# 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

Co-funded by
the European Union

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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
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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Research Design

The fieldwork in Portugal was conducted between January and May 2026 and focused on qualitative data collection through a mixed-methods approach, including semi-structured interviews with families and educators/stakeholders, an online survey, and focus groups. This approach enabled the research team to capture the **complexity of the lived experiences** of LGBTQI+ children, young people, and their families, supporting an in-depth and contextualized analysis. In Portugal, data collection involved different participant groups, including rainbow families, education professionals, and key stakeholders with expertise in education, youth, and LGBTQI+ issues. **Stakeholders** were selected based on their recognized expertise at the national level, and contacts were established directly with relevant individuals. Pre-existing professional relationships developed by the research team played an important role in facilitating access and contributed to the successful implementation of the interviews. Additionally, two participants held dual roles, combining professional expertise with personal experience as members of rainbow families; given the richness of their contributions, their accounts were meaningfully integrated across both analytical groups.

Participants were **recruited** through a diversified and effective strategy aimed at reaching different target groups. Initial dissemination was carried out via email through an extensive network of human rights organizations, youth associations, LGBTQI+ groups, student organizations, and both formal and non-formal educational institutions. **Social media**, particularly Instagram, was actively used to expand outreach through posts, stories, and direct requests for sharing among partner organizations and other relevant entities. Rainbow families were primarily recruited through a key national partner, *AMPLOS – Associação de Mães e Pais pela Liberdade de Orientação Sexual e Identidade de Género*, whose collaboration proved instrumental in ensuring access to and engagement with this group. This underscores the importance of strong **community partnerships** in conducting research on sensitive topics. In addition to the interviews, an online survey targeting young people was implemented as part of the fieldwork, aiming to capture the perspectives of adolescents from diverse backgrounds, including LGBTQI+ youth. Dissemination relied on collaboration with organizations, community networks, and social media channels.

**Focus groups** with young people were also incorporated into the research design, with dates and locations confirmed and participants identified, ensuring the completion of this phase of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted either online or in person, depending on participants' preferences and availability, in order to ensure a comfortable and appropriate setting. **Interviews** were in-depth, lasting between 60 and 120 minutes, and followed a structured guide. The flexible nature of the semi-structured format ensured consistency across interviews while allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences in meaningful ways.

While some **challenges** were encountered during the fieldwork process, these were actively managed and did not compromise the overall progress or quality of the data collection. A degree of reluctance was observed among some education professionals, mainly due to concerns about

potential repercussions in their workplace within a sociopolitical context marked by emerging backlash against LGBTQI+ rights. Nevertheless, the research team was able to secure participation from key informants, ensuring the inclusion of relevant professional perspectives. Similarly, although the sample of participating families was predominantly composed of supportive parents, this is understood as a reflection of recruitment dynamics—particularly the collaboration with AMPLOS—rather than an absence of experiences of discrimination. This limitation has been carefully considered in the analytical approach.

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 taking public transportations due to geographical distance and also felt their identity would be more protected in an online setting.

Challenges were also identified in relation to **the online survey**. Despite extensive dissemination through partner organizations, response rates were lower than initially anticipated, potentially reflecting broader difficulties in accessing school contexts in a climate of resistance to equality and non-discrimination initiatives. In response, alternative outreach strategies were implemented, including engagement with digital influencers, demonstrating the team's adaptive approach to recruitment, even if these efforts yielded more limited results.

## 1.2 Ethics

This project was evaluated by the Research ethics and biosecurity committee of the University of Girona and the approval number is 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.

## 1.3 Fieldwork Data

**Table 1: Interviews with rainbow families: sociodemographic information**

| INTERVIEW CODE | SHORT DESCRIPTOR OF THE PARTICIPANT |
|---|---|
| RF1 | Mother of 16 year old trans boy |
| RF2 | Mother of 18 year old trans boy and bissexual daughter. Her partner is a non-binary person. |
| RF3 | Mother of a 10 Year old trans girl |
| RF4 | Mother of a 18 bissexual girl |

| | |
|---|---|
| RF5 | Mother of a 18 year old trans boy |
| RF6 | Non-binary parent of a 12 year old lesbian girl |
| RF7 | Father of a 17 year old trans boy |
| RF8 | Father of a 18 year old trans girl |
| RF9 | Lesbian mother of a 13 year old trans girl |
| RF10 | Mother of a non-binary 13 year old boy |

**Table 2: Interviews with educators and policy-makers**

| | AGE | GENDER IDENTITY | SEXUAL ORIENT. | COUNTRY OF ORIG. | PROFESSIONAL ROLE | TYPE OF INSTITUTION |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EDU1 | 30-39 | Woman | Hetero | Portugal | Teacher and member of the citizenship and development department of the school; Artist | Public |
| EDU2 | 20-29 | Woman | Lesbian | Portugal | Teacher of Portuguese and citizenship and development education | Public |
| EDU3 | 40-49 | Woman | Hetero | Italy | University teacher | Public |
| EDU4 | 50-59 | Man | Bisexual | Portugal | Ex-Minister of Education; University teacher | Public |
| EDU5 | 50-59 | Woman | Lesbian | Angola | Teacher, activist | Public |
| EDU6 | 60-69 | Man | Hetero | Portugal | IT professional/ Retired | Private |
| EDU7 | 40-49 | Man | Hetero | Portugal | Teacher and director | Public |
| EDU8 | 50-59 | Woman | Lesbian | Portugal | School psychologist/Researcher | Public |
| EDU9 | 50-59 | Woman | Hetero | Portugal | Teacher, Class representative | Public |
| EDU10 | 20-29 | Non-binary | Queer | Portugal | Clinical psychologist/LGBTQ+ rights activist | Private |

### Table 3: Focus group participants' sociodemographic information

| | AGE | GENDER IDENTITY | SEXUAL ORIENTATION |
|---|---|---|---|
| FG1 | 17 | Trans boy | Asexual lesbian |
| FG2 | 17 | Cis girl | Queer |
| FG3 | 17 | Trans boy | Queer |
| FG4 | 16 | Cis girl | Pansexual |
| FG5 | 17 | Trans boy | Asexual hetero |

### Table 4: Survey respondents' sociodemographic information

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| TOTAL RESPONSES | 136 | |
| COMPLETE RESPONSES | 103 | |
| | | |
| GENDER IDENTITY | Man | 39 |
| | Woman | 50 |
| | Non-binary | 5 |
| | Other | 0 |
| | I don't know | 7 |
| | | |
| SEXUAL ORIENTATION | Gay/lesbian | 22 |
| | Heterosexual | 40 |
| | Bisexual | 28 |
| | Other | 13 |
| TRANSGENDER | Yes | 19 |
| INTERSEX | Yes | 1 |
| MINORITY ETHNIC GROUP | Yes | 5 |

## Characterization of the sample

The characterization of the sample participating in the survey shows a generally balanced distribution across the different response categories.

Within the LGBTQ+ sample, 48.1% self-identify as cisgender girls, 35.4% as cisgender boys, 7.6% as non-binary, and 8.9% selected "I don't know". In terms of **sexual orientation**, 39.2% identify as gay

or lesbian, 40.5% as bisexual, 3.8% as heterosexual, and 16.5% as "other", including asexual and queer identities. The proportion of respondents within the LGBTQ+ sample reporting a **disability** is 9.2%, slightly higher than the 5.7% observed in the non-LGBTQ+ sample.

The LGBTQ+ sample also shows a higher proportion of participants belonging to **ethnic minority** groups compared to the consortium average (9% compared to 7.6%). All participants self-identify as Black/African descent or "other", while no representation was recorded from Arab, Asian, or Roma ethnic groups.

Most participants are engaged in **extracurricular activities**, with artistic activities being the most commonly reported (44.3%), and showing higher participation than both the non-LGBTQ+ sample and the consortium average. Sports (36.7%), performing arts (29.1%), and volunteering (21.5%) are also frequently reported, while lower levels of participation are observed in cultural activities (1.3%), STEM-related activities (2.5%), and civic or political engagement (8.9%). Compared to other countries, participants also report a non-negligible level of involvement in religious and faith-based groups (5.1%), broadly similar to that observed in the non-LGBTQ+ sample (4.9%).

The sample is overwhelmingly composed of adolescents exclusively engaged in **education** (93.7%), while only 5.1% are employed and 1.3% combine study and work. **Economic hardship** is the most frequently reported difficulty in everyday life, affecting 75.9% of the LGBTQ+ sample, while 31% also report experiencing violence at home. Finally, only 3.4% of respondents in the LGBTQ+ sample live in foster care or residential care settings.

# 2. Legal and political context regarding LGBTIQ rights in childhood

## 2.1. Context

Following the **Portuguese Revolution** of April 25, 1974, a period of cultural and social transformation unfolded from the mid - 1980s through the 1990s. The period from the fall of the fascist regime of the Estado Novo, through rupture and conflict, to the Processo Revolucionário em Curso (PREC - Ongoing Revolutionary Process) and the entire socioeconomic and cultural reconfiguration, was a historic milestone of great change, influencing the framework of LGBT rights.

In Portugal, homosexuality was only **decriminalized** in 1982, and according to Lima (2011), it took several years before LGBT associations became "public" and to start emerging in "public, organized and regular intervention". According to Vale de Almeida (2023) in the following years, among side with the rise of Portuguese LGBT organizations: "Grupo de Trabalho Homossexual" (1991), Associação Abraço (1992) (against AIDS), ILGA-Portugal (1995), the integration and institutionalization of the feminist ideology with the gender equality rights agenda (for example the abortion) contributed to propelling the discussion of gender issues, particularly regarding civil unions that included same-sex

couples, as societal problems, establishing themselves as feminist demands and LGBT political and social struggles.

Over the years, Portugal has made astonishing **progress in promoting LGBTQI+ rights** especially since the year 2000, essentially through legislation, engaging the fourth position on the Rainbow Europe 2021, according to ILGA-Europe (2021). However, according to Saleiro (2021) the experiences of LGBTQI+ people in Portugal highlight "the shortcomings and challenges" of daily life, despite the achievements in legal rights over the years.

In 2001, it was approved in Portugal, the "Lei nº7/2001, de 11 de Maio Proteção das Uniões de Facto" or the "Common-Law Marriage Act", which defines the "legal situation between two people that, regardless of the sex, live in analogous conditions to those spouses for more than two years". As stated by Lima (2011), the approval of the "Common-Law Marriage Act" marked the beginning of a series of **legal changes** that included measures of protection against discrimination, for example, in the legal changes in the "Labor Code" that guaranteed the right to equality in employment and labor. Besides the legal changes in legal matters relating to labor law, in the beginning of the 21st Century, the "Common-Law Marriage Act" was the big impulse on different types of changes, since the amendment of Article nº13 - "Principle of Equality" of the Portuguese Constitution (CRP) in 2004, which added to the article the "non-discrimination" of individuals due to their sexual orientation; and, in 2007 the Penal Code was revised (Lei n.º 59/2007, 2007), and discrimination based on sexual orientation started to constitute a criminal offence.

