CLICK: Connecting families, educators and policymakers to combat violence and improve the well-being of LGBTIQ children through an intersectional approach

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CLICK
Connecting families, educators and policymakers
to combat violence and improve the well-being
of LGBTIQ children through an intersectional approach

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Title: CLICK: Connecting families, educators and policymakers to combat violence and improve the well-being of LGBTIQ children through an intersectional approach
Transnational report

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Executive Summary

This transnational integrative report synthesises evidence on violence, support, well-being and resilience among LGBTIQ children and adolescents in Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain. Drawing on six national reports produced within the CLICK project, it combines socio-legal and political analysis with mixed-methods data from children and adolescents, families, educators and other stakeholders. The report adopts an intersectional and child-centred perspective, recognising that experiences of violence and access to support are shaped by sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, family diversity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, migration, disability and geographical location.

The comparative analysis highlights marked differences across countries. Portugal and Spain have comparatively comprehensive legal protections, yet gaps persist between formal rights and children's lived realities. In Italy, Lithuania, Bulgaria and especially Hungary, limited recognition of rainbow families, restrictions on LGBTIQ-inclusive education and the growing influence of anti-gender movements create environments where children, families and professionals may feel increasingly exposed or constrained. Across all six countries, childhood and education have become central battlegrounds in political debates over gender, sexuality and family diversity.

Fieldwork findings show that LGBTIQ children and adolescents face multiple and intersecting forms of violence, including verbal harassment, bullying, social exclusion, misgendering, online abuse, threats and, in some cases, physical violence. Schools are the most frequently reported settings, though violence also occurs within families, public spaces, extracurricular activities and digital environments. These experiences are often normalised or inadequately addressed, and institutional responses remain inconsistent or dependent on individual professionals. Many children hesitate to report incidents due to fear of exposure, disbelief or further victimisation.

Despite these challenges, supportive relationships with peers, families, educators and community organisations significantly enhance children's safety, belonging and well-being. Inclusive school environments, trusted adults, access to affirming information and services, opportunities for participation and recognition of diverse identities and family forms emerge as key protective factors. However, access to such resources is uneven, particularly for trans and non-binary children, those living outside urban areas and those facing multiple forms of marginalisation.

The findings demonstrate that children's well-being and resilience are relational and structurally conditioned. They depend on supportive environments, institutional accountability and effective protection from violence. Children and adolescents should not be expected to compensate, through individual resilience, for systemic shortcomings in schools, services, legislation or public policy.

The report concludes with a transnational SWOT analysis. Strengths include existing legal frameworks, committed professionals, supportive families, civil society expertise and young people's capacity for collective resistance. Weaknesses include implementation gaps, insufficient professional training, fragmented support systems and limited preventive work. Opportunities lie in cross-sectoral cooperation, inclusive education, child-centred safeguarding mechanisms and meaningful participation of LGBTIQ children in policy and service development. Threats include political polarisation, anti-gender mobilisation, hostile public discourse and the widening gap between formal rights and lived experiences. Overall, the findings underscore the need for coordinated, preventive and evidence-informed action involving children, families, educators, policymakers and community organisations. Ensuring the safety and well-being of LGBTIQ+ children requires not only legal recognition but inclusive institutional cultures, accessible support, effective accountability and sustained commitment to children's rights, participation and citizenship.

1. Introduction - Research Design and Sample

CLICK: Connecting families, educators and policymakers to combat violence and improve the well-being of LGBTIQ children through an intersectional approach is a European project led by an interdisciplinary consortium of universities, research centers, associations, and NGOs in six European countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania,Spain and Portugal, from June 2025 to May 2027. Its main objective is to combat gender-based violence and improve the well-being of LGBTIQ children through a comprehensive educational approach that connects educational settings and rainbow families. All countries adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research, quantitative surveys (questionnaires), and qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews and focus groups). The fieldwork was conducted primarily between January and May 2026.

Based on a child-centered perspective and from an interdisciplinary approach, each country involved conducted an online national survey with young people born from 2007 to 2010, interviews with rainbow families (i.e. families in which at least one person identifies as part of the LGBTIQ community), stakeholders (such as education professionals and policymakers, or even LGBTIQ rights activists), and focus groups with LGBTIQ young people from 14 to 18 years-old. Due to legal constraints, the focus groups took place exclusively in Italy, Spain and Portugal.

The implementation of the fieldwork followed a methodological guide (MG) developed by the CES and UdG, in collaboration with the CLICK project consortium. This methodological guide was submitted to the Research Ethics and Biosecurity Committee of the University of Girona (CEBRU0083-25), ensuring full compliance with established standards for research involving human participants, including informed consent, confidentiality, and data protection. All ethical procedures were rigorously followed throughout the research process, in accordance with the project's methodological guidelines.

Participants were recruited between January and April 2026 through a combination of local, regional, and national networks, including LGBTIQ associations, schools and student collectives, psychologists and other mental health professionals, research centers, and public figures active in youth and LGBTIQ advocacy.

Some challenges were encountered during participant recruitment, such as the inclusion of participants across the full spectrum of the LGBTIQ acronym (specifically intersex) and the access to groups of young people that included LGBTIQ individuals. Moreover, participants often remained cautious when discussing specific schools, municipalities, or institutions because of fears related to visibility and social repercussions.

In addition, although the samples and data collected in each country are not statistically representative, they nonetheless provide meaningful empirical insights that support the exploratory nature of the analysis, enabling the identification of patterns and relationships that, while not generalizable, contribute substantively to the understanding of the phenomenon under study.

1.1. Online Survey

The online survey was designed by the University of Girona. After being shared and discussed by all partners, the survey was translated into all relevant languages, adapted to national contexts, and uploaded

to the online statistical software LimeSurvey. A pre-test was carried out in each local context in order to make some minor changes, which were added to LimeSurvey before implementation.

The survey was aimed at teenagers born from 2007 to 2010, and the data was collected between February and April 2026. To obtain the data, partners distributed the survey link with a variety of strategies, specifically: through social media (Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook and TikTok) – creating posts and videos, using paid ads, hiring influencers, sharing with professionals who work with children, with target participants, and specific civil society organizations; through newsletters, internal mailing lists and chats, and directly contacting schools and LGBTIQ organizations.

All project partners reported difficulty in recruiting participants from the target age group. In addition, low participation by intersex youth was also observed in all countries.

The survey received a total of 1994 valid responses. Cases in which participants had only completed the sociodemographic information but had not answered any of the evaluation questions were excluded. Nevertheless, no question was mandatory and therefore the total number of responses varies from one question to another. The category "Non-LGBTIQ" was assigned to participants who identified as heterosexual in terms of sexual orientation, identified as either women or men, and were neither transgender nor intersex. This group represents 39.2% of the sample (796 respondents). The remaining 60.1% corresponds to the LGBTIQ population (1198). Finally, 125 responses were analysed in the case of Portugal, 343 for Hungary, 77 for Bulgaria, 279 for Italy, 110 for Lithuania, and 1060 for Spain, with the grand total of 1994 analysed survey responses.

1.2. Focus Groups

Due to national laws, some countries were exempt from the focus group implementation (Bulgaria, Hungary, and Lithuania). For that reason, the focus groups with LGBTIQ children were only carried out in Italy, Portugal and Spain. Seven focus groups were conducted with a total of 35 participants from 14 to 18 years old.

The main themes explored during the focus groups were Self-Identification and Expression, Well-being and Distress at School, Strategies of Resistance and Resilience, Support Networks and Experiences with Adults.

In Portugal, the two focus groups were initially planned to happen in presence in two major cities, Lisbon and Coimbra. However, after receiving applications and messages from people from different cities, the team opted for one single focus group. The online format facilitated the participation of adolescents who had difficulties in dislocating themselves to the venue and also felt their identity would be more protected in an online setting. The focus group was carried out with five participants of 16 and 17 years old, who self-identified as trans and/or asexual, pansexual or queer.

In Spain, four focus groups were carried out (one by UdG and three by URJC), with a total of 24 participants from 14 to 18 years old, who self-identified as trans and/or gay, bisexual, pansexual. URJC's recruitment took place in a public secondary school, which was selected due to prior collaboration with the project team and because it implements a specific support initiative during school breaks, known as "Recreos Diversos" (Diverse Breaks), aimed at LGBTIQ students. Participants in the focus groups were recruited from among adolescents attending this programme. Alternative recruitment strategies were explored, including

outreach to LGBTIQ specialised services, and, with the support of a professional working with children, the UdG team was able to recruit participants for one focus group, which was conducted outside school premises.

Italy conducted two focus groups with three participants each, with ages ranging from 15 to 18 years old who self-identified as bisexual, trans and/or non-binary. Due to time constraints and to foster a diverse exchange of experiences from various Italian regions, the focus groups were carried out online. Despite significant challenges in the recruitment process – such as the fact that the main centers (e.g., anti-discrimination centers, LGBTIQ community centers, and youth centers) are not permitted to engage in activities with individuals under the age of eighteen, and that schools don't usually offer their students extra-curricular LGBTIQ groups – efforts were made to expand recruitment to youth groups that are not exclusively LGBTIQ, such as scouts, schools (i.e., involving teachers and student collectives or representatives), youth radio stations, sports clubs or personal connections, and also creating visually appealing content on social media.

1.3. Interviews with educators and policymakers

Interviews with stakeholders were conducted in the six countries of the consortium. The main themes explored in the interviews were: experiences of discrimination in the education system, support networks to improve LGBTIQ people's experiences in and with the education system, and finally, expectations, obstacles, and needs.

Participant recruitment relied primarily on professional networks, the research team's preexisting contacts, civil society organizations, and snowball sampling methods. Many challenges in the recruitment process were faced. In countries such as Bulgaria, Portugal, Italy and Hungary, educators expressed concern that participating might jeopardize their jobs or reputations due to the conservative political climate. Complete anonymity was guaranteed, and the names of the institutions were omitted, and in some cases, the interviews were conducted online to ensure safety.

In total, 84 interviews were conducted in person or online, depending on the person's availability and preference. The vast majority were teachers or educators, but the sample included a wide range of professionals who have a direct impact on children's lives such as psychologists, policymakers, youth workers, sociologists and other children-related services. Although many were cisgender and heterosexual, there was significant participation by LGBTIQ professionals who brought a "dual perspective" as both professionals and members of the community.

1.4. Interviews with rainbow families

Interviews with families were conducted in the six countries of the consortium . The main themes explored in the interviews were: experiences of discrimination in the education system, support networks to improve LGBTIQ people's experiences in and with the education system, and finally, expectations, obstacles, and needs.

Recruitment was primarily carried out through preexisting contacts from previous projects, civil society organizations, activism networks, and snowball sampling methods. Snowball sampling proved particularly important in the recruitment of rainbow families because many parents

expressed concerns related to confidentiality, social stigma, and the potential consequences of public visibility. The teams also encountered a specific difficulty in finding families with intersex children. These challenges were overcome through the additional support for dissemination and participant engagement by strong community partnerships and intensive outreach efforts within private groups – such as LGTBIQ families associations as well as public services for LGTBIQ people and other social stakeholders.

A total of 81 interviews were conducted in person or online, depending on the person's availability and preference. The sample of families was diverse, although it tended to be more "supportive" (due to the recruitment method through associations). Both LGBTIQ parents raising children and parents of LGBTIQ children were interviewed. The sample included families ranging from those in large urban centers to rural areas (although recruitment was more difficult in the latter), as well as families from different backgrounds, such as immigrant or multiracial families.

2. Legal and political context regarding LGBTIQ rights in childhood

2.1. Context

The legal and sociopolitical context of LGBTIQ children and adolescents in the CLICK project countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain), reveals distinct historical trajectories, different levels of institutional recognition, and strong inequalities in the ways sexual, gender and family diversity are protected in childhood. Although all these countries are members of the European Union and are bound by common principles of fundamental rights, the distance between formal recognition, institutional implementation and everyday experience remains significant.

The EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2026-2030[1], the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee[2] establish a European framework grounded in equality, protection from violence, child participation, universal access to education, health and essential services. Together, these instruments demonstrate the continuity of EU efforts to advance LGBTQI+ equality, while reinforcing the importance of mainstreaming it across policy areas through an intersectional approach (European Commission, 2020, 2021; Council of Europe, 2022). Nevertheless, the extent to which these commitments are translated into national legislation and policies, educational practices, healthcare provision, social protection systems and the everyday experiences of children and adolescents varies considerably across Member States.

Within this broader framework, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) (Council of Europe, 2022) is particularly relevant because it recognizes children as rights-holders, rather than merely recipients of adult protection. It brings together key dimensions such as participation, socioeconomic inclusion,

[1]

[2] Accessible here: https://commission.europa.eu/publications/lgbtiq-equality-strategy-2026-2030-0_en#details

protection from violence and discrimination, child-friendly justice and digital safety. The European Child Guarantee (European Commission, 2021)[3] complements this rights-based approach by focusing on children in vulnerable situations and seeking to ensure effective and free access to early childhood education and care, education, food, healthcare and adequate housing. Although these instruments are not exclusively aimed at LGBTIQ children, their emphasis on equality, inclusion and non-discrimination provides an important normative basis on equality, inclusion and non-discrimination provides an important normative basis for recognising that sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics as factors that may shape children's exposure to discrimination, violence and social exclusion.

In this sense, the rights of LGBTIQ children must be understood at the intersection of two fields: LGBTIQ rights and children's rights. Many situations affecting LGBTIQ children and adolescents are not only "LGBTIQ issues", but also central child protection issues: school bullying, cyberbullying, family-based violence, parental rejection, institutional invisibility, lack of adequate information, barriers to accessing affirmative healthcare and lack of recognition of rainbow families.

It is also important to recognise that the experiences of LGBTIQ children and adolescents can be shaped by multiple dimensions of inequality, including racialisation, migrant background, social class, disability, socioeconomic status, territory, amongst others.

The historical development of LGBTIQ rights shows that the decriminalisation of homosexuality was an essential milestone, but did not automatically produce social recognition, comprehensive legal protection or institutional inclusion. Homosexuality was decriminalised in Italy in 1890, in Hungary in 1961, in Bulgaria in 1968, in Spain in 1978, in Portugal in 1982 and in Lithuania in 1993. These moments are linked to very different political processes: democratic transitions in Southern Europe, post-socialist reforms in Central and Eastern Europe, and the gradual influence of European and international human rights instruments. However, that decriminalisation constituted only a minimum condition for recognition, not a guarantee of effective equality.

Portugal and Spain have the most developed legal frameworks among the countries analysed, although they also face implementation challenges and new forms of contestation (Langarita et al., 2024; Saleiro, 2021; Público, 2025). In Portugal, after the 1974 Revolution and decriminalisation in 1982, legal recognition advanced mainly from 2001 onwards, with the recognition of same-sex de facto unions. In 2004, Portugal became the first European country to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination in its Constitution. This was followed by civil marriage for same-sex couples in 2010, adoption and co-adoption by same-sex couples in 2016, access to medically assisted reproduction regardless of sexual orientation, and Law no. 38/2018[4] on gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. This law was particularly relevant for trans and intersex children and young people, as it depathologised legal gender recognition for those over 16, prohibited unnecessary surgeries on intersex

[3] European Commission. (2021). *EU strategy on the rights of the child* (COM(2021) 142 final). European Commission.

[4] Lei n.º 38/2018, de 7 de agosto. (2018). Diário da República, 1.ª série, n.º 151. https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/lei/38-2018-116068880

babies and provided for respect for the social name in schools (Hines & Santos, 2018; Esteves et al., 2021). One year later, Order No. 7247/2019[5] of 16 August was issued, establishing administrative measures for implementing these provisions in schools. However, the Order ceased to be in force in 2021, following Constitutional Court Judgment No. 474/2021.

In Spain, the development of LGBTIQ rights went through repression during Franco dictatorship, decriminalisation in 1978 and strong social mobilisation during the democratic transition. The approval of same-sex marriage in 2005 placed the country among the most advanced in terms of family equality, making history as the third country to recognise the right to same-sex marriage and at the forefront of global LGBTIQ equality (Missé & Coll-Planas, 2010; Platero, 2008).

Between 2011 and 2018, several Spanish autonomous communities adopted comprehensive legislation on LGBTIQ+ equality and trans rights, creating uneven levels of protection for children and young people across regions (Platero, 2020). In 2018, administrative reforms also facilitated changes to the names and gender markers of trans minors in the Civil Registry, based on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and later upheld by the Constitutional Court in STC 99/2019. A major step towards national harmonisation came with Law 4/2023[6], which strengthened anti-discrimination protections and introduced specific safeguards for LGBTIQ+ children and adolescents. The law recognises legal gender self-determination from age 16, permits changes from ages 14 to 16 with parental or legal assistance, and from ages 12 to 14 with judicial authorisation. However, the approval of this law also made visible strong political contestation from far-right parties, conservative sectors and some feminist discourses critical of gender self-determination (Willem et al., 2022; Platero, 2023). In addition, Spanish decentralisation produces territorial inequalities: some autonomous communities have school protocols, specialised services and support for trans young people, while others depend more on local initiatives or civil society.

