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PROUD AMBASSADORS

Training Handbook

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Executive Summary

The *Proud Ambassadors Training Handbook* has been developed within the Erasmus+ project “Support of the Inclusion and Reporting of LGBTQIA+ Youth and their Mental Well-being in Europe – Proud Ambassadors” (Ref. N. 2024-1-SE02-KA220-YOU-000250648), a European initiative funded under the Erasmus+ programme. The project addresses the ongoing challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ youth across Europe, particularly discrimination, social exclusion, and their impact on mental well-being.

In response, the project aims to strengthen the capacity of youth workers and educators to create inclusive, safe, and supportive environments, while also improving the visibility and reporting of LGBTQIA+ youth experiences. It brings together partners from Sweden, Greece, Belgium, Italy, and Slovenia, combining expertise in youth work, social inclusion, and LGBTQIA+ support.

The Proud Ambassadors project brings together a diverse partnership of organizations from across Europe:

- Sensus (Sweden) – Lead Partner, a network focused on citizens’ rights, health, and well-being.
- CUBE NGO (Greece) – Institute specializing in entrepreneurship, social development, and cohesion.
- PAL Network (Belgium) – A European network promoting inclusion and combating discrimination.
- Municipality of Reggio Emilia (Italy) – Contributing through its Equal Opportunities office.
- Legebitra (Slovenia) – An LGBTQIA+ civil society organization providing cultural and psychosocial support.

This handbook presents a structured training methodology that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical tools and interactive activities. Organized into eight modules, it equips professionals with the skills, knowledge, and approaches needed to promote inclusion, apply inclusive communication, and support the mental health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ youth.

Through research, training, and practical tools, the project develops a comprehensive educational framework aimed at enhancing knowledge, promoting inclusive communication, and supporting mental health resilience among LGBTQIA+ youth. The resulting training handbook equips professionals with both theoretical





understanding and practical skills to foster inclusive youth work practices across diverse European contexts.





Introduction

The present document constitutes the “Proud Ambassadors Training Handbook” developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ project “*Support of the Inclusion and Reporting of LGBTQIA+ Youth and their Mental Well-being in Europe – Proud Ambassadors*” (2024-1-SE02-KA220-YOU-000250648). The handbook combines theoretical knowledge with practical tools, exercises, and learning activities designed for both formal and non-formal education environments, aiming to support youth workers, educators, and professionals who work with young people across Europe.

The Proud Ambassadors project was developed in response to the continuing challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ youth across Europe, including discrimination, social exclusion, and increased risks related to mental health and well-being. Despite progress in equality policies and social awareness, many young people who identify as LGBTQIA+ still experience barriers in education, employment, and community participation. These barriers often manifest through stigma, bullying, lack of acceptance, and limited access to inclusive support systems. The project therefore aims to strengthen the capacity of youth workers and educators to provide safe, inclusive, and supportive environments for LGBTQIA+ youth.

The general objective of the Proud Ambassadors project is to support the social inclusion and mental well-being of LGBTQIA+ youngsters through the development of policy recommendations and the training of youth workers and educators. More specifically, the project seeks to map good practices related to LGBTQIA+ youth support, develop a comprehensive training curriculum for youth professionals, and create both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities that will allow practitioners to improve their skills and knowledge in supporting LGBTQIA+ youth effectively.

Within this context, the training methodology presented in this handbook has been developed to equip youth workers with practical competences, inclusive communication skills, and a deeper understanding of the experiences and needs of LGBTQIA+ youth. The methodology combines theoretical knowledge, evidence-based approaches, and experiential learning activities, encouraging participants to reflect on their own attitudes and professional practices while building the skills required to foster inclusive youth environments.

The methodology developed aims to:

- Increase awareness and knowledge about LGBTQIA+ identities, terminology, and lived experiences.



- Strengthen the ability of youth workers to recognize and address discrimination, exclusion, and non-acceptance experienced by LGBTQIA+ youth.
- Promote inclusive communication and anti-bias practices in youth work environments.
- Enhance understanding of the connection between social inclusion and mental well-being.
- Provide practical tools and innovative training techniques that support inclusive youth work practices.

The training materials, theory, tools, and exercises presented in this handbook aim to provide youth workers with accessible and practical resources that can be directly applied in their daily professional practice. Through interactive activities, reflection exercises, and case-based learning, the handbook supports participants in developing both knowledge and practical skills for supporting LGBTQIA+ youth in diverse educational and community settings.

Specifically, within the following pages, the Proud Ambassadors training methodology and materials are presented through a structured curriculum consisting of eight modules. Each module includes theoretical background, learning objectives, exercises, and practical tools designed to support youth workers in creating inclusive and supportive environments for LGBTQIA+ youth.

The modules that constitute the project's training methodology are the following:

1. **Module 1:** Understanding LGBTQIA+ Identities and Terminology
2. **Module 2:** Identifying and Supporting experiences of non-acceptance in LGBTQIA+ Youth
3. **Module 3:** Mental Health: Assessment and Resilience-Building Techniques
8. **Module 4:** Inclusive Communication and Anti-Bias Language Skills
9. **Module 5:** Creating Inclusive and LGBTQIA+ Friendly Workplaces
10. **Module 6:** Legal Frameworks and Rights of LGBTQIA+ Youth
11. **Module 7:** Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQIA+ Youth
12. **Module 8:** Practical Tools and Innovative Training Techniques for Supporting LGBTQIA+ Youth

Summing up, the 'Proud Ambassadors Training Handbook' targets teachers/trainers/researchers, with the aim of helping them use the new tools directly to the



learners of the *Proud Ambassadors*, by providing information about each module, methodology used, as well as practical exercises and other materials.



Module 1: Understanding LGBTQIA+ Identities and Terminology

1. Introduction

The module “Understanding LGBTQIA+ Identities and Terminology” forms a main part of the Proud Ambassadors Training Curriculum under the Erasmus+ project Support of the Inclusion and Reporting of LGBTQIA+ Youth and their Mental Well-being in Europe. This module responds to the urgent need for youth workers and educators across Europe to engage young people through informed, respectful, and inclusive communication.

Across European societies, LGBTQIA+ youth continue to experience significant levels of discrimination, social exclusion, and mental distress. Recent data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2024) highlight that 67% of LGBTQIA+ students have faced insults, threats, or mockery in school because of their identity, an alarming increase from 46% in 2019. Furthermore, 36% of LGBTQIA+ individuals report discrimination in daily life, and 14% have experienced physical or sexual attacks in the last five years. Similarly, research published in late 2024 (Euronews Health Study) found that LGBTQIA+ students are three times more likely to experience major depressive symptoms compared with their heterosexual and cisgender peers. Such findings illustrate a clear connection between language, stigma, and mental well-being. The lack of inclusive communication often leads to invisibility, withdrawal, and reduced help-seeking behavior among LGBTQIA+ youth.

