



Written Contribution from IGLYO¹ and ILGA-Europe²

Schools for the 21st Century Commission Staff Working Paper (SEC (2007) 1009) (December 2007)

Education plays a pivotal role in developing young people's capacity to reach their full human potential. As such, a priority for ILGA-Europe – the European Region of the International Lesbian and Gay Association – and the International Gay and Lesbian Youth Organisation (IGLYO) is to ensure a climate of safety, support and affirmation exist in schools, which enables lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people like their heterosexual peers to achieve their full potential. Unfortunately, the current situation of LGBT youth in schools is not one of openness and inclusiveness. A European-wide survey carried out by ILGA-Europe and IGLYO in 2006 (Takács, 2006) found that education is the field in which LGBT youth experience most discrimination: 61.2% of young LGBT people in Europe responded that they had experienced discrimination at school.

In this context, ILGA-Europe and IGLYO welcome the consultation regarding the future of Europe's school, and would like to contribute to the consultation by highlighting the situation of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in education. This contribution is intended to emphasise the importance of a rights-based approach to Community action and policies related to education through a discussion of the specific issues and concerns of young LGBT people. This paper also provides a response to questions raised by the Commission in its working paper from a human rights perspective aimed at combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and/or gender identity³ and promoting equality.

ILGA-Europe and IGLYO welcome the opportunity to contribute to this consultation process, and look forward to an ongoing debate in this important policy area with all the relevant stakeholders.

1 IGLYO is the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organisation. Founded in 1984 and with over 50 members in 30 countries of the European region, it represents and advocates for young sexual minorities in Europe. IGLYO is a recognised partner by the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

2 ILGA-Europe, the European Region of the International Lesbian and Gay Association, is a European NGO with more than 200 national and local lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) member organisations in 40 European countries. ILGA-Europe is a member of the Platform of European Social NGOs (Social Platform).

3 "Gender identity" refers to a person's sense of conformity between their biological and psychological gender. This is the individual's gender concept of self, which does not necessarily depend on the sex they were assigned at birth. ILGA-Europe uses the umbrella term transgender for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term may include, but it is not limited to: transsexuals, intersex persons, cross-dressers, and other gender variant people.

I. The situation of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in education

It is widely acknowledged that education plays a pivotal role in developing young people's capacity to reach their full human potential. As explained in the Commission's working paper, "School is the place where the majority of Europeans spend at least nine or ten years of their lives; here they gain the basic knowledge, skills, and competences, and many of the fundamental norms, attitudes and values which will carry them through their lives. Complementing the key roles of parents, school can help individuals develop their talents and fulfil their potential for personal growth (both emotional and intellectual) and well-being." In this context, it is also generally agreed that the environment in which young people learn is of significant importance in their personal development, growth and well-being.

Unfortunately, many young people do not experience education in a climate of safety, support, acknowledgment and affirmation in their school. This is particularly true for many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning young people across Europe who face stigma, discrimination and marginalization. Indeed, a European-wide survey carried out by ILGA-Europe and IGLYO in 2006 (Takács, 2006) with over 750 respondents from 37 European countries, found that education is the field in which LGBT youth experience most discrimination: 61.2% of young LGBT people in Europe responded that they had experienced discrimination at school.⁴ Discrimination and marginalisation in schools takes many forms: from verbal and physical bullying and prejudice in the school curriculum and teaching content, to insulting or degrading treatment during classes and refusing access to information about sexuality and sexual health.

The experience of stigmatisation and marginalisation of homosexuality and different gender identities at school can have a profoundly negative impact on young LGBT people. Researchers have emphasised that if the social environment is disapproving of their emerging sexual orientation, LGBT adolescents may experience profound isolation and fear of discovery, which then interferes with achieving the main developmental tasks of adolescence related to self-esteem, identity, socialization and ability to become autonomous, as well as with their achievement at school.

1.1 Forms of discrimination at school

Homophobic bullying and harassment

A serious problem for young people dealing with their emerging LGB identity is the prevalence of homophobic bullying and harassment in schools. Homophobic bullying is a particular type of bullying which is related to a person's sexual orientation, or assumed sexual orientation, and/or gender identity.⁵ Bullying, which often goes unnoticed,

⁴ There were 754 respondents to the questionnaires; 93% of the responses came from youth from within the EU. See Takács, 2006.

