



DEYSTVIE IN 2019

Growing stronger together



I. Overview

Youth LGBT Organization Deystvie was founded in 2012 and has been providing support to the members of the LGBTI community in Bulgaria ever since. We promote visible and active political life for LGBTI people in Bulgaria, and we demand from the competent authorities to respectfully address the rights of LGBTI people in Bulgaria and inform the general public with regard to the rights of LGBTI people in Bulgaria. Deystvie is part of coalitions that address the issues of LGBTI people or other marginalized groups and is member of [#NoviteBuditel\(k\)i](#), [Equality League](#), [National Youth Forum Bulgaria](#), [ILGA-Europe](#), [IGLYO](#), EqualBG and [NELFA](#).

Empowering the LGBTI community and promoting the rule of law is the mission of Youth LGBT Organization Deystvie. Founded by a group of young LGBTI people who strongly believe that proper social and legislative changes should be made for LGBTI people in Bulgaria. In order to do this Deystvie established the only Legal Defense program in the country which supports LGBTI people. Deystvie focuses its activities on providing opportunities for empowering the members of the LGBTI community and promoting the rule of law as a tool to prevent homophobia and transphobia from being a part of the everyday life of LGBTI people.

I. Who we are

Veneta Limberova

Veneta is a passionate activist who works for bringing equality for all (and in particular LGBTI people) in Bulgaria. She joined the movement in 2009 and has been the president of Youth LGBT Organization Deystvie since 2015. Veneta's personal experience as a parent in a same-sex relationship and her background in law gave her the opportunity to focus her work on LGBTI families and to support couples, families and single parents in their day-to-day struggle for equal rights. Since 2018, Veneta has been a member of the Board of Directors of NELFA, the European LGBTI family network. As a parent, Veneta has been actively involved in the parental cooperatives movement, and has also supported the establishment of the first school based on the principle of democratic learning in Bulgaria.





Att. Denitsa Lyubenova

Denitsa got a law degree in Bulgaria and specialized in International Public Law at the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands. At the moment, Denitsa is the head of the Legal Program of Youth LGBT Organization Deystvie as one of the founders of the organization. Her major goal is the recognition of LGBTI families in the country. In order to achieve that, she has initiated dozens of legal proceedings on everyday problems encountered by LGBTI people before the courts in Bulgaria, as well as some cases before the European Court of Human Rights. Denitsa took part in various conferences and professional trainings on the topic. She went through a practical training program on community organizing that took her to an exchange in the USA, where she spent one month in the American LGBT organization Human Rights Campaign. Honesty and justice are the driving forces of her life. She loves her dog and the mountains.





Doroteya Stefanova

Doroteya is Deystvie's Youth Program coordinator and her professional interests include education, anti-bullying, political advocacy, and community building and organizing. She identifies as queer. Doroteya is an advocate for the rights of university students at Sofia University, where she co-founded the Student Society for Equality, a student club focused on countering discrimination and violence on college grounds.





Borina Krasteva

Borina Krasteva is the project coordinator of Deystvie. Borina has over 15 years experience in project management and coordination. She is a great asset to the work of the organization and has been part of the team for over a year now.

Ana Mihova

Ana is part of the legal team of Deystvie. Ana is a law student at Sofia University and has been part of Deystvie for the last one year. Ana is currently coordinating all the requests coming from clients of the Legal Defense program.

Stoiana Petrova

Stoiana is the most recent team member of Deystvie. She is second year law student at Sofia University.



III. Our main programs

The Youth, Visibility and Community Building Program focuses on:

- Providing trainings, workshops, seminars, support groups and debates for members of the LGBTI community (and specific trainings for L.E.A.D. Academy young community organizers) with regard to their basic rights as citizens, anti-discrimination legislation, institutions that could be approached for support, change of legal gender, parenthood into same-sex relationships;
- Creating and maintaining online space within social media with specific information related to LGBTI people, sharing of stories, information for events and news within the community;
- Providing opportunities for visibility of youth leaders, role models and members of the LGBTI community;
- Participating in debates, round tables, working groups and media;
- Co-organizing the annual Sofia Pride March.



