

# National analysis on violence against LGBTI+ children

LITHUANIA



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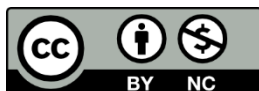
## Project information

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## Introduction – Research Design and Sample

The purpose of the research was to make a needs assessment in a participative way on needs produced by gender-based violence in childhood, focusing on LGBTI+ and gender non-conforming children. The research also aimed to map the good practices regarding attention in the intersection between gender, sexuality and childhood in 5 key spheres: school, health, family, public spaces and media.

For the above-indicated purpose, primary and secondary research was conducted including a) a desk research, b) an online survey, c) interviews.

Firstly, an extensive literature review was conducted and compiled. The **desk research** was conducted based on information on LGBTI+ rights collected by the National LGBTI+ rights organization LGL. In 25 years, LGL has drafted many reports and publications detailing the situation of LGBTI+ people and children in Lithuania and has many resources that were used in conducted the desk research.

Secondly, an **online survey with a total of 50 participants** was conducted to identify gender-based violence in childhood. Stakeholders from child protection agencies, equality bodies, teachers/educators, health professionals, journalists, family associations took part in the study. The survey was conducted in February, 2020 via “LimeSurvey” survey engine. “LimeSurvey” was used by all project partners due to its focus on security of personal data and support of national languages. Most participants of the survey represented education sector (34 percent) and public sector (34 percent). 12 percent of participants were health professionals, 6 percent represented family associations, 2 percent – journalists.

LGL sent out personalised letters to its partners from equality bodies, schools, health professionals, journalists and emotional support NGOs for LGBTI+ children and youth, making sure that stakeholders from areas of school, health, family, public spaces and media take part in the study. Representatives of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children Rights, Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, journalists from the main media portals 15min.lt and lrt.lt also took part in the survey.

Unfortunately, no family associations took part in the study, because most family associations in Lithuania are very conservative when it comes to LGBTI+ rights. Instead, LGL asked representatives of Child Line and Youth Line emotional support services to take part in the survey. The emotional support service representatives are quite familiar with the challenges faced by LGBTI+ children in youth in their families and domestic settings.



Thirdly, LGL conducted **10 interviews with stakeholders**: child protection agencies, equality bodies, teachers/educators, health professionals, journalists, family associations. Interviews were carried out in order to identify gender-based violence in childhood. Interviews were conducted in February, 2020.

LGL sent out personalised letters to its partners from equality bodies, schools, health professionals, journalists and emotional support NGOs for LGBTI+ children and youth, making sure that stakeholders from areas of school, health, family, public spaces and media take part in the study. Representatives of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children Rights, Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, journalists from the main media portals 15min.It and Irt.It, representatives of emotional support helplines Child Line and Youth Line, hospital and pharmacy employer, teacher and school employer also took part in the interviews. There were 9 female interviewees and 1 male interviewee.

The interviews took place for about an hour and all interviewees were motivated to contribute to the research with their knowledge and experience.

Before the beginning of the interview, the researcher provided the participants with information of the project in national language. The researcher also asked the participant to sign a Consent Form – both in national language. Participant did not provide the researcher with any other ID data and/or personal contact information. The Consent Form was also signed by the researcher. One counter signed copy of the consent form was given to each participant.

Interviews were sound recorded, upon the confirmation of the participant, in order to facilitate the transcription and at the same time enhance the validity of the research.

Researcher encouraged the participant to openly express their views and thoughts while trying to create a friendly and safe environment in order to facilitate the discussion. However, researcher did not pressure the participant and respected their right not to answer a question.

Interviews took place in a quiet (with no distraction sources such as the presence of other people, telephones, loud music, etc.) environment. Interview participants chose the place where the interview was conducted according to their convenience.



# 1. Legal and political context regarding LGBTI+ rights

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

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTI+) people in Lithuania face legal and social challenges not experienced by non-LGBTI+ citizens. Both male and female same-sex sexual activity are legal in Lithuania, but neither civil same-sex partnership nor same-sex marriage are available, meaning that there is no legal recognition of same sex couples, so LGBTI+ people do not enjoy all of the rights that non-LGBTI+ people have, and same sex couples in the country do not enjoy the same legal recognition that is given to opposite sex couples. Although homosexuality was decriminalized in 1993, the historic legacy has only resulted in rights for LGBTI+ people that are limited at best. Protection against discrimination was legislated for as part of the criteria for European Union accession and in 2010 the first LGBTI+ pride parade took place in Vilnius.

In the period between 2012 and 2018 the Lithuanian authorities did not seek to comprehensively address the tendencies of social, legal and institutional discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and (or) gender identity. On the contrary, certain aspects indicate that respect for human rights of LGBTI+ people in Lithuania is deteriorating.

First of all, the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information has been applied on three different occasions with the view of censoring LGBTI+ related public information. The Lithuanian authorities claim that this discriminatory interference with the right to freedom of expression is necessary to protect the “emotional, spiritual, psychological development and health of the minors”, thus creating a chilling effect on talking publicly about LGBTI+ issues in the Lithuanian society.