⁵ "Gender identity" refers to a person's sense of conformity between their biological and psychological gender. This is the individual's gender concept of self, which does not necessarily depend on the sex they were assigned at birth. "Sexual orientation" in turn is used to depict a person's sexual and emotional attraction to people of the same and/ or different sex.

includes a wide spectrum of negative experiences from name calling and verbal abuse, to ostracism and physical attacks. Abuse can be verbal, physical or psychological. Bullies can be both fellow pupils and students or teachers.

Numerous academic studies have found that homophobic bullying and harassment are pervasive features of many European educational systems. The 2006 ILGA-Europe and IGLYO survey found that 53% of respondents had experienced bullying at school (e.g. verbal attacks, harassment, threats, physical violence). Research funded by the Department of Education & Science in Ireland (Norman, Galvin & McNamara, 2006) showed the high incidence of homophobic bullying in Irish schools; the survey found that a majority of teachers (79%) were aware of instances of verbal homophobic bullying and a significant number (16%) were aware of physical bullying in their school. The research also found that 90% of respondents reported that their school's anti-bullying policy did not include any reference to lesbian and gay related bullying.⁶ Other research data corroborate the findings of the ILGA-Europe & IGLYO survey, including the "*Homophobia in the Educational System*" research project in Spain (2005), the SOS Homophobie survey in France (2007)⁷, the School Report of Stonewall in the UK (2007)⁸ and the *Observatório de Educação* in Portugal.⁹

It should be noted that homophobic bullying is not only experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people. It can also affect any child, young person or teacher who does not conform to ways of behaving that are traditionally associated with being 'masculine' or 'feminine'. Anyone seen as "different" or as having characteristics considered to belong to LGBT people can suffer from homophobic bullying. Bullying also affects those who are not directly targeted, since where bullying takes place, young people are learning in an environment where homophobic language and comments are commonplace. Hearing phrases like "that's so gay" or the use of homophobic remarks, such as "poof" or "queer" as insults contribute to making LGBT youth feel isolated and make them hide their identity.

Prejudice in the curriculum

Another key element affecting the school environment is the school curriculum. Stigma and reluctance to address sexual orientation in the school curriculum as a normal part of human identity has led to many young people who are dealing with an emerging LGB identity or those perceived to be LGB experiencing significant inequalities. According to

⁶ Research funded by the Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Education & Science (Norman, Galvin & McNamara, 2006)

⁷ This community-led research project on homophobia in schools carried out by the French non-governmental organisation SOS Homophobie found that 89% of the respondents considered that homosexuality is silenced in text books. 79% of the respondents to the survey said that homosexuality is not mentioned by teachers. SOS Homophobie also found that 58% of students had been victim or had witnessed acts of homophobia. Moreover, the study showed that 44% of these students didn't feel secure enough to turn to administration for support in cases of bullying. http://www.sos-homophobie.org/documents/analyse_enquete_milieu_scolaire.pdf

⁸ The School Report - The experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools by Ruth Hunt and Johan Jensen, Stonewall, 2007 (www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/school_report.pdf). This report produced by Stonewall presents the results of a survey conducted with more than 1100 of those young people, the largest poll of its kind ever carried out in the UK. It reveals that homophobic bullying is almost epidemic in Britain's schools: Almost two thirds of young gay people at secondary school (65%) have experienced homophobic bullying.

⁹ Research project from Spain available at

www.felgt.org/_felgt/archivos/4066_es_Homofobia%20en%20el%20Sistema%20Educativo%202005.pdf?cl=es-ES;

and Project of Rede Ex Aequo (Portugal): <http://ex-aequo.web.pt/observatorio.html>.

the ILGA-Europe and IGLYO survey, 43% of LGBT youth have encountered prejudice in curriculum and teaching content. This prejudice is often expressed through the inclusion of discriminative elements targeting LGBT people, but it also demonstrated by the lack of representation of LGBT issues in school curriculum. (Takács, 2006: 55)

Indeed, all the research studies cited above have found that in many schools, LGBT issues are still too often presented in negative contexts such as being a disease, a sin or an unnatural way of being, which only strengthening old, well-known stereotypes. Equally widespread is the silencing of LGBT issues in the school curriculum, i.e. the fact that LGBT issues are not included, mentioned or covered in the school curriculum, which is interpreted by many as a tool at the institutional level for maintaining LGBT invisibility in school and as such an instance of discrimination in itself. Also widespread is the practice of not including non-heterosexual forms of sexuality in sex education and health education classes which can have dangerous potential consequences on, for example, the sexual health of young LGBT people. This actively participates in the institutional exclusion of LGBT young people, since the curriculum carries the educational institution's authority, and therefore carries even more weight, as it becomes formal and official. It is thus necessary to stop presenting minority sexual orientations (homosexuality and bisexuality) as inferior or less valuable than heterosexuality (either implicitly by the sheer absence of mentions of homosexuality, or explicitly) in the school curriculum. Textbooks and curriculum need to be increasingly revised to take out negative representations of homosexuality, bisexuality and different gender identities.

