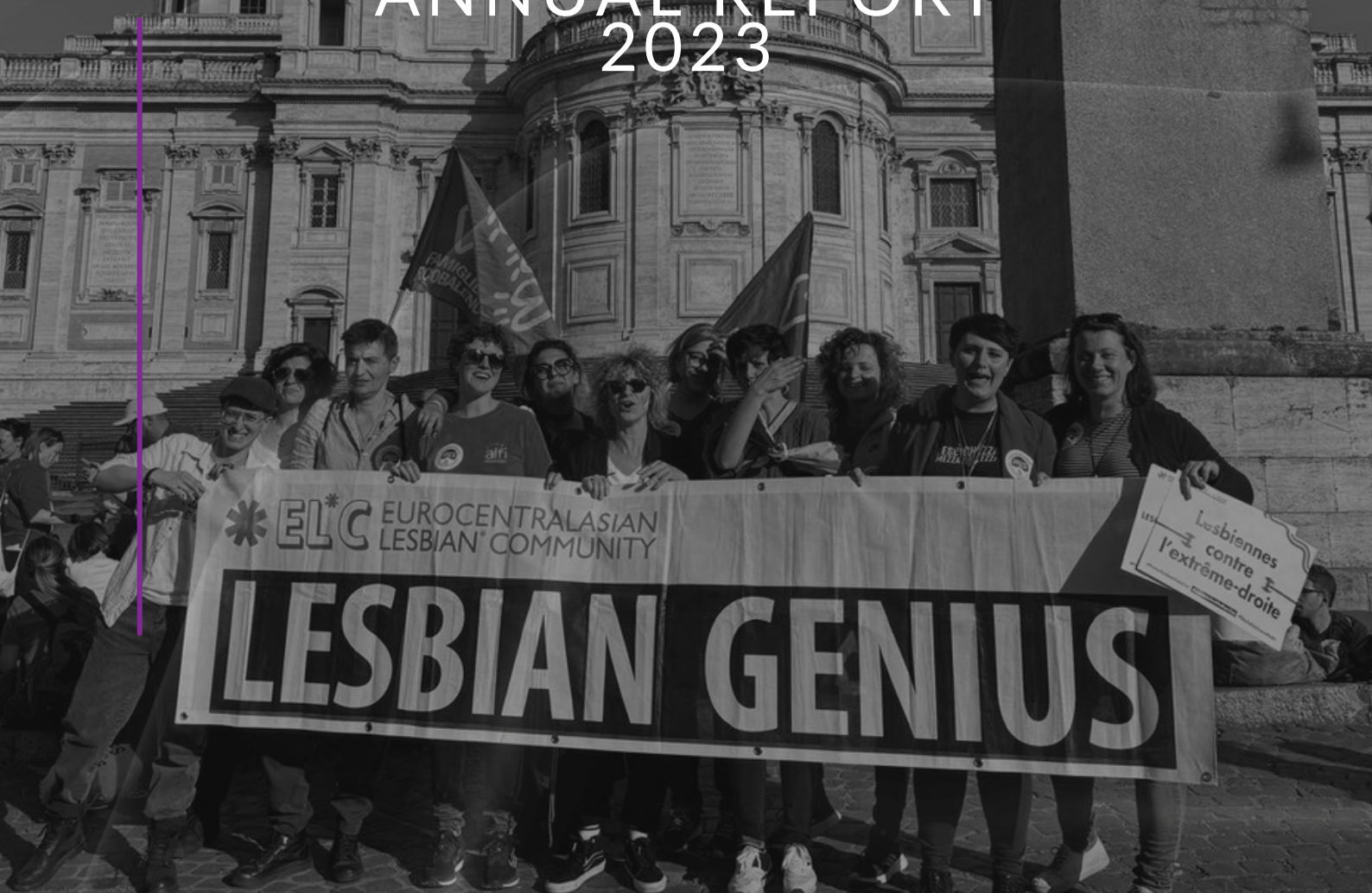




OBSERVATORY ON LESBOPHOBIA

ANNUAL REPORT
2023



Prepared For :



EUROCENTRALASIAN
LESBIAN*COMMUNITY



Funded by
the European Union



**EUROCENTRALASIAN
LESBIAN*COMMUNITY**

**Annual report of the Observatory on
lesbophobic violence and discrimination
against lesbians**

2023



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the European Union**

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The Eurocentralasian Lesbian Community – EL*C is a lesbian feminist and intersectional network. We publish our own research focused on lesbians and we are present at an institutional level with our advocacy to ensure that lesbian needs are visible, heard and considered when creating policies and laws. For more information, please visit our website: www.lesbiangenius.org*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT EL*C	4
INTRODUCTION	4
METHODOLOGY	5
1. LESBOPHOBIA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DATA	5
Gender expression: a risk factor for lesbians	5
State-sponsored lesbophobia: the case of Italy	7
2. SPECIAL FOCUS: VIOLENCE AGAINST VISIBLE LESBIANS	8
Women’s human rights defenders	9
Athletes	10
Journalists	11
Politicians	12
3. SPECIAL FOCUS: LESBIAN REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA	13
Deconstructing lesbophobia: a European media analysis	13
Main Findings	14
The anti-LGBTI propaganda	14
The role of UK media in shaping Europe’s representation of lesbians	15
Trivialisation of lesbians in LGBTI news	16
The representation of lesbian families	17
An intersectional view on visibility	18
The two sides of the misrepresentation of lesbians’ gender expression	19
OBSERVATORY ON LESBOPHOBIA IN THE EU MEMBER STATES	21
Cases of lesbophobia violence collected by the EL*C Observatory and EL*C members	21
LIST OF ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THE MEDIA ANALYSIS	27
RECOMMENDATIONS	29

ABOUT EL*C

The EL*C - EuroCentralAsian Lesbian* Community - started out of a self-organised space in 2017, recognising the multitude of needs surrounding the rights, the visibility, and the well-being of lesbians throughout Europe and Central Asia.

EL*C use the term “lesbian” as inclusive of cis, trans and intersex women, and non-binary persons who self-identify as lesbian, bisexual, and queer. For this reason, in the following report, unless otherwise specified, the term “lesbian” includes all non-heterosexual LBTIQ women. We will also refer to “lesbian organisations” to include all groups focused on and led by LBTIQ women.

For us, using the word “lesbian” is part of the political struggle for visibility, empowerment, and representation, bearing in mind that the word “lesbian” is one of the most stigmatised and marginalised words. It has long been connected with shame and disgust, as well as sexual objectification and porn, historically hijacked and distorted by the male gaze. It is time to shake off the stigma.

INTRODUCTION

The EL*C Observatory on Lesbophobia was launched in 2022 with a first report collecting cases from 2019 to 2022.¹ The need for an Observatory stemmed from the work of EL*C members in combating gender-based violence and hate crime against lesbians.

Lesbophobia is also often misunderstood in policy-making concerning hate crime, hate speech and gender-based violence, or not at all considered because it is believed to be the same as homophobia. While lesbophobia and homophobia have many aspects in common, the term lesbophobia conceptualises the misogynistic and sexist expression of violence against people that identify or are perceived as non-heterosexual women.

Definition of lesbophobia

Lesbophobia is a specific form of bias that encompasses the misogyny and stigma of non-conforming sexual orientations and gender expressions. In particular, hate against lesbians is structured around three entrenched social norms: 1) lesbians, with their sexual orientation and gender expression, refute the social expectations and stereotypes concerning ‘male’ and ‘female’ gender roles, 2) lesbians disrupt the expectations that women are at the ‘disposal’ of men, especially because women’s sexuality is widely objectified, and 3) they compel society to confront widespread taboos related to female sexuality and to non-heterosexual sexual orientations. These biases and the resulting violence have an impact not only on the victims, but also on society as a whole.

1 EL*C (2022) Observatory on Lesbophobia 2019-2022 <https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Observatory-Lesbophobia-2019-2022.pdf>

This year's report focuses on the issue of visibility. The question of visibility was analysed both from the perspective of lesbian representation in the media in Europe and Central Asia, as well as the perspective of violence against lesbians who are visible. The report also contains all the cases collected this year via the Observatory as well as a set of Recommendations for policymakers and public authorities at national, regional, and international level, to take action in addressing lesbophobia, gender-based violence and hate crime against lesbians.

METHODOLOGY

Building upon the methodology developed in 2022, in 2023 the activities of the Observatory focused on collecting cases of violence from the EL*C network. In May 2023, during the EL*C's strategic planning, representatives from EL*C members discussed the results and chose to focus the report on two issues, strictly interrelated: the representation of lesbians in the media, as well as violence against visible lesbians including politicians, journalists, athletes, and human rights defenders.

Specific data on these themes was collected in the summer of 2023 and a media analysis was launched in September 2023. In November 2023, during EL*C's Lesbiennale, a further conversation was held on the issue of violence against visible lesbians. Finally at the end of November 2023, the results of the analysis were discussed during EL*C's Lesbian Movement Committee. An interactive map including all the cases of lesbophobia collected by the Observatory was prepared and will be published in 2024. The annual report was compiled in December 2023 and will be published in 2024.

1. LESBOPHOBIA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Gender expression: a risk factor for lesbians

The data collected over the past two years suggests that not enough attention is given to the relevance of gender expression in lesbians' experiences of violence.

