LGBTQIA+ inclusion in European museums

An incomplete guideline

NEMO
Network of European
Museum Organisations

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Foreword

In this guideline, the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO) addresses the critical issue of ensuring that all communities feel welcome in the museum by implementing LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies in museums. Building on insights gathered from museum professionals across Europe, NEMO aims to support institutions in becoming more inclusive spaces for everyone.

As cultural institutions committed to continuous learning, critical reflection, and cooperation with and for communities, museums have a profound responsibility to ensure that their spaces are welcoming and representative of all people. Museums can play a unique role in fostering social cohesion, challenging stereotypes, and celebrating diversity. By advancing inclusion and ensuring welcoming spaces for one community, museums take a step towards enhancing inclusivity for all communities. This report serves as a guide for museum professionals looking to integrate LGBTQIA+ inclusivity into their operations and programming. It also presents potential scenarios that highlight common challenges museums may encounter when implementing such policies. These scenarios provide valuable insights into potential obstacles, such as revising exhibition content to be more inclusive, navigating sensitive language issues, and considering infrastructure to ensure that all visitors feel safe and welcome. The guidelines and each scenario underscore the importance of adopting a thoughtful, comprehensive approach that goes beyond surface-level changes.

NEMO encourages museums and their professionals to use this report as a roadmap for becoming more inclusive institutions. In 2024, NEMO introduced the social value of museums as a priority, focusing on wellbeing, inclusion, equity, and diversity.

Our objectives include:

Awareness: we want to achieve that every museum in the NEMO network is aware of the needs of LGBTQIA+ persons, both from an organisational perspective (staff) and that of audiences.

Instruments: we want to provide museums in Europe with good examples and guidelines on how to work with LGBTQIA+ persons.

Advocacy: we want to position museums as safe spaces and places for the LGBTQIA+ community to meet and discuss their challenges, especially in countries that are currently in a political environment where LGBTQIA+ groups are threatened.

By embracing the diversity in our communities and taking concrete steps to ensure that individuals are seen, heard, and respected, museums can strengthen their roles as trusted spaces for dialogue, learning, and social equity. This guide will support museum professionals in advocating for institutional changes, collaborating more effectively with communities, and taking steps towards creating a more inclusive and representative museum sector.

Petra Havu, Chair of the Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO)

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About NEMO

Since 1992, NEMO has been dedicated to connecting European museums and their national organisations to ensure their place in the cultural development of Europe, promoting European policies that help museums fulfil their role as keepers of cultural heritage, and supporting European museums through networking and cooperation opportunities. NEMO reaches these goals through four elements of strategic focus, whereby the network highlights the educational, social, economic, and collection value of museums. Additionally, NEMO supports its members and the wider museum sector with a transversal focus on Professional Development, Digital Transformation and the Sustainable Transition.

Introduction

For a couple of weeks every year, the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, the Netherlands, lays out a rainbow walkway in its garden. The colours of the rainbow include pink, blue, green, orange, yellow and red. These resemble the rainbow flag as it emerged in the 1970s as a symbol of queer communities, which remains in circulation to this day. The Centraal Museum is Utrecht's foremost museum with an eclectic collection ranging from seventeenth-century painting to modernist design. The museum is housed in a mediaeval monastery that has gradually been extended into a museum space. Standing on this rainbow walkway, all the museum's buildings can be seen at a glance.

For the Centraal Museum, this rainbow walkway may operate as a mission statement, signalling this museum's ambition to become more inclusive of the LGBTQIA+ community. Quite possibly, many visitors appreciate such symbols, helping them to feel more welcome in the museum. Others may wonder if the statement of the museum is sincere. In how far does this institution structurally support, and give a platform to, marginalised communities across all its endeavours? Yet other visitors might feel uncomfortable with such allusions to diversity and inclusion, possibly believing that museums should refrain from making statements they perceive to be political.

The Centraal Museum's rainbow flag hints at many of the questions involved in the inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ community in museums. What steps can museums take to foster LGBTQIA+ inclusion in their collections, exhibitions, public programmes and organisations? What are the dilemmas facing museum professionals committed to LGBTQIA+ inclusion in European museums? And how could professionals work through these dilemmas? This ethical guideline to LGBTQIA+ inclusion in European museums aims to respond to some of these complex issues.

In this introduction, firstly, we map out our conceptual framework with respect to LGBTQIA+, museums and Europe specifically. Secondly, we describe our methodology, which includes a literature review and interviews with museum professionals working across Europe. Lastly, we pinpoint the aim of this ethical guideline and reflect on our positionality.

Concepts

LGBTQIA+, queer, intersectionality

The acronym LGBTQIA+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and more.[1] The acronym operates as a broad umbrella term to point to a community of people who do not identify with normative standards in terms of their gender and sexuality. Moreover, the term *queer* has been reappropriated by this community as a more open and dynamic means of self-identification.[2] In the context of museums, *queer* is also used as a verb: artists and curators *queer* the museum to contest the institution's complicity in sustaining heteronormativity in their collections, displays, and public programmes.[3] Both terms have been subject to criticism: while LGBTQIA+ is rooted in western concepts of identity and categorisations, the historical roots of the term *queer* as a homophobic slur are, for some, difficult to forget.[4] Acknowledging these pitfalls, we here use the terms LGBTQIA+ and *queer* in tandem, with attention to consistency, clarity, and common use. ILGA-Europe has developed a Glossary with more guidance on terminology and acronyms concerning LGBTQIA+ identities and rights.

Identities are complex and multifaceted, as Eliza Steinbock and Hester Dibbits have recently reiterated: no group can be reduced to a single characteristic or trait.[5] Although this guideline focuses on the LGBTQIA+ community, we acknowledge that discrimination on the basis of gender or sexuality cannot be isolated from other mechanisms of exclusion, for instance on the basis of race, class, or ability. Intersectionality is a crucial concept here. Originally developed within Black feminist thought, for instance by the scholar and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality opens up the possibility of understanding how various mechanisms of exclusion, whether it be race, gender, class, disability, and others, can reinforce and strengthen each other.

Museum

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) maintains the following definition of the museum: 'A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.'[6]

This definition reflects some of the core aspects of museum work, such as caring for collections, organising exhibitions, and engaging with diverse audiences. Moreover, the definition refers to 'inclusion' and fostering 'diversity,' hinting at the increasing role of museums to become socially engaged in the twenty-first century.

Before ICOM's museum definition was accepted by ICOM's membership in 2022, revising the museum definition was a much-debated, arduous process.[7] Although museums have always been contested spaces, the discussion around the definition of the museum reflects anxieties surrounding the relationship between museums, society, and communities. Museums have historically reflected mechanisms of power, and they continue to do so, as they are often financed by governments or private entities with vast financial resources. As the scholar Robert Mills has articulated, echoing established critiques, museums have the traditional role of a repository of the past, underscored by taxonomic concepts such as the archive, the chronology, the category, and the label. Museum curators conventionally aim for coherence, objectivity, clarity, and narrative unity.[8] Going back decades, many artists, curators, and researchers have developed queer critiques of the museum, bringing into question how these taxonomic and conventional tendencies reproduce normative identity categories while silencing queer histories, for instance with respect to masculinity, heteronormativity, and whiteness.[9]

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>
> – ICOM's museum definition

A more extensive overview of such critiques of the museum extends beyond the aim of this guideline. Here, we aim to focus on questions and frictions that emerge in the daily practices of our colleagues working in and around museums in Europe. We hope to reflect a variety of perspectives of museum work, for instance from collections and exhibitions, but also from partnerships and the internal organisational workings of museums. Although this guideline takes the concept of the museum as a point of departure, some of the insights offered here are potentially relevant to exhibition spaces, archives, and other heritage institutions.

Europe

With respect to Europe, this guideline features examples of policies from both the European

level as well as from specific countries, cities, and regions. Europe encompasses neoliberal and post-socialist countries and much diversity in terms of culture, language, and society across its northern, eastern, western, and southern countries. As we will discuss in Chapter 1, LGBTQIA+ rights are being won in many European countries, even though factors such as the rise of political and religious conservatism contribute to an increasingly hostile climate for the LGBTQIA+ community in many parts of Europe. As some museums across Europe turn more and more often towards acquiring queer objects, hosting exhibitions with queer themes, or developing public programmes catering for LGBTQIA+ communities, questions remain as to how the knowledge and experiences gained during such initiatives could lead to transformations of institutional missions and practices in the long-term. For many other museums in Europe, the current tense political climate and public queerphobic anxieties can make initiating engagement with the LGBTQIA+ community a challenge in and of itself. As Bas Hendrikx pointed out in a recent overview of queer European exhibition histories, 'the inclusion and representation of LGBTQIA+ issues remains fragile practice'.[10]

In sum, this ethical guideline does not claim to discuss the topic of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in European museums exhaustively. Mapping out the historical origins and manifold meanings of concepts such as queer or intersectionality, the museum, and Europe extends beyond the scope of the discussion at hand. Instead, we consider this premise a jumping-off point for a diverse and multifaceted discussion in which we provide a range of specific examples from policies and practices at both European and national levels.

Methodology

A literature review is the first layer of research conducted for this guideline. It includes an overview of recent reports and policies developed concerning LGBTQIA+ communities, their rights, and the role of the cultural sector, both at the European and the national level. Also collected were case studies from museums across Europe working on queer collections, exhibitions, and public programmes. Colleagues from different museums across Europe, some of them from NEMO, have shared with us examples of their projects or their reflections.

The second layer consists of interviews with ten museum professionals working on LGBTQIA+ inclusion across Europe. We consider these interviewees experts who, in sharing their experiences and knowledge with us, have helped shape our research. Although we understand that our interviewees do not reflect the full breadth of the topic of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in European museums, we hope that they reflect a range of perspectives by taking into account the variation within the LGBTQIA+ community, institutional affiliations, localities across Europe, and intersectional perspectives. In the relevant chapters, we explain our methodology in greater detail in relation to the specific issues.

Ethical guideline

This guideline has been inspired by Trans-Inclusive Culture, an ethical guideline on trans and queer inclusion in museums and heritage institutions developed in 2023 by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, University of Leicester, United Kingdom.[11] More specifically, this guideline has an aim that is neither theoretical nor practical, but ethical. If theory is about what we know and practice about what we do, ethics is about what we *should* do.[12] As Gary Edson wrote in his definition of museum ethics, ethics provide a set of standards in professional practice that provide the best possible guidance and outcome while causing the minimum of bad consequences.[13] Especially in the context of the paradigm shift towards the socially-engaged, polyphonic museum of the 21st century, ethics provide the opportunity to reflect on what Janet Marstine called the 'contingency' of museum practice: the complexities, contradictions, and constant flux that diverse stakeholders and perspectives bring to institutions.[14] Consequently, this ethical guideline should not be seen as prescriptive. Instead, it should stimulate reflection, discussion, and self-assessment by museum professionals at all levels, informing and enriching museum practice.

