

Message from the co-founders

Dear East meets West friends,

When preparing this Newsletter editorial, we looked at the previous numbers, starting in 2016 and we passed the review of numerous activities and even more meetings with our community. In the beginning we could just mention a few happenings in our CEE region but gradually our Pages became an extensive window on the LGBTIQ life in our micro cosmos. The number and size of LGBTIQ activist groups increased and their professionalism grew. The first years we witnessed the quick rise of LGBTIQ rights in a way we had never expected. The size and intensity of the activism increased and great progress was made in the field of ending the existing discrimination of our people. We even saw great examples in the field of same sex marriage introduction. East meets West supported this emerging activism when possible, not in the least on their annual International Conferences where the CEE sphere always had a premium role. But we did not forget to reach out to the rest of Europe, of the world as we are a learning organization, always trying to inspire our regional CEE activists with external experiences. A nice example of this policy was our opening to the LGBTIQ business world, a task which is still an important part of our work.

But we cannot ignore that the winds have shifted, also in our region. The existing goodwill towards our community changed gradually into reluctance and even hostility. But when reading these Pages, you will see that we still move forward with our activism, we still have remarkable successes. We see that in many countries the courts form a democratic wall against repressive political decisions that violate constitutional rules. We must be vigilant in our strategies, but we have seen time and time again that no populist political nor any other parties will stop our work because our demands are just and an integrated part of Human Rights! We just entered our 11th year of advocacy work and are ready for the next 11 years.

Ludo & Pavel, co-founders East meets West

11 | years of LGBTIQ advocacy 



EW connect
2024

How to navigate through EmW Pages?

As these EmW Pages want to cover LGBTIQ Social as well LGBTIQ Business topics, we added a small hint allowing you the navigate easily through the Pages:

And if you see a [link](#), it is not only safe to click. It will provide you more reading to the topic.

-  **EmW Social Topic**
-  **EmW Business Topic**

The 2023 East meets West Conference

PAVING A NEW WAY

As sparkling as the bubbles in a glass of champagne, that is how we best describe the 9th International East meets West Conference 2023. Here a surprisingly new approach to the work an NGO does, there an individual presentation that made everybody very quiet, followed by a discussion between two different views that made us all aware of the simple complexity of the red line in the whole Conference: how to be best prepared as LGBTIQ community for the violent and loud opposition that rears its ugly head more and more.

Those of you who were present on-site or joined ONLINE witnessed it directly. If you missed the Conference, just look at the many pictures or take the time to watch the recordings (see links on next page of these 2023 Pages).

East meets West showed again what their conferences are all about: rally professional and authentic people around an innovative theme and the magic happens... eyes are opened by the informative part of the talks, minds get inspired and once home, you can test new approaches that were shared in the talks and during the networking moments. It was a unique day that did not miss the objective: **PAVING A NEW WAY!**



A very rich agenda, and what's new to come

Why did we go for the theme "PAVING A NEW WAY"? In the 10 years of our existence, East meets West witnessed a lot of gradual changes in the European LGBTIQ environment, especially in the CEE region, our focus sphere. Was there in the beginning a strong political influence of the 'EU Way of life', put down in anti-discrimination legislation that insured a safe living environment for minorities such as the LGBTIQ community, this came to a halt. Incompetence and especially foolhardiness poisoned this positive evolution. It slowed down the started innovations such as the marriage for all. But what saddened us most is that initially nameless groups of homophobic bigots became louder and more aggressive, supported by opportunistic politicians and extremist religious groups. How do we react to such negative evolution? The strategies we follow will have less or even no impact anymore when confronted with ruffians who use physical force to shut us up.

For East meets West the time was right for a 'constructive postponement' as we think that the hazards of a mere continuation of our work far outweigh the risk of a short delay in our actions. The French have a saying for such tactical move – *Reculer Pour Mieux Sauter* – which means in a contemporary way, to take a breather, reflect on a new strategy and come back more powerful and tactically better equipped in the new environment, to continue successfully the next phase in ensuring a safe life for each member of our very diverse LGBTIQ community. Such new tools and approaches exist and were shared on the Conference. We also gave ample space to the many successes our community achieved in the midst of a negative general atmosphere. East meets West decided for a more direct and efficient support for the network, calling it **East meets West Connect**. You will hear much more about it in the coming months!



Useful links

2023 Conference website: <https://www.eastmeetswest.eu/2023conference>

2023 Conference agenda: https://www.eastmeetswest.eu/s/2023_EmW_Program.pdf

2023 Conference recordings: <https://www.eastmeetswest.eu/2023emw>

2023 Conference photos: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/emwbusiness>

The 2023 East meets West Conference

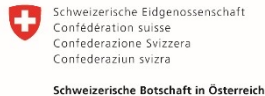
PAVING A NEW WAY

Supporting Partners

Organising the 9th International East meets West Conference in Vienna would not have been possible without the kind support of the following partners:



— Community Partnerships —



— EGLCC Founding Partners —



The 2023 Conference Recordings & Photos

Our work for the 2023 Conference would not have been complete if we would have not published all recordings and photos taken during the day – as always, we made them available on our East meets West Website: <https://www.eastmeetswest.eu/2023conference>



The 2023 East meets West Awards

For the third year, we announced the East meets West Award winners in three categories: **Corporate**, **NGO** and **Individual**. East meets West meets during the year NGOs, Corporate Businesses and Individuals who, by their actions, improve the status of the LGBTIQ community in their environment. These heroes are not always known. With the East meets West Awards, we give them the deserved positive stroke and the recognition they deserve.

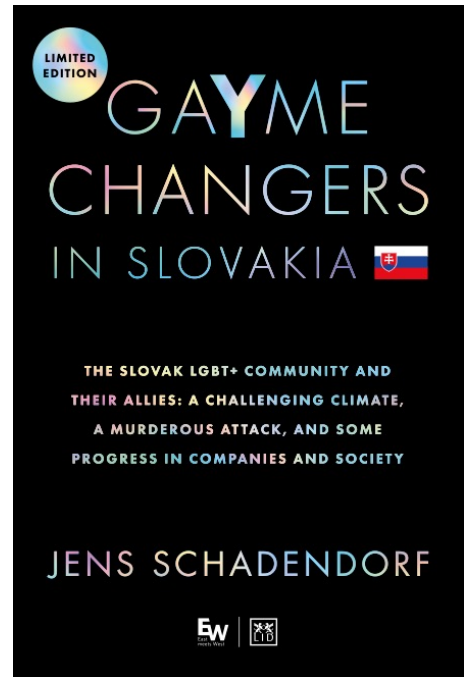
About the 2023 Awards "The very limited edition of the GaYme Changer"

When East meets West started with their Awards, we resolutely did not go for the traditional trophies but we picked presents with a strong symbolic meaning and a link to the location of its annual Conference. For the 2023 Conference we did not make an exception and once again the East meets West Award has a strong underlying story.

The new version of **GaYme Changer** was announced. It is called "**GaYme Changers in Slovakia**" – "The Slovak LGBT+ Community and their allies: a challenging climate, a murderous attack, and some progress in companies and society". You all heard this edition exists only as an eBook.

The truth is that there are also printed copies of this Slovak GaYme Changer, but not 20.000, or 10.000..., not even 1.000 or 500. There are only 5 copies of the Slovak GaYme Changer printed specially for 2023 East meets West Conference. And 3 of the copies are the very special 2023 awards.

*Did you know **Jens Schadendorf** published several other GaYme Changers in various languages? Check them out [here!](#)*



QWIEN Zentrum für Queere Geschichte (Austria)

WINNER IN THE CATEGORY "NGO"

Do you know how LGBTIQ life was 10 years ago? Perhaps. And what about 20 years or even 50 years ago? Probably not. The LGBTIQ history is rich and fascinating. We are just a small link in a long chain of LGBTIQ people who all tried to live their own life in the best possible way. But somebody needs to guard these traces of LGBTIQ life through time and keep them alive. With this year's **East meets West NGO Award** we want to honour a team that are the guardians of history of Queer living in Vienna over the years.

The NGO AWARD 2023 went to QWIEN, the - Zentrum für Queere Geschichte - the award was accepted by **Andreas Brunner**, the managing director of QWIEN



Useful links

2023 East meets West Awards: <https://www.eastmeetswest.eu/awards>
Jens's Schadendorf GaYme Changer: <https://www.gaymechanger.com>

The 2023 East meets West Awards

Martina (Tina) Bednar

WINNER IN THE CATEGORY "INDIVIDUAL"

Most people who are active in Diversity & Inclusion are very passionate about this topic, regardless whether they work for an NGO, are activists or work in a business environment. To keep the motivation is not always easy so without their passion we would not see all the great ideas and initiatives they drive.

But how to find someone for our Award in the pool of great and passionate individuals? What must happen so that the person really stands out, goes beyond borders and is paving a new way forward?

There is someone who we met and who very soon convinced us with an endless amount of motivation and drive to mobilize others to take action. And this all as a "side job" next to the main work in an international corporate environment and next to the family life (a rainbow family life).

This person transformed a simple idea into a first milestone – signatures of the first 25 corporates that appeal on their country leadership to stop LGBTIQ discrimination and ensure an adequate legal protection in Slovakia. And this is just a start! Read more about the current achievements on page 7.