Role of teachers

Educators in general have a pivotal role to play in the level of inclusion of lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in school life; they are also critical to creating school environments that are free from homophobia. Yet, according to the IGLYO and ILGA-Europe survey, 14% of respondents who had negative experiences in school mentioned teachers as being the source, or being part of their problems. They talked about teachers who “failed to provide help and guidance”, who did not want to or couldn't “guess where my problems were coming from at the age of 16-19”, who “were not supportive at all”. In some cases, teachers were described as passive outsiders who, instead of helping the isolated, hurt and/or bullied students, were perceived to be siding with the LGBT-opposing camp. Some respondents reported homophobic and heterosexist manifestations of teachers who “have spoken against homosexuality without knowing that there are gays in their class”, who “laugh when they briefly talk about this subject”, who “often made me the target of jokes publicly”. (Takács, 2006)

Teachers in schools across Europe also find themselves accountable for a major part of institutional discrimination experienced by young LGBT people. It is all the more important, as they are vested with the institution's discourse, and therefore are perceived to produce and speak the school's official discourse. This is particularly problematic, as usually teacher training does not address issues such as discrimination or homophobic bullying, and teachers do not know how to deal with such occurrences.¹⁰

¹⁰ Recent research showed that teachers often know about incidence of bullying. Indeed, research funded the Department of Education & Science (Norman, Galvin & McNamara, 2006) found that a majority of teachers (79%) were aware of instances of verbal homophobic bullying and a significant number (16%) were aware of physical bullying in their school. The research found that 90% of respondents reported that their school's anti-bullying policy did not include any reference to lesbian and gay related bullying.

What is more, teachers often mention the fear of children's or parents' reactions to the propping up of LGBT issues in schools. Such vicious circle leads to situations whereby teachers enforce silence around sexual minority issues or actually partake in homophobic jokes or mockery with pupils, be it in class or, more likely, in informal settings such as during breaks. This vicious circle can be broken if clear guidelines are given by the school or a higher institution, which would then protect teachers against complaints.

Discriminatory practices in school

The organisation of school life could seem to have little or no importance with regards to the mainstreaming of sexual minority issues, but it is important where school organisation maintains the invisibility of LGBT youth. In the context of the IGLYO and ILGA-Europe survey, a number of respondents talked about homophobia operating on the institutional level which gives the impression that heterosexism was part of official school policy. For instance, a young woman from Poland explained: *"I know that three of the teachers were expelled from the department because one of them is a gay man, and the other two were dealing with 'improper' issues i.e. LGBT, feminism"*.

Schools often promote implicitly a view according to which there is no other sexual orientation than heterosexuality by not mentioning sexual minorities. A simple example is the organisation of a school ball, where opposite sex couples are invited to come and dance at the end of the year, but pupils with partners of the same sex might feel embarrassment and shame at the idea of bringing their partner. Other examples can be found in the organisation of school life, for instance by the school administration asking about mother and father, thereby excluding same-sex parent couples, and indirectly their children (again, finger-pointing and mockery by either peers or members of the teaching or non-teaching staff).

The opening up of school's general discourse to sexual orientations other than heterosexuality, as well as the integration of transgender issues, is essential to the satisfaction of individual learners' needs. Recognising that every pupil is unique, and that in an increasingly multiethnic and multicultural Europe diverse needs and expectations have to be catered for, the adaptation of educational institutions to this increased demand must take into account every aspect of the pupils' identities. This includes the recognition that identities are multiple and unique, and also encompass one's sexual orientation and gender identity.

1.2 Impact of discrimination and marginalisation at school

The experience of discrimination and stigmatisation at school can have a serious impact on young LGBT people. At a time when young people develop their identity and learn to express themselves socially, bullying can damage self-esteem and confidence. Research has shown that bullying, exclusion and stigmatisation has **a negative impact on LGBT youth's mental health**¹¹; that it increases the risk of depression, self-harm

¹¹ Studies focusing on the specific mental health problems – relating to substance abuse, eating disorders, homelessness, depression, and suicide – and needs of young LGBT people emphasise that there is no association between their sexual orientation and psychopathology. However, like members of other minorities, they are subject to chronic and acute stress, related to their occupation of a stigmatised social position: "The mental health problems that may appear among lesbian and gay young adults tend to be explained in social or socio-political

and suicide. Bullying can socially exclude young people, and leave them in fear of being hurt or ridiculed. Anxiety related to fear of discrimination or bullying can also lead young people to hiding their true self and to considering the “coming out” process as a luxury with potentially dangerous consequences.¹²

