

**Statement by the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination
based on sexual orientation and gender identity**

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Statement on the EU LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026–2030

The new European Union (EU) [LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026–2030](#) represents a significant reaffirmation of the European Union’s commitment to equality, human rights, and democratic norms. The strategy strengthens the EU’s role as a global champion for inclusion, setting out a coherent vision built on three strategic objectives: protection, empowerment, and engagement.

This renewed commitment comes at a time of increasing polarization and legislative backsliding across parts of Europe, including in EU member States and candidate States. In recent communications, United Nations experts have expressed concern over a growing pattern of legislative initiatives that undermine the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons and those defending them. These developments reveal recurring forms of state interference and regression across several human rights domains.

First, a proliferation of laws and policies that have sought to curtail freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, as well as the right to education, by restricting public expression of identity, or access to information, based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Examples include a LGBT “propaganda” law placing restrictions on representation and public expression of identity, under the guise of “protecting children” – with the same rationale used to ban Pride in 2025;¹ sweeping anti-LGBT legislation effectively banning all forms of LGBT representation in the public sphere, and curtailing freedom of assembly;² an LGBT “propaganda” law, that forbids depiction or discussion of SOGI issues in or near schools;³ constitutional reforms have given primacy to national law over EU law in relation to matters of “national identity”, including “cultural-ethical issues” as well as placing limits on access to comprehensive sexuality education;⁴ and a draft LGBT “propaganda” law, which would place further severe restrictions on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.⁵

¹ [OL HUN 1/2025](#)

² [OL GEO 2/2025](#)

³ [OL BGR 1/2024](#)

⁴ [OL SVK 2/2025](#)

⁵ [OL TUR 5/2025](#)

Second, there has been an intensified effort to codify binary and exclusionary definitions of sex and gender, thereby compromising access to legal recognition for trans and gender-diverse persons. Examples include legislation that entrench biological definitions of sex, which compromises access to legal gender recognition for trans persons, and legislation that has made it impossible to legally change gender and placed further restrictions on gender-affirming health care.

Third, several legislative proposals have sought to weaken protection against discrimination and hate crime, either by omission or active rollback. Examples include amendments to the criminal code removing gender identity as a protected ground in hate-crime and anti-discrimination provisions;⁶ and the enactment of “propaganda” style laws and other legislation targeting LGBT people, which spuriously claim to “protect children” and thereby reinforce and amplify discrimination, by suggesting that LGBT people themselves represent a threat to the health or morality of children.

Finally, there is a discernible effort to constrain civic space and delegitimize human rights advocacy, as illustrated by “foreign agent” laws, which targets civil society organizations and independent media, echoing restrictive trends observed elsewhere in the region,⁷ and restrictions on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Taken together, these developments represent an escalating pattern of legislative backsliding, restricting fundamental freedoms and undermining equality and non-discrimination guarantees across multiple jurisdictions.

Against this backdrop, the EU Strategy assumes even greater significance as a countervailing force for human rights and democratic norms. The Strategy mainstreams equality across policy areas and introduces targeted measures that directly address long-standing concerns raised by civil society and UN human rights mechanisms. Its focus on ending harmful practices, including conversion practices and non-consensual medical interventions on intersex persons, responds to urgent protection gaps. Measures to counter hate crime and online hate – through the Digital Services Act, enhanced victim support, and proposed harmonization of hate-offence definitions – represent meaningful progress. The emphasis on inclusive education, mental health, and safe public spaces situates empowerment as a cross-cutting priority, while renewed commitments to collect high-quality equality data signal an evidence-based approach grounded in intersectionality. The Strategy also includes a vital commitment to expand support to LGBTIQ+ civil society organisations and activists in a context of global funding cuts, including through a significant increase in proposed funding for equality and human rights initiatives under the next Multiannual Financial

⁶ [OL BIH 1/2024](#)

⁷ [AL SVK 1/2025](#); [OL GEO 3/2024](#)

Framework of the EU. The time-bound expectation for Member States to adopt national action plans, coupled with the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ equality as an enabling condition in EU funding, promises progress, if coupled with sufficient political will from member States.

Equally important is the Strategy's global dimension. It reinforces the EU's engagement with multilateral institutions, including the United Nations and regional human-rights mechanisms, and explicitly recognizes cooperation with the UN Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The Strategy aligns with UNHCR guidance on LGBTIQ+ refugees and integrates equality objectives into external action, humanitarian assistance, and development cooperation.

At the same time, the new Strategy is less ambitious than the previous one, and persistent shortcomings remain. The Strategy's success will ultimately be measured by its implementation. Clear benchmarks, timelines, and transparent reporting are essential to ensure accountability and assess progress. In their absence, there is a risk that commitments remain aspirational rather than resulting in tangible improvements in people's lives. The lack of progress in recognizing hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity in EU criminal law reflects a continuing political impasse. While national action plans are encouraged, there are no binding mechanisms to ensure compliance or harmonized standards across Member States. Commitments to "exchange best practices" on gender recognition fall short of a clear call for procedures based on self-determination, free from medical pre-conditions. Furthermore, the Strategy does not yet fully address socio-economic inequalities that disproportionately affect LGBTIQ+ persons, including poverty, homelessness, and health disparities. Finally, although it calls for engagement with civil society, mechanisms to guarantee structured, well-resourced participation remain limited.

In sum, the EU LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026–2030 provides a comprehensive framework for action, albeit less ambitious than its precursor. It reaffirms Europe's leadership in promoting equality at home and abroad, even as parts of the region witness renewed efforts to erode these very principles. To fully realize its promise, the Strategy must translate political commitments into enforceable standards, ensure consistent implementation across all Member States, and ensure meaningful engagement with adequately resourced civil-society actors who work every day to make equality a lived reality.

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