



CHALLENGING HOMOPHOBIA TOGETHER

Research Report



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01 Introduction

This document reports on research carried out as part of a European project funded by the European Commission, DG - Justice. The 18-month project was undertaken by LGBT Youth Scotland, a Scottish LGBT organisation with experience of working within education, in partnership with Legebitra, an LGBT organisation in Slovenia, and aimed to:

Increase the confidence of EU member states to develop strategies to combat homophobia within education settings.

The project had four main components including a research stage, an education pilot in Slovenia, the development of a toolkit¹ and youth involvement.

The research stage sought to gain an in-depth understanding of anti-homophobia bullying programmes in schools across the European Union through a literature review on homophobia in education and interviews in the EU member states.

The literature review centred on:

- ▶ the rights of young people;
- ▶ experiences of LGBT young people;
- ▶ homophobia and its effects; and
- ▶ the needs of education professionals.

The qualitative interviews which took place with representatives from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government departments informed most of this report. These explored any partnerships in place, as well as the barriers and facilitators to anti-homophobia work.

The interview data concurred with the key issues highlighted in the literature review on LGBT equality and homophobic bullying in schools, that is:

- ▶ LGBT identities are invisible within the curriculum;
- ▶ belief that bullying does not take place; or
- ▶ denial that there are LGBT people in the school or even in the country.

The barriers to implementing anti-homophobic bullying programmes again reflected themes in the literature review, such as:

- ▶ misinformation on what the programmes are;
- ▶ the need for resources;
- ▶ thinking that it would only benefit a few students; and
- ▶ general lack of support within a school.

The above barriers were also compounded by other stumbling blocks which are covered in the body of the report.

Overall, the research suggests that there is a long way to go before member states of the EU can confidently state they are making progress to tackle homophobia within education. The interviews revealed that most education systems are still dealing with LGBT awareness and have not started work on anti-bullying programmes.

However, NGOs and governments, although not always both in each country, appear to be making strong efforts to get anti-homophobic bullying on the school agenda.

¹ Challenging Homophobia Together: A Guide to Developing Strategic Partnerships in Education, available from LGBT Youth Scotland, <http://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/home.htm>.

For the purpose of this report:

- ▶ the terms NGO(s) and organisation(s) have been used interchangeably;
- ▶ equality bodies are included under government(s);
- ▶ whilst the terms biphobia and transphobia are becoming more widely used, they are implicitly included under homophobia.

“ *Prohibition [of bullying]
is not the positive
promotion [of equality]*

Government, Ireland

02 Methodology

The research was conducted by LGBT Youth Scotland between June and November 2010. Legebitra, who has a great deal of experience developing and taking part in joint projects with a range of other LGBT NGOs, shared its contacts with LGBT Youth Scotland.

Additional contacts were gathered through established networks such as ILGA Europe (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) and IGLYO (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Youth and Student Organization).

02.1 Literature Review

The research started with a literature review to consider the existing evidence about LGBT equality and homophobia in education. It was carried out by LGBT Youth Scotland between May and July 2010.

The starting point for the literature review was to examine country reports produced as part of the Fundamental Rights Agency report in 2009 and explore literature across a variety of countries. In addition to this, networks such as ILGA Europe and IGLYO were contacted to source relevant materials.

The literature review was conducted by the researcher who also carried out the interviews.

02.2 Interviews

After the literature review, LGBT Youth Scotland developed a set of questions that needed to be answered and/or explored in the course of the survey. The questions were open-ended in order to draw out qualitative data. A list of the key themes and questions used to guide the interviews with NGOs and governments is included in the appendix.

In early June 2010, an email was sent to governments and NGOs from the 27 member states to invite them to take part in telephone interviews scheduled between June and August. A second email was sent to chase up those recipients who had not responded to the initial invite, asking whether they would be willing to take part in interviews.

LGBT Youth Scotland had planned to complete the survey by telephone, however paper questionnaires were sent to accommodate language barriers. Several respondents resorted to written responses. In that case, follow-up emails were used to clarify and expand any necessary points.

Responses

LGBT Youth Scotland conducted telephone interviews with representatives of NGOs in 15 countries (Belgium, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK). Eleven governments took part in the survey either through telephone interviews or paper questionnaire returns (the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom). Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK are the only 8 countries where both NGO and government took part in the survey.

Governments' education ministries were the initial target for interviewing, however when the researcher was referred to alternative contacts, interviews were completed with other respondents (ministries, statutory bodies working for equality or anti-discrimination, regional or state governments or city councils). This tended to be the case when education ministries acknowledged that they did not have any anti-bullying or LGBT-inclusive programmes in place.

It is likely that governments in countries where the importance of LGBT equality is not recognised did not respond at all. One government representative, to whom we were introduced through an NGO member, politely replied that he had been instructed not to take part in the interviews.

Limitations

The survey was conducted in English. This may have limited the ability of some smaller organisations or departments to respond to the questionnaire. This also restricted the researcher's ability to read websites and background information prior to conducting interviews (with the exception of material in Spanish, a language also spoken by the researcher).

Some emails may not have reached their intended recipients. For example, the researcher learned that the Spanish government representative had not received the initial emails sent throughout the research period. It is assumed that some non-responses may be attributed to messages being blocked by spam filters as the researcher's email address contained the initials "LGBT".

The interviews relied on NGO respondents, often volunteers, giving up personal time to take part. Many NGOs are voluntary organisations and interviews were scheduled outside work hours and often postponed or rescheduled. This research could not have taken place without the goodwill of all those who participated.

03 The Literature

National equality bodies and NGOs state that homophobia is a problem in all schools across the 27 member states¹, manifesting itself most prominently in homophobic bullying, school environments and national curricula.

03.1 Homophobia and Homophobic Bullying

Homophobic bullying refers to the victimisation of individuals as a consequence of identifying as LGBT, being perceived to be LGBT or having LGBT parents, relatives or friends².

Societies tend to be organised around the assumption of heterosexuality³ and peers monitor the gender stereotypes expected of individuals to perpetuate this structure. During adolescence, a large percentage of socialisation occurs during school and through peer groups, with individuals exploring their gender expressions⁴. As a result, young people who do not conform to gender stereotypes risk being bullied due to gender non-conformity⁵. The negative effects of homophobia and homophobic bullying can be experienced directly or indirectly, by both LGBT and non-LGBT people.

In education environments, homophobic bullying takes many forms, the most common being name-calling, social isolation, public ridicule, the spreading of rumours and teasing⁶. Less often, however still significant to young people's experiences, are instances of physical violence, sexual abuse and assault⁷.

Who is Affected?

Homophobic bullying affects everyone in the school environment, both directly and indirectly, by reinforcing beliefs and stereotypes and valuing discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.

In addition to affecting LGBT pupils, homophobic bullying also directly affects those who have LGBT family members. Children of same-sex and transgender parents are not only vulnerable to homophobic bullying, but at risk if their family is not accepted in the school and wider community. There is risk to emotional well-being and security when discriminatory legal systems prevent full recognition or protection of a family and when non-biological parents do not have adoption rights, as is the case in Italy⁸, Romania⁹ and Slovenia¹⁰, amongst others. This lack of recognition or devaluation of family weakens self-esteem, stability and identification with peers from families where heterosexuality is assumed to be the norm. This is particularly true for children of the transgender or transsexual individuals who must relinquish parental rights before legal gender recognition or sexual reassignment surgery¹¹.

When considering homophobic bullying, however, it is important to recognise the motivation behind the bullying, the ways that it manifests in schools and social situations, those directly and indirectly affected, and the larger issues created.

1 FRA 2009: 68.

2 O'Loan et al. 2006.

3 Also known as heteronormativity or heteronormativity. Heteronormativity positions the heterosexual family as the model against which all others are measured. In creating the assumption that individuals are heterosexual, it precludes all other sexual orientations and gender expressions.

4 FRA 2009: 68.

5 *ibid.*

6 O'Loan et al. 2006.

7 See Takács 2006.

8 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Italy 2009: 10.

9 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Romania 2009: 8.

10 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Slovenia 2009: 5.

11 In the Czech Republic, there is no legal recognition of transgender people as parents (The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Czech Republic 2009: 6).

The Effects of Homophobia and Homophobic Bullying

Homophobic bullying perpetuates fear. In homophobic environments, all those who do not conform to normative gender expressions come under scrutiny. Although some research has shown that for LGBT people, the family is the main environment for discrimination, discrimination at the hands of peers and friend groups follows closely in second place¹². In Malta, a 2003 MGRM survey found that 40 per cent of respondents had faced discrimination, including violence, in the family, with a correlation between discrimination and openness about sexual orientation¹³. Discrimination from peer and friend groups came second¹⁴. This has the potential to influence normal socialisation and personal growth of an individual. Pupils may not form deep same-sex friendships or expand their gender expressions beyond the typical roles, in order to avoid specific homophobic bullying.