The person awarded the 2023 East meets West Award: **Martina (Tina) Bednar**, SAP Austria



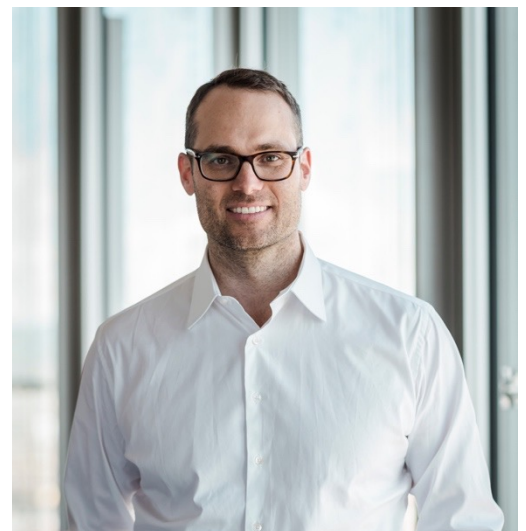
UNIQA Insurance Group

WINNER IN THE CATEGORY "CORPORATES"

East meets West is often confronted with corporate players that made Diversity, Inclusion and Equality to an essential part of their company identity. Very often these are companies that operate globally, followed by similar European companies but not very often, we find this in EU companies that are quite active in the CEE region. We know that implementing these, often quite challenging Diversity, Inclusion and Equality values, in our region can be challenging and demands a strong and resolute management. East meets West is proud to know such company that creates a safe environment for their LGBTIQ employees in all their local centres.

You might have guessed the Corporate Prize winner of the 2023 East meets West Award. This year's East meets West Award for Corporates goes to the UNIQA INSURANCE GROUP.

The award was be accepted by **Rene Knapp**, Member of the Board at **UNIQA Group International**.



Useful links

2023 East meets West Awards: <https://www.eastmeetswest.eu/awards>
Including awards from previous year awards and about

Canada's 1st LGBTIQ Trade Mission to Vienna

We wrote history, again

On March 20th the Canadian LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC) made a **historic Trade Mission to Vienna**. This mission represented a unique opportunity to learn about **Supplier Inclusion & Diversity**, about building an LGBTIQ-inclusive business environment and access a network of certified Canadian diverse businesses that are eager to connect and do business.

This Trade Mission was open to corporations, international businesses as well as any business who is looking to grow their network, explore new business opportunities, and support supplier diversity. It gave the opportunity to meet and engage with Canadian suppliers, attend business-to-business matchmaking sessions, and network with other top industry professionals. **This was a historic moment for Canada and we are proud that East meets West was selected as hosting partner for their mission to Vienna, Austria**, and with this we continue leading the way in promoting and supporting the growth of LGBTQ+ businesses. There were only two stops of this Trade Mission - the United Kingdom (London) and within the European Union Austria (Vienna).



Interested in learning more about the Canadian - Austrian trade and what support Vienna and Austria offer to new business ventures (to not only Canadian businesses)?

- Read from **Ronan Caillo**, Counsellor and Senior Trade Commissioner at Embassy of Canada to Austria on Canadian- Austrian trade [\[SLIDES\]](#)
- Read from **Ute Stadlbauer** and **Karin Zeltner** on how the Vienna Business Agency can support your business ventures [\[SLIDES\]](#)
- And also Read from **Michaela Laussegger**, Director the Americas at ABA-Invest in Austria on what support you can get overall in Austria [\[SLIDES\]](#)

Organising this historic Trade Mission to Vienna would not have been possible without the kind support of the following partners:



Directory of Participants

Browse through the Canadian delegation and learn more about product and service offering of the great diverse businesses.

[Directory](#)



Useful links

Event site <https://www.eastmeetswest.eu/2023cglcc>

Event photos on Flickr <https://www.flickr.com/photos/emwbusiness/albums/72177720306917832/>

Many spoke out after the terrible heartbreaking attack in Bratislava on October 12th 2022. More went on the streets to express disagreements with the direction the country has taken – also important was the reaction of the business community who stood up and joined a coalition to express a clear demand from the country leadership.

What does Slovakia miss out on as an LGBTIQ non-inclusive country? How much does it cost Slovakia and what are the main drivers behind the economic costs of exclusion? East meets West is one of the proud supporters and contributors to the recent **Open for Business research** which spotlights The Economic Case for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Slovakia. What we like about Open for Business work is the structure! The 27 clear propositions grouped in Economic, Business and Individual performance, which makes it easy for anyone to follow a clear business case for LGBTIQ inclusion.

This research was published at a press conference hosted by **Henkel Slovakia**. We were proud and glad that both **Dominic Arnall**, the Chief Executive Officer at **Open For Business (OfB)**, together with **Liz Jacobs** who leads at OfB Global Programs made the trip to Bratislava and joined in person the many journalists and business professionals from over 30 companies operating in Slovakia.

Download the report in [English](#) | Download the report in [Slovak](#)

The Economic Case for LGBTIQ Inclusion in Slovakia: Key Insights

From an economic and business perspective, Slovakia's position is relatively stable. **Yet there are worrying signals that the country will not meet its ambitious growth goals for this decade** (to reach 92% of EU average per capita GDP). So we are not surprised that the current situation LGBTIQ people in the country are facing is extremely challenging.

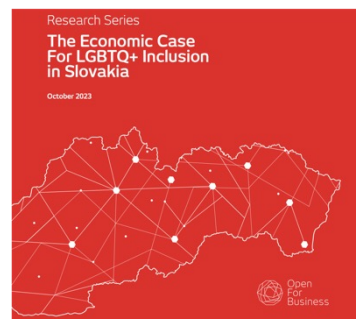
This level of anti-LGBTIQ activity comes at a cost. It affects the health situation and the wages and employment of LGBTIQ people. We also witness a negative impact on foreign investments, on SK tourism, and Slovakia's long-term issue with brain drains. Turn around this negative spiral, presents a substantial opportunity for Slovakia. Did you know that **just a 10% increase** in LGBTIQ rights in Slovakia would lead to an **approximate €3,000 per capita GDP** increase! This would only request the passing legislation allowing for same- sex partnerships, putting Slovakia on equal ground with the majority of the other European Union countries.

Bratislava drops behind the other Visegrad Group (CZ, HU, POL, SK) Capitals in overall openness. Data from the Open For Business 2022 Cities Ratings report find that Bratislava trails its neighbours on key economic metrics as well as LGBTIQ acceptance metrics. It is not surprising that **62% of university students intend to leave Slovakia!** Data also show that more Slovak workers in "jobs of the future" are leaving the country while Western European countries are gaining these workers.

LGBTIQ spending power is a significant contributor to economies. A review of third-party analyses shows that both global LGBTIQ spending power and local Slovak LGBTIQ spending power is significant and worth attracting. As it is estimated at **4,2 billion EUR in 2021**, representing **± 5 % HDP** of Slovakia that given year.

Join us!

You represent the Slovak business community? Join our our business appeal to country leadership. See below who has already joined this appeal!



Useful links

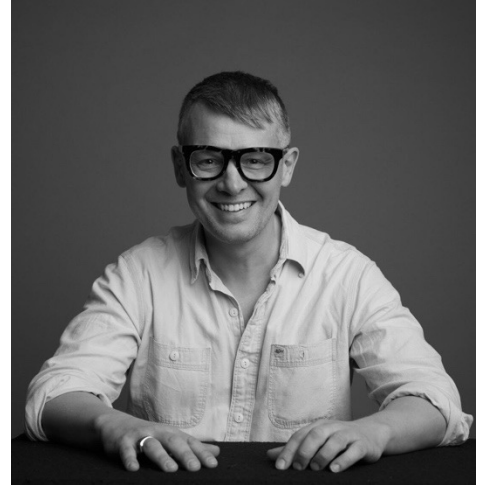
Firemna Vyzva | Company Appeal <https://firemnavyzva.sk>
Open for Business Reports <https://open-for-business.org/reports>

PRESS – The materials East meets West reads!

Fabrice Houdart's weekly message

Subscribe

We receive a large number of Newsletters during the year - some are quite local or treat a specific topic but 1 of them is really global and comprehensive: **Fabrice Houdart's weekly Newsletter on LGBTIQ+ Equality** – next to the Global (including the CEE region) and US news, Fabrice also looks at what is happening with the LGBTIQ representation in the Boardrooms of the Corporate players - he shares news on the gay business world and even adds a semi-cultural desk – every time you read **Fabrice's Newsletter**, you are up to date! Have a look on his weekly mails and the very personal communication style of Fabrice which makes the Newsletter also quite entertaining.



GAY45.eu

Subscribe

And now for something completely different! Those among you who joined our 2023 Conference will remember the interventions by **Răzvan Ion**, CEO at DerAffe.io the publisher of **GAY45.eu** - "GAY45.eu, is an award-winning European queer journal employing AI, with 200,000+ readers, a podcast, two newsletters, **Queer Journalism Campus**, the Snuffel Award, and the **Snuffel Queer AI Fusion Journalism Festival** - it is a unique diversified creative queer journal and multi-platform. It reaches out to a global audience with its diverse and thought-provoking content, making it an essential source of queer insights and inspiration. They don't believe in the mainstream, reject ignorant culture, think independently, and appreciate creativity. Just have a look at their website and become a part of the GAY45.eu universe!