In 2010 was approved the Law n.º 9/2010 that legally allows the civil marriage between same-sex couples, in 2016 the Law nº 2/2016 that eliminates any form of discrimination in the access of adoption process, allowing any person that lives in common-law union (according to the law) the right for adoption, and finally, in 2017 the Law nº58/2017 that allows the medically assisted reproduction, regardless of sexual orientation.

Regarding **trans rights,** it was with the Law nº 7/2011 that it became legally allowed the change of the gender marker and name in the Civil Registration. However, it was required a report confirming a diagnosis of "gender identity disorder", also known as "transsexualism", prepared by a multidisciplinary clinical team specializing in clinical sexology. Seven years later, the "self-determination law" (Law nº 38/2018) was approved, establishing that any adult (with Portuguese citizenship) may change their name and gender marker in the civil registry without the need for medical reports or medical interventions, such as gender affirming surgeries (thus separating the legal and medical spheres). This law also ensures the availability of and access to specialized **health services** and care within the National Health Service for treatments and procedures—whether surgical, pharmacological, or of another nature—related to a person's physical transition.

For **minors between the ages of 16 and 18**, the change of documents is also possible, however, parental/legal guardian authorization and a "statement of awareness" (i.e. medical report certifying the young person's capacity to make decisions) provided by any professional are required. Additionally, this law guarantees the protection of sex characteristics by prohibiting medically unnecessary surgeries and procedures on intersex infants and children. Finally, the use of a chosen name is now permitted upon request by the individual or their legal representatives.

Besides that, **educational institutions** are required to ensure the well-being of young people and to prevent discrimination against them based on their gender identity, by implementing the necessary measures to that end. For that matter, it is encouraged, for example, using the minor's chosen name both verbally and in school documents, as well as providing access to restrooms, the use of a gender-appropriate uniform, and participation in gender-segregated activities in accordance with the gender with which they identify, or even promoting educational and awareness-raising initiatives on gender identity and non-discrimination to make the school environment more inclusive.

Despite this legal and political approval there are specificities that make it an **inaccessible law** for some people, such as, non-binary individuals who are confined to a choice between female OR male gender, as well migrant minorities (as they do not hold Portuguese citizenship), do not see their name or gender legally recognized and legally protected. Besides that, ILGA Portugal (2022) also refers to the absence of gender identity in Article 13º of the Portuguese Constitution (Constituição da República Portuguesa, CRP) - "Principle of equality" - as well as the lack of tools or "mechanisms to ensure that the inclusion of gender identity in the labor code and penal code is, in fact, functional and capable of responding to the needs of trans, non-binary and gender diverse people".

Nevertheless, it is important to note that in 2019 it was published the document "Health Strategy for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex People" (Direção-Geral da Saúde, 2019), that focuses primarily on **health promotion** and health care for trans and intersex people, with particular attention to the organizational model that, at the National Health Service level, can ensure a better response to the health needs of LGBTI people by rationalizing resources and ensuring the implementation of good practices.

Finally, in 2021, it was ensured with the Law n.º 85/2021 that no one would be discriminated against regarding eligibility to donate blood on the basis of gender identity, sexual orientation, gender expression, or sex characteristics, and in 2024 the Law n.º 15/2024 that prohibits so-called "**sexual conversion**" practices against LGBT+ individuals, criminalizing acts aimed at altering, restricting, or suppressing sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

As demonstrated in the latest **Rainbow Map** (ILGA-Europe, 2026), Portugal presents its greatest achievements regarding LGBTQ rights in the domain of Legal Gender Recognition (LGR), achieving 11 out of 14 of the analyzed indicators. This demonstrates that LGR is the indicator with the highest number of implemented political and legal measures, although with some limitations (as shown before). Concerning Asylum policies, a significant deficit is presented, as Portugal has not yet established legal or administrative procedures for the legal gender recognition of refugees. Analyzing the Hate Speech and Hate Crime indicator, the data shows that while the legal Portuguese reality criminalizes both hate speech and hate crimes, there is a discernible deficit in the implementation of a concrete policy specifically designed to combat hatred. Regarding Equality and Non-Discrimination indicators due to the access to essential services and societal life and participation, the Portuguese legal system guarantees protection against discrimination in employment and education, but not in health. Nonetheless, it falls short of ensuring comprehensive legal protection and explicit policies in Housing, the full access to Good and Services, and the establishment of a comprehensive Equality Action Plan. Pertaining to Health, while Portugal has proactively prohibited conversion practices, it lacks the necessary political and legal solutions to implement a

depathologization approach and medical discourse. Finally, and analyzing the Family indicator it reveals that Portugal currently lacks any legal recognition of parenthood for trans and non-binary individuals, representing a fundamental gap in the legal protection of these families.

While Portugal has undertaken an important journey in advancing LGBT rights, a significant **disparity** persists between legislative decrees and the materialistic enforcement of these laws. According to an article published by the Portuguese Journal Público in July 2025 (Público, 2025), Portugal's progress on LGBT rights has stalled because legislative changes have failed to produce deeper political and social transformation. While the national public opinion on LGBT rights is positive, with a majority of Portuguese supporting equality and gender rights, the article notes a "stark mismatch between the popular will and the sluggishness of political action".

Besides that, on May 2024, ILGA Portugal reinforced the need to raise awareness about the "increase of hate speech (...) as a consequence of the legitimization and normalization of violence and harassment caused by the growth of anti-democratic forces", highlighting the failure to implement any mechanisms for monitoring the ban on medical practices performed on underage intersex individuals (Observador, 2024).

The emergence of new **far-right organizations** and political parties in Europe and Portugal has generated substantial organized resistance to these social advances (Ekman, 2022). This resistance is fueled by the instrumentalization of discourses and gender studies, marked by the adoption of the term "Gender Ideology" by far-right political forces and reactionary actors (Peniche, 2021). According to Peniche (2021), this process involves an "attempt at redefinition based on the belittlement and distortion" of these key terms, appropriating them and blaming them for "social destabilization" allowing the anti-feminist, homophobic and anti-immigration type of narratives to prevail within the "**Gender Ideology**" discourse promoted by far-right political parties and organizations. However, according to Severo and Guerra (2022), the far-right organized movements and political parties are growing and expanding as transnational phenomenon that encompasses several European countries, including Portugal, contributing to the rise of conservative and reactionary ideology that creates barriers and resistance to social progress, institutionalized through antifeminist and homophobic narratives incorporated in the discourse of Gender Ideology (Morais, 2024).

Even though the setback in public discourse has been observed for the past years, it became more evident in public policies after 2024 with the change of government (which was led by the center-left party since 2015). Currently, the government is led by a coalition of the center-right, liberal-conservative party and the conservative Christian Democratic party, with nearly a quarter of the parliament composed of members of the populist, far-right, nationalist, patriotic, and conservative party. In fact, in early 2026, the Parliament approved three bills aimed at repealing Law No. 38/2018 (presented above) and reinstating Law No. 7/2011. Although the self-determination law is still in force, the approval of the three bills represents a big **step backward** regarding legal gender recognition, bodily autonomy, and other existing protections for trans and intersex people. As expressed in a Joint Statement (IGLYO, ILGA-Europe, OII Europe, TGEU, EL*C, & Bi+ Equal, 2026) "These proposals represent a serious attack on the rights, dignity, safety and bodily autonomy of trans and intersex people in Portugal" and "if adopted into law, Portugal would lose at least 4 places on the ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map ranking". In addition, shortly after those bills, a petition with

approximately 17,000 signatures was also submitted calling for the decriminalization of conversion therapy (Pinho, 2026), but for now it didn't produce any changes in the law.

Therefore, it is clear that Portugal's legislative progress on LGBTIQ+ rights has yielded significant achievements, but the current political context highlights its fragility. The growing rise of conservative and far-right forces and the instrumentalization of the concept of "gender ideology" (also observed in other countries), as well as the recent approval of bills that threaten to overturn the Self-Determination Law, demonstrate that the rights achieved are not irreversible.

With regard to the **rights of children and young people**, these have been enshrined in the Portuguese Constitution (CRP) since 1976 in Articles No. 69 and 70, which specify—in the first case—that children have a specific right to protection against discrimination, oppression, and the abusive exercise of authority within the family and other institutions, and – in the second – that young people enjoy special protection for the realization of their economic, social, and cultural rights. Additionally, in 1990 Portugal ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Comité Português para a UNICEF, 2019), which serves as a binding reference in legislative drafting and the formulation of public policies, influencing areas such as health, education, child welfare, and juvenile justice, and subjecting Portugal to a mechanism of periodic review, whose recommendations have pressured the country to address shortcomings.

Law No. 147/99 was subsequently enacted, with the aim of promoting the rights and protection of children and youth at risk, with the goal of ensuring the well-being and holistic development of minors, guaranteeing that they grow up in a safe and healthy environment. Following this law, the CNPDPCJ - Commission for the Protection of Children and Youth (Comissão Nacional de Promoção dos Direitos e Proteção das Crianças e Jovens) were established. These are defined as official non-judicial institutions that aim to promote the rights of children and youth and to prevent or put an end to situations that could affect their safety, health, training, education, or overall development.

Currently in effect is the **Action Plan for the Unified Strategy on the Rights of Children and Youth** 2025–2030 (PAEUDCJ) (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 2025), designed to guarantee all children and youth well-being, safety, protection, and active citizenship, ensuring their holistic development. Aligned with the commitments of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, the plan covers areas such as the eradication of poverty and social exclusion, quality education and health care, and the promotion of an inclusive society, based on the principle that all children have the right to holistic development under conditions of equality and without discrimination. Although this framework is relevant to LGBTQI+ children and youth and to rainbow families, the plan does not explicitly mention them, constituting a notable limitation in a document that aims to leave no one behind.

*Casa Qui* is an association that provides **support** to children and youth in emergency situations resulting from domestic violence stemming from issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, including being kicked out of the home – particularly through ReAJo - Empowerment Response for LGBTI+ Youth (consisting of three apartments for young people aged 16 to 30) and the Victim Support Office (a free specialized service for LGBTI youth). The *Plano i* Association seeks to address a range of social issues, including inequality, discrimination, violence, exclusion, and poverty, through various projects, among which are *Espaço Lara* - Specialized

Psychological Support for Children and Youth Victims of Domestic Violence and *Casa Arco-Íris* - Emergency Shelter, which is intended for LGBTI victims of domestic violence.