2. Objectives

In response to these challenges, this module equips participants with foundational knowledge and practical tools to understand the diversity within the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, use inclusive terminology, and apply inclusive communication practices. By doing so, youth workers will be better prepared to support safe, supportive environments that enhance the mental well-being and social inclusion of LGBTQIA+ young people. The module aligns directly with the Proud Ambassadors project’s general objective of supporting social inclusion and mental health, while contributing specifically to:

Objective 1: Define and correctly explain key terms and concepts associated with the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, including sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics, using up-to-date and inclusive language.

Objective 2: Apply inclusive language in professional and social settings, replacing outdated, stigmatizing, or pathologizing terms with respectful and affirming alternatives.



Objective 3: Recognize the role of language and communication in shaping inclusion, identity, and mental well-being, and evaluate how inclusive practices can reduce stigma and support trust among LGBTQIA+ youth.

Objective 4: Identify and analyze intersectional factors that influence the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth, particularly those facing multiple forms of discrimination (e.g., ethnicity, disability, migration).

Objective 5: Develop capability in using inclusive communication techniques by participating in interactive activities, reflecting on learning outcomes, and co-creating strategies for inclusive youth work.

By completing this module, participants will learn to identify and explain key concepts and terms related to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics, apply inclusive and supportive language in professional and social contexts, recognize and address intersectional discrimination, and develop confidence in guiding others toward more inclusive practices.

Methodology

This module employs a mixed approach, combining **both learner centered and active learning methods** to ensure meaningful and applied learning. Through active participation and scenario learning, based participants move beyond theoretical understanding to develop practical skills in inclusive communication.

Each activity encourages learners to think critically, share experiences, and apply knowledge to real life contexts, supporting self awareness and confidence.

The learnercentered approach places participants' perspectives and experiences at the heart of the process, while the active component allows them to "learn by doing" through matching terms, evaluating language use, choosing inclusive responses, analyzing true or false statements, and clarifying myths.

This combination ensures that learning is both meaningful and applicable, equipping youth workers with the tools and sensitivity needed to promote equality and affirmation in their professional practice. This combination ensures that participants not only gain theoretical understanding of LGBTQIA+ identities and terminology but also develop confidence and practical competence to apply inclusive language and communication in real-life professional contexts.



3. Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcome 1: Participants show understanding of main terminology and develop confidence using inclusive language.

Learning Outcome 2: Participants can identify between outdated and inclusive terminology and are prepared to model inclusive communication.

Learning Outcome 3: Participants apply inclusive communication techniques and express respect for self-identification.

Learning Outcome 4 : Participants understand intersectionality as a practical tool for inclusive youth work, can identify intersecting forms of discrimination, and apply this awareness to design equitable, responsive support strategies.

Learning Outcome 5: Participants can challenge misinformation with evidence-based knowledge.

4.Theory

Understanding LGBTQIA+ identities and inclusive language is essential for building environments where all young people feel respected, valued, and safe. In youth work, language and terminology shape how individuals identify themselves and how they are identified by others. Theoretical knowledge of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics provides the foundation for inclusive practice. This section introduces participants to key concepts, frameworks, and evidence-based insights that inform inclusive communication and promote mental well-being. By integrating current research and international human rights standards, the theoretical component ensures participants develop both conceptual clarity and cultural sensitivity. Through this understanding, youth workers can apply language that validates diverse identities, challenge stereotypes, and support equitable participation for LGBTQIA+ youth in educational and community settings.

4.1 The Spectrum of LGBTQIA+ Identities

Understanding the spectrum of LGBTQIA+ identities is the first step toward building an inclusive environment in youth work. The acronym *LGBTQIA+* represents Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex & Asexual with the plus sign (+) recognizing the diversity of other identities that exist beyond this acronym, such as pansexual, demisexual, non-binary, and gender-fluid identities. The definitions of the main terms Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Non-binary, Intersex, Asexual, Queer, Pansexual, Sexual Orientation, Hermaphrodite, are the following:



-Lesbian: A woman who experiences emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction primarily to other women. The term “lesbian” can be used by women and non-binary people who identify with same-gender attraction. Using self-identification is key, as individuals define their own orientation.

(Source: ILGA-Europe, 2024; FRA LGBTIQ Survey III, 2024; GLAAD Media Reference Guide, 11th ed., 2023)

-Gay: A person who experiences emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction primarily to people of the same gender. The term is often used to describe men attracted to men but may also serve as a broader umbrella for same-gender attraction.

(Source: FRA, 2024; WHO, 2022; GLAAD, 2023)

-Bisexual: A person who experiences emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender. This can include attraction to people of the same gender and of different genders, not necessarily at the same time or to the same degree.

(Source: UNESCO, 2023; ILGA-Europe, 2024; GLAAD, 2023)

-Transgender (Trans): An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender is an identity, not a medical condition; not all trans people choose or have access to medical transition. The term should be used as an adjective (“transgender people,” not “transgenders”).

(Source: WHO, ICD-11, 2022; FRA, 2024; ILGA-Europe, 2024)

-Non-binary: A person whose gender identity does not fit within the traditional binary categories of male or female. Non-binary people may identify as both, neither, or a combination of genders. This identity is diverse and may include related terms such as genderqueer or genderfluid.

(Source: ILGA-Europe, 2024; UNESCO GEM Report, 2023; GLAAD, 2023)

-Intersex: An umbrella term for people born with physical sex characteristics (such as chromosomes, hormones, or anatomy) that do not fit typical definitions of male or female bodies. Intersex variations are natural forms of human diversity. Intersex is distinct from gender identity or sexual orientation.

(Source: ILGA World, Intersex Legal Mapping Report, 2023; WHO, 2022; FRA, 2024)

-Asexual: A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, and asexual individuals may still experience romantic attraction (e.g., heteroromantic, biromantic). Being asexual is a valid sexual orientation, not a disorder or choice.



(Source: UNESCO, 2023; ILGA-Europe, 2024; GLAAD, 2023)

-Queer: An umbrella term that can encompass people whose sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression differs from societal norms. Historically used as a slur, “queer” has been reclaimed by many in the LGBTQIA+ community as a positive, inclusive term. However, it should only be used for self-identification or when individuals express comfort with it.

(Source: FRA, 2024; ILGA-Europe, 2024; GLAAD, 2023)

-Pansexual: A person who experiences emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to people regardless of gender identity or sex. Pansexual individuals are attracted to people of all genders or gender expressions. The term emphasizes inclusivity beyond gender binaries.

(Source: ILGA-Europe, 2024; UNESCO, 2023; GLAAD, 2023)

-Sexual Orientation: refers to an individual's enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to individuals of a specific gender or genders. This encompasses a range of orientations, including but not limited to:

- **Heterosexual:** Attraction to individuals of the opposite gender.
- **Homosexual:** Attraction to individuals of the same gender.
- **Bisexual:** Attraction to individuals of both the same and opposite genders.
- **Asexual:** Lack of sexual attraction to others.

