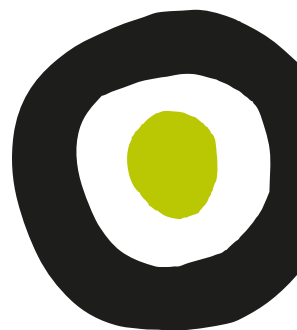
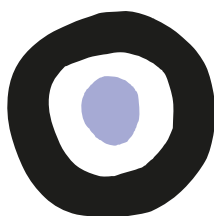


# **NISO project - Fighting homophobia through active citizenship and media education**

## **Final Report**

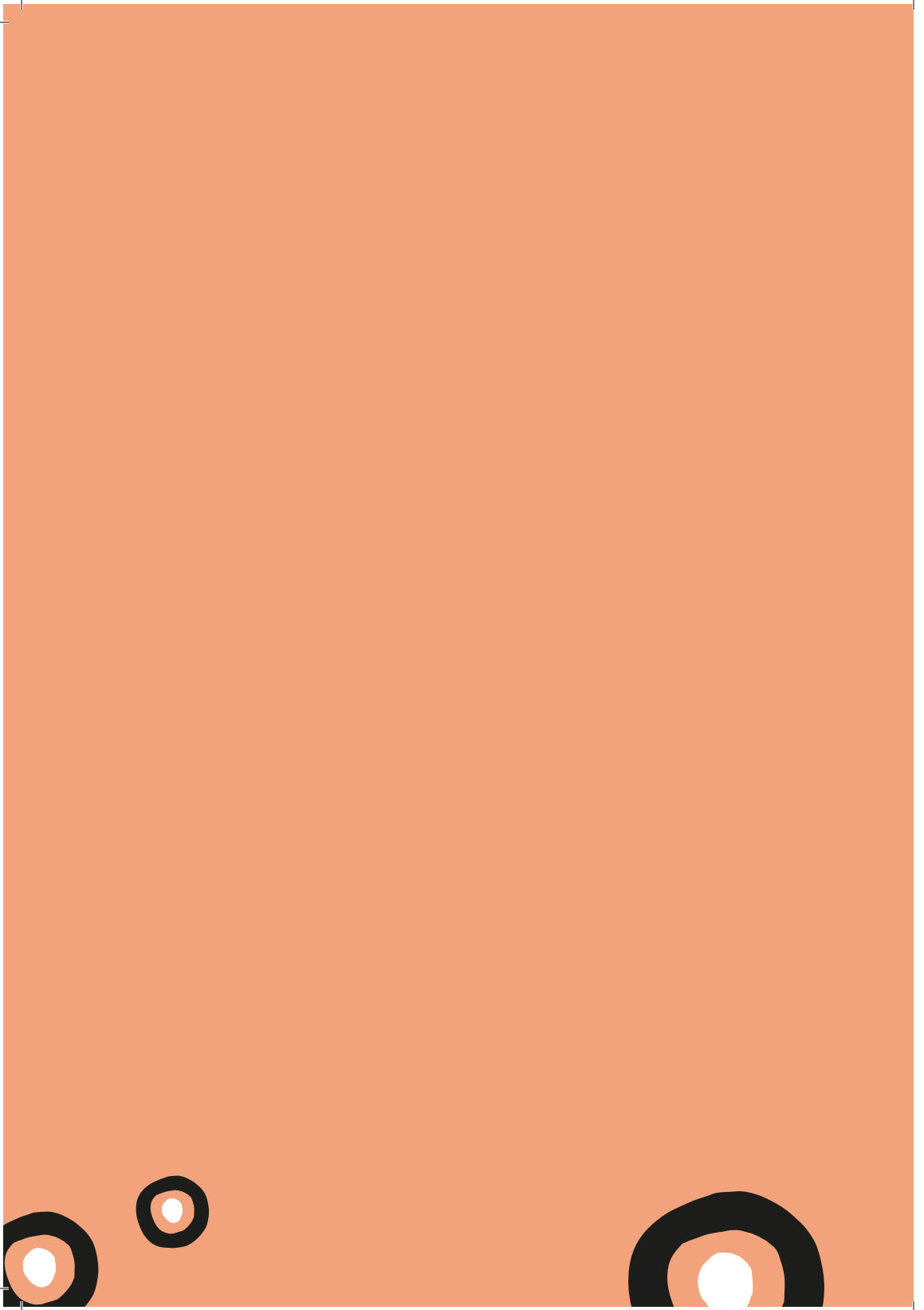


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Justice



**PROVINCIA  
DI ROMA**

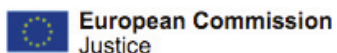
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The NISO project is coordinated by the Province of Rome



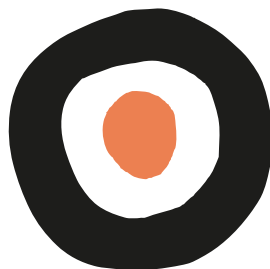


# **NISO project - Fighting homophobia through active citizenship and media education**

## **Final Report**



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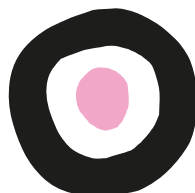


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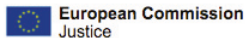
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Project partners:





## NISO PROJECT a short description

NISO project aimed at promoting human rights and fighting homophobia and heteronormativity through a set of activities based on an action-research approach. More specifically, the purpose of NISO activities was to promote among youngsters a wider knowledge and understanding of fundamental rights, specifically in terms of non-discrimination right on the grounds of sexual orientation. This goal has been pursued using active citizenship education, education to diversity and human rights and media education.

