UNIQUE-Project
Policy Recommendations

INTERNATIONAL

1. Emotional intelligence
2. Visibility
3. Integration
4. Innovation

NATIONAL

1. Emotional intelligence
2. Visibility
3. Integration
4. Innovation

INSTITUTIONAL

1. Emotional intelligence
2. Visibility
3. Integration
4. Innovation

CLASSROOM

1. Emotional intelligence
2. Visibility
3. Integration
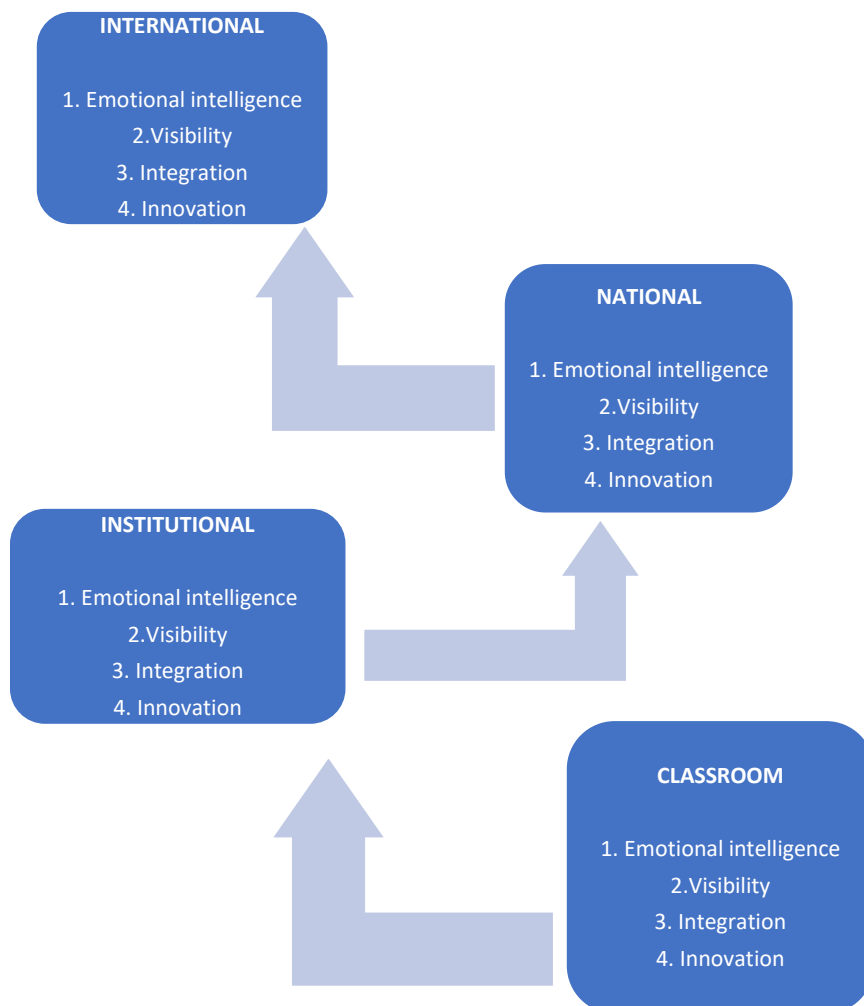4. Innovation

1. Executive summary

The UNIQUE project aimed to promote the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ learners in Vocational Education and Training (VET). VET teachers were trained as ambassadors for this cause and piloted training and implementation of activities in their institutions and countries. An international advocacy group developed a set of recommendations to help guide future projects and policies.

During the project we encountered a number of serious challenges and obstacles. The pilot countries are not among the most supportive countries in Europe for sexual and gender diversity[1], and the social and cultural context of a work was often hostile or indifferent. After careful consideration, the UNIQUE partnership identified four areas of contention. Rather than formulating a long series of concrete recommendations, we have chosen to discuss these four areas, which represent dilemmas that innovators will encounter when they engage in LGBTI+ inclusion in schools in general and specifically in vocational education.

The four areas are:

1. Emotional intelligence
   Rather than *informing* and *telling* students, teachers and other stakeholders on what to think and do, effective attitude change needs to be reached by developing emotional intelligence.

2. Visibility
   While the partnership agrees that representation and a degree of visibility is necessary to attain real inclusion, *feasible* implementation in VET requires a careful consideration of the type and degree of visibility that is workable and effective in each stage of implementation.

3. Integration
   Full inclusion of sexual and gender diversity in VET institutions requires going *beyond specific attention* and needs mainstreaming as a common subject among other topics.

4. Innovation strategy
   The knowledge among mainstream partners and LGBTIQ+ activists about adoption of innovation processes is limited. Making stakeholders aware of how gradual innovation works *as a process*, helps them to see and plan more realistically.

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[1] We use the term "sexual and gender diversity" to refer to the entire spectrum of diversities related to sexual orientation (lesbian, gay, bisexual and others), gender identity (transgender, non-binary and others) and sexual characteristics (intersex conditions).

2. Introduction

The UNIQUE project aimed to promote the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ learners in VET. This has been done by inviting international experts on LGBTIQ issues and convene them in an international Advocacy Working Group. The expert were trained during an international training in Amsterdam, they co-developed an international MOOC resource to train VET teachers and recruited and trained VET teachers to become UNIQUE ambassadors for this cause. During the pilot phase, the ambassadors experienced in practice how to further the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ learners in VET. This document is partly a report on their experiences.

The intention of the document is to make recommendations for future work on this topic. We aimed to classify the recommendations on both the concrete level of teaching in VET, as well as on the necessary supporting condition that are necessary on the team, school, national and European level.
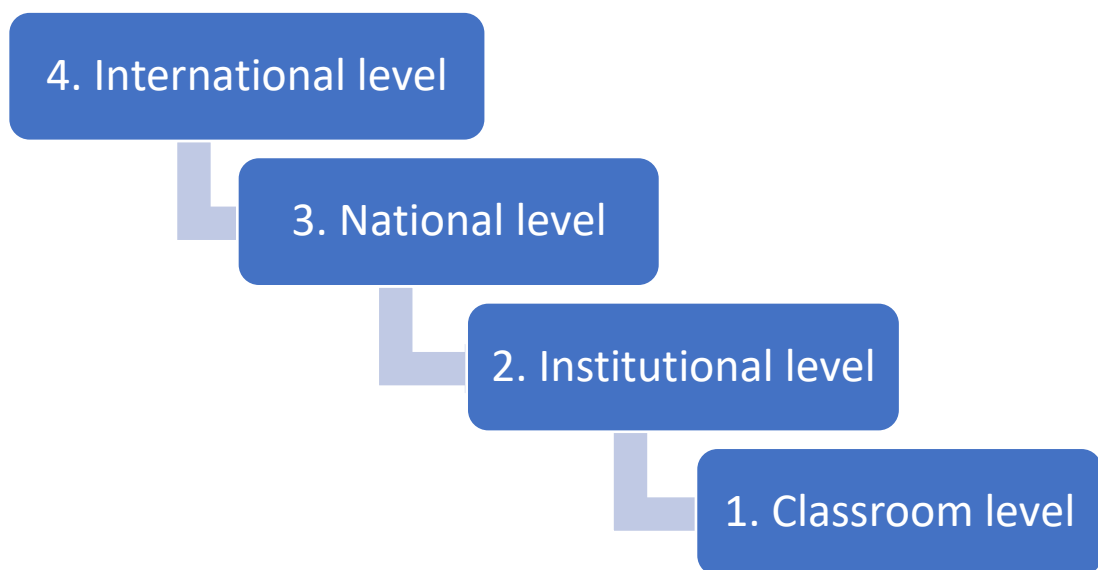
To support UNIQUE ambassadors in formulating concrete recommendations during the pilots in their institutions, we developed a "track sheet" to note good practices and suggestions.

