



CIVIC UPDATE

JANUARY 2014



A Publication of the Citizen Participation Team

Political Inclusion of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Population

How does LGBT inclusion fit within NDI’s mission?

A fundamental characteristic of democracy is that all citizens are able to express their voice and influence decisions affecting their lives. This includes segments of the population traditionally excluded from political power due to social prejudice and stereotypes. In many countries, individuals face exclusion based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. This exclusion can take a variety of forms, both in private and public life, and often prevents members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community from having a voice in the political arena. Barriers to political participation can include laws explicitly criminalizing homosexual behavior or political organizing, such as: anti-sodomy laws or the so-called “anti-propaganda” law in Russia; a lack of legal protections against discrimination often afforded to other minority groups; or simply societal bias against this segment of the population that results in violent intimidation or an inability to advance in the economic and political sphere. NDI has a unique opportunity to ensure these citizens are able to take part in political processes and debates at critical transition phases on an equal footing with other segments of the population, in the same way the Institute works to ensure women and other marginalized populations are able to express their voice in politics. Similarly, NDI has a responsibility to ensure programs comply with the “do no harm” principle, in this case meaning the Institute does not reinforce barriers to participation by LGBT populations through its programming.

In the rapidly changing environment of legal frameworks relating to the LGBT community, there are more and more occasions where anti-LGBT legislation threatens civil society or democratic development generally. Piloted in Russia and threatening to expand throughout the region, new “anti-propaganda” laws that prohibit individuals and organizations from presenting positive

images of homosexual behavior can be used to target any number of groups due to their broad wording. Because sexual orientation is not always a physically identifiable characteristic, many countries have seen political actors use anti-sodomy laws to discredit members of the political opposition, even when there is a lack of credible evidence of opposition leaders being members of the LGBT population. This has been widely reported in Malaysia with the accusations against opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim. Even in countries without laws banning homosexual acts, politicians have used insinuations of homosexuality to attack opponents, as seen in Venezuela’s recent presidential elections. Additionally, anti-LGBT legislation

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can be a “canary in the coal mine” signaling restrictions on civil society more broadly or other segments of the population are imminent. These developments demonstrate how the legal and social barriers erected to prevent the full participation of LGBT citizens are detrimental to the overall democratization process and must be addressed to ensure that all citizens have safe and meaningful spaces to express themselves.

In other cases there are particular political developments that can be leveraged as a way to advance LGBT inclusion. For example, accession to the European Union (EU) or completion of EU association agreements require countries to demonstrate respect for LGBT rights, and also provides an impetus for deepening democracy. In the Balkans and Eastern Europe, supporting LGBT organizations in advocating for equal protections can help keep the EU accession or association process moving forward. Similarly, attempts by certain governments such as Nicaragua to improve its international standing by promoting LGBT inclusion can provide space for precedent-setting engagement between government and civil society.

As always, comments on this Civic Update are encouraged.

NDI’s Approach to Mainstreaming LGBT Inclusion

As illustrated throughout this Update, the Institute’s efforts to promote the political participation of marginalized groups go beyond inclusion in program activities to support mainstreaming these populations in general political processes. NDI’s approach has been to involve members of marginalized communities in mainstream political activities such as election observation or issue advocacy alongside other citizens, while encouraging political parties, legislatures and government institutions to reach out to these populations and take their interests into account. As described below, this approach has proven successful in Turkey, where NDI programs that connected LGBT organizations to broader coalitions enabled activists to build important relationships and become part of the political mainstream. In pursuit of this overarching goal, LGBT populations may require targeted support due to a historic lack of political access and experience. As the global movement for LGBT equality has expanded in recent years, many nascent organizations have formed that often lack the organizational foundations NDI sees among other partners within civil society. Even among more established LGBT organizations, many times there is less experience with political organizing and advocacy in comparison to other civil society actors that may require targeted skills building before activists and organizations can perform on an equal footing. NDI has found this to be true in countries such as Serbia where there was a lack of experience among LGBT activists due to high rates of emigration. Additionally, the existence of restrictive laws specifically affecting the LGBT community may require targeted approaches to eliminate these unique barriers. An integrated approach that combines targeted support with broader inclusion can lay the foundation for challenging both the overt legal barriers and the cultural stereotypes that prevent LGBT citizens from expressing their voice.

