



# Public & Global Health Spotlight

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Issue 3

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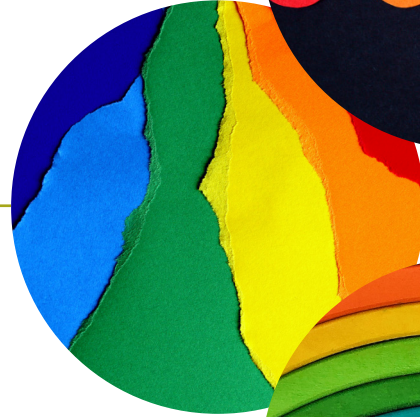
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# ZRM x Monkeypox

Project Spotlight



Dr. med. Rodolfo Novillo  
Specialist internal medicine

In the first of three episodes in our Pride Spotlight series, we would like to introduce Dr. med. Rodolfo Novillo. He is the co-project leader of the Covid-19 Reference Vaccination Center and will quickly tell us about all the rainbow aspects of his project.

## Who are you and that is your field of work?

My name is Rodolfo, I come from Argentina and I'm a physician and did my residency in internal medicine in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I'm currently working at the Vaccination Center here in Canton of Zurich.

## Do you like it here in Zurich?

I love it! I've been living here for three years and had the chance to work at an incredible place! I've learned so much. Not only Swiss German but also lots of information about Vaccination Campaigns and preventative medicine.

## The Travel Clinic is affiliated with the COVID-19 Reference Vaccination Center, where the Swiss population is vaccinated against Covid. You have done many unique projects. Can you name a few and tell us how they came about?

Well, not only are we a Vaccination Center inside the Covid Vaccination Campaign, we also work together with our friends from Checkpoint in the Monkeypox Vaccination Campaign since the start in November 2022. We had the chance to vaccinate over 6'000 people here in Switzerland against Monkeypox. That was a great challenge for us! Not only did we create the environment for everybody to be welcomed here to get the vaccination. We also worked with centres like for example Flora Dora, which is a center

created for sex workers at Langstrasse, where we had the chance to get in contact with this population which is usually forgotten by our health care system.

## Are there any other past, ongoing, or upcoming projects you'd like to bring attention to?

Yes definitely. There is a project - the same way we prevent infections like malaria and yellow fever - the idea is to apply the same idea to STI and sexual education before travelling. We know that people change behaviors when travelling and we wanna make sure they are informed enough to prevent infections with focus especially on HIV with prep and other STI's.

**Thank you very much for the interview and your work, dear Rodolfo!**

*Interview: Cécile Rasi*

# Travel PrEPared

Study Spotlight



Dr. sc. med. Dunja Nicca  
Advanced Practice Nurse  
and Nurse Scientist

In the second of three episodes in our Pride Spotlight series, we would like to introduce Dr. sc. med. Dunja Nicca. She is the co-project leader of the Travel PrEPared practice development project and will explain to us why this project has pioneering character.

## Who are you and what is your field of work or research?

My name is Dunja Nicca and I am a nurse practitioner and nurse scientist. My clinical focus is the development of new services in travel medicine. I also lead a research group with a similar focus. There, the main focus is on the scientifically guided development of new services and interventions to promote health or to promote collaboration, which then ultimately benefits the health of the patient.

## The sexual health of the population here in Switzerland does not end at the border. What can you tell us about sexual health while traveling?

Yes, that's right, sexual health is also important when traveling! What we saw in interviews was that sexuality is often lived differently when traveling and, therefore, the common patterns for preventive behavior regarding sexually transmitted diseases do not work the same anymore. Therefore, it is very important when traveling. In addition, sexually transmitted diseases naturally vary in prevalence depending on the country. The risk of infection can be higher or lower. What's more, sexual assaults or even sexual violence are different in a different environment than at home.

## At the Travel Clinic, work is underway on a clinic development project called „Travel PrEPared.“

### What is it about?

This project is about integrating sexual health counseling into travel medicine counseling. In surveys, we found out that it is not so easy to talk about sexuality - for professionals on the one hand, but also for travelers on the other. But it would be important to talk about risks and different ways of behaving or options for protection. That's what we want to achieve with this project. Another important part is that new prevention approaches, such as pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV, are not yet integrated in such consultations.

