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Combating homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools — HOMBAT

Project number: 764746

Call: REC-DISC-AG-2016

Comparative study of the cases of Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania 2018



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Introduction

1. Introduction

In the heteronormative context of contemporary societies, heterosexuality is being constructed and reproduced as the most legitimate form of sexual orientation. As a result, individuals with sexual and gender identities that challenge the heteronormative discourse often experience homophobic and transphobic (HT) prejudices and discrimination (McDermott et al., 2008). Such a trend was confirmed by the most recent research (FRA 2013) on the experiences of LGBTQI people in Europe. Research revealed that Greek, Cypriot and Lithuanian societies are among those, where the social environment for LGBTQI individuals is less inclusive as they are more likely to become victims of violence, harassment and discrimination. At the same time, while Cyprus and Greece show commitment regarding the implementation of the right to education of LGBTQI individuals, Lithuania, unfortunately, totally denies it (GALE, 2015).

Looking at the national contexts of these three countries, some similar challenges, but on a different extent, are identified: negative societal attitudes, inflexible policy response, high potential for discrimination, hate speech and, finally, HT bullying. For example, only 53% of Greeks accept homosexuality, a percentage of the lowest in Europe (Pew Research Centre, 2013). Moreover, the rapid rise in acceptance of the extreme right wing group Golden Dawn have led to a legitimisation of HT hate speech in Greece (Colour Youth-Athens LGBTQ Youth Community, 2014). Such discrimination and harassment lead to bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in schools, which, according to international studies, in Greece is very high.

The extent of homophobia within the Cypriot society appears to be large as well. According to research (FRA 2014) findings, around 8 in 10 respondents in Cyprus think that it is very rare for public figures in politics, business and sports to be open about being LGBTQI. The same survey shows that Cyprus ranks the highest percentage (29%) of respondents among EU Member States and Croatia who were employed in the last 12 months and felt personally discriminated against at work because of being LGBTQI. Overall, Cyprus is at the 4th place among the 27 EU Member States and Croatia in terms of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation.

The Lithuanian context shows that LGBTQI individuals experience one of the highest levels of discrimination in the EU context (FRA, 2014; Smith et al., 2014; ILGA-Europe, 2016). Despite international commitment to tackle intolerance, authorities do not take actions to improve national situation. Therefore, legal mechanisms that should protect LGBTQI rights are rather facile and seem to be ineffective in practice (HRMI, 2015). Moreover, Lithuania is one of the worst countries in the EU in terms of LGBTQI rights (ILGA-Europe, 2016). In addition, Lithuania has the highest rates of bullying among school-aged children (WHO, 2016). Eventually, in the environment where LGBTQI rights are denied and bullying in schools is prevalent, conditions for LGBTQI students are extremely difficult. According to the latest survey, 82% of LGBTQI school students reported being bullied due to their SOGI in the previous year, 90% of respondents did

not feel safe because of their sexual or gender identity and 50% of participants claimed that their teachers ignored or did not respond appropriately to homophobic bullying (LGL, 2017).

Considering the above mentioned challenges, research on the occurrence and characteristics of discrimination and bullying on the grounds of SOGI in primary and secondary school environment in Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania reveals the content of legal frameworks, societal attitudes, experiences of LGBTQI students, teachers' attitudes towards LGBTQI issues, prevalence of HT bullying and its identification / recognition, reactions of school community to HT bullying and, finally, measures employed by school and inter-institutional cooperation to fight HT bullying.

1.1. Research methodology

The main aim of the research in Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania was to identify the occurrence and characteristics of discrimination and bullying on the grounds of SOGI in primary and secondary school environment. For this purpose, quantitative and qualitative data was collected from students, school advisors, administrators, teachers, other relevant professionals and parents. The research encompasses literature review (desk research) and field work (focus groups and online survey) as a background of national reports.

The desk research includes the analysis of relevant and available data and resources (reports, policy documents, previous surveys, research, other) in relation to the occurrence and characteristics of discrimination on the grounds of SOGI, bullying and hate speech in schools, as well as relevant measures, initiatives and / or programmes implemented. The fieldwork was carried out by conducting an online survey and focus groups in all three countries. The online survey was conducted with at least 70 participants per country and targeted the education community in general: school advisors, administrators, teachers, school psychologists and other relevant practitioners. Two focus groups were carried out in each country; one focus group with professionals (school advisors, administrators, teachers, school psychologists, social workers and other practitioners), working with children that have been subjected to bullying (or perpetrators) either in schools or NGOs and one focus group with parents and students. Finally, national reports were produced for each country. The present summary report provides synthesises data / information from the three national reports that were produced in Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania. In addition, it includes the outline of common issues and differences among Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania, as well as policy recommendations at local, national and European levels, with additional focus on systematic implementation of research and data collection.