Gender expression, understood in this report as the way in which a person publicly expresses their gender, is a personal characteristic that is often used as an excuse to perpetuate violence against LGBTI people. Furthermore, women and people perceived as such are violently compelled to look feminine and to never cross the social line between what "a man looks like" and "what a woman looks like". For this reason, women of the LGBTI community are subject to strict social rules and expectations, as non-conforming gender expression is directly associated with homosexuality, as well as being a violation of the basic social norms on how a woman should look like and act.

Violence against masculine-presenting lesbians² is a direct punishment against women that dare to violate one of the fundamental social rules in patriarchal society: that women will never be at the same level as men, so they should not behave in ways that are associated with masculinity. Of course, sexual attraction toward women is an important marker of “masculinity” and therefore a non-conforming sexual orientation is also a violation of this rule, but it is not the only one. The way in which a person dresses, walks, and behaves in public is one of the most visible ways in which belonging to the category of “man” and “woman” is expressed. Sexual orientation and gender expression are therefore mutually reinforcing elements, and, for these reasons, there exists a strong social taboo (that concerns all women) of “not looking/not behaving like a lesbian”, which is often understood as “not looking/behaving like a man”.

Gender expression, being immediately visible, is often at the root of violence in public spaces, where lesbians are attacked because their clothes are judged “too masculine”, and they are told that “women should not dress like men”, or because they “look like men and should fight like men”.³ However, non-heterosexual women also experience violence related to gender expression when displaying a feminine gender expression. We know, for example, that non-heterosexual women, especially those that are more more femme coded, attract more sexual harassment and very often experience violence when they refuse to perform certain acts for the pleasure of male bystanders.⁴

For this reason, gender expression is critical in understanding violence against lesbians, trans men, and non-binary people on the grounds of their gender identity. Therefore, cisgender women, AFAB non-binary persons, and trans men are often subject to the same type of violence when their appearance violates the social norms mentioned above. Trans women are also subject to the same gender rules and are therefore subject to violence and discrimination because of their violation of the norms of femininity, in what is often referred to as “transmisogyny”.⁵

2 Human Rights Watch defines masculine presenting as “Describes a person who adopts a visual aesthetic that is culturally coded or aligned with men or masculinity, which could include types of clothing, mannerisms, haircuts, and patterns of speech”. See HRW (2023), This is why we became activists! Violence and discrimination against LBQ persons https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/02/global_lbq0223_web.pdf

3 See for example: https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/11/04/news/_io_aggredita_perche_lesbica_la_denuncia_di_una_quindicenne_a_torino-240222603/ and <https://imazpress.com/actus-reunion/le-tampon-une-jeune-femme-victime-dune-violente-agression-homophobe>

4 See for example: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jun/15/homophobic-attacks-must-stop-say-women-assaulted-on-london-bus-chris-and-melania-geymonat>

5 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/22/us/lgbt-julia-serano-transfeminist-trans-misogyny.html?partner=bloomberg>

State-sponsored lesbophobia: the case of Italy

Among the data collected by the Observatory, it is particularly important to mention cases of “state-sponsored” lesbophobia, meaning cases where lesbophobia is acted, condoned, or made possible by state actors and public authorities. These are particularly serious cases, as they not only constitute major violations of fundamental rights, but also legitimise violence, prejudice, and discrimination against both women and LGBTI communities more broadly. They send an unequivocal message that lesbians are not welcome, and that inequality and discrimination are not only tolerated but sanctioned by the state.

In 2022, the Observatory already highlighted the case of Hungary where, in 2021, the national government censored the children’s book “Fairyland is for everyone”, edited by the lesbian NGO Labrisz, and the Hungarian parliament approved the so-called “LGBTI propaganda law”. These actions have triggered an infringement procedure against Hungary, launched by the European Commission in July 2021. In mid-2022 the case was referred to the Court of Justice, with 15 EU Member States and the European Parliament joining the lawsuit in 2023.⁶

In 2023, EL*C strongly denounced the actions of the Italian government and judicial authorities threatening the removal of the non-biological mother from the birth certificates of children born in lesbian families in Italy.⁷ In Italy, the lack of a clear legislative path for the recognition of children of same-sex partnerships has provided an opportunity for the far-right and ultra-conservative government to attack lesbian families. The Civil Union act does not allow for direct recognition of children of same-sex couples.⁸ Furthermore, in Italy fertility treatments are only accessible to straight couples. However, many Italian lesbian couples access IVF in other EU countries and are provided with a birth certificate that recognises both parents.

Since 2016, some mayors have responded to these legislative gaps by using an administrative prerogative recognising foreign birth certificates with two mothers (and occasionally with two fathers). In January 2023, the Ministry of the Interior sent a “circolare”⁹ to all prefects (representatives of the government in each region)

6 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-institutions/news/15-governments-join-eu-law-suit-against-orbans-anti-lgbt-law/>

7 EL*C actions included an open letter to Giorgia Meloni and demonstrations in front of Italian embassies and consulates in France, Belgium, Portugal, Germany, UK, Ireland, and Mexico. The Italian lesbian movement also responded with a demonstration in front of the Vatican as well as a demonstration in April 2024. See: <https://lesbiangenius.org/european-lesbians-the-far-right-will-lose-this-fight/> and https://www.ansa.it/sito/videogallery/italia/2023/08/03/lesbiansare-motherstoo-manifestazione-di-fronte-al-vaticano_dd0d8279-9ff7-412b-8fca-13479cc12e81.html

8 Legge 6/2016, approved on the 20 May 2016

9 <https://associazionelucacoscioni.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/circ-dait-003-servde-mo-19-01-2023.pdf>

signalling that this practice should be considered unlawful according to a decision of the Italian Supreme Court, which concerned children born via surrogacy.

As a result, in several Italian regions public prosecutors started to demand a halt to these administrative registrations. In June 2023, the public prosecutor of Padua requested Italian courts to consider all birth certificates with two same-sex parents as illegitimate and to remove the non-biological mother from the municipal registry. If this request is granted, the fundamental rights of these children would be seriously impacted, as they may be obliged to change their surnames, and non-gestational mothers would no longer be considered legal guardians. These parents would not be able to authorise medical procedures, educational activities, or travel, as these are all decisions that can only be authorised by the legal parent. In case of the death of the biological mother or the separation of the couple, children may be forcefully removed from the other parent.

The media visibility that followed the decision by the state prosecutors in Padua also provided an opportunity for a wave of online hate speech and violence against LGBTI families, prompted, among other things, by an interview of the Italian Ministry of Family, who qualified the measure to limit LGBTI families' rights as a matter of "human ecology".¹⁰

2. SPECIAL FOCUS: VIOLENCE AGAINST VISIBLE LESBIANS

Data from the Observatory also shows that hate speech and violence against highly visible lesbians is common. Women who hold position of powers or are well-known to the public are generally subject to heightened public scrutiny and misogynistic violence, both online and offline. Belonging to a minority greatly increases the risk of personal attack, especially because stigma concerning non-conforming sexual orientation is often based on the idea that same-sex attraction is shameful and therefore should be hidden. A refusal to hide is bound to attract violent reactions from opponents who use the person's lesbian identity to attack or delegitimise them.

This, of course, concerns activists, human rights defenders and people that use their identity to criticise unequal social structure and injustices, but it is also used more broadly to insult political opponents and criticise women in positions of power or celebrities, regardless of their actual sexual orientation.

¹⁰ https://www.corriere.it/politica/23_giugno_20/ministra-roccella-non-si-diventa-genito-ri-contratto-questi-casi-strada-l-adozione-edddf1d8-0fa6-11ee-a963-f99c88e1a594.shtml

Insulting someone because she is a lesbian or implying that someone is a lesbian to diminish or delegitimise them does not only harm the person directly involved, it also has a harmful effect on partners, family members, and close friends that are scrutinised for associating with the person. For example, Elly Schlein, the leader of the main opposition party in Italy, is bisexual and in a relationship with a woman; her partner was widely outed without her consent by newspapers and the media.¹¹ Finally, hate speech and violence against publicly known lesbians, especially because perpetrators are often unpunished, sends a clear message to all of society that being a lesbian shameful, should be hidden, and “punishing” those that refuse to comply with this rule is allowed and even legitimate.

Lesbophobic violence is a powerful political tactic used to limit and censor the voices of women, LGBTI people, and other minorities and, therefore, to limit the space and freedom of expression that lesbian civil society enjoy within society. In this sense, the role of governments and national institutions is especially relevant, since violence and hate crime is especially dangerous when associated or followed with forms of censorship or limitation of rights acted by public authorities against those that are also subject to violent attacks.

Women’s human rights defenders

Women’s human rights defenders are generally subject to public scrutiny, violent misogynistic attacks and hate speech. Being a member of the LGBTI community exposes women’s human rights defenders to a heightened risk of violence, especially in social contexts where activists experience aggression and (online) violence from anti-feminist and anti-gender civil society groups as well as governments.

