

Diversity *and* Childhood

Position Paper



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Partners

UNIVERSITAT DE GIRONA – Spain

UNIVERSITAT AUTONOMA DE BARCELONA – Spain

KMOP – Greece

TOWARZYSTWO EDUKACJI ANTYDYSKRYMINACYJNEJ – Poland

ZAGREB PRIDE UDRUGE – Croatia

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI – Slovenia

CENTRO DE ESTUDOS SOCIAIS – Portugal

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CAVARIA VZW – Belgium

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1. Introduction

The project Diversity and Childhood (DaC) is an EU funded project which started on October 1st, 2019 and finished on September 30th 2021. Its main aim was to address violence against LGBTI and gender non-conforming children, particularly in a context where children's views and experiences are often overlooked. It did so by looking at children's lives through a broad lens, which is the reason why the project focused on five spheres of children's lives: health, education, family, public space, and media.

The DaC project has been applied in 9 different countries by 10 different project partners: in Belgium (by Çavaria), in Croatia (by Zagreb Pride), in Greece (by KMOP), in Hungary (by the Hátter Society), in Lithuania (by the Lithuanian Gay League), in Poland (by Lambda Warsaw), in Portugal (by CES-UC), in Slovenia (by the Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana), and in Spain (by the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the University of Girona, as project coordinator).

2. Implementation of the project

The project was implemented in four different stages. Stage 1 focused on a needs assessment of violence and well-being of LGBTI+ children, aiming at getting to know specific matters regarding all five spheres of life in each participant country. As part of the needs assessment, 116 stakeholders were interviewed in all participating countries about the project's areas of interest. Also, we carried out a survey, which received 634 responses from all participating countries. Finally, we implemented seven workshops with children to gather the understanding of children in matters of gender expression, gender identity, and sexual orientation; this brought children to the centre of the discussion as stakeholders. We implemented one workshop per participant country, except in Hungary and Lithuania, where national laws do not permit this. A grand total of 98 children participated in the workshops.

All these actions were key to the elaboration of 9 national reports on violence against LGBTI+ children -one per country-, a comparative analysis on violence against LGBTI+ children, and a collection of good

practices. All these documents can be found on the project website¹. These reports were the basis upon which the following stages were built.

Stage 2 of the project included the development of two different types of informative materials for professionals. The aim, here, was to sensitise children and professionals as well as raise awareness about violence against LGBTI+ children.

To this end, we created an interactive app for children and a handbook for professionals. The app is available in 10 EU languages, available for both Android and iPhone, and downloadable for free at the Google Play Store² and the Apple App Store³. When users open the app, they can choose their age group (6-10, 11-14, or 15-18), in order to receive tailored content. Once the age is chosen, the user finds a series of Q&A about sexual and gender diversity. These Q&A stemmed from workshop I and which were tested during workshop II.

The handbook for professionals is entitled “How to Prevent and Combat Violence Against LGBTI+ and Gender Non-Conforming Children and Youth”. It has been translated to 10 EU languages - including English. The handbook includes an introductory chapter, an extended glossary, a chapter on violence against LGBTI+ children, a chapter on inclusive representation, a chapter on good practices to support LGBTI+ children, a chapter on steps towards supporting LGBTI+ children, and finally a national list of resources - adapted for each participant country - and a list of international resources. It can be found in the DaC webpage⁴.

¹ Access to national and transnational reports: <https://www.diversityandchildhood.eu/handbook>

² Link to the APP in Google Play Store: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.diversity.app&hl=es&gl=US>

³ Link to the APP in the Apple App Store: <https://apps.apple.com/do/app/diversity-and-childhood/id1577170662>

⁴ Link to the handbook in 10 languages: <https://www.diversityandchildhood.eu/handbook>

In order to provide tools for trainers working with children, we also included a pool of activities for training professionals on preventing and combating violence against LGBTI+ children⁵.

