

Committee: Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee (GA3)

Topic: The issue of conversion therapy

Student Officer: Dimitris Kotsovilis

Position: Co-Chair

## Personal Introduction

My name is Dimitris Kotsovilis and this year I have the utmost pleasure to serve as the Deputy Chair of the Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee (GA3) in the 10<sup>th</sup> CSMUN. I am 16 years old, and I currently reside in Athens, Greece. I am an IB2 student wanting to study History and Politics at a university level, and therefore Model United Nations sparked my interest from the start. The complexity of the multipolar world order, in conjunction to my passion for geopolitics, have always intrigued me. MUN has helped me cultivate such an inclination and acquire a more holistic approach of contemporary global issues.

This study guide will discuss the topic of conversion therapy; a multifaceted issue that encompasses social, political, cultural and political dimensions. Even though this guide will familiarize you with the key points of the issue at hand, you are highly encouraged to conduct further research on the topic as well as your countries stance on it. I am looking forward to a fruitful debate and hearing all your different ideas!

For any questions and clarifications feel free to contact me via email: [dkotsovilis@gmail.com](mailto:dkotsovilis@gmail.com)

I'm looking forward to meeting you all!

Dimitris Kotsovilis



## Topic Introduction

In recent years, with progressively more LGBTQ+ visibility, the issue of conversion therapy has emerged as a social phenomenon, harming LGBTQ+ youth around the world. The topic covers an array of different and complex variables that need to be taken into consideration, while finding possible solutions.

To begin with, the issue is primarily political. With new achievements for the queer people throughout the world, a reactionary and conservative movement defies these social advancements and has inhibited progress that would codify laws restricting conversion therapy. In some extreme cases in which homosexuality is considered a disease, despite various studies that have rejected these claims, conversion therapy is considered a logical way to “pray the gay away.”<sup>1</sup>

Considering such a development it would be a remiss not to consider the fact that conversion therapy is also a religious issue. As most religions, including Christianity and Islam, scrutinize homosexuality and any gender identity that does not comply with the “traditional” male and female genders, conversion therapy has been supported by religious groups around the world. Therefore, the topic transcends political borders and takes an even more perplexing form, since religious sentiment is extremely difficult to be isolated from politics, especially in states in which the separation between religion and government has either not been achieved or is simply a fine or is simply a fine line.

Finally, another important aspect of this multifaceted global issue that delegates should consider is the cultural aspect of such an issue. In societies where homosexuality is not accepted by the majority and in which biphobia, homophobia and transphobia are the norm, conversion therapy remains an indivisible part of the culture. Notably, in conservative Christian sub-Saharan countries or in Islamic countries, where the Sharia Law is in place, countries cite the notion of cultural relativism to “defend” their reluctance and unwillingness to codify laws protecting LGBTQ+ youth, since they consider them a

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<sup>1</sup> “I Tried to 'Pray the Gay Away', and Ended up in a Hospital Bed.” The Independent, Independent Digital News and Media, 16 Apr. 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/i-tried-to-pray-the-gay-away-but-ended-up-in-a-hospital-bed-10182044.html>.



“western construct”. Furthermore, in some countries in which collective rights are culturally more significant than individual rights, LGBTQ+ rights are not prioritized, citing their individualistic nature, therefore inhibiting any substantial progress towards restricting conversion therapy. Overall, it becomes apparent that the issue of conversion therapy is a multifaceted one that demands delegates to consider its various aspects

## Definition of key terms

### Conversion Therapy

"Reparative" or "conversion" therapy is a practice posing a plethora of risks that target LGBTQ youth aiming to alter their sexual or gender identities involuntarily. The particular phenomenon has been plagued in controversy for its discredited methods that unscientifically and dangerously claim to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. Such methods have been plainly rejected by every accredited mental and medical health organization in the past years, however because of continuing discrimination and prejudices against the LGBTQ+ community, certain practitioners still conduct reparative therapy. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable, and conversion therapy may result to depression, anxiety, drug use, homelessness, and suicide.<sup>2</sup>

### Cultural Relativism

The philosophical school of cultural relativism affirms that cultures have distinct and noticeable differences from one another, therefore so do the moral frameworks that shape relations within different societies. In the field of politics and international relations, cultural relativists note if a practice is ethically 'right' or 'wrong' by evaluating it in compliance to the standards of a social group within which the practice takes place. It is worth noting that a debate exists concerning whether value judgments can be made across culture.

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<sup>2</sup> “The Lies and Dangers of ‘Conversion Therapy.’” Human Rights Campaign, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/the-lies-and-dangers-of-reparative-therapy>.