The project engaged approximately 250 European youngsters - aged between 14 and 18 years - in a learning process that combines non-formal education and peer-education approaches. The activities touched more than 5000 students and more persons can be reached by diffusing this final report. Besides students other project' targets were teachers and educators, schools and policy makers at national and European level for which ad hoc dissemination events have been organised.

The project - in its research-oriented element - investigated the situation of human rights for LGBT people at European level and in the four represented countries. NISO also investigated the most common stereotypes and prejudices diffused among youngsters and perceived by the LGBT communities.

In NISO four organizations from Belgium, Estonia, Italy and the Netherlands worked together, led by the Province of Rome; the project lasted two years.

Project partner are:

- **Province of Rome** (Project Coordinator, Italy)
- **GALE** (The Global Alliance for LGBT education, The Netherlands)
- **Çavaria** (Belgium)
- **Gay Center** (Italy)
- **T6 Cooperativa** (Italy)
- **NGO SEKY** (MTÜ Seksuaalvähemuste Kaitse Ühing - Estonia)



## THE VOICE OUT APPROACH

Project partners collaborated in developing a participative process aimed at creating a space for reflection for the students, in which their voices could be heard and 'seen' through the development of a awareness-raising campaign that uses short videos. Such process is called Voice OUT.

In each country represented in the consortium different schools, or groups of youngsters, have been engaged. In each school a Voice OUT group has been formed and students participated in activities that - starting from an initial phase of participatory training - mirrored a political campaign.

"If we want sexual orientation to become a right, gays and straight people together need to stand up for these rights. We cannot change society in one day. It will take time to make sure that acceptance of homosexuality is inherent in all societies. But I am convinced that it can happen. The fact that we have a homosexual prime minister, Elio Di Rupo, is a big step forward."

*Belgian student,  
17 years old*

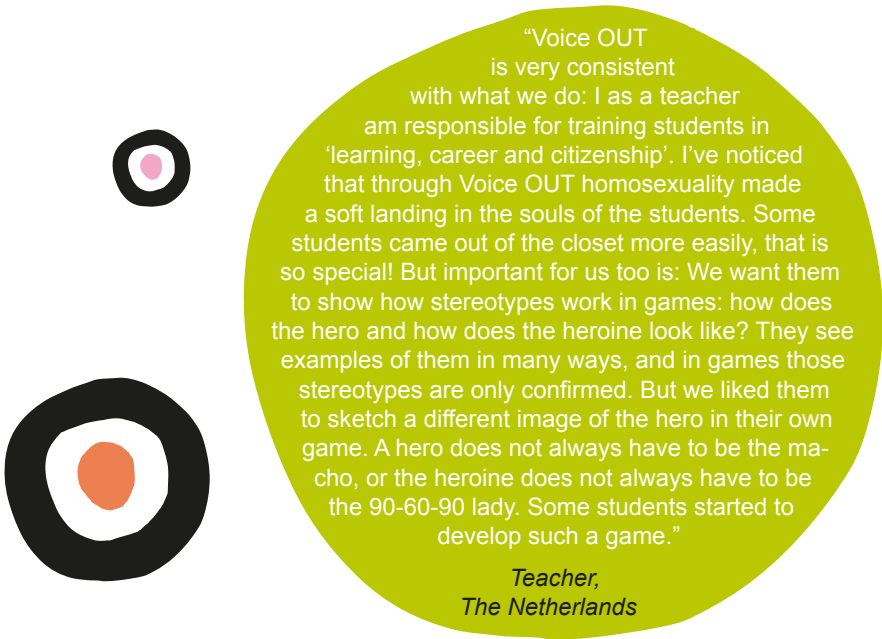
"Overall I'm really happy: we shaken the minds of a school that, at least for the five years that I have attended, never was interested in this topic and I think it's already a big step forward for those who are right that this group wants to promote for that ours was a very good job guys, congratulations to all of us."

*Italian student*

The most important thing about Voice OUT, however, is not the "political game" itself, but the fact that Voice OUT groups are a space in which students can freely express their opinions about identity, sexual orientation, gender, social norms and stereotype, human rights and social inclusion. A safe space in which freedom of expression is concretely experienced thought out all the activities proposed and in which educators trust students and see them as competent actors able to propose valid instrument for fighting discrimination.

In the Voice OUT groups students learn about the legal and social situation of LGBT people in different historical and social contexts, discuss about their identity and the role that gender and sexual orientation may play in their

everyday life and learn how to organize them-self for proposing policy recommendations that promote equal rights for all.



"Voice OUT is very consistent with what we do: I as a teacher am responsible for training students in 'learning, career and citizenship'. I've noticed that through Voice OUT homosexuality made a soft landing in the souls of the students. Some students came out of the closet more easily, that is so special! But important for us too is: We want them to show how stereotypes work in games: how does the hero and how does the heroine look like? They see examples of them in many ways, and in games those stereotypes are only confirmed. But we liked them to sketch a different image of the hero in their own game. A hero does not always have to be the macho, or the heroine does not always have to be the 90-60-90 lady. Some students started to develop such a game."

*Teacher,  
The Netherlands*

From an educational point of view, Voice OUT objectives are the following:

- To create a safe and welcoming environment in which students can express freely their opinions, reflect on their identity and be empowered as persons and as citizens;
- To promote students' civic skills and knowledge to act democratically, as a fundamental instrument to prevent discrimination with respect;
- To provide young people with analytical and emotional competences for deconstructing heteronormative stereotypes;
- To provide students with the essential information about the legal and social situation of LGBT people in different historical and social contexts;
- To support students in debating, make their voice heard and express their values and opinions;

- To teach students how to express their ideas in visual forms and engaging them in the production of multimedia artefacts aimed at tackling homophobia and promoting equal rights for LGBT people;
- To support students in developing concrete policy-oriented proposals to fight homophobia and act as peer-educators in their schools/social environment.

