

The 2017 Brussels conference on Parenting options for European gay men, Sept 23-24

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NELFA, The Network of European LGBTIQ* Families Associations, promotes the parenting of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people and defends their families.

The network (currently 24 associations in 15 countries) is represented by an Executive Board, elected every two years at the General Assembly (held every year in early spring). The next one will take place in Lisbon in March 2018. The members of the Board are members of the national associations.

NELFA, founded in 2009 and incorporated under Belgian law in 2012, works mainly by creating links among these national associations (through general assemblies, meetings of European families, etc.) and links with other international LGBTIQ* organisations such as Transgender Europe (TGEU) or ILGA-Europe (By the way: NELFA will be present at ILGA-Europe's Annual Conference in Warsaw in early November and will illustrate its "ARTguidelines", including surrogacy, and will also hold a workshop on the lack of freedom of movement for rainbow families in Europe). More and more, NELFA is known and increases its reputation. The network collaborates with organisations of the third sector, in particular organisations that deal with the protection of children and families. On 21 July 2016, NELFA has been granted participatory status with the Council of Europe. This year – and this a big deal – NELFA became supporting member of COFACE Families Europe, a network of mainly non-LGBTIQ* civil society associations (59 members), representing the interests of ALL families.

In short, NELFA tries to make the voices of rainbow families heard in Europe, with political organisations and NGOs. It highlights sudden discrimination, difficulties of all kinds in accessing parenthood, absence or lack of legal and social protection. NELFA offers concrete actions, helps to train its members (through the Erasmus+ programme), strengthens the cooperation between its member associations, organises international conferences on subjects that concern us (as in Naples in March 2017 – under the motto: "Families in Europe – Same love, Different status").

NELFA wants to be the spokesperson in Europe for the interests of our children and our families.

It is, with this in mind, that we have drawn up the guidelines on ART and surrogacy.

The drafting of these few lines was neither quick nor simple. A part of the previous Board did not see the real need for it, another part wanted on the contrary that NELFA clearly undertakes this way.

The problem, of course, let's face it, was surrogacy. We all know that - while adoption, co-parenthood, and ARTs for lesbians remain still difficult to admit in some parts of the society - it is undeniable that these processes for having children are now widely accepted in the West, with increasingly favourable legislation in almost all Western countries, but also by the pre-existence, in one form or another, of these processes to create, enlarge or rebuild hetero-parental families. In other words: ART, adoption, reconstituted families exist and have been socially accepted since forever, with ups and downs, for straight couples.

Surrogacy poses a new problem with the advent of GAY parenting. The Gay parenting provokes and highlights what until then remained very discreet. GAY parenthood has highlighted a practice that upsets our societies and openly poses questions that until now have been buried under the carpet.

Maternity is found again and unannounced sacred and untouchable, the woman's body, otherwise violated and abused, becomes inviolable for the hypocrites and acquires more importance than the will of the woman and its capacity to decide for herself. Everyone feels entitled to say what is right in

the name of child protection or the protection of women who bear the children of others without really listening to what the women and children concerned have to say on the subject.

NELFA believes that surrogacy is possible and can and must be done with respect and dignity of each of the actors. NELFA thinks that the "ostrich policy" never brings anything good and that the debate must be open, honest, critical if necessary.

But a debate **is** necessary, as wide as possible.

There is a need for positions and proposals to be debated.

Our guidelines on ART and surrogacy are proposals, but above all: an invitation to debate. They are the fruitful conclusion of intense and passionate discussions that has taken into account the multiple sensitivities that make up our network.

We do not pretend to have all the answers and solutions, but we want to make it clear that we support the families that have been built through gestation for others, we defend the right of children to see their parents of intention recognised. Let us defend the following key concept: responsibility, intentionality are the founding elements of our families.

The Debate that must follow succeeds in finding solutions and shared practices which put at the forefront the free will of the women concerned, their physical and psychological health, respect for children born thanks to women and parents of intention, all within a legal and sanitary framework that can guarantee the maximum guarantees to all the actors of the trial.

Obviously, although surrogacy remains the most criticised practice in ARTs, we do not forget that much remains to be done for women's access to ART in some countries such as France and the United States, Italy. There is still a great deal to be discussed on the issues of gametes donation, free donations, possible compensations, anonymity of egg and sperm donors, transparency and truth to be given to children born through donations etc. ...

NELFA wishes and encourages a public debate on all these issues.

Our primary goal is the non-discrimination and protection of LGBTIQ* parents and intended parents, our overriding goal is to improve the lives of all people by fueling the debate on all these issues, which are increasingly critical for society as a whole, infertility and sterility of people and couples are on the agenda and growing steadily.