

Interview with a local activist - Gloriya Filipova (Bulgaria)

How did you first get involved, what was your first volunteer experience like?

My first volunteering experience was my friend's idea. I've always wanted to be more active, but was very scared and thought I'd be useless and have nothing to contribute with. Fortunately, the person who was organizing first LGBTI event I volunteered for was really welcoming and motivating so I was soaked into activism right away. She managed to show us our own strengths and make us feel useful, she had the qualities of a true leader who gathers people around and activates their strengths.

What are the biggest daily challenges you face in your work?

The challenges are a lot, for example, in the last year we had a lot of security concerns, a lot of stress and pressure from the society. But currently for me the biggest challenge is to draw the line between work and personal life, to learn to take care of my physical and mental wellbeing and to re-connect with myself, because when you care too much about a cause and you put everything in the fight, you lose yourself, lose your health, your friends, your family.

What's your biggest achievement as an activist so far?

To be part of a momentum for the LGBTI community in Sofia when we finally have a sense of community and the movement is becoming more and more organized and people are feeling like they are part of a real community where they can feel safer and seek sup-

When did activism become a way of life for you (if so)?

I was into activism since I was a child, but I didn't know that the word activism exists. I was always interested in different causes, but didn't know the ways to engage more or how the whole movement/NGO work functions. For me activism became a way of life very quickly after I found out that there is such thing as activism and found the right people to work with, but I guess it was always part of me and was manifesting in different ways ever since I was a kid.



G L O R I Y A

How does Bulgarian activism differ from that in more developed countries and how can it be improved?

We have just started to work together with the other LGBTI organizations and to strategize, to try and coordinate our work and to share resources. The LGBTI movement in Bulgaria is still a baby movement and it's mostly based in Sofia, but it's growing really, really quickly, so hopefully soon we'll have a strong movement that demands and works for equality.

One thing that is very different from more developed countries is that we don't receive any political support besides the support of the Green Movement party, which is not in the Parliament and doesn't have much power. There is no political party or institution, that openly supports LGBTI rights or any positive change around LGBTI equality.

How do you imagine the development of public opinion on minorities in 10 years?

In the last couple of years the situation for LGBTI people got worse in Bulgaria, because of the increasing hate speech and hate crimes around the campaign against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in Bulgaria. However, I'm being positive about the future, because I see that **the movement is growing and getting stronger and strong community is the basis for positive changes**. Because of the anti-gender campaign, many causes realized that we can make improvements only if we work together, so I'm very hopeful about **creating intersectional and LGBTI-inclusive feminist movement in Bulgaria**, where we can support women's and other minorities' rights such as the rights of Roma, refugees and others.

Has activism ever been a threat to your own personal security?

Yes, many times.

How do you manage to stay motivated and go on, even when you don't see the results you expect?

The thing that always keeps me motivated is the community work where you see **the small positive changes of supporting each other**, helping someone improve their wellbeing, receiving support and acceptance, having this family feeling

Can you see LGBTQ+ people having more rights in the near future in Bulgaria?

Yes, mainly when it comes to **protection against anti-LGBTI hate crimes**.

What are you working on now and what's the thing you want to see happening the most during your lifetime?

To have **blooming queer community and culture not only in Sofia, but in the whole country**. People to feel more free to express themselves and live their lives safely in Bulgaria. On the practical note – to criminalize anti-LGBTI hate crimes, to adopt self-identification based legal gender recognition procedure and accessible healthcare services for trans people, to ban unnecessary medical procedures on intersex people. To have better services for **LGBTI people** such as free mental health support and shelter. I'm **planning** to live a long life and see this happen ha-ha.