### Why is this topic important to you?

This topic is important to me because I think that sexuality is an important part of people's lives and is also lived when they travel. And because it is a topic that is important in private life as well as in public, but still little is said about it. It leads to the fact that people do not prepare themselves well enough and don't think about it. It is important to me to change this and to find approaches, for example, to be able to talk about the topic as appropriately as possible during a travel consultation.

## Are there any other past, ongoing or upcoming projects that you would like to draw attention to?

Internationally, new approaches for prevention regarding sexually transmitted diseases, but also simply the integration of sexual health in travel medicine are still very little developed. This research-supported practical project, in which we are currently in the middle of, is certainly a project with pioneering character.

## Thank you for the interview and your work, dear Dunja!

*Interview: Cécile Rasi*

### TravelPrEPared

We are a team of health professionals with expertise in travel medicine and/or in the prevention and treatment of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STI). The team consists of staff from the Centre for Travel Medicine (ZRM) at the University of Zurich and Checkpoint Zurich. Our focus is on sexual health during and after travel. In concrete terms, this means integrating proven approaches from the prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections into counselling at the Travel Clinic.

Learn more here!



[https://www.ebpi.uzh.ch/en/translational\\_research/travel\\_and\\_health/travel\\_pre\\_pared.html](https://www.ebpi.uzh.ch/en/translational_research/travel_and_health/travel_pre_pared.html)

# SwissPrEPared

Study Spotlight



MSn Manuela Rasi  
Advanced Practice Nurse

In the third episode in our Pride Spotlight series, Manuela Rasi tells us about her experiences with people with drug addictions and the Platzspitz, its impact on infectious diseases, the origin of the SwissPrEPared program with accompanying study, and much more.

## Who are you and what is your field of work or research?

My name is Manuela Rasi, I'm originally trained in psychiatric nursing and later studied nursing science. My clinical and research focus was initially on HIV, hepatitis and STIs. Then, due to the pandemic, we switched to Covid-19 and have been doing mostly Covid studies for the last few years. The studies here at EBPI were very large. We enrolled thousands of subjects - a really big deal.

Now, fortunately, other topics are coming up again, and I'm glad about that. For example, we have projects on sexual health with PrEP and sexual health while traveling. At the moment, we are also working on a measles-mumps-rubella immunity study, which aims to test the immunity of the population.

Today, I manage the clinical study center here at EBPI and I am involved and entrusted with different projects. My main focus, however, is the implementation of clinical trials here at the Travel Clinic and I am also advising researchers in the implementation of their study projects at the institute.

## The incidents at Platzspitz and Letten station have left their mark on Switzerland. Can you tell us something about that?

Yes, I remember that time well! I was a young adult at

the time and followed the media reports. The situation made big waves internationally and also in the psychiatric ward. We had addicted people again and again, because they often didn't know what to do with these people. So they often came to us in the psychiatric ward for withdrawal treatment. I was interested in that. I also traveled to Zurich to take a look at the Platzspitz (or Needle Park, as it was called at the time). I can hardly describe it, it affected me deeply and had a lasting effect on me. It was an unbelievable misery.

At that time, I was also somewhat involved in politics. Back then it was not allowed to give out clean syringes and so, naturally, innumerable people infected themselves with HIV and hepatitis because of syringe exchange or unclean injections. That was really bad. If I remember correctly, the Platzspitz closed in 1992, which of course could be followed in the media. This was done in a violent and unpleasant way. It didn't really help. Everything simply shifted to the Letten and there, in my opinion, the misery was even greater.

Around 1995, the Letten was closed after a change in drug policy took place. For example, Arud was founded in Switzerland, a working group for low-risk drug use. They opened a heroin and methadone dispensary at that time, after which there were several such centers in Zurich. At the time, that was the key to getting addicts off the street,

to be able to integrate them and substitute them so that they could pursue another life. I still remember that quite well! Later, I worked in a heroin and methadone dispensary and had access to this clientele. I heard a lot of stories, a lot of sad things, which really stuck with me.

HIV was already an issue there, even later when I worked in the field of infectious diseases. These people are always with you. There were also a lot of drug addicts in the hospital in the infectious diseases wing, who were treated there. They all got good treatment. Many thought that it wouldn't work with this population, but they were very interested in their health, which impressed me a lot. You only ever saw them in misery on the streets, but when they had the opportunity, they cared a lot about treatment. I found that very impressive. In the past, there were still the „classic heroin addicts“; we have less of that today. Nowadays, we tend to have multi-dependent addicts. Heroin is less „in“ now and other drugs like cocaine, GHB, crack and others are being used more often. It's a different picture today than it used to be.