In The Netherlands there was one group of students participating in Voice OUT while doing education in audio-visual graphics. For them it really was a new thing to think about sexual diversity. Voice OUT gave them the opportunity to connect thinking and talking about sexual orientation to their own world of developing audio-visual materials. Besides making movies, they started to develop a game in which a gay person has to choose what he is going to do if peers are bullying him. The game was to make the players empathise with a gay person.

More information on the Voice OUT approach can be found in the NISO toolkit in DVD attached.



## THE RESEARCH: ANALYSIS OF HOMOPHOBIC ATTITUDES AND STEREOTYPES

The first step of the NISO project, in order to prepare the following activities, has been a research carried out on attitudes and stereotypes against LGBT persons in the four countries involved. After a preliminary background analysis on the situation regarding LGBT rights, social and political attitudes towards LGBT issues and the situation in schools at European and national levels, the experts realized two specific and complementary surveys.

The first survey was targeted to members of the LGBT communities, with regard to their personal experience of discrimination and prejudices, their opinion about homophobic behaviour and how

they lived their sexual orientation and gender identity at school. In total, more than

1.000 people responded to the questionnaire diffused through different means (Internet, LGBT associations, events, direct contacts, etc.). In parallel, the second survey analysed the opinion of young people about LGBT and gender issues and their perception of homosexuality. The questionnaire has

been distributed in schools and has been often used as an occasion to speak about homophobia in classes. Overall, almost 1.400 students participated in the survey.

The transnational analysis of the results of the surveys has been extremely interesting. In fact, the experts were able to compare the personal experience and feelings of LGBT people with the image that the youngsters have of them and of their situation.

It is not an objective of this publication to present the results of the research, in fact, all the reports (at national and transnational level) are available in the attached DVD and on NISO website. However, it is worth highlighting some of the main results of the research. First of all, more than 80% of the LGBT



respondents declared that they have suffered from discrimination during their lives, and the first context indicated for the discrimination was school. Moreover, according to the respondents, the main cause for homophobia in our society is the ignorance of the people and the lack of education.

Regarding the students, even if a large part declare to be in favour of LGBT rights and have a positive approach towards LGBT issues in general, less than 40% of the respondents would feel at ease sharing a room with a gay or lesbian classmate. The research shows, moreover, that gender stereotypes

"I am the teacher of ethics in a secondary school. My wife, is also my colleague. She teaches religious education. Our school consist of 90% children with Muslim roots. We are afraid to come out as a lesbian couple. We are searching for tools to make these issues more 'out there'. To break the silence. And we need tools that can relate the students to their own identity and minority status in our society."

*Female teacher, secondary school, 45 years old*

are still diffused among the young population, and

that most of the stereotypes against LGBT persons are linked to gender stereotypes

(both in the answers of the students and for those perceived by LGBT people). These results demonstrate that a strong involvement in the schools is essential to face homophobia and heteronormativity in our society.

Moreover, the results suggest that while working on LGBT issues with the students, it is important to address also sexual orientation and gender identity as strictly related to a stereotypical vision

"If the homosexuality is a disease, then we should blame on it only heteros. No gay or lesbian is born without heterosexual sexual act – so heteros should stop having a sexual acts to avoid the disease spreading. When heteros are not producing gays and lesbians we don't have a problem as well, as long as they are having a sex it is pointless to hate gays and lesbians. They are not guilty of their sexuality.

No sex = no gays :)"

*Estonian Student*

Moreover, the results suggest that while working on LGBT issues with the students, it is important to address also sexual orientation and gender identity as strictly related to a stereotypical vision

of homosexuality. The Voice OUT approach is meant to be an instrument for working on this topic in schools and for supporting students and teachers in creating a safer environment for all.

## VOICE OUT TRAINING TOOLKIT

NISO project also developed a training toolkit. The NISO toolkit describes the process and exercises used during this project within schools in the four countries. This bundle consists of exercises divided into seven categories. There is also a short presentation about the Voice OUT approach and how the participating countries adapted it to the specific needs encountered.

The toolkit is split up into seven categories with different types of games/activities:



### 1 Icebreakers:

Short exercises to break the ice in the participating group of youngsters, to create a safe and trusting environment. They introduce ground rules and are group binding.

### 2 Identity:

Activities that allow participants think about (their) individual identity, group identity, stereotypes, prejudices, minority & majority groups in society.

### 3 LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender):

Activities where participants learn more about LGBT issues and stories.

### 4 Voice OUT:

Different exercises about active citizenship and freedom of expression.

The participants learn how they can make their voice heard, how to express their opinions, how to stand up for themselves (assertiveness training), how to debate, how to set up a communication campaign, how to engage in politics, etc.



### **Human Rights:**

5

Activities where participants learn more about fundamental human rights in general and how they relate to LGBT rights.



6

### **Media Education:**

Participants learn to have a critical look at the images and messages they receive from the media (television, radio, magazines, newspapers, internet...)



7

### **Multimedia for Dummies:**

A basic training in the technical aspects of video-making.