Italy occupies an intermediate and paradoxical position being historically defined by a legislative vacuum. Although homosexuality was decriminalised very early (1889), the country maintained for decades a form of legislative invisibility regarding LGBTIQ people. During fascism, homosexuality was not explicitly criminalised, but gay and lesbian people were subjected to administrative repression, surveillance and internal exile, in a context in which the regime denied the very public existence of homosexuality (Benadusi, 2005).

LGBTQIA+ rights in Italy remain limited and fragmented. In ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map (2026), Italy scored 24.11/100 overall and only 8.74/100 for equality and non-discrimination, well below the EU average. Nevertheless, institutional mechanisms exist, particularly through the National Office Against Racial Discrimination (UNAR), which monitors discrimination and implements targeted initiatives. The National LGBT+ Strategy 2022–2025, extended until 2027, also provides a policy framework for addressing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

[5] Despacho n.º 7247/2019, de 16 de agosto (2019). *Diário da República*, 2.ª série, n.º 156. https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/despacho/7247-2019-123962165

[6] Ley 4/2023, de 28 de febrero, para la igualdad real y efectiva de las personas trans y para la garantía de los derechos de las personas LGTBI. *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, núm. 51, de 1 de marzo de 2023. https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2023-5366

Italy has developed several institutional mechanisms to address discrimination, notably through the National Office Against Racial Discrimination (UNAR), the *National LGBT+ Strategy 2022-2025*[7], extended until 2027, and a network of anti-discrimination centres and LGBTIQ shelters. These services provide legal, psychological, medical, housing and employment support, while the Strategy covers areas such as education, health, safety and monitoring. However, implementation remains limited, and access barriers persist for children and youth, who may require parental or guardian consent to use certain services. This particularly disadvantages young people facing family rejection, concealment of their identity or risk of homelessness.

Italian gaps are particularly visible in the areas of hate crimes and hate speech, rainbow families, and trans and intersex rights. The country does not have comprehensive criminal legislation that explicitly names homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia and transphobia as specific grounds for hate crimes and hate speech. Law 76/2016 recognised civil unions between same-sex people, but without full marriage equality and without a general guarantee of stepchild adoption. Constitutional Court decision no. 68/2025 recognised dual motherhood in specific cases of children conceived through assisted reproductive technologies abroad, but this solution remains partial, judicialised and does not cover children with two fathers. With regard to trans young people, Italy remains tied to a medicalised, judicialised and binary model of gender recognition, based on Law 164/1982, without a clear framework for trans children and adolescents or non-binary people (Voli, 2018; Mariotto et al., 2024). The existence of school practices such as the alias career is important to prevent outing and misgendering, but these measures have been contested by conservative organisations.

In Bulgaria, decriminalisation in 1968 also did not lead to broad recognition of sexual and gender diversity (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2024a, 2024b; ILGA-Europe, 2026a, 2026b; Samuilov, 2023). The Protection against Discrimination Act (2004/2015)[8], in force since 2004, includes sexual orientation and applies to areas such as employment, education, health, social protection, housing and access to goods and services. This remains the central domestic legal instrument for the protection of lesbian, gay and bisexual people however, gender identity and gender expression do not appear clearly and expressly as protected grounds, which weakens the protection of trans and non-binary people). The absence of legal recognition for same-sex couples continues to directly affect children in rainbow families. The "Baby Sara" case, decided by the Court of Justice of the European Union in 2021, showed precisely how the national refusal to recognise two mothers could prevent the effective exercise of a child's free movement rights within the European space. The decision required Bulgaria to issue documentation allowing the child to travel with both mothers, but did not create general recognition of rainbow families in domestic law.

The situation of trans people in Bulgaria worsened with the 2023 interpretative decision of the Supreme Court of Cassation, which held that Bulgarian law does not allow changes to sex markers, names and personal identification numbers for the purposes of legal gender recognition. This decision effectively

[7] UNAR – Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali. (2022). *Strategia nazionale LGBT+ 2022-2025 per la prevenzione e il contrasto delle discriminazioni per orientamento sessuale e identità di genere*. https://unar.it/portale/strategia-nazionale-lgbt-2022-2025

[8] Bulgaria. (2006). *Protection against discrimination act* (11 April 2006). Refworld. https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2006/53987

blocked legal gender recognition at the domestic level. Bulgaria also exemplifies the strength of anti-gender movements in the field of childhood and education. The controversy surrounding the Istanbul Convention in 2018 consolidated discourses associating "gender" with a threat to children, family and social order (Slavova, 2022, Raeva, 2020). In 2024, the amendment to the Preschool and School Education Act prohibited "propaganda, promotion or incitement" related to "non-traditional sexual orientation" and gender identity different from the "biological" one within the education system[9]. This broad wording tends to produce self-censorship among teachers, school psychologists and other professionals, making even factual approaches to diversity, rainbow families or prevention of anti-LGBTIQ bullying more difficult (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2025).

In Hungary, the recent trajectory is marked by sharp regression. After important advances, such as anti-discrimination legislation in 2003 with Act No. CXXV on equal treatment and the promotion of equal opportunities: prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in the field of employment, health, education, service provision and registered partnerships for same-sex couples in 2009, the 2010s opened a period of strong deterioration. In 2010, the Parliament revoked the previously adopted Civil Code and the new Civil Code, adopted in 2013, does not allow cohabiting partners to adopt each other's children. One year later, Constitution defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman, trying to cement a ban on same-sex marriages, the National Police Headquarters prohibited the Budapest Pride March. In 2020, legal gender recognition was banned. In 2021, restrictions on adoption by unmarried people were introduced, particularly affecting same-sex couples, and the so-called "child protection" law was approved, banning minors' access to content representing or "promoting" homosexuality, change of sex or gender identity different from sex assigned at birth. This legislation had direct effects in schools, creating fear among school leadership and professionals. The result is a chilling effect not only on LGBTIQ issues, but also on sexuality education, relationships, consent and affectivity more broadly (Kutassy et al., 2025).

Rainbow families in Hungary face legal insecurity and material inequality despite safeguards remain, including registered partnerships and Criminal Code provisions covering hate speech and hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity. However, the removal of gender identity as an explicitly protected characteristic from equality legislation in 2025 further weakened anti-discrimination protections, while laws restricting LGBTIQ+ content and public assemblies reinforced stigma and exclusion. Civil society organisations have therefore remained essential sources of support despite increasing political and financial pressure. The Tisza Party's electoral victory in April 2026 ended 16 years of Fidesz government, creating the possibility of legal change, although the new government's position on LGBTIQ+ rights remains uncertain.

Although decriminalisation represented a major legal turning point in Lithuania, it did not immediately lead to broader social acceptance or institutional inclusion of sexual and gender minorities. During the 1990s, discussions concerning homosexuality and gender diversity remained highly marginalised within public discourse, educational institutions, and state policy frameworks. LGBTIQ identities were often

[9] Euronews. (2024, August 8). *LGBTQ+ rights at risk in Bulgaria as parliament approves anti 'propaganda' law*. https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/08/08/human-rights-activists-call-on-the-eu-to-step-up-in-the-name-of-lgbtq-rights

framed as socially controversial, morally problematic, or incompatible with dominant understandings of family and national identity (Human Rights Monitoring Institute, 2022). Lithuania's accession to the European Union in 2004 significantly influenced the country's legal and political approach toward equality and anti-discrimination. As part of the accession process, Lithuania adopted legislative measures required under European Union equality directives, including legal protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in employment (European Commission, 2020). However, the implementation of these legal standards remained fragmented and limited in scope. Gender identity and gender expression were not comprehensively recognised within anti-discrimination frameworks, while protections concerning education, healthcare, and child protection remained inconsistent in practice (ILGA-Europe, 2023). Although the Constitutional Court of Lithuania subsequently deemed several controversial provisions associated with the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information unconstitutional, the broader political debates surrounding the legislation continue to influence institutional caution and self-censorship concerning discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity within educational environments. Human rights organisations previously criticised the legislation for contributing to censorship and institutional self-censorship concerning LGBTIQ-related topics in schools and public institutions (Amnesty International, 2010; European Parliament, 2009). Although Lithuania formally implements European Union anti-discrimination standards, important legal and institutional gaps remain regarding the recognition and protection of sexual and gender diversity in childhood. Same-sex partnerships are still not legally recognised, legal gender recognition procedures remain limited and insufficiently accessible for children and youth, and Lithuanian educational policies rarely explicitly identify LGBTIQ children as a vulnerable group requiring targeted protection measures (ILGA-Europe, 2024; Transgender Europe, 2024). In practice, these legal and policy absences contribute to uncertainty within schools, healthcare systems, and child protection institutions. The difficulties are particularly acute for trans and non-binary children and adolescents.

Overall, childhood has become a central arena of political dispute in contemporary debates on gender, sexuality and family diversity (Kuhar et al., 2026; Ekman, 2022). Across the CLICK countries, arguments about LGBTIQ rights are increasingly articulated through claims about child protection, parental authority, educational freedom and the defence of the "heteronormative traditional family". This shift is politically significant: children are not only affected by these debates, but are also symbolically mobilised within them. On the one hand, a child-rights approach requires states to protect children from violence, discrimination, bullying, family rejection and institutional invisibility. On the other hand, anti-gender actors often invoke children's vulnerability to justify restrictions on sexuality education, the recognition of trans and non-binary youth, and the visibility of rainbow families in schools, public services and other spheres of public life. In this sense, childhood becomes both a field of rights and a field of political struggle, where competing visions of family, citizenship, education and social change are negotiated (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Kuhar & Smrdelj, 2025).

This dispute is particularly visible in schools. Schools are key sites where the legitimacy of bodies, identities, families and ways of life is negotiated. When curricula, educational materials and awareness-raising activities include sexual, gender and family diversity, they enable LGBTIQ children and children from rainbow families to recognise themselves as legitimate members of the school community. Conversely, when such content is prohibited, avoided or dismissed as "ideology", their invisibility and exclusion are reinforced. As De Cordova, Selmi and Sità (2023) demonstrate in the Italian context, appeals to child well-

being may be mobilised against both same-sex parenting and gender equality education. Childhood is thus invoked not only as a category requiring protection, but also as a justification for restricting rights, knowledge and representation.

These tensions are particularly visible in the provision of school-based comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). International standards define CSE as an age-appropriate, scientifically accurate and rights-based process addressing relationships, consent, sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, diversity and violence prevention, rather than merely providing isolated information on reproduction or health risks (UNESCO et al., 2018; World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, & Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), 2010). Across the six countries, however, its legal recognition, comprehensiveness and implementation vary considerably. Portugal and Spain have the strongest formal frameworks, with compulsory or curriculum-based provisions that include affectivity, gender equality, diversity and violence prevention, although delivery remains uneven and dependent on teacher preparation, regional governance, resources and school priorities (European Parliament, 2022). Lithuania has a formal programme, but its implementation is fragmented across subjects and schools and remains affected by limited training and sociopolitical contestation Bytautas & Daukilas, 2023; Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, 2016). Italy lacks a compulsory nationwide programme, while Hungary and Bulgaria have adopted increasingly restrictive measures limiting the discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity in schools. The six countries therefore form a continuum ranging from relatively strong statutory commitments with implementation gaps to environments in which explicitly LGBTIQ-inclusive education is restricted or discouraged.

Within this context, rainbow families are central to the well-being of both LGBTIQ children and children growing up in LGBTIQ family settings. They are not merely subjects of legal recognition, but important spaces of care, belonging, protection and resistance. Where schools, health services and child-protection institutions fail to provide adequate support, families may play a decisive role in ensuring emotional safety, facilitating access to information, mediating with professionals and defending children's rights. At the same time, their capacity to provide protection is shaped by the broader institutional and political environment in which they live.

The growing influence of far-right populism and ultra-conservative anti-gender agendas therefore represents one of the most pressing threats to LGBTIQ children's rights in Europe. These movements challenge legal protections, inclusive education, the visibility of rainbow families and children's access to appropriate information and support. Although the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2026–2030 and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2022–2027 provide important supranational frameworks, their effectiveness depends on stronger implementation, coordination and accountability. Advancing equality consequently requires challenging adult-centred approaches, strengthening cooperation among public institutions, schools, families and civil-society organisations, and placing the rights, voices and best interests of all children—including LGBTIQ children and young people—at the centre of European human-rights agendas.

2.2. Statistical data about the LGBTIQ as well as children situation

In recent years, there has been a proliferation and normalization of conservative and discriminatory discourse in several European countries, alongside the rise of (far)right parties and the implementation of (far)right policies, which are deeply marked by racism, xenophobia, sexism, and classism. In short, this constitutes an attack on several minoritized populations and on human rights.

Although, according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2024) discrimination against LGBTIQ people has either decreased slightly or remained stable from 2019 to 2023, more than half of the respondents believe that violence has increased a little or a lot in the past 5 years in their country (59%) and that prejudice and intolerance have also increased (53%). Indeed, 33% of LGBTIQ victims of hate-motivated violence said that they suffered three or more such violent attacks in the 5 years before the 2023 survey, compared to 26% in 2019. The proportion of intersex respondents who said that they had experienced one or more physical or sexual attacks in the 5 years before the survey increased from 23% in 2019 to 34% in 2023.

As mentioned in the previous section, the legal and sociopolitical conditions for LGBTIQ youth in the CLICK project countries – Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, and Spain – vary considerably, although some similar patterns have been identified across them.

Spain currently ranks first on the Rainbow Map (ILGA-Europe, 2026), with a score of 88.7%, standing out in the categories of asylum, and equality and non-discrimination. Together with Portugal – which ranks 12th, with a score of 66.99% – they are the only countries in the consortium that prohibit unnecessary surgical or medical interventions on intersex children. Italy, Lithuania, and Hungary (which has experienced a democratic setback, falling from 9th place in 2012) have very low scores, ranking 36th, 37th, and 38th, respectively, and complying with just under one-quarter of the required policy and legislative measures. Bulgaria ranks 40th (19.76%), making it the lowest-ranked EU member state, just behind Romania, with particularly low scores in legal gender recognition, the Civil Society Space, and asylum.

While Spain and Portugal rank among the most progressive countries in the EU, Bulgaria and Lithuania consistently rank among the countries with the lowest levels of social acceptance and legal support for the LGBTIQ population. In Italy, despite the perception of high levels of discrimination, acceptance remains at moderate levels, while Hungary shows growing resistance to equal rights (European Commission, 2023).

Italy and Portugal are among the EU countries where most citizens believe discrimination is very widespread. Interestingly, in Lithuania, only 46% consider discrimination against transgender people to be widespread – one of the lowest figures in the EU – and in Bulgaria, only 40% believe that discrimination based on sexual orientation is widespread, a figure that has increased by 11% since 2019 (European Commission, 2023). Among the consortium countries, between 37% and 50% (Spain and Bulgaria, respectively) of respondents to the EU LGBTIQ Survey III (FRA, 2024) reported having been discriminated against because they are LGBTIQ at least once in the previous year. These figures are concerning, especially when compared to the EU average (37%). Discrimination occurs in many contexts: work, education, healthcare, housing, and social life.

Discrimination in school settings is an extremely serious problem and has been identified as the most common setting for victimization in all six countries, with more than 3 in 5 reporting that they have been ridiculed, teased, insulted, or threatened at school because they are LGBTIQ (FRA, 2024). Interestingly,

among the six countries analyzed, no significant difference was found in the prevalence of discrimination against LGBTIQ people, although there is a significant difference in how schools address this issue.

The violence experienced is mostly verbal and psychological than physical, with social exclusion and offensive language being the most common forms of discrimination, which have been on the rise. In fact, in Bulgaria, 83.1% often or very often heard homophobic slurs from other students, while 68% heard homophobic remarks from teachers or other staff – an increase compared to 2017–2018 (Single Step Foundation, 2024). In Italy, 40.6% of queerphobic offenses are committed by students against their peers – a figure that has nearly tripled compared to 2018 estimates (14%) – indicating an intensification of peer-based hostility (Centro Risorse LGBTI [CRL], 2024). Spain stands out within the consortium's landscape with significantly lower figures, where 7% of LGBT students report having been insulted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, a figure that rises to 17% among trans students (COGAM, 2023).

