



Let's meet, inspire and connect during the
ILGA World Conference 2024
in Ghent, Belgium.

>> Go further, go together >>

Dear ILGA World member

In this proposal, we would like to invite you in 2024 to experience the ILGA World Conference in Ghent. A beautiful city in Belgium, the heart of Europe. A city with a lot of movement, a thriving (LGBTI+) civil society where people discover, experiment, and flourish. It's a magical, accessible, and more inclusive place. Full of inspiration that we would like to share with you.

Together, we want to network and learn from each other. Better understand global needs and challenges. Seize opportunities to inspire each other and be inspired. To become more vital as a global LGBTI+ movement. With, by, and for each other. Go further, go together.

On behalf of the organizing partners,

Fleur De Baerdemaeker (they/them)

Chairperson Casa Rosa

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Organization team

As the local non-profit organization Casa Rosa, in close collaboration with çavaria and Arc-en-Ciel Wallonie and other partners, we wish to take on the organization of the ILGA World Conference.

- The provincial rainbowhouse **Casa Rosa** was founded in 1995 and is the home for LGBTI+ persons and organizations in East Flanders. (East Flanders is one of the 10 Belgian provinces.) We **organize and support initiatives and organizations that respond to the needs of LGBTI+ persons*** and their environment. Casa Rosa is one of Belgium's 12 local rainbowhouses (community centers).
- **Arc-en-Ciel Wallonie** and **çavaria** are **advocates and umbrellas of LGBTI+ organizations**, respectively in Wallonia (French-speaking Belgium) and Flanders (Dutch-speaking Belgium). Both organizations work towards the **well-being, equal rights, and equal opportunities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people** throughout Belgium. Together they continue to build a more **solidary and inclusive society** with a broad view on sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, and gender characteristics*. They are a movement, an advocacy group, and a center of expertise.

Together with the organizing partners, we have **ample experience organizing events and conferences**. For example, çavaria hosted the TGEU Council (Antwerp, 2018). Arc-en-Ciel Wallonie and çavaria were ILGA Europe Conference (Brussels, 2018) hosts as well. And Casa Rosa regularly coordinates small and large events in Ghent and the region. In addition, many **hundreds of volunteers** are active and involved in our various organizations.

We formed a (preliminary) core group and, in addition, a team of dozens of volunteers who can help prepare the conference and give visitors a warm welcome.

Whereas Casa Rosa will mainly be responsible for the logistical-practical organization of the conference (with support of GentCongres, the official congress agency of the city of Ghent), çavaria and Arc-en-Ciel Wallonie will be responsible for the content, policy, and movement themes. In addition, **Genderspectrum** and **Intersekse Vlaanderen** ('Intersex Flanders'), among others, are part of the hosting committee as expert partners in the intersex, transgender, and non-binary themes.

* There are many different terms to name sexual and gender identity. Some people deliberately choose no label. Others choose a particular label. The important thing is that everyone can decide on this for themselves.

We are learning from each other, being inspired, strengthening each other. **Making solidarity concrete. Forging bonds.** One by one, elements that motivate Casa Rosa and its partners for this bid. Because all this will also benefit the situation of LGBTI+ people in Belgium.

The core group of the hosting committee tentatively consists of

- **Fleur De Baerdemaeker** (they/them) from Casa Rosa and Genderspectrum;
- **Emmanuelle Verhagen** (they/them or she/her) from Intersekse Vlaanderen;
- **Yves Aerts** (they/them or he/him) from çavaria;
- **Tom/Anna Devroye** (he/him or she/her) from Arc-en-Ciel Wallonie;
- **Sophie Schepens** (she/her) from Casa Rosa;
- **Elio De Bolle** (he/him) from Casa Rosa.