### **The Travel Clinic is working on a research project called „SwissPrEPared“. What is it about?**

SwissPrEPared is a large multi-center study, or rather a program with a companion study, with over 40 centers in Switzerland and it started in 2019. It is about HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis PrEP and sexual health in general. PrEP stands for HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis. It's a medicine you can take before unprotected sex to protect yourself from an HIV infection. The goal of this program and this study is that you can improve the care of people who take PrEP or people interested in PrEP and adjust the medical guidelines (that we created) according to scientific standards that.

We developed a counseling tool, which is also a data tool, to help counseling professionals to work efficiently and not forget anything. The test persons fill out questionnaires. This way we learn something about their behavior. This should also help to make PrEP accessible in Switzerland, so that professionals (also from smaller practices that do not have much experience) have guidelines and can really give competent advice.

At the moment, the focus of SwissPrEPared is on MSM, that is men who have sex with men, and, among others, also transmen and sex workers (especially male sex workers). In another project, however, we also want to reach, as the saying goes, „the other half of the pandemic“, i.e. the rest of the society, i.e. heterosexuals who simply do

not have the information yet.

Regarding HIV, the queer population (especially MSM) is the group with an increased risk. With frequently changing sexual partners, this virus of course also goes around faster. The same is true for other sexually transmitted infections such as gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis. That is why we started with this group. They are certainly the people who need it the most. They know it well, PrEP has been taken for quite some time. We started back in 2016, but back then PrEP was already available for years in America and England. The queer community is very well informed, they also talk more openly about sexual health. So they had already heard about PrEP. There was a lot of pressure (from the community) for it to be available in Switzerland. It's a drug that wasn't approved for this indication here at the time - fortunately we have a generic today. The original PrEP was very expensive, at the beginning a couple hundred CHF for a monthly pack. Nobody could afford that.

In fact, that's how this program SwissPrEPared came about. It was activists but also experts in Switzerland who initiated this program. It is going quite well. We have enrolled 6,000 people so far, opened over 40 centers - the need is clearly there.

### **Are there any other past, ongoing or upcoming projects that you would like to draw attention to?**

Yes, what we've been doing over the last few years during the pandemic are the Corona studies, and two important studies in particular are still ongoing. That's the Zurich Corona Cohort Study and the Zurich Coronavirus Vaccination Study. Those have been going for quite some time now. They may be extended in some cases. It's very valuable to see the progression over a longer period of time, that's the cohort. Even internationally, there are not many studies that followed people for such a long period of time. So that's very important. That's where we did make a very good contribution to Corona.

The other thing, of course, as I mentioned earlier, is the TravelPrEPared project. I think you already asked my colleague (Dunja Nicca) about that. This is about sexual health while traveling. From my point of view, this is really very exciting and a very important project.

### **Why is this topic so close to your heart?**

Sexual health, you mean? Dealing with the topic of sex is something very personal and is also shaped by beliefs,

values and cultural backgrounds, and many people do not find it easy at all to talk about the topic. On the one hand it is difficult for the professionals, on the other hand, of course, it is difficult for the clients. I also worked for many years in the field of STI, i.e. sexually transmitted infections, and had many experiences there. I experienced the queer community as somewhat better informed, more open - in the straight community this knowledge is somewhat less common. There's also a lot of half-knowledge there, the generation that still grew up with HIV is slowly disappearing. This generation, of course, has heard more, at least about HIV. When it comes to STI knowledge, i.e. chlamydia and gonorrhoea, how to transmit it, there is a lot of half-knowledge. I think this is an important topic and should be addressed.

Especially here in travel medicine, for example, is a good place for it. When you travel, you usually have sex. You are relaxed and have time, and you simply need support. That's why I think it's important to be able to sit across from people as a specialist without prejudice and also to be able to give this advice. People should feel accepted and also dare to ask something. That's the only way to have an exchange and to pass on knowledge. And for that, you simply need more knowledge and more training on how to build that up. That's what the TravelPrEPared project is for, for example.

