

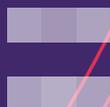
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Combating homophoBic and transphobic bullying in schools

Project number: 764746 Call: REC-DISC-AG-2016

National Report: Lithuania



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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 normative discourse often experience homophobic and transphobic (HT) prejudices and discrimination (McDermott et al., 2008). Such stigma on societal level often leads to internalised negative perceptions of non-heterosexuality among LGBTQI persons. Consequently, non-heterosexual people not only face external discrimination in terms of increased risk of physical and sexual assault, undermined employment opportunities, but are also more vulnerable to psychological stress, depression, issues with self-esteem, intimacy and self-destructive practices (Szymanski et al., 2008; McDermott et al., 2008).

A survey of public attitudes conducted in 2013 revealed that Lithuanians remain to be intolerant to homosexual individuals. 42% of respondents admitted they would be concerned if their child's teacher was homosexual; 35% would not elect a homosexual candidate to parliament or municipal body; 37% would not like to belong to an organisation with homosexual members. Only 26% agreed that civil partnership of same sex couples should be legalised. In terms of reactions towards homophobic bullying, most (46%) respondents claimed they would remain neutral if they heard homosexuals being talked about in insulting or demeaning ways. Only 12% said they would openly oppose such behaviour (Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, 2013).

At the same time, another public poll of 2016 suggests that Lithuanians do not consider LGBTQI community as highly discriminated against. Discrimination against them was identified as lower than against people with mental or physical disability, aged individuals and refugees. Compared to past survey results, however, publicly perceived discrimination against LGBTQI individuals was higher than in 2014. Arguably, the change suggests that more people became aware of LGBTQI issues (Human Rights Monitoring Institute, 2016).

Multiple bodies and studies conclude that LGBTQI individuals in Lithuania 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. Legal mechanisms that should protect LGBTQI rights are rather facile and seem to be ineffective in practice (HRMI, 2015). According to a report released by ILGA-Europe, Lithuania is one of the worst countries in the EU in terms of LGBTQI rights. Using a wide range of indicators such as hate speech, marriage and partnership rights, gender recognition and freedom of expression, community and expression as well as asylum rights, it was ranked the 27th out of 28 member states, outperforming Latvia only (ILGA-Europe, 2016).

In addition to intolerance towards LGBTQI persons, Lithuania has the highest rates of bullying among school-aged children. In a cross-national study of 42 countries in Europe and North America, students in Lithuania experience bullying and bully others more often than in any

other country. 32% of all male pupils and 26% of female pupils were victims of bullying; 33% male pupils and 15% female pupils bullied others (WHO, 2016).

In the environment where LGBTQI rights are denied and bullying in schools is prevalent, conditions for LGBTQI students are extremely difficult. According to a survey conducted by LGL, a national LGBTQI rights organisation, 82% of LGBTQI school students reported being bullied due to their sexual orientation or gender identity in the previous year. 90% of respondents did not feel safe because of their sexual or gender identity. 50% of participants claimed that their teachers ignored or did not respond appropriately to homophobic bullying. The effects of bullying on sexual or gender identity grounds in a highly HT society can be extremely detrimental, since LGBTQI students are often denied support both in school and family. HT bullying often leads to worse academic performance, serious mental issues, higher risk of depression and even suicide (LGL, 2017).

1.1. Research methodology

Taking into account the above mentioned challenges, the National Report aims at identifying the characteristics of discrimination and bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in the school environment (primary and secondary), and if and how it is being addressed in order to guide the development of the capacity building/training methodology. In addition, the National Report aims at disclosing broader field of challenges, related to HT bullying in Lithuanian schools. For that purpose, secondary data, also quantitative and qualitative data were collected from different primary and secondary sources; literature review has been accomplished through 1) desk research. Eventually, the information was collected from students, school advisors, administrators, teachers and other relevant professionals (including professionals from LGBTQI organisations) and parents through 2) focus groups and 3) an online survey.

1.1.1. Desk research

The desk research included the analysis of relevant and available data and resources (reports, policy documents, previous surveys, research etc.) on the occurrence and characteristics of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, bullying and hate speech in schools, and what relevant measures, initiatives and/or programmes were implemented to address the issues. The desk research was conducted to prepare better for the field research – an online survey and focus groups (see below).

1.1.2. Online survey

The Online survey that took place in Lithuania in January 2018, aimed at identifying the characteristics of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), bullying and hate speech in schools, as well as relevant measures, initiatives and / or programmes implemented by the school community. Specifically, it questioned if and how HT bullying is being addressed, in order to guide the development of the capacity building / training methodology. In total, 72 persons participated in the online survey. The preliminary findings of the online survey constituted the basis for designing focus groups with parents and students and experts in education.

1.1.3. Focus groups

In order to understand the prevalence and degree of HT bullying in Lithuanian schools and the way it is dealt with, two focus groups were organised. The first focus group included experts that work with schools: mostly experts from different governmental institutions and

nongovernmental organisations; the second one included teachers. In addition, two more focus groups – of students and their parents – were organised and aimed at gaining deeper understanding about prevalence and degree of HT bullying in Lithuanian schools. In total, four focus groups were organised with 23 participants in total.

Key findings from
the desk research

2. Key findings from the desk research

2.1. Legal antidiscrimination framework

As a member state of the EU, Lithuania has adopted laws ensuring equal opportunities. Consensual same-sex sexual relations between adults were decriminalised in 1993, soon after the independence of Lithuania was declared; later, 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). Noteworthy measures mentioned in the law include ensuring that the curriculum and textbooks do not promote discrimination and that there is no harassment or instructions to harass in these institutions.

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, approved in 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. The 2009 Criminal Code even included sexual orientation as an ‘aggravating circumstance’ under murder and health impairments (Dankmeijer, 2017).

However, 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. The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson received two complaints regarding alleged cases of discrimination due to sexual orientation in 2012, no complaints in 2013 and 4 in 2014, 5 in 2015, 3 in 2016, 3 in 2017. Considering high prevalence of discrimination regarding sexual orientation as indicated by other studies, low numbers of complaints suggest that the LGBTQI community often keep cases of discrimination unreported. Since the topic is still a taboo among Lithuanians, affected individuals often do not feel comfortable talking about their experiences (the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, 2018).

The number of pre-trial investigations of discrimination as regulated by the Criminal Code is particularly low – according to the statistics of Information Technology and Communications

Department under the Ministry of the Interior, there were no discrimination cases recorded in 2014-2017.

There is a lower amount of recorded cases of incitement of hatred each year, even if pre-trial investigations are initiated, later most of them are rejected, stopped or incitement of hatred is not recognised in courts. According to official statistics of 2014-2017, the number of recorded cases of incitement of hatred towards a person or a group of persons because of their sexual orientation was: 57 in 2014, 32 in 2015, 8 in 2016 and 2 in 2017. All pre-trial investigations based on 24 complaints regarding hate speech on the internet, initiated by LGL between 2013 and 2015, were stopped or closed, and perpetrators did not face any legal punishments (LGL, 2017). According to civil society organisations, the number of hate crimes towards LGBT people also remains unknown as most of persons do not feel safe to report hate crime cases and when reported they are not always recorded as such.

When it comes to recognition of same-sex relationships, so far Lithuanian legal systems do not have any regulations recognising neither same-sex partnerships nor marriages. Arguably, the situation of LGBTQI rights has worsened over the past years because the government has failed to initiate changes to improve the present state of affairs, and, even more, introduced new discriminatory laws.

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; there are no procedures of legal gender recognition and gender reassignment treatment. It is impossible to get certain health services relevant for the transgender community because they are not legalised. There is no legal framework for the protection of individuals with identities outside gender binary from discrimination, violence or hate speech (UPR, 2016; LGL, 2017). While a new Action Plan for 2015-2020 on non-Discrimination mentions assessment of general status of transgender individuals and their privacy in Lithuania as one of the objectives, actions to fight discrimination against LGBTQI people, concrete educational measures to promote institutional equality and involvement of NGOs are not included (Dankmeijer, 2017).