Secondly, Lithuania remains one of a few jurisdictions in the European Union without any legal recognition of same-sex relationships. The Lithuanian Parliament has not only dismissed a bill on introducing gender-neutral registered partnerships, but now is considering a legislative motion on “cohabitation agreements” *which would strip same-sex couples of the family status all together. The Article 38 of the Constitution explicitly states that “[m]arriage shall be concluded upon the free mutual consent of man and woman”, while the Article 3.339 of the Civil Code foresees a separate law that should lay down the procedure for registering a partnership between a man and a woman. Despite the fact that the Civil Code was adopted in 2000, the law on registered partnerships (for different-sex couples) has never been adopted.*



In 2011 the Lithuanian Constitutional Court provided a progressive interpretation of the constitutional concept of “family life” by indicating that *“[it] does not mean that [...] the Constitution does not protect and defend families other than those founded on the basis of marriage, inter alia, the relationship of a man and a woman living together without concluding a marriage, which is based on the permanent bonds of emotional affection, reciprocal understanding, responsibility, respect, shared upbringing of the children and similar ones, as well as on the voluntary determination to take on certain rights and responsibilities [...]”*. While the Constitutional Court did not mention same-sex families in its judgment explicitly, the legal reading of the judgment indicate that same-sex families potentially fall under the ambit of the constitutional concept of “family life”.

Thirdly, the Lithuanian authorities have systematically failed in investigating reported instances of hate speech and hate crimes on grounds of sexual orientation and (or) gender identity. In some cases the law enforcement officials simply refused to start pre- trial investigations, thus leaving the members of the local LGBTI+ community without any possibility for legal redress.

Fourthly, Lithuania remains one of a few European jurisdictions without any administrative procedures of legal gender recognition and gender reassignment procedure. As gender identity is not covered by Lithuanian anti-discrimination and hate crime legislation, transgender people remain disproportionately affected by instances of discrimination, harassment and violence. Since April, 2017 as a result of strategic litigation efforts the right to legal gender recognition is granted by the national courts without the sterilization requirement, i.e. based solely on mental diagnosis of ‘gender dysphoria’ and self-identification.

Finally, in the period between 2012 and 2018 the Lithuanian Parliament has considered nine openly homophobic and (or) transphobic legislative initiatives, effectively seeking to limit the rights and freedoms of LGBTI+ people.<sup>1</sup> The vivid public debate around these legislative proposals has negatively

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<sup>1</sup> A list of the homophobic and (or) transphobic legislative initiatives pending before the Lithuanian Parliament as of 1 June 2018:

- (a) **The amendment to the Civil Code No. XIIP-17** seeks to place a total ban on gender reassignment surgeries. The bill was included on the Parliament’s agenda on 23 May 2013 and has not been considered since then.
- (b) **The amendment to the Criminal Code No. XIIP-687** seeks to establish that the criticism of homosexuality and attempts to change someone’s sexual orientation would not qualify as discrimination or harassment on the ground of sexual orientation. The bill was included on the Parliament’s agenda on 12 September 2013. It passed the first hearing on 19 June 2014. The Parliamentary Committee on Education, Science and Culture temporarily postponed the adoption of the bill on 16 December 2014 by returning the bill to the initiators for “further improvements”.
- (c) **The amendment to the Law on Public Meetings No. XIIP-940**, proposes that the organizers of the public assemblies cover all expenses in relation to ensuring safety and public order in the course of an event. This legislative



impacted the social climate for LGBTI+ people in Lithuania, because it seemed as if fundamental rights and freedoms of LGBTI+ people could be simply revoked on a whim of political opportunism or discriminatory animus.

## 1.2. Timeline of LGBTI+ rights in Lithuania

**1993:** Same-sex relationships were decriminalized

**2004:** Age of consent equalized

**2005:** Law on Equal Treatment, which bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the areas of employment, education and access to goods and services, came into effect

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motion was introduced as a retaliatory measure for the successfully executed Baltic Pride 2013 March for Equality. The Parliament has not yet voted on the inclusion of this bill to its agenda.

(d) **The amendment to the Law on the Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child No. XIIP-473 (together with the amendment to the Civil Code No. XIIP-472)** stipulates that “every child has the natural right to a father and a mother, emanating from sex differences and mutual compatibility between motherhood and fatherhood”. The bill was included on the Parliament’s agenda on 21 May 2013.

(e) **The amendment to the Law on the Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child No. XIIP-1469(2)** seeks to establish that “it is forbidden for same-sex couples to adopt citizens of the Republic of Lithuania.” The bill was included on the Parliament’s agenda on 15 September 2015.

(f) **The amendment to the Article 38 of the Constitution No. XIIP-1217(2)** seeks to redefine the constitutionally protected concept of “family life” as emanating from a traditional marriage between a man and a woman, and stipulates that family arises from motherhood and fatherhood. The bill was included on the Parliament’s agenda on 10 December 2013. The amendment was accepted for the Parliament’s consideration on 28 June 2016. (g) **The amendment to the Code of Administrative Violations No. XIIP-4490(3)** introduces administrative liability for any public defiance of the constitutionally established “family values”. By carrying out public speeches, demonstrating posters, slogans and audiovisual materials, as well as organizing public events such as gay prides and other kind of actions, one would thus act against the law. The bill was included on the Parliament’s agenda on 21 January 2014. The Parliament postponed the final adoption phase on 13 March 2014, and once again on 12 November 2015.

(g) **The amendment to the Civil Code No. XIIP-750** seeks to introduce an “agreement for cohabitation” that would allow two or more cohabitants to realize certain property rights without an intention to create family relations. The proponents of this bill claim that the “agreement for cohabitation” would be suitable form of legal recognition for same-sex couples. However, it effectively prevents same-sex couples from enjoying the status of “family members”. The bill was included on the Parliament’s agenda on 30 May 2017.