About 150 local associations are involved with the umbrellas and rainbowhouses (discover them all via cavaria.be/associations, arcenciel-wallonie.be/nos-associations, and arcenciel-wallonie.be/maisons-arc-en-ciel). Of course, we want to work **closely together** with these and many other (inter)national organizations and partners who share their experiences, expertise, and drive to organize a **strong and impactful** ILGA World Conference in Ghent.



Rainbow stickers for a campaign of Casa Rosa, supported by the city of Ghent

The political situation in Belgium

As a country, Belgium ranks second in ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Europe Map 2021, with 74%. For years, Belgium has been taking a leadership role, especially in the legal framework, but is still striving for more societal change.

As the most recent legal achievement, on March 18, 2022, the Belgian Parliament approved a change in the law, which will decriminalize sex work.

The **rights of LGBTI+ people are supported** by just about all political parties. Ministers for Equalities, focusing on SOGIESC, work in the federal and regional governments.

On a local level as well, many steps are being taken to improve the well-being of LGBTI+ people. Financially, local LGBTI+ organizations (such as the local rainbowhouses) are supported. Center cities (such as Ghent) are **making an effort** with their inclusion and LGBTI+ policies. Many cities support LGBTI+ organizations logistically, financially, and substantively. Public administrations are also increasingly focusing on **knowledge, expertise, and awareness of LGBTI+ issues**.

LGBTI+ themes are **widely accepted in the media**. Numerous programs (both current affairs and entertainment programs) portray a broad spectrum of LGBTI+ people.

Events targeting LGBTI+ people such as several prides and LGBTI+ film festivals occur in safe(r) conditions, supported by the various governments.

Several major cultural houses bring a diverse and inclusive program and work on their inclusivity policies.

It's not the end of our work. The challenges remain great in Belgium as well. LGBTI+ phobia and discrimination still exist. The most vulnerable LGBTI+ people experience it most often. Social change takes a long time. **But the fact that so many institutional actors support a strongly developed LGBTI+ movement makes one look forward with hope.**



People in the city, with a view on the St. Michael's Church - Photo by Bas Bogaerts © Stad Gent-Dienst Toerisme

Ghent, in Belgium

Why Belgium?

We believe that Belgium is the perfect place to organize the next ILGA World Conference. **Belgium is the heart of Europe.** The headquarters of the European Union is in Brussels, and so is ILGA Europe & Central Asia. The Belgian Government is susceptible to the **fight for LGBTI+ rights and cooperates with other states of the European Union and at the United Nations level.**

Our country is easily accessible by train, plane, car, and bike, for those who like a challenge. Belgian cities are full of magnificent buildings, rivers, and life's sweetness. Ghent, where we propose to organize the ILGA World Conference in 2024, is **exemplary in terms of accessibility for people using mobility devices.** It has a large historic square with the Belfry as its central point. Accessible hotels are available in the center, and everything has been carefully thought of to welcome the conference participants.



Why Ghent?

All assets of a metropolis in a small and cozy town, with about 260,000 lovely inhabitants. Welcome to Ghent!

It can't be a coincidence that Ghent, the capital of East Flanders, was given several pretty names: medieval Manhattan, the historic heart of Flanders, a city of all times, **one of the most beautiful historical cities in Europe.** According to National Geographic Traveler, Ghent is "the most authentic historic city in the World", and Lonely Planet called Ghent "Europe's best-kept secret."

The city combines an impressive past with a vivid present. You will hardly ever find such a diversity of architectural styles and treasures, most of which are protected as national heritage by UNESCO. Strolling through Ghent often coincides with an adventurous trip through history. But above all, Ghent is alive! Here beats the young heart of a stunning city of culture with music, theater, film, and visual arts. **A thriving LGBTI+ movement is also active in our city.** A city of constant renewal and expansion of cultural perspectives. Where culture is a feast and where feasting is a form of culture. Discovering Ghent is a worthwhile endeavor.

Accessibility of Ghent

Ghent has always made sure that it is easily accessible for everyone. People with special needs in terms of comfort or care, such as older visitors and pedestrians with a temporary or permanent disability, can move freely in and out of Ghent. There are **several transport options** for visitors to Ghent **with reduced mobility**.