GAY45

journal for queer freedom & creativity | www.gay45.eu

We for you

East meets West did secure 10 complimentary subscriptions for GAY45. Interested? Then be fast and contact us!

Write us!



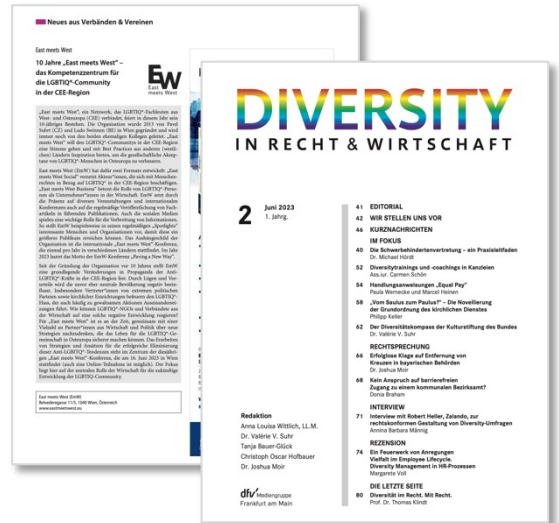
Useful links

Fabrice Houdart <https://fabricehoudart.com>
GAY45 <https://gay45.eu>

Publications & High Level Meetings in 2023

● East Meets West is often invited to publish articles. Unfortunately, we cannot mention all of these occasions but one we considered a real honour: co-writing a text about the role of East meets West and this in the new influential professional German publication 'Diversity in Recht und Wirtschaft' (June 2023 edition).

The specialist publication "**Diversity in Law and Business**" deals with the entire spectrum of the topic of diversity on a legal and economic level and brings the most important news to the point every quarter, informs about current legal developments and advises its readers with concrete recommendations for action, best practice examples, tools and checklists for a sustainably successful diverse company. Their view on is not limited to LGBTIQ but it refers to the variety of people and ways of life and aims to ensure equal treatment for everyone in society, regardless of age, ethnic origin and nationality, gender and gender identity, physical and mental abilities, religion and ideology, sexual orientation and social background. This way this excellent magazine offers a global and holistic view on the diversity concept!



● **Meeting a country president** happens not really every day. Or? Therefore very unlikely, and if happens, it is a precious moment. Even less likely is it to meet and talk to a country leader who despite a challenging decade takes the time and listens to the diverse societies around, including LGBTIQ people. Slovakia is fortunate to have such an ally with **her Excellency Mrs. Zuzana Čaputová**. She is an inspiration and a role-model for head of states (not only) in the region, Central and Eastern Europe.

Pavel was fortunate to meet her and have a wonderful conversation at the occasion of handing over in person the 2022 East meets West Award (something overdue on our end...). Ludo, you were missed! Next time, meeting head of state must be with you!



 **Useful links**

Diversity in Recht und Wirtschaft www.divruw.de

OPPORTUNITIES

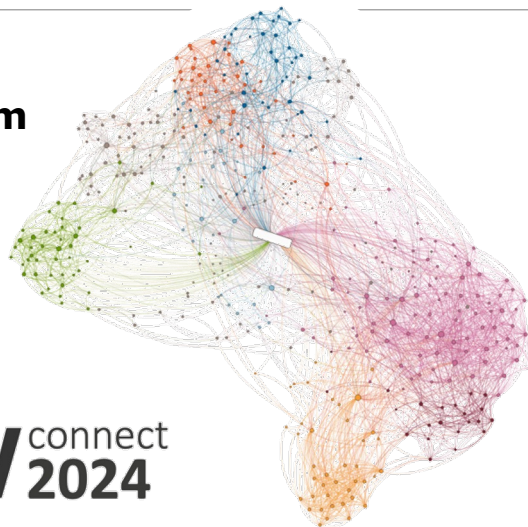
The East meets West Connect Program

East meets West 2024 Connect is a full year program which will bring **the missing competencies and skills** to as many LGBTIQ individuals, organisation and businesses from Central & Eastern Europe (CEE) as possible. This way we make the best use of the so many contacts and partners we acquired throughout the last years. And, this way the many aspects that we previously touched in a single dense conference day we spread over a number and variety of activities. This capacity building can have various forms - **attending a conference, taking part in a learning event, joining a round table or go on an internship.**

Our job as East meets West will be to connect the identified capacity building needs and link them to a solution offered by our supporting partner. Backed now by the first partners committed to host or run specific events for our **CEE network members**, we are certain this pilot year will be a success and will lay down fundamentals for scaling this bright idea in the next years!

[Apply today !](#)

EW connect
2024



To make it very concrete for you:

Apply and share with us the key focus areas you need to get better in, which capacity building you need, or which event you always wanted to attend but the necessary funds were not available. East meets West will continuously review all applications and work on matching the applicants' demand with the many opportunities offered by our supporting partners.

The BØWIE Investment Readiness Program

BØWIE

Never heard of **BØWIE**? They envision a world where gender norms no longer define who we are, who we can love or what we can achieve. Queer and feminist creators from all over the globe show us every day that we can collectively harness our creativity, passion and fearlessness and create a society where inclusion is truly lived, not only talked about. **BØWIE** supports these passionate creators whose ideas and actions have the power to move the needle for us all, wherever we are. Let's make gender and LGBTIQ the revolution it needs to be! Across industries and across communities. Let us be the collective (r)evolution.

BØWIE as a Geneva (CH) based impact incubator together with JPMorgan Chase, Dreilinden and us at East meets West, **BØWIE** launched a programme dedicated to advancing the economic empowerment of LGBTIQ+ owners of micro and small enterprises in Eastern Europe and the Balkan region.

East meets West is glad that some of their business network made it to the application process to receive:

- **Personalised Guidance:** Receive 5 months of tailored mentoring and training to boost investment readiness and unlock financial opportunities for your business.
- **Investor Pitch Session in Geneva:** Craft a comprehensive business plan, financial plan, and a compelling pitch deck and present it during an Investor Pitch Session in Geneva (all expenses covered).
- **Potential Investment:** Secure a chance to receive an investment of up to EUR 30.000 to bring your business to the next level.

Stay tuned for our updates! Soon we will be able to reveal more on those who are part of this year's program.

Useful links

The East meets West Connect Program <https://www.eastmeetswest.eu/connect>

BØWIE Investment Readiness Program <https://www.bowiecreators.com/investment-readiness>

Institutional Visit to the EU HQ in Brussels

Inclusive Supply Chain

East meets West, as founding member of EGLCC (European LGBTIQ Chamber of Commerce), joined the institutional visit to Brussels and met with representatives of European Parliament and the European Commission. Pavel Subrt focused in his contribution on one effective way to increase the social acceptance of LGBTIQ people in business environments, the inclusive procurement (also referred to as Supplier diversity & inclusion).



Though relatively new in Europe, Inclusive Procurement (also referred to as Supplier diversity & Inclusion) provides an effective improvement in increasing the social acceptance of LGBTIQ people in business environments.

- Supplier diversity & inclusion programs **activate growth opportunities** by connecting LGBTIQ businesses with private and public sector organisations who value stronger inclusiveness and diversity in their supply chain and have a high potential for improving the business environment conditions of SMEs owned or operated by LGBTIQ people. Such benefits of diverse & inclusive supply chains include: increased competition and innovation, reduced socio-economic inequality, economic prosperity and job growth, stronger and more sustainable communities.
- Do not forge **Small and Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)** that are the backbone of Europe's economy. They represent 99% of all businesses in the EU. They employ around 100 million people, account for more than half of Europe's GDP and play a key role in adding value in every sector of the economy. The EGLCC, the European LGBTIQ Chamber of Commerce, estimates there are around 1,5 Mio LGBTIQ owned SMEs across the EU with LGBTIQ entrepreneurs tending to struggle with huge disadvantages: discrimination, disconnection from mainstream business networks and disproportionate levels of doubt. Research shows that in the EU, the average 26% of LGBTIQ hide their sexual orientation or gender identity at work (with some countries reaching 50%).
- Not only large (global) corporates are increasingly embracing inclusive procurement and run Supplier Diversity & Inclusion programs, but also **the EU can help by promoting equality & encourage integration**. Inclusive procurement should also extend the agenda of the EU Platform of Diversity Charters, which coordinates the activities of Diversity Charters at Member State level. Next to the EU's motto "United in Diversity", which links well to the aims of inclusive procurement, to boost economic growth, one of the EU priorities. Inclusive procurement will enable buyers and the EU economy as a whole to tap on the benefits of more diverse, resilient, innovative and cost-competitive supply chains.