Young people who experience homophobic bullying can suffer:

- ▶ feelings of isolation and exclusion resulting from low level bullying behaviour such as name calling, going unchallenged by teachers and senior education staff;
- ▶ fear of attending classes resulting in truanting or persistent absences and lack of support from families, especially when young people are not out to their families.

Continuous victimisation of these young people can lead to internalised homophobia, meaning that names and labels used to insult them become ingrained in the way they see their own identities¹⁵.

Homophobic bullying creates additional physical and mental health risks for those who identify as LGBT, including increased rates of substance abuse, lack of correct sexual health knowledge, physical violence, and isolation. This isolation reaches all areas of life, from the possibility of homelessness when coming out to family members, to a higher rate of mental health issues due to homophobia, and the inability to freely express oneself¹⁶.

In France, surveys with 16-25 year-olds show that 25 per cent of suicide attempts of men (10 per cent for women) are linked to homophobia, gender identity and sexual orientation¹⁷. In studies of young people and retrospective interviews with adults, LGBT individuals across the EU mention experiences of discrimination in school. There are strong links between homophobic bullying in school and low levels of academic achievement; younger school leaving age and high levels of truancy later impacting upon work opportunities and community inclusion¹⁸.

In a homophobic environment, there may be the possibility of dismissal or strained working relations for teachers, administrators and school staff who are or are perceived to be LGBT, as well as those who challenge discrimination. Teachers may avoid disclosing their sexual orientation, particularly since in some EU countries teachers have been dismissed as a

12 Chetcuti 2008 cited in *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in France 2009*: 6; *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Portugal 2009*: 7; *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Luxembourg 2009*: 4; and *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Malta 2009*: 8, amongst others.

13 *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Malta 2009*: 8.

14 *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Portugal 2009*: 7; *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Luxembourg 2009*: 4.

15 O'Loan *et al.* 2006.

16 Takás 2006: 7.

17 Chetcuti 2008 cited in *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in France 2009*: 9.

18 O'Loan *et al.* 2006: 103; Takás 2006: 6.

consequence of being outed¹⁹. Across many of the member states, teachers noted an anxiety about the potential consequences of addressing homophobic bullying²⁰ or LGBT issues.

Some teachers are hesitant as they have not been trained on the issue or do not want to be seen to “favour” LGBT issues if no other staff members raise the subject. For others, it is the fact that the school management has not acknowledged homophobia or LGBT identities. As a result of this silence, they face potential disapproval from colleagues, management, pupils, and parents if seriously addressing homophobia²¹. While the perceived consequences may not always occur, the worry of losing one’s job or friendly working relationships is enough to keep many teachers silent.

03.2 National Attitudes and Policies

Across the member states, the social and cultural contexts impact on school environments and progress towards inclusion in different ways. These contexts directly influence how schools approach LGBT identities and homophobic bullying. The legal situation regarding homophobic crime and the protection of LGBT people also differs greatly across the member states because each national government has discretion when implementing EU directives.

Every individual is exposed to political and social messages and displays that define his/her views and attitudes. These are more or less overt but result in prejudices that can linger for a long time. These messages also influence attitudes towards LGBT people and issues, whether they are overtly displayed nationally or experienced more subtly.

19 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Greece 2009: 8.

20 The social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Estonia 2009: 8.

21 Norman *et al.* 2006: 18.

Can be Shaped by Legacy Systems

During the survey, representatives of several countries referenced the way communism, for example, had treated homosexuality. Under communism, homosexuality was treated as a threat to socialist society and was used as an accusation against dissenters²². This national stance on homosexuality has continued beyond communism, as shown in the case of Romania, where religion has since played an increased role in Romanian social and political life, also framing homosexuality as un-Romanian²³. The government supported such a framing when it emphasised the need to comply with EU legislation when decriminalising homosexuality²⁴. The interviews supported the notion of a conflict between national desires and the need to conform to European ideals and legislation.

Or by Political Views

In other countries, negative images of LGBT people in the media are perpetuated by politicians who speak of the threat to moral and family values²⁵, nationalism, and/or position homosexuality as a disease and foreign conspiracy²⁶. At the same time, these politicians argue that there is no discrimination. Other actors may be involved in homophobic rhetoric, such as competing nationalist groups as is the case in Estonia²⁷, or religious institutions that greatly influence political choices as cited for Hungary²⁸ and Latvia²⁹.

22 Stan and Turcescu 2005: 291.

23 *ibid.*

24 *ibid.*: 293-295.

25 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Italy 2009: 5.

26 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Latvia 2009: 13.

27 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Estonia 2009: 5.

28 Takács 2008 cited in The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Hungary 2009: 7-8.

29 Makarov 2008 cited in The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Latvia 2009: 10.

But Some are Supportive

It is important to note that, in nations where politicians and influential bodies promote the rhetoric of equality, homophobia still affects the daily lives of LGBT people, albeit in more subtle - and therefore difficult to address - ways. This includes situations in which official policies guarantee the equal rights of LGBT individuals, yet same-sex couples are expected to show more restraint than heterosexual couples in public³⁰. Further examples were drawn out in the interviews and are discussed in the research findings.

While each nation is characterised by a general range of attitudes which influence homophobia and homophobic bullying, it is important to also see regional differences. In research on homosexuality in 35 nations, Andersen and Fetner found that varying levels of inequality within a nation influenced tolerance towards homosexuality, stating that those who benefit least from economic development (regardless of the society in which they live and work) are less tolerant than others³¹. This should be taken into account when implementing anti-bullying strategies.

03.3 What's Happening in Education?

Education also varies greatly across the member states and even across departments, states, or councils within individual countries in some instances. Education systems reflect and promote a nation's ideals. Through schooling, students learn about citizenship, moral rights and wrongs and prevailing attitudes of the nation. Epstein and Johnson argue that discourse on sexuality is specifically created through the frame of nationality³². This is the reason why education is especially important in the fight against homophobia.

Anti-bullying work should not be limited to actions with pupils, but include all school staff, school policies, school communications and the school curriculum. Homophobia is not only present in direct actions, but also in:

- ▶ assumptions made about an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity;
- ▶ the way the issues are presented in the curriculum, particularly any stereotypes employed;
- ▶ practices which render LGBT people invisible, such as an unwillingness to discuss sexual orientation or gender identity, or not featuring positive images of transgender individuals and same-sex relationships.

³⁰ Keuzenkamp 2006 cited in *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Netherlands 2009*: 5; also mentioned in interviews with Sweden and Spain.

³¹ 2008: 943.

³² 1998 cited in Biddulph 2006: 16.

Invisibility is an Issue

The invisibility of LGBT identities and sexualities within school curricula is a significant contributor to, and perpetrator of, homophobic environments. There is currently little systematic inclusion of LGBT identities in the core curriculum. There can be many reasons for this, including:

- ▶ education institutions, authorities and national bodies denying that LGBT pupils exist within the school environment;
- ▶ the belief that presenting and including LGBT topics within the curriculum complicates the situation or reinforces immorality;
- ▶ the fear that addressing the issue will raise awareness of LGBT individuals and increase homophobia;
- ▶ and the perception that students are too young to receive the information.

In reality, homophobia will most likely be present already and challenging it through equality-focused programmes benefits individuals and schools as a whole. As noted previously, homophobic bullying can affect all individuals, whether LGBT or not.

In Malta, the 1999 National Minimum Curriculum states that pupils should learn respect for a range of sexual identities, however young people's experiences of the curriculum and materials did not include LGBT issues³³. This may reflect the proviso that teachers consider the moral and religious values of pupils and parents when discussing sexuality³⁴, a clause which easily absolves teachers from the need to deal with diversity³⁵.

33 Takács 2006 cited in *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Malta* 2009: 10.

34 Naudi 2008 cited in *ibid.*

35 *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Malta* 2009: 10.

Even when LGBT identities are included in the curriculum, they may be treated only superficially³⁶, in a stereotypical manner, or not be treated consistently across regions, education ministries or states within a nation³⁷. In 2003, the French Ministry of National Education published a sex instruction leaflet which mentioned “the fight against prejudice based on sexism and homophobia”. This was followed by a 2006 circular arguing for the “necessity to fight homophobia”. However, some French LGBT organisations argue that the curriculum and materials do not cover LGBT issues, with textbooks lacking reference to LGBT and other minorities³⁸.

In Slovenia, the official curriculum mentions sexual orientation, yet course materials do not always cover sexual orientation or same-sex families³⁹. According to research conducted in Slovenia in 2005, 79 per cent of the LGB respondents did not recall homosexuality being discussed at school⁴⁰. The interviews conducted as part of this project also reflected this disparity.