"The educational activity of the Lyceum Socrate has always proposed conditions so that students construct independently its cultural, human and civil training. Indeed, it seems essential that the educational experience fosters the formation of people creating their own qualities to respect those of others, in the belief that the relationship with diversity represents an opportunity for growth. The cultural, religious and gender differences can also be an opportunity for all to enrich their own culture and sensitivity. For this reason, the high school has always been a particular focus on equal opportunities for men and women, and - thanks to the project NISO - even to fight against homophobia. This care of inclusion and valuing diversity was the founding principle of the National Plan for Education for more recent years. The student welfare assumes a serene relationship dynamics and / or social environment to which the project Niso has contributed significantly."

*Italian teacher*



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## CHARACTERISTICS OF VOICE OUT IN DIFFERENT SCHOOL CONTEXTS

The NISO consortium has tried Voice OUT in different countries (Belgium, Estonia, Italy and The Netherlands), but also in different kinds of schools and different kinds of groups of younger people in each country. For a better understanding of these differences, or to see how to implement Voice OUT in different contexts, the characteristics of the project have been categorized. For a more thoroughly discussion about the diversity

in contexts, see *Voice OUT Toolkit* (page 5-9) in the NISO DVD.

"Of course we want to involve our students in a project about equal rights and homophobia. As a school we have a responsibility. We have to practice what we preach!"

*Head- Mistress, Belgian secondary school*

School type, group and age are the first three categories by which we can characterize the implementation of Voice OUT in twelve different European groups of younger people. Duration and hours spent in working on the Voice OUT themes with each group are important aspects to properly assess what investment is needed, while context make one aware of opportunities in curriculum to integrate Voice OUT in the regular programs of the school. If it doesn't fit within the regular lessons one can

"For us it is difficult. We have an almost all boy school. There is a lot of macho behavior among the students. There is not one student who is out of the closet. When discussing LGBT issues with their own class mates, students actually are quite open minded. They can openly speak their mind and admit that LGBT's are entitled to the same rights. Actually, deep down they do not have issues at all. But when they are on the playground, in the hallway, among other students, they are out of their comfort zone. The urge to profile, to be macho, is back. And you hear "that's so gay" in a negative way. As teachers, we need to break through those norms, we need to campaign the whole school together with the students and make LGBT issues visible on the playground."

*Teacher Belgian secondary school, 33 years old*

decide to do Voice OUT on a voluntary base, as some of the NISO partners did. With respect to didactics we have chosen to differentiate between cyclic, reflective, linear and synchronic:

- Cyclic: meaning that training in the Voice OUT themes and working on the practical side of it, was switched off;
- Reflective: the training of Voice OUT themes followed after the practical side of the Voice OUT approach;
- Linear: the opposite of the Reflective way; first the training and afterwards the practical side;
- Synchronic: both the training and the practical side done in parallel hours.

By practical side we mean the process of making the video and the development of a communication campaign.

"Recently I had a conversation with a gay student of Arabic origin. He said he meets a lot of misunderstandings at our school. For me that means that we have not been arrived at our goal yet with the project. But I hope that students, by working on it, have received a different, more positive image of homosexuality."

*Teacher, the Netherlands*

In one of the participating school, almost all students are Muslim, often children of immigrants from poor and conservative rural backgrounds. The pilot on this school showed how the students live in homes where sexual diversity is never discussed and how they – teachers in this school as well – were very surprised that guest-teachers dare to bring up the subject of sexual diversity and homophobia. In a class with a majority of boys, at the beginning of the Voice OUT program, the general opinion of the students was that all people deserved respect, but that gays and lesbians were an exception 'because they are not people'. After the program, the students developed a small campaign with a video on this theme, starting with the question 'Are gays human? Yes or No?' and it ended with an affirmation, showing how the people started to recognise that gays and lesbians deserve the same respect as anyone.

Belgium	School 1	School 2
<b>Type</b>	Technical and vocational education	Technical and vocational education
<b>Group</b>	1 class of 19 1 class of 11	1 class of 15
<b>Age</b>	16-17 year	16-17 year
<b>Duration in weeks</b>	7	5
<b>Hours a week per group</b>	3	1
<b>Context</b>	Lessons of religion and ethics	Lessons on behavioral studies
<b>Didactics</b>	Cyclic	Reflective
<b>Contents</b>	Each group: 3 interactive sessions on LGBT issues; identity and equal opportunities. 1 week media training. Then 1 week making the movie, doing the campaign on school. 1 week elections on school	1 week LGBT training (by teacher). Planned: 1 week for education training and making the movie
<b>Organisation of the campaign</b>	1 group of 11, one group of 17. Each group forms a party with its own message and name. Then each group develops a campaign to raise awareness in the whole school. They make a movie where they make clear what their party stands for and film the action they do in the school	Campaign never started because there wasn't enough time.
<b>Organisation of the election</b>	All students of the whole school will vote for the best campaign. The movies will be presented during classes: ethics and religion during 1 week. They will vote on: best presentation and best campaign	No election
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Non volunteers (difficult run-up) and anxiety to step forward for students. Difficulties with being filmed. Very intensive in short period of time	Timing
<b>Strenghts</b>	Included in class curriculum Support by whole school	Teacher can train students herself

Italy	School 1	School 2	School 3
<b>Type</b>	Middle high, year 3-5	Higher education, year 1-5	Higher education, year 3-5
<b>Group</b>	Volunteers: 30	Volunteers: 35	Volunteers: 25
<b>Age</b>	15-18 year	14-18 year	16-18 year
<b>Duration in weeks</b>	28	28	28
<b>Hours a week per group</b>	2	2	2
<b>Context</b>	Extra-school activity	Extra-school activity	Extra-school activity
<b>Didactics</b>	Reflective	Reflective	Reflective
<b>Contents</b>	Training on LGBT issues, identity, equal rights, media education. Making the political campaign and election days.	Training on LGBT issues, identity, equal rights, media education. Making the political campaign and election days.	Training on LGBT issues, identity, equal rights, media education. Making the political campaign and election days.



