Political Participation of LGBTI Persons: A Guide for Albanian Political Parties

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## CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

2 LGBTI POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE BENCHMARKS

3 POLITICAL PARTY BEST PRACTICE

### 3.1 POLICY AND STRUCTURAL MECHANISMS

3.1.1 Representation quotas and promoting LGBTI leaders

3.1.2 Gender policies that go beyond the binaries

3.1.3 Manifestos and constitutions

3.1.4 Internal party education

3.1.5 Clarifying political participation opportunities

### 3.2 VOCALLY SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS FOR LGBTI PERSONS

3.2.1 Issuing statements in support of LGBTI issues

3.2.2 Host events on commemoratory days

3.2.3 Holding party members accountable when they do not support human rights for LGBTI persons

3.2.4 Be an ally to LGBTI organisations and constituents

4 CONCLUSION

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY
The first Manual for Political Parties on LGBTI issues!

In early 2018 Open Mind Spectrum Albania (OMSA) and Victory Institute have commissioned a research on political participation and representation of LGBTI people in Albania. It aims to identify the existing reality and suggest entry points to improve and facilitate the participation and representation of LGBTI people in politics. This guide reflects the process and results of that study, conducted between end of 2016 and April 2018.

The guide forms part of the broader work of Open Mind Spectrum Albania (OMSA) towards increasing the participation of LGBTI people in democratic processes in Albania, and achieving equality for LGBTI people. Additional elements of this work include training LGBTI activists and advocates who are interested in democratic processes to get more involved in political spaces and civil society forums to create a platform for the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and best practice around the political participation of LGBTI people.

Two of the project’s objectives were to identify best practices to encourage political participation from LGBTI persons, and to identify opportunities to increase the number of LGBTI people in political parties’ structures. This best practice guide seeks to address those objectives, based on recent research by OMSA.

This is a guide, adapted from the first research in the country, the publication “LGBTI People Respond: Politics & Representation”, for political parties in Albania. The guide lays out clear recommendations and steps towards encouraging political participation from LGBTI persons, and identifies ways in which parties can be more inclusive both internally and through policymaking.
The guide also include proposals on how to include LGBTI political participation and LGBTI issues into their party platform. This will also allow us to begin building bridges and cultivating alliances with the Albanian political system. This also creates sustainability because the product remains as an advocacy tool for LGBTI leaders and political leaders who wish to engage their political systems and push for greater inclusion.
The Constitution of 1991 provided fundamental rights and freedoms including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. On 20 January 1995, after international pressure from the Council of Europe and ILGA, the Albanian Parliament decriminalized consensual same-sex sexual relations. The Constitution of 1998 enhanced the protection of human rights with a special clause on anti-discrimination, including gender as a prohibited ground for discrimination.

The Law of Protection against Discrimination, approved in 2010, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Albanian LGBTI citizens benefit from the protection of two equality bodies, the People’s Advocate (PA) and the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination (CPD), both providing independent assistance to LGBTI persons who are victims of human rights violations or discrimination. They have issued reports on the situation with regards to the rights of LGBTI people. These reports provide evidence of human rights violations and discrimination against LGBTI people.

By 2010, important LGBTI-related developments occurred, such as the founding of four new organizations for LGBTI people: Alliance LGBT, PINK Embassy, Pro-LGBT, and OMSA, all of which are working to advance the cause of human rights for LGBTI people today. The first ‘International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT)’ took place in 2008 with support from Children Human Rights Center Albania (CRCA), Human Rights Group, and the Albanian Helsinki Committee. In 2010 PINK Embassy held the first ‘Festival of Diversity’ and since then this event has been organized annually around May 17th. Festive demonstrations have been organized by other LGBTI organizations such as the Bike (P)Ride which took place in 2012, to celebrate IDAHOT.

In December 2014, two LGBTI NGOs, Alliance LGBT and LGBT Pro, opened a shelter (STREHA) for LGBTI individuals who are victims of domestic violence.

