Hombat

Combating HOMophoBic And
Transphobic bullying in schools

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Introduction

1. Introduction

Even though there is no official data on the size of LGBTI population in Cyprus, available research suggests that approximately 85,000 people identify as LGBT (Ecri1, 2016). The lack of adequate statistics and research on the size and needs of the LGBTI community in Cyprus appears to reflect a wider lack of research on the phenomenon of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. In relation to this, some relevant research argues that homophobia and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation constitutes a taboo subject in Cyprus that has not been sufficiently explored (Trimikliniotis & Karayanni, 2008). Evidently, the limited research in this area is in line with the fact that Cyprus is still a highly conservative and patriarchic society characterized by homophobic attitudes (Soshilou & Vasiliou, 2016; Kapsou, Christophi & Epaminonda, 2011; Eurobarometer, 2009; Research Centre of Cyprus College, 2006). The extent of homophobia within the Cypriot society appears to be also supported by the findings of the EU LGBT survey published by FRA2 (2014), which reveals that around 8 in 10 respondents in Cyprus think that it is very rare for public figures in politics, business and sports to be open about being LGBT. Along the same lines, the same survey shows that Cyprus ranks the highest percentage (29%) among EU Member States and Croatia of respondents who were employed in the last 12 months and felt personally discriminated against at work in the last year because of being LGBT. Overall, the survey also demonstrates that Cyprus is at the 4th place among the 27 EU Member States and Croatia in terms of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation.

The present National report aims to present the findings of the research conducted on the occurrence and characteristics of discrimination and bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in primary and secondary school environment in the Greek Cypriot community of Cyprus. More specifically, the report constitutes a synthesis of the following: 1) the findings of a desk research that reviewed all the relevant and available data and resources in relation to the phenomenon of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, bullying and hate speech in schools in the Greek Cypriot community, 2) the findings of an online survey which was conducted with the use of an online questionnaire and aimed to identify the characteristics of discrimination and bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in the school environment (primary and secondary) in Cyprus, as well as the manner in which the phenonmenon is being addressed and, 3) the findings that emerged from three focus groups.

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1   ECRI is the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

2   FRA is the European Union Agency for Fundamental Human Rights

1.1. Methodology

1.1.1. Desk research

The desk research that was conducted aimed to review all the relevant and available data and resources in relation to the phenomenon of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, bullying and hate speech in schools in Cyprus and more specifically in the Greek Cypriot community. It should be noted that the topic under investigation remains an area that has not been adequately researched in Cyprus. The acknowledgement of the lack of research in this field highlights the importance of further investigation that will enable insight on the topic. Pertinent insight and knowledge will form the basis for developing appropriate tools, as well as, a framework for potential measures to be used for combating homophobic and transphobic discrimination and bullying in the school environment.

1.1.2. Online survey

The online questionnaire was advertised through the project's website and local newspapers and circulated among the Cyprus educational community. More specifically, it was forwarded to teachers who are employed both in primary and secondary education, school counsellors, educational psychologists, other professionals who work directly with children, parents and, students. Overall, 70 people participated in the online survey. Even though, one of the limitations of the present research is the relatively small sample, it should be noted that the findings of this survey formed the basis for the interview protocol was designed and used in the focus groups.

1.1.3. Focus groups

With regards to the focus groups, two focus groups were conducted with professionals who work within the school environment and one focus group was conducted with parents and school children. The focus groups that were carried with professionals were designed to: a) explore professionals' experiences in relation to the phenomenon under investigation, b) investigate their views in relation to how this phenomenon is being addressed by the school community and, c) examine professionals' views with regards to the aspects they consider important for combating homophobic and transphobic bullying in school. Likewise, the focus group carried out with parents and children was designed to: a) explore both parents' and school children's experiences and views in relation to the phenomenon under investigation and b) examine their views and perceptions in relation to the issue of ex education both within the family and the school environment.

It should be mentioned that the insight gained from the desk research, the online survey and the focus group data analysis will be used to guide the development of the capacity building methodology of the Hombat project. Finally, the last part of the report offers recommendations on how the phenomenon of discrimination and bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity can be addressed and combated within the school community in Cyprus. The online survey findings emerged from a descriptive analysis and the findings of the focus groups derived from qualitative thematic analysis.

Key findings of the
desk research

2. Key findings of the desk research

2.1. Overview of attitudes towards LGBTQI people in Cyprus

According to the last ECRI report (2016), Cyprus is a country that is characterized by attitudes of intolerance against LGBT people. This is supported by the findings of the EU LGBT Survey published by FRA (2014) which showed that 61% of the Cypriot participants reported that discrimination of the basis of sexual orientation is "very widespread" in Cyprus. Importantly, this is a percentage that needs to be examined by taking into account that the equivalent EU average was 31%; a finding that highlights the extent of intolerance and discrimination against LGBT people in Cyprus. This dominant climate of homophobia and transphobia appears to have a detrimental negative impact on how LGBTI people experience themselves within their social context. In relation to this, the same survey revealed that the vast majority of LGBT people in Cyprus (9 out of 10 participants) reported that they did not disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to others as a way of protecting themselves. This finding seems to be in line with the findings of a previous study conducted in Cyprus that mapped the socio-political climate, as well as the experiences and needs of the LGBT community (Kapsou et al., 2011). More specifically, the study that was conducted with 136 LGB participants documented that LGB people experienced discrimination and moderate to low levels of acceptance. Furthermore, participants reported that trans people receive minimum social acceptance and overall, are 'not at all accepted' (ibid., 2011 p.114). The experience of discrimination was reported to have taken place in a number of different settings including participants' working environment, school, in the army and other settings. Along the same lines, the EU LGBT Survey (FRA, 2014) showed that 56% of the participants in Cyprus reported that they had been harassed or discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation in the past 12 months. Once more, the percentage of LGBT people who reported having been harassed or discriminated against in Cyprus well exceeds the EU average that was reported to be 47%. With regards to the situation in the school environment, in 2012, the Ombudsman published a report on homophobia in education in Cyprus, which underlined the extent of homophobic bullying in schools and emphasised the detrimental psychological impact on children (Demetriou, 2014).

Importantly, the public discourse on LGBTI issues is constructed and shaped through the Media. The significant role of Media is brought into the foreground by the study of Kapsou et al. (2011) which reveals that the Media in Cyprus has not changed much over the years in relation to the manner in which they portray LGBTI people; a culture that for the most part portrays gay men as caricatures that have exaggerated and stereotypical attributes, rarely presents lesbians and conspicuously ignores the presence of trans and intersex individuals. All in all, it could be argued that the dominant media culture not only ignores and denies LGBTI peoples' identity but constructs it as 'abnormal' and 'unnatural'. It would be a remiss not to refer to the influential

role of the Orthodox Church in the Greek Cypriot society which promotes, perpetuates and further establishes the negative attitudes and stance against the LGBTI community. In relation to this, the Archbishop of the Greek Cypriot Church declared on public television and on a number of other occasions that homosexuality is a sin and perversion. This view was also shared in a Church's press release that took place before the first Cyprus gay parade (Holy Synod of Cyprus, 2014). Along the same lines, in 2014 the Head of the Greek Cypriot Church declared his opposition against civil partnership and marriage rights by employing an aggressive and malevolent discourse on homosexuality and by openly asking people to condemn it and stand against it.