Positionality

This research has been the result of collaboration, discussion, and learning. Personal knowledge and lived experience have been essential resources in the process of writing and researching this guideline. Many of those involved in this research identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community and/or have professional experience in and around European museums. In our research process, we have attempted to reflect carefully on our positionality and how factors such as race, gender identity, level of education, and the political environment have undoubtedly influenced it. In other words, in preparing this guideline, we claim a position of power.[15] One recurring question during this research was: who gets to have a platform?

We are aware that this ethical guideline is incomplete: the knowledge and experience shared here could never be an exhaustive representation of the relationship between the LGBTQIA+ community and European museums. Still, we hope that our ethical guideline offers a framework within which further thinking and practice can take place. We have researched and written this guideline for an audience of students and museum professionals across Europe who are willing to foster LGBTQIA+ inclusion in their own museums. Hopefully, the general and multifaceted knowledge and insights shared in the following chapters is applicable to the daily questions our colleagues face in their own cities, regions, and contexts.

This first chapter of this guideline offers an overview of policies relating to LGBTQIA+ inclusion both at European level and in some European countries, especially those that are relevant to professionals working in museums and in the heritage sector. The second consists of eleven scenarios of dilemmas that museum professionals could encounter when fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion in European museums and considers how colleagues might face these dilemmas. The third chapter features a range of ethical standards in relation to LGBTQIA+ inclusion in European museums, focusing on collections, displays, personnel, partnerships, and publics. Following the first and second chapters, we have left blank pages as an invitation to our readers to reflect on their own positions.

European and national policies

This chapter maps out policies concerning the LGBTQIA+ community, both at European level and with case studies from individual European countries.[16] It consists of three sections. The first section offers a cursory overview of the relationship between Europe and LGBTQIA+ rights. Some significant rights and policies will be highlighted, as developed by the European Union and the Council of Europe, such as the European Commission's LGBTIQ Equality Strategy. The second section points out the significance of these policies to the cultural sector and to museums.

The third section zooms in on case studies from six European countries, namely Belgium, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain. For each of these countries, a brief sketch will be provided of the legal context for LGBTQIA+ rights, policies supporting LGBTQIA+ inclusion (if available), and examples of practices as they are taking place in museums.

European LGBTQIA+ policies and rights

In her State of the Union speech in 2020, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, announced her personal support of the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community:

'I will not rest when it comes to building a Union of equality. A Union where you can be who you are and love who you want – without fear of recrimination or discrimination. Because being yourself is not your ideology. It's your identity. And no-one can ever take it away.'[17]

Here, von der Leyen applies some of the core values of the European Union to the notion of 'being who you are' and 'loving who you want,' pointing to the freedom of gender identity and sexual desire.

Von der Leyen's reference to the 'Union of equality' hints at how, according to political scientists Philip Ayoub and David Paternotte, the European continent and the notion of a collective European identity are often conflated with notions of LGBTIQA+ tolerance.[18] The continent of Europe has been an important seedbed for the LGBTQIA+ community's activism, cultural expressions, and political emancipation. For instance, the very term 'homosexual' (in German, 'homosexuell'), was coined in a letter from the Hungarian lawyer Karoly Maria Kertbeny to the German lawyer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in 1864.[19] In the 1960s and 1970s, in the era of the sexual revolution and the 1968 student revolts, much queer activism emerged alongside the first Pride parades, especially in Scandinavia and Western Europe. In the 1990s and 2000s, this shifted towards the establishment of the first civil rights, such as marriage equality, and increased public discourse and visibility. Around the same

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– Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

time, trans rights groups emerged, as well as groups advocating for the rights of LGBTQIA+ people of colour and migrant groups. However, notions, or expressions, of queer identities as criminal acts or pathologies have also emerged in Europe. These continue to influence marginalisation and oppression of LGBTQIA+ communities, not only in Europe, but also in formerly colonised countries around the globe.

Von der Leyen considers questions surrounding gender identity and sexual expression a matter of ‘identity’ and clearly not of ‘ideology.’ This may be understood to point to the conservative and religious anxieties that perceive queer identities as a threat to heteronormative ways of life. Moreover, the continent of Europe is exceptionally heterogeneous in and of itself, with different countries having radically divergent legal and social contexts for LGBTQIA+ rights. Tensions often emerge between the support for LGBTQIA+ inclusion at the European level, as exemplified by von der Leyen’s statement, and the perception of civil rights as a responsibility of member states at the national level. In recent years, the emergence and strengthening of the far-right has complicated this dynamic, creating momentum for politicians to spout homophobic and transphobic language, passing laws limiting LGBTQIA+ rights to freedom of speech and expression, and tolerating hate crimes and hate speech in public and on social media. Religious groups, for instance the Catholic Church, commonly attack LGBTQIA+ communities and their rights, advocating for a return to heteronormative values and family structures.[20]

European international organisations are perceived to be exceptional in their legal and political support for the civil rights of the LGBTQIA+ community. The Treaty of the European Union upholds values such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and respect for human rights, in particular the rights of people belonging to marginalised communities. Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union explicitly prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. This is an example of primary European law that imposes the obligation on the European Union and its member states to combat discrimination.[21] The Council of Europe, an international organisation which upholds the mission to promote the human rights of every individual in Europe, also includes the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community in its mission:

‘Everyone must enjoy the rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights regardless of skin colour, sex, language, political or religious beliefs or origins. The prohibition of discrimination is closely linked to the principle of equality which holds that all people are born and remain free and equal in dignity and rights.’[22]

In 2010, the Council issued a recommendation to its member states to ensure and implement measures that provide ‘effective protection against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics.’[23] In turn, European Union and Council of Europe member states have adopted laws protecting the LGBTQIA+ community to extremely varying degrees, in some cases being unable to produce legislation, and in other cases (partially) covering issues such as equality, family rights, and legal gender recognition.[24]

For the legislative period of 2020–2024, the European Commission, the European body responsible for proposing and reinforcing legislation and implementing policies, has shown commitment to fostering LGBTQIA+ equality. The Commission’s focus has resulted in the launch of the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy for the period of 2020–2025. The *Strategy’s* aim is to map out some of the inequalities and challenges facing the LGBTQIA+ community in their civil rights and in society, which need to be addressed in order to move towards the ‘Union of Equality.’ The *Strategy* serves as an aid to mainstream concerns into European policies, legislation, and funding programmes, bringing together European Union member states, independent actors, and the LGBTQIA+ community across Europe.

In other words, the *Equality Strategy* serves as an instrument for legislation and policies to be implemented within the legislative period. It is important to emphasise that the *Equality Strategy* is non-binding. However, this policy document holds tremendous symbolic value, being the first and most substantial commitment the Commission has ever made with respect to LGBTQIA+ rights and policies. Following the 2024 European elections, it remains unclear at the time of writing in what capacity the *Equality Strategy* will be continued.[25]

The *Equality Strategy* identifies four general principles by which the LGBTQIA+ community can be supported from the perspective of policies and legislation:

- Tackling discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people.
- Ensuring LGBTQIA+ people’s safety.
- Building LGBTQIA+ inclusive societies.
- Leading the call for LGBTQIA+ equality around the world.

Museums and European policies

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed in 1948, states that: 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.'[26] In other words, enjoying and participating in culture is a human right to which anyone should have access. More recently, the European Union and the Council of Europe have played a significant role in safeguarding and enhancing Europe's cultural heritage through a number of policies and programmes. One example is the Faro Convention, a Council of Europe treaty signed in 2005 and ratified by many Council of Europe member states. The Faro Convention recognises that:

'Objects and places are not, in themselves, what is important about cultural heritage. Instead, they are important because of what people attach to them, the values they represent, and the way in which these can be understood and transmitted to other people.'[27]

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that citizens have the right to be audience members of cultural heritage and artistic expressions. Crucially, the Faro Convention shifts its emphasis towards a model of cultural democracy. In this model, culture is not seen as something to be shared top-down, by the state, but bottom-up. Citizens are acknowledged as audiences, but also as actors and creators of culture.[28]

It should go without saying that museums are important. As public institutions, they have a great responsibility to reflect and/or influence what histories should be remembered and what values should be upheld within a community or society. Within this model of cultural democracy, the responsibilities that museums carry have shifted. This aim is reflected by the aforementioned revised ICOM museum definition and its reference to the role of museums to 'foster diversity.' Museums should go beyond representing certain stories or perspectives in their exhibitions or events. Instead, they should become 'safe' places where culture can be practised while giving voice to divergent points of view, for instance from marginalised communities. This should extend to each and every aspect of the practices of the museum: its leadership, mission statement, collection practices, organisational culture, and audience engagements. The success of a museum in this field hinges on their ability to integrate notions of inclusion from their policies into their institutional fabric.[29]

Museums and communities

The *Equality Strategy* is specifically relevant to museums in two respects. Firstly, the policy indirectly points to museums and their cultural role as institutions within society. The *Equality Strategy* acknowledges that the LGBTQIA+ community suffers disproportionately from hate crime, discrimination, and abuse, and documents the European Commission's dedication to strengthening the legal framework at the European and national levels to protect the community. The *Strategy* touches upon the notion that representations of marginalised communities can play a significant role in combating negative sentiments in public discourse:

'The media, cultural and sport sectors are powerful tools changing attitudes and challenging gender biases and other stereotypes. The Commission will support projects that use cultural expression to tackle discrimination, build trust and acceptance, and promote the full inclusion of LGBTIQ people.'[30]

Although not explicitly mentioned, museums are certainly included here. The Commission's support for projects promoting the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ communities can be understood as a symbolic form of support, but it also refers to funding programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, which support projects that combat discrimination of LGBTQIA+ communities. Other funding programmes at European level that more specifically cater towards museums and the cultural sector are not explicitly mentioned in this policy.[31] An example is the New European Bauhaus, a policy and funding initiative launched by the European Commission in 2021. New European Bauhaus supports initiatives that transform the built environment and lifestyles in ways that are beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive, encouraging a dialogue across cultures, disciplines, genders, and ages.

Museums as employers

The second respect in which the *Equality Strategy* is relevant to museums relates to the role of museums as employers. The *Equality Strategy* acknowledges that LGBTQIA+ inclusion needs to be fostered in the European labour market and in the workplace. Although the *Equality Strategy* makes no explicit mention of museums in this section, once again, they are undoubtedly included.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has published reports, most recently in 2024, that offer an overview of the extent to

"The media, cultural and sport sectors are powerful tools changing attitudes and challenging gender biases and other stereotypes. The Commission will support projects that use cultural expression to tackle discrimination, build trust and acceptance, and promote the full inclusion of LGBTIQ people."