The main central institution for the protection of the human rights and the right to non-discrimination of LGBTI people is the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MoSWY). The responsibilities of this
Ministry have a potential large impact on the rights of LGBTI people in areas such as: employment, social welfare services, social inclusion, equal opportunities, and protection from discrimination. MoSWY coordinates its work with other central government institutions, equality bodies, and civil society. MoSWY has developed two National Action Plans on LGBTI rights, for 2012-2014 and 2016-2020. The first plan paved the way towards institutional cooperation between MoSWY, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), and other institutions and LGBTI organizations. The second plan was initiated in October 2016 with the creation of the National Implementation and Coordination Group (NICG). The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has begun training teachers on anti-discrimination but has not taken any other practical steps to address discrimination against LGBTI students and inclusion of their rights in the curriculum.

- LGBTI organizations have brought the cause of discrimination to the forefront of human rights mechanisms. The Second Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of 2013, presented by the government of Albania, has been accompanied by shadow reports from LGBTI organizations. As a result of these reports, the UN Human Rights Committee’s recommendations for Albania included improvements to the current situation of LGBTI people, specifically interventions to combat stereotypes, prejudice, and social stigmatization of LGBTI people.

- In 2015, based on a request by the parliamentary Sub-Committee on Human Rights and on recommendations from the PA (People’s Advocate), the Albanian Parliament issued a resolution on the rights of LGBTI people. The resolution required the development of a National Plan of Action for the protection of LGBTI people, based on the recommendations made during Albania’s EU accession process, as well as on the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers’ recommendation “on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity”. The resolution called for the MoES to train teachers on issues relating to discrimination against LGBTI students, and for MoSWY to amend the Labor Code to include anti-discrimination clauses on the grounds of SOGI\(^1\).

Between end of 2016 and April 2018, OMSA conducted research Albania regarding the history of LGBTI political participation.

The majority of the research relied on qualitative research methods. This involved interviews with political parties, youth political forums, LGBTI activists and with civil society, and an online survey for LGBTI persons to self-report on the obstacles to, and opportunities for, political participation.

SOME KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Political participation and representation of the LGBTI community in Albania faces multiple challenges. On macro level, there are challenges which reflect country development, history, and tradition, reflective of the rest of the region. On micro level, there are challenges which derive from the three kind of gaps developed especially in the last decade. The first one is the gap between the formal and real position political parties have on LGBTI rights, the second is between the knowledge and information the political parties have of the needs of the LGBTI community and the needs the LGBTI community have, and the third is between the legal and policy framework on LGBTI rights in Albania and their minimized impact on everyday life of an LGBTI person. Addressing these challenges together can contribute to better understanding of potential LGBTI political participation and representation in the future.

Listed below are some of the main findings & conclusions:

- More than the conventional left and right-wing positions related to LGBTI rights, the political parties in Albania can rather be classified in two groups depending on their popular support and level of representation in decision-making institutions in the country.

  The first group consists of the main political parties in Albania. These parties have larger electoral and parliamentary representation and exhibit a neutral position (or even a positive stance, but one that is
This position is produced as a consequence of interaction between the image these parties want to project as supportive of the EU integration process and their supporters’ sensibility toward LGBTI rights. In ideological terms, DP supports anti-discriminatory legislation, but it's against promotion of the “advanced rights” of LGBTI people, i.e. same-sex marriage. While the other two leftist parties consider the promotion and support of the “advanced rights” as premature in Albanian society, their ideologies do not cause them to wish to restrict these rights.

Meanwhile, the second party group includes small parties with less electoral significance and representation in parliament/executive institutions, including new parties (RP, LIBRA and PJIU). These parties have more open positions against or for LGBTI rights. This kind of positioning seems to be not merely ideological but also strategic, with the aim of dictating the political agenda, attracting public attention, and addressing certain electoral segments that could potentially mobilize around this discourse.

Taking into consideration the difficulty of and the variety of implications of coming out as LGBTI in Albania, the political discourse on LGBTI rights seem to be in vain. What the political parties have in common is that all of them from different perspectives and calculations tend to use and benefit from the LGBTI discourse far less than addressing the challenges of the reality LGBTI persons face in Albania.

- Most political party respondents found it unjustified to separately organize vulnerable groups within the party in the form of special branches, forums, or structures. This not only applies to the LGBTI community, but also to other groups that are considered marginalized. Respondents believed that the interests of these groups could be expressed through the program without the need for identity or issue-based structures within the party.

