

National analysis on violence against LGBTI+ children

POLAND



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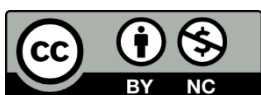
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Executive Summary

This Deliverable D2.17 is the national analysis on violence against LGBTI & gender non-conforming children in Poland. This analysis is based on the results from 20 interviews and 121 full survey responses from stakeholders of all 5 DaC project areas. This report includes a methodological introduction, the country legal and political context, an analysis of each of the project areas and overall conclusions.

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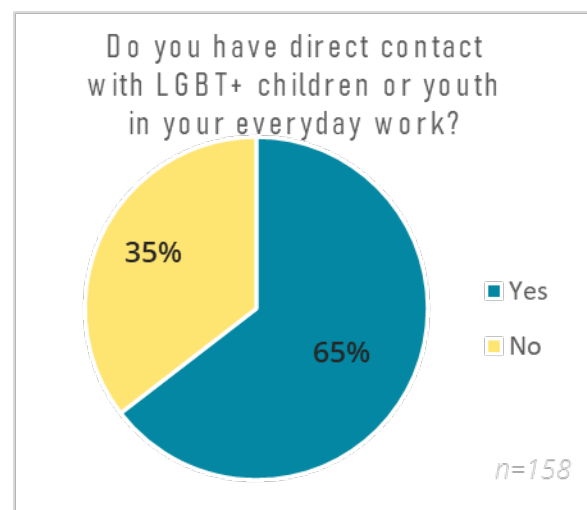
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Introduction – Research Design and Sample

As with all countries participating in the project, the research design assumed three information sources: an online survey, interviews with stakeholders and workshops with LGBT+ youth. The workshops were to take place in April 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2020 the Polish government began to implement social distancing procedures in order to restrict the infection rate. Among other, meetings of more than two people were temporarily banned. In these circumstances the workshops were cancelled and the remaining interviews were carried out online over Skype (with voice and video transmission) in order to maintain social distancing procedures.

The interviewees were chosen so that each of the five diagnosed areas (that is health, education, families, public spaces and media) was discussed in-depth with four stakeholders. Aside from the topic, the interviewees were chosen so that they represented a wide range of experiences and perspectives. We took into consideration the character of their work with LGBT+ children and youth topics (from working with youth in general or LGBT+ children and youth specifically to specializing in some aspect of the assessed area that concerns LGBT+), the institution they most worked with or at (including NGOs, private companies, self-employment and public offices), operating in small and large cities or age (ranging from 19 to 65 years old). Each interview lasted about 1,5 hours and was conducted along the script common for all countries participating in the project. Each participant was given information about the project and its data handling and usage, then asked whether they consented to participate in the study.

The projects’ research design included an online survey with questions identical in all participating countries and the aim to receive 100 complete responses. Participants were recruited via social media pages of Polish LGBT+ organizations. Posts explaining the goal of the survey and the target group were published in February and March 2020. Both the recruitment method and the assumed response count were suited for the qualitative and exploratory character of the study and thus could not inform about the occurrence



Source: Queerstoria. Czasopismo społeczno-historyczne. Archiwum Lambdy Warszawa

1983

First volume of a Polish gay and lesbian magazine "Biuletyn" printed in Vienna

1985

First article written from the perspective of a gay person in the journal "Polityka"

1986

First informal LGBT group ETAP in Wrocław

"Filo", first gay and lesbian magazine printed in Poland (Gdańsk)

1985-87

"Hyacinth", a secret mass operation by the communist police to create a database of Polish homosexual people

1990

1st formal LGBT organisation Stow. Grup Lambda registered in Warsaw

2001

1st First Pride Parade in Poland (Warsaw)

2004

Equality Marches in Krakow and Poznan

2008

First National LGBT Organisations' Forum

2019

Equality Marches in 29 cities

rate of opinions and problems in Poland.

The questions often mirrored the ones asked in the interviews and were aimed at broadening the pool of answers gathered in the interviews. Due to the length of the survey and a considerable amount of open questions the drop-out rate was very high (91%). We have received 1135 responses, including 121 complete ones. Respondents were mostly female (58%), males comprised 32% of the sample, 4% self-identified as non-binary and another 4% did not conform to gender norms. One respondent (0,8%) self-identified as transsexual and one refused state their gender. The age of the respondents varied from 15 to 67 years with the mean of 34 years old (SD=11.8). Most of the respondents was either heterosexual (42.7%) or homosexual (29.8%), 15.3% respondents stated they were bisexual, 4.8% were pansexual, and one person (0.8%) self-identified as pansexual.

Most of the respondents worked in education (65.8%) or in the area of families' support or social services (16.7%). A few worked in media (8.8%) or in the area of public spaces (authorities, police, lawmakers or lawyers, public officials or any occupation shaping the public discourse; 7.9%). Only one person (0.9%) worked in the area of health.

1. Legal and political context regarding LGBTI+ rights

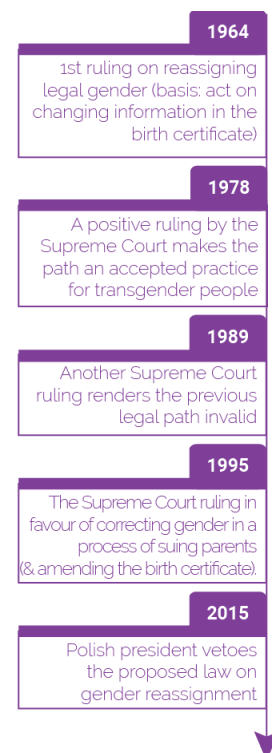
1.1 Historical evolution and backlash regarding the formal recognition of LGBTI+ rights

1.1.1 Legal Context

There are many international laws and standards that can serve as a basis for antidiscrimination claims and maintaining openness to diversity in Poland. The strongest and most often quoted were the European Convention on Human Rights and in case of youth and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both ratified by Poland in the 90'. A decade later Poland joined the EU, accepting its legal framework based on respect for human rights and diversity. Polish legal system is congruent with this attitude, with equality guarantee in the Constitution.

Unfortunately, there are very few particular protections for LGBT+ people in the Polish law. Whereas the interviewees considered the mentioned legal acts to be of extreme importance, they all indicated problems due to their very general character and lack of rules that would implement the standards of equality for LGBT+ people specifically (as is the case with other discrimination grounds such as race or disabilities). Some specific protections do exist, i.e. in the areas of employment and vocational education, but are lacking in most areas (including hate crimes or hate speech). Same-sex couples are in no way recognised by the Polish legal system. There is also no specific legal solution for gender reassignment¹. An established practice does allow for changing the gender assigned at birth on the basis of broader laws, but the record of the change remains in the birth certificate and the procedure involves suing one's parents. In 2020 Poland scored 16 out of 100 in the Ilga Europe Rainbow Index Ranking documenting legal protections and equality rights, which placed it in the 5 least LGBT+ friendly European countries².

Due to the very general nature of these legal acts, the practice of the law becomes all the more important. Many of the interviewed stakeholders noted that the practice and procedures varied vastly from one situation to the next (e.g. from one court to the next or from judge to judge or from school to school). Aside from uncertainty, practices in such an ambiguous situation are much more susceptible to change. In an example often recounted by the stakeholders, the broad law ensuring equality in access



¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200707134122/https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1637427,1,musza-pozwac-do-sadu-wlasnych-rodzicow-zeby-moc-byc-soba.read>

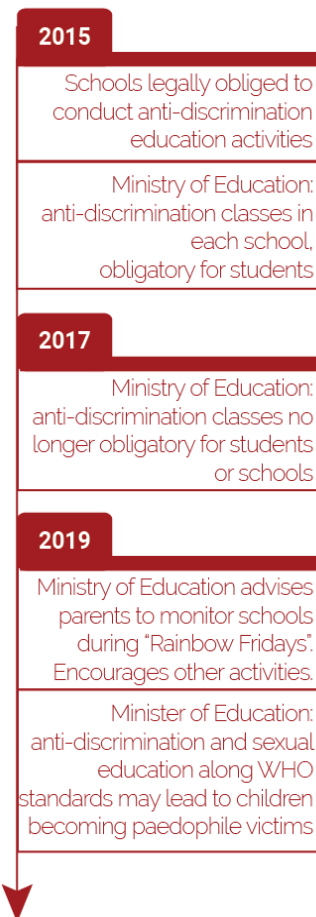
² <https://www.ilga-europe.org/rainboweurope/2020>

to services provided sufficient grounds for an LGBT+ NGO to win a case in 2016 against a printer that refused to print their materials (he clearly stated his anti-LGBT+ convictions as the reason). Although the verdict was upheld in courts of higher instances (including the Supreme Court in 2018), the Constitutional Tribunal found aspects of the law unconstitutional. In 2019 the Appeal Court ruled in favour of the printer, effectively rendering the existing, general protection against discrimination in access to services inapplicable in cases involving LGBT+ discrimination³.