## Gender Identity

“Gender identity is defined as a personal conception of oneself as male or female (or rarely, both or neither). This concept is intimately related to the concept of gender role, which is defined as the outward manifestations of personality that reflect gender identity. Gender identity, in nearly all instances, is self-identified, as a result of a combination of inherent and extrinsic or environmental factors; gender role, on the other hand, is manifested within society by observable factors such as behavior and appearance.”<sup>3</sup>

## Gender Non-conforming

“Refers to people who do not follow other people’s ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the female or male sex they were assigned at birth.”<sup>4</sup>

## Homophobia

Refers to an explicit or implicit expression of dislike against homosexuals which can be either conscious or subconscious.<sup>5</sup>

## LGBTQ+

“LGBTQ is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning. These terms are used to describe a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Shuvo Ghosh, MD. “Gender Identity: Definitions, Development of Gender Identity - Usual Patterns, Development of Gender Identity - Unusual Patterns.” Gender Identity: Definitions, Development of Gender Identity - Usual Patterns, Development of Gender Identity - Unusual Patterns, Medscape, 4 Feb. 2022, <https://emedicine.medscape.com/article/917990-overview>.

<sup>4</sup>Fact Sheet: Transgender & Gender Nonconforming Youth in School.” SRLP (*Sylvia Rivera LawProject*),20Aug. 2012, <https://srlp.org/resources/fact-sheet-transgender-gender-nonconforming-youth-school/>.

<sup>5</sup> “Homophobia: Meaning & Definition for UK English.” Lexico Dictionaries | English, Lexico Dictionaries, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/homophobia>.

<sup>6</sup> “Defining LGBTQ.” The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center, <https://gaycenter.org/about/lgbtq/>.



## Queer

“Denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms.”<sup>7</sup>

## Political polarization

A schism in the political world between different groups according to juxtaposing political belief or values.<sup>8</sup>

## Sharia Law

“Sharia law is a religious law that lays down governing principles for spiritual, mental, and physical behavior that must be followed by Muslims. Regarded as God’s command for Muslims, Sharia law is essentially Islam’s legal system.”<sup>9</sup>

## Background Information

Conversion therapy is a topic that can be explored through its political, religious, cultural and social aspects. Nonetheless, it is equally important to comprehend the historical contextual information regarding the particular issue so as to better understand the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community, in addition to the theoretical debate that preceded this study guide.

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<sup>7</sup> “Queer: Meaning & Definition for UK English.” Lexico Dictionaries | English, Lexico Dictionaries, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/queer>.

<sup>8</sup> “Polarization: Meaning & Definition for UK English.” Lexico Dictionaries | English, Lexico Dictionaries, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/polarization>.

<sup>9</sup> “Sharia Law.” Corporate Finance Institute, 7 May 2022, <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/knowledge/finance/sharia-law/>.



## Historical and theoretical background regarding conversion therapy (19<sup>th</sup> century-1969)

Throughout millennia, homosexuality and different gender identities were not considered as “deviant” and “non-conforming behaviors.”<sup>10</sup> However, with the spread of Abrahamic religions<sup>11</sup> (Christianity and Islam specifically), homosexuality and a gender identity different from the established male and female ones became a condition and was accompanied by negative connotations. In such developments, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Europe at the beginning and then in the United States (US), different psychiatrists attempted to understand the complex issues of sexuality and gender with many of them characterizing gender non-conforming individuals and homosexuals as “sick” with many of them attempting to find cures. An influential psychiatrist that shaped the history of conversion therapy was Richard von Krafft-Ebing<sup>12</sup>. The psychiatrist, of German-Austrian origin and one of the creators of what is commonly referred to as scientific sexology, through his work *Psychopathia Sexualis (1886)*<sup>13</sup> promoted the model that homosexuality is a pathology. Therefore, his inaccurate research became the basis for the psychiatrists that followed. For instance, Eugen Steinach<sup>14</sup>, inspired by the newly established consensus, tried to unsuccessfully “treat” homosexuals through the transplantations of testicles from heterosexual (straight) men

Additionally, during this period of time the “father of psychoanalysis,”<sup>23</sup> Sigmund Freud further supported the argument that homosexuality can be cured. More specifically, he

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<sup>10</sup> The Social Imagination of Homosexuality and the Rise of ... - Sage Journals. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2378023116630555>.

<sup>11</sup> Greenberg, David F., and Marcia H. Bystryn. “Christian Intolerance of Homosexuality.” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 88, no. 3, 1982, pp. 515–48. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2779118>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2022.

<sup>12</sup> “Richard, Baron Von Krafft-Ebing.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Freiherr-von-Krafft-Ebing>.

<sup>13</sup> Krafft-Ebing, and Chaddock. “*Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct.*” Project Gutenberg, 26 Mar. 2021, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/64931>.