In Bulgaria, BGO Gemini analysed eight textbooks for S3-6. It found that while there is mention of the existence of homo-, bi-, and transsexual individuals, sexual orientation and gender identity are barely mentioned. The textbooks present the information from a political-historical perspective and human rights, when

36 Hauer and Krickler 2008 cited in *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Austria* 2009: 7

37 *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Germany* 2009: 9.

38 *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in France* 2009: 8.

39 Kuhar 2008 cited in *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Slovenia* 2009: 7.

40 Švab, R. Kuhar 2005 cited in *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Slovenia* 2009: 7.

discussed, are from a social development standpoint⁴¹. In Greece, historical figures are presented without mentioning their LGBT identities, as is the case for Sappho⁴².

When LGBT issues are already devalued or invisible in the curriculum, hiding this aspect of identity for key historical or famous people denies the contribution that LGBT individuals make to everyday society. The “outing” of past historical figures also serves to normalise LGBT identities in response to persisting stereotypes. With curricular examples of LGBT identities presenting stereotypes, young LGBT people who do not identify with the depictions may experience further isolation and confusion when coming to terms with their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In multiple countries, there is no sex education at all, whether this refers to academic structure⁴³ or common practice⁴⁴. In other areas which do provide sexual health education, LGBT identities are not covered⁴⁵, or are not considered mandatory and left to the discretion of teachers⁴⁶. There may also be the assumption that those who identify as heterosexual will not experience any

same-sex sexual contact, or the belief that sexuality in general, is inappropriate for children. Just as the morals of parents and students may be used to justify avoidance of LGBT issues, so too can the formulation of sexual orientation as merely sexual practice⁴⁷. In Scottish education, homosexuality is treated in this way and paired with the common belief that children should not learn about sexuality:

“[The] hypersexualised social construction of LGBT identities and LGBT people’s relationships in the context of presumed ‘sexual innocence’ of young people in general is readily used to justify the exclusion of LGBT identities from the curriculum in Scottish schools.”⁴⁸

A 2005 Sex & Samfund research project examining the attention devoted to homosexuality in sex education in Denmark’s public schools found that 91 per cent of teachers who responded said that homosexuality had been covered in their sex education classes⁴⁹, however research by an NGO conducted the previous year somewhat tempers this information. Volunteers from the NGO visited schools and spoke with teachers and found a lack of information about or, at best, outdated information and references to LGBT identities in the curriculum⁵⁰.

Unlike other minority identities, LGBT identities are invisible and often hidden for safety reasons since coming out may lead to exclusion or increased targeting⁵¹. On average, participants in LGBT Youth Scotland’s 2008-2009 *Stakeholdervoice* survey had waited just under 3.5 years between realising that they

41 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Bulgaria 2009: 8.

42 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Greece 2009: 8.

43 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Poland 2009: 8; The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Cyprus” 2009: 7; The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Bulgaria 2009: 8; interview with Slovenian NGO.

44 In Greece, sex education textbooks are rarely allowed in the curriculum. The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Greece 2009: 8.

45 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Italy 2009: 10;

46 The social situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Denmark 2009: 9; The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Lithuania 2009:9.

47 Juetten and O’Loan 2007: 6.

48 *ibid.*

49 cited in The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Denmark 2009: 9.

50 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Denmark 2009: 9.

51 Takács 2006: 21, 24-25.

were LGB or T and coming out⁵². This social strategy inadvertently concurs with those who claim that homophobia is not an issue because there are no LGBT students. Their continued invisibility is then reinforced by the lack of teacher awareness of the homophobic bullying that is occurring within the school environment, which in turn keeps LGBT issues and individuals invisible. Institutionally, homophobia and homophobic bullying self-perpetuates.

The Effects of Invisibility

Social relationships are built on trust earned through perceived commonality and experiences. Therefore, when LGBT young people and children of LGBT families cannot divulge their identities and home life to peers, their relationships suffer, leading to further social isolation.

Invisibility or stigmatisation in the general curriculum can have devastating effects for LGBT young people, and cause increased feelings of isolation and reduced feelings of self-worth for vulnerable adolescents⁵³. There can also be health risks. For example, when adequate sexual health information relevant to same-sex sexual relationships is omitted from the curriculum, risky behaviour can increase. The omission of sexual health information in schools, which is relevant to same-sex sexual experiences, is a violation of rights.

“The best interests principle (article 3) implies that school sex education should be evidence-based and have the aims of (1) preventing the common negative outcomes of ignorance (e.g., sexually transmitted infections, early pregnancies) and (2) promoting the positive outcomes of knowledge (e.g., sexual and emotional health). In addition, articles 2, 16, 17 and 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child imply that (3) sex education be such that it provides knowledge about homosexual children and that it promote attitudes of acceptance toward them.”⁵⁴

Misinformation on LGBT identities or sexual health, systemic or internalised homophobia and a lack of positive role models may lead young people experiencing domestic abuse or sexual abuse to believe that they are to blame or that others may blame them or not take them seriously if they seek help.

Research on LGBT adolescents in Spain shows that due to inadequate accessible information on sexual health, and age-appropriate social opportunities, LGBT young people often gain information on sexuality from the internet and initiate sex with adults encountered at general LGBT spaces⁵⁵. In the research group, there was generally a lack of knowledge on how to prevent STIs, including HIV, and in understanding issues of domestic abuse or unwanted sexual contact⁵⁶.

Invisibility is not limited to the curriculum or school policies, but extends to all school communications, displays and school activities such as the prom or school concerts. Embedding and mainstreaming LGBT visibility is the only way to ensure actual equality in a school or society. Equal representation of an identity is not the same thing as its “promotion”.

Positive representation of LGBT people in the curriculum enables the wider population to value their contributions to society, community or families. In addition, positive role models and images enable LGBT young people to identify with the curriculum as their identities are reflected within it, and to value themselves as individuals and citizens.

52 LGBT Youth Scotland 2008-2009: 14.

53 IGLYO and ILGA-Europe 2007: 8.

54 Kennedy and Covell 2009: 143-144.

55 COGAM 2007: 2.

56 *ibid.*

The Role of Teachers

When teachers are unwilling, untrained or uncomfortable broaching the subject of homosexuality, the situation is in conflict with the rights of the child⁵⁷.

Several country reports highlighted an overt refusal on the part of teachers to engage with LGBT issues. According to one study, there is a widespread view among teachers that they are “forced” to promote tolerance and that intolerance only arises after students are taught about contentious issues⁵⁸. In Latvia in 2007, 266 teachers addressed the Prime Minister in a letter sent to a newspaper in response to an intended amendment of the criminal law, which aimed to prevent homophobic hate speech. The letter argued that implementing the amendments would result in the “persecution of those who oppose the ‘propaganda of homosexuality’”⁵⁹. In the same year, a Bulgarian NGO proposed a programme dealing with silence around LGBT issues and homophobia and contacted 144 schools across Bulgaria. Fifteen schools responded to the request and only seven attended the meeting⁶⁰.

In addition to reluctance, other studies have revealed a lack of teacher training on LGBT issues⁶¹. Without exposure to LGBT issues and the symptoms and manifestations of homophobia, teachers and educators

will not have the ability to support LGBT students or challenge discrimination. Research with young people, teachers and parents has shown that parents and teachers often view homophobic language in the school as “normal” behaviour⁶². Those who are unaware of the complexities of homophobia or LGBT identities may also be uncomfortable raising or discussing an issue.

There are some positive examples of teachers taking LGBT issues forward. In Estonia, where the Ministry of Education has thus far not supported educational materials on LGBT topics, SEKÜ (the developer) was contacted by teachers requesting information⁶³. Ultimately, however, the more integrated and supported LGBT-inclusive materials and topics are, the more accepted and supported LGBT individuals will feel in schools. This must accompany any anti-bullying policy.

57 Kennedy and Covell: 2009: 146.

58 Makarov 2008 cited in *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Latvia 2009*: 10.

59 *ibid.*

60 *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Bulgaria 2009*: 7.

61 Hauer and Krickler 2008 cited in *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Austria 2009*: 8; Pelleriaux and Ouytsel cited in *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Belgium 2009*: 7; *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Estonia 2009*: 8.

62 Norman and Galvin 2006: 16.

63 *The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Estonia 2009*: 8.

School Policies

Many schools across Europe do not have anti-homophobic bullying policies in place⁶⁴.

- ▶ In areas where homosexuality is considered a taboo⁶⁵, there is less chance that homophobic bullying will be publicly discussed, if at all⁶⁶. This is particularly likely in situations where suggestions for equal opportunities for LGBT individuals are considered controversial⁶⁷.
- ▶ In other areas, the formal policy may include LGBT issues or anti-homophobic statements, yet teacher engagement is not uniform. In schools where homophobic language goes unchallenged, pupils (and teachers) experience increased anxiety, depression and isolation⁶⁸. Visible bullying in the halls continues, as do lower-level assaults, taunts and exclusion⁶⁹, which are more difficult to recognise.