Source: World Health Organization (WHO)

-Hermaphrodite: The term "hermaphrodite" historically referred to individuals possessing both male and female reproductive organs. However, this term is now considered outdated and inappropriate when referring to humans, as it is misleading and can perpetuate stigma.

Source: Intersex Society of North America (ISNA)

Each identity within this spectrum represents a unique way of experiencing oneself in relation to gender, sexuality, and the body. According to the *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2024)*, understanding these distinctions is fundamental for building trust and psychological safety in youth spaces, as mislabeling or assumptions can lead to alienation or withdrawal among LGBTQIA+ young people.



The **key components** of identity include:

- **Sexual Orientation:** Who one is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual).
- **Gender Identity:** A person's felt internal sense of being male, female, both, neither, or another gender entirely (e.g., transgender, non-binary).
- **Gender Expression:** How a person outwardly presents their gender through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, or voice.
- **Sex Characteristics:** Biological attributes such as chromosomes, hormones, and anatomy, which vary among individuals and may not fit binary definitions of male or female.

A crucial concept is that identity is self-defined. Youth workers should never impose labels but instead ask open-ended questions, such as “How would you like me to refer to you?” or “What pronouns do you use?” Respecting self-identification affirms autonomy and dignity.

The *World Health Organization (WHO, 2022)* emphasizes that affirming identity and using accurate terminology significantly improves mental health outcomes among LGBTQIA+ youth. Research shows that when young people's identities are validated, they report lower levels of anxiety and depression, and higher levels of school engagement and resilience.

It's worth mentioning that persistent myths and misinformation also contribute to stigma, discrimination, and misunderstanding of LGBTQIA+ identities. Clarifying these myths with evidence-based facts is crucial for creating inclusive environments. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) and FRA (2024) confirm that being LGBTQIA+ is not a disorder or choice but a natural expression of human diversity.

One myth is that all transgender people want or need surgery. Gender identity is not determined by medical transition; some transgender individuals pursue medical interventions, while others do not, and all deserve respect regardless of medical choices (WHO, ICD-11, 2022). Another misconception is that intersex people are rare, however, approximately 1.7% of the population is born with intersex traits, comparable to the number of people with red hair (ILGA World, 2023).

Inclusive language and supporting communication have measurable mental health benefits. The minority stress model (Meyer, 2023) shows that acknowledgment reduces anxiety, depression, and stress among LGBTQIA+ individuals. Exposure to rejection or misgendering increases risk factors for poor mental health.



Other myths, such as the belief that asking for pronouns is disrespectful or that “coming out” is a one-time event, reflect limited understanding. In truth, sharing pronouns signals respect and inclusion, and coming out often happens repeatedly across contexts as individuals navigate new environments.

4.2 Inclusive Language and Respectful Communication

Language is one of the most powerful tools in creating inclusive environments. Inclusive communication refers to the deliberate use of words and expressions that affirm and respect diverse identities. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023) highlights that inclusive language policies in education improve participation and safety for marginalized learners, particularly LGBTQIA+ youth.

Using inclusive language involves three crucial principles: respect, accuracy, and openness to learning. Respect means using names and pronouns that align with a person’s identity. Accuracy requires staying informed about current terminology. Openness means being willing to learn from mistakes and updating language as communities evolve.

One of the most practical expressions of inclusivity is asking for and using correct pronouns. For example, introducing oneself by stating one’s pronouns (“Hello, I’m ..., and I use they/them pronouns”) normalizes the practice and signals respect. If someone shares pronouns different from those assumed, youth workers should acknowledge this respectfully and use them consistently. Misgendering or using outdated terms can cause harm and undermine trust.

Another dimension of inclusive language is avoiding assumptions. Not every young person who identifies as non-binary uses, they /them pronouns, and not all people who are attracted to multiple genders identify as bisexual. When in doubt, ask politely, or mirror the language used by the individual.

4.3 Intersectionality and Lived Experiences

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that helps explain how different aspects of a person’s identity, such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, religion, migration status, or disability, combine to create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege. The term was first introduced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to describe how systems of oppression (such as racism and sexism) intersect rather than operate separately. In the context of LGBTQIA+ youth, intersectionality reveals how individuals who belong to more than one marginalized group often face multiple and overlapping barriers to inclusion, safety, and well-being.



For instance, an LGBTQIA+ refugee may face xenophobia, homophobia, and language barriers, while a Roma transgender youth might encounter racism in mainstream society and transphobia within their community. The FRA (2024) and ILGA-Europe (2024) report that individuals with intersecting marginalized identities often experience higher rates of bullying, exclusion, and barriers to healthcare or education. Intersectionality thus enables youth workers to see beyond single-axis identities and design equitable, context-sensitive interventions.

Contrary to common misconceptions, intersectionality is not limited to women of color or to challenges alone, it also emphasizes resilience, community solidarity, and agency (European Youth Forum, 2023). Effective youth work requires cultural competence, recognizing that equality is not sameness. Treating everyone identically may ignore structural disadvantages, inclusive practice instead seeks equity, adapting support to meet diverse needs.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2024) and ILGA-Europe (2024) emphasize that intersectional inequalities contribute to higher levels of discrimination, harassment, and mental health challenges among LGBTQIA+ youth. Inclusive youth work therefore requires a context-sensitive and individualized approach, acknowledging that no single identity defines a person's experience.

According to the European Youth Forum (2023), adopting an intersectional perspective in youth work strengthens equality, cultural competence, and trust. Youth workers are encouraged to listen actively, avoid assumptions, and adapt support strategies to reflect each young person's lived reality. Intersectionality also highlights resilience and strength, many LGBTQIA+ youth develop strong coping skills and community connections through navigating diverse identities.

5. Exercises and Interaction

5.1 Exercise 1: Identity Match-Up (matching main terms with definitions).

Purpose: To promote understanding of LGBTQIA+ terminology and ensure participants can define and apply terms accurately.

Matching Activity: participants receive the terms (*LGBTQIA+*, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Non-binary, Intersex, Asexual, Queer, Pansexual, see section 4.1) and separate the definitions. They should match each term with its correct definition.



5.2 Exercise 2: Language Check (identifying inclusive vs. outdated terms)

Purpose: To raise awareness of inclusive versus outdated language. Outdated or Inclusive Activity: participants will identify a list of phrases if they are outdated or inclusive:

“Sexual preference” - “Sexual orientation”

“Hermaphrodite” - “Intersex person”

“Transgenders” - “Transgender people”

“Born in the wrong body” - “Affirming their gender identity”

“Ladies and gentlemen” - “Everyone” or “Friends”

5.3 Exercise 3: Pronoun Practice (Multiple Choice Version)

Purpose: To develop comfort and fluency in using correct pronouns. “Choose the correct answer” Activity: Read each question and select the correct option (A or B).

