

“...It is clear
that it is time
to **urgently**
and **radically**
redefine **&**
our work...” **reshape**”

ANTI-ACTIVITY REPORT

A critical reflection of TGEU's
activities and work from
June 2016 until June 2018

ANTI-ACTIVITY REPORT

A critical reflection of TGEU's activities and work from June 2016 until June 2018

This report has been created with the greatest care, but it does not claim to be complete. Please send feedback and suggestions for amendments to tgeu@tgeu.org.

Transgender Europe, June 2018

Transgender Europe (TGEU) is a European-based umbrella organisation supporting, fighting, and advocating for the rights of trans people across Europe and Central Asia. TGEU is committed to intersectional justice and trans rights through advocacy, campaigning, researching, community building, and networking with alliances. TGEU represents more than 115 member organisations and groups in 44 countries and coordinates global projects such as the Trans Murder Monitoring. TGEU's vision is a world free from discrimination where every person can live freely according to their gender identity or expression without interference.



TGEU is grateful for the financial support received from the Rights, Equality & Citizenship Program of the European Union towards the design and printing of this Activity Report. Sole responsibility for contents lays with TGEU and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

ANTI-ACTIVITY REPORT: Contents

Introduction

The Anti-Activity Report 4

A note from TGEU's Steering Committee 5

Anti-Activity Report

Uncovering Racism 8

Uncovering Ableism 12

Conclusion & Commitments 15

“...It is clear
that it is time
to urgently
and radically
redefine &
reshape
our work...”

INTRODUCTION: The anti-activity report

Transgender Europe (TGEU) has grown steadily as an organisation over the past 12 years. We now have 116 group members from 44 countries in Europe and Central Asia. Our work is supported by 7 main funders and donors, and this allows us to employ 11 members of staff, publish an average of 12 publications a year, work with our members and partners, and advocate and campaign on a number of issues. We have contributed successfully to shifting the discourse of trans rights in Europe from one which focuses on medical aspects to one which focuses on human rights.

Every two years we publish our activity report which outlines our successes and activities for the period and is presented to our members. Our activity report shares highlights in our different areas of work, lists our activities throughout these two years, and presents financial reports and budgets.

However, this time instead of only talking about our successes and victories we are also presenting our anti-activity report. We have recently started to take a power-critical look at our activities and deliverables, at our structures, at our (implied) values, at the ways we work, and have realised that we are leaving many people behind.

It's long overdue that we, the most privileged people within the trans community and within TGEU, open our eyes and realise that despite our successes in producing publications and fulfilling commitments made to our funders, we have also failed.

This anti-activity report takes a critical look at our work to underline where we are failing our communities.

INTRODUCTION: A note from TGEU's Steering Committee

At the last European Transgender Council in Bologna in Italy in 2016, our members asked us to take on intersectionality as a topic. The formal process and mindset we used to tackle this, turned into a series of explosive conflicts between people socialised as dominant groups (white, non-disabled, with high education...) and people from underrepresented groups (black and people of colour, D/deaf and disabled people, people with a migration background, sex workers...). Although it was clear that we all shared the same goal, in theory, there was no consensus on how the values of the organisation were applied in practice and in our work with these communities, which led us to start tackling these problems from within.

Those of us socialised as belonging to various dominant groups, and lacking awareness of the dominant norms and culture, thought that it was enough to 'learn' about intersectionality, to organise workshops and trainings for our staff and steering committee, to share articles and books, to talk over coffee and lunch about various topics.

This is not enough. We needed to deeply examine whom we were contracting for workshops, what articles and books we were reading, and whom they were written by. Why did we search for knowledge in academic ways while not seeing we were silencing the people sitting right next to us? How did people from underrepresented groups feel? How did our socialisation as belonging to the dominant group play a role in our empathy, or lack thereof, towards them being silenced or hurt?

These were the questions we had to ask ourselves - not ones that became relevant only recently, but ones that we have been neglecting for too long.

We needed work that tackled, challenged, deconstructed oppressive power dynamics, and helped us change the core structures of our organisation through liberating the voices of the ones we had silenced, shifting power dynamics from reproducing the society's hierarchy to a more representative organisation.

