

A vibrant, textured background featuring diagonal stripes of various colors including red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple, resembling a rainbow or a stack of colored paper.

2022

# ANNUAL REPORT

**BILITIS RESOURCE  
CENTER FOUNDATION**

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# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear friends,

The year that we are leaving behind has proven to be yet another year filled with unexpected difficulties. From a war just 300 kilometers from our borders to a number of health challenges within the team, 2022 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 growth for us at Bilitis and for the LGBTI community in Bulgaria.

The reopening of the Rainbow Hub community center in March at a third location since it was first launched in 2018 and only 4 months after the brutal attack on October 30, 2021, showed our courage and resilience. The LGBTI community has proven time and time again that the obstacles we face make us stronger and more united. This was also showcased through the record number of participants at the 15th anniversary of Sofia Pride on June 18 when close to 15 000 participants marched for equality, justice and freedom.

On a personal note, 2022 was one of the most challenging years for me as thyroid cancer surgery kept me away from work for 6 months. This was a shock not only for me and my family but it also posed extreme stress on the entire team who selflessly stepped in to cover for my absence while I was in recovery. They have done a tremendous job and I couldn't be more proud of them! But they have also been an irreplaceable source of hope and strength for me in the most difficult of times and for that and for their kindness and compassion I will always keep them in my heart.

In 2022 our beloved friend and amazing activist Gloriya decided to pursue a different professional journey after devoting her heart and soul to Bilitis and the LGBTI community for almost 10 years. We cannot thank Gogi enough for her perseverance, her loyalty and her devotion to the cause and to Bilitis. We could only wish her the best in whatever lies ahead. It has been a privilege for us to be on the same team.

And since the only constant in life is change, Bilitis strives to constantly reinvent itself. Therefore we are excited to welcome to the team our two new young colleagues - Robin and Jen, who have already been an integral part of our volunteer group. I am convinced that their fresh ideas and youth enthusiasm will serve them well in their activism.

Sincerely,  
Lilly Dragoeva  
Executive Director

# 2022 IN NUMBERS



## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

50+ Community mobilizing events  
2000+ Participants  
30+ Volunteers who supported us

## TRAININGS

28 Conducted trainings  
400+ Participants



## RESEARCH

5 Publications



# 2022 IN NUMBERS



## ADVOCACY

12 Advocacy campaigns

300+ Participants, supporters and allies

## MEDIA APPEARANCES

10+ Mainstream media  
appearances

## SOCIAL MEDIA

43 Facebook events

948 New Followers

400,000+ 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 2022 was proven to be yet another challenging year, 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 support & attracting resources for the LGBTI people fleeing the war in Ukraine**

In humanitarian aid initiatives, LGBTI people are frequently overlooked. At best, this could be due to a lack of cultural competency, and at worst, it could be a result of systemic discrimination against LGBTI people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. Bilitis launched its humanitarian fund in 2021 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and aided members of our community with financial and psychological help. We continued our support in 2022, and since the start of the Russian invasion in Ukraine, Bilitis has been dedicated to helping LGBTI refugees from Ukraine in their struggle to endure this savagery.

## **2. Showing persistence in sustaining the Rainbow Hub community center**

Following the attack on the Rainbow Hub on October 30th, 2021, when a mob stormed and vandalized the space, smashing equipment and furniture and physically hurt our project coordinator Gloriya Filipova, the Rainbow Hub was closed at the end of December due to a decision made by the owners in the building to evict the community center. In March, the Rainbow Hub was reopened in a new location and with the continued financial support of the Bulgarian Fund for Women. We are extremely grateful for their ongoing partnership and support!

## **3. Dynamic work & new inspiring projects**

We are delighted to announce that in 2022 we launched several new national projects led by Bilitis – Forward and Rainbow Hub, funded by the CERV programme of the European Union, and Rainbow Hub Without Borders, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA. We also launched the Improving the Access to HRT and LGR for Trans People in Bulgaria project, funded by The Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative Global Grants Program (GGP).

We are also part of a number of inspiring coalitions, which successfully launched their projects in 2022 - the two national Bursting the Bubble and Data Collection about Domestic Violence against LGBTI People in Bulgaria, funded by ILGA-Europe, and the international MESIS, funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.

We are also excited to share that we have been successful in our application for two new national projects that will start at the beginning of 2023 - BraveLab, funded by San Diego LGBT Pride, and Regional Work to Enhance the Safety of LGBTI Rights Advocates, funded by the Black Sea Trust.

Bilitis partnered in a number of Erasmus+ projects offering opportunities to LGBTI youth to participate in international activities and training.



# **RESPONSE TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE**

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# RESPONSE TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE



## Humanitarian Fund

In February 2021 Bilitis launched the LGBTI Humanitarian Fund aiming to provide humanitarian support to the LGBTI people in Bulgaria who are severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, after the start of the war in Ukraine, we redirected our efforts in supporting people affected by the war. By the end of 2022, the Fund has supported a total of 8 people with over 2045 Euros for food, medication, accommodation and psychosocial support.

We would like to extend our gratitude towards all individual donors of the Fund, as well as the Bulgarian Fund for Women and AllOut who have provided targeted grants for LGBTI refugees from Ukraine. These grants will be open until the end of July 2023.

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.



bilitis

HUMANITARIAN FUND

APPLY

# RESPONSE TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE



## Rainbow Hub Without Borders

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the team of the Rainbow Hub community center has been providing humanitarian aid to LGBTI refugees. The war and the related economic crisis are a prerequisite for the increase in trafficking and sexual exploitation of people from the LGBTI community. The new situation put on the agenda the need to increase the capacity of Bilitis and GLAS staff to work with refugees, victims of trafficking, as well as sex workers. Therefore in August 2022 we launched the “Rainbow Hub Without Borders” project, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA. Its aim is to train the team of the Rainbow Hub community center to provide adequate support to refugees and build close cooperation with relevant organizations working in the field (NGOs and public).

In the first six months of the project, the team underwent 3 capacity building trainings: on the rights of sex workers and the state of sex work in Bulgaria from a legal and material point of view, as well as on trafficking in human beings at the intersection with LGBTI, what are the available referral mechanisms and the current situation in Bulgaria, both conducted by experts from the Dignita Foundation; and on the migration situation in Bulgaria, as well as the reception centers in Bulgaria, conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Three more trainings on refugee law and working with refugees are planned to take place in January 2023.

