



**Rainbow
Cities
Network**

9th annual conference of the Rainbow Cities Network

4th & 5th November 2021, Bergen, Norway.

Day 1 – Thursday, November 4th

Official welcome

Welcome by the organiser Sølve Sætre from the City of Bergen.

Deputy Mayor for culture, diversity and equality, Eline Aresdatter Haakestad gave the welcome speech. She highlighted the importance of cities:

“We especially believe it is important that cities are engaged and stand up for the rights of sexual and gender minorities. Cities are often “safe-heavens” for people running away from social control or discrimination and are vital for the development of national policies in this field.”

She spoke about the importance of working with municipal services: *«We strive to be a proper rainbow city – not only in the literal sense because of the abundance of rain we receive – we want Bergen to be an open and including city for everyone. The City of Bergen will meet people of different sexuality, gender identity and gender expression with respect and knowledge of their situation. It is a goal that our employees are aware of the sexual – and gender diversity of our city and the prevailing “heteronormative” environment in our services. Further we aim to provide more “gender neutral” services to our population.»*

Juliane Steeger, Chair of the board, RCN, some points from her speech:

Experiences during the pandemic, have also affected the LGBTI- community when important services and meeting points were closed down.

The network has also been affected. Even though almost 40 delegates are present in Bergen, some cities are prevented from participating in person, due to travel restrictions and vaccine- regulations.

Looking forward to welcome the new cities, and happy to finally be in Bergen after this meeting has been postponed three times.

Manuel Rosas Vázquez, Managing director, RCN. Quotes from his welcome speech:

“Thanks the deputy mayor and the organizing comite, both in Bergen and in the preparatory meeting. Thanks to the countless individuals who have contributed to the fight and made it possible for the LGBTI- community to live openly and freely. Still there are many tasks to work with, as change is slow. Glad that we have delegates from Poland and Hungary with us today.”

Sølve Sætre, Bergen:

Reminded the network of the importance that all cities honour the obligations of being a member: Sharing good practices, handing in one-pagers, paying the memberships fees.



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Welcoming of new cities

- New Taipei City, member since January 2021. Receiving the certificate was Danny Jacqmont on behalf of NTC. Recorded message director general Ms. Chingyu Yao from of New Taipei City.
- Wiesbaden, member since June 2021. Receiving the certificate was Stefan Kräh representative of the City of Wiesbaden before RCN
- Bordeaux , member since July 2021. Receiving the certificate was Leslie Rialhe, representative of the city of Bordeaux before RCN
- Helsinki, member since July 2021. Receiving the certificate was Veli-Matti Hurtig representative of the city of Helsinki before RCN
- Oostende, member since August 2021. Receiving the certificate was Lisolette David, the city of Oostende representative before RCN
- Kortrijk, member since September 2021. Receiving the certificate was Joachim van Overberghe city representative before RCN

1st working session

1. Annual report 2020-2021.

Juliane Steeger, Marije Pluijm and Manuel Rosas Vázquez presented annual report, activities and finances

Juliane Steeger, Chair of the board, RCN:

- **Introduction of the board:** Johanna Illgner is replacing Sören Landmann as the board member from Mannheim due to reorganization of the tasks in the City of Mannheim.
- The board has had monthly meetings online.
- There will be elections of new board members next year in Rotterdam.
- The board invites both old and new members to contact them if they have comments or initiatives they want to share. Also possible for new members to be part of the work.

Manuel Rosas Vázquez, Managing director, RCN:

- International presence increased during the last year: Paris international prize, NGO-competition, flag-raising events.
- Europe for Citizens. A contest will be announced. Manuel encourages the cities to participate when they receive the email.
- New members. 12 new members, not only in Europe. The city of Copenhagen has applied. Montreal will apply next year. Cities of all sizes. Many activities through Covid.

Experiences from the flag-raising event:

- Reykjavik: Shared two flags with city in Poland + Vilnius
- Heidelberg: shared two flags.
- Cologne: Contacted several sister-cities and encouraged them to join. Helped to intensify the dialogue with Katowice in Poland and highlight discussions on diversity.
- Hannover: Initiative toward sister cities. Next time it will be interesting to send flags to cities outside Europe,
- Taipei, sent flags to four cities, but only Boston answered. There was an issue with the date, as many cities normally raise the rainbow flag the first week of June.



