

UNIVERSITIES TOWARDS DIVERSITY

POLICY BRIEF

Partners:



UNIVERSITIES TOWARDS DIVERSITY

POLICY

BRIEF

www.university-project.eu



Funded by the Rights, Equality
and Citizenship (REC) Programme
of the European Union

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

HOW ARE OUR UNIVERSITIES LGBTI+ INCLUSIVE?

FINDINGS FROM GREECE, ITALY, AND LITHUANIA

1. Background

Individuals who do not fit the traditional notions of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGISC) face various forms of discrimination and harassment. These includes, but is not limited to, discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

The EU FRA study¹, conducted in 2013 on the experiences of over 93,000 LGBT individuals from various countries, found that they were more likely to be victims of discrimination and violence than those non-LGBT. This study also revealed that many LGBT individuals experienced harassment and violence in educational environments.

Again in 2015, the Special Eurobarometer 437² revealed that 60% of participants stated that they experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI).

This topic emphasizes the need for a step-up in addressing LGBTI+ discrimination in the educational environment, which is a place where people can develop and grow.

2. The educational environment

In Greece and Italy, anti-discrimination laws do not explicitly address SOGISC. However, despite the lack of such protection, both countries' Education Law promotes gender equality. In Lithuania, the Law on Equal Treatment prohibits discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation, but it makes no reference to gender identity and sex characteristics.

According to the EU FRA study 2013, it is estimated that, in Greece, around one third of the educational staff members has been suffered discrimination due to its race or ethnicity. In Lithuania, 27% of the respondents stated that they had suffered discrimination in the education environment, while in Italy it is 14%.

According to the EU FRA 2014 report³ on the experiences of transgender individuals in the European Union, over 30% of those who were asked about their school or university experienced discrimination, such as harassment and negative comments due to their gender identity. Looking at the data with regards to the different member states, the percentage is close to the mean for Italy and Greece, where it ranges from 23-26%, but far higher for

¹ FRA, *EU LGBT survey European Union lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survey – Results at a glance*, 2013.

² European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 437 Discrimination in the EU*, 2015.

³ FRA, *Being Trans in the European Union Comparative analysis of EU LGBT survey data*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014.

Lithuania, where 39% of respondents indicated having faced discrimination by school/university personnel because of being trans in the 12 months preceding the survey.

According to the Special Eurobarometer 493⁴, in 2019 about 5% of LGBTI+ respondents from Greece, Italy, and Lithuania stated that they faced discrimination at school or university.

The evidence shows that the research mainly targets discrimination in the high school environment instead of the academic environment. The two environments are thought differently, with the former being more focused on bullying and harassment, while the latter is more concerned with discrimination. The data on bullying and harassment in the academic environment are therefore both limited, as are the measures that can be put in place to prevent it.

This policy brief presents some findings from a study conducted within the activities of the EU-funded project *UniDiversity: Universities towards Diversity*⁵, which considered both characteristics of the episodes of discrimination and violence based on SOGISC in universities and the training needs of the academic community in terms of the prevention and tackling such episodes.

3. Research methods

The literature review was focused on the discriminatory behavior against LGBTI+ individuals that occurs in the academic environment and on the basis of SOGISC. Researchers from the three countries reviewed the relative primary and secondary research on the topic of discrimination on the SOGISC grounds. National and EU situation concerning LGBTI+ rights in higher education, as well as the existing legal framework that protects them, were also considered in the analysis.

The research team also investigated the prevalence of hate crimes and discriminatory acts in academic environments in their own country. To this purpose, an online survey was conducted to collect data on the prevalence of discriminatory acts against LGBTI+ individuals and members of the academic community. The survey participants were asked to identify the form, the frequency, the characteristic of perpetrators and the location of the discriminatory incidents that take place.

The survey was semi-structured, and the questions were mainly focused on the participants' target groups. In order to provide feedback on the potential training modules, two open-ended questions were added. Participants were informed about the project's objectives and the confidentiality of their responses. In order to achieve an appropriate number of online questionnaires filled, project partners used different ways to attract participants, including official websites, social media accounts, as well as academic associations.

4. Key findings

The results of the survey were collected by a total of 1.079 participants, of whom 251 were Greek (23,2%), 575 Lithuanian (53,3%), and 253 Italian (23,5%).

