My ID Newsletter

Number 5
May 2021

This is the fifth newsletter of the SENSE-My-ID project. The project aimed to integrate sensitivity for sexual diversity (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex – LGBTI - issues) in vocational training.

The project ran from January 2019 until May 2021. Products were prepared in 2019 and piloted in 2019-2020. In this newsletter we report on the final discussions about the project.

Content

European experts call for wider LGBTIQ participation in EU projects
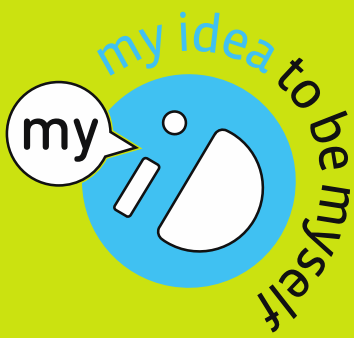
The final online expert meeting of SENSE was organized by Valentina Chanina of EfVET. Peter Dankmeijer, director of GALE and project coordinator, said he was proud to be able to chair this expert meeting, which is - as far as we know - the first international discussion on sexual and gender diversity in vocational education.

Student videoclips

The meeting started with a screening of the four trigger videos made by the students. The videoclips can be watched on YouTube:

- EUROTraining: https://youtu.be/U9Fj_pNXZGw
- ROC van Amsterdam: https://youtu.be/hN1NLuRW4Uo
- Fra Luca Pacioli: https://youtu.be/vGSS4Jc8aso
- Euroform: https://youtu.be/SwksOsJKLk0

The power of storytelling

Pete Chatzimichail, a board member of the European Youth Forum, spoke about how testimonials and storytelling are powerful tools for education.
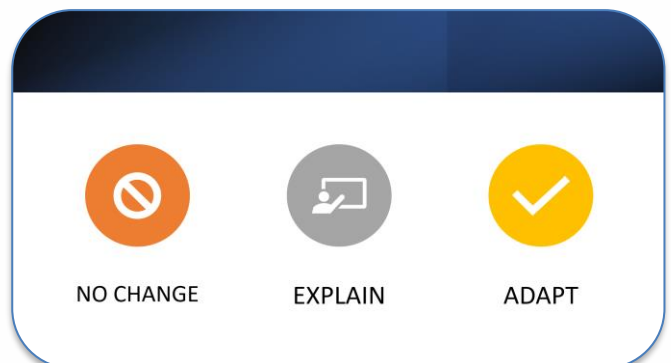

Image: Pete Chatzimichail

He said sharing stories about LGBTI issues works in two ways: for the storyteller it works cleansing when you can tell your story in a safe space. For the listeners, it creates an understanding which goes deeper than just reading information. In good storytelling about LGBTI issues, the audience also has responsibility. They have to prepare for the session and to be properly introduced to the subject. Otherwise, there is a risk that they will be shocked by the newness of what they hear, and that they close down. In school, it is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure such preparation is done.
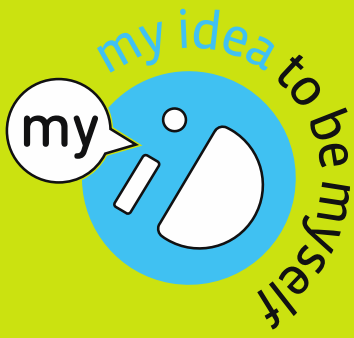

Discussions on desirable competences

After a break, the participants were divided in breakout rooms and discussed 3 statements. The first statement proposed we don't need any changes in national qualification frameworks, because the current frameworks are adequate enough to cover sensitivity for LGBTI issues. The second statement maintained that current qualification frameworks are okay but could be supplemented with a clarification on how to make them sensitive for LGBTI issues. This is the level of change we chose in this project. The last statement went one step further and claimed that we should explicitly include LGBTI friendliness in renewed formal qualification frameworks.

In the plenary reporting, it became clear that it is difficult to assess the European value of competence frameworks. VET qualifications are different in each country. Even within countries, VET institutions can have different competence expectations of their students.