1. How should you introduce yourself while including your pronouns?
A) “Hi, my name is Alex, and I use they/them pronouns.” B) “Hi, my name is Alex.”

2. Someone refers to you using the wrong pronoun. What is the best way to respond?
A) “Actually, I use she/her pronouns.”
B) “No problem, it’s fine.”

3. How should you correct someone politely if they use the wrong pronoun for you?
A) “Actually, I use they/them pronouns.”
B) “Yes, that’s correct.”

4. You are meeting new people. Which introduction is inclusive and clear?
A) “Hello, I’m Jordan, and I use he/him pronouns.”
B) “Hello, I’m Jordan.”

5. You notice someone used the wrong pronoun in a conversation. How can you respond respectfully?
A) “Actually, I use he/him pronouns. Thanks for using them.”
B) Ignore it and continue.

6. During a group introduction, which approach is correct?
A) “Hi, my name is Casey, and I use she/her pronouns.”
B) “Hi, I’m Casey.”



7. Someone repeatedly uses the wrong pronoun. How can you address it respectfully?

A) "Actually, I use they/them pronouns. I'd appreciate it if you use them going forward."

B) "Yes, that's right."

5.4 Exercise 4: True or False

True or False Activity: participant will identify if the below sentences are right (true) or wrong (false).

1. "Intersectionality only applies to women of color." → False.
2. "An LGBTQIA+ refugee youth may face both xenophobia and homophobia."
3. "All LGBTQIA+ young people share the same challenges and needs."
4. "Intersectionality focuses only on disadvantages, not strengths."
5. "A Roma transgender teenager may face discrimination both from outside and within their community."
6. "Cultural competence is not necessary if we treat everyone the same."
7. "Intersectionality helps youth workers design more inclusive and effective support strategies."

5.5 Exercise 5: Myth or Fact Quiz

Purpose: To remove misconceptions and promote actual understanding.

Quiz Activity: Participants have to read the caption and decide if it's a Myth or a Fact.

- "All transgender people want or need surgery."
- "Intersex people are very rare."
- "Using inclusive language can improve mental health outcomes."
- "Being LGBTQIA+ is a mental disorder."
- "It's disrespectful to ask someone's pronouns."
- "Coming out is a one-time event."
- "Inclusive communication benefits everyone, not just LGBTQIA+ people."

Suggestions for follow-up activities



To deepen learning and sustain inclusive practices beyond the module, participants are encouraged to engage in follow-up activities that extend reflection and application. Suggested actions include organizing workshops to share inclusive language strategies within their organizations, conducting a terminology review of youth program materials to ensure inclusive and supporting language, or creating a short awareness campaign celebrating LGBTQIA+ identities in local communities or schools. Participants can also establish online forums to discuss challenges and successes in applying inclusive communication, exchange resources, and co-develop solutions for emerging issues. Continuing professional development through webinars and reading recent research from ILGA-Europe or FRA is recommended to keep knowledge current and responsive to evolving language and community needs.

6. Conclusions

This module has provided youth workers and educators with the knowledge, awareness, and skills necessary to understand and use inclusive LGBTQIA+ terminology. By exploring the spectrum of identities, learning principles of affirming communication, and analyzing the intersectional factors that shape experiences, participants have gained the competence to create safe, supportive, and equitable spaces for all young people. The combination of theory and applied exercises has supported both understanding and confidence, equipping participants to challenge outdated language, address misconceptions, and model inclusive practices. Finally, the ability to communicate respectfully and accurately about gender and sexuality contributes directly to the mental well-being, belonging, and empowerment of LGBTQIA+ youth. Through continuous reflection and practice, participants will act as ambassadors of inclusion, dignity, and equality in their communities.



Module 2: “Identifying and Supporting experiences of non-acceptance in LGBTQIA+ Youth”

1. Introduction

Across Europe, many LGBTQIA+ youth still face **non-acceptance**, ranging from subtle exclusion to overt discrimination and violence. Although social attitudes have improved, the **FRA LGBTIQ Survey (2023)** shows that non-acceptance remains widespread: **70 %** of respondents aged 15–17 experienced hate-motivated harassment in the previous year, and **two-thirds** were bullied or ridiculed at school because they were (perceived as) LGBTIQ, while only **4 %** felt “very open” about their identity. **53 %** of young LGBTQIA+ people reported discrimination in at least one area of life, and **67 %** had faced bullying or harassment at school.

Those most affected include **trans, intersex, and gender-diverse youth**, as well as those from **ethnic, religious, or low-income backgrounds** (FRA, 2024).

Such non-acceptance often leads to **mental health difficulties, self-censorship, isolation, and educational challenges**, limiting young people’s ability to live and learn safely and authentically.

However, it is equally important to avoid **assuming that someone is queer or that they are experiencing oppression** based on appearance, behavior, or background. Not all LGBTQIA+ individuals are visibly queer, and not all marginalized people face the same challenges; assumptions can erase personal experiences and reinforce stereotypes. Every person’s identity and life circumstances are unique, and only they can define and report their own experiences. Making assumptions risks **misunderstanding, alienation, or harm**, even when intentions are positive. Professionals should instead **approach each young person with openness, curiosity, and respect**, asking questions sensitively when necessary and allowing individuals to self-identify and share their experiences on their own terms. This approach fosters trust, supports autonomy, and ensures that interventions are **responsive to actual needs rather than perceived assumptions**.

Our module is therefore focused on building the capacity of recognizing queer youth’s experience of non-acceptance, but at the same time not making assumptions about their experience without listening to individuals.

2. Objectives

This training module equips professionals (youth workers, teachers, social workers, mental health professionals, and others) to:

- Recognize the subtle and overt forms of exclusion and non-acceptance that affect LGBTIQ+ youth.



- Understand and recognize how intersectional identities (such as gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, or class) compound risks of exclusion.
- Get acquainted with research and basic data about the experiences of exclusion of the LGBTQIA+ youth in the EU.
- Explore the difference between dismissive and supportive responses and learn to respond appropriately and ethically, supporting young people without making assumptions about their identity or experience.
- Assess the acceptance level of their organization and analyze how to improve it.
- Promote institutional change by exploring the changes they can make on various levels to increase inclusivity in their professional environment, to foster inclusive and affirming environments for all youth.

3. Learning Outcomes

After completing this module, participants will be able to:

- Define and distinguish between overt, covert, and structural forms of non-acceptance.
- Identify intersectional risk factors contributing to exclusion and victimization.
- Know the basics of research and data about the experiences of exclusion of the LGBTQIA+ youth in the EU.
- Learn how to respond supportively to LGBTQI+ youth's reports of non-acceptance but avoid assumptions about their experience.
- Implement changes that raise the level of acceptance within their organization
- Design and promote practical interventions and policies that strengthen acceptance and safety for LGBTQI+ youth.