LGBT young people are therefore subject to minority stress, defined by Meyer as a chronic psychological strain caused by the experience or the expectation of mockery, bullying, finger-pointing and psychological or physical violence (2003)¹³. Minority stress is the mental state whereby the worry to be ‘unmasked’ or ‘discovered’ as different generates continuous strain on one’s mind, and leads to permanently deploying important amounts of energy to hide and build an alternative truth or self. As a 30 year old German male respondent to the 2006 IGLYO & ILGA-Europe survey recalled: “*I wasn’t out at school due to anxiety of discrimination.*” (Takács, 2006: 51).

Research also showed that homophobic bullying and harassment in school can result in **increased absenteeism, poor or deteriorating schoolwork, and sometimes lead to early school leaving**. For example, the research conducted in 2007 by Stonewall in the UK found that seven out of ten of young LGBT people say the bullying affects their school work, and half admitted to having skipped school to avoid the bullying.¹⁴ According to this survey, over a third of young lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils do not like going to school; pupils who have experienced homophobic bullying are 44 per cent more likely to feel this, compared to those who have not been bullied. Similar results had been reached by a University of London research that noted that homophobic incidents directed towards LGBT young people are reported to have led to elevated rates of absenteeism from school, limited achievement and the desire to stay on in education.¹⁵

School’s mission to develop actively participating, autonomous citizens fails when it does not address the situation of LGBT young people. By not taking into account pupils’ diverse sexual identities, a school promotes the situation whereby sexual minorities feel and sometimes are powerless, and hence unwilling or incapable of participating fully in society, let alone become active citizens. More generally, tackling homophobic bullying and discriminatory practices in schools is necessary because these problems contribute

rather than psychological terms, [and a] potential range of psychologically demanding situations arising largely from the social context, including negative social representations of lesbian and gay sexuality [which] translate into a heightened psychological vulnerability of young lesbians and gay males as a sexual minority” (Vincke – van Heeringen 2002:182).

12 Takacs, p.51.

13 Meyer, Ilan H. 2003. “Prejudice, Social Stress, and Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: Conceptual Issues and Research Evidence.” *Psychological Bulletin* 129(5):674–697.

14 The School Report - The experiences of young gay people in Britain’s schools by Ruth Hunt and Johan Jensen, Stonewall, 2007 (www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/school_report.pdf)

15 Homophobia, Sexual Orientation and Schools: a Review and Implications for Action, Ian Warwick, Elaine Chase and Peter Aggleton - Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, 2004 www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR594.pdf
Other researches addressing the issue of absenteeism and early school leaving include: McNamee, Helen (2006). *Out on Your Own. An Examination of the Mental Health of Young Same-Sex Attracted Men*. Belfast: The Rainbow Project. Rivers, Ian (2000). *Social exclusion, absenteeism and sexual minority youth*. IN: *Support for Learning* 15(1):13-18. Norman, James and Miriam Galvin (2006) *Straight Talk: An Investigation of Attitudes and Experiences of Homophobic Bullying in Second-Level Schools*, Gender Equality Unit of the Department of Education & Science, Dublin City University
www.dcu.ie/education_studies/schooling_sexualities/schoolingsexualities-phase2report.pdf

to a culture of homophobia and exclusion in a school and creates an unhealthy environment for all students. Moreover, harassment experienced by LGBT youth also implies that anyone who is perceived to be “different” is a legitimate target for ridicule, taunts, aggression or even physical assault. In addition, bullying and discrimination in school limit opportunities for personal growth and hence it negatively impacts a young person’s ability to manage the transition from school to work and to become an autonomous adult and an active citizen.

II. The right to education in international law

In the context of this consultation on the future of Europe’s schools, ILGA-Europe wants to recall the right to education which has been recognized by international and European human rights instruments, which all EU Member States have adhered to. The right to education being inscribed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (art.14), we strongly believe that fundamental rights should be put at the core of all Community and national actions in relation to education.

To this end, we highlight the fact that the right to education is enshrined in the main international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration on human rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ICESCR), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960). Having ratified all these instruments, EU Member States engaged themselves in respecting, promoting and fulfil the right to education.

The right to education is guaranteed in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). According to the ICESCR, “**education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality** (*emphasis added*) and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Moreover, it shall **enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society** (*emphasis added*), promote understanding, tolerance and friendship”.

