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# Combating homophoBic and transphobic bullying in schools

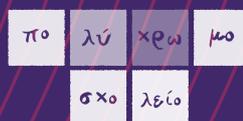
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# National Report: Greece



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

# **National Report:** Greece

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# Introduction

# 1. Introduction

Discriminatory behaviours towards people who express a difference in sexual orientation and expression of gender identity (SOGI) include attitudes and expressions within a social context of heteronormativity, namely the perception that heterosexuality is the only acceptable form of sexual expression (Tauches 2011). Such discrimination is expressed through homophobic and transphobic (HT) behaviours. The term homophobia is used to describe any kind of bias, discrimination and oppression of individuals because of their sexual orientation. Homophobic attitudes reflect a kind of phobia and aversion for homosexuals and are often punitive towards them. Respectively such behaviours and attitudes towards people with a different gender identity (trans) are characterised by the term “transphobia” (Weeks 2011, UNESCO 2012a).

The most recent and larger EU survey on the perceptions and experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons with a total of more than 93,000 respondents indicates that in the year preceding the survey (2012) approximately half of respondents had been personally discriminated or harassed on the grounds of SOGI and approximately a quarter had been attacked or threatened with violence (FRA, 2013). The latter reached 35% for transgender individuals. Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania are amongst the 10 Member States (MS) where LGBT individuals are most likely to become victims of discrimination, violence and harassment. Of those 3 countries, Cyprus and Greece appear to be ambiguous regarding the implementation of the right to education of LGBT individuals while Lithuania is totally denying, suggesting a big discrepancy between these countries and other EU MS such as the Netherlands where LGBT individuals are supported and the social environment is inclusive (GALE, 2015).

Greece is characterised by a dominant presence of the Greek Orthodox Church in civil matters and politics, which influences public opinion. Only 53% of Greeks accepts homosexuality, a percentage of the lowest in Europe (Pew Research Centre, 2013) and as a country it remains far behind in comparison to the majority of European Union (EU) MS in terms of civil rights, equality and non-discrimination of LGBT and queer (LGBTQ) individuals (Colour Youth-Athens LGBTQ Youth Community, 2014). The wide representation of the Orthodox church in civil matters and the rapid rise in acceptance of the extreme right wing group Golden Dawn, who has achieved a place in the parliament, have led to a legitimisation of HT hate speech in Greece (Colour Youth-Athens LGBTQ Youth Community, 2014), a country that scores above EU average on the rates of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of SOGI. Such discrimination and harassment lead to bullying in schools on the grounds of SOGI, which in Greece is very high according to international studies, although there has been no research in Greece investigating directly the levels of such bullying. Findings from Europe’s Anti-bullying Campaign Project (2013) indicate that approximately 25% of students believe that sexual preferences are a factor of victimisation and bullying. The results of the EU LGBT Survey point out that 97% of Greeks aged 18-24 years old have heard or seen negative behaviours because one believed a peer to be LGBT and 76% of

respondents have experienced such behaviours themselves. It is surprising that when looking at all age groups, the percentage of individuals who have heard or seen such negative behaviours remains approximately the same at 96%. Such discrimination and harassment could not remain outside the educational institutions, where 27% of most serious incidents and 17% of the most serious physical/sexual attacks or threats of violence take place. Critically, 1 in 3 respondents reported having felt discriminated against because of being LGBT, by school/university personnel in the year preceding the survey (FRA, 2013).

The project “Combating HOMophoBic And Transphobic bullying in schools” (HOMBAT) supported by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the EU aims to contribute to the prevention and combating of homophobia and transphobia in Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania through the prevention and tackling of HT bullying in schools. This will be achieved by building the capacity of education professionals (teachers, school advisors) on preventing and addressing HT bullying, by enhancing multi-actor cooperation, by raising awareness about HT bullying in the educational environment and by indirectly changing people’s attitudes. The present report was developed in the context of HOMBAT’s Working Package 2 “Research on bullying on the grounds of SOGI in Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania”, which aims to analyse the relevant data and existing resources in relation to the occurrence and characteristics of discrimination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) individuals on the grounds of SOGI with a focus on bullying and hate speech in the school environment (primary and secondary) as well as to look at relevant measures, initiatives and/or programmes implemented in the three participating countries. The objective of the present report is to identify the characteristics of discrimination and bullying on the grounds of SOGI in schools in Greece, and if and how this is being addressed, as well as needs of the educators, the families and the children to combat it.

## **1.1. Methodology**

For the above-indicated purpose, primary and secondary research was conducted including a) a desk research, b) an online survey and c) 3 focus groups with educational professionals as well as students and parents.

### **1.1.1. Desk research**

Firstly, an extensive literature review was conducted and compiled in a 28-page document, the findings of which are summarised in section 2 of the present report. The aim of the desk research was to map the existing situation regarding the topic at hand, the legal framework behind it and to identify gaps and needs in Greece. This research informed the questions of the online survey.

### **1.1.2. Online survey**

Secondly, an online survey with a total of 84 participants (minimum expected 70) was conducted to identify how prevalent bullying on the basis of SOGI is, how people including educational staff and students react to it and ways in which it is being or can be addressed and combated within the school community in Greece. The responses were used to refine and inform focus group questions for better targeted information. Online survey report was completed in January 2018, submitted and a summary of the findings is reported in section 3 following subsection relevance.

### 1.1.3. Focus groups

Lastly, three focus groups were conducted in February 2018, two focus groups with professionals of the educational community with a total of 17 participants (15 expected) and one focus group with parents and students in secondary education with a total of 10 participants (10 expected). The aim of the focus groups was to explore the experiences of the phenomenon, the views about the phenomenon and the needs of those three groups for combating it. These findings have also been recorded in two reports; one for professionals and one for parents and students, both of which have been completed and submitted and a summary of the findings is recorded in section 3 of the present document.

# Key findings of the desk research

## 2. Key findings of the desk research

### 2.1. Overview of attitudes towards LGBTQI people

According to public opinion polls (Focus-Bari, 2015) including 1431 Greek respondents, 76% believe that society should accept homosexuality as opposed to 15% who believe that they should not. Approximately 70% of respondents supported the right of same-sex civil partnership as opposed to 20% who opposed it. Concerning same-sex marriage however, only 56% believe that this should be legal, while 35% oppose it, and as age increased, the number of respondents opposing same-sex marriage increased. Regarding the adoption of children by same-sex couples, the results were similar, with 56% supporting this right and 30% opposing it. Again, the percentage of people opposing it increased with age. Regarding homosexuality, 33% believed that one is born a homosexual, 20% believed that it is a choice while 38% declared unaware or did not want to respond. At the same time, 14% believed homosexuality to be a psychiatric disorder, while 57% disagreed. 37% of respondents considered it a “disadvantage” to be a homosexual in Greece as opposed to 18% who did not. More than half of respondents (55%) believed that the Church needs to show more understanding and tolerance on the topic of homosexuality. The distribution of responses to the above questions was similar across age groups and locations but again females appeared to be more accepting than males. Lastly, although 54% supported that there should be harsher punishments in cases of hate-speech against LGBTQI individuals, 59% supported that the projection of homosexual individuals and standards on TV or the media has a bad influence on children. This was believed predominantly by males (66%) as compared to females (52%), it was supported more by smaller cities outside Athens (64% as compared to 57%) and it was more representative of older individuals as this was believed by 82% of respondents over 55 years old as compared to 49-50% of respondents between the ages of 18-34 years old. Of the 47 individuals who revealed being homosexuals only 24% reported being open about their sexual orientation to friends, family and work, 60% only to specific individuals and 16% to no one. Of them 21% had been victim of physical violence because of their sexual orientation, 76% had not and 3% did not want to answer. Overall, only 35% hoped that things will change for LGBT individuals, 13% believed that they won't and 49% didn't report either.

### 2.2. Greek legislative context on LGBTQI rights

Discrimination can be defined as the daily, discreet or not, symbolic or real violence towards groups of the population, usually minorities, which lead to marginalisation and inability of those people to participate equitably in the system (Androussos 2001). Greece is one of the countries that until lately had not clearly defined the grounds of discrimination in their implementation of legislation, but had included the general principle of equal treatment of people (European

Commission, 2016). Hate speech is defined as the speech that attacks a person or group on the grounds of nationality, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability and gender identity (Nockleby, 2000).