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2. Approval of the Annual report

The annual report was approved by 34 votes – all the votes were cast. Both cities that participated online and those present in Bergen were able to vote. The board will sign the annual report.

2nd Working Session

3. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Report). Karel Fric, Programme Officer – Social Research.

Karel Fric is a researcher in the Research and Data Unit. He is a social scientist specialising in the areas of statistical analysis, survey methodology, labour market issues, inequalities and discrimination.

Points from the presentation:

- 3 out of 10 are not open about being LGBTI.
- 4 out of 10 experienced harassment for being LGBTI in the 12 months before the survey. Trans, Intersexual and lesbian report the most harassment.
- 1 out of 9 experienced physical or sexual attacks 5 years before the survey. Most common among young adults. Most incidents are never reported to the police or any organisation or institute. Official statistics show only the tip of the iceberg. Differences among countries.
- Reasons for not reporting are often lack of confidence in the police or fear of homophobic and/or transphobic reaction from the police.
- The physical or sexual attacks most often happened in a public place, such as a street, square, park ect.
- 6 out of 10 always or often avoid holding hands in public with same-sex partner.
- LGBTI in school: More information, both positive and negative. 3 out of 10 in the age group 15-17 years are hiding LGBTI identity at school.
- LGBTI people experience housing difficulties and homelessness,

Questions and answers:

Q: You collect a lot of data. Are there intersectional results you could share?

A: The data is available at <https://fra.europa.eu/en/data-and-maps/2020/lgbti-survey-data-explorer>

Q: FRA study – ILGA-ranking. Belgium. Lacking: Protection by law. Straight allies – full equal rights. We must focus on allies. Intersectionality: Lack of socioeconomic reference and ethnical. Strategies for next survey?

A: I agree with your remark. Thank you – certain groups are not represented. We tried campaigning and targeting to gain representation.

Q: Can you see trends in the surveys? Areas of improvement?

A: This is only the second survey. Trends is difficult to see. However, we see more openness, and more experienced discrimination.



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4. Open for Business, George Perlov- Interim Executive Director

George Perlov has an MPA degree from Columbia University. He is the Interim Executive Director at Open for Business and a consultant who helps foundations and NGOs to be more effective using research, strategic planning and evaluation.

Presentation of the ranking of cities and how inclusive they are to LGBTI+ population. The core idea is that cities that are LGBTI+ inclusive are better placed to develop global competitiveness: evidence shows they have stronger “innovation ecosystems”, greater concentrations of skills and talent, and better quality of life. LGBTI+ inclusive cities may be more likely to become globally integrated hubs for high value businesses. For information about the organization:

[Open For Business \(open-for-business.org\)](http://open-for-business.org)

Q: How can the cities use the ranking:

A: Public relations, economic growth plans, attracting LGBTI communities. Combination of business and LGBTI is a wake up call for cities! The mid-range cities with an interest for growing.

Q: Why is the main focus economic reasons? Should not people’s rights issues be more important?

A: LGBTI rights important, but economics are a door-opener to change.

3rd Working Session

5. Best Practices Document, RCN publication.

Manuel Rosas Vázquez presented the document of best practices 2021. The presentations will be made available.

Comments on the one pagers:

- Do not count words, rather have a page limit
- PDF barrier free adapted to disabilities
- Label the images, for vision disabilities
- Picture credits
- Pictures need to be JPG-pictures – high quality

6. Presentation of 3 Best Practices randomly selected from the participants

- Oostende, Lisolette David
- Reykjavik, Svandis Sigurðardóttir
- Zurich, Shelley Berlowitz

7. Introduction to the “Rainbow Square” ceremony, Sølve Sætre

8. Opening of the “Rainbow square” in Vestre Torggaten 2.

The City of Bergen named a square in the city center the “Rainbow square”. The aim is to create an inclusive public space.



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Day 2 – Friday, November 5th

4th Working Session

9. National Norwegian Queer Archive. Bjørn Andre Widvey, The University of Bergen

Presentation of the background, foundation and current projects of the institution.
Website: [Skeivt Arkiv](#)

Q: What is the annual budget? Are there any other local archives?

A: Annual budget of 5 mill NOK through the budget for the university. This is the only queer archive in Norway, but we are cooperating with other archives to teach them how to look for queer content. There is now a woman in Oslo building a lesbian archive.

Q: Have you experienced resistance from individuals to giving you their personal archives? How is the team put together to gain the trust of the queer population?