1.1.2 Political Context

In this context, the changes to the political and social climate in Poland gain importance as they have an even stronger and more immediate impact on formal procedures. The decade preceding access to the EU saw a growing prevalence of human rights topics in the media and in public officials' comments. An increasing openness to LGBT+ issues in the public discourse followed. According to our interviewees the years in the EU have seen a slow but steady improvement in official standards and stance on diversity and discrimination in general and LGBT+ issues in particular as Poland gradually implemented EU guidelines. Many noted the year 2015 when the Minister of Education set the next year's priority to safety and combating discrimination in education (with homophobia explicitly named as one of the grounds of discrimination) and each school was obliged to conduct anti-discrimination classes for all students⁴.

The parliamentary elections at the end of 2015 have marked a change in the Polish political climate as a government with a very different priorities was established. Its actions resulted in Poland receiving gradually lower scores in democracy rankings in the past years⁵⁶, with the



³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200707133403/https://www.prawo.pl/prawo/odmowa-uslugi-fundacji-lgbt-sprawa-drukarza-z-lodzi-umorzona,496900.html>

⁴ <https://web.archive.org/save/https://queer.pl/news/196366/szkola-edukacja-homofobia-1-wrzesnia-dyskryminacja-ministerstwo-edukacji-narodowej/>

⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/poland/>

⁶ [https://www.cato.org/human-freedom-index-new#:~:text=Selected%20countries%20rank%20as%20follows,%2C%20Egypt%20\(157\)%2C](https://www.cato.org/human-freedom-index-new#:~:text=Selected%20countries%20rank%20as%20follows,%2C%20Egypt%20(157)%2C)

University of Gothenburg naming Poland as one of the main backsliders in its annual democracy report⁷ and the Economist accusing the Polish ruling party of promoting right-wing extremism⁸. Continuing on the previous example, although the broad obligation for schools to conduct anti-discrimination activities remained in the legal system, in 2017 the Minister of Education removed the obligation of such classes for all schools and students⁹, whereas in 2019 the next Minister of Education claimed anti-discrimination classes and sexual education based on WHO standards may teach children how to become paedophile victims¹⁰. The stance of the ruling party on LGBT+ issues strongly reflected those on openness to diversity in general. In 2019, on the day the annual “Rainbow Friday” initiative was conducted in schools nationwide, the Ministry of Education advised parents to pay special attention to classes conducted in schools and to stay vigilant. It also launched “The School Remembers” --a separate initiative for schools that took place on the same day¹¹. With time, the anti-LGBT+ attitude of the ruling party became more open and pronounced. In 2019 local officials in multiple municipalities, voivodeships and counties ruled their territory an “LGBT-ideology free zones”, covering about one third of Polish territory in total¹². In 2020 the current President running for re-election has made anti-LGBT+ notions a cornerstone of his presidential campaign¹³.

⁷ <https://www.v-dem.net/en/news/democracy-all-v-dem-annual-democracy-report-2018/>

⁸ <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/04/21/polands-ruling-law-and-justice-party-is-doing-lasting-damage>

⁹ <https://wyborcza.pl/osiemdziewiec/7,159012,22043484,fabryka-patriotow-pis-wyrzuca-edukacje-antydiskryminacyjna.html>

¹⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200705180612/https://tvn24.pl/polska/minister-edukacji-dariusz-piontkowski-o-wychowaniu-seksualnym-dzieci-ra942414-2293981>

¹¹ <https://web.archive.org/save/https://polskieradio24.pl/5/1222/Artykul/2388896,Kontrowersje-wokol-Teczowych-piatkow-w-szkolach-MEN-zabiera-glos>

¹² https://web.archive.org/web/20200705172920/https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/polands-right-wing-ruling-party-has-found-a-new-targetlgbt-ideology/2019/07/19/775f25c6-a4ad-11e9-a767-d7ab84aef3e9_story.html

¹³ <https://oko.press/osoby-lgbt-kobiety-osoby-z-niepelnosprawnosciami-ktory-z-kandydatow-dba-o-rowne-prawa/>

1.2. Timeline of LGBTI+ rights in Poland



1932 – Decriminalisation of homosexuality in Poland. Age of consent set to 15 for both homosexual and heterosexual relations.

1991 – Poland ratifies the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

1991 – Poland joins the Council of Europe.

1993- Poland ratifies the Convention on Human rights.

2003 – Amendment to the Polish labour law to include sexual orientation as grounds for discrimination employees are protected against.

2004 – Poland joins the EU.

2008 – Amendment to the Law on Granting protection to Aliens on the Territory of the republic of Poland to include the grounds of sexual orientation.

2010 – The law on implementing some of the legal rules of the EU. Implementing only an extremely limited protection against discrimination for LGBT+ people specifically (vocational education and training).

2019 – officials in multiple municipalities, voivodeships, and counties ruled their territory an “LGBT-ideology free zones”, covering about one third of Polish territory in total¹⁴.

1.3. Relevant statistical data about LGBTI+ situation in Poland

The legal and political changes have brought on significant developments in the social situation concerning the LGBT+ issues. The topic became prevalent and as the public discourse in Poland polarised, so has the public opinion on LGBT+ issues. As such, the recent years have seen an increased activity of the LGBT+ community and a strong public support for its needs. In 2019 Equality Parades were organised in 29 cities both large and small, and gathered an unprecedented number of participants. At the same time, many of those events met with nationalist counter-demonstrations, most notably in Bialystok, where a peaceful parade was met with widespread physical violence¹⁵.



2. CBOS. Polish representative sample

In a 2016 study by Campaign Against Homophobia most surveyed members of the LGBT+ community experienced some form of violence in the period of past 2 years. 63% of respondents experienced prejudice-motivated verbal aggression, 33% received threats, 27% were victims to vandalism and 13% experienced physical violence¹⁶ In 2019 a report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights concluded with similar results, with 15% of the surveyed Polish

¹⁴ “Unijny zakaz dyskryminacji a prawo polskie” red. K. Śmiszek, Warsaw 2018,

https://ec.europa.eu/poland/sites/poland/files/docs/news/ptpa_raport_www_fin.pdf

„Sytuacja prawna osób nieheteroseksualnych i transpłciowych w Polsce” A. Mazurczak, M. Mrowicki, M. Adamczewska-Stachura, Warsaw 2019, https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/Sytuacja_prawna_raport_ZRT.pdf

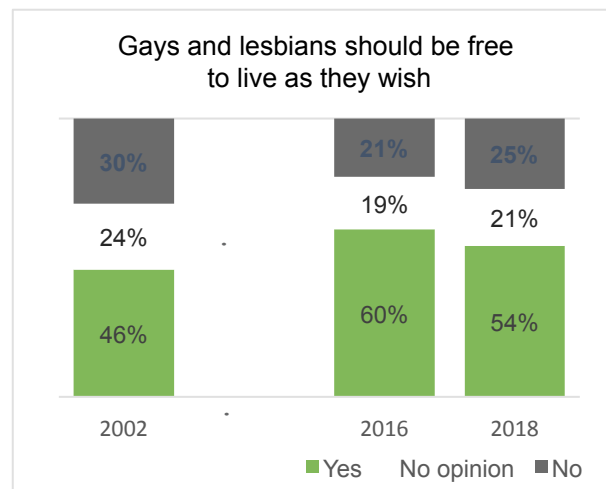
¹⁵ <https://oko.press/bialystok-marsz-rownosci-przeszedl-kibole-przeklenstwa-przeplatali-modlitwami/>

¹⁶ <https://kph.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Sytuacja-spoeczna-os%C3%B3b-LGBTa-w-Polsce-raport-za-lata-2015-2016.pdf>

LGBT+ respondents had been attacked in the period of 5 years before the survey. The survey found that 47% felt discriminated against in the previous year¹⁷.

A study of the LGBT+ community conducted by the Love Does Not Exclude Association (2015) found that less than half respondents came out to any one at work (43%) and even less to their neighbours (23%)¹⁸. It does however seem, that the prevalence of LGBT+ issues and activity in the community correspond to the increase in coming outs and higher visibility of LGBT+ people¹⁹ in recent years (see fig. 2).

The attitudes towards homosexual people, measured regularly by several research institutions have been slowly, but steadily improving since the beginning of the century^{6, 20}. Yet in the past two years there has been a decline in acceptance of gays and lesbians^{7, 21} and according to the Centre of Prejudice Research, an increase in homonegativity. Similarly, 68% of the respondents of the polish LGBT+ community surveyed in 2019, said that prejudice and intolerance have risen.⁵



3. European Social Survey, Polish weighted sample

2. DaC Areas of Intervention: schools, health, family, public spaces and media

The following assessments of all areas were made based on the interviews and survey answers. All quotes cited in the assessment as well as evaluations of the situation in Poland were made by our respondents, including the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threads, and needs.