It was also noted is that sex education is not adequately integrated in the VET curriculum, and even when it is, it is often too technical and does not focus on social and emotional aspects.
Also, in a wider sense, many vocational courses focus on knowledge or technical skills. But emotional intelligence is increasingly important as a transversal skill in any job. This remains a challenge: teachers and VET managers often consider emotional and

social competences of a lower status then technical skills.

The importance of teacher training was stressed. And it was argued that most training on LGBTI issues remains voluntary, which means that only interested teachers get trained. Maybe training should not be up to individual teachers, but be a mandatory upgrade of their professionality.

Policy debate

After the breakout discussions sessions with participants, the meeting turned to a panel of experts, featuring Fabrizio Boldrini as moderator and as speakers Marc Angel (Member of the European Parliament and co-chair of the LGBT Intergroup), Rubén Ávila Rodríguez (International LGBTQI Youth & Student Organisation IGLYO), Paolo Antonelli (Italian expert on LGBTI rights and Professor at the School of Psychology in the Department of Health Sciences of the University of Florence), Aron le Fèvre (Director of Human Rights at Copenhagen 2021 WorldPride & EuroGames).

Image: Marc Angel

Marc Angel noted it is a shame that some European member states block the adoption of a horizontal directive (forbidding discrimination in the area of sexual orientation and gender identity across

sectors, not only in employment as currently is the case). Another point he wants to make is that it should be made easy for trans and intersex people to get a new diploma with the appropriate gender when they want.
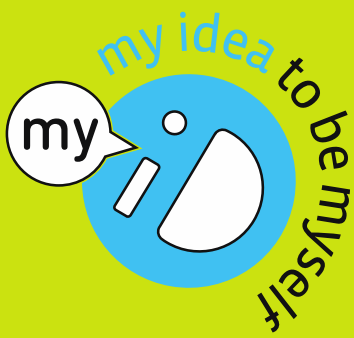
The audience asked the speakers suggestions for future directions of Erasmus+ and other European projects. It was suggested to write the project proposals and products in easier language to get a wider audience among people who are not used to advocacy, political or academic jargon, and to have enough attention for what will happen after the project, the sustainability of the results.

Image: Rubén Ávila

All speakers backed the wish of Rubén Ávila that LGBTIQ young people should be involved in meetings and projects as full partners, and not only as tokens. Paolo Antonelli and Aron le Fèvre added that it would be good to also include teachers, parents and LGBTI advocates as full partners in projects and policies.

The suggestion that countries should consider making teacher training on LGBTIQ issues mandatory was also found interesting by most speakers. At the least projects should look at the sustainability of teacher trainings they develop.

19% of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, 35% of trans people and 32% of intersex people felt **discriminated against at work** in the previous year.

46% of LGBTI people are **never open** to medical staff or healthcare providers **about being LGBTI**.

51% of intersex and 48% of trans persons, 35% of lesbians and 31% of gay men live in households that have **difficulties making ends meet**.

#Union of Equality: the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy

"I will not rest when it comes to building a Union of equality. A Union where you can be who you are and love who you want – without fear of recrimination or discrimination. Because being yourself is not your ideology. It's your identity. And no-one can ever take it away." This is what Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, said in her State of the Union for 2020.

Image: Ursula von der Leyen, State of the Union 2020

That same year, the EU issued a key policy document: the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025. This is the "roadmap" LGBTIQ activists in Europe have long called for.
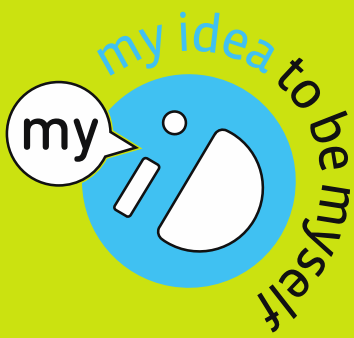
Although before this document, LGBTIQ citizens were named here and there in policy documents, this is the first integral LGBTI formal policy to frame systemic future initiatives.