Useful links

EC LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025: [LINK](#)

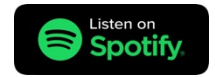
EPBN, The European Pride Business Network: <https://epbn.eu>

THE 2023 SPOTLIGHT SERIES

Our New Conversation Recordings

PODCASTS

To be innovative and come up continuously with new ideas has for many years been a symbol of East meets West. People we meet throughout the year and who we bring to the Conference stage, deserve more than just the short session at our signature event. We therefore decided to go the next mile and establish regular online events. We are proud and happy to introduce to the wider public the East meets West **SPOTLIGHT SERIES**. Every month we select an **inspiring individual, organisation or proud business** and we bring them to our online stage for either an interactive session with the audience or a video conversation / a podcast.



#14 Meet Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce



We had a great talk with the **CGLCC, Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce**, about their work and mainly about the "historic" LGBTIQ Trade Mission to Europe. Trade Missions are well known to many, but an LGBTIQ Trade Mission? It is one of the concrete ways how LGBTIQ owned businesses can get more visibility and tap on new business opportunities.

Listen to our conversation with **Darrell Schuurman**, who co-founded CGLCC 20 years ago, and **Cass Elliott** who runs CGLCC Global Programs. It was once again for us an enjoyable recording. And if you wanted to learn more about CGLCC and perhaps to take the flight to Kingston (Canada) and meet CGLCC at their 2023 Conference, we had a special offer waiting for you!

About CGLCC: Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce is a coalition of LGBTQ business owners, allies, government liaisons, corporate members, and community partners. We advocate for and work towards a more inclusive North American economy – one connection at a time.

ITB Travel Hero Podcast



ITB
BERLIN

The World's
Leading
Travel Trade
Show®



The ITB Berlin (5-7 March 2024) is the leading international travel trade show for LGBTIQ Tourism. In this month's Travel Hero Podcast our host Charlotte Lamp Davies of management consultancy *A Bright Approach* spoke to Pavel Subrt, co-founder of East meets West, and shared insights on how the travel industry can get more involved in the debate to, not only ensure it captures this travel community but that it also supports the ongoing conversation about inclusion in travel. Pavel declared that authenticity is key to engage and push the agenda. There is also a commercial angle here if you wish to get involved. The LGBTQ+ communities are keen travellers, more diverse than any other community and travel should do all it can to capture this group of travellers. As with most things, getting involved requires some persistence, but the efforts will be well worth it as travel pushes this important agenda. Listen here:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/5qKE43okbI7aIJAIn0ah2F>

Useful links

All our podcasts can be found on our website

<https://www.eastmeetswest.eu/podcasts>

East meets West podcasts channels

<https://open.spotify.com/show/4rZM5GxqwXvOyEaUsnoLVs>

<https://soundcloud.com/user-14622893>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZ-BHWiqANmMGdSLom9E9pw>

LGBTIQ Business

Another growth in 2023

● **EGLCC**, the **European LGBTIQ Chamber of Commerce** where East meets West is among the founding members, announced the inclusion of the Spanish Business Network & Chamber for LGBTI Diversity & Inclusion (**REDI**) and FGLBC - French LGBT+ Business Chamber by **L'Autre Cercle** as the new member chambers.

Welcoming **REDI** and **FGLBC** marks a significant milestone as EGLCC continues to grow their network in Europe. Spain and France, both integral regions in the EU's economic landscape, play a crucial role in advancing diversity and inclusion in the current business environment.

The synergy between our local and regional member chambers amplifies our collective efforts toward a common goal, fostering the economic and social acceptance of LGBTIQ people as equals in the European business environment. As EGLCC Member Chambers, REDI and FGLBC will work closely with us to activate opportunities for growth for LGBTIQ-owned and managed businesses on both local and national levels.

As of January 2024, **EGLCC's local and regional business chambers cover the following regions:** BeNeLux (BGLBC), Germany (GGLBC), Italy (EDGE), Central & Eastern Europe (East meets West), France (FGLBC by L'Autre Cercle), Spain (REDI), and Scandinavia (SGLCC).



About EGLCC:

The European LGBTIQ Chamber of Commerce (EGLCC) is the European advocacy group for LGBTIQ-owned businesses. It activates growth opportunities by connecting LGBTIQ businesses with corporations valuing stronger inclusiveness and diversity in their supply chain.



The growing support of Corporate Partners

EGLCC's founding and corporate partners, friends, and allies, include Accenture, AUDI, Barilla, Dow, IBM, Intel Corporation, Johnson & Johnson, JLL, MSD, Nike, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Unilever, and Yara International.

Founding Partners



Corporate Partners



Friends & Allies



Register today!

Are you also a proud and out LGBTIQ Business owner(s)? Then please register today at no costs and be part of the new untapped growth opportunities offered by EGLCC corporate partners.

[Register](#)

Useful links

EGLCC's local and regional business chambers <https://www.eqlcc.eu/en>
EGLCC's corporate partners <https://www.eqlcc.eu/en/partners>

Inclusive Procurement

Unlocking growth through Inclusive Supply Chains

● **Diverse and inclusive supply chains** bring benefits such as **increased competition, innovation, reduced socio-economic inequality, economic prosperity, job growth**, and the development of stronger, **more sustainable communities**. Inclusive procurement enables buyers and the European economy as a whole to harness the benefits of more diverse, resilient, innovative, and cost-competitive supply chains. SDI programs unlock growth opportunities by connecting LGBTIQ businesses with private and public sector organizations that value stronger inclusiveness and diversity in their supply chain, presenting a high potential for improving the business conditions of SMEs owned and operated by LGBTIQ individuals.

Inclusive procurement, also known as **Supplier Diversity & Inclusion (SDI)**, is gaining traction in Europe, contributing significantly to advancing the social acceptance of LGBTIQ people in the business environment.

Recognizing the Economic Potential of LGBTIQ Entrepreneurship

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute around 99% of all businesses in Europe, employing over 100 million people and contributing significantly to Europe's GDP.



As of January 2024, the **EGLCC estimates approximately 1.5 million LGBTIQ-owned SMEs across Europe**. However, LGBTIQ entrepreneurs often face challenges such as discrimination, limited access to mainstream business networks, and heightened levels of doubt. Research indicates that, on average, **26% of LGBTIQ individuals** in Europe conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity at work, with some countries **reaching 50%**.

The Role of Corporations and European Institutions in Advancing LGBTIQ Inclusion in Business and Beyond

The corporate SDI programs and initiatives, such as those of **EGLCC's corporate partners**, unlock growth opportunities by connecting LGBTIQ businesses with organizations, both public and private, that value stronger inclusiveness and diversity in their supply chain. While global corporations increasingly embrace inclusive procurement and Supplier Diversity & Inclusion programs, **Europe needs to play a pivotal role**, too. To further promote equality, encourage integration, boost economic growth, and align with broader European objectives, European institutions should actively foster inclusive procurement policies and recognize minority entrepreneurship within their institutional structure. As for the European Union, the motto, "United in Diversity," resonates with the goals of inclusive procurement, promoting equality, encouraging integration, and boosting economic growth. While the EU has long promoted inclusive entrepreneurship policies, there is a crucial need to fill the gap concerning initiatives that encourage inclusive procurement—positive actions that help SMEs owned by people from disadvantaged and under-represented groups overcome obstacles in securing contracts with EU institutions, public bodies, and large corporations. Inclusive procurement should also extend beyond the **EU Platform of Diversity Charters**, coordinating the activities of Diversity Charters at the Member State level. It should involve research focused on LGBTIQ-owned businesses, filling gaps in data, and validating assumptions and insights from business networks.

Useful links

East meets West Supplier Diversity <https://www.eastmeetswest.eu/supplier-diversity>

European Registration website for LGBTIQ business owners <https://eglcc.eu/en/self-registration-emw>

Short news from the EmW Network

East meets West works in a region where the LGBTIQ topics touch many people in a variety of ways. Sometimes political or business, often social, but always very driven! Enjoy the news from our network and be amazed. For more information about country related news, feel free to contact us: info@eastmeetswest.eu.



Austria Award Sessions, a Memorial and an important Anniversary

Since 2009, the “**Meritus**” award has honored companies and other organizations every two years that are particularly committed to diversity management in the dimension of sexual orientation and gender diversity. The Meritus 2023 was awarded in these four main categories, of which two deserve a special mentioning:

PrideBiz Award 2023: The feminist Austrian online health magazine “Our Bodies” has existed since 2022 and deals with taboo topics in areas such as body, gender and sexuality

Category “**Public Sector 2023**”. In the Graz city administration, diversity is anchored at the management level. Gender diversity in all data sets and gender-appropriate language including accompanying training in cooperation with the LGBTIQ association “**RosaLila Pantherinnen**” shows the commitment of the city of Graz as well as explicit specifications for the gender-inclusive furnishing of sanitary facilities in new buildings or corresponding retrofitting of existing facilities



The **11th LGBTIQ+ Business Forum** took place under the motto “LGBTIQ+ and artificial intelligence”. This year's host of the forum was the Vienna University of Technology. The forum was also supported by the Federal Computing Center. As part of the forum, they approached the question of the extent to which artificial intelligence has the potential to prevent or fuel discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people from very different perspectives.