2.2. Cypriot legislative context on LGBTQI rights and EU directives

2.2.1. International and Cypriot legal framework

Homosexuality among men remained a criminal offence in Cyprus until 1998. Abolition of criminalization of homosexuality constituted the outcome of pressure from the European Court of Human Rights after a gay activist, Alecos Modinos won a legal court case against the Republic of Cyprus at the European Court of Human Rights (European Court of Human Rights, 1993). Even though, Modinos won the case in 1993 when the Court ruled that the Cypriot criminal code violated his right to private life, it was only in 1998 that the Government was forced to implement the Court's decision and amend the law. More specifically, the law amendment took place in 1998 when Cyprus claimed membership in the European Union and was forced to comply with the Court's ruling. Nevertheless, the age of consent was set at 18 for homosexuals and 16 for lesbians and heterosexuals. Moreover, the amended criminal code criminalised the 'promotion' of homosexuality until 2000. In 2002, the age of consent was equalised and the law was amended setting the age of consent at 17 for both heterosexuals and homosexuals. It should be noted, that this change did not eliminate discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation as the age of consent for marriage that applies for heterosexual couples, remains at 16 (Kapsou et al., 2011).

In 2000, the European Union adopted two directives that prohibited discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, disability and sexual orientation. The directives aimed to ensure that all individuals living in the EU could benefit from effective legal protection against such discrimination (European Commission, 2016). In 2004, the Republic of Cyprus implemented an anti-discrimination law and particularly, the Equal Treatment in Occupation and Employment Law 2004 which forbids discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment. This law was designed to comply with the European Union's Employment Framework Directive of 2000. On the same note, in 2004 Cyprus also implemented the Law on Combating Racial and Other Forms of Discrimination through which the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman) was appointed as the National Equality Body for combating direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of community, race, language, colour, religion, and national or ethnic origin and sexual orientation. Although discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation is explicitly prohibited only in the employment field, the Equality Body's wide mandate has enabled interventions into fields beyond employment. Nevertheless, the Equality Body has never received any employment-related complaints for sexual orientation discrimination (Demetriou, 2014).

According to the comparative legal analysis (on the protection against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics in the EU) that was conducted by FRA (2015), since 2014, ten EU Member States treat discrimination on the basis of gender identity as a form of sex discrimination. Unfortunately, this is not the case for Cyprus in which the lack of legislation or case law that treats discrimination on the grounds of gender identity

results in legal uncertainty about the protection against discrimination of trans people. In addition, even though as of 2014, 15 EU Member States consider homophobic intent an element to be taken into account when determining penalties, in Cyprus committing criminal offences with such intent does not constitute an aggravating circumstance (FRA, 2015). On a positive note, in 2013, the Cypriot Parliament amended the penal code in a manner that criminalises public incitement to violence or hatred against people on the grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity. According to the law, perpetrators face up to three years imprisonment or a fine of up to 5 000 euros or both. (Ecri, 2016). However, in November 2016, the LGBTQI rights group Accept called on the Attorney General to investigate the Archbishop's public comments against the LGBTI community as hate speech and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Until the present moment, the Attorney General has not responded to the call of investigation of violation of the criminal code.

2.2.2. Legislation for same-sex couples and gender identity change

Another positive change took place in 2015 when the House of Parliament passed the law on Civil Partnerships conferring the possibility of "two heterosexual or homosexual persons" to conclude a "written agreement", known as the civil partnership agreement. While acknowledging that the legal recognition of same-sex couples was an important in the direction of LGBTI equality in Cyprus, the fact remains that there is still a long way to go.

More specifically, the legal recognition of gender is Cyprus remains a troublesome issue as until the present moment there is no gender recognition law in Cyprus. This is accompanied by the absence of simple procedures in place that can ensure the legal change of gender identity for trans people. On the contrary, the procedure of sex reassignment means that trans people are often required to undergo major medical interventions and surgeries before requesting a change of personal data that reflects their gender identity (Ecri, 2016). Also, trans people need to travel abroad for surgery as no gender reassignments surgeries are performed. Based on Ecri (2016) report, it has been reported that the Ministry of Health appears to be unwilling to cover the costs of the surgery on the basis that it is not medically necessary. As a result, trans persons find themselves in the difficult position of having to finance their reassignment surgery. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the legal recognition of gender is currently a topic under discussion.

2.3. Antidiscrimination policies and actions

In order to reduce the phenomenon of homophobia and transphobia in schools, the government took specific steps. More specifically, in 2011 topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity were introduced in the pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). Furthermore, in 2012, Cyprus implemented an anti-bullying plan in schools in order to promote a supportive environment for LGBTI children. The campaign called Shield against Homophobia in Education was organised under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights and the Commissioner for Children's Rights. In addition, The Campaign was funded under the National "Youth in Action Program" and implemented by the Pool of Trainers of the Cyprus Youth Council (CYC) in partnership with the Cyprus Family Planning Association (CFPA). It was also assisted by the University of Cyprus and the Pedagogical Institute (Papageorgiou & Kapsou, 2015). The aim of the campaign was to empower a group of professionals within the field of education to prevent and handle homophobic incidents in the school environment. In addition, the project aimed to promote positive discourse on sexual orientation and gender sexuality. It should be clarified that the project consisted of three parts: a qualitative study that investigated the teachers experiences with gender norms and homophobia in schools, a

training course for teachers on gender and sexuality for teachers and, a nationwide conference for education professionals (see Soshilou & Vasiliou, 2016; Papageorgiou & Kapsou, 2015). Overall, 80 educators of different school levels were trained on the topic of homophobia in education and importantly, a handbook with guidelines for LGBT-inclusive education will be produced and distributed to schools. In addition, according to the Ecri report (2016), between June 2014 and March 2015, Cyprus was one of six countries taking part in the joint EU/Council of Europe programme "Training to Teach about Controversial Issues" which covered questions of homosexuality. Around 180 mostly primary school teachers participated in the training. Finally, in 2016, the Ministry of Education and Culture published the revised version of the Code of Conduct against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents (Ministry of Education, 2016). The Code notes that zero tolerance should be shown regarding incidents racism or any form of discrimination due to gender, nationality, appearance, religion, sexual orientation, disability or other aspects of identity.

In relation to trans persons' rights, in 2013, the Equality Body issued a report on the conditions of detention of trans people that led to a set of guidelines issued in cooperation with the police on the arrest, search and detention of trans persons. The guidelines were disseminated by the police to all departments and units (Demetriou, 2014).

2.3.1. Contribution of NGOs and other organisations

The NGO in the Greek Cypriot Community that is advocating and lobbying for LGBTQI rights is Accept. Accept is working closely with other NGOs such as the Refugee Council and the Cyprus Family Planning Association for issues that concern rights of LGBTQI populations in Cyprus.