On the other hand, all political party representatives interviewed stated that individuals that belong to vulnerable groups are part and will be part of the membership of these parties and have all the potential space to compete within their structures and develop a political career, regardless of their identity, based on political and professional skills. Most of the political party respondents do not support the idea of promotion within the party based on identity, gender, and minority status, or the use of “positive discrimination” mechanisms to promote them.
By this logic, LGBTI persons can become members, make a career, and choose to run for office on their personal skills and contributions, not merely as a member of the LGBTI community.

- All political representatives interviewed do not know anyone within their political party, in the capacity of members, bureaucrats, elected persons within parties, or candidates for municipal councils and parliamentary elections, who are openly LGBTI. This is expected if taking into consideration the costs of coming out in Albania.

In terms of coming out and running for positions within the party or on MP lists, LGBTI persons have two scenarios:

**The first scenario** is when elected persons, or those who have already made their political career within parties or even in the country's institutions, come out as LGBTI. In this case, mostly according to left-party respondents, the level of acceptance by society would be greater because the politician would not be seen as merely a part of the LGBTI community but also as an LGBTI person who has demonstrated publicly other skills and has made various contributions.

**The second scenario** would be when the person comes out publicly as LGBTI and then becomes part of the political parties or lists of candidates for municipal councils or MPs. In this scenario, due to a lack of an already existing public persona and an absence of a reputation regarding skills and contributions of the person concerned, the dominant quality perceived would be their LGBTI identity. In this case, the level of societal acceptance would be lower.

All political party representatives interviewed do not have information regarding the number of LGBTI people in Albania, and much less about their voting behavior and political preferences. According to them, from an electoral point of view, as long as there are no accurate statistics, LGBTI voters have no electoral meaning or significance.

- Noted throughout most of the interviews conducted with representatives of political parties is the lack of information on the daily needs and issues faced by members of the LGBTI community. The needs and concerns of LGBTI community, according to the political
representatives, are equated with the right to same-sex marriage.

Generally, people are convinced that LGBTI people in Albania enjoy all the freedom to express their sexual orientation and there are very few, and not meaningful, cases of physical violence against them. The rights of this community are guaranteed both in terms of law and everyday practice. There is a general perception that sexual orientation is a personal choice and there should be no discrimination for this choice.

For most of the political parties’ representatives, it is still too early in Albania to talk about LGBTI rights in election campaigns. Perhaps in five to ten years, as a result of the EU integration processes and a change in the level of social acceptance, this issue will be more prevalent.

It should be noted that upon analyzing the attitudes of political party respondents, different yet simultaneous positions in relation to LGBTI rights are apparent. The politicians interviewed (mostly women) show a more personal attitude towards LGBTI rights compared with the political party they represent, portraying themselves as more open and as more supportive of LGBTI rights because of information, trust in human rights, their education level, and/or professional experiences. According to them, within political parties, women or young people are more open toward LGBTI rights and will gradually influence their party colleagues to raise awareness and to support LGBTI rights.

If we refer to the legal framework, the role of constitutional institutions such as the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and the Ombudsman, concrete plans undertaken by the Albanian Government (such as the 2012-2016 and 2016-2020 action plans), involvement of local government in defense, and support for the LGBTI community, it is evident that Albania has made concrete steps in the last 10 years. This finding is especially true in comparison to other countries in the region.

The Albanian Parliament’s resolution, particularly the action plan, indicates a serious institutional approach and commitment to addressing the different needs of the LGBTI community and increasing the access of this community to society. Both action plans were drafted in close consultation with international organizations, the Council of Europe, and LGBTI organizations.
The actual action plan and the legal framework could be considered a very well-built protective and promotional system for LGBTI rights if social acceptance was higher and the consequences of coming out were not so negative. However, while that is not the case, it seems that the legal framework and policies in place are reminiscent of places other than Albania, or rather they are in place prematurely. In the context of Albania, where the majority of LGBTI people cannot come out, plans and legal frameworks function in a vacuum. Institutions have few solutions for LGBTI people experiencing an emergency, and they do not offer integrated solutions and protection for people who come out.

The other problem of the legal framework and institutional response by sectors is the opposite effect they can produce in society. Their existence in a vacuum, not addressing the real needs of LGBTI community in Albania, may produce a more conservative reaction to the idea of affirmative action for LGBTI people, that it is “discrimination” against the rest of society. As long as legal framework and action plans go beyond current realities, they could produce counterproductive results in the near future.