In terms of education, in 2009 it was approved a law (Lei nº 60/2009, 2009) that establishes the framework for the implementation of sex education in schools and stipulates that it must promote respect for different sexual orientations and combat discriminatory behavior based on gender or sexual orientation. This means that the inclusion of LGBT topics is part of the required curriculum. In 2012, it was approved the Student Code of Conduct and School Ethics (Lei nº 51/2012, 2012), that affirms that every **student** has the right to not be discriminated against based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, reinforcing that school environments should be inclusive and safe for everyone.

In 2018, the **National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination** – Portugal + Equal was approved for the period of 2018 to 2030 and includes three Action Plans, one of them specific to combating discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (PAOIEC) (Comissão para a Cidadania e a Igualdade de Género, 2023). The PAOIEC main goals are to: 1) Promote awareness of the real situation of LGBTI+ people's needs and discrimination based on SOGIESC; 2) Ensure the mainstreaming of SOGIESC issues; 3) Combat discrimination based on SOGIESC and prevent and combat all forms of violence against LGBTI+ people in public and private life.

The measures presented in this Action Plan include developing trainings for professionals (not only education but also health, justice etc.), promoting the inclusion of SOGIESC issues in the Estratégia Nacional de Educação para a Cidadania (National Strategy for Citizenship Education) (primary and secondary education), and in higher education institutions curriculum, promoting of information/awareness initiatives, as well as sharing good practices against bullying issues based on the OIEC (aimed at teaching and non-teaching staff, students, associations representing families, and professionals in the field of child and youth protection), and other initiatives. Even though the goals and measures of the PAOIEC are comprehensive, there are no specific materials or training programs – only recommendations.

Following that, in 2023 the **guide "The Right to BE in Schools**: Guidelines for preventing and combating discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics in school settings" was published on the websites of the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality, and of the Direção Geral da Educação. This document presents guidelines for teachers and school staff with the goal of promoting inclusive and safer schools, however, it was quickly removed from schools and the official websites by the new government in 2025. Later that year the curriculum for Citizenship and Development Education was also changed and the subjects about gender and sexual diversity are now barely mentioned.

Even though sexuality education is mandatory, it is simply integrated in the **curricula** of Citizenship and Development Education (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2025), specifically in the dimension of Health and with very poor guidelines, not mentioning much about SOGIESC. The guidelines for the Human Rights dimension are also very superficial, with only a brief mention of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. However, these guidelines serve merely as a curricular framework or reference point, leaving it to the discretion of each institution (or teacher) to decide how to teach and

assess the subject. It is important to note that, in general, the **teaching staff** has no specific training in the topics covered in the subject, though there is an openness to establishing partnerships with external entities that address specific topics (such as SOGIESC).

Considering the hostile political environment that has been developing, there has been increasing difficulty in addressing these topics in schools due to **backlash** from families and teachers, which generates more fear and resistance among teachers and schools to bring in external partners. In the book "Políticas Públicas de Igualdade de Género na Educação em Portugal - Da Legislação à difícil transposição prática" (Public Policies for Gender Equality in Education in Portugal - From Legislation to Difficult Practical Implementation), the authors draw their considerations by reflecting on the current context of gender equality in education over the last five decades in Portugal. They describe a "public policy sector that is extremely resistant and corporately closed", coupled with a "lack of political will and the non-recognition of gender inequalities in education." Consequently, the authors emphasize the necessity to "recognize diversity" while simultaneously proposing a "combat" against "political-administrative resistances" and the "rise of anti-gender movements." These factors are identified as significant barriers to the material application of these policies within the education sector (Monteiro et al., 2024, p. 15).

In short, Portugal's progress in promoting LGBTIQ+ rights has been marked by significant legislative advances, which place the country in a leading position within Europe, but also by structural weaknesses and recent setbacks that highlight the fragility of the gains achieved. With specific regard to children and young people, it is evident that, despite the existence of a set of legal instruments and public policies aimed at their protection and well-being, their effective implementation remains inconsistent and increasingly threatened by the current political climate.

## 2.2. Statistical data

In accordance with the **2026 Rainbow Map** (ILGA-Europe, 2026), Portugal currently holds the 12th position among the evaluated countries, achieving a score of 66,99% in comparison with the European average of 42,82% and the European Union average at 52,27% (ILGA Europe, 2026). According to the **TGEU Trans Rights Map** presented in 2026, Portugal fulfills 20 out of 32 established indicators for trans rights, reflecting a landscape of significant advancements alongside persistent critical gaps, as presented before in the National Report. However, as explained before, Portugal might go through significant legal changes in the near future, with the possibility of dropping in these scores.

In line with the previous scores, according to the **Eurobarometer** (European Commission, 2023), Portuguese public opinion about LGBTI+ rights seems relatively favorable, being above EU average on almost all topics: 73% of the respondents agree that there is nothing wrong in a sexual relationship between two persons of the same sex, and almost 80% believe that LGBT people should have the same rights (such as marriage, adoption or parental rights) as heterosexual people, with 81% supporting same-sex marriage across Europe. However, even though 76% are comfortable with a LGB person being in the highest elected political position (and 71% for a trans or intersex person), and 82% are comfortable having daily contact at work with a LGB person (and 77% for trans and intersex person), only 59% feel comfortable with their child being in a love relationship with a person

of the same sex (and 22% say they would feel uncomfortable), and 51% feel comfortable if it was a trans or intersex person (with 29% feeling uncomfortable).

Regarding **trans rights**, according to Ipsos (2023), 84% of the respondents agree that trans people should be protected from discrimination in employment, housing, and access to businesses such as restaurants and stores, 72% agree that with parental consent, transgender teenagers should be allowed to receive gender-affirming care (e.g., counseling and hormone replacement treatment), but only 54% believe that transgender people should be allowed to use single-sex facilities (e.g., public restrooms) that correspond to the gender they identify with (with 23% disagreeing).

In spite of these results, the large majority still recognizes that **discrimination** against LGBTI+ is very widespread in Portugal (European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2023). In the EU LGBTIQ survey III (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2024), 38% of the respondents felt discriminated against in at least one area of life and 48% say they were harassed the year before the survey. Additionally, 36% say that violence, prejudice and intolerance against LGBTIQ people has increased, which seem to be reflected in the political changes and backlash described in the previous section.

According to the National Study on the Needs of LGBTI+ Individuals and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (Saleiro et al., 2022), the main contexts of discrimination based on SOGIESC are "health, education, employment, public safety, and social protection." This corroborates the data from the EU LGBTIQ survey III (FRA, 2024), where 18% reported feeling discriminated against at work or looking for work and 17% felt discriminated against in healthcare. In ILGA's **Report of the Observatory on Discrimination against LGBTI+ People** in Portugal (Fernandes & Almeida, 2023), the street was the location most frequently cited for incidents of discrimination or violence (22.1% in 2021 and 24.8% in 2022), with one in five cases occurring online, a figure that peaked in 2021 (31.4%).

This data is already very concerning, and it is important to note that although **hate crime and hate speech** legislation in Portugal includes sexual orientation and gender identity as an aggravating factor, there are still no policies tackling hate crime and hate speech based on SOGIESC included in a national strategy tackling hatred. Additionally, there is also no hate crime or hate speech legislation including sex characteristics or intersex status as an aggravating factor (Portugal scores only 46.34% in this category of the Rainbow Map). This may be one of the reasons for the underreporting of these crimes/violence (besides the discrimination faced in these services): only 21% went to the police to report physical or sexual attacks and 12% reported their discrimination experiences to an equality body or another organization (FRA, 2024).

As mentioned earlier, **school settings** are among the places where LGBTI people experience the most violence. In fact, 74% of Portuguese respondents in the EU LGBTIQ survey III (FRA, 2024) say that during their time in school they suffered bullying, ridicule, teasing, insults or threats because they are LGBTIQ. In the Preliminary Report on LGBTQ Youth and the School Climate in Portugal of The FREE Project (Gato, 2022) (a study of 1,535 young people aged 14 to 19, of which 44.8% were non-heterosexual and 10% were non-cisgender), it was clear that school continues to be unsafe for many LGBTQ students, who experience disproportionate rates of bullying offline and online – 26.5% said they were a victim of bullying at least once in the 30 days or more before the survey, and 11.5% was

a victim of cyberbullying sometimes (compared to 0.4% of the heterosexual population). More than half of the anti-LGBTQ bullying took place in the hallways (57.1%), and over a third in classrooms (39.21%) and almost half of the victims thought that school interventions were ineffective. Nearly half (45%) of trans and non-binary students reported feeling unsafe using changing rooms and bathrooms and almost half (46.2%) said teachers refused to respect their chosen name. As a result of this hostile social environment, many LGBTI students end up hiding their identity from teachers, students and friends. Besides that, LGBTQ+ students are more likely to consider dropping out of school and miss more classes than their heterosexual peers.

Unfortunately, even though Portugal has some **public policies** and recommendations that encourage citizenship education and sexuality education, 60% of LGBTIQ respondents in the EU LGBTIQ survey III (FRA, 2024) say their school education never addressed LGBTIQ issues. In the FREE Project, 40.6% of students say that topics related to sexual orientation have never been discussed, and 54.2% say they have never discussed issues related to transgender people. Furthermore, 60.1% say they have never learned anything about homophobic or transphobic bullying or about acceptance of LGBTI+ people.

Regardless of these results, Portugal scored 75 out of 100, being 7th place compared to other 49 European countries based on how inclusive their education system is for LGBTQI learners and students (IGLYO, 2025). The key gaps are essentially related to the lack of mandatory and comprehensive **teacher training** on LGBTQI awareness, and the absence of data on anti-LGBTQI bullying collected by the government. Just like many other services that the government does not provide, these two examples are tackled by civil society organizations like ILGA, rede Ex-Aequo, Plano i and others.

Besides the school, the **family** also constitutes one of the contexts where discrimination occurs most regularly (37%), as shown in the Colorful Childhoods study. Indeed, 18.7% of LGBTI students admit that their parents or other family members insulted or humiliated them because of their identity in the year before the study and 53.8% of trans students report that their family refuses to call them by their chosen name (Gato, 2022). Besides that, 21% of respondents of the EU LGBTIQ survey III (FRA, 2024) experienced a so-called '**conversion' practice** in order to make them change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Besides that, according to Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses (2021), LGB young people are three times more likely to commit suicide, and this probability is bigger when the family is not supportive. Similarly, 14% of LGBTIQ respondents in Portugal thought often or always of committing suicide in year before the survey (FRA, 2024).

