



PROGRAMME OVERVIEW ON ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF LGBTI PEOPLE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

Outline:

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 - a. Encouraging LGBTI owned businesses and enterprises;**
 - b. Working with businesses;**
 - c. Working with state institutions;**
 - d. Partnerships and cooperation with other networks and organisationsP3;**
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1. The situation in the Western Balkans and Turkey region

The [regional LGBTI survey](#) conducted in 2017 by the World Bank in cooperation with the Williams Institute and ERA found out that 2/3 of LGBTI people are not out in their workplace (64%). This result is not surprising considering that one third or more of them claim to have experienced a general negative attitude at work against LGBTI people (35%) or had negative comments and conduct against their colleagues at work because they were perceived as LGBTI (41%). More than 14% of them have personally experienced negative comments and conduct at work and 16% have received unequal treatment with respect to employment conditions or benefits.

In all countries of the region, research and reports provide further proof of this situation. A 2010 study in Albania found that LGBT individuals are not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace, out of fear of being fired or facing discrimination.¹ The [NDI poll](#) conducted in 2015 shows that 36% of LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 37% in Montenegro, believe that most cases of discrimination occur in the workplace.² In Kosovo, a survey conducted in 2013 with LGBTI persons found out that only 28% of them were employed which is a significantly

¹ <http://www.lgbti-era.org/content/albania>

² <http://www.lgbti-era.org/content/bosnia-and-herzegovina>

lower percentage compared to the average employment rate for young people in Kosovo.³ In Turkey, most LGBTI people hide their sexual orientation both from family and in the workplace due to fear of abuse or violence. Many individuals who do come out experience severe discrimination often resulting in termination of their job. Several cases of such treatment have been published in mainstream media including firing of police officers or teachers due to their sexual orientation.⁴

All surveys and reports from LGBTI organisations in the Western Balkans and Turkey reveal that trans and intersex individuals have significantly less chances of getting employment and that rates of discrimination and violence are also much higher than the rest of LGBTIQ population.

2. Opportunities in the Western Balkans and Turkey region

Since its establishment, ERA team has had the possibility to hold meetings and establish dialogue with several international organisations which work on the issues of economic empowerment of LGBTI people such as [East meets West](#), [Stonewall UK](#), [National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce \(NGLCC\)](#) etc. ERA team members have been attending several regional and international conferences on this subject and have raised awareness on the position of LGBTI people in the employment sector in our region.

At meetings and consultations held within the membership (e.g. the Annual Conference in Pristina in 2016), ERA was advised to explore diverse fundraising models for its members including here with the business community. ERA team included this topic in its 2017 and 2018 Action Plans. This area of work has been recommended to ERA also at the consultative meeting held by IGLYO and ERA with our members in December 2017 in Belgrade.

In its 3 years of operations, through above consultations and meetings ERA's team has come to the conclusion that several opportunities are currently present in our region which need to be further explored.

They are enlisted as follows:

- Legislation: Positive anti-discrimination laws are present in the Western Balkans region, with special emphasis on employment;
- Large presence of multinational companies (particularly in some capitals of the region as well as Turkey); Support from the business community has taken place to a low degree across the region (e.g. Fundraiser Gala of the Shelter in Albania, supporting Pride events, individual donations etc);

³ <http://www.lgbti-era.org/content/kosovo>

⁴ <http://www.lgbti-era.org/content/turkey>

- Businesses owned and run by LGBTI persons are popping up across the region. While there is no empirical evidence to prove this, it is known throughout ERA's membership of businesses and start-ups led by LGBTI persons;
- Employment Equality Index has been already conducted in Albania and it has proven to be a successful model for increasing visibility of companies on this subject;
- In October 2018 ERA will join the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UN Serbia in launching and presenting [the Standards of Conduct to Support the business community in tackling discrimination against LGBTI people](#); This is the first launch to take place across the entire Eastern Europe region and ERA will continue to cooperate with OHCHR for the potential launch of these standards also in other countries of our region;
- In October 2018 in cooperation with ERA, the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce [will conduct a scoping exercise](#) in Serbia in order to assess whether an LGBTI chamber of commerce is possible. The ambition of ERA is that - if successful - this scoping exercise should be conducted also in other countries of the region as well as the possible establishment of LGBTI chambers of commerce.

3. ERA's role in the topic of Economic Empowerment

ERA's current role on this subject is defined in its Strategic Plan particularly in three main fields:

- how to identify alternative forms of fundraising;
- how to increase the member organizations' financial sustainability;
- how to strengthen the regional LGBTI movement;

As mentioned above, up until now ERA has worked on this matter by trying to increase knowledge on the subject, establishing dialogue and cooperation with major regional and international organisations working on this subject, in cooperating with the OHCHR on launching of business standards for LGBTI and in conducting a scoping exercise on the possibility of creating a chamber of commerce in Serbia and the Western Balkans region. All such efforts and activities have been conducted in close communication and cooperation with the Steering Board as well as member organisations.

As of September 2018, the areas of work which ERA can cover on the subject of economic empowerment of LGBTI people are the following:

- **Encouraging LGBTI owned businesses and enterprises:**
 - o Create regional or national LGBTI Chambers of Commerce;
 - o Contribute to NGLCC's International LGBT Supplier Diversity Initiative;

- Build capacities of LGBTI owned businesses on entrepreneurship, joining chamber, the international supplier diversity initiative;
 - Conduct capacity building trainings for LGBTI organizations on entrepreneurship, social enterprises, fundraising with businesses;
 - Support development of social enterprises;
- **Working with businesses:**
- Conduct Employment Equality Index;
 - Provide trainings and capacity building on LGBTI inclusion;
 - Work on implementing UN Standards of conduct for Business in tackling discrimination against LGBTI persons;
- **Working with state institutions:**
- Analyze legal, social policy and economic policy framework related to LGBTI (already included in ERA's advocacy program);
 - Advocate regionally and nationally for improved laws and policies on LGBTI (already included in ERA's advocacy program);
 - Advocate for law on social entrepreneurship;
- **Partnerships and cooperation with other networks and organizations:**
- Enter into cooperation and partnership with LGBTI business networks and chambers in Europe and other regions;
- **Research:**
- E.g. Economic cost of homophobia and transphobia in the Western Balkans and Turkey;

4. Decision of the General Assembly

However, as this is a complex and big subject, which concerns many topics and areas of work, in order for ERA to have as much of a clear mandate on this as possible, an evaluation, discussion and decision by the General Assembly is required.

More specifically, the General Assembly should vote on whether ERA should engage on the subject of economic empowerment as stated under section three.

Note: This document has been reviewed and approved by the Steering Board prior to its submission to the General Assembly.