¹⁷ https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/lgbti-survey-country-data_poland.pdf

¹⁸ https://mnw.org.pl/app/uploads/2017/08/SpolecznoscLGBTQIAwPolsce_raportMNNW.pdf

¹⁹ https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2019/K_090_19.PDF

²⁰ <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/country.html?c=poland>

²¹ http://cbu.psychologia.pl/uploads/f_bulska/LGBT_2018_2019_final.pdf

2.1. Education

Some interviewees noticed that due to the general nature of legal acts concerning schools, the norms and the situation of LGBT+ children varied greatly from school to school and the opinion of the principal could constitute the final authority in many such educational institutions. Others stressed that in a situation where the legal system left a lot of room for interpretation, other guidelines gained importance. In case of education, the priorities and guidelines published by the Ministry of Education each year were heeded by schools and often provided directions that truly changed the way most schools functioned. Even the Ministers' comments on current topics in the media were observed closely by the principals and could often visibly change their course of action.

2.1.1 Needs Related to Children

All of the stakeholders stressed the need to adjust the curriculum in Poland. Each mentioned that antidiscrimination classes need to be an obligatory part of the curriculum. They need to include teachings about equality so that the next generations grow up with a mindset that embraces diversity. Equally important and equally often mentioned were the sexual education classes—the need for them to be obligatory and include LGBT+ issues so that LGBT+ youth can learn about themselves and for their peers' so that familiarity would foster acceptance. The learning materials approved and recommended by the Ministry need to have all gender stereotyping material removed and cease to stereotype LGBT+ people as many books still do. The teaching materials and textbooks that include any content about human sexuality (especially the ones for Preparedness for Family Life classes) are often old and also need to be rewritten to adhere to current knowledge and diverse standards. Additionally, the curriculum needs to include lectures that show examples of gender and sexual diversity (as part of literature and art) and LGBT+ should not be omitted from history classes (a frequently given example was the omission of LGBT+ people's presence in concentration camps). Almost all schools in Poland organize religion classes, most often taught by a Catholic priest or a nun. Several interviewees mentioned that although in the largest cities the parents could release their children from attending them, in most places the social norms made that almost impossible. Due to the stance of the Catholic Church in Poland on LGBT+ issues, these classes include messages harmful for LGBT+ children. Several interviewees mentioned that as a problem, whereas suggested solutions varied—from setting standards such catholic teachers would have to heed to be able to teach in schools and from changing teaching materials to creating more alternatives for such classes and implementing procedures for reacting to discriminatory content.

Poland has seen teachers' protests due to low wages and long hours, which makes it harder for a teacher to spend time with students after classes, advise and help solve their problems when such help is needed. LGBT+ students often need the teachers' time and energy, if only to recognize and properly react to discrimination. The school psychologists have astoundingly few hours to support or even notice all problems. Additionally, for LGBT+ youth it is crucial that people fulfilling an advisory role receive training about LGBT+ issues, as that is very rarely the case. Several educators noted that advisory classes (part of a standard curriculum) ought to be used, among others, to teach about diversity and discuss LGBT+ issues with the students. Additionally, many mentioned that due to social norms and the teachers' own upbringing it is still uncommon for teachers to speak to students openly about emotional topics and about sexuality in particular. Such openness is required and very important for youth to be able to trust, to open up about their problems and to ask for and accept support.

Many interviewees mentioned the schools need clear, nationwide guidelines for openness to diversity and reacting to discrimination. Whereas some schools in large cities were diverse and proud of it, many allowed open hostility towards LGBT+ youth. Moreover, the situation sometimes varied not only between schools, but from class to class. Hence the need for clearly formulated norms and antidiscrimination procedures. A student reporting discrimination has to know that the case will be handled, they ought to be aware of how and by whom. Several stakeholders mentioned the need to implement "the Lighthouse keeper initiative", which assumed each school would have an appointed person to stay vigilant and eliminate discrimination, protect diverse youth and be a diversity educator and advisor for pupils and teachers alike. The lighthouse keeper role would fall to a person working at a school and trusted by students.

Almost all interviewees mentioned transgender pupils' problems when it came to their need to be addressed by their chosen name at school. The legal system ought to recognize such need, but even before that happens, schools ought to allow it and teachers should be informed there are no obstacles against it in the Polish law.

Many stakeholders spoke about anti-LGBT+ initiatives directed at schools or parents, conducted in the past year. Misinformation about the LGBT+ people and negative consequences of sexual education in general was spread in letters to school principals and social campaigns directed at parents. Interviewees noted an urgent need for the legal system to penalize such discrimination and for the authorities to react to it when it happened, acting on the basis of general laws already present in Poland.

2.1.2 Good Practices

Rainbow Friday

Each year, the last Friday of October is considered a “Rainbow Friday”, an occasion for teachers and students to display their support for LGBT+ youth by wearing LGBT+ symbols, organizing events to inform, educate, or simply support the community. The tradition was founded in 2016 by Campaign Against Homophobia (Kampania Przeciw Homofobii), a Polish LGBT+ NGO. Since then many organizations published materials that could be used by teachers or students to organize their own Rainbow Fridays. Many celebrities joined either media campaigns or simply showed their support on social media.

LGBT+ Friendly Schools Ranking

When children finish primary school, they face a decision of which high schools to apply to. Up till now, the only way of learning whether a school is diverse and LGBT+ friendly was to ask students and former students – a solution far from perfect and inaccessible to most.

The LGBT+ Friendly Schools Ranking is city-wide study. The organizers (students themselves) contacted pupils in each school in the city and asked them to spread the information about an online questionnaire among their peers. The survey asked pupils to evaluate their everyday school experiences. Most of the schools responded. A list of schools grouped into LGBT+ friendliness categories, along with the detailed results for each of the schools. Thus, each high-school candidate could check to what extent the schools they were considering were LGBT+ friendly.

Equality Polonaise

In Poland students of the last year of high school attend a prom – a dance to celebrate the end of this level of education. Traditionally, a prom begins with a formal dance, where pairs of students walk majestically to the sound of the Polonaise. Pairs of students used to mean one male and one female students. One school decided their students would show their support for the LGBT+ community by dancing this traditional dance in pairs of the same gender. Since then, several other schools have shown their support in a similar way. In others, the rules about who can dance with whom became less strict.

Diversity Modelling

“The best schools are those in which there are teachers with dreadlocks or ones that are fascinated by manga and lead a discussion group about it for students. [...] If you begin working with staff, you immediately see whether they show various aspects of their own identity. And that is how the children learn and make decisions on whether they in turn can show their own diversity”.

Analysis of whether school environments are LGBT+ friendly often focuses on occurrences of discrimination and violence. Yet to truly prevent violence and discrimination against LGBT+ youth, we need to instil norms of acceptance of diversity, which will enable youth to openly and freely express themselves. Such norms cannot be taught by a homogenous group of teachers in an environment where adults are reluctant to step out of line. One of the ways children learn is through observing others (modelling) and the behaviour of adults can be an influence more potent than any direct message. Teaching diversity acceptance in schools must happen in an environment where the staff is openly diverse. Otherwise the message to be learnt is that although aggression and discrimination are prohibited by the norms but so are open displays of diversity and one’s own identity.

It is important to note that diversity of staff in this case does not only mean gender and sexual orientation diversity. It means that children need to see all people are different and unique. In order for youth to observe that, teachers must be allowed to express who they are, including gender and sexual diversity, but also diverse preferences and interests.

2.1.3 Training Needs for Education Professionals

The main sources of information for this section are interviews with stakeholders and online questionnaires.

All interviewees agreed as to the necessity for the following for all students (and for those teachers and professionals that were not raised with such an education present)

- Sex education
- Anti-discrimination education that includes LGBT+ topics

Aside from that, the interviewees mentioned training in the following topics as an important need for teachers and education staff

- The consequences of homophobia and the resulting need to prevent it
- Knowledge about social phenomena and psychological mechanisms that relate to minorities, such as stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and minority stress
- Understanding LGBT+ situation in general and LGBT+ youth in particular (including the process and obstacles that come with discovering one’s own non-heterosexual orientation or non-conforming to traditional gender definition)
- The skill of talking openly and in a straightforward manner with children

2.1.1. SWOT on Education in Poland

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each school is obliged to have a psychological support for the pupils. In many cases the person fulfilling that role does have students’ trust. • Ability to effectively adjust priorities yearly • An effective system of Teachers’ Training Centres • Schools’ ability to organise extracurricular classes • Polish Teachers’ Association conducts workshops on and conferences about LGBT+ pupils • NGOs offering sexual education workshops and workshops on LGBT+ issues (in large cities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of LGBT+ training for teachers and psychologists in schools • No laws specifically protecting LGBT+ children and youth • Teachers in polish schools are under a huge strain – with a large workload and relatively low wages (which caused protests in recent years), which leaves little room for their own initiatives to ensure equality and tolerance • Lack of antidiscrimination education and sex education in schools • Each parent can ban their children from attending an extracurricular class.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General laws allow for fast changes including setting priorities to protect diversity • A lot about the LGBT+ situation in schools depends on the principal and the teachers in a particular school. • A body of students is often able to sway the situation in favour of LGBT+ children, if they are willing • Schools’ ability to collaborate with NGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few schools have procedures for reacting to discrimination. Reactions on a case by case basis which means lack of predictability and safety for students. • LGBT+ acceptance dependent on the views of the current Minister of Education and thus the policy of ruling political party • Recent, very strict and conservative proposals that appear in polish public discourse and politics, including penalising sex educators, abortion ban