2.2. Discriminative nature of laws protecting “family values”

In a context where effectiveness of antidiscrimination laws is doubtful, introduction of new legislation promoting family values has further undermined LGBTQI rights. In 2010, the law “Protecting minors from the effects of negative public information” was introduced. While information which mocks people due to their sexual orientation or gender identity is classified as information that has negative effects on minors, the law is ambiguous and contradictory. It also defines information which “undermines family values, promotes an understanding of marriage and family creation that differs from what is stated in the Lithuanian Constitution and the Lithuanian Civil Code” as having negative impact on minors (Article 4, part 16). This part of the law indirectly establishes limitations on talking about other, non-heterosexual relations and families to minors on a national level and on this basis spreading of LGBTQI related information was stopped in a few cases (LGL, 2017). By using the “detrimental effect” on development and health of the minors, broadcasting promotional videos for the Baltic Pride 2013 was restricted to certain timeframes. For the same reason, after receiving a complaint from the Ministry of Culture, a fairy tale book “Amber Heart” that contained two fairy tales about same-sex relationships was restricted to children above the age of 14. The same year, another social ad raising awareness about the LGBTQI community was considered as harmful information to minors. Due to vague wording, the law that was supposed to protect minors from negative information might be used to censor information about the LGBTQI community and therefore undermine their freedom of speech (HRMI, 2015).

In addition, another law protecting “family values” has recently challenged the rights of LGBTQI individuals. In October 2017, the Law on Strengthening Families was adopted. It has emphasized the concept of family as based exclusively on marriage between a man and a woman, therefore excluding other alternative couples which involve homosexual individuals or persons with gender identities outside of the binary Male-Female (LGL, 2017; Dankmeijer, 2017). Due to its heterosexist nature, the recent piece of pro-family legislation undermines already hostile psycho-social environment for LGBTQI persons. It provides legal justification to discriminate on the ground of sexual orientation and gender identity and hence arguably contributes to homophobia and transphobia on a societal level.

2.3. Legislation on bullying in schools: no LGBTQI issues addressed

Despite its international commitments to protect the rights of children, Lithuania struggles to combat bullying in schools and has never addressed HT bullying in particular. By ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995, Lithuania committed to defend children from violence of any kind and to take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of children. While in the past bullying was vaguely addressed in multiple legal acts, it was only after the amendment of the Lithuanian law on Education in September 2017 when bullying was acknowledged as a form of violence. As it is defined in the law, “bullying is a repeated intentional action done to another person by a person or a group that has an advantage of psychological or physical power to humiliate the dignity or reputation, to offend, hurt or cause psychological or physical damage in other ways”.

By its decision “On the approval of recommendations on the implementation of violence prevention in schools”, the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science has for the first time introduced guidelines on how to prevent bullying and violence among students in schools. The roles of school staff, municipalities and the state are stated in the document. However, these recommendations of the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science are non-binding, containing abstract content and wording such as “development of social and emotional competences, creating positive microclimate, forming the positive values of schoolchildren”. Established goals and suggested ways to achieve them are not specific enough; the methods of prevention are largely left for schools themselves to figure out. Bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity is not mentioned, suggesting that issues faced by LGBTQI students are ignored or at least not seen as requiring distinct prevention methods.

2.4. Experiences of LGBTQI students

According to a 2012 survey of LGBTQI people in Lithuania conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 50% of respondents avoid being open about their sexual orientation at school due to fear of attacks, threats or bullying (FRA, 2013). Results of the Eurobarometer survey of the same year suggest higher figures: 81% of LGBTQI students in Lithuania hide their LGBTQI identity (Eurobarometer, 2012).

A small-scale study carried out by LGL in 2015 asked 166 homosexual and bisexual students about their perception of homophobic bullying; it showed that the majority of LGBTQI individuals did not feel safe at school. Only 24% of respondents claimed that they felt no threat because of their sexual orientation, while 30% of LGBTQI schoolchildren felt insecure or completely unsafe. Boys felt more insecure than girls: 39% of male students reported concerns regarding safety, whereas the figure for girls was 20%. Similarly to figures presented by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 52% of schoolchildren hide their sexual orientation at school and only people closest to them know about it. 79% of schoolchildren experienced bullying because of their sexual orientation. Only 21% of the respondents noted

that they never or almost never encountered the mentioned forms of bullying. Many students believe that the problem of homophobia at school could be solved by sex education and discussion on LGBTQI issues (LGL, 2015). More than half of the students believe that the school lacks clear rules determining ways how bullying due to sexual orientation could be properly responded. According to the data of the Lithuanian Gay League, it is obvious that bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation is a very common, although completely denied, problem. The study suggests that talking about LGBTQI issues and HT bullying is seen as potentially the most effective measure to tackle these problems by the affected students themselves.

In June 2017, LGL carried out another anonymous survey in which 475 LGBTQI high school students between the ages 14 and 18 were asked about their experiences in Lithuanian schools. 57% of LGBTQI students admitted that they faced homophobic bullying often or very often and did not have access to support. While 55% of subjects claimed that their school organised anti-bullying campaigns, 73% reported that none of their study materials covered LGBTQI topics. 89% of them never heard any positive information about LGBTQI people from their teachers. In fact, data reveals that only 38% of respondents did not experience bullying from school personnel (LGL, 2017). The numbers support findings of the 2012 LGBTQI survey of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, in which 31% of LGBTQI students admitted feeling discriminated by education personnel (FRA, 2014). Both studies show tremendous hostility faced by LGBTQI individuals in the school environment. In addition to high levels of discrimination from their peers, school staff, instead of combating the issue, ignore it and even contribute to it.

2.5. Teachers' attitudes towards LGBTQI issues

Research on teachers' attitudes towards HT bullying suggests that teachers perceive HT bullying as less prevalent than the students themselves, indicating a lack of awareness and knowledge on how to identify it. In combination with the study on LGBTQI students, LGL has conducted research on teachers' attitudes towards homophobic bullying. Among 136 respondents, almost half of the teachers (47%) believed that they knew no LGBTQI people, 27% said they knew a few, 16% said they knew one person, and 10% were not sure if they knew LGBTQI people. The survey data suggests that the vast majority (67.6%) of teachers do not encourage opening up about one's sexual orientation. Only 17.6% of teachers support the disclosure of sexual orientation and believe that they will support the disclosed young person. More than half of respondents claimed that homophobic bullying in their school did not exist, and 41.2% of teachers think that they are not qualified enough to solve it and that this problem should be solved by specialists such as psychologists and social workers (LGL, 2015). The research shows that most teachers do not notice or do not want to notice homophobic bullying, supporting the wider belief that there's a tendency to ignore homophobic bullying in Lithuanian schools. Taking into account that there is no national framework to combat bullying and therefore schools are left to implement preventative measures on their own, lack of awareness among school staff is crucial for failure to indicate and combat HT bullying.

2.6. Bullying prevention: project overview

There are no systemic bullying prevention programmes that would be mandatory on a national level in Lithuania. While school authorities are legally obliged to ensure a safe environment for students and school workers to react to violence and bullying, guidelines are not specific enough and schools are left to tackle bullying themselves. They can decide not to implement recommendations, and, even if they do, school staff may lack the necessary experience, will or resources for successful prevention. Since HT bullying is not addressed in national guidelines and there are no continuous educational initiatives combating HT bullying specifically, discrimination experienced by LGBTQI students in school remains to be largely ignored both

on national and school levels. The projects initiated by non-governmental organisations are fragmented and cannot fully ensure HT bullying is continuously recognised, prevented and tackled in schools. The nature of HT bullying is distinct from that of bullying on other grounds, because affected students can be isolated not only in school community but also due to lack of family support. However, bullying of LGBTQI persons could be addressed only indirectly through general bullying prevention projects.

