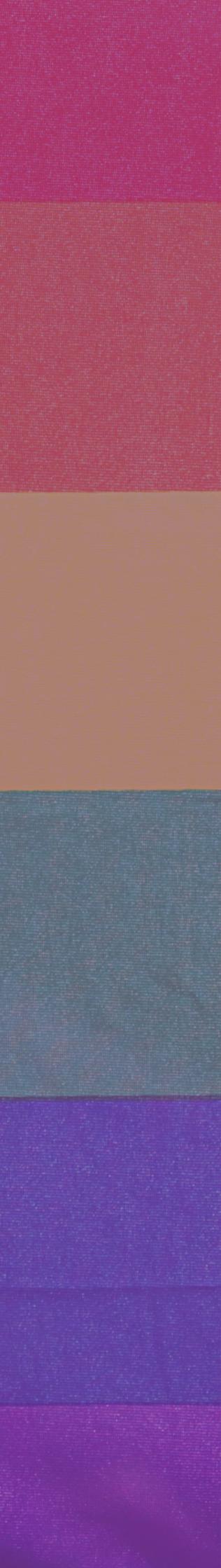
The “**Building professional capacity to combat discrimination against and better meet the needs of Intersex Persons**” (Bring-In) project, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), is a ground-breaking initiative aimed at making Intersex people more visible by targeting the social and healthcare sector, where existing knowledge and awareness about Intersex equality is very limited. The overall objective was to promote Intersex equality in Greece, Hungary, UK and Bulgaria by educating social and healthcare professionals on how to recognize, prevent and combat Intersex discrimination, while raising public awareness and advocating for the need to act upon the human rights violations Intersex people face.

As part of the project, Bilitis developed a transnational research report on the existing needs and challenges of intersex people in the 4 participating countries (by analyzing and summarizing findings from national researches conducted within the project, incl. [national report for Bulgaria](#)). The research results were used as the basis for developing a policy brief that can be used by all partners after adaptation to their national contexts. Bilitis promoted the policy brief at the national and the EU level in a total of 22 meetings with MEPs and EU-level international organizations.

Bilitis was also responsible for the development of an [Online Learning Resources Guide](#) on intersex equality that includes references to useful resources for health and social workers as well as parents of intersex children.

Bilitis conducted one training of health and social service professionals in Varna in November 2021 (including 2 groups: group 1 - 17 social workers, and group 2 - 15 health workers) and another one is planned for February 2022 in Stara Zagora.

Last but not least, Bilitis implemented a dedicated awareness raising campaign, targeting professionals, policy makers and the public about intersex equality and the human rights violations that intersex people face. An [information day](#) on the occasion of Intersex Awareness Day with a thematic movie screening and a discussion has been organized.



HATE CRIMES AND HATE SPEECH

HATE CRIMES AND HATE SPEECH



The “**Enhancing the capacity of public and private actors to provide support to victims of anti-LGBTI hate crimes in Bulgaria**” (Rainbow over hate) project, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), was dedicated on the topic of homophobic and transphobic hate crimes. In 2021, Bilitis organized four regional and one national trainings for victim support service providers on working with victims of anti-LGBTI hate crimes. A total of 72 participants joined the trainings, most of them social workers, psychologists and health mediators.

The aim of the trainings was to equip the professionals with skills and knowledge on supporting victims of anti-LGBTI hate crimes and the program included theoretical and practical aspects. It covered general information on hate crimes: definitions, legislation, barriers for reporting and addressing underreporting and the influence hate crimes have on the victim’s mental health and personal life. It also provided main information about the LGBTI community, such as terminology, the obstacles LGBTI people face in Bulgaria and the specifics of working with victims of anti-LGBTI hate crimes.

Within the Rainbow over hate project Bilitis launched a petition, urging the Bulgarian authorities to criminalize anti-LGBTI hate crimes. The petition was published at the online platform All Out and gathered 8181 signatures. On October 19th Bilitis filed the petition at the Ministry of Justice and is now following up on the developments.