AGPRO - Austrian Gay Professionals celebrated in 2023 its **25th anniversary** this year. To celebrate this, the network hosted an inspiring symposium with numerous high-profile guests at a very special location, the venerable halls of the Österreichisches Parlament, underlining the enduring relevance of AGPRO's mission. May the next 25 years bring further improvements in the legal and social equality of LGBTIQ+ people

A remarkable action was the fact that the **Austrian Business** sector came together to hand over the **Levelling-up petition**, driven by Deloitte. Living free from discrimination is a human right. That is why they, together with 18 other companies and organizations, were calling for protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation to be included in the Austrian Equal Treatment Act.



Vienna has in its 4th District (Resselpark) a new memorial to homosexuals persecuted by the Nazi regime: “**ARCUS (Shadow of a Rainbow)**”. Homosexuals were not perceived or recognised as victims of the Nazi regime for a long time after 1945, especially in view of the fact that homosexuality remained criminalised in Austria until the minor criminal law reform in 1971. Discrimination regarding the age of consent was only abolished in 2002.





Czech Republic

A new organizational format to fit their new vision on extended LGBTIQ support

● The Czech Pride Business Forum organized their annual conference subtitled "Taste of Equality", hosted by the renowned Czech pastry chef Josef Maršálek, during which 247 attendees enjoyed a day-long program. During the event, they announced their LGBTIQ Friendly Employer Award winners and also introduced their new Fostering Transgender in the Workplace Toolkit. Here you can find more about the event and as well some photos capturing the conference. Read more [here](#).



● Other important news as that in 2023, the Pride Business Forum became an independent organization (Foundation). The Pride Business Forum Fund was established with as aim the promotion of equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer people. They aspire to support and empower LGBTQ+ people in and outside of the workplace. More to read [here](#).

● In 2023, they welcomed 23 new members. Right now, Pride Business Forum has now 77 members in total with 2 members upgrading their membership to the premium level.

● And finally, the many great actions from initiative Jsme Fer (Fair marriage fairmarriage.org), that included also an open letter to Prime Minister signed by over 70 respected businesses, 2023 was the year that brought Czech Republic closest to marriage equality... however, we are still not there yet. [Here](#) a great 2023 summary of what happened every month.



Slovakia

Deserving LGBTIQ activists rewarded by Inakost prizes showing a positive elan after the saddening October attack

○ 2023, the year after the murder of LGBTIQ members. It was also a year when state representatives were unable to enforce anything positive and the result of an undignified and hateful election campaign is a parliament dominated by parties promoting measures against LGBTIQ people. But at the same time, we witnessed the efforts by a record number of people, organizations and companies to improve the lives of LGBTIQ people in Slovakia. A year of an extremely successful fundraising campaign, thanks to which a community center for LGBTIQ people in Bratislava will become a reality. With a number of **Awards, Inakost** distinguished a large number of activities by among others the Media, Art & Culture and Leadership. [Read more](#) from Inakost.



○ Unfortunately, the results of the recent elections led to significant changes to previously planned legislation in the field of **Trans rights**. The Ministry of Health will revoke the expert guidance that was supposed to simplify the process of gender change for transgender people. He will do so at the request of the SNS coalition partner. [Read more](#).

○ We end the news from Slovakia on a positive touch! Some countries have to fight to organize 1 Pride. A smaller country like Slovakia managed to set up already 4 during the year in such a small country like Slovakia! The youngest Pride took place in the city of **Bardejov**. The **Banska Bystrica** Pride is already a real fixture with in 2023 the theme of love in various forms. The one with the longest tradition is the Rainbow Pride in **Bratislava** which took place for the 13th time in a city filled with rainbows and covered a whole month of accompanying events. And we cannot forget the 11th edition of the **Pride Kosice**, preceded by a week full of various events.



Poland

A country getting ready to take a new direction for a more positive LGBTIQ environment

● Poland started a great new project called **BeyondLabels**, the first Inclusive Job Fair in Poland. This initiative was a response to a need to support for LGBTIQ people in entering the labor market. What is offered? A really Inclusive Job Fair, an event that connects employers with diverse talents. They set up Workshops that will improve your qualifications and reduce minority stress. Also Innovative Mentoring that connects experienced professionals with people at the beginning of their careers, offering this way a chance to gain knowledge and support and valuable contacts. At BeyondLabels, they are aware that your diversity is your strength. The project was created to give you a chance to find your dream job. [BeyondLabels](#) is more than just a project - it is a community of people who strive for change.



○ Also in Poland the European Court of Human Rights has issued a judgement against the Poland state in a case taken by 5 same sex couples seeking to have their relationships legally protected. **ILGA-Europe** was one of nine groups who intervened in the case. Their Head of Litigation, Arpi Avetisyan declared: "Today's judgment from the European Court is a crucial stepping stone in ensuring the rights of same-sex couples in Poland are duly recognised and protected. No more 'if's' and 'but's' can justify delays in putting in place a framework for legal recognition of rainbow families." [Read more.](#)

● Also positive news on the economic case for LGBTIQ inclusion, as **Open for Business** was seeking to raise the profile of the economic case for LGBTQ+ inclusion in the run up to the autumn elections. Their work in Poland has been ramping up as they expected LGBTQ+ issues to be a key focus of the campaign from all sides and they wanted to ensure that the economic case features in these discussions. In support of this, they co-hosted a conference - the **LGBTQ+ Diamonds Forum** - with ABSL (one of the largest employers' associations in Poland) and NatWest Group. This enabled them to equip nearly 200 people from across business, civil society and local and central government with the data and insights needed to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights through their different channels of influence. You can view recordings of all of the sessions (in both English and Polish) are [available here.](#)



Hungary

The famous Annual OPEN Conference remains also in 2023 the motor for progress of the LGBTIQ Community, by WeAreOpen

● **WeAreOpen** presented the 2023 National Manifesto Campaign at the OPEN Conference. In the campaign film, 33 company leaders collectively voted to build a non-judgmental, open, and inclusive corporate culture. The campaign film run on RTL and AMC platforms, as well as in national media. [Read more.](#)

● WeAreOpen took the national dialogue on diversity to a new level at this year's **OPEN Conference**. The regional event on diversity in business attracted 300 participants, 50 speakers including international leaders in the field of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and 100 large companies. The conference touched on several aspects of social sustainability, including Roma and LGBTIQ inclusion, employment of people with disabilities, women's career paths, and highlighted the challenges of DEI in several industries - creative industries, media, and FMCG sector. Check out [photos](#) of the event.



● WeAreOpen has developed over the years LGBTIQ support in companies in three categories:

- **DEI Audit** and OPEN Survey research to measure companies' diversity and inclusion maturity
- **DEI capacity development** of companies by developing and implementing a strategy
- **Raising the visibility** of firms at the forefront of diversity through national campaigns.

● Thanks to **ESG standards**, social sustainability has become an equivalent to environmental sustainability, and companies are already required to show concrete results in this area. The portfolio of services WeAreOpen has developed over the past years now goes beyond educating organizations about the importance of an open corporate culture. Check out the latest video [here.](#)



Slovenia

Reaping the rewards of 25 years of hard work

When celebrating the 25th anniversary of **Legebitra**, they organized 2 events. One was held in September and was a community based event for our volunteers, employees and other friends of Legebitra. A second one was hosted by the Embassy of Ireland for Slovenia, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Declaration of human rights and also their 25th anniversary.



ILGA-EUROPE

Ljubljana 2023

Rising to The Moment

In 2023 they hosted the **ILGA Europe conference in Ljubljana** and this for the 1st time! A national LGBTIQ+ strategy and action plan, where the national secretary from the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social affairs and Equal opportunities, discussed the upcoming first LGBTIQ Nation Strategy that is planned to be created together with NGOs by the end of 2024.



A crucial step forward for the LGBTIQ community was the coming in force of a new Family Code. Together with the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the Ministry of Interior, Legebitra urged all couples who had a partnership union to transform their partnership into a marriage.



Bulgaria

Not only overcoming the setbacks of recent years but also achieving significant legislative changes in favour of the LGBTIQ community

In July this year the **Bulgarian Parliament passed a law** amending the Penal Code, which provides heavier penalties for crimes committed with the motive of the victim's sexual orientation. This is the first significant legislative change in favour of LGBTIQ people in Bulgaria since the adoption of the Protection from Discrimination Act in 2004. The addition of sexual orientation as a protected characteristic in the Criminal Code became possible after many years of work and public pressure from LGBTIQ organizations in Bulgaria, international and European institutions and many activists and public figures.

The reopening of the [Rainbow Hub](#) – after being physically attacked by a far-right presidential candidate in 2021, the LGBTIQ non-commercial community centre had to change numerous locations, but has finally found a permanent space. The premises, granted in cooperation with the Bulgarian Jewish Organization Shalom, will be used for the next 10 years, once again becoming the vital safe space for the community and reaching beyond to other vulnerable groups.



We must mention the **Sofia Pride Business and Human Rights Forums**. The first editions of the events contributed greatly to the cause of Sofia Pride and drew together businesses, human rights advocates and state officials into a fruitful two day discussions, with practical outcomes. The only Pride in Bulgaria continues to expand each year, with record number of attendance.