As recognised by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders,¹² lesbian human rights defenders are exposed to the worst type of violence including smear campaigns, so-called “corrective” rapes, physical attacks, harassment by police and other state authorities, and illegal detentions.¹³ In situation of crisis, governments, public authorities, or religious figures may also try to use LGBTI communities as a scapegoat, fuelling hate against LGBTI people and exposing the most visible activists to violent attacks. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Patriarch Kirill, the influential head of the Russian Orthodox Church, blamed LGBTI people, saying the pandemic was God’s punishment for gay marriage¹⁴ while in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he also declared during a sermon that western liberal values and especially gay parades justified the war.¹⁵

11 <https://lespresso.it/c/attualita/2023/4/6/i-media-non-capiscono-che-louting-alla-compagna-di-elly-schlein-e-una-violenza/2880>

12 UN Human rights council, Situation of women human rights defenders: report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, A/HRC/40/60, January 10, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc4060-situation-women-human-rights-defenders-report-special>

13 For a compilation of cases see Human rights watch (2023), “This is why we became activists. Violence against lesbian, bisexual, queer women and non-binary people” https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/02/global_lbq0223_web.pdf

14 See: <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/ukrainian-church-leader-who-blamed-covid-19-gay-marriage-tests-n1239528>

15 See: <https://www.advocate.com/world/2022/3/07/pride-parades-caused-russia-ukraine-war-says-russian-church-leader>

EL*C has constantly been reporting cases of political violence against lesbian human rights defenders, as well as against community events, Pride marches, and lesbian, feminist and LGBTI organisations, and will continue to monitor the situation, as we expect that the European elections will fuel lesbophobic hate and violence.

Athletes

EL*C Observatory has repeatedly reported cases of violence, waves of hate speech in social media, death threats, and rape threats against publicly known lesbians, which includes activists, politicians, and journalists, but also celebrities and athletes.

The 2023 Women's Football World Cup marked a historic moment in the public recognition of women's sports and the visibility of LBT athletes.¹⁶ However, being out might backfire against lesbian athletes that are attacked when they publicly reveal a lesbian relationship, as it was the case for two players of the Football's First Division in Spain.¹⁷ Achievements and results do not protect the athletes, as shown clearly by the case of Ebrar Karakurt, a prominent national volleyball player, who was subjected to hate speech by high-level politicians and religious leaders when they publicly reveal that they are in a lesbian relationship. Ahead of a European final where the national team was due to play, members of the ruling party demanded that she be kicked out of the national team.¹⁸

The 2021 report from EL*C on LGBTI women in sports found that a "culture of silence" is often imposed where teams, coaches, and social environment may discourage lesbian athletes to publicly come out in order not to "confirm" the stereotype that certain sports are "not feminine" and "taint" the reputation of their sport as a sport where all athletes are lesbians.¹⁹ Often, social pressure begins within families, who refuse to allow their daughters to play sports which are considered "too masculine", and by consequence full of lesbians who will have a bad influence on young girls.²⁰ Once again, violence against those who dare to be visible sends a clear general message, reinforces the idea that people should stay in the closet, and ensures the violation of human rights and the discrimination of lesbian athletes can be perpetrated without consequences.

16 <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/2023-womens-world-cup-record-87-lgbtq-athletes-will-compete-rcna93727>

17 <https://www.mirales.es/dos-futbolistas-lesbianas-de-primera-division-reciben-cientos-de-insultos-por-hacer-publica-su>

18 <https://www.politico.eu/article/lgbtq-volleyball-karakurt-champion-backlash-turkey-erdogan-culture-war/>

19 United Nations (2007), Women, gender equality and sport, <https://www.un.org/women-watch/daw/public/Women%20and%20Sport.pdf>

20 EL*C, EGLSF, Ilga Europe, OII Europe and TGUE (2021), LGBTI women in sport: violence, discrimination and lived experiences <https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/20210810-violence-and-discrimination-against-LGBTI-women-in-sport-2.pdf>

Journalists

Violence against lesbian journalists constitutes the other side of negative media representation. Journalists are discouraged to be out for fear of being discriminated against, being deemed biased and therefore less reliable than straight colleagues, or being forced to only cover LGBTI issues.²¹ As denounced by French journalist Alice Coffin, the social incitement to stay closeted has an impact on the narratives that media are able to produce, as newsrooms are dominated by white, cis, heterosexual men.²² Furthermore, the obligation to remain in the closet is often enforced via violent attacks and waves of hate speech against journalists that publicly declare their lesbian identities.

In some cases, online violence progresses to offline violence. For example, in the 2022 Observatory we reported the case of the lesbian journalist Irantzu Varela who was physically assaulted, after having been called a “fucking lesbian” and a “whore”. The magazine office for which she worked was vandalised on the same day.²³

Even when violence is restricted to online spaces, the consequences are very serious. Online tools are often indispensable for journalists to do their jobs. The violence has a damaging impact over the journalists’ mental health, ability to perform their job, and may force them to stop using social media, closing personal accounts and reducing their online presence in general. It therefore amounts to a form of censorship that contributes to sending a message that certain voices should be silenced.

In 2021 UNESCO published a study focusing on violence against women journalists online.²⁴ The research found that journalists that identify as lesbian and bisexuals experience some of the highest rates of online violence, and that the intersection between stigma related to sexual orientation and sexism and misogyny “worsen[s] and deepen[s] women journalists’ experiences of online violence”.²⁵

21 A. Coffin (2020), *Le Génie Lesbien*, Grasset

22 A. Coffin (2020), *Le Génie Lesbien*, Grasset

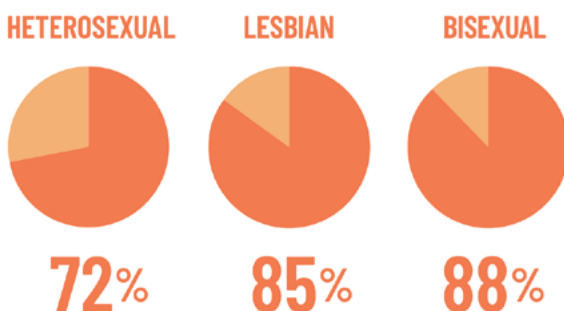
23 <https://www.publico.es/mujer/lgtbfofia-agresion-lesbofoba-periodista-irantzu-vare-la-lesbiana-mierda-has-contagiado.html>

24 The study composed of a global survey of 901 journalists from 125 countries conducted in five languages, 173 long-form interviews with international journalists, editors, and two big data case studies assessing over 2.5 million posts on Facebook and Twitter

25 J. Posetti, N. Shabbir, D. Maynard K. Bontcheva N. Aboulez (2021), *The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists*, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377223>

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND HARASSMENT

How sexual orientation is intertwined with gendered online violence experienced by the women journalists surveyed



Data derived from a 2020 ICFJ-UNESCO survey of 714 women journalists

Table 1 – UNESCO research: intersectional experience rates of online violence

Politicians

Misogyny also operates against elected women and women who hold positions of power. This is true for women of all sexual orientations in general. In November 2023, EL*C organised the Lesbiennale with the aim of denouncing gender-based violence in the political arena and in the public space. The event included testimonies from women, lesbians, and politicians of colour of the misogynistic abuse that they were subject to, which coincided with disturbing political developments, including the Netherlands' election results²⁶ and the recent indictment of a senator for sexual abuse against a female colleague in France.²⁷ However, the type of violence, the reasons for the insults, and the virulence of the attacks take on a lesbophobic dimension when the person victimised identifies or is believed to be a lesbian.

It is important to mention that this concerns ALL women who are perceived as non-heterosexual, regardless of their actual sexual orientation. For example, during her electoral campaign, Maia Sandu, the Moldovan president, who is not married and does not have children, had to hold a press conference to counter a disinformation campaign that accused her of being a lesbian.²⁸ As mentioned above, Elly Schlein, the leader of the Italian Democratic Party, is often attacked on the grounds that she is a bisexual woman in a relationship with another woman.

26 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/26/far-right-normalised-mainstream-parties-geert-wilders-dutch>

27 <https://www.france24.com/fr/france/20231117-garde-%C3%A0-vue-pour-un-s%C3%A9nateur-soup%C3%A7onn%C3%A9-d-avoir-drogue%C3%A9-une-d%C3%A9put%C3%A9e-en-vue-d-une-agression-sexuelle>

28 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WB99B9pXYg>

This type of violence not only heightens hate and violence against lesbians in society and discourages them from running for office or holding positions of power, but it also contributes to shaming women for their non-conforming sexuality or lifestyle, reinforces traditional gender roles and expectations, and is ultimately a limitation of fundamental rights for all women and all LGBTI people.

SPECIAL FOCUS: LESBIAN REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA

Deconstructing lesbophobia: a European media analysis

In the 2022 report from the Observatory, it quickly became apparent that lesbians do not trust the media. The overwhelming majority of the respondents to the EL*C 2022 Survey considered the media as being directly or indirectly lesbophobic. This included both cases in which a victim is blamed for being subject to a hate crime, as well as cases where the lesbophobic nature of the crime is not mentioned.

