



**European Trans
Gender Network**
<http://tgeu.net>

Mediterranean Sun and Sea is not always pretty to see

**Abstract of speech given to the
First European TransGender Council
in Vienna on 4th November 2005**

by Jó Bernardo, 04.11.2005

Transgenderism is a widely unknown reality in Portugal.

There are no statistics concerning the transgender population, and investigation in this field is limited by the difficulties in accessing individuals that lack support from the law and are stigmatised by society in general. There are many false beliefs attributed to transgenderism, like for example that all transgender people are sex workers or have some other type of night life activity (like strippers or drag show performers). In fact, the most visible part of the transgender community, either national or emigrated from Brazil or from ancient Portuguese African Colonies like Angola, São Tomé e Príncipe or Mozambique has a professional activity related with one of these two (or both) areas.

In a study conducted in 1998 with a sample of approximately 50 transgender individuals, some important issues were identified; a significant majority of the sample came from rural parts of the country (45%) from this sample 28% had changed from their birthplace because of their sexual orientation. 39% are originally from the city and 16% are foreigners.

There are no specific laws in the country regarding transgenderism or transsexualism, only a few court sentences that serve as references about the later and that are sometimes contradictory. In fact, name change is possible for any citizen that wishes it and is a relatively accessible procedure, but only when the new name belongs to the same gender category as the previous one or to a gender-neutral name. This last case is the chosen one by several transsexuals in order to avoid the complicated procedure to have gender identity recognised. For this, the person has to go through a complicated legal process, and it can only occur with the decision of a court of law.

Since 1996, sex change operation is possible and occurs in Portugal. It was only that year that the Portuguese Medical Order allowed it to happen. However, no information is available regarding the real number of operations performed in the national territory. Nevertheless, the process to have a sex change operation is long and implies a severe psychological and psychiatric evaluation in order to verify whether the candidate is eligible for the process.

Besides, transgender persons were until the last 10 years socially not well seen, and were very often, disregarded as well as discriminated. However, as in the case of homosexuality, the traditional Portuguese „tolerance“ is usually prevalent in the contact with transgender individuals.

For a couple of years now several institutions working in the field of HIV prevention have organised an annual transvestite gala on the 1st of December (World AIDS Day) to gather funding for the fight against AIDS. This gala has considerable impact in the media. Many other Trans people have in the last years contribute for changing the mainstream idea about the transgender community due to the visibility and recognition in their professions like Human rights activists, Models, Medicine Doctors, Lawyers or Journalists.

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Page 1