- About 50% of the online respondents participated in the elections, while 45.21% of them did not participate. The rest refused to answer this question. Although the sample is not representative, it is interesting to note that the participation is somewhat similar to official voter turnout for the general population in the 2017 parliamentary elections.

Regarding membership of political parties, about 11% of the respondents indicate that they were party members, more specifically that 5.47% were members of the Socialist Party, 4.11% of the Democratic Party and 1.37% of the Socialist Movement for Integration party. Almost all respondents who were party members also were part of the youth forums of the parties.

Regarding the “willingness to participate further in politics” given the opportunity in the future, 38.36% expressed direct interest, 38.36% were undecided if they would like to become involved, while 23.29% do not wish to participate.

- Most of the respondents, about 81%, agree that the interests and rights of the LGBTI community would be better represented by an openly
LGBTI politician. The rest of the respondents do not necessarily link representation of their needs with openly LGBTI elected officials.

Most of the respondents perceive the Socialist Party as better representing LGBTI rights compared with the other political parties.

47.95% of the respondents did not vote in the 2017 parliamentary elections. 13.75% of the respondents participated in the elections but did not declare which party they voted for. About 24.66% of the respondents voted for the Socialist Party, which is the most-voted-for party among respondents. 4.11% voted for the Democratic Party, and the same percentage of respondents voted LIBRA and Challenge. Meanwhile, 1.37% of the voters voted for the Socialist Movement for Integration, or the third largest party in the country. Interestingly, the two new parties (Libra and Challenge) had the same amount of votes from LGBTI people as the Democratic Party, indicating the need for alternative political representation.

Given these findings, interview candidates were provided with an opportunity to make recommendations regarding increasing access to political participation opportunities and spaces for LGBTI persons.

These recommendations are detailed in Section 3.
As noted in Section 2, there are a number of obstacles for LGBTI persons to participate politically. Some of these are:

- Physical obstacles (lack of safety)
- Political education (lack of awareness of opportunities)
- Fragmentation within the sector and the lack of a cohesive strategy
- Disinterest and disillusionment

As the survey data shows, none of respondents were active members or volunteers of political parties, and are thus a constituency group that political parties can reach out to in order to grow their membership and enhance their commitment to promoting SOGI rights and human rights for LGBTI persons.

Several recommendations can be derived from both civil society and political party interviews that could enhance their accessibility LGBTI persons and promote LGBTI political participation.

3.1 POLICY AND STRUCTURAL MECHANISMS

The table opposite provides a summary of some of the key recommendations for using internal party strategies to promote LGBTI involvement.

**TABLE 1: INTERNAL POLITICAL PARTY STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE LGBTI INVOLVEMENT**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promoting Party Accessibility and Support for LGBTI Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduce a deliberate policy to encourage LGBTI persons’ participation, or mainstream LGBTI interests throughout existing policy and promote LGBTI leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When LGBTI issues are not considered independently of the issues of vulnerable groups gaps can develop. All policies should consider their impact on LGBTI persons, and a specific policy on LGBTI issues will indicate to LGBTI voters that your party cares about and will promote their needs. Promoting LGBTI leaders gives credibility to your party when speaking on these issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporating respect for human rights for LGBTI persons in party manifestos and constitutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making over statements of support will make it clear to LGBTI persons that your party supports their human rights, and will support them. Manifestos should explicitly mention LGBTI persons as an interest group and constituency. One way to do this is to invite LGBTI organisations to do sensitivity training with your organisation, so that you can incorporate these perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When considering a ‘gender balance’ in party structures, parties should take into account the need to be inclusive of gender diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most mentions of ‘gender’ within political party structures actually relate to cisgender women. This ignores the experience of LGBTI persons, and can lead to marginalisation. To be more inclusive, representation targets should take into account the need to represent diverse sexual orientations and genders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite LGBTI constituents and interest groups to make presentations to the party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursue political education of party members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold party members who discriminate accountable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**3.1.1 REPRESENTATION QUOTAS AND PROMOTING LGBTI LEADERS**

Most mentions of ‘gender’ within political party structures actually relate to the representation of cisgender women. This ignores the experience of LGBTI persons and can lead to marginalization. To be more inclusive, representation targets should take into account the need to represent diverse sexual orientations and genders.