Research Results

Key findings of the
desk research

2. Key findings of the desk research

2.1. Overview of public opinion polls in Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania

According to LGBT Survey in the EU (FRA 2014: 53), discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is very and fairly widespread as answered by more than 80% of respondents in Cyprus (85%), Greece (86%) and Lithuania (93%) compared to 75% of EU average. Around half of participants in all three countries (Greece – 48%, Cyprus – 56%, Lithuania - 61%) felt discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation in the past 12 months, compare to 47% of the EU average (FRA 2014, 26). National reports compare different public opinion polls carried out in Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania. Therefore, a comparative analysis of those opinion polls is not provided.

2.2. Legislation

2.2.1. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity

Legal framework of antidiscrimination in Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania slightly differs. All three countries have laws prohibiting discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in employment in line with the EU Employment Equality Directive. It has to be noted here that some EU member states followed the model of Racial Equality directive and expanded the prohibition of discrimination on sexual orientation in other fields: social security, education, access to goods and services. Laws in Lithuania also prohibit discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in the fields of education, access to goods and services, but there is no prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of SOGI in the field of education in Cyprus and Greece. Anti-discrimination regulation in Greece includes a separate ground of gender identity. However, the laws in Cyprus and Lithuania do not mention gender identity or expression among those grounds.

In 2004, Cyprus amended antidiscrimination law and, particularly, the Equal Treatment in Occupation and Employment Law, which forbids discrimination on sexual orientation in employment. This law was designed to comply with the EU Employment Framework Directive of 2000 (National Report Cyprus, 2018). According to the research on the protection against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, since 2014, ten EU member states consider discrimination on gender identity as a form of sex discrimination (FRA 2015). However, this is not the case in Cyprus.

The first national law to protect against discrimination on sexual orientation in Greece was passed in 2005 (no.3304/2005) and it concerned the equal treatment of employees regardless of, amongst other things such as religion or nationality, their sexual orientation. The law was

passed to transpose the Race Equality Directive (no.2000/43/EC) and the Employment Equality Directive (no.2000/78/EC), in domestic law (Lesbian and Gay Community of Greece – OLKE, 2010). Although “sexual orientation” was included as a discrimination ground, transgender and transsexual individuals were not protected from discrimination on the grounds of gender, gender identity or gender expression as Greek legislation did not differentiate between “gender” and “sex”. The law was replaced in 2016 by a new labour law (no. 4443/2016), protecting against discrimination on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristic (SOGISC), both by association and based on inferred features. However, it was done only in employment area, but not in such areas as social security, acquirement of public goods and access/right to education (Government Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, 2016; National Report Greece, 2018).

In Lithuania, the law on Equal Treatment, which transposes the Employment Equality Framework Directive 2000/78/EC, was first introduced in 2003. It defined discrimination as “direct or indirect discrimination, harassment, instructing to discriminate” and included discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, among gender, race, nationality, citizenship, language, origin, social status, beliefs, conviction or views, age, disability, ethnicity and religion. According to the Equal Treatment law, educational organisations, science and research institutions must ensure equal opportunities (Dankmeijer, 2017).

The situation regarding recognition of gender identity is even worse. In contrast to sexual orientation, gender identity is not covered by antidiscrimination and hate crime legislation (UPR, 2016; LGL, 2017), nevertheless the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson’s Office provides explanations that they would analyse discrimination complaints on the ground of gender identity as complaints based on discrimination on grounds of gender.

2.2.2. Legislation on hate crimes and hate speech

In addition, even though as of 2014, 15 EU Member States consider homophobic intent an element to be taken into account when determining penalties, in Cyprus committing criminal offences with such intent does not constitute an aggravating circumstance (FRA, 2015). According to OSCE, Greece’s Criminal Code contains a general penalty-enhancement provision for hate crimes. Lithuanian Criminal Code includes an aggravating circumstance and mentions sexual orientation as an ‘aggravating circumstance’ under murder and health impairments.

Hate speech on the ground of sexual orientation is considered a criminal offence in all three countries. However, the ground of gender identity is mentioned in Greek and Cypriot legislation, but not in the Lithuanian one.

Hate speech is defined as the speech that attacks a person or group on the grounds of nationality, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability and gender identity (Nockleby, 2000; National report Greece, 2018). In 2013, the Cypriot Parliament amended the penal code in a manner that criminalises public incitement to violence or hatred against people on the grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity (National report Cyprus, 2018). The Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania has made discrimination and incitement of hatred because of sexual orientation (among other grounds) illegal and punitive. The Criminal Code (2000) states that individuals, who carry out discriminatory acts aimed at hindering others to participate in political, economic, social, cultural, labour or other activities or at restricting the rights and freedoms on the grounds of sexual orientation among others, may be prosecuted and sentenced to three years of imprisonment (National report Lithuania, 2018). Lithuanian Penal code also has a separate article on incitement of hatred. However, gender identity is not mentioned among those grounds.

While discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is defined in the law and considered either a violation of equal opportunities or a criminal offence, in practice it remains largely unreported and unrecognised in all three countries.

2.2.3. Recognition of same-sex relationships and gender identification in laws

Summarising the results of the research of Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania, none of the countries have full legal recognition of same-sex relationships, as none of the countries recognise same-sex marriages. However, Greece has passed a gender neutral law recognising civil partnerships and the Law on civil partnerships was passed in Cyprus approving a gender-neutral cohabitation agreement (both countries passed the laws in 2015). Despite such attempts to draft law on partnership, Lithuania remains one of the countries that does not recognise civil partnerships of neither between a man and a woman, nor same-sex couples.