<sup>14</sup> Södersten, Per, et al. “Eugen Steinach: The First Neuroendocrinologist.” OUP Academic, Oxford University Press, 1 Mar. 2014, <https://academic.oup.com/endo/article/155/3/688/2843196>.



advocated that homosexuality “could be removed through hypnotic suggestion,” however he stated that converting a “fully developed homosexual into a heterosexual does not offer much prospect or success”<sup>15</sup> and that it was “a variation of sexual function.”<sup>23</sup> Hence, although Freud still supported the idea of conversion therapy, he accentuated certain perceived limitations, reinforcing the idea that homosexuality could be cured only at a young age. This statement on the other hand, oriented conversion therapy to LGBTQ+ youth, which had profound ramifications for posterity. Freud also publishes a scientific book *Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman (1920)*<sup>16</sup>, in which he elaborates his views on female homosexuality, considered outdated by the scientific community.<sup>17</sup> Overall, Freud was a significant figure when it comes to the topic of conversion therapy, however his theories were greatly misinterpreted and were used to justify atrocities discussed below.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century more and more psychiatrists supported this view of homosexuality and a non-conforming gender identity being mental diseases. It is worth noting that there was great disagreement throughout the scientific community. Sándor Ferenczi, a Hungarian psychoanalyst on the one hand “did not see how gay men could be cured”<sup>18</sup>, while Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund Freud, stated: “we can cure homosexuals.”<sup>19</sup> Such claims and counterclaims stressed the juxtapositions that further confused the public opinion at the time leading to limited advancements towards banning conversion therapy.

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<sup>15</sup> Brody, Jane E. “More Homosexuals Aided to Become Heterosexual.” The New York Times, The New York Times, 28 Feb. 1971, <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/02/28/archives/more-homosexuals-aided-to-become-heterosexual-more-homosexuals-are.html>.

<sup>16</sup> The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis - Lacan. <https://www.lacan.com/The.Psychogenesis.of.a.case.of.female.Homosexuality.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Misusing Freud: Psychoanalysis and the Rise of ... - UNLV Libraries. [https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1027&context=psi\\_sigma\\_siren](https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1027&context=psi_sigma_siren).

<sup>18</sup> “Sándor Ferenczi.” Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sandor-Ferenczi>.

<sup>19</sup> “Letter from Sigmund Freud to the Mother of a Homosexual Man. - Sigmund Freud - Google Arts & Culture.” Google, Google, <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/letter-from-sigmund-freud-to-the-mother-of-a-homosexual-man/0QEgF5UcJfYCcw>.



## Historical and theoretical background regarding conversion therapy (1969-1999)

The Stonewall riots on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1969 in New York City, US, were pivotal for the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights. The activists fought for their right to identity against the police, changing the course of queer history setting a “new phase in the struggle for gay liberation.”<sup>20</sup> The visibility of the LGBTQ+ community and through their advocacy started to change the public opinion on matters of gender identity and sexual orientation, leading to a series of advancements. More specifically, in 1973 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders known as the *Statistical Manual on Mental Disorders (DSM III)*, a win for the queer community, which can be attributed to the findings of Kinsey and Hooker. Although opposition to the 1973 decision existed, the referendum that took place upheld the decision of the APA with a majority of the votes (58%).<sup>21</sup> Lastly, in 1987, the APA removed ego-dystonic homosexuality from (DSM III).<sup>22</sup> Such developments were a huge win for the LGBTQ+ community, as they were able to get federal recognition that their sexual orientation was a characteristic of their identity and not a disease.

Considering the aforementioned events, it would be a remiss not to mention the setbacks that the LGBTQ+ community faced during this era. In detail, in 1974, the same year when the referendum upheld the decision of the APA to remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders, George Reckers and Ole Ivar Lovaas<sup>23</sup> conducted research that harmed the community and was later deemed homophobic, having led to the suicide of one of the participants. Also, it is important to note that by 1998 Christian right groups such as the American Family Association and the Family Research council

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<sup>20</sup> History.com Editors. “Stonewall Riots.” History.com, A&E Television Networks, 31 May 2017, <https://www.history.com/topics/gay-rights/the-stonewall-riots>.

<sup>21</sup> Drescher, Jack. “Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality.” Behavioral Sciences (Basel, Switzerland), MDPI, 4 Dec. 2015, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4695779/>.

<sup>22</sup> HS, Lief HI;Kaplan. “Ego-Dystonic Homosexuality.” Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, U.S. National Library of Medicine, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/3820321/>.

<sup>23</sup> Disturbing Behaviours: Ole Ivar Lovaas and the Queer History of Autism ... [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328400705\\_Disturbing\\_Behaviours\\_Ole\\_Ivar\\_Lovaas\\_and\\_the\\_Queer\\_History\\_of\\_Autism\\_Science](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328400705_Disturbing_Behaviours_Ole_Ivar_Lovaas_and_the_Queer_History_of_Autism_Science).







Figure : Protestors at the Stonewall Riots on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1969, advocating for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community.

had spent approximately 600.000 US Dollars to promote conversion therapy.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, highlighting the politicized and religious aspects of the issue of conversion therapy, with a significant movement of opposition.

## Techniques used in conversion therapy

Throughout history, an array of different methods has been used to attempt to convert homosexuals to heterosexuals with some being physician and others being mental.