2.3.2. Overview of research findings and reports

The first field research conducted in Cyprus on sexual orientation and the experiences of the LGBT community that took place in 2011 (Kapsou et al., 2011) revealed high levels that homophobic incidents, which occurred within the school environment, were not addressed or investigated by the school authorities. The same year, in 2011, the Equality Body received a number of complaints about homophobic incidents at schools (Demetriou, 2014). A different study conducted by Kapsou & Mantis (2012) reported severe instances of homophobia-motivated bullying and harassment in school, which often remained unreported since there were no guidelines for their handling. On the same note, in 2012, the Ombudsman published a report on homophobia in education in Cyprus, which emphasised the extent of homophobic bullying in schools and described the negative impact of bullying on victims (Demetriou, 2014). All the findings presented above are also presented in the Ecri report (2016). The Ecri was pleased to observe that the government took into account the severity of the issue and took important steps in order to counter the phenomenon of homophobia in the school environment (see section of antidiscrimination policies and implementation). Interestingly, the most recent research published in Cyprus by Soshilou & Vasiliou (2016) that explored homophobia by examining the narratives of teachers showed significant lack of awareness on the topic of sexual orientation, as well as teachers' lack of ability to handle sexual orientation issues. Furthermore, teachers' narratives when describing both their personal views and homophobic incidents were permeated by discourses of homophobia. Another important finding that brings into the foreground both the educators' lack of knowledge and awareness on the topic is the fact that a number of teachers expressed feeling concerned with regards to parents' reactions about discussing sexual issues or gender expression at school. This is also linked to fact that institutional homophobia is reinforced by the stereotypes that teachers themselves hold (ibid., 2016). The latter is in line with previous research findings (Kapsou et al., 2011; Trimikliniotis & Karayanni, 2008) which explain that LGBT issues and discussions about homophobia remain a

taboo and are rarely openly discussed in the public sphere and in the school environment. In a similar vein, the survey carried out by FRA (2014), showed that in Cyprus, 97% of all respondents reported having seen or heard negative comments or behaviours because a schoolmate was perceived to be LGBT when at school and before the age of 18.

Findings of the field research

3. Findings of the field research

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

This part of the report presents the research results that emerged from the online survey and the three focus groups in relation to the prevalence of homophobic and transphobic bullying and its identification/recognition. Before presenting the findings of the research, it would be fair to refer to the social and demographic characteristic of the participants. More specifically, the vast majority of the participants (67.1 %) identified themselves as female whereas, the rest (32.9 %) identified themselves as male. None of the participants identified themselves either as trans nor as intersex. In terms of age, participants were divided into four age groups: 1) 16 to 18 years of age (8.6 %), 2) 19 to 30 years of age (28.7 %), 3) 31 to 40 years of age (41.4% %), 4) 41 to 58 years of age (21.3 %). With regards to the participants' education level the great majority of participants (75.7 %) said that have a Bachelor's degree, 5.7 % said that have a secondary school certificate, 10 % stated that have a Master's degree, 2.9 % said that hold a PhD degree, 2.9 % stated that have a professional title from a higher institution, 1.4 % said that are High school students (lyceum) and 1.4 % said that they dropped out from secondary school. With regards to the family status 38.6 % of the participants stated that are married and 24.3 % of the participants that are single. Moreover, 18. 5 % said that live with their partner, 10 % of the participants mentioned that they are in relationship but do not live with their partner, 4.3 % of the participants said that are single and have never lived with a partner, 2.9 % said that are underage and live with their parents and 1.4 % that are separated. In terms of participants' sexual orientation, the big majority of them (78.6 %) identified as straight, a percentage of 11.4 % identified as homosexual, 7.1 % of participants identified as bisexual, 1.4 % said that they do not know and 1.4 % said that they preferred not to answer the question.

Finally, in relation to participants' role within the educational community, 57.1 % said that they work as teachers in primary or secondary education. 11.4 % of the participants identified as parents, 5.7 % as students, 4.3 % as school counsellors, 4.3 % as university students, 2.9 % of the participants identified as social workers and 2.9 % as psychologists. Furthermore, 2.9 % of the participants identified as photographers, 2.9 % as health visitors, 1.4 % as special education teachers, 1.4 % as English teachers who work in a private institution, 1.4 % as youth workers and 1.4 % identified as a student who dropped out from school recently. With regards to the focus groups participants, the first focus group consisted of four teachers, three females and one male. Three of the participants worked in secondary education and one in primary education. The second focus group consisted of two school psychologists, one school counsellor and one primary school teacher/clinical psychologist trainee; three females and one male. Finally, the third forcus group consisted of four parents, three females and one male and four school

children of primary and secondary school, two boys and two girls. The small size of the focus groups was due to last minute drop outs. Nevertheless, the focus group discussion produced rich material.

3.1.1. Individual perspectives

As some of the school professionals who participated in the focus group explained, the school community either because of ignorance or in an attempt to protect students with different sexual orientations and gender identities often tends to perpetuate homophobic and transphobic attitudes. Most of the participants said that this stance is also reflected upon the fact that teachers are openly discouraged from discussing issues on sexual orientation in class as these issues are considered inappropriate. More specifically, two of the participants said that the fact they discussed issues of this nature has had a negative impact on them personally (one of them was transferred in another school and another one received a complaint from parents). Overall, participants mentioned that when teachers and other colleagues observe bullying incidents, they either remain silent or try to ignore/cover them instead of addressing them.

3.1.2. School environment

In the online survey, prevalence, identification and recognition of homophobic bullying within the school environment in Cyprus was examined by asking participants to report which students are usually subjected to bullying and participants could identify more than one group of students. The group that was identified as the one more likely (72.9 %) to be subjected to bullying is the group of students who do not fit the expected image of a boy or girl. The group that ranked second (68.6 %) in terms of how likely is to be subjected to bullying is students who are overweight. This was followed by students with a migrant background (54.3 %), students who face learning challenges (51.4 %) and students from poor families (34.4 %). Finally, anyone could be subjected to bullying was an answer that received 8.6 %. 10 % of participants said that they do not know which students are usually subjected to bullying. Two persons said that anyone who deviates from the norm is usually subjected to bullying. Last, one person said that students who are popular and are physically strong might be subjected to bullying.

When participants were asked whether they know any LGBTQI students or people in their school, 42.9 % of participants said that they are not aware of or do not know any, 31.4 % answered yes and, 25.7 % answered no. Likewise, when then were asked if they think whether there are any LGBTQI students or people in their school, 53.6 % of participants said yes, 33.9 % answered that they do not know and 12.5 % answered no. The following question asked participants to state the prevalence of homophobic and transphobic bullying in their school. 22.9 % of participants said that they do not know of the prevalence, 21.4 % said that homophobic and transphobic bullying is somewhat prevalent, 20 % of participants said that it is not really prevalent, 18.6 % said that is not prevalent at all and 1.4 % said that it is highly prevalent. However, when participants were asked whether students in their school have ever experienced homophobic and transphobic bullying or heard negative comments about LGBTQI community, 47.1 % of participants answered that they do not know but 40 % answered yes. A lower percentage of 12.9 % of participants said no. Participants were asked whether the class of sex education is being provided and taught at school. 61.4 % of participants said no and 38.6 % said yes. Those who answered yes (38.6 %) were asked whether sex education includes information about different sexual orientations and gender identities. The vast majority of them (66.7 %) said no it does not include information about different sexual orientations and gender identities and 33.3 % said yes it does provide information on the aforementioned issues. Participants were also asked whether the class of sex education includes information about identification and prevention of homophobic and transphobic bullying. Importantly, 90.9 % replied no

whereas only 9.1 % said yes. Next, participants were asked how important it is in their opinion for a school community to fight homophobic and transphobic bullying. 70 % of participants said that it is very important, 11.4 % said they do not have an opinion, 10 % said that it is important, 7.1 % said that it is neither important nor unimportant and 1.4 % said that it is not important.