The perpetrators are usually students, but also teachers and staff, which is particularly problematic given that, very often, there are no school policies that explicitly protect LGBTIQ youth. Consequently, there are no effective reporting mechanisms or support systems in place for these situations. For example, in Italy, 74% say there are no specific anti-bullying regulations addressing gender identity, and 68% report none addressing sexual orientation (CRL, 2024). However, even where certain anti-bullying policies do exist, they generally do not translate into adequate intervention: in Italy and Bulgaria, about half of students report that teachers or staff do not intervene in situations of discrimination (Single Step Foundation, 2024; CRL, 2024).

In addition to the lack of policies and protocols for addressing situations of discrimination, there is also a significant lack of training for both professionals and students, which is particularly problematic given that the absence of inclusive sexuality education contributes directly to discrimination and poorer mental health outcomes among LGBTIQ youth (UNESCO, 2021). In Spain and Portugal, although certain institutional recommendations or guidelines for inclusive sexuality education exist, implementation is weak or nonexistent: in Portugal, students report that topics related to sexual orientation (40.6%) and transgender people (54.6%) have never been discussed (Gato, 2022). Bulgaria recently restricted the discussion of "non-traditional" sexual orientations and gender identities in schools, and Hungary prohibited adolescents under the age of 18 from accessing content that "promotes or depicts a deviation from the gender identity corresponding to one's biological sex, a change of sex, or homosexuality."

This school culture, which often prioritizes the institution's image over the well-being of the student community – choosing to discourage and push away educational and awareness-raising initiatives, and covering up allegations and cases of violence to avoid controversy and backlash (from parents, school staff, etc.) – ultimately results in a highly hostile environment for LGBTIQ people (or minoritized populations in general). In fact, across all countries in the consortium, a sense of insecurity in school settings is consistently reported; for example: in Hungary, only 25% of respondents said there was no place at school they would avoid because they felt uncomfortable there (Kutassy et al., 2025), and in Portugal, nearly half (45%) of trans and non-binary students reported feeling unsafe using changing rooms and bathrooms (Gato, 2022). In fact, locker rooms and restrooms are repeatedly cited as particularly unsafe spaces for LGBTIQ students: one-quarter of students in Italy (CRL, 2024) and over one third in Lithuania report avoiding them (Platūkytė, 2023).

This sense of insecurity not only affects psychological and/or physical well-being but also has implications for participation and learning, as well as for social life. It is thus evident that a large proportion of students continue to hide their identity at school: in Bulgaria, 74.8% of students hide their identity from teachers, and 73.9% are out only to a small group of classmates or to no one (Single Step Foundation, 2024). Similarly, in Italy (CRL, 2024), 85% of trans students are not out to anyone or are out only to a few members of the school staff. This results in greater isolation and invisibility, and sometimes higher rates of absenteeism and school dropout compared to their heterosexual peers. For example, in Italy (CRL, 2024), over 12% of students report missing school days because they feel unsafe, including cases of prolonged absence among intersex youth.

The impact of exclusion and violence is reflected in alarming mental health indicators. The most alarming statistic comes from Bulgaria, where 49.6% of students seriously considered suicide in the past year (Single Step Foundation, 2024). In Spain, 43% of students who experienced homophobic bullying had suicidal thoughts, and 17% attempted suicide (Generelo, 2012). In Portugal, LGB youth are three times more likely to commit suicide than their heterosexual peers, a risk that increases when the family is unsupportive (Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses, 2021).

In fact, the family is described both as a vital support system and as the second most violent environment for LGBTIQ youth. In Bulgaria, among young people who came out, 37% received no support at all, and 58.7% were subjected to homophobic or transphobic comments from family members (Single Step Foundation, 2024). In Portugal, 18.7% of LGBTI students admit to having been insulted or humiliated by parents or family members because of their identity (Gato, 2022)

Finally, one limitation noted by nearly all the countries analyzed is the lack of government studies and national statistics on the LGBTIQ population, which contributes to the invisibility and social vulnerability of this population – especially with regard to the development and implementation of public policies – and places an undue burden on civil society organizations that take this responsibility.

3. Findings

3.1. Children experiences.

This section examines the everyday experiences of violence, discrimination, and support reported by LGBTIQ children and adolescents in Click countries. Despite differences between national contexts, limitations arising from unequal sample sizes, and the fact that some countries collected limited information directly from children and young people, the findings reveal common patterns. Violence cuts across different spheres of everyday life, occurring primarily at school, but also in other contexts such as extracurricular activities, within the family, and in public spaces. The reported experiences also demonstrate that exposure to violence does not depend solely on explicitly identifying as LGBTIQ, but is frequently associated with how children's and adolescents' gender expression, behaviour, clothing, or family relationships are perceived by others.

3.1.1. Spaces where violence occurs

Across the LGBTIQ sample, school was by far the main setting in which violence occurred, being mentioned by an average of 69.0% of participants. This was followed by the home or family context, at 41.5%, streets and other public spaces, at 37.2%, and extracurricular activities, at 29.5%. The workplace presented a considerably lower percentage, at 6.8%, also considering that most adolescents are full-time students. These findings show that, although school occupies a central position, violence accompanies LGBTIQ children and adolescents across the different spaces in which they study, socialise, participate in activities, and move through their daily lives. There were, however, differences between countries. Bulgaria recorded the highest percentages in almost all contexts: 82.3% at school, 62.3% at home, 56.5% in streets or other public spaces, and 20.0% at work. Hungary stood out particularly in relation to extracurricular activities, where violence was reported by 35.4% of participants, the highest percentage among the countries. By contrast, Italy recorded the lowest values in most contexts: 51.6% at school, 34.4% at home, 30.0% in streets or public spaces, and 3.3% at work. Spain, Portugal, and Lithuania occupied intermediate positions.

School

The centrality of school in experiences of violence was evident across countries. Violence in this context was reported by 67.5% of participants in Spain, 68.9% in Portugal, 68.1% in Lithuania, and 82.3% in Bulgaria. In Italy, 51.6% reported experiences of violence at school, while in Hungary, 205 of the 281 LGBTIQ respondents reported violence in this context. Although these findings do not constitute directly comparable national estimates, they consistently demonstrate that school remains a particularly significant space of insecurity, discrimination, and regulation of sexual and gender diversity.

Incidents occur in different areas of the school. In Spain, classrooms, playgrounds, corridors, and digital environments associated with school relationships were particularly identified. In Bulgaria, 74% of those who reported school violence mentioned classrooms, and the same percentage identified corridors, followed by the areas surrounding the school, playgrounds, and online spaces. In Hungary, the classroom was also the most frequently mentioned location, with 153 responses. In Portugal, playgrounds, school entrances, toilets, canteens, and corridors were described as particularly unsafe. Classrooms were perceived as relatively safer by some participants, although the data do not allow confirmation of whether this difference resulted from the greater presence of adults.

The occurrence of violence in supervised spaces shows that the presence of professionals does not, in itself, guarantee safety. Qualitative data from Bulgaria and Hungary indicate, for example, that teachers may ignore, minimise, or, in some cases, participate in discriminatory behaviour. School violence is therefore not restricted to less visible or unsupervised locations. It may also occur inside classrooms and be reproduced or legitimised by institutional practices themselves.

Extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities constitute another important setting of exposure to violence. Among LGBTIQ participants who reported incidents during these activities, sport was by far the most frequently mentioned context, with an average of 61.0%. A similar percentage was found among non-LGBTIQ participants, demonstrating that sport can be a setting for youth violence more broadly. Among LGBTIQ

children and adolescents, however, violence was distributed across a wider variety of activities. Within the LGBTIQ sample, the highest percentages of violence in sport were recorded in Portugal, at 70.6%, Spain, at 63.8%, and Hungary, at 61.8%. In Bulgaria, sport was mentioned by 52.9% of those who experienced violence in extracurricular activities, but incidents were also distributed across performing arts, at 29.4%, cultural activities, at 17.6%, and activities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, at 11.8%. Bulgaria therefore presented the broadest distribution of violence across different types of activities. In Italy, violence in contexts of civic or political participation stood out, being reported by 23.5% of participants who experienced

violence in extracurricular activities, as did violence in volunteering and scouting activities, both at 11.8%. In Hungary, incidents were concentrated primarily in sport, although religious groups were also mentioned by 13.5%. In Lithuania, violence was more concentrated in sport, mentioned by 35.7%, with no cases reported in several of the remaining categories. Spain followed the overall pattern, with a clear predominance of sport and a more moderate presence of performing arts, reported by 17.4%.

Comparison with the non-LGBTIQ sample suggests that LGBTIQ children and adolescents experience violence across a wider variety of activities, including performing arts, religious groups, scouting, and spaces of civic or political participation. These findings show that contexts intended to promote young people's development, socialisation, and active participation can also reproduce gender and sexuality norms, becoming particularly hostile towards those perceived as non-conforming.

Family and home environment

The family emerges as a profoundly ambivalent context. For some children and adolescents, it represents a fundamental source of protection and emotional safety; for others, it constitutes a space of rejection, surveillance, control, and silencing. Violence or discrimination in the home or family context was reported by 62.3% of participants in Bulgaria, 47.8% in Lithuania, 45.9% in Portugal, and 34.4% in Italy. In Hungary, 130 of the 281 LGBTIQ respondents reported experiencing violence at home. In Spain and Portugal, the qualitative data reveal situations involving a lack of

family support, sometimes associated with religious beliefs or conservative positions regarding sexual and gender diversity. Family control may focus on clothing, make-up, behaviour, friendships, intimate relationships, and gender expression. Faced with the possibility of rejection, punishment, or exposure to direct or indirect violence, some young people choose to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity. Although remaining closeted may function as a self-protection strategy, this decision simultaneously restricts access to potential adult support networks.

The data also reveal some regional differences in the distribution of violence among family members. In the Southern European countries participating in the study—Spain, Portugal, and Italy: family violence tended to be concentrated primarily among parents. In the data from Bulgaria, Hungary, and Lithuania, a wider range of family members were involved, including siblings, grandparents, and other relatives.

These differences should nevertheless be interpreted with caution, given the sizes of the

national samples.

Streets and other public spaces

Violence also extends beyond the boundaries of school and family. Among participants who reported violence in public contexts, the street was the most frequently identified location in every country, accounting, on average, for 81.9% of these incidents. This proportion was particularly high in Italy, where 95.7% of those who experienced violence in public spaces mentioned the street, followed by Bulgaria, at 84.8%, Hungary, at 81.0%, Spain, at 80.5%, Portugal, at 80.0%, and Lithuania, at 79.3%.

Public transport constituted the second most frequent context, particularly in Italy, where it was identified by 65.2% of those who reported violence in public spaces, and in Hungary and Portugal, both at 60.0%. Bulgaria again presented the broadest distribution of incidents, which also occurred in shopping centres, bars or nightclubs, healthcare services, public administration services, social services, community centres, and interactions with the police. In Portugal, places of worship and gyms also stood out, both being identified by 20.0% of participants who reported violence in public spaces. In Portugal, social media and messaging applications were also identified as contexts of exposure, including through the circulation of rumours, defamation, and false information. Digital environments do not necessarily constitute a space separate from face-to-face relationships: they may extend conflicts that began at school, within peer groups, or in the community, increasing the visibility and persistence of violence.

3.1.2. Reasons attributed to violence

Across countries, children and adolescents primarily associated violence with the policing of norms related to gender, sexuality, and social belonging. Participants were targeted not only because they explicitly identified as LGBTIQ, but also because of the way they dressed, acted, spoke, or expressed themselves, or because others perceived them as failing to conform to dominant norms.

The way participants dressed, acted, or expressed themselves was identified as a reason for violence by 44.1% of participants in Italy, 37.9% in Portugal, 35.6% in Lithuania, 33.9% in Bulgaria, and 31.6% in Spain. In Hungary, 128 of the 281 LGBTIQ respondents also associated the aggression with their self-expression. Sexual orientation was mentioned by 30.5% of participants in Bulgaria, 25.1% in Spain, and 20.5% in Lithuania. Vulnerability therefore depends not only on the voluntary disclosure of an identity, but also on the socially attributed visibility of gender and sexual non-conformity.

Experiences also differed within the LGBTIQ acronym. In the Spanish focus groups, cisgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents mainly described difficulties related to the acceptance of their sexual orientation. Trans and non-binary participants highlighted more intense scrutiny of their bodies, gender expression, names, pronouns, and access to toilets or changing rooms. Aromantic and asexual participants also referred to the lack of recognition of their identities and experiences.

In Hungary, some schools refused to use students' chosen names, and the KRÉTA digital school system did not allow these names to be registered, repeatedly exposing trans students to the use of the name assigned to them at birth. Restrictions on access to toilets were also identified, as were institutional solutions that, instead of providing protection, increased queer students' visibility and exposure. In Italy,

deadnaming and misgendering were similarly among the most frequently reported offences. The experiences of trans, non-binary, and gender-non-conforming students therefore take particularly visible and, at times, institutionalised forms of delegitimisation.

The reported forms of violence included insults, public humiliation, exclusion and social isolation, the dissemination of rumours, questioning of sexual orientation or gender identity, comments about the body, misgendering, deadnaming, cyberbullying, and physical aggression. In Bulgaria, spreading rumours or lies had the highest average, followed by public humiliation and social exclusion. In Lithuania and Hungary, exclusion, humiliation, rumours, and cyberbullying were also particularly prominent. These practices operate as mechanisms for regulating conformity and legitimate belonging. In Bulgaria, adults raised in rainbow families and former students recalled insults, comments about their relatives, ridicule of their gender expression, and physical assaults. In vocational and technical schools in Hungary and Italy, cultures of hypermasculinity were described as increasing the vulnerability of students who did not conform to dominant gender expectations.

These experiences were also shaped by other axes of inequality. In Portugal, racialised participants reported racist and xenophobic harassment, while migrant or cultural background was identified as a factor that could intensify experiences of anti-LGBTIQ+ discrimination. Violence should therefore be analysed through the relationships between gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, appearance, social class, and family context, rather than as the result of a single identity characteristic.

3.1.3. Profile of perpetrators

The profile of perpetrators varied according to the context, although peer relationships were particularly central at school and in extracurricular activities. When violence occurred at school, classmates were identified as the main perpetrators in all countries, accounting for an average of 85.9% of cases. Students from other classes followed, at 51.9%. School violence against LGBTIQ children and adolescents is therefore predominantly a form of peer violence. Spain and Bulgaria recorded the highest percentages of violence perpetrated by classmates, at 89.2% and 88.0%, respectively. In Portugal, classmates were identified in 76.1% of cases, while the involvement of students from other classes also stood out, being reported in 60.9% of cases, the highest percentage in this category. In Spain and Portugal, school violence was particularly concentrated within relationships between students.

Adults within the school community may, however, assume different roles: they may be direct perpetrators, passive witnesses, or agents who prevent an adequate response. On average, teachers were identified as perpetrators in 25.4% of school incidents. Hungary recorded the highest percentage, at 42.5%, clearly distinguishing it from the other countries. In Bulgaria, in addition to teachers, school management staff, administrative professionals, and those responsible for extracurricular activities were mentioned. In Italy, a relatively high percentage of incidents was also attributed to former partners, at 17.5%.

Qualitative accounts included situations in which teachers punitively assigned additional schoolwork to LGBTIQ students, gave them unfavourable assessments, ignored bullying, punished victims, or threatened them with expulsion, particularly in educational settings run by religious institutions. In Bulgaria, participants described negative comments from teachers, a lack of intervention by psychology professionals, and recommendations that the child change schools rather than addressing the discriminatory environment. In Italy, some of the most significant experiences involved adults who directly perpetrated violence, blocked responses, or failed to recognise young people's needs.

In extracurricular activities, the main perpetrators were also peers participating in the same activity, identified in an average of 68.4% of cases. This pattern was particularly pronounced in Portugal, at 88.2%, and Spain, at 81.6%, where violence occurred almost exclusively between peers. In Bulgaria and Hungary, professionals responsible for activities or instructors were more frequently identified as perpetrators, at 47.1% and 42.5%, respectively, considerably higher than the average of 25.3%. In Italy, peers participating in the same activity were less frequently identified, but there was greater involvement of young people taking part in other activities held in the same space.

Within the family context, fathers and mothers were the main perpetrators. Among those who reported violence at home, fathers were identified in an average of 57.5% of cases and mothers in 49.8%. Bulgaria recorded the highest percentage of violence attributed to fathers, at 72.2%, while Lithuania recorded the highest percentage involving mothers, at 66.7%. In Hungary, grandparents were more frequently involved, being identified by 30.8%, while in Lithuania, siblings were mentioned by 28.2%. These findings show that family violence is concentrated primarily among parental figures, although in some contexts it also involves the extended family.