### 2.2.1. International legal framework

Greece includes limited legislation and has not implemented policies addressing discrimination and hate speech on the grounds of SOGI, which results in a legal uncertainty about the ways in which LGBTQI individuals can legally protect themselves (European Commission, 2016). The general principle of non-discrimination, the right to freedom and dignity and the principles of fair and equal treatment provided by international conventions are thought to ensure fair and equal treatment of all individuals and groups against discrimination. The core articles are article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights, article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights about equality of all people without discrimination before the law and article 2 (principle of progressive realisation) of the International Covenant of the United Nations on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (no.1532/1985), which ensures respect and all rights of the convention to all people without discrimination within a specific jurisdiction. Greece has implemented the EU Charter of Human Rights (2000/C 364/01), but policy documents and initiatives referring to the charter are limited. Relatively recently, Greece introduced a Human Rights Action Plan (General Secretariat for Transparency and Human Rights, Hellenic Ministry of Justice, 2014) in order to protect human rights in a more precise, systematic and coherent way. Highly relevant is also considered the decision by the Human Rights Council of the United Nations (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2011) regarding the legal actions that ensure the rights of LGBT individuals, which were supported by all MS, including Greece. A useful instrument for the protection of rights of LGBTQI individuals is the Recommendation CM/Rec (2010) 5 of the Committee of Ministers to the MS of the Council of Europe to combat discrimination on the grounds of SOGI, which recalls the universality of human rights, the guarantee of dignity to all individuals regardless of, amongst other things, their SOGI and calls for positive measures to be taken to ensure protection against discriminatory treatment. In order to combat discrimination on the grounds of SOGI in the educational environment while taking into account the over-riding interests of the child.

### 2.2.2. Greek legal framework

According to the Greek constitutional law individuals are protected by discriminatory acts and have their rights respected with articles 2 - paragraph 1 (respect for and protection of human dignity), article 4 - paragraph 1 (equality before the law), article 5 - paragraph 2 (protection of life, honour and freedom), article 20 - paragraph 1 (right to judicial protection) and article 25 - paragraph 1 (unrestricted exercise of individual and social rights with regard to the State and relations between individuals). The first national law to protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation was passed in 2005 (no.3304/2005) and it concerned the equal treatment of employees regardless of, amongst other things such as religion or nationality, their sexual orientation. The law was passed for the integration of specific directives of the EU for equal treatment without discrimination, those being the Race Equality Directive (no.2000/43/EC) and the Employment Equality Directive (no.2000/78/EC), in domestic law (Lesbian and Gay Community of Greece – OLKE, 2010). Although “sexual orientation” was included as a discrimination ground, transgender and transsexual individuals were not protected from discrimination on the grounds of gender, gender identity or gender expression because Greek legislation did not differentiate between “gender” and “sex”. The law was replaced in 2016 by a new labour law (no.4443/2016) protecting against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristic (SOGISC), both by association and based on inferred

features but only in employment and not in what concerns social security, acquirement of public goods and access/right to education (Government Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, 2016). Gender identity is reflected next to sexual orientation in the constitutional law of Greece in law no.4139/2013 on substance abuse and other provisions where hate acts related to one's SOGI are mentioned and referred to as aggravating circumstances the sentence of which cannot be suspended. Lastly, it is worth mentioning law no. 3896/2010, which implemented the European Directive 2006/54/EC and states that discrimination based on gender reassignment is protected by the same aforementioned provisions, but does not list gender identity as an area of discrimination in employment and work place, suggesting potential discrimination based on their gender identity of individuals who do not want to do gender reassignment.

Hate speech in Greece up until recently was regulated exclusively by law no.927/1979, which used to incriminate hate speech on the grounds of racial origin, religion and nationality only and not on the grounds of sexual orientation, offering as a result no specific protection to LGBT individuals (Centre for European Constitutional Law – CECL, 2010). Moreover, this law was idle for many years and had only started being applied a few years before it was revisited in 2014, when amendments concerning sexual discrimination issues were included.

Regarding freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, in the Greek constitution is ensured by articles 11 and article 14 and guarantee the freedom of expression and assembly, which applies to LGBTQI individuals. (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Working Group, 2015; Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2009).

### **2.2.3. Legislation for same-sex couples and gender identity change**

Although Greece attempted to implement laws in accordance with the standards of the EU, LGBTQI issues and discrimination on the grounds of SOGI are marginally dealt with (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Working Group, 2015). The Greek State has violated LGBTQI individuals' rights with the most known case being the Vallianatos and others v. Greece case (European Court of Human Rights – ECtHR, 2013). In 2008, before the recent vote for civil partnership of same sex couples (2015) and the vote for gender identity change (2017), Greece passed a law for civil partnership (no. 3919/2008) between heterosexual individuals, being one of the few countries to establish such a right only for heterosexual individuals, although same-sex civil partnerships were legal in Europe for more than 15 years. Under the Law, only two adults of different sex could enter in such unions. Gregory Vallianatos sued the Greek State relying on violations of Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) in conjunction with Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) and by arguing that the law infringed their right to respect for their private and family life and thus constituted an incident of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. The state argued that there are reasons civil partnership does not apply to same-sex individuals. Firstly, it primarily protects children born outside of marriage and strengthens the institutional family in the traditional sense, suggesting it was not relevant to same-sex couples. Secondly, all rights and obligations (inheritance, property matters etc.) of same-sex couples could be ensured on a contractual basis, suggesting that there was no direct legal need for civil partnerships of same-sex couples. The Grand Chamber of the European Court for Human Rights opposed both arguments and in 2013 the Greek state was held responsible for violating the rights of same-sex couples (ECtHR, 2013).

Although the above decision was taken in 2013, civil partnership for same-sex couples was not legalised until December 2015 when a new law was voted (no. 4356/2015) according to which civil partnership is independent of the gender of the concerned individuals, whether those were of the same/different sex. At the same time, the equalisation of the age of consent was achieved by the abolition of article 347 of the criminal code of Greece which criminalised “indecent acts between males for financial gain”, criminalising essentially homosexual prostitution when

heterosexual and female prostitution were legal, subject to the existing laws on the regulation of prostitution. At the same time the age of consent for homosexuals was 17 years old, while for heterosexuals it was 15 years of age, another discriminatory difference from the side of the Greek State. The abolition of article 347 came with article 68 of the Law no. 4356/2015.

Recently, a new law titled “Legal Recognition of Gender Identity – National Mechanism for the Development, Monitoring and Evaluation of Action Plans on Children’s Rights” was passed in the Greek Parliament with 171 votes of 300. It defines gender identity as the “the personal way in which a person experiences his or her sex, irrespective of the sex registered on their birth certificate on the basis of his/her biological characteristics, including the personal perception of the body, as well as the social and external expression of gender, which corresponds to the will of the person” and allows Greek citizens over the age of 15 to change their official identifying documents by obtaining a court ruling. Importantly, it removes the former requirements for such changes on identifying documents, including the requirement that the individual had undergone a psychiatric assessment and sex-change surgery. The process is slightly different for individuals 15-16 and over 17 years old as the former groups will undergo psychiatric assessment while the latter will not.

### 2.3. Anti-discrimination policies and actions

In Greece there are not defined antidiscrimination policies specifically related to LGBTIQI individuals. However, a very important programme, which is the first to be run in association with a government body in Greece (Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs) focusing on LGBT and intersex (LGBTI) issues is also the 11528 project (<http://11528.gr/>, created 2015-2016) for combating and preventing discrimination based on SOGI. It is a joint project of Lesbian and Gay Community of Greece (OLKE), Positive Voice, Athens Pride and Thessaloniki Pride and consists of the “11528 – Next to You” helpline for LGBTI youth, their parents, educators and the campaign “Next to You” aiming to raise awareness on LGBTI issues and rights.

Moreover, the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs in the year 2016-2017 introduced a thematic week in secondary schools titled “Body and identity” with the aim to inform and raise awareness in the educational community (amongst others) on the topic of gender identities (Ministry of Education, 2016). Research conducted to investigate the experience of a conservative sample of educators (43 completed questionnaires) from the thematic week, revealed that although half of the educators (47%) did not face any problems when implementing this initiative, others had problems with members of the teachers’ association (24%), others with parents (20%) and 9% faced reactions/denying from students themselves (Pateraki, Orfanidou & Skibas, 2018). During this Thematic Week and specifically on the topic of gender identities 73% of educators reported that students asked for implementation of more actions like this one, which shows that they are clearly interested, which was shown from the fact that 62% of educators reported that students’ position towards SOGI issues was positive. Only 20% reported that they thought students attitude was negative, which educators thought, in the majority reflected negative stereotypes produced in/from the family (44%). According to the majority of educators (63%) students do not have good, adequate knowledge of what concerns SOGI, interestingly educators themselves were considered to have bad quality knowledge on the topic and this was reported by 99% of the participants. Many educators were reported to have a negative attitude towards SOGI matters and of those 22% believe these issues are outside of their pedagogical role, 20% expressed fear and alarmism and 29% refused or resisted collaborating in designing relevant material. Conservatism and the defence of regularity were expressed by 11%, while the attempt to deprive the initiative was expressed by 11%. Finally, 24% expressed indifference, lack of awareness and silence. These findings reflect that the educational community does not have adequate or accurate knowledge to address

SOGI issues, which probably minimises their ability to combat discriminatory behaviours based on SOGI.