In addition, in the process of preparing the trainings, 7 work meetings with relevant stakeholders were held, incl. with representatives of the US Embassy in Sofia, Safe Place International, CVS-Bulgaria, Foundation for Access to Rights - FAR, and others. More meetings are scheduled to take place by the end of the project in July 2023.



# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS

# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



## Re-Opening of the Rainbow Hub

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.

After the attack, the Rainbow Hub was closed at the end of December due to a decision made by the owners in the building to evict the community center.

In March, the Rainbow Hub was reopened in a new location and with the continued financial support of the Bulgarian Fund for Women. We are extremely grateful for their ongoing partnership and support!

## Sofia Pride 2022

With the motto "Proud to be" on June 18 this year, the largest event in support of human rights in Bulgaria celebrated its 15th anniversary.

The event opened with an afternoon live concert in front of the Soviet Army Monument in the centre of the capital city and was to be followed by an evening procession through the streets of Sofia.

The main goal of Sofia Pride 2022 this year was equal rights for LGBTI people, not only by treating them equally regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, but also by calling for the necessary changes in state policy towards LGBTI people.

In addition to Mila Robert, Ruth Koleva, Victoria and Preya, this year for the first time in support of the cause the concert was attended by Kamelia, Papi Hans, Hayes & Y, Dara Ekimova, Liana Georgi and the special guest from Ukraine – the singer Constantine. The event proceeded without riots and provocations. Special participation in the concert took this year's winners of Benediction Drag Race – Enigma and Africa Benediction. The 2022 Sofia Pride also has a charitable cause, with parts of the funds raised to support Kyiv Pride, which cannot be held this year because of Russia's war on Ukraine. There was a video message from Kyiv Pride, including an appeal to stand up for Ukraine and for its LGBTQI+ community. The concert also featured a performance by Ukrainian singer Constantine.



# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



Ambassadors and representatives from the embassies of France, the UK, the US, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg, Ireland, Switzerland, Romania, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Finland, and the Czech Republic attended the event and greeted participants from the stage. The crowd gave them a warm welcome for their position in solidarity with Sofia Pride.

This year, for the first time, Sofia Pride had something special prepared for its international guests. They spent the day before Sofia Pride exploring Sofia, visiting the Rainbow Hub community center and learning more about the LGBTI community in Sofia. On the day of Sofia Pride, they enjoyed the concert from a reserved tent and marched all together in solidarity and support with us.

At the concert, a 15-point manifesto in celebration of the 15th anniversary of Sofia Pride 2022 was read out:

“We are proud...

1. That we are free.
2. That we do not see the world only in black and white.
3. That we want to remember.
4. That we care for the family.
5. That we want Bulgaria to move forward.
6. That we do not respond to hatred with violence.
7. That we know who we are.
8. That we assert our rights.
9. With our flag
10. With our parents
11. That we do not hide our love
12. That we are against the war
13. That we want our children to be happy
14. That we are here
15. That we are Bulgarians.”

A recording of Sofia Pride 2022 can be found [here](#).

# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS





# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



## Sofia LGBTI Community Fest 2022

This year, after a digital edition in 2020 and the decision to cancel after the attack on the Rainbow Hub in 2021, the 17th edition of Sofia LGBTI Community Fest took place in person under the theme “Queer Without Borders”. Throughout the challenging times and tribulations of the past year, we wanted to create a safe space for expression, community organizing and bonding around certain topics.

The LGBTI Community Fest consisted of a total of 13 events in the span of the first 2 weeks of December. All of the events aimed to give the LGBTI community an opportunity to organize and facilitate events with the financial and logistical support of the team of Bilitis. Events ranged from “Tarot for Mental Health” to “Introduction to Neurodiversity”, all of which were well attended. We also hosted 3 artists’ work with the exhibition “Exhibition Under the Rainbow” at the Rainbow Hub community center and opened the floor for poets and writers alike with two poetry workshops.

The events during the Sofia LGBTI Community Fest gathered more than 300 people from the community.



# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS



## Protests and marches

*“It's not hooliganism, it's hate crime”*

The protest “It's not hooliganism, it's hate crime” was held on March 30th in solidarity with the victims of the Rainbow Hub attack that happened at the end of 2021. The protest happened during the first hearing of the court trial against Boyan Stankov - Rasate.

*“NO to hate”*

The protest “NO to hate” was held on the 27th of June after the Bulgarian court decided to exempt from criminal liability Boyan Stankov - Rasate. Manuela Popova held a speech in support of the victims, addressed the Bulgarian court and the Ministry of Justice to take action against hate crimes.





# KEY VISIBILITY EVENTS

## *“Not one more”*

The protest “Not one more” was held on the 25th of November - the International day for the elimination of violence against women and girls. Manuela Popova held a speech on the violence and torture intersex people experience due to “normalising” surgeries.





# **COMMUNITY ORGANIZING**

# COMMUNITY ORGANIZING



## Rainbow Hub

In 2022, Bilitis successfully completed the “Rainbow Hub” project, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA. The project consortium included GLAS Foundation and the Youth LGBT Organization Deystvie.

The objectives of the project - training representatives of vulnerable groups in advocacy work, as well as supporting advocacy campaigns initiated by them - were successfully achieved. Over 165 LGBTI participants in the 7 community groups in the Rainbow Hub were trained in advocacy work within a 6-module training and as a result have an improved understanding of the processes of planning and implementing advocacy actions, developed skills in strategic communication, organizing campaigns, and leadership. As a result of the acquired skills and knowledge and based on the conducted needs assessment, the groups developed their advocacy plans and successfully implemented 7 advocacy initiatives on 7 different topics important to the LGBTI community. Advocacy initiatives reached nearly 1,000,000 people across the country, resulting in the LGBTI movement publicly positioning itself much more sustainably. Campaigns and activities in the Rainbow Hub have also helped to raise the awareness of representatives of a number of public institutions and the general public about the needs and problems of LGBTI people.