One mechanism to promote the membership and leadership of LGBTI persons is the introduction of quotas for LGBTI persons, or the creation of positions or portfolios specifically to deal with LGBTI issues (as many parties have to deal with youth, women, or disability issues for example).

Promoting LGBTI leaders within your party gives the party more credibility when speaking on these issues. There is also the need to ensure that where LGBTI persons are represented at a local government level, they do not encounter a ‘glass ceiling’ to their progress onto provincial or national structures.

**3.1.2 GENDER POLICIES THAT GO BEYOND THE BINARIES**

When LGBTI issues are not considered independently of the issues of vulnerable groups, gaps in services and planning can develop. All policies should consider their impact on LGBTI persons, and a specific policy addressing LGBTI issues would indicate your party’s commitment to LGBTI voters.

A gender balance should not be seen as being only ‘women friendly,’ and space should be provided for representation for LGBTI members within parties. Many of the current electoral manifestos only mention gender with regards to women, and none specifically speak to human rights for LGBTI people. Whilst these are not always different from other community members’ interest (for example securing basic services) there are particular vulnerabilities and needs that LGBTI persons have.

Political parties should reach out to LGBTI organizations within their constituencies to ensure that these issues are raised and addressed in manifestos, and policy documents. In addition, human rights for LGBTI persons should be mainstreamed throughout all other policy documents within parties.
3.1.3 MANIFESTOS AND CONSTITUTIONS

Although many political parties include commitments to address women's or gender issues in their manifestos and constitutions, none of the parties analyzed in recent research explicitly stated their commitments to promote human rights for LGBTI persons. When interviewed, parties suggested their commitment to Constitutional values, however, an explicit statement supporting SOGI rights makes it clear to all party members, and potential party members, that the party is a safe place to be openly out.

3.1.4 INTERNAL PARTY EDUCATION

It is not safe to assume that all members of a party are equally aware of human rights for LGBTI persons. Hold regular discussions within all levels of the party to promote awareness for these rights, and the challenges LGBTI persons face.

Invite LGBTI constituents and interest groups to make presentations to the party. This will ensure that your policies and strategies to support constitutional values and LGBTI persons is suitable to address the needs of LGBTI persons in your constituencies and in the country more broadly.

3.1.5 CLARIFYING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES

The best way to approach political parties to engage on LGBTI issues is not always clear for outsiders. Parties should make these channels clear on branch communications, and maybe on their websites. Parties should also invite specific feedback and input on human rights for LGBTI persons to encourage participation.

3.2 LOCALLY SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS FOR LGBTI PERSONS

The table below provides a summary of some of the key recommendations for supporting LGBTI political participation through external activity.

**TABLE 2: HOW POLITICAL PARTIES CAN PROMOTE LGBTI POLITICAL PARTICIPATION THROUGH EXTERNAL ACTIVITY**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make statements to support LGBTI persons at all levels (community, local government, provincial and national level).</th>
<th>Statements of support are important in making your party accessible to LGBTI persons, and raising awareness of the opportunities for political participation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be an ally to LGBTI organizations: for example, attend events hosted by LGBTI organizations, be part of marches against homophobia or transphobia.</td>
<td>Showing solidarity via attending LGBTI events is a good way to build working relationships with the LGBTI community, and to increase their awareness of your political party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote community openness and accessibility.</td>
<td>The best way to approach political parties to engage on LGBTI issues is not always clear for outsiders. Parties should make these channels clear on branch communications, and maybe on their websites. Parties should also invite specific feedback and input on human rights for LGBTI persons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host events on commemorative days.</td>
<td>Political parties often have events on Youth Day and Women’s Day, and on other days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within your constituencies address the barriers that LGBTI persons face in participating politically.</td>
<td>Engage with service providers, community members, religious organizations, and civic organizations within your community to ensure that they are supportive of and informed about human rights for LGBTI persons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.1 ISSUING STATEMENTS IN SUPPORT OF LGBTI ISSUES

Political parties should put out statements during important LGBTI months/events to show their support of human rights for LGBTI persons. Using existing political platforms to introduce conversations around LGBTI issues is one way for political parties to promote human rights for LGBTI persons.