The lack of concrete data and information on the realities of LGBT reality in Portugal underscores a profound **lack of awareness** regarding the lived experiences of LGBT families. With the National Statistics Institute producing almost no relevant studies and data collection, the true political impacts - on issues such as social vulnerability, the legal recognition of LGBT families and discrimination - remain unmeasured. This data void reflects the broader stagnation and crystallization of progress in these areas. (Público, 2025)

The data presented show that, despite the legislative progress made in recent decades, Portugal still faces significant **structural challenges** in effectively protecting and promoting the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, particularly among the younger population. The persistence of discrimination, violence, and

exclusion in school and family settings, coupled with the absence of institutional mechanisms for monitoring and response, demonstrates that the legal enshrinement of rights does not, in and of itself, translate into effective social transformation. These findings thus underscore the need for an **integrated approach** that combines research, public policies, and educational intervention, recognizing that the path toward a truly inclusive society remains largely uncharted.

# 3. Findings

## 3.1 Children experiences

**Discrimination.** A large majority of the LGBTIQ sample reported having been **humiliated or hurt** at some point in their lives. In line with the consortium average, the data show that violence and discrimination occur primarily in schools (68.9%) and at home (45.9%). In other environments, responses indicate a lower incidence of violence (31.5% in public spaces and 27.4% in extracurricular activities), although these levels remain concerning. Across all contexts surveyed, the LGBTIQ sample reports significantly **higher rates** of discrimination than the non-LGBTIQ sample, suggesting that sexual and gender diversity constitutes a factor of increased vulnerability to violence and exclusion. The gap between the two groups is evident across all settings examined, including schools, homes, public spaces, extracurricular activities, and workplaces.

The main **triggers** for violence and discrimination appear to be linked to the way respondents dress, appear, or express themselves (37.9%), with percentages slightly higher than the average reported in other participating countries. Participants also identify being transgender as a significant reason for discrimination (13%). Ethnic and racial background emerges as another important factor (5.2%). Notably, this reason is reported by the non-LGBTIQ sample at similar levels (5.5%), indicating that **racism and xenophobia** constitute important forms of discrimination that are not necessarily linked to sexual or gender diversity. This issue was repeatedly raised during the focus groups, where participants from racialised backgrounds described episodes of racist and xenophobic harassment experienced both in schools and in public spaces.

When asked to identify additional reasons behind discriminatory experiences, respondents pointed to being gay or lesbian (58.9%), having a different physical appearance (57.1%), and experiencing mental health issues (33.9%). In all these categories, the LGBTIQ sample reports higher rates than the non-LGBTIQ sample, with the exception of factors related to xenophobia and racism. Overall, the findings suggest that adolescents who do not conform to **normative expectations** regarding gender expression, appearance, and behaviour are more likely to be subjected to forms of social sanctioning and exclusion. As the focus groups further highlighted, the **intersection** of multiple marginalised identities tends to increase vulnerability. For example, a Brazilian, racialised trans boy is likely to face higher levels of discrimination than a white Portuguese trans boy.

Discrimination most commonly takes the form of **exclusion and social isolation** from shared activities and social spaces. Several participants also reported being the target of **rumours**, gossip, and the circulation of false information, including through digital platforms. Other forms of violence include public humiliation, verbal abuse, and pressure to engage in actions against one's will. The data suggest that many children experience discrimination in a resigned manner, often choosing not to react. Friends represent an important **source of support** when discriminatory incidents occur, with 52.7% of respondents identifying them as the first people they turn to. However, focus group participants also noted that friends often have limited capacity to intervene directly, meaning that the support provided is primarily emotional, through listening and offering comfort.

Discrimination is also a consistent experience in **extracurricular activities**, particularly in sports settings (70.6%). Although many respondents report participating in artistic activities, none identified these environments as sources of discrimination. Interestingly, several families and adolescents involved in the focus groups were also connected to artistic and cultural activities, which were generally described as more inclusive and accepting environments. **Religious and faith-based groups** emerge as particularly problematic contexts, reporting substantially higher levels of discrimination than both the non-LGBTIQ sample and the averages observed in other participating countries. This finding may reflect the influence of more conservative religious environments, including evangelical and other faith communities characterised by traditional views on gender and sexuality. For some participants, involvement in these groups may also be not voluntary but mediated through family participation, increasing their exposure to potentially hostile environments.

**Violence amongst peers.** Most discrimination originates **from peers**, a finding that contrasts sharply with data emerging from several other participating countries. A total of 76.1% of respondents identified classmates as the primary perpetrators of violence, while 60.9% pointed to students from other classes. The data suggest that teachers and other school staff members play a less prominent role as perpetrators than in some of the other national samples.

Experiences collected through focus groups and interviews with families (*see Section 3.2*) point to a recurrent pattern. Due to existing legal protections, **teachers** are formally expected to comply with principles of inclusion and respect for LGBTIQ identities. While some individuals may privately disagree with these norms or occasionally challenge them, most educators appear to follow institutional requirements without openly contesting them. Nevertheless, some participants reported difficult relationships with individual teachers who engaged in discriminatory behaviour or failed to intervene appropriately. Although such cases are not representative of the educational system as a whole, they remain highly significant for the young people involved and can have a lasting impact on their well-being.

Peers are also the primary source of violence in extracurricular activities. No participants identified staff members as perpetrators of discrimination in these settings, whereas 88.2% identified fellow participants as responsible. Compared both to the non-LGBTIQ sample and to the other countries involved in the project, this figure is particularly striking. Similarly, in **public spaces**, peers and schoolmates contribute substantially to feelings of unsafety, accounting respectively for around 60% and 40% of the perceived threats. These findings suggest that discrimination among young people is not confined to formal educational environments but extends across multiple spheres of social interaction.

**Adults as both threats and sources of support.** Experiences of violence and discrimination also involve adults across various social settings. Within the **family,** for example, parents are frequently identified as sources of discrimination, with fathers and mothers being mentioned at equal rates (50%). Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives are also reported as perpetrators. At the

same time, siblings appear to play a more supportive role than in the non-LGBTIQ sample, often acting as allies and sources of emotional support.

In public spaces, **strangers and unknown adults** are perceived as the greatest threat, being identified by approximately 90% of respondents. This percentage is substantially higher than both the non-LGBTIQ sample and the averages reported by the other participating countries. Such findings suggest that public interactions with adults are frequently characterised by uncertainty, fear, and a perceived risk of verbal or physical aggression.

Seeking support from adults, particularly family members and professionals, is nevertheless one of the **strategies** adopted in response to discrimination. However, the data reveal relatively low levels of trust in school-based professionals such as teachers and school counsellors. While participants acknowledge the importance of **professional support**, many prefer to seek assistance outside the school environment. This reluctance is often linked to concerns that reporting incidents to school staff may exacerbate the situation, increase visibility, or expose them to further victimisation.

**Unsafe spaces.** The data reveal that LGBTIQ children often struggle to feel safe across the various spaces they inhabit in their daily lives. Violence and discrimination within schools take multiple forms and appear to be persistent features of everyday experience. Areas characterised by **limited adult supervision** are perceived as particularly unsafe. These include schoolyards and recess areas (69.6%), school entrances (32.6%), bathrooms (26.1%), and canteens (26.1%).

Participants emphasised that these spaces are especially **risky** because they expose them to students from different classes and age groups. Corridors are similarly perceived as unsafe, as verbal harassment frequently occurs there within large crowds, making it difficult to identify perpetrators while simultaneously exposing victims to public humiliation. **Transitional spaces** between the school and the wider community—such as school entrances and the public areas surrounding schools—are also considered particularly dangerous. As one focus group participant noted, these are environments where students may feel less constrained by school authority and therefore less accountable for their actions.

Interestingly, LGBTIQ adolescents report feeling generally unsafe throughout the entire school environment, whereas among the non-LGBTIQ sample the classroom emerges as the setting where most incidents occur. Portuguese participants also report comparatively high levels of exposure to **online abuse** through social media platforms and messaging applications. Unlike findings from other participating countries, where classrooms are often identified as the primary site of victimisation, the Portuguese sample appears to perceive classrooms as relatively safer. This may be related to the presence of teachers and the perception that adult supervision increases accountability among peers.

**Public spaces** are likewise experienced as unsafe, particularly streets, public transport, shopping centres, and gyms. Participants report feeling especially vulnerable to the gaze of strangers and to the possibility of verbal harassment or physical aggression in these settings. The increasing visibility of far-right political discourses and the rise in reported anti-LGBTIQ incidents in recent years may contribute to these perceptions of insecurity. Places of **worship** also emerge as particularly

threatening environments, reflecting the broader concerns regarding religious conservatism discussed above.

Finally, it is noteworthy that some **public institutions and civic spaces** receive very low or almost non-existent levels of reported discrimination. This may reflect limited use of these spaces by adolescents, but it may also suggest that formal institutional settings and their staff are more widely prepared to deal with LGBTIQ due to their duty to abide to existing laws against discrimination.

## 3.2 Educators and rainbow families' experiences

**Gap between law and practice.** In general, interviewees acknowledge that Portugal has now an advanced **legal framework** that guarantees protection from discriminatory practices and abuse and that offers pathways of gender affirmation for minors that self-identify as non-binary or trans. The framework offers a formal recognition of diversity within the education system and, in principle, safeguards the well-being of young LGBTIQ people in school. Families who have immigrated to Portugal from other countries, such as Brazil, where no such provision is guaranteed, often recognise the positive difference and praise the existence of such framework. The recent debate that sought to undo some of the advancements existed since 2018, especially in terms of protection of non-binary and trans young people, generated deep concern in most families interviewed. Policymakers see it as a grave and unnecessary **step back** that will produce negative effect on the well-being of children and limit the intervention of families and associations in school environments.

The interviews collected show that the **gap** between formal recognition of diversity and actual experiences is often considerable. The **reasons** identified for such gap are mainly three. First, many teachers and educators are still **not aware** of existing regulations and law. In particular, when they are confronted with the case of a trans student, many educators find themselves scrambling for more information or not knowing what they are supposed to do. In some cases, reported in interviews with rainbow families, teachers were informed about the terms of the law by parents or by AMPLOS (the main organization for the rights of rainbow families). After this mediation, they generally actively sought to adjust the necessary measures to the specific case. The widespread **lack of knowledge** about the law is connected not only to its recent approval, but also to the absence of specific training provided to teachers and educators, as we will address further in the report.