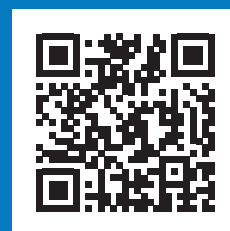
Another experience I've made is that the queer community or sex workers have had very bad experiences with the health care system. This is often based on ideas, values and norms that people have in their heads, and I think that this simply can't happen. You have to do something about it. That is what has driven me and continues to excite me, and I would like to do something about it.

**Thank you very much for the interview and your work, dear Manuela!**

*Interview: Cécile Rasi*

Do you have any further questions about SwissPrEPared or PrEP?

You can find more information here:



<https://www.swissprepared.ch/en/>



# Talking about sexuality and how to do it successfully

Sex while traveling can be planned or spontaneous, sometimes different than at home. This can be a challenge for maintaining sexual health. Dealing with the topic of sex is very personal and shaped by individual beliefs, values and cultural backgrounds. In order to include the topic of sexual health individually in travel counseling, the TravelPrEPared project was launched at the Department of Public & Global Health.



„These findings already make clear that sexual health is an important topic for travel medicine.“

Natascha Stürmer, Advanced Practice Nurse



MScN Natascha Stürmer  
Advanced Practice Nurse

The topic of sex goes hand in hand with sexual health, which refers to physical, emotional, mental and social well-being. It is not just the absence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or an unwanted pregnancy that plays a role. The ability to experience sexual relationships in a safe, consensual, and satisfying way is also important. Moreover, regardless of sexual identity, orientation, and preferences, this should be done freely and without discrimination or stigma.

## The project: TravelPrEPared

As part of the TravelPrEPared project, a sub-project of the SwissPrEPared program, we are particularly interested in sexual health while traveling. In particular, how profes-

sionals and travelers can be supported to talk about this important and so far little addressed topic, on an individual basis, respectfully and empathetically. Through interviews with professionals and travelers, we want to find out how we can integrate this topic into travel counseling in a low-threshold way. The goal is to empower people to achieve and maintain their own sexual well-being and to be able to experience it free from discrimination, coercion or violence.

Initial findings from the project indicate that talking about sexual health in travel medicine is challenging for both professionals and travelers. It does not always seem easy for both parties to engage with the topic for a variety of reasons.

Travelers generally perceive sex while traveling as a topic they can talk about normally. At the same time, however, they express difficulties in talking openly about their personal behavior. One reason: fear of being judged. Professionals also consider the topic important, but they

too report uncertainty about raising the issue of sexuality while traveling. For their part, they are afraid of unpleasant reactions, but also because they do not want the clients to feel accused of anything.

These stigmas are a hindrance to open communication and they run through three observations that we would like to discuss in more detail below.

### **No space for sexual health counseling**

Until now, sexual health counseling has found little place in travel counseling. Both travelers and professionals find sexual health counseling generally lacking. Few travelers have ever been approached about sexual health. This refers not only to travel medicine professionals, but also to other health professionals such as family doctors. Travelers therefore tend to react with surprise, sometimes feeling caught off guard and then almost blocked from talking about the topic.

Professionals, on the other hand, experience that they can only touch on the topic in passing, in addition to the many other topics relevant to travel. Furthermore, it does not seem to be expected from the travelers, since they come primarily for vaccinations. In addition, some professionals lack a structured process to help them address the issue.

### **Every beginning is hard**

Getting started on the topic of sexual health is proving to be a challenge. Some travelers have been found to definitely have questions about sexual health. Others prefer not to talk about risks and still others feel safe with what they have been practicing for a long time. What they all have in common is that they have not previously dealt in depth with their sexual health and current knowledge and recommendations. It was only the interaction in the interviews that prompted them to think more deeply about the topic.

For the professionals, the focus is on how they manage to make the topic of sexual health attractive. There are different strategies for doing this. On the one hand, risk communication, for example, emphasizing the probability of infection. On the other hand, by positively emphasizing that sex is something beautiful and normal. The difficulty lies in triggering an interaction, i.e. a conversation, and not just in conveying information. In addition, specialists must be able to assess the risk for the traveler sitting opposite very quickly on the basis of a small amount of information, in order to be able to convey only the information that is actually required.

### **Individualization is demanding**

Third, individualized sexual health counseling requires a high degree of flexibility and skill to meet the diverse needs of travelers. Travelers often express the need for professionals to intuitively identify their needs without the the traveler needing to reveal too much about him or herself.