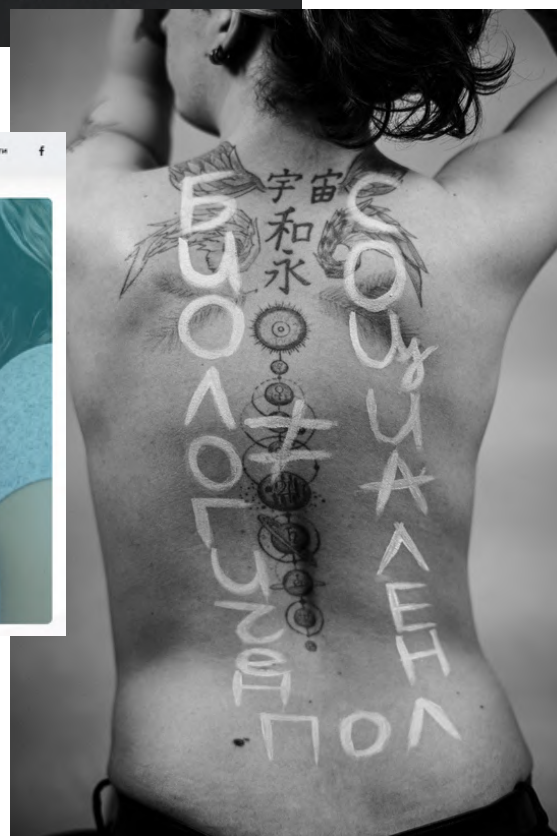
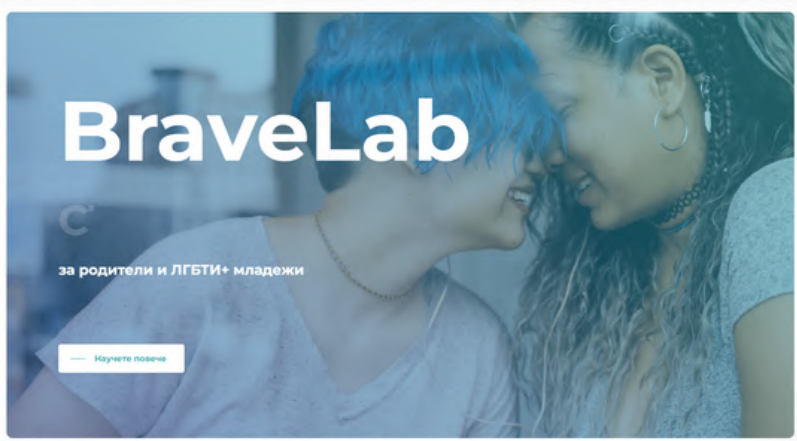
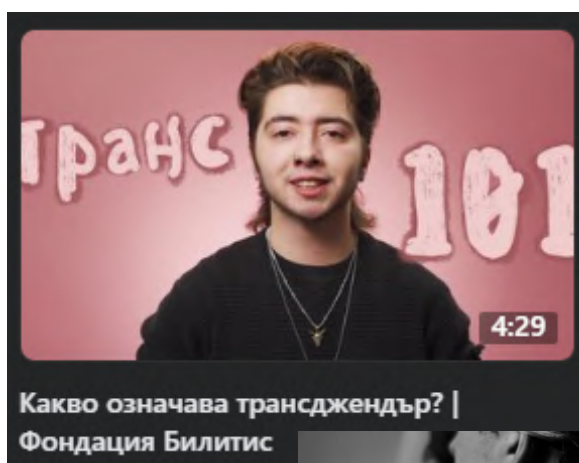
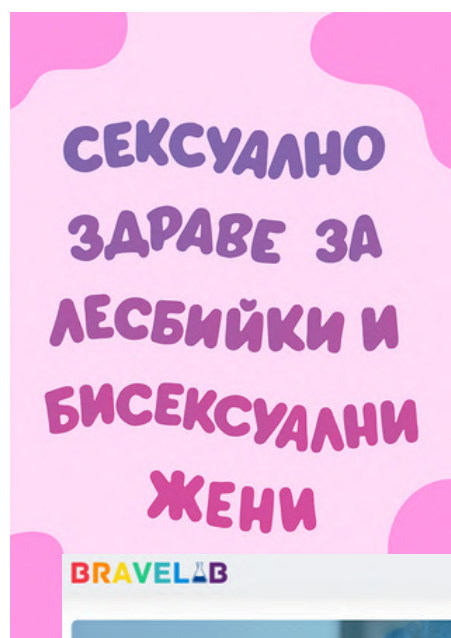
The three groups facilitated by Bilitis created successful and engaging campaigns targeted at three different target audiences:

- BraveLab for young LGBTI people launched their own website, which contains a number of useful articles for LGBTI+ youth and their parents, incl. the video "What is BraveLab?", the video "How to come out as LGBTI+" and the video "Advice for parents of LGBTI+ youth". Together with People of Sofia, the group promoted its campaign and reached 300,000 people featuring two of the group members - Tanya and Niki, together with their moms.
- QueerFemme for LBT women created a campaign on the topic of women's and sexual health, incl. a brochure on women's sexual health, the video "Sexual health for lesbian and bisexual women" and the video "Stereotypes of lesbian and bisexual women", as well as the movie "Anastasia".
- The newly created trans activist group TransMission along with the TIA group created informational videos on the topic of trans identity, incl. the video "What does transgender mean?" and the video "How to be an ally to trans people?"



# COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

The main target group of the project - LGBTI people - were actively involved at every step of the planning and implementation of the project activities. This is due to the chosen methodology for developing a community based on the active participation of target groups. The rest of the project's target groups - civic organizations, public institutions, the general public, businesses, media - were reached through the activities of the Rainbow Hub and the groups' advocacy campaigns.







## Rainbow Hub Voice

The key objectives of the “Rainbow Hub Voice” project, funded by ILGA-Europe, were several: scaling up the skills and competence of experienced and new activists; strengthening the alliance building processes which has already been started; creating the first of its kind strategic communication plan for the national LGBTI movement and toolkit for training of future activists; establishing new communicational approaches towards more positive portrayal of the community in Bulgarian media. The project was implemented in collaboration with GLAS Foundation and Youth LGBT Organization Deystvie between September 2021 and October 2022.

The change that we hoped the project would bring was a more positive and accurate portrayal of the community’s needs and demands and an increased overall acceptance in society. Although this change is a more long-term one, within the lifetime of the project we already saw signs that such change has in fact already been achieved - 2022’s coverage on Sofia Pride for example was predominantly encouraging and for the first time there were no meaningless TV debates on why there is a Pride parade or should it be banned. This is a really positive development which shows changes in the attitudes coming from the media as well as an increased level of acceptance of the general public which craves less and less TV drama around Sofia Pride.