When participants were asked to report how often certain situations occurred in their school they reported that the situations that appeared to occur in the school environment frequently and more specifically, ranging from several times per year to several times per month and more often were the following: 1) students calling other students gay, faggot, lesbian, butch and other similar negative words (82.8 %), 2) students telling other students to "not act like a girl"(for boys) or to "not act like a boy" (for girls), or similar (80 %), 3) students are being called other names that are not related to LGBTQI (68.5 %), 4) students leaving LGBTQI students out on purpose from various activities (62.8 %), 5) students make fun of LGBTQI students (54.2 %), 6) students spreading nasty rumours about LGBTQI students (54.2 %), 7) students intimidating/threatening LGBTQI students (45.6 %), 8) students make negative comments about LGBTQI on the internet (44.2 %) 9) students taking away or destroying property of LGBTQI students (38.4 %), 10) LGBTI students being hit or pushed by other students (34.2 %),11) LGBTQI students being sexually touched/harassed by other students (28.5 %).

The findings above indicate that certain homophobic and transphobic behaviours are quite evident within the school environment and can be identified quite clearly. In relation to this, a very high percentage of the online survey participants acknowledged that children use the words 'gay, faggot' etc in a derogative manner to insult other children. This finding is also supported by the focus groups in which professionals who have witnessed incidents of homophobic bullying clarified that quite often the word 'gay' is often used to offend someone. Along the same lines, two of the children that participated in the focus group said that the terms 'lesbian or gay' are used in an offensive manner between children and the teachers do not react to it.

Interestingly, when participants were asked how often they hear students posting negative comments online about the LGBTQI community 28.6 % of participants replied several times per year, 21.4 % several times per month and 5.7 % once per week and more often. Thus, a high percentage of 55.7 % reported hearing students posting negative comments online about the LGBTQI community. Some of the comments of this nature included the following: 1) the LGBTQI community is a bad example for children and young people and encourages young people not to follow the 'normal image' constructed by society. Also, some people have stated that young people with different sexual orientations or gender identity will harm society with the help of the LGBTQI community 2) Gay, abnormal, deviant etc., 3) being gay is not normal and that they shouldn't marry or adopt children, 4) That a fellow (male) student has a preference to the male genitalia but worded in a cruel and abusive way, 5) shitty lesbian, when talking about a trans person, gay when talking about a straight boy, 'lesbians were fucking in the toilets again'.

When participants were asked about how often they hear colleagues saying negative comments about LGBTQI community, 31.4 % of participants said rarely, 25.7 % several times per year, 22.9 % several times per month, 12.9 % never, 5.7 % once per week and more often and 1.4 % answered that they do not know. As it appears, a high percentage of 54.3 % said that they do hear colleagues saying negative comments about the LGBTQI community and more specifically, some of the comments they have heard from their colleagues were the following: 1) being gay or/and trans harms society and harms the development of a normal family, 2) it is disgusting to see gay couples or men dressed like women and they form a bad example for children, 3) Homosexuality = against nature, 4) it's unacceptable to talk about gender identity, our gender is what our genitals show. Being gay is satanic. Anything other than being straight is clearly for sexual satisfaction, 5) they do not have a problem as long as they do not adopt children. This is

not normal otherwise nature or God would let them have children, 6) he is a faggot, she does ballet, 7) Gay pride is not necessary to take place, 8) How can you be around them? This is a sin in the eyes of God's. It's the schools' fault for teaching them that this thing is acceptable.

As one can clearly discern, these comments deriving from professionals who work within the school community are not only indicative of the homophobic and transphobic attitudes that exist within school but more importantly, reveal the negative impact that this environment can have on LGBTQI people. Unfortunately, as the focus group also revealed, school professionals who participated in the focus groups reported that often children do not feel comfortable to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity, however when they actually do it they often receive insulting/ offensive comments by both students and teachers (who believe that these students might not behave appropriately). These comments are often based on a set of prejudices and biases regarding the notion of male and female, the distinction between them, as well as the assumptions that accompany both notions (e.g. boys should not dress in that manner). Likewise, teachers who are not comfortable with different expressions of sexuality and gender identity often try to protect students by discouraging them from expressing themselves and showing who they are and by forbidding them to engage into activities that are not compatible with the stereotypical notion of heteronormativity (e.g. a girl was not allowed to play football in order not to become a lesbian). Finally, as one of the participants stressed, homophobia and transphobia are more prevalent amongst teachers than students. This homophobic stance appears to also manifest in a more general attitude that revolves around the notion that issues of sexual orientation should not be discussed in school as addressing them might encourage students to develop different sexual orientations that are not normal.

Next, participants were asked to state the degree to which they agree with some statements regarding homophobic and transphobic bullying. Most of the participants completely agreed with the following statements: 1) the school should prevent or fight negative comments against LGBTQI people (61.4 %), 2) LGBTQI people should be able to express their sexual orientation or gender identity at school (52.8 %), 3) the school should take the wellbeing of LGBTQI students into account (58.5 %). In addition, a big percentage of participants (57.1 %) appeared to completely agree with the statement that research shows that LGBTQI people miss lessons because of negative atmosphere in school and the school should make sure they don't skip lessons and finally, a very high percentage (64.2 %) completely agreed with the statement that research shows that LGBTQI students have a higher level of suicide than heterosexual male/female students and the school should make sure they feel comfortable at school. Last, participants were asked their opinion on whether LGBTQI students' academic performance is lower due to negative comments about their sexual orientation or gender identity. 30 % of them said that the academic performance of LGBTQI students might be lower compared to other students. Importantly, the positions above reveal that one the one hand the participants do identify and acknowledge the extent to which homophobic and transphobic bullying takes place whilst on the other, the fact that 64.2 % of the participants completely agreed with the statement that research shows that LGBTQI students have a higher level of suicide than heterosexual male/female students and the school should make sure they feel comfortable at school brings into the surface the need establishing a safe school enviroment that promotes acceptance and tolerance of diversity of any kind.

Some further statistical analysis (chi square independence test) was conducted in order to identify whether there were any significant differences among the sample of the online survey. The first chi square independence test was conducted in order to investigate whether the role of the participants appeared to make a difference in relation to several questions. More specifically, participants were grouped into two categories according to the role they hold within the school community: 1) teachers and 2) others. The analysis revealed that there was statistical

significance between teachers and others in the following statements: 1) students leave other students out on purpose from various activities 2) students take away of destroy property of other students 3) students are being hit or pushed by other students , 4) students spread nasty rumors about other students, 5) students make negative comments about others on the internet, 6) students are sexually touched by other students. It could be argued that teachers, becasue of their role might in a better position to identify these incidents compared to other professionals within the school community.