Research in 700 Irish schools showed that teachers were often unaware of the homophobic bullying occurring, and lacked sensitivity when addressing incidents⁷⁰.

Research on the social situation for young LGBT people

in Europe argues for the consideration of LGBT specific needs when policy makers formulate social exclusion policies⁷¹. Discrimination diminishes the ability to be included and participate in all areas of society. Young people are a population segment at risk of social exclusion⁷², making LGBT young people particularly vulnerable. It is the combination of attitudes, practices, policies, and institutional structures which perpetuate discrimination and lead to exclusion. Social inclusion of young people enables them to become independent and socially integrated, to experience a smooth transition from education to work, and to participate in, and contribute to, society⁷³.

Research in Britain has shown that in schools with clear anti-homophobic bullying policies or programmes, LGB pupils are 60 per cent less likely to experience bullying and more than twice as likely to enjoy attending school⁷⁴. However, where procedures for reporting homophobic bullying are in place, there can still be stigma attached to LGBT identities and this can lead to under-reporting⁷⁵. This mirrors crime in the larger community, as evident in how homophobic incidents are treated across the EU⁷⁶. It is essential for policies to explicitly name sexual orientation and gender identity as categories protected from discrimination and state that homophobia is not acceptable, as the experiences for this type of bullying are distinct. Clearly including homophobia in over-arching anti-bullying policies is not about creating extra work, but making current policies as inclusive and robust as possible.

For LGBT young people or those perceived to be LGBT, reporting homophobic bullying is often a barrier. Non-

64 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Greece” 2009: 8; The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Spain 2009: 6.

65 See The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in France” 2009; The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in .Cyprus” 2009: 7.

66 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Cyprus 2009: 7.

67 The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Malta 2009: 3.

68 Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack 2008 cited in Swearer et al. 2010: 40-41.

69 Rivers 2000 cited in O’Loan et al. 2006: 20.

70 Norman et al. 2006 cited in The social situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Ireland 2009: 3.

71 Takács 2006.

72 *ibid.*: 17.

73 *ibid.*

74 Hunt and Jensen 2007: 2, 14.

75 FRA 2009: 10.

76 See FRA 2009.

LGBT individuals may fear admitting the accusation and LGBT individuals may feel that they are forced to “come out” when reporting⁷⁷. Thus a low rate of reporting does not necessarily reflect a positive school environment.

Conversely, increased rates of reporting may indicate an increased awareness of the importance of the anti-bullying procedures rather than merely an increased awareness of homosexuality (and therefore bullying) after anti-bullying education.

SOS Homophobie (France) published a report in 2007 noting that the number of homophobic incidents in schools had increased⁷⁸ after awareness-raising. They cannot conclude whether this increase was due to a new awareness of the reporting process, or whether it showed an increase in homophobia as a result of increased awareness of LGBT individuals⁷⁹. When evaluating whole-school anti-bullying programmes, Swearer *et al.* mention the importance of taking an awareness of the reporting process into account and not prematurely assuming that there has been a rise in actual incidents⁸⁰. Exclusion and isolation cannot be measured in statistics, nor can it be addressed through anti-bullying policies unless the issues and prejudices behind homophobic bullying are explored.

⁷⁷ FRA 2009: 99.

⁷⁸ The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in France 2009: 8.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ 2010: 41.

04 Research Findings

The literature review showed that homophobia is a problem in all schools across the 27 member states¹, manifesting itself most prominently in homophobic bullying, school environments and national curricula.

The interviews conducted by LGBT Youth Scotland enabled to explore issues in more details and uncovered a varied landscape across Europe.

04.1 Acknowledging the Problem

The interviews showed different levels of awareness of homophobia amongst teachers, schools or governments. For example:

- ▶ some schools reported to NGOs or governments that homophobic bullying did not exist;
- ▶ some governments told NGOs that homophobic bullying didn't exist;
- ▶ some governments told NGOs that homophobic bullying did exist but left schools to decide what to do about it; and
- ▶ some governments told schools that they 'could' or 'had to' do something because it did exist.

This reflects the variety of structures in place throughout the member states and the different levels of autonomy or influence schools and governments have. Although the context varied, the majority of interviewees were concerned about the need to acknowledge homophobia.

"It's an issue that is invisible. When I look at schools for instance, there are some schools doing a really good job on these issues. But on the other hand, it's so easy to just overlook, to not take those issues up at school... It's fine to talk about it in general but it becomes a

problem to people when you mention their children or their environment...because they are confronted with the roles and norms of society that still exist. Heteronormativity is still there. They would have to confront the way they think and the way they act, which is a change". (NGO, Belgium)

"There is enormous need, as shown, but there is little demand which is part of the problem. It is not on teachers' minds that they may be homophobic or that students may not be heterosexual. Arguing for the necessity of training is a problem because it is not seen". (NGO, Germany)

Barriers

There are misconceptions that sexual orientation equals sexual activity and programmes will teach about sex or sexuality, as reported by NGOs in Sweden, Finland and Lithuania. This leads to the argument that programmes discussing LGBT issues should be a private matter.

This is particularly true for schools in societies where sexuality is not discussed, as recognised by NGOs in Spain and Finland.

"They don't think about transgender because they don't have a clue. But as soon as they think about homo- or bisexuality, they think of sex. They don't think of that with heterosexuality". (NGO, Sweden)

LGBT issues are thought to be an inappropriate topic for younger ages. Most of the NGOs are doing work with high schools but not younger pupils because educators or parents think that they would be too young to talk about homophobia or learn about LGBT identities. Schools and teachers also argue that:

- ▶ students are too young to know their sexual orientation and school visits by organisations simply influence them (NGO, Ireland; NGO, Finland); or

¹ FRA 2009: 68.

- ▶ that they are not ready to understand information provided and wouldn't have thought about it (NGO, Finland).

In actual fact, students and young people are often interested in learning and curious about LGBT issues when organisations deliver workshops.

“They are afraid. They think we are going there to try and convert everyone to be gay. There is a lot of misinformation about the content of our school visits. Or they think we talk about sexuality. We talk about sexual orientation and norms and normativity. We don't go into the bedroom”. (NGO, Finland)

“Not in the curriculum, yet children as young as eight call each other gay. They know about it. Sometimes they think they are too young or if you teach them, they will ask themselves questions and it's like a promotion... When I talk to teachers and say ‘what are you going to do with a child in a classroom who has two mummies or two daddies?’ ‘Okay, then I will talk about it’. ‘Okay, but then it's too late, you should do it earlier’”. (NGO, Belgium)

“Until 15 or 16, the only info you have on homosexuality is that it's wrong”. (NGO, Portugal)

04.2 Commitment

The commitment of individual teachers, schools, school districts and national governments are all cited as crucial to the impact and success of anti-homophobia programmes.

The Importance of Teachers

Teachers are in an influential position because they have daily contact with students. This can have negative effects, such as when teachers disallow conversation on LGBT issues or sexual orientation and gender identity, or when shaping the curriculum and lessons around

their own comfort levels. In many curricula or education guidance, teachers have the discretion on how to address sexual orientation, if at all.

This influence can also be very beneficial when homophobic bullying has not yet been acknowledged. There are instances of teachers, teachers' unions and networks making the decision to initiate broader discussions in institutions where the problems are not acknowledged.

Teachers face many barriers to displaying a commitment to anti-homophobic bullying work. The interviewees highlighted the following barriers:

- ▶ teachers may fear that they will not be supported when raising LGBT issues;
- ▶ teachers may not know how to challenge homophobia;
- ▶ teacher training courses may not equip them:

“People don't know what to do with homophobic remarks even though they can handle racism”. (NGO, Germany)

- ▶ none of the countries stated that teachers currently receive LGBT issues in their initial teacher training, and continuing professional development (CPD) trainings are sparse and on an opt-in basis. One NGO in Sweden remarked that including LGBT issues in teacher training would greatly facilitate anti-homophobia work:

“Even though the policies of the school systems say schools should work against traditional gender roles, fear and hatred of the other, etcetera, the teachers aren't given any tools to do that in their training”. (NGO, Sweden)

Where training opportunities exist, the schools are not consistent in supporting teachers seeking professional development. Only a small number of countries mentioned the availability of sexual orientation and gender identity or anti-homophobia training and a smaller number had recognised CPD credits. Teachers may have to take time off work or attend in their free time when training programmes are not supported by the education ministry and/or schools and may not receive credit for having taken part. In addition to these practical barriers, it may still take determination to attend trainings.