The Legal Defense and Advocacy Program focuses on:

- Collecting and analyzing data on LGBTI-related hate crimes and discrimination incidents;
- Providing access to pro bono legal expert services for members of the community in cases of LGBTI-related hate crimes and discrimination incidents;
- Strategic litigation;
- Representation before administrative or judicial bodies in Bulgaria and EU.
- Providing expert opinion with regard to the current LGBTI-related legislation and amending it;
- Providing trainings and workshops;
- Advocacy through different tools within the governmental bodies, institutions, LGBTI community on discrimination and/or violence that LGBTI population is facing in Bulgaria and insisting that adequate positive changes are made to the legislation.



The Cultural Program focuses on:

- Supporting and/or organizing exhibitions of art works during LGBTI-related events;
- Supporting and/or organizing story-telling of LGBTI people through photo events, publishing books;
- Organizing the annual Sofia Pride Film Fest during the Pride Month.

The HIV and Sexual Health Program focuses on:

- Providing information on prevention, testing and living with HIV and other sexual transmitted infections through a web page and social media and through specially created campaigns;
- Providing specific pro-bono administrative and legal support in HIV-related cases;
- Facilitating dialogues between the MSM community, health authorities and other decision-making bodies and/or stakeholders on the topics of prevention and living with HIV.

IV. 2019 in projects and achievements

Love Moves - funded by the European Commission





The project LoveMoves aims to oppose discrimination practices of member states which do not treat same-sex couples recognized in another jurisdiction as such, and thus violate their right of free movement within the European Union. The main objective of the project is to identify and analyse the situation of same-sex couples recognized in another EU Member State who travel to or reside in Bulgaria; To inform the LGBTI community (in Bulgaria and abroad) about the limitations on freedom of movement across the EU for LGBTI couples, and to mobilise support for change; To raise awareness among authorities and the general public for the unfair and discriminatory way same-sex couples from other EU member states are treated, and to put pressure on them towards change; To put the freedom of movement for same-sex couples on the public agenda and to initiate policy discussion on a national and European level.

The project was co-funded by the European Commission.

Main activities: 4 workshops with the community took place in Sofia, Blagoevgrad and Varna. Interviews with same-sex couples were conducted with regard to their rights in Bulgaria, and a research of the respective legislation was carried out and together they all resulted in a report on the situation of the same-sex couples in Bulgaria. The report, together with the petition to the Bulgarian institutions, was presented to the authorities at the round table held at the end of 2018. The project ended in May 2019.



Together for LGBTI rights in Bulgaria funded by the European Commission

НЯМА
СТРАШНО.
ТОВА Е
ПРОСТО **ЛЮБОВ**

РАЗЛИЧНИ ХОРА,
РАВНИ ПРАВА

Този материал е произведен в рамките на проекта "Заедно за правата на ЛГБТИ хората в България", съфинансиран от ЕК по програма "Права, равенство, гражданство" с договор №777266. Изразените тук становища не обвързват по никакъв начин Европейската комисия и тя не носи отговорност за използването на информацията, която се съдържа в този материал.



Raising awareness about the need for teachers, civil society/youth leaders, politicians and business leaders, citizens from the movable middle, incl. parents of LGBTI, to stand up for LGBTI rights in Bulgaria; Disseminating good practices on becoming an LGBTI ally; Building support for the LGBTI movement. A survey of all groups targeted by the project was conducted in February 2018 and Deystvie held 30 seminars across with representatives of NGOs and youth. The goals of the seminars were to introduce the topic of LGBTI rights by giving information about the history of the movement, the Bulgarian context, the challenges and suggested ways for members of the civil society to support the movement. The project is co-funded by the European Commission.

