



Pathways to School Success Consultation Inclusion of LGBTI learners in schools

Prepared by IGLYO, TGEU, OII Europe and ILGA-Europe

Introduction

Exclusion, bullying and harassment in educational institutions is still a problem for many European lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersex (LGBTI) children and young people. While it is difficult to accurately capture experiences in education, there is clear evidence of violence and discrimination faced by LGBTI learners in Europe¹.

The results from the 2019 FRA LGBTI Survey II show that 45% of 15-17 years old respondents experienced discrimination in school. The percentage is larger for trans (59%) and intersex (54%) children². Bullying rates within the same age group are also unacceptably high: 43% LGBTI respondents said they had been bullied at school. Again, the share is even higher for trans (48%) and intersex (50%) respondents of the same age³. During their time at school, 32% LGBTI learners of the same age group experienced negative comments and almost half never or rarely felt supported or protected. Although the survey has no questions to assess cyberbullying, 15% of respondents aged 15-17 said they had been cyberharassed in the past 12 months (19% for trans respondents of the same age, and 18% for intersex).

These numbers are startling, especially considering their underestimation of the true rate. A study conducted by IGLYO shows similar bullying rates and states that most learners (58%) never report such incidents. When asked about the reasons for not reporting these incidents, many either said that school staff had not done anything in previous situations (35%) or feared they would do nothing (30%)⁴. The study also shows that LGBTI learners experienced high rates of harassment online (20,5% respondents had been the target of cyberbullying frequently).

Although there is no European data on school dropouts for LGBTI learners, the results of the 2019 FRA LGBTI Survey II show that 15% of respondents aged 15-17 considered leaving or changing school because of the discrimination they faced. These rates are especially alarming for trans (29%) and intersex (37%) children^{5,6}. Likewise, many LGBTI learners of the same age group must avoid being open about themselves for fear of being assaulted or harassed in schools (50% of LGBTI respondents, 54% trans respondents, and 59% intersex respondents)⁷.

Violence and harassment are not the only burdens to quality education that LGBTI learners experience. Despite the progress made by many EU Member States on inclusive education, most school curricula and learning materials still do not convey positive messages or avoid negative representations and stereotypes of LGBTI people, which risks misinforming and fuelling hate against the LGBTI community. Although the latest Eurobarometer⁸ shows that the vast majority of European citizens would support curricula discussing sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or variations of sex characteristics (SOGIGESC), only 13 EU Member States ensure that their national curricula convey positive

¹ For a policy review on inclusive education for LGBTI children and young people, read [Don't look away](#) (UNESCO & IGLYO, 2021).

² See [responses](#) to question 'In the past 12 months have you ever felt discriminated against due to being LGBTI by school or university personnel?' on the data explorer of the survey.

³ See [responses](#) to question 'During your time at school have you ever been ridiculed, teased, insulted or threatened because of you being LGBTI?' on the data explorer of the survey.

⁴ IGLYO (2021). [LGBTQI Inclusive Education Study](#). For a summary of the report, please watch this [video](#).

⁵ See [responses](#) to question 'Did you ever consider leaving or changing school because you are LGBTI?' on the data explorer of the survey.

⁶ For a full report on LGBTI children's school dropouts, refer to GLSEN's [Educational Exclusion](#) report.

⁷ See [responses](#) to question 'Where do you avoid being open about yourself as LGBTI for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed by others?' on the data explorer of the survey.

⁸ [Special Eurobarometer](#), 493. *Report on Discrimination in the European Union*, 2019.

representations of LGBTI people.⁹ The 2019 FRA LGBTI Survey II also shows that only 13% of respondents who were going to school at the time of completing the questionnaire were always receiving positive information about LGBTI identities, while 47% of respondents were not receiving any information at all and 10% only received negative information.¹⁰

Overall teachers and school staff in Europe also lack access to adequate training to prevent and address SOGIGESC-based violence or to include LGBTI content in their lessons.¹¹ Mandatory teacher training is rarely implemented across Europe.¹² Although the situation has improved over the last decade, only 1 in 3 LGBTI young people aged 18 to 24 have received systematic support or protection from their teachers during their school time.¹³ This translates into an important barrier to creating an inclusive environment for all learners. The lack of training and clear guidance for school staff leads to them feeling uncomfortable with SOGIGESC topics and may contribute to the perpetuation of negative messages about sexual and gender diversity (implicitly or explicitly). This situation may also add to a hostile school climate for LGBTI learners.

All across Europe, there is currently a lack of attention about learners' gender identities in school and their relation with anti-discrimination and bullying policies, curricula and learning materials or school staff training.¹⁴ Trans children who socially transition before puberty will often continue to transition medically when puberty starts, first using hormone blockers to suppress puberty development and later accessing gender confirming hormone therapy. At the same time, legal gender recognition procedures might be inaccessible to them due to restrictive legal requirements, leaving them in a situation where their social role and outer appearance match their gender identity, but their official name and gender marker do not. In the absence of legal gender recognition procedures for trans youth which are quick, transparent, accessible and based on self-determination, schools need to ensure that people's gender identities are respected within all school documents such as class lists, but also certificates using the right name, pronouns and gender marker. Trans learners should be able to access gendered facilities that match with their gender identity. The same options need to be provided for intersex children, where needed.

Ensuring safe and inclusive school environments for LGBTI children and youth serves to directly protect the wellbeing and best interests of children and youth in education systems. IGLYO, TGEU, OII Europe and ILGA-Europe call on the European Commission to:

1. Explicitly mention sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics as protected grounds of discrimination and develop specific actions to protect LGBTI learners in the initiative *Pathways to school success*.
2. Include LGBTI learners as a group at risk when promoting actions to prevent or address school-bullying and cyberbullying.
3. Conduct research to know the extent to which LGBTI learners' educational outcomes and early leaving from education is impacted by discrimination and bullying.
4. Make sure actions taken to promote better educational outcomes for all LGBTI learners are sensitive to the specific struggles faced by trans and intersex learners.

CONTACT DETAILS

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⁹ IGLYO (2018). [LGBTQI Inclusive Education Report](#).

¹⁰ FRA (2020). [A long way to go for LGBTI equality](#).

¹¹ FRA (2016). [Professionally Speaking: Challenges for achieving equality for LGBT people](#).

¹² IGLYO (2018). [LGBTQI Inclusive Education Report](#).

¹³ According to the 2019 FRA LGBTI Survey II report, only 22% of young people aged 18 to 24 often received support from someone during their time at school, and only 11% received it always. FRA (2020). [A long way to go for LGBTI equality](#) (p. 15).

¹⁴ IGLYO (2018). [LGBTQI Inclusive Education Report](#).