### 2.3.1. Contribution of NGOs and other organisations

Except such isolated initiatives, support to LGBT individuals is provided mainly by NGOs and private organisations/associations. Important is the work of LGBT NGO Colour Youth Athens (<http://www.colouryouth.gr/en/>) fighting against discrimination of people based on their SOGI. They fought for the legal gender recognition and they continue to fight for marriage and parenthood and against domestic violence. They are fighting for equal rights to education and health, for financial coverage of the gender reassignments procedures and for expansion of the legislation to LGBT refugees and migrants. They are currently running three projects those being the “Tell Us” project (2013) some of the results of which are mentioned in the next section 2.3.2, the “School Climate Survey” project (2017) to investigate and determine the quality of the school environment as it is perceived by LGBT pupils and the European REC project “Come Forward” (2016), which aims to address the issue of hate crimes against LGBT people through the increase in number of centres that register such incidents, through the empowerment of civil society, the sharing of good practices, the strengthening of international partnerships and the empowerment of the victims themselves. Older projects of theirs involve the provision of legal services and support to hate crime victims (“We are all citizens”, 2014-2016) implemented by the Hellenic League for Human Rights in collaboration with the Greek Council for Refugees, the Greek Forum of Refugees, METAdrasi, Doctors of the World and Day Centre BABEL. Colour Youth was responsible for the LGBTQI incidents. They ran the “share it” (2014-2015) project where parents of LGBTQI individuals could share their concerns and personal stories with other parents in the same situation. Lastly, the project “Vote for your rights” (2014) included a campaign in the light of the European and municipal elections aiming to encourage LGBTQI voters, in particular young people in order to assert their rights by voting for them.

A summary of other important organisations/association can be found in Table 1 along organisations and associations who deal with the phenomenon of bullying.

**Table 1: Relevant associations and organisations**

Name	Link	Topic and actions
Colour Youth Athens	<a href="http://www.colouryouth.gr/en/">http://www.colouryouth.gr/en/</a>	LGBTQI
Rainbow School	<a href="http://rainbowschool.gr/">http://rainbowschool.gr/</a>	LGBTQI
Research Centre for Gender Equality (KETHI)	<a href="https://kethi.gr/">https://kethi.gr/</a>	Prevention and Fight against sexism and discrimination on gender identity issues
Athens Pride	<a href="http://www.athenspride.eu">www.athenspride.eu</a>	LGBTQI
Thessaloniki Pride - HOM-Ophonia	<a href="http://www.thessalonikipride.com">www.thessalonikipride.com</a>	LGBTQI
SYMPRAXI – Partnership for the Social Gender	<a href="http://lgbtq-iff.gr/en/home/">http://lgbtq-iff.gr/en/home/</a>	LGBTQI
Lesbian Group of Athens	<a href="http://loa.gr/">http://loa.gr/</a>	LGBTQI
Greek Transgendered Support Association	<a href="http://www.transgender-association.gr/">http://www.transgender-association.gr/</a>	LGBTQI
Lesbian and Gay Community of Greece (OLKE)	<a href="http://olkegr.blogspot.gr/">http://olkegr.blogspot.gr/</a>	LGBTQI

Name	Link	Topic and actions
Bisexual and Solidarity group	<a href="https://bisparkle.blogspot.gr">https://bisparkle.blogspot.gr</a>	LGBTQI
QueerTrans forum	<a href="https://queertrans.espiv.net/forum/">https://queertrans.espiv.net/forum/</a>	LGBTQI
Rainbow Families	<a href="http://ouraniotoksofamilies.blogspot.gr/">http://ouraniotoksofamilies.blogspot.gr/</a>	LGBTQI
Good As You(th) in Thessaloniki	<a href="http://goodasyouth.com/">http://goodasyouth.com/</a>	LGBTQI
Blender – Community of LGBTQI Youth in Patras	<a href="http://koinonikokentro.gr/category/blender-blog/">http://koinonikokentro.gr/category/blender-blog/</a>	LGBTQI
LGBTQI Larissa	<a href="http://lgbtqi-larissa.wixsite.com/lgbtqi-larissa">http://lgbtqi-larissa.wixsite.com/lgbtqi-larissa</a>	LGBTQI
Lesbian Community of Thessaloniki	<a href="https://lothess.weebly.com/">https://lothess.weebly.com/</a>	LGBTQI
For Adolescent Health – FAH	<a href="http://www.youth-life.gr/el/">http://www.youth-life.gr/el/</a>	Bullying; Greek partners in ENABLE; <a href="http://enable.eun.org/">http://enable.eun.org/</a>
KMOP	<a href="https://kmop.gr/index.php">https://kmop.gr/index.php</a> , <a href="https://livewithoutbullying.com/">https://livewithoutbullying.com/</a> , <a href="http://combatbullying.eu/en/">http://combatbullying.eu/en/</a> , <a href="http://divercity.ub.edu/">http://divercity.ub.edu/</a> , <a href="http://www.epsilonproject.eu/">http://www.epsilonproject.eu/</a>	“Live without bullying” platform; Greek partner in the EU projects “ComBus”, “DIVERCITY”; EpsiLon; Power Action.
Greek Prevention Centre COMPASS (Πυξίδα)	<a href="http://www.pyxida.org.gr/index.php/nea/234-to-spiti-ton-paidion-paei-sxoleio">http://www.pyxida.org.gr/index.php/nea/234-to-spiti-ton-paidion-paei-sxoleio</a>	Bullying: “House of the Children”
EAN - European Antibullying Network	<a href="http://www.antibullying.eu/">http://www.antibullying.eu/</a>	Bullying

### 2.3.2. Overview of research and reports

Although bullying is a general phenomenon in schools targeting difference from norms (UNESCO, 2012b), LGBTQI students, or students perceived as being LGBTQI are particularly vulnerable to this form of discrimination. HT bullying involves the calling of derogatory terms, public embarrassment, rumour spreading, violent acts whether verbal or physical, pushing, social isolation, online harassment, stealing or destruction of personal items, sexual harassment/attack and threats of any kind (Aide et al., 2013; Guasp et al., 2012). These behaviours negatively impact on the wellbeing of the individuals, causing depressive feelings, problems in concentration and academic attainment, difficulties to enter, attend and complete school, as well as reduction of one’s willingness to attempt entry to higher education and to take on professional opportunities (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Intersex Youth and Student Organisation – IGLYO, 2017, FRA, 2016). HT bullying is prevalent across the world (UNESCO, 2012a) with LGBT individuals reporting having been victims of such harassment at percentages ranging from 34% in Ireland to 90% in USA (indicatively: 35-48% in EU countries such as France, Belgium or Spain, 65% in the United Kingdom, 61%-68% in Mexico, 60-76% in Australia and New Zealand, 83% in Japan). Greece is not considered friendly or tolerant towards LGBT individuals and older data points to negative attitudes towards sexual differentiation, with it being considered dangerous not only by the general population (Tzamalouka, 2000) but also by young groups of people (Deligiannis-Kouimtzi and Renzis 2000). According to the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Council (2010, 2011) discrimination against LGBTQI in Greece exists in most environments and it is exercised also by authorities such that there is hierarchy in detention facilities, at the bottom of which are LGBT individuals who end up suffering double or triple discrimination. Indicatively, it has been reported that individuals detained in the LGBT section of a prison were confined to their cells

and adjustment corridors while being denied access to an outside yard for two years. In terms of employment, LGBTQI individuals have lower chances of being invited for job interviews, with lesbians reaching 28% less chances than heterosexual women (Drydakakis, 2011).

In Greece, according to the EU LGBT (FRA, 2013) 76% of respondents have experienced negative behaviours because of being LGBT. The educational institutions are the place where most serious incidents of harassment take place those being 27% as compared to 23% that happens in public spaces and 11% online. Moreover, 17% of the most serious physical/sexual attacks or threats of violence take place in educational environments. Additionally, 33% of 93,000 respondents reported having felt discriminated against because of being LGBT, by school/university personnel in the year preceding the survey. Relatively recent survey results (Grigoropoulos, 2010) indicate that such negative predisposition towards LGBTQI individuals in the student population is predominantly expressed by individuals who report that they do not know any homosexual individuals personally themselves and who also score high in religiosity. More recently, a study assessing social factors behind anti-transgender sentiments in a sample of 238 undergraduates students of major universities in Athens revealed that negative attitudes are not only related to religiosity, but also to the frequency of attendance at religious services, political designation, sexual prejudice and gender, with males being overall considerably more negative and intolerant towards transgender individuals than females (Grigoropoulos & Kordoulis, 2015). Qualitative data on the reaction of primary school teachers to the bullying of children by peers on the ground of non-stereotyped gender behaviour, indicates that teachers themselves show a weakness or even indifference to face/deal with those incidents (Gerouki, 2010).

The LGBT NGO Colour Youth in 2012 joined the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN) (2014, 2015) and in 2013, they recorded 166 incidents of discriminatory violence on the grounds of SOGI with total of 320 victims. In 2015, there were 185 cases of discriminatory violence against LGBT individuals the 4 of which were LGBT immigrants, of which the two were also disabled. The same organisation implemented the "Tell Us!" Project (Theophilopoulos, 2016) which recorded 101 incidents of HT violence and discrimination with at least 140 victims from 1st of April 2014 until 30th November 2015, from at least 194. Critically, it should be noted that Colour Youth work solely within the wider area of Athens, thus the majority of those incidents (98) took place only within this area and not in the whole of Greece.