Because most VET teacher don't have enough information to develop original recommendations on the national and European levels, we based draft recommendations on these levels on a literature study of relevant research and previous recommendations. Then we put these suggestions forward to VET teachers. In this way, we established a logical cascade of recommendations, in which recommendations for concrete activities in classes directly link to higher level recommendations.

Because we expected most ambassadors and members of the advocacy group don't have much time, we constructed a survey which allowed them to comment on the draft recommendations and make other recommendations.

In the past, a multitude of recommendations have been made to improve the situation of LGBTIQ+ students and to make schools safer for them. Likewise, the UNIQUE project participants came up with a range of suggestions for recommendations. Rather than to simply list all these recommendations in a complete compendium, we decided to make a summary to improve readability and usability. In this document, we limited the number of recommendations and focus on a logical framework that is less general and more focussed

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than previous recommendation documents. All the suggestions and more information about the development of the recommendations can be found in the Advocacy Working Group Report (output 6.3).

3. The recommendations

This chapter discusses the Policy Recommendations the UNIQUE project makes. Previous projects and researches have offered long lists of recommendations, some directly following project or research results, and some in a more generalized way like: "provide teacher training" and "provide LGBTIQ+ inclusive curricula" without going into what such general recommendations actually mean. The UNIQUE project wanted to make a next step in this and provide recommendations that together form a logical framework in which recommendations on different levels interact with each other and strengthen each other. We also were intent on basing our recommendations on the real needs on the classroom level and to make the recommendations feasible in the realities of our participating countries.

Cascade approach

To do this, we linked our recommendations to the "cascade approach" used in the project. Our fundament is to support what happens in the classroom. The next level is the VET institutional level, which needs to support LGBTIQ+ students and teachers to be safe and comfortable and to adequately integrate LGBTIQ+ sensitivity on the classroom level. The third level is the national (and local) level, which incorporates the political and cultural environment of VET institutions. The top level is the international and European level which may or may not influence the national policies and practices.

To make our framework more coherent, we have chosen to focus on 4 key issues. Each issue is repeated on each level, but filled in with how these key issues could be elaborated into concrete recommendations. The four key issues are (1) emotional intelligence, (2) visibility, (3) integration, and (4) innovation strategy.

Key issue 1: Emotional intelligence

In this project, we took care to link LGBTIQ+ needs like a specific need for tolerance and sensitivity toward sexual and gender identity with more general horizontal skills like emotional intelligence, being able to deal with diversity and client-friendliness. We did this because throughout the project we noticed considerable support for inclusiveness, but a bit more hesitance towards "diversity" and great hesitation to specifically mention sexual or gender diversity. This illustrates an incongruity on how students and teachers deal with inclusion. As the quote from Animal Farm (George Orwell) went: "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others." Somehow, LGBTIQ+ diversity is less acceptable than general diversity. Our basic goal is to eradicate this incongruity when working on inclusion. This can be done by focussing on the general skill to handle adverse emotions when confronted with diversity that is different from our own expectations. And to label this more specifically: to be able to handle alternatives to heteronormativity. This is the most basic red line we intend to capture throughout the 4 levels of our recommendations.

Key issue 2: Visibility

The most controversial point we encountered in the UNIQUE project pilot countries is visibility. Although we agree that some degree of "visibility" is necessary to make "integration" possible, certain levels and types of visibility make cisgender heterosexual students (and also adults and professionals) insecure. They may even feel that the "traditions" they value are being under attack, which gives their insecurity an angry political dimension. Our discussions on our online course, the realities of our pilots and the feedback on our draft recommendations made it abundantly clear that a *feasible* implementation strategy needs to negotiate different types and various levels of visibility to be successful. In our recommendations we offer suggestions, but do not give simple guidelines for types of visibility, because we are convinced that visibility depends on a proper risk-assessment and strategies on how to be visible should be tailored to each situation and be feasible to use by each implementing person. We acknowledge this this point of view may disappoint LGBTIQ+ activists who favour proper representation and who fear that teachers and other stakeholders may abuse this perspective by choosing too implicit messages. We encourage stakeholders not to fall into this trap of continuing the taboo. But we also recognize that the type and level of visibility needs to be tailored to real risks and opportunities.

Key issue 3: Integration

Our ultimate goal is not just visibility and representation. We think visibility is a tool towards the ultimate a goal to attain full inclusion of sexual and gender diversity in VET classes, institutions and policy. Visibility is an aspect of inclusion, but on its own, it is more a symbol than real integration. *Real* integration is including LGBTIQ+ visibility without making it "special". Heteronormativity is now considered the *norm* and therefore *normal*, but we would like to see that (currently) non-conforming aspects of sexual and gender diversity become part of the norm. This is what inclusion should look like. Sexual and gender diversity should be part of all the curriculum subjects, throughout the vocational training and it should be included in the standards for exams, in administrative procedures and the welcoming environment of the VET institute. Only then will VET institutions be sustainably safe and really inclusive. Integration means that sexual and gender diversity becomes a matter-of-fact, rather than a special topic. The controversial nature and categorization of the topic needs to be neutralized. This also requires different kinds of visibility, depending on the situation and the phase of implementation.