CAPCOM





The aim of the project was to support the professional and personal development of youth workers and activists in the region by also planning the implementation of a long-term training course aimed at enhancing capacity in community youth work with LGBTI people. It was implemented in partnership with 9 other Western Balkans organizations working with the LGBTI community. The specific objectives of the project are related to capacity building for the planning, implementation and implementation of programs for working with LGBTI youth; exchange of good practices for community work with LGBTI youth; creating and distributing a brochure of good practices and methodology for working with LGBTI youth.

Between December 2017 and December 2018, volunteers at the Youth LGBT Organization Action participated in 4 mobility activities related to the delivery of 4 training courses aimed at building skills for the implementation, planning and implementation of youth work programs. As part of their training, the volunteers facilitated a series of meetings with LGBTI youth in Sofia. There were also 3 meetings to increase the capacity of partner organizations, which were related to the preparation of a brochure for the exchange of good practices. During the program preceding Sofia Pride 2019, a conference was held with project partners on the topic "LGBTI Youth and Politics - Future Challenges". A booklet on good practices and methodologies for LGBTI youth work was also presented.

Project was funded by Erasmus + program.

Project partners: Group COME OUT, Queer Montenegro, Subversive Front, Foundation CURE, Tuzla Open Centre, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of Republic of North Macedonia, Centre for Social Group Development, Youth Peace Group "DANUBE"



Rainbow Rays

Rainbow Rays is a youth-led project that aims to empower young LGBTI people to achieve quality change in their local communities by strengthening their skills and understanding of solidarity, active citizenship and social inclusion. Two LGBTI youth groups were established – one in Sofia and one in another city in the country. The project participants participated in the organization of events in solidarity with the local community. Networking meetings between the youth and activists working in the fields of youth work, community organizing and LGBTI rights took place. The group shared best practices in a handbook about establishing LGBTI youth group within the local context. The project is financed by the European Solidarity Corpus of the European Union.



Healthy, Brave, and Proud: A mental health support program for LGBTI youth

The project is aimed at improving the LGBTI community's awareness of the mental health with a particular focus on LGBTI youth. LGBTI people often do not have opportunities for full inclusion in the public life and are stigmatized in their own families, which affects young people very much. Factors such as bullying and domestic violence, the total stigmatization of LGBTI people community, lack of professionals aware of the community needs and an established support system contribute to many cases of mental health problems among LGBTI youth. From 2019 Deystvie organizes group support meetings led by the psychologist Anna Doneva and the group facilitator Joana Nikolova. The psychological help group is a process will long-term improve the mental health of its participants and will address common issues.

The project is financed by the TELUS International Bulgaria Community Board .





Equality League

The Equality League is a coalition of organizations, activists and experts who work for full participation of all citizens in public life, focusing on some of the most excluded groups (Roma, LGBTI, deaf, disabled). Consolidating and building the capacity of a coalition of organizations, participants and activists working with different marginalised communities;

Building a movement against discrimination by engaging current and future leaders from disadvantaged communities, as well as allies, with a focus on young people;

Countering the harmful stereotypes that lead to discrimination through training, cultural and political events;

Ensuring political response and participation of oppressed communities in the political life;

Testing, evaluating and disseminating a model for joint action by oppressed communities and their organizations against any form of discrimination. On October 17, 2019, the Equality League, together with partners from the civil sector, hosted a pre-election debate "Sofia on Equality: Policies for Vulnerable Groups". It was the first forum in Bulgaria to enable representatives of several marginalised groups - the Roma community, the LGBTI community and the deaf community - which allowed them to raise their questions to local government candidates and hear their ideas on how they can be addressed. As part of the activities of the Equality League project an equality march in Plovdiv was organized which gathered over a 100 people in the European capital of culture for 2019.



The Equality League Project is a joint project of the SEGA Foundation, Youth LGBT Organization Deystvie, Roma-Stolipinovo Youth Club and Listen Now Foundation. The project is funded by the European Commission Law, Equality and Citizenship Program (2014-2020).