(h) **The amendment to the Civil Code No. XIIP-1327** places a total ban on both medical and legal gender reassignment in Lithuania. The bill was registered in the Parliament on 10 November 2017, but the Parliament has not deliberated on the proposal yet.



**2009:** Ban of hate crimes based on sexual orientation

**2010:** Law on the Protection of Minors was passed and since was used against LGBTI+ community numerous times

**2010:** First LGBTI+ community march “Baltic Pride” organized in Vilnius

**2019:** The Constitutional Court ruled that foreign, same-sex spouses must be granted residence permits.

### 1.3. Relevant statistical data about LGBTI+ situation in Lithuania

Despite the fact that Lithuanian legislation, in theory, provides for quite extensive legal guarantees against discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation, its implementation in practice is, at best, described as ineffective. Instances of discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation remain highly underreported. The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, i.e. the public body responsible for the implementation of the Law on Equal Opportunities, received four complaints regarding alleged instances of discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation in 2009, three in 2010, four in 2011, two in 2012, none in 2013, four in 2014, five in 2015, three in 2016 and three in 2017.

Taking into account the widespread phenomenon of discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation indicated by international surveys and opinion polls (see paragraph 8), it can be concluded that the national equality body is not perceived as an effective remedy with the view of addressing experienced injustices.

Despite the fact that there are no comprehensive national surveys on the situation of LGBTI+ people in Lithuania, various international surveys and opinion polls indicate that Lithuania remains one of the most socially hostile societies against LGBTI+ people in the European Union (EU). According to the LGBTI+ Survey by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Lithuanian respondents admitted always (14 %) or almost always (20 %) feeling downhearted or depressed. Moreover, 55 % of Lithuanian respondents personally felt discriminated against in 8 areas of life due to their LGBTI+ identity. These rates are highest among all EU countries.<sup>2</sup>

Survey results also showed the lack of openness in Lithuania. 51% of Lithuanian respondents confessed to hiding their LGBTI+ identity at work, while 59% admitted to not being open about it at school. 44% of

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<sup>2</sup> EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, European Union lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survey. Results at a glance, Vienna, 2020, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/data-and-maps/2020/LGBTI+i-survey-data-explorer>



Lithuanian survey participants said that they avoid holding hands with their same-sex partner in public fearing that they might be subjected to threats, assault or harassment.

FRA survey also confirms that education on LGBTI+ topics in schools remains critical: respondents said that LGBTI+ topics are discussed in a negative manner (19%) or are not discussed at all (65%).

Comparison of 2019 and 2012 survey results reveals little overall progress over the past seven years.<sup>3</sup>

2020 ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map revealed that in Lithuania there was no positive change in the field of LGBTI+ Human rights compared to the 2019 results. Lithuania is placed 34rd among 49 European countries.<sup>4</sup>

According to Eurobarometer on Discrimination 2019, only 30% Lithuanians are in favor of same-sex marriages to be allowed throughout the Europe.

Eurobarometer results also revealed that Lithuanians are very intolerant to LGBTI+ people in the workplace. Survey showed that only 44% respondents in Lithuania would feel “comfortable” having a lesbian, gay or bisexual co-workers. The numbers are even lower for the same question concerning a transgender person (40%).

53% Lithuanians agree with the idea that sexual minorities should enjoy the same rights as heterosexuals.<sup>5</sup>

In Summer, 2017 LGL carried out a survey in which respondents – 580 LGBTI+ high school students between the ages of 14 and 18 – elaborated on what is taught in moral education lessons, and what LGBTI+ adolescents who are still discovering their sexuality and gender identity face in Lithuanian schools. LGL’s data reveals that when high school students struggle with bullying due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the school environment, they’re forced to deal with it on their own. 82% of LGBTI+ students participating in the survey reported being bullied due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the last year, and of these respondents, 90% reported feeling unsafe at school

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<sup>3</sup> EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, European Union lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survey. Results at a glance, Vienna, 2020, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/data-and-maps/2020/LGBTI+i-survey-data-explorer>

<sup>4</sup> 2020 ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map, <https://rainbow-europe.org>

<sup>5</sup> Eurobarometer on Discrimination 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2251>

for this reason. 50% of survey respondents also declared that their teachers either did not respond appropriately to homophobic bullying, if they responded at all.<sup>6</sup>

In 2018, the international LGBTI+ youth and student organization IGLYO launched its LGBTI+ Inclusive Education Index and Report. The LGBTI+ Inclusive Education Index ranks all 47 Council of Europe Member States. Lithuania ranks 30th out of 47 Council of Europe Member States.<sup>7</sup>

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

### 2.1. Education

#### 2.1.1. Needs related to children to combat violence regarding sexual and gender diversity in the sphere of education

According to education professionals, LGBTI+ children in Lithuania face hostility from parents, teachers and their peers. A teacher who took part in the interview noted that the attitude of parents in Lithuania is very much affected by prevailing Catholic religion and former Soviet regime. “There are certain idealisms that say that the family must be formed by a man and a woman, and so there is a mockery of those who do not fulfil this ideal,” claimed participant of the interview. Teachers at school also cannot relate LGBTI+ issues with children and see being LGBTI+ as something forbidden. “I wanted to invite an LGBTI+ group to my class and I told my colleague teachers about this and they said *How dare you, do you know what harm it can do to children*. There is really a lot of work to be done in Lithuania for people to accept LGBTI+ people.”