The “**Enhancing the legal protection of LGBTI people in Bulgaria**” (Rainbow Shield) project, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), aimed to improve the legal protection of LGBTI people in Bulgaria with a focus on awareness raising and empowerment among LGBTI community members. Following up on a series of activist trainings in 2020, in 2021 we supported the newly established activists in organizing events in their hometowns across Bulgaria, addressing the topics of LGBTI rights. Over 150 LGBTI people participated in the events in Sofia, Bankya, Burgas, Varna and Plovdiv. The 10 events aimed to raise the awareness of the participants on anti-LGBTI discrimination and hate crimes and what are their rights as LGBTI people in Bulgaria. The events took different forms, in order to respond to the local needs of the community and to be attractive enough to gather participants. The events were a milestone for the LGBTI community outside of the capital, because in most places there are rarely LGBTI events and when there are, they’re organized by the LGBTI organizations and not by the local community.

HATE CRIMES AND HATE SPEECH



The activists from Sofia organized 4 events: a Workshop on LGBTI rights aiming to inform other community members on their rights as LGBTI people in Bulgaria; a Protest in Solidarity with the Hungarian LGBTI community around the Hungarian “gay propaganda” legislation; a Workshop on the topic of safe sex; and a Discussion on LGBTI rights and feminism and how to be allies against anti-gender attacks. The activists in Varna organized 3 events: a Quiz night that addressed topics of LGBTI rights, history and culture; a Movie night showing short LGBTI movies and discussion; and a Board Games night focusing on teambuilding among the community. An activist in Plovdiv organized a Discussion on LGBTI rights and the state of the community in Plovdiv. An activist in Bankya organized a Workshop on how to recognize and report anti-LGBTI discrimination and hate crimes. An activist in Burgas organized a Workshop on creating posters for the first ever Burgas Pride.

The Rainbow shield project also included outreach activities for the trans community which included 6 trans community events and the development of a user-friendly leaflet on legal gender recognition. The 6 trans events gathered over 50 participants. Two of them were organized online, two in person and two were organized in a hybrid way – some participants were gathered in person and some joined online.

The events aimed to gather trans people from across Bulgaria and to provide them with a platform to meet and share information on important for the trans community topics, such as legal gender recognition and mental wellbeing. The events also gave the opportunity for the participants to share personal experience, exchange good practices and support each other. For two of the events we invited the legal experts Radoslav Stoyanov from the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and Denitsa Lubenova from Youth LGBT Organization "Deystvie" in order to give more clarity about the legal situation of legal gender recognition and to discuss an important court case on this topic, which was about to set new rules for LGR.

The main challenge around organizing the 6 trans community events was the security. Due to security concerns the participants for the first 5 events were gathered via posts in private trans groups and personal invitations. Unfortunately, the only event that was publicly announced via Facebook event on Bilitis Foundation’s page was attacked by a group of nationalist which destroyed the community center Rainbow Hub where the event was taking place and hit one person.

The leaflet Trans in BG (guide) was created by Bilitis in collaboration with Youth LGBT Organizations Deystvie and in 10 pages provides information on LGR, as well as information on the available services and resources for trans people in Bulgaria.

HATE CRIMES AND HATE SPEECH



The “**Protecting and defending the rights of victims of anti-LGBT hate crimes: Innovative paths through restorative justice**” (Let’sGoByTalking) project, funded by the European Union’s Justice Programme (2014-2020), takes an innovative approach in addressing anti-LGBTI hate crimes via restorative justice (RJ) practices. In 2021, Bilitis organized a series of educational events on the topic. In February we organized a workshop with 19 participants (LGBTI activists and RJ professionals) on addressing anti-LGBTI hate crimes via RJ practices and giving the opportunity for networking on the topic. After the workshop and based on research conducted in 2021, a blended learning methodology was developed by the project partners and implemented in each country. The b-learning consists of two online modules, giving basic information on the LGBTI community and hate crimes and restorative justice and a third module conducted in person where the possibilities of implementing RJ in anti-LGBTI hate crimes cases are addressed. Twelve participants joined the Bulgarian training. Following up on the training, Bilitis organized a training of trainers with 6 participants, again RJ professionals and LGBTI activists on implementing the b-learning. Two resources were developed and translated in Bulgarian on the topic of restorative justice and anti-LGBTI hate crimes: the booklets Promising strategies of restorative justice in anti-LGBT hate crime cases and Repairing the harm of anti-LGBT hate crimes

The “**Building a national movement against hate speech that triggers Antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance**” (Not Just Words) project, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), aims to enhance collaboration among communities, affected by hate speech, and create a national movement of allies that prevents and combats Antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. In 2021, Bilitis and the Organization of Jews in Bulgaria “Shalom” organized 3 trainings for LGBTI and Jewish youth in Plovdiv, Varna and Ruse. The trainings aimed to build bridges between the young people from the two communities and to inform them on how to recognize and report discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes. The trainings also gave a platform to the participants to discuss and find ways to combat hate speech by organizing initiatives together. In 2022, another two trainings are planned to take place.

