

Opinion: Is Italy Protecting LGBTQ Citizens?

Jacob DeCarli (November 07, 2019)



As he prepares to spend a year in Bologna, an American student contemplates LGBTQ safety in Italy.

Tolerance and acceptance for marginalized peoples across the world appears to worsen. Throughout this past decade, hate crimes and violent actions against people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ people, and religious minorities increased in the United States. However, these issues reach other parts of the world regardless of their “developed” or “developing” statuses.

One country struggling with intolerance towards marginalized people is Italy. Although Western Europe tends to be an area of the world known for its progressive economic and social policies, Italy is consistently behind the times with regards to safety and rights for its Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) citizens.

In 2016, Italy was the last western European country to legalize same-sex civil unions. Although



these unions are a big step for LGBTQ Italian citizens, it is not the same as marriage, and couples do not have the same rights as legally married couples.

Italy's problems for LGBTQ citizens extend beyond marriage rights. [Rainbow Europe](#) [2], an organization that provides "an overview of the social climate for LGBTQ people in each country" based on the "annual human rights situation of [LGBTI] people in Europe," rates each country in terms of "LGBTQ friendliness." According to their report, Italy's LGBTQ friendliness score dropped from 26.67 percent in 2016 to 21.53 percent in 2019. In comparison to the other 49 countries, Italy places 35th in rankings of LGBTQ friendliness in Europe, a decrease from their 2016 ranking of 32nd. It has the lowest ranking in western Europe.

People can argue that Italy's strong catholic nature derails the country from enacting progressive social policies. I grew up in a Roman-Catholic family and attended Sunday school frequently as a child, in a small town in central Pennsylvania. Even though my church never spoke against LGBTQ people, we were taught that marriage was between a man and a woman. Sentiments like these are expressed by high members of the Vatican, and therefore normalized in Italian society. Pope Francis, who has spoken out in acceptance of LGBTQ identifying people entering in civil unions, does not support same-sex marriage: "We cannot change it. This is the nature of these things," he said in a 2017 interview with Dominique Wolton.

As an Italian Studies major, who plans to spend his whole junior year in Bologna, I'm excited to live in Italy for nine months, but as a queer person, I am nervous that I might not feel completely safe there. I once interviewed an Italian professor who came out as transgender for my college newspaper and, among the many topics we discussed, was the theme of safety in Italy for people in the LGBTQ community. Suffice to say that her answers on the matter were not very reassuring.

I then did some further research and found out that Italy does not have any hate crime laws to protect LGBTQ people, even though a recent statistic published by [Arcigay](#) [3] (Italy's first and largest national gay organization) shows that such crimes have increased by 33% in 2018.

Without protection and equal rights for LGBTQ people in Italy, it is no surprise that the country ranks low compared to its European neighbors, despite being home to a significant LGBTQ community. Luckily, university students make up a large percentage of Bologna's population, and hopefully that will translate into a strong support system of friends and classmates.

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Links

[1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/lgbtq.jpg>

[2] <https://rainbow-europe.org/>

[3] <https://www.arcigay.it/en/>