To begin with, a method which used to be popular was behavioral modification as practitioners would employ “aversive conditioning techniques.” Amongst other methods, electric chairs that would send shocks of electricity were used in an attempt to change the behavior of members of the LGBTQ+ community. According to Haldeman “such methods can be called torture besides being ineffective.”<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, some other sources have pointed out to ex-gay and ex-trans ministers as a form of promoting conversion therapy. These organization would have “Ministers” that were reportedly previously gay show that they had been cured. Many members of the LGBTQ+ have been stigmatized by such techniques with many being deceived during a period of time in which they needed support so as to deal with

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<sup>24</sup> NatSecGeek. “American Family Association (AFA).” MuckRock, <https://www.muckrock.com/foi/united-states-of-america-10/american-family-association-afa-31213/>.

<sup>25</sup> Wilson, G. Terence, and Gerald C. Davison. “Behavior Therapy and Homosexuality: A Critical Perspective.” Behavior Therapy, Elsevier, 14 June 2006, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0005789474800821>.

internalized feelings of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia. Many have pointed out on the deceiving nature of such tools which are “nothing but a lie.”<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, a preferred method which can be seen until today is psychoanalysis. Long-term therapy was thought as one of the best ways to “treat” homosexuality. Such a technique would resolve “unconscious childhood conflicts” that “made children gay.” Although some organizations have claimed relative success, the international scientific community rejects such claims characterizing them as “unscientific” and “baseless.”<sup>27</sup>

Another technique used was titled “Sex therapy.” The particular method aimed at “teaching homosexuals about heterosexual sex” by forcing them to engage in intercourse with members of the opposite sex so as to “turn them straight.” The results published from such experiments in reports such as *Homosexuality in Perspective* (1979) did not offer any concrete evidence that homosexuality can be “cured” thus being once again rejected by the international community.<sup>28</sup>

Adding to this, another method used is conversion camps. Such a method is widely used until this day. Essentially it refers to programs created mostly by Christian organizations that promise individuals that they can help them convert to heterosexuals. This method has been highly debated and remains controversial. It is also worth noting that victims of these camps have been stigmatized throughout the world, adding to the already immense struggles faced by the LGBTQ+ community.

Last but not least, potentially one of the most grotesque techniques used to convert gay men in particular was lobotomy. Especially in the 1940s and the 1950s American neurologist Walter Freeman proposed “ice-pick lobotomy” as a treatment for homosexuality. Freeman was able to perform lobotomy, which meant removing part of

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<sup>26</sup> Merritt, Jonathan. “Perspective | the Ex-Gay Christianity Movement Is Making a Quiet Comeback. the Effects on LGBTQ Youth Could Be Devastating.” The Washington Post, WP Company, 6 Sept. 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/09/06/ex-gay-christianity-movement-is-making-quiet-comeback-effects-lgbtq-youth-could-be-devastating/>.

<sup>27</sup> “LGBTQIA+ Studies: A Resource Guide: Psychology & Conversion Therapy.” Research Guides, <https://guides.loc.gov/lgbtq-studies/subject/conversion-therapy>.

<sup>28</sup> “Conversion ‘Therapy’ Laws.” Movement Advancement Project | Conversion “Therapy” Laws, <https://www.lgbtmap.org/policy-and-issue-analysis/conversion-therapy>.



the human brain out in 23 states in over 3400 individuals which left the vast majority of individuals severely disabled for the rest of their lives.<sup>29</sup>

## Recent developments in conversion therapy

With the dawn of the new century, significant advancements occurred in the field of LGBTQ+ rights. In 2001 the Netherlands, became the first country to legalize same sex marriage<sup>30</sup> and as of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022, 30 countries have legalized same sex marriage. Significant improvements were also observed regarding the issue of conversion therapy throughout the world. Namely, in 2001, David Satcher stated: “there is no valid scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be changed” and studies that aimed to reject such a view such as the one written by Robert Spitzer ere recanted (2012)<sup>31</sup>. Additionally, by 2004 APA spoke against the “National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality” (NARTH), thus highlighting the amelioration of the condition of LGBTQ+ individuals in the states and worldwide. In 2007 APA set up a task force to evaluate its stance on the issue during the previous decades.<sup>32</sup>

By the 2010s the US political reality allowed for positive developments for the LGBTQ+ community. A representative of the House of representatives for instance exclaimed “sexual orientation carries no visible badge and a growing scientific community accepts

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<sup>29</sup> Katherine Ott, November 15. “The History of Getting the Gay Out.” National Museum of American History, 24 June 2019, <https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/getting-gay-out>.

<sup>30</sup> Veiligheid, Ministerie van Justitie en. “Same-Sex Marriage.” Marriage, Cohabitation Agreement, Registered Partnership | Government.nl, Ministerie Van Algemene Zaken, 14 Oct. 2021, <https://www.government.nl/topics/marriage-cohabitation-agreement-registered-partnership/marriage-registered-partnership-and-cohabitation-agreements/same-sex-marriage>.