Likewise, there was a statistically significant association between teachers and others in relation to whether students in their school have experienced homophobic and transphobic bullying or heard negative comments about LGBTQI community. Along the same lines, it could be also argued that teachers are more likely to be aware of homophobic and transphobic bullying than other professionals. A significant association has been also found between questions B3 that asks wether participants know any LBGTQI students/people at their school and B6 that asks whether students at their school ever experienced homophobic and transphobic bullying or heard negative comments about LGBTQI community; a finding that might suggest that people who are aware of LGBTQI people in their school are also in a position to identify homophobic and transphobic bullying.

Finally, significant associations have been also found between questions B3 that asks wether participants know any LBGTQI students/people at their school and some of the statements of question B14 such as: 1) The school should prevent or fight negative comments about LGBTQI 2) The school should take the wellbeing of LGBTQI students into account and 3) 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. Interestingly, no statistically significant results were found between participants of different sexual orientations.

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

The identification/ recognition of homophobic and transphobic bullying appeared to be a matter that also emerged within the family environment. More specifically, all parents that participated in the focus group (parents and children focus group) emphasised the importance of sex education taking place within the family. When participants were asked about the topics that parents need to discuss with their children they said that it is very important to be honest and open with children from the day they are born, talk about sex and answer all the questions they might have otherwise, children might get the impression that this a taboo issue and develop the feeling of guilt. They also emphasised the importance of allowing children to express themselves and search the information they need within the family environment. One of the parents stressed that they should be mindful of how they present the issue of sexual intercourse particularly in younger ages and said that is important to explain the concept of sex by locating it within the discourse of love. Another topic that emerged as an important area to be discussed was relationships and respect of each others' rights. Finally, another participant also added that sex education includes discussions on different types of couples that exist in society (e.g. homosexual couples) and families (families that might consist by a mother/ father their child and their dog). In relation to this, during the discussion, it was emphasised on a number of times that children should learn from a young age that there are different manifestations of love other than the dominant heteronormative one. Two of the parents also said that they do have friends who have different sexual orientations or gender identities and it is something that is considered normal for their family.

Evidently, all the comments and positions presented above demonstrate that the ability to identify and recognise homophobic and transphobic bullying primarily requires an understanding of the fact that different manifestations of love and being other than the

dominant heteronormative one are also normal and need to be empraced by society as such. Therefore, it is when children accept and embrace diversity that they can identify injustice, violence and bullying on the basis of someone's sexual orientation and gender identity. In relation to this, two of children who participated in the focus group reported that when they heard someone in their school/class using the word 'gay' in an offensive manner they explained to them that this word should not be used negatively as it is something normal. One of the children also added that often girls might say to a girl 'I don't want to hang out with you because you play football'. In addition, she said that boys are more exclusive and boys who tend to deviate from the norm are more marginalized.

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

This section of the report focuses on the reactions of the school community to homophobic and transphobic bullying in school. Even though the findings are presented separately for each group of participants, it should be noted that the percentages presented are not group specific. For analysis and classification purposes, the main findings of the online survey along with the findings that emerged from the focus groups are presented in different sections.

3.2.1. School administration

In the online survey participants were asked whether they think that the school staff should act in response to homophobic and transphobic bullying. The vast majority of participants (82.9 %) said yes, 15.7 % of them said that they do not know. In relation to this, the focus group that was conducted with professionals revealed even though homophobic and transphobic bullying in school is quite prevalent, it is often not addressed but swiped under the carpet because the society itself is homophobic and transphobic. This finding appears to also reflect a wider inability of the school administration to implement the relevant policies that can combat homophobic and transphobic bullying effectively. It also reveals that school's attitude towards this phenomenon depends on the school administration and the specific views the prinicpals migh have on it.

3.2.2. Teachers, counsellors / psychologists

Next, participants were asked whether they think they have enough knowledge to act against homophobic and transphobic bullying. Half of the participants (50 %) said yes, 27.1 % said no and, 22.9 % said they do not know whether they have enough knowledge to deal with this phenomenon. When they were asked to state how often they support students when they hear homophobic and transphobic comments, 35.7 % replied always, 24.3 % said most of the time, 21.4 % said that they have never heard homophobic and transphobic comments in school, 14.3 % said that they sometimes support students and 4.3 % said they never support students when they hear homophobic and transphobic comments. In relation to this, in one of the focus groups, a teacher mentioned that even though she would like to help students she feels that she cannot do it because she might get exposed for having different views and hence, have issues with the school administration of the school. Along the same lines, another participant said that she feels that this is a huge battle that she cannot fight on her own, therefore she also chooses not to speak about these issues.

This finding appeared to be also linked with the fact that other participants said that the policies that exist are not implemented by the school thus, they cannot provide a solid frame within which professional can combat homophobic and transphobic bullying. This brought into the surface the fact that some participants acknowledged that the responsibility for the lack of

essential measures that combat homophobic and transphobic bullying lies in the Ministry of Education and Culture. Participants were also ask to report how they would feel in certain situations. More specifically, a very high percentage of participants (65.7 %) said that they would feel very comfortable if they were alone in the same room with an LGBTQI student and a very small percentage (4.2 %) said they would feel very uncomfortable with this. Respectively, a very high percentage of participants (64.2 %) said that they would feel very comfortable if they had an LGBTQI student in their class and a very small percentage (4.2 %) said they would feel very uncomfortable with this. Moving on, a high percentage among participants (52.8 %) said that they would feel very comfortable if an LGBTQI student disclosed to them their identity outside the class and a small percentage (5.7 %) said they would feel very uncomfortable with this. When participants were asked how they would feel if an LGBTQI student disclosed their identity in their class, 41.4 % said they would feel very comfortable with it and 8.5 % said they would feel very uncomfortable. Likewise, when they were asked how they would feel if an LGBTQI student asked for personal support in a private conversation, 47.1 % said they would feel very comfortable with it and 2.8 % said they would feel very uncomfortable. Finally, a high percentage of participants (47.1 %) said that they would feel very comfortable if an LGBTQI student asked for their support in approaching the principal to improve school policy on sexuality and diversity and a very small percentage (2.8 %) said they would feel very uncomfortable with this.