Furthermore, the tools that have been developed during the project - media toolkit and 8 supporting videos - created a first of its kind toolbox for future activists from Sofia and the country to learn how to easily and successfully communicate their messages to local audiences. Together with the comprehensive media training of 14 leaders of the LGBTI community, the LGBTI movement in Bulgaria now has a much better prepared young generation of LGBTI activists who can become role models for the community and engage with the media.

The development of the strategic communications plan has been a really useful process for the three partnering organizations to look at how communication can be better coordinated and what plans and procedures should be followed. Along with the crisis communication plan that has been elaborated with the help of external professionals, the LGBTI movement is better equipped to react to the ongoing anti-gender movement attacks.

# COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

## Community Voices



In 2022, Bilitis participated in the “Community Voices” project, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA, coordinated by GLAS Foundation, and in partnership with AEJ-Bulgaria and Oslo Pride. By implementing a large-scale communication campaign that will cover 500,000+ citizens, as well as by conducting seminars and trainings for different public speakers and opinion leaders, incl. journalists, LGBTI activists and allies, the project aims to overcome negative stereotypes towards LGBTI people and other vulnerable groups in society who are victims of hate speech. In the first half of 2022, Bilitis in collaboration with AEJ-Bulgaria conducted 5 media trainings for LGBTI people and their allies. A total of 44 people took part in 5 one-day trainings, with a methodology developed by the partner AEJ-Bulgaria and held at the radio-television center of the New Bulgarian University. The workshops were led by one of the most prominent journalists in Bulgaria with many years of experience - Lora Kumova. The largest percentage of participants were people from the LGBTI+ community, activists for LGBTI+ rights and women's rights, as well as from environmental NGOs. People from the Roma and Jewish communities also participated in the trainings, as well as a Ukrainian refugee.

On the occasion of Sofia Pride 2022 on June 18, two representatives of project partner Oslo Pride held a working visit to Sofia aimed at exchange of best practices and meeting the local LGBTI community. A number of meetings with youth LGBTI activists, meetings with journalists, as well as other workshops and activities were held.

# COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

## Forward



The general objective of the “Forward” project, funded by the CERV programme of the European Union, is to enhance LGBTIQ rights in Bulgaria by implementing a comprehensive initiative for institutional changes in Bulgaria with focus on hate crimes on homophobic and transphobic grounds and access to public services. The proposal invests in awareness raising, capacity building and coalition building in a broad sense of creating meaningful relationships and recognizing shared interests, while raising awareness on challenges for LGBTIQ rights, with specific social groups and sectors, which will also serve as the project target groups (civil society organizations, public institutions and expert organizations, political parties and actors, and segments of the general public).

In August 2022, Bilitis organised an Activist academy for LGBTI community members. A total of 15 participants from 4 different cities gathered together and spent 3 days learning about the current goals of the LGBTI movement, as well as how they can successfully build their own initiative with help from Bilitis and GLAS. During the training, a facilitator was involved in order to help the participants brainstorm their own ideas and find true avenues and connections in order for them to become a reality.

A total of 5 initiative ideas were drafted during the Academy and their authors - the trained activists - along with the Bilitis team continued to develop them further, offering mentoring and ongoing support. The initiatives will largely be implemented in the second year of the project in 2023. The ideas are centered around the development of a queer neurodiverse community in Sofia; organising anti-discrimination seminars for young people from Kazanlak and Stara Zagora; launching BraveLab studio - a YouTube channel for educating young people on the terminology, problems and reality of young LGBTI people in Bulgaria; launching a GayBoard - events for LGBTI people and allies in a non-formal setting; and “Art for Revolution” - 2 art workshops aimed at strengthening connections and partnerships between players in the NGO sector.



# EDUCATION

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# EDUCATION



In 2022, the international “School's OUT” (SOT) project, funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), was successfully completed. The goal of this project was to deal 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. This project aimed to increase knowledge of teachers on how to include LGBTI topics in classes and how to react to LGBTI bullying in school. This project also aimed to provide a more systematic and evidenced approach on how schools can achieve an LGBTI inclusive school environment by developing the Inclusive School Cycle Program (ISCP). The project aimed to specifically focus on integrating knowledge and policies that benefit transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming students. Ultimately, this project aimed to help schools be safer and more inclusive, where LGBTI students are more open to report harassment and bullying.

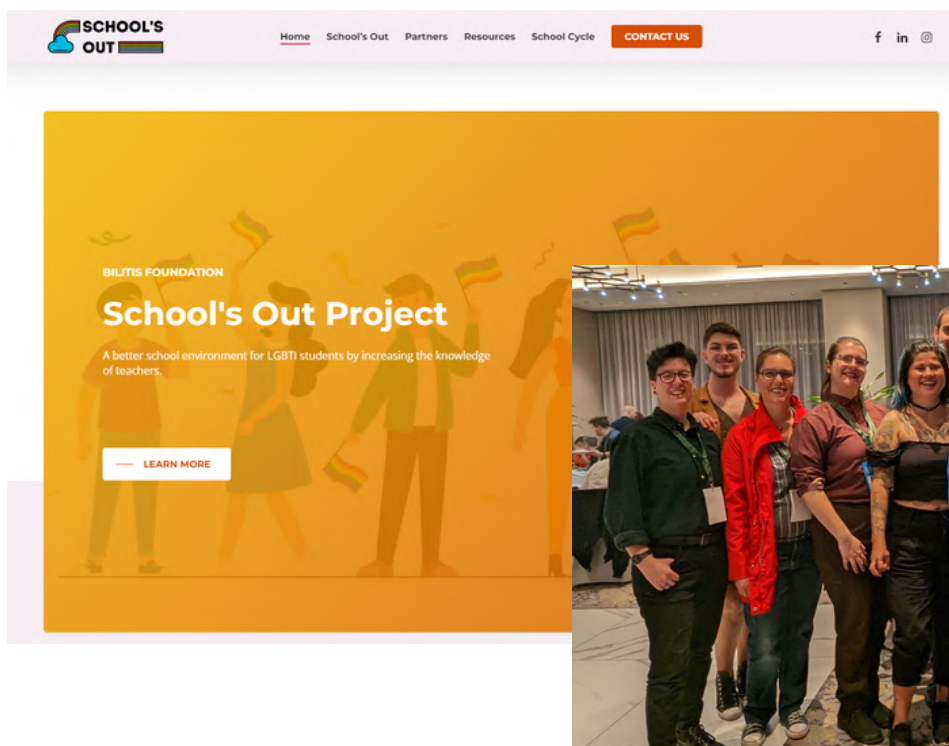
The School's Out project [website](#) was developed by Bilitis with the support and consultation of all project partners. A [digital toolkit](#) was created by Çavaria, with the support of all partners, to support the schools and organizations, since the Inclusive School Cycle Program (ISCP) contains quite a long and comprehensive process. The toolkit provides step-by-step instructions, tips and tricks on the implementation of the ISCP and templates for each step, so it can be implemented by any organization and school that is interested. It is available on the School's Out project's website in English, as well as in Bulgarian, Dutch, Italian and Portuguese. Thanks to the toolkit, the program can live longer, even after the project is over. During the dissemination events within the project many LGBTI activists and educational professionals expressed interest in implementing the program in their work and we believe that it will continue to be used in the future, thanks to the digital toolkit. A [poster campaign](#) was developed by Bilitis with the aim to disseminate and promote the Inclusive School Cycle Program further.

