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Conference

«Bridges of Refugee: Ensuring Safety for LGBTQI+ Refugees from Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA)»

Event Date: July 29, 2024
Organizer: LGBT World Beside
Venue: Amsterdam, Netherlands
Supported by: Pride Amsterdam, The Social Hud

2024



@lgbtworldbeside



www.lgbtworldbeside.org



Moderators and speakers

The event was moderated by:

Alexandra Volgina - Program Director of the Global Network of People Living with HIV, actively working to support LGBTQI+ communities in different countries.

Max M - LGBTQI+ Global Advocacy Fund volunteer and expert on diversity, equality and inclusion, LGBT World Beside volunteer, who contributed to the conference in a meaningful way.

Keynote speakers included:

Dastan Kasmamytov - activist, board member of Kyrgyz Indigo and founder of Pink Summits.

Inge Zuidhoek - immigration and asylum lawyer.

Piet de Bruijn - former Rapporteur General on LGBTQI+ rights in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, member of the Flemish Parliament.

Vyacheslav Samonov is a representative of Queer Base, Vienna, Austria, working on reception and support for LGBTQI+ refugees.

Background

On July 29, 2024, a conference entitled “Bridges of Asylum: Ensuring Safety for LGBTQI+ Refugees from Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA)” was held in Amsterdam. This significant event, organized by the non-profit organization LGBT World Beside with the support of Pride Amsterdam and The Social Hub, brought together experts, activists, lawyers, representatives of international organizations and LGBTQI+ refugees themselves. The aim of the conference was to comprehensively discuss the challenges faced by LGBTQI+ people who are forced to flee their home countries due to persecution, discrimination and threats to their lives.

The conference provided a platform to discuss critical issues related to human rights, security and support for LGBTQI+ refugees. The program of the event included presentations by invited experts, discussions on legal and political aspects, practical examples of refugee assistance, as well as the screening of a documentary that revealed personal stories and realities of LGBTQI+ refugees' lives.

Main topics discussed

The conference focused on the following topics:

1. The challenges of LGBTQI+ refugees in EECCA countries.

The many legal challenges faced by LGBTQI+ refugees in seeking asylum in Europe were discussed. Participants emphasized the need to reform legal processes in order to protect the most vulnerable people. Also addressed was how the international community should increase pressure on EECCA governments to improve the situation of LGBTQI+ citizens and create safe living conditions.

2. Legal and political aspects.

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3. Practical assistance and support.

The experience of working with refugees in Austria was discussed, where there are initiatives that provide LGBTQI+ refugees with housing, psychological support and legal assistance. The importance of establishing similar projects in other countries, including the Netherlands, where the support system for LGBTQI+ refugees still needs to be improved, was emphasized.

Film screening and Q&A session

After the speeches, the documentary film “Beyond the Rainbow” was shown, which depicted the life of LGBTQI+ refugees in the Netherlands. The movie showed a real picture of their struggle to survive and integrate in a new country. The screening was followed by a Q&A session where conference participants could ask questions to the speakers and discuss possible solutions to improve the situation of LGBTQI+ refugees.

Topics and issues

Realities and challenges

- What are the personal experiences and struggles of LGBTQI+ individuals who have fled persecution?
- What are the biggest challenges they face in the region, and how does the work of activists help address these challenges?
- What harsh realities are shown in films about refugees? Could you talk about some of the most pressing challenges they face while fleeing and upon arrival in host countries?
- What are the most pressing needs of LGBTQI+ refugees once they arrive in the Netherlands?
- How do these challenges differ from those faced by other refugee groups?
- What impact do “anti-LGBTQI+ propaganda laws” have on people’s lives and how can the international community counter their spread?

Legal and political issues

- What is the legal situation for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in the Netherlands (and in Europe)?
- What specific legal obstacles do LGBTQI+ asylum seekers face in proving their claims in the Netherlands?
- What are some legal strategies that can be used to protect their rights and secure asylum?
- What key policy recommendations have been made to improve the lives of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers around the world?
- What advances have been made internationally to protect the rights of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers?
- Are there international organizations or initiatives that offer hope for progress in this area?

Asylum system and reception

- What information can be shared about the reception process for LGBTQI+ asylum seekers in the Netherlands?
- What concrete steps are taken to ensure the safety and well-being of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers during the reception process?
- How does COA tailor its services to meet the unique needs of this group?
- Are there culturally sensitive training programs for staff working with this population?
- How can the asylum system and reception process in the Netherlands be improved to better meet the needs of this vulnerable group?



Support systems and advocacy

- What role do NGOs and advocacy groups play in empowering LGBTQI+ refugees?
- What successful advocacy efforts have had a positive impact on these communities?
- What are the main obstacles NGOs face in supporting LGBTQI+ refugees and how can they be overcome?
- What are activists' experiences abroad and successful advocacy efforts that have positively impacted these communities?
- How do NGOs and advocacy groups support COA's work? Can you share success stories?

Changing political landscape

- What impact might the new right-wing government in the Netherlands have on current and future asylum claims and experiences of this vulnerable community?

International Response

- How can international organizations and regional bodies put more pressure on EECCA governments to respect the human rights of their LGBTQI+ citizens?

Key findings

Conference participants came to the following conclusions:

- The international community must be more proactive in responding to violations of the rights of LGBTQI+ people in EECCA countries and increase pressure on governments that violate human rights.
- More inclusive legislative and legal procedures to protect LGBTQI+ refugees must be developed and implemented.
- Practical assistance and support must be expanded. This includes the creation of safe spaces and specialized programs that are culturally and personally sensitive to LGBTQI+ refugees.

Acknowledgements

The organizers would like to express their sincere gratitude to all the speakers and moderators whose presentations made the conference rich and informative. We would also like to thank Pride Amsterdam and The Social Hub for their support in organizing the event. Their contribution was invaluable and made it possible to hold the conference at such a high level. Special thanks to the RUSA LGBTQ+ organization (New York, USA) for their active participation and support, as well as to the volunteers of LGBT World Beside and all those involved in the preparation and implementation of this important event.

Without all these people and organizations, this event could not have taken place and left such a significant mark on the LGBTQI+ refugee rights movement.