Key issue 4: Innovation strategy

A common mistake made by naive innovators is to demand *immediate* change *now*. Such demands are understandable because they are based on many years of taboo, marginalization, exclusion, suffering and trauma. But the proposed changes related to the mentioned three key issues cannot be implemented overnight. The innovation expert Everett Rogers (Rogers, 19623/1983) showed how work teams commonly include innovators, early adopters, early and late majorities and laggards.
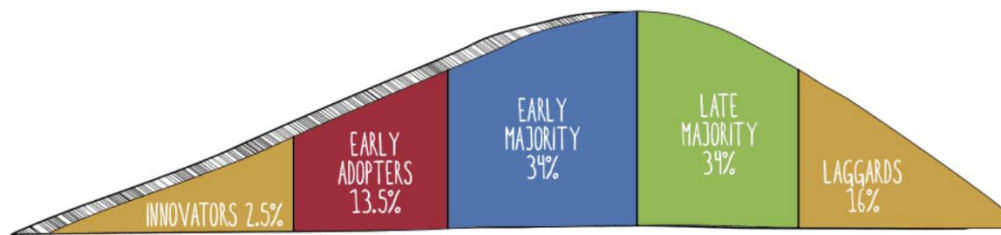
Effective adoption of innovations in an institute (and probably in society as a whole) requires a careful strategy that gradually involves a larger number of participants in the workplace. In this process, external innovators (LGBTIQ+ activists) and internal innovators (like UNIQUE ambassador-teachers) need to take into account that each of Rogers' groups will respond on different cues and strategies. A focus on *laggards* in the early phases of a school introducing LGBTIQ+ inclusion will definitely fail. But a focus *only on innovators* and not trying enough to involve other potentially willing early adopters, will fail just as well. We agree with Rogers that sustainable innovation (in this case LGBTIQ+ inclusion) can only be effective when the innovation leaders develop a plan that gradually involves more and less willing groups in schools and in society. On each level, we need tailored strategies to raise awareness, secure commitment and 'organize' integration and sustainability of LGBTIQ+ inclusion. This perspective makes clear we cannot give one straightforward advice or recommendation on how to reach LGBTIQ+ inclusion. This process-oriented approach makes it necessary to developed tailored plan for each class, VET institute and society.

3.1. Classroom level

The responses on our survey showed considerable resistance against the draft recommendations that asked for a *culture change on the classroom floor*. Both the recommendation that asked for a culture change in general and specific recommendations to mention LGBTIQ+ examples and to use gender sensitive language were rejected or not actively endorsed by 30-50% of the respondents. At the same time, LGBTIQ+ activists suggested that these recommendations should be made even more specific and more strongly worded. This raised the question whether we should replace those recommendations by less engaging ones (taking the resistance into account) or whether we should explain better why concrete changes are needed. We chose the latter option, but created space for tailored solutions.

1. Emotional intelligence in the classroom

Emotional intelligence means to be mentally flexible and to be able to cope with rapid change. We consider the resistance to recommendations to change the school cultures to be more inclusive as a lack of emotional intelligence. We recognize that VET teachers are working hard to teach students concrete professional skills, and that this is not always easy. Students may come from family and cultural backgrounds and country areas where mental flexibility is not appreciated and where globalization and embracing innovations may be seen as threats. Still, we have to realize that the field of vocational training is rapidly changing, and that all vocational students in the future will have to deal with environments in which client-friendliness and openness to rapid change is a basic requirement. We think

that the topic of sexual and gender diversity is one of the key areas where insecurities around change are crystallizing and resulting in polarization. The polarized discussions about *gender ideology* are radical examples of this. However, it cannot be denied that gender stereotypes in general and more specifically rejection of variations in the area of sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual characteristics need to be overcome to create a more just society.

Therefore, our main recommendation is that vocational education and training needs to focus more on the horizontal competences of emotional intelligence. This mental flexibility should also be trained in relation to sexual and gender diversity. A major consequence of this recommendation is to be careful with trying to counter prejudices by offering lots of information about sexual and gender diversity to students. Experience shows that giving information does not automatically lead to a more positive attitude. It may even trigger resistance if teachers don't prepare their students emotionally first. The focus should be on creating a more tolerant and accepting atmosphere rather than on solely transferring 'correct' information.

The focus on emotional intelligence is both relevant for the students and for the teachers, because VET teachers have often not been trained on how to deal with emotions in class. Teaching about sexual and gender diversity may trigger negative comments laced with insecure and angry emotions. Teachers need to learn how to treat such incidents as 'teachable moments', or opportunities for learning. But teachers may panic and their fight-or-flight instinct may take over. Their need for self-preservation may compel them to 'convince' students to adopt a 'right' attitude, to fall back on giving information students don't want at that moment, or to avoid further conflict completely and drop the subject. Proper teacher training needs to support teachers not to fall back on such instinctual but ineffective responses. This is also a form of 'professional' emotional intelligence.

Concrete suggestions on how to use emotional intelligence in the classroom:

- Be a role-model of openness, curiosity and self-development; make visible that this includes interest and support for sexual and gender diversity on your part
- Create a safe classroom atmosphere in which students can express and have a dialogue on emotions
- Make behaviour agreements/rules with your classes on how students want to discuss sensitive issues; make sure that such rules are kept
- Prefer the conversation technique 'dialogue' over 'discussion' or 'debate'; a dialogue is an equal exchange or emotions and experiences with interest in others, while discussion and debate may create undesirable competition and strive to win arguments
- Provide students with triggers to reflect on emotions, norms and diversity
- Tailor triggers and the level of reflection to the level of personal development and acceptance of students; don't accept a lazy low level but also don't provoke students too far beyond their current level of tolerance
- Mention LGBTIQ+ issues in an off-hand way
- Develop a plan on how you can gradually coach students towards higher levels of tolerance, acceptance and general emotional intelligence
- If you feel insecure about how to handle such suggestions, seek training and support

2. Visibility in the classroom

LGBTIQ+ activists asked us to be more concrete about what visibility should be given in the classroom and they offered a range of concrete examples. At the same time, VET teachers were very hesitant to use explicit visibility examples of LGBTIQ+ people, especially when such visibility would represent behavior or identities that are considered outside or in the margins of the norm of heterosexuality. In classrooms with conservative students, being visible about sexual and gender diversity can create negative feedback that may be difficult to handle by teachers.

Our recommendation is that teachers should be conscientious about choosing which level of visibility they want to use in which phase of their educational program. They should realize that visibility is a necessary condition for next steps in LGBTIQ+ inclusion. At the same time, they should not choose forms of visibility that trigger students on a level they cannot cope with yet. The goal of teachers should be to let students get used to sexual and gender diversity. A too provocative approach will lead to students to close their mind, but a too generic and implicit approach will make the students lazy and indifferent.

