Let's Design Equality Together – The Push*Back*Lash Cartoon Series.

Under One Roof – Family Is What You Make It!

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„Family is what you make it!" – A cartoon about LGBTQ* parenthood

This cartoon on lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and other (LGBTQ*) forms of parenthood was created as part of a cartoon series for the Push*Back*Lash research project. The project deals with the emerging movement against feminism and gender equality and its impact on democracy. It examines phenomena such as hate speech in social media, anti-equality debates in political parties and parliaments, as well as citizens' attitudes towards democracy and feminism. In addition, the project develops and tests counterstrategies that can effectively counter anti-gender gender and misogynistic discourse.

The graphic and the accompanying text are the result of a collaboration between the illustrator Laura Sistig and researchers from GESIS, Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (Juno Juliane Reichelt, Prof. Dr. Alexia Katsanidou).

About the Illustrator

Laura Sistig (she/her) completed her master's degree in communication design, specialising in illustration, at Düsseldorf University of Applied Sciences (HSD). Since then, she has been working as a research assistant at HSD and as a freelance illustrator. In her work she deals with queer-feminist topics, mental health and in particular the problem of (gender-specific) violence in the digital space.

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Funding Information

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Information on the illustration

Family is more than the traditional mother-father-child constellation - family is what you make it!

Rainbow families have become much more visible in Europe in recent years. This goes hand in hand with processes of social change, groundbreaking legal judgements and political efforts to enable rainbow families and put them on an equal footing with other family forms. Nevertheless, rainbow families are still a minority that faces legal barriers and discrimination. There is a great need for political and legal action and regulation to further advance their equality with heterosexual parents. This includes, for example, a reform of parentage law to enable the automatic recognition of the non-birth parent and to replace the stepchild adoption that has been required to date. As existing adoption and parenthood regulations are based on a binary gender system, trans* and inter* parents also need to be legally recognised in order to avoid discrimination. The utilisation of assisted reproduction and the facilitation of multiple parenthood are also relevant in this context.

gender binary
binary means 'two-part' and a binary gender system therefore only recognises two genders, into which all people can supposedly be classified. The currently applicable parentage law is binary, i.e. it only recognises 'mother' and 'father'.

multiple parenthood
At this point in history, multi-parenting is not recognised in any European country. This means that it is not possible for more than two people to have custody or legal parenthood of a child at the same time. In some countries, additional social parents in patchwork or rainbow families can take on responsibility by means of joint custody or a power of attorney without being legally recognised as parents.

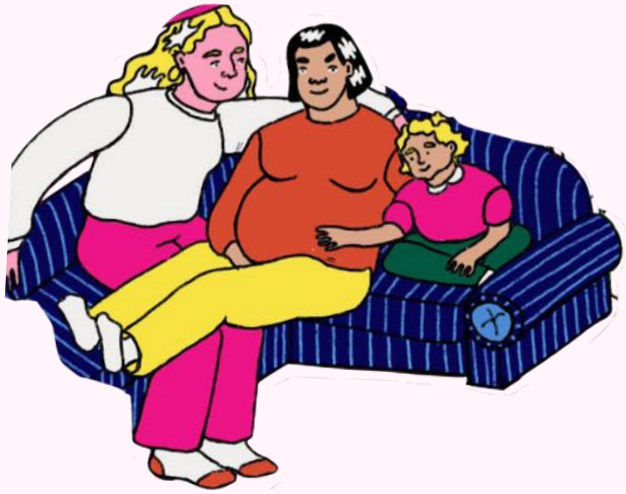
assisted reproductive health care
...includes methods that were previously referred to as 'artificial insemination'. These include intrauterine insemination (IUI), in which sperm cells are inserted into the uterus using a catheter and a syringe, or in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), in which egg cells are removed and fertilised with sperm cells in the laboratory and then reinserted. So-called egg donation and surrogacy are also methods of assisted reproduction but are illegal or restricted in some countries.

In addition, queer families have been exposed to growing hostility and intensified political debates[1]. Depending on the governing party, inclusive family law is also being dismantled in some European countries, making same-sex parenthood less accessible[2]. Old prejudices are gaining new strength: are children from rainbow families different? Are they missing something? Are the children of queer parents more likely to become queer themselves later on? The scientific answer to this is clear: No. Studies over decades have shown that children in rainbow families develop just as well as children in heterosexual families[3]. There is no demonstrable influence of the parents'

[1] Ipsos. (2021). LGBT+ Pride 2021 global survey.
[2] Blei, B. (2025). Regenbogenfamilien in Europa kämpfen um ihre Rechte. Der Standard.
[3] What We Know Project, Cornell University, "What Does the Scholarly Research Say about the Well-Being of Children with Gay or Lesbian Parents?" (online literature review), 2015.

sexual orientation or gender identity on the children's identity development[4]. The fear that children from rainbow families suffer particularly from discrimination is also unfounded[5]. Stable, loving relationships within the family are much more important for the well-being of the child - parental love is universal[6].