Four national dissemination conferences were held in all the partnering countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy and Portugal). Almost 170 people in total attended the national conferences. In Bulgaria, the national conference was held on the 17th of October 2022, and it gathered 29 educational professionals, activists and students from across Bulgaria. The conference was organized in a way to present and disseminate the project, but also to focus on the challenges faced in the field of education in Bulgaria. Bilitis Foundation put a great effort to invite educational institutions to the conference, but unfortunately without much success. We didn't receive any response from the Ministry of Education and from the Regional Departments of Education.

# EDUCATION

Furthermore, Bilitis organized a workshop during the annual ILGA-Europe conference of 2022 in Sofia, aiming to present the School's Out project to LGBTI activists from across Europe and Central Asia. The workshop was organized in cooperation with the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Intersex Youth and Student Organization (IGLYO) who took part in the School's Out project by providing feedback on the ISCP. The workshop was attended by 34 people and was led by Bilitis and Çavaria.

The international School's Out conference was organized by Bilitis in Sofia on the 18th of October 2022, where the project was presented, a discussion was held on the importance of inclusive schools and the possibilities for advocating on an international level for a more inclusive school environment. The hybrid format gathered 71 educational professionals, activists and students from across Europe, including students representing a newly founded GSA club in the Sofia High School of Mathematics, who all belonged to groups we wanted to target. The program of the conference aimed to balance three main topics: the presentation of the SOT project, discussions on advocacy for inclusive education on a European level and giving a platform for the experiences of LGBTI students.





# **LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION**



# LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION



In May 2022 Bilitis launched a long-term initiative that aims to improve access to gender affirming hormonal replacement therapy and to legal gender recognition for trans and intersex people in Bulgaria. The work in this sphere is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies Global Grants Program. Its long-term goal is improving the connection between health data on trans and intersex people and their legal gender recognition, and also enhancing the capacity of our health and judicial systems to meet the needs of the trans and intersex people. The first step was to analyze the court practice on legal gender recognition in Bulgaria from the last 10 years. This is not the first time when Bilitis engages in analyzing the court practice on LGR. The first analysis in this sphere was produced in 2012 and covered the court practice from 2000 to the year in which the report<sup>[1]</sup> was produced. The new updated analysis focused on the last 10 years from 2012 till 2022. Bilitis Foundation collected 84 legal cases. The analysis included a comparative part in which the national practice was compared with the leading practices on LGR in Europe and globally, and some recommendations for improving the national practice were drawn. The last part of the analysis focused on the decisions of the Bulgarian Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court of Cassation which have a direct impact on legal gender recognition. The analysis was not completed by the end of 2022 because it aimed to include the latest interpretative decision of the Supreme Court of Cassation on legal gender recognition court practice which is expected in the first months of 2023.

Bilitis paid special attention on involving the trans community and intersex people at every step of the work in this sphere. Regular community meetings were held and the voices and opinions of the trans and intersex people were heard and taken into account in the development of the strategy for continuation of the work. The initiative will unfold in 2023 with awareness raising training of judges, prosecutors and health workers to help connect the dots between the gender affirmation health treatment and the legal gender recognition procedure for trans and intersex people.



# **HATE CRIMES AND HATE SPEECH**

# HATE CRIMES AND HATE SPEECH



## Not Just Words

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), aimed 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. Partners in the initiative were the GLAS Foundation, AEJ-Bulgaria and the Organization of Jews in Bulgaria “Shalom”.

In 2022, Bilitis organized the final event in collaboration with all project partners. The event was attended by over 120 participants. A total of 16 speakers and moderators participated in the 3 panels of the conference, among which the minister of justice - Nadezhda Yordanova, the mayor of Sofia – Yordanka Fandakova, and Emi Palmor - a member of the oversight board of Facebook. Over 2000 people watched the event live on Facebook. [Here is the full 6-hour recording](#) from the conference.





# HATE CRIMES AND HATE SPEECH

The first panel discussion - Legal framework and self regulation of hate speech was moderated by Adela Kachaunova, lawyer and director of the Legal Defense Program of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the participants were Emi Palmor, Kalin Kalpakchiev, judge at the Sofia Appeal Court, and Zhana Popova, associate professor at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communications at Sofia University. The panel focused on the legal recognition of hate speech, the ethics of journalism and reporting hate speech online.



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# HATE CRIMES AND HATE SPEECH



The second panel discussion - Words in Action – focused on the point of view of journalists, who are at the fore-front of counteracting hate speech. Freedoms of speech and human rights. The discussion was moderated by Maria Cheresheva, Vice-President of Association of European Journalists-Bulgaria. The speakers who took part in the discussion were Irina Nedeva, journalist, Association of European Journalists-Bulgaria, Una Hajdari, Journalist from Kosovo, Ana-Maria Luca, journalist, reporting from Lebanon and Marija Ristić, regional director of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network.