Developments Among Donor Agencies



Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton delivering a seminal speech on LGBT rights in Geneva, December 2011
Photo by Getty Images

Donor agencies and government officials have increasingly highlighted LGBT inclusion as integral to foreign policy and development aid. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave a speech in December 2011 laying out the US government commitment to promoting LGBT rights through foreign policy mechanisms, and in the same month the Obama administration issued an official memo requiring all agencies, including the State Department and USAID, to report annually on efforts to promote LGBT inclusion. This has led to a great increase in attention from US Embassies and offices such as DRL to LGBT communities around the world. In 2012, DRL established the Global Equality Fund to provide funding for programs that specifically aim to promote LGBT inclusion. DRL simultaneously amended their evaluation criteria for all proposals to give extra weight to programs that work

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to promote inclusion of marginalized populations, including the LGBT community. Mirroring these efforts, USAID has launched a funding mechanism through its Public Private Partnership office aimed at promoting LGBT inclusion in partnership with the Victory Fund and Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice. USAID has also created a new position for a Special Advisor for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, and will be releasing a Vision for Action on LGBT inclusion in the coming months.

Donors such as the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and British DFID have also created internal policies outlining the importance of LGBT inclusion for development. The World Bank has recently launched a research project outlining the economic impact of exclusion, making a clear argument for the developmental benefits of taking an active approach to inclusion.

Definitions and Terminology

The language of sexual orientation and gender identity can be confusing for those not familiar with discussing the topic. As with words used to describe other marginalized groups, the key is to ask members of the LGBT community in each country context which terms they prefer. Because of the diversity of language used to describe this population, some organizations employ the phrase “sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)” as a catch-all. The “sexual orientation” of a person refers to their attraction towards particular sexual partners and activities, and their personal expressions of romantic desire and fulfillment. It is important to note that sexual orientation and gender identity, although related, are two distinct aspects of a person’s identity. For example, a person may identify as male, which reflects their gender identity, and also identify as bisexual, gay, or heterosexual, which reflects their sexual orientation. “Gender identity” is defined by a person’s own identification as male, female, or other identity and relates to legal status, social interaction, public persona, cultural position, and psychology. Gender identity is closely related to the concept of gender roles, which are the sets of social and behavioral norms that are considered appropriate for individuals of a particular gender. The gender of a person may be reflected in the pronouns they use to describe themselves (she/he/her/his), styles of dress and other forms of presentation such as a hairstyle or footwear, and the position or role adopted within a family, community, social setting and culture.



The rainbow flag is a common symbol of the LGBT community

Below are some definitions of broadly used terms:

Lesbian: a woman who is attracted to women

Gay: a man who is attracted to men, sometimes also used to describe any person of alternate sexual orientation

Bisexual: a person who is attracted to both genders

Transgender: the preferred term for a person whose gender identity does not conform to his or her biological gender, or a term for a person whose gender identity or expression does not conform to either male or female norms. While the terms “transsexual” or “trans” are also sometimes used, the term “transgendered” is incorrect.

Intersex: a person who is born without a clear biological gender, often resulting in surgery to assign a gender at birth

Queer: historically used as a negative/pejorative, this term has been appropriated by some LGBTI persons and groups to describe themselves and their communities. Many people refer to their sexual orientation as “queer” because they feel that gay, lesbian, or bisexual does not fully encompass their patterns of attraction. This term, however, is still perceived as an insult by some, and should be avoided unless referring to someone who self-identifies that way.

Men who have sex with men (**MSM**): a medical term frequently used by activists working to prevent HIV/AIDS that describes an activity rather than a “gay” or “queer” identity

It is also important to note that there are many regionally/culturally specific terms, such as “hijra” in Pakistan or “kuchu” in Uganda. These should be discussed with members of the community to navigate which terms are most appropriate.