HATE CRIMES AND HATE SPEECH



Within the **“Youth Theatre against Hate Network Development”** project, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA, Bilitis and three partners organizations - Association “Debyut”, Association for Strategic Management “Delphi” and community center “Hristo Smirnenski”, published the “Theatrical etudes against hatred” practical handbook. The handbook presents the “theater against hatred” methodology which includes a multi-layered approach that combines elements of different approaches to work in the field of non-formal education: forum theatre, impro theatre and guided discussion. The handbook also includes 12 cases of conflict situations related to vulnerable groups (3 cases, related to LGBTI people, 3 to Roma people, 3 to migrants and refugees and 3 to people with addictions) that teachers, trainers and social workers can use with groups of youngsters to develop etudes. The aim is to open discussion and break the stereotypes towards mentioned vulnerable groups. In 2022, a total of three network meetings will be organized by Bilitis to disseminate the practical handbook among relevant stakeholders.

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RAINBOW FAMILIES

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RAINBOW FAMILIES



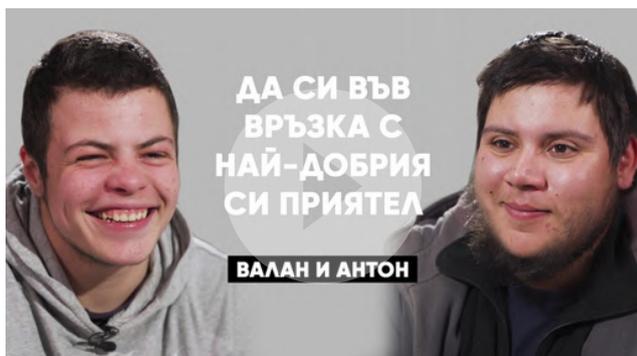
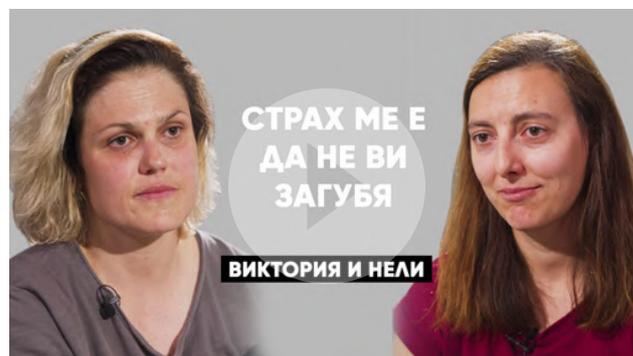
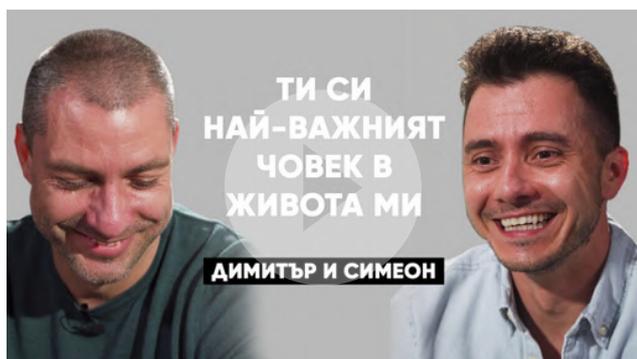
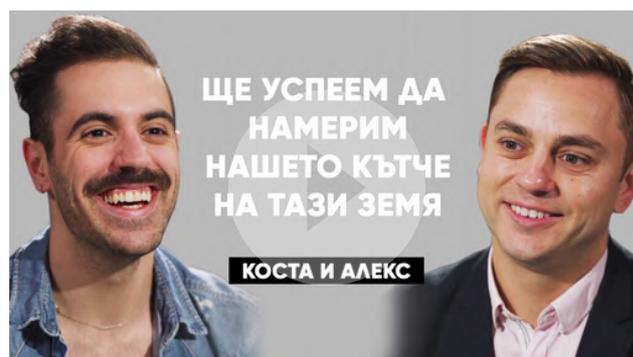
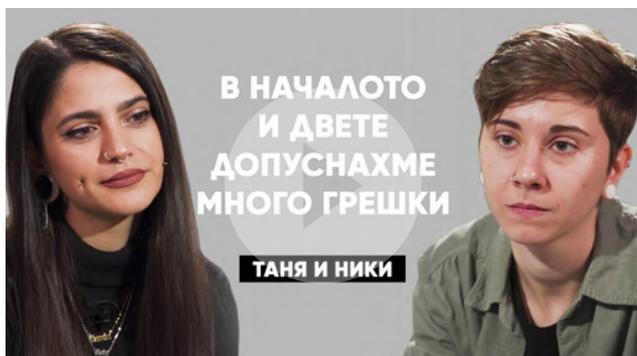
The “**Raising awareness for Inclusive Societies to Embrace rainbow families in Europe**” (R.I.S.E) project, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), has emerged from partners' drive to challenge de-facto recognition of LGBT families' rights in Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia through promoting diversity and improving social acceptance of LGBT families, and to ensure the full enjoyment of right to respect for family life and freedom of movement within the EU of LGBT citizens, by increasing civic understanding on consequences of existing national legislation in socio-economic conditions and quality of life of same sex couples.