More than that, the city of Ghent continues to work on its **inclusion policy** and invest in training and coaching of civil servants and police to ensure that they can **respond to the needs of LGBTI+ persons** to the best of their abilities. In 2021, the city opened a **first-ever public gender-inclusive toilet**, the first in Belgium. The new sanitary facilities in the Voorhavenpark are just a start, as gender-inclusive and integrally accessible public restrooms will become the norm in Ghent.

Ghent, the veggie capital of Europe

There's no history of meat-free eating in Belgium. But back in 2009, Ghent became the first city worldwide to adopt a weekly vegetarian day. The local government **recognized the health and environmental benefits of a vegetarian diet** and mandated that all Ghent restaurants offer at least one vegetarian menu item. Nowadays, the city has more vegetarian restaurants per capita than most cities.



The streams of water and flowers throughout the city - Photo by Bas Bogaerts © Stad Gent – Dienst Toerisme



One of the many green hotspots in the middle of the city - Photo by Bas Bogaerts © Stad Gent – Dienst Toerisme

Ghent, a green city

The Ghent city council approved the Climate Plan in 2015. With this, the City of Ghent confirms its commitment for this legislature to invest in measures that directly contribute to **reduced CO2 emissions**. An additional budget is earmarked for efforts indirectly contributing to reduced emissions. The final objective is to be **climate neutral in 2050**. Since January 2020, the inner city (the area within the ring road) has turned into a Low Emission Zone (LEZ). Polluting cars are banned as much as possible, which positively impacts air and life quality.

Ghent, city of light

The city lights up again with a magical play of light and shadow with the **award-winning lighting plan** when the sun goes down. The Ghent lighting plan kicks in as **thousands of lights** when switched on. It's not a mishmash of styles but a carefully crafted network of atmospheres and accents.

Ghent, city of water

Water plays a crucial role in Ghent. The city developed at the confluence of the rivers Lys and Scheldt. Water invariably creates a **sparkling atmosphere, distinctive of water cities**: you always get a holiday feel. The City Council was once even rewarded for its considerable efforts to obtain clean water in rivers and canals full of life.

Conference venue and overnight stay

Ghent has plenty of spaces, conference rooms, and other possibilities. We propose a combination of Arts Centre 'Vooruit' and the 'Ufo building' of Ghent University (UGent) for the ILGA World Conference. These unique and enchanting venues are located next to each other and have a direct private connection.

Arts center Vooruit is located in an impressive, **historical building in the city's heart**. Thanks to its lively atmosphere, Vooruit is a unique and ideal location for the conference. Vooruit houses four beautiful halls and eight smaller rooms, fully equipped with multimedia technology and wifi. The café and its lovely terrace are ideal for a well-deserved coffee break or a drink.

The Ufo at Ghent University houses a large auditorium. In



The Vooruit building (both visible buildings) - Photo by Bas Bogaerts © Stad Gent – Dienst Toerisme

addition, the location has several smaller spaces, such as the Foyer.

The venues are **accessible and inclusive for wheelchair users and visually impaired people**. They have **gender-inclusive sanitary facilities** and are **widely accessible** (including soap and disinfectant dispensers with sensors that recognize all skin colors). Vooruit Arts Centre also wants to be accessible in a broad sense regarding the building facilities. Communication, artistic programs, and public relations need to be accessible as well. Or, as the British artist Jessica Thom powerfully puts it, "a space where everyone can be themselves". It includes working with a 'visual story' drafted together with people with mental disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In addition, they are continuously working on their 'Code of conduct', a guide for staff and partners to create a safer place for everyone.

The Vooruit Arts Centre is also developing a digital platform and equipping a large part of the rooms with the latest **videoconferencing technology**, allowing the ILGA World Conference to take place in a **hybrid way**. This way, the conference will be **accessible to all**, even those who cannot attend for various reasons.