The last panel - Words of Hope focused on the communities united in the fight against hate speech. The partners shared the lessons they learned during the “Not Just Words” project, and the psychological pattern behind the phenomenon of hate speech and how we can help the ones creating it. In the panel we heard words from Julia Dandolova, Executive Director of Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria “Shalom”, Simeon Vasilev, chairman of GLAS foundation, Lilly Dragoeva, Executive Director of Bilitis Foundation and Rada Naslednikova, psychotherapist.

The NotJustWords project came as a response to the growing radicalization and hate speech towards minorities in the Bulgarian society, which annihilates social bonds and decreases social capital. It united partners with a history of success in campaigning, empowering minority communities, and educating journalists/media. The project demonstrated the two conflicting viewpoints: that of the victim and that of the user of hate speech and sought a common ground that will help overcome hate and build healthier communities. Change in social attitudes towards "the others" who are "different" was advanced by means of applying a holistic approach that empowered affected communities (LGBTI and Jewish people), activated people from the movable middle to address hate, and strengthened the national coalition against hate consisting of different NGOs. The resource materials developed within the project as well as the reporting platform on hate speech and hate crimes, integrated into the project website [www.stophate.bg](http://www.stophate.bg), will be used in the long-term as the project coordinator, Bilitis Foundation, is dedicated to maintain this website for many years.

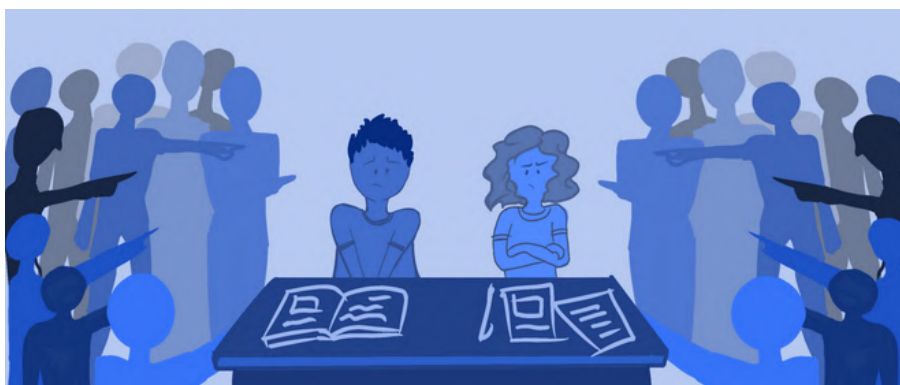
# HATE CRIMES AND HATE SPEECH



## Youth Theatre against Hate Network Development

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” successfully drafted and tested the “Theatrical Sketches Against Hatred” practical handbook. The “youth theaters against hate” model represents a multi-layered approach that combines elements of different ways of working in the field of non-formal education: theater-forum, impro-theatre and discussion. The Handbook aims to provide this innovative methodology for working with young people on topics affecting prejudice against people from vulnerable groups, with the aim of sensitizing young people to issues in society. The manual is intended to serve specialists who work with young people - teachers, trainers, social workers, youth workers and other experts, and it is not necessary to have previous experience in working with theater methods.

In May-July 2022, Bilitis held the planned three two-day network meetings to spread the “youth theaters against hate” methodology among a wider range of schools and non-governmental organizations that work with young people. 26 participants from 11 organizations and one school took part in the meetings. Bilitis also held two additional one-hour meetings in which we briefly presented the methodology to teachers and NGOs. The feedback from all the networking meetings was very positive. All participants shared that they find the “youth theaters against hate” methodology extremely useful and suitable for their daily work with young people, as it allows to touch on very sensitive topics for our society in an informal and engaging way.





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# **RAINBOW FAMILIES**

# RAINBOW FAMILIES



## Children on Focus

The “Children on Focus” project, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA, was coordinated by the Institute for Mediation and Dispute Management (IMEUS), in partnership with the Professional Association of Mediators in Bulgaria (PAMB) and Bilitis. The project was aimed at tackling the insufficient and ineffective out-of-court resolution of parental conflicts, the ignorance of the best interests of the child in today's variety of family relationships and the intolerant societal environment that harms the rights of families from vulnerable groups.

The project addressed all three issues by offering a comprehensive new approach to family conflict resolution which includes the creation of a Centre for Alternative Family Conflict Resolution - the first place for solving family disputes and transforming family relations into new, constructive ones in Bulgaria, which is staffed by mediators, lawyers, psychologists and child development experts. Over 50 people benefitted from the Center's services during the project duration. A report on children's best interests, legal issues and foreign best practices was drafted at the beginning of the project, outlining key areas for further joint work. A number of information materials on vulnerable families and family conflict resolution have also been created, incl. 3 educational videos, and are all available on the project website. Two events were held within the lifetime of the project - a two-day online training with international participation (incl. guest panelists from the USA and Lithuania) gathering 58 participants, and a two-day round table on “Modern Bulgarian families - overcoming discrimination and stereotyping in a conflict-free environment. Mandatory judicial mediation in family conflicts” with a total reach of over 500 participants (recordings are available for day 1 and day 2).

The project has a strong response among the interested parties in the form of various institutions, organizations and independent professionals. The period of implementation of the project (September 2021 – December 2022) proved to be extremely suitable given the upcoming introduction of mandatory mediation in family cases in Bulgaria.



# **SPORTS AND WELLBEING**



# SPORTS AND WELLBEING



## Fair Play

The “Fair Play” project, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria within the Financial Mechanism of the EEA, addresses a problem that is not talked about enough in our country: discrimination based on gender and gender identity, as well as gender-based violence 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. Coordinator of the project is the Bokaya Association. More information is available on the project website.

In 2022, Bilitis conducted a situation analysis on the topic of gender-based violence in sports and produced the Gender-Based Violence in Sports: Current Situation and Good Practices in Bulgaria and the EU report. The objectives of the research were generating new knowledge about the current situation in Bulgaria regarding gender-based violence in sports by conducting an online survey among 205 professional athletes and active sports enthusiasts; and identifying and documenting good practices from abroad in relation to developing and proposing a set of recommendations to form the basis of a Handbook with rules for preventing and combating gender-based violence in sports.