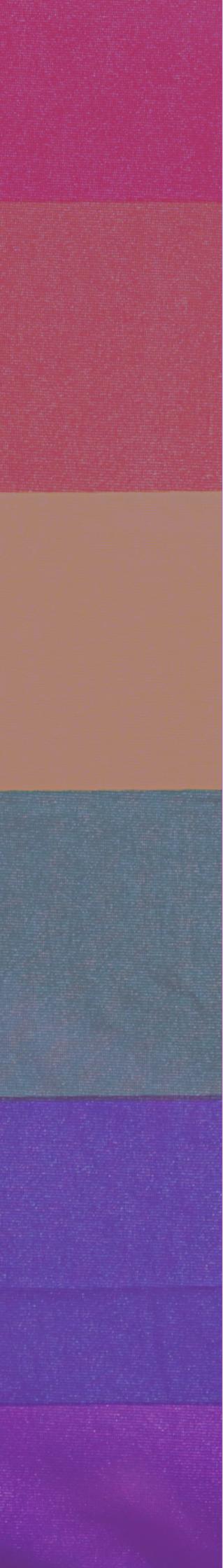
The following activities were implemented in Bulgaria:

- Positive Role Model campaign: The Positive Role Model Campaign was designed as an intensive awareness raising campaign combining online media and offline community events to portray a more positive image and grow public support for LGBT families / Rainbow families. We created and published 5 videos, plus one additional campaign trailer, using the hashtag #FamilyForAll. The campaign consisted of five emotional conversation videos of rainbow families. The videos got more than 100,000 views, which made them one of our most successful online campaigns.
- Development of the "Daily Life Challenges" Assessment of same-sex families in LT, LV, PL, RO, BG and SK - the report was published in Bulgarian language at our website.
- The Policy Recommendation Paper developed within the project was disseminated in face-to-face meetings with Bulgarian politicians and MEPs and a commitment for collaboration in our future work for family equality in Bulgaria was achieved.

The project outcome is an increased awareness on non-discriminatory portrayal of LGBT families among general population; Improved knowledge of government stakeholders on quality of life of LGBT families;
Strengthened LGBT people on right to respect for family life and free movement for LGBTI families; Increased support from LGBTI community and allies on same-sex couple issues.

RAINBOW FAMILIES





INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

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INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE



The “**Workplace well-being and risk assessment for LGBTI employees**” (**Prevent**) project, funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), deals with the wellbeing and discrimination of employees that are LGBTI. Most people, including LGBTI people, spend quite a lot of their adult life at the workplace. The European Union issued legislation to ensure that workers’ health and safety is taken care of. In the Directive on health and safety in the workplace, health is seen as a broad concept that includes stress and well-being related to specific risks. Research has shown that LGBTI people face specific risks in the workplace such as discrimination and intolerance that influence their well-being. These risks are related to their sexual and gender identity.