Discrimination persists

Discrimination against LGBTIQ people persists throughout the EU. For many LGBTIQ people, it is still unsafe to show affection publicly, to be open about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, to simply be themselves without feeling to be threatened. An important number of LGBTIQ people are also at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Not all feel safe to report verbal abuses and physical violence in school or to police.

LGBTIQ people's everyday experience varies significantly across the EU. Although the average social acceptance of LGBTI people rose from 71% in 2015 to 76% in 2019, it actually went down in nine Member States. The Strategy states clearly that LGBTIQ people are abused as scapegoats in political discourse, including during election campaigns. Resolutions on a 'zone free from LGBT' aim to deny fundamental rights and freedoms to the LGBTIQ community. The labelling of LGBTIQ as an 'ideology' is spreading in online and offline communication and the same is true with regard to ongoing campaigning against the so-called 'gender ideology'. It says:

"LGBTIQ-free zones are humanity free zones, and they have no place in our Union".
It is also clear that Covid-19 and an additional severe impact on LGBTIQ people.

Four pillars

The Strategy follows calls for action by Member States, the European Parliament and has the strong support from the Intergroup for LGBTI Rights and civil society. It sets out a series of targeted actions across four pillars:

1. Tackling discrimination against LGBTIQ people;
2. Ensuring LGBTIQ people's safety;
3. Building LGBTIQ inclusive societies; and
4. Leading the call for LGBTIQ equality around the world.

The education domain is not an area the EU can make directives for; the Member States agree that the content of education is a decentralized responsibility. But at the same time, the European commission does have the right to take measures in the area of combating violence, and promoting equality and health. This makes it possible to include LGBTIQ issues in for example the European ESF program to improve employment possibilities, into Erasmus+ projects that promote the quality and inclusiveness of education and in a range of other funding programs. The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy implies that sexual and gender diversity is now a standard priority in all these funding programs.

Addressing stereotypes

Although the European Union does not make general directives for education, it can promote exchange of good practices among member states. A new expert group developing proposals for supportive learning environments will address

gender stereotypes, bullying and sexual harassment. In addition, the Commission's upcoming comprehensive Strategy for the Rights of the Child, will ensure indiscriminate access to rights, protection and services also for LGBTIQ children.
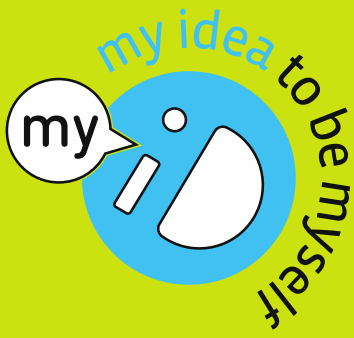

Image: poster from a Swiss LGBT school campaign, 2007

LGBTIQ young people

Young people play a critical role in building inclusive societies. Together with the Member States, the Commission collected their opinion through the EU youth dialogue process, which led to 11 European youth goals that call (among other things) for the equality of all genders and for inclusive societies. These youth goals reflect young European's views and present a vision for a Europe that enables them to realize their full potential, while helping to reduce the obstacles that prevent those with fewer opportunities from participating in the social and economic life.

Source: European Commission (2020). Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025. COM(2020) 698 final. Brussels: European Commission

New EU Strategy on the rights of the child complements the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy

In March 2021, the European Commission published the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. It strongly complements the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025, committing to clear actions to end intersex genital mutilation, tackle online bullying of LGBTI youth, and improve free movement for rainbow families.

Promoting the rights of the child is a core objective of the EU. It aims to build the best possible life for children in the EU and across the globe. Here are the three key points of the strategy that focus on LGBTI kids.

Intersex mutilation

The Strategy acknowledges the similarities between intersex genital mutilation and female genital mutilation. Intersex genial mutilation (IGM) and female genital mutilation (FGM) have a lot in common. 62% of intersex people who had undergone a surgery said neither they nor their parents gave fully informed consent before medical treatment or intervention to modify their sex characteristics. The EC will support the exchange of good practices on ending non-vital surgery and medical intervention on intersex infants and adolescents to make them fit the typical definition of male or female without their or their parents' fully informed consent (IGM).

