

EESC input session

“Demographic challenges in the EU in light of economic and development inequalities”

Brussels, 14th of January 2020, 10-13:00

NELFA intervention:

Thank you for the invitation and for your attention. My name is Björn Sieverding and I am Member of the Board of NELFA which is the European umbrella organisation for rainbow families, means: lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer people with children; parents or parents-to be.

We have actually 40 member organisations, representing 32 countries in Europe. And we will be able to welcome a new full member from Iceland very soon (Samtökin '78). We estimate the number of organised rainbow families in our network between 20-25.000, means up to 10.000 children.

The total number of rainbow families, especially in the European Union framework is unknown. But we can – for sure - speak of **thousands of LGBTIQ* parents and children who can't be ignored!**

What does this mean concerning the demographic challenges? Well, like the report already states in a paragraph the movement of rainbow families from East to West because of the different legal provisions and that this won't change too much in demographic terms. Of course – this is true.

But - and this is today also very important to state - LGBTIQ* people, rainbow families, are not an additional burden regarding the demographic winter nor responsible for this development. There are many people holding very conservative stances on relationships, accusing homosexuals of the demographic decline, of destroying traditional families and values, spreading diseases.

Unfortunately, such attacks are not only formed by fundamental religious groups or foreign intelligences. We know that those narratives actually course through in the European Union, with the rise of right-wing populism, especially in Hungary and Poland – where LGBTIQ* people are openly attacked as “threat to society” with anti-gay-zones and -stickers for shop windows and cars.

The current report draft says: “Discussing demography means talking about real children, mothers and fathers”. And yes, rainbow families are real and will continue to exist, even in countries where they are not legally recognised. LGBTIQ* parenting can't be avoided by legal restrictions. However, parents and [especially children are put in jeopardy](#) – and this without any positive aspects for society. No “traditional” family will be better by discriminating against the alternative forms. It's an unnecessary battle, we need to stay in dialogue to deal with demographic challenges.

What does it mean in practice? For us: continuous inclusion of LGBTIQ* people and their families. The steady deconstruction of prejudices, a non-biased education – in schools, public services etc.

Research has shown – with evidence – that children raised up in rainbow families are fine. They don't tend to specific disorders; they don't suffer from paedophilia or lacking gender role models. They love their parents and grow up in safe spaces. The only *real* threat to them is hate speech, bullying and the stress that their families are legally not recognised. Because this means at the end: less obligations for parents and less benefits (tax credits, access to health care, etc.). Children are still discriminated against – just by association to their parent's sexual orientation/gender identity.

There are clear tasks for EU Member States: to ensure that laws, regulations, policies are rainbow families inclusive (in line with Fundamental Rights Charter, UN Convention of the Child, settled case law ECtHR, EJC). There were many achievements in the past, but [we need to fill further gaps:](#)

14 Member States have implemented marriage equality, 8 more have at least established civil unions – but **six countries within the EU don't offer (nearly) any recognition of same-sex partnerships.**

18 Member States provide joint parenthood rights for LGBTIQ* couples (second-parent adoption or similar instruments, or: recognition from birth (mostly ART treatment in a clinic) – means: **ten countries don't grant legal ties between children and their non-biological parents (soon changes in France and Ireland)**! Consequence: i.e. (source: Gender Equality Index 2019): 11 countries in the EU don't provide parental leave for rainbow families (means in most cases: non-biological parents).

Special task of the EU: to encourage Member States to guarantee human rights and **to ensure free movement rights!** (a lot of difficulties because of the legal patchwork situation within the European Union: [i.e.] stateless children, loss of legal ties, horrific bureaucratic hurdles!)

Regarding demography, NELFA has some additional positions - and I would like to share the existence of two guidelines for further discussions - on [Assisted Reproductive Techniques \(ART\) and Adoption/Foster care parenting](#). See also the [Council of Europe resolution October 2018](#)

- **Access to fertility treatment for lesbian couples/single women** (IVF, ROPA etc.), funding! Means => regardless of their marital status and sexual orientation
 - ⇒ 16 EU Member States don't offer ART to lesbian couples (change in France 2020!)
 - ⇒ 11 EU Member States don't offer ART to single women (France will change it most probably in summer 2020, but Poland i.e. has abolished this possibility)
- **Regulation for surrogacy arrangements** (national approaches, recognition of intended parents after arrangements in countries with a reasonable and ethical environment)
 - ⇒ only UK with a regulation, Netherlands/Belgium with possibilities for gay couples, but without a clear legal framework, Greece/Portugal only for heterosexuals
- **Possibilities for all types of families** (including LGBTIQ*) **to apply for adoption/foster care**
 - ⇒ 14 EU countries without joint adoption rights (and often related to marital status!)
 - ⇒ Foster care open to LGBTIQ* couples in 18 (soon in 19 countries = Croatia), but there are still at least 7 countries without possibilities for LGBTIQ* people (even as singles)
- *And new to debate:* **Co- or multi-parenting** (i.e. a lesbian couple and a gay couple who want to become parents) is quite popular – but how we deal with those families and their legal protection? More than two legal parents – impossible at the moment. Interestingly, Croatia offers a possibility of partial legal recognition of partners of biological parents (including LGBTIQ*) and the Netherlands are discussing this (at least with more parental rights)...

SUMMARY...

Maybe it's true that rainbow families only have a slight impact in demographic terms. But they are definitely not a threat to society and responsible for the demographic winter!

Non-traditional families – besides the concept of man+woman+children - need protection. It is the duty of the EU to safeguard the diversity of individual choices of how we as citizens would like to live together. **Demography should be about making sure that every family has the means and opportunities to improve, thrive and live a dignified life in every EU State and not dividing families into "right" and wrong" ones.** The demographic challenges can be for sure tackled WITH rainbow families and their children. We are ready to contribute – with your support... THANK YOU...