Special Pedagogy and Psychology Centre that had implemented the National Prevention of Violence against Children and Child Support Programme of 2008–2010, launched the Olweus bullying and prevention programme in 2011. It is implemented in secondary schools in order to reduce cases of bullying and other antisocial behaviour. The goal of the programme is to train the whole staff of a school to recognize bullying and respond appropriately. By 2015, about one third of all Lithuanian schools became involved. However, it is worth mentioning that schools taking part in the programme cannot enrol in similar programmes against bullying. While the programme is still ongoing to this day, since 2015 it is no longer being financed by the European social fund. Therefore, schools must pay for the services of instructors themselves or use Lithuanian general funds, while other expenses are covered by the Special Pedagogy and Psychology Centre (SPPC, 2017). Arguably, reduced funding opportunities determine lower enrolment rates and hence, lower contribution of the programme in preventing bullying on the national level.

One of the best known and arguably the most impactful anti-bullying campaigns is initiated by Child Line Lithuania. In addition to providing psychological help to the children and teenagers by phone and online, Child Line Lithuania organises annual “Action Week WITHOUT BULLYING”. It aims to raise awareness about the scope of the issue and encourage society to contribute to the prevention of bullying. Informative material for children, teenagers, school personnel, parents and general audience is also prepared and distributed; training sessions for school staff are organised. It includes most of Lithuanian schools nationwide: in 2016, 1100 educational institutions participated in the campaign (Child Line, 2016).

In 2016, Child Line started a partnership with a Swedish organisation “Friends” that has been working on the prevention of bullying and violence since 1997. It is expected that partners’ experience will help Child Line to adopt new reliable methods to address the issue and improve safety of Lithuanian school environments (EAN, 2017).

2.7. Raising awareness

In the context of nationally high levels of discrimination against the LGBTQI community and the absence of projects directly tackling HT bullying in schools, raising awareness is one of a few measures employed to improve the situation that LGBTQI people face. However, it is worth noticing that the campaigns are always initiated by organisations from the non-governmental sector rather than national institutions, indicating that authorities continue to ignore LGBTQI issues.

The “#TRANS_LT” social campaign initiated by LGL in 2016 in collaboration with international partners ILGA-Europe and TGEU achieved relative success. Social ads in which trans persons told their stories were watched over 30,000 times on YouTube and shown on TV. Taking into account scarce information about trans community in Lithuania, the campaign significantly contributed to increasing social visibility of the issues faced by the group. As a result, it was nominated in the National Equality and Diversity Awards as “the Breakthrough of the Year” (LGL, 2017; National Report to the UN HRC, 2016).

Another recent initiative that aims to draw public attention to LGBTQI issues is a platform “Isgirsti” (“to be heard”). In addition to the creation of a new portal where quality support and

systematic relevant information for LGBTQI individuals can be easily accessed, initiators also organise training for volunteers and professionals on emotional support and to develop their capabilities to better understand and support LGBTQI persons. Moreover, "Isgirsti" holds film screenings and discussions related to LGBTQI topics (In Corpore, 2015). In 2016, multiple videos where LGBTQI people and individuals supporting LGBTQI are telling their personal stories were released. Some of them included well-known people and reached over 40,000 views on YouTube.

Research results

3. Research results

3.1. State response

Field research confirmed key challenges revealed in the desk research (see above). According to the experts from the focus group, there are no preventative policies against HT bullying included neither in the agenda of the Ministry of Education and Science, nor in individual schools. In addition, legal acts do not acknowledge HT bullying as particularly challenging.

The other challenge is the fact that HT bullying is not defined in the Lithuanian legal system. Furthermore, there are no education laws requiring implementation of programmes about recognition of bullying for school communities. Only educational centres offer such programmes. None of the experts has seen programmes for teachers specifically focusing on LGBTQI. In this case, according to experts, the emphasis should be placed on the fact that antidiscrimination (policies and processes) usually focus on all aspects / grounds of discrimination; in some cases, due to the fear of the opposition and reactions, with the exception of sexual orientation.

On the other hand, topics of sexual orientation and gender identity are included in Health, Sexuality Education and Family Planning Programme, adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science (so called "Sex education programme"). Experts emphasized that these topics could be integrated in classes of biology, religion and ethics. However, educational methods do not specify how to present such topics, while teachers are not qualified enough to talk about them. According to experts, the good news is that the Ministry of Education and Science has prepared recommendations on how to implement the above mentioned programme in primary schools. However, there was a remark that LGBTQI related topics are not mentioned there, again, fearing public reactions.

In addition, experts revealed that the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information, which has a provision that any information that encourages a concept of marriage and family other than the one stipulated in the Constitution or in the Civil Code, is detrimental to minors and should be restricted. The experts emphasized that this law had an effect on how safe and comfortable people feel talking about the topic concerned.

3.2. Prevalence of HT bullying and its identification / recognition

3.2.1. Individual perspectives

The participants of the focus groups indicated that HT bullying was highly prevalent in Lithuanian schools. However, in their opinion, it is rarely recognised and, eventually, it does not receive any response. Therefore, more common response from school educational

communities and school communities at large is required. On the other hand, the parents indicated that very few parents showed interest in reacting to HT bullying and, if proposed to do anything about it, they were likely to face opposition from other parents and teachers. Most of the professionals and parents in the focus groups indicated that training was necessary in order to identify HT bullying and learn how to react to it. In addition, training needs to be a common standpoint across all schools rather than just an individual initiative of teachers (see subchapter 3.4.).

3.2.2. School environment

The prevalence of bullying situations in schools in the past year, as perceived by the school community, is shown in Table 1 below. Answers of the online survey were chosen similar to those provided by the PISA World questionnaire to enable comparison between the results¹. The PISA 2015 report offers an indication of the victims by showing a percentage of students that experience certain behaviours a few times per month. Similar questions were asked, identifying how often different types of bullying situations occurred towards LGBTQI students (see Table 1). Interestingly, when asking about frequency of bullying situations towards LGBTQI students, most of the school's educational community answered that they did not know (over 40% for each bullying situation).

Table 1: Percentage of respondents on the prevalence of bullying in the schools where they work as responded to the question “How often situations described occurred in your school in the past year?” – compared with similar situations against LGBTQI students and PISA world results

Situations	Frequency					
	Never or almost never	Several times per year	Often (at least several times per month)	I do not know	Several times per month addressed towards LGBTQI students	PISA results students' perspective – types of bullying that happened a few times a month
Students call other students names	9.7%	19.4%	61.1%	9.7%	NA	NA
Students leave other students out on purpose from various activities	25%	29.2%	34.7%	11.1%	7%	6.8%
Students make fun of other students	9.7%	23.6%	61.1%	5.6%	8.4%	9.2%
Students intimidate/threaten other students	36.1%	30.6%	22.2%	11.1%	4.2%	4.8%
Students take away or destroy property of other students	37.5%	34.7%	22.2%	5.6%	4.2%	4.2%
Students are being hit or pushed by other students	36.1%	33.3%	20.8%	9.7%	5.6%	4.4%
Students spread nasty rumours about other students	8.3%	20.8%	62.5%	8.3%	11.1%	7.9%

¹ OECD (2017), PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 137. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264273856-en>

Situations	Frequency					
	Never or almost never	Several times per year	Often (at least several times per month)	I do not know	Several times per month addressed towards LGBTQI students	PISA results students' perspective – types of bullying that happened a few times a month
Students make negative comments about others on the internet	16.7%	25%	26.4%	31.9%	8.4%	NA
Students are sexually touched by other students	56.9%	6.9%	5.6%	30.6%	8.4%	NA

When answering questions about prevalence of certain bullying situations, the vast majority believed that the following situations were mostly prevalent in the past year, happening very often or at least several times per month: students calling other students names (61.1%), students making fun of other students (61.1%), spreading nasty rumours about others (62.5%). Other behaviours were not seen as prevalent because less respondents answered that they had been taking place very often or several times per month.

When answering questions about what students were the most vulnerable to the above mentioned bullying situations, the answers were following: students from poor families (45.8%), students with learning challenges (41.7%), overweight students (41.7%), students who do not fit the expected image of a boy or girl (29.2%), students with migrant background (4.2%).

