

International Travel Report: EuroPride Lisbon 2025 Human Rights Conference

From **19 to 20 June 2025**, I attended the **EuroPride Lisbon Human Rights Conference** in Lisbon, Portugal, as a Senedd representative. The conference was held mainly at **Cinema São Jorge**, with parallel sessions in meeting rooms at the **European Parliament Office in Lisbon**.

This was not a “Pride fringe”. It was the policy heart of the week: a place where people tried to speak plainly about a difficult question — how equal citizenship is protected when politics is noisier, trust is thinner, and public institutions are under strain. The programme did not invite grand speeches about progress. It was closer to a working audit of where rights hold up in practice, and where they fray.

The opening reflected that seriousness. **José Marquina**, speaking for the host organisation, made the basic point that equality cannot remain a promise for later; it has to be lived. **Luís Loureiro de Amorim**, from the European Commission’s representation in Portugal, put it in institutional terms: strategies matter, but only if they shape what governments and public bodies actually do. The emphasis throughout was on delivery, not rhetoric.

What was discussed

The programme ranged widely, but it was not a scatter of unrelated themes. It was organised around the everyday places where people experience freedom and safety: public services, workplaces, local government, and the information environment. In practice, that meant sessions on inclusion, disinformation, mental health, migration and asylum, work and technology, and the sustainability and independence of Pride organisations.

Inclusion and the politics of symbols

One early session focused on fairness and inclusion for trans communities, explicitly including sport. The most useful contributions were those that resisted the temptation to rehearse familiar arguments. Instead, speakers asked what institutions should do when people become symbols in wider political conflict: how to keep rules fair, how to protect safety, and how to avoid turning minority participation into a permanent public controversy.

It was a reminder that rights are not only defended in principle; they are defended in the design of everyday systems. Practical questions — how decisions are made, who is listened to, what standards apply — often matter more than slogans.

Disinformation and the cost of mistrust

A separate session tackled disinformation and “fake news”. The main point was not that misinformation is unpleasant. It is that it changes the terms of politics. When people

are encouraged to doubt everything, it becomes harder to have sensible arguments about policy at all. Minority rights are an easy target in that kind of environment: they can be flattened into simple, emotive claims, detached from the lived reality of ordinary lives.

What came through strongly was the need for institutions to behave in ways that earn trust: clear explanations, consistency, and a willingness to correct falsehoods without inadvertently spreading them further.

Work, technology, and quiet reversals

Another session examined inclusion in the workplace in the context of new technologies and the changing climate around corporate “DEI” (diversity, equity and inclusion). It treated this as a practical matter of power and incentives rather than a contest of slogans. The point was straightforward: if workplaces become less safe for people to be visible, if policies are weakened quietly, or if new systems embed bias, the effect is real even if nobody announces it.

This was a useful corrective. In practice, many people experience equality most directly at work — through recruitment, progression, everyday culture, and whether they feel able to be open without being penalised.

Mental health and minority stress

The session on mental health used a “minority stress” frame: the idea that chronic stigma and exclusion have predictable effects on wellbeing. If social environments produce fear, isolation, and constant self-management, public services will see the consequences. The implication for policymakers is uncomfortable but clear: prevention is not only clinical. It is also about the conditions that make distress more likely in the first place — safety, belonging, and fair treatment.

Public health: prevention, stigma, and the design of services

A session on sexual health and HIV prevention was one of the most practically useful discussions of the conference, precisely because it stayed away from slogans. It treated public health as a question of service design: who can access prevention, how easy it is to do so, and what gets in the way when systems still rely on outdated assumptions about “risk”.

The panel brought together **Jack Lewis** (a Massachusetts state representative), **Tor-Hugne Olsen** (Sex og Politikk) and **JayJay Potter-Peachey** (InterPride). The discussion ranged across different national approaches, but the core message was consistent: prevention works when services are easy to reach, non-judgemental, and built around the reality of how people live — not around stereotypes, stigma or unnecessary gatekeeping.

Stigma came up repeatedly. If people feel judged, if they fear being labelled, or if the route to prevention requires intrusive justification, they delay testing or avoid services altogether. Shame is not only personally damaging; it is a barrier to good health.

The questions from the floor sharpened the picture. Speakers and participants discussed how access can be uneven, including where cost, eligibility rules or long waiting times make provision patchy even in systems that are, on paper, universal. There was also a clear warning against services that default to assumptions that leave some groups having to “prove” they are entitled to care.

Two practical lessons stood out.

First, training and cultural competence matter. If clinicians do not have the language or confidence to ask the right questions, the result is awkward, repetitive, sometimes demeaning interactions — and that drives people away from prevention.