In public spaces, perpetrators were mainly unknown adults, identified in an average of 74.4% of incidents. This proportion was particularly high in Portugal, at 90.0%, Hungary, at 85.0%, and Lithuania, at 82.8%. In Spain and Italy, incidents involved both unknown adults and people of a similar age to the victims. Bulgaria again displayed a more diverse pattern: in addition to unknown adults, perpetrators frequently included people of a similar age, groups or gangs, school peers, police officers, and other authority figures.

3.1.4. Reactions, reporting of violence, and experiences of support

After experiencing violence, children and adolescents primarily turned to informal support networks, especially friends, while institutional and school-based mechanisms were used much less frequently. This preference does not necessarily mean that peers have the resources required to stop the violence. In many cases, they are approached because they offer greater trust, recognition, and emotional validation than the adults or institutions responsible for protection.

In Italy, 71.2% of participants received support from friends following experiences of discrimination. In Lithuania, friends were identified as the main source of support by 82.8% of participants. Following an incident of violence, 56.2% spoke to friends and 48.4% sought professional psychological support. By contrast, only 14.1% told a teacher what had happened, and 12.5% approached school counselling professionals. When asked about the support they had actually received, only 6.2% identified teachers, while 21.9% mentioned mental health professionals.

In Bulgaria, 53.4% told a friend after experiencing violence, while 46.6% did nothing. Only 20.7% reported the situation to a teacher, the same percentage sought professional help, and 6.9% used school counselling services. Friends were also the main source of support actually received, identified by 63.8% of participants.

In Hungary, 111 respondents spoke to friends, while 95 did nothing after the incident of violence. Only 41 told teachers what had happened, and 29 approached school counselling services. In Portugal, peers similarly played an essential role in emotional validation and the sense of belonging, although they frequently had few resources to stop the aggression or initiate institutional responses.

The decision not to report violence should not simply be interpreted as passivity. In Spain, participants emphasised the need to carefully control how much they disclosed, to whom, and under what circumstances. In Bulgaria, Hungary, and Portugal, silence and avoidance were associated with a lack of trust in institutions and adults, fear of involuntary disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity, the normalisation of violence, and previous experiences in which reporting had not resulted in protection. In Lithuania, the limited use of support within schools, in contrast to reliance on friends and external mental health professionals, similarly suggests that existing school structures were perceived as insufficiently prepared or reliable.

Informal support may also come from the family. Some families provide emotional protection and help children and adolescents cope with experiences of violence. In Portugal, siblings emerged as particularly important allies when parental support was absent. The family may therefore constitute both a context of risk and a source of safety, depending on how it responds to sexual and gender diversity.

At school, positive experiences were associated with the presence of identifiable and trustworthy adults, clear procedures, and supportive peer networks. In Spain, openly LGBTIQ teachers and professionals responsible for Diverse Playground Spaces were described as fundamental sources of support, alongside anti-bullying protocols and procedures addressing the needs of trans students. In Italy, alliances between peers and adults and the work of student collectives encouraged participation and collective responses to discrimination. In Hungary, positive accounts were concentrated mainly in some alternative schools in Budapest, where queer students and children from LGBTIQ families were accepted and could express themselves more freely. In some cases, teachers included topics related to family diversity and same-sex marriage in their lessons. Although these experiences cannot be generalised to the educational system as a whole, they show that explicitly inclusive institutional cultures can function as important safeguards. In Portugal, Italy, and Hungary, some artistic and performing activities were also described as potentially more welcoming contexts that supported personal expression. These spaces were not free from violence, as the findings concerning extracurricular activities demonstrate, but particular practices and group cultures could provide opportunities for recognition, belonging, and the development of supportive relationships.

3.2. Educators and rainbow families experiences.

The data collected in the interviews with educators and rainbow families highlighted several important elements: despite national differences in legislation and provision of LGBTIQ rights, several issues are recurrent and resonate across the different countries, offering a broad perspective on the current state of LGBTIQ experiences in the educational system. In particular, three elements emerge as especially relevant: gaps in the implementation of measures to counter LGBTIQ-phobia; polarisation of discourse on LGBTIQ issues; and invisibility of LGBTIQ lives.

3.2.1. Gaps in the implementation of measures to counter LGBTIQ-phobia

The first recurrent aspect that emerges transversally from the data collected in all countries is that discrimination against LGBTIQ people is widespread and pervasive. It affects children, educators, and rainbow families and produces devastating effects on individual wellbeing and social cohesion. Verbal abuse, structural discrimination, and gender-policing are particularly ubiquitous and harmful. The experiences collected show several gaps in the implementation of effective measures to counter LGBTIQ-phobia.

Between law and practice.

In countries where legislation provides formal protection against discrimination, such as Portugal and Spain, the implementation of such measures is weakened by institutional and social obstacles. As data from these countries show, the application of consequential actions to condemn and punish acts of discrimination is often limited by cultural reluctance and resistance to conflict. The gap between the legislative and social levels remains significant and needs to be addressed through profound political and cultural measures. Conversely, in countries where the provision of legal tools to counter discrimination is limited or absent, such as Italy, Bulgaria, and Hungary, the experiences collected show that individual initiatives are often central to overcoming stalled situations where the law cannot intervene, leaving relatively ample power to single actors.

Between personal inclination and institutional response.

The data highlight the existence of substantial divergences between individual inclinations towards LGBTIQ people and institutional responses. At an individual level, several families across the different countries report having encountered supportive people in educational contexts: staff members, teachers, and school leaders may show openness and willingness to listen and support the needs of LGBTIQ families or young people in schools. However, such support is often not backed up by institutional responses that involve the school as a whole. Therefore, there is a clash between discourse at the individual level and actual practices, where, for example, children are encouraged to express themselves as they feel, but in practice are routinely excluded from activities; or where families receive the open support of one teacher or staff member but are ostracised by others. Securing personal connections in the educational environment and counting on affirming adults is a crucial resource to improve children's wellbeing in schools. However, reliance on individual goodwill alone limits institutional change.

Between local and European orientations.

Data from countries where legislative provision of anti-discrimination measures is weak, such as Bulgaria, Hungary, and Italy, reveal a discrepancy between the orientations issued by European institutions on anti-discrimination and the practices adopted at national and local levels. Fuelled by political narratives that conflate progressive policies with "European propaganda", governments and public bodies in these countries oppose recommendations from EU institutions in various ways, limiting opportunities to implement LGBTIQ-inclusive policies across the territory.

Between actual needs and available tools.

Teachers and families in all the countries involved in the research identify a major need for effective training on LGBTIQ issues. This need is unmet in all countries. In some contexts, such as Portugal and Spain, there are examples of positive activities regarding LGBTIQ issues in schools, but their implementation is strongly limited by geographical disparities and local differences. In these countries, families and teachers call for a national, coordinated, and mandatory policy that would include LGBTIQ issues in all existing curricula. In countries where provision is weaker, the establishment of a nationwide programme would constitute a transformative measure to respond to the needs of families, teachers, and young people under institutional protection.

3.2.2. Polarisation of discourse on LGBTIQ issues

Data from all countries confirm that the growth of far-right parties and the proliferation of anti-LGBTIQ propaganda have significantly impacted the experiences of children and families in educational contexts. In countries where conservative views and anti-LGBTIQ panic were already widespread in the past decade, such as Hungary and Italy, participants report that homophobic and transphobic abuse has been steadily increasing in recent years. In Portugal and Spain, despite growing awareness of LGBTIQ issues supported by progressive policies for the protection of LGBTIQ rights, several teachers and families highlight a worrying rise in radical anti-LGBTIQ discourses at both political and societal levels.

In the past two to three years, teachers have observed, for example, the growth of parents' groups dedicated to monitoring and reporting the spread of the so-called "gender ideology" in school activities, and an increase in scrutiny regarding the content included in school programmes. With regard to LGBTIQ children in particular, the spread of misinformation has had a negative impact in educational contexts, affecting both teachers and rainbow families.

The climate of growing polarisation and politicisation of LGBTIQ issues generates increasing fear that introducing LGBTIQ topics in educational settings will create conflicts. In this sense, several teachers from Portugal, Lithuania, and Italy report that they actively avoid organising any activity on LGBTIQ issues or introducing such topics into their teaching programmes, for fear that parents will raise concerns. Those who decide to include LGBTIQ issues nonetheless mostly do so indirectly, for example within sessions on wellbeing, civic education, or empathy. As Spanish participants highlight, the precarious working conditions of many teachers and the workload they face often create incentives to avoid any potential source of conflict with institutions and parents.

The lack of institutional coherence around LGBTIQ issues and the increasing polarisation of narratives lead to an erosion of trust in the collective bodies that govern education and a shift towards individual responsibility. Teachers and, more broadly, all professionals involved in the educational system are left alone to decide whether they introduce LGBTIQ issues in their work or not; often, individually choosing to challenge institutional resistance by organising an activity on LGBTIQ issues or by emphasising the importance of anti-homophobic practices leads to negative repercussions on their professional trajectory and relationships. Similarly, rainbow families are often left to manage the challenges of navigating the school system, its bureaucracy, and its networks without any support, either from other families or from the school itself. Perhaps even more importantly, those who suffer the worst consequences of the lack of institutional and collective protection are children and young people. Being able to count on a supportive family represents the most impactful protective factor against discrimination; however, when this is not available, children and young people are often left on their own to confront violence, discrimination, and exclusion in schools.

3.2.3. Invisibility of LGBTIQ issues

The third recurrent element emerging from the data is the absence of LGBTIQ visibility in school programmes, activities, and narratives within educational contexts. As noted by stakeholders and teachers, for example in Bulgaria and Italy, such invisibility is connected to a broader absence of structured, widespread, and coherent programmes on sexual education and affective education in schools. The lack of education regarding LGBTIQ experiences is thus partially linked to a more general failure to engage with the educational mandate concerning affectivity, sexuality, and relationships. In Portugal, until recently, activities on LGBTIQ-related topics were included within a subject called “Citizenship”, which also addressed empathy, environmental awareness, and other issues relevant for the development of psychosocial skills.

Moreover, as noted by both teachers and families, the vast majority of school subjects and educational curricula do not include any specific mention of LGBTIQ figures, histories, or key events. The heteronormativity on which educational systems appear to be founded reinforces the invisibility of LGBTIQ experiences and the binary vision of gender. Consequently, children and young people who may feel different from the majority are not exposed to relevant role models who could offer positive feedback on the validity of their feelings. At the same time, rainbow families feel isolated because their experiences and affective configurations are neither mentioned nor legitimised within the narratives presented to students during their school years.

3.3. Children’s needs and perspectives.

The analysis starts from their experiences and the conditions they associate with safety, recognition, support, and participation. These needs cannot be reduced to individual coping or psychological support; they also depend on the family, educational, community, and digital environments in which violence is produced, normalised, ignored, or challenged. Avoiding certain spaces, anticipating risks, managing identity disclosure, and seeking peer support may provide immediate protection. However, these

strategies should not be confused with transforming the conditions that make them necessary or transfer responsibility for managing hostile environments onto children and adolescents.

Overall, emotional and professional support was a common need that emerged from data, expressed particularly strongly in Portugal, Lithuania, Hungary, and Bulgaria, alongside information about LGBTIQ rights and available resources. These needs were expressed less strongly in Spain and especially Italy, possibly reflecting differences in perceived service availability, awareness of resources, institutional trust, and previous help-seeking experiences.

3.3.1. Recognition, legitimacy, and control over visibility

A cross-cutting need concerns recognition of identities, experiences, and self-expression. For many participants, this means being addressed by the correct name and pronouns, having their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression respected, and not being continually required to justify who they are. This was particularly evident among trans and non-binary adolescents, who reported misgendering, deadnaming, restrictions on access to toilets and changing rooms, scrutiny of their bodies, and challenges to the legitimacy of their identities. In Hungary, some schools refused chosen names, and the KRÉTA digital system did not allow them to be registered. In Italy, deadnaming and misgendering were also reported, while aromantic and asexual adolescents in Spain emphasised the need for recognition of experiences that are often rendered invisible. Institutional or interpersonal refusal to recognise an identity can produce insecurity, isolation, and exclusion, whereas affirming contexts can foster pride, self-determination, and belonging. Spain's Diverse Playground Spaces illustrate the value of environments where adolescents can express themselves and connect with other LGBTIQ people. Recognition must nevertheless be combined with privacy: young people need to decide how much they disclose, to whom, in which contexts, and when. Respect therefore requires both recognition of identity and control over visibility.

3.3.2. Emotional, professional, and community support

When asked what kind of help they would need, 51.7% of participants mentioned talking to friends and 49.1% professional support, demonstrating the importance of both trusted informal networks and specialised assistance. Demand for professional support was highest in Bulgaria (58.1%) and Hungary (53.8%). Support from LGBTIQ organisations was also strongly valued in Bulgaria (48.8%) and Hungary (49.2%), while Bulgaria recorded the highest percentage wishing to speak with other LGBTIQ young people (32.6%). In Lithuania, 59.5% wanted to speak with friends and 57.1% sought support from LGBTIQ organisations. Portugal stood out for professional support (58.3%) and family relationships: 41.7% wanted to speak with parents, 25.0% with siblings, and 16.7% with other relatives. Despite qualitative accounts of family rejection, many Portuguese participants still regarded family as a possible source of help. Spain showed the lowest demand for support from LGBTIQ organisations (22.7%), while Italy recorded lower percentages for most forms of support and the highest proportion saying they did not need help (26.3%).

Across the CLICK countries, friends provided listening, validation, shared experience, information, accompaniment, and, at times, intervention or referral to adults and services. Small peer groups intervened in violent situations in Bulgaria, while student collectives and alliances between young people and adults were valued in Italy. However, emotional support is not equivalent to effective protection.

Portuguese participants noted that friends could provide comfort but had limited capacity to stop violence, and one trans and non-binary participant in Bulgaria described peers who did not always know how to help. Peer support may facilitate access to help but cannot replace institutional resources, authority, or responsibility. LGBTIQ organisations were particularly important in Lithuania, Hungary, and Bulgaria, offering information, specialised assistance, contact with peers, and affirming communities. Online spaces were similarly ambivalent: they could expose young people to cyberbullying and non-consensual disclosure, while also providing communities, resources, and language through which to understand their experiences.

3.3.3. Information to manage emotions, understand rights, and address discrimination

The main information need was learning to manage stress, anxiety, and other emotions, reported by 68.1% of participants and particularly high in Portugal (75.0%), Hungary (69.2%), and Spain (68.8%). The effects of discrimination therefore continue beyond the incident itself, as children and adolescents manage fear, anxiety, isolation, and anticipation of risk. Nevertheless, emotional management must not individualise the problem or replace violence prevention and structural change. Portugal showed strong demand for information about safe spaces (75.0%), LGBTIQ rights (61.1%), and responses to bullying or discrimination (52.8%). Demand for rights information was highest in Lithuania (75.6%), followed by Hungary (64.6%) and Bulgaria (59.5%), but lower in Spain (37.2%) and Italy (39.5%). Italy also recorded the lowest demand for information about dealing with bullying or discrimination (18.4%). Information needs therefore extend beyond LGBTIQ identities to emotional management, recognising discrimination, understanding rights and reporting mechanisms, identifying safe spaces, and locating supportive people, services, and organisations.

3.3.4. Safety and protection in educational settings

Schools are central spaces of socialisation, frequent sites of violence, and institutions expected to provide protection. For participants, safety included protection not only from physical aggression but also from insults, rumours, humiliation, exclusion, cyberbullying, misgendering, deadnaming, and the policing of gender expression. Overall, 74.5% identified clear rules and effective action against bullying as necessary for safer and more respectful schools, rising to 83.3% in Bulgaria and Portugal and 79.5% in Lithuania. Young people expected concrete prevention, recognition, and response rather than generic messages of inclusion. Lithuania showed broad demand for institutional measures: teacher training (76.9%), visible school support (74.4%), and effective anti-bullying rules (79.5%). Bulgaria also showed strong demand for visible institutional support (71.4%). Italy recorded the highest demand for teacher training on LGBTIQ issues (78.4%), which is particularly relevant given accounts of professionals ignoring, minimising, or reproducing discrimination. In Hungary, 57.7% wanted clubs, groups, or activities for LGBTIQ students, which could provide belonging, peer support, and information. In Spain, anti-bullying rules remained the main priority (70.8%), while demand was lower for LGBTIQ clubs or activities (30.0%) and teacher training (57.7%). Overall, Lithuania called for the broadest combination of measures; Hungary prioritised dedicated groups and spaces; Italy emphasised training; and Portugal and Bulgaria highlighted clear procedures, effective responses, and visible support.