A: Norwegian society has a high level of trust in the authorities. It has helped that the first person contributing to the archive was Kim Friele, an activist with a high standing in the community.

Q: We experience competition between different groups. Is it the same in Norway?

A: We do not experience the same competition and division. Trust is important, the persons share very personal stories. Important that we are archivists and scientists, not activists

Q: Have experienced a lot of history from the gay community, very little from the lesbian side. Experiences in Norway?

A: It is maybe easier to get access to stories from gay men. More difficult to reach the women (that goes for many areas of society)

Q: Does the archive a strategy of communication to share stories to include other marginalised groups.

A: We use the word “queer” in the broad sense, including all aspects that breaks the norms of gender

Q: How many people are working? Open to visitors?

A: 5- 6 persons. Open on a daily basis

Q: Leslie: Do you organize events for archives?

A: We have presentations. Queer walks, focusing on the queer history of Bergen.

10. Municipal services - Youth and gender identity, the Norwegian case. Bergen’s best practice. Runa Kongsvik

Introduction to Norwegian history and practices with gender identity and gender affirmant treatment. Presentation of experiences with dialogue groups for young people, aged 13- 18 years old.



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Surgical and hormonal treatment first used in the 1950s. Until 2000 there were very few patients, as little as 14 per decade. Then the Oslo clinic opened in 2003 as the national clinic providing this treatment. Obligatory psych evaluation beforehand.

To be able to change your national security number you previously had to be sterilised pre 2016. We have a traditional male/female system – passports etc – and there's no gender neutral system.

Transgender still a psych condition because WHO wants to ensure access to health care for this group.

If you need treatment, you must first see the GP – your personal doctor. Then a psychiatric clinic for assessment, which can take a year. Then referral to Oslo to the national clinic.

Disadvantages

- Just one clinic, not possible to get a second opinion.
- No treatment for non-binary trans, only for binary. This is based upon the traditional diagnosis book and doesn't fully take into account perceived gender identity.
- Young people are often rejected.
 - Local evaluation with a less qualified and less suitable psychologist.
 - The education does not cover gender.

New guidelines from 2020:

- Regional centres offering gender affirming treatments, making it more accessible.
- Psychological assessment will not be a requirement.
- The guidelines have not been implemented.

Experiences from the groups

- Open to anyone, 10 participants per group meeting a psych and a peer person. Recruitment through schools, clinics etc.
- Key word: reflection, community and information
- Considerations: age group, group moderators, open topic or manual-based, how should mental health or other issues be addressed?
- The group determines the topics covered: Older participants are focussed on treatment whilst younger ones are more concerned about coming out.
- Mental health is a great concern. The school nurse provides an extra safety net.

11. Round Table, Minority religious communities
Queer Christian Network, Elisabeth Meling and Queer World, Erwin Rapaz Navarro

Moderated by Stina Ihle Amankwah

Erwin, Skeiv verden vest/ Queer World West – a volunteer organisation in the Bergen region since 2015. Around 100 paying members in Bergen but many more who attend and are included at the annual general meeting. It is an organisation with mainly members from non-western migrant communities. The organisation started in Bergen during the refugee crisis in 2016 when Syrians needed safe spaces – no longer purely for migrants.

Many members experience psychological stress, but the organisation doesn't have the skills to support them so they refer them to health services. Another issue is "not being queer enough" in a Western



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way. For immigrants there are language issues and lack of trust in translators. Translators are suspected of breaking the ethical code when they do not communicate accurately

Elisabeth, Queer Christian network Skeivt Kristen nettverk since 2019. A network for LGBT+ in christian communities mainly outside the mainstream Church of Norway. Elisabeth (transgender) has background from conservative Christian circles (Pentecostal and evangelical). The reason for the organisation is that there was a vacuum within the Christian context – the organisation is filling the void, as a multi-demoninational organization from catholic to free-church.

Elisabeth grew up in a very conservative church and message she received as transgender was that she was sinning against god's creation. The main message from the organisation is that you should like yourself and be able to retain their faith. The goal to build up local groups all over Norway.

Nationally it has 230 members. They have closed fb-groups.

The question Elisabeth often get is why she still is a Christian. So as to be able to work with churches. Previously churches were on the barricades, whilst now they want to offer their hand and approach the church more like Jesus. Elisabeth referred to recent developments where pentecostal leaders spoke on the subject of same sex faithful relationships as a positive development.