The cartoon on LGBTQ* parenthood is intended to show that queer families are not a threat to other families. Social structures and norms are constantly changing: family forms have evolved over time, and the understanding of family today includes single-parent and queer families alongside the traditional heterosexual family. We can all live together ‘under one roof’ in diversity - and at the same time have the privacy to do our own individual thing. Although the illustration shows the diversity of family forms, it does not show the statistical reality: in Germany, for example, queer families make up less than one per cent of all families. Further facts and figures can be found on the following pages.



[4] Fedewa, A.L., Black, W.W., Ahn, S. (2015). Children and Adolescents with Same-Gender Parents: A Meta-Analytic Approach in Assessing Outcomes. Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 11, 1-34.
[5] Rivers, I., Poteat, V.P., Noret, N. (2008): Victimization, social support, and psychosocial functioning among children of same-sex and opposite-sex couples in the United Kingdom. Developmental Psychology, 44(1), 127-134.
[6] Farr, R.H. (2017). Does parental sexual orientation matter? A longitudinal follow-up of adoptive families with school-age children. Developmental Psychology, 53(2), 252-264. |Becker-Stoll, F., Beckh, K. (2009). Die Entwicklung der Kinder - Ergebnisse der entwicklungspsychologischen Teilstudie. Köln: Bundesanzeigerverlag, 233-280.

The rights of rainbow families in the EU

As rainbow families and LGBTQ* people's rights continue to be under attack in several European countries, here are some facts and trends affecting rainbow families in Europe today.

Recognition of same-sex parenthood at EU level in 2021

In 2021, a major step was taken at EU level: a ruling by the European Court of Justice requires all EU states to recognise same-sex parenthood, even if the national law does not provide for same-sex parenthood. This means that a child of queer parents cannot become stateless or lose their freedom of movement within the EU.

15 countries recognise marriage equality and joint adoption for same sex couples

They are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

Nine European countries do not recognize children of non-biological parents: In Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Poland and Slovakia, rainbow families do not exist, legally speaking. Therefore, the children of LGBTQ* couples are left unprotected.

Trans* parenthood

Only four countries of the EU recognise trans parenthood: Belgium, Malta, Slovenia, and Sweden.

There is a major gap between legislation and societal acceptance of rainbow families

Even in countries where rainbow families are protected, legislation and public opinion don't always go hand-in-hand. According to NELFA[7], public opinion is advancing positively, but the speed varies widely. Many people have never encountered rainbow families and therefore have no experience with them. In some countries, like Hungary, state-backed policies actively undermine LGBTQ* rights. A law restricting the portrayal of homosexuality in media accessible to minors reinforces stigmatization and legal discrimination, making life for LGBTQ* parents and their children more precarious[8].

In 11 countries, medically assisted insemination is available for same-sex couples and singles

They are: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. In Austria, only couples have access and in Latvia, only singles. While cisgender heterosexual couples have easy access to medically assisted insemination, LGBTQ* people continue to face reluctance from service providers across the board[9].

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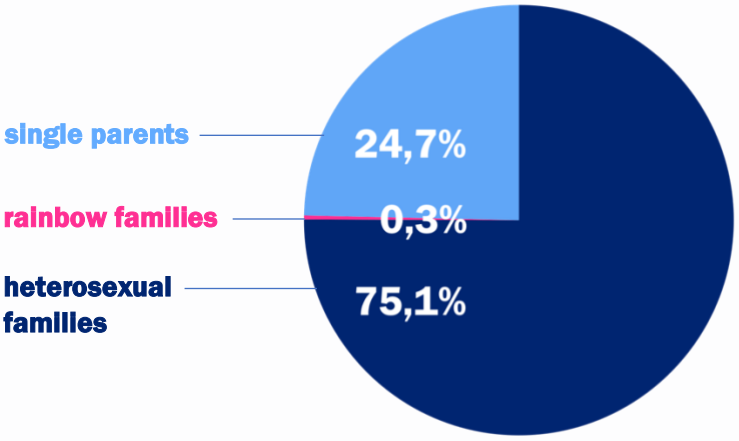
[7] NELFA stands for Network of European LGBTIQ* Families Association. http://nelfa.org/inprogress/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/NELFA-presentation-Nov2020-draft2.pdf

[8] Civicus lense. (2023). Hungary's Latest Assault on LGBTQ* Rights. https://lens.civicus.org/hungarys-latest-assault-on-lgbtqi-rights/

[9] ILGA-Europe. (2021). 6 things you didn't know about rainbow family rights in Europe. 14.05.2021.