It is important to note that Greek legislation was discriminatory for some years since adoption of the law recognising civil partnerships between heterosexual individuals. The Greek State has violated LGBTQI individuals' rights with the most known case being the Vallianatos and others v. Greece case (European Court of Human Rights – ECtHR, 2013). In 2008, before the recent vote for civil partnership of same sex couples (2015) and gender identity change (2017), Greece passed a law for civil partnership (no. 3919/2008) between heterosexual individuals, being one of the few countries to establish such a right only for heterosexual individuals (although same-sex civil partnerships were legal in Europe for more than 15 years). In 2013, the Greek state was held responsible for violating the rights of same-sex couples (ECtHR, 2013). However, as mentioned above since 2015 there have been big changes in the legal rights of same-sex couples. Not only did civil partnership become legal but critically, very recently (Government Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, 16th May 2018) the Greek State passed amendments to the article 8 of the existing legislation about fostering children so that anyone in a civil partnership, regardless of being same or different sex couples can become foster parents.

From three countries covered by this report, only Greece has passed a law, allowing self-identification and legal change of a person's gender identity. Neither Cyprus, nor Lithuania have passed laws allowing persons to change gender identification documents or regulating gender reassignment procedures. Lithuania has not adopted a Law on Gender Reassignment Procedure, despite the fact that a restricted procedure was started against Lithuania by the Council of Europe for not implementing the EctHR decision L. v. Lithuania (EctHR, 2007). Article 2.27 § 1 of the Civil Code (adopted in 2000, Article 2.27 entered into force in 2003) provides that an unmarried adult has the right to gender-reassignment surgery, if this is medically possible. A request by the person concerned shall be made in writing. The second paragraph of this provision stipulates that the conditions and procedure for gender-reassignment surgery shall be established by law (EctHR, 2007). Lithuanian law recognises their right to change not only their gender but also their civil status. However, there is a gap in the pertinent legislation; there is no law regulating full gender-reassignment surgery. Until that law is adopted there do not appear to be suitable medical facilities reasonably accessible or available in Lithuania itself (EctHR, 2007).

2.3. Policies on European level

The EU Charter on fundamental rights says that any discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour <...> sexual orientation shall be prohibited (Art. 21). Even though the charter became a binding primary EU law on 1 December 2009, it only applies when EU laws are at stake (Rosas, 2012). Article 13 of the European Community Treaty empowers the EU to create legislation to combat discrimination on the

grounds of sexual orientation. However, the EU has created the legislation combating sexual orientation discrimination only in the area of employment (FRA, 2009).

Eighteen Member States have decided to go beyond the requirements of EU Law and extend protection beyond the workplace. This offers LGBT people protection in a wider range of social spheres, such as education, social protection, social security, health care, access to goods, services and housing. Members of racial and ethnic minorities already have this broader protection under the Racial Equality Directive 2000/43/EC (FRA, 2009). As research revealed, the non-discrimination on sexual orientation in Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania could be expanded to other fields, such as goods, services and education. However, according to the EU legislation, is not obligatory and, therefore, applied differently by member states. According to national legislation, Lithuania prohibits discrimination on sexual orientation in the field of education, whereas Cyprus and Greece do not.

The European Commission has adopted the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Non-discrimination and equal opportunities: A renewed commitment in 2008". The Communication presents the approach of the EU towards fighting discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, age, gender or sexual orientation and promoting equal opportunities. Among other tasks to perform, the Communication mentions proposing new laws to extend the scope of legal protection to all forms of discrimination in all areas of life (for example, the proposal for a directive on equal treatment of persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation). In addition, the European Commission drafted the Proposal for a Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, taking into consideration the principle of subsidiarity of member states. This directive was considered as the instrument that best ensures a coherent minimum level of protection against discrimination across the EU.

Another important document to mention is the European Parliament resolution on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU 2013-2014 (08.09.2015 no. 2014/2254(INI). A similar resolution was adopted in 2016 (No. P8_TA(2016)0485), calling member states to take positive actions to foster equality of LGBTIQI persons and "start a dialogue with those Member States whose legislation does not cover homophobic hate motives, with a view of filling the remaining legislative gaps".

In December 2015, the Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality presented the "List of actions to advance LGBTI equality" to the Council and the European Parliament. It was the Commission's response to a European Parliament Resolution and a joint call from Member States to step up efforts to combat discrimination on sexual orientation and gender identity. Council conclusions on LGBTI equality in June 2016 required the Commission to report annually on the implementation of the list of actions (Annual report 2017 on the list of actions to advance LGBTIQI equality, 2017).

The Council of Europe adopted conclusions on LGBTI equality in 2016 encouraging the implementation of the list of actions to advance LGBTI equality. In addition, it called the European Commission to step up efforts in the field of comparative data collection on the discrimination of LGBTI persons in the EU in the field of targeted awareness-raising activities in such areas as employment, education, health, sports, knowledge of rights and the fight against under-reporting of discrimination incidents. Hence, policies to combat discrimination of LGBTI persons fall within the broader context of equal treatment.