The rights of students under 18 years of age to education without discrimination, including on grounds of sexual orientation, are also protected by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child protects the child from discrimination (article 2) and ensures their right to education (article 28). The Committee on the Rights of the Child has ruled that the non-discrimination provision in Article 2 of the Convention obliges states parties to ensure that all human beings below [the age of] 18 enjoy all the rights set forth in the Convention without discrimination, including on the basis of adolescents sexual orientation (General comment No. 4 (2003). The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education (Mr. Vernor Muñoz Villalobos) has also, in the framework of his mandate, expressed concern at discrimination in educational institutions towards youth expressing affection for other students of the same sex (E/CN.4/2006/45).

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has also commented that the right to express views freely and have them duly taken into account (art. 12) is also fundamental in realizing adolescents’ right to health and development. The Committee said that “States parties need to ensure that adolescents are given a genuine chance to express their

views freely on all matters affecting them, especially within the family, in school, and in their communities. In order for adolescents to be able safely and properly to exercise this right, public authorities, parents and other adults working with or for children need to create an environment based on trust, information-sharing, the capacity to listen and sound guidance that is conducive for adolescents' participating equally including in decision-making processes.”

We would also like to recall the work of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the 21st Century which defined the four pillars of education as learning to be, learning to know, learning to do and learning to live together.¹⁶

ILGA-Europe and IGLYO consider that any European Union action in the field of education has to take into account these rights and principles recognized by international human rights law, as well as the rights enshrined in the Treaty of Amsterdam (article 13 on non-discrimination), the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (article 14 – right to education and article 21 on non-discrimination) and the European Convention of Human Rights.

III. ILGA-Europe and IGLYO's response to “Schools for the 21st Century”

ILGA-Europe and IGLYO welcome the opportunity to comment on the Commission Staff Working Paper “Schools for the 21st Century” and wish to focus on questions 4 to 7 in this Communication.

Question 4 – How can school systems best respond to the need to promote equity, to respond to cultural diversity and to reduce early school leaving?

Stigmatisation of homosexuality in the curriculum, homophobic bullying and marginalisation of young LGBT people are major factors contributing to early school leaving and academic underachievement among LGBT youth, as well as to their social exclusion. As explained in section I of this submission, many young LGBT people have described how they sometimes stopped attending school because of bullying, or the fear of bullying, linked to their real or perceived sexual orientation. Thus, in order to address the problems of early school leaving and inequity in the school systems, it is necessary to tackle the harassment and discrimination experienced by some groups of young people, including young lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people.

We recognise that strategies aimed at reducing early school leaving need to be comprehensive and made up of both preventative and compensatory actions. In this context, it is essential to acknowledge discrimination and marginalisation as one of the causes of school drop-out, and hence to tackle these phenomena in the framework of prevention measures.

¹⁶ UNESCO, Learning: The Treasure Within, April 1996.

➤ **Actions to be taken**

Schools can best respond to the need to promote equity and to reduce early school leaving by taking action against homophobic bullying and harassment, on one hand, and by increasing the visibility of non-heterosexuality at school, and therefore partake in the creation of a wider and more open attitude of schools to sexual minorities, on the other hand. This is done by adopting the measures previously mentioned in this document, measures such as:

- **Anti-bullying policies** which clearly state that homophobic name-calling, bullying and harassment are not tolerated, offer clear and known mechanisms to address homophobia harassment and violence, and support teachers and school managers to address bullying
- **School curriculum** which presents people of all sexual orientations as normal and treats them with respect and dignity. Where possible people who identify as LGB should be made visible in the curriculum and content of what is being taught.
- **Access to support mechanisms and information** (e.g. from teachers, health professionals, peer groups, etc.) for young people identifying as LGB or who are perceived to be LGB.
- **Diversity policy** which promotes a positive, supportive and inclusive school culture, explicitly mentions diverse sexual orientations and expressions of gender identity. Equity needs to be understood as a state in which diverse and multiple identities are recognised, valorised, and allowed to burgeon safely in the school environment.

The school's official discourse, presented by either teaching staff or school materials, is now one of the primary means of institutional discrimination for LGBT young people in schools, and heavily contributes to early school leaving. Addressing this issue by including sexual minorities in a definition of cultural diversity, and encouraging schools to improve their discourse implicitly and explicitly will considerably help.