4. Theory

4.1 Key Terms & Concepts

LGBTQIA+: Umbrella term encompassing sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sex characteristics.

Non-acceptance: Attitudes, actions, or structures that reject, exclude, or invalidate an individual's identity.



- *Overt*: verbal harassment, exclusion, bullying.
- *Covert*: ignoring or erasing identities, misgendering, assuming heteronormativity.
- *Structural*: lack of protection policies, unequal access to resources.

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989): Framework recognizing that individuals experience layered discrimination and privilege depending on intersecting identities (e.g., being both trans and Roma, or lesbian and disabled).

Self-identification principle: A person's identity is defined by what *they* report, not by assumptions of others, solely based on how they are perceived. Professionals must avoid labeling youth (with both queer and cis-/heteronormative identities, as well as other personal circumstances) unless and until they self-disclose.

4.2 EU-Wide Evidence on Non-Acceptance

Bullying and Harassment

- Around **67 %** of LGBTQIA+ respondents across Europe experienced **mocking, bullying, or harassment at school** due to their identity (FRA, 2024).
- **Trans and non-binary youth** report the highest rates of school exclusion and absenteeism related to fear of bullying.
- In many EU member states, **anti-LGBTQIA+ bullying policies** are either absent or inconsistently enforced.

Safety and Violence

- Nearly **1 in 7** LGBTQ+ youth in the EU have experienced physical or sexual attacks in the past five years.
- **73 %** of those who faced hate-motivated harassment avoid certain places for fear of being attacked (FRA, 2024).

Mental Health Impacts

- LGBTQIA+ youth report significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation compared to non-LGBTQ peers.
- Lack of acceptance correlates strongly with self-harm and substance use among young people (ILGA-Europe, 2023).

Disclosure and Openness



- Only a small minority of European youth are “fully open” about their identities. Fear of rejection by family or peers and lack of supportive adults are key reasons.
- Openness is linked with school climate: inclusive curricula and visible allies increase disclosure rates and well-being.

4.4 Intersectional Vulnerabilities and Protective Factors

Youth from ethnic minorities, religious backgrounds, or low-income households report double discrimination: racism/xenophobia + homo/transphobia.

Disabled LGBTQAI+ youth often face invisibility or infantilization.

Rural youth report fewer role models, fewer support networks, and higher social surveillance.

Despite these risks, **protective factors** can significantly improve LGBTIQ+ youth well-being across Europe. According to FRA (2024) and IGLYO (2023), youth who have supportive adults, inclusive school climates, and access to LGBTIQ+ peer networks are more likely to feel safe, accepted, and resilient. Even for youth with **intersectional vulnerabilities** (such as those from ethnic minorities, rural areas, low-income households, or with disabilities) these protective factors can buffer the negative effects of non-acceptance and help youth thrive.

5. Exercises and Interaction

5.1 Activity 1: Spot the Non-Acceptance

Objective: Recognize subtle and overt forms of exclusion.

1. Divide the participants in a few groups of 2-3 individuals. Each group gets a task of reading through one short scenario and discussing the particularities of non-acceptance that took place.

Examples of scenarios:

- A teacher refers to “boys and girls” when addressing the class, leaving a nonbinary student feeling unseen.
- A youth center organizes a Valentine’s Day dating event for “young men and women”, where they assume all participants are cisgender and have heteronormative dating preferences.
- A trans teen is repeatedly asked about “their real name” during a conversation they have with a social worker.



- A student hides their same-gender relationship after hearing homophobic jokes from peers.

Examples of questions for participants to stimulate discussion:

- What forms of non-acceptance appeared?
 - What might the LGBTIQ+ youth in question feel?
 - What would a supportive adult do or what should they do differently?
2. After each group discusses the scenarios amongst themselves, they shortly share their examples and discussion with the other participants.

5.2 Activity 2: Intersectionality in Practice

Objective: Recognize and analyze intersectionality.

1. Divide the participants in a few groups of 2-3 individuals and give each group a character profile (e.g., a bisexual refugee, a disabled lesbian student, a trans Roma youth). Ask participants to map:
 - Which identities intersect?
 - What specific challenges might arise?
 - What systemic barriers exist (school, family, legal, social)?
 - What support strategies would be effective?

They can do this either graphically or in the form of a discussion.

2. After each group maps their profile, they shortly report on their mapping process and outcomes to the other participants.
3. **Debrief and discuss** how each layer of identity affects non-acceptance risk and support needs.

5.3 Activity 3: EU Snapshot Quiz

Objective: The participants get acquainted with research and data about the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in the EU.

1. The participants each get a notebook or a piece of paper. They are reminded that the purpose of the quiz is not to win or to get all the answers right, but to get familiarized or refamiliarized with basic research and data.
2. The facilitator presents them with short questions and they write down their answers (or guesses).



3. After each participant answers a question individually, the facilitator presents the correct answer, and the participants can compare how correct or off their answers (or guesses) were.

Examples of questions:

Question
What percent of 15–17-year-old LGBTIQ+ youth in the EU report harassment?
What percent of LGBTIQ+ youth feel fully accepted at school?
Which group amongst LGBTIQ+ youth faces the highest risk of hate crime?
What percent of youth avoid certain places for safety reasons?
Which protective factor is most strongly correlated with their well-being?

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. *LGBTIQ Equality at Crossroads: Progress and Challenges*. Publications Office of the European Union, 2024 (<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/lgbtiq-equality-crossroads-progress-and-challenges>)

5.4 Role-Play: Responding to Disclosure

Objective: The participants practice the difference between dismissive and supportive responses.

1. The facilitator divides the participants into pairs. Each pair picks or draws a scenario.

Examples of scenarios:

- A student tells a social worker: “I think I might be gay, but my parents would hate me if they knew.”
 - A student expresses how they are thinking about trying out gender neutral pronouns to their teacher.
 - A youth center user reports to a youth worker that they were misgendered by another user.
2. Participants act out each of the scenarios twice. For each staging, they change the roles of the young person and the professional and try a different response in each staging - once, the professional gives a **dismissive response** (e.g., assuming a phase, denying someone’s fear or experience

etc.) and the second time, the professional does their best to give a **supportive response** (affirming, non-judgmental, confidentiality maintained).

3. The participant pairs debrief the whole group on how they experienced the scenarios. They can also be given a few questions to help them analyze how their responses affected the young person in the scenarios:
 - How did the youth's comfort change?
 - What language helped convey safety?
 - How can we avoid making assumptions?