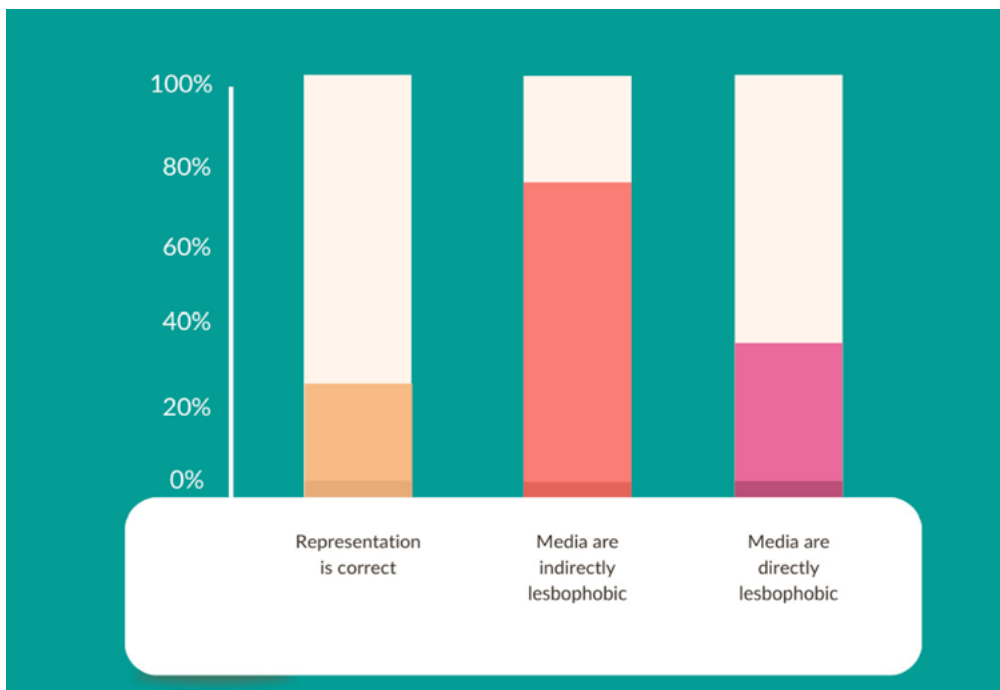


Table 2. EL*C 2022 survey – Observatory on Lesbophobia. What do you think about the way in which gender-based violence and hate crime involving lesbians is treated by the media?

For this reason, we decided to engage in more detailed research on the representation of lesbians in European media. We collected 6,891 media articles published in Europe for one month in 2023 (May). From this dataset, we created a final sample of 23 articles, ensuring geographical representations as well as a variety of publications. The detailed analysis of these articles is available in a report attached to the Observatory that will be published at the same time as this annual report. However, the main findings of this research are summarised below, and the complete list of articles used for this analysis is included in the annex of this report.

Main Findings

Among the analysed articles a certain number of relevant trends have appeared. The first trend is connected with a more general narrative on LGBTI rights, where lesbians appear to be targeted as members of the LGBTI community, as well as women's rights defenders. The second trend is a lesbophobic narrative linked with the anti-gender movement which emanates from countries deemed progressive, where lesbian identities are weaponised to attack trans rights, while never portraying the real needs of the community. The result is, of course, very harmful for trans lesbians and the trans community, but it is also negative for the lesbian community, which is being untruthfully portrayed as exclusionary.

The analysis also allowed us to delve into a few specific issues concerning the representation of lesbians. This includes: invisibility within general LGBTI narratives, the representation of lesbian families, the lack of an intersectional representation, and the issue of the gender expression of lesbians in media coverage. These findings reinforce the point made above: representation is important, visibility is key, but we want to be able to define it in our own terms.

The anti-LGBTI propaganda

The most alarming trend in this report is the intensification of lesbophobic narratives, connected with laws on LGBTI propaganda that, after being approved in countries like Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, are now also part of EU member states' legal systems, like in the case of Hungary. Other EU member states like Romania, Latvia, and Italy are at the stage where similar legislations are discussed publicly, and even proposed in parliament.

This does not only directly harm important democratic values such as freedom of speech and respect of human rights, it also creates a situation where the living conditions for lesbians become very precarious, the numbers of lesbophobic attacks increase, and the few out and proud lesbians bear the cost of being visible in such environments.²⁹ Even more serious than lesbians becoming invisible in the media is when they appear only through hateful and harmful discourses, such as the case of the lesbian protest in Kazakhstan, during which Zhanar Sekerbayeva demanded that the media not write anything about lesbians. In other words, lesbian invisibility in the media is preferred by activists, if the alternative is the spread of hateful lesbophobic propaganda.

²⁹ For detailed statistical data and justifications of these claims please see the individual case study reports.

The article from Latvia shows, similarly to the situation in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, that the hostility towards lesbians, and queer people in general, is justified through a division between the West and the East. According to this logic, the West stands for corruption and sinful lifestyle, and the only way to resist the globalisation of values and ideas is to return to the traditional, national lifestyles. This logic lies at the intersection of nationalism, racism, xenophobia, heteronormativity, and patriarchy. In the individual case studies in this report, the lesbophobic association of lesbian identities with the corruption and propaganda of the West is usually expressed alongside racism (as with the case of Russia), misogyny and patriotism (as with the case of Belarus), or through enactment of gender-based violence (as with the case of Latvia). From this it becomes clear that lesbophobia is almost never an isolated social symptom but coexists with other insidious discrimination and prejudice that are harmful for social cohesion and democracy.

Black activist and theorist, Franz Fanon, has traced the ways certain types of representations lead to the construction of black people as ‘phobogenic objects’. He argues that this construction is at the heart of anti-black racism and the only reason white supremacist atrocities could be performed and justified.³⁰ Echoing Fanon, we claim that representational erasure and harmful representations, construct lesbians as phobogenic objects in the face of a heteronormative society. This is exactly the way stereotypes work, by creating phobogenic objects in the first place and at the same time leaving little space for authentic and meaningful representations. In order to comprehend this erasure of lesbians, we need to keep in mind that lesbophobia is at the intersection of misogyny and heteronormativity and therefore constitute a double erasure for lesbian identities. This is the notion of compulsory heteronormativity, a system of norms, beliefs, and representations that is enforced upon lesbians in order to delegitimise their existence.³¹ As such, we need more human rights organisations to position themselves in relation to this unfolding reality, especially as more right-wing and conservative politicians are winning seats in the EU parliament.

The role of UK media in shaping Europe’s representation of lesbians

However, Eastern European and Central Asian countries are not the only places where lesbophobic narrative are actively promoted by the media. Analysis on media narratives in the United Kingdom have been included because for years now the UK has been the centre of a narrative which falsely portrays lesbians as trans-exclusionary, by giving visibility to a few so-called “gender critical” thinkers and influencers who, sometimes, identify as lesbians.

30 Frantz Fanon (1986) “The Negro and Psychopathology”, in *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press: 141-209.

31 Adrienne Rich (1980) ‘Compulsive Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’ *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 5, issue 4: 631-660.

Furthermore, the UK enjoys a hegemony in terms of media representation and therefore cannot be ignored when analysing the media narrative of lesbians in the region. The article in our dataset with the highest number of views and shares on social media was from the UK, while in the case of Croatia and Bulgaria the articles were translations from UK media. In these three examples, the content of the articles related to the anti-gender propaganda and gave a platform to lesbians with gender critical views.

This attack goes hand in hand with a right-wing, xenophobic attitude towards everything and everyone who is not seen as white or European enough. Anti-gender and anti-human rights narratives do not only target members of the LGBTQI+ community. With a classic “divide and conquer” strategy, these narratives pit different minority groups within the community against each other. It becomes evident through this that the anti-gender campaign is a well-funded project that attracts wider media visibility, whereas most lesbian organisations are trans-inclusive and do very vibrant and important work, but are severely underfunded.³²

Trivialisation of lesbians in LGBTI news

Another clear trend that can be found in our analysis is the fact that usually, lesbians are not often mentioned when discussing broader LGBTI rights. In practice, this means that most of the media coverage takes into consideration a gay male’s experience and agenda, while lesbians are included as an afterthought. As a result, lesbians are rendered invisible along with their unique experiences and intersectional identities, facing misogyny and the effects of a patriarchal, heteronormative world order. This also applies to LGBTI-friendly media. In terms of lesbian representation, this tactic creates more invisibility and in some cases, reaches the point of erasure of lesbian experiences. How can we be visible as lesbians in a world that is constantly making our struggles and experiences invisible?

Some possible answers could come from the few positive representations that we found. For example, it appears there is a renewed interest in lesbian archives and in retelling our history through our own lenses. This is the case with the articles from France and Germany and the connection with lesbian collectives and struggles of the past, as well as concrete work on collecting and creating lesbian archives as a mechanism to address to lack of inclusion of lesbian stories in national archives and the erasure of lesbians from national histories.

32 Mama Cash and Astrea (2019), “Vibrant Yet Under-Resourced: The State of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Movement: Executive Summary”, available at https://www.mamacash.org/media/publications/astrea_mamacash_lbq_summary_def.pdf.

Another positive trend concerns the slowly growing representation of the lesbian community in politics, amplifying lesbian voices inside local, national, and European parliaments. This is the case of the articles from Portugal and Sweden in this report. The representation of candidates' sexuality is done with respect in a hopeful first step towards a more gender equal and diverse representation in politics. In the face of intensified violence and widespread hate speech from politicians, religious leaders, right-wing organisations, and media pundits,³³ there is now, more than ever, a strong need for more lesbian representation in politics on the local, the national, and the supranational level.