Professionals, on the other hand, claim to be experts and find it difficult to advise on something they are not 100% familiar with. For example, most professionals limit their travel advice to vaccinations and condoms. This leads to insufficient integration of other risk reduction strategies, especially HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis, or HIV-PrEP.

These findings already make clear that sexual health is an important topic for travel medicine about which it is difficult for both travelers and professionals to talk. In a next step, we will now develop a counseling concept that will enable such conversations. Travelers and professionals will be involved in the development of this service. These services will also integrate newer approaches to prevention such as HIV PrEP.

We are already looking forward to presenting the final results to you, so stay tuned!

### **Do you have any questions? Contact the project management:**

Dr. sc. med. Dunja Nicca  
dunja.nicca@uzh.ch

# «Pride is the Christmas of the queer community»

Our Travel Clinic has enjoyed a close collaboration with the Checkpoint Zurich, a health center for queer people, for years. Lars Wolfer coordinates the prevention projects there and told us what makes the Checkpoint so special and what they have planned for this year's Pride.

„The Checkpoint is a «safe space». No one is judged here, no one has to be ashamed of anything.“

Lars Wolfer, Prevention Coordinator



Lars Wolfer  
Prevention coordinator  
Checkpoint Zurich

## Who are you and what is your field of work?

My name is Lars Wolfer. I work in the division for prevention at the Checkpoint Zurich. I am responsible for Pride, the STI testing campaigns in spring and fall, and for the discussion series «Checkpoint im Gespräch», which is about HIV and LGBTQ+ topics.

My colleague Chris (Christian Grolimund) coordinates the mobile outreaches of our prevention team, where our staff does outreach work in clubs, bars or saunas and also offer testing. Another project is specifically designed for male and trans sex workers. And then there is «Queer Plus», a peer-to-peer program for people with HIV.

## Was the peer to peer program developed here? How does it work?

After a new HIV diagnosis, some people feel the need to

talk to others who are also living with HIV. There are profiles of peer counselors on our website. You can contact the person who most appeals to you - for example, who is the same age or has a similar biography. For many people it is helpful to talk to someone who is in a similar situation.

## The Checkpoint is a health center for queer people. What does that mean exactly? How long has the Checkpoint existed? What do you offer?

The Checkpoint Zurich has been around for over 15 years. Our two sponsors are Sexuelle Gesundheit Zürich SeGZ (formerly Aidshilfe Zürich) and Arud, Center for Addiction Medicine. The health center sprang from the community, meaning, it was conceived by MSM (men who have sex with men), because at that time the need for confidential treatment was very great. If you went to your family doctor as a gay man with syphilis, you were often looked at strangely.

The Checkpoint is a «safe space». No one is judged here, no one has to be ashamed of anything. So we break down

that stigma by talking openly and casually about sex and STIs. Over time, Checkpoint has grown and people have recognized the need in the broader queer community. Therefore, it has been made accessible to a broader clientele: the Checkpoint no longer welcomes only MSM. With the competence centre for trans people, it is now also an important contact point for trans people in German-speaking Switzerland. In addition, our services have been continuously expanded: we no longer only do STI testing or treatment and HIV therapy, but also have a comprehensive range of counseling services, offer professional psychological counseling as well as therapies, and recently even added family medicine to our services.

**People who are not part of the queer community may not always be aware of the importance of such a health center. Can you tell me something about the significance of such an institution for the queer community?**

Many may underestimate the importance of a «safe space» It is not a given that you will be welcomed and treated without prejudice. Queer people feel welcome here not only because of our accepting, respectful attitude, but also because many queer people work here. The community recognizes itself here and feels understood. Of course, non-queer people are also welcome. Especially the testing for STIs is also popular with heterosexual clients.

**Makes sense, STIs don't stop at hetis<sup>1</sup> after all. Do many come?**

There are indeed quite a few who appreciate the offer and come. The pilot project B25 starts in June. People under 26 who live in the city of Zurich or have a Kultur-Legi can be tested for STIs and treated free of charge. In addition to the Checkpoint, this service is also available at Test-in, the SeGZ counseling and testing center at Kanzleistrasse.