Besides the EU documents and policies relevant in ensuring LGBTIQI equality in education, the Council of Europe documents are particularly relevant, addressing bullying in educational environment. The Committee of Ministers Recommendation (CM/Rec(2010)5) on measures

to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity notes that “Member States should take appropriate legislative and other measures, addressed to educational staff and pupils, to ensure that the right to education can be effectively enjoyed without discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity; this includes, in particular, safeguarding the right of children and youth to education in a safe environment, free of violence, bullying, social exclusion or other forms of discriminatory and degrading treatment related to sexual orientation or gender identity”.

Resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly on Access to school and education for all children (No. 2096, 2016) calling on Member States to “ensure access by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children to quality education by promoting respect and inclusion of LGBTI persons and the dissemination of objective information about issues concerning sexual orientation and gender identity, and by introducing measures to address HT bullying”. Resolution on Discrimination against transgender people in Europe (No. 2048) stresses the importance of access to education for transgender persons. Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016–2021 mentions that from a human rights perspective, the quality of a society is measured by how it is treating its’ most vulnerable and marginalised groups.

The above-mentioned EU policy framework is a substantial background to ensure that the rights of LGBTQI people are respected in all spheres of society. However, to ensure a coherent minimum level of protection of LGBTQI persons and equal treatment, substantial legislative developments in many EU member states are necessary with the possibility to start infringement procedures, where such standards are not ensured. Considering the fact that in practice equal opportunities are not always ensured (gaps between policies and practices are visible in the implementation of EU policy framework at the national level), the EU and national level initiatives for data collection and analysis need to be initiated along with the awareness raising activities. Such monitoring would ensure both the general implementation of the principle of equal treatment and more inclusive environment for vulnerable groups, such as, for example, LGBTQI students in schools.

Key findings of the
field research

3. Findings of the field research

3.1. Prevalence of homophobic and transphobic bullying and its identification / recognition

According to the online survey results (total sample – 226 persons, CY-70 persons, GR-84 persons, LT-72 persons), generic bullying is considered to be prevalent in schools by the majority of respondents. More than half of participants considered following groups of students to be most vulnerable to bullying: students who are overweight (CY-69%, GR-65%, LT-42%), students with learning challenges (CY – 51%, GR – 76%, LT – 42%), students with migrant background (CY – 54%, GR – 65%, LT – 4%). Least vulnerable to bullying in Greece and Cyprus and most vulnerable to bullying in Lithuania were considered students from poor families (CY-34%, GR-30%, LT-46%). In Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania, respectively 73%, 71% and 29% of respondents (58% on average) reported that students who do not fit the expected image of a boy or girl are usually subject to bullying, which might also be the indicator for prevalence of HT bullying that is not necessarily recognised as such.

Almost half of participants said they were unaware of LGBTQI people in their schools (CY-43%, GR-51%, LT-51%), while more than one quarter in Cyprus and Greece indicated knowing such persons (CY-31%, GR-26%). In Lithuania, this percentage was considerable lower – 14%. Even though unaware of LGBTQI people, almost half of respondents in Cyprus and Greece (CY-54%, GR- 41%) believed that there are LGBTQI persons in their schools, comparing to only 18% in Lithuania. The majority did not have any opinion about the presence of LGBTQI persons in their schools in Lithuania (57%).

HT bullying is considered to be prevalent by 53% of Greek, 21% of Cypriot and 25% of Lithuanian respondents. The majority of respondents in Lithuania (63%) think that HT bullying is not prevalent in schools, compared to 49% in Cyprus and 7% in Greece. However, there is a lack of awareness in Greece as 40% of the respondents answered that they did not know whether HT bullying was prevalent in schools. In this particular case, focus groups showed slight disagreement in Cyprus and Lithuania as focus groups participants thought that HT bullying was prevalent. In the Greek report, focus groups results illustrated the data from the online survey as Greek focus groups participants claimed that HT bullying was prevalent.

However, when participants were asked whether students in their school have ever experienced HT bullying or heard negative comments about LGBTQI community, almost half of the respondents in all three countries answered that they did not know (CY – 47 %, GR – 44%, LT – 44%), but around 1/3rd of participants on average answered yes (CY – 40%, GR – 25%, LT– 33%).

According to the professionals that participated in the focus group in Cyprus, the school community, either due to ignorance or in an attempt to protect students with

different SOGI, often tend to perpetuate HT attitudes. However, the focus groups with professionals and parents / students in Lithuania revealed that HT bullying is present in schools, but it might be very latent or unrecognised by the educational community. Parents and students in the focus group emphasise that HT bullying is widespread and happens every day. Education experts in Greece were of similar opinion, indicating that HT bullying is not uncommon in Greece, but tends to remain undetected, unless it leads to an extremely serious outcome. Despite not remembering having witnessed any particular incidents of such bullying, respondents described a generally negative school climate, where bullying is initiated not only by students, but also by school staff.