Elisabeth highlighted some main challenges

- Members previously active in their churches. Subsequently rejected and unable to serve (play instruments for example) in their churches.
- Conversion therapy. The church itself is trying to hinder a hearing and is twisting ideas to confuse discourse. Heartbreaking stories of poor mental health as a result and suicidal thoughts.

Q: Religion is very important to those who believe. Does Elisabeth work to influence senior religious leaders.

A: Yes

Q: How can people find you?

A: Through language schools, a social worker does counselling, peer to peer

12. The situation in Poland and Hungary

City of Krakow, Nina Gabrys. Presentation of what Krakow is doing to balance the situation of the so-called LGBTI free zones.

Nina Gabrys is plenipotentiary of the Mayor of Krakow for Equality Policy and a Chair of the Equal Treatment Council in Kraków. The Equality Treatment Council was established in 2017 by the mayor of Krakow. The council aims to promote discussion and promote equality. Also anti-disc activity.

Various activities:

- "Krakow free from hate" event.
- Focus during the covid lockdown on connecting people.
- "Safe Krakow" program



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- “Queer centre” in Krakow
- “Equality festival” for the first time in May, 2021. Human-rights in focus.
- Freemuse in Krakow. LGBT art.
- “City of refuge” for ICORN artists and writers who need to work creatively in a safe environment.
- “Inclusive employer” policy
- “Rainbow diplomacy”

Goals

- Equality policy
- Political work, lobbying and influencing
- Involvement in the Rainbow Cities Network

Questions and answers

- Homeless shelter
 - 12 places at the shelter. At the present time this is sufficient. The shelters address is not public knowledge to ensure safety.
- Budget for LGBT-actions
 - Post-covid budgeting is very difficult and there’s great uncertainty in general.
- Inclusive workplace policy
 - Work on a dictionary which presents positive and inclusive language
- International help
 - There’s great interest in helping. Council of Europe promoting a coalition to help within Poland.
 - Any legislation forcing EU-members to act inclusively is helpful.

“LGBTQ+ community in Hungary and the work of Budapest pride”, Máté Hegedüs.

Máté Hegedüs is a employee at Rainbow Mission Foundation (Organizer of Budapest Pride) from Hungary. He is a part of RMF’s Public Relations group and leads the project that organizes marching groups.

Before the Orban-government

1995: First Pride march

2003: Legislation

2012: Constitutional amendment. Marriage is between a man and woman... the beginning of a homo- and transphobic view.

2019: Same sex couples are equated with paedophiles.

2020: Ban on legal gender recognition. Far-right MP destroys inclusive childrens book. The politician sent the message to “leave our children alone”

2020: Ban introduced making it impossible gays and lesbians to be single parents.



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2021: Fidesz passes propaganda law communicating negative messages, silencing the gay community, and prohibiting NGOs working in schools.

- Ban on local gender
 - Budapest Pride launched #drop33 campaign
 - Brought together Hungarian LGBTQ
- Ban on adoption
 - Budapest pride joined Foundation for Rainbow families
- Russian type propaganda law
- Biggest Pride march in Hungarian history with 30,000 attendees.
- First rural Pride March outside of Budapest, in Pecs

Budapest pride, founded 2001. Also feminist and anti-racist

4 employees, many volunteers and projects.

Organise

- Pride March
- Budapest pride community festival, one month with 100 events, 60 external organisers.
- National Pride academy
- Advocacy
- Mobilization, influencing politics, lobbying

Questions and answers

Q: How is pressure from the EU helping? Reference to Poland benefiting from such pressure.

Q: 4 employees, how are they financed?

A: They finance themselves. When the money runs out, they'll become volunteers.

Q: Is the work illegal?

A: As a student and employee Mate's work is allowed, but gatherings have been banned during covid.

Berlin sent letters of support to three Hungarian cities offering support.

5th Working Session

13. Rainbow Cities in Action

14. The Board Reports

15. Conclusion, Host city 2023 & Closing Ceremony

Solve summarize the activities of the two days



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Juliane or Manuel would conduct the selection and voting of the host city 2024. Manuel would then announce the flag relay. The decision was not voted on.

Manuel reminds everyone that next year the annual meeting will be hosted in Rotterdam. The preparation meeting will be held in Geneva. Iceland in 2023 (to be confirmed) and Cork is a possibility in 2024.

Juliane closed the general assembly.