Respondents from Greece were significantly more likely to believe that LGBTI+ are accepted in universities, followed by Lithuanian colleagues. Most of the Italian sample remained neutral, while approximately similar percentages believe that LGBTQI+ people are and are not treated respectfully.

⁴ European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 493 Discrimination in the EU*, 2019.

⁵ The project *Universities towards Diversity - UniDiversity* is co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020) of the European Union.

Although a majority of respondents from all participating countries believe that the frequency of discriminatory incidents in academic settings is low, it should be noted here that this does not imply inexistence. Discriminatory incidents are still prevalent in Greek, Italian and Lithuanian academic environments.

The most common form of discrimination reported by respondents was the use of LGBTQI+ words in an insulting manner. Other forms of discrimination include negative comments and prejudice. Deadnaming and misgendering also appears to take place sometimes. Violence has been reported to take place less often in Greece and Lithuania, with verbal harassment being the most prevalent form of violence. It should be underlined that at least two thirds of the Lithuanian participants believe that the incidents described above never happen in their universities.

Most of the time, the perpetrators are students, followed by faculty members and staff members. In Lithuania, 24,5 % of survey respondents said that students could be named as perpetrators, and only 17,5 % said that academic staff (research, permanent staff, other staff members) could be named as perpetrators.

According to the participants of the survey, most of the time, they experienced discrimination in various areas on the campus. These included the areas of the university that are usually open to the public, such as the dining areas and the classrooms. Several respondents reported experiencing discrimination in the areas of the school, including the board offices, the cafeteria, and the yards.

As for the level of visibility of LGBTQI+ individuals in the academic environment, almost half of the Greeks and Lithuanian respondents stated that there are openly gay and lesbian students in their academic environments. The Italian participants were split on the issue, with some stating that they did not know about the presence of openly LGBTQI+ staff members in their universities. Almost half of the students stated that they have participated in classes where the issues related to LGBTQI+ are discussed in a positive manner. This was also the case for almost half of the academic staff members.

Most students and staff members of Italian and Lithuanian universities have not undergone training regarding LGBTQI+ issues in the five years preceding the survey. Respondents from all countries would be however interested in participating in trainings. In terms of the topics of such potential trainings, students were more interested in terminology, the psychological effects LGBTQI+ discrimination, the national situation of LGBTQI+ rights, the different forms of discrimination and the legal framework; while staff members appeared to be more interested in existing good practices, ways to integrate inclusive practices in everyday practices, terminology, and teaching strategies for a more inclusive approach.

5. Policy implications

In view of the current situation, and in order to provide more inclusive academic environments for all participants, the following recommendations have been made:

1. The States should promote the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in the protected grounds of hate crime and discrimination. At the same time, mechanisms to prevent SOGISC-based discrimination in universities should be implemented in order to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all involved people. This should be done also to prevent the phenomenon of underreporting.
2. Further research is needed on the experiences of LGBTQI+ individuals in universities. A safe space should be created that enables academic staff members and students to freely express their identities. This space should be a place where they can feel safe and secure. Also, a collaboration between universities and civil societies should be established to promote academic freedom and human rights.

3. All university staff members should be trained to the latest standards and procedures to enable them to effectively perform their duties. This training should be carried out in a way that is consistent with the current conditions and legal framework. Trainings and activities on LGBTQI+ should be widely disseminated to reach as many people as possible. Regular research on the current training needs of students and professionals should be conducted to keep up with the changing trends in the field.

4. Action on awareness raising should be more coordinated in the context of educational environments. Students, faculty members, and administrators should be aware of the various barriers and discrimination faced to the rights of LGBTQI+ people. Also, awareness raising activities should be organized to improve the visibility of minorities in the community and to stimulate discussions on these topics. There should also be support for professionals to integrate such topics into their existing lectures.



university

www.university-project.eu

The project is funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union and is implemented in Greece by Panteio University of Social and Political Sciences and Colour Youth LGBTQ Community of Athens, in Lithuania by Vytautas Magnus University, Diversity Development Group and in Italy by University of Brescia and Avvocatura per i Diritti LGBTI. The project is coordinated by Panteion University.