In all countries, the focus groups identified HT behaviours as HT bullying practices. However, name calling using SOGI related words as derogatory words was not always recognised as HT bullying in any of focus groups. The results of the online survey, recognising certain behaviours that could be considered HT bullying, differ from country to country.

The most frequent incidents of HT bullying, which take place at least several times per month are the following: calling of other students with names such as gay, faggot, lesbian, butch and other similar negative words (CY-41%,GR-40%, LT-31%); telling other students to “not act like a girl” (for boys) or to “not act like a boy” (for girls), or similar (CY-43%, GR-47%, LT-29%); calling of each other names, which might not necessarily be associated to the LGBTQI community (CY-37%, GR-55%, LT-32%).

Individuals that participated in the online survey and focus groups identified verbal harassment as an HT bullying practice, such as the use of SOGI terms as insults. However, the majority said they heard negative comments about LGBTQI persons both from students and school staff, but it is not always recognised as bullying. In Greece, focus groups also indicated intentional misgendering as HT bullying practice.

According to the online survey results, the practice of hearing negative comments about LGBTQI persons takes place among students, education staff and from teachers to students. In Greece and Cyprus, respondents heard negative comments about LGBTQI community from members of education community more often than in Lithuania. For example, quite significant share (CY-26%, GR-38%, LT-18%) of respondents, who are members of the educational community, reported having heard or learnt about negative comments that came from their colleagues towards the LGBTQI community several times in a year. Around one third (CY-29%, GR-25%, LT-7%) reported hearing them at least several times in a month. Others said they hear such comments rarely (CY-31%, GR-28%, LT-32%) or almost never (CY-13%, LT-43%, GR-8%). When asked about negative comments towards LGBTQI community from students, even more persons said they heard it several times per year (CY-29%, GR-28%, LT-19%) or several times per month (CY-21%, GR-19%, LT-17%).

As one can clearly discern, these comments deriving from school professionals who work within the school community are not only indicative of the HT attitudes that exist within school, but more importantly, reveal the negative impact that this environment can have on LGBTQI people (National Report Cyprus, 2018). As revealed by the focus groups, this situation seems to be similar in all three countries. The participants of the focus groups indicated that very often teachers express negative opinions. This affects people who suffer from HT bullying in two levels: people are being afraid to seek help, and LGBTQI students avoid disclosing their SOGI due to fear of negative comments from fellow students and / or school staff on the other hand.

Despite some differences in the prevalence of HT bullying and/or recognition in Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania, most of the participants in all three countries similarly agreed or completely agreed that schools should prevent or fight negative comments against LGBTQI people (CY-81%, GR-93%, LT-56%), take the wellbeing of LGBTQI students into account (CY-84 %, GR-92%, LT-

72%) and make sure they don't skip lessons (CY-79%, GR-93%, LT-72%). A very high percentage (CY-83%, GR-94%, LT-76%) agreed with the statement that LGBTQI students have a higher level of suicide than heterosexual male/female students and that schools should make sure they feel comfortable. Nevertheless, most of the respondents in Greece and Cyprus (CY-79%, GR-80%) thought that LGBTQI people should be able to express their SOGI at school, compared to only 36% in the Lithuania. Finally, in average less than one third of respondents believed that the academic performance of LGBTQI students might be lower compared to other students (CY-30%, GR-24%, LT-10%), whereas more than one third believed that it was not worse (CY-20%, GR-24%, LT-33%) or probably not worse (CY-13%, GR-12%, LT-22%).

3.2. Reactions of school community to homophobic and transphobic bullying in school

3.2.1. Reactions of school administration

The vast majority of school communities in all three countries (CY-83%, GR-95%, LT-92%) believe that school staff should act in response to HT bullying. However, the focus groups revealed that this is rarely done (focus groups Lithuania). More specifically, reactions to HT bullying do not take any official form (focus groups Greece) and are often swiped under the carpet because of society's HT attitudes and very often implementation of policies depend on the attitudes of school principals (focus groups Cyprus). Experts in the Lithuanian focus groups agreed that LGBTQI topics were unpopular and especially sensitive in society and that the same happens in schools as attitudes and stereotypes, that prevail in grassroots societies, reflected in the schools. If homophobic attitudes prevail in society, not surprisingly they manifest within the school environment through different channels: administration, teachers, students and parents (National Report Lithuania, 2018).

3.2.2. Reactions of teachers, social pedagogues and psychologists

From the results of the online survey, it is not clear if school staff think they have enough knowledge to act in response to HT bullying. In Greece and Lithuania, a similar number of participants thought having (43% and 40%) and not having (52% and 44%) enough knowledge to act in response to HT bullying. More respondents in Cyprus thought they have enough knowledge (50%) and less thought that they do not (27%), whereas almost one third are not sure if they have enough knowledge or not (23%).