Concrete suggestions on how to choose visibility in the classroom:

- Do an informal needs assessment on the level of tolerance of students in a class; this can for example be done by showing them pictures or a video which offers several not too provocative examples of nonconformity with the norm of heterosexuality
- Make your support for sexual and gender diversity gradually more explicit; allow for comments and questions, even when they may appear offensive
- When you are reasonably sure that there is a basic safety in the classroom, you can post more explicit signs of LGBTIQ+ safety like "safe space" stickers
- It is best to discuss using desired name (changes) and pronouns after you introduced students to how gender stereotypes work and the existence of people who are transgender or present as non-binary; however, when you have a transgender student coming-out in your class and requesting to be addressed with their desired pronouns, the teacher should oblige and ask students to do the same
- When offering student assignments on how to deal with diversity in their trained vocation, choose case studies in which specific needs of LGBTIQ+ people need to be recognized and handled
- It is helpful to not generalize about LGBTIQ+ as one group or referring to this imagined group as the "LGBTIQ+ community"; students and other LGBTIQ+ people may not feel connected to such subcultures and LGBTIQ+ are not an ethnic group
- When discussing LGBTIQ+ issues, it is helpful to distinguish between the specific needs of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgenders people, people with an intersex variation, queer or questioning people and others; teach students not to assume that LGBTIQ+ clients or customers al have similar needs and to remain sensitive to differences – even when you may not be aware of all the specific differences
- When a student comes out as LGBTIQ+ in the classroom, support them
- When a student approaches you about coming out in the classroom or in school, don't discourage or encourage them, but discuss the opportunities and risks of such a choice, and make an agreement on how you can support them in their choice
- Don't inform the parents of a student of them being LGBTIQ+ without their permission

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☐ Don't label LGBTIQ+ people as special or as 'strange fruit'; this may seem like an attractive option because it may attract students' interest but it will strengthen the view of sexual and gender diversity is 'different' and weird

3. Integration in the classroom

In this phase of LGBTIQ+ emancipation, in many countries sexual and gender diversity is not yet part of the regular curriculum. Teachers may be forced to give specific or additional lessons on sexual and gender diversity. In this situation, teachers need to be aware that treating sexual and gender diversity as a *specific* topic may implicitly lead to seeing the subject as something special and as 'strange fruit'.

We recommend that teachers make an effort to 'normalize' sexual and gender diversity, but without confirming the norm of heterosexuality. This can be done by engaging students in activities during which they critically reflect on gender, relationships, sexuality and social power relations. Rather than telling students what to, teachers can engage them in a dialogue on what is just and fair, and specifically in relation to their vocation: what it means to be respectful and client-friendly. Students should be empowered to make their own choices on these matters and to be respectful to the choices of others.

It would be better when teachers make regular small interventions in which sexual and gender diversity is referred to, then to provide *one* an exceptional lesson on the topic.

Support for LGBTIQ+ students in the classroom should always be dependent on the choice of the student involved. Only the students can make the assessment whether coming out to their fellow students is safe enough. The LGBTIQ+ student needs to integrate into the social dynamic of the class group and remain or become a full member with equal status. Becoming the underdog, the class clown or the special friend of some students is not an adequate integration. If this happens, action needs to be undertaken on the level of the class dynamic, not to correct or help to adapt the LGBTIQ+ student.

Concrete suggestions on how to integrate sexual and gender diversity in the classroom:

☐ Start the year with 'golden weeks' in which students get acquainted with each other and are supported to built a constructive group dynamic; although there will always be leaders and followers; leaders do not have to become bullies – for example by vilifying other students who do not conform to traditional gender expectations (the major reason for LGBTIQ+ bullying and exclusion)

☐ At the end of the (first 6) golden weeks or shortly after, offer lessons on bullying and gendered bullying; make students aware this is not a question of just a bully and victim but a consequence of an inadequate group dynamic, and that all students are co-responsible for mutual support and the prevention or exclusion

☐ Introduce comprehensive sexual and relational education in your class; comprehensive means that it is not just focussed on biological and technical information but on the needs of the students and that it includes dialogue on how students handle relations and sexuality (which of course includes sexual and gender diversity)

☐ Plan repeated occurrence of LGBTIQ+ issues and examples in your curriculum; tailor these to relevant vocational and cultural issues and to the increasing level of emotional intelligence of students

4. Innovation strategy in the classroom

In any classroom, teachers will be able to see that a number of students are progressive and open, while some other students may be hesitant or even outright sexist, homophobic or transphobic. Our experience shows that students with intolerant and demeaning attitudes are often louder than other students, and therefore often set a negative tone about sexual and gender diversity in class. However, in most classes such negative (*laggard*) students are a minority. In innovation terms, it is not the best strategy to take them on specifically. This may create adversarial situations in which the teacher risks to go into emotional arguments which are not fruitful for creating emotional intelligence.

Our recommendation is to not engage too much in discussion or debate, but rather choose for the form of a dialogue (exchange of views and emotions with the aim to better understand each other), which is less contentious than a discussion or a debate. Loud or emotional students should be heard, but should not be allowed to take over the lesson.

Another recommendation is to engage all students in the dialogue and provide a safe atmosphere in which the exchange of thoughts can take place. At the same time, it would be good when students can remain silent if they wish. The teacher has to realize that just listening can also be a valuable learning experience.

Furthermore, if some students remain loudly adversarial and create an unsafe atmosphere in which a dialogue is not possible, they should be stopped (when they clearly block the learning process) or ignored. Highly emotional students are often loud because it is the only way they know how to get attention. They should learn that they will be empathically heard when they present their feeling and arguments in a respectful way, but not rewarded for destructive ways of seeking attention by judging others.

Our final recommendation is that the teacher can organize a spiral curriculum, which sets increasingly higher goals for emotional intelligence and tolerance towards sexual and gender diversity along the duration of the course. At the end of the course, even clearly negative students should have attained a minimal level of respect towards diversity. If they do not, it is questionable whether they have reached an adequate level of professional competence. This means that even though a spiral curriculum aspires to follow the level of development of students, it does have a 'hard' competence requirements aspect to it.

A summary of concrete suggestions to plan an innovation process on the classroom level:

- Make a formal or informal diagnosis of the emotional intelligence and attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity in your classes
- Set minimum and maximum standards for exam-level competences you will demand of your students; a minimal level could be to treat all your clients with basic respect, while a maximum competence could be to be open and inquisitive towards all the diversity your clients represent and to be sensitive to their needs
- Plan a spiral curriculum to gradually increase the tolerance and sensitivity of your students, at least to the minimum level; create space for students to advance to a broad sensitivity
- Do not tell students what to feel or do but coach them to experience how equal treatment and client-friendliness is a desirable competence

- Openly reward students who progress to higher levels of competence, support students who feel challenged by diversity and ignore or stop *laggard* students to threaten your educational goals
- Allow for differences in learning styles and tempo among students

3.2. Institutional level

The UNESCO "Safe and Seen" report points at the key importance of good school leadership, which sets the tone for inclusion. School leaders set such a tone through their own behaviour and use of language as well as through institutional policies, provision of and support for relevant training, and codes of conduct for staff and learners. In the recommendations for the VET institute level, we will focus on how VET managers and course team leaders can initiate and coach change processes among their staff.