2.1.2. Quotes

“The initiatives by Ordo Iuris and other NGOs, that are directed against LGBT+ are conducted with at least a silent consent from the public institutions. Judging by the personal ties between such organizations and the public institutions one could treat it as a set mechanism of institutional homophobia carried out with the hands of NGOs”. *Lawyer*

“Teachers are afraid that using a preferred name of a transgender pupil is illegal. Ridiculous.” - *Educator and teachers’ trainer*

“The situation can vary even from one class to the next in a single school. In one it [diversity] is accepted and considered natural. In another I see as soon as I enter that there’s a conflict and a queer student will need my help”. *Activist and Educator*

“In other countries there is the notion that children have gender identity and sexual orientation, in general that they are gendered and sexual beings. In Poland we are tightly holding on to the notion that they’re not and if they are, we need to squelch it in them immediately”. *Sex Educator*

2.2. Health

Many interviewees spoke about the obstacles to proper healthcare for LGBT+ children and youth in Poland. Some were specific to all patients but had an important effect on LGBT+ patients as well. One such example was the insufficient funding that healthcare in general and psychiatry in particular received in Poland. This in turn directly contributes to the lack of access to treatment and specialists. Most of the obstacles, however concerned the LGBT+ specifically.

2.2.1 Needs related to children

Interviewees admitted each year there are more medical and mental health professionals that are familiar with LGBT+ topics and opened to diversity. Despite that, the majority of them mentioned the numbers of such professionals are still much too low. According to the stakeholders, several problems naturally followed; For one, if an LGBT+ person or a member of a family of an LGBT+ child wants to talk about a topic strictly concerning LGBT+ issues, they find it hard to reach a doctor that can address such a need (due to either the doctors’ lack of knowledge or physical distance to an expert). Even if they know whom to turn to, the waiting line to such a professional is often long and equals months of waiting. In case of psychologists and psychotherapists, this often means LGBT+ children and youth reach professional help in times of deep crisis only and

prevention is not possible. If they choose to simply visit a random clinic, they can never be sure whether the professionals there will support gender and sexual orientation diversity or, as is sometimes the case, speak against it, which is especially harmful to LGBT+ children and youth, who are often still uncertain about many aspects of themselves. Hence the often-stated need of LGBT+ children and youth was for each clinic or hospital to include at least one medical professional that is familiar with LGBT+ topics and for an increased access to needed professionals, including sexologists and psychotherapists. Aside from that, LGBT+ issues should be included in standard medical curriculum, so that stereotyping (such as associating LGBT+ patients with certain diseases) would not occur in any doctor's office.

There is also a need to verify existing standards and procedures against LGBT+ stereotyping (e.g. several stakeholders mentioned different treatment of LGBT+ and heterosexual patients when they donate blood), hetero-normativity (such as standard questions about a wife/girlfriend for males and husband/boyfriend for females) and cis-gender normativity (like naming the procedures in a gender-differentiating manner as opposed to gender neutral fashion, for example an of ovaries USG instead of USG of reproductive organs). Many spoke about the need to remove the assumption a patient belongs to the majority as this makes it even harder for LGBT+ youth to come out to a doctor.

Conversion therapy needs to be banned (and all the books and training materials about it should be moved to the historical library sections as opposed to psychological ones). The most prestigious psychological and medical societies ought to take a unanimous stance when it comes to condemning such therapy, homophobic practices, homophobic and transphobic conferences or guest university lectures--to make it common knowledge that science does not support such prejudice.

LGBT+ children need to be able to partake in the decision-making process about their own treatment, including the choice of psychotherapist or psychiatrist and the decision whether to continue therapy. The current situation assumes complete control in that matter belongs to the parents.

All stakeholders agreed, the most dire need for transgender patients is to introduce a better legal procedure for reassigning gender. The current one involves suing one's parents. It is incongruent with international legal and human rights standards and is often criticized by experts.

Another problem of transgender children and youth in Poland regarding healthcare is lack of standards for diagnosing and treatment. Without such standards, the children and youth can never be certain how long will the diagnosis take and what treatment options will be available, if any, as that depends on the doctor they visit. If there are more than one way to act, the responsibility to choose falls to the parents, which have no standards to guide their decision. As few medical professionals are knowledgeable on the subject, there is a need to create interdisciplinary teams that provide complete care for transgender youth and advice to both them and their parents. Where such teams are unavailable, there is a need for standards of interdisciplinary cooperation on how to diagnose and treat.

The medical treatments need to be more available, especially the ability to block puberty changes as such a procedure does not pose any controversy. Diagnosis and treatment for transgender patients younger than 16 should be refundable. Additionally, standards should be in place as to how to treat patients after the transition (for example, on how to interview and diagnose them during the obligatory military commission till).

2.2.2. Good Practices

Internal standards

The following is a combined list of practices introduced by separate clinics as part of their internal standards. The thing they have in common is that a clinic took the initiative to educate and regulate where the national institutions and the legal system lacked. Introduced rules included:

- All employees participating in workshops that included LGBT+ issues, including stereotyping (as stereotypes and myths about prevalence of certain health issues in the LGBT+ community are still strong in the medical community).
- Storing information about how a patient should be addressed as a standard alongside patient data (to make sure transgender and non-binary patients would be addressed the way they preferred).

If the clinic offers psychotherapy, making sure at least one of the therapists is familiar with LGBT+ issues.

- Keeping available a list of psychological and medical experts an LGBT+ patient could be further directed to if needed.
- Ensuring a standard of including an LGBT+ child’s perspective in the decision about the treatment (currently that depends solely on the guardian)
- Ensuring a standard of confidentiality when a child came out to the doctor and not to the parent or legal guardian.

2.2.3. Training Needs

The stakeholders mentioned the following training needs:

- Tolerance, diversity acceptance and antidiscrimination workshops (including disproving stereotypes about LGBT+) should be a standard part of the curriculum for all medical and psychological studies.
- Techniques to support the parents but also to educate them
- Training in handling parents that are opposed to LGBT+ so that the children’s situation improves-- techniques to understand and communicate with them, handle the situation and convince them to continue treatment.
- Workshops for both medical professionals and psychologists that includes knowledge about LGBT+ issues related to puberty (including the consequences of societal pressure and norms on realising and admitting own sexual orientation)
- Workshops for medical professionals to educate them about the procedures available for transgender patients, with emphasis on those legally available for transgender children and youth (including the consequences of lack of hormonal therapy during puberty as the doctors often do not realise that some changes are not reversible in later life e.g. the size of hands)
- Empathy training for professionals is necessary to be able to properly act and treat in the presence of patients with values and norms different that their own.
- All interviewees working in the capacity of psychological help and support mentioned an important problem with knowledge availability. More specifically, contemporary psychology and psychotherapy focus on the individual and offer tools to diagnose and modify their behaviour. That is often a problem for LGBT+ youth when it’s not the individual, but their peers’ reaction that is maladaptive. For

example, if a therapist followed standard procedures, they'd often have to diagnose LGBT+ youth as people with social phobias and offer them help in opening up to their social surroundings. But if the behaviour was caused by a homophobic school, standard treatments would only worsen the situation, while at the same time stigmatising the person. Hence there is an important need to include techniques for working with people in adverse societies into psychology curriculum.

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- LGBT+ issues training and help methods should be a part of psychology programmes, including: problems, difficulties, minority stress related issues, areas of sensitivity, standards. Each clinic should employ at least one psychologist that underwent such training. Additionally, methods helping violence victims should be known to said professional.