Serbia

Reposting the increased violence against the LGBTIQ community with objective and scientific facts

From our personal experiences East meets West saw the violent attitude of the local population towards the LGBTIQ community. Therefore we are happy a scientific research on the **"The Economic Cost of Exclusion based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics in the Labor Market in the Republic of Serbia"** as such action constitutes an objective answer to negative declarations on LGBTIQ people. This recent research suggests that the effects of stigma, discrimination, and exclusion against LGBTIQ people have an economical cost. Here a few of many interesting findings: the annual economic loss due to SOGIESC-based exclusion totalled 31 bln. RSD or 0,5% of the 2021 GDP in the Republic of Serbia. The annual fiscal loss totalled 9,3 bln. RSD, or approximately 0.1% of the 2021 GDP. [Read more.](#)



The sickened atmosphere towards LGBTIQ people in Serbia leads to **violence as was proven by two separate hate crimes** against LGBTIQ people in Belgrade. Member organisations of ERA recently reported that in the night between 27 and 28 February, three young men were attacked in Manjež Park in Belgrade. The reason for the attack was their sexual orientation. A group of men belonging to the "Skinheads" stabbed one of the victims with a knife, and attacked the others with a broken bottle. The victims were hospitalized, and one of them has serious injuries. Meanwhile a day later the security guards of a Belgrade nightclub inflicted injuries on a gay man, an attack which seems to have been also due to the victims' sexual orientation. Such attacks remind us similar crimes in Slovakia and cannot be tolerated! We demand for the state authorities in Serbia to take the cases of hate crimes against LGBTIQ people with utmost seriousness and to promote a language of tolerance and respect for the LGBTIQ community, who have become the punching back of nationalistic and fascist rhetoric in Serbia as well as other countries of the region. More info on the hate crimes in Serbia [you can find by ERA.](#)



Albania

Small in size but not in supporting the LGBTIQ community

Albania's first and only LGBTIQ shelter, **"Streha"** was hosting its 7th Charity Gala to support at-risk LGBTIQ youth. Albania's LGBT Shelter is a story of success. Throughout the years, it has helped hundreds of at-risk youth from Albania and a few neighbouring countries survive very challenging situations caused due to homophobia and transphobia, including housing and other services to empower LGBTIQ people (primarily those aged 18-29). Based in Tirana, [Streha](#) supports LGBTIQ youth from Albania and, occasionally, LGBTIQ youth from neighbouring countries by providing a long list of assistance such as safe accommodation and meeting their basic needs, legal aid, health services and advocacy campaigns.

4th edition **QUEER FILM MARATHON TIRANA** 2023, the first and only QUEER Film Festival in Albania. The opening film of the festival with guest film director Mette Aakerholm Gardell and the discussion panel was opened by the artistic director of the festival Z. Arber Kodra. The [Film Festival](#) is made possible with the support of the "Culture and Creativity for the Western Balkans" (CC4WBs).



And we must mention the **Tirana Pride**. In 2023 they marked the beginning of the second decade of the fight for recognition, rights and equality for the LGBTIQ+ community in Albania. The 2023 Pride Parade was held under the smoke of an even more disturbing phenomenon than the scorn and hatred of some individuals. In 2023 they marched on a boulevard that was being emptied of young men and women and of the LGBTIQ community, in a city where the main institutions are still silent and deny the recognition of the rights of the most needy communities. It took courage to march on the Pride in Tirana where despite the colourful facades and the image of a false security, the LGBTIQ community, must still be lived amidst fear and closed between four walls. After many years in the dark and after a decade of activism, they continue to rise above the smoke and darkness that tries to suffocate their hope, for their rights and for the rights of those that society did not support for years.



Lithuania

How a divers children’s book makes the European Court of Human Rights rule against Lithuania for violating article 10

○ It reads like a modern fairy tale. In 2013 the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences published a book written by the late lesbian writer, **Neringa Dangvyde Macate**. Two of the six fairy tales in the book had story lines about relationships and marriages between persons of the same sex. On the book’s publication, eight members of the Lithuanian Parliament sent a letter to the University, relaying to it concerns expressed by associations representing families about literature which “sought to instil in children the idea that marriage between persons of the same sex was a welcome phenomenon”.



○ But..., the Inspectorate concluded that the two fairy tales who depicted same-sex couples did not comply with a provision in Lithuania’s **‘Minors Protection Act’**, stating that any information which “expresses contempt for family values”. Macate lodged civil proceedings against the University, arguing that depiction of same-sex relationships could not be considered harmful for children of any age, but in 2019 the courts ultimately endorsed the measures taken against the book and dismissed her claim. The case was taken to the European Court of Human Rights that decided, unanimously, that there had been: a violation of Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights. [Read more.](#)

○ Along with the first day of winter, **LGL (National LGBT Rights Organization)** celebrated its [30th anniversary](#). In 2023 LGL has implemented several successful projects such as organizing an international conference to discuss the situation of LGBTIQ young people in Lithuania. They also carried out LGBTIQ human rights advocacy at the national and international level and they paid special attention to the prevention of hate crimes and hate speech against LGBTIQ people.



Armenia

Two high level Events and the election of a new Chairperson show the innovative power of Pink Armenia NGO

○ In 2023, the 8th [Rainbow Forum](#), which has already become a tradition to be held each year, took place from November 30th to December 2nd. The forum kicked off with a vibrant opening ceremony with powerful opening speeches with ambassadors and representatives of diplomatic missions and the UN being invited to the stage to elaborate on each answer since the topics were related to their countries, society or history. On the second day, numerous panel discussions and parallel sessions covered a multitude of topics. The final day continued the momentum with a panel discussion on selective justice and was concluded with a festive celebration, marking **Pink’s 16th birthday**.

○ The **Pink Human Rights Defender NGO** participated in the [Armenian Forum for Democracy](#). The Armenian Forum for Democracy aimed to discuss the process and challenges of democratic reforms. The speakers mentioned the legislative gaps that hinder the complete protection of the human rights of LGBTIQ people in Armenia and the discriminatory approach by law enforcement bodies, particularly emphasizing the fact that sexual orientation and gender identity are not mentioned as protected characteristics in RA legislation, which makes the investigation of hate crimes and the recording and prevention processes of cases of discrimination more complex. The Prime Minister of Armenia, the President of the Republic of Armenia, deputies of the National Assembly, as well as ambassadors, ministers, other political and state figures, representatives of international bodies and members of civil society attended the forum.

○ Last but not least, Pink's General Assembly elected **Karine Aghajanyan** as the new chairperson of the organization. Karine brings a unique set of capabilities to the organization's leadership with an impressive educational background and diverse professional experience in human rights, journalism, and advocacy. She is also proficient in four languages and has excellent knowledge of digital security.





Ukraine

Amazing successes in the status of the Ukrainian LGBTIQ community!

○ The registration of the **first draft of law on civil partnerships was finalized**. It is the result of cooperation with MP Inna Sovsun. It is already supported by Ministry of Defence and Justice. And also this is another of their successes as before they were not supportive. Also, more than 40 CSOs created a petition to the President, getting 25k signatures in three weeks. So, we see that not only officials and institutions have become more supportive, but this change of attitude is also carried by the general public.



● There was also launched a project for Ukrainian private companies - **Point of Care**. It is aimed to help businesses to launch inclusive psychological support for their teams including the needs of 3 groups: LGBTIQ, veterans and IDPs. Currently a video course was created and a guide was prepared. Have a look at the website of the project - t-t@org.ua. More than 100 HRs have already finished the training. Read more on (not only) Point of Care on Fulcrum's [website](#).



● In 2023 was also organized the **annual Forum of Allies BAM** (business, activism, media)! They managed to unite on one platform LGBTIQ activists, celebrities and the biggest employers in Ukraine, such as Ukrzaliznytsia, Uklon, Starlight Media and Comfy to talk about diversity and inclusion in terms of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. [Watch recording](#).



Bosnia & Herzegovina

Organizing a professional survey to measuring the gradual progress by the general public in understanding the LGBTIQ community

○ A research on the attitudes of the citizens of Bosnia & Herzegovina was conducted. The collected learnings from the survey are too extensive to repeat here but we added the links to get all information. These research findings indicate a positive trend in the knowledge of LGBTIQ topics and changed attitudes of the general population but there still remains a lot of work for the local activists. [Read more](#).



○ Positive was the successful organization of the third edition of the queer (LGBTIQ) art festival Kvirhana [\[LINK\]](#) which had more than 1500 visits. The festival slogan, "Rod da prostiš", carried a broader meaning that relates to the acceptance and expression of diverse gender identities and the questioning of traditional gender norms and stereotypes.



○ A 3rd positive achievement in Bosnia & Herzegovina was the appointment of 16 contact persons at the prosecutor's offices to help LGBTIQ persons in reporting hate crimes. Once again it proved the power from the judicial system to support the justified rights of the LGBTIQ community. Simply follow soc.ba/en/map



Kosovo

Trade Unions and the Dutch Embassy Empower the Local LGBTI Community

○ The **Centre for Equality and Liberty of the LGBT Community** in Kosovo (**CEL**) was established in July 2013 with the aim to empower the LGBTIQ community in Kosovo. For 10 years **CEL** has prevented the discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, raised awareness of the general population on LGBTIQ rights and advocated for equal rights and non-discrimination of the LGBTIQ community in Kosovo in accordance with the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Kosovo. To this day, CEL has aspired to become a driving force behind the creation of a progressive, diverse and tolerant society in Kosovo towards the LGBTIQ community; a motivator for change of traditional social constructs and a support system for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all.