**Another population you advocate for is sex workers. You offer discounted/free STI testing and treatment for male and trans sex workers. Can you tell us about your involvement in this area?**

Male and trans sex workers are a particularly vulnerable group, which is why they need special attention. We offer low-threshold access to testing and treatment through street work.

**You mentioned that male and trans sex workers need special attention. What does that mean?**

Sex work is work. Our clients don't have to fear prejudice and can access sexual health support through us very easily. Our two employees build trust with the sex workers in the street work. At the Flora Dora counseling center on Langstrasse, we offer free tests and PrEP<sup>2</sup> counseling twice a month.

**We have already collaborated with you on some projects. What can you tell us about that?**

The interdisciplinary perspective and the exchange of expertise in joint projects are fruitful for both sides. In addition, our institutions get more attention when we appear together. This promotes both quality of care for the queer community and research in the field.

We have collaborated on the Corona as well as the Mpox vaccination campaigns. We have vaccinated against both here at the Checkpoint as well. We also continue to work closely together on SwissPrEPared<sup>3</sup>, which certainly contributed to the success of that project. I personally worked with the EBPI<sup>4</sup> on the RealRisks study. It was a sub-study of SwissPrEPared for which I was responsible for recruitment. It examined the impact of dating apps on sexual and mental health.

**You have been involved in Pride for many years. What does this event mean to you and your community?**

We've already achieved a lot, but if you look at the current political climate in Switzerland and worldwide, queer friendliness is going downhill a lot right now. I'm talking specifically about trans hostility and the attacks on drag queens.

The community is all about visibility, being loud, taking up space, showing solidarity, coming together. Many get to know themselves at Pride, have their outing afterwards, finally feel that they belong. Pride is the Christmas of the queer community. Our other holiday is the Eurovision Song Contest. ;-)

**What does the Checkpoint have planned for this year's Pride Parade?**

We have a big tent again, where we offer testing. And at the parade, as always, we have a float.

1 Heti: heterosexual person

2 PrEP: «pre-exposure pro», a medication that protects against an HIV infection  
3 See Interview with Manuela Rasi  
4 EBPI: Institut für Epidemiologie, Biostatistik und Prävention, to which the Department Public & Global Health and, therefore, the Travel Clinic, belong

### Didn't you offer testing on the cart once?

That was in 2021, in the middle of the pandemic. We weren't allowed to hold a festival because of Corona, but the parade was happening. So we quickly converted a truck into a mobile testing unit and offered testing on it before and after the parade. The cabins were separated by shower curtains.

### Testing at Pride is pretty popular, isn't it?

We usually test between 300 and 500 people.

### Is it mainly young Pride visitors who come to you for testing?

Yes, last year half of the people were between 20 and 29. For almost a third of the people tested, it was their first HIV test ever. So we also reach a lot of new people at Pride. More than two thirds of all tested people have never been to the Checkpoint before.

### Is Pride testing the event where you reach the most new people?

No, that's the campaigns. We are allowed to offer 750 discounted STI tests twice a year. For the last two years, it's been free for under 25 year olds, and of course that attracts young people. At Pride, we simply reach people we wouldn't otherwise reach. The festival testing has a bit of a lower threshold.

### Pride Month is coming up: what do you want everyone celebrating to keep in mind?

Drink enough and take care of each other.

### Are there other organizations and centers for queer people in Switzerland that our readers should know about?

There is also a Checkpoint in Bern, Basel, Lucerne, Wadt and Geneva. Otherwise, the Swiss AIDS Federation is also a good place to go for information about HIV, and then there are the Pink Cross -the umbrella organization for gay and bisexual men in Switzerland-, and the Lesbian Organization Switzerland (LOS) -the national umbrella organization for lesbians, bisexuals and queer women in Switzerland-.

For young people, the Milchjugend, the largest youth organization for queer people in Switzerland, or also Du bist Du, a youth organization for the LGBT+ community that builds on the peer approach, are certainly interesting.

For queer family planning, the Dachverband Regenbogen-

familien can be helpful and for older people there is Queer Altern, a housing, care and counseling project.

Regarding events, Offstream (queer party culture Zurich), the Kweerball and the Heldenbar spontaneously come to mind.

### Thank you Lars for the interview and I wish you a wonderful Pride!

*Interview: Cécile Rasi*

Checkpoint Zürich



<https://www.cpzh.ch/en/>

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## IMPRINT

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