The majority of respondents (62.5%) think that HT bullying is not prevalent in schools, 36.1% – not prevalent and 26.4% – not prevalent at all. 25% of the respondents believe that HT bullying is prevalent, while 12.5% reported that they did not know. 1/3 thought that students in their schools experienced HT bullying or heard negative comments about the LGBTQI community, but the majority said that they did not know (44.4%) or that such bullying did not occur (22.2%). However, the focus groups with professionals and parents / students revealed that HT bullying was present in schools, but it might be very latent or unrecognised by the educational community. Parents and students in the focus group emphasised that it was widespread and happened every day.

When online survey respondents were asked if they knew any LGBTQI students / people in their schools, only 13.9% said that they knew LGBTQI people, while the majority said they didn't (86.1%). Out of those who didn't know, 25.4% thought there might be LGBTQI people, while the majority (57.1%) reported having no opinion about the presence of LGBTQI people in their school, and 17.5% answered that they thought there were no LGBTQI people in their schools. However, the focus groups participants (teachers, students and parents) said that they knew LGBTQI students in their schools. This trend could be explained by the fact that talking about LGBTQI was still a taboo and most of the students didn't disclose their sexual orientation and / or gender identity in schools.

It should be noted that none of the behaviours (indicated in Table 2) were considered to be very prevalent by the respondents of the online survey, meaning that there were no situations that would be recognised as prevalent by more than a half of respondents, unlike when answering questions about bullying situations in general (Table 1). From all the situations listed, the most prevalent ones, that were recognised as taking place at least several times a month, were following: calling other students gay, faggot, lesbian, butch and other similar negative words (30.6%), telling other students to "not act like a girl" (for boys) or to "not act like a boy" (for girls),

or similar (29.2%). Students were also being called other names that were not related to LGBTQI (31.7%).

Other situations were considered not prevalent. Many respondents reported that situations, indicated in Table 2 below, never or almost never happened in their school: students leave LGBTQI students out on purpose from various activities, students make fun of LGBTQI students, students intimidate / threaten LGBTQI students, students take away or destroy property of LGBTQI students, LGBTQI students are being hit or pushed by other students. A large percentage of respondents were also unaware of such behaviours (over 40% each); they said they were also unaware of further behaviours: students spreading nasty rumours about LGBTQI students, making negative comments about LGBTQI students on the internet, LGBTQI students were sexually touched by other students (see Table 2).

Table 2: Share of respondents on the prevalence of bullying in their schools, responding to the question “How often situations described occur in your school?”

Situations	Frequency			
	Never or almost never	Several times per year	Often (at least several times per month)	I do not know
Students call other students gay, faggot, lesbian, butch and other similar negative words	20.8%	43.1	30.6%	5.6%
Students tell other students to “not act like a girl” (for boys) or to “not act like a boy” (for girls), or similar	29.2%	30.6%	29.2%	11.1%
Students are being called other names that are not related to LGBTQI	18.1%	23.6%	31.7%	16.7%
Students leave LGBTQI students out on purpose from various activities	44.4%	6.9%	7%	41.7%
Students make fun of LGBTQI students	41.7%	4.2%	8.4%	45.8%
Students intimidate/threaten LGBTQI students	45.8%	5.6%	4.2%	44.4%
Students take away or destroy property of LGBTQI students	48.6%	4.2%	4.2%	43.1%
LGBTQI students are being hit or pushed by other students	48.6%	2.8%	5.6%	43.1%
Students spread nasty rumours about LGBTQI students	29.2%	15.3%	11.1%	44.4%
Students make negative comments about LGBTQI on the internet	31.9%	6.9%	8.4%	52.8%
LGBTQI students are sexually touched by other students	41.7%	5.6%	4.2%	48.6%

All students in the focus groups reported that words like faggot, gay, lesbian and others were used in school every day and, in their opinion, teachers heard them all the time, but reacted towards them as ordinary swear-words, mostly ignoring them. One of the teachers said that they reacted to the comments all the time; another said that they mostly ignored them because they had rarely heard them in primary classes.

Students commented that they knew examples of homosexual, transgender or transsexual people who were in danger of experiencing physical injury or were threatened by other students. These situations, in their opinion, are more frequent in smaller towns and among younger students than in cities and among older ones. According to the students, rumours regarding someone's sexuality are frequent in schools. However, students do not perceive it as bullying. On the other hand, these rumours frequently evolve into bullying. Students assume there are many people at school who have prejudices and negative attitudes towards LGBTQI, but choose to stay silent. In case of HT bullying, it's not necessarily used only against LGBTQI people as it can be used against anyone who is different in his / her look or behaviour.

The vast majority (63.9%) of the school community that participated in the online survey reported that they rarely or never heard negative comments about the LGBTQI community, while 19.4% said that they heard comments a few times a year and 16.6% several times per month.

When the online survey participants were asked about negative comments, they replied that they heard homophobic words: using LGBTQI terms as insults or words relating to LGBTQI used for name calling, offending someone, or using words as – “faggot”, “lesbo”, “perverts”, calling gay people sick, offending them using other words. Some respondents indicated that comments were so severe that participants did not want to name them. Others wrote comments that they heard which could amount to inciting hatred and violence: “They should be quiet in hiding”, “Faggots should be shot/closed/cured”, “If I saw someone like this, I would hit them”. Respondents wrote comments that they had heard about the LGBTQI community by students.

The online survey respondents were asked if they had heard negative comments about the LGBTQI community from their colleagues who work in schools. An even bigger percentage reported that this happened rarely or never (75%), several times per year (18.1%) or more often (7%). As reported in the survey, some of those comments by educators or other school staff were quite similar to the ones used by the students: using LGBTQI related words as insults or using them in a negative manner, calling them perverts, abomination, gay men and potential child molesters. Some focused more on saying that homosexuals expressed themselves too much or demanded too many rights, wanting to adopt children and marching on the streets, while the focus group participants provided different attitudes. All the students and parents (except one) said that negative comments about LGBTQI people were widespread in schools and could be heard from students and teachers. The results by the educational community were different, as they mostly said that they didn't hear negative comments about the LGBTQI community neither from the students, nor from their colleagues.

When respondents were asked if students disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity, the majority reported that students didn't disclose it (52.8%) and many were unaware (27.8%). Quite a low number (12.5%) of respondents responded that a few students had disclosed it, while 5.6% said that it happened once and 1.4% said that many had disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity.

More than half (54.2%) of respondents didn't know how students related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many believed they only opened up to the people they trust (23.6%) or that they hid their sexual orientation or gender identity (15.3%). Only 1.4% thought that students opened up to everyone, 1.4% said that “it seems they act in the same manner as heterosexuals”, 1.4% respondents indicated that students disclosed their gender and sexual orientation in questionnaires.

Focus group students reported that they hesitated to tell school workers about their sexuality or sexual identity as educators often encouraged them to keep it quiet. Students would also be afraid to talk about the subject with psychologists or social pedagogies, fearing that the

information they shared would not be kept confidential. Some said that LGBTQI students would also fear that this information might be disclosed to their parents as not all of them disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to their parents because of fear for reactions. They would talk with a school worker if that person would be from the LGBTQI community or, in rare cases, to a teacher expressing his / her support to LGBTQI students in the school.

The online survey results illustrate that only 1/3rd of respondents thought that LGBTQI people should be able to disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity at school. Similarly, 27.8% didn't agree, 36.1% chose the option more or less. The majority agreed that the school should prevent or fight negative comments about the LGBTQI community (55.6%) and take the wellbeing of LGBTQI students into account (63.9%), make sure they do not skip lessons due to negative comments (72.2%), make sure they feel comfortable at school (76.4%) (see Table 3 for more detailed answers).

Table 3: Agreement and disagreement with the statements below (% of respondents).