A comparative analysis by FRA (2015) revealed that in the majority of EU MS equality bodies are merged with national human rights institutions (NHRIs), which however are sometimes fragmented suggesting the absence of a coordinated, coherent approach for the monitoring of fundamental rights. In line with this some EU MS ensure that the equality bodies and the NHRIs have the proper, required resources to act in full independence, others however, Greece included, do not provide means for direct enforcement by the equality bodies. This is in line with previous FRA findings (2011) on the effectiveness of the Race Equality Directive (no.2000/43/EC) to combat racial discrimination, which indicate problems in the enforcement of the legislation by the responsible bodies. They also point to low awareness of the legislation and procedural framework for dealing with discrimination, which is very important in those cases because the knowledge one has on the legislation, allows them to pursue their rights in a more complete and coherent way. It should be noted however, that sometimes even if knowledge of the rights and legal processes are acquired, the monitoring and facing of cases of discrimination might be deficient because of potential disincentives in the complaint/reporting process. As such are considered the legal costs involved in reporting complaints on the grounds of discrimination, the reluctance to report the incidents, a failure to recognise discrimination, the fear of negative consequences and the perception that things will not change. Critical for the resolution of such issues is considered the role of national and local authorities as well as equality bodies and NGOs in providing advice and, if possible in the future, legal guidance.

Findings of the  
field research

### 3. Findings of the field research

In this section the results of the field research are presented thematically, which included an online survey and three focus groups but before that it is important to indicate the demographics of the groups.

A total of 84 individuals took part in the online survey. The majority of respondents were female (65%) of 41 years of age on average, while the second biggest group of respondents was male (31%) of an average of 44 years of age (see Table 2). The rest of the respondents included intersex people (2%) aged on average 49 years old and individuals who chose the option "Other" without specifying (2%) their gender identity and were on average 24 years old.

**Table 2: Number of participants, mean % of respondents and their age in years per gender identity**

Variables \ Gender	Female	Male	Intersex	Other
Number of participants	55	25	2	2
% of respondents	65	31	2	2
Mean age in years	41	44	49	24

The sample consisted predominantly of heterosexual individuals (71%), with the second largest group of respondents being homosexual, gay or lesbians (13%) and 9% being bisexual. Of the remaining respondents 5% chose the option "Other", 1% preferred not to answer and 1% reported not knowing what their sexual orientation is. With regards to their profession and most importantly their role in the school community, 64% of responders were teachers in primary/secondary education, 13% were school advisors, 5% were psychologists, 5% were special pedagogues, 2% were social workers, 1% were heads of school and 10% played other roles in the school community including children psychologists, trainers and health. Since the survey was directed to the educational community, it is not surprising that the vast majority of respondents were highly educated, having acquired a bachelor's degrees (69%), 16% had gained a master's degree, 6% carried a Ph.D. title and 6% had undertaken vocational training diplomas. The rest had finished secondary education. Given that the sample consisted predominantly by education staff, those were probably people represented in the other category of their participation in the school community. Regarding the family situation of the respondents the majority (45%) were married, 18% not married but lived with their partner, 20% not married, 6% not married and have never lived with a partner, 6% in relationship but have again not lived with their partner, 4% divorced and 1% separated.

The sample in the focus groups with professionals included 17 people, 16 women and 1 transgender man. They were all teachers in primary, secondary and vocational education specializing in a variety of sciences (sociology, ICTs, French, economics etc.), a school principal, a social worker and two education officials by the Institute of Education Policy (IEP). The sample of the focus group with parents and students consisted of 7 parents and 3 students. The parents were all female and the students were two male and one female, being second-year students in the Greek General Lyceum<sup>1</sup>.

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

#### 3.1.1. Individual perspectives

According to both focus group participants and respondents of the online survey bullying, general and HT, is prevalent in Greece. Most prevalent activities are leaving others out of activities on purpose (55%), spreading nasty rumours about others (65%) and students being hit or pushed by others (61%). Also, the reporting of negative comments about others on the internet and the sexual touching of students by other students do not happen as often, but maybe several times a year (32%, 30%, 23% respectively) or never/almost never (23%, 28%, 36% respectively). HT bullying might also take the form of organised physical attacks among students, which are considered rarer, as well as exclusionary practices. The participants claimed that recipients of such behaviours are prone to school dropout.

#### 3.1.2. School environment

Education experts who took part in the focus groups indicated that HT bullying is not uncommon in participants' schools in Greece but tends to remain undetected, unless it leads to an extremely serious outcome. Despite not remembering having witnessed any particular incidents of such bullying, respondents described a generally negative school climate, where bullying is not always initiated by students, but also by school staff. It can be observed, however, more often in the secondary and post-secondary levels than in the primary level. Individuals identified verbal harassment as HT bullying practices, such as the use of SOGI terms as insults, mocking in SOGI terms and intentional misgendering. These practices might take place among students, among educational staff or, importantly, by teachers to students, something that was also shown from the online survey, where 38% of respondents who are members of the educational community reported having heard or learnt about negative comments by their colleagues towards the LGBTQI community several times in a year (as compared to 28% who reported negative comments from students), while 25% reported the same but for at least several times in a month (as compared to 19% from students). According to focus group participants, most of the time such comments by school staff take place in a covert manner, behind the back of the student in question. In that sense, participants believe that at least students themselves are more overt in their discriminatory and phobic behaviours. For example, sometimes, when teachers observe non-stereotypical gender behaviours from the part of the students, they exchange humoristic or ironic comments or gossip about them. Often teachers discuss what to do with kids that are "different" in order to discourage or suppress the expression of this "different" behaviour. Furthermore, it is common for teachers to advise the parents to consult an expert, and/or to encourage gender "appropriate" games and friendships. Interestingly, focus group participants claimed that SOGI bullying is sometimes

<sup>1</sup> Lyceum is the Greek upper secondary level of education.

directed towards teachers themselves, mainly by their colleagues and/or education officials (i.e. the school principal). The example that was mentioned was a case of intentional and continuous misgendering of a transgender teacher.

According to the survey, individuals considered to be most vulnerable to bullying are students with learning challenges (76%), students with migrant background (65%) and students who are overweight (65%). Least vulnerable to bullying were considered students from poor families (30%). Critically, 71% of respondents reported that students who do not fit the expected image of a boy or girl are usually subject to bullying, suggesting a prevalence of HT bullying. More than half of respondents (53%) reported that their students are subject to HT bullying although a large percentage of respondents (40%) reported that they do not know. Only 7% was confident that their students are not subject to HT bullying. Although the majority believes that their students become victims of such bullying they did not believe this to happen very often (8%), but rather most of participants believed that it happens rarely-not frequently (22%) or not at all frequently (29%). Regardless of participants reporting the above, over half of respondents (51%) reported not knowing whether there are LGBTQI students/people at their school and only 26% of participants reported being aware and knowing LGBTQI students/people in their schools, against 23% of participants who reported that they do not know any LGBTQI students/people at their schools. Of this 74% (approximately 62 people) who reported not knowing any, or whether there are any LGBTQI students/people at their schools the majority (41%) said that although unaware, it is their belief that actually there are LGBTQI students/people within their schools.

Regarding the prevalence of bullying and HT bullying in schools, the incidents through which it manifests more frequently (several times in a month) are recorded by the educational community through the online survey in Table 3 along the PISA 2015 results (OECD, 2017) of self-reported bullying by students.

**Table 3: % of respondents on the prevalence of bullying in the schools where they work as responded to the question “How often situations described occur in your school?” and PISA 2015 results for the same question.**

Incident	Frequency	To students: often (at least several times per month)	To LGBTQI students: often (at least several times per month)	PISA 2015 results (at least several times per month)
Students call other students names		NA	55%	NA
Students leave other students out on purpose from various activities		55%	25%	4.9%
Students make fun of other students		NA	30%	10%
Students intimidate/threaten other students		NA	24%	3.2%
Students take away or destroy property of other students		37%	12%	4.6%
Students are being hit or pushed by other students		61%	15%	4.3%
Students spread nasty rumors about other students		65%	23%	7.3%
Students make negative comments about others on the internet		19%	16%	NA

Incident	Frequency	To students: often (at least several times per month)	To LGBTQI students: often (at least several times per month)	PISA 2015 results (at least several times per month)
Students are sexually touched by other students		17%	12%	NA

Incidents of HT bullying, which take place most frequently, at least several times in a month, appear to be the calling of other students with names such as gay, faggot, lesbian, butch and other similar negative words (40%), the telling to other students to not act like a girl, when they are boy and not act like a boy when they are a girl (47%) and the calling of each other names, which might not necessarily be associated to the LGBTQI community (55%). Other behaviours were not considered as prevalent with many respondents reporting that those never or almost never happen at their schools and relatively similar percentage of people reporting being unaware whether such behaviours take place at their schools. Those included leaving LGBTQI students out on purpose from various activities, making fun of LGBTQI students, intimidating/threatening LGBTQI students, hitting and pushing LGBTQI students, destroying their property, sexually touching LGBTQI students and so on. HT bullying might also take place when students or teachers laugh over SOGI terms. For respondents, ridiculing something so fundamental to human existence is extremely violent and abusive and has nothing to do with humour. However, they often observe children in school causing pain to other students by abusive or ridiculing language, claiming that this is for fun. Moreover, participants mentioned that very often students, who are subjected to this type of “humour”, laugh along with their peers to avoid further stigmatisation and consequent marginalisation. Overall, in such an unsafe environment, according to the student participants of the focus group, it is extremely difficult for a student to find the courage to claim his/her diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity. However, participants also believe that if LGBTQ+ students had the strength to discuss their identity, they would eventually receive acceptance from their community.