3.2.2 HOST EVENTS ON COMMEMORATIVE DAYS

Political parties often have events on Youth Day and Women’s Day, and on other days where specific groups of people are invited to give feedback on how government policies and programmes are affecting their lives. Political parties could hold similar events during Pride month, for example an LGBTI Parliament, an Imbizo or a march. This sends a signal to your constituents that human rights for LGBTI persons are a party priority.

3.2.3 HOLDING PARTY MEMBERS ACCOUNTABLE WHEN THEY DO NOT SUPPORT HUMAN RIGHTS FOR LGBTI PERSONS

There is the perception that at some levels of government it is safe to be homophobic or transphobic. This perception should be addressed through holding party leaders and office bearers accountable at all levels, and ensuring that the public is made aware that your party takes these matters seriously.

Holding party members accountable to policies and manifestos that promote human rights for LGBTI persons sends a clear message to supporters and constituents that your party supports LGBTI persons. In particular, mention was made during interviews of ensuring that local government councillors and traditional leaders are held accountable for homophobic statements or practices.

3.2.4 BE AN ALLY TO LGBTI ORGANISATIONS AND CONSTITUENTS

Be an ally to LGBTI organisations: for example, attend events hosted by LGBTI organisations, be part of marches against homophobia or transphobia. Speak to LGBTI constituents within your communities about what challenges they face. Showing solidarity via attending LGBTI events is a good way to build working relationships with the LGBTI community, and to increase their awareness of your political party.
Part of being an ally means engaging other groups in your party constituencies to promote human rights for LGBTI persons. Engage with service providers, community members, religious organisations, and civic organisations within your community to ensure that they are supportive of and informed about human rights for LGBTI persons.
The political participation of LGBTI Albanians is important to ensure that law and policy that promotes human rights for LGBTI persons takes their voices, needs, and concerns into consideration.

However, law and policy is not sufficient to create an equal society. This requires the constant reinforcement of constitutional values by political parties and government, and the promotion of opportunities for engagement for LGBTI persons.

This guide provides recommendations for political parties on how to ensure that the constitutional commitment to equality is realised.
The recommendations are organized in three categories addressing different actors and stakeholders. The first group of recommendations is for political parties, responsible institutions and LGBTI organizations operating in Albania.

Recommendations for political parties and youth political forums:

1. **Encourage key political parties to make their position public on various issues related to LGBTI rights.**
   - Issues should not include only same-sex marriage, but also family violence, education, health services, social services, access to justice, employment, sex workers’ rights etc. These positions should be written, published, and publicly articulated. Having a public position on each of the issues will contribute to adequately addressing the reality of LGBTI people in Albania, despite ideological differences. It will also contribute to diminishing “politically correct” language and artificial/populist public discourse. Silent consensus, which is widespread among main parties in Albania, negatively affects the promotion of LGBTI rights.
   - Socialist Party (SP) and Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI), which are associate/members of European or international socialist bodies (Party of European Socialist (PES) and Socialist International (SI)), should especially make their position public regarding LGBTI rights, if it is the same with SI and PES resolutions or if it differs from them.

2. **Organization of roundtables among parties and LGBTI organizations**
   - These types of discussions should be organized in order to become informed on LGBTI needs, social acceptance, and human rights restrictions. This will also help bridge the gap in understanding between these two groups, leading to enhanced cooperation.

3. **Higher levels of engagement on issues affecting the LGBTI population**
   - Political parties and youth forums should better inform themselves on the current Albanian legislation and institutional engagement
that addresses LGBTI rights. Political parties’ representatives should be invited and should participate on the joint institutional annual meetings in order to be updated on the situation of LGBTI people in Albania. Also, they should aim to engage with LGBTI groups and organizations and foster healthy relationships.

Institutions which are responsible for protection and promotion of LGBTI rights and approved legislation:

1. Design and implement an integrated institutional protection mechanism for the 2016-2020 Action Plan
   - This mechanism should address all LGBTI persons who are isolated from their families and jobs and as a result could turn to sex work as a means for survival, which carries a higher risk of violence. The experience of the STREHA shelter, in terms of organization and services provided, can be replicated large-scale by public institutions. A similar protection mechanism such as the one addressing human trafficking victims in Albania is a good example of legal framework, institutional involvement and victims’ integration in society. Most importantly, this mechanism will enable a more realistic political and public discourse on LGBTI rights and the difficulties of coming out as LGBTI in Albania.