Another school employee claimed that LGBTI+ children are afraid acknowledge their identity and speak about it with their parents and teachers. The interviewee insisted that LGBTI+ children in Lithuanian schools lack scientific information about LGBTI+ issues presented at school.

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<sup>6</sup> Safe and Inclusive School Environment for Every Student. Brochure, 2018, <https://www.igl.lt/en/files/Safe-and-Inclusive-School-Environment-for-Every-Student.-Brochure.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> IGLYO. LGBTI+QI Inclusive Education Index, 2018 <https://www.iglyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/LGBTI+QI-Inclusive-Education-Index-Preview.pdf>



Survey participants noted that LGBTI+ children should be better protected in the school environment by Lithuanian Law (58 percent of survey participants). 72 percent of survey participants agreed that LGBTI+ diversity issues should be discussed at school.

### **2.1.2. Good practices related to education to combat violence against LGBTI+ and gender non-conforming children**

Both interview participants claimed that Lithuanian schools are not ready to embrace LGBTI+ diversity issues and see these issues in a negative way.

This is further reflected by the answers of survey participants. Only 12 percent of respondents could name some specific services for LGBTI+ children. 82 percent of respondents could not name one. Of those who could name such services, the participants referred to emotional support services Child Line, Youth Line and the National LGBTI+ rights organization LGL.

When asked, what services are needed for LGBTI+ children, the participants named mental health services (62 percent), community support services (56 percent), social support (44 percent) and accommodation services (13 percent). 50 percent of respondents also claimed that parents of LGBTI+ children also need support services to help them to deal with child's identity. 54 percent of survey participants claimed that LGBTI+ issues should be included to the school curriculum. 52 percent claimed that schools should also raise awareness of parents when it comes to LGBTI+ issues.

### **2.1.3. Training needs for education professionals**

None of education professionals who took part in the interviews have ever taken part in a training on LGBTI+ or broader human rights issues. However, both professionals claimed that they would like to take part in such trainings.

Most survey participants (80 percent) also insisted never taking part in such trainings. Only 8 percent of participants took part in a training on LGBTI+ or broader human rights issues.

When asked why they did not take part in such trainings, the respondents claimed that it was assumed that they would not encounter LGBTI+ children and youth in their professional work (32 percent). 28 percent claimed that such trainings were never discussed their work settings.

74 percent of participants claimed that LGBTI+ issues were never a part of their professional education.



42 percent of participants claimed that they would like to take part in a training on LGBTI+ issues, while 22 percent of respondents insisted that they would not like to take part in such training.

## 2.1.4. SWOT related to education in Lithuania

| STRENGTHS (+)   |  |
|---|--|
| Discrimination based on sexual orientation in the school settings is forbidden  | Most schools are implement anti-bullying programmes  |
| WEAKNESSES (-)  |  |
| Law on the Protection of Minors Against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information is effectively limiting possibility to discuss LGBTI+ issues at schools                | Transgender and gender non-conforming children are not protected from bullying and discrimination in the school settings by Lithuanian Law   |
| LGBTI+ issues are not included in the national education curriculum   | There is no mandatory teacher training on LGBTI+ awareness   |
| OPPORTUNITIES (+)   |  |
| Since there is no LGBTI+ content in the national education curriculum, there is an opportunity to create curriculum based on the best practices of other European countries | Since NGOs are collecting data on bullying and harassment, Government could use their best practices in order to monitor the situation of LGBTI+ children in school settings                         |
| Since, national anti-bullying policies and programmes are in place, they could easily include information about anti-LGBTI+ bullying  | Since NGOs have the expertise on LGBTI+ issues, schools could easily invite experts to conduct trainings on LGBTI+ issues  |
| THREATS (-)   |  |
| Transgender and gender non-conforming children could be subject to bullying and discrimination with no means to redress   | The public perception on LGBTI+ issues will not change, since there is no education on LGBTI+ issues at school   |
| Since there is no mandatory training on LGBTI+ issues for teachers and school staff, they might not have the knowledge and skills to address homophobic bullying incidents  | Since the Law on the Protection of Minors Against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information is in place, discussing LGBTI+ issues at school could be considered a detrimental activity for minors |



### 2.1.5. Exemplary quotes from interviews related to schools

“The negative parental attitude in Lithuania is still very strong. I wanted to invite an LGBTI+ group to my class and I told my colleagues about this and they said *How dare you, do you know what harm it can do to children*”. (Teacher).

“I think maybe we just need more information so that teachers or anyone else in the field would realise that being an LGBTI+ person is not a disease, that it’s not something abnormal. So that children can feel more comfortable with it”. (School staff member).

## 2.2. Health

### 2.2.1. Needs mentioned by children to combat violence regarding sexual and gender diversity in the health sphere

According to interviewees representing healthcare, LGBTI+ children may be subject to violence in healthcare sector. One interviewee claimed that medical professionals do not have required knowledge to provide services for LGBTI+ children. She claimed that healthcare professionals discuss their patients behind their back and focus on their differences. The interviewee also claimed that medical professionals are keen to perform invasive medical procedures for intersex babies with no informed consent by child and parents. Medical professional also claimed that LGBTI+ children would not receive any support by general practitioners. According to her, healthcare professionals still pathologize LGBTI+ identities and tend to send LGBTI+ children to psychiatrists without any medical indications to do so.

