

EU Fundamental Rights Agency: fight discrimination, harassment and violence against Lesbians and Gays in the EU

The EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) today publishes its new report “Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the EU Member States: Part II - The Social Situation”. The report finds that discrimination, harassment and violence against LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) persons are widespread throughout the EU. The FRA calls on political decision-makers to further improve equality legislation and ensure accurate reporting, in order to improve the situation.

FRA Director Morten Kjaerum: “Many LGBT persons experience discrimination, bullying and harassment. There have been physical attacks and even deadly assaults against LGBT persons in some countries. These are alarming signals in an EU that prides itself on its principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination”.

The FRA report finds that discrimination affects the lives of LGBT persons in all walks of life, ranging from harassment in schools to discrimination in employment or health care. In some Member States, LGBT NGO premises have been vandalised or burnt down. Events such as Gay Pride marches have been banned or obstructed in some Member States. The report also notes that hate speech by public figures is a particularly worrying phenomenon, as it negatively affects public opinion, thus fuelling intolerance.

Morten Kjaerum: “We know that very few incidents are reported to the police or other public authorities. This means that crimes go unpunished, victims do not obtain justice, and authorities are not able to take the necessary action to respond to such crimes or prevent them from recurring. I call on the EU governments to improve the recording of hate crimes and to train their police accordingly. In addition, we need campaigns to inform everyone about diversity and non-discrimination, as making a complaint requires people to be legally aware.”

At the same time, the Agency notes that in some countries there is encouraging evidence that efforts are being made to improve the situation. For example, a number of countries have introduced anonymous reporting mechanisms, where a complaint can be made either via the internet, or to independent bodies in which LGBT organisations are involved. In several Member States, Pride events were celebrated with the participation of government ministers and political

parties. The EU's anti-discrimination rules have also started to have some positive effects. Yet, the legislative protection against discrimination still has gaps. While EU-wide legislation bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the context of employment, it does not yet cover sectors such as housing, education, or health services. In order to remedy this situation, the EU Commission proposed more comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation in July 2008.

Anastasia Crickley, Chairperson of the FRA's Management Board, concluded: "Everyone in the EU must be able to live without fear and discrimination, regardless of their sexual orientation. I call upon all EU governments to support the newly proposed EU anti-discrimination legislation."

"Part I - The legal situation" of the FRA report was published in June 2008 and found that the legal protection for LGBT persons varies considerably across the EU.

The FRA reports can be found at <http://fra.europa.eu>

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