➤ **Elements for European cooperation**

The European Union has a clear role here in promoting practices aimed at preventing inequality, social exclusion and early school leaving, such as the measures cited above. The EU should support and facilitate an exchange of practices and policies developed by Member States, including those States which have adopted LGBT specific policies in the field of education.¹⁷

Such an exchange of practices should be closely linked to EU action in the field of education, but also to policy processes such as the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process. As stated in the 2007 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, "*ensuring access to quality education and training for all, focusing especially on pre-schooling and on tackling early school leaving is vital*" to reducing poverty and social exclusion. In this context, mechanisms for mutual learning and peer review

¹⁷ Examples of good practices can be found in Ireland (Equality Authority's "Stop Homophobic Bullying Campaign" - www.belongto.org/), in the UK (e.g. the Greater London Authority programme to tackle homophobia in education - www.stonewall.org.uk/education_for_all/) and Sweden (work of the Ombudsman against Discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation - www.homo.se/o.o.i.s/3351)

available in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination should be used to develop strategies to tackle the various causes of school drop-out, including discrimination and exclusion of vulnerable young people, such as LGBT youth.

More generally, the European Union's crucial involvement here lies in the promotion of an open model of 'culture' and 'cultural integration', which will lead to the inclusion of more children in schools across Europe, and the promotion of equity in European educational systems.

Question 5 – If schools are to respond to each pupil's individual learning needs, what can be done as regards curricula, school organisation and the roles of teachers?

As stated above, the 2006 IGLYO & ILGA-Europe survey has established that curricula (in 43% of the cases), organisation of school life, and attitudes of teachers (in 14% of the cases) all partake in the ever-present discrimination and "invisibilisation" of LGBT young people in their educational environment. (Takács, 2006)

➤ ***Actions to be taken***

Schools need to **widen their formal discourse (curriculum, teachers) and informal discourse (teachers, school organisation) by including sexual minorities**, in order to review and discuss what it means to be 'normal' and 'accepted'. The educational discourse, formally as well as informally, must reflect the complexity of reality, and mainstream the reality of diversity in sexual orientations and gender identities. The *Guidelines for an LGBT-inclusive education* (IGLYO) – attached to this submission – provide a detailed explanation of measures to take at school to better meet the needs of LGBT pupils.

This will not only benefit pupils belonging to sexual minorities. Firstly, the whole school community (and not only pupils) will benefit from such opening up of the discourse: teaching staff, non-teaching staff, parents, support staff, and the local community. Secondly and most importantly, this does not only benefit sexual minorities exclusively. A more open school is a more open school for all, and the social climate can only better if the school discourse and ethos are reworked to include a significant amount of the school community.

School curriculum

There is a need to see sexual orientation issues as well as positive representation of LGBT people and their families included in the **school curriculum**. This should be done throughout the curriculum, by mainstreaming LGBT issues in class such as literature and history. Making LGBT people visible in the curriculum can help pupils to become more accepting of alternative family structures, while seeing their life experience reflected in the school curriculum can be very affirmative for both young LGBT people and the children of LGBT parents. It is also essential for all pupils, regardless of their sexual orientation, to have access to adequate and complete information about sexual health. One example of curriculum development initiative was carried out in the framework of an EU Socrates project aimed at creating safe and affirming schools for gay and lesbian students and staff. This initiative involved five schools from four European countries. A

video, training course and training handbook have been produced (more information available at www.inclusiveschool.org).

Role of teachers

Teachers have a crucial role to play first in breaking the silence around sexual minority issues and in breaking the cycle of perpetuating negative representation of homosexuality. Teachers can do so by presenting people of all sexual orientations as normal in their classroom, and by ensuring that their pupils treat each other with respect and dignity, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Where possible people who identify as LGB should be made visible in the curriculum and content of what is being taught. They can also help promote an inclusive and open educational environment by using language that is respectful of everyone's differences.

Teachers are also often called on to provide support to pupils who face verbal or physical harassment because of their perceived or real sexual orientation, and young people who simply need to talk about their emerging sexual orientation. There are many positive testimonies of young LGBT people who explain that the positive attitude of a teacher helped them during their coming out process.

Given the central role that teachers play in responding to the needs of young LGBT people, among others, they need to be empowered to speak about LGBT issues in schools, which continue to be a sensitive topic to address in many European countries. Whether it is about having open discussions about homosexuality in class, or addressing homophobic jokes or mockery with their students, teaching and non-teaching staff need to have clear guidelines from the school or a higher institution, which protects them against potential complaints. (See response to question 7 for examples of good practices to train and support teachers. Also see Chapter 6 "Good practices to promote social inclusion of LGBT youth" in the *Social Exclusion of LGBT Youth* Report (Takács, 2006) for more references on teacher training and curriculum development initiatives in EU member states).