2.2.4. SWOT on Health in Poland

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of the Polish Patients' Ombudsman office • Private clinics favourable to LGBT+ patients • Steady increase in knowledge about homosexual people among medicine and psychotherapy students and increasingly favourable norms • Steady trend among the LGBT+ children and youth to seek sexologists more often to learn more about the issues that concern them from a reliable source they can talk to • Many publications and educational materials and leaflets as well as reliable internet resources to learn about LGBT+ issues that are available to doctors and medicine students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clinics that specialise in transgender or LGBT+ patients, lack of experts willing to diagnose and treat • Lack of LGBT+ issues training during the course of psychotherapy studies • Lack of standards (including: patients with gender dysphoria diagnosis and treatment, LGBT+ psychotherapy patients' treatment, etc.) • Lack of medical and psychological professionals familiar with LGBT+ issues. Long waiting lists and large physical distance to reach such experts (incl. sexologists and psychiatrists) • Medical and psychological professionals familiar with LGBT+ issues present in large cities only • Lack of clear standards for Children's Ombudsman

	<p>and Patients’ Ombudsman. Their actions vary from one appointed person to the next.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many procedures for LGBT+ children and youth are non-refundable • Prevalence of negative LGBT+ stereotypes among medical professionals • Lack of programmes to hormonally block puberty
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple procedures function in other countries and good practices have been extensively described. They’re available and ready to be introduced into the polish healthcare system • Treatment options reliant on parents’ decision offer a huge opportunity for them to choose doctors, therapists and procedures to suit their children’s needs • Lack of standards offers flexibility but also a chance to create standards according to the most recent knowledge and technology advances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative experiences with healthcare professionals strengthen the tendency to ide and make coming out more difficult for LGBT+ children and youth • Long waiting times result in psychological help reaching only those in acute crisis. Lack of preventive care • Responsibility to choose doctors and treatment lies on the parents only • No method of changing gender legally for people not of age • Presence of reparative therapy • LGBT+ prejudice in parents, as they are the ones that decide the course of action

2.2.5. Quotes

“The main obstacle in working with LGBT+ children and youth are stupid adults. Therapists in state owned clinics that tell children to pray.” - *Therapist*

“I’d feel much safer if I knew I could send a young person to a local therapist or a doctor without needing to worry if the person they end up seeing will have the knowledge and attitude required to speak to a young LGBT+ patient without causing them distress. Workshops on LGBT+ issues should be a standard for medical professionals.” *LGBTI+ Helpline Worker*

“Healthcare needs better procedures. A standard interview has questions about a partner of opposite sex. It should be inclusive, without assumptions by default so that everywhere patients would know that it’s OK [to be homosexual].” *Therapist*

“The current procedure for reassigning gender for transgender people is inhumane and infracts on the dignity of a person.” *Lawyer*

“Lack of standards gives you the option to choose a doctor you want to visit and with them a treatment. On the other hand, it offers no support to transgender youth or their parents. Safety, so that they feel someone knows, what can be done. Now a young person needs to diagnose themselves at the age of 12 or 14 and be certain of the future they want, and trust the chosen treatment won’t be of harm.” *Diagnostician*

2.3. Families

Several interviewees noted that there is a general need to support and educate families so that parents have the tools to create supportive relationships with their children as those are still not the norm. This is especially important in case of LGBT+ children who are under a lot of stress and external pressure.

2.3.1 Needs Related to Children

Interviewees noted that positive relationships with the parents can mitigate a lot of negative consequences of living in environments adverse to LGBT+ people. The LGBT+ children and youth need to feel safe and accepted at home. That means the need to educate the parents, that is to create support groups and meetings for them and for educational materials dedicated and tailored for the parents to be readily available. The meetings and training materials for the parents ought to educate, reduce stereotypes and include acceptance. They ought to teach parents how to provide emotional support to LGBT+ children (as several interviewees noted that even well-meaning parents often acted out of fear for their child in ways that was not optimal in terms of support, such as advising the child not to come out, which implied the message of shame).

In case of problems in the family caused by prejudice against an LGBT+ child, youth needs the assurance of procedures that help and mitigate the consequences. Even though an effective procedure for documenting domestic violence and collaborative help in such cases does exist in Poland, it does not recognize LGBT+ related issues. Such recognition is necessary for action but is also extremely important in itself for LGBT+ youth. Inevitably after such recognition actions must follow. Procedures for both physical and psychological violence against LGBT+ children at home need to be implemented for the children’s safety, according to the stakeholders. Among other, psychological, legal and financial help should be provided for LGBT+ children who suffer discrimination and violence at home. In violent cases, procedures ought to enable the child to receive help without notifying the parent of certain aspects of it. Many LGBT+ youth live in fear of homelessness if their parents decide to evict them. Temporary, safe housing options should additionally be available for such crisis situations

Many interviewees noted that social workers in Poland should have better access to knowledge in order to be able to better understand problems related to LGBT+ issues and react to them (for example to help educate the parents, provide support to the child and even demonstrate to LGBT+ youth there are people open to diversity with views different than the negative ones). Two people mentioned that even if a social worker recognizes LGBT+ related problems, they often do not note them in the official documents due to lack of proper procedures (for example violence motivated by prejudice against LGBT+ is not recognized separately by Polish law, so it is not reported as such). Most of the stakeholders pointed out, same sex relationships are not recognized by the Polish law. One of the mentioned consequences was that parents of the same gender are routinely described by the social workers as a single parent (and a cohabitant or without mentioning the latter at all). Families' safety requires that the legal and social welfare systems recognize same-sex relationships.

On a different level, many stakeholders noticed that in Polish society strong stereotypes prevail as to what a family has to be. If LGBT+ children constantly hear and see that a traditional family of two married people of opposite sex is the strongly preferred and only norm, they will not feel safe and accepted. Their parents will also understand the implicit message and will be less likely to open up to diversity. For LGBT+ youth's sake, the public spaces, education system and the media need to include a more diverse depictions of families.

2.3.2. Good Practices

The LGBT+ Hostel

Underage LGBT+ youth are often completely dependent on their parents or caregivers. For those who, fearing for their safety or experiencing physical or emotional abuse, had to leave their home, the LGBT+ hostel was an asylum, where they could stay for a short while and regain their footing in life. It offered a roof over one's head. Its location was not made available to the public so that people staying in the hostel could feel completely safe from the violence and abuse they left behind. The true uniqueness of the LGBT+ hostel lay in that it provided many tools necessary for permanent life change for the better. It offered psychological help so that LGBT+ youth could deal with the difficult experiences they ran away from. It provided legal help to aid in solving past problems and any obstacles to starting anew. Complex expert support in settling social, legal issues, plan finances and one's future -- and to leave the hostel certain of one's path made it a

place of successful interventions and a turning point in life for many. Due to lack of funding, the hostel that was ran by an NGO (Lambda Warszawa) had to close down.

2.3.3 Training needs

Training needs in the broad area of the family concern several target groups. First and foremost, the group that needs better access to training and knowledge are the parents, but also for social workers and for children in general to combat the prejudiced habits they often learn at home.

- Parents' training needs
 - o Training including broad knowledge of the LGBT+ topics so that they know what it means their children are LGBT+
 - o Training for parents needs to convey knowledge in order to induce acceptance and emotional support for the child. Additionally
 - o Training has to include methods of supporting LGBT+ children (several interviewees mentioned as many well-meaning parents attempt to protect their child by advising them not to come out which can be problematic from the standpoint of emotional support)
 - o Workshops free of cost as many parents cannot afford additional fees
 - o Anti-discrimination workshops
 - o Knowledge about LGBT+ situation both psychologically (for instance minority stress) and legally so that they know what their children go through and what options they have
 - o Group therapy or LGBT+ parents' meetings so that they can cope with the knowledge about their children's situation (which is often a source of distress for the parents as well) and in order so that they are able to better support their children
- Mandatory anti-discrimination education in schools. For everyone. Peers of LGBT+ youth often learn prejudice at home. Without understanding, they act in a harmful, prejudiced way by simply repeating what they heard at home.
- Social workers need to be trained in the following topics:
 - o Anti-discrimination training
 - o LGBT+ issues
 - o Sources of reliable information on LGBT+ issues

- o Psychological tools to work with and help LGBT+ youth
- o Knowledge about what the majority group does that contributes to the exclusion of minorities in general and LGBT+ people in particular so that they recognize the current norms for what they are
- o Knowledge about sexuality, sexual orientations and gender identity
- Psychologists and psychiatrists, whose patients are LGBT+ youth and the parents are not in therapy need training that includes methods of understanding and dealing with the parent so that they understand, learn and go along with the proper therapy plan.
- Children should additionally take part in workshops that include
 - o Setting boundaries, as they have small chances of learning that at home
 - o Strategies of coping with stress as the situations in their families often include prolonged periods of insecurity

2.3.4. SWOT on public spaces in Poland

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of LGBT+ parents’ organisations and parents’ meetings (in several large cities only) • The “Blue card” – a system for documenting domestic violence and helping the victims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of a personnel familiar with LGBT+ issues in social services to educate parents • Lack of support or sources of knowledge for LGBT+ parents’ outside of large cities • Lack of state funded support dedicated for LGBT+ youth who face discrimination or violence at home • Lack of psychological training for social care workers that would suffice to understand and help LGBT+ youth • Lack of knowledge about the legal issues concerning LGBT+ youth • The family law does not mention LGBT+ issues • Lack of any recognition of rainbow families by polish law
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In case of medical treatment or psychological help, the law does not specify any procedures. It’s all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For many parents the catholic church is a main source of knowledge about LGBT+ issues

<p>dependent on the parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social workers often willing to accept LGBT+ families • As the LGBT+ issues are more frequently discussed in the media in a polarised manner, more and more parents decidedly support their children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of dedicated support for LGBT+ youth who return home after a crisis psychological or medical intervention. Lack of programs to assess the conditions at home they return to • Social workers often describe rainbow families as something else in official documents because the system does not recognise them • As the society becomes more polarised when it comes to LGBT+ issues, so are the families • Threat of internalising homophobia if the family is prejudiced
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2.3.5. Quotes

“Fear of being thrown out of their own home is very common [among LGBT+ youth]”. *Therapist and LGBT+ helpline worker*

“They know what a family is supposed to be from the media, from their own parents, the education system and the politicians. They are the parents they were taught to be”. *Psychotherapist and helpline worker*

“First, we educate parents it’s not their fault. Then we educate them there is no fault at all. There’s nothing wrong with having an LGBT+ child”. *Activist working with LGBT+ parents*

“The level of knowledge of social workers is null. In large cities kids know much more than they do. Youth there know where to look for knowledge. In small cities that is unfortunately not the case”. *LGBT+ Activist involved in LGBT hostel initiative*

2.4. Public spaces

First and foremost, public spaces need to provide both safety as well as acceptance for LGBT+ children and youth. According to the interviewees, self-expression of LGBT+ youth is often met with derogatory comments, threats or even physical violence. They pointed out the lack of many elements that are needed for them to feel both safe and accepted in Poland.