A second reason for the gap between law provision and practices is the **lack of orientation** regarding what to do and who to talk to in case of discriminatory episodes happening in the educational setting. Both families and educators do not count on structured guidelines to follow and are often left with few options in how to intervene in cases of bullying or discrimination. In particular, as one policy-maker suggest, the absence of a public authority tasked with **monitoring** the implementation of legislation is a considerable obstacle that often leaves margins for circumventing legal provision or bending some of its requirements.

A third reason for the difference between formal and informal levels of protection of LGBTIQ rights in the educational system is that the existing legal framework does not address broader issues that have more to do with the **cultural and social context**, such as the widespread use of homo-transphobic slurs in interactions amongst young people, verbal and physical abuse towards those who are considered different and, in general, bullying as a constant presence in all educational settings. As the majority of families and policymakers acknowledge, in the last few years, political parties on the right and far-right, together with the uncontrolled use of social media, have contributed to intensify the use of **aggressive and discriminatory language** against LGBTIQ people, immigrants (particularly from Brazil), and other minorities. This has also created a normalization of hate speech and violence both in intragenerational and intergenerational relationships, which constitutes today a pressing matter to be tackled in educational settings and cannot be contained only through the application of the existing laws.

**Difficulties in guaranteeing safety.** Most interviewees recognise that the safety of LGBTIQ children and adolescents in the school is not easy to be guaranteed. Rainbow families are deeply aware that the experiences of safety and well-being of their children in education are the result of a combination of factors that do not fall all under their control. Educational spaces are commonly characterised by **bullying**, discrimination, and violence: although they are more frequent amongst students, families also report some cases where the aggressors were teachers. Children and adolescents perceived as different, for example for their physical appearance, their gender expression, or the way they move or talk, are often targeted by verbal and physical abuse by colleagues. Some families mention also cases in which a teacher would use the deadname of a trans adolescent on purpose or would openly mock them. A mother, for example, mentions that she is sure that her trans son is not victim of more bullying because he is always been an excellent student – and his performance in studies protects him from harassment. Some cases report how adults in educational settings may not straightforwardly operate discrimination but do so by **passively resisting** to the implementation of norms or calling into discussion issues of morality. In two cases reported, a school psychologist and a teacher openly challenged the gender-affirming process of their trans students, opposing every attempt from the family to obtain recognition of their children's chosen name.

Discrimination by peers occurs especially in **less supervised spaces**, where children and adolescents interact informally, such as canteens, corridors, changing rooms, gardens. Most family are informed of the abuses happening at school only when their children decide to share them. A father, for example, admits he only became aware of what his trans child had gone through in school after some years. Some also express the fear that digital spaces, such as social media platform, may be vectors of uncontrollable discrimination and abuse. It is thus possible that, besides the experiences collected, many others remain **submerged and untold** and that the extent to which discrimination happens in educational settings may remain unknown in its entirety by families and educators. In general, families express concerns over their children's experiences in educational settings; even when their overall process was admittedly positive, they acknowledge that this may only have been the result of **pure luck** or very specific factors that could be difficult to reproduce.

Several interviews emphasize how the experiences in educational settings turn positive and more welcoming when at least one of the adult figures in the school are willing to **openly and actively support** LGBTIQ children. Experiences show that in a context in which laws are present but not always duly implemented, one person with "boa vontade" (**good will**) can make a great difference. One interview, for example, recalls how a school aide provided a space of affirmation and care to a trans child experiencing negative commentaries from teachers. In another interview, the mother of a trans girl reflects on how crucial it was to obtain the open support from the school's director, who limited the backlash from other parents and addressed the issue with all teachers to prevent any conflict that would hinder the child's well-being. However, the importance of securing **adult allies** in the educational setting seems to be key to open for safe experiences for LGBTIQ children in school. It also means that safety and protection may only be guaranteed as long as that specific adult is working in the school. If, on one side, these networks of care are absolutely crucial, on the other, they are also fundamentally precarious and unstable.

Finally, rainbow families which participated in the study acknowledge they are the expression of a **supportive approach** to LGBTIQ issues: most of them are connected to AMPLOS, some are active in other LGBTIQ groups, and overall are visible and open about their situation. This is a **protective factor** that contributed substantially to the well-being of their children and to the creation of safety net within the school. However, the situation of LGBTIQ children and adolescents who cannot count on their families' support is probably radically different. As policymakers acknowledge, the absence of support from families, or even the absence of a family, in the case of institutionalised children, drastically impact the support that they may encounter also in the educational setting, as it often means they lack trusted adults to advocate on their behalf or to whom they can turn.

**Invisibility.** Although they acknowledge that visibility around LGBTIQ identities has been growing in society in the past decade, families lament that schools seem to have slowly accompanied such increase. In particular, they mention how LGBTIQ issues are completely **absent from contents** in all disciplines, textbooks, and didactic materials. The absence of representation extends also to the invisibility of diversity in family relationships, as the non-binary parent of a child reports. As a consequence, children and adolescents who may be questioning their orientation or gender will find representation only in other spaces other than schools, such as, especially, digital platforms.

The absence of an active approach to promote initiatives, content, and debates on LGBTIQ is often mentioned as a strategy pursued to **avoid conflicts**. Some families mentioned that teachers avoid taking responsibility in organizing activities on LGBTIQ issues because they fear the negative reaction of groups of parents. Indeed, in recent years, groups of parents connected to conservative religious faiths or right-wing parties have become more vocal in opposing initiatives connected to LGBTIQ issues. After the surge of far-right parties in national elections, in 2024, the discourse against "gender ideology" in schools has become more widespread and aggressive. Cases of parents that directly opposed initiatives on LGBTIQ issues in schools became nationally known, with mediatic attention and debates: as such, teachers and school directors tend to prefer not to generate this type of attention.

Teachers interviewed note how the possibility of creating spaces of visibility for the experiences of LGBTIQ people of all ages is left completely to the **individual initiative** of educators, and, in many cases, to their ability to mask these topics under cover. Moreover, some of them note how initiatives are commonly taken **as a reaction** to specific situations occurred in the school, not as a preventative preparation to open the environment to welcoming LGBTIQ. Families of LGBTIQ children who had overall positive experiences with the educational context admit they still felt that the posture of the school had been to accommodate issues without making them visible: as a mother of a trans teenager defines, this left her with the feeling they had to walk on eggshells all the time. On a larger scale, this context creates significant **differences** in the experiences of visibility and knowledge that student may have or not have in different classrooms in the same school; in addition, it generates a large variability in the processes of implementation of LGBTIQ-friendly initiatives across the national territory.

**Schools as agents of normativity**. Several families interviewed remark that the educational system is entirely designed to reinforce **gender binarism** and reproduce **heteronormativity**. Restrooms are the most visible example of such normativity: all parents of trans children or adolescents had to discuss the issue of gender-neutral restrooms with schools. Although the existing law guarantees that the school provides a **gender-neutral restroom** for any trans or non-binary child signalled, the existing practices are often blurred. In some cases, families had to insist against the passive resistance of the personnel; in other cases, the spaces offered were not comfortable solutions, as in the case of one interviewee's child who was offered to use the professors' restroom, or another who was suggested to use the restroom for disabled people. In any cases, parents note that, despite the practical accommodation made to the issue, using the restroom is generally difficult for trans and non-binary children, many of which end up not going at all – with long-term consequences on their health. Other examples of gender binarism in the school organisation refer to locker rooms, colours to separate students by gender, different sport activities for different genders, representation in textbooks. In the narratives collected, schools are founded on the **assumption of cis(hetero)normativity**: parents and teachers interviewed notice how this assumption contributes to a culture of resistance towards diversity and somehow makes schools a fertile territory for the growth of discrimination. It extends also to the invisibility chosen by several LGBTIQ teachers and connects directly to the absence of LGBTIQ content in school programs discussed earlier.

Some families and policymakers point out that educational contexts seem to be unprepared to deal with the **intersectional diversity** that students of all ages bring to the classroom. The parent of a child who was institutionalised and then adopted, has ADHD and is bisexual, reflects on how her school lacks the instruments to deal with the complexity of such entanglement: although teachers may be able to address issues of neurodiversity, they seem to be unprepared to do so through an intersectional lens that also includes issues of sexual orientation, belonging and identity. In other interviews, parents report worries about the school's inability to tackle rising xenophobia and racism, especially directed at immigrants from Brazil. Other parents mention the lack of preparation to address religious diversity, especially regarding Muslim children, and mental health issues, in particular for adolescents. In all these experiences, the educational system appears to encourage a

racialised, cis-heteronormative, ableist idea of individuals – one that does not reflect the actual diversity that children and adolescents embody in intersectional ways.

## 3.3 Children's needs and perspectives

The survey and the focus group highlight that LGBTIQ children are aware of their needs and are eager to find solutions to the challenges they encounter every day.

**Support from families.** As emerged in the previous sections, children supported by their families are less exposed to discrimination and violence. For many respondents, however, **families are also sources of tension**, struggle, and sometimes conflict. Indeed, adolescents identify that they would need help in talking with a parent (41.7%), a sibling (25%), or another family member or family friend (16.7%). These figures are consistently higher than those reported in the other countries and higher than those reported by the non-LGBTIQ sample. They indicate that **communication** within the family is a relevant issue and that children may feel they do not possess the tools or capacity to face these challenges without support. They also point to the centrality of families which, while often being sources of discomfort, are nonetheless considered important and valuable by young people. Moreover, 58.3% of responses indicate a strong need for **professional support** from a therapist or psychologist. As highlighted in the focus group, the intervention of a psychologist is often fundamental in facilitating family relationships and helping young people develop emotional coping tools. However, access to professional support generally requires **parental approval** and mediation; furthermore, the vast majority of participants remain financially dependent on their families. As a result, access to professional support largely depends on the quality of family relationships. Many respondents also report a need for emotional support (66.7%), which may be lacking when family relationships are fraught or complicated.

**Information for empowerment.** The data reveal an alarming need for information at multiple levels, highlighting, on the one hand, the importance of research projects such as CLICK and, on the other, the fact that existing information does not adequately reach those who need it most. Data show that children seek adequate information on how to manage stress, anxiety, and other emotions (75%), revealing significant concerns regarding **mental health**. Children also report needing more information about the existence of **safe spaces** and youth-friendly services (75%). The lack of such information may be connected to the actual scarcity of LGBTIQ-friendly spaces available to adolescents and young people in the country. With the exception of a few associations and events, most initiatives within the LGBTIQ landscape are directed at adults and concentrated in major urban centres, leaving many young people with limited opportunities to access safe and welcoming spaces. Indeed, respondents also identify the need for more **public events** and activities where LGBTIQ young people are explicitly welcomed and supported (75%).