– European Commissions' LBGTIQ Equality Strategy

which the legal framework for LGBTQIA+ people in Europe has had an effect on their lives and experiences. In their 2024 report, they conclude that '[a] fragile equality hangs in the balance.' For their research, they have conducted interviews with 100,577 respondents who identify as LGBTIQ and live in 30 countries. 36% of them mentioned that they faced discrimination, with 19% explicitly referring to their employment situations.[32]

The *Equality Strategy*, observing data such as those collected by the FRA, presents two arguments for fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the workplace.[33] The first is the equal opportunity argument. No employer is permitted to discriminate against any person on the basis of their gender or sexual identity. More specifically, the choices that employers make in hiring people and the professional environments they create can have a tremendous impact on the experiences of marginalised communities. They can contribute to an equal playing field for LGBTQIA+ colleagues within the organisations that hire members of these communities and in the labour market at large. The second argument mentioned in the *Equality Strategy* is the business argument. The *Equality Strategy* refers to the fact that a diversity of perspectives present within an organisation can provide novel insights and stimulate innovation within the organisation itself as well as the broader sector. In relation to museums, one might imagine that hiring LGBTQIA+ colleagues can offer novel insights into collections, bring in innovative themes for exhibitions, or aid in developing projects that bring in communities who have not been brought in before.

The *Equality Strategy* proposes several strategies through which LGBTQIA+ inclusion can be fostered in the professional context in Europe. The European Commission promotes diversity through the European Platform of Diversity Charters. Its signatories have developed LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies, maintained LGBTQIA+ employee resource groups, and organised internal workshops briefing colleagues on LGBTQIA+ issues. The Council of Europe has commissioned a report, *Diversity in the Workplace* (2021), which features further recommendations to public and private employers for fostering an inclusive workplace for LGBTQIA+ communities.[34]

National policies

This section offers more focused perspectives on policies and practices concerning LGBTQIA+ inclusion in European countries. In our research process, we have collected examples of policies and practices from many European countries, ranging from Finland's Leikki – The Museum of Play in Espoo, which organises rainbow painting sessions with children, to Serbia's Gallery of Matica Srpska in Novi Sad, which develops exhibitions on queer women in interwar Serbia.[35] This section focuses on six different European countries: Belgium, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain. We hope that these countries reflect different parts of Europe (north, west, south and east), different political contexts, and varying museum cultures. For each country, we have added examples of professional networks, exhibitions, public programmes, and other initiatives that have been brought to our attention by our partners in the research process.

We have also consulted ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map. ILGA-Europe is a non-profit organisation, supported by the European Commission. For its Rainbow Map, ILGA-Europe monitors civil rights for the LGBTQIA+ community, for instance regarding family support, bodily autonomy, and freedom of expression, delivering a percentage for each European country and a ranking of all countries.

Belgium

On ILGA-Europe's 2024 Rainbow Map, Belgium is in 3rd place with a ranking of 78%. This marks Belgium as one of the countries with the most robust legal framework and open-minded civil societies for LGBTQIA+ communities across Europe. Belgium has significant means of legal protection: for example, marriage equality was legalised in Belgium as early as 2003. Still, some recent developments at the local level are indicative of growing conservatism, as LGBTQIA+ events have come under fire or have lost financial support. Yet ILGA-Europe recommends some significant improvements for the legal protection of LGBTQIA+ communities in Belgium, such as the availability of legal gender recognition for all individuals regardless of their age.

For the period 2024–2028, the Flanders Ministry for Culture, Health and Sports, has indicated inclusion as one of the aspects which the cultural sector should develop further. Although gender identity and sexual diversity are not mentioned specifically, this offers an incentive for many Flemish museums to reflect on how to become inclusive institutions, marking a shift in policies over the last 10 years.[36] Some cities have developed their own policies tailored more directly to the LGBTQIA+ community. One example is the city of Ghent, which offers funding for LGBTQIA+ themed NGOs, has committed to opening all-gender public bathrooms, and maintains the Rainbow Network to foster dialogue amongst Ghent's civic institutions, universities, and communities.[37]

Since some of Ghent's museums are municipal organisations, they are directly affected by these policies. One example is Ghent's Museum of Fine Arts, which houses a historical collection of art from the late mediaeval era up to the 20th century. As of 2022, the museum offers queer tours, that is guided tours to children, students, and wider audiences that spotlight queer artists and stories throughout its collection displays. At present, the museum is preparing *Queer Belgian Art*, a major exhibition offering an overview of queer perspectives on Belgian art history from the early modern period up to the 20th century.[38] Another Belgian organisation that aims to promote LGBTQIA+ inclusion in Belgian museums is the Brussels Museums Association, a non-profit organisation with which most museums in Brussels are connected. The association is responsible for organising flagship events such as Museum Night Fever. Through issuing open calls, the association seeks to collaborate with LGBTQIA+ communities in Brussels. Moreover, Brussels Museums asks its partners to sign an inclusive language charter, which features guidelines for inclusive vacancy writings and communicative ethics in French, Dutch, and English. The association also organises

workshops and presentations to guide museums in their language use and other inclusive practices.

Estonia

In ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map, Estonia is in 21st place with a ranking of 46%. This signals a context where some significant legal frameworks exist, but major uncertainties remain. Civil rights for the LGBTQIA+ community in Estonia are expanding; marriage equality, for example, was legalised in 2023. However, in part arguably due to the country's history of occupation by the Soviet Union and its proximity to Russia, far-right wing homophobia and transphobia remain ever-present. ILGA-Europe highlights the urgency for Estonia to adopt and implement effective hate crime and speech laws that cover bias-motivated crime and speech based on LGBTQIA+ identities.

Despite these uncertainties, LGBTQIA+ representation is ever-growing in the Estonian museum sector, aligned with developments in civic discourse and political momentum. Estonia has few policies that relate to diversity and inclusion in the cultural sector. Most initiatives come from the communities themselves and from professionals who initiate projects based on their personal motivations, expertise, and networks.

In 2011, Tallinn Art Hall hosted an exhibition entitled *Untold Stories,* the first ever international group exhibition dedicated to the issues of sexual minorities and presenting queer art in Estonia.[39] At the 2015 Venice Biennale, the Estonian pavilion featured the exhibition *Not Suitable for Work: A Chairman's Tale*, curated by the Estonian artist Jaanus Samma. This exhibition offered a micro-historical account, based on archival materials, of an Estonian man during Soviet occupation, whose career and life were destroyed because of a court case against his homosexual activity in the 1960s.[40] The exhibition eventually moved to the Vabamu Museum of Occupations and Freedom in Tallinn, which holds a collection of historical objects and memorabilia from the era of Soviet occupation in Estonia, from World War II until the early 1990s. The opening of the exhibition in Tallinn was met with demonstrations, potentially reflecting pro-Soviet or neo-Nazi sentiments.[41] Vabamu has since continued to pursue LGBTQIA+ inclusion in its exhibitions and public projects, for instance through an audio tour spotlighting stories from queer and trans people living in Estonia in the 20th century in its collection displays.[42]

Hungary

Hungary is in 29th place in ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map with a ranking of 33%. This indicates that among European countries, Hungary has one of the most severe political climates for LGBTQIA+ inclusion. The LGBTQIA+ community in Hungary is supported by very few civil rights, as reflected in Hungary having no marriage equality. One particular recent turning point is the so-called Child Protection Act, which bans the exposure of students under 18 to images and media that are perceived to promote same-sex expression and diverse gender identities.[43] In response, ILGA-Europe has recommended the removal of obstacles to the effective exercise of freedom of expression at national and local levels as well as the removal of legislation censoring communication about LGBTQIA+ people in Hungary.

Exhibitions and projects surrounding LGBTQIA+ inclusion are currently very rare in Hungarian museums. Some of the experts to whom we have spoken have observed how the national government and the Church have increasingly forced themselves on Hungarian institutions such as museums, gradually coercing their employees into cultures of self-censorship. One widely-reported controversy concerned the display of Hannah Reyes Morales' photograph series, *Home for the Golden Gays* (2023), which depicted elderly queer people in a community in the Philippines at the World Press Photo exhibition at the National Museum in Budapest in 2023.[44] The display sparked a far-right-wing backlash, ultimately culminating in the National Museum's director being dismissed from his position. While some exhibitions in Hungarian museums feature queer artists but completely obscure the matter of their identity, other museums resort to highly implicit ways of introducing queer perspectives so much so that they become almost impossible for wider audiences to perceive.[45]

Still, major differences may be observed depending on the financial situations of museums and their environments. Museums funded by Hungary's national government have a different climate from those that are supported by Budapest's city council, for example. In other parts of the cultural sector such as the film sector, discourse surrounding LGBTQIA+ representation remains vivid and impactful. Moreover, the Roma LGBTQIA+ community continues to raise their voice, underscoring the significance of intersectional representation.[46] One example is RomaMoMA, a contemporary art project supported by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) and OFF-Biennale Budapest. RomaMoMA is involved in exhibitions, film screenings, workshops, and other initiatives in Hungary and across Europe. These provide spaces to reflect on, and discuss, many questions, including what a contemporary art museum representing Roma communities could, or should, look like. One recent example of this initiative took shape at documenta 15 in Kassel, Germany, in 2022.

Italy

Italy is in 35th place on ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map with a 25% ranking. This indicates that Italy offers one of Europe's least open legal and societal frameworks for LGBTQIA+ inclusion. In Italy, queer communities enjoy relatively few civil rights: marriage for all, for instance, has not been legalised yet. Although Italy has no law explicitly limiting queer expressions in media, ILGA-Europe observes that hate speech in politics and in the public sphere continue to be a serious issue. Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has explicitly denounced the LGBTQIA+ community, rejecting what she refers to as the 'LGBT lobby' and 'gender ideology.'

There are only a few policies supporting LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the Italian heritage sector, and few museums pursue projects for, or with, this community. Some of our correspondents have shared their perception that queer topics are still perceived as sensitive or controversial.

The projects that exist emerged out of museological interest and as grassroots initiatives of colleagues with an inherent, personal wish to pursue projects regarding inclusion. ICOM Italy has an active working group on Gender and LGBTQIA+ Rights, coordinated by Nicole Moolhuijsen, which organises conferences and has launched a bibliography featuring resources on queering museums in Italy.[47] An Italian translation of *Trans-Inclusive Culture*, edited by members of this working group, is forthcoming. Queering Rome offers walkabouts to reflect on Rome's heritage from a queer perspective. These grassroots initiatives influence major institutions. In cities such as Milan and Bologna, museums proactively counter political trends by pursuing LGBTQIA+ inclusion. In the south of Italy, in cities such as Rome, conservatism in museums and cultural institutions may still be observed. Some Italian museums have supplied digitised versions of their collections to Europeana, Europe's digital heritage repository. Europeana recently opened a virtual queer tour of its own collections, featuring examples of film, art, and images from Italian collections with connections to queer individuals and queer histories.

The Netherlands

On ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map, the Netherlands are in 13th place with a ranking of 59%. This signals a decent support of human rights and public support for the LGBTQIA+ community, although not one of the most open or progressive. The Netherlands have historically been perceived as tolerant towards the LGBTQIA+ community, exemplified by this country being the first to legalise marriage equality in 2001. Recent years have seen a stagnation of this development due to the rise of far-right-wing politics entangled with increased negative public sentiment. ILGA-Europe observes increased hate speech in the Dutch context, for instance on social media, and recommends introducing policies tackling hatred against the LGBTQIA+ community.