Mainstreaming LGBT Groups in Broader Coalitions: Turkey

Including LGBT organizations and individuals in broader coalitions of civil society organizations (CSOs) can have a range of positive outcomes. Coalition work can allow LGBT organizations to acquire best practices from fellow CSOs and encourages other coalition partners to take a more active approach to supporting the LGBT community. It leads to greater coordination and inclusion and can often net more response from governments. In addition to ensuring LGBT voices are included in coalition decisions and activities, connecting LGBT organizations to other segments of civil society can help break down stereotypes and prove LGBT activists are capable partners. Coalition work can also inspire members to be introspective and consider their internal efforts at inclusion.

NDI used this approach in Turkey, where LGBT organizations have been included in broader coalitions for various initiatives. The Institute first began working with two LGBT organizations – Kaos LGBT and the Social Policies, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (SpOD) – in 2009 as part of the Advocacy Working Group program, in which NDI assisted 13 organizations to influence policy and increase citizen engagement with the legislature. Assistance included drafting concrete policy recommendations, strategic planning for advocacy initiatives, gaining a better understanding of the legislative process, and managing relationships with decisionmakers. During this period, Kaos LGBT and SpOD focused on advocating for the passage of anti-discrimination legislation and amending Article 10 of the constitution to include guarantees for equal protection based on sexual orientation and gender identity, in line with European standards. NDI helped the partners develop a concrete policy recommendation and prepare a policy document for circulation with decisionmakers.



Building on this initial program, NDI is currently providing support to the Network for Checks and Balances, a coalition of 111 CSOs working to promote a new constitution, institutional reforms, and promote a participatory and transparent political culture in Turkey. One focus of the coalition is “human and individual rights”, using the space provided by the discussions on constitutional reform to highlight the issue. NDI conducted specific outreach to four LGBT organizations to be included in the coalition, including Kaos LGBT, SpOD, the Association of LGBT Families,

and the Pink Life LGBT Solidarity Association. NDI assistance included how to reach consensus on joint recommendations and in planning and implementing activities, as well as how to recruit members, participate in monitoring activities, persuade decision makers, build public awareness and mobilize constituents. NDI supported the Network in creating a three-year strategic plan and establishing the Constitutional Monitoring Committee (CMC) in collaboration with constitutional and legal experts. SpOD founder and prominent LGBT activist Mehmet Tarhan participated as a core member of the CMC, contributing to a report produced in June 2013 analyzing the work of the Constitutional Consensus Committee. Representatives from Kaos LGBT also actively participated in meetings with political party groups and members of the Constitutional Consensus Committee.

The Network for Checks and Balances represents an unprecedented civil society coalition in Turkey. Participation has enabled LGBT organizations to establish working relationships with MPs and non-LGBT groups for the first time, including religious conservatives. Under the auspices of this coalition, a representative of Kaos LGBT attended a meeting with Turkish President Abdullah Gül, marking the first-ever meeting between the president’s office and an LGBT activist. These productive working relationships have given LGBT activists access to the highest levels of government and have put the issue of anti-discrimination and amendments to Article 10 on the table for the constitutional reform process, adding credibility and strengthening the voice of the LGBT activists.



Holding Candidates for Office to Account: Serbia



Former US Ambassador to Serbia Mary Warlick holds a sign that says “love freely” in support of the *Roze Listici* campaign

Serbia’s aspirations for EU membership provide a strong incentive for solidifying its transition to democracy. As the accession process evolves over time, EU officials have increasingly highlighted respect for LGBT rights as a prerequisite for moving forward with membership, as reflected in the annual Progress Reports on applicant countries. This has provided an opening for engagement with decisionmakers on issues affecting the LGBT population, and heightens the importance of LGBT inclusion in terms of long-term democratic consolidation. At the same time, LGBT individuals and groups have been increasingly targeted for violence and exclusion, led by rising far-right groups and the Serbian Orthodox Church. The government of Serbia has failed to guarantee the right of freedom of assembly for LGBT citizens by banning the pride parades planned for Belgrade in four of the last five years. In light of this situation, NDI is working to mainstream the political participation of the LGBT population and improve Serbia’s progress toward EU accession.