Through these conflicts, we (white and/or non-disabled people) have learnt at the expenses of others that:

- we are **racist**;
- we are **ableist**;
- we are not even close to being intersectional;
- we owe many people an apology;
- **apology without action is nothing.**

Most importantly, we have realised that before learning justice, we need to unlearn oppression. We need to unlearn what this white, binary, Christianity-dominated, patriarchal, racist, North- and West-centric, ableist European society has taught us and how it makes us privileged. As trans activists and feminists, many of us have unlearnt the specific structures that contribute to sexism and anti-trans violence. We have applied this to our work. It is time to unlearn all the other oppressive structures. Without this unlearning we will be unable to continue our social justice work.

Correction, without unlearning and taking action, we are unable to call our work social justice work. And more importantly, we will continue to be completely disconnected from the communities we claim to support.

We need to recognise and name these structures within TGEU and commit to concrete actions to address them. This anti-activity report is our first step in recognising publicly and naming the racist and ableist structures that we have reproduced from society.

We acknowledge that we have only been able to critically look at our work in a manner which uncovers racism and ableism at the expense, work and emotional labour of Black and People of Colour and D/Deaf and disabled people in the staff and steering committee of TGEU.

In these last two years, these internal conflicts have impacted the functioning of the organisation and have reflected on the team. We have had three Co-Chairs resign: Alocs Recher, Arja Voipio, and Tina Orban. We have also seen the first members of staff to leave the organisation: Noah Keuzenkamp, Catie Carr, Adam Smiley, Nathan Gale, and Boglarka Fedorko (July 2018). Carla LaGata is on a one-year sabbatical from the organisation.

This path to change and our transparency might feel uncomfortable for some people, including other similar organisations. However, we value this as a crucial turning point for TGEU: we are committed to completely reshaping our work towards better representing the expertise and lives of trans Black and People of Colour, trans D/deaf and disabled people, trans sex workers, trans migrants, trans poor and/or homeless people. These are the reasons why we claimed we were activists in the first place. And we are dedicated to creating this change in TGEU, even if for some of us it means leaving that space.

It is clear that it is time to urgently and radically redefine and reshape our work.

TGEU's Steering Committee, 2016 – 2018

Arian Kajtezović, Clémence Zamora-Cruz,
Stein Wolff Frydenlund, Ulrika Westerlund,
Vreer Verkerke, Nicole De Leo, and Toryn Glavin.

ANTI-ACTIVITY REPORT: Uncovering Racism

In order to show how racism is being reproduced at TGEU we have made a non-exhaustive list of some of the racist practices we have identified.

We reproduce racism when... We continue to use a strategic plan that was developed in 2012, written from the perspective of and serving the white trans community.

How is this racist? With this action we exclude Black and People of Colour from the decision-making process. We tell Black and People of Colour that their voices are not important for the organisation and that the priorities of the trans movement in Europe were set by white people.

We reproduce racism when... We give more care to our white team members, and take them more seriously than our Black and People of Colour team members during and after conflicts. And we expect Black and People of Colour team members to offer emotional support and provide emotional labour.

How is this racist? We are biased towards listening to and providing more care for white people, while expecting Black and People of Colour to not only cope with oppression but also protect white people from taking accountability for racist behaviour. We have been socialised to a wide variety of representations for white people in every field, different traits of personality and develop individuality, which means that the way we interact, provide support and share empathy always goes in priority to white people. We are also biased in not seeing racist conflicts and staying silent, thinking we are neutral when we are actually taking the side of the oppressor.

We reproduce racism when... We expect Black and People of Colour to constantly explain micro-aggressions against them, and to be experts on racism and intersectionality while silencing them the rest of the time. For example, we go to Black and People of Colour for random, quick responses on “intersectionality” while silencing them in broader input and work in TGEU.

How is this racist? This means that white people at TGEU stay in a passive state and are not willing to do any work to unlearn racist behaviours, in which they are supported by the organisational structure. We tokenise Black and People of Colour when we need something from them, while completely failing to address oppressive actions and attitudes towards them in our own organisation and beyond.

We reproduce racism when... Our hiring practices are based on formal educational-merit (focused on a lot of work experience, requiring a formal university degree) and are led completely by white people.