Questions surrounding LGBTQIA+ inclusion and representation have been the subject of a widespread discourse and have sparked many initiatives in the Dutch museum and heritage sector. One specific policy instrument is the *Diversity and Inclusion Code* (2019). The *Diversity and Inclusion Code* is a non-binding tool for self-regulation intended for the cultural sector in the Netherlands. The aim of this *Code* is to offer working definitions of concepts such as diversity and inclusion and a roadmap for cultural organisations to grow as institutions. Notably, the *Code* refers explicitly to gender and sexual preference as axes of marginalisation to which cultural institutions must be attentive. The *Code* identifies four major areas in which organisations should become inclusive: their programming, their personnel, their partnerships, and their publics.

IHLIA, Europe's largest archive dedicated to LGBTI heritage, is based in Amsterdam. A sample project is The Critical Visitor (2020–2025), funded by NWO, the Dutch Research Council. It consists of a consortium of academic partners, such as Maastricht University and the Reinwardt Academy, and museums and heritage institutions such as the Van Abbemuseum and the Amsterdam Museum. The aim of *The Critical Visitor* is to dismantle structures of exclusion and promote inclusive daily practices within the heritage sector. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands' largest museum and collection dedicated to Dutch art and history, is one example of a museum fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Women of the Rijksmuseum is the museum's internal network, committed to researching and exhibiting objects related to the history of gender from the museum's collection. In the summer of 2024, the museum shows the exhibition Point of View, offering gender-inclusive perspectives on the museum's art, fashion and material culture collection from the early modern period up to the present day. The Rijksmuseum also offers LGBTQIA+ themed tours of its collection displays and has revised problematic terminology in their collection registration.[48]

Spain

Spain is in 4th place on ILGA-Europe's Rainbow map with a ranking of 76%. This indicates that Spain has one of the strongest legal frameworks for the LGBTQIA+ community across Europe. One example is that Spain legalised marriage equality as early as 2005. More significant is the recent passing of the so-called Trans Act in 2023, which aims to eradicate discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community and creates a safe framework for gender affirmation procedures based on self-identification. While the Trans Act was praised by organisations such as the Council of Europe, conservative political parties such as Vox or groups related to the Catholic Church remain outspoken in their discrimination of the trans and queer communities in Spain. ILGA-Europe recommends that Spain introduces further hate speech laws and policies to tackle this continued discrimination.

The Trans Act extends to employers, who are now legally obliged to develop protocols for LGBTQIA+ inclusion and to commit to making their professional spaces safe. This endows museums in Spain, as public institutions, with the responsibility to foster inclusion themselves. For instance, the Museum of the Americas (Museo de América) in Madrid has organised networking gatherings where professionals can reflect on personal and professional experiences in fostering inclusion, stimulating collaboration and engagement.

The Museum of the Americas was founded after the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) under the fascist dictatorship of General Franco to commemorate the missionary and colonialist conquest of the American continent by Spain. From the 1980s onwards, the museum has overhauled its strategies to reflect critically on its racist and colonialist past. LGBTQIA+ inclusion has become a main tenet of their programme. In 2017, they organised the major exhibition and public programme TRANS*: Diverse Identities and Gender Roles. During Madrid Pride in 2024, they organised guided tours to spotlight gender and sexual diversity in Indigenous cultures in their collection displays. The Museum of Anthropology, Madrid, has also spent the last few years focusing their exhibitions and public programmes on LGBTQIA+ inclusion. One example is their Migration and Culture programme linked to Pride Madrid in 2024, which included Halal, an Arab queer party featuring poetry readings, singing, music, and dance, among many other parties, discussion events, and exhibitions. Beyond Madrid, the National Museum of Roman Art in Mérida has developed *The Otherness in Antiquity*, a tour offering queer histories and readings of some Roman sculpture and archaeological remains in the museum's permanent collection displays.

Help us build a more inclusive resource

We want to hear from you!

→ In which country are you located?

→ What policies have you followed in your work to foster LGBTQIA+ inclusion?

→ Is there inclusive legislation in your region or country, relevant to museums, that you would like to share?

Our ‘incomplete guide’ becomes more complete with every submission you share! Your answers will be added to our webpage and will contribute to this growing resource for our museum community.

Submit your information

Explore our growing resource on NEMO’s diversity and inclusion webpage.

Scenarios

This chapter consists of eleven scenarios, ten of which start with a dilemma that museum professionals in Europe might face when fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Each dilemma is followed by advice on how to navigate a given situation and which ethical principles to keep in mind. The dilemmas reflect varying aspects of museum practice: from research, working with collections, and displaying objects to developing relationships with queer communities and responding to criticism.

To prepare these scenarios, interviews were conducted with museum professionals across Europe from June to August 2024. Seven of them were in-person, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, while three were conducted by e-mail. Other colleagues have offered us their personal reflections by e-mail and/or have shared examples of their ongoing practices. Our colleagues shared with us a variety of lived experiences from different positions within the LGBTQIA+ community and different political climates regarding inclusion across northern, western, southern and eastern Europe. Although we started by finding interviewees in our own professional networks, we eventually used a 'snowball method,' asking them to forward us to other colleagues whose voices should be heard. We have strived to connect with interviewees who occupy varying positions of power with respect to the museum, among them are a freelancer, a researcher, an artist, but also curators, a public programme coordinator and one (former) museum director. Our semi-structured interviews focused on questions such as: what dilemmas have you faced in your practice fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion? How have you navigated these dilemmas? And what recommendations would you bring to your colleagues?

In composing the scenarios, we have attempted to focus on the issues that resonated most with our interviewees and their lived experiences. The resulting scenarios are personal in tone, but not personalised. None of the following scenarios is meant to reflect specific events, institutional contexts, or individuals. Neither are these scenarios intended to offer an exhaustive overview of the potential dilemmas museum professionals might face when fostering inclusion. Trans-Inclusive Culture features a compatible set of scenarios with guidance specifically tailored to the cultural sector and the existing legal framework in the United Kingdom.[49]

Instead, we hope to address some of the frictions and conflicts of interest that may occur in our work in, and for, museums. How should we navigate them? How can we work through them towards a queer museum? One might consider these scenarios like a quilt: consisting of multiple layers of fibre or fabric; the tapestries, when woven together, create a whole. We hope that the combined knowledge and experiences brought to us by our participants shape a kaleidoscopic perspective of their practices. In other words, we hope these scenarios offer inspiration, stimulate critical reflection, and offer empowerment to all who wish to fosterLGBTQIA+ inclusion in European museums. In the scenarios, we have highlighted the insights and recommendations we consider to be the key takeaways of each scenario.

1. Initiating our research into queer histories in our collection

Our museum has a collection of historical objects. We are interested in developing an exhibition project offering queer perspectives on our collection. One colleague responded to our search by telling us that our collection has no queer objects. How can we respond to this colleague? How can we begin our research?

Research is a valuable first step to understand how your collection relates to the history of the LGBTQIA+ community in your city, region, or country. Throughout many different cultures across the world at many different moments in history, varieties in terms of gender expression and sexual identity have existed and manifested themselves. There are queer stories and queer lives waiting to be unlocked in any museum collection. The interviewees for this research have collected examples not just from art collections or historical collections, but also from ethnographic museums, natural history museums, and collections of children's toys.

Be prepared for the fact that your research will take up much of your time and energy. You will have to browse many libraries, look through archives and spend much time trying to find things you feel are not even there. Perhaps you might already find clues to certain queer objects or stories because of terminology in your collection registration. Prepare yourself for the surprise of an unexpected encounter with a written source, an undocumented photograph, or an article from a newspaper giving you a clue as to the context of one queer person's life.

In your research, your connections are crucial. Much history and knowledge, especially when it comes to the histories of marginalised communities, is handed over from one person to another. Get in touch with the right people and see where they might take you. An impulsive cup of coffee on a weekday might help you get in touch with an important local collector or give you crucial information about significant queer people who have meant a lot to your community. Do not hesitate to reach out to professional researchers, for instance those connected to your local university, to seek guidance or advice. Consider collaborating with queer grassroots archives, NGOs or activist groups. (For more guidance on collaborating with queer communities, see Scenario 7.)

Researching queer lives, peoples, and cultures from the past is a tricky balancing act. Remembering the lives that our community has lived in the past helps us understand who we are and where we are today. Even finding these lives can already be a challenge. If you do, you need to be careful in considering how you understand them and their choices. People who are no longer with us can no longer advocate for themselves. They may have been trapped in cultural or social norms that existed at a certain point in time at a particular place. Then again, not remembering them and not identifying them as our ancestors risks erasing them and rendering them invisible once again.

2. Identifying an image as queer

We are conducting research into our collections for the purpose of an exhibition considering queer histories. We have found an image showing two bodies in an intimate relation. We cannot identify their gender so we are unsure how to interpret this image. Could we consider this a queer image? Should we include this in our exhibition?

When is an image queer? **By their very nature, many queer lives and objects resist clear definition.** Many of those who came before us have been trapped in norms and values of a specific era at a particular place or have resorted to intimate or covert means of expressing their identities and desires. If any sources exist that describe them, these might only refer to them in indirect ways. Objects or images can reflect the lives lived by queer people, for instance by depicting them in certain clothing or with certain accessories that point to their subversion of gender norms in the era in which they lived. In other cases, objects have become queer by virtue of the values that beholders have attributed to them. Think of a queer collector with a preference for a certain painting or a writer who describes an object from their own perspective. Curators and writers, in developing exhibitions and research projects into

Pride & Paintings 2023 © Museum of Fine Arts Ghent, Martin Corlazzoli.

queer histories in Europe, have already grappled with these questions.[50]

Many of the interviewees who participated in this research have spoken about the consequential challenge of even knowing when an object might become relevant to a queer exhibition. If a painter, who lived hundreds of years ago, consistently focused on painting male nudes, should we imagine he was sexually attracted to the same gender? If two people who identified as the same gender exchanged letters of an intimate nature, may we presume they were lovers? If secondary sources refer to a person's desire to change their gender, might we consider them trans or non-binary?

You seem to have looked closely at the image itself already, which is important. Go further – try to understand the network and context in which the image was made and seen. **Have you identified who made the image? Who were they? How did they live their lives? Which people were in their networks?** You can also research the life of the image: who owned it before it entered your collections?

You do not need clear answers to all these questions before you decide to exhibit this image. The American exhibition designer and museum consultant Margaret Middleton has argued for the 'queer possibility' in exhibition displays, using contemporary language and/or connections to contemporary queer culture to spotlight queer histories in museums. 'When weighing the risk of accidental queering against queer erasure,' Middleton argues, 'it is more just to err on the side of queerness.'[51] You might consider inviting a contemporary artist to create their own work, and develop their own response, to this image. Collaborate closely with your (queer) colleagues, for instance from your education department, to develop guided tours to reflect on these issues with your audiences. Be transparent about what questions have arisen in your research and what insights and experiences contemporary queer communities have shared with you.