There already have been some developments in recent years on diversity and inclusion of LGBTI people in the workplace. There is however an aspect clearly missing. Up until now diversity management in the workplace has been a voluntary act, mainly taken up by large multinationals or governmental organizations. However, if you take the approach of safety and health at work as it has been taken up in European legislation and you recognize that LGBTI people are a group at specific risks, it is necessary for every employer to take this issue seriously.

And so there is a clear need for:

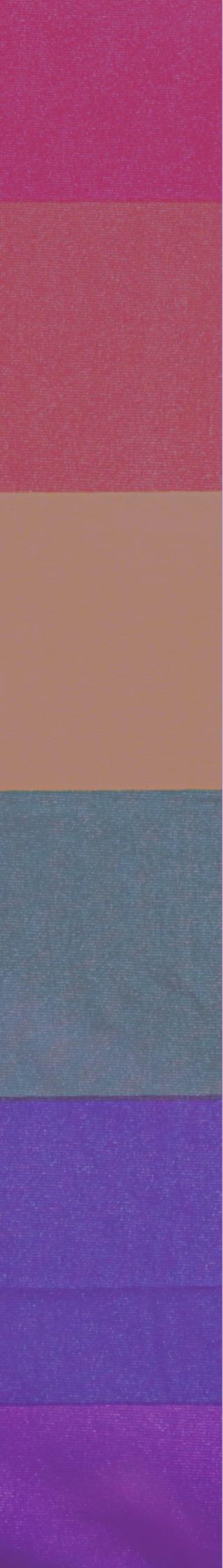
- Tackling discrimination and health risks for employees that are LGBTI.
 - Awareness raising of employers on the Council Directive 89/391/EEC, Safety and Health and diversity management benefits and business risks related to the mental health and well-being of employees.
 - Instruments that assist employers and prevention workers in assessing the risks for the well-being of LGBTI employees and implementing the directive on Safety and Health.
 - A toolbox customized specifically for employers and prevention workers identifying and collecting best practices on preventing risks by creating inclusive workplaces.
- In the long run this will contribute to the well-being and inclusion of LGBTI people in the workplace.

INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE



Bilitis was responsible for conducting a national-level research of good practice in the workplace inclusion of LGBTI people and developed a national report. The latter was used as background information when developing the main tools for employers, which the project consortium produced. These tools are available now in Bulgarian language at the website of Bilitis, along with the three e-learning modules (module 1, module 2 and module 3) and the organizational scan. Bilitis was also responsible for the organizing and delivery of training for employers in two cities of Bulgaria, as well as for direct outreach to companies to present the tools developed within the project.

We organized one national-level online Diversity and Inclusion Forum that attracted 139 participants. We also organized two half-day information seminars for employers in two main industrial cities of Bulgaria: Stara Zagora and Varna. Each seminar attracted more than 30 participants. The total number of employers who were directly involved in the outreach seminars is 205. The participants came mostly from the business sector, but there were also some leaders of NGOs. In addition, we organized some face-to-face meetings with companies and associations of employers, both physical and online – 11 such meetings were held. Raising the awareness of employers and business partners from towns beyond the capital was a special priority of our outreach activities. In this way, we contributed to bridging the gap between large companies following international standards and local SMEs, which do not have access to training on the topic of LGBTI inclusion.



ARTIVISM

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ARTIVISM



The project **"Innovation and the Arts: Towards the Inclusion of LGBT+ People"** funded by the Erasmus+ Programme creates a partnership between LGBT+ organizations in Central and Southeast Europe. The aim of the project is to connect these organizations in order to share experiences and strengthen capacities in the field of inclusion of LGBT+ people in society, primarily through innovative practices in civic engagement and the use of art as a means of communication with the public. The main goal of the project is to increase the competencies of employees, collaborators and volunteers of LGBT+ organizations that work in the field of education and awareness raising and focus on working with youth and young adults. The project partnership also directly includes three art companies that represent different genres of contemporary independent art.

Together with the drag collective Queer Vartelezhka we organised four workshops on drag performance, art and activism, and one artistic event. The workshops showed more than 25 participants how to create their own drag persona, makeup and performance. At the end of the workshops we organised drag show where all the participants had the chance to perform in front of live audience.



