

BACKGROUND: Referendum in Romania on 6th and 7th of October 2018

(source: ILGA-Europe, Accept Romania)

On 17 September, the Romanian Constitutional Court approved a request to hold a referendum on changing the definition of 'family' in the Constitution (Article 48.1). If successful, the initiative will replace the current neutral definition of the family with a version that recognises only married different-sex couples as the basis of a family. This excludes from constitutional protection all other formats of families, i.e. not only rainbow families, but also for example grandparents raising grandchildren, single parents, and multi-generational families. This makes it a broader family issue, not only an LGBTI issue, contrary to the narrative of those behind the referendum, who are framing it as being about whether same-sex couples can get married in Romania – a false line largely echoed in international media.

Why does the distinction matter?

The false narrative being propagated frames the LGBTI population in Romania as the 'other', a threat to "traditional values", and increases the marginalisation and vulnerability of the community. It also scapegoats the LGBTI population as a means to change the conversation. What conversation? The widespread, ongoing one about the corruption scandal currently plaguing the Romanian government, for which the referendum serves as a timely and useful diversion. In Romania, ILGA members and their allies are working to emphasise the true nature of this referendum: as an attack on all families, an infringement on the human rights and liberties of people in Romania, and another step further away from EU values. On 18 September, the Romanian government issued an emergency ordinance declaring that the referendum would take place over two days, instead of the one day that is usual referendum procedure. This changing of the rules so late in the game – to prolong the voting period and increase the likelihood of the threshold being met – is a clear attempt by the government to influence the outcome by bending the rules of the state for its own purposes.

How are Romanians countering this?

LGBTI organisations in Romania and their allies are calling for a boycott of the referendum – the threshold is 30%, so if enough of the electorate can be persuaded not to cast a vote, the referendum will fail and a strong message will be sent that the people have no interest in supporting discrimination and corruption. It's about families, human rights and the rule of law!