Safety is also context-specific. Toilets, changing rooms, and sports facilities are especially relevant for trans, non-binary, and gender-non-conforming students. Corridors, playgrounds, and entrances may increase exposure, while classroom violence in Bulgaria and Hungary shows that adult presence does not automatically guarantee safety. In Portugal, corridors, playgrounds, entrances, toilets, and canteens were described as particularly unsafe. Violence may also extend to transport, journeys between school and home, extracurricular activities, public spaces, and digital platforms, so protection cannot be confined to classrooms.

3.3.5. Trusted adults and credible protection mechanisms

Across CLICK countries, adults could recognise and interrupt violence but also ignore, minimise, or reproduce it. Participants described teachers and school professionals who avoided LGBTIQ issues, used incorrect names or pronouns, made discriminatory comments, or imposed punitive treatment. In Hungary, students who had been attacked were sometimes sanctioned instead of perpetrators. In Bulgaria, some schools recommended transferring the child after families activated formal procedures rather than holding perpetrators accountable or changing the environment. In Italy, affirmative policies were not always implemented consistently. Children and adolescents need teachers, psychologists, non-teaching staff, and school leaders who recognise violence, act consistently, maintain confidentiality, and assume institutional responsibility. Trust depends on knowing whom to approach, what will happen after a report, who will access the information, and whether intervention may increase exposure. Low use of school-based support reflects this fragility. In Lithuania, friends and external mental health professionals were approached more often than teachers or school counselling services. In Bulgaria and Hungary, many participants did nothing after an assault or spoke only to friends. Such responses may reflect normalisation, fear of escalation, lack of procedural knowledge, or previous ineffective interventions. Anti-bullying protocols, procedures for trans and non-binary students, and referral pathways matter only when young people expect protection, confidentiality, and consistent follow-up.

3.3.6. Family support and coordinated care networks

Children and adolescents need family relationships that provide emotional safety, recognition, and protection rather than surveillance, control or rejection. Some families supported and advocated for children and young people, while others regulated clothing, make-up, friendships, intimate relationships, or gender expression. Fear of rejection, punishment, or exposure led some participants to conceal their identities and experiences. In Portugal, family remained a desired source of support, and siblings were important allies when parental support was absent. Relatives also intervened with schools or helped young people anticipate risk. Family support can reduce isolation when children are listened to, believed, and not punished after disclosure. However, even supportive families face limits when institutions do not fulfil their responsibilities. Children's needs therefore require coordinated networks involving families, schools, mental health services, community organisations, and LGBTIQ associations.

3.3.7. Safe communities and protection in public spaces

When asked what would help create safe local environments, 79.1% prioritised stronger protection against discrimination in public spaces. This was especially high in Bulgaria (90.2%), Portugal (83.3%), and Hungary (81.4%). Bulgaria also emphasised explicit institutional commitment: 80.5% wanted visible support from

public authorities and 75.6% a public commitment from local governments. Lithuania prioritised community opportunities, with 79.5% supporting inclusive public events and 74.4% LGBTIQ youth centres or groups. Portugal combined both approaches: 72.2% valued visible public support and 75.0% inclusive events alongside stronger protection. Spain and Italy showed lower demand for specific community measures. Protection against discrimination remained the main priority in Spain (77.4%), but demand was lowest for inclusive events (50.0%) and youth centres (48.0%). In Italy, 75.7% prioritised protection against discrimination, while support for visible public commitment, inclusive events, and youth centres was lower. Overall, Bulgaria emphasised institutional commitment, Lithuania community spaces, and Portugal protection, visibility, and participation.

3.3.8. Differentiated responses, belonging, and participation

Needs are not homogeneous. Trans and non-binary young people highlighted names, pronouns, toilets, changing rooms, and institutional recognition; aromantic and asexual adolescents reported invisibility and lack of understanding. Racialised participants in Portugal described racist and xenophobic harassment, while children from rainbow families, particularly in Bulgaria, experienced violence associated with family structure. Violence may operate through sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, nationality, appearance, and family configuration, including among children who have not disclosed an LGBTIQ identity, are questioning it, or are perceived as non-conforming. No intersex adolescents were identified in the focus groups, limiting conclusions about their specific needs. Participants also valued opportunities for self-expression, relationships, belonging, and participation. Diverse Playground Spaces in Spain fostered pride and self-determination; student collectives in Italy supported participation and alliances; some alternative schools in Hungary created more affirming environments; and artistic and cultural activities in Portugal were perceived as potentially welcoming. Demand for school clubs, youth centres, inclusive events, and contact with other LGBTIQ young people shows that safety also involves belonging and participation. A safe space is not simply free from violence but enables relationships, access to information, activities, and expression without continual concealment. Participation may include supporting friends, sharing information, joining online communities, intervening in bullying, or helping others find adults, services, or organisations. Children and adolescents are therefore not only recipients of support but active participants in creating it.

3.4. Educators and rainbow family's needs.

3.4.1. Institutional legitimacy

In all countries, the need for institutional legitimacy and recognition of the experiences of rainbow families and LGBTIQ children emerge as the first and most crucial one. In countries where the legal framework regarding LGBTIQ rights is weak or fragmented, such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, and Italy, interviewees highlight the pressing need to create conditions for the institutional recognition of LGBTIQ families. As the data demonstrate, institutional uncertainty regarding interventions with LGBTIQ people strongly affect the ability of teachers, families, and professionals to implement measures to tackle discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ children. The existence of laws that explicitly or implicitly ban

the discussion of LGBTIQ topics in schools – as in the case of Bulgaria, Italy, and Hungary – creates a void where individual actions are not backed up by institutional protection: educators, in particular, are left without any support and can face negative professional consequences when taking action on LGBTIQ issues. However, legislative action is also needed at a higher level regarding the recognition of rainbow families: in particular, in Bulgaria this topic emerges as urgent and crucial. Where rainbow families are legally recognised, their existence is also rendered real.

The data also indicate the need for changes to be made to systemic issues related to the way the educational system works. For example, partners in Spain highlight how the chronic precariousness affecting teachers, especially in secondary schools, has a negative effect on the possibility of establishing meaningful actions and relationships in schools. Similarly, partners in Hungary note that the educational system should be changed towards greater flexibility and openness to different curricula and topics.

In general, partners emphasise the need for clear institutional guidelines regarding anti-discrimination measures, policies to tackle violence in schools, and LGBTIQ-oriented initiatives. Educators, families, and policymakers express concern about the absence of general guidelines to intervene against homo-transphobia established at a nationwide legislative level. This emerges also in countries where a stronger provision of policies around LGBTIQ rights is guaranteed, such as Spain and Portugal.

3.4.2. Training

Across the data, the need for training is highlighted by almost every person interviewed. Teachers and educators report the need to receive ongoing training, organised as part of nationwide strategies. The main issue with the (scarce) existing examples of training, in fact, seems to be that they are fragmented and activated only when needed – for example, only in schools where a specific situation requires teachers to intervene. On the contrary, data from all the participating countries point to the importance of training as a basic resource available to all teachers, on a mandatory basis and at all stages of their careers. Moreover, teachers emphasise that training should not cover only basic knowledge on LGBTIQ issues – such as, for example, concepts of sexual orientation, gender identity, homophobia, and transphobia. They point out that training should encompass a wide array of topics connected to the experiences of LGBTIQ young people, such as mental health, relationships with families and friends, hate speech, wellbeing, and consent. Some suggest that these topics should be developed within a more general approach to affective and sexual education, which is generally perceived as lacking. In addition, teachers and educators report a strong need to receive specific guidance on relational skills, communication with young people – especially those in vulnerable conditions – and conflict resolution. Several interviewees from different countries also stress that training should be compulsory for all professionals involved in the educational system: teachers, administrative staff, psychologists, and technical staff.

Families also report distinct needs in terms of training. Support is particularly sought regarding topics of legal and practical guidance for supporting young LGBTIQ members of families, in particular trans, non-binary and/or intersex youth. Moreover, families highlight the importance of receiving specific guidance on how to navigate the emotional challenges that often come with accompanying a young LGBTIQ relative, both in relationships with schoolmates and with teachers. In several cases, families report that being the primary source of support for their young members is itself a source of emotional fatigue and burnout. Families also express the need for more training on peer-to-peer support, that is, learning

how to strengthen community-building with other families and collectively act through their own embodied experiences.

It is also particularly relevant that several narratives point to the deep need for both families and teachers to learn how to strengthen digital literacy, for both adults and young people, in order to tackle online violence and limit misinformation. The rapid surge of new platforms where young people share and consume content is not accompanied by adequate knowledge and training by teachers and families, who may feel excluded by the languages, the cultural artefacts, and the communities that populate the digital verse. The main worry is that digital spaces may contribute to spreading incorrect information, political propaganda, and hate speech around LGBTIQ issues, thus reinforcing the violence that young people are exposed to on a day-to-day basis.

3.4.3. Representation and visibility

Families and teachers lament the scarce visibility of LGBTIQ issues in school programmes, as well as the absence of references to LGBTIQ role models, historical figures, or important dates. All of this missing information could contribute to fostering acceptance of diversity in classrooms and nurturing self-confidence in LGBTIQ young people. The lack of reference to LGBTIQ experiences is commonly associated with the fear expressed by several teachers of creating conflicts in schools or triggering negative reactions from parents. In this sense, teachers need institutional support and guarantees regarding the importance of introducing some of these topics, in order to be able to instigate change themselves.

Some families also point out that LGBTIQ issues should be accompanied by a more general educational objective oriented towards intersectionality and diversity. Topics such as racism, mental health, neurodiversity, ableism, and sexism should also be discussed in educational programmes.

LGBTIQ teachers and educators also stress the importance of being out to their students to provide positive examples of visibility; however, they also report difficulties in choosing to be visible and fear negative reactions from colleagues and families.

Finally, rainbow families recognise that the education provided in schools is mostly based on cis-heteronormative models of binary gender and heterosexual families. They report a strong need to diversify the narratives around the many different ways of making a family, including greater visibility for rainbow families, trans and non-binary parents, and intersectional family settings.

3.4.4. Networks of care and access to information

In all countries, grassroots organisations that fight for the rights of rainbow families and LGBTIQ people represent the most important source of support and protection from discrimination, violence, and isolation. However, these organisations are based on voluntary work and insecure funding and are therefore strongly dependent on limited resources to provide answers to all the fronts where they are needed. A major need expressed by families and stakeholders who rely on collaboration with these organisations is that they access more sources of funding and receive increased support from public bodies. Although this need may be addressed differently depending on national contexts, it is interesting to note that the chronic lack of resources has a negative effect on the work of organisations in all the contexts investigated.

Moreover, geographical inequalities between central and peripheral areas are particularly exacerbated where organisations Moreover, geographical inequalities between central and peripheral areas are particularly exacerbated where organisations cannot rely on solid resources: in Bulgaria and Portugal, for example, the main LGBTIQ organisations are based in the capital city, and families living in peripheral territories find it harder to participate in activities and maintain contact with peers. In the countries where some educational programmes are in place, geographical inequalities are still present due to administrative fragmentation in the implementation of such programmes, as in the case of Spain.

Families, teachers, and policymakers also express concern regarding the difficulties in providing and disseminating reliable, accessible, and trustworthy information on LGBTIQ issues, especially in contexts where conservative governments openly oppose any kind of knowledge on these topics. In particular, they report the need to find ways to counter the spread of misinformation on digital platforms through organised, community-based instruments of information. Some also identify the need to allocate more funding and resources to large-scale communication campaigns in schools and media to address specific topics, for example violence against trans and non-binary young people or hate speech.

Finally, families recognise that being able to count on peer-to-peer support – for example through regular meetings, working groups, or networks – is paramount to learning and increasing their ability to counter difficulties in everyday life.

3.5. Well-being and resilience.

Across the data, well-being and resilience of LGBTIQ children and adolescents emerge as relational and structurally conditioned processes. Data shows that well-being depends not only on individual capacities to cope with daily violence, discrimination, or invisibility, but also on environments that provide safety, recognition, belonging, support, and opportunities for participation. Likewise, resilience should not be treated as a personal trait that enables children and young people to endure hostile contexts. It is produced, sustained, or weakened by family and peer relationships, school practices, support services, public policies, community organisations, and available material resources. This perspective recognises children's and adolescents' creativity and agency without making them responsible for compensating for institutional failures.

3.5.1. Educational contexts: safety, recognition, and belonging

Schools occupy a central but ambivalent position: data show that they can expose children and young people to bullying and discrimination while at same time, provide protection, recognition, and belonging. Correct names and pronouns, intervention against bullying, trusted teachers, inclusive educational materials, and visible institutional support can strengthen emotional safety. Conversely, silence, absent or inconsistently applied protocols, discriminatory language, and inadequate support contribute to fear, isolation, identity concealment, and sometimes intense distress.

In Portugal, a relatively protective legal framework coexists with uneven implementation. Participants from survey and focus group identified needs for psychological and emotional support, accessible information about rights, and help with stress, anxiety, bullying, and discrimination. Formal rights are insufficient unless translated into consistent practices by trusted adults and institutions. In Spain, well-being was linked to living one's identity without continually explaining or defending it. Rainbow families

selected schools and activities carefully, consulted other families, and sought inclusive institutions, demonstrating agency but also showing that safety is not guaranteed. Protective schools featured visible LGBTIQ teachers, recognition of rainbow families, inclusive activities, and Diverse Playground Spaces, while the lack of comprehensive sexuality education limited preventive approaches to sexual, gender, and family diversity. In Hungary, political and legal constraints restrict professionals' ability to address LGBTIQ issues and explicitly support queer students. Access to trusted adults often depends on individual teachers or families' financial capacity to choose private or alternative schools. Some alternative schools in Budapest appeared more child-centred, respectful of diversity, and able to provide psychological support than under-resourced public schools. In Bulgaria, institutional silence, self-censorship, and fear of exposure strongly condition well-being. LGBTIQ children and young people and families may conceal information, avoid particular spaces, change schools, or seek external support. These strategies can offer immediate protection but also reveal unequal access to safety and pressure some children into invisibility and private spaces. In Lithuania, well-being relies heavily on peers, relatives, and a small number of trusted adults. Positive practices included teachers intervening against bullying, respecting names and pronouns, and integrating diversity into lessons. However, these practices often depended on individual initiative rather than an established institutional culture, shifting help-seeking towards friends, relatives, and external mental health professionals. In Italy, policies and affirmative initiatives were also implemented inconsistently, and safety often depended on particular adults, student collectives, and solidarity networks that created small protective spaces within unequal institutions.

3.5.2. Visibility, privacy, and protection strategies

Managing visibility was a cross-national pattern. Concealing identity, avoiding spaces, controlling shared information, adapting gender expression, or remaining silent may reduce immediate risks of bullying, rumours, family rejection, or involuntary disclosure. Yet sustained reliance on these strategies can generate anxiety, isolation, shame, bodily disconnection, and a sense of living separate lives. Continually assessing people and contexts before disclosure may also limit spontaneity, participation, and trusting relationships.

Non-disclosure should not automatically be interpreted as fear, lack of trust, or self-rejection. In Spain, some participants described actively deciding when, where, and to whom they would disclose, particularly after negative experiences. Visibility management can therefore express privacy, agency, and safety. The problem arises when concealment is no longer a choice but the only perceived way to avoid violence or rejection. Well-being requires control over one's own narrative: neither forced exposure nor compulsory concealment. Affirmative support should respect young people's timing and decisions while creating conditions for safer and freer self-expression.

3.5.3. Friendships, peer relationships, and belonging

Friendships and peer groups are among the main sources of well-being across countries, offering validation, emotional comfort, recognition, and opportunities to share experiences. In Spain, friends helped adolescents regain confidence after bullying, rejection, or isolation. In Italy, students created micro-

spaces of safety through solidarity, shared expression, and everyday care. Friendships were especially important in Lithuania when trust in school structures was low; in Bulgaria, friendships and chosen families offered protection in contexts of silence and hostility; and in Hungary and Portugal, peers and community spaces provided recognition when family or school responses were insufficient.

Peer support includes listening, accompaniment, intervention, information-sharing, and referral to trusted adults or services, showing that young people actively build care networks. However, peers may lack the authority and resources to stop violence, hold perpetrators accountable, or ensure psychological care. Their centrality is both protective and evidence of gaps in formal systems.

3.5.4. Family support and chosen families

Family is another ambivalent determinant of well-being that was identified. Affirming families can provide emotional safety, advocate for rights, mediate with institutions, and help children interpret their experiences. Rejection, surveillance, and control can instead intensify fear, isolation, and concealment. In Spain, family support involved listening, protection, reassurance, actively seeking inclusive schools and activities, and connecting with other rainbow families. In Portugal, family remained central even when it was uncertain, and siblings could be especially important when parental support was absent. Family acceptance protected Lithuanian young people in hostile school or social settings. In Hungary, support groups involving rainbow families or relatives of queer children reduced isolation and enabled resource-sharing. In Bulgaria, some families mobilised friends, professionals, LGBTIQ organisations, and online communities to build external protection networks. Italian findings also showed that young people's self-affirmation and expression could transform relatives' perspectives and foster greater pride, understanding, and solidarity.