➤ ***Elements for European cooperation***

The European Union's role is, once again, to promote good practices, mutual learning and the use of materials promoting tolerance and respect for diversity. A lot of educational material has been developed in recent years, which can and should be shared across the EU; these include teaching tools produced at both national level and European level, such as the COMPASS manual published by the Council of Europe. The EU can continue to provide financial support for transnational projects throughout programmes such as Socrates, aimed at developing materials and tools for school staff.

The EU can and should also emphasise the importance of a good school ethos at the European, national, regional and local levels, in order to educate active citizens in a spirit of acceptance and awareness of diversity. The school alone has such a wide impact on civil society, and the European Union's role must be to support the opening up of educational discourses across schools at every level by encouraging and facilitating the exchange of good practices and approaches from various countries.

Question 6 – How can school communities help to prepare young people to be responsible citizens, in line with fundamental values such as peace and tolerance of diversity?

As a result of their discrimination, LGBT young people are victims of social exclusion, which entails that they are prevented from participating fully in society. Additionally, where the general education received by children and young adults in schools does not clearly state its stance on sexual diversity and sexual minorities, the school cannot but fail in trying to achieve its objective of preparing young people to be fully active citizens in a spirit of peace and tolerance of diversity.

On the one hand, school communities do not value or make visible sexual minorities within the school premises or its discourse, and this leads to sexual minority students to feel partly excluded, and therefore not perceive their own input or participation in their school community as worthwhile. This is contrary to the need for educating young people in a spirit of responsible and citizenly involvement. It also promotes the idea that sexual minorities do not hold a place in the public space.

On the other hand, schools fail to raise pupils in a spirit of peace and tolerance of diversity by not mentioning, acknowledging and accepting sexual diversity. Heterosexual learners are not presented with a complex and truthful view of reality, and their lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender peers are not presented as they are, in their valuable diversity. This most often leads to silence about sexual minorities, which in turn fosters ignorance, fear, and discrimination (much like any other discriminatory process, as recognised in relation to xenophobia, for instance). In this case, silence about homosexuality, bisexuality and different gender identities is the worst possible characteristic of a school's discourse, as it indirectly breeds discrimination.

➤ ***Actions to be taken***

Firstly, school communities need to help preparing young people for being responsible citizens by acknowledging the variety in a diverse learning crowd, and valuing minorities in their dealings with pupils. With regards to sexual minorities, such can only be achieved by the **explicit positive mention of homosexuality, bisexuality and gender issues in the school's documents**, such as anti-bullying policies, teaching orientation, teaching material and regulations of the school life.

Secondly, the importance of fundamental values such as peace and tolerance of diversity need to be re-stated explicitly in schools across Europe. Schools' role in fostering such values is paramount, and their failing to actively promote them infers that those exiting the educational system do not have a valuable baggage with regards to values, and cannot be expected to live with, let alone promote, tolerance of diversity and a spirit of peace towards sexual minorities, as well as other minorities.

In this respect, we would like to refer to the core principles for citizenship education and diversity promoted by CEJI - A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe, which includes:

- Foster respect for and appreciation of differences, and opposition to discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnicity, language, religion, gender,

- sexual orientation, social origin, physical or mental condition, and on other bases;
- Facilitate the development of students' self confidence and competence to learn, participate and develop their potential as whole individuals;
- Provide an environment that is inclusive and respectful of diversity and human rights for all;
- Establish clear policies, programmes and pedagogical practice to address and prevent discrimination, exclusion, violence and bullying;
- Provide a variety of positive role models reflecting the socio-cultural diversity of the student population;
- Make use of participatory pedagogies that include knowledge, critical analysis, co-operation and intercultural skills for action to further respectful diversity.¹⁸

➤ ***Elements for European cooperation***

The European Union needs to publicise the widely-stated imperative of a positive attitude towards minorities, as well as the imperative of bringing discrimination to an end. This can be done, for instance, by involving national educational systems in a consultation on diversity and how different systems address sexual or other minorities' needs, and how educational systems can cope with the need for a wider understanding of diversity, on that includes sexual orientations and gender identities.

Question 7 – How can school staff be trained and supported to meet the challenges they face?