The representation of lesbian families

A further trend in our analysis indicates that lesbians are also pivotal in the representations of rainbow families. Two articles from Denmark and Italy provide examples of good practice of representation. Here, we truly see a hopeful turn in the media in support of the legal recognition of rainbow families, even if under assimilationist slogans like 'we are all the same', and 'love is love'. Rainbow families, in which the majority include lesbian mothers, are facing the consequences of an outdated moral debate. The moral dilemma of whether families that do not follow the heteronormative model are negatively impacting the well-being of their children. As right-wing and conservative governments are elected all over Europe, one of the first items on their agenda is denying rights to rainbow families, as shown clearly by the recent example in Italy.³⁴

This debate is timeless, as the institution of the heteronormative family is closely associated with the continuation of the racist model of nation-state building. Rainbow families, in this sense, become the subject that epitomises issues of heteronormativity and misogyny, religious oppression, and the continuation of the purity of the nation. Other intersecting issues arise, since a large number of lesbians are economically marginalised and experience a range of socio-economic inequalities, and the cost of accessing fertility treatments is unaffordable in many cases. Despite all these difficulties, lesbian and rainbow families exist and have to navigate a hostile environment of heteronormative institutions (e.g. state registry, school) and on top of that, are subjected to a lack of rights and benefits including tax credits, inheritance, access to health care and parental leave. As a result, in many cases, children have been reported to remain stateless and have been denied fundamental human rights as a "punishment" for the sexual orientation of their parents.³⁵

33 ILGA Europe (2023) 'Europe's Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex People Covering Events that occurred in Europe and Central Asia between January and December 2022', available at <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2023/>.

34 Chantelle Billson (2023) 'London to protest in support of lesbian mums stripped of birth certificates in Italy', in PinkNews, available at <https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/08/02/lesbians-are-mothers-too-london-protest-giorgia-melonis-lesbian-mums/>.

35 Network of European LGBTIQ* Families Associations (2023) 'Parenthood Recognition in the EU', available at http://nelfa.org/inprogress/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/NELFA-position-parenthood-proposal-August2023-finaldraft_4.pdf

Another dangerous trend in the article closely linked with the rainbow family moral debate is the “protect the kids” discourse. According to this narrative, a lesbian themed book in the public library is going to corrupt the youth (see article from Poland), lesbian representation in sex education classes is harmful for the well-being of students (see article from Bulgaria), and children were being morally corrupted (see article from Kazakhstan). These lesbophobic cries have nothing to do with young people’s well-being,³⁶ they are symptoms of the continuation of patriarchal heteronormativity, in which lesbians were always seen as enemies and outcasts. Limiting the societal and cultural model of sexual education imposes on an individual’s right to develop their own gender and sexual identity, which implies that not only is an individual’s agency hindered, but also their capacity of developing as citizens aware of their rights, their capability of reflecting on their own identity, and their capability of performing acts of insubordination.

An intersectional view on visibility

We must also signal that most articles portray a lesbian community that is white, middle class, able-bodied, cisgender, and generally feminine presenting. A prominent exception is the article from Ireland that provided an excellent example of representation of lesbians with disabilities (in this case autism). It becomes evident that there is a wider critique of the white, cis, ableist model that heteronormativity provides in the lesbian community. It was also an empowering media representation for other lesbians facing disabilities. Finally, the article countered a prevailing narrative on disabilities that portrays the sexuality of women with disabilities through the lens of reproductive rights. Disabled lesbian activists are contesting this model, advocating for a social model of disability that contests biologism and reproductive heteronormativity.

In general, however, the analysis of the articles from an intersectional perspective shows a clear lack of representation for any lesbians that are not white, able-bodied, and middle class. There is no such thing as one monolithic representation of lesbians, simply because it is hard to capture the heterogeneity of lesbian existence in a one-dimensional representation. We should demand representations that are as wild, messy, and diverse as our communities. Representations that come in all shapes, ethnic backgrounds, and genders.

Trans lesbians, intersex lesbians, Romani lesbians, Muslim lesbians, and black lesbians are just some of the examples of the groups that are facing intersectional erasure due to the recent backlash of the anti-gender discourse that goes hand in hand with right wing policies. Engaging in lesbian intersectional politics means that we centre the representation of the members of our communities who face an organised attack. Following this path, we should also attempt to decolonise lesbian representations and demand to move away from the figure of the white lesbian

36 For more information please see the study of the Turkish case study.

and, along with this, to stop reproducing the discourse that lesbian rights are more protected in the Western world, as we are uncritically reproducing racism and colonialism. Not to mention that this is an inaccurate claim since the West was never liberated from heteropatriarchy.

Instead, what the West managed to do, is to own the means of media production and circulation to produce a myriad of representations of its superiority. And since representation matters, as lesbians we should be able to practice the collective intelligence of distinguishing representations from propaganda.

The two sides of the misrepresentation of lesbians' gender expression

The media representation that favours the representation of a specific type of lesbians (when they are represented at all) also means that the media coverage tends to favour lesbians with a more feminine gender expression.

From our analysis it is clear that there is a tendency to over-feminise lesbians in the media. The mainstream feminisation of lesbians leaves no space for other lesbian representations to present as valid and as such, respected and socially cherished. In terms of media portrayal of lesbians, this has led to the phenomenon known as "femme or dead".³⁷ This term refers to the film and television portrayal of butch, dykes, and masculine lesbians that usually die by the end of the film, or the complete erasure of lesbian masculinity from mainstream media. In real life, masculine lesbians have faced brutal discrimination and oppression in the past decades that has pushed many of them to the limits of poverty and social exclusion.³⁸

As mentioned above, masculine lesbians usually face violence from men who see them as a threat to their claim on masculinity, whereas femme lesbians usually experience objectification and harassment. These are just different sides of the same coin of lesbophobia. From the standpoint of the male gaze, which occupies the hegemonic view in society, feminine-presenting lesbians are still performing their role as feminine women and, according to patriarchal standards, women perform their gender for the pleasure of men. As a consequence, feminine-presenting lesbians are not usually perceived as lesbians at all, since they are still perceived as feminine objects of desire by the male gaze. In other words, from the

37 Michaella Johnson (2022) 'From Dead to Femme: A Qualitative Analysis of Lesbian Representation on Television', John Hopkins University, available at <https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/96ac9fac-23a7-470a-9bb7-dc95d8f18dc4/content#:~:text=An-nati%20and%20Ramsey%27s%20study%20analyzed,%26%20Ramsey%2C%202021%2C%20para.>

38 See for example Kerry Manders (2020) 'The Renegades', New York Times, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/13/t-magazine/butch-stud-lesbian.html>; Leslie Feinberg (1993/2014) Stone Butch Blues, available at <https://www.lesliefeinberg.net>.

privileged male standpoint, it is easier to erase someone's identity than to accept that your desire will not be reciprocated. As mentioned in the EL*C Observatory on lesbophobia, it is not a coincidence that the cases of lesbophobia in public spaces involve couples, with physical aggression often following a refusal to perform certain acts such as refusing to kiss or let a man "join".³⁹

he media is more likely to cover violence against lesbians, especially when there is opportunity for graphic description, however attention should also be given to more subtle and banal everyday lesbophobia that often risks not being identified as lesbophobia. For example, the article from Croatia revolves around a husband fearful that a lesbian is going to 'steal' (sic) his wife. This is a way to deny that being a lesbian is a chosen, stable, lifelong identity. Lesbian existence is seen as ephemeral, or as an indication that something is wrong with the physical or mental health of the person (see articles from Estonia and Turkey).

The escalation of this heteropatriarchal logic leads to cases of lesbophobic rape, as many lesbians are refused to be seen as such and in their abuser's mind 'they are not lesbians, they just haven't met the right man'.⁴⁰ A widely used legal term for this practice is corrective rape: a term referring to straight men raping lesbians in order to 'correct' or 'cure' them. Yet, the United Nations 2015 Terminology Guidelines suggested that the term corrective rape should no longer be used, as it implies that something needs to be fixed or corrected. According to the guidelines it should be replaced by the term homophobic rape, which does not suffice the overwhelming number of women and non-binary persons victims and survivors of this violent practice. We, remaining true to our claim that representation matters, are using the term lesbophobic rape, since lesbians remain the vast majority of the survivors of this practice and, at the core of this practice, we find a dangerous mix of misogyny and heteronormativity.

³⁹ EL*C (2023): Observatory on Lesbophobia 2019-2022, available at <https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Observatory-Lesbophobia-2019-2022.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Sarah Doan-Minh (2019) *Corrective Rape: An Extreme Manifestation of Discrimination and the State's Complicity in Sexual Violence* Women's Legal Journal, Vol.167, available at: <https://repository.uclawsf.edu/hwlj/vol30/iss1/8>.