Stage 3 of the project focused on providing professionals and stakeholders with the necessary tools to combat and prevent violence against LGBTI and gender non-conforming children. A grand total of 1,200 professionals were trained in small groups of approximately 20 participants at a time. The training sessions were originally planned to be face to face on-site, but due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions throughout the participant countries, the training sessions were mainly held online instead.

To ensure good quality of the implementation of the training sessions, all trainers participated in a 'training for trainers' session. This training was also supposed to be on-site, but was eventually held online. This course was very useful as the trainers studied skills and were given tools to provide engaging online training. Based on the evaluation forms, filled out by the professionals who participated in the training sessions, the training was engaging and largely met their teaching aims.

This third stage also included a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), which took place online between June 21st and July 18th. A total of 305 participants enrolled in the course. Participants could follow the course at their own pace, within the course timeline. The development of the course was split between academic partners (CES-UC, UAB, UoL, and coordinated by the UdG). Each partner developed a course module and students had a week to finalise each module. The MOOC consisted of the following modules; Module 1: "Introduction to sexual and gender diversity in childhood, paying attention to terminology and main theoretical perspectives on sexual and gender diversity." Module 2: "Analysis of violence against LGBTI+ children and youth and intersectional overviews of violence." Module 3: "Context of violence against LGBTI+ children and youth and opportunities for empowerment." Module 4: "Assisting LGBTI+ children and youth."

⁵ Link to the training activities proposal: <https://www.diversityandchildhood.eu/training-and-workshop-modules>

Stage 4 of the project dealt with raising awareness and the dissemination of the project. As such, we created Facebook and Twitter accounts ⁶, as well as several awareness raising videos, to be circulated on the aforementioned social media platforms. We also created a project website, which is a platform to share all project outputs and publications, as well as an introduction to the project and the partners. Social media accounts and the website were updated with news about the progress of the project, events, news articles related to violence against LGBTI+ children, and international days of importance to the project, among other items.

Besides online media, the project was also disseminated through scientific dissemination of the project's results. All university partners contributed to it by creating 3 scientific outputs, including papers presented at scientific conferences, scientific articles submitted, and the creation of a co-edited book that will be published by Routledge on 2022.

3. Results of the project: an overview

The main results of the DaC project have highlighted important differences between participant countries, both legal and social. Legal disparities are directly due to the existence or lack of laws aimed at protecting LGBTI people -including children- and laws that complicate the lives of LGBTI people -also including children. Some participating countries –Belgium, Greece, Portugal, and Spain– have laws that legally protect the rights of LGBTI-people. On the other hand, Lithuania, Hungary, and Poland have certain laws and public policies in place that are directly aimed at limiting the liberties and rights of LGBTI people. Finally, Croatia and Slovenia are in a middle ground in relation to the other participant countries, with some legal recognition for LGBTI people, but also with less legal protection. However, when looking at the everyday work of professionals who work with children, we were able to see that there is growing interest in learning how to take sexual and gender diversity into account in a better way.

⁶ Link to Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/diversityandchildhood> and Twitter account: https://twitter.com/Childhood_LGBTI.

While Belgium, Portugal, and Spain appear to have a broader and more inclusive legal framework, research within the DaC project noted that legal recognition does not always translate into effective social measures to prevent and combat violence against LGBTI and gender non-conforming children.

As for the political context, we observed that there have been significant changes in participant countries over the last two decades. These changes include the possibility of same-sex marriage and parenthood in some of them, as well as the continuous work from social movements that, in some countries, has led to wider acceptance and visibility of LGBTI issues. Nevertheless, certain parts of the EU, including some of the participant countries, seem to be particularly hit by the rise of far-right movements who consider gender equality as one of their main targets. As a result, Gender Studies departments have been shut down and political measures aimed at advancing gender and sexual diversity have been banned.

Based on fieldwork, the DaC project carried out analysis on the 5 project areas –education, health, family, public space, and media, which are addressed in the national analysis, the comparative analysis, and the collection of good practices. Results are split into project areas below.

