



MEDNET 2 – Innovation, exchange, networking for a new leading class in the Mediterranean

Sent on: August 14, 2015

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## Second COUNTRY REPORT TEMPLATE

Update Thematic Dossier #4:

Equal opportunities for all and Gender equality

Topic to be explored: Equal rights and

opportunities for LGBTI people

*proposed by Margherita Mugnai and Barbara Imbergamo (Socio Lab, Florence, Italy)*

# Dignity

*"Let me say this loud and clear: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are entitled to the same rights as everyone else. They, too, are born free and equal. I stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them in their struggle for human rights."*

**Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General,**  
New York, December 11, 2012

# Freedom

The idea to propose this topic for updating the dossier #4 on Equal opportunities for all arises from the experiences gained during the workshop in San Rossore, where the interaction with the young participants made it possible to better focus on issues which seem interested in developing a debate and around which **the network could take concrete action.**

# Solidarity

Today it seems increasingly urgent to address the issue of equal opportunities from the point of view of **LGBTI people**, especially with regard to **awareness raising, to access to justice and civil rights campaigns, to improve the visibility in the Media, thus their participation in public and political life.**

# Equality

At the same time, today, thanks to the work of activists and opinion leaders and the enactment of laws (also popular initiative) for the advancement of equality in rights, **the international debate on the subject is extremely developed** and opens windows of opportunity for formalization of positions shared by youth organizations.

# Justice

The time seems ripe to facilitate a comparison between young people of the Mediterranean on these issues.

LGBTI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex, terms which indicate people's sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Sexual Orientation** refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviours, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions. Three sexual orientations are commonly recognised - heterosexual, homosexual (gay and lesbian) and bisexual.

The template aims to explore and bring out **the current condition of LGBTI people in the Mediterranean**, by **collecting and processing data** about **the main obstacles and discrimination** faced by them in each country of the area and so **the main strategies and initiatives** designed and put in act by their different actors **to prevent, monitor and counteract** the dangerous and unfair trend and lead people to a **growing awareness** on these issues that are critical to ensure **equal rights and opportunities for all**.

Considering that the law is a crucial part of any effective human rights work to combat discrimination but that the access to this knowledge shows a particular challenge when it comes to LGBTI issues, we ask you to build a report on the topic paying particular attention to the **current legislation on subject** adopted by your country.

Considering also that **the purpose of our work**, which represents the spirit of the MedNet project, **is always to connect us**, each time discussing, sharing and spreading our voices about some of the major issues that affect us as global citizen and so advocating **as youth network** the efforts of each country to respond at the contemporary challenges thus offering inspiration and support to the people of the others, in order to update the dossier 4# on Equal opportunities for all, we ask you to share a **good practice** in the field of **raising awareness and education on the topic of LGBTI people** that demonstrates an effective result on reducing violence, prejudices and discriminations against them, thus improving the condition of their social life in your country.

**Homophobia** refers to fear of or prejudice and discrimination against LGB people. It is also the dislike of same-sex attraction and love or the hatred of people who have those feelings. The term was first used in the 1970s and is more associated with ignorance, prejudice and stereotyping than with the physiological reactions usually attributed to a 'phobia'. While homophobic comments or attitudes are often unintentional, they can cause hurt and offence to LGB people.

**Transphobia** refers to fear of or prejudice and discrimination against people who are transgender or who are perceived to transgress norms of gender, gender identity or gender expression. While transphobic comments or attitudes are often unintentional, they can cause hurt and offence to transgender people.

- In many cases beyond homophobic and transphobic episodes there are other problems, mostly related to a culture with a heteronormative vision, models of sexuality and gender rules –

**“Sexual orientation and gender identity have increasingly been recognised as grounds of discrimination in European and national legislation.”**

- **Your tasks:**

**[First part – max 5 pages - Collect and elaborate data]**

“By discrimination we mean when somebody is treated less favourably than others because of a specific personal feature such as their age, gender identity, sexual orientation, minority background or for any other reason.”

**- (1) please, introduce the topic pointing out the main barriers and discriminations faced by LGBT people in your country with reference, when possible, to the legislation of your country affecting the rights of LGBT people**

Under Tunisian law, homosexuality is a crime, punishable by years in prison. But in the past few years, those who oppose the law have found an outlet for their dissent: social media. A new initiative has piqued the interest of a growing sector of Tunisia's public sphere. A Facebook page called "Decriminalization of Homosexuality in Tunisia" currently has several thousand followers.

"We plan to file status in compliance with the law of associations currently in force. We will declare ourselves openly and officially as an association for the abolition of Article 230 of the Criminal Code that penalizes homosexuality with a prison sentence of up to 3 years. We will also fight for the repeal of Article 226 used against transgender and transsexual individuals, accusing them of outrages against public decency," "Bayrem," (a pseudonym), a lawyer and activist said.

At the heart of this initiative are fifteen men and women. The future president of the association is a woman (for security reasons, no names are mentioned). Our contact states that this mixed group is composed of people with different sexual orientations, but with one unified goal:

"We hope to prove that homosexuals are citizens and patriots who are entitled to the same rights as the rest of the population," he said.

LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) activists in Tunisia are growing in numbers, especially on social networks, following a declaration by Samir Dilou, the former Minister of Justice and Human Rights, who openly said on national television that homosexuals were "sick" and needed to be hospitalized.

The Department of Justice recently rejected a proposal from several civil organizations (including the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women) to reform the penal justice code by repealing Article 230.