Cyber harassment of LGBTI children
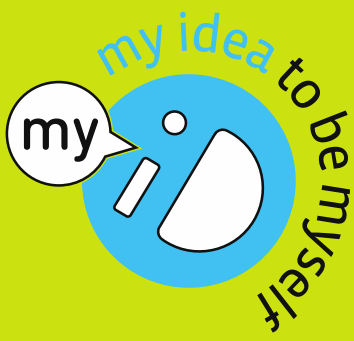
According to the 2018 PISA results children from minorities encounter upsetting events online more frequently then other children. The latest FRA survey on LGBTI people in the EU shows that amongst LGBTI 15–17 years old respondents, 15% have experienced cyber harassment due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics. The EC will update the Better Internet for Kids Strategy in 2022 in order to raise awareness of and build capacity around cyberbullying, recognize mis- and disinformation, and promote healthy and responsible behavior online.

Freedom to move of rainbow families

The Strategy will improve freedom of movement for rainbow families. Although freedom of movement is of prime importance in the EU, rainbow families cannot always enjoy it. For example, a baby with two mothers is currently at risk of statelessness because of discriminatory regulations in one EU country. The EC proposes a horizontal legislative initiative for 2022 to support the mutual recognition of parenthood between EU countries.

Sources: ILGA Europe Rainbow Digest March 2021, EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, ILGA Europe Blog on the EU policy, EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025.
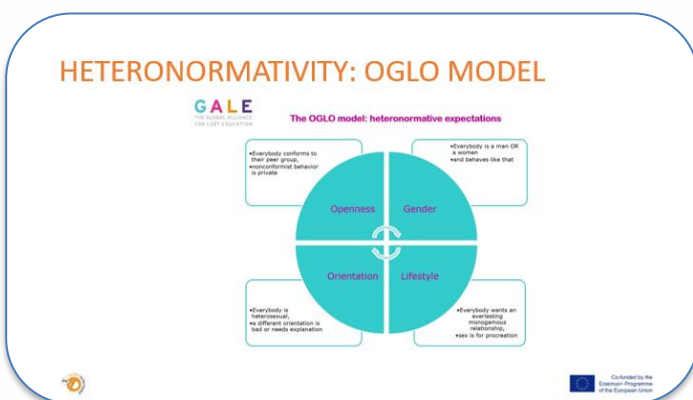
The "My-ID" teaching methodology

The SENSE project developed the innovative "My-ID" teaching technology. "My-ID" has a focus on LGBTI (sexual and gender diversity), but in its treatment of the topic LGBTI it goes beyond "knowledge" about LGBTI and "visibility". The technology identifies basic averse emotions towards difference as the key challenge, especially when such differences challenge existing values and norms. The My-ID technology is a "deep diversity" approach: how to deal with fight or flight emotions. It makes a link between generic exclusion mechanisms and specific LGBTI exclusion.
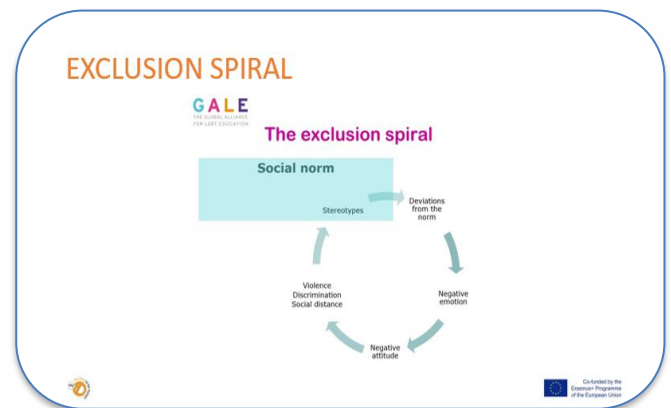
Heteronormativity

To explain heteronormativity, My-ID uses the OGLO model. OGLO stands for openness, gender, lifestyle and orientation.