The data further show a need for more information about **LGBTIQ rights** (61.1%) and how to deal with **discrimination and bullying** (52.8%). These findings are somewhat surprising, considering that the country has a well-established legal framework concerning LGBTIQ rights and a solid track record of

awareness-raising initiatives. Adolescents also stress the need for more support in reporting or blocking abusive **online content** (38.9%) and call for more campaigns and initiatives to reduce **online hate** (47.2%), highlighting the challenges and risks that continue to characterise digital environments.

**Visibility and representation.** The data point to a strong need for visibility and representation, both in schools and in public spaces. The lived experiences of adolescents reveal a near-**complete absence of LGBTIQ representation** in educational content, textbooks, and school environments, as also highlighted by policymakers and families. Schools are considered responsible for doing more to provide platforms for the visibility and representation of LGBTIQ issues. In the survey, 55.6% of respondents affirm that visible **support from school staff**—through posters, inclusive language, or similar initiatives—would immediately contribute to making their school feel safer for LGBTIQ students. In response to the same question, 47.2% believe that schools should encourage the creation of LGBTIQ clubs, groups, or events.

As highlighted in the focus group, greater visibility also entails broader **representation of diversity** in all its forms through an intersectional lens. Young people wish to see themselves represented in their complexity, not only as LGBTIQ individuals but also as racialised, disabled, neurodivergent, or migrant young people. The need for greater visibility is also connected to a desire for **less adult-centred** representations, particularly in initiatives that address LGBTIQ issues. As some participants noted, these initiatives are often designed and led by adults using languages and formats that are neither relatable nor representative of young people's experiences, thereby limiting their impact.

**Accountability.** LGBTIQ children express discomfort regarding the **lack of consequences** for those who perpetrate discrimination and abuse, both within schools and beyond. A large majority of respondents affirm that schools need to establish clearer rules and stronger measures against bullying and harassment (83.3%). Similarly, participants in the focus group expressed **frustration** at observing that discriminatory behaviour in school settings is rarely sanctioned explicitly and that teachers often appear reluctant to take disciplinary action against perpetrators.

Children also identify **training** as one of the most urgent needs to be addressed in order to improve safety. Indeed, 77.8% affirm that teachers and school staff should receive training on LGBTIQ issues. Although training is also among the main priorities identified by educators and rainbow families (see Section 2.4), children appear to view it primarily as a mechanism to increase teachers' accountability, rather than simply as a way to improve the support they receive from them.

A strong demand for more decisive action against discrimination is also evident in relation to **public spaces**. A total of 83.3% of respondents affirm that their town or city should do more to improve protection against harassment in public spaces, while 72.2% consider it important that schools and local authorities visibly support LGBTIQ communities. Similarly, 69.4% believe that municipal governments should publicly position themselves in support of LGBTIQ young people. These findings are particularly significant given that, during the same period in which the data were collected, the national government approved legislation prohibiting local authorities from displaying non-institutional flags, including the LGBTIQ flag.

## 2.4 Educators and rainbow families' needs

Educators and families identify several common needs that should be taken into consideration to improve both the well-being of LGBTIQ young people and the relationships between families and educational systems.

**Training.** The first and most recurrent need identified is training. In all interviews, families and educators mention that the lack of training across all sectors of education is the factor that most negatively affects the **well-being** of LGBTIQ young people in schools. It is interesting to note that the type of training mentioned points to a wide variety of audiences. **Teachers and educators** are the category most frequently identified as needing training on LGBTIQ issues. At present, no training is mandatory, and most available training sessions rely on individual initiative. In other words, LGBTIQ issues are not currently included in the mandatory curricula of teacher education programmes, nor in continuing professional development programmes for teachers already working in schools. One of the key issues identified is therefore the lack of a national strategy to raise awareness about the importance of acquiring basic knowledge on LGBTIQ issues as part of the educational role.

In an increasingly polarised social context, LGBTIQ issues are often framed as either too divisive or too private. Indeed, when teachers or families attempt to organise or suggest training sessions on these topics, they are frequently met with resistance. Moreover, interviews highlight the need for training to be **mandatory and formally recognised**. In this way, schools could ensure that all teachers receive basic information and are encouraged to participate.

One of the challenges identified is that those who actively seek training opportunities are often teachers who have already recognised LGBTIQ issues as important topics and who are generally more open to engaging with them. However, training may be even more necessary for those who do not currently consider these issues relevant or important. Effective training should not be limited to introducing basic concepts—for example, the distinction between gender identity and sexual orientation—but should also address the **specific experiences of LGBTIQ children and adolescents**, the obstacles they encounter in expressing their identities, and the best practices for supporting their well-being.

Interviews also emphasise the importance of extending training to **all workers involved** in educational settings, including support staff, teaching assistants, psychologists, and sports coaches. The experiences collected show that these individuals often become key figures of reference for adolescents facing discrimination. By strengthening their knowledge and awareness of LGBTIQ issues, they would be better equipped to contribute to supportive networks of care within schools.

An additional element frequently mentioned is the need for training to take place as a **regular, mandatory, and standard practice**, regardless of whether LGBTIQ students are currently present in a particular school. Several interviewees observed that teachers tend to seek information only when confronted with a specific situation, such as the arrival of a trans student in their class. However, for

training to be effective in the long term, it should be delivered on a regular basis, preparing educational personnel to address future situations proactively rather than reactively.

Families also identified other aspects of training that appear particularly relevant, especially the need for guidance regarding the **legal dimensions** connected to their children's identities. This issue was raised particularly by parents of non-binary and trans young people. Although many reported receiving immediate support regarding psychological and relational aspects, they often felt uncertain about how to navigate practical and legal matters. In these situations, the mediation of organisations supporting parents of LGBTIQ children, such as AMPLOS, proved fundamental. One mother also suggested that schools should provide this type of information through their websites and digital platforms, allowing families who are not immediately connected to activist organisations to access basic information and guidance.

Finally, stakeholders stressed the need for greater training and awareness among families and young people regarding the challenges posed by **digital platforms**, particularly social media. LGBTIQ young people are exposed to a constant flow of information online, including both discriminatory and affirming content, making digital literacy an increasingly important area of intervention.

**Spaces.** Interviewees highlighted the need to implement policies promoting **gender-neutral spaces** across educational environments. Existing legislation, which guarantees access to gender-neutral restrooms in the presence of trans students, is often disregarded through active opposition, passive resistance, or the proposal of inadequate alternatives, such as directing students to use teachers' restrooms.

Policymakers emphasise the need for existing legislation to be **implemented consistently** across all levels of education and without exceptions. Furthermore, interviews reveal a strong demand to extend gender-neutral approaches to other spaces where young people spend their daily lives, many of which continue to be organised around rigid gender divisions. Several participants, for example, mentioned the need to intervene in sports facilities and in the broader culture surrounding sports participation, where binary gender distinctions remain particularly entrenched.

**Representation.** Families emphasise the need to promote more diverse forms of representation within educational materials and content. The lack of representation of gender and sexual diversity in textbooks, visual materials, and communication campaigns reinforces the **invisibility** of LGBTIQ people and undermines their sense of belonging within educational communities.

Several interviewees also highlighted the importance of diversifying **representations of families** themselves, normalising the fact that students come from a wide range of backgrounds that extend beyond the cis-heteronormative family model. The mother of an adolescent who was adopted later in childhood, for example, stressed the importance of providing narratives that go beyond the biological family model and open space for discussions about institutionalised children, adoption, and families of choice. Calls for greater representation of **intersectional identities** also emerged. Some families highlighted the importance of including narratives related to mental health,

neurodivergence, and disability. Families from immigrant backgrounds similarly stressed the need for greater racial and ethnic representation as a way of addressing racism and xenophobia.

Finally, a lesbian teacher interviewed stressed the importance of providing **positive examples** of LGBTIQ people who are visible, out, and proud. While schools increasingly focus on the well-being of LGBTIQ students, she argued that they must also consider the well-being of LGBTIQ teachers and recognise their potential role as safe and supportive figures for students.

**Networks.** Families acknowledge the crucial **role of associations** in providing secure platforms for mediation between educational contexts and families. However, these networks are often fragile due to the multiple demands placed on organisations that operate with limited resources.

In general, families recognise that valuable support resources already exist, thanks to the combined efforts of activist and academic initiatives. Nevertheless, they express the need for more **effective dissemination** of these resources through stronger networks of information-sharing and knowledge transfer, ensuring that relevant information reaches the people who need it at the appropriate time.

Some policymakers also emphasise the connection between visibility and **mental health**. The more visible, accepted, and supported LGBTIQ children and adolescents are, the more effective the available tools become in addressing mental health challenges. From this perspective, the inclusion of LGBTIQ issues within education should be understood as a **health policy** intervention aimed at improving adolescent mental health, reducing youth suicide, and fostering a broader culture of respect.

The networks that currently connect activist organisations, schools, and families function effectively when all actors involved demonstrate an **active willingness to engage**. However, all parties need to strengthen their capacity to build collaborations and create safe environments for young people. This need is particularly urgent for young people who lack family support or who live in institutional settings, as they are especially vulnerable to discrimination within educational systems and often have no adult actively advocating on their behalf. For this reason, strengthening **community-based support** structures and ensuring access to reliable networks of care should be considered a priority, particularly for those young people who are most socially isolated and at risk of exclusion.

## 3.5 Well-being and resilience

Despite experiences of discrimination and violence, well-being and resilience often emerge as crucial aspects of everyday life, both for children and for families.

**Bonds of trust and support.** The experiences of the children interviewed demonstrate that the existence of a small group of close **friends** at school constitutes the most important **lifeline** for facing challenges and discrimination. While friendships are important for adolescents in general, they appear to be even more crucial for LGBTIQ young people, as the survey data show. When faced

with discrimination, telling a friend is the most common and immediate reaction reported by participants (52.7%). Often, the type of comfort found in friendship is precisely what LGBTIQ children identify as most needed: being listened to and having their feelings and experiences validated. As some participants highlight, however, friends are not always in a position to actively intervene against harassment. Nevertheless, they represent important sources of **emotional support, information, and practical advice**, helping young people share their struggles and develop resilient responses to difficult situations. Being able to count on the support of peers is particularly important in spaces perceived as unsafe—such as corridors and bathrooms—as well as during activities taking place in public spaces, including public transportation and shopping centres. Parents interviewed recognise the importance of these connections and actively encourage their children to cultivate meaningful friendships. At the same time, some parents note that they cannot control how the parents of their children's friends may react when, for example, they become aware of a child's trans identity.