2.4.1. Needs Related to Children

Most of the stakeholders noted that public spaces include more and more symbols both LGBT+ friendly and against LGBT+ people. However, all mentioned a serious increase in anti-LGBT+ labelling of spaces in the recent year (such as local officials voting for LGBT-free zones) and the need to make the LGBT+ symbols more pronounced. Most events that take place in public, even if

they are not excluding LGBT+ people outright, are implicitly discriminating (three of the interviewees mentioned the valentine's day, which offered many events and promotions but only to male-female couples, several people noted almost all flyers published by the local governments and businesses alike always depicted male-female couples, even in cases where the business in question prided itself on inclusivity or was a therapist office claiming to welcome diversity).

There is an increasing need of not only symbolic, but also physical safety as several LGBT+ parades in Poland have seen violent counter-demonstrations (most notably in 2019 in Białystok where a peaceful Pride Parade met with physical violence from civilians and hostile attitudes from the police). Thus, there is a need for clear cut police procedures for reacting to LGBT+ discrimination-based violence, for processing such cases and for reporting statistical data of such violence.

Moreover, polish law needs to recognize discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation. That includes, but is not restricted to naming LGBT+ motivated violence specifically in the penal code. In the absence of specific regulations, LGBT+ people that are discriminated against can only argue referring to broad categories or international standards. The outcome of their claims is uncertain and heavily depends on the convictions of the judge (or the public official conducting the process, be it a public employee or a police officer in case of claims).

Many stakeholders noted that there is no recognition of same sex couples in the polish legal system. Such lack has a tremendous impact on the social norms and values. It also sends a clear message to the LGBT+ youth about the way the society would treat their future relationships which is why many stakeholders stressed the need to introduce complete marriage equality.

Public spaces encompass the metaphorical space, including public discourse. Most of the stakeholders noted the latter is becoming extremely polarized with very strong anti-LGBT+ phrases being uttered more openly and frequently. Norms and standards are needed in the public debates to shield LGBT+ children and youth from harmful, prejudice-laden language. The same goes for the internet. Whereas positive information and educational materials are available for LGBT+ youth there, so are the misinformation and mal-information placed to intentionally harm and increase prejudice. Hence the strong need to increase diversity-friendly norms in social media and remove harmful information, as well as to increase the media literacy of LGBT+ youth so that they can better deal with mis-information. Additionally, even though many positive information about LGBT+ is present in the internet youth need to learn how to reach it.

Many interviewees stressed that the situation is vastly different in large cities and in all other spaces (smaller cities and in rural areas). Whereas in larger cities the youth often felt empowered to act, in smaller cities they had no access to any LGBT+ groups, meetings or NGOs and the public spaces often contained only negative symbols. In such cases, even if they had access to the Internet they did not know they could contact a LGBT+ NGO (as such action was unfamiliar to them). Sometimes they didn't even realize their own experience could be described as discrimination, as that was the prevalent norm. Thus, most interviewees stressed the great need for educational campaigns in smaller cities, for events and actions organized there or for all forms of outreach to LGBT+ youth from smaller cities.

2.4.2. Good Practices

Reporting to the Commissioner for Human Rights

Bureau of the Commissioner for Human Rights has made it incredibly easy to report any violations of human rights by public officials. Several aspects of the process could be singled out as good practice, including: ease of reporting (possibility to report anonymously, report an injustice seen not only one that was experienced, reporting via e-mail or a web page), the provided support and advisory reactions in most common cases as well as – on the citizenship side – the sole action of reporting a crime. The Bureau not only assists in many cases of LGBT+ discrimination, but also preserves statistics on cases that involve crimes and infractions against LGBT+.

Local Authorities' LGBT+ CHARTER

In 2019 the president of the city of Warsaw signed an official document called The LGBT+ Charter. The process was initiated by a single LGBT+ NGO (the Love Does Not Exclude Association), but involved active participation of many organisations and city officials to negotiate a well-rounded and actionable proposal that would best address the key LGBT+ issues.

The LGBT+ Charter includes a preamble declaring Warsaw the city that strives for diversity and wishes to eliminate discrimination and hate speech against the LGBT+ people. The preamble gives context to the directions for future action that constitute the main part of the document. The sections of the document correspond to key areas for action and are as follows: safety, education, culture & sports, work and administration. Each of them describes actionable and realistic solutions the city resolves to introduce.

2.4.3. Training Needs

- The stakeholders named the following training needs for the police
 - o Diversity and anti-discrimination training, including understanding of LGBT+ issues, minority stress
 - o Recognizing and reacting to prejudice
 - o Aspects victims’ interrogation tackling the topic of minority victims and hate crimes
 - o Protection of LGBT+ events and parades in an effective and non-threatening manner
- In order for LGBT+ children, youth and their parents to be able to receive legal help, workshops about LGBT+ legal issues, pathways and possibilities in Poland is currently unavailable yet necessary
- Government employees should receive obligatory anti-discrimination training that includes LGBT+ related issues and broad topics as well as things specific to their institution and position
- For local and central authorities and politicians the anti-discrimination training should include LGBT+ specific topics but also aspects of anti-discriminatory public discourse stereotype and prejudice recognition as well as anti-discriminatory language

2.4.4. SWOT on Public spaces in Poland

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased availability to resources about LGBT+ issues (in the internet and – in larger cities – in public spaces maintained by the NGOs) • Increased activity and courage of LGBT+ youth. • LGBT+ educational campaigns by the NGOs • Increased presence of LGBT+ symbols in public spaces • Presence of the Commissioner for Human Rights and Commissioner for Children’s Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of LGBT+ symbols in public spaces reserved to large cities • Lack of specific legal acts that mention LGBT+ discrimination or name equality on the basis of sexual orientation • Lack of procedures to monitor hate crimes against LGBT+ people • The legal acts that are the basis of operation for the Commissioner for Human Rights and Commissioner for Children’s Rights actions are broad, general. The treatment of LGBT+ complaints changes from one representative to the next.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBT+ NOGs reaching large cities only • Social norms for public discourse that allow discrimination • Lack of same-sex couples' recognition by the Polish legal system
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased activity of LGBT+ youth • Public coming outs more common • International standards and EU laws applicable to Poland • Antidiscrimination laws that can be updated with the inclusion of LGBT+ and implemented with specific procedures • Increased public awareness about the LGBT+ topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misinformation and negative information about LGBT+ people in online and offline public spaces • Anti-LGBT+ campaigns. • Local government officials labelling spaces as LGBT-free zones • Social campaigns against LGBT+ people and the presence of negative symbols in public spaces • Presence of hate speech against LGBT+ people in public discourse • Lack of reactions of authorities to social campaigns and actions of anti-LGBT+ organisations • Anti-LGBT+ motivated violence in public spaces

2.4.5. Quotes

“Considering what I see and hear, the atmosphere concerning the LGBT+ people in Poland is pre-pogroms-like.” *Educator and teachers’ trainer*

“There is a law against discrimination concerning access to services. But as the Constitutional Tribunal rejected the verdict [in a famous case where an LGBT+ organisation was refused services] that act was effectively cancelled.” *Lawyer*

“They [the LGBT+ youth in small cities] do not have access. They do not have the support of NGOs nor from their families. They don’t feel a part of the community. Often, they just realized that what they experience is called discrimination.” *LGBT+ Activist*

2.5. Media

Most of the interviewees stated recent years have seen a trend of media polarization in Poland. That pertains to social and political topics in general and even more so to LGBT+ themes in particular. Several stakeholders noted the topic has been used by the politicians to gain attention and rally supporters on both sides, which further polarized the public discourse on the matter. The trend, along with ubiquitous internet access, contributed to a large increase in accessibility of information about LGBT+ topics (positive and negative alike) for children and youth.

It is worth mentioning that more than a fourth of the interviewees, especially those working with LGBT+ issues almost exclusively, declared that they were severely limiting their own exposure to media content as failure to do so would cause almost immediate burnout and have severe negative psychological consequences.

2.5.1. Needs Related to Children

Most of our respondents agreed media should include LGBT+ topics more often. Events concerning LGBT+ community, especially those in smaller cities and rural areas should be reported in mainstream media. The authors ought to pay special attention so that the language and adopted perspective promoted tolerance and avoided stereotypes.

