



Shatter the stigma on World Health Day

Joint statement from ILGA-Europe and Mental Health Europe, 7 April 2016

Mental health problems are not a minority issue. They are more common than you think. Anyone reading this statement might experience a mental health issue at some point in their lives. While organisations like Mental Health Europe are working hard to combat negative attitudes, there is still a lingering social stigma around mental health problems. This fear of judgment, discrimination or isolation is a sentiment that ILGA-Europe also understand very well. On **World Health Day 2016**, our organisations are joining together to call for greater support for the well-being and mental health of LGBTI people.

LGBTI people are often at a heightened risk of experiencing depression, substance abuse issues, anxiety and suicidal feelings due to their experiences of discrimination and the societal barriers that they face. This is an issue that was picked up on by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in their recent report '[Professionally Speaking](#)'. We welcome the fact that a number of the health care professionals interviewed in the FRA survey recognised the effect discrimination can have on a LGBTI person's mental health. This is often referred to as "**minority stress**".

If people feel uncomfortable disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity, then this creates an **additional barrier** to accessing the mental health services they need. *Professionally Speaking* reports that medical professionals in a majority of countries stated that LGB patients were afraid of unfavourable treatment. Mental healthcare services should enable LGBTI persons to be open about their identity and allow them to include their partners in medical processes, just like anyone else.

The FRA study also highlights the specific **difficulties faced by trans people**. Healthcare professionals in Austria, Malta, the Netherlands and Spain felt that discrimination was very harmful to their mental health. It's important to point out that people with trans identities are not more prone to mental health problems because of their gender identity but because they might have experienced discrimination, bullying or long delays in accessing appropriate treatments.

The use of the term 'disorder' can be stigmatising, particularly if it is used to describe a core experience in a person's life. We are encouraged that the majority of healthcare professionals interviewed by FRA no longer view homosexuality as a mental health issue. However, as we celebrate the birthday of the WHO, we regret that the WHO's own **International Classification of Diseases (ICD)** still pathologises the identities of trans people.

The ICD is currently under revision and Mental Health Europe and ILGA-Europe hope that this revision will move away from the 'the 'disordering' of people's experiences, lives and identities.

Together, ILGA-Europe and Mental Health Europe call on policy makers and the health sector to ensure access to **person-centred mental health services for LGBTI people** across Europe. We also call for more LGBTI awareness **training for healthcare professionals**, to end the stigma many people still face within the healthcare system.

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Notes for the editor:

1. ILGA-Europe is the European Region of ILGA, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association and works for human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans & intersex people in Europe. ILGA-Europe represents over 400 member organisations in 45 European countries: www.ilga-europe.org
2. Mental Health Europe is an umbrella organisation which represents associations, organisations and individuals active in the field of mental health and well-being in Europe. MHE envisions a Europe where people with mental health problems live as full citizens with access to appropriate services and support: <http://www.mhe-sme.org/>
3. WHO's ICD 10 includes a diagnosis of "Gender identity disorder in adolescence and adulthood". This is located in the "Mental, Behavioral and Neurodevelopmental disorders" chapter. Following its revision (planned for 2018), it is likely that the ICD will no longer refer to this particular diagnosis but rather to a diagnosis of "gender incongruence", not located in the "mental disorders" chapter. However, other issues may arise with the 11th version of the ICD, in particular in relation to gender diverse children.
4. You can download the FRA's *Professionally Speaking* report here: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2016/professional-views-lgbt-equality>
5. More information on ILGA-Europe's work on health is available here: <http://www.ilga-europe.org/what-we-do/our-advocacy-work/health>
6. For more information on MHE's work on the ICD revision: http://www.mhe-sme.org/fileadmin/Position_papers/MHE_Position_Paper_on_ICD-10_Revision.pdf