When families of origin are unsafe, chosen families can provide care, belonging, and recognition. They do not necessarily replace relatives but expand the range of relationships in which identity need not be hidden or repeatedly justified.

3.5.5. Creative, embodied, and extracurricular practices

Creative, embodied, and extracurricular practices are important sources of well-being and resilience. In Italy, music, cinema, photography, drawing, acting, video games, and tattoos supported calm, emotional self-regulation, and reconnection with body and identity. In Spain, dance and cultural or performing activities helped participants manage distress, explore expression, and develop belonging. In Lithuania and Bulgaria, artistic, sporting, voluntary, and civic activities could create relationships and participation outside rigid school structures. In Portugal, associations, youth networks, community activities, and online resources facilitated information, support, and contact with other LGBTIQ people. Hungarian findings highlighted the need for free and accessible community spaces, which remain limited and dependent on civil society.

Beyond leisure, these activities regulate emotions, restore confidence, support embodied expression, and foster competence and participation, allowing recognition through interests and abilities rather than only

discrimination. However, access depends on resources (e.g., economic), geography, mobility, family support, and institutional openness, and activities organised around rigid gender norms may reproduce exclusion.

3.5.6. Psychological, professional, and community support

Psychological and professional support is essential but unevenly accessible. In Spain, therapy and support from associations helped participants process difficult experiences and rebuild safety. In Portugal, psychological and emotional support was linked to managing stress, anxiety, bullying, and discrimination. Italian professionals stressed the importance of addressing trauma and minority stress without reducing queer identity to suffering or treating diversity as a clinical problem. In Hungary, inequalities between public and alternative schools affected access to psychological professionals and affirmative approaches. Low trust in Lithuanian school services encouraged external help-seeking, while therapists, legal professionals, and community specialists often formed part of family protection networks in Bulgaria.

Appropriate support must recognise the effects of SOGIESC discrimination without pathologising identities. It should locate distress within the social and institutional relations that produce it while addressing safety, self-esteem, recognition, relationships, and participation. Civil society organisations provide information, training, awareness-raising, mediation, referral, and direct support. In Portugal, Spain, and Italy, they help translate formal rights into concrete assistance and connect schools, families, professionals, and young people. In Hungary, Bulgaria, and Lithuania, they are particularly important where public responses are limited or inconsistent. Nevertheless, dependence on organisations with limited resources and uneven geographical coverage reveals structural fragility. Community organisations should complement, not replace, inclusive public services and institutional protection.

3.5.7. Digital spaces, information, and representation

Digital spaces can provide information, community, and models of identification when offline environments are hostile or silent. They may help young people find language for their experiences and connect with others. In Italy, online representation opened possibilities beyond binary norms and sometimes supported communication with relatives. In Portugal, Bulgaria, and Lithuania, online communities reduced isolation and facilitated access to support; in Hungary, they were particularly relevant because educational discussion of diversity was restricted.

These benefits coexist with cyberbullying, harassment, rumours, and unwanted exposure, while information may be unsafe, inaccessible, or inappropriate for younger users. Digital environments are therefore not inherently protective and require digital literacy, safety mechanisms, and trustworthy sources.

Positive representation and visible inclusion also support well-being. In Portugal, flags and inclusive materials could signal safety. In Spain, diverse LGBTIQ characters, stories, and role models helped normalise diversity. In Italy, ordinary queer lives enabled young people to imagine futures beyond violence

and exclusion. Where visibility is risky, friends, families, organisations, and digital spaces become especially important sources of recognition.

3.5.8. Joy, self-expression, and flourishing

Common patterns identified in the data describe not only suffering and survival but also queer joy, gender euphoria, pride, embodied pleasure, self-determination, and happiness. In Italy, small acts of gender expression supported by peers illustrated resilience through experimentation, recognition, and affirmation. In Spain, some participants prioritised their own happiness and challenged relatives who rejected their identities. Across CLICK countries, the search for community, information, safe spaces, and participation similarly demonstrated agency and belonging.

Well-being is therefore more than reduced distress. It includes meaningful relationships, positive embodiment, future possibilities, community participation, and identity expression without fear. Yet joy and self-expression are not produced by individual strength alone; they depend on safety, resources, recognition, and support. Without these conditions, opportunities to flourish remain unequally distributed.

LGBTIQ+ children's and adolescents' resilience is creative, relational, and collectively constructed, but structurally constrained. It is sustained through friendships, affirming and chosen families, alliances with adults, creative practices, community participation, digital spaces, psychological support, and civil society organisations. These resources promote well-being by providing safety, recognition, belonging, emotional regulation, information, participation, self-expression, and possibilities for joy.

3.6. Community resistance.

The practices of resistance activated through community-building and collective initiatives vary greatly not only according to the level of legislative protection guaranteed to LGBTIQ rights, but also in relation to geographical and economic inequalities.

3.6.1. Participation and networks

In all countries, participation in activities organised by LGBTIQ organisations or groups of LGBTIQ people is considered a key instrument to collectively gather strength and respond to increasing backlash. Families, in particular, highlight the importance of peer-to-peer learning through meetings with other families, in order to share experiences, learn from one another, and identify possible solutions. These encounters are often more accessible to families living near larger cities, where most initiatives take place, especially in countries with pronounced geographical disparities, such as Hungary, Bulgaria, and Portugal. For families living in rural or peripheral areas, online platforms offer a valuable alternative to connect with others in similar situations and to find relief from feelings of isolation. Some participants also stress the importance of involving not only parents but also other relatives, such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, siblings, and cousins, as a way to promote awareness and collectively create safer environments for children and young people. Interviewees from Spain emphasise that everyday contact with other rainbow families is an important factor of protection and resilience.

3.6.2. Community engagement

The data show that rainbow families tend to build coalitions and forms of resistance particularly when backlash intensifies. For example, debates on legislative changes or discussions on how to respond to specific incidents or attacks often serve as catalysts that mobilise strong reactions and encourage people to come together to find common solutions. In this sense, in countries where the far-right shift has been more recent, such as Spain and Portugal, some participants recognise that this context has also generated renewed motivation to invest in community-building and resistance.

Community engagement is developed especially through participation in activist initiatives and grassroots organisations. Rainbow families frequently find solace and comfort in taking part in collective actions aimed at improving their everyday lives. At the same time, many report risks of emotional burnout and fatigue associated with sustained activist work.

Several interviews also emphasise the relevance of physical spaces of belonging, such as cultural centres, bars, and artistic venues, where rainbow families feel welcomed and represented, and where their young members can find affirmation and visibility. Although such spaces are relatively rare and difficult to sustain, they represent a crucial resource, offering rainbow families, LGBTIQ children, and their allies places for socialisation and support.

3.6.3. Institutional networks

Stakeholders across countries highlight that community support for rainbow families and LGBTIQ young people is sustainable over time and across territories only when networks of partners are activated. The role of institutional actors is crucial in creating systems of collaboration that provide orientation, support, and affirmation. In particular, social services, municipalities, libraries, as well as NGOs, can make a significant difference when they are involved in alliances to foster LGBTIQ visibility and protection. Sustained territorial engagement is possible only when such collaborative practices are consistently encouraged, funded, and endorsed.

When national institutions are not always responsive to issues concerning the inclusion of LGBTIQ children and rainbow families in educational settings, local bodies are often more reactive and solution-oriented, especially in peripheral areas. Community resistance is thus constructed not only through engagement with those who experience discrimination and exclusion in their daily lives, but also with those who represent institutional power at the local level and act in positions of proximity.

3.6.4. Access to information

One of the recurrent themes emerging from interviews with rainbow families and educators is the difficulty of accessing, disseminating, and sharing trustworthy information. In their everyday experiences, parents and teachers report having learned that access to reliable knowledge is fundamental to building resistance and community resilience. In Italy, for example, some participants speak of the need to invest in cultural work on respectful language, starting from the ability to identify trustworthy sources.

Community resistance is therefore strengthened by raising awareness of how propagandistic, anti-scientific, and false information is produced and circulated, and by empowering communities to counter misinformation through the involvement of professionals from different sectors and through the

use of reliable platforms. Parents and teachers express concern about the impact that access to digital platforms may have on children, particularly with regard to exposure to hate speech and violent anti-LGBTIQ content. Many state that tackling these forms of harmful information is one of the priorities for communities in the near future.

3.7. Exemplary quotes

3.7.1. Families

For years it was like I was living two separate lives, the one I believed was right for me and my ideas, and the one I needed to show in order to integrate myself.

(Adult raised in a rainbow family; Bulgaria)

When we met other families, we understood that we were not alone.

(Parent of transgender adolescent; Lithuania)

When my son was in fourth grade, he already had an alias, he had come out, he was in therapy. There was an opportunity to spend six months abroad with school. I asked him, 'Do you want to go?' He replied, 'Mom, I'll do it in college. I don't feel up to it right now. I need warmth, a nest where I feel protected. When I leave the house, I put on my helmet, my shield, and my sword. At home, I need someone to hug.' That's how they feel... when they don't have that protection at home, life becomes a hundred times harder. With support at home, they gain strength, more awareness, more ability to fight in the world and assert who they truly are.

(Rainbow Family; Italy)

Families need to be empowered. Why? Because we already know that a vulnerable family will be targeted. They will be targeted by others, by neighbours, by everyone. An empowered family holds its head high, and people do not mess with them. And that is our job. That is why it is so important.

(Father of 17 year old trans boy; Portugal)

3.7.2. Educators and policymakers

The problem is that we are unable to provide a safe space for the children where they could proudly be themselves. It sounds pessimistic

but I don't think that this can be changed. I was motivated to study and learn about acceptance so maybe I would be able to change my colleagues' outlook on these issues to no avail. Discrimination, exclusion and prejudices are so deeply embedded in people that it's like a second nature for them to hate. I think that if they would hear or learn that someone is gay, then it would definitely be discussed and worst of all, if not in an overt way, but they would more than likely do everything in their power so that particular child would change schools.

(Educator in public institution; Hungary)

I have students who hold very homophobic views. The problem is that there are far-right discourses that these adolescents encounter on social media, and end up adopting as their own, right? Because, let's say, given the context of the neighbourhood they live in, these discourses are very present. So that is the first thing that comes out of them. Afterwards, you can talk things through, but the impact is really strong. They can make very extreme statements.

(Educator in public institution; Catalonia)

I was invited to take part in a legislative process concerning measures for schools and the protection of trans children and young people... What I decided to do was bring people together—invite trans young people, trans adults, and families—to understand how much proximity allows us to work better, fosters empathy, and helps break down barriers and prejudices.

(Politician and Teacher; Portugal)

3.7.3. Focus groups with children

I'd rather cut an hour of English class to make room for an hour of empathy class. I think this [focus group] was the hour of empathy that doesn't happen at school […] I empathized with all situations, meanings, struggles you're fighting, the people you're dealing with. We can fight at school. I fight it in the Scouts, in the student association, wherever else. I [...] feel this need to reach out to individuals and try to help my peers with their personal struggles; this idea of representation [...] we're all fighting a battle; some fight it by going to the principal, others by listening to the girls no one else listens to. What matters is that we all believe in something.

(Trans girl, 17 years old; Italy)

I think that especially in literature, in the texts we study—since I'm also in the arts program—the arts themselves have a problem in that… in history, you don't see women, you don't see Black people, you don't see LGBT people. And then in what they could be added, they're excluded too, so you can't study anything created by people like me, so it feels like we never get a chance to have a place at all, you know?

(Trans boy, 12nd grade; Portugal)

When I arrived here, because I came as an immigrant, and I got up to fourth grade in Galicia, I had a really bad time. Everything was horrible, a huge mess, they treated me badly, and they locked me in the bathrooms, they bullied me, they would take tissues and shove them into me… And my brother knew it was because I was gay… Then, when I arrived here, in secondary school, they wouldn't hang out with me, and every time we had physical education, they would lock me in the bathroom… And I would tell the teachers about it and they would make fun of me

(14 years old; Catalonia)

4. Overall evaluation: tendencies and absences regarding well-being and empowering LGBTIQ children to combat LGBTQIphobia

4.1. SWOT analysis.

4.1.1. Strengths

The strengths identified are not equally present or consolidated across all countries. Some correspond to formalised legal frameworks, services, or procedures for example in educational settings, while others depend primarily on the initiative of individual professionals, families, peer groups, or civil society organisations. In several contexts, these resources still perform a compensatory role, attempting to address gaps left by fragmented, insufficiently prepared, or inadequately inclusive institutional systems. Despite these differences, the national reports identify a range of existing resources, practices, and capacities that contribute to the protection, recognition, and well-being of LGBTIQ children and

adolescents. These strengths provide important foundations for developing more consistent, coordinated, and sustainable responses.

1. The existence of protective legal and policy frameworks

A key strength is the existence of European, national and, in some cases, regional legal and policy frameworks establishing principles of equality, non-discrimination, protection from violence and respect for children's rights. In several countries, these frameworks explicitly recognise discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics as a form of violence or a violation of rights. Such provisions frame the protection of LGBTIQ children as an institutional responsibility rather than an optional matter dependent on the individual attitudes or beliefs of teachers, professionals, schools, other educational settings or families. They also provide a basis for responding to bullying, exclusion, discrimination and violence, while offering rainbow families, professionals and civil society organisations a normative foundation from which to demand appropriate action.

The European legal and policy framework is particularly important in national contexts where legislation addressing private domains, such as gender-based violence within families, or relevant public policies remain limited. Despite considerable differences in implementation across countries and between territories within the same country, as in Spain, these frameworks legitimise the defence of LGBTIQ children's rights and can help children recognise themselves as rights-holders entitled to support and protection. Nevertheless, this strength should be understood as a normative and strategic foundation rather than a guarantee of effective protection, as substantial gaps persist between legislation and implementation across regions, schools, urban and rural areas, and public services.

2. The existence of protocols and institutional tools for identity affirmation

The existence of protocols, guidelines and procedures supporting trans and non-binary children constitutes an important strength where such mechanisms are formalised or consistently implemented. Gender-affirming school protocols, the carriera alias, chosen-name agreements and other administrative arrangements can guide schools in the use of chosen names and appropriate pronouns, the adaptation of internal records, communication with families and classmates, access to school facilities, and coordination between teachers, school leadership, psychologists and external services. By organising responses that might otherwise depend on the interpretation or willingness of individual professionals, these tools can make institutional practices more predictable, coherent and protective for LGBTQI children.

Recognition of sexual and gender diverse identities in everyday interactions can significantly support children's well-being. The consistent use of chosen names and pronouns, together with administrative procedures and documents reflecting children's lived identities, provides repeated validation and can reduce anticipatory anxiety, identity vigilance, fear of exposure and the need to continually explain or correct others. Even where national or regional protocols are underdeveloped, the reports identify

informal practices and agreements established through collaboration between schools, families and professionals. These experiences show that practical knowledge and institutional capacities for affirming responses already exist, although they remain uneven and insufficiently systematised.

3. The presence of educators and professionals committed to inclusion

The national reports highlight the importance of teachers, school psychologists, counsellors, social workers, youth professionals, support staff and other adults who actively protect LGBTIQ children, often acting as trusted figures when family support is absent, limited or conditional. Their role extends beyond acceptance: they listen without judgement, validate children's experiences, intervene in cases of bullying or discrimination, interrupt violence, facilitate access to resources and specialised services, and create safer spaces for LGBTQI children express their identities and experiences.

Protection may begin through simple but meaningful actions, such as respecting chosen names and pronouns, challenging discriminatory comments, incorporating diversity into educational practices and remaining available to listen. These practices can strengthen children's safety, belonging and recognition. Although support often depends on individual sensitivity and initiative, the presence of committed professionals shows that relevant competences already exist and can be shared, valued and more systematically embedded within institutions.

4. The visibility of LGBTIQ people and allies within educational institutions

The visible presence of LGBTIQ teachers, school staff and other adults, together with allies who openly support inclusion, constitutes an important strength. For children and adolescents, such visibility can provide positive role models, challenge representations of LGBTIQ identities as associated with marginalisation or limited futures and demonstrate that these identities are compatible with fulfilling relationships, autonomy, social participation and professional achievement.