On a different note, participants were asked whether they think that information about sexual orientation and gender identity should be presented in school. The vast majority (65.7 %) said yes, a smaller group of 17.1 % also replied that they think that information about sexual orientation and gender identity should be presented in school however, they are not allowed by the school or the authorities, 15.7 % said they do not know and 1.4 % said no. When asked if issues on sexual orientation and gender identity are addressed during classes, 55.7 % of participants said no, they are not addressed and 44.3 % said yes, they are addressed. The following question addressed how different sexual orientations and different gender identities are being presented during lessons. 44. 3 % of participants said that the topic as such is not presented, 31.4 % said that the above issues are presented neutrally, 12.9 % said that are presented negatively, 5.7 % that they are presented positively, 4.3 % very positively and 1.4 % very negatively. Participants were also asked how they would feel when talking about LGBTQI related topics with students. 44.3 % of participants said that they would feel very comfortable, 27.1 % said they would feel neutral 15.7 % said somewhat comfortable, 10 % said they would feel somewhat uncomfortable and 2.9 % very uncomfortable. In addition, participants were asked to state how they would feel in certain situations. A very high percentage of participants (65.7 %) said that they would feel very comfortable if they were alone in the same room with an LGBTQI student and a very small percentage (4.2 %) said they would feel very uncomfortable with this. Respectively, a very high percentage of participants (64.2 %) said that they would feel very comfortable if they had an LGBTQI student in their class and a very small percentage (4.2 %) said they would feel very uncomfortable with this. Moving on, a high percentage among participants (52.8 %) said that they would feel very comfortable if an LGBTQI student disclosed to them their identity outside the class and a small percentage (5.7 %) said they would feel very uncomfortable with this. When participants were asked how they would feel if an LGBTQI student disclosed their identity in their class, 41.4 % said they would feel very comfortable with it and 8.5 % said they would feel very uncomfortable. Likewise, when they were asked how they would feel if an LGBTQI student asked for personal support in a private conversation, 47.1 % said they would feel very comfortable with it and 2.8 % said they would feel very uncomfortable. Finally, a high percentage of participants (47.1 %) said that they would feel very comfortable if an LGBTQI student asked for their support in approaching the principal to improve school

policy on sexuality and diversity and a very small percentage (2.8 %) said they would feel very uncomfortable with this.

Furthermore, participants were asked whether they feel that there are people among school staff which support LGBTQI students. 58.6 % said yes, 35.7 % said they do not know and 5.7 % said no, there are not any people who support LGBTQI students. When they were asked how many people from school staff express their support of LGBTQI students, 38.6 % of participants said only a few, 21.4 % said the minority, 15.7 % said less than half, 12.9 % said more than half, 8.6 % said the majority and 2.9 % said nobody. Finally, participants were asked whether they express their support to LGBTQI students. The biggest group (40 %) replied that they express their support to LGBTQI students even if that means they risk their position in the school, 35.7 % said they do express their support but take into consideration the risk they run in relation to their position in the school, 8.6 % said they do not express their support because it is the responsibility of the school and 1.4 % said they do not express support because they do not support this kind of behaviour (referring to being LGBTQI). One participant said that once they expressed their support towards LGBTQI they were reprimanded by the principal of the school and the inspector and another participant explained that they had come into conflict with their colleagues for this matter. Interesting, these findings appear to be linked with the fact that most of the participants said that they are openly discouraged from discussing issues on sexual orientation in class. As already mentioned two of participants said that the fact they discussed issues of this nature has had a negative impact on them personally.

Lastly, participants were asked whether they think that information about sexual orientation and gender identity should be presented in school. The vast majority (65.7 %) said yes, a smaller group of 17.1 % also replied that they think that information about sexual orientation and gender identity should be presented in school however, they are not allowed by the school or the authorities, 15.7 % said they do not know and 1.4 % said no. When asked if issues on sexual orientation and gender identity are addressed during classes, 55.7 % of participants said no, they are not addressed and 44.3 % said yes, they are addressed. The following question addressed how different sexual orientations and different gender identities are being presented during lessons. 44. 3 % of participants said that the topic as such is not presented, 31.4 % said that the above issues are presented neutrally, 12.9 % said that are presented negatively, 5.7 % that they are presented positively, 4.3 % very positively and 1.4 % very negatively. Participants were also asked how they would feel when talking about LGBTQI related topics with students. 44.3 % of participants said that they would feel very comfortable, 27.1 % said they would feel neutral 15.7 % said somewhat comfortable, 10 % said they would feel somewhat uncomfortable and 2.9 % very uncomfortable.

3.2.3. Students

In the online survey, participants were asked about often students support other students when they hear homophobic and transphobic comments. The biggest group of participants (41.1 %) said that they do not know, 32.9 % said that they students sometimes support other students, 8.6 % of participants said sometimes and 8.6 % said never. In addition, a small group of participants (4.3 %) said that students always support other students when they hear homophobic and transphobic comments. Finally, one person (1.4 %) said that it depends on whether the incident has really happened and whether the student is a person from their circle, one person (1.4 %) said rarely and another person (1.4 %) said that they might report that someone is has made negative/offensive comments towards them, but they do not do it in order to protect LGBTQI people.

During the focus group that was conducted with parents and children one of the parents talked about the incidents in which her daughter had a fight with one of her classmates because her

classmate kept insisting that two men cannot love each other and her daughter supported that this is normal. Along the same lines, participants, both children and parents emphasised the importance of respecting other people who are different and express in a different way. When participants were asked whether their children or themselves have classmates or friends who might have a different sexual orientation or gender identity two of the children said that do have children in their school who might be different in terms of their sexual orientation, but they usually do not express it because the school environment is judgmental and hostile thus, nobody in their class ever expressed it. One of the children also added that she had an experience of a teacher who was very judgmental and because of her own attitude she almost encouraged children in the class to attack and bully children who were different. The same child said that there are teachers who encourage bullying of any kind in school; a finding that brings into the foreground the extent of the problem and need of implementing measures for combating it. Finally, when children were asked if there is any person in their school that they could to talk to in case they experienced or witnessed an incident of bullying, they said that this is possible only if children have a close relationship with a teacher that they can go and talk to.

3.2.4. Parents

The parents that participated in the focus group emphasised the importance of respecting other people who are different. Parents also explained that their children should support and defend other children who might be bullyied on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In relation to this, they explained that this an attitude that needs to emerge from within the family enviroment and which in turn needs to be strengthen and empowered within the school community. Unfortunately, all parents who participated in the focus group shared the view the school community is highly conservative and cannot easily accept people with different sexual orientations and gender identities. They also explained that lack of acceptance manifests in the use of a discourse that often excludes and marginalizes people who express themselves in ways that deviate from the heteronormative manner that Cypriot society promotes. These views are very much in line with parents' perspective on the issue of sex education. More specifically, as it was mentioned in the previous section of the report, all parents of the focus group underlined the significance of talking to their children from a very young age about issues sexuality, relationships, diversity, acceptance and respect.

3.3. Measures employed by school and interinstitutional cooperation to fight homophobic and transphobic bullying

This section of the report presents the measures employed individually by teachers and professionals who work within the school community, by school and interinstitutional cooperation to fight homophobic and transphobic bullying.

3.3.1. Measures taken individually

During the focus groups, professionals talked about their experience of working within the school community and dealing with incidents of bullying. As already mentioned, many of the participants talked about the dominant conservative attitudes that exist within the school community and when they were asked whether there are teachers or other professionals within the school community that are open and supportive of students with different sexual orientation and gender identity two participants said that they have to identify the people who are open in order to develop a supportive network with them. When professionals were asked if there is a person in their school to whom children could talk to about such matters, they replied that there is not a specific person but there might be a teacher that is open to listen to students

and help them. Two of them talked about their experience of talking to students and supporting them around issues of sexual orientation.