5.5 Institutional Reflection Tool

Objective: The participants analyze the acceptance level of their organization

1. Each participant is asked to rate their organization on a 1-5 scale (1 being the worst and 5 being the best) in different categories, some examples being:
 - Visible inclusivity (posters, policies, role models).
 - Inclusive language use.
 - Access to gender-neutral facilities (toilets, changing rooms etc.).
 - Staff training on LGBTQIA+ inclusion.
 - Support protocols for disclosure or harassment.
2. Each participant is encouraged to share with the others in what areas they assess their organization is performing well and where they could improve.
3. The group of participants discusses and shares with each other what improvement actions they can take to raise the acceptance levels in their organization, and how short-term or long-term the solutions can be.

5.6 Action Planning

Objective: The participants reflect on changes they can make on various levels to increase inclusivity in their professional environment.

1. Based either on their personal experience or a previous exercise, each participant writes a short plan outlining:
 - One **policy-level** change (e.g., adding an inclusive pronoun policy).

- One **practice-level** change (e.g., updating forms to be gender-neutral, adding a gender-neutral bathroom option, etc.).
 - One **personal-level** goal (e.g., attending LGBTQIA+ allyship training).
2. The participants are divided into pairs. They compare their suggested changes and discuss what obstacles they might face in their implementation and how they can gain more support in implementation within their own organization or outside of it.

Key Messages

Non-Acceptance is Pervasive

Across Europe, many LGBTQIA+ youth face subtle and overt non-acceptance, including bullying, harassment, and exclusion (FRA, 2024). Trans, intersex, and gender-diverse youth, as well as youth with intersecting marginalized identities (ethnic, religious, disabled, low-income), are at higher risk.

Impact on Well-Being

Non-acceptance correlates with **mental health challenges**, self-censorship, isolation, and educational difficulties.

Fear of disclosure limits young people's ability to express themselves authentically.

Do Not Assume Identity or Experience

Professionals must **avoid assumptions** about sexual orientation, gender identity, or oppression.

Only the youth themselves can define and report their experiences. Approaching them with openness and respect fosters trust and autonomy.

Intersectionality Matters

Multiple identities intersect, creating layered experiences of risk and discrimination (e.g., a disabled, rural, trans youth may face several compounding challenges).

Protective Factors

Supportive adults, inclusive school climates, peer networks, and visible role models significantly improve safety, acceptance, and resilience.



Even youth with intersectional vulnerabilities benefit from environments that affirm identity and provide support.

Practical Skills for Professionals

Recognize overt, covert, and structural forms of non-acceptance.

Apply trauma-informed, youth-centered approaches.

Use inclusive, non-assumptive communication.

Plan and implement institutional and individual-level strategies to foster inclusion.

Engagement and Reflection

Interactive exercises (scenario analysis, role-play, quizzes) reinforce understanding of non-acceptance and intersectionality.

Reflection tools and action planning encourage participants to apply learning in real-world settings.

6. Conclusions

This module emphasizes that recognizing non-acceptance and supporting LGBTQIA+ youth requires both awareness and humility. Professionals must:

- **Listen without assumptions**, allowing youth to define their own identities and experiences.
- **Understand intersectionality**, acknowledging that layered identities can increase vulnerability.
- **Foster protective environments**, providing support, inclusion, and safety at personal, organizational, and policy levels.
- **Translate knowledge into action**, using practical tools, reflection, and planning to create inclusive, affirming spaces.

By combining theory, evidence, and interactive practice, participants are empowered to **support LGBTQIA+ youth effectively, ethically, and respectfully**, ensuring that all young people can thrive authentically and safely.



Module 3: Mental Health – Assessment and Resilience-Building Techniques

1. Introduction

Young LGBTQI+ people (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex and others) in Europe face a particularly vulnerable situation regarding mental health.

Despite increasing social acceptance in some regions, many young LGBTQI+ individuals experience higher levels of mental health issues, discrimination, harassment, and violence compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers. This constitutes a significant public health concern with consequences for well-being, education, social inclusion, and long-term life outcomes.

Reference: European Commission, 2025. EU's new LGBTQI+ strategy. Brussels: European Commission. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/free-love-free-be-eus-new-lgbtiq-strategy-2025-10-08_sv

⚠ Trigger Warning, good to know before start: This module addresses sensitive topics such as mental health challenges, discrimination, self-harm, and suicide. Participants are encouraged to take breaks when needed and to seek support if the content feels overwhelming.

2. Objectives

The purpose of this module is to:

This module aims to develop participants' knowledge and understanding of common mental health challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ youth. It provides insight into the specific stressors and vulnerabilities that many young LGBTQIA+ individuals experience, while also highlighting protective factors that can strengthen wellbeing and resilience.

Throughout the module, participants will gain practical tools to support the mental health of LGBTQIA+ youth in their professional and everyday roles. The module also explores strategies for suicide prevention, with a focus on early identification, sensitive communication, and creating safe and affirming environments.

In addition, participants will be invited to reflect on their own role as supportive adults, considering how attitudes, language, and actions can contribute to safer spaces and positive mental health outcomes for LGBTQIA+ young people.

3. Learning Outcomes

After completing this module, participants will:



- Have increased knowledge about mental health risks among LGBTQIA+ youth
- Understand minority stress and its effects on well-being
- Be able to identify microaggressions and their long-term impact
- Gain practical tools for resilience-building and supportive responses
- Feel more confident in noticing and responding when a young person is struggling

4.Theory

4.1Mental Health and Vulnerability Among LGBTQIA+ Youth

Research shows that: Trans youth face a dramatically higher risk of suicide, with up to six times greater likelihood compared to cisgender youth. Bisexual youth show around five times higher risk, and gay/lesbian youth around four times higher risk of attempting suicide compared to heterosexual peers.

Nearly half of young LGBTQI+ people in Europe report frequently feeling sad or unhappy, with even higher rates among non-binary youth.

According to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), more than one-third of LGBTQI+ individuals in Europe have considered suicide at some point.

Discrimination and minority stress.

LGBTQI+ youth frequently report repeated bullying and harassment at school. FRA data shows that up to 70% of young respondents experienced hate-motivated harassment in the past year.

Physical and sexual violence is also more common in this group—strongly associated with depression, anxiety, and trauma. Online environments, including social media, are major sources of hate, threats, and negative content that contribute to psychological distress.

High-Risk Groups

Trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse youth are often the most affected and report the highest rates of mental health problems and suicidal ideation.

Young LGBTQI+ individuals who also belong to other marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, socioeconomically vulnerable groups, or those with disabilities—face even greater risks of psychological stress and social exclusion





Statistics EU Wide, All ages.

Numbers from 2023

Over 1/3 (33%+) of LGBTQAI+ people in the EU have considered suicide.

More than 50% of trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse people report suicidal thoughts.

Over 2/3 (66%+) report having been bullied at school due to their identity.

More than 50% have faced hate-motivated harassment in the past year.