Another healthcare representative who works at a pharmacy, pharmacists would not consult every customer equally. She stressed that transgender persons often seek hormone blockers, but doctors are not allowed to prescribe it. Transgender individuals would often ask for hormone blockers, however it is not possible to have it without prescription. She also noted, that LGBTI+ identities are highly pathologized in the healthcare sector.

### 2.2.2. Good practices related to health to combat violence against LGBTI+ and gender non-conforming children

Interviewees claimed that there are little good practices when it comes to healthcare. Participants of the interview listed emotional support services and some healthcare professionals who are providing psychological and medical support for transgender individuals.

Survey participants also claimed that healthcare facilities lack services tailored for the needs of LGBTI+ children (62 percent of respondents). Among reasons why healthcare facilities do not provide good



experience for LGBTI+ children, respondents named lack of knowledge about LGBTI+ issues (52 percent), lack of services for LGBTI+ children (52 percent) and lack of confidentiality (42 percent).

### 2.2.3. Training needs for health professionals

Survey participants stressed that health professionals lack trainings on LGBTI+ issues in healthcare (50 percent).

Interview participants claimed that they have never took part in trainings on LGBTI+ issues. However, both healthcare professionals would like to participate in such trainings.

### 2.2.4. SWOT related to Health in Lithuania

| STRENGTHS (+)  |  |
|--|--|
| Discrimination based on sexual orientation is banned in the healthcare sector                      | Some healthcare professionals strive to help LGBTI+ patients even though it is not required  |
| There are many emotional support services in Lithuania   | Healthcare students often seek trainings on LGBTI+ issues  |
| WEAKNESSES (-)   |  |
| Transgender people in Lithuania do not have any medical services when it comes to their transition | Discrimination based on gender identity in the healthcare sector is legal in Lithuania   |
| Medical students receive no trainings on LGBTI+ issues   | LGBTI+ identities are still highly pathologized in healthcare sector   |
| OPPORTUNITIES (+)  |  |
| Most medical students are open to trainings on LGBTI+ issues                                       | Some medical professionals already have experience treating transgender patients   |
| There are many materials prepared by NGOs that are useful for the healthcare professionals         | Medical professionals are becoming more aware about specific needs of LGBTI+ individuals   |
| THREATS (-)  |  |
| Transgender individuals are subject to discrimination based on gender identity                     | Transgender individuals might receive no professional services from medical professionals and risk by self-medicating                    |
| Intersex children might be subject to invasive medical procedures without informed consent         | LGBTI+ identities are still highly pathologized, so LGBTI+ people might be subject to unnecessary psychological or psychiatric treatment |

### 2.2.5. Exemplary from interviews related to Health

“In the hospital everyone will look up and react in case a transgender person would come. The medical staff would talk behind this person’s back”. (Healthcare professional).

“If an intersex baby is born I am sure that nobody will wait to perform medical procedures until he or she grows up”. (Healthcare professional).

## 2.3. Family

### 2.3.1. Needs mentioned by children to combat violence regarding sexual and gender diversity in the family sphere

One interviewee claimed that the main issues LGBTI+ children face in the family sphere are negative reactions by the family members. She claimed that when LGBTI+ children receive no support from parents, they tend to hide their sexual orientation and gender identity. Living in such isolation is very difficult for children and therefore they face many psychological issues. She claimed that their emotional support service frequently receive calls from LGBTI+ children who suffer negative emotions due to unacceptance by family members. Children also complain about being subject to bullying at schools and receiving no support by school staff.

Another interviewee also claimed that LGBTI+ children often do not receive support that they need. According to him, it is very difficult for a child to not be able to talk about their LGBTI+ identity. Children suffer in isolation and often have behavioral issues at school. According to interviewee, parents form a lot of expectations on how children should behave and when children cannot fulfill these expectations it places an emotional burden on children.

### 2.3.2. Good practices related to family to combat violence against LGBTI+ and gender non-conforming children

The interviewees listed emotional support helplines for children and youth as a good practice. In their opinion, these services compensate children the lack of support by parents and teachers.

Interviewees also claimed that there are some good examples when it comes to certain schools where LGBTI+ children are more supported. These schools invest more in anti-bullying programs.



54 percent of survey participants claimed that LGBTI+ children might not be out to their family members. 60 percent of respondents insisted that even out of closet LGBTI+ children might receive negative reactions by parents and family members. 42 percent of respondents claimed that children might be afraid to be rejected by parents and family members.

### 2.3.3. Training needs for professionals related to Families

Both interviewees claimed they have taken part in training on LGBTI+ issues. However, both professionals claimed they would like to take part in such training again.

80 percent of survey participants claimed that they have never taken part in a training on LGBTI+ issues. 45 percent of survey participants would like to take part in such training.