○ We also must mention 3 imported events in Kosovo in 2023. Firstly, the **Regional Conference "The state of play of LGBTIQ+ rights in Western Balkans and Türkiye"**. Watch the [recording](#).



○ In September and for the 1st time in Pristina the **Queer Festival** was organized. Everybody could enjoy a program filled with performances, films and concerts that reconstruct queer culture in Kosovo. [[LINK](#)]



○ And last but certainly not least we look back at the **Pride Month 2023** marked under the slogan "**Looking Back and Moving Forward**," as an important reminder of past achievements, how they have shaped them and the dedication to moving forward toward a bright future. Special was a unique television experience summarizing queer news awaits you. The third edition of **Queer TV** came with a dose of satire to ironize the media industry and public debates in Kosovo related to queer people. This television experience was an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which the media and public debate treat and present queer topics, and aims to influence public awareness and challenge accepted norms in our society.



Croatia

The City of Zagreb signing the Paris Declaration & Joining the Fast-Track Cities Network

○ On the occasion of the **World AIDS Day**, the Mayor of the City of Zagreb, Tomislav Tomašević, signed the Paris Declaration on the City of Zagreb's accession to the Fast-Track Cities Initiative in the City Administration. The City of Zagreb already carries out numerous activities for the purpose of eliminating HIV infection, AIDS, viral hepatitis and other sexually transmitted infections and tuberculosis, but by accepting the Paris Declaration on the Fast-Track Cities Initiative, it will go one step further. You can read more about the [Fast-Track Cities Initiative](#).



○ An important HIV initiative was taken in Osijek. From the end of May 2023, they started community-based testing with a rapid free test for HIV and syphilis. The testing is anonymous, intended for gay/bi and other MSM (men who have sex with men) and does not require an appointment reservation.

○ For the tenth year, the **European Testing Week** was conducted. This Week involves over 50 European countries with more than 500 organizations in Europe. In 2023, they conducted HIV and syphilis testing in 4 cities: Zagreb, Osijek, Rijeka and Split, in cooperation with county public health institutes in other cities (Rijeka, Split) and local associations and organizations (CroMSIC Osijek, Udruga LORI) [[LINK](#)]





Belarus

The walls that Belarus builds around its people are weak and will never silence the belief of its people in freedom and justice

The walls that Belarus builds around its people are weak and will never silence the belief of its people in freedom and justice.

It should not be a big surprised to learn that the **Belarusian LGBTIQ communities** are moving rapidly in the direction of the extremely repressive Russian attitude towards our community. We take here over the recent information from the Belarusian LGBTIQ communities and coalition of Belarusian LGBTIQ activists, groups and initiatives; they are reaching out to you to inform you about recent rapid negative developments in Belarus in relation to safety of LGBTIQI people, and state sexual and reproductive rights in the country. With this letter, they ask for your solidarity and support in raising awareness among funders, international CSOs and your respective Ministries of International Affairs in relation to the situation in Belarus.

On June 19th 2023, the **General Prosecution Office of Belarus** has informed about new legislative initiatives supported by the ex-president of Belarus, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, which will be developed on the following matters: increase of parental responsibilities in relation to sexual crimes committed to children; defining the administrative punishment for “propaganda on non-traditional sexual relations, sex change, pedophilia, and child-free”, and integration of obligatory sex education course into the school curriculum.

Within the Belarusian LGBTIQ movement, we share grave concern for this news. While the Belarusian pro-state political actors have been forcing adoption of the Russian law on “LGBTQ+ propaganda” many time, this is the first time when the endorsement of the law has been expressed by the ex-president and first time when the General Prosecution Office has publicly announced that they were tasked to develop the administrative punishment for “**the propaganda**”. Taking into account the recent deterioration of the legal and justice systems in Belarus and creation of several legal initiatives in Russia attacking of freedoms and rights of LGBTIQ people (specifically, full-ban and increased prosecution for “LGBTIQ propaganda” and ban of gender affirmative health care), we project that once the law is drafted, it will be quickly adopted. It will heavily affect already vulnerable LGBTIQ people in the country and will open new ground for political persecutions of activists. We also foresee that the design and integration of the obligatory sex education course will translate into pro-life conservative actors

gaining access to children and youth, promoting damaging perspectives on SHRR, and seeking for international funding to GONGOs who will maintain the facade of “progressive sex education” in school. To prepare for the potential crisis, they ask for your solidarity and support in raising awareness about these developments and preparing for the rapid deterioration of the situation in Belarus. We are actively seeking for working solutions on how to address these developments – in case you have capacity to support us with learning sessions, we would appreciate it. [Read more.](#)

We gladly mention a message from our friend, [Nik Antipov](#): **DasHip - a media dedicated to gender and sexuality in the context of Belarus.** [DasHip](#) website primarily focuses on the Belarusian audience and will be working on Belarusian and Russian content. English section to preserve and archive highlighted stories is planned too. As an LGBTIQ activist Nik said “I understand the importance of supporting and empowering the community. I firmly believe that storytelling is one of the most powerful tools we have for creating change in our lives and societies. We aim to give voice to the LGBTIQ community in Belarus and beyond. Our platform shares personal stories, news, initiatives, creative practices, and events, from different angles that assemble the endless puzzle into a picture that describes what is happening to the community now. By doing so, we hope to create a more inclusive and supportive society for all. I'm proud to work with a talented team of individuals who share the same values and vision. I couldn't have done it without the support of my partner, who has been a constant source of encouragement. As I continue on this journey, I'm committed to doing all I can to support the LGBTIQ community and create a more just and inclusive world. If you're interested in joining me on this, please feel free to reach out. Thank you for your support, and I look forward to sharing more about DasHip - [dæz.hɪp] in the future.”

btw: who is Nick? Some of you remember him from our 2022 Bratislava Conference an the session “LGBTIQ NGOs in Exile - Bending but Never Cracking!” We are a little jealous that he had the opportunity to share the stage with President Obama at the 2022 [Democracy Forum](#).





Montenegro

The international IGLYO Annual Members' Conference and Podgorica Pride marked a successful 2023

The **IGLYO** (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) Youth & Student Organization) Annual Members' Conference 2023 brought together over 70 LGBTIQ young activists from more than 30 countries in Podgorica, Montenegro, for an amazing journey together! After holding the AMC online in 2020 and 2021, and hosting it in the [IGLYO](#) office's home city of Brussels in 2022, this AMC was the first organized on the ground with a local host since the 2019 AMC in Helsinki. After a number of years of disruption they were beyond excited to visit Podgorica, attend Montenegro Pride, and work with and get to know our host organization Queer Montenegro. From lively statutory discussions to the General Assembly and Board Elections, all the way to insightful Members-led workshops and fun social activities, these three days gave us food for thought and brought our international family of LGBTIQ youth activists even closer together. The IGLYO AMC Podgorica was organized by IGLYO and **Queer Montenegro** with the support of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (**CERV**) 2021-2027 program of the European Union and the Dutch Ministry of Education Culture & Science.



The 11th **Montenegrin Pride** was organized in Podgorica under the slogan, "**Self-determination**" ("Samoodređenje"). Montenegro Pride is the national LGBTIQ pride march in the city of Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, which first took place for the first time in 2013. Since then Montenegro Pride has become an annual event. It is self-identified as an LGBTIQ pride rally. The Organizing Committee of the Montenegro Pride is a non-hierarchical group, and it is logistically supported by the non-governmental organization Queer Montenegro. Pride receives support and funding from various donors and sponsors, including the European Union.

We should not forget that homosexuality remains a sensitive issue in Montenegro, a socially conservative country, as it does in other Balkan nations. In July 2020, Montenegro's parliament narrowly voted to legalize civil partnerships for same-sex couples, making it the first non-EU Balkan state to do so. A year later, the first same-sex marriage was recorded in the coastal town of Budva. Officials celebrated this milestone and pledged to adjust the legal framework accordingly but **the reality is a little different.** [More info.](#)



North Macedonia

2023, it was a year marked by significant challenges for the Queer Center

Despite the constant pressures and the struggle for the organization's survival, these are the three activities/events that stand out for the **Queer Center Skopje**:



The established collaboration and successful reporting of discrimination to the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, coupled with complaints to the **Council for Media Ethics** regarding breaches of the journalists' ethical code, when covering LGBTIQ topics. Additionally, they signed Memorandums of Cooperation with both bodies, ensuring them a future close collaboration.



A video campaign made a mark, featuring a father of a gay guy openly sharing his experience with his child—from the moment of his son's coming out, the process of acceptance, reactions from family and close ones, to the current situation. The video carried a beautiful message to all parents in similar situations. With these numbers, the video became one of the most-watched video campaigns released by a non-governmental organization in Macedonia, gaining support despite the highly sensitive nature of the topic within their society.

On May 15th, in the presence of members of the LGBTIQ community and supporters, representatives from the civil sector, parliament, domestic and international institutions, diplomatic corps, and other guests, they commemorated the **10th anniversary of the Queer Center**. During the anniversary celebration, they honored Maja Morachanin, a Member of Parliament and coordinator of the inter-party parliamentary group advocating for the advancement of rights for LGBTIQ individuals. [Read more](#) about the center.