The Preventing and Fighting Gender-Based Violence in Sports: A Handbook for Coaches describes rules for the work of sports organizations in order to improve the prevention and fight against gender-based violence, and is the first of its kind for Bulgaria. It is designed for coaches and managers of professional and amateur sports clubs who want to improve their management policies and practices. The Handbook is entirely practically oriented and includes a questionnaire for self-assessment of the degree of implementation of the proposed policies and practices. We believe that this Handbook will contribute to improving the self-regulation of sports organizations in the field of preventing discrimination and hate speech based on gender stereotypes, and that it will increase the intolerance of sportspeople, professional athletes and other stakeholders to gender-based violence in sports.



# **PARTICIPATION IN ERASMUS+ PROJECTS**



The project **"Innovation and the Arts: Towards the Inclusion of LGBT+ People"** funded by the Erasmus+ Programme created a partnership between LGBT+ organizations in Central and Southeast Europe. The aim of the project was 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 was 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 included three art companies that represent different genres of contemporary independent art.

In 2022, during the Sofia LGBTI Community Fest we organised series of poetry workshops, where young poets from the community participated by brainstorming together about the issues of the LGBTI+ people and then addressing those issues by writing their own original pieces, dedicated to the struggles of the LGBTI+ community.

Bilitis implemented a youth exchange **"Come Out and Play"** as a partner organization and in May sent 4 participants and one group leader to Latvia for 10 days. The participants did a workshop on working with emotions for LGBTI people, in the Rainbow Hub community center in Sofia, on their return from the program. The leading organization of the project is our long-term and strategic partner Active Rainbow.

Bilitis also gave the opportunity to 4 young people to participate in the Erasmus+ training **"Taking action against sexist speech"** in Slovakia in August. The lead organization of the project is our long-term and strategic partner Sapling.

Bilitis successfully completed a two-year project **"RALYO - Rainbow Audio-visual Learning for Youth Organizations"** in the Erasmus+ KA2 program for developing strategic partnerships, with a total of 10 partner organizations from Europe and the Balkans. In December, the last training was carried out, which completed the cycle of a total of three trainings for the project period and exchange of experience and support among the participants in the periods between the three activities. For this project, we sent a total of 5 participants, who during the Open Days and during the annual Sofia LGBTI Community Fest, shared some of what they learned and screened films made during the project.





# AWARDS

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# AWARDS

The “Person of the Year” is an award created and carried out by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, which supports and awards different NGOs and human rights activists each year.

In this year’s edition, TransMission, a youth trans activist group, created with the support of Bilitis, was nominated by a LGBTI community member. The team of TransMission received an honorary certificate for the nomination.





# NEW PROJECTS

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# NEW PROJECTS



## Forward

**Aim:** The overall goal of the project is to improve the rights of LGBTI people in Bulgaria by implementing a comprehensive initiative for institutional change in Bulgaria with a focus on homophobic and transphobic hate crimes and access to public services.

### Activities:

- Civil society and community engagement efforts, such as networking meetings and participation at events, will seek to establish relationships with civil society organizations which are well-positioned to influence policies and public opinion, find shared interest and intersection and actively work to secure their support for LGBTI rights. Bilitis will identify and train 15 LGBTIQ leaders in a 3-days residential academy, who will – in their turn – reach out and engage with stakeholders in their local context. Once empowered to do so, they are supported by partners to practice and hold meetings and organize small campaigns on LGBTIQ issues.
- Coalition building and advocacy invests in individual work and relationship building with political stakeholders and expert organizations, which later translates into two working meetings with institutions and one public round table. The round table will capitalize the individual relationships and will bring the coalition together. The focus is on LGBTIQ-phobic hate crimes, but other issues will be also tried,
- Awareness raising targets the general public (rather specific segments) and will use research-based approach to address misunderstanding and lack of sensitivity on LGBTIQ-phobic hate crimes and other LGBTIQ issues

**Duration:** 24 months (February 2022 - January 2024)

**Partners:** GLAS Foundation, Youth LGBT organization Deystvie

**Donor:** European Union under the CERV Programme

# NEW PROJECTS



## Rainbow Hub

**Aim:** The project will support the relaunch of Rainbow Hub, offering vital services of support and information through walk-ins, community events, individual mental health support service, mental health group seminars and anti-bullying virtual support service. It will give a home to 8 affinity groups who will support each other in 80 meetings, learn from each other and run action/campaigns around shared interests. The Rainbow Hub will also become host of collectives and groups from sister civil society and social movements.

### Activities:

- Relaunch and operation of Rainbow Hub provides along with specific uses of Rainbow Hub information and referral for walk-ins, LGBTIQ community events and collaboration with groups and organizations from other social movements.
- Supporting the well-being of the LGBTIQ community offers two horizontal services: 'Rainbow Cabinet' for individual psychological support from mental health experts and open group seminars; and 'Live Without Bullying' for virtual consultations and support for school students who struggle with bullying. Communication campaigns will run to promote these services (and other Rainbow Hub opportunities) across the LGBTIQ community. Empowering the LGBTIQ community provides specific types of affinity groups to recognize and reconfirm different groups based on identity and interests. All of these groups will be supported to run their campaigns/actions on shared identified issues. In parallel, horizontal call for texts will enhance the voice of LGBTIQ people who would create content to be published on the queer-themed website Proud.bg.
- Learning, sustainability and dissemination brings together peer organizations who operate LGBTIQ community centres across Europe for regular meetings of a community of practices and address more of them with a publication of good practices and lessons learned from Rainbow Hub. To secure sustainability, market research and social entrepreneurship business plan will be elaborated to secure the self-sustaining of Rainbow Hub beyond the project

**Duration:** 24 months (February 2022 - January 2024)

**Partners:** GLAS Foundation

**Donor:** European Union under the CERV Programme

# NEW PROJECTS



## Rainbow Hub Without Borders

**Aim:** The project "Rainbow Hub without Borders" is implemented with financial support provided by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Financial Mechanism. The project aims to increase the capacity of Rainbow Hub staff to work with refugees, victims of trafficking, and sex workers. The project will train the teams of organisations working in Rainbow Hub (Bilitis, GLAS and Sappho) to provide adequate support to refugees and will build close cooperation with organisations (NGOs and public) supporting refugees from Ukraine.