How is this racist? This means that TGEU does not understand how racism in society contributes to unequal opportunities for Black and People of Colour to access education and employment and therefore sets them at a disadvantage in hiring practices based on white-educational-merit, while ignoring white bias.

We reproduce racism when... We do not have any Black staff members or steering committee members.

How is this racist? We have hired team members and elected team members that are only light skinned People of Colour. White bias towards Black people is stronger and has played a role in this fact. It therefore excludes trans Black people from decision making positions in the European and Central Asian work frame of TGEU, as well as meaning that TGEU is completely disconnected from this community.

We reproduce racism when... We tone-police Black and People of Colour.

How is this racist? In times of conflicts, we asked Black and People of Colour to “speak with respect” and “be less angry”. We failed to see that we were imposing our white and classist culture on how people should behave, interact, and most importantly, we were setting the frame of how they should have dealt with our racist behaviors. Not being angry is also a privilege because it means we do not see the problem. There is an unspoken understanding that it is ok for white people to judge the “appropriateness” or “legitimacy” of a reaction by a Black or Person of Color. This is often done based on how a reaction of a Black or Person of Color to racism makes the white person/people feel, rather than on the underlying oppression causing the reaction.

We reproduce racism when... We assume that being perceived as male is a privilege.

How is this racist? This means that we ignore the fact that black men and men of colour are consistently and disproportionately targets of institutional violence (police, courts, medical care, etc.).

We reproduce racism when... We ask Black and People of Colour “where are you really from?”

How is this racist? This means that we do not believe Black and People of Colour can be from Europe, perpetuating the idea that Europe and all the spaces in it (including education, healthcare, legal protection, housing, government, etc.) are only for white people.

We reproduce racism when... We tokenise Black and People of Colour and people from the Global South and East to justify our worldwide projects as non-colonial.

How is this racist? This reproduces colonialist practices and approaches by using Black and People of Colour’s and people from the Global South and East experience and expertise for our own gains, without involving them in the shaping of the project itself or properly acknowledging their work and expertise.

We reproduce racism when... We lack institutional solutions to visa problems for those from the Global South and East and hold events in locations which favour people with EU passports.

How is this racist? This reinforces the inaccessibility of employment in TGEU and participation at events for people who lack the privilege of holding an EU passport, in effect keeping the voices and perspectives of Black and People of Colour and people from the Global South and East out of the discourse.

ANTI-ACTIVITY REPORT: Uncovering Ableism

In order to show how ableism is being reproduced at TGEU we have made a non-exhaustive list of some of the ableist practices we have identified.

We reproduced ableism when... We held a week-long retreat on wellbeing in a physically inaccessible venue.

How is this ableism? This means that many D/deaf and disabled trans activists could not attend the event. And it tells D/deaf and disabled trans people that they are not included in TGEU and that we do not value them and their wellbeing the same way as that of non-disabled people.

We reproduced ableism when... We sent out 17 newsletters over 3 years without alternate text in images and did not add alternate text in our images on our website, nor ensured that our publication designs are easily read by PDF-readers.

How is this ableism? It means that we forget about the needs of visually impaired people and that visually impaired people received less information than others and had a harder time to read our documents. This also makes it more difficult for visually impaired people to participate in discussion around TGEU's work.

We reproduced ableism when... We launched videos without subtitles because we were in a hurry.

How is this ableism? It means that we forget about the needs of D/deaf people. It means that people who are D/deaf and people who are still learning English received less information than others, and were excluded from our work.

We reproduce ableism when... We forget breaks in our training programs and do not offer quiet rooms.

How is this ableism? It means that we assume that everyone has the same capacity for work and socialising and being around people, and ignores the needs of some autistic people and some neurodivergent people.

We reproduced ableism when... Our campaigns for depathologisation of trans identities end up stigmatising mental illness.

How is this ableism? This stigmatises people who have mental illness and live with a diagnosis. It erases D/deaf and disabled trans people for whom diagnosis is a part of life, regardless of the fact that they are trans.

We reproduce ableism when... We rent an office or training spaces which are physically inaccessible.