OBSERVATORY ON LESBOPHOBIA IN THE EU MEMBER STATES

Cases of lesbophobia violence collected by the EL*C Observatory and EL*C members

Cases/Data	Country	Type of violence
2023 data		
An exhibition in the European Parliament by lesbian artist Elisabeth Ohlson attracted criticism from far-right politicians and a wave of social media hatred against the artist. ⁴¹	Belgium	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists Online violence
A lesbian couple exchanging a kiss in public transport were subject to lesbophobic insults and death threats. ⁴²	France	Violence in public space
The 2023 report from SOS Homophobie analysed 158 cases of lesbophobia collected in 2022. Echoing last year's report, almost a third of the cases concerned violence in the family, while 18% concerned violence in school and in the workplace. ⁴³	France	National data
The National Library refused to issue ISBN codes for a booklet published by EL*C member Lesbians on the Verge. After repeated communicated with the publishing house, it appeared that the reason for the refusal was the word "lesbian" in the title. ⁴⁴	Greece	Lesbophobic discrimination
In June 2023, prosecutors in several cities in Italy asked for the removal of the non-biological mother from already registered birth certificates of children born in lesbian families. In Padua, 33 mothers were involved in prosecutors' cancellation request. ⁴⁵ Judicial cases are pending, and the Italian Constitutional Court is expected to decide on these cases. ⁴⁶	Italy	State-sponsored lesbophobia
Since 2021, Medus3, an observatory on lesbophobic violence launched by a coalition of lesbian organisations, collects cases of lesbophobic violence. 20 cases were reported by Italian media in 2022. The observatory also collected data via an online tool that allows people to report cases of lesbophobia. In 2023, 238 cases were registered ⁴⁷ , almost double the cases collected in the previous year (158).	Italy	National data

41 <https://www.foxnews.com/world/art-european-parliament-shows-jesus-gay-sadomasochistic-slaves-sparking-outrage-disgusting>

42 <https://www.leprogres.fr/faits-divers-justice/2023/04/26/agression-homophobe-a-lyon-il-menace-de-mort-un-couple-de-jeunes-femmes-dans-le-metro>

43 https://ressource.sos-homophobie.org/Rapports_annuels/Rapport_LGBTIphobies_2023.pdf

44 Case reported by EL*C member, Lesbian on the verge

45 https://27esimaora.corriere.it/23_giugno_20/mamme-cancellate-padova-cosa-succede-adesso-perche-non-entra-niente-la-maternita-surrogata-faad5092-0f84-11ee-a963-f99c88e1a594.shtml

46 https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2023/11/14/news/mamme_arcobaleno_padova_corte_costituzionale-420355427/

47 <https://www.retemeduse.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/report-lesbofobia-2023.pdf>

Elly Schlein, the leader of the main opposition party in Italy, is routinely subject to hate speech for being bisexual and being in a relationship with another woman, whose identity was revealed by the press without her consent. ⁴⁸ Attacks often come from elected representatives from the government coalition' parties. ⁴⁹	Italy	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists
A 17 years-old boy was condemned for attacking a lesbian couple. He approached the pair after seeing them cuddle at a bus shelter. He initially used lesbophobia slurs against them and then repeatedly punched them. He has been sentenced to community service. ⁵⁰	Ireland	Violence in the public space
A print shop in Bucharest refused to print a leaflet containing information on lesbophobic violence and data coming from EL*C Lesbophobia Observatory. When asked the reason for the refusal, the owner of the shop claimed that he had a right to refuse to print "pornographic material" and material promoting a "lifestyle" he disagreed with. ⁵¹	Romania	Lesbophobic discrimination
A lesbian couple was insulted and violently attacked in front of their children by a group of people at an amusement park. The park's security guards were present but did not intervene in defence of the couple. ⁵²	Spain	Violence in the public space
Two players of the Spanish first leagues reported being subject to waves of lesbophobic insults and hate speech after publicly revealing their relationship. ⁵³	Spain	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists
A journalist was subject to repeated lesbophobic hate speech from Alain Sorell, a well-known French far-right influencer. As a result, Sorell was sentenced to three months in jail. ⁵⁴	Switzerland	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists
Ebrar Karakurt, a prominent volleyball player, was subject to hate speech by high level politicians and religious leaders when she started posting photos of her and her girlfriend on social media. Ahead of a European final, members of the ruling party demanded that she be kicked out of the national team. ⁵⁵	Turkey	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists

48 <https://lespresso.it/c/attualita/2023/4/6/i-media-non-capiscono-che-louting-alla-compagna-di-elly-schlein-e-una-violenza/2880>

49 <https://lespresso.it/c/attualita/2023/4/6/i-media-non-capiscono-che-louting-alla-compagna-di-elly-schlein-e-una-violenza/2880>

50 <https://gcn.ie/community-service-attack-dublin-lesbian-couple/>

51 <https://lesbiangenius.org/elc-statement-on-lesbophobic-case-in-romania/>

52 <https://www.elmundo.es/madrid/2023/05/26/64708400e4d4d8d5118b45bb.html>

53 <https://www.mirales.es/dos-futbolistas-lesbianas-de-primera-division-reciben-cientos-de-insultos-por-hacer-publica-su>

54 <https://www.radiolac.ch/justice/accuse-dhomo-phobie-alain-soral-est-juge-en-appel-a-lausanne/>

55 <https://www.politico.eu/article/lgbtq-volleyball-karakurt-champion-backlash-turkey-erdogan-culture-war/>

2019-2022 data

Xheni Karaj, leader of the LGBTI movement in Albania, has been subjected to numerous death and rape threats online. These followed a TV interview where she defended the right for two mothers to register their teens and both be recognised as mothers. ⁵⁶	Albania	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists Online violence
Two women were killed by the ex-husband of one of the two, when he found out they were a couple. ⁵⁷	Belgium	Violence by family members Lesbophobic murder
A pansexual woman was attacked in Brussels city centre after the aggressors saw her kissing another woman. They then insulted her, called her a “dirty dyke” and violently beat her. ⁵⁸	Belgium	Violence in a public space
A group of 14-15-year-old students from Plovdiv organised and carried out a violent attack on young girls because of their perceived homosexual orientation. The boys’ goal was to “clean up the city garden” in Plovdiv of boys and girls with the ‘wrong’ sexual orientation. Several girls were viciously harassed, insulted, thrown eggs at, spat on, and beaten because of their appearance. ⁵⁹	Bulgaria	Violence in a public space
Lesbians very often receive threatening messages from young men online. They ranged from “you’re abnormal” to “it’s shooting season, get ready!” ⁶⁰	Bulgaria	Online violence
The lesbian activist who organised Sofia pride march received a photo showing a rifle and a gun and the words “see you tomorrow” on the night before the pride march. ⁶¹	Bulgaria	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists
Rainbow Hub Community Center was attacked by far-right groups, and the presidential candidate for the nationalist party punched a lesbian activist from Bilitis Foundation. ⁶²	Bulgaria	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists
A lesbian woman was violently attacked at a night club after having refused a man’s advances and disclosing that she was a lesbian. ⁶³	Croatia	Violence in a public space
A young lesbian woman was raped with the explicit motive of ‘correcting’ and punishing her because of her sexual orientation. ⁶⁴	France	Lesbophobic rape
The French group Les Dégommeuses has reported multiple cases of corrective rape used against lesbians with a migrant background and masculine gender expression (that makes them easily identifiable in public as lesbians). ⁶⁵	France	Lesbophobic rape

56 <https://lgbti-ep.eu/2021/07/02/lesbophobic-violence-meps-address-questions-to-four-commissioners-for-clarification-on-follow-up-actions/>

57 <https://www.rtb.be/article/double-femicide-a-gouvy-cest-un-homme-qui-a-tue-deux-femmes-parce-que-elles-se-desiraient-10824858>

58 <https://www.lesoir.be/323283/article/2020-09-06/lou-victime-dune-agression-lesbophobe-bruxelles-la-police-va-la-contacter-apres>

59 <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/10/02/plovdiv-attacks-highlight-bulgarias-unsolved-homophobia-problem>

60 Reported by EL*C Member Bilitis Foundation

61 Reported by EL*C Member Bilitis Foundation

62 <https://bilitis.org/en/2022/04/05/attack-on-rainbow-hub-community-centre/>

63 ECHR, Sabalić v. Croatia, application number 50231/13, decision of the 14 January 2021

64 <https://www.nouvelobs.com/droits-desfemmes/20210528.OBS44614/une-premiere-historique-un-viol-reconnu-comme-lesbophobe-auxassises.htm>

65 Reported by EL*C Member Les Degommeuses

A study of the national institute of demographic studies focusing on violence inside the family found that lesbian and bisexual girls were the two groups most affected by all types of intra-family violence (psychological, physical, and sexual violence) compared to heterosexual girls and homosexual and bisexual boys. ⁶⁶	France	Violence by family members
An event hosting Alice Coffin in June 2021, Board Member of the EL*C and well-known lesbian politician and activist, was interrupted in Rouen, France, by a group of men qualifying themselves as “The Normals” by bursting on the stage and holding a sign that read “Don’t you like men, madame Coffin?” ⁶⁷	France	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists
Alice Coffin has been on the receiving end of waves of lesbophobic hate speech, hateful public statements by politicians and public figures, as well as cyber violence. These include numerous lesbophobic and misogynistic insults and worrying death and rape threats. The latter forced her to suspend her Twitter account and were considered serious enough to justify her being granted police protection. ⁶⁸	France	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists Online violence
A woman was violently attacked at a bus stop in Paris while kissing her partner. ⁶⁹	France	Violence in a public space
A young lesbian committed suicide after having been subject to continuous bullying and harassment because of her ethnic origin and her sexual orientation. ⁷⁰	France	Suicide as consequence of lesbophobic bullying/harassment
A lesbian woman was violently attacked by two men while walking in the street with her partner. The attackers insulted her for her gender expression and attacked her while claiming that “she looked like a man and should fight like a man”. ⁷¹	France	Violence in a public space
A transgender man died in Münster after being violently beaten up during the local pride for responding to lesbophobic hatred. The assailants insulted several women at the festival, calling them “lesbian whores” and telling them to “piss off.” He intervened in their defence, and he was subject to a vicious attack that tragically resulted in his death. ⁷²	Germany	Violence against activists/politicians/journalists
A lesbian couple was insulted and kicked out of a café after having kissed. ⁷³	Germany	Violence in a public space
Several cases of anonymous online verbal abuse because of gender-related issues, including threats of physical and sexual violence. ⁷⁴	Hungary	Online violence