Statement	Answer	Completely disagree	Disagree	More or less	Agree	Completely agree
The school should prevent or fight negative comments about LGBTQI		8.3%	9.7%	26.4%	34.7%	20.8%
LGBTQI should be able to express their sexual orientation or gender identity at school		18.1%	9.7%	36.1%	20.8%	15.3%
The school should take the wellbeing of LGBTQI students into account		23.6%	8.3%	23.6%	40.3%	23.6%
Research shows that LGBTQI skip lessons because of negative atmosphere: the school should make sure they don't skip lessons		8.3%	4.2%	15.2%	50%	22.2%
Research shows that LGBTQI students have a higher level of suicide than heterosexual male/female students: the school should make sure they feel comfortable at school		6.9%	2.8%	13.9%	40.3%	36.1%

One third of respondents said that they were unaware if the academic performance of LGBTQI students was worse than that of other students (31.9%). One third thought that the academic performance of LGBTQI students was not worse than that of the rest of the students (33.3%). Approximately 22.2% indicated that it was probably not worse than the academic performance of other students; 9.7% responded that it might be lower.

3.2.3. Inside/outside family environment (family, friends and school)

The results of the focus groups showed that both students and parents were tolerant in accepting diversity. According to them, students have tried to stop bullying themselves or expressed their support to bullied people. Not all of them come from families with non-stereotypical views. However, tolerant worldview was formed while engaging with LGBTQI people or being one of them. One student felt rather uncomfortable talking about the subject and said that LGBTQI students should not "show off".

Some of the students felt safe talking about the topic of the LGBTQI community and HT bullying with their families. Those from families where HT attitudes prevail admitted that tolerance for LGBTQI people was not usual to them, and some of them would never talk about it or would avoid talking about it with their families. These students had to learn how to accept and react

in different situations, for example, by interacting with LGBTQI students or offer support to a person who has experienced bullying due to not fitting within traditional and stereotypical gender roles or due to belonging to the LGBTQI community.

All parents that came to the focus group said that they were talking with their children about people having different sexual orientation and gender identity; one of them said that they had started looking for more information after their child came out as bisexual. Parents reported not facing difficulties to discuss about different sexual identities with their children. However, they admit that tolerance towards LGBTQI individuals is not widespread in Lithuania. Parents agreed that the topic was still a taboo in many families. Therefore, many children are also afraid to talk about the topic and feel insecure to come out as LGBTQI. Therefore, there is a need to have a secure and welcoming environment at least in schools.

Many professionals during focus groups, however, stressed that the school was only a reflection of society, where HT attitudes were still prevalent, and very often schools feared to do anything about HT bullying because they were afraid of the reactions from parents.

3.3. Reactions of school community to HT bullying

3.3.1. School administration

Experts in the focus groups agreed that LGBTQI topics were unpopular and especially sensitive in society, while schools reflected society in particular. If homophobic attitudes prevail in society, not surprisingly they manifest within the school environment through different channels: administration, teachers, students and parents.

The experts agreed that not only teachers, but also the entire school community tended to deny / ignore the existence of the phenomenon of bullying in their schools as they didn't know how to deal with (recognise, prevent and tackle) the problem. Some of the participants said that schoolmasters were (should be) responsible for the way in which the school community was responding to bullying in general and HT bullying in particular, while other participants believed that HT attitudes came from local communities / families, which means that to challenge bullying of this nature was much more complicated than it might seem.

3.3.2. Teachers, social pedagogues and psychologist

The vast majority (91.7%) of the school community believe that school staff should act in response to HT bullying. However, according to the focus groups, they rarely do as they either do not recognise it, or don't consider situations of HT bullying serious enough. There are other reasons of not responding to such situations such as not knowing how to react, fearing reactions from other people or having negative attitudes towards LGBTQI people. Less than half (40.3%) of the online survey respondents thought that they had enough knowledge to act in response to HT bullying, while almost other half (44.4%) thought that they didn't have enough knowledge. Approximately 15.3% answered that they didn't know.

Nevertheless, participants in the focus group of parents and students agreed among themselves that most of school workers didn't 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. On the other hand, students remembered positive examples of teachers who addressed the topic during their classes. Unfortunately, bad examples were also identified. Students reported the case when their classmates, who looked and behaved differently, not conforming to the traditional image of a

girl or a boy, had been forced to leave the school, as school staff didn't stop bullying. According to the participants of the focus group, sometimes it is even indirectly promoted, for example, when the word 'gay' is treated negatively, as something to be ashamed of.

Some experts in the focus group believe that many teachers still have so called post-soviet mentality. Therefore, many of them are not qualified enough to recognise, prevent and tackle HT bullying. There are also opinions saying that some teachers are afraid to react or speak about LGBTQI related topics as they don't want to provoke negative reactions from parents or even from the school community.

Almost half of the participants (48.6%) reported they always supported students when they heard HT comments, 1/3 of them said that they had never heard such comments in schools (30.8%), the rest said that they reacted most of the time (9.7%) or sometimes (6.7%). Respondents were asked about the reactions of students to HT comments and mostly responded that they didn't know (47.2%) whether the students reacted, one third said they reacted sometimes (30.6%), the rest most of the time (8.3%), some always (1.4%), some very rarely (1.4%) and some never (5.6%).

Focus group participants tend to interpret reactions of the school community differently. For example, students see a gap in teachers' attitudes towards HT bullying, even if educators do not have stereotypes and prejudices, as they are not educated on how to recognise and react to such bullying. Often teachers are trying to avoid these topics because of the fear of causing negative reactions from students and their parents. In addition, teachers indicated that most of the school community didn't react.

According to the experts, students are afraid to talk to someone about HT bullying, fearing that they would be considered LGBTQI (if they are not) and / or their sexual orientation and gender identity would be revealed to the others. Besides, in cases where they talked to staff about sexual orientation and gender identity, sometimes LGBTQI students have been given the advice not to disclose their sexual identity or not to come out as homosexual. Based on experts' opinion, many students are also concerned about the confidentiality of the information they share with the school workers, especially in smaller towns, where communities are very small and information spreads very fast. In addition, there are students who feel ashamed for being subjected to bullying. As a consequence, they are afraid to tell their parents and school workers about their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Half of the respondents believed that information about SOGI should be presented at school (50%), a few said it should be presented but it wasn't allowed by the school authorities (4.2%), one third had no opinion on this (30.6%), and 15.3% thought it should not be presented in schools. According to the majority opinion, students had an opportunity to learn about sexual orientation and gender identity during lessons (61.1%), while the rest thought this opportunity didn't exist (38.9%). When different sexual orientations and gender identities was presented during lessons, most of the time it was presented neutrally (65.3%), while the rest said that this topic wasn't discussed (23.6%) or presented positively (5.6%) and negatively or very negatively (5.6%). Most participants reported that they would feel neutral when talking to students about SOGI (51.4%), somewhat uncomfortable (20.8%), somewhat comfortable (13.9%) and very comfortable (9.7%).

In the focus group, some students and all parents said that training on sexual orientation and gender identity at school might affect how students treat other students who might belong to LGBTQI community. However, focus groups with parents and students revealed that during sex education or other classes students didn't have a possibility to learn about sexual orientation and gender identity. At the same time students reported that classes of sex education had been organised in schools. However, such classes hadn't been conducted systematically and had

been rather improvised than professionally planned and mostly focused on addressing bodily structure, organs of female and male bodies, and the changes happening during adolescence, etc. Students also said that, in their opinion, topics related to contraception or bodily changes had been touched too late, only when students had experienced them themselves. There have been cases when teachers have even promoted gender stereotypes during such classes, commenting on how girls or boys should act. Students believed that situations like this occurred due to teachers' lack of qualification to speak about these issues. In addition, some students declared that during sex education classes, sexual diversity or gender identity hadn't been discussed at all.

Some students believe that information regarding LGBTQI is not necessary as those who want to know more can find plenty of information on the internet. However, other participants thought that information about this topic should be provided to students as it could help them form a general opinion regarding the topic and make it less of a taboo in society, as well as discuss the information dispersed on the internet and make LGBTQI people feel being a part of the school community. They also indicated their intention to provide more support to other students if there was more information available.