In those countries where LGBT issues were recognised in CPD courses, teachers received credit for attending, and schools supported teacher attendance, the NGOs spoke more positively about their interactions with education. This generally reflected a wider willingness to address homophobic bullying.

“You have to be brave to say you are going on a course like this. If you say you are pro-gay or for LGBT rights, it can be assumed that you are gay. You are suspect. Teachers who talk about it are still a minority. Even if teachers have nothing against it, it is harder to support rights because of society”. (NGO, Spain)

“Teachers who attend are grateful for the information”. (NGO, Belgium)

“Teachers’ reactions are generally positive because it helps them”. (NGO, Germany)

Apart from finding time to attend courses, teachers may find that schedules are very tight with programmes or lessons competing for time. Examples of schools inviting in LGBT equality programmes were rare during the interviews, with the responsibility more often falling to individual teachers in “relevant” subjects, such as biology, citizenship, religion, and personal and social development. Homophobia cannot be challenged during

a quick and isolated lesson, especially if peers in other classes do not receive the same information. A school-wide approach is needed in order to challenge stereotypes, provide correct information, and create a strong ethos of inclusion across the school.

“It is still not so easy because some schools say they do not have the time with other programmes. It is up to the teachers who are interested”. (Government, Germany).

Some interviewees mentioned the training of guidance teachers or student advisors on LGBT issues and the manifestations of homophobia, but this was not a sizeable number and it was not consistent across the sample group. All school personnel should receive training in order to support a school-wide challenge to homophobic bullying and enable staff to support those who have experienced it.

Teachers’ endorsement may also be mitigated when school boards or parent groups veto NGO visits arranged by them. Many interviewees noted that teachers and schools fear parental reactions but that the fear is often worse than the reality. An interesting story happened in Slovenia, where parent groups have the ability to object and prevent organisations from visiting. A school had scheduled a workshop on families that included same-sex families. While the majority did not object, a loud minority protested and the event was cancelled. One of the parents from the class invited the other parents to her home and the lecture took place on a Friday evening with 60 in attendance.

Some did not see the importance of committing themselves and time or school funds to the issue (NGO, Sweden). As explored in the literature review, schools:

- ▶ often do not see a bullying problem (NGO, Ireland; Government, Netherlands),

- ▶ think that bullying only affects those who identify as LGBT (NGO, Finland), or
- ▶ do not see the benefit for all pupils.

Again, there is the issue of visibility of bullying and the thought that only physical violence signifies bullying. An NGO in Sweden noted the misconception that programmes are unnecessary for schools as everyone is treated “the same”.

Yet, the literature review has shown that when sexual orientation and gender identity are not discussed openly in schools, student discussion continues and spreads incorrect sexual health information, bullying continues unchecked, LGBT and other students experiencing homophobic bullying become isolated and other social and physical well-being factors suffer.

“Some people don’t understand that it’s not the same as other discriminations... [the assumption is that] you share the same identity with parents. This is not the case and it’s really serious if you out the students to the parents because you can risk making it worse”. (Government, Portugal)

The role of schools

School systems differ greatly across the member states. This has led NGOs and governments to develop tailored approaches in each area.

School structures range from being autonomous at a local level, to state or region-led, or nationally-led by the education ministry. Individual schools’ decision-making powers also vary significantly. Some patterns have been identified, as follows:

- ▶ Individual schools decide which issues are taught in the school, including the organisations that visit.
- ▶ Frameworks for subjects act as guidance, yet individual schools choose the extent to which the subject is covered. Subjects are adapted to the school.
- ▶ A national curriculum or mandatory subject goals are in place to act as guidance but not all components are compulsory.
- ▶ The national curriculum must be followed but may not necessarily be monitored for conformity.

“The tools to combat and prevent racist and sexist bullying are not so different from the tools used to fight homophobic bullying. It’s important to share the practices used”. (City Government, Italy)

One of the initial questions asked in the survey was how anti-homophobic bullying programmes were presented:

- ▶ In the majority of cases homophobia was not mentioned in bullying programmes.
- ▶ Two other responses stated that it was technically included in general bullying programmes but the extent to which it was actually covered was questionable.
- ▶ Only in a few of the interviews was it felt that homophobic bullying would be covered.

Where existing frameworks or the curriculum mention homosexuality or same-sex relationships, this can lead to an assumption that issues have been resolved and nothing else needs to be done.

“If you ask the school board, they will say yes, they dealt with it [by placing LGBT identities in mandatory educational goals and a few lines in the biology book] so it’s okay. If you ask the students, they will say it’s only a few lines in biology and they never hear about it otherwise”. (NGO, Netherlands)

“Under mental wellbeing, it says that students should be able to express their opinion on sexual identity and have respect for people regardless of race, sexual identity, or disability. It is mandatory but you are free to deliver the content in any way you want. You can say we have covered it because we have talked about it but you don’t have to prove it”. (NGO, Belgium)

Depending upon the political support behind each system, LGBT equality could be either nurtured or overlooked entirely. For instance, where schools have the autonomy to narrow or broaden the subject focus, they could either ignore anti-homophobia guidance or, more positively, include it regardless of an unsupportive government. Based on the knowledge shared by interviewees, the latter is uncommon but is a potential site for cultivation by teachers’ unions and training courses.

The Need for Government Commitment

During the research, government commitment was identified as one of the most powerful factors in conducting equality work, as teachers are not always supported by schools and schools are generally focused on addressing the curriculum, whether or not it includes LGBT identities. This was the case for all governments, regardless of the strength of their commitment to equality. For example, the Ministry of Education in Finland created a programme to address bullying which included homophobic bullying. All materials were provided freely to schools to encourage them to take part.

“The government has declared that it is not wrong to be gay”. (NGO, Portugal).

However, when inclusive equality laws are in place and the government provides strong support, there can be some complacency by schools and the public who believe that equality has been achieved and that homophobic bullying is no longer a problem. They may not recognise the discrimination occurring daily, because they hear about the laws and inclusive protection. This goes to

reinforce the need for governments to display continued commitment and to maintain support for programmes to keep LGBT issues to the fore.

“People think that LGBT emancipation is over, that we’re there. But that’s not true, especially in schools”. (NGO, Netherlands)

“There should be something between schools and the ministry. Some higher power who would be able to say this is what you have to do. For example, a curriculum that teachers have to teach. At the moment, the ministry puts out guidelines, there’s a call for different books, people submit the books, a list of about 15 books per class is made and then teachers decide which books they are going to use. Classes are based on the guidelines but you can have different approaches, sometimes completely different topics”. (NGO, Slovenia)

There may be frameworks or guidelines which support the ability to do LGBT inclusive work, but they may not be known. In Germany for instance, both NGO and government representatives referred to the Sexual Health Guidelines as progressive, yet little known. Ultimately, what will increase the profile of these programmes and ensure that they are implemented systematically is government commitment to hold educators accountable.

The Ministry of Education in the Netherlands used the Inspectorate to make the issue known to schools in 2008:

“Homophobia is a hidden problem. If you want to have dialogue with different groups you need to make the problem visible. School boards tell us that there are no problems in their schools because there is no problem with bullying. We asked the Inspectorate to make a survey about safety in schools and we used the results to confront the schools. We said look at the figures and look at the facts. That was the first step in getting schools to listen to us”.

04.3 Pitching Programmes

NGOs appear to need to rationalise their work in a few areas, such as in applying for grants and funding, and in explaining the importance of their work to schools. Governments may also have to support the latter.

The interviewees based their arguments for inclusion of LGBT issues in schools around the following points:

- ▶ Legal requirement.
- ▶ Anti-homophobia work benefits everyone, not just LGBT individuals.
- ▶ It is everyone's responsibility to work for equality.
- ▶ Presenting research or statistics gathered by NGOs showing bullying exists.
- ▶ Benefits of making or keeping schools safe and preventing harm.
- ▶ The promotion of positive health, avoiding health risks and resulting savings for the health care system.
- ▶ Human rights and the right to education as listed in the UNCRC.
- ▶ Connections with other equality issues.

"In Finland, we think of things in relation to money. We could argue that if we talked about homophobia, we could save money because we wouldn't have to spend money on mental health. A very practical thing". (NGO, Finland).

Human Rights Focus

NGOs discussed human rights as important for framing anti-bullying programmes in schools, regardless of how advanced countries were in terms of LGBT equality laws. In countries where there is little acknowledgement of the existence of homophobia and where equality laws are lagging, using broader themes may be the best way to broach the subject of LGBT identities into the classroom.

This would be particularly useful in member states where the promotion of certain materials or ideas is legally banned. In Lithuania, an act on the protection of minors from detrimental information, in force since March 2010, bans information that promotes sexual relations or expresses contempt for family values, entry into a marriage and creation of a family other than that which is stipulated in the constitution, which defines marriage as between a man and a woman. The act does not include the word homosexuality, yet Lithuania Gay League representatives stated that it is not clear how the act works in practice and while it was difficult to get into schools before, they no longer know if they will be able to work with them at all.