<sup>31</sup> “Surgeon General David Satcher, Commentator George Strait Discuss Aids Anniversary on NPR's 'Morning Edition'.” Kaiser Health News, 5 June 2001, <https://khn.org/morning-breakout/dr00004983/>.

<sup>32</sup> Whitehead, N., et al. “What Research Shows: NARTH's Response to the APA Claims on Homosexuality a Report of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality.” Journal of Human Sexuality, 25 Oct. 2017, [https://www.academia.edu/34948471/What\\_Research\\_Shows\\_NARTH\\_s\\_Response\\_to\\_the\\_APA\\_Claims\\_on\\_Homosexuality\\_A\\_Report\\_of\\_the\\_Scientific\\_Advisory\\_Committee\\_of\\_the\\_National\\_Association\\_for\\_Research\\_and\\_Therapy\\_of\\_Homosexuality](https://www.academia.edu/34948471/What_Research_Shows_NARTH_s_Response_to_the_APA_Claims_on_Homosexuality_A_Report_of_the_Scientific_Advisory_Committee_of_the_National_Association_for_Research_and_Therapy_of_Homosexuality).



that sexual orientation is a characteristic which is immutable,” highlighting the changes in the American society.<sup>33</sup> In 2015, the year in which same sex marriage became legal in the United States of America, Barack Obama, the then US President, expressed his opposition to conversion therapy, while Biden the current US President has also pledged to help LGBTQ+ youth and help the cause of banning conversion therapy.<sup>34</sup> Conversion therapy has already been banned in various states and counties throughout the United States, although the division of Democrats and Republicans has hindered significant developments.<sup>35</sup>

In Australia at the same time, another Western country, conversion therapy became a heated topic for debate. By 2017 a ban on conversion therapy was issued in the state of Victoria, where Melbourne is located. As of 2022, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and Queensland have all banned conversion therapy. At the same time a ban has been proposed in Western Australia where Perth is located. <sup>36</sup>

In India, a country not considered a pioneer of gay rights, following the ruling of the Indian Psychiatric Society of February 2014, banned conversion therapy on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2021, providing hope for the millions of people who identify as queer in this South Asian Nation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “Same-Sex Marriage Is Made Legal Nationwide with Obergefell v. Hodges Decision.” History.com, A&E Television Networks, 23 June 2020, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/obergefell-v-hodges-ruling-same-sex-marriage-legalized-nationwide>.

<sup>34</sup> “Fact Sheet: President Biden to Sign Historic Executive Order Advancing LGBTQI+ Equality during Pride Month.” The White House, The United States Government, 15 June 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/15/fact-sheet-president-biden-to-sign-historic-executive-order-advancing-lgbtqi-equality-during-pride-month/>.

<sup>35</sup> “What Roe v. Wade's End Could Mean for LGBTQ Rights.” NBCNews.com, NBCUniversal News Group, <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-politics-and-policy/roe-v-wades-end-mean-lgbtq-rights-rcna32411>.

<sup>36</sup> McLennan, April. “‘I Didn't Want to Be Gay’: These Three Australians Underwent Conversion ‘Therapy’.” ABC News, ABC News, 17 May 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-17/conversion-therapy-in-australia-calls-for-ban/101041368>.

<sup>37</sup> “The Ban on the Practice of ‘Curing Queer Sexuality’ in India.” OpenGlobalRights, <https://www.openglobalrights.org/the-ban-on-practice-of-curing-queer-sexuality-in-india/>.



When it comes to the European continent, since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century significant improvements have been observed when it comes to the issue of conversion therapy. The European Parliament, in March 2018 condemned conversion therapy in a vote 435 to 109, accentuating the support of the LGBTQ+ community by European institutions and encouraging countries to effect change.<sup>38</sup> The UK has proposed a ban on conversion therapy which has not been codified yet.<sup>39</sup> It is also worth noting that by 2016 Malta became the first country in Europe to ban conversion therapy. In 2020, Germany and Albania followed. Most recently in February 2022<sup>40</sup> and May 2022, France and Greece respectively became the last up to date countries to criminalize conversion therapy for minors, showing the common direction towards equality pursued by European countries.<sup>41</sup>

## Current issues and UN involvement

Considering these positive advancements, it would be a remiss not to mention that the LGBTQ+ community still suffers due to prevailing attitudes promoting homophobia, biphobia and transphobia throughout the world. In many countries throughout the world and in particular in sub-Saharan Africa and Islamic countries that follow the Sharia law, conversion therapy is not an option simply because members of the LGBTQ+ individuals receive the death penalty just because of their identity. Hence, such incidents show the great disparities that exist worldwide when it comes to the legal recognition of queer rights. Additionally, the majority of countries still don't ban conversion therapy, showing the fact that important steps have not taken place yet. Last but not least, Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) such as the UN or the EU, have failed to promote LGBTQ+ equality and protect such individuals from violations. The

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<sup>38</sup> Moore, Matt, et al. "The EU Has Voted to Condemn Gay 'Cure' Therapy, and Urged Member States to Ban It." GAY TIMES, 3 Mar. 2018, <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/life/the-eu-has-voted-to-condemn-gay-cure-therapy-and-urged-member-states-to-ban-it/>.