### Activities:

- 3 trainings are planned for the Rainbow Hub team on the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Bulgaria, the process of registration and integration, and the challenges in working with refugees and how to deal with them; the topic of trafficking in human beings, prevention, and access to services for the victims; and on the topic of sex workers and their rights and access to services in our country;
- 10 working meetings between Bilitis, GLAS and organizations and institutions working with refugees, victims of trafficking and sex workers will be organized;
- The Rainbow Hub website will be upgraded to provide information about the project and the received funding, and will also be enriched with materials in Bulgarian and English language for available services for LGBTI refugees, victims of trafficking, and sex workers. 3 informational videos will be created, each targeting one of the three vulnerable groups. The new forms of support that Rainbow Hub provides will be promoted in LGBTI social networks and info channels, incl. via Proud.bg to achieve the snowball effect and information to reach those in need of support from the listed groups. Final informational event will present the results of the project to various interested parties.

**Duration:** 12 months (1 August 2022 - 31 July 2023)

**Partners:** GLAS Foundation

**Donor:** Active Citizens Fund of Bulgaria under the Financial Mechanism of the EEA Grants



# NEW PROJECTS



## Improving the Access to HRT and LGR for Trans People in Bulgaria

**Aim:** The project will contribute to solving the problem with LGR through a comparative legal study of the different practices of civil gender reassignment in Europe and the world compared with that in Bulgaria, as well as cooperation with public institutions to facilitate and change the way of accessing HRT. The ultimate goal is to achieve an efficient, fast, and accessible procedure. Another direction of impact of the project will be to improve the use of data on trans people in the health system to improve their access to gender affirmation procedures and adequate medical monitoring. The transgender community will play a central role in the whole process and will assist in all activities.

### Activities:

- Preparation of an analytical report, incl. a review of the case law in the field of LGR\* in Bulgaria over the last 10 years, a comparative legal study of best practices for LGRs in Europe and worldwide and with recommendations to improve the gender recognition procedure in the country.
- Engaging different stakeholders, incl. community meetings, meetings with politicians, public institutions and NGOs to build support for this initiative.
- Communication with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of e-Government, NHIS, and the Medical Association to ensure more effective use of available medical data on trans people in securing their access to gender affirmation procedures as well as medical monitoring.

\*LGR - Legal Gender Recognition

**Duration:** 16 months (May 2022 - August 2023)

**Donor:** The Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative Global Grants Program (GGP)

# NEW PROJECTS



## Bursting the Bubble

**Aim:** We have set ourselves the ambitious goal of developing a winning communication strategy to help change public opinion on LGBTI in Bulgaria. We are fully aware that in order to achieve such a fundamental change in our society, we need to work together and build on our wealth of experience in communications, and to actively break out of our activist 'bubble' and seek expertise and advice from renowned professionals in various fields.

### Activities:

- In the first 6 months we will conduct a national opinion poll in cooperation with a reputable polling agency to establish a baseline of the general perception of LGBTI issues in Bulgaria.
- The data will then be used by the think tank to create a roadmap/communication strategy for the remaining duration of the project.
- We will take this unique opportunity to host the IE 2022 Annual Conference Seminar in Sofia to bring together prominent activists to share their experiences in successfully helping to change public opinion on LGBTI issues in their respective countries.

**Duration:** 30 months (June 2022 - Dec 2024)

**Partners:** Single Step (coordinator), GLAS Foundation

**Donor:** ILGA-Europe

# NEW PROJECTS



## **Data Collection about Domestic Violence against LGBTI People in Bulgaria**

**Aim:** The project aims to improve access to justice and victim support services for LGBTI victims of domestic violence. This will be achieved by improving the reporting of such cases, the responsiveness of law enforcement institutions to them and laying the groundwork for updating national legislation to ensure equal protection for all victims of domestic violence, regardless of their SOGIESC. The project will produce an analytical report based on field and desk research that will support evidence-based advocacy. The expected outcome is to raise awareness among LGBTI people and improve cooperation with public institutions to address the issue.

### **Activities:**

- Collect domestic violence cases from 2021, 2022 and 2023 on the stohate.bg platform and conduct interviews
- Produce a comprehensive report on the situation of LGBTI people who are victims of domestic violence, along with recommendations for legal changes.
- A campaign to encourage reporting
- Advocacy meetings with relevant stakeholders - creating an action plan to amend the Protection from Domestic Violence Act and to improve case reporting

**Duration:** 12 months (20.12.2022 – 31.12.2023)

**Partners:** GLAS Foundation

**Donor:** ILGA-Europe

# NEW PROJECTS



## MESIS

**Aim:** The project aims to foster LGBTI inclusive sport communities by developing new pedagogical tools and competences in the field of the “Education Through Sport” (ETS) methodology. The idea has been developed starting from the outcomes of Erasmus+ project “Outsport” (2017-2019), on the basis of the international follow up webinars “WebOutsport” held in November 2020 (“Sport and Equality in Europe”) and in January 2022 (“The Rise of Visibility”).

### Activities:

- The project will generate e-learning and practical tools for organisations and youth operators involved in sport, in particular coaches and PE teachers, and will develop local strategic partnerships in the field of LGBTI and ETS, by selecting 15 local stakeholders (schools, local authorities, sport associations).
- After a preliminary Training of Trainers meeting, the project trainers will involve 60 recruited coaches and PE teachers with 3 capacity building sessions in order to transfer the key competencies on LGBTI issues in sport and make them able to deliver ETS exercises to their audience (students, athletes, practitioners).
- The outcomes of these actions will lead to the design of e-learning contents in 7 different languages, structured for operators who train sport coaches and PE teachers and for educators who directly work in the field. These contents will be organized in an open access MOOC and in 7 open resources for the EPALE platform (educational activities and pedagogic exercises).
- The project foresees 8 dissemination events to deliver and test the educational outputs and reach approx. 300 people (students and practitioners). Starting from the achieved know-how and results, the partnership aims to create a EU-wide model by implementing a Policy Vademecum designed for local policy implementation in the fields of sport and education.

**Duration:** 30 months (1 December 2022 - 31 May 2025)

**Partners:** AICS (Italy) - coordinator, The European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF), Out in Slovenia (Slovenia), Clube Portuguese Gym (Portugal)

**Donor:** Erasmus+ Sport





# **CORE SUPPORT GRANTS**

# CORE SUPPORT GRANTS



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

- Sigrid Rausing Trust
- 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 from March 2021 until the end of June 2022.
- 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. Mama Cash supported us with an End of Trajectory Grant that will be invested in the renovation and upgrading of our community center, the Rainbow Hub.

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# bilitis

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