According to the survey many respondents (17%) reported not knowing whether students are open about their SOGI, very few (3%) believe that students come through about this, some believed that they do so sometimes (26%), some that they know it has happened at least once (16%) in their schools, while the majority believes that this never happens (38%). Moreover, the dominant views about the way students related to their SOGI in the school environment hold that they either open up only to individuals who they really trust (31%), or that they hide their true SOGI from their peers (25%), or that some students do one or the other (17%). Many people did not really know about ways in which students manage the above (23%), while only a very small percentage believed that students were open about their SOGI to everyone (3%). Regardless of the above, the vast majority agreed that LGBTQI individuals should be able to express their SOGI at school (60%), that the school should prevent and deal with negative comments about the LGBTQI community (76%). The schools should take the wellbeing of LGBTQI students into account (70%), making sure they do not skip school (79%) and by making sure they feel alright at school (78%). Critically, one fourth of participants (26%) thought that the academic performance of LGBTQI students is not worse than that of the rest of the children because of the negative comments that are directed to them, although approximately the same amount of people (24%) believed that it might actually be worse. Some believe that their academic performance is probably not worse (12%) than others' although most people reported that they do not know (31%) about the matter. Lastly, there were some respondents who thought that the academic performance of LGBTQI students is definitely worse than that of the rest of students, but the percentage was very small (4%).

To investigate potential differences between subgroups of the sample we conducted an extended statistical analysis. Given that variables were categorical and not continuous, it was not possible to perform t-tests and bivariate correlations. Therefore, chi-square tests of associations between the categorical variables has been conducted. Initially, the sample was divided into 1) teachers and 2) other. However, no differences between the relevant variables have been found. Secondly, the sample was divided into two age groups, specifically 1) under 35 years old and 2) over 35 years old and found no differences between variables. Lastly, the sample was divided by sexual orientation to 1) Heterosexuals and 2) Non-heterosexuals and then differences arose (significance level for all tests:  $p < .05$ ). Firstly, there was a significant difference between the groups in the frequency of the recognition of HT bullying, and specifically of the calling of students as faggot, lesbian, butch and other similar negative words by other students, where the majority of non-heterosexuals reported that this happens very often, several times a month while heterosexuals reported that this happens rarely, never or that they did not know. This is somewhat expected given that someone who is not heterosexual and has a sexual orientation, which is subjected to such bullying (all except heterosexuality) is most likely to perceive the manifestation of it, while the same might be less evident to heterosexuals. Similarly, a significant difference was found between groups in the perceived frequency of a) social exclusion/ostracism of LGBTQI students ("leaving LGBTQI students out of various activities on purpose"), b) bullying of those students, c) the use of violence to take away or destroy property of LGBTQI students, d) being hit or pushed by other students, e) spreading nasty rumours about LGBTQI students and f) making negative comments on the internet about LGBTQI students. Far more non-heterosexuals reported that those are frequent phenomena and happen several times in a month, while heterosexuals believe that they happen rarely, never or reporting that they do not know. Lastly, an association was found between the participants' awareness of LGBTQI students' presence in school and the awareness of HT bullying directed towards them, so that people who were aware that LGBTQI students existed in their schools were also more aware of the bullying directed to them, which again makes sense given that if one is not aware of the presence of a community, consequently they will not be aware of the problems that community faces.

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

The recognition of HT bullying was a matter that emerged also in the discussion with parents and students and is directly related to sex education provided by school to students and parents to their children within the family environment as well as the contact of those students with their peers. The discussion with student participants was quite helpful in bringing out the diverse sexual identities that exist at their schools and amongst their friends. According to students, fluidity regarding sexual identities (bisexual and pansexual identities) is widespread, especially among girls, as it appears from discussions with their peers, and there is a small presence of trans students/friends. However, when the issue is discussed among peers, boys tend to overreact, as they feel their masculinity to be vulnerable and under threat. However, student participants also reported that they had never witnessed an episode of threatening HT bullying. Bullying is usually limited to verbal violence and abusive speech, mainly expressed through comments and jokes such as "don't be such a girl", "don't cry like a girl", "how does he/she look like this", "how does he/she walk like this". Students interpret such comments as the result of stereotypes and prejudices that take root and become certainties from an early age within the family and society at large, and have become hard to change when children reach Lyceum. Students referred to the choice of blue and pink clothes for boys and girls respectively, or to the selection of toys on the basis of biological sex as characteristic manifestations of such stereotypes. At the same time, they appeared to differentiate themselves from this view, claiming that there are no clothes (dresses, high heels) or practices (makeup) that are strictly

male or female. In their view, such stereotypes must be tackled from early on in school, since the way people handle these issues is a matter of education. Most educators were not reported to make openly HT comments, not necessarily because they are informed about these issues, but mostly out of courtesy. According to the students, most educators avoid discussing openly such taboo issues, out of fear that they may cause problems and elicit negative reactions. Nevertheless, students believe that it is necessary for teachers to be knowledgeable and ready to support students, especially LGBTQI+ individuals.

Students also referred to adequate sex education as the way to learn to recognise such bullying, but claimed that compared to other European countries, sex education is absent from Greek curricula, or confined to learning about the reproductive system in biology classes. Seminars by visiting specialists mainly concern sexually transmitted diseases and do not take place in all schools (private and experimental schools appear to be more open on these issues, as students report) or at all grades, except the final two years of Lyceum (according to the students, these are considered taboo issues to be discussed at earlier grades). The very few exceptions, such as a programme on art and love attended by a female student, tend to be confined to heterosexuality. Further, there were differences in their willingness to discuss such issues with their fellow students. One boy participant said that he discusses such issues with his friends and cross-examines what he hears with what he knows, while the girl participant claimed that it is worse to discuss such issues with friends and fellow students, because of the ignorance that exists on many subjects (eg. contraception).

The examination of sex education within the family brought forward some of the basic characteristics of Greek society, as well as of the way in which these issues are discussed. Most participating parents characterised Greek society as conservative and repressive, especially in rural areas, with which they were familiar through personal experience. These parents talked about closed, religiously influenced societies, which have instilled fear and insecurity to many parents and have made them reluctant to discuss these topics with their children. Often, they believe that despite parents' efforts the heteronormative societal environment contributes in difficulties that sexually diverse children face. Sex education seems to remain a taboo subject in Greek society. Almost two decades ago, textbooks on sex education were issued by the Ministry of Education but were never distributed to schools, due to opposition by the powerful Orthodox church, which has systematically resisted attempts to bring the subject to schools. In addition, attempts to inform students on sexual matters are confined to the issue of sexually transmitted diseases and to heterosexuality.

Within the family, the parents emphasised the need for sex education and referred to the practices they themselves followed, which included discussions with their children and the purchase of relevant books. Often, a personal life incidence or the need to face particularly family struggles and understand their own child's diversity or difference made parents explore further issues of sexuality and sex education. They recognised that sex education concerns an important part of life that includes feelings, the creation of families, reproduction, and the expression of a large part of who we are. Thus, it should be discussed openly and accurately, in detail, as well as with reference to sexual diversity. Nevertheless, parents stated that often they decide not to discuss such issues if they feel embarrassed or unknowledgeable about them. According to the parents, sex education at school should start in the kindergarten with topics related to self-image, the demarcation of the body or the "rule of the underwear", and be adjusted to age and grade, as it concerns a natural function that constitutes part of everyday life.

Most participating parents did not have particular difficulties in talking with their children about sexual diversity, either in theory or through personal experience. They emphasised, however, that Greek society still finds it difficult to deal with diversity. They also referred to the impact

that a heteronormative culture has on individuals with non-heteronormative gender identity or sexual orientation, since they are frequently forced to hide their identity at school or in the family. Further, some parents appear to ignore the terminology of gender identity, which makes it difficult to discuss these issues. However, most of them seemed to be informed and capable of handling comfortably conversations on sexual diversity. The student participants stressed the importance of a climate of sincerity that allows them to discuss these issues, openly with their parents. The families of participating students appeared to accept diversity of sexual orientation and gender expression. By growing up in families where these are no taboo subjects, these children have come to find nothing shocking or strange about them. This approach seems to help them perceive sex as a normal part of their lives.

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

This section focuses on the reaction of the school community including school administration, educators, social pedagogues, psychologists, students and parents to HT bullying in school. Although the findings are reported according to participant group, the findings of the online survey, reported as percentages are not group specific.