Rainbow Shield: Enhancing the legal protection of LGBTI people in Bulgaria

The Rainbow Shield project aims to enhance the legal protection of LGBTI people in Bulgaria. The specific objectives of the project are:

- To expand the scope of legal practitioners prepared to deal with LGBTI cases and enhance their expertise in doing so;
- To provide possibilities for effective handling of discrimination and other LGBTI rights violations in a holistic way, including legal advice, litigation, psychological support and media preparation;
- To raise awareness among the LGBTI community about possibilities for legal protection in cases of discrimination and other violations of their rights and increase cases of reporting;
- To test and disseminate best practices of civil organisations of enhancing legal protection of LGBTI people around Europe.

The project will reach these goals through training and networking among legal practitioners, training of LGBTI community leaders, international study visit at LGBTI Association ACCEPT Romania, through launching and running of holistic legal program, through campaigning within the LGBTI community through community events and an international conference.

The project is funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).



Rainbow Hub

The Rainbow Hub project is funded by Iceland, Leichteinsten and Norway under the EEA Financial Mechanism. Its overall aim is to increase the capacity and mobilize the LGBTI community by supporting 8 self-support groups at Rainbow Hub Community Center, to provide advocacy training and to support advocacy initiatives for each group.





National LGBTI Legal Program

The “National LGBTI Legal Program” project aims to create a National LGBTI Legal Program covering five district cities - Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas and Veliko Turnovo. The project will contribute to the empowerment of the LGBTI community through providing direct access to legal protection provided by professionals in the field of LGBTI rights. Filing cases leads to official national statistics and official coverage of an existing problem, which in turn will lead to a change in legislation and will improve the lives of LGBTI people in Bulgaria. A team of lawyers, psychologists and local coordinators will be set up in the 5 district cities. The purpose of the local coordinators is to organize the events with the community and connect the community members with the lawyers. An online platform for reporting cases of discrimination and hate crimes will be established. It will also serve as an administration of the cases. A new book on empowering the LGBTI community is planned for publication, as well as a major human rights event. The National LGBTI Legal Program is funded by the Active Citizens Fund under the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021.





BrinkItOn - On the Brink of Acceptance: Fighting Discrimination by Strategizing and Empowerment for the LGBTI Community in Bulgaria

The overall aim of the BrinkItOn project, funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), is to improve the social acceptance of LGBTI people in Bulgaria. Among the project's objectives are to identify and analyse the trends and societal perceptions regarding LGBTI people by conducting research, as well as to build the capacity of the LGBTI movement for strategic planning development. During the project duration, the first LGBTI Strategic Framework and Action Plan in Bulgaria will be developed which will further be utilized to empower the LGBTI community and its allies and mobilise support for change.

Developing tools for civic participation in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of anti-discrimination policies in Bulgaria

Project aims at creating a full legal analysis of the existing criminal legislation in the country and a proposal to the government on how to change this legislation in order to fulfill its obligations under the Victims' Rights Directive.

Funded under Operational Programme "Good governance" 2014-2020



National Police training

In early June 2019 the first ever training of police officers on SOGIE hate crimes took place near the town of Velingrad. The training was part of a project funded by American Bar Association and US State Department and implemented by Youth LGBTI Organization Deystvie with the support of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Facilitated by Maria Alkalai and with the guest speakers from Commission against discrimination (Nasko Atanasov, Vladimira Stoimenova), Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (Krasimir Kaven), Police Academy (Prof. Timchev), police officers from Police Departments of Netherland and Sweden (Maria Lust, Yanitza Bakalova) training gathered together 53 police officers from around the country.

As a continuation of this training of police officers happened the Rainbow Over Hate project funded by the European Commition.