Italy	School 1	School 2	School 3
<b>Organisation of the campaign</b>	2 groups, each group made a movie and a campaign presentation around the movie, of which the best were presented by the team of the students to all the classes of the school	2 groups, each group made a movie and a campaign presentation around the movie, of which the best were presented by the team of the students to all the classes of the school	2 groups, each group made a movie and a campaign presentation around the movie, of which the best were presented by the team of the students to all the classes of the school
<b>Organisation of the election</b>	All students voted for the best campaign, on basis of 3 criteria: movie, presentation and message	All students voted for the best campaign, on basis of 3 criteria: movie, presentation and message	All students voted for the best campaign, on basis of 3 criteria: movie, presentation and message
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Cultural unfamiliarity with sexual diversity Only volunteers	Only volunteers	Only volunteers
<b>Strenghts</b>	Video made by youngsters for youngsters Practical experiences Support by the school	Open students Enthusiasm Video made by youngsters for youngsters Practical experiences Support by the school	Open students Enthusiasm Video made by youngsters for youngsters Practical experiences

Estonia	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<b>Type</b>	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed
<b>Group</b>	10	6	5
<b>Age</b>	16-17 year	16-17 year	
<b>Duration in total hours</b>	54	54	54
<b>Context</b>	Extra-curricular activity	Extra-curricular activity	Extra-curricular activity
<b>Didactics</b>	Linear	Linear	Linear
<b>Contents</b>	24 hours of training on LGBT issues, 20 hours of media training, 10 hours of individual work	24 hours of training, 20 hours of media training, 10 hours of individual work	24 hours of training, 20 hours of media training, 10 hours of individual work
<b>Organisation of the campaign</b>	Group agrees on the messages of their video, does the script	Group agrees on the messages of their video, does the script	Brainstorming on the methods, group agreement, script
<b>Organisation of the election</b>	Selection by a jury at a national conference	Selection by a jury at a national conference	Selection by a jury at a national conference
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Voluntary activity and therefore kids can come and go as they please, media training needs to be better organized	Voluntary activity and therefore kids can come and go as they please, media training needs to be better organized	Voluntary activity and therefore kids can come and go as they please, media training needs to be better organized
<b>Strenghts</b>	Kids are interested in media training and feel motivated because of learning new skills	Kids are interested in media training and feel motivated because of learning new skills	Kids are interested in media training and feel motivated because of learning new skills

Netherlands	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
<b>Type</b>	Low level, prep for job education, year 4	Middle high, job education, year 1	Higher education, year 1-5	Highest education, prep for scientific education, year 5
<b>Group</b>	2 classes of 20	1 class of 27	Volunteers: 15	1 class of 20

Netherlands	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4
<b>Age</b>	14-15 year	17-20 year	13-17 year	16-17 year
<b>Duration in weeks</b>	6	10-12	10-12	10-12
<b>Hours a week per group</b>	1,5	1,5 and more	1	1,25
<b>Context</b>	Lessons on citizenship education	Lessons on citizenship education	Gay and Straight Alliance	Lessons on social science
<b>Didactics</b>	Linear	Cyclic	Reflective	Synchronic
<b>Contents</b>	3 weeks of interactive training on identity, inclusive groups, message, stereotypes, homosexuality, storyboard and interviewing. Then 2 weeks of making the movie and 1 week for the presentation by two students for a selected number of classes	Started with 4 lessons on identity, gender stereotypes and myths about homosexuality. Same time making a plan for the products. Feedback moments for deepening knowledge on homosexuality and discrimination and the campaign technics	Started with thinking through the campaign. Deepening awareness and knowledge about sexual diversity during a thematic week (4-8 June), for which all teachers are called up by the group during a break meeting	Training on the project themes and making the 6 movies in lessons on turns.
<b>Organisation of the campaign</b>	2 groups of 15, each group makes a movie and makes a campaign presentation around the movie, of which the best will be presented by two students per group to a selected number of classes	Initially 3 groups of 9, each one consisting of film, game and management team (for coordination and integration). Later on the teams were reduced to one group, because of time limits	1 group, making a movie of the making and campaigning process of the GSA. During the week of June 4-8 the students will organise a (visibility) campaign in their school	2 groups each making 6 movies; presentation of the movies by the coaching teacher for his other groups in the week of June 4, with a campaign text made by the students
<b>Organisation of the election</b>	All students of the selected number of classes will vote for the best campaign, on basis of 3 criteria: movie, presentation and message	None: because of time pressure the total group has divided itself in three groups: game, movie and campaign	None (has to do with the context)	Students of a selected number of classes will vote after the presentation of their teacher
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Non volunteers (difficult run-up) Cultural unfamiliarity with sexual diversity Difficulties with being filmed Short project lifetime	Very ambitious	Not much time (program in free time) Only volunteers	Training and campaign are less interconnected Not very well prepared for the campaign
<b>Strengths</b>	Challenge to link with recognized themes Open students Difficult group because of obstructing convictions (good for piloting)	Volunteers Innovative integration in their job education Integrative campaign Enthusiasm	Sustainability Combination of the GSA concept and Voice OUT	European orientation Eagerness of the school coordinator to integrate the game in the curriculum



## ADAPT AND TRANSFER VOICE OUT

In this section elements to be considered when planning Voice OUT activities are described.

### Different cultural settings

It will be necessary to consider how to introduce the project and all the different themes. Some countries/groups are used to talk about sexual diversity, sexual identity or sexuality in general while others are not. In the latter case it may be better to start by talking about human rights, respect, diversity and introduce the theme of sexual diversity in a second moment.