More generally, strong emotional bonds appear to play a significant role in **safeguarding well-being**. Whereas children tend to focus on building friendships, adults often find comfort in relationships with **supportive allies** who can contribute to their children's safety and well-being. For example, a single teacher or staff member can make a substantial difference by validating families' experiences and acting as a mediator within the educational institution. Families also emphasised the importance of the bonds of trust developed through their involvement with AMPLOS, the association for rainbow families active in Portugal. Through **activism and participation**, many families reported having the unique opportunity to exchange experiences with others facing similar situations—an opportunity that is often more difficult to find within school settings. The mutual support generated through these networks has positive consequences for children as well, as more empowered families are generally better equipped to support their younger members and protect their well-being in the face of challenges.

The relationship between educational institutions and families generates **resilient practices** when it is built and cultivated over time, and when dialogue remains open, respectful, and constructive. Several parents highlight the importance of sustained relationship-building work with key figures within schools. Although children are often unaware of the emotional and practical effort required to establish and maintain these relationships, it is frequently thanks to this work that they are able to benefit from safer and more supportive educational environments. As highlighted in previous sections, the advantages provided by strong relational networks can be remarkable; conversely, their absence may have severe consequences for children's well-being.

**Visibility as a tool of resilience.** The evidence collected also shows that **representation and visibility** provide important pathways through which children can feel recognised, validated, and included, while offering families reliable models of positive futures. The experiences gathered suggest that invisibility and silence contribute to lower levels of trust in social and political change, stronger feelings of isolation, and increased vulnerability. Conversely, children report feelings of **joy, trust, and well-being** when they encounter images, narratives, and visible representations that reflect their own experiences, both within schools and in public spaces. The needs highlighted by participants reveal not only a desire for spaces specifically dedicated to LGBTIQ people, but also a

**broader aspiration** for all the environments they inhabit to be inclusive of diversity and respectful of different identities and life experiences. Families and policy-makers acknowledge the importance of insisting on visibility within the school settings, especially in what can provide young people with representation of **positive, successful, and happy futures**, in contrast to the messages of hate and violence they receive in their everyday life.

## 3.6 Community resistance

The interviews show that community resistance is built through multiple practices and the involvement of different actors, but that it requires considerable time and effort.

**Centrality of associations.** The interviews demonstrate that associations dedicated to LGBTIQ young people and, especially, to rainbow families, play a **crucial role** in securing connections between all the actors involved in the educational lives of adolescents. AMPLOS is the only association in the country dedicated to rainbow families, and its presence is recurrently mentioned in the interviews as fundamental in changing the course of events, particularly for parents of trans adolescents. However, the association is **limited** in the number of actions it can undertake and in the territorial reach it can maintain, especially as most of its work is concentrated in Lisbon and other urban centres. AMPLOS provides support to families, including legal and psychological advice; it offers training sessions in schools and community centres; and it coordinates regular online and in-person meetings for parents, adolescents, and teachers. Community resistance is primarily secured through **sustained territorial engagement with local actors**, such as school directors, teachers, and psychologists, often prompted by direct requests from parents or families. Organisations such as AMPLOS play a fundamental role in facilitating access to information, creating connections between relevant actors, and providing safe platforms where people can debate, share experiences, and learn collectively.

Their central role is, however, a challenging one: in some cases, when they are not present or available due to limited human resources, there are no alternatives, and families may feel they lack the tools necessary to engage in dialogue with schools.

**Role of families.** Families are another central actor in creating safety and fostering well-being. The families interviewed are all aware that **openly supporting** LGBTIQ adolescents is the first and most important way of protecting their well-being. However, this support needs to be nourished through access to information and processes of empowerment. In the case of parents of trans adolescents, for example, feelings of uncertainty and confusion regarding what to do and whom to contact are common. Families are often at the **forefront** of creating change in everyday life. They frequently do so through difficult conversations with neighbours, relatives, and colleagues. One interviewee, for example, recounted how he decided to discuss his son's transition during a condominium meeting to ensure that everyone understood the situation and to create an opportunity for dialogue. Another

described similar conversations with family members who were initially unsupportive of their child's transition.

At the same time, some interviewees reported situations in which disagreement over their children's choices generated tensions within the family, at times leading to divorce or legal action. One mother spoke of experiencing a prolonged period of depression after her young son came out. In these moments, support is often guaranteed by the presence of other significant adults within the family network. **Members of the extended family**, such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins, or close friends, frequently play an important role in safeguarding family well-being.

The experiences collected show that when LGBTIQ adolescents receive support from their families, they are more likely to experience **positive outcomes** and to overcome challenges encountered at school. However, these interviews leave out the experiences of those who do not receive family support, for whom few forms of protection or assistance appear to be available.

**Fostering dialogue.** The interviews reveal that the most effective forms of community resistance are those **involving adults in different roles**. In other words, without the support of a teacher or school director, families can achieve little, even when supported by an association. Likewise, without the collaboration of at least one family member, associations and teachers may struggle to improve an adolescent's well-being.

**Community-level organisation** appears to be driven largely by the goodwill of individuals and sustained through the solidarity networks that emerge from these relationships. At the school level, particular importance is attributed to the role of the class director, who acts as a mediator between teachers, students, families, and the wider school community. The experiences collected indicate that collaboration between **class directors and families**, whether mediated by activists or not, can be highly effective in producing meaningful changes in the everyday lives of LGBTIQ children.

Both policymakers and families stressed that collaboration has become particularly challenging in the current political context, characterised by polarised debates and the growing visibility of **anti-gender discourses**. The changes observed since 2024 have been significant and, in some respects, unexpected, leaving many actors still trying to determine how best to respond and intervene.

**Access to knowledge.** The main obstacle to community resistance appears to be the lack of accessible and accurate information. The widespread circulation of misinformation about LGBTIQ adolescents and rainbow families, together with the political instrumentalization of these topics by far-right political actors, contributes to the spread of prejudice and the growth of suspicion surrounding these issues. Families and policymakers instead highlight the importance of creating opportunities for **open dialogue** involving teachers, families, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Dialogue promotes understanding and knowledge, fostering stronger collaboration. One policymaker, for example, emphasised the importance of creating empathetic exchanges between families, trans adolescents, and teachers, where experience-based knowledge can be shared in a personal and meaningful way. These dialogues should also be **intergenerational and intersectional**.

## 3.7 Exemplary quotes

**Policymakers**

There is a huge lack of training [on these issues]. There is none in the school... Training needs to be open and ongoing because things keep changing... It cannot be limited to those who are already interested in these topics. The school should be the first institution to make it a requirement. (EDU1, Portugal, Woman, heterosexual, teacher)

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. (EDU4, Portugal, Man, bisexual, politician and teacher)

It would be important to have a more institutional and formal stance, rather than relying on people's goodwill, which is what is happening... people say, "oh, nothing needed to be done, everything was fine," but in practice... they were using the staff toilets [for trans students]. (EDU8, Portugal, Woman, Lesbian, school psychologist and researcher)

**Rainbow families**

I think things have been fairly easy for me overall. But I would say that one of the biggest difficulties is the feeling that teachers are sometimes very afraid to act within the school context because they fear parents' reactions—other parents' reactions.I feel that everything has gone very well, but that it is all a little bit... not exactly secret, but whispered. Like walking on eggshells. Everything has to be very unofficial, very... carefully handled so as not to cause any waves. There is always a great deal of caution involved. (RF9, PORTUGAL, Lesbian mother of 13 yo trans girl)

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. (RF7, PORTUGAL, Father of 17 yo trans boy)

Yes, it has happened that some teachers continue to use feminine pronouns, even though they call him by the name he chose. [...] He has not made any formal changes yet—there has been no amendment to any documents or anything like that. So, because no official change has been made, some teachers still seem to think that it is acceptable. He is a very good student, an excellent student. [..] So, in a way, that also undermines any possibility of people attacking him because of this. But there have been occasions when he became upset because of some teachers. [...] However, he has friends who attend the same school and who have tried to do the same thing, and it did not go as well for them. (RF2, PORTUGAL, mother of 18yo trans boy, married to a non-binary person)

**Focus group**

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? (FG1, PORTUGAL, trans boy, 12nd grade)

I'd like the teachers, the administration, and the staff in general to take more decisive action in these situations. I mean, if there's a problem, it gets reported, and there should be direct consequences, you know? (FG1, PORTUGAL, trans boy, 12nd grade)

I can trust them. In the sense that if they ever get my pronouns wrong, it wasn't on purpose—maybe they were just thinking of someone else and used the wrong pronoun. I know it wasn't on purpose; it's not about my name. For example, I have a friend who calls me "friend" without meaning to. She corrects herself right away. She's always validated me as a man. Most of my friends always validate me as a man. And not as… I don't know, as… my birth gender. They've never questioned it. And sometimes, they feel like punching others every time they call me by my dead name. And I think, in that sense, they validate me a lot. (FG3, PORTUGAL, trans boy, 11th grade)

# 4. Overall evaluation

## 4.1 SWOT on promoting well-being and combating violence against LGBTIQ children in Portugal

### Strengths

The research shows several strengths within the current state of educational settings in Portugal.

First, the **existing legal framework** for the protection of LGBTIQ rights and the regulation of gender affirmation in schools provides a solid foundation for preventing direct discrimination and punishing violence. Despite the multiple attempts made between 2024 and 2026 to amend it, the legal framework still represents an important instrument that guides policymaking in educational settings. It has a **positive impact** on the perceptions of LGBTIQ children, who perceive themselves as rights-holders and as entitled to receive protection against violence. It also provides adults with guidance to navigate the complexities of educational systems. In particular, it proves crucial in offering orientation to families of trans and non-binary children involved in gender-affirming processes.

Second, the study shows that rainbow families, children, and policymakers are **deeply aware** of the importance of preserving the current framework and fostering the improvement of LGBTIQ inclusion in schools. Although they show different needs and perspectives, adults and children are aligned in recognising that it is of utmost importance for schools to actively encourage debate and increase the visibility of LGBTIQ issues. In this sense, the actors involved in the network are all deeply committed to pursuing the **continuous improvement** of current conditions and are not willing to settle for minimum protection or the basic implementation of measures. The involvement of teachers, school staff, as well as families, children, and other relevant educational figures, is crucial to fostering better policies in all schools: the fact that all recognise the importance of working collaboratively is an element of great strength that emerged during the study.