The focus group results show a slightly different view. The limited reaction or inaction regarding SOGI issues in schools is attributed by the participants of the focus groups to teachers' lack of training and accurate – knowledge of the topic (National Report Greece, 2018). Participants in the focus group of parents and students agreed among themselves that most of school workers do not have qualifications to effectively address issues related to HT bullying or talk about topics related to LGBTQI individuals. School workers exacerbate the situation by making inappropriate comments, questions and statements, which encourages further discrimination of LGBTQI students and / or HT bullying (Lithuania). In Cyprus, participants mentioned that policies that exist are not implemented by the school thus, they cannot provide a solid frame within which professionals can combat HT bullying. In their opinion, responsibility lies within the Ministry of Education and Culture. Burnout was also mentioned as one of the factors in Greece. Sometimes teachers are afraid to help students fearing negative reactions of others teachers and / or parents (Cyprus, Lithuania).

According to online survey results, more than a half of the respondents in Cyprus and Greece believed that information about SOGI should be presented in schools (CY-66%, GR-

78%, LT-50%) and few said that it should be presented, but are not allowed by the school authorities (CY-17%, GR-14%, LT-4%). A relatively high number of participants in Lithuania had no opinion on this (CY-16%, GR-6%, LT-30.6%) and a higher percentage of Lithuanian participants compared to other countries thought it should not be presented in schools (CY-1%, GR-2%, LT-15%). In Greece and Cyprus, there is no law restricting provision of information to students about SOGI as in Lithuania (mentioned by focus group participants), but still a bigger number of persons said that provision of information is not allowed by school administrations. This might be because of religious or other attitudes of school administrations.

Less than a half of the participants (44%) in Cyprus and Greece say SOGI related topics are presented in schools and more than half of participants think students do not have an opportunity to learn about SOGI during lessons (56%). A bigger number of participants in Lithuania thought that it is possible to learn about SOGI during lessons (61.1%). However, the number of participants who thought SOGI should be presented in school is smaller. Most of Greek and Cypriot participants believed that SOGI are not discussed in their schools (CY-44%, GR-41%, LT-24%), while the majority of Lithuanian respondents believed such topics as SOGI are presented neutrally (CY-31%, GR-36%, LT-65%).

In the focus groups, some students and all parents said that training on SOGI at school might affect how students treat other students who might belong to LGBTQI community. However, they revealed that during sex education or other classes students do not have a possibility to learn about SOGI (Lithuania), even though they report sex education classes taking place in schools. The situation appears to be somewhat similar in Cyprus and Greece, where the majority of teachers have neglected the subject and believe that it would have been more effective if clear policies were in place (Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania).

In all three countries the focus group participants mentioned the insecurity of teachers to talk about subjects related to SOGI. However, the majority of online survey respondents in Cyprus said they would feel comfortable to talk about SOGI in schools, in comparison to a smaller number that reported feeling comfortable in Greece and Lithuania (CY-60%, GR-46%, LT-24%), while others would feel neutral (CY-27%, GR-21%, LT-51%). The high choice of neutrality might show that the Lithuanian school community would feel somewhat uncomfortable, which was explicitly chosen by 25% of respondents in Lithuania, compared to 13% and 3% in Cyprus and Greece respectively.

The majority of participants in Cyprus and Greece (CY-59%, GR-64%, LT-37%) believed that there are people among school staff that would express their support to LGBTQI students (the percentage in Lithuania is significantly smaller). Around one third in Cyprus and the majority in Lithuania said they were unaware if there are any persons (CY-38%, GR-24%, LT-56%) or there are no persons who would express their support to LGBTQI students (CY-6%, GR-12%, LT-7%).

Finally, in Cyprus and Lithuanian most of the respondents (CY-40%, LT-46%) reported that they would support LGBTQI students even if they risked their position in school or that they would support them, but would take into consideration the risk to their position in school (CY-37%, LT-7%). The majority in Greece (65%) reported they would support LGBTQI students and that they do not believe that they risk their position in school.

3.2.3. Reactions of students and parents

A large percentage of respondents from the online survey did not know (CY-41%, GR-26%, LT-47%) whether the students react to HT comments. A smaller proportion indicated that students react only sometimes (CY-8.6%, GR-51%, LT-31%), an even smaller proportion said that students react rarely, always or never (from 1 to 10%).

Most of the respondents from the focus groups with parents and students appeared to be sensitive regarding the subject. Most of them react in situations or express their support even if it is unpopular. However, persons that participated in the focus groups mostly came from families with non-stereotypical views (Greece, Lithuania), or students belonged to SOGI themselves (Lithuania).

Most of the parents that participated in the focus groups talked about SOGI with their children and did not feel uncomfortable about it (Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania). Parents also took a role to explain to their children that they should react when other persons are being bullied because of their SOGI (Cyprus, Lithuania), but also told that sometimes school community feared reactions of other parents (Lithuania). More importantly, parents that participated in the focus groups underlined the importance of talking to their children about relationships, diversity, sexuality and respect from an early school age.

3.3. Measures employed by school and inter-institutional cooperation to fight HT bullying

3.3.1. Measures, taken individually

Considering different measures aiming to fight HT bullying in schools, different trends have been identified in all three countries. For example, in Lithuania, significantly larger proportion (almost half) of educational community is talking with students about HT bullying and its prevention than in Greece and Cyprus. However, in comparison to this, talking about HT bullying with parents and advisors is significantly lower in all three countries.

