

Cologne - Germany

1. Good practise: “Sister Cities stand together” – Lesbian Rights are Human Rights International Exchange with lesbian/queer LGBT activists from Cologne’s Sister Cities

In July 2018, during Cologne Pride, the City of Cologne hosted a 5-day international exchange programme for LGBT human rights activists from 5 of Cologne’s 22 sister cities including guests from Istanbul (Turkey), Katowice (Poland), Cluj-Napoca (Romania), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and Tunis (Tunisia) – focusing on lesbian visibility, international solidarity, networking and empowerment of lesbians: 9 out of these 10 international guests were lesbian/queer women. A similar exchange programme was held already in 2017.

Goals

- Empowering and supporting human rights activists in Cologne’s sister cities - mostly from countries with high rates of discrimination and low social acceptance of LGBT
- Highlighting the situation of lesbians in these countries and increasing lesbian visibility
- Inspiring local lesbian activists as well as international lesbian activists
- Building networks and connecting lesbians on an international level

Target audience

LGBT activists and other human rights activists – lesbian/queer women – from Cologne’s sister cities and from Cologne itself



Partners

The exchange was a successful collaboration between the city’s LGBT office, the city’s Office for International Affairs, local NGOs and lesbian activists from Cologne.

Duration of the project

While the planning phase started about 9 months beforehand, the actual exchange programme included 4 days (arrival Wednesday afternoon, departure Monday morning). The programme included: a welcome dinner; a half-day conference (attended by approx. 90 people, where the lesbian guests spoke about the situation for LGBT in their home countries and the volunteer work they engage in); an official reception in the town hall, visiting two LGBT NGOs, exploring the Cologne Pride street festival and participating in Cologne’s Pride Parade with amnesty international (see photo below) and as a group with its own banner accompanied by the Mayor of Cologne (see photo above).

Role of the City

The City of Cologne was the main body responsible for organising, hosting and funding this exchange. About 7500 Euros were available to pay for flights, hotel accommodation and the half-day conference.

Outcome/results

The international guests as well as everyone involved from the German side, felt inspired and empowered for their work as activists by this mutually beneficial exchange. The exchange programme received good media coverage (newspaper and TV). Following the exchange in 2017, LGBT activists from two of these sister-cities (Katowice/Poland and Cluj/Romania) invited Mayor of Cologne to visit their local pride event. On behalf of the Mayor, one Vice Mayor of Cologne made official visits to support these local pride demonstrations, which received a lot of media coverage. Cologne is planning to continue this exchange programme with LGBT activists from different sister cities in 2019. Other German cities felt inspired and are planning a similar exchange next year.



2. Developing an Action Plan for more acceptance of sexual and gender diversity

3. Publishing a study about the city’s LGBT community as an economic location factor