A primary school teacher said that there was no need to talk about sexual orientation and gender identity at primary school, and another teacher disagreed saying it should be done in ways appropriate for the age of children since kindergarten.

Most members of educational community reported feeling very comfortable being alone in the room with an LGBTQI student (47.2%). For the rest of the matters, the majority said that they would feel neutral having an LGBTQI student in their classroom (47.2%), having a student revealing their sexual orientation and gender identity outside of school (38.9%), having a student revealing their sexual orientation and gender identity in class (45.8%), asking for personal support during a private discussion (47.2), being requested by a student to help approaching the principal to improve school policies on sexuality and diversity (44.2%). Concerning disclosing students' identity, the majority (45.8%) reported that they would feel neutral, approximately one fourth of respondents said that they would feel somehow uncomfortable (22.2%) or very uncomfortable (1.4%) (see **Table 4** for more details).

Table 4: % of respondents to the statements "How would you feel if..."

Statement	Answer				
	Very comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Neutral	Somewhat uncomfortable	Very uncomfortable
...you were alone in the same room with an LGBTQI student?	47.2%	4.2%	44.4%	2.8%	1.4%
...you had an LGBTQI student in your class?	37.5%	15.3%	47.2%	0%	0%
...an LGBTQI student disclosed to you their identity outside the class?	33.3%	15.3%	38.9%	12.5%	0%
...an LGBTQI student disclosed their identity in your class?	20.8%	9.7%	45.8%	22.2%	1.4%
...an LGBTQI student asked for personal support in a private conversation?	34.7%	16.7%	47.2%	1.4%	0%

Statement	Answer				
	Very comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Neutral	Somewhat uncomfortable	Very uncomfortable
...an LGBTQI student asked for your support in approaching the principal to improve school policy on sexuality and diversity?	20.8%	19.4%	44.4%	8.3%	6.9%

Overall, one third of the educational community believed that there were individuals amongst the school staff who expressed their support towards LGBTQI students (37.5%), while more than half reported that they didn't know (55.6%). Most of respondents (45.8%) reported that they would support LGBTQI students even if they risked their position in school or that they would support them, but take into consideration the risk to their position in school (6.9%). Almost one fifth reported that it wasn't the responsibility of the school (18.1%) and 5.6% reported they would not support it.

3.4. Measures employed by school and interinstitutional cooperation to fight HT bullying

The measures employed within the school environment should be considered as structural instruments fighting HT bullying. Therefore, a significant proportion of questions in the online questionnaire and the focus groups were prepared to analyse what kind of preventative pro(active) measures were being taken to fight HT bullying in schools on different levels: 1) individual, 2) collective within the school environment and 3) external cooperation with NGOs, municipalities, experts and other schools.

3.4.1. Measures, taken individually

Even though a quite significant number of measures are employed in order to fight bullying in general (see Table 5 below), respondents from the online survey revealed that only a few measures were being implemented by the school community to fight HT bullying in particular. Consequently, the majority of respondents indicated not having regular discussions or talks about HT bullying with students (54.2%), parents (81.9%), with students and parents all together (80.6%) and, eventually, with other teachers and such professionals within the school environment, such as social workers and psychologists (68.1%). Not surprisingly, HT bullying does not seem to be a very important issue to deal with at an intersectoral cooperation level (see 3.4.3.).

The focus groups revealed that, on an individual level, attitudes were very important, as, according to the experts, there were teachers who believed that any information relating to LGBTQI might damage children. Therefore, while dealing with these challenges, participants believe that political leadership and the position of the Ministry of Education and Science is very important. In addition, experts emphasised that it was always very important to respond to HT bullying as children needed to know that school workers were aware of the problem and were committed to prepare and implement programmes / initiatives against bullying in general and HT bullying in particular. It was mentioned that every teacher had to devote at least five days for qualification training; however, most of the teachers didn't express the need to be trained on LGBTQI issues.

3.4.2. Measures, taken internally within the school environment: training on the spot

Concerning the measures taken within the school environment, the distinction between bullying in general and HT bullying in particular has to be made. On the one hand, the online survey revealed that schools had initiated specific programmes to combat bullying as such. For example, 65.3% of respondents indicated that schools were applying general programmes to fight bullying in general. On the other hand, in most cases, schools do not have any specific and proactive measures, programmes or initiatives with the aim to fight HT bullying. Such a trend was confirmed by more than 80% of respondents. However, HT bullying seems to be unrecognised or even ignored. Eventually, the trend of non-recognition of HT bullying could be explained by the lack of training and, as a consequence, by the lack of awareness. Research revealed that staff from schools was usually being sent to different seminars and training related to the identification and prevention of any form of bullying. Such trend was confirmed by 62.5% of respondents. However, almost 80% indicated that there were no similar training or awareness raising seminars to recognise and understand HT bullying.

While summarising measures taken by the school community to fight HT bullying, the emphasis should be put on the fact that, unfortunately, there are no regular discussions about bullying as such. Moreover, there are no specific guidelines or policies, related to the understanding and prevention of bullying (almost 57% of respondents indicated the lack of discussions and policies / initiatives).

Although there were no formal or informal measures to fight specifically HT bullying in schools, more general measures were in place. For example, 56.3% of respondents indicated having a shared team vision, while 84.7% revealed that schools had rules to prevent and forbid the so called bad behaviour. Moreover, 86.1% indicated that sometimes, lessons on bullying prevention were organised, but without any specific focus on HT bullying.

More detailed information on measures taken by the school community to fight HT bullying in Lithuania can be found in the **Table 5** below. On the one hand, it seems that the infrastructure for the identification, combating and prevention of bullying in general is already in place or at least is being developed. On the other hand, it is clear that such infrastructure with all necessary elements (training, awareness raising seminars, proactive guidelines / measures and political will coming from the school environment) has no focus on the identification, combating and prevention of HT bullying.

Table 5: Measures employed by the school against HT bullying

Measures	Response	
	Yes	No
Talks with students about HT bullying and its prevention	45.8%	54.2%
Talks with students' parents about HT bullying and its prevention are regularly held	18.1%	81.9%
Talks with students and their parents together about HT bullying and its prevention are regularly held	19.4%	80.6%
Talks with teachers, social workers and psychologists about HT bullying and its prevention are regularly held	31.9%	68.1%
School cooperates with non-governmental organisations in order to fight HT bullying	23.6%	76.4%
School cooperates with the Education Development Centre under the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania in order to fight HT bullying	25%	75%
School cooperates with municipalities in order to fight HT bullying	26.4%	73.6%

Measures	Response	Yes	No
School has a specific programme that aims to fight bullying (in any forms)		65.3%	34.7%
School has a specific programme that aims to fight HT bullying in particular		19.4%	80.6%
HT bullying and its prevention is discussed, regularly or irregularly, in child welfare commission established in school		34.7%	65.3%
School administration, teachers, pedagogues, psychologists and social pedagogues are sent to seminars related to identification, reduction and prevention of bullying (in any forms)		62.5%	37.5%
School administration, teachers, pedagogues, psychologists and social pedagogues are sent to seminars related to identification, reduction and prevention of HT bullying in particular		20.8%	79.2%
We have an anti-bullying guideline/paper (explicitly including LGBTQIIQ; implicitly including; not inclusive; explicitly excluding)		43.1%	56.9%
We have a shared team vision		56.3%	41.7%
There are rules for students forbidding bad behaviour		84.7%	15.3%
There are rules for students guiding pro-social behaviour		83.3%	16.7%
We introduce the rules to students at the start of the year		80.6%	19.4%
We introduce students to pro-social behaviour by organizing a social get-to-know- each other-and-the-school week at the start of each year ("golden weeks")		62.5%	37.5%
We clarify the rules on posters for students in the school		55.6%	44.4%
We offer lessons on bullying prevention some time during the year		86.1%	13.9%
We pedagogically correct students when they transgress social rules		87.5%	12.5%
We punish students that transgress social rules		54.2%	45.8%
We have a no-blame policy regarding bullying		55.6%	44.4%
We have "real justice meetings" when there are complicated bullying problems		43.1%	56.9%
We use peer mediation to solve the lesser student conflicts		47.2%	52.8%
We use the "undercover" team method to combat bullying		31.9%	68.1%
We use groups relations analysis to understand bullying		61.1%	38.9%
We use groups relations analysis to teach students about bullying processes		62.5%	37.5%
We involve parents in meeting with bullies and victims to solve bullying which behave to do with family and background context		65.3%	34.7%

3.4.3. Training

When discussing issues related to attitudes, training and education are considered very important instruments to deal with bullying on one hand, and change the attitudes towards LGBTQI people on the other hand. According to 75% of respondents, schools in Lithuania are providing the so-called sex education, whereas one quarter indicates that schools are not providing such education. Though almost 80% of respondents revealed² that such education encompassed vast information about SOGI, almost 56% were unaware if such education encompassed information on prevention of HT bullying. Eventually, more than one third (30.6%) revealed that it didn't have any focus and information on HT bullying.