Where LGBT issues were discussed in schools, it was felt that a human rights approach enabled a broader discussion of commonalities between identities and discrimination. An overwhelming number of interviewees cited either current or planned work based around human rights, believing that this would also enable partnership working with other organisations. Amnesty International in particular was mentioned by interviewees in Italy and Lithuania as a strong potential partner.

"We believe it is important that when teachers talk about LGBT issues, they give pupils the wider picture. As a teacher, when you first talk about diversity or first talk about being different, or discrimination ...it's a good introduction to later talk about LGBT issues". (NGO, Belgium)

However, a focus on human rights may lead to LGBT issues being ignored, because of its broader coverage.

“My gut feeling is that on a national level, it’s not very good. LGBT issues would not be the issue that many schools would take up. They would take up racism or environmental issues and democracy and democratic rights, etcetera. It would not be one of the issues they would highlight”. (School system, Malta)

In Slovenia, although Legebitra promoted a workshop on general human rights and partnered with a disability NGO, they could not gain access to schools and it was felt that people were not interested in human rights as they did not see it as an important issue. This is most likely linked to legal positions and similar to the assumption that the issue can drop off the agenda.

Links to Bullying and Gender

In addition to human rights, the broader issues of bullying and gender have been used to broach the subject of homophobia, or for deeper analysis of the connections between all forms of gender-based violence.

Embedding LGBT issues within a wider bullying discussion was also a technique used for addressing homophobia. Other NGOs have found it productive to attend teacher training courses or non-educational seminars on gender and sexism, raising homophobia within that situation. As both are forms of policing the boundaries of gender roles and expression, these programmes highlight the links between homophobia and sexism.

“Homophobia is a form of sexism that works against all individuals. Especially heterosexual men because it is a way of controlling their way of speaking, acting, etcetera”. (NGO, Spain)

Questioning the Norms

Interviewees from Finland, Sweden and Belgium spoke of the importance of questioning normative value systems in society. Rather than presenting LGBT people as an example of human diversity (i.e. difference) to tolerate, this approach raises questions about power imbalances, stereotypes and assumptions, and places the onus for change on each individual and his or her thoughts and actions. In Sweden, the national guidelines for education state that education should employ a norm-critical approach.

“You start out talking about tolerance, which has its place. It is initially a good thing to tolerate difference. But the more you start to develop, when you look at a situation of tolerance, there is an imbalance of power. You have the majority group given power to tolerate the minority group. With a minority group, you give them what they want, even if you don’t want to. We try to balance that power so we don’t talk about tolerance anymore. We talk about acceptance and respect to try and level the playing field. That makes it more controversial because it comes down to every individual...It’s about making people realise that everything they do is involved in this. It’s much more difficult than leaning back and looking at the ‘weird’ people over there and being nice to them most of the time...The beauty of being norm-critical is that you can look at all aspects”. (NGO, Sweden)

Using a norm-critical approach may be the most intensive type of programme as it requires all participants to examine their personal biases and analyse how this influences their actions. This asks for a much deeper commitment to equality as it requires not just a change of actions but thoughts as well.

But Not a Debate

Some interviews reported that teachers may also feel the need to provide balanced information when presenting LGBT issues, like in a debate. One NGO in

Italy mentioned a school mandate to present both “sides”. That example included inviting a political or religious counterpart, frequently an overtly anti-LGBT speaker, when attempting to raise awareness of the issues faced by LGBT pupils.

“Arcigay discourages this whenever possible because students are not given the basic knowledge they need of what being LGBT means... We work with the teachers and students who are LGB- friendly in how to empower them.... this compromises it because in principle you cannot have a counterpart or be judgemental about individual experiences of a person”. (NGO, Italy)

Positioning LGBT inclusion as a debatable issue has serious affects on the mental and emotional well-being of pupils. Providing an opposing argument when addressing personal experiences shows that there is a high level of misinformation surrounding the purpose and content of anti-homophobic bullying or LGBT awareness programmes.

04.4 Getting Into Schools

In both the rationale for access and approaches to schools, interviews included the importance of a personal approach to LGBT equality. This was especially relevant when schools or governments did not believe homophobic bullying was a problem, when teachers thought there were no LGBT pupils or staff, or when the legal situation led to complacency in practice. It was felt that raising the visibility of LGBT people and homophobic bullying in general increased the likelihood that an individual would accept the need to work for equality. The difference between heart and mind, or emotional and intellectual homophobia, is the focus for change.

“We think it is important to not only work against intellectual homophobia but also against emotional homophobia... Intellectual homophobia: ideas we

have about homosexuality, as a disease or illness, etc. Emotional homophobia as feeling: ‘You’re gay and that’s okay, but I don’t want to see you with your partner’. Even if the brain says it’s not a problem, you still feel it is a problem”. (NGO, Spain)

There were a variety of techniques shared on how to negotiate various school systems with many using pre-existing contacts or networks, and often seeking contact with more than one of the groups below.

Through Pupils

Many of the interviewees felt that pupils had the power to convince others of the importance of anti-homophobic bullying work and lend visibility for the LGBT community. This was the case in schools where pupils could decide upon the extra-curricular subjects for inclusion, or where they had influence over the curriculum or which organisations visited the school. These approaches were most likely to take place in countries with inclusive and extensive LGBT equality legislation and a moderately accepting social situation; one in which it was not too risky for pupils to advocate for the rights of LGBT people (regardless of whether or not they self-identified with the group).

The common techniques for using pupil voices are as follows:

- ▶ Sending former pupils to approach the school (Italy, Portugal, Finland);
- ▶ Contacting current student boards, representatives, or student union representatives (Finland);
- ▶ Supporting Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) (Netherlands).

“Former pupils attended their old school and suggested LGBT awareness to their former teacher. The teacher said ‘No, why would we need that?’ Then they went to

the head master and asked...The response was 'No, why would we need that?' Then the two girls said 'Well, we are gay. If we are, then maybe there are some others too'." (NGO, Finland)

Through Teachers

Teachers' unions or teacher networks are also a seemingly successful pathway, particularly since teacher confidence may impact upon commitment. Teacher networks may be developed formally through teacher unions or informally through volunteers or teachers who have received LGBT training for example.

Some examples of work through teachers' unions and networks brought up during the interviews included:

- ▶ in Italy, a volunteer network for training in education was established;
- ▶ a state government representative in Germany noted the importance of having the teachers' unions support the teachers who bring lessons forward in schools;
- ▶ in the Netherlands, following the support of their trade unions or education networks, teachers had the confidence to address issues in classrooms and schools;
- ▶ in some areas, LGBT friendly teachers in each trade union raised the issue in their areas and schools; and
- ▶ in other areas, LGBT teachers' unions were in existence.

Through Both: The Case of the Netherlands

Through building and supporting Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), COC Netherlands (the national LGBT organisation) encourages current students to approach teachers they think will be willing to work for equality. They then address the school boards together, to make them aware of the homophobic bullying problems. The

NGO has found that this is a productive system and has increased its reach compared to previous methods, as the students and teachers are voices already within the school. In addition to the GSAs in schools, there is also a Gay and Straight Education Alliance, comprising education unions and LGBT organisations. The Education Ministry in the Netherlands also spoke of this programme, noting that the success comes from the fact that, although the government can't speak to the school boards on the issue for the school boards deny the problem, teachers and pupils are able to prove that the problem exists. Using their contacts and positions within teacher unions, the alliance has had success speaking to school boards.

Above all, consistency is important for building relationships. When schools need advice, they are comfortable turning to the experts, whoever they are (LGBT NGOs, equality bodies or education ministries).

"We get this sort of link with the school so every time the school has to deal with some gay or lesbian or transgender youth then they know there is this organisation that can give some help, support or information". (NGO, Portugal)

04.5 The Need for Legal and Social Change

As expected, each country interviewed displayed stark differences in their legal and social situations, with the social often lagging behind. Both of these contexts must be considered when starting anti-homophobic bullying work.

Interviewees were divided as to whether it was more important or feasible to change either the social or legal first and let the other develop as a result. The interview results clearly distinguished between three groups of countries:

- ▶ countries that still needed a lot of legal progress, but where politicians still had negative reactions and were not ready to directly support EU equality legislation;
 - ▶ countries that still needed a lot of legal progress and that could use the law for support of further work; and
 - ▶ countries that had made considerable legal progress but were met with complacency over continuing work that many thought was unnecessary because laws were in place.
- ▶ educate teachers;
 - ▶ attend schools and deliver programmes;
 - ▶ distribute research and materials; and
 - ▶ support schools to examine their policies and practices for LGBT inclusion.

