



Is Gozo Comparable to Malta when it Comes to LGBTI+ Realities?

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I have always valued equity. It acknowledges that people are diverse, with specific needs according to the particular contexts in which they live, and it recognises that the world doesn't treat each person equally. In my view, equity – and its ability to isolate the unique needs of marginalised communities – is of essential value to our global society.

As an activist for the LGBTI+ community, I have always admired Malta's advocacy for equity. Malta has continuously supported LGBTI+ people through meaningful legislation that bridges the impact of social stigma. However, what is done on paper takes time to become the status quo, particularly on Malta's sister island of Gozo. Through my work with LGBTI+ Gozo, the island's only LGBTI+ organisation, I have learned that Gozo experiences its own unique issues that need to be identified in order to enact change.

So, what are the unique needs that LGBTI+ people living in Gozo face? And what are the disparities that exist between Malta and Gozo? I find the most prevalent to be anonymity. In Gozo, running into relatives and family friends is a common occurrence, and as a queer person, there is always the fear that your sexuality or identity may be called into question. That is why a large number of Gozitan LGBTI+ people, especially youths, express their sexuality more freely in Malta; there is less risk of being outed.

Another disparity is the assumption that Gozo does not have a vibrant queer community. Gozo often runs the risk of being forgotten within the broader context of LGBTI+ rights in Malta. For example, even with Europride taking place in Malta this year, Gozo has received little media attention despite plans to host events for the Gozitan community. Disregard for Gozo's LGBTI+ identities also means that the island's place within the social discourse is limited.

I believe that the mentality surrounding LGBTI+ people in Gozo is one of tolerance but not yet acceptance, and social norms have hindered Gozo from truly embracing LGBTI+ communities. A stark example of this came just a few months ago when a notorious quote from the Bible condemning men who lie with men was left outside the LGBTI+ Gozo office.

However, despite bigotry, progress is still being made. With the opening of the Qawsalla Hub in 2021 and the first ever Gozo Pride March in 2022, LGBTI+ people are gradually being represented here in Gozo. LGBTI+ Gozo's recent publication, *Gozo Voices*, allows these realities to come to light so that social stigmas can be challenged. With continued dedication and commitment in all levels of society, from governments to activists to caring citizens, I believe Gozo can one day match Malta in being one of the most accepting places for LGBTI+ people in Europe. **T**