How does the group deal with competition? We noticed that some groups saw it as a challenge to do their very best while other groups could lose their motivation if the competition element became central. Some groups preferred to debate and try to find consensus with other groups instead of competing. Educators need to carefully consider the group preference and plan the activities accordingly.

"During this course I had to fight against ignorance, superficiality, the inconsistency, the stereotypical pedantic "moralism" that reigns supreme in Italian society (and not only), and especially against intolerance and discrimination. What I am upset and disappointed is the inability to understand that homosexuality falls just in the many shades of love, so I wonder... what is the need to designate love using this word so awkward! There are already five letters perfect."

*Italian student*

### Different types of groups

In the Voice OUT approach, there are two goals: teach all the participants about LGBT issues and let them set up a campaign and make a video. Some participants find it better to start with the different workshops where they learn about LGBT issues and, based on the information obtained, start working on their campaign and video. Others found it better the opposite way. It also can be organized that both kind of activities run simultaneously.

The media aspect varied from country to country; some found it stimulating, others were timid of being filmed. Democracy is the best approach: discuss with the groups and adopt their proposals.



## Different school strategies

The overall goal of Voice OUT is to mobilize the school to integrate sexual diversity within its curriculum, as well as create a safe learning environment where sexual diversity is an essential part. That means that different things have to be considered equally as important, both before and during a Voice OUT project. The three most important focuses are implementation, student participation and integrating from beginning to end.

## Student Participation

Student participation is the backbone of Voice OUT, but when this project comes to the school context, it may turn out differently, depending on how much the school works with participatory methods.

"I know our principal is very open minded towards LGBT issues. He is very concerned with the situation of some of our LGBT students. We address these issues on regular base during classes, but this is entirely up to the initiative of the teachers involved. The only problem – to do the project - could be our student's parents who are mainly conservative-catholic. But, they will not influence us. We have learned to fight their opinions as well."

*Belgian teacher*

Therefore it is important to consider the system in which the students are used to participating.

Try to push the boundaries with an eye on the potential of the students. Before setting up the training program, start with re-searching the school context.

It is useful to look at the social climate concerning the knowledge and attitudes of the participating students, as well as the didactic borders.



## Thinking from the end to the start

In general, schools have to be recruited to do a Voice OUT activity early, because school planning starts early each year and most of the time schedules are full after the planning phase. It is important to determine the amount of time that can be dedicated to the project before planning, together with the school. The time that can be dedicated to the project depends on different factors, such as whether the project is being done within a curriculum context or outside. In order to thoughtfully adapt the length of the project, one should look at which selection of themes to introduce or the background of the students.



## THE WINNING VIDEOS

As a result of the Voice OUT activities, the youngsters developed awareness campaigns and short videos. Each group chose its own way of talking about LGBT discrimination and to get active on this topic. Here below a short description of the work done by the groups that emerged as favored in each country.

The Estonian students had decided to adopt a soft approach and to show that relationship between two lesbian or gay persons was “normal”. The spot they realised suggest positive feelings to those who watch it, and help people being more open about LGBT issues. They decided also to have a limited diffusion of the spot at the beginning: they showed it only to their friends, knowing that they would not show criticism. Their friends then showed it among their friends, and so on. In the end, the spot was widely seen through the internet. The Estonian students received very good feedback about this video; the teachers were very positive about it, and some headmasters asked their teachers to use it during their lessons.

Some schools in The Netherlands have Gay and Straight Alliances: groups of students who identify themselves as LGB or T or as heterosexual or as yet unsure but who all share the desire to make their school a safer place for LGBT teachers and students. At the winning school in the Netherlands, Voice OUT turned out to be a very good format to start a GSA and to give it body. The students brainstormed with teachers of different courses how to use one lesson for sexual diversity, during the campaigning week. The teacher in French organised his lesson around the story how he moved to the Netherlands because of his coming-out, a teacher in English let his students write a letter to Obama why they were for or against same-sex marriage, and at History a student gave a lesson on homosexuality during Holocaust. This group of students was, according to the jury of the national election, the winning



group, because they had done the most to mobilise others in school to stand up for sexual diversity.

In Belgium, Voice OUT activities have been carried out in a vocational school frequented almost only by boys. It was difficult in

this context to tackle LGBT issues, and therefore homosexuality was inserted inside a wider range of topics.

The message on which the students worked was that you must respect everybody, whatever their differences (whatever their gender identity, sexual orientation, the way they dress, etc.).

The competition between the two groups, which made the videos in the school, has been important, and the winning group succeeded in involving

almost all the students of the school in a big wave representing the word “respect”. The video made by the students is about diversity and respect and it features their waving at the end.

In Italy, the students decided to make a more striking spot, featuring the life of two boys, one straight and one gay. While the straight

boy has a “normal” life (he goes to university, finds a job, has a baby, etc.), the gay boy gets pestered and the rest is black. The students wanted to show what reality is in their country and thought that it was necessary to shock people to make them understand how necessary it is to act now to change this reality. They presented this video to their schoolmates together with other promoting activities during an election week. In fact, the video was

only a part of the activities promoted in their school by the students, who engaged almost all their classmate.

“Ignorant, dumb and closed minded people will always exist, the important thing is not to get discouraged and do not give up. It is important to continue fighting for what you believe in and not to give up, because this is just what these people want! I want to be optimistic, I hope that one day these people will not be laughing at others, but others will exclude them from society and laugh at them and their painful superficiality.”