#### **3.2.1. School administration**

Regarding the reactions to and prevention of HT bullying in schools, the vast majority of the survey respondents (95%) believed that the school community should have an active role in the process, but reactions towards HT bullying do not take any official form, as focus group participants told us. This is common in all levels of education. There are not established practices in schools for dealing with SOGI bullying, neither are there appointed educators responsible for handling bullying issues, in comparison to other safety issues in the school such as fire protection. A few years ago, as respondents remembered, the Ministry of Education instructed schools to appoint two or three educators who would be responsible for handling situations and provide anti-bullying interventions in schools. This practice has faded away and nowadays most schools do not appoint anyone. Those findings indicate a general indifference or inability of the school administrations to tackle the issue at hand and react to HT bullying, in an attempt to prevent it.

#### **3.2.2. Teachers, social pedagogues and psychologist**

At the same time, however, this might not be the case as from the survey it was unclear if education professionals have the necessary knowledge to act against HT bullying (4% said that they shouldn't and 1% expressed no opinion), with almost half of respondents from the educational community saying that they believe they do (43) and the other half believing that they do not (52%). Approximately half of the participants (49%) reported that they always support students when they hear HT comments, approximately half (24%) said that they do so most of the time and 15% reported not having heard such comments. Most of them (78%) believed that information about SOGI should be provided to students at school (2% said that they should not and 6% expressed no opinion), although sometimes they believed that it might not be allowed by the school or the authorities (14%). In some cases, students have the opportunity to learn about SOGI in the classroom (44%) but in others they do not (56%). When such matters are presented in the classroom in their majority they are presented neutrally (36%), without negative or positive connotations. Only 9% said that they are presented negatively, 6% positively and the majority 41% reported that they are not presented at all.

The limited reaction or inaction regarding SOGI issues in schools is attributed by the participants of the focus group to teachers' lack of training and accurate information on the topic. Teachers do not have the knowledge, skills and tools to discuss diverse family structures (rainbow families), gender and sexual diversity at school (LGBTQI+ students), or to respond to particular parents' inquiries. Another reason for such indifference is the fact that many teachers are allocated in more than one school and spend very limited time in each one. Burnout was also mentioned as a restrictive factor for teachers, who prefer to limit their role on traditional school practices, rather than being creative and alert educators. Similarly, due to the general financial crisis teachers have lost an important amount of their salaries and are therefore angry and unwilling to do more than the basic teaching.

Often teachers are afraid of the responsibility; they feel insecure about what they are going to say, in order to not be misunderstood or scare students. However, in the survey most participants reported that they would feel very comfortable talking with their students about LGBTQI related topics (46%; 21% said they would feel neutral and only 3% uncomfortable), being in the room with an LGBTQI student (74%), having an LGBTQI student in their classroom (72%), having a student revealing their gender identity outside of school (64%) or asking for personal support during a private discussion (55%) and being requested by a student to help them approach the principal in order to improve school policies on sexuality and diversity (66%). However, when it came to a student revealing their identity during class and although the majority (45%) reported they would feel comfortable, one fourth of respondents said they would feel somehow uncomfortable (25%).

Importantly, focus group participants attributed indifference to the lack of clear educational policy frames. They believe that most teachers have neglected the subject, however, if there were clear policies applied, schools would respond more efficiently. Although there are rules, they are not always followed and there are no consequences for that, as there is no systematic evaluation of teachers' work. For them, this is a political matter: educational policy makers are politicians and tend to see parents as their voting pool. In that sense, they do not willingly touch issues that could jeopardize this relationship. As participants mentioned, every time there is a change of a Minister of Education, there are fundamental changes in the educational policies, as well. Finally, as participants discussed, there are psychologists who work in schools who could offer some help and take over if cases arise, but these professionals are a few and their presence in the school is irregular. Sometimes school advisors are asked to handle these situations, as well. In private schools, these topics are considered highly taboo, so teachers are not even allowed to discuss them in the fear of parents' dissatisfaction and complaints. According to respondents, individual teachers could help LGBTQI students by recognizing them and giving space for all voices in class. They could help LGBTQI students by making them feel in equal terms, like all students: functional and part of the social web. LGBTQI students should have an autonomous presence in society, be able to fulfil their basic needs and form unrestricted social ties. Overall, the educational community that participated in the survey believed that there are individuals amongst the school staff who express their support towards LGBTQI students (64%) but those are not many but just a few from the school personnel (reported by 41% of respondents). Critically, the majority (65%) reported that they would support LGBTQI students and that they do not believe that they risk their position at the school.

### 3.2.3. Students

Participants in the survey reported that in terms of the reactions of students to such comments towards their peers, 51% of participants reported that they sometimes react, but not always (2%), with the second largest part of respondents reporting that they do not know (26%). It is important to remember that these views are from adult respondents belonging to the

educational community and not of the students themselves, thus they are the perception of the school staff about what happens in the school environment by students in support of their peers. When we consider the students themselves (focus group with parents and students), these appear to be quite sensitive in matters of equality, inclusion and discrimination. They reported that they have disagreed or quarrelled with fellow students over the use of abusive or offensive language towards LGBTQI+ children or children whose gender identity or expression differs from normative stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. However, the students came from families with non-stereotypical views on these issues. Thus, they were inclined to trust their parents and notify school authorities in case they perceived bullying incidents. In actual incidents of bullying behaviour at school, these students did notify their teachers and the school administration, although actions were not always taken in response to such incidents. According to the students, the inability of many teachers and administrators to handle diversity and to address bullying incidents is due to a lack of proper training, which leads to positive or negative discrimination. As one student characteristically said, "It would be better if someone said that homosexuals simply exist and I don't mind about that". In addition, students referred to a feeling of resignation among some teachers who have lost hope and do not believe they can change anything.

### **3.2.4. Parents**

Much like the students, the parents who participated in the focus group stated that they do not feel worried or uncomfortable if their children interact with individuals of non-heteronormative gender identity or sexual orientation. They have chosen to talk openly with their children about these issues, either as part of their sex education, or through direct contact that the family might have in their friendly environment with individuals of different sexual orientation or gender identity. A characteristic case in this respect was that of a mother whose daughter came out as a trans girl, and so she decided to discuss openly everything with her. As the mother stated, this experience had a positive effect on her as it strengthened communication with her child, even though she recognizes the difficulties of acceptance at the family level. For parents, the important thing is to create the space and the conditions that allow individuals to develop their identity freely. Some parents referred to the difficulties that boys face in handling issues of sexual diversity, mentioning that in such cases discussions with their children are oriented towards re-framing and overturning stereotypes. Finally, for parents who are themselves LGBTQI, the handling of such issues within the family starts very early.

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

This section focuses on the measures that are employed by educational professionals individually or the educational community as a whole, measures within school or outside of school, resulting from interinstitutional cooperation.

### **3.3.1. Measures, taken individually**

The majority of focus group participants had some experience of training to manage diversity in SOGI and be able to combat HT bullying, which lasted from few-days seminars to a year training. However, these trainings were optional, self-paid and undertaken in their free time. Lastly, most of the participants who undertook this training did so because they themselves were interested to find out information on this subject. From their experiences, the first and most important condition for effective results is that trainings are systematic, mandatory and involve the general population of teachers of all education levels. Trainings should start from basic definitions and concepts, such as "difference", "diversity", gender and sexuality, because

it is important to understand all those frequently misunderstood concepts. Teachers should be encouraged to renegotiate their personal stereotypes, to learn how to monitor themselves and control their own stereotypical predispositions, by challenging heteronormativity. Trainings should focus on human equality issues and human rights, as well as emotions and empathy. Child and adolescence developmental psychology could be the frame of learning.

Participants stressed the need for teachers to be trained in groups, engage in collaborative work and learn to recognize group dynamics. Experiential, active and cooperative learning techniques are necessary for the educators. Art is also an interesting way to approach the subject. However, respondents expressed considerations over the medical approach and the role of medical practitioners that some trainings and seminars involve. They believe that this approach might be misleading, because it reinforces biological determinism. Medical discourses are often structured around the conceptual frame of normal vs. pathological, which is considered dangerous and problematic, when it comes to gender and sexual identity construction.

Critical, was considered the learning about the legal framework under which SOGI issues fall. Focus group participants agreed that there is still a predominant belief that if SOGI issues are discussed at school, there will be negative consequences for teachers. Therefore, they need to know the legal framework, in order to address voices that are positioned against difference [hate speech]. Training on managing emotions like anger or fear is very important, including communication skills to address students' or their parents' inquiries and be supportive in times of crisis.

In order to motivate teachers such training should be accredited. Training efforts should not be limited to educators. They should be directed to all school stakeholders: teachers, students, parents, school advisors, education officials and the wider community. Sometimes, respondents mentioned that parents do not know how to deal with situations of SOGI with their own children, regardless how open minded they might be. Parent-teacher relationships, therefore, should be enhanced and promoted. Students on the other hand need to have systematic teaching on sex education issues, sexual diversity including.