3.3.2. Measures, taken internally within the school environment

A large percentage of respondents indicated that schools have a specific programme that aims to fight bullying in general, while significantly lower number of respondents indicated that their schools have a specific programme that aims to fight HT bullying in particular. However, in Cyprus, there are more seminars in which school administration, teachers, pedagogues, psychologists and social pedagogues are participating to be able to identify and fight HT bullying than in Greece and Lithuania. The biggest difference was identified in Greece and Lithuania, where respectively 53% and 63% of respondents indicated that the school community is sent to seminars related to bullying in general, while only 24% and 21% indicated that the school community is sent to seminars, related to HT bullying in particular. It seems that in Lithuania a larger percentage of respondents than in Greece and Cyprus indicated having general anti-bullying guidelines in schools.

Looking at other measures, applied in schools internally, it seems that there is less of a shared vision in Greece as well as less anti-bullying lessons and introduction rules for students at the beginning of the year than in Lithuania and Cyprus, while Lithuania uses more group analysis to understand bullying than Cyprus and Greece. At the same time, Lithuania focuses more on pedagogic correction and a no-blame approach, and less on punishment.

Research also revealed that significantly larger percentage of respondents in Lithuania (75%) than in Greece (15%) and Cyprus (39%) indicated that schools provide sex education. However, in Lithuania bigger percentage (46%) of respondents indicated that such education does not include SOGI.

Training

The vast majority of representatives of the educational communities in Greece and Cyprus emphasised the need for training for teachers, advisors and school administration to fight bullying in general and HT bullying in particular, while in Lithuania the proportion of those who agreed that training is needed was significantly lower. In all three cases (teachers, advisors and administration), Greek and Cypriot educational communities considered training to fight HT bullying in particular slightly more important than training to find bullying in general, while in Lithuania the support for training to fight bullying in general was higher than support for training to fight HT bullying in particular. Summarising the need for training, there is a clear signal to organise and implement both trainings to find bullying in general and HT bullying in particular. In Lithuania, the need for training, according to the research results, is not as visible as in Cyprus and Greece. However, the majority of respondents in all countries think that it is needed.

The same trend was identified when considering different aspects of trainings. The Cypriot and Greek educational communities expressed the need to organise different kinds of trainings to a higher degree compared to the Lithuanian educational community. With just few exceptions in Greece, more than 90% of respondents support training, related to pedagogic skills, didactic skills, balance opinions, dealing with fellow staff, coaching LGBTIQ students, influencing school policy, legal/cultural restrictions and parents' objections. In Lithuania, the support to the above discussed training was significantly lower.

At the same time, in all three countries a broader field of need has been disclosed: from skills in handling cases in Cyprus to supporting teachers and influencing parents in Greece, and good practices as well as stress / conflict management in Lithuania.

3.3.3. Measures taken externally in cooperation with NGOs, municipalities, experts and other schools

Some differences regarding cooperation between schools and relevant stakeholder (NGOs, ministries, municipalities) were identified. For example, cooperation with NGOs, municipalities and other schools is considered to be more important by Greek and Cypriot educational communities compared to the Lithuanian community, while cooperation with relevant ministries (particularly, education) is considered to be more important in Lithuania and Greece rather than in Cyprus. In all countries, significant proportion of respondents identified other bodies that it would be important to cooperate with: from social workers, human rights activists and media to the church, LGBTQI community, psychologists and academia.

However, regardless of the fact that the participants of research revealed the importance of cooperation, approximately 75% of respondents in Lithuania, 77% in Cyprus and 80% in Greece indicated that schools were not cooperating with relevant organisations in order to fight HT bullying. Eventually, there is a big gap between the understanding of what is important on one hand, and what kind of measures are implemented in practice on the other hand.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1. European level

The EU policy framework constitutes a substantial background to ensure that the rights of LGBTQI people are respected in all spheres of society. However, to ensure a coherent minimum level of protection of LGBTQI persons and equal treatment, substantial legislative developments in the EU level and many EU member states are necessary with the possibility to start infringement procedures, where such standards are not ensured. Article 13 of the European Community Treaty empowers the EU to create legislation to combat discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. However, the EU has created the legislation combating sexual orientation discrimination only in the area of employment (FRA, 2009).

The adoption of the list of actions by the Commission to advance LGBTI equality is a positive step forward. However, it needs a clear role of the EU institutions to start implementing it, starting with a set priority as stated in it: “to ensure that EU legislation and policy fully comply with the Charter of Fundamental Rights, including Article 21 which contains a general prohibition of discrimination, including on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity” (List of Actions by the Commission to Advance LGBTI equality, 2015).

Eighteen Member States have decided to go beyond the requirements of EU Law and extend protection beyond the workplace. As research revealed, the non-discrimination on sexual orientation in Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania could be expanded to other fields, such as goods, services and education. However, according to the EU legislation, it is not obligatory and, therefore, it is applied differently by member states. According to national legislation, Lithuania prohibits discrimination on sexual orientation in the field of education, whereas Cyprus and Greece do not.