Hosted housing

To make barriers as low as possible for the participants, we want to organize "hosted housing". We will look for **local queer(friendly) residents** who will welcome the visitors in their homes and can be a **buddy** during the conference and social activities.

Hotels

Hotels are primarily located in the city center, **easily accessible** by foot and public transportation. Ghent offers a wide range of hotels in all categories:

Classification	Hotels	Rooms
4 ****	9	1,069
3 **	17	996
2 **	7	374
Total	33	2,439



A hotel room in Ghent - © Stad Gent – Dienst Toerisme

By 2022, another 300 new hotel rooms will increase the total hotel capacity to almost 2,750. The city of Ghent is equipped with enough hotel rooms for hosting participants of conferences of this size.

Since 2008, hotel accommodations in Flanders have been thoroughly screened and rewarded with the Flemish label for accessible tourism if they live up to all criteria. The label is a quality feature and tells at a glance whether **wheelchair users and other customers with a temporary or permanent disability can access** an accommodation entirely independently or with a minimum of assistance.

Social activity program

A parallel local LGBTI+ conference

Parallel to the ILGA World Conference, you can participate in the local LGBTI+ conference - **for and by the local LGBTI+ movement** - which will specifically address relevant themes in Belgium. At the same time, it is the perfect moment to get to know Belgian LGBTI+ organizations and their workings.

Parties and connections with the local LGBTI+ movement

Our local LGBTI+ movement will be more than happy to organize some fabulous **queer parties** to relax after the conference formalities. Discover the **cozy queer and LGBTI+ friendly bars** and places in Ghent and let your dancing legs work to the fullest.

LGBTI+ museum tour

A seventeenth-century family portrait with the little boys wearing long robes. A large painting depicting the transformation of Hermaphroditus. Scenes with goddess Artemis and her female companions, the oldest portrait of a "man who had a relationship with a man" in the collection. These are just some of the stops on the LGBTI+ museum tour of the Ghent Museum of Fine Arts. We invite you to discover this tour and be inspired.



Some of the diverse group of Casa Rosa volunteers during a meeting and games afternoon in February 2022