**(2) Please, search and show us the most relevant initiatives put in act by the different actors of your country (institutions, civil society, social partners - at national, regional and/or local level) to prevent, monitor and combat violence and discrimination against LGBT people, to ensure equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of basic human rights to them and thus to enhance their quality of social and public life.**

There are about seven organizations in Tunisia that fight for the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community (LGBT), but you wouldn't know it at first glance: only one of these organizations openly presents itself as such.

"The other organizations didn't have the courage to even try to get official recognition," said 21-year-old law student Belhassen Azaiez with a smile, sitting in a smoky cafe in Tunis. His organization Shams received official recognition last May as an advocacy group for sexual minorities. Other LGBT organizations claim to fight for human rights or for minorities in general, despite focusing exclusively on gay rights. "If we refer to ourselves as an LGBT organization, we wouldn't be able to do as much and it wouldn't be safe," explained Ramy Ayari, 22, on a terrace in one of Tunis' "gay-friendly" cafes.

The computer science student is an active member of Without Restrictions, another gay rights organization. "During the dictatorship there was little you could do. It was almost impossible to set up organizations," he said.

Shortly after the Jasmine Revolution of 2011, there was an explosion of new organizations advocating against issues such as pollution and torture and for women's rights. Following the implementation of a new law, it finally became possible to establish official organizations for these and other causes. The LGBT community embraced this opportunity with open arms.

As a teenager, Azaiez did not know any other gay people, and LGBT organizations did not yet exist in Tunisia. "I locked myself in my room and fell into a severe depression. I'm an activist now because I don't want others to go through the same."

The advocacy groups, most of which operate in the capital city, use social media to help the LGBT community with problems, inform them of their rights and fight discrimination. This is no easy task; according to the activists, the vast majority of the Tunisian population is homophobic. During a television interview, the former minister for human rights, Samir Dilou, referred to homosexuality as a "perversion that should be treated medically". The organizations also fight for the abolishment of Article 230 of the Tunisian Penal Code, which prohibits homosexual relations. With this in mind, you might wonder why Shams was recognized under Tunisian law. "Having sex with someone of the same sex is forbidden," Azaiez explained, "but to be part of a sexual minority is not".

The advocacy groups emphasize different areas and try to achieve their goals in different ways. "It is a good that there are more organizations," said Ali Bousselmi, 26, from the organization Mawjoudin (We Exist). "It would be easier for the government to stop us if there was just one organization."

"I'm lucky, my parents are open-minded," he added, speaking from his family house in the Old City of Tunis. Although Bousselmi has previously volunteered for Amnesty International in Tunisia, as with other civil rights organizations in the country, there was no room for LGBT issues at the time.

## [Second part – max 2 pages - Share a good practice]

**- share with us at least one good practice to raise awareness and so to counteract stereotypes and discrimination of LGBTI people looking at strategy (projects, campaigns, support networks) puts in act in your country, especially working with individuals, families and communities.**

The past six months have been tumultuous for Tunisia's LGBT community. In March a gay pride festival was held, perhaps for the first time ever in this North African country. The modest multi-day event took place at a university campus in Tunis.

"We took a rainbow umbrella," recounted Ayari, "and signs with texts like 'Love is not a crime,' and 'My body, my sexuality, my right'. Most passers-by looked puzzled."

Azaiez was present as well. "Someone asked me what the rainbow flag means. I explained it and he asked if I was one of them. I told him I was and he left without saying a word."

Bousselmi also attended the event. "At the end, Islamists and people from left-wing student organizations came to bother us. They told us we should leave and that what we do is against nature."

On 17 May, the International Day against Homophobia, several activities were organised by the LGBT community in Tunis as well. Chouf, which fights for the rights of women who belong to a sexual minority, organized a festival that was very well attended. For security reasons, it was called a feminist art festival and the location, in the chic and liberal neighborhood of Carthage, a suburb of Tunis, was chosen carefully.

According to Ramy Ayari and other activists, the police tap their phone calls. "When that happens, you suddenly hear other sounds on the line," he said, adding that he sometimes notices log-in attempts on his Facebook account from a city he has never visited.

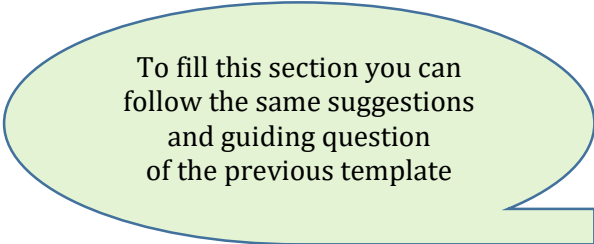
He showed a Facebook message he received a few days earlier. The message, which contains a variety of obscene threats, was written by someone wearing a police uniform. "I blocked him immediately," Ayari said with a sigh. "I'd notify the police, if there weren't so many homophobes working there."

NB. The issue of **education to diversity like richness and added value** cuts across all groups subject to discrimination, hate crimes, exclusion, etc. and therefore it is considered a crucial element in the fight for equal opportunities and rights.


We strongly believe that the youth organizations of the Mediterranean may activate promoting campaigns, projects and networking ideas and experiences on it!

For example, at San Rossore, in the dialogue session around this issue it has emerged clearly the desire of young people to work primarily at the micro level, in their communities reference frame: family, school, peer groups.

To facilitate discussion among the young participants in the network, so we ask you **to focus on positive experiences** that exist in your country to improve the quality of life of LGBTI people, in particular at the level of individuals, families and communities.



To fill this section you can follow the same suggestions and guiding question of the previous template



Have a look at ILGA: a global network of local and national associations working for the achievement of equal rights for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) wherever they are. Founded in 1978, ILGA has obtained consultative status at the United Nations where it gives voice to 1044 associations registered.

<http://ilga.org/>

**Country: Tunisia**

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**[thanks!]**