Visible professionals and allies can also help break the silence surrounding sexual and gender diversity by challenging discriminatory language, using inclusive references, recognising diverse family forms and showing openness to discussion. This can signal that LGBTIQ children are not alone and that supportive adults are available. However, inclusion should not depend on LGBTIQ professionals disclosing their identities or assuming responsibility in unsafe environments; visibility is protective only when supported by institutional safety and a broader commitment from the educational community.

5. The central role of peer support

Peer support is one of the most consistent strengths across countries. Friends are often the first source of emotional and practical support after experiences of violence, discrimination, isolation or rejection. They

help children and adolescents understand their feelings, explore their identities, access information, decide when and with whom to disclose, and support gender-affirmation processes, including the use of chosen names.

Peer recognition can strengthen self-esteem, belonging and emotional safety, while helping young people recover from bullying and resist isolation. Beyond individual friendships, student collectives, youth networks and peer-led spaces create collective support, enabling young people to share knowledge, develop strategies and transform experiences of discrimination into solidarity, participation and collective action.

6. The existence of supportive families and family advocacy

The reports highlight the protective role of supportive parents, caregivers and rainbow families. By recognising and respecting children's identities, opinions and experiences, families provide emotional security and a stable base from which they can cope with discrimination, hostility or exclusion, thereby supporting resilience and well-being. Supportive families also act as advocates by seeking information, contacting organisations, engaging with schools, requesting protocols, defending chosen names and pronouns, and challenging discriminatory practices. By sharing knowledge and strategies with other families, they reduce isolation and strengthen collective support. Family associations are particularly important in mediating relationships between families, schools, professionals and policymakers.

7. The structuring role of civil society organisations and community networks

LGBTIQ organisations, family associations, children's rights groups, mental health organisations, anti-bullying initiatives and other community spaces provide essential support, particularly where schools or public services lack specialised resources. They offer information, legal advice, psychological and social support, helplines, peer groups, cultural activities and opportunities for participation, helping children and families understand their rights, access services and respond to discrimination or violence.

These organisations also produce specialised knowledge by bringing together the experiences of children, families and professionals, identifying shared patterns and informing recommendations and institutional responses. Despite often limited resources and geographical reach, they create spaces of belonging, connect key actors and provide intervention models that can support broader and more informed practices.

8. Children's and young people's agency, knowledge, and capacity for participation

Across countries, LGBTIQ children and young people demonstrate significant agency. Rather than being passive recipients of protection, they seek information, interpret their experiences, identify risks, build

support networks and propose ways to improve schools and communities. Many also show substantial knowledge of sexual and gender diversity and available resources, sometimes helping adults better understand these issues.

Young people clearly identify the conditions needed for safer settings, including adults who listen, effective responses to bullying, inclusive content, identity recognition, professional support and contact with other LGBTIQ peers. Through groups, collectives and informal networks, they share knowledge, build community and develop mutual support and participation. However, recognising their agency should not transfer responsibility for educating adults or addressing institutional failures onto them.

9. The existence of collaborative networks between families, schools, professionals, and organisations

The reports show that some of the most effective responses emerge through collaboration between families, schools, psychologists, health and social services, community organisations and policymakers. These networks support information-sharing, referrals, resource identification and coordinated interventions, reducing fragmentation and preventing children and families from navigating services or repeatedly recounting their experiences alone. Examples include families connecting schools with external organisations/associations, professionals participating in joint reflection or supervision, organisations supporting protocol implementation, and schools reaching agreements with families and students. Even when informal, these networks combine knowledge, responsibilities and resources, enabling more coherent and integrated responses than isolated or fragmented interventions.

10. The existence of psychosocial support and child-protection structures

Across several Click countries, mainstream education, health, social support and child-protection systems already include services and professionals that can assist LGBTIQ children, such as school psychologists, nurses, family support centres, interdisciplinary teams, children's rights representatives, helplines, mental health services and abuse-response mechanisms. Even where specialised knowledge of sexual and gender diversity is limited, these structures provide entry points for identifying violence, offering emotional and family support, and facilitating access to specialised services.

The presence of psychology or health professionals in schools, interdisciplinary family centres and regional children's rights representatives creates an existing infrastructure that can be mobilised to meet LGBTIQ children's needs. Unlike civil society support, these mechanisms are embedded in mainstream public systems, meaning responses do not need to be developed entirely from the ground up, although appropriate knowledge, competences and procedures remain necessary.

11. Growing awareness of the need for transversal inclusion

The CLICK reports indicate growing recognition among educators, families, professionals and policymakers that LGBTIQ inclusion cannot rely only on isolated activities, occasional campaigns or responses introduced after violence occurs. Sexual and gender diversity must instead be integrated into curricula, educational materials, sexuality education, professional language, administrative procedures, communication with families, school facilities, extracurricular activities and student relationships.

This perspective supports a shift from reactive interventions towards structural approaches rooted in a comprehensive sexuality education framework that prevent violence, normalise diversity and promote recognition. Even where it has not yet resulted in fully implemented policies, awareness of the limitations of isolated activities constitutes an important resource for institutional change.

12. Greater openness among younger generations towards diversity

In some countries, younger students, professionals and educators show greater familiarity with sexual and gender diversity, stronger awareness of discrimination and greater willingness to challenge traditional norms. This openness can support more inclusive peer relationships, encourage intervention against prejudice and help LGBTIQ children find communities where their identities are more naturally recognised. Also, awareness of the intersection with other multiple axes of oppression were also mentioned. Younger generations also use digital resources and social media to access information, representation and transnational networks, reducing isolation and strengthening belonging, despite the risks associated with these spaces. Although this shift is uneven and coexists with conservative attitudes, peer violence and political polarisation, it represents an important medium- and long-term basis for cultural change.

4.1.2 Weakness

The National reports reveal common patterns at several levels: legal and political weaknesses; institutional invisibility; insufficient professional preparation and capacity; school responses that are neither sufficiently preventive nor reliable; cis and heteronormative curricula; fragmented and territorially unequal services; and a strong dependence on family, economic, and community resources. These factors prevent existing resources from forming consistent, predictable, and accessible protection systems for all LGBTIQ children.

1. The gap between formally recognised rights and effective protection

A major weakness is the gap between formally recognised rights and their implementation in schools, protection services and other institutions. Even where laws protect LGBTIQ children from discrimination and violence, they may be poorly known, inconsistently applied or disregarded without consequences many times. Support and protection therefore vary across regions, municipalities, schools, leadership teams and individual professionals, leaving some children with informed and responsive support and others facing silence, passivity or lack of knowledge. Existing rules are often enforced only when families or activists formally request action and have sufficient knowledge and resources to challenge institutions, creating inequalities between children. Decentralisation can produce territorial disparities, while

centralisation may restrict professionals' ability to respond to specific needs. Weak enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation and low reporting of incidents further deepen this implementation gap.

2. Legal restrictions, lack of explicit recognition, and adverse political contexts

In some countries, weaknesses arise not only from poor implementation but also from discriminatory legislation, the absence of explicit protection for LGBTIQ children and restrictive political approaches to family, gender and education. Reported limitations include restricted access to information on sexual and gender diversity, barriers to school programmes, lack of legal gender recognition and institutional reluctance to affirm trans and non-binary students' identities. Policies may address bullying and discrimination only in general terms, without explicitly referring to sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, leaving professionals without clear guidance and weakening institutional accountability.

Rainbow families may also remain legally or administratively invisible in school forms, curricula, institutional communication and relationships with schools, while some countries lack national LGBTIQ equality strategies. These gaps are reinforced by political and media discourses promoting cis/heterosexist family values or framing LGBTIQ issues as "propaganda," which can generate insecurity, avoidance and self-censorship among professionals and institutions such schools.

3. Institutional invisibility and silence surrounding LGBTIQ children and families

The invisibility of LGBTIQ children, rainbow families and their needs is a cross-cutting weakness. Schools and other institutions may avoid addressing sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and family diversity because of fear of controversy or lack of recognition. This silence deprives children of the language, references and validation needed to understand and express their experiences, while suggesting that LGBTIQ issues are inappropriate or incompatible with school settings.

The absence of openly LGBTIQ adolescents is sometimes interpreted as an absence of need, although it may reflect fear, concealment, lack of trust and unsafe conditions for disclosure. Rainbow families also remain underrepresented in institutional practices and are often required to repeatedly explain their family structures. This invisibility is reinforced by the scarcity of age-appropriate initiatives, services and community spaces specifically designed for LGBTIQ children and young people.

4. Insufficient professional training, knowledge, and preparedness

A persistent weakness is the limited preparation of teachers, psychologists and other professionals working with children. Many lack knowledge of sexual and gender diversity, trans and non-binary experiences, minority stress and anti-LGBTIQ violence, as well as the skills to recognise discrimination,

intervene appropriately, support identity exploration, work with families and integrate inclusive content into educational practice. Relevant training is often absent from compulsory school curricula and, when available, depends on individual initiative or civil society organisations.

Training must extend beyond terminology to relational skills, including managing classroom dynamics, creating safer spaces and reflecting on personal fears, discomfort and sexual and gender prejudice. Without institutionalised preparation, responses remain highly uneven: some professionals actively support LGBTIQchildren, while others avoid intervention or reproduce stereotypes, discriminatory language and pathologising attitudes and behaviours, making protection dependent on individual adults rather than guaranteed institutional competence.

5. Lack of interest, avoidance, fear, and self-censorship among professionals

Beyond insufficient knowledge, some professionals show limited willingness to engage with LGBTIQ issues, avoid responsibility or decline opportunities to learn. This may reflect fear of making mistakes, opposition from families or school leadership, media scrutiny, employment insecurity, retaliation or legal consequences, particularly where addressing diversity or LGBTIQ-phobia is politically contested. Such avoidance and self-censorship reinforce institutional silence and leave children without trusted adults. Failure to respond to discriminatory language or violence may signal that these issues are taboo and that institutional protection is unavailable. Expectations that younger generations of professionals will naturally bring change do not resolve the current lack of engagement, reflexivity and accountability.

6. Excessive dependence on individual initiative and the fragility of inclusive practices

In many contexts, inclusion depends on committed teachers, activist educators, informed professionals or families with the capacity to intervene, rather than on a shared institutional culture. This creates unequal and unpredictable protection, as children's access to support may depend on encountering a particular adult. Initiatives such as safe spaces, LGBTIQ activities, family sessions and informal networks may disappear when staff change, become overburdened or lose institutional support. Limited time, heavy workloads, staff turnover, precarious employment and lack of dedicated resources further undermine continuity. Supporting children affected by violence requires time for listening, coordination, family contact and work with peers. Without allocated hours, recognition and stable structures, inclusion remains an additional and fragile responsibility carried by individual professionals, preventing institutions from consolidating knowledge and practices.

7. Insufficient prevention and delayed, generic, or ineffective responses to violence

School responses are often reactive, occurring only after violence has escalated or families have repeatedly demanded action. Preventive work addressing gender norms, sexual and bodily diversity, peer relationships and school culture remains limited. Anti-bullying protocols may be absent, poorly known,

generic or inadequately implemented, making them less effective in recognising and responding to anti-LGBTIQ violence.

Families also describe procedures as slow, bureaucratic or merely formal, with insufficient documentation, follow-up, confidentiality, communication and coordination with external services. Activating a protocol does not necessarily stop violence, change peer relationships or reduce isolation. Effective prevention therefore requires not only procedures but broader changes in school culture, pedagogy, norms and relationships.

8. Low trust in formal structures and underreporting of violence

Many children and adolescents turn primarily to friends or seek no support after experiencing violence, while teachers, psychologists, counsellors and formal services remain underused. This reflects distrust in adults, fear of involuntary disclosure or further aggression, uncertainty about reporting procedures and expectations that institutions will not respond effectively.

Normalisation of violence and exhaustion may also make silence and concealment forms of self-protection. Consequently, many incidents remain undocumented and receive no institutional response. Underreporting cannot therefore be addressed simply by encouraging disclosure; it requires safer, confidential and trustworthy mechanisms capable of providing effective protection.

9. Institutional reproduction of cisheteronormativity and violence perpetrated by adults

Schools and services may reproduce discrimination through persistent misuse of names and pronouns, refusal to affirm identities, pathologising attitudes, ridicule, discriminatory comments and failures to intervene. Apparently neutral routines, such as binary administrative forms, celebrations centred exclusively on mothers and fathers, and procedures incompatible with children's lived identities, can also exclude LGBTIQ children and rainbow families.

In some contexts, recognition of chosen names or access to administrative procedures depends on a diagnosis, reinforcing medicalised approaches. Children and families are also frequently expected to educate professionals, explain concepts and justify their needs, transferring institutional responsibility onto those already exposed to discrimination.

10. Insufficiently inclusive and critical curricula, sexuality education, and pedagogical practices

Curricula, textbooks and educational materials often remain binary, cisnormative, heteronormative and endosex-normative, predominantly representing cisgender, heterosexual and normative bodies,

relationships and families. Limited inclusive sexuality education and the absence of positive, intersectional representations deprive children of relevant information, recognition and diverse role models.

Exclusion may result from legal and political restrictions or from insufficient training, materials and institutional commitment. Broader limitations in critical thinking, media literacy, social skills and reflection on norms, hierarchies and sexism may also weaken anti-bullying initiatives when these are implemented without wider pedagogical and cultural change.

11. Fragmented and underfunded services with insufficient professional capacity

Accessible, affirmative and informed services remain limited, particularly outside major urban areas. Families may struggle to find professionals with knowledge of trans and non-binary experiences and LGBTIQ youth mental health, while some practitioners minimise, misunderstand or pathologise children's experiences, including anxiety, depression and social isolation.

Services are often fragmented and poorly coordinated across education, healthcare, social services, child protection and civil society. Shortages of professionals, high workloads, long waiting lists, unfilled positions, centralisation, low salaries and staff turnover further restrict capacity and create territorial inequalities, especially in rural and peripheral areas.

12. Unequal distribution of protective resources and exposure to multiple unsafe contexts

Protective resources are unevenly distributed. Access to supportive families and peers, specialised organisations, affirmative professionals, psychological support or the possibility of changing schools or location varies according to social class, geography, family acceptance, migration status, language, racialisation and disability. Migrant families, Roma students and children with disabilities may face additional barriers, while children without family support are especially vulnerable.

Risks occur across schools, homes, extracurricular activities, bathrooms, changing rooms, transport and digital spaces, with cyberbullying often connected to offline violence. LGBTIQ visibility may bring recognition but also exposure, stigma and rejection. Concealment, silence, changing schools, accessing private education or leaving unsafe environments may therefore become protective strategies, although these options depend on economic, family and territorial resources that are not available to all children.

4.1.3 Opportunities

The opportunities identified vary across the CLICK countries according to their legal protections, institutional openness, access to specialised services and possibilities for addressing diversity in schools. In some contexts, progress depends on implementing existing protections; in others, it requires removing

legal restrictions or mobilising European frameworks. Despite these differences, the analysis identifies common opportunities for developing more stable, coordinated and inclusive responses.

1. Mobilising national and European legal frameworks

Existing equality, non-discrimination, child-protection and violence-prevention frameworks can be used to translate recognised rights into school plans, anti-bullying procedures, educational materials, professional training and support mechanisms. Where protective legislation exists, the priority is to strengthen implementation and prevent regression and backlash. European frameworks on children's rights, equality, participation, mental well-being and protection from violence can also support advocacy and reform. In restrictive contexts, amending or repealing legal barriers could enable clearer guidelines, protocols and support pathways in order to better provide a supportive environment.

2. Institutionalising and expanding existing practices

The reports identify social practices that could be adapted and expanded, including safe spaces guidelines, student groups, teacher networks, youth-led initiatives, cultural activities, chosen-name agreements and rainbow family sessions. These experiences show that intervention models already exist and are under development. Funding, coordination and institutional recognition could reduce their dependence on individual will coming from professionals, private schools, municipalities or under-resourced NGOs, while preserving knowledge and expanding geographical access. Institutions could also make affirmative procedures and resources available proactively, before LGBTIQ children or rainbow families are required to request them.

3. Developing initial, continuing and interprofessional training

Training on sexual, gender, bodily and family diversity could be integrated into the initial and continuing education of teachers, psychologists, healthcare professionals, child-protection workers and youth practitioners. Priority areas include LGBTIQ concepts, gender expression, trans, non-binary and intersex experiences, family diversity, discrimination, responses to violence and inclusive practice. Joint training and peer supervision could promote shared knowledge across services. Already existing university interest and training materials developed by civil society organisations provide resources for this expansion.

4. Integrating diversity into curricula and educational practices

Curricula offer opportunities to address sexual, gender, bodily and family diversity continuously and in age-appropriate ways, rather than through isolated activities or responses to violence. Relevant content can be incorporated into literature, history, biology, social sciences, ethics, arts and pastoral support. This could normalise diversity, increase LGBTIQ representation and reduce the responsibility placed on young

people to educate peers and professionals. Even under legal restrictions, some reports identify possibilities for addressing diversity and minority rights through authorised professionals.