Second, good practice does not scale by goodwill alone. Outreach can reach thousands; standards, pathways and routine training can reach everyone. If prevention depends on a few committed individuals, it remains fragile. If it becomes normal practice — clear routes into services, consistent protocols, trusted clinicians — it becomes durable.

Civic space, funding, and independence

A further strand of the conference dealt with the sustainability of Pride organisations and the question of funding. The discussion was focused on the new context LGBT+ organisations are now facing. Public events have costs — venues, security, accessibility, staffing — and that these costs rise when politics becomes more hostile. It also recognised the dilemma: funding can sustain civic space, but it can also raise questions about independence and credibility if governance is weak.

The best parts of the conversation were practical: how to maintain trust, how to be transparent, and how to ensure that Pride remains rooted in community rather than becoming a purely commercial product.

Political networks: how change is made in the mainstream

One of the most practically useful sessions I attended focused on LGBTQIA+ networks within European politics, bringing together representatives linked to different political traditions.

Three points stood out.

First, speakers argued that equality is strongest when it is integrated into ordinary policy — housing, work, public services, local decision-making — rather than treated as a separate “community issue”. People do not live single-issue lives, and discrimination

often shows up as something mundane: a landlord, a job interview, a hostile workplace, a service that becomes harder to access if you are different.

Second, there was a strong emphasis on the local level. Whatever is agreed in capitals or in Brussels, rights are lived in schools, hospitals, councils and workplaces. If policy cannot be translated into decisions that local leaders and service managers can use, it remains abstract.

Third, speakers were candid about the role of networks. They exist because political parties are not uniform. Some colleagues need persuading; others need educating; some need a nudge to be braver. Networks provide continuity and a shared memory, and they reduce the isolation that can make people retreat under pressure.

I used this session to raise a practical question about engagement in plural democracies: what attitude should democrats take when LGBT individuals hold influence inside parties whose broader programmes may be hostile to equality? The responses were measured. They drew a clear line between formal engagement, where it may be necessary to secure better outcomes, and civic endorsement of regressive political movements.

This discussion connected directly with my own work to establish the first **CPA LGBT+ parliamentarians' network**. The European experience reinforced the value of networks that are not simply symbolic, but operational: they share policy approaches, create support across jurisdictions, and keep minority rights on the mainstream agenda.

The closing session: Europe, but not only Europe

The conference closed with a deliberately wider lens. It brought together senior Pride and human-rights figures, including international organisers, and it included **Erika Hilton**, a Brazilian congresswoman. Her presence mattered because it reminded the room that these debates do not sit neatly inside European borders. Rights are contested globally, and choices made in one country — whether to protect civic space, whether to make minorities into political targets, whether to let disinformation run unchecked — can echo elsewhere.

Relevance to Wales

The relevance to Wales of our discussions was multi-faceted.

First, this visit strengthened international parliamentary relationships that Wales has a clear interest in building — particularly through my work with the CPA LGBT+ parliamentarians' network. Lisbon offered a concentrated view of how comparable European networks operate: what they prioritise, how they keep issues on the agenda, and how they translate values into usable policy.

Second, it offered useful learning for Wales as we prepare to host major European inclusion-focused events. Cardiff will host **EuroGames 2027**. Lisbon showed what it looks like when a city pairs a large public event with serious human-rights content and institutional participation. The lesson is simple: a host city and country is judged not only on celebration, but on competence — planning, safety, accessibility, and credibility.

Third, it helped clarify what a future **EuroPride bid** would involve. Lisbon demonstrated that EuroPride is not simply a parade. It includes a human-rights conference of real substance, the capacity to convene partners across civil society and institutions, and the organisational maturity to deliver at European scale. Wales should not treat a potential bid simply as a gesture. Visiting Lisbon made it easier to understand what a credible bid would require, if we choose to explore it before 2030.

What I brought back

First, a clearer sense that rights are sustained — or weaken — through everyday systems. Formal equality matters, but lived equality depends on how institutions behave: how consistent they are, how accessible services feel, and how confident people are that public bodies will treat them fairly.

Second, a sharper appreciation of how disinformation changes democratic life. When trust collapses, policy debate becomes harder, and minority rights become easier to exploit as issues. Institutions cannot solve that alone, but they can either steady the ground or make things worse.

Third, practical insight into how political networks keep equality embedded in mainstream institutions: turning values into workable policy language, sharing practice, and maintaining solidarity and peer-group support across very different contexts.

Lisbon, led by dynamic and progressive mayor, is clearly a city that clearly knows how to host large-scale international events. But the value of this visit lay in the seriousness of the conference and the direct relevance of its themes to the work of a modern legislature: protecting equal citizenship means defending not only principles, but the everyday machinery that makes those principles real.