Elections provide a unique opportunity for engaging politically and raising policy issues. In the lead-up to the 2012 general elections, NDI supported local partners Queeria Center and *Izadji* (Come Out) in developing the *Roze Listici* (Pink Ballots) website, launched in April 2012. The project aimed to monitor statements of candidates, parties, and officials regarding the LGBT community and provide citizens with information on the political party platforms regarding LGBT issues. Activists involved with *Roze Listici* also conducted online surveys within the LGBT community to identify policy priorities and partnered with the NDI-supported *Istinomer* (truth-o-meter) project, which evalu-

ates the veracity of statements by politicians using the model of PolitiFact, to learn more about their successful approach to gaining a wide audience and maintaining credibility. This represented the first time candidates and political parties were evaluated in terms of their stance on various issues affecting the LGBT population. Although the two initiatives were separate, the *Roze Listici* project complemented a questionnaire sent to parties by the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) asking for clarification on parties’ stances on LGBT issues, setting a precedent for surveying parties on this topic and causing some parties and politicians to go on record for the first time. The statements monitored by *Roze Listici* and the questionnaire answers provided in the lead-up to elections created space for organizations to hold officials to account in the post-election period. The process also established relationships with representatives from political parties and put the civic organizations more solidly on the political map. This helped change the previous dynamic where political parties largely ignored the concerns of the LGBT community.

NDI Support to LGBT Groups in Serbia

NDI has supported numerous LGBT organizations in Serbia since 2010, such as Labris Organization for Lesbian Human Rights and Belgrade Pride. Assistance has included organizational development, which was identified as a key priority due to high levels of turnover among staff resulting from emigration. This was followed by trainings on advocacy, communication, and message development skills, with particular focus on media relations. In collaboration with Labris, NDI conducted public opinion polling to track support for LGBT initiatives and the annual pride parade, with support to groups in creating messages that resonate. NDI continues to support Labris in conducting advocacy for a relationship recognition law. Due to the high profile nature of the Belgrade pride parade in Serbia, the Institute has supported the organizers of the parade to use the space and media coverage around the event as a public awareness raising opportunity for protecting the freedom of assembly as well as for various LGBT advocacy initiatives. Following consultations with NDI, organizers have capitalized on the increased media attention during the pride week to highlight the barriers to freedom of assembly facing the LGBT community in Serbia and they have invited other human rights defenders to attend a week of events surrounding the parade itself to broaden the coalition of support. Over the years, this event has become much more professional and focused rather than simply a group of supporters showing up on the street without clear goals or demands.

Effective Advocacy: Macedonia

Interactions between Macedonian CSOs and the legislature have been very limited historically, creating a democratic deficit in which citizens have limited input on policy decisions. At the same time, despite the creation of new space for discussion of otherwise “taboo” topics of sexual orientation and gender identity due to the EU integration process, LGBT activists and organizations have been unable to get traction with decisionmakers. This was demonstrated in the Macedonian Assembly’s passage of an anti-discrimination law in 2010 that did not include protections for the LGBT population. To foster a more inclusive political process, NDI has been working with a wide range of CSOs and MPs. NDI utilizes a formal application process to identify local partners for the program who have an existing level of capacity appropriate for implementing advocacy campaigns targeting the legislature. Following targeted outreach by NDI staff, LGBT organizations submitted applications for inclusion in the program and have become participants alongside a number of organizations advocating for a range of issues. Several LGBT organizations met key characteristics, such as existing networks and identification of concrete issues, making them well-suited for the program.

NDI provides support to the Association for Health Education and Research (HERA) in advocating for sexual education curriculum focused on HIV prevention, among other initiatives. Although it is not an explicitly LGBT organization, HERA focuses on high risk groups for HIV/AIDS, including gay men, and created a broad coalition that included outreach to the LGBT population. With NDI assistance, HERA provided testimony before multiple parliamentary committee hearings on topics such as contraception, the care and treatment of people living with HIV/AIDS, abortion rights, and workplace harassment and bullying. As a result of these testimonies and interactions with MPs, HERA successfully advocated for the creation of an HIV issues caucus comprised of 10 MPs

from six parties, which has joined European networks of parliamentary HIV interest groups. This level of collaboration between civil society and decisionmakers on issues affecting this marginalized community were previously nonexistent due to stereotypes and prejudice that HERA was able to overcome through positive interactions. This altered dynamic has led HERA to successfully persuade state institutions to provide regular and full access to the antiretroviral therapy that is essential for people living with HIV.