5. Developing comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education

Comprehensive sexuality education can address bodies, consent, boundaries, relationships, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, reproduction, pleasure and respect. Moving beyond binary and normative understandings would improve the representation of trans, non-binary and intersex children and other experiences frequently absent from educational materials. Integrating this content into mainstream education could reduce invisibility and misinformation while promoting broader understandings of bodily, sexual and gender diversity.

6. Strengthening the prevention of and response to bullying and violence

There are opportunities to strengthen anti-bullying rules, school coexistence plans, institutional procedures, safe spaces and visible professional support. Child-protection and non-discrimination frameworks can help schools recognise and respond more clearly to anti-LGBTIQ violence across the settings children attend. Growing attention to bullying, emotional safety and well-being also creates space to address discrimination and minority stress. LGBTIQ inclusion can be connected to wider commitments to children's rights, gender equality, anti-racism, disability inclusion and democratic school cultures.

7. Strengthening collaborative, territorial, and cross-sectoral networks

Collaboration between families, schools, education and health professionals, civil society organisations, local authorities and policymakers represents an opportunity to strengthen existing mechanisms for preventing and responding to violence and providing support. By combining specialised knowledge, responsibilities and resources, these actors can improve referrals, information-sharing, documentation, technical assistance and the coordination and continuity of the response's implementation. Territorial and cross-sectoral networks can also reduce fragmented responses and prevent LGBTIQ children and rainbow families from having to navigate services or repeatedly explain their experiences alone. Stable and adequately funded cooperation between public institutions, community organisations and professionals could reinforce existing structures, address gaps in institutional capacity and ensure that protection and support do not depend solely on individual professionals or children's capacity to cope.

8. Building on growing attention to mental health and emotional well-being

Increasing public attention to mental health, bullying and emotional safety creates opportunities to include LGBTIQ children's experiences in broader discussions of well-being. These debates can address the effects of discrimination, isolation, lack of recognition and minority stress, even when diversity is not

initially their central focus. The reports identify opportunities to expand affirmative, non-pathologising psychological support and strengthen coordination between schools, hospitals, municipal services, youth structures and community organisations. Existing child and family support services could also provide information and guidance to families.

9. Strengthening LGBTIQ children's and young people's participation and collective agency

LGBTIQ children and young people can identify needs, assess their environments and propose ways to make schools and communities a safer place for them. Participation mechanisms involving students and professionals could improve institutional responses in educational settings, assess school climates and reduce reliance on exclusively adult perspectives. Young people's desire for community and collective action can support horizontal, student-centred and intersectional forms of participation. Digital environments may also facilitate agency, peer contact and the organisation of support networks.

10. Training, supporting and mobilising families

Families need accessible information and spaces to discuss uncertainty and learn how to support children. Training, sessions, materials and manuals could reach supportive families, rainbow families and parents or caregivers who have limited knowledge or express hesitation or resistance. Existing child and family services could provide information from an early stage. The growing visibility and mobilisation of rainbow families can also strengthen peer support, advocacy, institutional awareness and changes in education, bullying prevention and psychological support.

11. Developing public communication and responding to disinformation

Public communication can counter disinformation about sexual and gender diversity. Strategies grounded in the everyday experiences of young people and families may reduce fear-based reactions and promote empathy. Media campaigns, articles, school and cultural initiatives, and collaboration with public figures can increase positive representation and the visibility of rainbow families, supportive professionals and role models. Changes in political contexts and public attitudes may create more favourable conditions for awareness-raising, although these remain contextual opportunities rather than consolidated transformations.

12. Using digital, cultural and community spaces

Digital media can expand access to information, peer contact, educational resources, organisations and role models, particularly in rural areas and places with limited services. They allow organisations and educators to share materials, organise networks, promote programmes and respond to disinformation.

Schools and community organisations can support young people in using these environments critically and safely, although online support should not replace face-to-face relationships.

Extracurricular activities, artistic projects, cultural initiatives and youth spaces provide complementary opportunities for self-expression, recognition, peer interaction and engagement with equality and diversity. Stable, adequately funded partnerships between schools, organisations, youth professionals and arts educators could expand their reach and strengthen community support.

4.1.4 Threats

Considering that national contexts differ in terms of their legal frameworks, the stability of public policies, the organisation of education and child protection systems, the availability of services, and the degree of social and political hostility towards LGBTIQ issues it is also true that, despite the differences we identified, the Click reports identify common transnational patterns: the growing politicisation of gender and sexuality issues; the dissemination of anti-gender discourses, disinformation, and hate speech; institutional fear of possible reactions from families, political actors, or the media; the fragility and discontinuity of responses; territorial inequalities; the normalisation of violence; and serious risks to the mental health of children and young people. In several contexts, these threats may undermine the progress already achieved and widen the gap between formally recognised rights and the protection effectively available.

1. Politicisation of gender and sexuality and the strengthening of anti-gender movements

Far-right, anti-gender and conservative actors increasingly portray LGBTIQ inclusion, sexuality education and the recognition of diversity as ideological threats to children, families and parental authority. Often linked to nationalist, religious and cisnormative and heterosexist understandings of family, these discourses intensify polarisation, legitimise opposition to school initiatives and may discourage professionals and public authorities from adopting inclusive measures. In some contexts, they are also associated with the risk of extremist violence.

2. Legislative backsliding, legal restrictions and political uncertainty

Restrictive legislation attempts to reverse existing rights and delays in necessary reforms threaten LGBTIQ children's protection. Reported barriers include restrictions on sexuality and relationship education, parental-consent requirements, limits on legal gender recognition and insufficient recognition of trans and non-binary children and youth, rainbow families, parenthood, marriage and adoption. Political instability also creates uncertainty regarding the continuity of services, programmes, funding and inclusive policies at national, regional and municipal levels.

3. Institutional fear, parental backlash and professional vulnerability

Opposition from families, organised movements, political actors or the media may lead schools to avoid sexuality education and LGBTIQ inclusion because of complaints, conflict or reputational concerns. Professionals may fear criticism, isolation, career consequences or a lack of support from school leadership, while visible LGBTIQ staff may face heightened scrutiny. These pressures can lead institutions to prioritise avoiding controversy over children's safety, reinforcing silence and professional self-censorship.

4. Disinformation, hate speech and violence in digital spaces

Digital environments facilitate the rapid circulation of homophobic, transphobic, sexist and racist disinformation, hate speech and bullying. Anti-gender campaigns may present distorted information as scientific, while organisations and professionals promoting inclusion often have fewer communication resources. Online and offline violence are interconnected, moving between social media, school groups, peer interactions and parent networks. Limited media literacy and insufficient institutional capacity to respond further increase children's vulnerability based on gender and sexual diversity.

5. Normalisation and trivialisation of violence

Insults, jokes, invasive questions, rumours, comments about gender expression and exclusion may become normalised within everyday school life. When rarely challenged, these practices may no longer be recognised as violence, leading children to tolerate discrimination, defend themselves alone or avoid seeking support. Public polarisation and violent online discourse reinforce this process, presenting hostility as inevitable and encouraging concealment or individual coping strategies.

6. Silence, concealment and underreporting interpreted as an absence of need

Children's concealment and institutional silence may be wrongly interpreted as evidence that no LGBTIQ children, violence or specific needs exist. Fear of exposure, family rejection, peer retaliation or ineffective responses discourages reporting, while families may also avoid complaints to protect children from further visibility. The resulting absence of records creates an appearance of normality that conceals violence and insecurity. Small or incomplete samples may similarly produce misleading comparisons and underestimate protection needs.

7. Worsening psychological distress and mental health consequences

Persistent bullying, family rejection, exclusion, invisibility and the absence of adult intervention can contribute to anxiety, depression, social isolation, self-harm, suicidal ideation, school disengagement and

emotional crises. Without accessible and affirmative professional support, children may cope alone or rely exclusively on friends and informal networks. Family violence is particularly serious because it simultaneously removes a source of safety and limits access to adults capable of seeking assistance.

8. Territorial inequalities in protection, services and participation

Access to affirmative services, specialised organisations, peer networks, trained professionals and inclusive policies differs considerably between regions, municipalities and rural and urban areas. Political changes in decentralised systems may further affect access to programmes and resources. Children outside major cities often face greater conservatism, fewer services and stronger pressure to remain invisible, limiting their opportunities for support, participation and contact with informed professionals.

9. Underfunding, precariousness and discontinuity of services and initiatives

Underfunding, inadequate infrastructure, staff shortages, low salaries, excessive workloads and high turnover threaten education, healthcare, social support and child-protection responses. Affirmative initiatives often depend on particular individuals and may disappear when they leave or lose the conditions required to continue. This discontinuity interrupts trusted relationships, weakens institutional knowledge and reduces services' capacity to respond promptly to violence, psychological distress and protection needs.

10. Family rejection, parental opposition and community hostility

Families may be sources of rejection, violence and lack of support, while parental opposition can also prevent schools from implementing a comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), professional training or inclusion initiatives. Hostility may extend through parent networks, local communities and public spaces, following children across their everyday environments. In smaller communities with limited alternatives, family and community rejection can have particularly severe consequences by restricting access to peers, safe adults and specialised services.

11. Superficial or episodic inclusion without institutional and structural transformation

Institutions may support an individual child without changing curricula, materials, language, procedures or school cultures structured by cis and heteronormativity, the gender binary and endosex normativity. Isolated projects, training sessions and campaigns may create an appearance of inclusion without lasting change and remain dependent on individual professionals. In polarised contexts, poorly adapted initiatives may also intensify resistance, expose staff or mobilise opponents, increasing frustration when formal commitments do not improve everyday experiences.

12. Protection through exit and the deepening of inequalities

Changing schools, moving to private education, relocating, seeking support outside public systems or emigrating may become strategies for escaping unsafe environments. However, these options depend on financial resources, mobility, information, social networks and family support. When safety is achieved mainly through leaving, children with fewer resources remain exposed, deepening inequalities related to class, geography and access to specialised support. Responsibility for resolving institutional failures is consequently transferred from institutions to children and families.

4.2. Best practices and recommendations

10 key recommendations ensuring the full inclusion and protection of LGBTIQ children, young people and their families within educational systems requires a comprehensive, multi-layered policy approach. The following ten recommendations outline key areas where public authorities, schools and communities can intervene to promote equality, prevent discrimination and foster resilient networks of care. However, each of them needs to be complemented with specific actions based on national contexts.

4.2.1. National anti-discrimination standards and institutional guidelines

A first and fundamental step is the establishment of clear, nationwide standards on anti-discrimination in education, accompanied by detailed institutional guidelines. These standards should explicitly prohibit discrimination against LGBTIQ children and violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, and should apply to all levels of the educational system. Operational guidelines must translate legal principles into concrete procedures for schools: how to report incidents, how to protect students and staff, how to monitor environments and how to follow up on cases. Without such coherent frameworks, responses remain fragmented and depend on individual goodwill. National standards should therefore be binding, publicly available, and regularly reviewed, ensuring that educational institutions have both the responsibility and the tools to act decisively against LGBTIQ-phobia.

4.2.2. Continuous, mandatory training for all educators

Training cannot be left to sporadic initiatives, voluntary interest of some professionals or responses to emergencies. Policies should introduce continuous, mandatory training on LGBTIQ issues for all educators, including teachers, school leaders, counsellors, and support staff. Training should cover not only basic terminology and concepts, but also practical skills through an intersectional approach: how to intervene in cases of bullying, how to create inclusive classrooms, how to communicate respectfully, and how to deal with intersectional experiences of exclusion, e.g. regarding racism, ableism, fatphobia as well. It should be embedded within broader professional development programmes and offered periodically throughout a

career, rather than as a one-off session. Making training mandatory recognises that inclusion is a core professional competence in contemporary education.

4.2.3. Supporting networks of NGOs, institutions and families

Rainbow families and LGBTIQ young people often rely on a dense web of support, which includes NGOs, community groups, schools and local institutions. Public policies should actively support these networks by funding community organisations, facilitating partnerships between schools and NGOs, and recognising families as key interlocutors. Formal cooperation agreements can help coordinate activities such as peer-support groups, awareness campaigns, and joint training sessions. When networks are sustained, families do not have to face challenges alone, and schools can draw on external expertise. Support should be long-term and stable, moving beyond short project cycles towards structural investment in community organisations that have proven their impact.

4.2.4. Educational change based on children's perspectives

Children and young people should be recognised as active agents in shaping educational policies that affect their lives. The systematic inclusion of their perspectives in the design, implementation and evaluation of school practices should be a fundamental aspect in any educational system. This can be achieved through student councils, consultation processes, participatory research, and feedback mechanisms where LGBTIQ students and allies can express their needs and concerns safely. Educational change should not be imposed from above without listening to those who experience the consequences daily. Policies must require schools to establish child-centred participatory processes and ensure that the voices of LGBTIQ students, particularly those facing multiple forms of marginalisation, are heard and acted upon.

4.2.5. Integrating LGBTIQ topics in curricula and programmes

LGBTIQ topics should not be confined to occasional events or treated as controversial additions. They need to be systematically integrated into curricula and educational programmes as part of ordinary teaching. This includes explicit reference to LGBTIQ histories, figures, cultures, and contributions in subjects such as literature, social studies, history and civic education, as well as inclusion in comprehensive sexuality and affective education. When LGBTIQ experiences are visibly present in learning materials, they become normalised rather than exceptional. Policies should promote the development and adoption of inclusive curricula, provide teachers with vetted resources, and encourage school inspections to evaluate the presence of LGBTIQ perspectives in educational content.

4.2.6. Intersectional approach to education

Discrimination rarely operates along a single axis. LGBTIQ young people and families may simultaneously experience racism, ableism, sexism, class-based exclusion or xenophobia. An intersectional approach to education recognises these overlapping systems of oppression and ensures that policies and practices do not treat identities in isolation. Anti-discrimination standards and training should explicitly address intersectionality, and schools should be encouraged to develop projects that connect LGBTIQ inclusion with broader work on diversity, mental health, disability, migration and socio-economic inequalities.

4.2.7. Involvement of professionals to build bridges between families and schools

Professional mediators, social workers, psychologists, and community educators can play a crucial role in bridging the gap between families and schools, especially when one or the other are not accepting of LGBTIQ diversity. Their involvement should be formalised and supported through policy frameworks and adequate funding. These professionals can facilitate communication, mediate conflicts, and help translate the needs of rainbow families into institutional language, while also supporting schools in designing appropriate responses. Building such bridges is particularly important where families may feel distrustful of institutions or where schools lack experience in dealing with LGBTIQ issues. It can also have a fundamental role in providing support to children who are not accepted by their families and have no adult allies. Structured collaboration, rather than sporadic contact, helps create environments in which concerns can be discussed constructively and solutions developed collectively.

4.2.8. Public efforts against misinformation

The spread of misinformation about LGBTQ issues, especially through digital platforms, fuels fear, prejudice and hostility. Public authorities should adopt proactive strategies to counter misinformation with accessible, evidence-based information. This includes national campaigns, educational materials, and collaborations with trusted media, digital platforms and civil society organisations. Schools can be key sites for media literacy programmes that teach children and families how to critically evaluate information, recognise hateful or manipulative content, and access reliable sources. Public communication should be transparent, consistent and framed around human rights, wellbeing and social cohesion. By tackling misinformation, institutions help create a more informed public debate and safeguard the dignity of LGBTIQ communities.

4.2.9. Accessible mental health support

LGBTIQ children and young people, as well as their families, face stress, stigma and emotional challenges that require specialised support. Policies should guarantee accessible, affordable and culturally competent mental health services within and beyond schools. This may include counsellors trained on LGBTIQ issues, partnerships with external mental health providers, and referral mechanisms that are safe and non-stigmatising. Families should also be able to access counselling and support groups that help them navigate the emotional impact of discrimination, social pressure and fear for their children's wellbeing. Mental health provision must be recognised as a core component of inclusive education policy, not an optional add-on.

4.2.10. Networks of care to address territorial disparities

Policies must respond to stark territorial disparities in access to support and information. LGBTIQ families and children living in rural or peripheral areas often have limited opportunities for participation, services and community spaces. Networks of care need to be designed with territorial justice in mind, ensuring that support is not concentrated only in major cities. This can involve mobile services, regional hubs, funding for local initiatives, and investment in digital platforms that allow meaningful participation at a distance. Importantly, territorial policies should not rely solely on virtual solutions; they must also create

physical spaces of belonging outside urban centres. By addressing geographical inequalities, networks of care can ensure that the right to safety, recognition and support is not dependent on where one lives.

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