*Italian student*



## THE BRUSSELS EXPERIENCE: WRITING THE POSITION PAPER

In the case of the NISO project, the Voice OUT process ended with a three-day meeting in Brussels, in which the winning groups from the different countries got together to develop a position paper against discrimination.

During the three-day workshop the students learned the roles of ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Association) and IGLYO (International Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organisation). A dedicated game was developed for learning more about the European Parliament

and about how EU politics work. In the game “What

“For me, wearing my piercing is important to me. However it is forbidden to do so within the school walls. It is important to have the freedom to express yourself. No one should have to hide their true identity. And it shouldn’t matter if this is about clothes, music or sexual orientation.”

*Belgian Student*

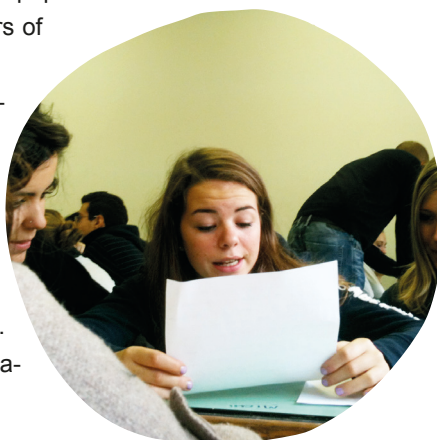
we need in schools” the students explored the needs of young people in schools for a non-homophobic environment and existing policy suggestions. A series of brainstorming in small groups lead the students to think about the contents of the position paper, all the proposal were summarized and through a vote for the top six ideas they built up the position paper reported here after. The three-day workshop

in Brussels, ended at the European Parliament

where the position paper have been

presented by the students to members of the European Parliament.

We understand the possibility to organise a three-day workshop at European level may be difficult to replicate; however it is important to mention that, in this case, the Voice OUT process did not end with a competitive step such as the previous ones. Rather it generated a shared collaborative output.



## NISO POSITION PAPER

The Voice OUT campaigners, 50 students from Belgium, Estonia, Italy and the Netherlands, meeting in Brussels on the 1st and 2nd of October 2012:

- Have received training with regard to LGBT issues, gender stereotypes, human rights and the role of the media in their respective countries, subsequent to which they organized campaigns in their schools and/or regions with respect to these issues;
- Have exchanged ideas, views and experiences with regard to the topics mentioned above in Brussels on the 1st and 2nd of October 2012;
- Have concluded that there is room for improvement in all of the participating countries with regard to the public view vis-à-vis sexual diversity, thereby increasing general tolerance and acceptance of sexual diversity;
- Therefore recommend that the following constructive steps are taken in the area of education, media and judicial issues.

### With regard to EDUCATION:

We have noted that bullying, in the form of verbal and non-verbal aggression, as well as digital bullying, specifically by means of social media, takes on worrying forms. This then leads to the social exclusion of LGBT teachers and students who are literally set apart in a type of Apartheid based on sexual diversity.

The levels of bullying and exclusion depend on cultural and religious background and the dominant school culture, i.e. up to which extent does a school, as a mini-society as it were, deal with intolerance towards LGBT people. Overall the level of LGBT awareness amongst teachers and school leaders needs to be effectively improved, teachers either do not know how to react, or are judgmental, they convey their own intolerance in class. In certain countries sexual diversity is a taboo subject, its issues are entirely ignored by schools and teachers. This is the case for general education about LGBT itself, but also when the historical, literary or social context includes LGBT.

Within the prevailing youth cultures the words “gay” or “homo” have been ingrained as very common expletive descriptions, and anything associated with LGBT is seen in a very negative light.

To create a safer school environment we propose the following:

- Training for students with regard to gender stereotypes and bullying of LGBT teachers and students.
- Training for teachers with regard to gender stereotypes and bullying of LGBT colleagues and students, specifically in how to deal with LGBT issues at school.
- Educational material should propose non stereotypical representation of family and gender.
- Increased subsidies to LGBT associations to support their activities to raise awareness and tolerance in schools.

### **With regard to MEDIA:**

We have noted that on the whole mainstream magazines and television there are differences between countries; in some cases media does not directly reinforce negative stereotyping, though this may be the case when LGBT people are presented in extreme stereotypical form. However, there is a definite indirect reinforcement of negative stereotyping. First of all the media emphasize an image of “normality” in which LGBT is either ignored entirely (think of advertising) or only vaguely referenced to (think of magazines aimed at the teen market). Either way, in their representation of average (family) life LGBT do not play a part of any significance as an alternative way of existing. Currently the media use too many stereotypes which affect division and misunderstanding among (young) people and intensifies the levels of intolerance. The media has a huge influence on public perception. It is a very important instrument of reaching the public, which leads to increasing awareness.

In order to adapt media portrayal of “normality” and use the media to reinforce acceptance and tolerance of sexual diversity, we recommend:

- Books, cartoons and films to propose non-stereotypical images of family and gender related matters.
- The financing of a long-term media campaign in which LGBT issues are discussed and tolerance and acceptance are encouraged. We

think that the appointment of 'ambassadors', in the form of highly influential celebrities from the world of music, sports and entertainment, would work well.

### With regard to LAW:

We have noted that many EU countries have stated that while free speech is a cornerstone of democracy on a national and Pan-European level, the incitement to discrimination and violence can have serious direct and indirect consequences. Therefore, if a group is threatened, insulted or degraded due to race, national or ethnic origin, faith, sexual orientation or gender identity then this would fall under the category of hate speech, which in some countries is expressly forbidden. With regard to LGBT issues, this is very positive. However, some countries with such laws in effect do not always uphold said laws, and other nations in the EU have not enacted similar laws.