<sup>39</sup> "Banning Conversion Therapy." GOV.UK, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/banning-conversion-therapy/banning-conversion-therapy>.

<sup>40</sup> staff, ByStonewall. "Which Countries Have Already Banned Conversion Therapy?" Stonewall, 1 Apr. 2022, <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/which-countries-have-already-banned-conversion-therapy>.

<sup>41</sup> Person. "Greece Bans LGBTQ Conversion Therapy." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 11 May 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greece-bans-lgbtq-conversion-therapy-2022-05-11/>.



Anti-Homosexuality Law (2013) in Uganda and the LGBTQ+ free-zones in Poland (2019) are real world examples showing the difficulties faced by the community with the aforementioned organizations being rather passive.<sup>42</sup>

## Major countries and organizations involved

### United States of America (USA)

The United States can be credited as the pioneer of the modern LGBTQ+ movement. The stonewall riots and the queer community of San Francisco are iconic for the LGBTQ+ community worldwide. On the issue of conversion therapy the United States has not been able to ban it at a federal level however. The polarization of republicans and democrats has hindered any substantial progress in recent years. LGBTQ+ have been politicized in a way that accentuated the differences of the two parties. In the light of the Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe v. Wade (1973), certain Justices from the Supreme Court proposed to strike down the Supreme Court decision that made same sex marriage protected at a federal level. Therefore, in today's United States the juxtapositions between Blue and Red states has hindered advancements with only a few states being "safe-heavens" for the LGBTQ + community.<sup>43</sup>

### United Kingdom (UK)

The United Kingdom despite presenting itself as a free, liberal and western state has failed to ban conversion therapy as of July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022. Although the Conservative party had pledged to ban conversion therapy back in 2018, such a development has not yet taken place. On International Women's day on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2021, the UK held a debate on conversion therapy, however no timeline of any legislation was provided, therefore any law does not have a framework. Adding to the controversy, the UK

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<sup>42</sup> "LGBT Rights." LGBT Rights | Human Rights Watch, 31 May 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/topic/lgbt-rights>.

<sup>43</sup> "How Will Roe v. Wade Reversal Affect LGBTQ Rights? Experts, Advocates Weigh In." NBCNews.com, NBCUniversal News Group, <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/will-roe-v-wade-reversal-affect-lgbtq-rights-experts-advocates-weigh-rcna35284>.



government has not used the word “ban”, connoting possible exemptions for religious reasons. In April 2021 the panel discussing the issue of conversion therapy was disbanded due to lack of “adequate action.” However, on May the 11<sup>th</sup> 2021 during a speech by the Queen, the intention to ban gay conversion therapy but not trans in Wales and England was expressed, with many LGBTQ+ individuals being optimistic about potential reforms.<sup>44</sup>

## Australia

In Australia at the same time, another Western country, conversion therapy became a heated topic for debate. By 2017 a ban on conversion therapy was issued in the state of Victoria, where Melbourne is located. As of 2022, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and Queensland have all banned conversion therapy. At the same time a ban has been proposed in Western Australia where Perth is located.

## India

In India, a country not considered a pioneer of gay rights, following the ruling of the Indian Psychiatric Society of February 2014, banned conversion therapy on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2021, providing hope for the millions of people who identify as queer in this South Asian Nation.

## European Union (EU)

The European Union is a multiethnic and multicultural Intergovernmental Organization (IGO) aiming to politically, socially and economically unite Europe. Another important role of the EU is to promote the advancement of human rights, including the rights of the the LGBTQ+ community. The European Union praises itself as a “free-zone” for the queer community. Notably, most countries of the EU have allowed same sex couples to marry or have a civil union. The EU and the European Parliament has condemned conversion therapy with the aforementioned 2018 ruling and has

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<sup>44</sup> Person. “UK Government Will Ban Gay Conversion Therapy, Changing Previous Plan -Report.” Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 31 Mar. 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-ditches-plan-legislation-ban-lgbt-conversion-therapy-2022-03-31/>.



encouraged countries to codify laws in their own judicial and legislative systems. Albeit these improvements, the EU is characterized by sharp East vs. West divide when it come to LGBTQ+ rights, with Western Europe being significantly more liberal in such policies. In countries such as Poland and Hungary however, LGBTQ+ people are treated as second class citizens, having been marginalized and ostracized by the political life of their respective countries. Therefore, the EU faces a plethora of challenges when it comes to LGBTQ+ rights and the ban on the conversion therapy. With countries such as Germany, France and Greece having banned conversion therapy, while countries like Poland allow for ‘LGBTQ+’ free zones.<sup>45</sup>