Over 1 in 10 (10%+) have experienced physical or sexual violence in the last 5 years because of their identity (<https://www.iglyo.org/about-us>) & (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/edn-20250910-1/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

4.2 Mental Health and Safety Risks for LGBTQAI+ Youth

For LGBTQAI+ young person's there is a higher risk of being exposed to harassment and violence (physical + psychological) LGBTQAI+ individuals often face an increased risk of harassment and violence, including both physical attacks and psychological abuse, which can result in long-term trauma, fear, and social exclusion.

Low emotional support, low self esteem, resulting in: Involuntary loneliness, social isolation: Involuntary loneliness means feeling lonely without wanting to be. It describes a situation where a person wants social contact, connection, or belonging but lacks it due to circumstances beyond their control (e.g. exclusion, discrimination, health issues, lack of safe spaces).

Minority stress, chronic stress experienced by people who belong to a stigmatized or marginalized group, due to prejudice, discrimination, and social exclusion. Lower trust among LGBTQAI+ people is shaped by repeated experiences of stigma, inadequate care, and fear of being questioned or invalidated by institutions.

Gender dysphoria, may increase the risk of eating disorders, particularly when individuals experience distress, lack of body autonomy, or pressure to conform to gender norms. If you or somebody you know experience this, contact the national help line.

Risk of lower income and unemployment, Many LGBTQAI+ persons experience discrimination at work or when applying for jobs. This includes harassment, bias, and hiding their identity to avoid negative reactions, which can influ-

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ence whether they get hired or feel safe in employment and further on affect the income levels.

Barriers to Participation and Identity Development among LGBTQIA+ Youth.

- Lack of feeling able to participate and influence in society
- Lack of economic factors → lack of access to support
- Lack of parental/important adult support
- Questions about identity, oneself and group
- Trans youth: transphobia, lack of access to gender affirming care, major identity crisis, coming out and integrating in society as trans person

Bisexual youth: less “clear” identity than homosexual, labeled immature/insecure (+identity search)

4.3 Misconceptions and Mental Health Impacts for Bisexual Youth

Not all LGBTQ+ identities are recognized or treated equally. For example, gay and lesbian individuals often face more visible prejudice, while bisexual people may encounter more subtle challenges. Many bisexual young people experience that their identity is not taken seriously.

Common misconceptions include beliefs that bisexual is “just a phase” or that bisexual people have the “privilege” of being attracted to both men and women.

These misconceptions can negatively affect mental health, as bisexual individuals may feel questioned or invisible, both within the LGBTQ+ community and in society at large.

4.4 Norm Awareness and Minority Stress

Norms around gender, sexuality, bodies, and relationships shape who feels included and who does not. When LGBTQIA+ youth constantly have to explain, defend, or hide their identity, this creates ongoing stress.

Norm Awareness, self-reflection

Ask yourself and reflect:

What does society often assume about sexuality and relationships?

Who fits into these assumptions, and who doesn't?

4.5 Resilience techniques, based on awareness of existing norms: What Helps LGBTQIA+ Youth Feel Safe and Seen

Everyone deserves to feel respected, supported, and able to be themselves. It is crucial that all of us take our part in creating safe and inclusive spaces where LGBTQI+ youth feel seen, heard, and taken seriously for who they are.

We will in this module therefore go deeper into:

- what support looks like in everyday life
- why representation, allies, and role model's matter
- how LGBTQIA+ competence and norm-aware leadership help create safer environments

These factors help create safer spaces, strengthen mental well-being, and build resilience for LGBTQIA+ young people.

What Support Looks Like in Everyday Life

Support is not only a big action. Often, it shows up in small, everyday moments. With support for LGBTQI+ youth we for example mean:

- Being treated with respect and kindness at school, work, or in social spaces
- Having adults or friends who listen without judging or questioning your identity
- Being believed and heard when you talk about your experiences, not shut down or questioned.
- Feeling safe to express your gender identity or sexual orientation

Example: A teacher uses the correct name and pronouns and steps in when someone makes a harmful comment. In the next slide we will guide you how to do it.

Practical Method: Pronoun Rounds

Pronouns: words a person wants to be referred to by, such as she, he, they, or others

In this space, sharing pronouns is always voluntary. You do not need to share your pronouns, and you do not need to know them in advance. What matters most is



that we create a listening, respectful atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable.

How we do this in practice:

- When writing a name badge, you may choose to add your pronouns (for example: she/her, he/him, they/them).
- It is also completely okay to write only your name.
- During introductions, you can share your pronouns if you want — or you can simply say your name.
- You can also say “pass” if that feels safe for you.

Why this approach matters:

- It avoids putting pressure on anyone to disclose something they are not ready to share.
- It normalizes respect for different identities without forcing visibility.
- It helps create a safer, more inclusive environment for everyone.
- The goal is not to label people, but to show care, respect, and openness.

Checklist, how to build resilience and support for LGBTQI+ youth.

1. Respect: Treat youth with kindness, acceptance, and without prejudice.
2. Opportunities to Meet Others: Provide chances for youth to connect with people who understand and accept them. Peer to peer guidance.
3. Representation: Ensure that organizations, authorities are representing LGBTQI+ persons in media, if you work in a public body to ensure you have all identities represented in for example, social media.
4. Sharing Experiences: Encourage youth to share their experiences and listen to others in safe spaces.
5. Role Models: Be or highlight people who show it's okay to be yourself.
6. Allies: Be a supportive adult—friend, teacher, or mentor—who actively shows support for LGBTQIA+ youth.
7. Healthcare & Support Services: Know and guide youth to healthcare and support services that understand their needs.



8. Legal Rights: Have knowledge of youth rights and help them feel protected by it. Give guidance.
9. Safe Spaces & Caring Leaders: Create and maintain places where everyone feels safe, respected, and included, with clear rules and caring leadership.

5. Practical Exercises & Interaction

5.1 Exercise 1: Multiple Choice

Which of the following is a protective factor for the mental health of LGBTQIA+ youth?

- a) Avoiding conversations about identity
- b) Having access to supportive and understanding adults
- c) Always having to explain their identity to others
- d) Not seeking professional or peer support

How to use resilience techniques to handle micro aggressions.

In the previous chapters and upcoming text, you have or will explore what microaggressions are and how these subtle, everyday actions can create stress for LGBTQIA+ youth.

Even small comments or exclusions can build up over time, affecting mental health and wellbeing.

“But what happens if these tensions aren’t addressed?”

Introduction to the Violence Triangle

The Violence Triangle helps us understand how subtle harm at the base—like microaggressions—can escalate into verbal aggression or even physical violence if left unchecked.”

By seeing the full triangle, we can better understand the importance of early intervention and how our role as supportive adults can prevent escalation

Violence Triangle & Microaggressions

Microaggressions can be compared with mosquito a bite – The Mosquito Bite Analogy. One mosquito bite might seem small and easy to ignore. But many bites, over time, can become painful, exhausting, and hard to heal.



In the same way: One comment, look, or assumption may seem “harmless” to the person who says it.