### 2.3.4. SWOT related to families in Lithuania

| STRENGTHS (+)  |  |
|--|--|
| Some parents and teachers support LGBTI+ children                                  | Emotional support services are available for LGBTI+ children   |
| Some schools are supportive of LGBTI+ children                                     | LGBTI+ children have access to information about their identity  |
| WEAKNESSES (-)   |  |
| Most parents do not support LGBTI+ children  | With no support from parents and school staff children are subject to isolation and emotional problems |
| LGBTI+ children might not be able to be out  | LGBTI+ children might face rejection or even lose their home when they come out to their parents       |
| OPPORTUNITIES (+)  |  |
| Emotional support services might collaborate more closely with family associations | NCOs could provide support for parents of LGBTI+ children  |
| Parents could form their own emotional support groups                              | LGBTI+ children are becoming more open about their identity  |
| THREATS (-)  |  |
| LGBTI+ children might feel isolated and depressed with no family support           | Emotional support helplines are the only form of support for LGBTI+ children                           |
| LGBTI+ children might become homeless with no family support                       | LGBTI+ children might suffer depression and have behavioral issues                                     |

### 2.3.5. Exemplary quotes from interviews related to family

“The access of information probably gives a lot more freedom to LGBTI+ children now, but at the same time I think it is important that adults give their support too” - staff member of emotional support hotline

“There may probably be a range of reactions from, say, acceptance, understanding to a certain degree of disapproval. Children feel that parents may not agree and they tend to hide things from them and it’s very hard to live like that” - staff member of emotional support hotline

## 2.4. Public spaces

### 2.4.1. Needs mentioned by children to combat violence regarding sexual and gender diversity in public spaces

One interviewee claimed that the most important problem LGBTI+ face is inability to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to their family members. According to her, LGBTI+ children are very cautious about the negative image of LGBTI+ people in Lithuanian society. She also claimed that LGBTI+ children might hide their identity at school as well.

Interviewee claimed that public officials have no specific knowledge about the needs of LGBTI+ children in the public sector.

Another interviewee insisted that public officials should be taught about acceptance of LGBTI+ children. According to her, children should be taught about LGBTI+ issues at school. She also noted that there is a need for public awareness on this issue.

### 2.4.2. Good practices related to public spaces to combat violence against LGBTI+ and gender non-conforming children

Both interviewees could not name any good practices related to public spaces to combat violence against LGBTI+ and gender non-conforming children. However, they noted that public spaces should implement projects, programs and activities aimed at combat violence against LGBTI+ and gender non-conforming children. They also claimed that public institutions should provide support and other services tailored specifically to LGBTI+ children.

According to survey participants, LGBTI+ children believe that social services are not for them (22 percent). 30 percent of respondents believe that LGBTI+ children are unaware of existing social services.





30 percent of survey participants claim that LGBTI+ services are not specialized for children. 32 percent of respondents also claim that there is a noticeable lack of adaptability in public spaces for LGBTI+ and gender non-conforming children.

### 2.4.3. Training needs for professionals re: public spaces

One interviewee claimed that she never took part in a training on LGBTI+ issues. She claimed that she would like to participate in such training.

Another interviewee claimed that she herself organizes such trainings.

### 2.4.4. SWOT related to public spaces in Lithuania

| STRENGTHS (+)   |   |
|---|---|
| Discrimination based on sexual orientation is banned in public spaces   | Public spaces are obliged to follow government regulations                                  |
| Public spaces might be open to trainings on LGBTI+ issues   | Public spaces provide many services to children   |
| WEAKNESSES (-)  |   |
| There are no mandatory trainings on LGBTI+ issues for public officials  | Public officials lack knowledge on specific needs of LGBTI+ children                        |
| There are no specific services provided by public bodies for LGBTI+ children  | Public bodies are reluctant to change   |
| OPPORTUNITIES (+)   |   |
| NGOs could cooperate with public spaces in organizing training on LGBT issues   | NGOs already have the knowledge that public officials could use                             |
| Public spaces could easily implement activities and programmes in order to counter discrimination against LGBTI+ children | Public spaces could provide services tailored to the needs of LGBTI+ children               |
| THREATS (-)   |   |
| LGBTI+ children might not receive services they need  | LGBTI+ children might think that nobody could help them                                     |
| LGBTI+ children might feel the lack of representation   | Transgender children might be discriminated based on their gender identity in public spaces |



### 2.4.5. Exemplary quotes from interviews

“We need changes. It is necessary to start from the younger generation, from school, in order for children to be educated and informed about it. We need to talk about diversity of people”. (Staff member of the Child’s Rights Ombudsperson).

“Public institutions need to organize trainings on LGBTI+ issues and the problems LGBTI+ children face”. (Employee of a public body).

## 2.5. Media

### 2.5.1. Needs mentioned by children to combat violence regarding sexual and gender diversity in the media

One participant of the interview claimed that the most important issue faced by LGBTI+ children is bullying. According to journalist, children do not receive any support by the school staff or the support they receive is inadequate. The headmasters at school always deny this problem. The journalist also noted, that LGBTI+ children often do not receive support from their parents as well. Interviewee shared her experience when dealing with LGBTI+ youth in their work. She claimed that when discussing their experience her interviewees are afraid to disclose their identity.

Another journalist who took part in the interview insisted that LGBTI+ children lack information about their identity and receive negative comments online. She also insisted that LGBTI+ children often feel lonely, because they do not receive support from teachers and parents. The interviewee claimed that it is very important to provide information on LGBTI+ issues at school.

### 2.5.2. Good practices related to the media to combat violence against LGBTI+ and gender non-conforming children

One interviewee claimed that her news portal is actively moderating their Facebook account. This news portal is deleting illegal comments so that LGBTI+ people are not subjected to them.

Both interviewees insisted that Lithuanian media is fighting discrimination faced by LGBTI+ community by preparing ethical articles, raising visibility of LGBTI+ community and raising awareness on the problems they face.



### 2.5.3. Training needs for media professionals

One journalist who took part in the interview said that she participated in LGBTI+ awareness training, organized by the National LGBTI+ rights organisation, and numerous other trainings on human rights issues.