These labels stand for expectations and norms: everybody is expected to conform to their own peer group culture and to hide aspects that are different from that (sub)culture (openness), everybody is expected to be male or female and to fulfill their role as such (gender), everybody is expected to have a romantic, everlasting and monogamous relationship with someone of the opposite sex (lifestyle), and
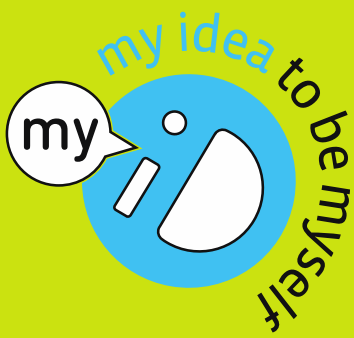
everybody is expected to be heterosexual until it is proven otherwise, and in that case non-heterosexuals are often asked to explain or defend their sexual orientation (orientation).

The exclusion spiral

To explain how the social exclusion process works in practice, My-ID uses the model of the exclusion spiral. The spiral describes how social norms and expectations can lead to negative emotional responses to expressions that do not conform to the norm or to expectations. These negative emotions, or *fight or flight* responses, are hardwired and a natural instinct. It is not healthy to ignore them or suppress them, but at the same time they need to be handled in an adult way to prevent undesirable and discriminatory consequences. This handling of your own and others' emotions is the key to the My-ID technology, which in school, is mainly done through immediate pedagogic action in response to averse emotions.

When negative emotions are allowed or even rewarded, they are "covered up" with cognitive arguments and this mix of emotions and arguments is called an attitude. Attitudes are more stable than volatile emotions. Contrary to what some teachers think, negative attitudes *can* be influenced in school, but this cannot be done in a single topic lesson. It requires a spiral curriculum in which the students are coached to explore their own values and norms

and to gradually redevelop them in a more open and positive way.
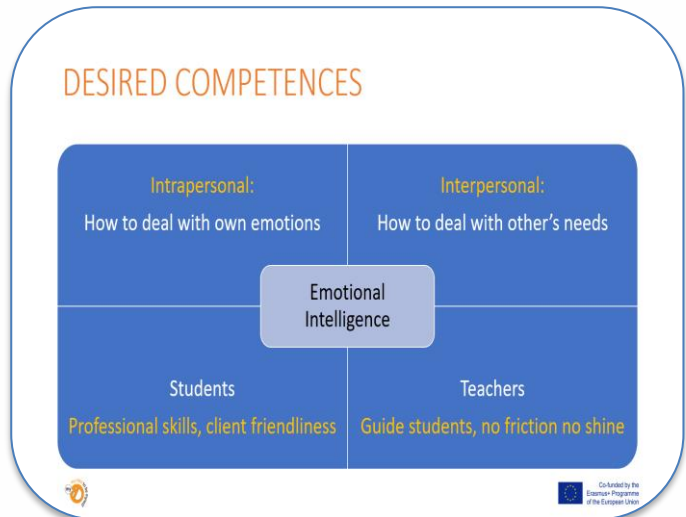
Negative attitudes commonly lead to negative behavior. In terms of homophobia or transphobia, we often think of rather crude forms of violence or exclusion, but the most common form of negative behavior is "taking distance". We prefer not to associate with people who are different from ourselves, and in cases where we are pretty irritated about other races, cultures or lifestyles, we tend to ignore or block information about them. Negative behavior can also be influenced by school by creating rules about prosocial behavior and agreeing on them with the students - not only prescribing them. In the curriculum, cooperation between students also helps to create relations with a social nearness rather than a social distance, it helps to develop skills of relating to other people in well-mannered and even welcoming and curious way. These are basic diversity skills.