According to students, LGBTQI students are invisible in Greek schools. Often non-conforming sexual and/or gender behaviours are ridiculed or even challenged. As a result, many students hide their SOGI. Invisibility makes it harder to identify and address incidents of HT bullying. The lack of sex education and the absence of actions and good practices for addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying create a vicious cycle of reproduction of ignorance, stereotypes and symbolic or physical violence. Lack of understanding and communication about these issues at all educational levels, combined with the fact that Greek schools do not always manage to address also other types of discrimination, create an educational context that needs significant change, both educationally and politically. The students stressed the need for an inclusive school that does not reproduce discriminatory myths and categorizations, and does not treat diversity as something exotic. Inclusive education, in their view, facilitates communication and conflict resolution. Such a context would help all children to "flourish and be happier". The students stated that this could happen in each school individually because it is up to the educational staff to promote it. However, they also acknowledged that the Ministry of Education bears the responsibility for creating such a context, designing and implementing sex education in schools, informing and training teachers on the issues, even those who disagree or have a negative attitude towards them.

### **3.3.2. Measures, taken internally within the school environment**

During the online survey, the educational community was asked which measures were employed by them to combat HT bullying. Unfortunately, according to their responses, not

many measures are employed by the school or interinstitutional cooperation to fight HT bullying. Indicatively, the vast majority of respondents (the percentage is given in brackets) reported that in their schools they do not have regular talks about HT bullying neither with students (72%), their parents (81%), or with both students and parents together (81%) nor with other teachers or relevant professionals, such as social workers and psychologists (75%). According to approximately 82% of respondents (79-84%) schools do not cooperate with neither non-governmental organisations (NGOs), nor with the Centre for Development of Educational Policy (ΚΑΝΕΠ-ΓΣΕΕ: Κέντρο Ανάπτυξης Εκπαιδευτικής Πολιτικής της ΓΣΕΕ), under the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, nor with municipalities in order to fight HT bullying. Although some schools have specific programmes in order to combat any form of bullying (as 45% of respondents report) it seems that they do not have such programmes specific for HT bullying (as 84% of respondents report). Similarly, although educational staff is sent to seminars related to the identification, reduction and prevention of bullying of any form in general (as 53% of respondents report), they are not similar seminars specific to HT bullying (76%). Overall, the vast majority (81%) reports that there are no regular discussions about the subject at hand and its prevention in schools, no guideline or policy for its prevention (62%), and no common vision – idem (75%). On the other hand, in some schools, there are rules preventing negative behaviour (81%), some promoting positive behaviour (66%) and in some cases, those rules are presented in the start of the school year according to 69% of respondents and in some cases (44%) they remain written on posters. Importantly, although the majority of respondents (78%) reported that they pedagogically correct students when they transgress social rules, a large amount of people (64%) reported punishing children when they transgress the rules. The majority does not use “no-blame” policy (63%), “real justice meetings” (71%), “peer mediation” (63%) or the “secret team” for combating bullying (85%) when a bullying incident occurs. Lastly, the majority does not use relations analysis to understand bullying (67%), neither to teach students about bullying processes (70%) and according to 62% parents are not included in the meetings between victims and bullies, although their contribution could be helpful. From the above results, it becomes evident that there are not many procedures implemented in schools in Greece for the identification, combating and prevention of HT bullying in schools, although some training and information exists about bullying of any form in general.

This general lack of measures to combat HT bullying was verified by the focus group participants who also stressed the importance for further training of the educational community. According to them during the past couple of years, following the death of Vangelis Yakoumakis<sup>2</sup>, many schools implemented anti-bullying programs. As they mentioned, it is typical within our educational system to adopt practices that address or try to solve a problem that already exists, rather than encourage preventive strategies. However, SOGI issues do not appear in anti-bullying programs usually implemented by teachers. Respondents emphatically stressed that SOGI issues are not discussed in any way at school and most educators do not see the need for learning about sexual diversity. Accordingly, sexual diversity is silenced in textbooks and other educational material such as trainings, seminars and so on, as compared to other issues around diversity, such as discrimination against refugees.

Respondents mentioned the “Thematic Week<sup>3</sup>” as a measure used to tackle SOGI issues. In their opinion, it has been a positive addition towards raising awareness of the educational community on SOGI issues. The fact that the implementation of the Thematic Week was

2 A post-secondary student, whose sudden death in 2015 was associated with (homophobic) bullying.

3 During school year 2016-2017 Thematic Week was introduced in secondary schools. During this week, schools are advised to use active and project learning techniques to discuss various issues such as nutrition, addictions and gender identities. This last suggestion has raised a lot of heated discussions among the public. For more information see section 2.3.

nationwide, contributed to a broader visibility of the subject. Respondents claimed that many teachers were willing to discuss such issues in schools as part of the Thematic Week. Moreover, students had been very interested and receptive to explore the issues. The informants also pinpointed the decisive role of the school principal in initiating action towards sensitization of important stakeholders over SOGI issues and homophobic bullying. On the other hand, not all education professionals willingly accepted the Thematic Week. Many raised objections and resisted discussing not just the subject of gender identity, but all proposed topics. Many of them did not even attend lectures or other interventions that had been arranged during the Thematic Week. Such resistance was attributed to teachers' mentality and attitudes towards their role in the school. That is, many teachers, according to participants, restrict their role solely to teaching their subject. Thus, often Thematic Week was carried out based on individual teachers' initiatives and efforts. These are the so-called "activists/educators". The activist on SOGI issues is described by participants as the "lone wolf" of the school, as the person who is always a minority among the teachers. This educator often has to pursue and promote issues of teachers' training and anti-bullying programs implementation in their school. They show more empathy on sexual diversity issues and is often considered a source of advice and solace for students and parents.

Focus group participants emphasised the need for an official framework, designed according to legally bound principles, which would involve specific directions and aims of anti-bullying policies and strategies, by which all school actors would be obliged to abide. Commitment from the part of the school community to tackle homophobia and transphobia is a precondition of any strategy. Very few schools and teachers have participated in training against discrimination issues. Often, educators do not even know where and if such trainings are being offered. As far as primary education is concerned, occasionally some school advisors have organized seminars on the subject of discrimination and bullying, but these take place in a rather fragmented way and lack follow up monitoring. Moreover, SOGI issues are not usually part of such seminars, which focus primarily on immigration and refugee issues, as well as special education and learning disabilities issues. Those who work in post-secondary educational institutes mentioned that teachers' training against discrimination has never been initiated by the Ministry of Education or any other institution. Anti-bullying training is not mandatory, rather some educators take the initiative to be trained and to teach the subject. Moreover, they expressed the fear that due to lack of systematic and comprehensive training, those who are willing to explore and teach SOGI issues might make mistakes that affect students negatively. Invisibility of HT bullying issues and training was attributed to the general limited discussion on the subject of SOGI. As mentioned "we have made it a matter of habit not to discuss those issues". SOGI issues are invisible because they are considered to be a complex taboo topic. Although all participants very often stressed the need for training on handling HT bullying, it seems that neither strong school policies are applied, nor efficient training options are offered.

In line with this, the majority of survey participants (71%) believed that specific training is important for the educational community. According to 85% of participants schools do not provide sex education and of the 15% that reported they do, the majority reported that it does not include information about SOGI or the prevention of HT bullying. Specifically, it was reported that teachers (69%) and administrators (72%) are the ones most in need of training for the prevention of bullying in general, while less people supported that special pedagogues (56%) and psychologists (47%) are in great need of such training, potentially because due their professions they are already trained up to a level. Lastly, 66% thought that the rest of the school staff is in great need of training in this direction. When it comes to specifically HT bullying the responses are similar, with most people believing that teachers (79%), administrators (69%), social pedagogues (60%) and psychologists (79%) are the school staff most in need of training

on the prevention of HT bullying with less people believing that there is pressing need for the rest of the educational staff (38%).

The skills that most participants considered of great importance for the training were pedagogic skills (81%), didactic skills (65%), balancing different types of opinions for example progressive vs conservative (63%), dealing with fellow staff who might not cooperate (65%), supporting LGBTQI students or students who doubt about their SOGI (70%) and dealing with parents' objection (70%). Least important were considered the ability to deal with and influence school policy (55%) and to deal with regional and national context/restrictions (59%). Other suggested skills reported by participants included ways to manage and influence parents who abuse their children physically or verbally, ways of (self)-supporting teachers in the intimidating "Teachers' Office", sex education lessons and collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

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

In the online survey, the cooperation of the educational community with other institutions was judged as very important by most of the respondents, such as cooperation with NGOs (by 45% of respondents as very important and by 33% as important), with other schools (by 48% as very important, by 39% as important), with municipalities (by 38% as very important, by 44% as important) and with the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (by 60% as very important, by 33% as important). As most important association were judged the parents, parents' association, parents'-teachers' association, the LGBTQI+ community in general, psychologists, social services – social workers, colleagues/school staff with different sexual orientation, the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), Children's Education Institute (Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο), the Advocate of the Child, the Institute of Education Policy (IEP) and the school community in general.



## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

Concluding, discrimination on the grounds of SOGI in Greece is not efficiently dealt with, with HT incidents taking place across sectors such as the educational environment, professional environments and detention centres. In 2013, the Greek state was held responsible for discriminatory legislation against same-sex couples by the European Court of Human Rights because it passed a law for civil partnerships between solely heterosexual individuals, when other EU countries had such legislation for all couples regardless of being heterosexual or homosexual for over 15 years. At the same time, the age of consent for homosexuals was not the same as for heterosexuals until very recently, in 2015 when the legislation targeting discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation started being more refined and inclusive of LGBTQI rights. Although such changes have taken place in the legislation for the rights of LGBTQI individuals with the legalization of civil partnership for same-sex couples, the equalisation of the age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual relationships and the legal recognition of gender identity from the age of 15, there has not been a large change in people's attitudes. People still oppose them other rights such as the right to child adoption and they tend to still believe that exposing children to homosexual standards is a bad influence for them. This also confirms that Greece is in an in-between situation concerning the acceptance of rights of LGBTQI individuals. At the same time there is limited interest by local researchers and institutes to investigate LGBTQI individuals and the situation in Greece. As a result, the actions, policies, reports and research that have been conducted on the topic are limited.

A contributing factor in this is the dominant presence of the Orthodox Church, which takes part in public matters and influences public opinion strongly, and as recent research indicates negative views/opinions of the student community in Greece towards LGBTQI individuals are predominantly held by individuals who score high on religiosity, attend church frequently and have no LGBTQI individuals in their direct environment. Females appear to be overall more accepting of sexual orientation and gender identity diversity something that is reported in the literature but was also confirmed during the field research. Males and older people seem less tolerant and hold more negative attitudes towards the LGBTQI community.

The prevalence of bullying is considered high in Greece with specific behaviours being more common and happening several times a month, such as students being pushed by others, and other incidents taking place only a few times per year. Several bullying behaviours were rated and most of them were indicated as behaviours that do happen in the school but several times a year or a month and not more frequently. Those involve primarily negative comments towards LGBTQI students and the LGBTQI community. What is most surprising is that the number of respondents who had heard or learnt about negative comments directed to LGBTQI students by educational staff was larger than the one that had heard or learnt about such incidents being provoked by students. This suggests that HT bullying is not only provoked by

peers to peers but also by the educational staff to the students in Greece, something that was confirmed by the education professionals in the focus group discussion, who demonstrated a good understanding of some characteristics of HT bullying. Moreover, they recognise gender and sexual identity as crucial issues, which are important to students and should be discussed and addressed in the school environment. Furthermore, participants emphasized the varying teachers' reservations or resistances to address SOGI issues and attributed them to lack of trainings regarding gender and sexuality, to educators' professional strategies of entrenchment and closure, to limited determination by the state to promote SOGI issues by fear of parental reactions and to teachers' own ignorance and established stereotypes, as well as to the absence of relevant state policies. Participants felt that the responsibility of the teachers for creating safe conditions in their schools is crucial. It is among teachers' duties to enforce teaching and learning values that promote respect, tolerance, acceptance and understanding of diversity.

Parents and students who participated in the research stressed the lack of sex education in Greek schools. This lack seems to be related to the prevalence of stereotypes concerning difference and diversity in general, whether it is about people with special needs or individuals with non-heteronormative gender identity or sexual orientation, as well as to incidents of homophobic and transphobic bullying. What is proposed is to replace the medicalisation and pathologisation of sexuality with a holistic approach that includes biological, social and psychological aspects. Further, an experiential approach is proposed as the most appropriate for teaching such subjects, as well as the diffusion of knowledge and the utilization of art and music. Finally, an important factor for the success of such programs is their implementation throughout the school year, and the training of educators on issues of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

#### 4.1. Future research areas

In Greece, the national census data does not target or include information about LGBTQI people and research investigating the phenomenon in Greece is limited. Specifically, in the case of such discrimination in the educational environment, with the form of HT bullying which is at the centre of the HOMBAT project, there are only EU level surveys and no local ones, which report that most serious discriminatory incidents take place predominantly in educational environment. Future surveys should:

- Investigate the levels of HT bullying in schools in Greece and the religious, political and socio-economic factors contributing to this phenomenon as well as the role of the educational community and the family in tackling it in primary and secondary schools.
- Investigate the needs of LGBTQI student's in the school community, to gain a more holistic view of the situation, which would inform a better training of educators.
- Target the general population and achieve a more representative (larger and more variable) sample than the one in the present study, which investigated specifically the educational community.
- Look into bullying combined with other factors that might increase its intensity, given that it is a complex phenomenon. It would be interesting to see whether the interaction of several factors that lead to discrimination increase the level of HT bullying. For example, if a student is not only LGBTQI but also non-native, or has weight problems, mental difficulties and so on, given that individuals who face the above were also considered vulnerable to bullying.

## 4.2. Policies

Given the situation in Greece, the results of the present research and the lack of antidiscrimination policies particularly on the grounds of SOGI, we make some recommendations:

- Adaptation and expansion of the anti-discrimination legal framework applicable to education, safeguarding the right to education. This should include the treatment of discrimination due to actual or assumed SOGISC.
- Policies and action plans that promote safe environments, which are essential for determining and realising actions against homophobia and transphobia.
- Regular collection of data on bullying for the monitoring of the nature, frequency and impact of school violence and intimidation generally and specifically on the grounds of SOGISC.

## 4.3. Schools

Teachers stressed the lack of skills and training of the education community, of policies and guidelines, information and instruction for LGBTQI students as well as visibility of and awareness about LGBTQI individuals (FRA, 2016). Critically, the results of the EU LGBT Survey (FRA, 2013) indicated that the implementation of measures at school to respect LGBT people and the training of public servants (e.g. teachers) on the rights of the LGBT community was the most popular suggestion for facilitating and making more comfortable the life of LGBT individuals.

Inclusive interventions in education could create positive difference (IGLYO, 2017).

Recommendations of such interventions include the following:

- Inclusion of LGBTQI rights and LGBTQI persons in national education because the community is underrepresented in this sector which can have negative consequences for all students.
- Training of teachers' and other education staff on LGBTQI issues for the creation of a safe environment of love and support to LGBTQI students for better and effective inclusion. Those should be (a) mandatory, (b) designed according to a human rights perspective, rather than delineated by medical discourses, (c) require and include collaborative work among teachers, among teachers and parents and other stakeholders. Importantly, it would be ideal if those trainings were accredited.
- The right for gender choice within the school community to avoid additional obstacles for students who might be trans, fluid, diverse sex and intersex. All students should have the right to choose their name and gender index in school and their decision must be respected by all and in all documents.
- Additional support systems, provided by trained school staff to provide guidance to LGBTQI students and assistance to those who have been discriminated against based on the SOGI. Links to additional youth services would be useful.
- Educational material on SOGI issues should be included in the compulsory education curriculum so that pupils, students, and young people are educated and sensitised on gender diversity and equality issues. This could be integrated in schools from primary education for changing the heteronormative stereotypes that dominate the educational material. For example, "Maria likes girls, John does too" or "The prince met the prince".
- Obligatory education material on human sexuality not only in biology but also in social knowledge to capture both dimensions.

- Education material including notable figures, such as famous authors in literature, who were LGBTQI.

#### 4.4. NGOs and municipalities

Recommendations not solely related to the educational environment include the following:

- Direct collaboration of schools with the relevant NGOs and the municipalities on SOGI issues, and direct collaboration between LGBT NGOs, of which there are many in Greece.
- Better informing of legal and medical professionals on the fundamental rights of LGBTQI people and particularly children.
- Increased awareness of the LGBTQI community on the national legislative and procedural framework giving effect to the prohibition on discrimination and the legal process for complaint filing, enabling individuals to pursue their rights.
- Intensification of awareness-raising activities by authorities at the local and national level including organizations such as equality bodies, NGOs and trade unions, from employers and service providers under the support of EU institutions, all of who can help to disseminate the information further and widely address this issue.
- Awareness events targeting the public should continue to exist and target as many people as possible to raise concerns and questions about the employment and health related issues of the LGBTQI community.
- Establishment of a functioning relationship between law enforcement authorities, equality body, prosecutors, lawyers, public services and NGOs with the common goal of combatting of homophobia and transphobia both at the local and EU level.
- Encouragement of public speaking and openness on the topic by local and national media to open conversations on important issues for LGBT people and promote LGBT actions.

Overall, there are not many procedures and tools implemented in Greece for the identification, combating and prevention of HT bullying in schools, although some training and information exists about bullying in general. This stresses the need for precise, diversity-management related training for the educational community in general, which will address the aforementioned aspects that our sample reported as missing. The members of the educational community, as well as the parents and students, who participated in this study show strong willingness to take action for the combating of the phenomenon, action that should take place through interinstitutional cooperation and which should target pedagogical skills, didactic skills, management of diverse opinions and of uncooperative staff, ways of supporting and coaching students in need, ways to integrate parents in this effort and deal with their objections and importantly the sharing of information about the country's legal context and framework.

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