3. Revising potentially offensive terminology in our collection registration

We are revising our museum's collection registration from the perspective of LGBTQIA+ inclusion. We have encountered an object from the past that displays queer people. In our registration, terminology is linked to this object that is considered offensive by contemporary audiences. How should we update our collection registration?

Museums wish to categorise objects: their registrations often require knowledge of when an object was made, by whom, of what materials, and who owned it. This desire often conflicts with the indirectness by which queer people have lived their lives throughout history and how often objects or images can reflect their identities in multifaceted ways.

Terminology is one way in which this tension manifests itself. Offensive, antiquated, or problematic words have often been used throughout history to describe members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and they remain present in many archives and museum collections. **Yet language is constantly changing, and researchers, activists, and curators might all have divergent stakes and expectations with respect to how terminology should be updated.** Should we remove words that are considered offensive, or should we leave them in place?

Some of the interviewees who have participated in this research have mentioned the question of traceability as a matter of concern. Historians and other users of your registration systems might be dependent on problematic terminology to find potentially queer objects or descriptions of queer people from the (not so distant) past. For example, if you are searching historical collections for representations or resources depicting or describing intersex people, search terms such as intersex or queer are far less likely to yield results than antiquated and offensive terms. Erasing this kind of terminology or metadata could make the objects even more difficult to find, putting them at risk of becoming invisible once again.

Your choices should be highly context-dependent: you might find that some terminology is problematic, but can still be used, depending on who is using it. If you are developing new terminology, your aim should be to find words that avoid strictly identifying people but still offer help to users of your registration system to explore and find potential queer themes in your collections. **You could include trigger warnings to indicate what kind of language is considered offensive today and should not be used proactively.** Consult a resource such as *Words Matter* to help you reflect on your choice to use old terminology or develop new terms.[52]

You should also consider if there are people alive whose stories are represented in your collection. How do they identify themselves? And how do they wish to see themselves remembered? Involve them actively in your process of revising your terminology and redeveloping your collection registration process. If your collection registration may be accessed publicly, you should consider whether publishing personal information is in conflict with European laws, such as the General Data Protection Regulation.[53] Get inspired by European projects such as DE-BIAS, which has collaborated with various communities to develop a tool to detect problematic metadata related to queer and colonial histories in the Europeana collection.[54]

Working with collection registrations requires concentration and patience. Your museum and your leadership should offer you time and resources to consider how your registration systems are structured, what problems need to be addressed, and how they might be resolved. Your choices should be part of a coherent collection policy and reflect your museum's long-term mission with respect to diversity and inclusion. If you lack the relevant expertise, you might consider collaborating with a (freelance) expert who would provide you with specific knowledge and advice regarding terminology and its sensitivities.

4. Displaying images of queer people from the past

We are seeking to add an object to our collection display that features an image of a person from the past who lived by gendered standards different to the one assigned to them at birth. We only have access to historical news items and resources addressing this person's transition. We wish to display and describe this object responsibly and carefully. What aspects should we take into consideration?

Images and documents that offer us insights into the historical lives of the queer community, especially from trans communities, should be highly treasured and valued. **In considering whether, and how, you should display this image, you need to reflect carefully on the historical conditions under which this image and these documents were created, and how these relate to the trans communities in the context in which you are working.**

Firstly, you should study the image itself, on a case-by-case basis. Who was displayed here? In what ways? Who created this image, and for which intended audience? Many representations of queer people from the past were evidently crafted by, and for, a heteronormative, cisgender gaze. Some of these images reflect an intention to show the community in a genuine, nuanced light. Other images reproduce harmful stereotypes or problematic tropes with which present-day communities should no longer be associated. In the most extreme situations, historical resources reproduce a kind of violence, actively intending to harm the community and its image in the public realm.

Representation is crucial, especially for queer and trans audiences. However, you should be very cautious not to expose queer and trans communities visiting your museum to violent depictions of those who came before them, at the risk of reproducing this historical violence. Careful means of curation, for instance with the aid of a disclaimer or a trigger warning, can provide a middle ground.

United Student Front (Egységes Diákfront), Dear under 18s: This is what you are not allowed to see, 2024. Photograph by Claudia Andujar. Created by Nina Zádor.

Joyful and affirmative representations of queer and trans communities can have a significant impact on your visitors. Do not hesitate to seek advice or help. Perhaps a trans or queer exhibition designer or artist can bring the insights and sensitivities needed to curate this image ethically.

Secondly, your description has to consider carefully how you describe the person in the image. Obviously, they can no longer speak for themselves, and the kinds of historical sources you have collected often tend to speak *about* someone instead of letting them speak. **Try to imagine: how do you think this person would have liked to be remembered?** Concepts and language to describe queer communities and gender fluidity have changed throughout history in many different cultural and social contexts. Even now, words carry divergent meanings depending on whether you ask historians, theorists, or activists. Directly labelling someone – e.g. 'This person was transgender' – risks sidestepping these complexities. At the same time, not mentioning someone's identity or avoiding making the right connections risks either erasing the communities' historical roots or, worse, contributing to their continued erasure. Some of the interviewees who have participated in this research have developed careful ways of navigating these discussions, imagining in one case that if the person in question had lived today, they might have seen themselves as queer or transgender. Again, do not hesitate to seek advice or help if you are unsure, and do not let questions like the ones posed above discourage you from fostering trans and queer representation in your exhibitions. *Trans-Inclusive Culture* offers more insights on the ethics of displaying and representing trans people in spaces such as museums.[55]

5. Raising awareness among our colleagues of the importance of LGBTQIA+ inclusion

In a recent meeting, we have pitched to include an object related to queer activism in our museum's collection display. Our suggestion was met with resistance by our colleagues, who rejected the notion of displaying LGBTQIA+ related objects in our museum's collection display. This incident has raised concern among us, a small group of queer employees, that our colleagues lack awareness of the significance of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in our museum. What steps can our museum take to foster an inclusive professional atmosphere?

Fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion in your museum should not only be about curating exhibitions, managing public programmes, or conducting research. Your museum's internal organisational culture is inseparable from your museum's initiatives to represent the LGBTQIA+ community. In other words, the front-of-house staff and the back-of-house staff are inseparably linked. Although your colleagues should be lucky to have you, only hiring a small group of queer colleagues does not ensure that the organisation becomes inclusive. This depends on many other factors,

such as a clear and distinct institutional mission, organisational policies that explicitly address LGBTQIA+ inclusion, daily interactions between colleagues, and facilities such as all-gender bathrooms.

Your colleagues' rejection of the display of this object would make a great occasion for a workshop, where the object's history and your thought process behind its display can be explained. In this workshop, your colleagues could share their feelings but also reflect on their own positionality. Such workshops could also be used to brief colleagues on topics such as pronoun usage, gender neutral bathrooms, and safety protocols. The aim of workshops such as this one should be that the significance of LGBTQIA+ inclusion is supported by your colleagues. We strongly recommend collaborating with a freelance professional who has lived experience to guide this potentially sensitive process.

One might imagine that you have faced these kinds of questions repeatedly in your work for this museum. Some museums have developed LGBTQIA+ employee resource groups (ERGs) as platforms for queer colleagues to reflect on their experiences. ERGs can be informal networks for queer colleagues, especially in larger organisations, to make informal connections with each other. In other cases, ERGs are more professionalised. Its members reflect more extensively on bottlenecks in the organisation's policies and practices, turning them into recommendations for management and leadership. The colleagues that decide to join ERGs should receive fair and equitable compensation for their efforts in addition to work they already deliver for the museum.

Moreover, your museum should have a neutral, professional confidential counsellor to whom you could report more urgent situations.

In the end, the responsibility for fostering an inclusive environment in your museum should not lie with you or your queer colleagues, but with your leadership. LGBTQIA+ inclusion should be a clear part of your museum's mission statement. Your leadership should make this commitment clear to your colleagues, for instance through internal communications and to external constituents. Small symbols or gestures can set the tone, such as introducing one's pronouns at a meeting. **If inclusion is a part of your institution's mission, your leadership and your colleagues should be expected to stick to these values.** Consult resources such as the report *Diversity in the Workplace* (2021), commissioned by the Council of Europe, which offer recommendations for public organisations to foster LGBTQIA+ inclusive professional environments.[56]

6. Defending queer exhibitions in a hostile political climate

We have recently displayed an object depicting queer people in our museum. In our country, a far-right-wing government has implemented laws prohibiting minors from being exposed to content that is perceived to relate to the LGBTQIA+ community. In response to this law, a politician has publicly denounced our exhibition. How can we offer resistance?

ICOM's most recent museum definition from 2022 states clearly that museums 'foster diversity,' and they are 'open to the public, accessible, inclusive.' This definition is one indication of the significant role that museums can play in sustaining an open, democratic culture and offering platforms for the positive representation of marginalised communities. Unfortunately, across Europe, far-right-wing political parties and religious entities increasingly contribute to a climate which enables open hostility, hate speech, and violence against the LGBTQIA+ community. With this in mind, we should not forget that museums also are political institutions, in the sense that financially, many of them are partially, if not completely dependent on funding from national or local governments, especially in Europe. This can create dynamics in which museums become gradually less autonomous as political interference in their organisations and projects intensifies.

In a political and cultural climate such as the one you describe, the LGBTQIA+ community benefits greatly from being represented and supported, especially from within museums. Understandably, you might prefer using more implicit or indirect strategies to avoid making the community vulnerable. At the same time, fear of controversy or backlash can stop you from following what you believe in. You cannot predict what will become controversial, but you should be prepared for controversy. Some of our interviewees have referred to the challenge of developing covert critique that fosters diversity, as per ICOM's terminology, without becoming too subversive of the limitations imposed on them by political and potentially legal frameworks.

Stay guided by your own principles and moral frameworks and continue exhibiting LGBTQIA+ related objects, tell their stories and connect to these communities. This might be an opportunity to honour people in your exhibitions or public programmes who have endured social climates in which an expression of their queer identity may not have been readily accepted. They might have resorted to implicit ways of expressing themselves. Stay in touch with the communities whose work you are researching or curating. How would they like to be represented? In your writing and curatorial work, you can try to make the right connections in such a way that people who wish to see them will understand, while those who do not wish to see them will not.

You can also make a difference in your professional conduct. Discuss the daily dilemmas you face with your colleagues. Try to organise meetings, potentially at a large scale as a means of civil disobedience. These meetings have the greatest potential of making an impact if they are held publicly and are accessible to outside visitors. **Stay in touch with the communities that are the most vulnerable. What are their needs and expectations?** Reach out to your international colleagues who might voice their support of your practice or who might help you in reflecting on your situation. The Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO), for example, organises webinars and conferences to create a discourse

around such complex and sensitive topics.