Social distance creates a situation in which we don't know the other very well, and because we only perceive the others from a distance, we form stereotypes. Stereotypes in turn, lead to the impression that marginalized people fall outside the norm. This starts the negative emotion again. Schools can combat stereotypes by explicitly giving attention to a wide variety of people, races, cultures and lifestyles. In their pedagogy and curriculum, they can note stereotypes and discuss with students to what extent stereotypes are based on realities and to what extent they are exaggerated and unproductive.
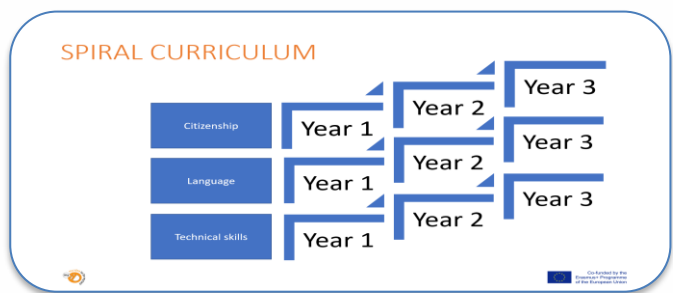
The need for a spiral curriculum

The SENSE project developed a series of competences for students and teachers which are supposed to lead to a higher level of emotional intelligence, and in the practice in vocational

education to an increased client-friendliness and awareness of diversity among clients.
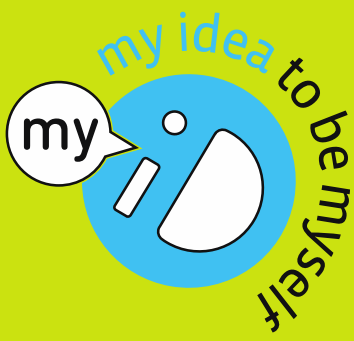

The SENSE competence framework is divided in intrapersonal and interpersonal competences, and are applied to both students (as preparation on job skills) and to teachers (to be able to guide the skill development in students). The SENSE framework explains how generic skills are relevant for LGBTIQ customers or clients and gives examples of how to implement them. However, it remains a discussion whether a set of specific skills need to be described.

It is clear that such competences require a spiral curriculum to develop improperly during the lifetime of vocational education course. In the SENSE project this was done by developing a spiral curriculum which extends over the two or three years vocational courses take, and describe what needs to happen in the level of goals and on the level of concrete classroom activities in the different subjects of the curriculum, like citizenship, language and technical skills.

Good practice: a Dutch VET Institutional strategy

On 18 May, the Amsterdam Institute for vocational training ROC van Amsterdam presented her LGBTIQ strategy. Although the ROC already had LGBTIQ policy before, the SENSE project helped focus and expand it. Especially the new LGBTIQ youth participation aspects were new and experienced as very positive.

The GIN-GEN website

Students of the ROC of Amsterdam have created a website about sexual diversity in vocational education: GIN-GEN.com. The website gives students the opportunity to ask questions, and a team of students behind the website answer these questions themselves. Students showed the introduction video to the GIN-GEN site. The name "GIN-GEN" is inspired by the words "ginger" and "generation". "Ginger" refers to the ginger or gender bread puppet, which is used by many young people to explain the difference between sex, gender, gender expression and sexual orientation. This is the generation of young people who do not want to conflate prejudices about gender and sexual orientation.

The students explained that the questions that appear on the website are not only intended to answer, but also as a reason for teachers to discuss sexual diversity. In the Naaldwijk location of the ROC in Amsterdam, there is a large rainbow-colored letterbox in which students can also deposit questions.
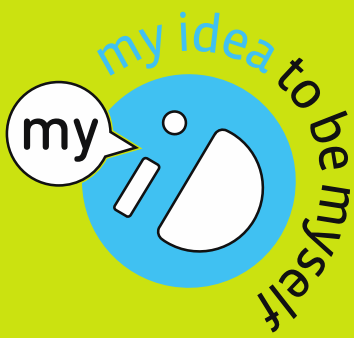

The students and their teacher Nathan think that the demand-driven approach to the letterbox and the website is more accessible than simply addressing the subject in a top-down informative lesson.