66 C. Hamel (2021) Violences intrafamiliales : les filles et les jeunes LGBT plus touchés, available at this link: https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/sites/default/files/atoms/files/etude-resultats_violencesintrafamnum-24-04-20.pdf

67 https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/slogans-et-banderoles-que-sest-il-passe-lors-de-lintervention-a-rouen-de-la-militante-alice-coffin-20210617_MAVVMQNZMNCFRFHGXGNVXCJX5B4/

68 <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20201119-feminist-advocacy-of-lesbian-genius-sends-france-into-frenzy-par-is-lgbt-g%C3%A9nie-lesbien-book-separatism>

69 <https://www.rtl.fr/actu/debats-societe/paris-une-femme-victime-d-une-agression-lesbophobe-enquete-ou-verte-7795418099>

70 <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/grand-est/haut-rhin/mulhouse/affaire-dinah-deux-mois-apres-le-suicide-de-l-adolescente-la-procureure-fait-le-point-2371360.html>

71 <https://imazpress.com/actus-reunion/le-tampon-une-jeune-femme-victime-dune-violente-agression-homophobe>

72 <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-25-year-old-transgender-man-dies-after-pride-event-attack/a-63003413>

73 <https://www.stern.de/panorama/wien--lesbisches-paar-nach-kuss-aus-caf%C3%A9-geworfen-3461090.html>

74 Reported by EL*C Member Labrisz Lesbian Organisation

<p>The lesbian NGO Labrys published an educational book for children titled “Fairyland is for everyone”, containing fairy tales aimed at explaining the existence of different kinds of families. A politician from the far-right fringe party Our Homeland tore the book apart and shredded it at a press conference, referring to it as “homosexual propaganda”, while bookshops selling the book were subject to attacks and violence. Following the attacks of the far-right groups and politicians, the government forced the publisher to add a warning that its stories contained ‘behaviour inconsistent with traditional gender roles’.</p>	<p>Hungary</p>	<p>Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/ journalists State-sponsored lesbophobia</p>
<p>Several instances of lesbophobia were registered in the streets of Dublin, from stares and insults to negative reactions when lesbian couples kissed in public.⁷⁵</p>	<p>Ireland</p>	<p>Lesbophobia in the public space</p>
<p>A young lesbian was attacked and brutally murdered by a man after she refused to start a relationship with him.⁷⁶</p>	<p>Italy</p>	<p>Lesbophobic murder</p>
<p>A 15-year-old lesbian was violently attacked in Turin by a man because she was wearing clothes judged too ‘masculine’.⁷⁷</p>	<p>Italy</p>	<p>Violence in a public space</p>
<p>A young woman was killed in a road accident caused by her brother. Just after the accident, the partner of the victim (present during the accident and who is a trans man) was assaulted by the brother. The latter declared that he did not want to kill his sister but needed to teach her a lesson because she had been “infected” by her trans partner.⁷⁸</p>	<p>Italy</p>	<p>Violence by family members Lesbophobic and transphobic murder</p>
<p>A young lesbian, after her parents discovered her sexual orientation, was subject to years of abuse, including physical and sexual violence perpetrated by her father.⁷⁹</p>	<p>Italy</p>	<p>Violence by family members Lesbophobic rape</p>
<p>Two doctors volunteering at a HIV centre in Naples were threatened and insulted with lesbophobic slurs.⁸⁰</p>	<p>Italy</p>	<p>Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/ journalists</p>
<p>Two famous lesbian women were subject to waves of lesbophobic violence online after announcing the date of their civil union.⁸¹</p>	<p>Italy</p>	<p>Online violence</p>
<p>In Kazakhstan, Gulzada Serzhan and Zhanar Sekerbayeva were violently attacked by a group of around 30 men at a feminist gathering they had organised with Feminita NGO, during which gender equality was discussed. The group of men filmed and harassed participants, chanted religious calls and homophobic slurs, beat Zhanar and attacked Gulzada, destroying her possessions. The police present at the scene did not protect the activists and instead illegally detained them.⁸²</p>	<p>Kazakhstan</p>	<p>Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/ journalists</p>

75 <https://www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/22140499/>

76 https://www.corriere.it/cronache/20_agosto_24/elisa-pomarelli-oggi-funerali-ragazza-lesbica-uccisa-2019-il-suo-omicidio-non-verra-giudicato-come-femminicidio-768c9726-e56d-11ea-b5c1-ffe7ca7d9551.shtml

77 https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/11/04/news/ io_aggreddita_perche_lesbica_la_denuncia_di_una_quindicenne_a_torino-240222603/

78 https://napoli.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/09/13/news/sperona_e_uccide_la_sorella_nel_napoletano_fer_ito_il_compagno_trans-267102124/?ref=RHPPTP-BH-IO-C12-P2-S1.8-T1

79 https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2019/03/07/meglio-una-figlia-morta-che-lesbicail-padre-la-stupra-per-punirla-la-famiglia-la-perseguita-per-anni_a_23686577/

80 <https://www.fanpage.it/napoli/insulti-omofobi-a-due-dottoresse-a-napoli-stavano-eseguendo-test-hiv-gratis/>

81 <https://www.arcigaynapoli.org/2022/07/01/solidarieta-a-paola-turci-e-francesca-pascale-per-lattacco-lesbico-di-cui-sono-vittime/>

82 <https://lgbti-ep.eu/2021/07/02/lesbophobic-violence-meps-address-questions-to-four-commission->

A lesbian couple was assaulted while leaving Amsterdam pride after refusing to kiss in front of a group of men. ⁸³	Netherlands	Violence in a public space
A woman was attacked and insulted by her Uber driver in a ride back from an LGBTI party because she kissed her girlfriend in the backseat of the car. ⁸⁴	Netherlands	Violence in a public space
A lesbian couple were attacked in an asylum centre in Amsterdam; the attackers insulted them and threw boiling water at them. ⁸⁵	Netherlands	Violence in a public space
Clube Safo reported a rise in online hate speech and harassment in Portugal. ⁸⁶	Portugal	Online violence
A woman was verbally and physically attacked in a metro station in Bucharest. The attackers insulted her for her gender expression and perceived sexual orientation, asked whether she was a man or a woman, and said that they were coming for “the likes of you”. ⁸⁷	Romania	Violence in a public space
Queer Women of North Caucasus and other lesbian groups from that same area report that the situation for LBT women is particularly difficult, resulting in exposure to violence, rapes, threats, and forced marriage when they are outed to their family. This violence is often perpetrated with impunity, and often even with the assistance of law enforcement. ⁸⁸	Russian Federation	National data
Several lesbian activists that attended the Europride in Belgrade were violently attacked after the march, which took place in a very tense context fuelled by the decision of the national government to ban the march and then allow it only few hours before the planned start of the demonstration. ⁸⁹	Serbia	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists
The lesbian journalist Irantzu Varela and the magazine office for which she worked for was attacked. The journalist was violently attacked multiple times, after having been called a “fucking lesbian” and a “whore”. The magazine office was vandalised twice by members of a far-right political party on the same day. ⁹⁰	Spain	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists
A lesbian couple was attacked in a Red Cross reception facility for asylum seekers by other residents because of their sexual orientation. The employee to which the couple reported the incident failed to address the problem directly and instead suggested that the couple should have avoided coming out to the other residents. ⁹¹	Spain	Violence in a public space
A lesbian trans woman was violently assaulted in the streets of Bilbao. ⁹²	Spain	Violence in a public space

[ers-for-clarification-on-follow-up-actions/](#)

83 <https://nltimes.nl/2019/08/06/lesbian-couple-attacked-pride-amsterdam>

84 <https://nltimes.nl/2022/08/09/demonstration-anti-lgbtqia-violence-amsterdam-uber-assault>

85 <https://nltimes.nl/2020/08/11/lesbian-couple-attacked-boiling-water-asylum-center>

86 Reported by EL*C Member Clube Safo

87 <https://www.vice.com/ro/article/v7vya9/victima-abuz-metrou-bucuresti>

88 The Advocates for Human Rights, & Moscow Community Centre for LGBT+ Initiatives (2020), Russian Federation’s Compliance with Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Suggested List of Issues Relating to Discrimination Based on Sexual orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fICO%-2fRUS%2f4_2841&Lang=en