Within each group, interviewees referenced countries in similar situations, such as Portugal referencing Spain's same-sex marriage or Lithuania referencing Hungary's EU responses.

Legal Provisions

Government representatives felt that legal proposals and governmental guidance raised the issue's profile to generate discussion, leading to gradual change in social assumptions. During the interviews, Civil Partnerships were being proposed in Ireland and it was felt that not only would societal attitudes be changed as a result, but also the curriculum which would then include those partnerships in lessons on marriage. The legal change would "normalise things and reduce the stigma". Civil Partnership and marriage were also cited as raising discussion and normalising LGBT identities in Portugal and the Czech Republic.

"What created public debate was the proposal of the Ministry of Human Rights for Civil Partnership. It was about 5 years ago, in 2005". (Government, Czech Republic)

Most NGOs said that while the social situation did not yet match the legal situation, it was important to have governmental backing for equalities as it acted as a benchmark for society to work towards. With government support, they felt it would be easier to:

In several of the Accession 8 countries, there was a negative reaction to the legal equality requirements of EU membership, expressed by politicians as well as the media. This has appeared in previous research and formed part of the interview discussion for representatives from Lithuania and Hungary. It was felt that the negative reactions have been both in response to the promise of change and the actual change.

"Politicians are afraid [to back human rights issues]... People say we have to do this because Europe needs that...These values, these human rights issues, when it comes to homosexuality or any LGBT issue, people don't want to hear about it so they reject it by saying that it just came from Europe and it's not in our country...The politicians of Lithuania do a lot of work in the area and don't say these things are good for us, but say that we have to do it because it's a European obligation". (NGO, Lithuania).

Backed Up by Social Acceptance

"Legally there has been quite a bit of progress recently. Socially, I don't think people are much more accepting. There have been extremists at gay pride, right wing politicians. It's a Central European phenomenon". (NGO, Hungary).

"Not all the country was prepared for equality as we thought it would be". (NGO, Spain)

Visibility is central to LGBT-inclusive practices. The issue was raised in many interviews when discussing awareness that both LGBT individuals and homophobia exist. In some countries, legal developments brought about negative social reactions. Interviewees thought that this was due to the increased visibility of LGBT identities. In several cases, there was a tangible negative public reaction to LGBT equality and visibility. In Slovenia, there has recently been debate over the new family code attempting to change the definition of marriage to a union between two people. The media forced people to share their opinions about the issue, thus showcasing more homophobic views and increasing the backlash against the LGBT community as they become more visible.

“I hear that a lot. ‘We don’t have any transgender people in our community therefore we don’t need to.’ How do you know you don’t have any transpeople in your community if you don’t measure? Even if you don’t know how many, it’s not going to work. It won’t be sufficient to say we don’t have any so therefore we’re not doing anything [with Equality Act in force]”. (Government, UK)

“Sometimes society doesn’t want to see and yet the LGBT community in Lithuania does not show itself. If the LGBT community came out of the closet more often...because people in Lithuania don’t know that they know an LGBT person”. (NGO, Lithuania)

But Avoid Complacency

However, legal developments were also a barrier in countries with advanced legal protection of LGBT people on issues like same-sex partnership or marriage or adoption, such as in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, and the UK. NGO and government representatives expressed frustration with the low visibility surrounding LGBT discrimination in light of high media profiles of equality legislation. They

regularly dealt with teachers, schools and parents who believed that since the legal situation was inclusive, discrimination had ended.

“They think that if there’s a good legal system we don’t have homophobia anymore. But there are still some norms of society we have to fight. Especially when they do not personally know any LGBT people dealing with things”. (NGO, Belgium)

Due to the varying responses to legal change, there was some disagreement as to whether legal or social change should come first. An important lesson for schools across the EU, however, is that legal protection does not eradicate homophobia or homophobic bullying. It is important to implement clear anti-homophobic bullying policies, equip educators with the correct information, and support a curricular and whole-school approach.

04.6 Partnerships are Key

An interview question for both NGOs and education ministries asked about the extent of collaboration between the two. While the relationships varied throughout the member states, each interviewee pointed to the importance of partnerships in carrying out projects. In their views, the most successful programmes involved partnership work across organisations or departments.

Government-NGO Partnerships

Partnerships that present a coherent and clear message against homophobic bullying involve both organisations and governments working together to support schools. Ideally, this includes leadership from the education ministry but the respondents noted that it was more often with departments dealing with equality or human rights. Other ministries included those working for health, social affairs and social justice.

During the interviews, the researcher was able to identify those countries where there was a strong working relationship between NGOs and government as they continually cross-referenced the other party and referred to mutual activities. The extent of the work completed in those countries was also a key indicator of well established partnerships.

The partnerships included government support for, amongst others:

- ▶ finances for youth groups;
- ▶ health activities or school programmes;
- ▶ endorsement of education materials;
- ▶ regular consultation meetings and shared strategy planning.

“For the NGOs, it’s a good relationship because they get money from us and we have known them for 20 years”. (Government, Germany)

In both Sweden and the Netherlands, NGO interviewees were comfortable that they could be critical about current government work without repercussions, as both parties knew the critique came from a position of respect and a desire to move forward.

“Our success is that different organisations are willing to work together for common goals. It was easier for us that way as well. We had to deal with one organisation that was speaking for all organisations. When we give financial support, we give it to other COCs and then they distribute to other organisations. Everyone worked together with us and everyone was heard”. (Government, Netherlands)

In Portugal, city councils have a local advisor for equality, including sexual orientation and gender

identity. The government Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) and the Secretary of State suggested that this role be created. The CIG takes part in a consulting council, which has included four LGBT organisations for the past three years, along with Amnesty International and other organisations dealing with sex and gender discrimination.

“There is a campaign for youth with the Institute for Public Health and Ministry of Health. [We have also] been involved with the Ministry for Internal Affairs and for the last several years the minister came to Pride to walk with us since she is a strong supporter of the LGBT cause. Due to her, there is good support from the police”. (NGO, Slovenia)

“It’s about reciprocity and an awful lot about trust. If I’m having a conversation with groups and I’m honest with them about what our expectations are, I would hope that that would be taken on to build a reciprocal and honest relationship...I think that the groups we meet do genuinely feel that we are committed to this issue. We only get that by being honest brokers in this process”. (Government, UK)

And Other Partnerships

In addition to partnerships between NGOs and government, other local partnerships played a large role in the activities of interviewees. Building local partnerships seemed to enable both NGOs and governments to extend work and influence regardless of funding or staffing capabilities. The benefits of such collaborations included:

- ▶ reaching a wider audience through access to the reputation or networks of another organisation;
- ▶ building upon different areas of expertise; and
- ▶ spreading the financial and personnel costs of projects.

Partnership working benefits both sides of the relationship, increasing influence and sharing expertise and resources. This often results in wider or more effective delivery with less financial strain.

*“When organisations work together, it is cheaper for the government to be able to achieve its goals”.
(Government, Netherlands)*

In the absence of funding or government backing, this emerged as the most successful means to broaden the organisations’ reach. There were examples of pairings:

- ▶ within governments and statutory bodies;
- ▶ between small LGBT NGOs;
- ▶ between local and national LGBT NGOs;
- ▶ between local or NGOs of differing themes; and
- ▶ between local and international organisations.

Partnerships between LGBT NGOs and local organisations (often supported by government) included the following:

- ▶ family associations, including LGBT specific family associations;
- ▶ disability organisations;
- ▶ religious organisations;
- ▶ health (including sexual health) organisations and initiatives;
- ▶ Police Departments;
- ▶ international NGOs such as Amnesty International;

- ▶ anti-bullying organisations;
- ▶ work between two LGBT organisations in different countries, often involving joint-projects, conferences or exchanges;
- ▶ Embassies from other countries, particularly in the case of Baltic Pride.

Examples of Partnerships

Some organisations were remote-reporting sites for hate crime or domestic abuse (Scotland). Others held office-hours in the police stations, with NGO members supporting individuals to go to police stations to report (Slovenia, Sweden). If individuals felt unwilling or were unable to report a crime, several NGOs passed on the statistics of types of crime for each area and this resulted in heightened police attention.

The NGO in Sweden partnered with the Lithuanian Gay League. The Lithuanian representatives went to Sweden and both organisations spent a few days sharing experiences of what worked well for each of them. The second half of project directly benefited the Lithuanian LGBT community, with 10-12 evening events on various topics such as health and crime.

An NGO in Spain and the Portuguese government have both paired with university social science departments in order to gain evidence and publish research. At Legebitra in Slovenia, there is no funding for research yet two research projects were underway during the interviews. A Ph.D. student affiliated with the organisation was conducting sociological research on how LGBT teachers negotiate the school environment and general teacher opinions on LGBT topics.