RainbowOverHate

The project aims to combat homophobia and transphobia through improving the capacity of public and private actors with regards to hate crimes and incidents against LGBTI people in Bulgaria and beyond. The project has two legislative aims: collectiong information and develop evidence-based report that the State of Bulgaria did not transpose and implemented the Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime in EU Member States and developing a policy paper, which provides recommendations on the transposition and implementation obligation to the State of Bulgaria and to inform the European Commission for breaches of the European law. It aims at executing 4 regional and 1 national training of police officers, training of lawyers and victims' support services. The project is funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020)

V. Achievements and Media Coverage

Marriage equality court cases

Cristina and Mariama won the fight for LGBTI equality court case in Bulgaria. Case was litigated successfully by Deystvie lawyer – Denitsa Lyubenova

In June 2019 the Bulgarian Supreme Administrative court has backed the right of a same-sex married couple to reside in the country for the first time in a landmark ruling. The Court ruled that the French-Australian couple should be allowed to live in Bulgaria together. Cristina Palma, from Australia, married her partner Mariama Diallo in France in 2016, having met in Sydney 15 years ago. The couple moved to Bulgaria together shortly afterwards. However, Palma's application to continue her residency in the country was rejected in 2017. Palma then started a lawsuit over the refusal of her residency, which she won on June 29, when the Sofia court ruled in her favour. The court decision was covered in New York times, Washington Times, Associate Express, and over 100 articles from media around the world.



Lili and Darina court case was lost on last instance before the Supreme Administrative court in December 2019 and protest was organized

Lili and Darina are a lesbian couple who got married in 2017 in the UK and started a court case in Bulgaria for recognizing their marriage in the country they legally reside and of which they are citizens. In a final decision in December 2019 the Supreme Administrative court did not recognize their right to family. The protest organized on the next day after the decision initiated the most massive campaign for family rights in the country which peak is expected in February 2020. Lili and Darina court case was covered by all the national and regional TV and newspapers.



First community organizing trainings for LGBTI community in Bulgaria

Two 5-days long trainings on community organizing were organized during Mo George visit with Deystvie team and group of activists. Training with Deystvie team took place during the day and the activists worked in the evenings. All trainings happened in Rainbow Hub and gathered 20+ people who received their certificates at a small specially created ceremony at the end of the training. All were invited to join the Civil Partnership campaign working group.





National round table on LGBTI rights, Dec 3rd 2019

The event gathered around 60 participants and guests from Bulgarian institutions, non-governmental sector, experts, stakeholders, members of the LGBTI community. Though there were not any members of the Parliament, the event attracted as panelists representatives of Ombudsman office, Commission Against Discrimination, Ministry of External Affairs, Unicef, child experts, lawyers and members of the community.



Pride March 2019

Since 2015, Deystvie has been co-organizing Sofia Pride together with other LGBTI+ organizations and activists. Sofia Pride march is essential for the LGBTI+ movement and for the movements of other marginalized groups as well, for it serves as a political tool to communicate that a part of the Bulgarian society does not have equal rights and they are ready to bring about change. In 2019 we managed together with our partners to gather over 7000 participants and hundreds of private donors.

Participation in EQUAL BG

EQUAL BG is a coalition of 30 NGOs from 15 cities around Bulgaria. The aims of the coalition are: development of the NGOs in Bulgaria, enforcing democracy and human rights. The coalition was formed in 2018 as a result of debates for the unconstitutionality of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention. Project is financed by Civitates.





Women's rights protests

Deystvie is one of the organizers of the 8th of March and 25 of November women's rights protests in the country. The protests gather hundreds of people annually.



Student Society for Equality

In 2019 Deystvie continues to support the Student Society for Equality at Sofia University and granted them development money through a funding by Bulgarian Fund for Women.

VI. Accents

Veneta Limberova – board member of NELFA

Veneta participated in the LGBTI families lawyers annual meeting in Frankfurt in April 2019.

Denitsa Lyubenova held a TedxVitosha talk before 1000 people in the National Theater.





Denitsa Lyubenova gave a workshop and presentation during Oslo Freedom Forum in May 2019 in Oslo.

In 2019 Deystvie presented reports to the CEDAW and the European Commissioner on Human rights on the situation of LGBTI rights in Bulgaria.

In June 2019 NELFA co-organized a presentation in Brussels on the rights and problems of rainbow families across Europe where Veneta Limberova took part and made a presentation.

Deystvie participated in the European Commission conference on the LGBTI future in Europe in September 2019.



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