² From those who have indicated that sexual education exists.

Lack of awareness and non-recognition of HT bullying in the school environment could be explained and illustrated by the online survey data about the importance to fight such bullying on the one hand, and the need of training / seminars to recognise it on the other hand. For example, only one third (29.2%) of respondents indicated that fighting HT bullying in schools was very important, while 45.8% stated that it was important. A relatively bigger proportion of respondents believe that specific training is needed: 43.1% indicated that it was very much needed, whereas 33.3% thought it was much needed.

Again, when discussing about target groups of training that aim to recognise and combat bullying in general and HT bullying in particular, the distinction concerning the needs has to be made. For example, the online survey revealed that different target groups were in need of training related to the prevention of bullying in general: teachers (70.8%), social pedagogues (76.4%), psychologists (76.4%), administrators (73.6) and other school staff (63.9%). However, while discussing the need of specific training to combat HT bullying, the support of such training was lower in comparison to seminars on bullying in general. Eventually, less people identified the need of such training for the following target groups: teachers (59.7%), social pedagogues (67.5%), psychologists (68.1%), administrators (69.4%) and the rest of the school staff (51.4%). For more detailed data, see Table 6-7 below.

Table 6-7: The need of school staff to receive training for the prevention of any form of bullying

School staff \ Response	Very high	High	Moderate	Low	None
Teachers	38.9%	31.9%	16.7%	11.1%	1.4%
Social pedagogues	43.1%	33.3%	13.9%	8.3%	1.4%
Psychologists	48.6%	27.8%	12.5%	8.3%	2.8%
Administrators	37.5%	36.1%	16.7%	8.3%	1.4%
Others	30.6%	33.3%	23.6%	6.9%	5.6%

The need of school staff to receive training for the prevention of HT bullying

School staff \ Response	Very high	High	Moderate	Low	None
Teachers	38.9%	20.8%	25%	11.1%	4.2%
Social pedagogues	36.9%	30.6%	18.1%	9.7%	2.8%
Psychologists	38.9%	29.2%	16.7%	12.5%	2.8%
Administrators (principals)	34.7%	34.7%	16.7%	11.1%	2.8%
Others	23.6%	27.8%	22.2%	18.1%	8.3%

However, respondents of the online survey indicate a wider range of target groups: according to the findings, support staff, cleaning staff, canteen staff, technical support staff, security staff and everyone working in the school needs such training. Such data shows that the school community understands that bullying might occur in a much broader context of the school environment, and not only in the educational one (for example, not only in the classrooms).

Eventually, different forms of trainings were evaluated as very important or important by the majority of respondents, when dealing with prevention of bullying. Such training aspects as

pedagogic skills, balancing own opinions, dealing with fellow staff that may be opposed and not wishing to cooperate, dealing with parents' objections were identified as the most important (see Table 8 below).³

Table 8: Percentage of respondents selecting the importance of different types of training for prevention of bullying

Types of training	Importance				
	Very important	Important	More or less	Not important	Not important at all
Pedagogic skills, factual information, how to answer questions, how to deal with violent or silent reactions?	54.2	30.6	12.5	1.4	1.4
Didactic skills: planning lessons or a curriculum	30.6	33.3	30.6	2.8	2.8
How to balance own opinions (progressive or conservative) and those of others (progressive or conservative)?	44.4	33.3	15.3	2.8	4.2
How to deal with fellow staff that may be opposed and not wishing to cooperate?	45.6	27.8	18.1	4.2	4.2
How to coach/support LGBTQI students and students who are in doubt about their sexual orientation or gender identity?	41.7	33.3	16.7	4.2	4.2
How to deal with / influence school policy?	23.6	34.7	29.2	8.3	4.2
How to deal with regional/national context/restrictions (legal restrictions, social attitudes, religious convictions)?	29.2	23.6	27.6	11.1	8.3
How to deal with parents' objections?	43.1	27.8	23.6	1.4	4.2

The online survey provided quantitative information on the different approaches towards training, while the focus groups enabled a much deeper understanding regarding the nature of necessary training. The participants of the focus groups indicated that training about diversity and tolerance should be initiated at a very initial stage of organising schooling. Furthermore, teachers from the other focus group reported that there was a mechanism of different steps in relation to when and where to report certain incidents and / or bullying. However, such a plan doesn't specify what to do when HT bullying occurs. Therefore, the need of training emerges. The other problem, identified by teachers, is the absence of the so-called sexual education in schools. The administration isn't qualified enough to address this topic. Eventually, their proposed topics on sexual education are usually oriented towards contraception and sexual intercourse.

During discussions on sexual education in the focus groups, parents provided a broader field of challenges revealing strong resistance from other parents in the school towards sex education addressing gender equality or including topics of LGBTQI. The parents often stressed that there were bigger problems in the school's community than HT bullying. According to the participants, sex education and discussions about sexual diversity and gender identity is necessary as, for example, children are using words such as 'faggot' without knowing its meaning.

³ In addition, research respondents identified more diverse field of training aspects by indicating following examples of topics to discuss: good practice in context of Lithuanian schools on how to act when students are aggressive and how to behave with a student that is hostile towards LGBTQI, avoid being blamed for "not accepting a different opinion"; myths and scientific reality about LGBTQI; ensuring human rights in school by implementation of national and international obligations in teacher's work; no to gender stereotypes; obstacles in prevention of bullying situations: how quality bullying prevention programme should be implemented; intercultural understanding, sexuality concept; legal knowledge, stress and conflict management; importance of family and school cooperation.

While emphasising the need for training, the experts in the focus groups also expressed their opinion that every (potential) teacher and educator should get the information about LGBTQI issues from professionals and in professional training events because sometimes teachers were receiving negative information about LGBTQI community. For example, a method proposed to teachers to be used to implement the sexual education programme by the Education Development Centre was mentioned. These methods portrayed gay men in a very negative manner and were recognised as discriminatory by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. It is indeed the example of how homophobia and transphobia starts in the highest levels of policy implementation.

Finally, summarising the online survey and the focus groups' results, the emphasis should be put on the need for training of teachers regarding sexual orientation and gender identity issues as teachers and other members of the school community recognised the gap in their ability to balance between the two – progressive and conservative – opinions. The participants of research agreed that there was lack of knowledge on how to deal with co-workers or parents who have HT beliefs, how to influence the school's internal policy regarding bullying, how to solve issues related to the school's regulations, how to solve issues related to legal constraints, different social or religious beliefs.

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

Finally, in the online survey, the cooperation of the school community with other institutions to fight HT bullying was indicated as very important or important by the biggest part of respondents. For example, 36.1% of respondents indicated that it was very important, whereas 29.2% reported that it was important to cooperate with NGOs, 13.9% stated that it was very important, whereas 33.3% said it was important to cooperate with other schools, 27.8% indicated that it was very important, whereas 29.2% said it was important to cooperate with municipalities. Finally, 30.6% stated that it was very important, whereas 25% that it was important to cooperate with the Ministry of Education and Science or Education Development Centre.