Human rights such as those against discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation or those protecting free speech are encoded in some of the European Union's fundamental statutes. These values should be implemented in the laws and policies that apply in specific European member states. Policy documents such as the European Commission's *LGBTIQ Equality Strategy* underscore the significance of museums in fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion and creating inclusive professional environments. **These, hopefully, will remind you that your work is protected, valued and supported.**

7. Working ethically with, and for, LGBTQIA+ communities

We are interested in pursuing a collaboration with local LGBTQIA+ communities. We wish to proceed sensitively: we want to empower this community and avoid exploiting them. How do we proceed ethically?

Before you approach the communities that you wish to work with, you should reflect carefully on your own positionality. Which potential LGBTQIA+ related themes and topics for projects emerge from the history of your museum and collection? How inclusive is your museum's professional environment? Which communities are already involved in your museum, and which ones should be? What is the mission of your institution, and what are your long-term goals? **Do the work yourself before you ask other people to work for you.**

Make your connection informally, without expectations. Have a coffee at your local café and start a conversation. Begin by identifying the leaders of the communities with whom you wish to connect. Leaders often live as a reference point for a community and have a given following. Perhaps they are connected to NGOs or activist groups in your country, city, or region. Once you have gotten to know them, you can invite them over to your museum.

When your connection feels more comfortable, you can start handing the community your keys, figuratively speaking. **What are their wants and needs?** Invite them to organise a project, for example a small-scale event initially. In the medium to long term, empower them by giving them your resources to let them create something new. Museums have manifold, imaginative ways of developing collaborations with communities, from collective acquisitions and collection management to exhibition projects and public programmes.

Consider how the connection between the museum and the communities could be formalised. Some museums have specifically-appointed curators working directly with one of multiple communities. Other museums have collaborated to offer platforms such as citizen assemblies or community forums to empower communities to influence decision-making processes at varying levels. The NEMO Working Group Sustainability and Climate Action! has developed guidance on hosting community forums in museums; Fostering dialogue in divisive times: A guide for museums regarding engagement with community forums on climate action.

In our interviews, three factors were considered important in collaborations with communities:

- Time is an important currency for many projects, since time is needed to conduct in-depth research, make the right connections, and develop innovative solutions to complex questions. Fast deadlines and pressure to offer deliverables can inhibit the creative process that is so important to collaborations. **Give your collaborators time, and you will reap what you sow gradually.**

- Give the communities the resources they need. The knowledge and skills that LGBTQIA+ communities have developed are hard-earned. They have been subjected to unpaid labour or made vulnerable to exploitation. Research from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights has shown that 38% percent of the LGBTQIA+ community has great difficulty to make ends meet and faces employment discrimination based on their identity.[57] Spend your resources carefully; consider the labour laws that apply in your city, region, or country. **The amount you are willing to pay someone reflects how much you value their knowledge and experience.**

- Be prepared to stand with the community. Marginalised communities often face discrimination and hate, especially from others who feel discomfort at their presence. Develop and discuss external guidance tools, such as the one published by Access Culture from Portugal, to communicate clearly about the needs and expectations of the queer and trans communities with whom you are going to work.[58] **Clearly state your commitment to stand with the LGBTQIA+ community from the beginning of your collaboration.** Write a statement detailing your commitment to LGBTQIA+ inclusion together with your partners at an early stage of your collaboration, to be used in case of controversy. If negative messages appear on your social media, consider removing them and reflect carefully on how your museum can take more responsibility to prevent communities from being exposed to these messages again. Show your allyship. Even small symbols can help, such as rainbow flags, celebrating the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) on your social media or wearing pronoun badges during meetings. Do not appease those who wish to discriminate against the communities you value and wish to work with.

A fruitful collaboration between museums and LGBTQIA+ communities works both ways. Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation can be a useful tool to help you reflect on where you stand as an institution and how much you are willing to offer.[59] **How much power and resources do you have at your disposal? How much are you willing to give away?** On the one hand, you should avoid tokenism, that is to say, using a community merely for their identity without giving them a voice and agency within your organisation. Tokenism is

cosmetic, reductive, and does not contribute to a fruitful collaboration with your communities. Queer communities in particular are very sensitive to seeing institutions use their symbols and identities for marketing and commercial purposes. On the other hand, you should recognise the need for you to change yourself. Reflect on your positionality and take responsibility for your actions. Arrange regular check-ins to make sure that the collaboration still meets the expectations of everyone who is involved. Listen carefully to the queer and trans communities with whom you are working. Try to understand their wants and needs and make these happen for them.

8. Fostering intersectional LGBTQIA+ representation in our exhibitions

We have opened an exhibition offering queer perspectives on our historical collections. After our opening, visitors staged an intervention in our exhibition to voice their criticism against our exhibition. They described that we have focused on white, cisgender, male, middle-class, gay perspectives, and that we have erased queer people of colour. How can we take this criticism as an opportunity for reflection and growth?

The LGBTQIA+ community is not monolithic. The acronym alone refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual and more – many communities with different gendered and sexual identities. Moreover, crudely put, their experiences may be compounded by other experiences of being marginalised, for instance on the basis of their race, ability, or class. Within Black feminist thought, the concept of intersectionality has been developed to illustrate this, for instance by Kimberlé Crenshaw.

Sculpted figurine of two lovers, Natufian, from Ain Sakhri. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

Many museums in Europe have increasingly paid attention to the LGBTQIA+ community in the context of their exhibitions, their collections, their employees, or their visiting audiences. These kinds of initiatives are highly-valued and welcome opportunities to chart the community's history, offer them complex representation, and reflect on the challenges they presently face. At the same time, these projects can feel like missed opportunities to many members in, and outside, the LGBTQIA+ community. They often depend on what is already given or there, such as objects that have been collected, stories that have been told, queer colleagues who have been hired. As a result, they raise the question of who is represented, who is offered a platform, and who is not?

The curator Maura Reilly, who is based in the United States, has observed that many recent exhibitions focusing on the LGBTQIA+ community have inadvertently focused on white, cisgender, gay, middle-class men, and have obscured, or erased, the contributions of women members of the community, as well as LGBTQIA+ people of colour.[60] **The risk emerges that an opportunity to represent one or multiple communities ends up erasing, or excluding, groups who *should* have been included.**

The criticism received for your exhibition is a valuable opportunity for you to reflect carefully on your positionality. How have you tackled your project? What aspects have you focused on, and who have you left behind? Reach out and collaborate with researchers, consultants, or other professionals with lived experience if they are not yet part of your networks. (For more guidance on collaborating with communities, see scenario 7.) There are a couple of possible initiatives you could take to continue the discussion that has been initiated. You could organise public discussions between the visitors of your exhibition and yourselves to have an open dialogue and a space for reflection regarding your visitors' demands to be represented. You could include more objects in your exhibition or in other displays to turn a spotlight on the communities you have so far overlooked. Proceed with caution as you should be aware that such initiatives should not be seen as a reflective, or more deeply-rooted, means of addressing mechanisms of exclusion. At best, they are opportunities to create a discourse and establish connections with groups that may potentially lead to more ambitious initiatives and structural change in the long term.

Ultimately, it is the fundamental questions that your visitors have raised that have made this intervention so powerful. Who has held power in your museum historically? And who is actively maintaining it? It may take years to begin addressing the questions that they have raised so powerfully. This should not discourage you from collaborating with other communities in your next exhibition, from their conception to their execution. Share the knowledge and resources from your museum with those who should be included. These initiatives should go hand-in-hand with other changes, such as revising your museum's mission statement. **The demands made by these critical visitors should stimulate you to revise the long-term strategies and policies you develop for your exhibitions and for your museum as a whole.**

9. Providing all-gender bathrooms in our museum

We have redeveloped our museum's interior spaces in light of our ambition to become inclusive. For example, we have redesigned our bathrooms to become open to anyone regardless of their gender. After the opening of our museum, visitors have expressed their outrage at these bathrooms on social media. How do we respond?

Everyone uses the bathroom. In many bathrooms, binary gender segregation remains in place. For many queer and trans people, bathroom visits in public spaces or institutions can be an uncomfortable, if not stressful, experience, potentially even dangerous, as one never knows for certain which bathroom to use and what might possibly await one there.

All-gender bathrooms should include the following facilities, fully enclosed: a toilet, a sink, drying facilities, menstrual aids, and optionally other things such as mirrors. All-gender bathrooms have been implemented in many public institutions across Europe including museums, depending on the legislation in specific countries, regions, or cities. Many of the interviewees and colleagues we have spoken to in the context of this research have mentioned that they have implemented all-gender bathrooms in their museum spaces. They stress that their visitors respond in positive ways. Trans and queer visitors will feel more safe and welcome in your museum, and many non-queer visitors will feel the same way as some of them will be able to take their child to the bathroom regardless of their gender, for example.

Gender-neutral restrooms at Museo Nacional de Antropología. 2021. Museo Nacional de Antropología (Madrid).

It is valuable that your museum has provided all-gender bathrooms. **This is an important step in making your museum more welcoming and accessible.** If you have not done so already, please make sure to use clear signage to indicate facilities such as wash basins, diaper changing areas and wheelchair-accessible bathrooms. You might include a note to your visitors near your bathroom explaining your decision to open all-gender bathrooms and alter your facilities. Even for museums with only one bathroom or those that might have difficulty adapting their facilities, clear signage can make a significant difference.

Unfortunately, all-gender bathrooms have become a lightning rod for transphobic and homophobic anxieties, in Europe and worldwide. In response to the anxieties stirred up by your decision, you could communicate and explain your choices more extensively, using platforms such as your website, your online newsletter, or your social media. Include pictures, signage, and a clear description of your facilities. Explain why, and to whom, your all-gender bathrooms are important. **Contextualise your choices in light of your museum's broader vision to become inclusive for the LGBTQIA+ community.**

If the controversy develops further, you might consider organising a (partially) public debate where your leadership explains the decision to implement these facilities in the context of the museum's broader ambition and vision, without giving transphobic sentiments too much visibility. It goes without saying that your bathrooms should be aligned with your other initiatives to foster LGBTQIA+ inclusion, from your collection registration and your exhibition to your public events and professional environment. In processes such as this, you should be prepared to stand by the queer communities you wish to welcome to your museum. **Do not be afraid to show your allyship.** After all, museums lead by example.

10. Failing to see our initiatives lead to long-term change

We have organised a temporary public programme for a museum, bringing in queer practices and perspectives. Some time has passed, and the museum has not contacted us again for a new initiative. We are concerned that not much seems to have changed in this museum. We wonder if we have done enough to foster inclusion in this museum – we feel as if we had failed. What can we do?

Public programmes are one significant example of an initiative museums can take to foster LGBTQIA+ inclusion. They provide a platform for queer artists, performers, and educators to share their knowledge with queer audiences and their allies. They are an opportunity for you to welcome

queer people and provide them with a safe space to meet their friends and feel comfortable in their own skins. Moreover, they are opportunities to foster LGBTQIA+ inclusion in your organisation, inviting your colleagues to contribute actively to this important cause.