When participants were asked whether they have ever participated in any relevant trainings or seminars, almost all of them (seven out of eight) participated in trainings that were designed to help them identify and combat discrimination. When they were asked what elements of the training were most useful for them, they referred to three aspects: 1) scientific knowledge on the topics (theories, models regarding sexuality and terminology), 2) knowledge on relevant policies and directives and 3) information and skills developing on how to address and handle cases of bullying through experiential workshops and exercises. In addition, participants emphasised the need of further training and more specifically, they underlined that training on such issues should be compulsory for all professionals involved in the school community. They explained that the trainings should take place regularly and not only once and should focus on changing professionals' perceptions and attitudes on issues of diversity in general as their current attitudes form a barrier in identifying and handling cases. Moreover, one of the participants suggested that the trainings should ensure that there is zero tolerance to violence.

3.3.2. Measures taken internally within the school environment

In the online survey, participants were asked to state which of the measures are employed in their school. An important percentage (20 % +) of participants reported that the measures that are employed in their school were the following: 1) talks with students about homophobic and transphobic bullying and its prevention (21.4 %), 2) talks with students' parents about homophobic and transphobic bullying and its prevention are regularly held (21.4 %), 3) talks with teachers, social workers and psychologists about homophobic and transphobic bullying and its prevention are regularly held (28.5 %), 4) school cooperates with non-governmental organisations in order to fight homophobic and transphobic bullying (22.8 %), 5) school cooperates with the Ministry of Education and Culture in order to fight homophobic and transphobic bullying (22.8 %), 6) school cooperates with municipalities in order to fight homophobic and transphobic bullying (21.4 %), 7) homophobic and transphobic bullying and its prevention is discussed, regularly or not, in the child welfare commission established in school (21.4 %).

Importantly, other measures appeared to be more frequently employed in the school. These were the following: 1) school has a specific programme that aims to fight bullying (67.1 %), 2) school administration, teachers, pedagogues, psychologists and social pedagogues are sent to seminars related to identification, reduction and prevention of bullying (62.8 %), 3) school administration, teachers, pedagogues, psychologists and social pedagogues are sent to seminars related to identification, reduction and prevention of homophobic and transphobic bullying in particular (62.8 %), 4) the school has an anti-bullying guideline/paper (37.1 %), 5) the school has a shared vision (51.4 %), 6) there are rules for students forbidding bad behaviour and guiding pro-social behaviour which are introduced at the start of the year (87.1 %), 7) students are introduced 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") (42.8 %), 8) the rules are clarified on posters in the school (58.5 %) 9) the school offers lessons on bullying prevention during the year (77.1 %), 10) The school pedagogically corrects students when they transgress social rules (75.7 %), 11) the school punishes students that transgress social rules (77.1 %), 12) the school has a no-blame policy regarding bullying (48.5 %), 13) "real justice meetings" are held when there are complicated bullying problems (55.7 %), 14) peer mediation is used to solve the lesser student conflicts (55.7 %), 15) the "undercover" team method is used to combat bullying (37.1 %) 16) groups relations analysis is used to understand bullying and to teach students about bullying (45.7 %) and 17) parents are involved in meeting with bullies and victims to solve bullying which behave to do with family and background context (52.8 %).

Professionals who participated in the focus group also mentioned that there is a directive according to which there should be a committee in every school that is staffed with people who have the role and expertise to handle incidents of violence and bullying and support students. Nevertheless, most of the times, the people who staff this committee do not have any knowledge on these issues unless they personally want to receive training outside school. Therefore, most of times, students approach teachers that they feel comfortable with. This is a finding that indicates the great need for developing specialised training courses for all professionals who work within the school community. Participants also added that even though there is a directive from the Ministry of Education and Culture against bullying most of the teachers and professionals who work in the school community are either not aware of it or do not take it into account. However, one of the participants who works in the school as a counsellor mentioned that there is a directive with very clear guidelines on how cases of bullying should be handled. One participant shared an experience of an incident in which the teacher was reluctant to report it and she only reported it when the counsellor of the school warned her that she was responsible for reporting and in the event that she did not do it the counsellor would report her for not assuming her responsibilities.

The next question asked participants to state the degree to which they think their school staff need training related to prevention of bullying of any form. The majority of participants (65.7 %) answered that the need for teachers receiving training for the prevention of any form of bullying is very high. 62.8 % of participants said that that the need for special education teachers receiving training for the prevention of any form of bullying is very high. Likewise, 50 % of participants said that the need for psychologists receiving training for the prevention of any form of bullying is very high. 67.1 % of participants said that that the need for administrators/principals receiving training for the prevention of any form of bullying is very high and finally, 62.8 % of participants said that that the need for other school staff receiving training for the prevention of any form of bullying is very high. Finally, when participants were asked to state the degree to which they think their school staff need training for the prevention of homophobic and transphobic bullying, the majority of participants (72.8 %) answered that the need for teachers receiving training for the prevention of homophobic and transphobic bullying is very high. 71.4 % of participants said that that the need for special education teachers receiving training for the prevention of homophobic and transphobic bullying is very high. Likewise, 57.1 % of participants said that the need for psychologists receiving training for the prevention of homophobic and transphobic bullying is very high. 74.2 % of participants said that that the need for administrators/principals receiving training for the prevention of homophobic and transphobic bullying is very high and finally, 57.1 % of participants said that that the need for other school staff receiving training for the prevention of homophobic and transphobic bullying is very high. When participants were asked to specify other (who else needs training from school staff), some of the answers they gave were: everybody, administration and adjunct staff, parents and students.

Importantly, 75.7 % of participants identified the following components as very important aspects of the training: pedagogic skills, factual information, how to answer questions, how to deal with violent or silent reactions.

In addition, 65.7 % of participants identified as a very important aspect of the training to learn didactic skills (planning lessons or a curriculum). 68.5 % of participants said that to learn to balance own opinions (progressive or conservative) and those of others (progressive or conservative) would be very important, 67.1 % said that to learn to deal with fellow staff that may be opposed and do not want to cooperate would be very important, 74.2 % said that it would be very important to learn to coach/support LGBTQI students and students who are in doubt about their sexual orientation or gender identity and 70 % said that it would be very important to deal

with/ influence school policy. 68.5 % said that it would be very important to learn to deal with regional/national context/restrictions (legal restrictions, social attitudes, religious convictions), 77.1 % said that it would be very important to learn to deal with parents' objections. Finally, 35.7 % said that other aspects that should be included in training are the following: 1) sex education/sexual orientation issues, 2) skills in handling cases, 3) seminars for changing attitudes and perceptions and 4) Ways of managing and achieving psychological balance for LBGTQI people and others.