While cases like this are positive opportunities for both researchers and organisations, there is no guaranteed sustainability once the research is finalised. COGAM (NGO) in Spain has solved the sustainability issue

by building a partnership between the Universidad Autonoma de Madrid's anthropology department, through the professional links of the organisation's staff. As anthropologists themselves, they have been able to create an agreement with the university, now in its 5th year, that students near the end of their training will conduct a small study and research. The students carry out 6 months of research after qualifying. They have conducted interviews and surveys and facilitated the first official report on homophobia in Spain².

Partnerships Require Care and Attention

Since partnerships take time and effort to cultivate, and all interviewed were part of some sort of local or national partnership, losing partnerships is particularly damaging to the work underway. This was most often expressed in relation to the disruption of government partnerships when individuals are moved to other departments (Hungary, Belgium). This also affects partnerships within governments, when one department is responsible for the delivery mechanism of another, such as equality-related health or legal issues.

"You have to start all over sometimes when a different party or a different person is sitting on the chair... positions change often with elections". (NGO, Belgium)

The majority of NGOs spoke as though they felt that government guidance would have greater influence over schools than their own organisation's suggestions. With LGBT equality the focus of most NGOs yet only a fraction of the focus, if at all, for Education Ministries or other government departments, it is understandable that there was a high level of frustration with the slow pace of anti-homophobic bullying work taking place.

There were several factors resulting in a misalignment of focus for governments and NGOs. Miscommunication

or no communication was a common factor. An NGO in Finland received government funding yet did not have any working relationship with government representatives. Other NGOs felt as though governments did not recognise the problem of homophobic bullying.

"Sometimes politicians do not see that it's a problem... because they are still homophobic themselves". (NGO, Lithuania)

"They [regional Education Ministry] don't interfere with school work, but do not help either. They understand what we say to them but they say they prefer to work against discrimination on the whole and not specifically homophobia... We think it's a way for them to keep homophobia and sexual diversity hidden. They think if you don't talk about the problem, problems don't arise". (Government, Spain)

Additional barriers included:

- ▶ Government involvement, but not from the Education Ministry.
- ▶ Education ministry not supporting the work.
- ▶ Change within government after building up a relationship.
- ▶ Individuals change and then the information is removed by the new administration. This gives the idea that the work was only a side project rather than one worthy of consistent support.
- ▶ Position towards LGBT equality and anti-bullying varies. There are differing opinions on whether it is an ideological or personal issue, or one that affects everyone.

² COGAM 2005.

Rede ex Aequo, an NGO in Portugal has started talking to the government recently about visual materials in schools, including posters with a short message that homosexuality is not something that relates to a small part of a lesson, but relates to life. Rede ex Aequo says that the ministry is reluctant to take part in such an initiative since they consider it an ideological issue, even though the constitution says they cannot discriminate.

Another mis-alignment between organisations and governments centred on the amount of funding available and the resultant lack of personnel capacity. Most NGOs interviewed do not receive core funding and must work on a project-by-project basis. This funding constraint also curtailed their ability to undertake work in other relevant areas to meet the demands of schools or LGBT service users, or deliver educational materials and training courses, or simply to set up meetings with partners.

Although partnerships may be demanding and require a lot of effort initially, they are well worth pursuing. Partnership working increases influence and access to resources while not requiring increased funding. It creates wider-reaching outcomes and draws upon expertise already developed. One government representative stated it succinctly:

“partnerships align outputs so that it doesn’t cost any extra money and in fact creates two outputs for the price of one”.

05 Conclusion

Homophobic bullying in schools is a problem across all 27 member states of the European Union. The effects of such bullying can be devastating to individuals, families and entire school environments. While the interviews reinforced previous research on homophobia and homophobic bullying in schools, they also highlighted additional areas of consideration for education.

The interviewees identified both barriers and facilitators to anti-homophobic bullying work. These included commitment, recognition of the problem, evidence, communication, resources, political will, visibility and linking bullying to larger concepts of human rights or gender.

Often, the support of government/education ministries was acknowledged to greatly facilitate the embedding of anti-homophobia practices and policies into the curriculum and school. Individuals and structures to influence in this work include: school systems, organisations, unions or boards comprising pupils, teachers, parents, school administration and other government departments.

Interviewees were able to identify success factors in the fight towards equality. According to them, the most important ones were:

- ▶ joint working between NGOs and governments, notably when education ministries support LGBT equality, and government equality departments include sexual orientation and gender identity in their focus;
- ▶ strong communications with schools, and between governments and organisations;
- ▶ the use of local and relevant research or statistics;
- ▶ creating partnerships which expand the skill set of those involved; and
- ▶ working on common goals such as anti-homophobic bullying, increased equality, and improved mental and emotional well-being for pupils.

“You know yourself, people find some reason to say that the research - if done in another social context - isn't relevant”. (NGO, Ireland)

NGOs and education ministries must work flexibly to address problems common across the European Union in order to make anti-homophobic bullying programmes and LGBT equality a reality in schools. However, there is a need for programmes to be designed at a local level to address the cultural and social situations in which the homophobia operates.

LGBT Youth Scotland has used the research findings as a basis to develop a guide offering advice and support on the issues relating to addressing homophobia in education. Designed for use by both NGOs and governments, it is hoped that the guide will help in progressing LGBT equality in education by sharing some best practice with the key players.

“Dynamic communication, being prepared to take on new forms such as listening to comments on blogs, twitter, etcetera, meeting in person and having both sides talk out what they think is feasible”. (Government, UK)

“Now that we have anti-discrimination unit, I think it is easier for us to talk about LGBT rights with other subjects rather than just coming and saying I want to work for LGBT rights. Easier to open doors”. (Government, Germany)

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07 Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Biphobia	Biphobia is the dislike, fear or hatred of bisexual people.
Bisexual	A person who is emotionally and physically attracted to women and men.
Coming out	Acknowledging to yourself or to others that you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.
CPD	Continuing Professional Development.
Gay	A male who is emotionally and physically attracted to other males. Some girls and women prefer to refer to themselves as gay women rather than lesbian.
Gender	<i>The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women (World Health Organisation).</i>
Gender identity	A person's internal self-perception of their own gender.
Heterosexual	A person who is emotionally and physically attracted to people of the opposite sex. Also commonly referred to as straight.
Heteronormativity	Describes an environment where it is taken for granted that societies, systems, institutes and processes are constructed with the assumption that the people in them are heterosexual.
Homophobia	The dislike, fear or hatred of lesbian and gay people. It is often used to describe prejudice towards bisexual and transgender people too, but the terms Biphobia (the dislike, fear or hatred of bisexual people) and Transphobia (the dislike, fear or hatred of transgender people) are becoming more commonly used.
Homophobic bullying	Homophobic bullying is when a young person's actual or perceived sexual orientation/ gender identity is used to exclude, threaten, hurt, or humiliate him or her.
Homosexual	A person who is emotionally or physically attracted to people of the same sex. Nowadays this term is rarely used by lesbians, gay men or bisexuals to define themselves as, historically, it has been used to medicalise or criminalise LGB people. The terms lesbian, gay and bisexual are generally preferable.

Institutionalised homophobia	Describes any kind of system of inequality based on the dislike, fear or hatred of LGBT people, leading to their unfair treatment. It can occur in public or private institutions such as public government bodies, businesses, education institutions, etc.
Internalised homophobia	Negative feelings about being gay, lesbian or bisexual. This can negatively affect the way people see themselves.
Lesbian	A female who is emotionally and physically attracted to other females.
LGBT	Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. A term commonly used in Scotland.
LGBTQ	Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer. An umbrella term commonly used in EU countries.
NGO	Acronym for Non-Governmental Organisation.
Out	Being open about one's sexual orientation or transgender identity.
Pride	Annual festival to celebrate being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.
Sex	A person's biological sex includes not only their genitals but also their internal reproductive system, their chromosomes and their secondary sexual characteristics such as breasts, facial and body hair, voice and body shape.
Sexual orientation	A term used to describe a person based on who they are emotionally and physically attracted to. For example, a person who is attracted to the opposite sex might describe their sexual orientation as straight.
Sexuality	Everybody has a sexuality – this is a term which describes the ways in which people experience themselves as sexual beings and the ways in which they express this. It includes a person's sexual orientation, sexual practice and behaviour. It also involves cultural and social expectations and behaviours.
STI(s)	Abbreviation of Sexually Transmitted Infection(s).
Straight	A person who is emotionally and physically attracted to people of the opposite gender. See heterosexual.
Transgender	This is an umbrella term used to describe a range of people whose gender identity or gender expression differs in some way from the assumptions made about them when they were born. Under the transgender umbrella are transsexual men and women, intersex people, androgynous/polygender people and cross dressers.
Transphobia	The dislike, fear or hatred of transgender people.
UNCRC	Acronym for United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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