1. Emotional intelligence in the VET institute

VET managers and team leaders should facilitate that their staff and especially teachers have the space and tools to incorporate into emotional intelligence training for the students. This may be a challenge because many vocational teachers have not been trained in this area and they may be focused on transferring technical information and skills to students. They may even think that attention for emotional intelligence is of lower status than transferring knowledge or learning so-called 'hard' concrete vocational skills. Younger teachers may be more open to this approach than older and more traditional teachers. It is up to VET managers and course team leader to develop and guide a smooth process of innovation to integrate emotional intelligence in teaching and learning.

On this level, the promotion of emotional intelligence does not seem to incorporate specific attention to LGBTIQ+ issues, but the context of emotional intelligence is of absolute necessity to be able to make strides forward on these specific issues.

While engaging on a path towards integration of LGBTIQ+ issues in the institute, some setbacks may be experienced on different levels. We should not deny that there is social and political resistance against LGBTIQ+ inclusion. VET managers and team leaders may be confronted with complaints and with public criticism. When responding to such criticism, school managers are always forced to make a choice for maintaining a positive professional image of the VET institute and protecting vulnerable students or attacked teachers. Regrettably, unprepared school leaders may feel forced to favour the public image of the institute above the individual safety of staff or students. Under pressure, managers may equate attention for sexual and gender diversity with a hobby of a teacher, an unprofessional handling of an issue or even consider giving attention to sexual or gender diversity is an undesirable threat for the institute's public relations. Such pitfalls can be prevented by managers preparing themselves for possible risks.

Concrete suggestions for VET managers and team leaders to take the lead on emotional intelligence:

- Be a role-model in 'living' emotional intelligence by being curious and inquisitive about the well-being of your staff and their needs to be supported

☐ Engage in teambuilding and support of course teams to encourage own initiative in innovating the courses

☐ Take the initiative or state clear support for innovations that promote handling diversity and (LGBTIQ+) inclusion

☐ Make a risk assessment on (LGBTIQ+) innovations; prepare yourself to not giving in to panic in the face of complaints or threats; develop a crisis protocol

☐ In handling negative feedback related to sexual and gender diversity, make a difference between rational arguments and less rational 'limiting convictions'; treat 'limiting convictions' with empathy and connection but without giving in to them, solve rational objections with practical solutions

☐ Communicate the way you will be handling risks with the staff and students

2. Visibility in the VET institute

Visibility of sexual and gender diversity on the level of the institute is a very important signal that the institute supports LGBTIQ+ inclusion. However, in a country and culture, or in an institute which has not yet incorporated systematic attention to diversity, specific types of visibility may create resistance and opposition. VET managers would like to prevent such opposition. They would want to facilitate a gradual increase in tolerance and normalization of diversity in general and more specifically of sexual and gender diversity.

A good way of introducing and facilitating a gradual increase in visibility of sexual and gender diversity is to appoint a committee in which both teachers, administrative staff and LGBTIQ+ students take part.

Concrete suggestions for VET managers to gradually increase visibility of LGBTIQ+ issues in their institute:

☐ Monitor the level of tolerance and sensitivity of students and teachers

☐ Share the results with your staff and discuss opportunities to improve the situation

☐ Use the monitoring results and feedback on the results to make a feasible plan to gradually improve the school safety and quality in the area of sexual and gender diversity

☐ Publish a summary of these intentions and this plan in your public relations tools (brochure, website, antibullying plan, curriculum outline all)

☐ Show sexual and gender diversity in the visible PR of the institute, tailor the visibility to the phase of implementation

☐ Assign one or more toilets to be gender-neutral; when gender stereotypes and violence have been overcome to a large extent, you can consider to make all toilets gender-neutral

☐ Make it possible that trans and non-binary students use changing rooms which allow them to be safe of harassment

☐ Go through your administrative protocols, forms and online tools and make it possible that transgender and non-binary students choose an appropriate option, like "other" or more specific gender marker

☐ If the ministry requires specific reporting on gender markers, signal the ministry that this may work out discriminatory or marginalizing; if the ministry doesn't adapt, find alternative ways to not marginalize or offend transgender and non-binary students

- Allow students to change their gender marker and to be addressed according to their desired name and pronouns
- Incorporate in the Child Protection Policy that informing the parents about challenges students may face should be dependent on the permission of the student, and should certainly not be done when the student indicates there is a risk of exclusion or violence from the family
- Train and support teachers and other staff to handle such changes; take into account that some staff may be insecure or reluctant to go along with such innovations

3. Integration in the VET institute

Integration of attention for sexual and gender diversity in a VET institute can be done in all the typical four pillars of school safety: (1) Monitoring and planning, (2) the environment, (3) the curriculum and (4) student counselling.

Planning: Most if not all VET institutes have several forms of monitoring to measure the level of well-being of their students and teachers, and the progress of learning results. The data arising from this are used to improve the quality of the institute. Although such forms of monitoring commonly include registering gender and disaggregating the results on gender, questions about sexual orientation and gender identity are often not yet asked. This means the Institute does not notice the needs of LGBTIQ+ students (and staff). It is recommended to include one or two questions on sexual and gender diversity in monitoring mechanisms and to use the aggregated results to base innovation plans on.

Environment: It is recommended that schools including VET institutions make a safety policy, an antibullying policy or/and a non-discrimination policy. It is recommended that such policies include attention to sexual and gender diversity. It is not enough to just make a reference that the policy is inclusive of LGBTIQ+; LGBTIQ+ students have specific needs that need to be addressed. For example, it is unlikely that a generic antibullying policy will have a significant effect on specific homophobic or transphobic bullying. School policies need to be explicit about how to deal with threats to coming-out, gender transition and gender nonconforming behaviour.

Curriculum: Although we advised teachers to develop their own curriculum that systematically leads to a higher level of tolerance and emotional intelligence, most VET curricula are teamwork. Therefore, it is essential task of team leaders to make sure that specific vocational courses in effect have a spiral curriculum, which guides how horizontal competences will be addressed throughout the duration of the course and throughout the given subjects. It is advisable that the entire team is involved in co-developing such a spiral curriculum. The team leader is an indispensable promoter and coordinator in this effort. Not all vocational course teams will be enthusiastic to integrate emotional intelligence or specific attention to sexual and gender diversity in their courses. Higher level team managers need to set the tone, gave the order to integrate diversity in course curricula and set up monitoring mechanisms to make sure that such VET institutional directives are properly implemented.