Macedonian MPs and representatives from HERA during a parliamentary hearing on the care and treatment of people living with HIV



NDI also supported the Coalition for Sexual and Health Rights of Marginalized Communities in advocating for a parliamentary declaration against hate speech, in reaction to increasing hostility and public hate speech against the LGBT community. The Coalition testified before a parliamentary hearing on the draft declaration against hate speech in May 2012 and worked with the Liberal Party and Democratic Renewal of Macedonia to submit a draft of the declaration into parliamentary procedure in July 2012. Although this first attempt at adopting the declaration was ultimately unsuccessful, it created broad press coverage and helped change the tone in the debate over hate speech, which is targeted particularly at the LGBT population.

The efforts of these two groups represent the first time parliament discussed issues affecting the LGBT community and people living with HIV/AIDS. These first steps have helped the groups build and sustain key relationships in parliament, setting them up to be more effective advocates for their constituencies. NDI trainings on media outreach and public relations have helped the groups focus on specific initiatives and counter the claims that they have “secret agendas” on a range of other issues, which is a common allegation facing LGBT organizations that often presents a barrier to gaining traction.

Outreach to Political Parties: Colombia

As part of a region-wide political party strengthening program, NDI supported a number of parties in increasing their inclusion. The program supported select party activists in completing a self-designed project. The Institute recruited two openly lesbian participants from the *Polo Democrático Alternativo* (PDA) in Colombia – Angelica Lozano and Blanca Duran. Lozano’s project focused on creating internal party statutes during the party’s initial phase with a focus on inclusion, while Duran’s project took this initiative a step further and proposed the creation of an LGBT wing of the party, called *Polo Rosa*. With NDI support, Duran created a database of openly LGBT party members in advance of a party congress, and members she identified successfully advocated to receive funding from the party for *Polo Rosa* activities. Organizing party members in this way created a welcoming internal environment that explicitly affirmed aspiring LGBT candidates for office. The developments within PDA created a more inclusive atmosphere among political parties generally, enabling the LGBT advocacy organization Colombia Diversa to successfully lobby various parties contesting the Bogota mayoral election to sign on to an LGBT issues platform. Program successes have centered around Bogota, setting the stage for the *Polo Rosa* model to expand throughout Colombia. This model of focusing on the local level in more promising locations to set positive precedents is a common strategy for promoting the equal participation of LGBT citizens.



Polo Rosa members participate in a pride march in 2009

Common Challenges and Considerations

Programs providing support to LGBT organizations can face certain unique challenges in implementation. An important consideration for programs is the difference between legal discrimination and societal discrimination. Often the primary barrier preventing the full participation of LGBT citizens in public life is the threat of violence and lack of access to police protection and judicial systems. This community can also face uneven implementation of existing laws and protections, as seen in the Serbian government’s unwillingness to respect the freedom of assembly of LGBT citizens. This requires programs to consider the potential risk of supporting LGBT activists who may face a violent backlash when they raise their public profile. In extremely restrictive contexts, working with LGBT organizations and individuals in conducting behind the scenes outreach to decisionmakers and institutions may be a preferable option. The underlying stigma that creates these situations is often justified on religious grounds, creating a complicated political environment. However, as demonstrated in Turkey, NDI-facilitated contact between LGBT activists and decisionmakers can help forge constructive relationships even among religious conservatives.

Another common challenge is the lack of consensus among LGBT groups. This requires broad outreach at the outset of a program to map the environment of existing groups and their history of working together in order to identify the most appropriate partners. Additionally, historic overrepresentation of gay men and MSMs due to comparatively higher levels of funding for HIV/AIDS prevention requires a more concerted effort to be sure lesbian women and transgender individuals are not inadvertently left behind or excluded.