Another journalist did not take part in any trainings, but she would like to participate in such training.

### 2.5.4. SWOT related to media in Lithuania

| STRENGTHS (+)  |   |
|--|---|
| Media is becoming more ethical when it comes to reporting on LGBTI+ issues   | Some media outlets actively moderate illegal hate speech comments   |
| Some media outlets are open to participate in LGBTI+ awareness trainings   | Media is becoming much more active when it comes to publishing articles on LGBTI+ issues  |
| WEAKNESSES (-)   |   |
| Journalists still lack knowledge on LGBTI+ issues and ethical reporting  | Some news outlets tend to sexualise and scandalise LGBTI+ issues in order to gain more readership   |
| There is only a handful of journalists who could be considered experts on LGBTI+ issues  | Some news outlets do not reflect the experiences of the LGBTI+ community when drafting articles   |
| OPPORTUNITIES (+)  |   |
| NGOs and news outlets could collaborate in organizing trainings on LGBTI+ awareness  | News outlets could prepare more articles on LGBTI+ celebrations and experiences   |
| News outlets could publish news drafted by experts from LGBTI+ human rights organizations  | News outlets could prepare more publications in order to raise awareness on issues faced by LGBTI+ youth  |
| THREATS (-)  |   |
| Since the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information is in place, news outlets could face fines for LGBTI+ content that is considered detrimental | Since the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information is in place, news outlets might limit their content on LGBTI+ issues to adults only |
| Some journalists might not be able to speak about LGBTI+ issues positively in case it does not reflect the official position by their news outlet  | Journalists might be tempted to sexualize and scandalize LGBTI+ issues in order to gain more readership   |

### 2.5.5. Exemplary quotes from interviews

“In schools it is a really sensitive problem when kids turn to psychologists at school, they do not necessarily react properly, children do not get the help they need and are advised to just close their eyes and ignore it or fight with the perpetrator”. (Journalist).

“Probably often people are afraid to talk. They want to tell their story, but they ask not to disclose personal information. They are afraid to speak openly” (Journalist).

## 3. Overall evaluation: tendencies and absences re: LGBTI+ children in Lithuania

LGBTI+ children in Lithuania face a variety of different challenges in 5 key spheres: school, health, family, public spaces and media.

### 3.1. School

For LGBTI+ children in Lithuania, school can be an unsafe place for a variety of reasons. When students feel unsafe or uncomfortable in school they may choose to avoid the particular areas or activities where they feel most unwelcome or may feel that they need to avoid attending school altogether. Thus, a hostile school climate impacts an LGBTI+ student’s ability to fully engage and participate in the school community. Feeling unsafe and uncomfortable at school can negatively affect the ability of students to succeed academically, particularly if it results in avoiding school or classes.

Homophobic, sexist, racist, and other types of biased language can create a hostile school environment for all students. Lithuanian society often imposes norms for what is considered appropriate expression of one’s gender. Those who express themselves in a manner considered to be atypical or contrary to norms may experience criticism, harassment, and sometimes violence. Hearing anti-LGBTI+ remarks in school can contribute to feeling unsafe at school and create a negative learning environment. However, direct experiences with harassment and assault may have even more serious consequences in the lives of LGBTI+ students. When harassment and assault occur in school, students may not always feel comfortable reporting these events to staff. Students may fear they will be blamed for the harassment or assault, or simply not be taken seriously.

All students deserve a space where they can safely learn. Yet, as demonstrated throughout this national report, LGBTI+ students are often denied these opportunities. LGBT students may not feel safe or comfortable at school, and as a response they may seek to avoid it, ultimately affecting their academic



opportunities. In addition, experiences of harassment may contribute to psychological trauma that impairs learning, even if physical harm is minimal. All of these negative experiences can contribute to decreased feelings of connectedness to school, and thus impair students' engagement at school.

Although all students deserve equal access to education, LGBTI+ students can face a variety of obstacles to academic success and opportunity. Given the hostile climates encountered by LGBTI+ students in Lithuania, it is understandable that some students could have poorer outcomes in school.

Being able to express one's identity is an important aspect of adolescent development. Youth who feel like they can express themselves freely are more likely to feel welcome in their schools. For LGBTI+ children specifically, being open about being LGBTI+ may not only enhance feelings of school belonging, but also contribute to positive well-being. Unfortunately, many LGBTI+ students in Lithuania may feel that they cannot publicly acknowledge or embrace their LGBTI+ identity.

Supportive teachers, principals, and other school staff serve as an important resource for LGBTI+ students. Being able to speak with a caring adult in school may have a significant positive impact on the school experiences for students, particularly those who feel marginalized or who experience harassment.

Having supportive teachers and school staff can have a positive effect on the educational experiences of any student, increasing student motivation to learn and positive engagement in school. Given that LGBTI+ students often feel unsafe and unwelcome in school, having access to supportive school personnel may be critical for creating better learning environments for LGBTI+ students.

Including LGBTI+-related issues in the curriculum in a positive manner may make LGBTI+ students feel like more valued members of the school community, and it may also promote more positive feelings about LGBTI+ issues and persons among their peers, thereby resulting in a more positive school climate for everyone.

### 3.2. Health

Healthcare professionals in Lithuania do not receive any training on LGBTI+ issues. Therefore, healthcare professionals are not aware about specific need of LGBTI+ persons and specially LGBTI+ children in healthcare. Lack of scientific knowledge and negative perceptions of LGBTI+ people in Lithuanian society contribute to pathologization of LGBTI+ identities.