Three-pronged institutional strategy

Nathan van der Hooft, the teacher who supervised the project, was very happy about the peer participation aspect of the project. But he pointed out that the strategy of the project is actually threefold:

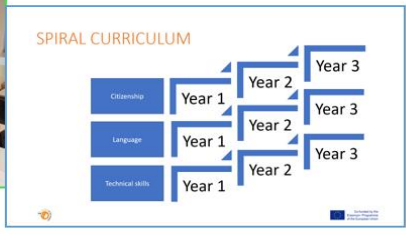1. The website offers the possibility to ask questions and provide answers.

2. The teacher training. He mentioned that for him, the training was an eye-opener to understand that discrimination comes from somewhere and then you can deal with it with more understanding - instead of just rejecting it.

3. The spiral curriculum. Ater the training, a continuous learning pathway has been developed to integrate sexual diversity sensitivity in the subject of citizenship (a generic subject all students have to take), which can also be used more widely throughout the institute.
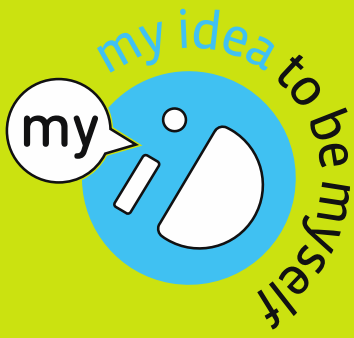
Mainstreaming

During the final online mini-conference of the SENSE project, various managers from ROC van Amsterdam took part in a panel discussion. They said mainstreaming initiatives are underway to tackle LGBTIQ sensitivity more broadly in collaboration with student councils of locations and the central student council, and with the LEC (Career Expertise Center). The idea is to use recruit students from all ROC divisions and locations for the GIN-GEN team. It was also suggested that sexual diversity should be more explicitly integrated by the ROC Central Working Group on Diversity. It should also be included in the long-term strategy.

Threats and how to deal with them

The participants also discussed how to deal with seriously polarized and blunt statements from students. In some branches of the ROC, differences in social class, cultures and religions make open dialogue about sexual en gender diversity extremely challenging. A question of the management was how to deal with such risks. Teacher Nathan van der Hooft sees several opportunities, based on the peer character of the project. The GIN-GEN website safeguards accessibility because the participating students remain anonymous. The website and the video have been deliberately made light-hearted to lower the threshold. Nathan hopes that the peer nature of the website, through which students exchange information and experiences with other students, will also lower the threshold. In addition, he thinks it is mainly a matter of gradually increasing the awareness of the website.

Products SENSE project

The SENSE project developed 4 products to secure optimal integration of sexual diversity sensitivity in social domain VET courses:

- **Discussion triggers made by students**. Manual on how to facilitate such a student participation proces: English, Greek, Italian, Spanish, Dutch. Here are the trigger videos students developed: ROC van Amsterdam (Netherlands, Amsterdam), Fra Luca Pacioli (Italy, Tuscany), Euroform (Italy, Sicily), EUROTraining (Greece, Athens). The Dutch students also developed a Question & Answer website for VET students: GIN-GEN.com
- **A teacher training**, which improves the pedagogic competences of VET teachers. **Training manual**: English, Greek, Italian, Spanish, Dutch; and a **background reader**: English, Greek, Italian, Spanish, Dutch.
- **A curriculum consultancy manual**, which provides guidance on how to structurally integrate sexual diversity sensitivity in a spiral course curriculum (English, Greek, Italian, Spanish, Dutch)
- **A competence framework**, which describes the needed diversity competences of VET students and which will function both as an underlying model for the other products, and as tool for discussion with the aim to improve the formal competence frameworks in the participating countries and regions. Framework for student's competences: English, Greek, Spanish, Italian, Dutch. Framework for teacher's competences: English, Greek, Spanish, Italian, Dutch.

The products without links are forthcoming: check out https://www.gale.info/en/projects/sense-project for updates.

What is gender and sexuality to you?

Colophon

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union