Student counselling: All VET institutions have a department and/or staff to prevent student dropout, for student counselling and for guidance toward internships and future

employment. In these kinds on counselling situations, LGBTIQ+ issues often become visible for the first time. Student counsellors need to be prepared for this and training for this is advisable. Aspects of this training could be to what extent the institutional counsellors can support LGBTIQ+ students themselves or when they have to referring them to external professionals, and to have a list of LGBTIQ+ affirmative referral addresses where LGBTIQ+ students can be referred to with confidence. Students who are gender nonconforming, or want to come out in their internship needs to be protected. It is advisable that the VET institute has guidelines on how to deal with this, and possibly need to include openness for (such) diversity in internship contracts with companies.

Concrete examples of institutional integration of LGBTIQ+ issues are:

- ☐ VET managers should take initiative for, or support initiatives to include sexual and gender diversity in vocational courses
- ☐ Include sexual and gender diversity in your institutional monitoring
- ☐ Make reports based on disaggregated results
- ☐ Use the results to address LGBTIQ+ challenges and for improvement plans
- ☐ Open the possibility to have other gender markers than male/female in your forms
- ☐ Include sexual and gender diversity in safety policy, antibullying policy, non-discrimination policy and policy against drop-out
- ☐ Include LGBTIQ+ needs in protocols for complaints and redress
- ☐ Integrate sexual and gender diversity in a spiral curriculum that runs throughout the vocational course and all subjects; this could be combined with civic education, social skills or sexual education
- ☐ Top VET managers should cooperate with team leaders and set up monitoring and control mechanisms to make sure that central policies being implemented in teams
- ☐ Student counsellors need to be trained to handle issues that are specific for LGBTIQ+ students
- ☐ Student counsellors need to be aware when students are challenged with 'simple' challenges related to sexual and gender diversity (like coming-out and bullying); which they should be able to handle themselves, or when they are challenged with 'complicated' challenges, like gender dysphoria, gender transition, a combination of problems like joblessness, drug use, alcohol use, violence in the home, homelessness, sex work which are related to their sexual or gender diversity; which need specific (external) counselling and support
- ☐ student counselling departments need to develop the list of LGBTIQ+ affirmative referral addresses where LGBTIQ+ students can be referred to with the confidence that they will be treated well

4. Innovation strategy in the VET institute

VET managers need to be aware and skilled to secure adoption of innovations concerning sexual and gender diversity in a process-oriented way. They need to be aware that teams are always made up from different types of workers and that effectively innovations always start with *innovators* and with involving *early adopters* as soon as possible.

A decision to actually start with the innovation in a team or in the institute as a whole is usually taken on the initiative of a small group of innovators and early adopters, so a full

commitment of the entire staff is not necessary. However, by linking specific sexual and gender diversity issues to more general vocational priorities and emotional intelligence, a larger part of the workforce can be involved.

The *early majority* will generally be willing to experiment with LGBTIQ+ inclusion when it seems to be a good cause and with feasible tools. The *late majority* is commonly unwilling to innovate for the sake of innovation, but they can be involved when the early majority has shown that inclusion of LGBTIQ+ issues is feasible and beneficial. They will then join, not primarily because it is their own choice, but because they tend to follow the majority.

The final small group of *laggards* may keep opposing any change. It is wise not to involve this unmovable group too much during the innovation process. It may even be necessary to allow them a temporary exemption to participation. But when LGBTIQ+ inclusion has become a reality and a team norm, then not going along with this new norm becomes a professional drawback. Especially when laggards insist on keeping being offensive and discriminatory towards LGBTIQ+ students in an already generally supportive environment, their behaviour becomes professionally unsound and they need to face the consequences.

VET managers need to be informed and trained to understand and supervise this innovation process. They need to stimulate and facilitate the process with the help of a operational innovation committee (consisting of innovators and early adopters). They need to take the clear decisions when laggard staff or students attempt to block the process of inclusion.

3.3. National level

Policies on the national levels may differ. Some countries have a centralized education system, in which the Ministry of Education directs schools in much detail. In other countries, the education system is largely decentralized. It may come under the direction of local authorities, but it is also possible that schools or school boards of a cluster of schools are largely autonomous in an open market. These differences make it necessary to tailor national advocacy strategies to the specific national education systems.

Educational policies may be influenced by government officials, politicians, educational experts, national federations of school boards or school principals, by trade unions and student associations, and by (among others) LGBTIQ+ NGOs. Our recommendations are a mix of suggestions for stakeholders inside to the education system and advocates who tried to influence the education system from the outside (LGBTIQ+ activists).

In the GALE Committee Guide (Dankmeijer, 2017), the Global Alliance for LGBT Education describes how a cooperation between government officials, education experts and LGBTIQ+ activists would be the ideal way to achieve national change. The GALE Committee Guide advises to set up a national committee to organize such cooperation. This suggestion is in line with recent European reports on antibullying and youth policy (Downes & Cefai, 2016). In the survey on our draft recommendations, this suggestion to set up a national committee encountered some resistance. Maybe this is because respondents considered setting up a national committee specifically on LGBTIQ+ issues in education overdone. Considering the seriousness of the taboo and exclusion of LGBTIQ+ in schools, we don't agree with such criticism. But still, if the topics of LGBTIQ+ issues are not broad enough to set up such a committee, then we would recommend to set up a committee which is somewhat broader,

for example on antibullying, school safety, citizenship education or on general student well-being – provided sexual and gender diversity remain explicit topics.

1. Emotional intelligence in national policies

National policies have more support and commitment when issues relating to specific target groups are embedded in a broader context. In this case we think that emotional intelligence and mental flexibility of the future generation is beneficial for human rights, peace and for employment opportunities. It is functional to embed tolerance, respect and social inclusion in such a broad policy.

To enable such a policy, it would be best for authorities, politicians and LGBTIQ+ activists to be role-models of emotional intelligence themselves as well. In the struggle to get influence on national policy, it is tempting to make demands and to 'fight' your opponents. But experiences teach us that too much thinking in abortifacients leads to polarization, which in turn leads to the marginalization of the least powerful stakeholders. A series of innovative advocacy attempts in the area of LGBTIQ+ inclusion on the national and international levels has shown that strategies that focus on connection and dialogue have more impact than protest, provocation and demands. A more non-violent communication and actions may also a role-modelling effect on the levels of the were authorities, schools and students.