Unfortunately, an LGBTQIA+ inclusive museum depends on many people and many factors. Of course, initiatives depend on queer colleagues with the right sensitivities, or on questions raised by objects in a museum collection. Other factors can be the political climate in the country, region, or city in which the museum is located, or the museum's financial dependence on governments or private foundations. The culture of a museum can be shaped by its professional environment, for instance leadership or management working as proactive allies.

A project in a museum may be considered to fail when themes and expectations are formulated but the outcomes of a project do not necessarily reflect these expectations. Many of the colleagues we have been in contact with for this research have cited occasions where they felt they had failed. Some mentioned pitching ideas for a queer exhibition that was deemed not suitable for, or relevant to, a museum's programming. Others attempted to mention a person's queer identity in a wall text but observed that these references were removed in the curatorial descriptions in the museum exhibition. Others again developed and initiated inclusive organisational policies, only to see them evaporate once allies in crucial professional positions within the museums were released from their roles. Understandably, some queer museum professionals decide to withdraw their labour from museums altogether, facing burnout or exhaustion due to the constant pressure of trying, but struggling, to enact change.

The writer and curator Liang-Kai Yu has also observed many instances of failure in museums. He argues that the failure of such projects should not be seen as a failure on the part of the individual, or group, who had taken the initiative.[61] Instead, these initiatives failed because they were stopped by other people, or larger forces, to prevent them from becoming what they could have been and implementing the long-term transformations that should have happened. **Failure reflects the complexity of museums as institutions and how they are intrinsically related to the broader political and cultural environments in which they operate.**

The writer, professor, and activist Audre Lorde famously wrote: 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.' With the 'master's tools,' she referred to the means by which the 'master's house,' a society that upholds patriarchy, whiteness, and heteronormativity, is created and upheld. Following her logic, employing the tools that are used to sustain heteronormativity in our society will only serve to sustain these norms.[62]

Still, you should never forget that your trying to change the 'master's house' is important. Your initiatives may have helped your queer colleagues feel comfortable at work, your visitors identify with the stories you tell, or queer youth feel comfortable in their own skin. **With your dedication to representing the LGBTQIA+ community in your museum, you have made a difference.**

Share your experiences in developing more inclusive museums

We want to learn from you!

→ What dilemmas have you faced while developing inclusive programs and policies in your museum, and how have you navigated these challenges?

→ What experiences or lessons around diversity and inclusion would you like to share?

→ Does your museum have initiatives in place to foster inclusion and embrace diversity that you would like to highlight?

Our 'incomplete guide' becomes more complete with every submission you share! Your answers will be added to our webpage and will contribute to this growing resource for our museum community.

Submit your information

Explore our growing resource on NEMO's diversity and inclusion webpage.

Ethical guideline

This chapter offers an ethical guideline to LGBTQIA+ inclusion in European museums. This guideline effectively consists of the condensation of the interviews, the materials supplied by our colleagues, and the primary and secondary sources that have been collected in the process of this research. The guideline covers five pillars of museum practice:

1. Working with collections
2. Developing exhibitions and displays
3. Professional environments
4. Interacting with audiences
5. Engaging in partnerships with communities.

From each pillar derives a range of principles that can serve as guidance for museums who wish to foster LGBTQIA+ inclusion in Europe. These pillars were identified based on ICOM's museum definition and policies such as the Dutch Code Diversity and Inclusion that identifies programming, personnel, publics, and partnerships as guiding aspects in which cultural organisations should foster inclusion.

A prominent example of a similar guideline is ICOM's Code of Ethics, which offers an overview of standards for professional practice in museums.[63] Along similar lines, we aim to offer a range of standards for museums to avoid pitfalls and act responsibly as they foster LGBTQIA+ inclusion. We hope that they reflect specifically some of the daily questions and concerns these kinds of processes can raise. We encourage our colleagues to use this guideline in tandem with the ethical guidelines from Trans-Inclusive Culture, which support 'good work' that maximises public benefit, builds public trust, and contributes to museums and heritage spaces making a positive impact in the world.[64]

The following guideline is meant to be neither definitive nor exhaustive. It reflects the concerns of those who contributed to this report, who occupy certain roles, and who operate in specific contexts. This ethical guideline can be a productive reference point for your daily practice as well as for the more complex, long-term decision-making processes taking place in your museum. We hope that our readers can apply this guidance to the contexts in which they work and that this aids them in reflecting on their own practices.

1. How can museums take care of, and foster, LGBTQIA+ inclusive collections?

→ By acknowledging that we have historically and violently omitted to collect and research LGBTQIA+ artists, queer stories, and queer agents in relation to our own collections.

→ By acknowledging and researching in our collections the presence of LGBTQIA+ artists, LGBTQIA+ related stories, and the relationship of queer individuals and networks to these collections.

- When researching LGBTQIA+ people and stories from the past, we should aim to understand how they identified themselves in their own historical and cultural contexts without forgetting the significance to queer communities of representation in the present.

- When researching LGBTQIA+ perspectives in museums collections, we should take care to understand how experiences of being LGBTQIA+ can be compounded by other mechanisms of exclusion based on race, class, ability, and so on (i.e. intersectionality).

→ By revising our collection strategies in accordance with our institutional mission statement with respect to LGBTQIA+ inclusion. In these strategies, we should set clear goals for researching LGBTQIA+ narratives and acquiring LGBTQIA+ objects by ethical and feasible means.

→ By employing inclusive strategies for collection registration.

- By employing and revising our terminology with consideration to self-identification, potential harm to contemporary communities, and accessibility.

→ By taking care of our collections not for the LGBTQIA+ community but with the community.

- By taking care to involve the communities that have created and owned objects in every aspect of the acquisition process, keeping in mind the museum's long-term collection strategies. Extractive means of acquiring objects, without engagement with the LGBTQIA+ community, should be avoided at all costs.

→ By being transparent with regard to the research we conduct into our collections as well as our practices of acquisition for our collections.

2. How can museums develop LGBTQIA+ inclusive exhibitions and displays?

→ By integrating LGBTQIA+ perspectives into our long-term exhibition strategies, including permanent collection displays, major exhibitions, and smaller-scale interventions, in alignment with our institutional mission statement with regard to LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

→ By using our exhibitions to highlight LGBTQIA+ related themes, objects and stories.

- By creating exhibitions that centre representations of queer joy and affirmation.

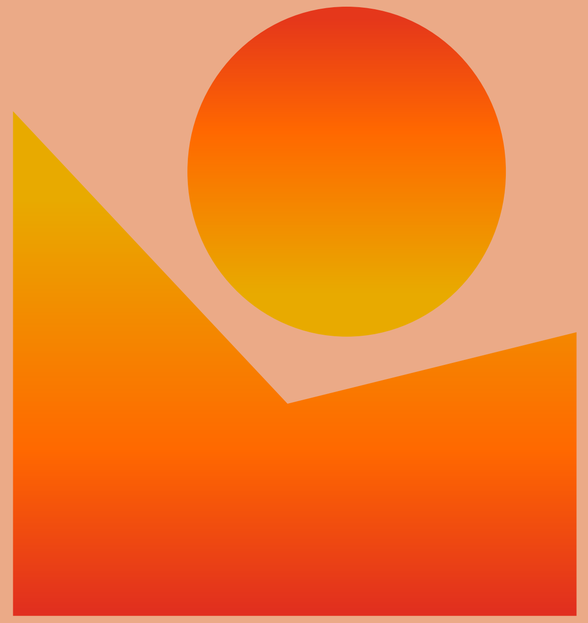
- By being careful not to display images or objects that reproduce stereotypes or enact harm or offence in any other way to the community.

→ By being transparent in our exhibitions about our collections and objects, their histories and provenance.

→ By addressing people in our exhibition communications (e.g. wall texts) by their own names and pronouns.

→ By actively collaborating with LGBTQIA+ communities in our exhibitions and displays from their conception and research phase to their execution.

→ By developing interactive displays, such as audio tours, to spotlight LGBTQIA+ related stories and objects in our collection displays and temporary exhibitions.



3.How can museums become LGBTQIA+ inclusive organisations?

→ By developing a mission statement that announces our aim to be LGBTQIA+ inclusive in an accessible and concrete way, permeating our museum policies in all respects.

→ By a leadership and management that communicate their mission to be inclusive and expect their colleagues to follow this mission.

→ By creating an open professional atmosphere for dialogue and critical reflection.

→ By organising internal training and meetings for our colleagues on issues regarding LGBTQIA+ inclusion, based on lived experience, to guide collective learning.

→ By allowing everyone time and grace to make mistakes while learning to accept what might be entirely foreign concepts.

→ By developing inclusive hiring procedures.

→ By developing objective and safe procedures for reporting discriminative and unsafe behaviour.

→ By fostering LGBTQIA+ employee resource groups to stimulate the exchange of best practice and deliver strategic recommendations to management and leadership.

→ By respecting the pronouns and names of our LGBTQIA+ colleagues, both in contracts, writing, and daily face-to-face communication.

→ By providing all-gender bathrooms where all colleagues and visitors feel safe and welcome.

→ By developing sustainable, long-term professional relationships with our colleagues, including those who are hired freelance.

→ By offering fair and equitable compensation for our colleagues, particularly for those from the LGBTQIA+ community.

→ By clearly communicating our allyship, for instance through, but not limited to, using pronoun badges and celebrating the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) and our local Pride events.

→ By using and sharing ethical guidelines such as Trans-Inclusive Culture and this guide to support the LGBTQIA+ community and stimulate critical reflection.

→ By acknowledging and researching in our collections the presence of LGBTQIA+ artists, LGBTQIA+ related stories, and the relationship of queer individuals and networks to these collections.

→ When researching LGBTQIA+ people and stories from the past, we should aim to understand how they identified themselves in their own historical and cultural contexts without forgetting the significance to queer communities of representation in the present.

→ When researching LGBTQIA+ perspectives in museums collections, we should take care to understand how experiences of being LGBTQIA+ can be compounded by other mechanisms of exclusion based on race, class, ability, and so on (i.e. intersectionality).

→ By revising our collection strategies in accordance with our institutional mission statement with respect to LGBTQIA+ inclusion. In these strategies, we should set clear goals for researching LGBTQIA+ narratives and acquiring LGBTQIA+ objects by ethical and feasible means.

→ By employing inclusive strategies for collection registration.

→ By employing and revising our terminology with consideration to self-identification, potential harm to contemporary communities, and accessibility.

→ By taking care of our collections not for the LGBTQIA+ community but with the community.

→ By taking care to involve the communities that have created and owned objects in every aspect of the acquisition process, keeping in mind the museum's long-term collection strategies. Extractive means of acquiring objects, without engagement with the LGBTQIA+ community, should be avoided at all costs.

→ By being transparent with regard to the research we conduct into our collections as well as our practices of acquisition for our collections.

4. How can museums welcoming LGBTQIA+ audiences?

→ By organising events for the LGBTQIA+ community where we ensure that they are always made to feel welcome and safe.