Manifestation in Ghent against violence, discrimination, and racism

Small LGBTI+ film and queer arts festival

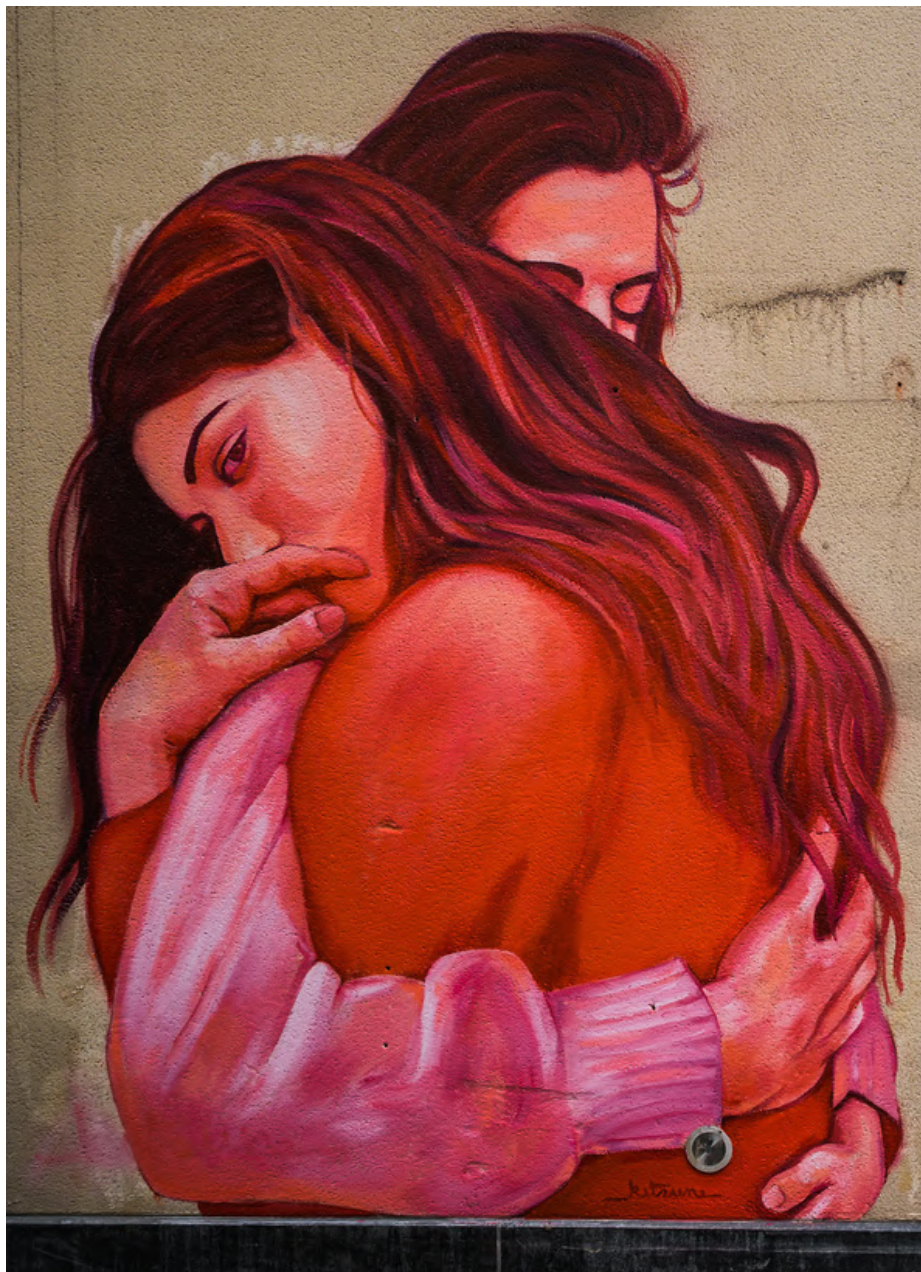
You can explore our multidisciplinary mini art festival during the conference, **which centers on LGBTI+ artists while supporting culture and diversity**. We are happy to show you some documentaries, including 'Pride is protest', which asks the question "what are LGBTQ people fighting for today?".

Pre-conference hospitality tour offered by GentCongres

For those who like to arrive early and have a sneak preview, the Ghent Convention Bureau provides a guided tour that is fully wheelchair accessible. Of course, you'll discover the highlights of the city;

- The Three Towers: St Bavo's Cathedral, the Belfry, and St Nicholas' Church;
- old guildhalls of boatmen, masons, grain measurers, fishmongers, and hagbutters;
- the Castle of the Counts and the Prince's Court;
- the more than solid 13th-century monasteries previously occupied by Augustinians and Dominicans;
- the Ancient Port of Ghent with its quay walls and mercantile houses.

At the same time, you'll get a chance to learn about practical things, such as where to take a taxi or public transport, ahead of everyone else.



Graffiti street art in a Ghent alley - Photo by Martin Corlazzoli © Stad Gent - Dienst Toerisme

Prominent speakers

As organizing partners, we have **good contacts with several influential and inspiring policymakers, media personalities, opinion makers, and influencers** from Belgium.

For the opening or other official ceremonies, we specifically propose the Belgian Prime Minister (Alexander De Croo), a Belgian Deputy Prime Minister (Petra De Sutter), and the Ghent Alderman for Equalities (Astrid De Bruyckere). Their powers and network can serve to strengthen and empower the LGBTI+ movement.

Since the European institutions are located in Belgium, it is also possible to ask **European policymakers**.

Financial resources

We know from preliminary discussions that the different governments, private sponsors, and partners are willing to **support this conference financially and logistically**. As soon as the ILGA World members choose this bid, these commitments will become concrete.