2. Monitor hate speech and hold political officials accountable
   - The Anti-discrimination Commissioner and Albanian Ombudsman should continue using public institutions to condemn politicians in Albania who use hate speech against LGBTI people. Their stance should be made as public as possible to demonstrate that acts of discrimination are not acceptable and those that commit them will suffer consequences.

LGBTI organizations and international actors supporting LGBTI rights in Albania

1. Better communicate the reality of the LGBTI population to government
   - Political parties and youth forums lack information on the challenges and realities that LGBTI people face in Albania. Thus, it is important to better communicate this information. LGBTI organizations supported by international actors should establish a systematic communication with political parties and parties’ youth forums.
related to the LGBTI community’s issues and situations in Albania. It is important to challenge the idea that LGBTI people in Albania are free to fully exercise their constitutional rights.

2. **Form alliances and positive relationships with universities**
   - LGBTI organizations should organize open discussions at universities to present the situation of LGBTI people in Albania. In these meetings it is important to share with students what it means to come out as LGBTI in Albania. It is also important to reflect not only on the perspective of an LGBTI person, but especially of their family and friends. These activities could contribute to informing young voters on LGBTI rights and challenges in Albania.

3. **Foster strong alliances with the media**
   - These alliances will allow the media to present systematic accurate information about LGBTI needs and rights that showcase other qualities of out individuals, such as professional achievements, societal contributions, and interests. This could encourage more LGBTI people who already have a professional career to come out and perhaps even participate in politics.

4. **Create a public monitoring system**
   - LGBTI organizations should work to establish an online presence and provide detailed information about LGBTI people and their rights in Albania through monitoring developments like updated legislation, action plans, local and central initiatives, political parties’ position on various LGBTI issues, etc. Any online space should also provide information on the services provided, the activities being carried out, initiatives, relevant studies and resources, and partners and allies.

5. **Encourage and support LGBTI people to engage in political system**
   - LGBTI organizations should encourage and support LGBTI persons to express their interests to be part of political parties. This can be done in the form of political leadership workshops that impart the skills and knowledge necessary for LGBTI people to use civic engagement as a tool to advance toward equality.
RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

1. A view to the political participation of LGBTI people in movements and political parties in Colombia - 2014 © Corporación Caribe Afirmativo. © Gay & Lesbian Victory Institute Western.

2. Guides from Victory Institute, for example: https://victoryinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Triangle-Best-Practice-Political-Parties-WEB.pdf


4. Western Balkans LGBTI: Landscape Analysis of Political, Economic and Social Conditions. This report was produced by the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice as part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Global Development Partnership. The Partnership was founded in 2012 and brings together the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Government of Sweden, the Arcus Foundation, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, the Gay & Lesbian Victory Institute, the Williams Institute, the Swedish Federation for LGBT Rights (RFSL) and other corporate, non-profit and non-governmental organization resource partners to promote equality, human rights and economic empowerment of LGBTI people in the developing world. Cover photo: Labris Belgrade Protest. Photo courtesy of In Serbia Network Balkans LGBTI: Landscape Analysis of Political, Economic & Social Conditions. Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice. 2015.


Inequalities & Exclusion and Combating Homophobia & Transphobia experienced by LGBTI people in Albania. This country report is part of a sub-regional project “Being LGBTI in Eastern Europe”, implemented by UNDP in partnership with civil society and in cooperation with the LGBTI Equal Rights Association (ERA). In Albania the project is being implemented with the following country partners: Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, relevant line ministries, All United Pro LGBT Cause, Open Mind Spectrum, PINK Embassy, Alliance Against Discrimination of LGBT people, Ombudsman and Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, STREHA LGBT, and other civil society organizations that work in the human rights. UNDP 2017.


12. TheHeadHunter Index http://www.headhunter.al/sq-al/lgbtq-index


REPORTS


10. Special Report of the activity of the Ombudsman on the rights of LGBTI persons in 2012/Albania

**LAWS**

- The Electoral Code of The Republic Of Albania (Approved by Law no.
10 019, dated 29 December 2008, amended by Law no. 74/2012, dated 19 July 2012 and Law no. 31/2015, dated 2 April 2015)


POLITICAL PARTIES IN ALBANIA

- https://www.ps.al/
- https://pd.al/
- http://www.lsi.al/
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