## African Union (AU)

The African Union is the main IGO located in Africa and has attempted to bridge the many socioeconomic differences arising from the divided continent. The African Union has failed to ban conversion therapy. The stance of the organization has been rather passive since the popular opinion does not support the notion of homosexuality itself. This phenomenon can be attributed to the concept of cultural relativism. The conservative Christian and Muslim parts of the African continent do not accept homosexuality under the doctrines of political bias and Sharia Law. It is worth noting that when Uganda passed the Anti-Homosexuality Act (2013) the African Union did not morally condemn the action.<sup>46</sup>

## Timeline of events

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<sup>45</sup> Spotlight on the EU and LGBTI Equality, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/com/factsheets/lgbti/en/>.

<sup>46</sup> ISSAfrica.org. “The African Union and the Question of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Rights.” *ISS Africa*, <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/the-african-union-and-the-question-of-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-lgbt-rights>.





<u>1886</u>	Richard con Krafft-Ebing publishes his work <i>Psycopathia Sexualis</i> , an influential text stating that homosexuality was a pathology, and therefore could be cured.
<u>1920</u>	<i>Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman</i> was published by Sigmund Freud in which he elaborates on his views regarding female homosexuality.
<u>1950s</u>	Edmund Bergler supported the theory of homosexuality being a disease and made a series of violations.
<u>28<sup>th</sup> June 1969</u>	The Stonewall riots in New York City, took place and acquire a symbolical significance, "creating a new phase in the struggle for gay liberation."
<u>December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1973</u>	The American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.
<u>May 26<sup>th</sup> 1974</u>	A referendum that took place upheld the 1973 decision of the APA with a majority of the votes (58%).
<u>1974</u>	Reckers and Ole Ivar Lovaas Research.
<u>1987</u>	The APA removed ego-dystonic homosexuality as a disorder from its list o mental disorders.
<u>1998</u>	Christian right groups such as the American Family Association and the Family Research council had spent



	approximately 600.000 US Dollars to promote conversion therapy
<u>April 1st 2001</u>	The Netherlands become the first country to officially legalize same sex marriage.
<u>2001</u>	David Satcher stated: “there is no valid scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be changed
<u>2004</u>	APA spoke against the “National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality” (NARTH
<u>March 19<sup>th</sup> 2007</u>	APA set up a task force to evaluate its stance on the issue during the previous decades.
<u>2011</u>	A representative of the House of representative exclaimed “ sexual orientation carries no visible badge and a growing scientific community accepts that sexual orientation is a characteristic which is immutable,” highlighting the changes in the American society.
<u>26<sup>th</sup> June 2015</u>	Same sex marriage becomes legal in all 50 states of the USA.
<u>April 9<sup>th</sup> 2015</u>	US President Barack Obama expresses his opposition to conversion therapy.
<u>6<sup>th</sup> December 2016</u>	Malta became the first country to ban conversion therapy.



<u>2017</u>	Victoria became the first state to ban conversion therapy in Australia.
<u>1<sup>st</sup> March 2018</u>	The European Parliament, in March 2018 condemned conversion therapy in a vote 435 to 109
<u>7<sup>th</sup> May 2020</u>	Germany bans conversion therapy.
<u>May 2020</u>	Albania bans conversion therapy
<u>7<sup>th</sup> June 2021</u>	India bans medical professionals from practicing conversion therapy
<u>January 26<sup>th</sup> 2022</u>	France bans conversion therapy
<u>May 11<sup>th</sup> 2022</u>	Greece bans conversion therapy



## Previous attempts to solve the issue

### Obergefell v. Hodges

On the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2015 the Supreme Court of the United States passed the historic Obergefell v. Hodges decision. Such a ruling essentially overturned Baker, a previous ruling which did not recognize same sex marriages at a federal level. Thus, through this reform all 50 states in the US were required to issue marriage licenses to same sex couples. This decision has been recently menaced by the polarization and consequent politicization of the issue of Sam sex marriages in the US, with judges of the Supreme Court implying that Obergefell v. Hodges might be overturned in the future, a setback for LGBTQ+ rights in the states that might hinder potential advancements with regard to banning conversion therapy in the states.

### European Parliament decision on conversion therapy

The EU and the European Parliament has condemned conversion therapy with the aforementioned 2018 ruling and has encouraged countries to codify laws in their own judicial and legislative systems. Nonetheless as previously mentioned that such a decision came with a lot of criticism by some countries, namely Poland and Hungary known for their pushbacks regarding there advancement of LGBTQ+ rights. For instance the decision is considered by some analysts to have lead to the establishment of LGBTQ+ free zones in Poland in which any kind of “LGBTQ+ propaganda is banned.” Hungary on the other hand in 2020 banned the dissemination of content in schools that was deemed to promote homosexuality, despite warnings by the European Parliament. The two countries citing the principle of internal sovereignty thought that the European Parliament was imposing a decision on them that did not comply with their values, thus further accentuating the notion of a divided European continent on the issue of LGBTQ+ rights. The European Parliament lastly, also lacks enforcement capabilities making it even more difficult for the particular institution to uphold the protection of human rights.