Latvia

After a 6-year break Tallinn, the Latvian Capital, hosted the Baltic Pride again

○ The **Baltic Pride**, a joint LGBTIQ community festival of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, gathered the largest number of participants in Tallinn ever. The [Baltic Pride](#) is an annual festival of the Baltic LGBT+ community and its allies since 2009. The festival started on June 6 and lasted for six days. The most outstanding part of the festival was undoubtedly the procession on Saturday, where more than 7,000 people took part, according to the Police and Border Guard Board. In addition to private individuals, representatives of the diplomatic corps from more than 15 embassies, several ministers of the government coalition, the Speaker of the Parliament and, for the first time, also many companies that represented and supported the people of the LGBTIQ community in their field, walked in the procession. The procession ended with an open-air concert and a picnic on Rāvala Boulevard. According to the participants, it was a community event with a very pleasant atmosphere. The next Baltic Pride will take place on 10 - 15 June 2024 in Riga.



○ The Baltic Pride 2023 also included a **Pride Conference** that was to provide answers to many burning questions related to LGBTIQ. Some of the topics discussed were how to create a secure environment and how to discuss LGBTIQ related topics with students? Why should an employer be interested in sexual and gender identity? One of the main themes of the conference was the equal treatment in the school system. They tried to identify how we can best support LGBTIQ teachers and students and create a safe environment for them. [More on Baltic Pride Conference.](#)



Estonia

Estonia became the first former Soviet-ruled country to legalize gay marriage

○ The biggest [news](#) coming from the Baltic countries is that **Same-sex couples in Estonia** are able to marry from New Year's Day in a milestone move that brings the Baltic nation closer to its Nordic neighbors. Estonia became the first former Soviet-ruled country to legalize gay marriage when Estonia's parliament, voted in favor of marriage equality in June. A majority of 55 MPs voted for amending the Family Act, while 34 MPs voted against the bill in the 101-seat parliament. The law came into effect on Monday, with same-sex couples able to register their marriage applications online from New Year's Day. The first applications will be processed and certified by 2 February, with applications typically taking one to six months to process. Perceptions of same-sex marriage have shifted in recent years in the largely non-religious country of 1.3 million. In a poll conducted by the Estonian Human Rights Centre this year, 53% of Estonians supported same-sex marriage. A decade ago, it was just 34%. Civil partnerships and cohabiting partners have been legally recognized by Estonia since 2013. Estonia's largely secular outlook has helped shift opinions on LGBTIQ people within the last decade. Corporate sponsorship of this year's Baltic Pride was at an all-time high, with Estonia's biggest telecommunications company, Telia, among 16 other businesses, openly funding the festival.

○ And we can celebrate one more anniversary with 15 years of **The LGBT Association**. The Estonian LGBT [Association](#) is a non-profit organization working for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other sexual and gender identity and self-expression" people. The mission of the Estonian LGBT Association is to influence policies and legislation with strategic advocacy work, that the state ensures equal opportunities for LGBTIQ people. The vision of the Estonian LGBT Association is a fair and safe Estonian country for LGBTIQ people.

○ A last 2023 more niche activity by the Estonian LGBT Association who organized a Conference for the LGBTIQ community and doctors called "**LGBTQI+ health equality - how do we get from values to actions?**" LGBTQI+ people and doctors discussed that health equality means people-centeredness, consideration of different needs and a trusting relationship between patient and doctor. However, the experiences of LGBTIQ people with the Estonian healthcare system show that there is still a long way to go to health equality. What attitudes hinder the achievement of health equity? What should change? Who has a role to play in bringing about change? So there was a clear need for such open Conference!



Romania

The LGBTIQ Family in the center of attention

○ The **European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)** showed **Romania the red card** for violating Article 8 (right to respect for private and family right) of the European Convention on Human Rights. This important ruling originated from 2 dozen complaints by same sex couples arguing that, because Romania did not recognize any type of same-sex union, it was impossible for them to legally safeguard their relationships. The couples turned to the European court since local authorities had refused their demands. In its ruling, the ECHR reiterated that Council of Europe member states are required to provide a legal framework that protects and recognizes same-sex relationships. [Read more.](#)

○ The right to form a family was also the slogan of the **2023 Pride in Bucharest "Visible Love. Visible Families"**. The Accept association launched a campaign that says "every family deserves to feel at home in Romania". Every mother deserves to know her child is safe at home, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. There is no need to break up a family in order to create another. LGBTIQ people do not yet have the right to found a family in our country, and this directly affects their parents as well. If you also believe that every family deserves to feel at home in Romania, fill out the form below and sign the petition for the recognition and legal protection of families made up of people of the same sex. Follow more on [Accept Romania](#).



○ And also a final word on the efforts by **Romanian Diversity Chamber of Commerce (RDCC)** to push LGBTIQ inclusion in Romania. In 2023, They initiated conversations within the business community to foster a more accepting and supportive environment for LGBTIQ professionals. Moving forward, their focus will be on implementing policies that ensure equal opportunities and combating discrimination. View the Roundtable event with Stonewall UK for LGBTIQ Inclusion, where East meets West was a speaker bringing insights from the region and inspiration from projects in the CEE region. [More info](#) on LinkedIn.



Russia

The last legislative changes in Russia against the LGBTIQ community reached an extreme level of repression, violating elementary human rights

○ Unfortunately, because of the extreme repressive situation in Russia, we cannot give any information on important events. Nevertheless during 2023, **Coming Out Group** [[LINK](#)], managed to provide support (psychological, legal, peer-to-peer consultations, support groups) to 3000 LGBTIQ persons in Russia (compared to 800 in 2021, 2 years ago. In this way, they participated to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review: provided the information to the UN, participated in a pre-session on Russia in-person in Geneva. [[LINK](#)]

It is clear they need all possible support from the whole LGBTIQ community. They suggest 2 main ways to help them:

1. Support Coming Out directly with funds. They needed to grow up too fast during the last 2 years, and face permanent lack of funds. To continue their work and provide support, money is the main thing we need.

Here is the link to the donation form on their website:

comingoutspb.com/en/support-coming-out

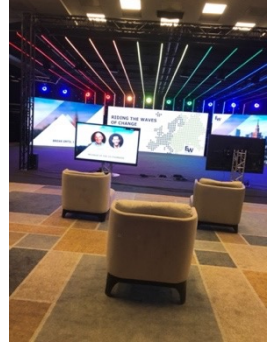
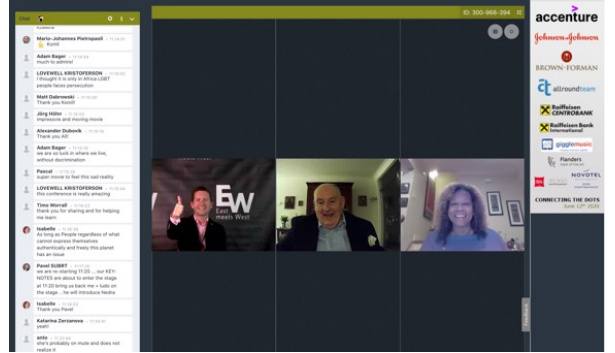
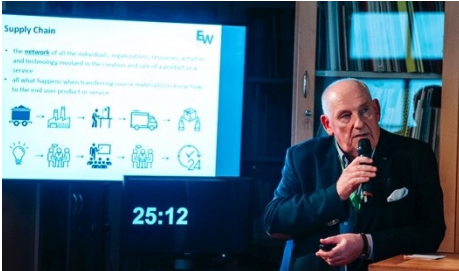
So as GlobalGiving donation site

www.globalgiving.org/projects/coming-out

2/ Do share information about the situation of human rights and LGBTIQ rights in Russia, raising international awareness on this topic. To make the environment for LGBTIQ people who fled Russia less toxic.



10 Years of East meets West



Our Signature Events



About East meets West

Founded in 2013 in Vienna, Austria, East meets West is a network of LGBTIQ professionals from Western & (primarily) Eastern Europe. East meets West facilitates the exchange of ideas, the sharing of best practices and generates mutual inspiration to improve the social acceptance of LGBTIQ people in the different countries. The East meets West brand has two pillars. East meets West Social has a catalyst function in the LGBTIQ organizational ecosystem by connecting NGOs, diplomatic representatives, officials, corporate players, entrepreneurs and variety of other inspiring personalities. East meets West Business is the facilitator of awareness on LGBTIQ businesses and that LGBTIQ people can be successful entrepreneurs and become role models inside and outside the LGBTIQ community. East meets West is also the founding member of the EGLCC, The European LGBTIQ Chamber of Commerce and supports strongly the introduction and growth of the principle of Supplier Diversity.



Imprint

Publisher, media owner, editorial: East meets West Forum (EmW) - Gemeinnütziger Verein zur Förderung von Micro LGBT Geschäftsinitiativen in Österreich und Zentral- und Osteuropa. ZVR: 231608652. Belvederegasse 11/5, 1040 Vienna, Austria. **Published:** 6.2.2024 in Vienna, Austria

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