Together with ILGA World, we wish to explore all possibilities to find the resources needed to make the conference possible for as many visitors as possible.

Support

The organization of the ILGA World Conference in 2024 is supported by numerous organizations, and prominent political figures are also expressing their support. For example (and non-exhaustive);

Petra De Sutter, Federal Deputy Prime Minister;



To: ILGA World members

Brussels, March 16, 2022

Regarding: Letter of support for the Ghent 2024 ILGA World Conference

Dear ILGA World members

Belgium has always been a proud frontrunner on LGBTQIA+ rights. Our country was the second country in the world to allow same-sex marriage and ranked second on the ILGA Europe Rainbow Index in 2021. Still, also in Belgium we have work to do, and our federal government is currently working on its third SOGIESC action plan to further improve the situation of LGBTQIA+ people both inside and outside Belgium.

In its current government agreement, the Belgian federal government stresses the importance of its policies on diversity and equal opportunities and the fight against discrimination. This also has an international dimension: Belgium wants to take the lead internationally on LGBTQIA+ rights, focusing on decriminalization and the protection of LGBTQIA+ people.

Being able to welcome the ILGA World Conference and many activists from all over the world in Belgium, would be an honor for our country and a demonstration of this engagement.

I have been involved for many years in supporting LGBTQIA+ rights (e.g., taking part in the ILGA Europe conferences), sexual and reproductive health and rights and human rights in general. So it is with great joy that I strongly support the bid of Casa Rosa to bring the ILGA World Conference to Belgium.

Sincerely yours,



Deputy Prime Minister Petra De Sutter

Office of Petra De Sutter
Kruisduniaan 50 / 195 - 1000 Brussel



Sarah Schlitz, Federal Secretary of State for Equalities;

Secrétaire d'État à l'Égalité des genres, à l'Égalité des chances et à la Diversité, adj. M. Mobilité



Staatssecretaris voor Gendergelijkheid, Gelijke Kansen en Diversiteit, toeg. M. Mobiliteit

ILGA World members Brussels

Brussels, March 17, 2022

Regarding: Letter of support for the Ghent 2024 ILGA World Conference

Dear ILGA World members

As State Secretary for Gender Equality, Equal opportunities and Diversity I will be honored to welcome the ILGA World Conference in Belgium.

Belgium, as you know, is considered as a model of excellence thanks to its very advanced legislative arsenal on LGBTQI+ rights. Our country was the second country in the world to enable equal marriage and ranked second position on the ILGA Europe Rainbow Index in 2021.

However, there are still many challenges in terms of protecting the rights of LGBTQI+ people and I am working hard on them through a federal action plan to be adopted this year. I am proud to see my country playing a leading role in the fight for the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ people on the international scene. This commitment is enshrined in the agreement. It is valuable that Belgium builds on its status as an exemplary country in this field.

Belgian LGBTQI+ associations have been doing remarkable work for years. And we will be happy to see LGBTQI+ activists and organizations from all over the world to strengthen partnerships. So it's with great joy that I strongly support the bid of Casa Rosa to bring the ILGA World Conference come to Belgium.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah SCHLITZ
Secretary of State for Gender Equality,
Equal opportunities and Diversity

Boulevard du Jardin Botanique, 50
1000 Brussels
Email: info@schlitz.fed.be

Go further, go together. We wish to give ILGA World members and conference participants a warm welcome in Ghent, Belgium. Our organizations, members, and volunteers will share their most beautiful experiences with you in 2024. Don't hesitate to **contact us with any questions**; we will be happy to answer.

In name of the whole hosting committee,

Fleur De Baerdemaeker (they/them)

Chairperson Casa Rosa

fleur@casarosa.be

Elio De Bolle (he/him)

Coordinator Casa Rosa

elio@casarosa.be



www.casarosa.be/ILGAWorldConference



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