## Relevant UN Resolutions, Events, Treaties and Legislation

### The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR)(1948)

The Universal Declaration of human rights is one of the fundamental documents that have promoted human rights in the contemporary era. The guiding, but not legally binding document, expresses the universality of human rights, meaning that they are inherent to every human being regardless of their characteristics and cannot be taken away from them. Hence, although not explicitly mentioned, the right to privacy, to identity and to freedom, all clauses of the UDHR concern the issue of conversion therapy. More specifically, Article 5 of the Declaration which states “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” echoes UN’s opposition to the practice of conversion therapy. Therefore, the most prominent documents on human rights, signed and ratified by all member states contain the basis for any future advancements on the topic explored in this study guide.<sup>47</sup>

### A/HRC/19/41 (17th November 2011)

On 17 June 2011, South Africa led a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council requesting that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) draft a report "documenting discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity" to follow up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action. The resolution passed with 23 votes in favor to 19 against, with 3 abstentions. It was the first such resolution and was hailed as "historic". Although the resolution does not explicitly refer to the issue of conversion therapy, it discusses the violence and discrimination endured by LGBTQ+

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<sup>47</sup> “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” United Nations, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.



individuals and which has been the root of the issue of conversion therapy and is not legally binding.<sup>48</sup>

## Possible solutions

### Raising awareness about issues relating to the LGBTQ+ community

It is commonly agreed upon that political reforms reflect changes that have occurred within a society. It is not surprising that the countries that have passed the most LGBTQ+ friendly laws are the states in which the acceptance of the queer community is the highest. Hence, an important step towards achieving the goal of banning conversion therapy has to do with raising awareness. Although informing adults may be effective, the most important demographic is the youth. The young generation is the future, and therefore it is going to effect change in the future. It is important to teach them about the struggle of the LGBTQ+ community and how it can be a better “ally.” This can be done through an array of different methods from school projects to exhibitions, to TV shows and campaigns on social media to familiarize them with this global issue. Such a solution is considered a long-term solution which demands persistent commitment by government officials and a significant number of resources, elements which should be considered by delegates.

### Reaching a consensus at an international and a national level

As evidenced by the information above, it becomes apparent that the lack of a consensus remains one of the primary obstacles inhibiting the progress on LGBTQ+ rights and in particular the issue of conversion therapy. The politicization of conversion therapy, in conjunction with the existence of the concepts of a political bias and of cultural relativism, have made it a really difficult endeavor for global leaders. Countries should engage in dialogue and agree on a common strategy. Such a development might presuppose raising awareness, nonetheless since today’s phenomena of biphobia,

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<sup>48</sup> “Historic Decision at the United Nations.” Human Rights Watch, 28 Oct. 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/17/historic-decision-united-nations>.



homophobia and transphobia are transnational issues, governments need to cooperate with each other. Such a solution might seem to idealistic and therefore the realist school of thought is needed on such occasions. Delegates may want to consider the concept of progressive realization that reaffirms a global goal which is going to be gradually achieved by member states of the United Nations through different phases.

### Creating stronger enforcement mechanisms

Considering the ruling by the European Parliament which strongly condemned the practice of conversion therapy, it becomes clear that the lack of enforcement capabilities poses an obstacle for such institution to protect and promote a ban on conversion therapy. This problem does not concern only the European Parliament but is an observable pattern throughout the world's IGOs. Structural weaknesses which may include veto power, unanimous vote or bureaucratic mechanisms reduce the effectiveness and the productivity of such institutions. Taking into consideration the things already mentioned, delegates should critically evaluate the existing structure of such institutions and may consider finding ways to improve them. Lastly, it should be noted that the GA3 can only propose changes but cannot enforce anything since it is outside the committee's jurisdiction.

### Amelioration of existing monitoring mechanisms for documenting violations regarding the issue of conversion therapy

Finally, it is equally important to find a problem before solving it. Thus, monitoring a situation is one of the most important aspects of any human rights related issue and it applies to the topic of conversion therapy. The unwillingness of governments and of local populations to document issues relating to the LGBTQ+ community is evident, and specifically in the previously mentioned regions of sub-saharan African and the Islamic World. Therefore, for a proper solution, monitoring human rights violations is important. Delegates should consider relevant UN bodies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other important institutions that might help assess a situation, provide insightful statistics, and highlight a spherical image of situation. Delegates could also consider the interactions between civil society and the government in addition to any other important non state actor.



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