We therefore recommend:

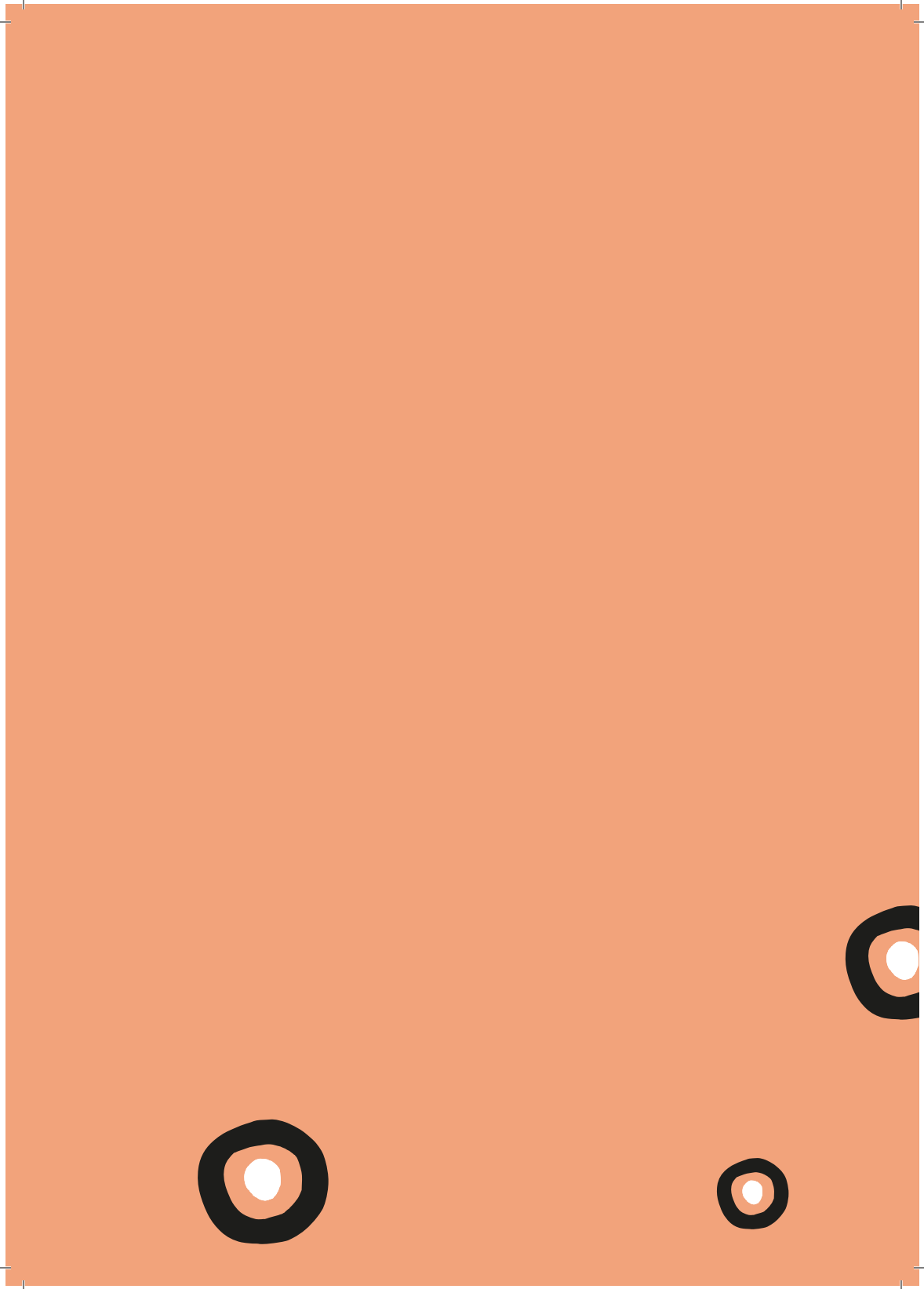
- That the EU encourages and stimulates states to either uphold laws against hate speech with respect to LGBT issues, or introduce said laws.

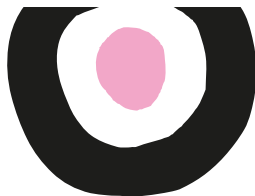
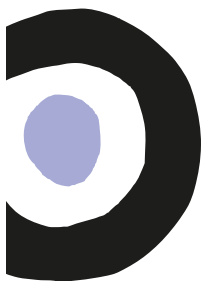
### CONCLUSION

We would really appreciate it if you would appreciate the efforts we have gone to in order to exchange and discuss problems with regard to LGBT issues as well as to initiate solutions.

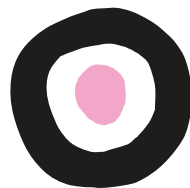
This is the society in which we live, work and will grow old, why should it not be a better place for everyone? It is our future.

We have a vision of a future in which differences unite us, in which differences become irrelevant. A future in which we don't add the word "gay" to café, literature, clubs, marriages. This because a marriage, for example, is a marriage regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of those marrying. In this vision people are not judged on whether they are LGBT or not, as this no longer makes a difference. People are accepted for who, and not what, they are. We are willing to fight for this. We have done so at our schools, in our countries and now in our European Union. Will you help us?





The NISO project aims to improve knowledge and understanding of human rights among students, with special regard to sexual orientation. For this purpose, the project team has developed the Voice OUT “game” based on an interactive and participative learning method. Voice OUT helps students express their views on human rights and fight homophobia in schools and the media. In this toolkit you will find some useful instruments and suggestions tested by the NISO Consortium that can be adapted to suit individual needs.



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