In addition, one third of respondents believed that it would be important to cooperate with other bodies/organisations and stakeholders: for example, with organisations that have experience in the topic, with social workers, students themselves, students' parents, families, victims, professional / objective media, human rights activists, pedagogical and psychological services of towns and regions, colleagues, media and social networks, the church because there was a lot of homophobia and "old-fashioned views".

Regardless of the fact that the participants of research revealed the importance of cooperation, approximately 75% of respondents indicated that schools were not cooperating with non-governmental organisations, the Education Development Centre under the Ministry of Education and Science and the municipalities in order to fight HT bullying. Eventually, there is a big gap between the understanding of what is important on one hand, and what kinds of measures are implemented in practice on the other hand.

The experts in the focus group explained that there was a possibility for schools to reach out to experts or NGOs, however, most of the schools avoided letting NGOs in as they were afraid of publicity and reactions from the parents. Eventually, the cooperation with external actors is limited due to prejudices, stereotypes and prevailing attitudes.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1. Future research areas

Due to the fragmented manner of collecting and analysing data on bullying in general and HT bullying in particular, only a limited range of research and reports on HT bullying, mainly conducted by non-governmental organisations, and implementation of antidiscrimination policies is available. However, to combat homophobia and transphobia effectively nationwide and in schools, it is necessary to have systematic and comparative data about discrimination and bullying faced by LGBTQI individuals. Therefore, a political leadership along with an independent national body that would annually monitor and report on human rights, hate crimes and hate speech on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and other features has to be established. At the same time, it is necessary to carry out longitudinal quantitative and qualitative research in order to collect the data and respond to prevailing challenges, related to bullying in general and HT bullying in particular.

4.2. Policies

While legal antidiscrimination mechanisms have been introduced due to the pressure from the EU and other intergovernmental institutions, the protection of human rights is not considered as an issue of first importance by Lithuanian authorities. Laws that should ensure equal opportunities for LGBTQI individuals are rather facile, adopted only to meet the requirements, and quite vague regarding their implementation.

Although anti-discrimination laws formally exist, in most cases they have proved ineffective in practice.. In addition to the lack of protection, the latest legal act promoting family values has further undermined LGBTQI rights. The laws have provided legal justification for censoring LGBTQI related public information. In a context where projects to raise public awareness about LGBTQI issues, organised by non-governmental and human rights organisations, are the only visible attempt to improve situation for LGBTQI persons, such violations of the rights of expression pose a serious threat.

Lithuania has one of the highest rates of bullying as well as discrimination towards LGBTQI. However, there are no national strategies to combat the issues at the national level. Measures to address any forms of bullying are not systematic and depend on schools individually, whereas bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity is ignored on both national and school levels, despite its high prevalence.

In addition to being subjected to peer bullying, many LGBTQI students experience discrimination from the school personnel. In general, school staff isn't supportive towards LGBTQI students, it doesn't perceive the scope of HT bullying and doesn't think it is their

responsibility to address the issue. Hence, many LGBTQI students feel insecure at school and choose to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity. Such hostile environment arguably causes tremendous effects on their wellbeing.

In order to prevent HT bullying and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, the legal mechanism protecting rights of LGBTQI individuals must become effective first of all. The adoption of legislative proposals that restrict LGBTQI rights and define family as exclusively heterosexual has to be reconsidered.

As homophobia and transphobia are grounded on societal prejudices, drawing public attention to LGBTQI issues and discrimination as a form of an offensive behaviour would improve the public opinion towards LGBTQI people and hence would increase overall coexistence on both societal and institutional levels.

Although bullying in schools is acknowledged as an issue on the national level, no systematic strategy in this field has been adopted. A compulsory national programme would ensure enrolment of students and staff of all educational institutions and help reduce overall levels of bullying. Despite its tremendous harmful effects, today HT bullying is completely ignored by the Lithuanian authorities. Considering the lack of awareness among educators on this issue, the authorities should take actions at the higher level. The national strategy should help initiate training of school staff to build their capacity to tackle HT bullying on the local level and guarantee the inclusion of LGBTQI related topics to the curriculum.

4.3. Schools

The research revealed that HT bullying had been unrecognised within the school environment. According to the online survey results, HT bullying rarely occurs in Lithuanian schools, but according to the focus groups participants – parents and students, – it is widely spread and is unrecognised. The professionals that participated in the focus groups had different opinions: some said it was very prevalent, and the others lacked knowledge to prove the prevalence.

Therefore, school administration, teachers, social pedagogues and psychologists need training on how to recognise HT bullying, with clear examples of it, and understand how and which groups are affected by HT bullying, also how to deal with negative reactions when the topics are raised. Training of school staff would help recognise and prevent cases of HT bullying; knowledge about general LGBTQI issues, communities and support services would enable personnel to support and, if needed, refer LGBTQI students to other institutions.

Moreover, HT bullying is perceived in very narrowly. For example, the professionals consider HT bullying as a particular type of bullying directly addressed only towards LGBTQI students, without taking into consideration that usage of LGBTQI words as insults towards any student or negative comments about LGBTQI community might affect the wellbeing of LGBTQI students and others that don't conform with the traditional image of a girl or a boy.

The vast majority of the school educational community did not know or weren't aware of any LGBTQI persons (students or adults) in their schools. According to the parents and students, LGBTQI students don't feel safe to come out and talk to adults in their schools, only to the peers they trust, peers who are LGBTQI themselves or school staff who openly declare their support or are LGBTQI themselves. Therefore, the parents and students said students wouldn't feel safe to report HT bullying at school, fearing that either their sexual orientation would be disclosed to others (students, parents or teachers) or that they might be seen as LGBTQI (when they are not).

Most LGBTQI students think that HT bullying could be mitigated by the curriculum (e.g. sexual education) that includes LGBTQI topics. Not only LGBTQI but also heterosexual students have to be informed about sexual orientation and gender identity to develop adequate attitudes

towards LGBTQI individuals. If the formal position of the school authorities condemns bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity as well as on any other grounds, LGBTQI students will feel more accepted and secure in the school environment.

Only few measures are being employed by the school community to fight HT bullying. Eventually, there are no any regular discussions about HT bullying neither with students and parents, nor with other teachers and other professionals within the school environment. Eventually, HT bullying doesn't seem to be a very important issue to deal with at the intersectional cooperation level.

On the one hand, schools have initiated specific programmes to combat bullying as such. On the other hand, in most cases, the schools don't have any specific and proactive measures, programmes or initiatives with the aim to fight HT bullying. In the school environment, bullying in general is an issue considered to be the subject of discussions and different initiatives. However, HT bullying seems to be ignored rather than recognised.

The infrastructure for the identification, combating and prevention of bullying in general is already in place or, at least, is being developed. However, it is clear that such infrastructure with all necessary elements has no focus on the identification, combating and prevention of HT bullying.

The implementation of Health, Sexuality and Family Planning Education Programme, even if it includes information on sexual orientation and gender identity issues, depends on the schools and teachers. Eventually, such education rarely reaches the students. This happens due to the lack of training and / or methodological and or moral preparation of school communities to talk about the topics.

4.4. NGOs and municipalities

School communities believe that cooperation with NGOs and municipalities is an important instrument to fight bullying in general and HT bullying in particular. Moreover, different ways of cooperation have been revealed. Regardless of the fact that the importance of cooperation has been identified, the majority of respondents indicated that schools were not cooperating neither with NGOs, nor with other relevant organisations. Therefore, proactive measures from NGOs are necessary to start an effective cooperation, joint training programmes and ad hoc responses to (HT) bullying in schools. In this regard, the municipalities could act as mediators between NGOs and schools or the community. Such mediation would create easier access to the schools as, according to research findings, most of the schools avoid letting NGOs in due to publicity and negative reactions from the local communities.

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