Third, the **existing national organisations** for rainbow families (AMPLOS) and for young people (Rede Ex-Aequo) provide a crucial service by offering legal, psychological, and social support to families and young people facing challenges. In particular, despite being the only association specifically addressing the needs of rainbow families, AMPLOS represents a pivotal actor in facilitating relationships between families, schools, and policymakers. It also fosters the creation of **shared knowledge** around the challenges faced by rainbow families by promoting dialogue, meetings, and initiatives: the study shows that this is particularly important in validating families' experiences and helping them address their difficulties. The centrality of the organisation should therefore be considered a key strength and, possibly, replicated in the future, especially to reach peripheral areas and underrepresented communities.

Fourth, despite the growing polarisation in Portuguese society, the study shows that civil society actors mobilise **resources to improve policies** concerning LGBTIQ issues. In the absence of a

coordinated national plan for LGBTIQ issues in schools, each family, teacher, school, or child tries to do what they can with the resources available to them, no matter how limited. The **power of individual initiative**, together with the aforementioned awareness, creates opportunities for change on a small scale, fostering better experiences for LGBTIQ children and families in their everyday lives.

## Weaknesses

The weaknesses identified are closely connected to the strengths outlined above, particularly with regard to the legal framework.

First, the study highlights a considerable **gap between the legal framework and social practices**. In several contexts, laws and regulations designed to protect LGBTIQ children are either ignored without consequences or simply unknown. Teachers and school staff do not receive training on the implementation of these regulations, despite the fact that they have been in place for at least ten years. As a consequence, in practice, laws are respected only when families or activists intervene through formal requests. The perception that laws exist but are not respected leaves children with a sense of **mistrust** towards adults, especially within school settings, and hinders their ability to build meaningful dialogue with adult reference figures.

Second, LGBTIQ children **experience discrimination** and are vulnerable to multiple forms of violence. Compared to their non-LGBTIQ peers, they face higher levels of discrimination across all school spaces, in extracurricular activities, and often at home, where dialogue with extended family members may be difficult. Moreover, they experience **violence from peers and within digital spaces**, where adult supervision is weaker. Despite positive experiences of resilience and inclusion, the majority of LGBTIQ children should still be considered particularly exposed to abuse, with consequences for their mental health, well-being, and future life trajectories. Discrimination is particularly severe towards **trans and non-binary children**, who face exclusion from peers and challenges in the ways schools and teachers interact with them. Finally, LGBTQIQ-phobia is often accompanied by other forms of discrimination, such as **racism**, making intersectionality a fundamental lens through which to address these weaknesses. Children who lack support from family members are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and violence due to the absence of adult support networks capable of safeguarding their well-being.

Third, participants consistently mentioned that **invisibility and lack of representation** have a negative impact on the overall experiences of both children and families. School curricula, textbooks, and educational spaces lack representations of LGBTIQ people in intersectional ways and contribute to perpetuating a cycle of silence around the richness and diversity of LGBTIQ lives. Moreover, children lack **positive role models** who could encourage them and improve their well-being. Rainbow families are also underrepresented and often overlooked in the public debate on LGBTIQ issues. Their invisibility contributes to feelings of isolation, especially when they have no opportunities to connect with LGBTIQ associations. Finally, most LGBTIQ initiatives and spaces are directed towards **adults**: LGBTIQ children may therefore feel invisible even within the LGBTIQ community itself.

Fourth, the educational system does not provide sufficient **training for teachers, staff, and families** on LGBTIQ issues. The lack of knowledge emerges from the study as the principal obstacle to implementing effective measures in schools and extracurricular activities. Teachers are not expected to undertake training on LGBTIQ issues, and those who do generally do so on their own initiative. All actors involved in the research expressed a strong need for training that reflects **principles of intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, and lived experience**. Teachers and school staff require training to address discrimination in schools, engage with diversity in respectful ways, and foster inclusivity across all educational spaces. Children need educational opportunities to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices, recognise discrimination, and learn how to actively combat violence against LGBTIQ people. Finally, families need training to understand their rights and those of their children, learn how to provide support, and address discrimination within their social environments.

## Opportunities

The research shows that the current situation in Portugal offers important opportunities to promote change and improve the lives of LGBTIQ children and rainbow families.

First, the study shows that conditions are in place to **translate the legal framework into effective practice**. The awareness demonstrated by LGBTIQ children, rainbow families, and teachers provides an excellent starting point for improving compliance with existing legislation and implementing effective actions within educational systems. On the one hand, the opportunity lies in protecting existing laws and ensuring that they are not reversed by political changes. On the other hand, families and teachers need to make use of these laws to advocate for effective change within their own contexts.

Second, the need for training highlighted in interviews, focus groups, and the survey is considerable and offers the **opportunity to establish collaborative protocols** between schools, organisations, and policymakers. The scale of this need is so evident that it calls for the implementation of **large-scale**, interdisciplinary training programmes at the national level.

Third, the study reveals that visibility around LGBTIQ issues can be **promoted in many different ways**, including the implementation of school-based initiatives, the involvement of families and activists in extracurricular activities, campaigns aimed at increasing the visibility of rainbow families and LGBTIQ experiences, and collaboration with visible public figures to encourage teachers' visibility. Visibility is key to promoting positive messages that LGBTIQ people can internalise and is crucial for fostering long-term well-being.

## Threats

The research reveals that the current context presents new threats and emerging challenges to the promotion of LGBTIQ well-being.

First, the **growth of far-right movements** and attacks on so-called "gender ideology" represent the most significant threat currently faced by LGBTIQ children and rainbow families. In an increasingly polarised public debate, LGBTIQ issues have come to be constructed as problematic and divisive, often through the instrumentalization of children and the dissemination of misinformation regarding the experiences of LGBTIQ minors. Moreover, the current government has attempted to reverse some existing laws, increasing social conflict around LGBTIQ issues. As a result, families, children, and teachers face growing **backlash** when implementing initiatives related to LGBTIQ issues in schools.

Second, **digital spaces** appear increasingly unsafe due to the dissemination of misinformation, hate speech, and bullying. LGBTIQ children are exposed to online abuse and affirm that they need tools to help them counter hate and violence. Although aware of the threats posed by digital environments, teachers and policymakers often **lack the knowledge** or capacity to intervene effectively, thereby contributing indirectly to negative experiences among children. Many countries around the world are currently debating restrictions on, or the prohibition of, social media use by minors. The findings of this study suggest that this is a necessary debate for improving the well-being of LGBTIQ minors.

Third, the **absence of a national and comprehensive educational plan** on LGBTIQ issues, combined with the existence of a legal framework that recognises LGBTIQ rights, creates a paradoxical situation characterised by significant disparities between schools. While, in some contexts, proactive teachers and/or families develop programmes and activities on LGBTIQ issues, generating considerable benefits for children, in others teachers and/or families face resistance and opposition. These **disparities** have a negative impact on the overall well-being of children and families, whose experiences may vary dramatically depending on their geographical location.

Fourth, the presence of **peer-to-peer violence** across all spaces inhabited by LGBTIQ children is a serious issue that needs to be addressed through robust strategies. The use of digital tools, together with increasing polarisation in public debate, contributes to the **normalisation of violent language** and hate speech, which often has direct consequences for the most vulnerable children. The mediation of adults is fundamental, not as a means of controlling or suppressing violence—which would reproduce adultist perspectives—but primarily as a tool for fostering a culture of respect, dialogue, and openness towards others.

## 4.2 Best practices and recommendations

The analysis conducted enables the identification of several recommendations for policymakers, educators, and families to improve the well-being of LGBTIQ children in educational settings.

1. **Implementing training as a mandatory requirement for educators in all schools.** The analysis shows that the lack of preparation in dealing with LGBTIQ issues is a major source of vulnerability in the educational system. Training needs to be mandatory and continuous to guarantee that every teacher and educator receives the necessary information and is, at least in principle, prepared to respond to LGBTIQ needs in their educational activities.

2. **Promoting accurate and scientific information on LGBTIQ children.** The growth of far-right movements and anti-gender discourse, together with the misinformation generated in digital spaces, constitutes a major obstacle to the circulation of scientific and accurate information about the experiences and needs of LGBTIQ children. Institutional actors have a responsibility to ensure that the information disseminated does not reproduce false stereotypes.
3. **Securing institutional support for diversity in learning.** The presence of a nationwide subject called "Citizenship", taught in all schools, guaranteed, until it was cancelled, that teachers and educators had an institutional space in which to create dialogue and encourage reflection on diversity within a recognised and formal discipline. It is therefore fundamental to restore this recognition in order to avoid the fragmentation of experiences and backlash from parents.
4. **Providing information and support to families.** Parents and extended families of LGBTIQ children, as well as rainbow families, play a fundamental role in providing guidance and support to their loved ones: a supportive family drastically reduces the psychosocial suffering of children. Families need to receive training and support, learn how to grow alongside their children, and create safe environments around them. As such, training for families should include psychological support, legal advice, parenting support, and medical guidance.
5. **Stimulating peer-to-peer knowledge exchange.** Discrimination from peers is a major cause of suffering in schools. Educators and policymakers have the responsibility to foster opportunities for the exchange of knowledge produced by young people and shared with other young people, breaking away from top-down approaches and encouraging horizontal learning, proximity, and dialogue.
6. **Facilitating coordination among actors.** The work carried out by national LGBTIQ organisations, individual educators, and even families is often conducted with little coordination and is frequently the result of personal initiatives. Coordination among all actors involved in educational settings—from teachers to school staff, from school directors to families—is fundamental to creating effective synergies, facilitating the circulation of information, and promoting the dissemination of best practices.
7. **Promoting LGBTIQ issues in educational spaces.** The lack of visibility of LGBTIQ issues in school curricula and educational materials reinforces the invisibility of these experiences and the stigma surrounding them. Schools can implement activities, debates, exhibitions, and competitions that highlight the richness of LGBTIQ experiences, for example by celebrating the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (17 May), Pride Month (June), and Trans Awareness Week (13–19 November); showcasing artworks on diversity; and promoting art and sports competitions dedicated to well-known LGBTIQ athletes.
8. **Encouraging youth organisations.** Within schools, the presence of interest-based groups can be an effective measure to create space for LGBTIQ issues and activities organised by children and young people themselves. Outside the school environment, other educational

settings are fundamental in offering space and opportunities for the development of associations, groups, and initiatives led by young people.

9. **Opening spaces for LGBTIQ children**. Most LGBTIQ activities are organised by and for adults, while youth spaces are often not openly welcoming of LGBTIQ members. It is essential that LGBTIQ children have opportunities to attend events and participate in spaces where they can meet other people, socialise, and receive information and support.
10. **Fostering digital education to combat hate.** Digital spaces can represent significant risks when used without adequate literacy and may expose children to heightened levels of violence and harassment. Investment in promoting digital literacy and awareness in the use of digital technologies is paramount to protecting children and ensuring their well-being.

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