- By organising events specifically tailored to LGBTQIA+ children and youth to make them feel welcome and safe.

→ By developing guided tours through our collection displays and exhibitions, highlighting LGBTQIA+ related perspectives on our displays and fostering debates and reflections.

→ By providing all-gender bathrooms and communicating clearly what facilities are available.

→ By communicating our active allyship, e.g. through displaying the trans flags, wearing pronoun badges or commemorating days like the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) and our local Pride events.

→ By ensuring that security is always present and briefed at various spaces in our museum and is available in the case of unsafe situations.

5. How can museums develop fruitful partnerships with LGBTQIA+ communities?

→ By developing partnerships not for, but with the community, involving them in every step of the way in our projects from conception to execution.

- By avoiding tokenism, the ad-hoc, cosmetic involvement of community skills and expertise that often remains unpaid or uncompensated.

→ By reflecting carefully on experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community and how these can be compounded by discrimination based on other factors, such as race, class, or ability (cf. intersectionality).

→ By developing sustainable, long-term professional relationships with LGBTQIA+ communities.

→ By offering LGBTQIA+ communities fair and equitable compensation for their work.

→ By involving the community with their full and complete consent in how they are represented in internal and external communications, for instance in contracts, press releases, and images.

→ By being prepared to stand in solidarity with the community, responding clearly and defiantly to negative responses, discrimination, hate speech, or violence.

Endnotes

1. Steinbock, '"LGB" and the Addition of "TQIA2S"', 71–75.
2. 'Our Glossary,' ILGA Europe.
3. See Yu, Performing Diverse Sexualities (2018), Miles, 'Theorizing the Queer Museum,' 45–57.
4. See op. cit. notes 1 and 2.
5. Steinbock and Dibbits, 'Gathering Critical Visitors Together,' 13–45.
6. 'ICOM approves a new museum definition,' ICOM International Council of Museums.
7. Marshall, 'What is a Museum?' (2020).
8. Mills, 'Theorizing the Queer Museum,' 45.
9. For some recent examples, see Dibbits and Steinbock, eds., 'The Critical Visitor' (2023), Hendrikx, ed., Queer Exhibition Histories (2023), Isenia, Moore and STUDIO-I, eds., Baseline (2020).
10. Hendrix, 'Introduction: A Labour of Love,' 10.
11. MacLeod, Sandell, Cowan, Scott, Cuzzola and Plumb, 'Trans-Inclusive Culture' (2023).
12. See op. cit. note 5.
13. Edson, 'Ethics,' 3–17.
14. Marstine, 'The Contingent Nature of the New Museum Ethics,' 3–25.
15. Boon, 'Diary of a Diversity Researcher,' 158–171.
16. The continent of Europe, European Union member states and Council of Europe member states overlap but are not interchangeable. In this chapter, we refer to Europe when discussing the continent at large and to the specific organisations when discussing policies they have issued. The countries featured in the third section on national policies are all European Union and Council of Europe member states.
17. European Commission, 'State of the Union Address.'
18. Ayoub and Paternotte, 'Europe and LGBT Rights' (2020).
19. Ibid., 5.
20. Schoots, 'In Europa verkoopt radicaal-rechts queerfobie als "zorgen"' (2024).
21. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 'LGBTIQ Equality at a Crossroads', 7.
22. Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Council of Europe, 1950. Cited in Margaine and Pichardo, 'Diversity in the Workplace', 11.
23. Ibid., 11.
24. 'LGBTQIA+ Rights in the EU,' Erasmus University Rotterdam (2023).
25. Marcia, 'LGBTIQA+ Equality Ahead of EU Elections' (2024).
26. Cited in Da Milano et al., 'A Community Engagement Methodology', 11.
27. Council of Europe, The Faro Convention, 5.
28. Da Milano et al., 'A Community Engagement Methodology', 16–18.
29. See Da Milano et al., 'A Community Engagement Methodology', 13.
30. European Commission, 'Union of Equality', 10.
31. Euclid and Network of European Museum Organisations, 'EU Funding for Museums, Archives and Galleries in Europe' (2019).

32. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 'LGBTIQ Equality at a Crossroads', 18. This report focuses on data collected specifically from those who identify as LGBTIQ.

33. European Commission, 'Union of Equality', 6, 8, 9.

34. Margaine and Pichardo, 'Diversity in the Workplace' (2021).

35. Ivanović, Identity(ies), esp. 110–155.

36. Interview, Bart Ooghe, June 6, 2024. See also Vlaamse Overheid, Strategische Gelijkekansen- en Diversiteitsplan (2016).

37. Stad Gent, 'Het Gentse LGBTQIA+ beleid.'

38. Ooghe, 'LGBTQ+ in the MSK' (2022).

39. Kivimaa, 'Untold Stories,' 251.

40. Nasr, 'Faggot Exhibitions,' 204.

41. Ibid., 205.

42. Vabamu, 'From "such people" to LGBT activism.'

43. Kovács, 'Portrayal and Promotion' (2021).

44. Hanga Zsófia and Horváth Kávai, 'Director of Hungarian National Museum fired' (2023).

45. Pócsik, 'Institutional Repair,' (2024).

46. Márton, 'Owning the Game,' (2021).

47. Our research has found other examples of professional networks concerning LGBTQIA+ inclusion in European museums. One example is The Queer Heritage and Collections Network, which ranges across the United Kingdom. The Netherlands-based Queering the Collections network seems to be no longer active at the time of writing.

48. For more examples from the Dutch context, see Moolhuijsen, 'Queer Identities and Heritage.'

49. MacLeod, Sandell, Cowan, Scott, Cuzzola and Plumb, 'Trans-Inclusive Culture' (2023).

50. Some of the people who have influenced us are Dibbits and Steinbock, eds., 'The Critical Visitor' (2023), Isenia et al., Baseline (2020) and Hendrikx, eds., 'Queer Exhibition Histories' (2023), among many others. One recent example of an exhibition project based on a museum collection is Liucci-Goutnikov, eds., 'Over the rainbow' (2023).

51. Middleton, 'Queer Possibility,' 431.

52. Modest et al., 'Words Matter' (2018).

53. NEMO, 'Digital Basic Cataloguing', 61, 62.

54. De Milano et al., A Community Engagement Methodology, 4–7 and throughout.

55. MacLeod, Sandell, Cowan, Scott, Cuzzola and Plumb, 'Trans-Inclusive Culture', 17, 37.

56. Margaine and Pichardo, 'Diversity in the Workplace' (2021).

57. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 'LGBTIQ Equality at a Crossroads', 39.

58. Access Culture, 'Trans-Inclusive Rider' (2024).

59. Organizing Engagement, 'Ladder of Citizen Participation.'

60. Reilly, 'Curatorial Activism', 165.

61. Yu, 'Musing On a Queer Museum of Failure,' 188 and throughout.

62. Lorde, 'The Master's Tools' (1984).

63. The ICOM Code of Ethics consulted for this research was published in 2017. At the time of writing, the Code is undergoing revision.

64. MacLeod, Sandell, Cowan, Scott, Cuzzola and Plumb, 'Trans-Inclusive Culture', 15.

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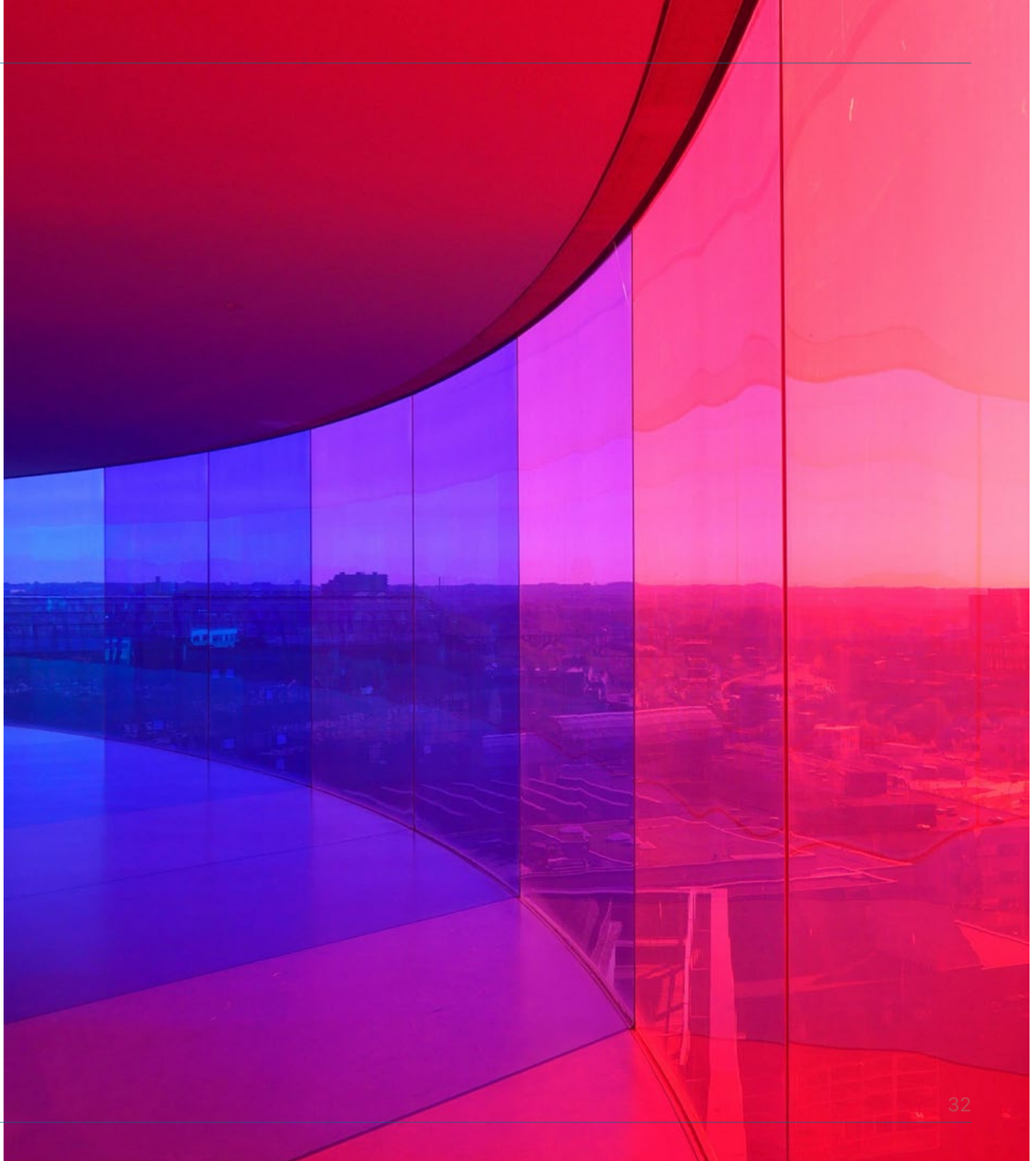

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