Lastly, when participants were asked if their school environment embraces diversity they said that the notion of diversity primarily revolves around the concept of migration and different ethnic background and does not include diversity in terms of different sexual orientation and gender identity. They also stressed that discussing issues around different sexuality and gender identity is often seen as an issue that is not appropriate for discussion and that professionals who are often in high rank positions do not support discussion on these issues. Finally, they emphasised that often what creates this negative attitude on issues of diversity on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is fear. They said that the most important values that need to be developed in order to address this type of bullying is acceptance, friendship, love and respect. It is also important to empower children to become confident about who they are. One of the participants also brought into the surface the importance of stressing the legal context of human rights and specifically the fact that we have an obligation to respect each other regardless of how different they are. Likewise, some of the participants emphasised the significance of public policy in terms of establishing the context for combating homophobic and transphobic bullying.

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

Finally, participants were asked to evaluate how important is their cooperation with other bodies in their efforts to fight homophobic and transphobic bullying. 61.4 % of participants identified that cooperation with non-governmental organisation is very important in the fight of homophobic and transphobic bullying. 47.1 % of participants said that cooperation with other schools is very important and 51.4 % that cooperation with municipalities is very important in the fight of homophobic and transphobic bullying. Finally, 17.1 % of participants said that cooperation with the Ministry of Education is very important in the fight of homophobic and transphobic bullying. 42.8 % of participants identified other bodies that it would be important to cooperate with. Some of the bodies were: 1) various research and educational centers, 2) Accept, 3) psychologists, 4) Ministry of Health and School Health Service, 5) The church, 6) parents associations, 7) all the bodies that work with children.

Conclusions and Recommendations

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This final section of the National report concentrates on providing some conclusions that emerged from the discussion of the findings of the desk research as well as from the online survey and focus groups. In addition, it provides recommentations on how discrimination against the LGBTI community can be addressed more effectively.

Overall, even though Cyprus has made important steps towards ensuring LGBTI rights, the fact remains that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is a major social issue that is not adequately dealt with. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is an issue that takes place across all sectors and settings of social life including the working and school environment. Unfortunately, the school environment appears to be a context that is particularly vulnerable to homophobic and transphobic discrimination, violence and bullying. Evidently, homophobic attitudes that appear within the school environment constitute a reflection of the homophobic attitudes that exist within the wider Greek Cypriot community; attitudes that are deeply imbedded in a rigid heterosexual conceptualisation of family that revolves around the notion of heteronormativity.

On a different note, participants of the research emphasised the importance of the school's role in preventing and combating homophobic and transphobic bullying and acknowledged the detrimental repercussions that bullying might have on LGBTQI students' life. Along the same lines, the majority of participants underlined the significance of the school educating students on sexual issues and providing information on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. Importantly, the research revealed the great need of providing training for the prevention of homophobic and transphobic bullying, as well as for bullying of any form to school staff, parents and children and brought into the foreground the need of cooperation between different bodies and organisations. Interinstitutional cooperation seemed to form the ground for a more coordinated approach on the prevention and combating of homophobic and transphobic bullying within the school enviroment and society in general. As mentioned, one of the findings that emerged is the great need for specialised educational trainings for all professionals who work within the school community, as well as for parents and children. These trainings need to primarily focus on changing peoples' perceptions and attitudes on issues of diversity. More specifically, the trainings should aim to help people understand diveristy and establish an open and accepting stance towards it. In addition, training courses need to be designed in a manner that will help professionals gain scientific knowledge on relevant topics, including relevant policies and directives and on developing skills on how to address and handle cases of bullying. It should be noted that the recommendations of Cypriot participants need to be taken into consideration and more specifically, their need to include elements such as pedagogic skills, factual information, as well as knowledge on how to deal with specific cases, support LGBTQI students and deal with the school authority and policies.

4.1. Future research areas

Given the findings that emerged from the online survey and focus groups the findings of the desk research and having taken into consideration the recommendations and suggestions made by the European Organisations such as FRA and Ecri, additional and research needs to be conducted on:

- examining the views and attitudes of the wider population in relation to diversity in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity. This will provide insight on how to address the phenomenon of homophobic and transphobic bullying on a larger scale within the Greek Cypriot society.

- the extent and manifestations of discrimination against LGBTQI people in Cyprus. More specifically, future research should be conducted with a much larger sample of participants. This will allow a broader mapping of the phenomenon and will enable professionals to design more efficient interventions to tackle discrimination

- LGBTQI people's needs and experiences within the school community. Research of this nature will provide more insight on the areas that need to be taken into account when designing specialised educational programmes for children, parents and professionals who work within the school community.

4.2. Policies

Upon taking into consideration the research findings as well as the current situation in Cyprus in terms of the legislative context, the antidiscrimination policies and the overall attitudes on LGBTQI issues, some recommendations are provided:

- A plan that combats homophobia and transphobia in all areas of everyday life needs to be designed and implemented by the government. Based on Ecris' recommendation the plan needs to be in line with the Recommendation CM/Rec (2010)5 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.

- Educational programs on LGBTQI rights and discrimination against LGBTQI people need to be designed and implemented for employers and professionals in general across all professional settings in the government.

- Legislation should be amended to allow change of personal data that reflects people's gender identity without the need to be subjected to surgery.

4.3. Schools

As the research findings revealed, the school environment in Cyprus appears to be a context that is particularly vulnerable to homophobic and transphobic discrimination, violence and bullying. More specifically, the school community is a space that reflects and often perpetuates the existing homophobic and transphobic attitudes that are portrait by the media and the church. For these reasons, certain interventions needs to take place within the school community. Some of these are the following:

- Specialised courses on LGBTQI rights and issues need to become a structural component of educators' teaching training in both public and private universities all over the country.

- Additional educational trainings and workshops that will address and target educators' homophobic and transphobic attitudes need to be designed by specialist professionals. School authories and parents should also participate in trainings of this nature.

- Discussion on LGBTQI rights and issues and on diversity and particulalry, on different ways of being a should take a more central position in the curriculum and in the health education/ sex education/ life education class.

4.4. NGOs and Municipalities

As participants identified, cooperation with NGOs is fundamental in preventing and combating homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools. Liaising and cooperating with NGOs can establish a protective network that will primarily focus on social interventions and actions which will in turn aim to convey and promote the message that behaviours such as bullying are not tolerated or accepted. Importantly, this effort needs to take place jointly with governmental bodies as well and more specifically, with universities and units that aim to promote diversity in society. Currently, in the Greek Cypriot community the only NGO that works on LGBTQI rights and issues that concern the LGBTQI community is Accept Cyprus. Nevertheless, there is a number of other NGOs such as the Family Planning Association, the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family, CARDET and others that can work with Accept, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Pedagogical Institute, the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights, the Commissioner for Children's Rights and the Municipalities in order to establish a common ground for combating homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools.

Overall, one could clearly observe that Cyprus has a still a long way to go in becoming an inclusive society, that embraces all forms of diversity and ensures equal human rights for the LGBTQI community. Despite the overall negative and hostile climate, a number of important positive changes have taken place in relation to LGBTQI rights within the Greek Cypriot society during the last years. It is of critical importance that positive changes continue to take place within society and that relevant policies are implemented to prevent and combat all forms of discrimination and bullying and particularly on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. It is only through a joint and constant effort that the rights of the LGBTQI community will be ensured and protected. Likewise, it is through awareness raising, campaingning and education that society will develop zero tolerance to all forms of violence.

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