

## International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia - 17 May 2021

The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, observed on 17<sup>th</sup> May, commemorates the 1990 decision of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to remove homosexuality from the list of mental disorders.<sup>1</sup>

This year's chosen theme for the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia is *'Together: Resisting, Supporting, Healing!'*. This theme was chosen in view of the recent challenges the world faced in the past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> This international day aims to celebrate diversity and to raise awareness of the human rights of LGBTIQ+ people.

Although Malta has passed several important laws and has made significant leaps in LGBTIQ+ rights, discriminatory perceptions on LGBTIQ+ persons are still a reality. Homophobia and intolerance towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons are still widespread in our societies. Many of these persons are still suffering from exclusion, discrimination and violence on grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, 20% of the Maltese still disagree that gay, lesbian and bisexual people should have the same rights as heterosexual people, while 80% believe there is something wrong in a sexual relationship between two persons of the same sex.<sup>4</sup>

As stated by EU Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, *"We are still a long way away from the full inclusion and acceptance that LGBTIQ people deserve"*.<sup>5</sup> Hence, more efforts are needed to ensure that every person is fully respected regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

In November 2020, the European Commission presented its first-ever EU Strategy for LGBTIQ Equality.<sup>6</sup> The Strategy sets out a series of targeted actions around four main pillars, focusing

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-channel/idahotb>

<sup>2</sup><https://may17.org/posters-for-may-17-2021-free-to-use-and-share/>

<sup>3</sup><https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168047f2a6>

<sup>4</sup>FRA, the second EU LGBTI Survey – A long way to go for LGBTI equality

<sup>5</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_2068](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2068)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

on: tackling discrimination, ensuring safety, building inclusive societies, and leading the call for LGBTIQ equality around the world.

Moreover, the Strategy proposes extending the list of EU crimes to cover hate crime, including homophobic hate speech and hate crime, and to bring forward the legislation on the mutual recognition of parenthood in cross-border situations. It also ensures that LGBTIQ concerns are well reflected in EU policy-making, so that LGBTIQ people will have equal opportunities to prosper and fully participate in society.

In Malta, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy & Action Plan (2018-2022)<sup>7</sup> was formulated by the Human Rights and Integration Directorate (HRID) in close partnership with the LGBTIQ Consultative Council to implement the necessary measures to guarantee substantive equality for LGBTIQ persons in practice.

Since 2015, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) has also been empowered by Chapter 456 of the Laws of Malta to investigate complaints of alleged discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics in employment, education and vocational training as well as by banks and financial institutions. In this regard, the NCPE has taken various initiatives to ensure adherence to the law by investigating complaints on the above mentioned grounds, organising conferences and awareness-raising campaigns, and implementing EU co-funded projects.

In this context the NCPE, in partnership with Allied Rainbow Communities (ARC), is currently implementing an EU co-funded project entitled 'Empowerment for Diversity' (E4D) which will run until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.<sup>8</sup> This project focuses on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, sex characteristics and gender expression and seeks to address the national societal and cultural impacts which have resulted from the recent legislative advancements through awareness-raising initiatives, capacity building and various analytical activities.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://humanrights.gov.mt/en/Documents/LGBTIQActionPlan.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Pages/Projects\\_and\\_Specific\\_Initiatives/Empowerment-for-Diversity---E4D.aspx](https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Pages/Projects_and_Specific_Initiatives/Empowerment-for-Diversity---E4D.aspx)



The NCPE's E4D Project Launch Conference, which took place on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2021, served to kick start this work and inform the general public, relevant stakeholders and target groups about the aims, objectives, expected results and the initiatives to be undertaken through this project.

The International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia is a worldwide celebration of sexual and gender diversities that highlights the developments achieved in this sphere. This day also marks our commitment to safeguard equality in the everyday reality of LGBTIQ+ persons.

*The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) can be contacted on: 2295 7850 or [equality@gov.mt](mailto:equality@gov.mt) or our Facebook page.*

**6<sup>th</sup> May 2021**