Across all LGBT groups, NDI staff may need to conduct targeted outreach or send specific invitations for them to feel NDI programming is open to them. For example, prior to outreach from NDI staff in Macedonia, LGBT organizations had not applied for the Institute’s civil society assistance program, but are now active and enthusiastic participants with demonstrated results in engaging with MPs. LGBT groups often fit the profile of the type of organization NDI is looking for in this type of program due to their previously identified issues and existing networks.

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In comparison with some other segments of civil society, LGBT citizens often lack other employment opportunities or access to education and healthcare that can limit their ability to devote time to activism. Additionally, because of the recent global rise in LGBT activism, many organizations are quite new and experience high turnover due to emigration to more accepting countries among prospective LGBT leaders. This means LGBT organizations may require more support in organizational development compared to other potential partners.

Despite these challenges, NDI programming has demonstrated that LGBT citizens can be mobilized as enthusiastic and active members of civil society when given the opportunity, often setting precedents for engagement with decisionmakers or working to overturn legislation that threatens the fundamental democratic nature of a society.

Mapping the Environment: Nicaragua

After receiving funding from USAID to support the political inclusion of the LGBT population in Nicaragua, NDI conducted a broad baseline assessment of a large number of groups to determine their existing organizational capacity and experience with political advocacy. The Institute identified the groups in collaboration with the US Embassy and an implementing organization (PrevenSIDA) with a history of working with the LGBT community. The purpose of the assessment was to gain a better understanding of the current landscape in order to focus assistance on the areas that would be most meaningful. A key challenge identified in the baseline assessment was the lack of consensus among LGBT activists and organizations on priorities and approaches, which prevented groups from supporting each other's initiatives. To address this, NDI invited a wide range of groups to participate in initial advocacy skills-building events, and will then invite organizations to submit applications to continue with the assistance program. In this way, NDI did not reinforce divisions within the LGBT community or cause increased tension among groups, while simultaneously working only with those who demonstrated interest. Initial sessions also focused on the benefits of collaboration.



NDI staff met with representatives from the Center for Education and Prevention of AIDS (CEPRESI - left) and *Agentes de Cambio* (Agents of Change - right)



Additional Resources

- ◇ **UNITED NATIONS REPORT ON THE RIGHTS OF LGBT INDIVIDUALS**
 - ◇ AVAILABLE AT: [HTTP://WWW2.OHCHR.ORG/ENGLISH/BODIES/HRCOUNCIL/DOCS/19SESSION/A.HRC.19.41_ENGLISH.PDF](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/19session/A.HRC.19.41_ENGLISH.PDF)
- ◇ **“INCLUSION MATTERS: THE FOUNDATION FOR SHARED PROSPERITY”, WORLD BANK**
 - ◇ AVAILABLE AT: [HTTP://WWW.WORLDBANK.ORG/EN/NEWS/FEATURE/2013/10/09/INCLUSION-MATTERS](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/10/09/inclusion-matters)
- ◇ **“ACCESSING US EMBASSIES: A GUIDE FOR LGBT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS”, COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL EQUALITY**
 - ◇ AVAILABLE AT: [HTTP://WWW.GLOBAEQUALITY.ORG/PUBLICATIONS/COUNCIL-REPORTS](http://www.globalequality.org/publications/council-reports)
- ◇ **“MAKE IT WORK: 6 STEPS TO EFFECTIVE LGBT ADVOCACY”, INTERNATIONAL LESBIAN AND GAY ASSOCIATION**
 - ◇ AVAILABLE AT: [HTTP://WWW.ILGA-EUROPE.ORG/HOME/PUBLICATIONS/REPORTS_AND_OTHER_MATERIALS](http://www.ilga-europe.org/home/publications/reports_and_other_materials)

Civic Update
is a production of
NDI's Citizen Participation
Team.

Please send comments
or suggestions to
Kent Fogg at
kfogg@ndi.org

The Citizen Participation
Team thanks all
the DC and field
staff members who
provided assistance
in compiling this issue
of *Civic Update*.