How is this ableism? This means that TGEU assumes that we will not employ members of staff who are physically disabled, and tells trans disabled people that they are not welcome by TGEU.

We reproduced ableism when... We asked our disabled members of staff to represent TGEU at conferences and other events which can be highly stressful and/or draining for them, without providing for assistance and extra-time off for recovery.

How is this ableism? This means that TGEU cares more about productivity and outputs at the expense of a person's health.

We reproduced ableism when... We did not offer appropriate support to a disabled trans person to relocate to Berlin.

How is this ableism? This disproportionately adds obstacles for disabled people, thus further excluding them from employment in TGEU.

We reproduce ableism when... We ask and expect our disabled team members to work 32 to 40-hour weeks.

How is this ableism? This assumes everyone has the same capacity for work, ignores the effect of ableist environment on people, and means that TGEU cares more about productivity and outputs at the expense of a person's health.

We reproduce ableism when... We blame people for letting the team down when they take self-care breaks and go on sick leave due to burnout, and do not address instead the effect of workplace environment on everyone.

How is this ableism? This ignores the source of the problem in the environment and instead puts the blame and responsibility on the individual affected by the disabling environment, including unrealistic workplans and workloads.

We reproduce ableism when... We do not offer interpretation (sign languages or languages other than English).

How is this ableism? This automatically excludes D/deaf and people who are not fluent in English from participating in TGEU's events or joining TGEU's team as staff or steering committee member.

CONCLUSION & COMMITMENTS

Additional to these instances of racism and ableism that we have started to uncover in our work, we know that there have been other practices in our work which have been also non-binary exclusionary, transmisogynist, colonialist, North- and West-centric, classist, ageist and sexist.

This would include elements of our policy and advocacy work (e.g. giving points to countries for Legal Gender Recognition in our Trans Rights Index that would always favour Western countries even though they do not allow Legal Gender Recognition for minors and offer no other options than the binary gender), in our campaigns, our communications, our travel procedures (e.g. not providing enough support on visa procedures for people from the Global South travelling to Europe for conferences), and in many other areas of our work.

We are **deeply committed** to immediately undertake the work needed to address the above issues and more, and to better understand the complexity of these issues, we hope that the practices which we put into place will also have a broader benefit.

The past years have led the remaining team to burn out and for these reasons we will close TGEU's office for 4 weeks in July and August 2018. In August and September, our newly elected steering committee and staff will come together to set out a workplan that reflects this work and pushes us to continue to break free from these systems, while setting a healthy work frame for everyone who is on the team at the moment. With special care to also ensure high standards in place so that those people from underrepresented groups and who are currently left behind by TGEU's work would also be able to be an integral part of the team.

We acknowledge that resource distribution also needs to change in order to achieve a more accessible organisation and strive to become an anti-racist and decolonial organisation. This includes an extensive reflection on the power Europe plays on the Global South, rethinking how we shape and handle our global projects, but also how our environmental practices affect other parts of the world.

In practice this means:

Encouraging our members to elect steering committee members from underrepresented groups.

Ensuring scholarships for our events which are only for Black and trans People of Colour, D/deaf and disabled trans people, for refugees, and sex workers.

Having people from underrepresented groups in the selection process of scholarships, in hiring processes and in all decision-making processes.

That we would rather have 2 disabled people than 10 non-disabled persons at events.

That if it costs more money to have an event in an accessible venue we will make sure to cover the costs.

That we will budget for personal travel assistants to accompany disabled trans people when travelling, if this is needed.

Not being afraid of focusing on more specific topics with only groups concerned by the topic participating, rather than just “general” events.

Understanding that we need to offer per-diem to enable sex workers and other people with irregular-, low- or no-income to be at our events, and not have to choose between participating in the community and their economic survival.

That if we want trans parents to be at our events and their voices to be heard, we need to offer child-care facilities or to cover the costs of child-care.

That we need to plan our events more in advance to ensure that we are able to obtain visas for all people, in particular those travelling from outside the European Union and from the Global South.

That as an organisation based in the Global North we need to commit to sustainable practices which do not contribute to climate change, including printing locally, recycling and using recycled paper, traveling sustainably and reimbursing sustainable travel, even when this is the more expensive option.