89 https://twitter.com/Xheni_Karaj/status/1571404954153148416

90 <https://www.publico.es/mujer/lgtbfobia-agresion-lesbofobia-periodista-irantzu-varela-lesbiana-mier-da-has-contagiado.html>

91 Reported by EL*C Member Grupo Lesbico Feminista Artemisa, Refugiada y Migrante

92 <https://www.pikaramagazine.com/2019/06/agresion-sexual-transfoba-y-lesbofoba-a-una-medeaak/>

Journalist Irantzu Varela suffers a lesbophobic attack. Her neighbour punched her four times in the face while calling her a “fucking lesbian” and a “tomboy”. ⁹³	Spain	Violence in a public space
A lesbian couple were insulted, pushed, and punched. One of the women suffered various injuries and required medical assistance. Both filed a complaint with the police. ⁹⁴	Spain	Violence in a public space
Four lesbian and bisexual women were punched and insulted with lesbophobic slurs by a group of men. ⁹⁵	Spain	Violence in a public space
A lesbian couple were violently assaulted after publicly displaying affection while being sexually harassed and insulted.	Spain	Violence in a public space
Olena Shevchenko, a well-known lesbian activist and a leader of the LGBTI movement in Ukraine, was attacked with pepper spray in April 2022 in Lviv, while unloading a truck with humanitarian aid for the shelters organised by the lesbian organisation Insight NGO. ⁹⁶	Ukraine	Violence against lesbian activists/politicians/journalists

LIST OF ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THE MEDIA ANALYSIS

Country	Title of Article	Link
Belarus	“Are you a lesbian?” Former political prisoners spoke about the weirdness of the assistant head of the women’s prison colony	https://nashaniva.com/ru/315257
Bulgaria	The new LGBT world of Soros: Here is what they are preparing from PP-DB with the scandalous “Domestic Violence” law	https://blitz.bg/obshtestvo/noviyat-lgbt-svyat-na-soros-eto-kakvo-ni-glasyat-ot-pp-db-ss-skandalniya-zakon-za-domashnoto-nasilie_news951781.html
Croatia	Did she switch teams?	https://net.hr/magazin/brak-veze/muskarac-mukumuci-sa-suprugom-mislim-da-moja-zena-ima-lezbijsku-aferu-sa-svojom-najboljom-prijateljicom-d95b1856-ea64-11ed-97a2-6e36d1a0bbdf
Denmark	My dad and I sit here. Well, not really. Not in the eyes of the system	https://www.femina.dk/agenda/samfund/her-sidder-min-far-og-jeg-eller-det-vil-sige-ikke-rigtig-ikke-i-systemets-oejne
Estonia	A note for supporters of gender-neutral marriage: a child raised in a same-sex family is more likely to grow up to be gay	https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/maailm/tead-miseks-sooneutraalse-abielu-toetajatele-homoperes-kasvanud-lapsel-on-suurem-toenao-sus-kasvada-omasooiharaks/
France	Television “Lesbiennes, quelle histoire?”, a welcome spotlight by Marie Labory	https://tetu.com/2023/05/17/programme-17-mai-lesbiennes-quelle-histoire-lesbienne-documentaire-marie-labory-tv/

93 <https://www.pikaramagazine.com/2020/12/la-periodista-irantzu-varela-sufre-una-agresion-lesbofoba/>

94 <https://www.diariodemallorca.es/sucesos/2021/08/30/pareja-lesbianas-denuncia-agresion-homofoba-56696663.html>

95 https://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/denuncian-agresion-homofoba-cuatro-mujeres-fiestas-badalo-na_1_8991449.html

96 <https://twitter.com/MarshZhinok/status/1514533189234135040>

Germany	On the Trail of Prole Lesbians: “Dyke Dogs” Salon at the Schaubühne (theater in Berlin)	https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/auf-der-spur-der-prololesben-dyke-dogs-salon-in-der-schaubuhne-9770684.html
Greece	Where love is illegal photographic exhibition	https://www.lifo.gr/culture/photography/ekei-poy-i-agapi-einai-paranomi
Ireland	Watch: Young Irish person opens up about being queer and autistic in powerful video	https://gcn.ie/watch-queer-autistic-irish-person/
Italy	We are a family like many others. With love, respect, lots of fun and a few fights. Raising a child takes a village	https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/2023/05/31/news/du-mamme-tre-figli-famiglie-arcobaleno-giada-serena-12834315/
Kazakhstan	The lesbian who marched to the mausoleum with an LGBT flag addressed the media	https://baigenews.kz/lesbiyanka-vyshedshaya-s-lgbt-flagom-k-mavzoleyu-obratilas-s-pros-boy-k-smi_153706/
Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyzstan Threatened by Western Decadence	https://snob.kg/labirint/o-nas-nachistotu/item/6405-kyrgyzstan-pod-ugroznoj-zapadnoj-dekadentsii
Latvia	Ran with a knife through palm. How Alfrēds Apinis protected his mother from his despot father	https://www.delfi.lv/193/politics/55485436/izdu-ra-nazi-cauri-plaukstai-ka-alfreds-apisis-pasargaja-mammu-no-sava-teva-varmakas
Poland	Barbara Nowak warns of depravity by dangerous book with lesbian in title	https://aszdziennik.pl/147230.nowak-ostrze-ga-przed-deprawacja-przez-grozna-ksiazke-z-lesbika-w-tytule
Portugal	Mariana Mortágua’s coming out is political. And she did well.	https://www.tsf.pt/opiniao/o-coming-out-de-mariana-mortagua-e-politico-e-bem-16278754.html
Romania	The Opinion of a Theologist: Quo Vadis Europa!	https://www.cotidianul.ro/opinia-unui-teolog-quo-vadis-europa-ca-tot-a-fost-ziua-ei/
Russia	The White House declared the U.S. the victor over fascism in the Second World War.	https://mpsh.ru/17741-belyj-dom-nazval-ssha-pobediteljami-fashizma-vo-vtoroj-mirovoj-vojne.html
Sweden	Angelika, 19: “The atmosphere in the town hall feels uneasy”	https://www.trelleborgsallehanda.se/nyheter/angelika-19-stamningen-i-radhuset-kanns-infekterad-66245266/
Turkey	Homosexuals face greater risk of heart disease	https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2023/saglik/escinseller-da-ha-fazla-kalp-hastaligi-riskiyle-karsi-karsiya-
UK	SNP MP Joanna Cherry says she’s been ‘cancelled’ over gender views after Edinburgh Fringe event scrapped	https://uk.news.yahoo.com/snp-mp-joanna-cherry-says-135700759.html

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** Explicitly identify lesbophobia as violence at the intersection of homophobia and misogyny and recognise that it is a type of violence with its own roots, patterns, modes, and consequences formed by this intersectional experience.
- 2.** Use human rights instruments and international law to ensure that the rights of lesbians are not violated by direct actions from state actors and public authorities.
- 3.** Ensure that hate bias based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are considered as aggravating circumstances in legislation aimed at criminalising gender-based violence, hate crime and hate speech.
- 4.** Design and implement measures to combat violence, including online violence, against visible and well-known women including on the basis of sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity, and ensure that existing measures are effectively implemented.
- 5.** Consider, in legislation concerning sexual violence, the increased risk for lesbians and pay particular attention to sexual harassment, rape, and physical violence aimed at punishing or 'correcting' lesbians and women perceived as non-heterosexual.
- 6.** Address, in legislation concerning participation to democratic processes, freedom of the press and protection of human rights defenders, the specific experiences of violence faced by lesbian politicians, journalists, high-level athletes, and human right defenders.
- 7.** Include, in the training of relevant professionals, notably law enforcement, judges and prosecutors, awareness of the specific needs and challenges faced by lesbians that are victims of hate crime, gender-based violence, domestic violence, and harmful practices.
- 8.** Design and implement measures to protect the rights of victims of violence without discrimination on the basis, among others, of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

- 9.** Adapt the psychological support and training of healthcare professionals and institutions to the realities and difficulties experienced by lesbians, and facilitate the reporting process of health professionals and institutions who have demonstrated lesbophobic behaviour.
- 10.** Ensure that all incidents of gender-based violence and domestic violence against lesbians are properly and effectively recorded, that disaggregated statistics on hate crimes, hate speech, and discrimination are collected, analysed, and disseminated, and that specific studies and research on this phenomenon are funded.
- 11.** Organise public campaigns, in collaboration with lesbian organisations, designed to counter violence experienced by lesbians in public spaces, in the family, and online, and to encourage them to report such incidents to law enforcement and/or dedicated associations.
- 12.** Encourage the private sector, especially online platforms, to ensure that the word 'lesbian' is not automatically associated with derogatory or hypersexualised and harmful content, especially in the design of measures intended to reduce illegal and harmful gender-related online content.
- 13.** Encourage the media to review its approach to lesbophobic gender-based violence and hate crime, ensuring that the lesbian identities of the victims are not erased when relevant to the motive of the crime, and pay particular attention to the vocabulary used, the treatment of information, and limit sensationalism.
- 14.** Ensure adequate, accessible, and reliable funding for projects and activities implemented by organisations focused on and led by lesbians, including smaller project, and that are designed to counter lesbophobic rhetoric and narrative, to provide training to law enforcement and judicial authorities, as well as to ensure assistance and support for the victims of this type of violence.