2. Visibility in national policies

The visibility of sexual and gender diversity is important to provide legitimation to stakeholders on lower authority levels and in schools. However, visibility of LGBTIQ+ issues on the national level is a double-edged sword.

In different countries we see both visibility without implementation (symbolic policy) and implementation without much visibility (below-the-radar policy) and a mix of visibility and concrete action. We conclude that a very specific visibility is helpful but not always necessary for an effective national policy. In some countries, LGBTIQ+ issues are controversial and supportive authorities choose a careful and off-the-radar strategy to implement LGBTIQ+ supportive policy. On the other hand, we see countries where the government takes initiative to make specific LGBTIQ+ policy with concrete visible measures. Still, even is such contexts, there may remain resistance and sabotage on the political level or among civil servants who need to carry out the measures.

This means that effectively making and implementing national policy depends on key stakeholders on the government level who have the power to push through the measures that have commitment and to know how to navigate internal and external resistance. Government officials and LGBTIQ+ activists can cooperate in this area, but they need to have trust and respect for their respective positions.

3. Integration in national policies

The concrete integration of sexual and gender diversity in national policies is called 'mainstreaming'. This means the move from funding specific LGBTIQ+ projects and

undertaking ad hoc activities and measures towards making attention for sexual and gender diversity a standard aspect of all regular policies and government routines.

One of the first and most necessary aspects of mainstreaming is asking about sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual characteristics in national educational monitoring mechanisms. If this is not done, the entire topic remains invisible and it will be impossible to determine which real challenges are playing out and what specific actions need to be taken. Once such 'independent variable' questions have been included in regular monitoring mechanisms, it needs to be secured is that the data are reported on in a disaggregated way and that the specific challenges of LGBTIQ+ students are being discussed and on the political or management agenda.

Usually, it will turn out that LGBTIQ+ students face similar problems as other students but that the reasons and context of the challenges are different, which requires specific sensitivity and additional measures to resolve the issues. In some cases, amendments to existing policies may be enough, on other issues, more specific interventions need to be developed or implemented.

Based on disaggregated monitoring results, regular policies need to be scanned for adequacy of resolving specific LGBTIQ+ challenges. When the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ questions in monitoring mechanisms is not yet realized, then LGBTIQ+ activist organizations can still scan regular policies and identify potential drawbacks of the policies for their constituencies. However, such more "convenience sample" researches will the handicap of not being seen as having hard enough proof (large -scale statistical comparison between LGBTIQ+ and cisgender heterosexuals).

4. Innovation strategy in national policies

National policies often start with lifting legal discrimination, followed by legislation to protect against discrimination and to secure equal treatment. Such general measures definitely have some effect on the education system, but they don't change the education system or the mentality of stakeholders in it substantially. To make the education system safer and welcoming for LGBTIQ+ students, the government needs to develop a process-oriented plan – like a roadmap – which secures full implementation of mainstreaming LGBTIQ+ inclusion in the education system.

Teacher training and controlling mechanisms are essential for this. Teacher training is necessary because teachers are the backbone of schools. Controlling mechanisms are needed to make sure that government guidelines are actually being implemented by staff on different levels. Because measures and interventions need to be culturally tailored, pilots with different measures and interventions need to be done and evaluated and the successful good practices need to be more widely implemented.

Concrete general suggestions to include LGBTIQ+ needs on the national level are:

- ☐ LGBTIQ+ activists should map the power structure of the national level, and develop a plan who to involve in which stage to improve the inclusion of sexual and gender diversity in schools, or specifically in VET

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- An advocacy plan should not only encompass concrete needs or demands, but also incorporate a process of involving LGBTIQ+ youth, educational stakeholders and political and government officials
- LGBTIQ+ activists could try to engage in connective strategies with the government and the education system, and only shift to demands and political pressure when the government officials are not responsive to such strategies
- The most effective strategy to improve the education system is when government officials, educational experts and LGBTIQ+ youth and activists work together in a national committee
- If a cross-sectional national committee is not possible, then cooperation between two of the three sectors is preferable; if none of the three sectors is willing to work together, then LGBTIQ+ activists could best involve at least individual stakeholders from the educational sector and government officials who operate under-the-radar, to make sure that a strategy is realistic and feasible
- A 'roadmap' to make the education system more LGBTIQ+ inclusive should focus on interventions to improve content and measures as well as on the process to create and broaden commitment to LGBTIQ+ inclusion
- Teacher training should be developed to support teachers in engaging on sexual and gender diversity, and along the road, such training should become compulsory
- Control mechanisms need to be developed to make sure that national policy is actually being implemented

Specific recommendations for the UNIQUE pilot countries

The UNIQUE pilot countries have in common that their educational policies on sexual and gender diversity are either denying or ambiguous. There are few supportive aspects of LGBTIQ+ policy in the pilot countries. The stakeholders had few suggestions for national recommendations. We formulated a number of specific recommendations for the governments of the pilot countries based on progress reports by IGLYO (2022) and ILGA-Europe (2023) and on the recommendations GALE made in 2017.

Bulgaria

In 2017, GALE scored Bulgaria as 64% ambiguous on their policy on LGBTIQ+ in education. A general recommendation would be to reduce this ambiguity and to move towards more supportive policy.

- Ratify the Istanbul Convention. Protection of women including trans women against abuse is not 'gender ideology' but a real need and human right.
- Take measures to stop violence and bullying in schools. Give special attention to LGBTIQ+ harassment.
- Support LGBTIQ+ grass roots organizations and safe spaces/support for LGBTIQ+ students
- Support LGBTIQ+ grass roots NGOs to create an educational committee and participate as a official observers
- Include LGBTIQ+ in the monitoring reports on the Convention against Discrimination in Education and SDG 4

☐ Create a national Action Plan or Roadmap to combat social prejudice against LGBTIQ+, to support initiatives in this area and to secure that schools are safe for all students including LGBTIQ+

Croatia

In 2017, GALE scored Croatia as 39% discouraging, 46% ambiguous and 23% supportive on their policy on LGBTIQ+ in education. This points to a rather inconsistent policy, with some good intentions but also with severe drawback. Our main recommendation is to make the LGBTIQ+ education policy more consistent and supportive.

☐ Make teacher training on LGBTIQ+ issues mandatory, or at least create a national stimulation program for teachers to follow such training.
☐ Provide training on LGBTIQ+ bullying and exclusion to school counsellors and psychologists.
☐ Develop a national guideline to allow students to use their chosen names in schools.
☐ Include LGBTIQ+ in national educational monitoring and provide report with disaggregated data.
☐ Combat social prejudice against LGBTIQ+ or support initiatives in this area.
☐ Secure that schools have a safe school climate which includes LGBTIQ+ students.
☐ Support peer education, Gender and Sexuality Alliances and other grass roots interventions.
☐ Develop training en offer educational resources about sexual diversity for interested teachers.
☐ Create a National Strategic Committee on Sexual and Gender Diversity in Education.
☐ Include LGBTIQ+ in the monitoring reports on the Convention against Discrimination in Education and SDG 4.