Transgender, gender non-conforming and intersex children are particularly vulnerable in the healthcare sector as discrimination based on gender identity in Lithuania is legal. Transgender and gender non-conforming children may face degrading pathologization in healthcare as they could be sent to psychiatrists for no particular reason except being transgender or gender non-conforming. Intersex



babies in Lithuania are subject to invasive medical procedures with no informed consent of parents and the child.

Facing gender dysphoria children often feel depressed and have many psychological issues. With no support at home or at school, children can only rely on themselves or emotional support helplines who are helping them to deal with these issues. There are no legal medical means to help children who face gender dysphoria in Lithuania. Homosexual and bisexual children might also be subject to “conversion” therapies.

### 3.3. Family

As negative perceptions of LGBTI+ people are prevailing in Lithuania society, parents of LGBTI+ people in most cases do not support their LGBTI+ children. In this way, they contribute to social exclusion, pathologization and victimization of LGBTI+ child. With not support from their closest family members LGBTI+ children feel isolated and this has an impact on their mental health. LGBTI+ children feel that they cannot openly discuss their identity with their parents and other family members. When discussing these issues, parents of LGBTI+ children often do not accept their child’s identity and give advices, such as to hide their identity, that further impact their mental health

When having to deal with these negative issues children feel all alone. They suffer in isolation and often reach out to emotional support helplines which guarantee anonymity. In some cases when parents do not accept their LGBTI+ child, the conflict escalates up to the point that LGBTI+ children run away from home.

Parents of LGBTI+ children also feel that they have to deal with their child’s sexual orientation or gender identity alone. As negative stereotypes about LGBTI+ people prevail in Lithuanian society, parents receive no support from their family members or friends. Most often parents of LGBTI+ children do not know where to turn to for support and knowledge about LGBTI+ issues. In Lithuania only one group for parents of LGBTI+ children exist and most parents are still afraid to disclose their identity to strangers.

### 3.4. Public spaces

In most cases, employees of public spaces don’t have any trainings on LGBTI+ issues or human rights. As discussions on LGBTI+ human rights and specific needs of this group are still very moderate in public space, public institutions and bodies, with some exceptions, do not have any programmes, activities or projects aimed to counter discrimination of LGBTI+ people and LGBTI+ children in particular.

With no visibility of LGBTI+ people in public spaces, visitors of such spaces might feel like LGBTI+ people would not exist in Lithuanian society. Although Lithuanian NGOs carry out activities aimed to raise awareness on the specific issues faced by LGBTI+ people and LGBTI+ children, the Government does not



support such activities. Therefore, human rights NGOs have to constantly search for funding of their activities. In most cases, funding comes from EU or other sources.

Services provided by public spaces are in no way adapted to specific needs of LGBTI+ people or children. Therefore, when applying for such services, LGBTI+ individuals might be discriminated against or feel that their needs are not reflected at all. As LGBTI+ families are not recognized in Lithuania, they not might be able to use any public services for families.

### 3.5. Media

Lithuania is amongst countries where anti-LGBTI+ propaganda law is in place, severely limiting possibilities to gather, organize and take part in public and community events, and access information. Therefore, the anti-LGBTI+ propaganda law is used to further discrimination, with chilling effects on LGBTI+ people, mostly under the pretext of protecting the wellbeing and healthy development of children.

Article 4.2.16 of the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information stipulates that *“public information shall be attributed to information which has a detrimental effect on minors [...] which expresses contempt for family values, encourages the concept of entry into a marriage and creation of a family other than stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania and the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania”*. In the period between 2013 and 2014 the provision in question was applied on three different occasions with the view of interfering with the right to freedom of expression of LGBTI+ persons.

While the law does not explicitly outlaw positive imagery of LGBT, the implementation of the law speaks the contrary. For instance, in the period between 2013 and 2014 alone, the Law was applied on three different occasions with the view of censoring LGBT-related public information thus directly interfered with the right to freedom of expression of LGBT persons. In 2013, public broadcast of the promotional videos for Baltic Pride 2013 was limited by state-run Lithuanian Radio and Television (LRT) board. The decision which, as a state-sponsored Lithuanian Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics (IJE) ruled to have not been in violation of any laws was grounded in the protection of minors and the airing of the ads was limited to late-evening hours only.

The application of this law with the view of censoring LGBT+ related public information has caused a chilling effect among the online media outlets, as they have started branding news items pertaining to LGBTI+ issues as suitable only for adults. It can be concluded that the limited positive information about LGBTI+ issues in the public sphere further reinforces a socially hostile atmosphere for LGBTI+ people in Lithuania.





There are many TV shows and films including LGBTI+ roles shown on Lithuanian televisions. However, these shows are not created in Lithuania. There are no Lithuanian TV shows including an LGBTI+ role.

Therefore, LGBTI+ children are highly unrepresented in Lithuanian media. Although the Lithuanian media is getting more active and ethical when it comes LGBTI+ issues, there are only some journalists in Lithuania who publish articles on the problems that LGBTI+ children face: coming out, bullying, rejection by parents, receiving no support and homelessness.

However, the Lithuanian media outlets are becoming more open when it comes to raising its awareness on LGBTI+ issues. In Summer, 2019 LGL organized 3 LGBTI+ sensitivity trainings for the employees of the Lithuanian National Radio and Television, news portal 15min.lt and the most popular magazine "People".





# Diversity and Childhood

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