Let's take a closer look at the statistics – with Germany as an example

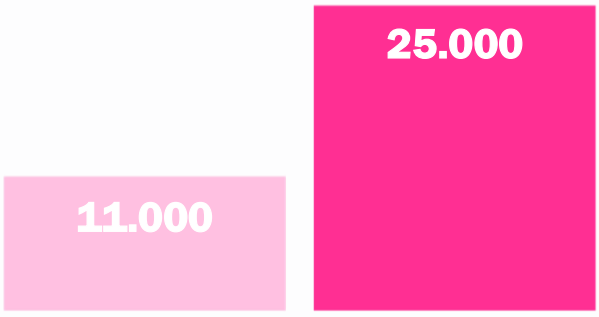
Distribution of family forms in Germany, 2023 [1]



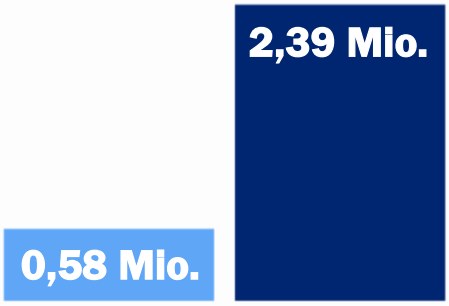
70%

of the people in Germany are convinced that same-sex couples can be just as good parents as heterosexual couples. [2]

What types of partnerships do parents in rainbow families live in? [3]



Gender of single parents [1]



According to the microcensus, there were a total of 36,000 so-called rainbow families in Germany in 2023[1]. This means that the proportion of same sex families in all families is comparatively low at just 0.03%. In 82% of all rainbow families there is at least one biological child, in 19% of all rainbow families there is at least one adopted child[2].

Overall, the number of rainbow families has increased significantly in recent years: in 2018, just 10,000 rainbow families were registered[3]. The increase is partly due to the fact that queer relationships and queer families are becoming more and more accepted within the population. The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs assumes that there will be a further increase in the number of rainbow families in the coming years, also because the majority of LGBTIQ* people in Germany currently want to have children[3].

References: [1] Statistisches Bundesamt (2024). Familien nach Lebensform und Kinderzahl in Deutschland, Jahr 2023, Familienformen. Stand 2. April 2024. | [2] De Vries, L. (2021): Regenbogenfamilien in Deutschland – Ein Überblick über die Lebenssituation von homo- und bisexuellen Eltern und deren Kindern, vom BMFSFJ geförderte Expertise im Rahmen des Neunten Familienberichts. | [3]Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend. (2024). Familienreport 2024.

Further reading and information

Exploring the equality status of queer families in Europe with the Rainbow Map

ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map annually ranks 49 European countries on a scale between 0% (gross violations of human rights, discrimination) and 100% (respect of human rights, full equality) on the basis of laws and policies that have a direct impact on LGBTI people's human rights.

Countries can be filtered on the map according to a total of seven categories, including the category 'family life', which tracks the countries in which queer people can marry or adopt children. The map shows, for example, that 20 countries in Europe have achieved marriage equality and that same-sex couples can legally apply for joint adoption in 23 countries.

⊃ Explore the Rainbow Map via the following link

Attitudes towards same-sex parenthood in a cross-European comparison

As part of their 'Values - Zoom' project, researchers from the University of Vienna have analysed the attitudes of people in different European countries towards same-sex parenting. In their report, they show that there is a clear East-West divide within Europe when it comes to approval of same-sex parenthood. In some countries, strong generational differences are also visible.

⊃ Read here

How many parents can a child have?

German law Professor Nina Dethloff attempted to answer these and other questions in an interview with the Goethe-Institut in 2019.

⊃ Find the interview here

Podcast: on the way to more equality for rainbow families

The European LGBTQ* association ILGA-Europe has its own podcast called 'The Frontline'. In this 2021 episode, host Katrin Hugendubel talks to activist Björn Sieverding about the issues that still need to be tackled in the future with regard to the rights of rainbow families.

⊃ The Frontline: Rainbow Family Rights in Europe – Part 6: The Future

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