The Council of Europe adopted conclusions on LGBTI equality in 2016 encouraging the implementation of the list of actions to advance LGBTI equality. In addition, it called the European Commission to step up efforts in the field of comparative data collection on the discrimination of LGBTI persons in the EU in the field of targeted awareness-raising activities in such areas as employment, education, health, sports, knowledge of rights and the fight against under-reporting of discrimination incidents. Hence, policies to combat discrimination of LGBTI persons fall within the broader context of equal treatment.

Besides the EU documents and policies relevant in ensuring LGBTQI equality in education, there is a need for clear standards to ensure not only prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of SOGI, but also ensuring of minimum standards to address bullying and HT bullying in schools.

Considering the fact that in practice equal opportunities are not always ensured (gaps between policies and practices are visible in the implementation of EU policy framework at the national level), the EU and national level initiatives for data collection and analysis need to be initiated along with the awareness raising activities.

Such monitoring would ensure both the general implementation of the principle of equal treatment and more inclusive environment for vulnerable groups, such as, for example, LGBTQI students in schools.

4.2. National level and schools

In Lithuania, Greece and Cyprus, there is no national legislation or guidelines to protect LGBTQI students, nor are there specific guidelines to make schools safer for the LGBTQI community. This means that schools are taking the leading role to deal with challenges related to HT bullying and harassment on the grounds of SOGI without any decent coordination and structural approach. As a result, schools do not have any specific guidelines to fight HT bullying specifically, although there are some indications that schools in Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania have guidelines to deal with bullying in general.

This means that the initial infrastructure to fight HT bullying is already in place. Eventually, acknowledging the above mentioned challenges/gaps and considering the fact that Standards One (Policies and Training) and Four (Multilevel policies and approach) of the “Minimum standards to combat HT bullying in formal education settings”, developed by the “International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organisation” (IGLYO) are not implemented sufficiently, there is a need to strengthen capacities of schools’ communities, starting from the identification/recognition of HT bullying and finishing with the preventative actions. In this case, trainings are as important as specific guidelines/action plans, implemented not only in schools, but also at national level to create decent multilevel policy in response to bullying, discrimination and harassment, where all relevant institutions and key stakeholders (schools, municipalities, NGOs, other) would take proactive stance.

Lack of coordination and structural approach could be explained by the fact, that in all three countries, talking about LGBTQI people and SOGI is still a so called taboo. In addition, as research revealed, school could be considered as a reflection of the society, where HT attitudes are still prevalent. Eventually, unresponsive policy framework and passive reactions from the school community are related to the general reactions/attitudes, coming from the society. Therefore, at the same time, when more structural approach is needed from national and local governments as well as school communities to fight HT bullying and harassment on the grounds of SOGI by creating and implementing specific guidelines/action plans, there is also the need to initiate and implement more horizontal curriculum measures in those institutions (such as universities), that are working with the preparation of in- and pre- service teachers to reflect diversity on one hand, and deal with bullying (including HT) on the other. Given all the above, there is a need to work on curriculum to reflect diversity in the broader sense with the emphasis on SOGI within the framework of sex education and, at the same time, prepare teachers as well as other practitioners (social pedagogues, psychologists, members of child welfare commission, other) to implement such curriculum effectively.

4.3. Local level and schools in particular

Considering 1) the lack of external cooperation in Greek, Cypriot and Lithuanian schools, 2) the conservative societal attitudes towards LGBTQI community in these countries, 3) the inflexible response from school community and 4) the fact that students (especially from the LGBTQI community) do not receive sufficient support within the school environment

and 5) therefore, do not feel safe to open themselves up, sensitive student support systems within schools should be created in all three countries by involving external-to-the-school actors, such as human right organisations, social workers, local community leaders, youth associations, other. Thus, the Standard Two (student support systems) of “Minimum standards to combat HT bullying in formal education settings” would be implemented more effectively in all three countries than it is implemented now.

4.4. Research and data collection

The research revealed gaps in systematic and longitudinal research implementation and limited data collection in all three countries. Therefore, considering these gaps and acknowledging that Standard Three (Systematic Data Collection) of “Minimum standards to combat HT bullying in formal education settings” is not properly implemented in Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania, there is a need for a more systematic examination and comprehensive understanding of discriminatory behaviour of societies in general, as well as a need to reveal and explain attitudes of the wider population in relation to diversity in terms of SOGI specifically. Such data would provide the background to address HT bullying on a larger scale within Greek, Cypriot and Lithuanian societies. At the same time, considering broader challenges within contemporary societies, it is necessary to measure the so called multiple discrimination and harassment if, for example, a person from LGBTQI community at the same time is a refugee, non-native or a person with mental disabilities. Such an approach would enable understanding of discrimination, harassment and bullying in a much wider context of the so called “otherness”. In addition, practical needs’ assessment within local communities is needed including the disclosing of the needs for better support systems at schools and municipalities, and the extent of bullying in general and HT bullying in particular in school communities and grass roots societies.

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