

Extremadura: An example of best practice in social progress for LGBTI rights, from a local and rural perspective

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Twenty years ago, Extremadura was the only region in Spain that did not have its own body to protect people's rights in the area of sexual identity or orientation. All this changed with the launch of De Par en Par, the first LGBTI rights group in the region. Since then, so much progress has been made in terms of LGBTI policies, activism, and the situation on the ground that our autonomous community is now at the cutting edge nationally when it comes to promoting these rights and liberties. This is thanks to the adoption of the *Law on social equality for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender and/or intersexual and on public policies to combat discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the Autonomous Community of Extremadura*.

This regulation aims to eradicate discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation, protecting LGBTI people from any kind of discrimination within the framework of the autonomous community's powers. It is currently being used as a basis for developing similar legislation in various autonomous communities across Spain, as well as in certain Latin American countries.

In practice, it ensures that transsexual and intersexual people in Extremadura have the right to full support, with the establishment of a health protocol to this effect. It also unequivocally guarantees access to assisted reproduction for lesbian and bisexual mothers, and makes Extremadura the first Spanish region to legally recognise bisexuality and biphobia.

The new legislation normalises diversity amongst families, and recognises the need for specific protection for children and spouses. It recognises the obligation to prevent discriminatory behaviour towards the LGBTI community, especially the most vulnerable sectors, particularly when it comes to education. It also introduces a specific health and welfare plan, guaranteeing proper care and insurance via the establishment of protocols, notably in relation to the police. Furthermore, it lays down penalties for homophobic, lesbophobic, biphobic, and transphobic attacks.

In order to demonstrate a commitment to historic justice, the new law acknowledges that it is necessary to remember the experiences of those that have faced repression. It therefore establishes the Extramadura Observatory against discrimination on the grounds of gender identity and sexual orientation, and the LGBTI Documentation and Democratic Heritage Centre. It also recognises the LGBTI Service *Servicio Plural de atención a la población LGBTI* as a specialised social service. Moreover, it acknowledges established cultural events with high social impact such as the Festival FanCineGay, or Los Palomos, which has only been around for six years but has already become a symbol of the LGBTI community in Extremadura and throughout Spain.

These activities and lines of work have been pursued consistently across the years, based on social activism but in continuous cooperation with institutions. They have been the driving force for change that has enabled the autonomous community to act as a pioneer in adopting legislation of this kind. Extremadura has also led the way in social advances, such as overturning the ban on homosexuals giving blood as early as 1996, and developing initiatives in rural areas via the Network of Extremaduran Communities against Homophobia and Transphobia, with the help of FEMPEX.

Progress has also been made in the area of international cooperation, with projects such as the Latin American LGBTI Education Network.