Many interviewees spoke about the need to incorporate LGBT+ topics into other narratives in order to include them into the “normal” or the standard depicted by the news and entertainment media. Whereas news media often cover events concerning the rainbow community in Poland, it is rarely the case that LGBT+ are mentioned when they are not the story. What youth need are media that show diversity as part of our everyday world, for example, mentioning that one quoted person spoke about their spouse of a different gender and another about their partner of the same gender. They need to see examples of same-sex couples and positive LGBT+ characters in TV series, books and movies, especially the ones created in their own country--even if such appearances would be for a brief moment, or maybe especially then. Only then will the media truly communicate acceptance for the LGBT+, which is of grave importance to the LGBT+ youth their families.

Professionals working with LGBT+ children and youth all agreed politics and media coverage of difficulties LGBT+ people face are an increasing stressor that weighs LGBT+ youth down. That is not to say these stories should be avoided by the media. It does however mean positive events in LGBT+ community should receive coverage in mainstream media to counterbalance the fear

evoking ones. Aside from that, the negative stories should avoid the language and angle aimed at shock the audience. They could explain, show various facets of reality and possibilities for action. A helpful angle might show stories of successfully overcoming such difficulties and educating about them. Each such story should include information about possible sources of support, whether a way to contact an NGO, support group or helpline.

2.5.2. Good Practices

Boycotting homophobia

A campaign encouraged LGBT+ activists to refuse invitations to TV and radio programmes that included homophobic interlocutors to create conflict. A common stance resulted in a sharp decrease in debates that could only deteriorate into conflicts. It could not eliminate the presence of people who strongly opposed LGBT+ equality in the media but it did diminish the proportion of extreme voices in moderate media outlets.

Diversity-sensitive language guidelines in an accessible form.

LGBT+ organizations as well as media experts sometimes organize workshops about LGBT+ issues and guidelines for speaking about them in a way that is sensitive to LGBT+ problems and inoffensive to all possible audiences. A short form of the key points and best language practices for the media should be accessible to journalists and content creators – a flyer in every desk for an easy consultation at a moments' notice.

Diversity officers

Designating an LGBT+ issues or diversity issues expert among peers. It might be a more achievable goal to designate one person that would not only have the knowledge about diversity (situation of LGBT+ people or other discriminated minorities) and be fluent in a correct, inoffensive language than to assume the whole office would do so. Such an expert would take it upon themselves to be up to speed on current problems and changes.

Anyone preparing content that touches on LGBT+ issues could consult it with the designated expert as they conceptualize the story. Most importantly they should consult the finished piece to make sure it does not contain offensive language or harmful descriptions of social categories and

is socially responsible. Additionally, the expert should make sure that if the created media content addresses a sensitive topic a message of available help sources or assistance is included in the content. A consultation of this sort should be a standard part of content creation process.

Dialogue for depolarizing media

A platform for dialogue for both opposing sides is necessary for positive change. A unique initiative of journalists made that possible in a way that avoided the usual pitfalls of such debates. The initiative was that conservative journalists would sometimes write for the liberal media outlets and liberal ones would in turn write for the conservative ones, making this an exchange of sorts. It pierced the informational bubble as the readers on each side got to learn more about opposing views from their usual, trusted source without additional effort on their part.

2.5.3. Training Needs

Trainings for media professionals should include:

- Proper language to describe LGBT+ topics.
- Support sources for the LGBT+ community that could be appended to the more difficult stories
- Ways to double check the finished pieces
- Knowledge about negative and positive LGBT+ stereotypes, sensitivity to them and ways to avoid stereotyping

According to respondents, media professionals could also greatly benefit from presence of sources of current knowledge in the workplace (such as pamphlets, leaflets or publications authored by NGOs). Additionally, each media outlet should appoint a diversity officer – a person tasked with keeping their knowledge up to date that could support other media professionals in proper coverage of LGBT+ topics.

2.5.4. SWOT on Media in Poland

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV and radio series increasingly include positive LGBT+ characters • Internet ubiquity allows LGBT+ youth to easily reach others that are similar age and in similar situations. It's easier to meet friends, date and discuss common topics. • Some media outlets have internal policies about describing diversity related topics • Access to social media shows LGBT+ youth a broad spectrum of LGBT+ identities and ways to describe them • The current media bill includes sexual orientation specifically as one of characteristics that advertisements should not discriminate against. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information chaos in social media and the internet in general makes also negative and false information more prominent and accessible to LGBT+ youth. Information created to intentionally harm them is often difficult to discern as such. • Traditional media often induce conflict to increase interest in their stories. • Social media include mechanisms that escalate conflicts and negative emotions • Journalists are expected to write a lot of content fast, which makes it increasingly difficult to learn and create in-depth stories. • Many media outlets are political tools • Media rarely cover LGBT+ stories and events from smaller cities as the large cities are much easier to reach • The current media bill does not include sexual orientation specifically as one of characteristics that broadcasted media content should not discriminate against
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary and tertiary plots in TV series are often left for the scriptwriter to decide. Information could be directed to them. • Radio series are a unique way to reach elder audience and teach them acceptance towards LGBT+ youth • The community is more active than ever. There is an increasing number of LGBT+ events in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination against LGBT+ and hate speech in media is accepted in various media outlets. • Increase in the volume and severity of negative content about LGBT+ people in media. • Media companies are not diverse themselves, their employees suffer inequalities. This makes them untrustworthy sources when it comes to positive stories about diversity. Equality could be covered

public space. Media should use that opportunity to cover the topic in a positive light and educate.

- Privately owned media have a clear goal to earn money. That makes them responsive to the actions of their recipients. Social initiatives, mass displays of support or outrage in social media, all have the capacity to influence them
- Organisational culture in many media outlets often allows the content creators to choose their own topics and shape the narrative as they choose
- NGO experts are easily accessible to journalists and are often available to consult created content
- Due to increased coverage of LGBT+ topics in media many online portals have among their staff at least one person that wrote extensively on the topic and could serve as an information source

better by journalists who experience it in the workplace as the norm.

- Many cases of traditional media spreading negative, false information about LGBT+ without any consequences
- Even though people distrust political figures they still adopt the way they debate
- Increased media polarisation. Lack of open discourse among the emerging sides
- The government, state owned media and the catholic church in Poland all speak derogatorily about the LGBT+ people
- Public discourse that strengthens negative LGBT stereotypes.

2.5.5. Quotes

„What we sorely lack is a positive indirect communication. Not only should we speak about diversity, we should just show it”. *Psychotherapist and helpline worker*

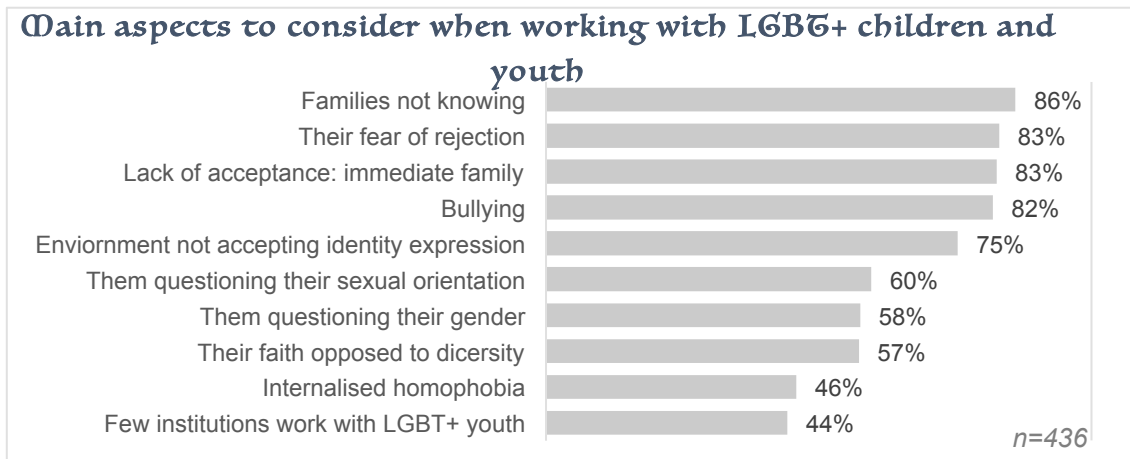
“We lack an open, straightforward message. The presence of diversity in mainstream culture, that would be a trustworthy message”. *Journalist*

“Politics often appears in therapy sessions these days” - *Therapist*

3. Overall evaluation: Tendencies and absences regarding LGBTI+ children in Poland, including perceptions and attitudes, stereotypes, representations

As reported by Ilga Europe, Poland offers scarce legal protection to LGBT+ people. All stakeholders stated there are none or almost no laws that protected LGBT+ children and youth in all areas the project assessed. There is no legal recognition of same-sex couples in Poland. Reparative therapy is still practiced and legal. Reassignment of legal gender exploits general laws that allow for annotating the birth certificate and require suing one’s parents, which makes the process all the

more difficult. Almost two decades after Poland Ratified the European Convention on Human Rights and fifteen years after joining the EU, the international laws and standards are often still the only grounds for legal procedures in case of problems encountered by the LGBT+ people. Hence the grounds for legal protection in Poland are very general and often not legally binding for the judge.