➤ ***Actions to be taken***

If we ask teachers to be including LGBT issues in the curriculum, it is also crucially important to explore the specific training needs of teachers and other school employees to enable them to address issues of sexual orientation within education. A first step is of course to raise awareness about LGBT issues to enable teaching and non-teaching staff to create a safe space for students to speak about these issues, to be able to discuss the issues positively in classrooms, as well as to be able to respond to problems such as bullying. Such work can be done through partnerships with unions of education workers, such as Education International, which already works with its members on formulating recommendations and policies on LGBT issues (see www.ei-ie.org/lgbt/en/). These kinds of organisations should be considered as key partners at national and European in developing training and support tools for teaching and non-teaching staff in schools.

Other partnerships should also be sought such as cooperation with youth groups and organisations; often times, teachers may not need to take on the counselling role for homosexual or questioning youth if they are in a position to redirect young people to a person of trust (i.e. either a counsellor or a peer who is properly trained). Moreover, there is a growing need to integrate issues of diversity in teachers' training in college and university, and to make it part of the education that future teachers themselves receive. Finally, schools and/or education authorities can develop clear guidelines for teachers. For example, the Department for Children, Schools and Families in the UK has

18 Guidelines and Considerations for policy makers and practitioners on Citizenship education and diversity available at http://www.ceji.org/acodden/Guidelines_UK.pdf

developed guidance for teachers on ‘*Preventing and Responding to Homophobic Bullying in Schools*’¹⁹, in partnership with the LGBT organisation Stonewall, which provides school governors, heads, teachers and other staff with practical information - including lesson plans - about how to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying. A similar resource for including LGBT students was produced in Ireland; the publication ‘*More than a Phase: A Resource Guide for the Inclusion of young Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Learners*’ is for use within formal and non-formal education settings, and comprises a glossary of terms, a resource list, a separate ‘how-to-guide’ and a booklet called ‘Understanding the Issues’ designed to assist those who don’t have a lot of experience or knowledge in this area. (Also see Chapter 6 “Good practices to promote social inclusion of LGBT youth” in the *Social Exclusion of LGBT Youth* Report (Takács, 2006) for more references on teacher training initiatives in EU member states).

Concluding recommendations and remarks on opportunities for European cooperation and action

The European Union has a central role to play in sharing knowledge and promoting mutual learning on how to create safe and inclusive schools in Europe, where all young people can learn and grow, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as their ethnic origin, religious beliefs, social status or disability. Achieving social cohesion, non discrimination, equality and diversity in the school environment constitute a challenge at times, and it is thus even more important to share experiences, good practices and different approaches in order to identify ways to have a real impact for young Europeans.

The following recommendations and remarks are meant to highlight what ILGA-Europe and IGLYO consider being ways forward and opportunities for EU institutions towards building inclusive schools for the 21st century. In considering these recommendations, we strongly encourage the European Commission to refer to the *IGLYO Guidelines for an LGBT-inclusive education* which provide a clear framework for devising policies that meet the needs of LGBT youth in Europe.

➤ **Legislative and policy framework on non-discrimination**

- Adopt EU anti-discrimination legislation that protects against all grounds of discrimination listed in Article 13 of the Treaty in the field of education. Laws are necessary to ensure protection against discrimination, and key factors in driving forward non-discrimination policy and practices at national level. All grounds of discrimination should be equally protected, including in the field of education.
- Better use of the European Commission’s impact assessment procedures to assess the impact of EU education and training policies on LGBT people, and promotion of equality mainstreaming in the field of education policies (see ILGA-Europe’s factsheet on equality mainstreaming)²⁰

¹⁹ www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/homophobicbullying/

²⁰ http://www.ilga-europe.org/europe/publications/non_periodical/equality_mainstreaming_fact_sheet

- **Exchange of information and peer review**
 - Use mechanisms for mutual learning and peer review available in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination to develop strategies and policies to tackle the various causes of school drop-out, including discrimination and exclusion of vulnerable young people, such as LGBT youth
 - Use peer review and mutual learning mechanisms in a more structured way to promote exchange of good practices in educational practices (including curriculum reviews and teacher training) and to develop guidelines on inclusive education
 - Take into consideration the outcomes of the studies carried out for the Fundamental Rights Agency on youth and on homophobia in Europe in developing the EU policies and strategies on education.

- **Funding**
 - Structural and community funds should be (or continue to be) used to support projects aimed at developing materials and programmes that support the creation of inclusive schools.
 - Community funds should also provide support youth networks and organisations which represent specific youth groups, such as IGLYO. Such organisations are essential in bringing the voice of young people to policy-makers, and in developing methods and approaches that meet the needs of all young people.
 - The EU should encourage and support research and the collection of quantitative and qualitative data on the experience of LGBT youth in Europe, in particular comparative data on the situation of young LGBT people in education.

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