ARTIVISM



Bilitis gave the opportunity to 4 young people to participate in the Erasmus+ project **“YOUTH in ACTivism: The Camp”**. The idea behind the project was to bring together LGBTI youth and allies, in a shared space, where they can explore and experience different forms of activism. The participants were able to exchange on LGBT+ related issues of their choice, the basics and issues that matter to them, understand the form of activism that fits them the best, what does activism means to them, become inspired by themselves and their peers and more. After the Camp they had the opportunity to develop their own local initiatives.

Two Bilitis volunteers participated in a training in Slovakia, organized within the Erasmus+ project **“Rainbow audio-visual literacy for youth organizations”**. The training provided the participants with skills and information on the basics of audio-visual storytelling. Two follow up trainings will be conducted in 2022 and the trainees will have the opportunity to expand their knowledge and to work on their own projects in the field of storytelling.





AWARDS

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AWARDS

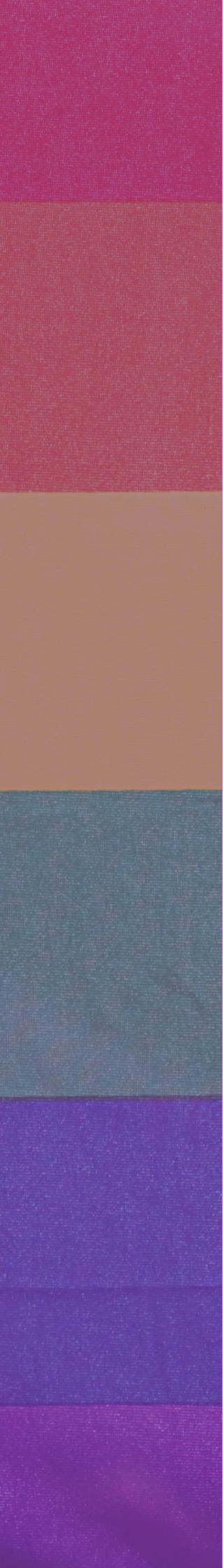


On September 12, 2021, Bilitis together with GLAS foundation received the prestigious Shofar Award for counteracting hate speech in Bulgarian society. We are deeply grateful to the Organisation of Jews in Bulgaria “Shalom” for the recognition of our work!



Gloriya Filipova and Manuela Popova from Bilitis Foundation and the Rainbow Hub received the runner-up awards in the Human of the Year 2021 Awards of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee for their outstanding contributions to the development of the LGBTI community in Bulgaria and the protection of human rights. The ceremony as always was held on December 10, the International Human Rights Day. We are deeply grateful to the jury for recognizing the resilience and strength that our colleagues have shown!





NEW PROJECTS

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NEW PROJECTS



Rainbow Hub Voice

Aim: The aim of the project is to scale up the media skills and competences of experienced and new LGBTI activists in Bulgaria through a multi-faceted approach. It falls strictly within the priorities of the call and is a very timely initiative that will support a much needed work on combating the anti-gender narratives in the country.

Activities:

- Developing and implementing a strategic communication plan for the Rainbow Hub community center and organizations, incl. crisis communication management protocol and distribution of functions between the organizations
- Developing a toolkit on countering anti-LGBTI rhetoric and media participation for activists
- Organising training on how to implement the strategic communication plan and the crisis communication protocol, and how to prepare for public and TV debates
- Building alliances with journalists, media experts and established NGO coalitions
- Regular meetings of project partners' communication experts and external communications experts

Duration: 14 months (September 2021 – October 2022)

Partners: GLAS Foundation, Youth LGBT organization Deystvie

Donor: ILGA-Europe

NEW PROJECTS



Children on Focus

Aim:

The project aims to tackle the three following issues:

1. insufficient and ineffective out-of-court resolution of parental conflicts;
2. ignorance of the best interests of the child in today's variety of family relationships;
3. an intolerant societal environment that harms the rights of families from vulnerable groups.

The project addresses all three of these issues by offering a comprehensive new approach to family conflict resolution. It includes the creation of a Centre for Alternative Family Conflict Resolution, which is staffed by mediators, lawyers, psychologists and child development experts, to help find solutions and dress them in due legal form.