Cyprus

In 2017, GALE scored (Southern) Cyprus as 57% ambiguous and 53% discouraging on their policy on LGBTIQ+ in education. Since then, Cyprus has made some progress, mainly in the area of teacher training. But social attitudes and organized religious resistance are hampering progress. We recommend that the government resists backtracking movements and initiates campaigns to stimulate more tolerance among the general public. There could be specific extensions of such campaigns in or through schools.

☐ Adopt legislation to prohibit discrimination in education (of students) including on the ground of sexual and gender diversity.
☐ Provide disaggregated data reports based on education monitoring in order to make LGBTIQ+ education policy more effective.
☐ Support LGBTIQ+ grass roots organizations and safe/spaces/support for LGBTIQ+ students.
☐ Evaluate the impact of the anti-racism guidelines and the anti-homophobic bullying circular and enhance the implementation strategy with the results.
☐ Support LGBTIQ+ grass roots NGOs in the creation of an educational committee and participate as observer.

- Include LGBTIQ+ in the monitoring reports on the Convention against Discrimination in Education and SDG 4.
- Actively protect LGBTIQ+ teachers against employment discrimination.
- Develop an Action Plan or Roadmap to secure that schools have a safe school climate which includes LGBTIQ+ students.

Greece

In 2017, GALE scored as 47% discouraging, 38% ambiguous and 6% supportive on their policy on LGBTIQ+ in education. Since then, Greece has made some progress, notably by adopting the National Strategy for Equality of LGBTQI+ people (2021-2023) and the introduction, in 2023, of a law on preventing and combatting bullying - including bullying on the basis of SOGIESC. However, it seems that this intended strategy is not being implemented properly and that concrete initiatives of the Ministry of Education contravene the planned efforts. Our main recommendation is to improve the implementation of the National Strategy for Equality of LGBTQI+ people and to extend in to the following years and to the education sector.

Other recommended measures:

- Make it mandatory for schools to include a paragraph on sexual and gender diversity in their required school plans on antibullying.
- Include LGBTIQ+ in national educational monitoring and provide disaggregated data reports.
- Offer systematic state funding to the helpline "11528-By your side", which is the only helpline for LGBTIQ+ people, their families and educators, ensuring its continuous operation
- Offer funding to Rainbow School, which is the Greek group having the most expertise on LGBTIQ+ issues in schools.
- Take measures to stop violence and bullying in schools. Give special attention to LGBTIQ+ verbal harassment and the prevention of suicide due to harassment and hate speech.
- Expand existing anti-discrimination laws to the field of education
- Develop a national guideline to allow transgender students to use their chosen names in schools.

Poland

In 2017, GALE scored as 53% discouraging and 57% ambiguous on their policy on LGBTIQ+ in education. Since then, the situation in Poland has only deteriorated to the point where there is doubt whether Poland is still adhering to shared European values. We realize that the policy is currently made by a populist government that thinks it is defending traditional Polish values in this way. A recommendation to the Polish government and politicians is to re-evaluated whether this quite radical opposition to diversity is really helpful to maintain Polish values. To LGBTIQ+ activists we recommend to keep engaging in EU supported projects and to focus on gradually re-establishing a base among he public ad in schools to support emotional intelligence and true connection in the country.

- Follow the ECRI call to abolish abusive requirements on gender transition, like psychiatric diagnosis, medical examinations, divorce and the court procedure which requires a trans person to sue their own parents stating that they wrongfully indicated their gender at birth.
- Allow minors to apply for legal gender transition.
- Include LGBTIQ+ in national educational monitoring and provide disaggregated data reports; LGBTIQ+ NGOs could do research to show how LGBTIQ+ people are affected by the current policies and ask authorities to be inclusive for the entire population
- Support LGBTIQ+ grass roots organizations and safe/spaces/support for LGBTIQ+ students.
- LGBTIQ+ grass roots NGOs could set up an activist educational committee and invite educational experts and government officials 'under-the-radar'.
- Ratify the Convention against Discrimination in Education.
- Include LGBTIQ+ in the monitoring reports on the Convention against Discrimination in Education.
- Protect LGBTIQ+ teachers against employment discrimination.
- Secure that schools have a safe school climate which includes LGBTIQ+ students
- Include LGBTIQ+ students in your implementation of the right to education monitoring.

3.4. International level

Although the European LGBTIQ+ Strategy is a major step forward, it mainly provides legitimation and funding for a series of projects. The actions of the European Parliament and the European Commission towards member states that are not implementing European human rights and values are very important. However, in the area of education, European stakeholders need to explore to what extent they can strengthen the current strategy.

1. Emotional intelligence on the European level

- The European vision on education, human rights, the social dimension and employment could be even better integrated. Linking the needs to be more flexible in employment markets with mental flexibility and the competence to adapt to changing circumstances could be a good link for this.
- Work and cooperation on social issues 'with a heart' seems to distinguish the European Union from many other parts of the world. This aspect could be strengthened and worked out to a more concrete strategy in employment and education.

2. Visibility on the European level

- It is good to regularly repeat current large-scale researches like the FRA-LGBT Survey. But it would be a major step forward when research on LGBTIQ+ will be mainstreamed, i.e. integrated in regular monitoring mechanisms.

☐ It needs to be explored in which European monitoring mechanisms sexual and gender diversity can be added. Where possible, 'independent variables' on sexual and gender diversity need to be added to questionnaires.

3. Integration on the European level

☐ General educational policies on (for example) early school-leaving and academic results do not yet systematically include sexual and gender diversity. It would be a great start of European mainstreaming when this would become a point of attention.

☐ Promote integration or sexual orientation and gender identity in international agreements and policies.

4. Innovation strategy on the European level

☐ The European environment is characterized by national policies ranging from hostile to supportive. It would be worthwhile for the European Union and the Council of Europe to develop a policy or roadmap that takes these differences into account introducing them for example by stimulating exchange between more and less supportive populations.

☐ Convene key educational and LGBTQI stakeholders in a safe space for discussion that minimizes backlash. International agencies and organizations that have the capacity and legitimacy to convene different actors should bring together key players (even those with conflicting arguments) in a safe space for discussion that will ultimately lead to cooperation on inclusive policies and which will help to avoid or minimize backlash.

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5. Project information

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