4. Survey results: Main considerations for working with LGBT+ youth.

“There are no protections. Only half-measures. Like the procedure to change the name. You can legally change the name to the one being used. Transgender youths choose a gender neutral one and lie”.

Lack of legal solutions is mirrored by a lack of procedures in other assessed areas. There are no standards for dealing with prejudice in schools, medical procedures were found lacking and the default standard often do not acknowledge anything other than the majority norm. Such deficits in laws, standards and procedures make the situation of LGBT+ youth highly dependent on goodwill of professionals they happened to stumble upon. Thus, they result in ambiguity and extreme differences in situations across the country.

Moreover, these deficits make the situation unstable, quick to change in times of unfavourable social attitudes. Each and every stakeholder stated they considered the situation of LGBT+ people in Poland gradually improving for years and that the recent times have brought a significant turn

for the worse--a sentiment mirrored by social research as Centre for Prejudice Research²² and European Union Agency²³ for Fundamental Rights confirm the change. Almost all respondents of our questionnaire (over 80%) quoted that working with LGBT+ youth requires consideration for the fact that their families might not know about their psychosexual orientation or gender identity or not accept them for who they are, that they'll fear rejection, suffer bullying. Such responses concur the prevalence of prejudice and discrimination against LGBT+ youth in Poland.

„There are guidelines for education, mainly due to Polish commitments to the UN or the Council of Europe, but they're not enforceable and actions that are in direct opposition to those guidelines are often carried out". LGBT+ Activist and Educator

All stakeholders agreed that education was crucial for changing the social norms and improving the situation of LGBT+ youth. The prevalent lack of knowledge about LGBT+ issues was identified in all assessed fields by the interviewees (with all experts expressing concern for the lack of knowledge about the LGBT+ issues available to their peers) and the online respondents (who stated, lack of knowledge pertained to all three of the most prevalent problems of working with LGBT+ youth, see fig. 6). The common consensus was that there is a need to include such topics into the curricula of university studies, including medical, psychological and pedagogical ones. Public institutions would do well to introduce anti-discrimination training that includes LGBT+ issues, as most public employees have ever had the chance to learn about them. Moreover, all stakeholders agreed the current efforts of schools to teach openness to diversity were sorely insufficient and unanimously professed the crucial need for anti-discrimination education to become an obligatory part of education in every school.

Many noted, the need to educate the parents of LGBT+ children, as they often possess little knowledge about the LGBT+ issues but receive the negative and prejudiced messages from the media or the Catholic church. As LGBT+ youth cannot make their own legal decisions e.g. about possible therapy, seeking help or changing a school--and are thus completely depend on the parents--an access to support, training and trustworthy information for the parents was often identified as a major need.

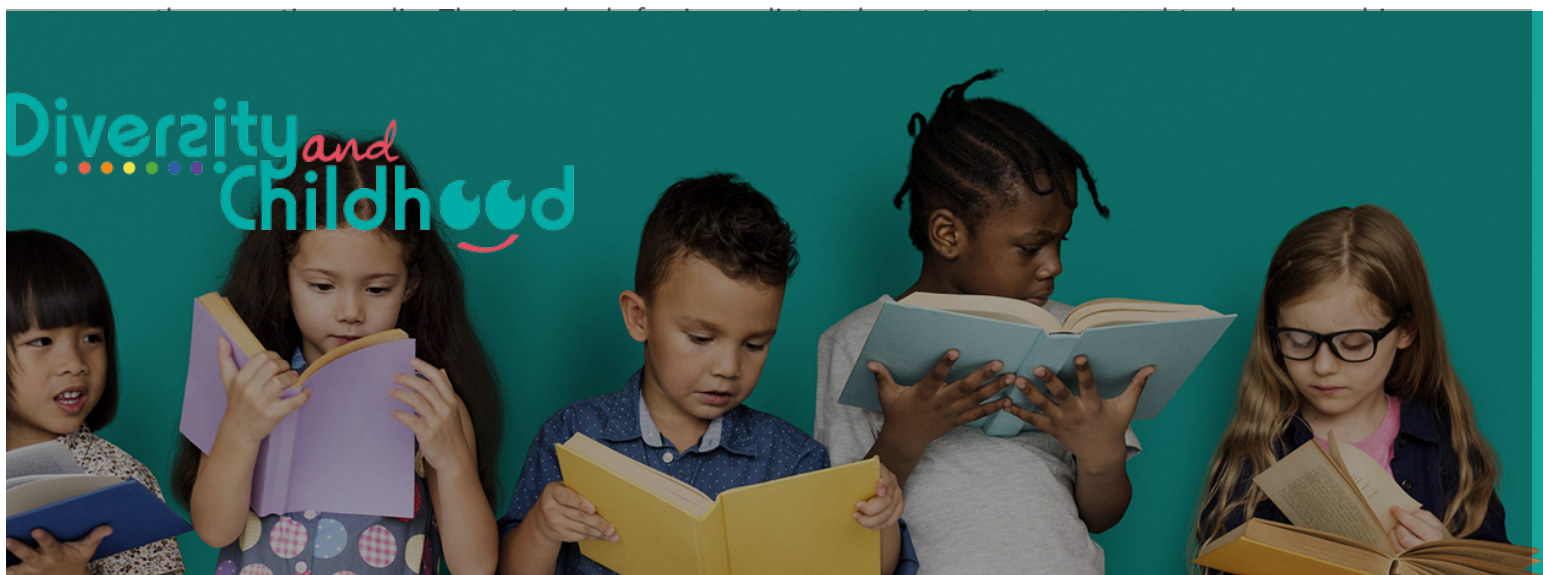
²² http://cbu.psychologia.pl/uploads/f_bulska/LGBT_2018_2019_final.pdf

²³ https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/lgbti-survey-country-data_poland.pdf

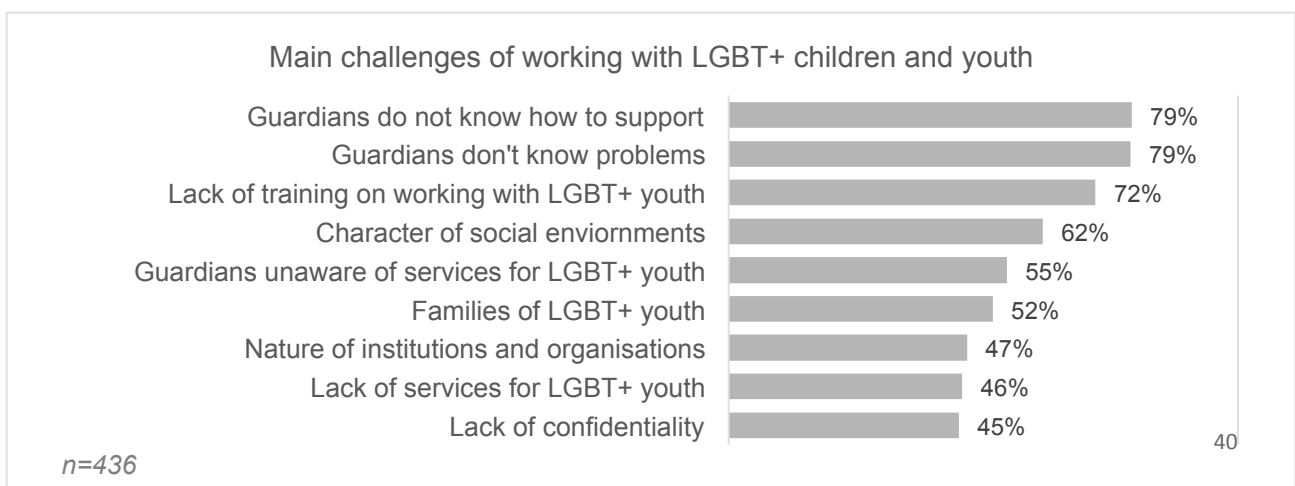
“Last twelve months were a constant battle with the smear campaign about LGBT+ people by the government, public media and Catholic church officials. It’s unprecedented”. LGBT+ Activist

„In the past years the smear campaign [in the media] definitely rose in strength”. Journalist

Aside from the legal protections and education, the most commonly identified needs of LGBT+ youth were the ones concerning public discourse that increasingly allowed for prejudiced and hateful language. Experts working with LGBT+ youth all noted the public discourse and politicians’ harsh words influenced the children personally. Electronic and media literacy is needed for the youth to be able to protect themselves from misinformation and hateful narratives. More positive examples of LGBT+ people were necessary in the current popular culture including fiction as well



strengthen values of openness to diversity (including a common and obligatory anti-discrimination education), according to all stakeholders. Many noted, the positive change was unlikely to happen without clear signals and help from the European Union.



6. Survey results: Main challenges for professionals working with LGBT+ youth

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