The area of “Education” in general showed a need for recognition and safety. Related to this, we also identified a need for representation and role-models, as textbooks and teaching curricula are often not representative with regard to sexual and gender diversity. This is directly related to the need for self-acceptance and support, since in educational environments, both peers and adults have a very strong impact on children’s self-esteem.

In the area of “Health”, we found the need to value diversity as a positive thing in the health care system, so it can be taken into consideration by health professionals.

The need for healthcare environments to be safe spaces was also pointed out. This has to do with the need to recognise the experiences of LGBTI+ children, to place them at the centre of their clinical processes, and to let them speak for themselves. Finally, there is a need to create specific services with regard to gender and sexual diversity among children, with properly trained professionals.

As for the area of “Family”, the most important needs that were identified had to do with receiving support and acceptance within the family, receiving psycho-emotional support, and self-determination and respect for their own decisions. Furthermore, we also identified the need for public institutions and family services to get involved with LGBTI+ issues. Additionally, families also need to access training to widen their information and skills regarding sexual and gender diversity, and violence towards LGBTI+ children.

In the area of “Public Space”, the needs mostly had to do with an adult-centred perspective. It is key to rethink visibility strategies, so they make sense for children, to review the use of public space by children, and think about safe spaces and environments for children in the public space. Other needs established had to do with counteracting hegemonies in public spaces and expanding the available resources beyond urban spaces.

Finally, in the area of “Media”, we found needs related to the covering of LGBTI+ matters - specifically related to children - and creating visibility and awareness and disseminating useful information and resources. Also, media has a key role in visibilising and normalising diversity, which is still identified as a need because it is currently not being covered.

Additionally, regarding the analysis of the specific areas, the undertaking of the 9 national analyses resulted in the identification of a series of shared features among all of them. Firstly, common encouraging features. These include the increase of visibility of LGBTI+ children, as well as a general recognition among professionals that they have specific needs. Concerned professionals are increasingly more aware of diversity or sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, and more resources are available to them. Also, professionals generally recognise their own lack of training in relation to LGBTI+ issues.

Secondly, common alarming features. There is a general worry about unequal territorial distribution of services and the existing support for LGBTI+ children, which at the moment consists of universal access to social protection. In the same vein, in most countries there are no specific services for trans children. There is also a general lack of awareness among professionals in the public sphere that their



role is essential to prevent and combat violence against LGBTI+ children. Also, in some of the participant countries there is still a need for social awareness – albeit different issues in different countries -, and a need for debate on public space and hate crimes.

Finally, common urgent measures. These include the need to review professional practices aimed at children, to undertake work at a community level, to involve media professionals, and to include LGBTI+ themes in school curricula. Also, public bodies must take a position at the forefront of defending children’s rights and liberties, including being able to live free of anti-LGBTI violence. At the level of professionals, working together in a cohesive manner among different services would greatly improve the response to anti-LGBTI violence towards children.

The project Diversity and Childhood is now in its final months of implementation. Even though there have been difficulties along the way, mostly related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the strength and professionalism of the consortium have been able to push the project through. The results are now becoming visible, and as most training sessions have finished and training and materials for spreading awareness are finalised, the impact of the project can be better assessed.

4. Recommendations

- Raising awareness for professionals that work with children to get trained on the specificities of LGBTI+, as well as how to combat violence against LGTBI+ children.
- Creating a pool of good practices in all spheres of life that all professionals in Europe can access.
- Creating a mandatory curriculum on diversity of sexual, gender, and sexual characters for professionals that work with children across Europe in several fields such as education, health, or law enforcement, among others.
- Creating spaces of discussion for children and teenagers, where they can properly address the matters that concern them.
- Promoting positive discourse about diversity among children, including media.
- Creating mandatory legal recognition of children’s gender.

- Promoting a well-being of children in family spheres, supporting families and providing tools for family context.
- Allocating EU funding to small-scale projects that are directed at fighting violence against LGBTI+ children and promoting diversity.
- Making it mandatory for institutions that receive EU funding to have a protocol on how to address violence against LGBTI+ people, including children.





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