Activities:

- A report on children's best interests, legal issues and foreign best practices;
- 10 pieces of information material on vulnerable families and family conflict resolution;
- 3 educational videos addressing intolerance of "non-traditional" families;
- Two-day training on the specifics of family mediation on parental rights, focusing on the contemporary variety of family structures;
- 2 roundtables on qualitative change of resolving parenting conflicts.
- The construction of the first CARSC integrating mediation procedures for the resolution of kinship disputes, psychological counseling and therapy for parents and children.

Duration: 16 months (September 2021 – December 2022)

Partners: Institute for Mediation and Dispute Management (IMEUS) - coordinator, Professional Association of Mediators in Bulgaria (PAMB)

Donor: Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA

NEW PROJECTS



Community Voices

Aim:

- CSOs to involve young people in their activities, including as volunteers, and in campaigns for human rights
- Improving the implementation of international human rights standards
- Providing legal assistance and advice to victims of discrimination and human rights violations
- Develop and implement educational tools in defence of human rights
- Communication measures to overcome negative stereotypes against vulnerable groups in society who are victims of hate speech
- Establishing partnerships between civil society organisations and media on specific topics related to the protection of human rights
- Conducting campaigns on raising awareness on human rights

Activities:

- Megaphone - media training for LGBTI people and their advocates
- Pass it on - seminars to increase the competence and objectivity of journalists
- Step Forward - communication campaign
- Shared Lessons - sharing experiences and positive visibility with the partnership of Oslo Pride
- Project management and reporting

Duration: 24 months (September 2021 – August 2023)

Partners: GLAS Foundation (coordinator), AEJ-Bulgaria

Donor: Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA

NEW PROJECTS



Fair Play

Aim:

The project addresses a problem that is not talked enough in our country: discrimination based on gender and gender identity, also gender-based violence in sport. The project's approach: information, activation, changing perceptions and behaviour, develops an active civic position to tackle this problem. Vulnerable individuals (discriminated against and victims of gender-based violence in sport) will be empowered to speak up about the issue. The project introduces a standard of work (Rules for the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence in Sport) based on international best practices, validated with the support of institutions (Ministry of Youth and Sports and NSA) and promoted among all those involved in sport. The long-term outcome of the project is the strengthening of mechanisms to counter gender-based violence in sport leading to a strengthened civil society.

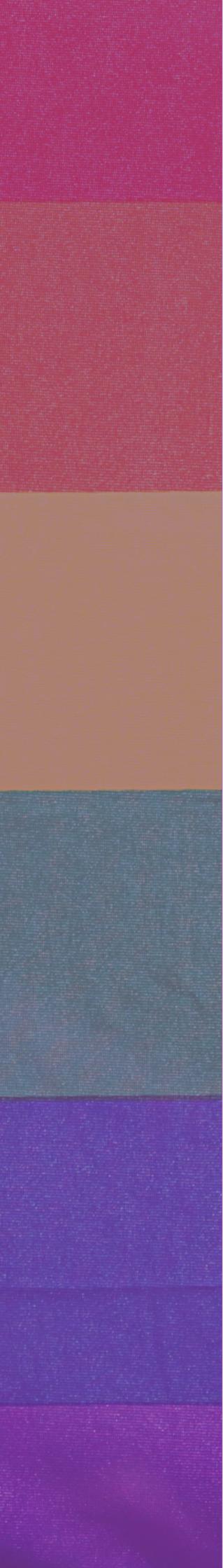
Activities:

- Situation analysis and development of a communication and advocacy strategy
- Trainings for journalists and dissemination of the Handbook for Sports Organisations
- Implementation of a strategic communication campaign and advocacy actions

Duration: 24 months (September 2021 – August 2023)

Partners: Bokaya Association (coordinator)

Donor: Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA



CORE SUPPORT GRANTS

CORE SUPPORT GRANTS



Bilitis is very proud that it has been supported with core funding by the following donors:

- **Astraea Lesbian Foundation of Justice Intersex Fund** - for enhancing our activities in the sphere of intersex human rights
- **Bulgarian Fund for Women** - for covering the rent of Rainbow Hub community center in 2021
- **Mama Cash Foundation** - after being supported for over 10 years, Bilitis received its final grant from Mama Cash Foundation. We are extremely thankful for the flexible and timely core support from Mama Cash Foundation, who accompanied us as we grew and matured.
- **Sigrid Rausing Trust**

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