But repeated microaggressions accumulate and create minority stress, affecting mental health, safety, and self-esteem.

The Violence triangle can be visualized in 3 dimensions

1. Base – Tension / Conflict (Microaggressions)

Subtle comments, stereotypes, or exclusions

Example: “You don’t look gay” or assuming gender/sexuality

Creates minority stress and mental health strain

Often overlooked but builds over time

Violence triangle 2. Middle – Aggression

Repeated microaggressions escalate to verbal harassment, bullying, or social exclusion

Youth may feel isolated or unsafe

Adult support and allyship can prevent escalation

3. Top – Abuse / Violence

Serious harassment, threats, or physical violence

Result of unchecked aggression at lower levels

Shows the importance of early intervention

Everyday examples of microaggressions and how they connect to the Violence Triangle for LGBTQIA+ youth

- Being repeatedly misgendered
- Hearing “You don’t look gay”
- Being asked invasive questions about identity
- Being excluded “without anyone noticing”
- (The mosquito bite) Each incident = one bite
Over time = stress, anxiety, withdrawal, or anger

Adult Role: Preventing More Bites



As an adult you have the responsibility to: See how you can act below:

1. **Notice and name the bite**
“That comment might seem small, but it can hurt.”
2. **Stop the behavior early**
“We don’t make assumptions about people here.”
3. **Support the person affected**
“Do you want to talk about what just happened?”

Building Resilience (Helping Youth Heal the Bites)

Just like caring for mosquito bites, adults can help youth recover. Here are examples of how you can act and respond in everyday situations involving microaggressions.

- Validation: “It makes sense that you’re tired of this.”
- Grounding techniques: breathing, pausing, stepping away
- Reframing: “These comments don’t define who you are.”
- Connection: reminding youth they are not alone
- Rest & safety: creating spaces where no new ‘bites’ happen

5.2 Exercise 2: Drag and Drop

Match the concept to its description:

Concept	Description
1. Minority stress	A. Subtle forms of invalidation or questioning, such as jokes, comments, or glances that make someone feel excluded or judged
2. Microaggression.	B. Stress that comes from living in a society where norms and attitudes create discrimination or pressure on minority groups
3. Pronoun round	C. A group practice to make sure everyone is addressed with the correct pronouns or allowed to pass if they prefer



Transition: From Microaggressions to Noticing When a Young Person Is Struggling

From Everyday Harm to Deeper Distress

In previous chapters, you have learnt and reflected talked about how repeated microaggressions can affect LGBTQIA+ youth over time—like mosquito bites that don't get a chance to heal.

For some young people, this constant stress doesn't just stay on the surface. It can lead to withdrawal, isolation, anxiety, depression, or feelings of hopelessness.

This is why you and your role as a proud ambassador is so important—not only to prevent harm, but to notice when something deeper may be going on.

In the upcoming text we will focus on how you, as an adult, can recognize warning signs, reach out in a caring way, and support a young LGBTQIA+ person who may be struggling—or who may no longer want to live. Please notice, the text and examples can be triggering!

Noticing When a Young Person Is Struggling

When something more may be going on we may notice that an LGBTQIA+ young person:

- Withdraws or isolates themselves
- Stops participating in activities they used to enjoy
- Seems anxious, low, angry, or emotionally numb
- Expresses hopelessness or worthlessness
- Talks about not wanting to exist or feeling like a burden
- Shows changes in sleep, appetite, or attendance

A single sign doesn't mean there is a crisis. But it may be a signal. Trust your concern and involve support. These signs are not attention seeking- they can be a call for help

What TO Do – How you can respond, if a LGBTQI+ youth needs your help and support. How to Respond.

Step 1: What to Do





Notice and name what you see

“I’ve noticed you seem quieter lately, and I wanted to check in.”

Step 2. Ask directly and calmly

“Are you feeling so bad that you’ve thought about hurting yourself or not wanting to live?”

Step 3: Listen without fixing

“That sounds really heavy.”

“Thank you for telling me.”

Step 4: Take it seriously

Stay calm, present, and respectful.

Step 5. Tale help: You — both as the listener and the LGBTQIA+ youth — are not alone in this. Seek support from:

- School counsellors, youth clinics, healthcare services
- Follow safeguarding routines if there is immediate risk
- National NGOs specialized in mental health and suicide support

Show that you are there and listening (Don ´t refer elsewhere right away, Be careful when sharing your own thoughts and experiences)

Ask open ques-

tions about what they feel they need and what makes things feel so difficult (don ´t give unsolicited advice, blame, or challenge)

Decide on a time and a way to stay in touch — and keep that commitment.

Involve others! Need to be complemented by other people or services, clarity of involvement alongside! Important for your own energy to share the responsibility of offering support

Checklist: What Not to Do

- ❌ Minimize: “It’s just a phase.” or “Others have it worse.”
- ❌ Question or debate feelings: “Are you sure?” “You shouldn’t feel like that.”
- ❌ Panic or overreact: Avoid shock, fear, or urgency that centers your emotions
- ❌ Promise secrecy: Never promise confidentiality if safety is at risk



⊘ Try to handle it alone: You are a bridge, not the solution. Take help from the national help lines, if you are worried for someone being in a emergency CALL THE POLICE.

Bottom line:

Being present matters more than having perfect words.

5.3 Exercise 3: True or False:

It is dangerous to ask about suicidal thoughts?	TRUE OR FALSE?
Those who talk about suicide will commit it.	TRUE OR FALSE?

5.4 Exercise 4: Personal case story, (Hope and recovery)

Case study example: When Alex was 16, they experienced constant microaggressions at school — comments, jokes, and being excluded. Over time, Alex stopped participating, withdrew from friends, and felt increasingly hopeless.

Questions for you to reflect on: What signs of stress or withdrawal did Alex show, and how could others notice them earlier?

How can small acts of support, like asking someone how they feel, contribute to resilience?

What do you think happened? See below..

What did happen...

One adult noticed the change and asked directly how Alex was really feeling. That conversation led to support from a counsellor and connection to an LGBTQIA+ safe space.

Alex says today: ‘What saved me wasn’t one big thing — it was someone noticing and not looking away.’”

Reflection exercise from Alex case story

Alex’s story highlights the power of noticing small changes in someone’s behavior.

Reflect: Have you experienced people around you whose behavior has changed recently?



What small signs might indicate they need support, even if they haven't said anything?

What can you do to see if they need your support? Which questions to ask etc.?

8. Take Care of Yourself

Supporting others, especially when they are going through difficult experiences, can be emotionally demanding. To be the best support you can be, it's essential to take care of your own physical and mental well-being.

This includes:

- Physical self-care: Ensure you get enough sleep, eat well, exercise, and take breaks when needed.
- Mental self-care: Reflect on your own emotions, practice mindfulness or relaxation techniques, and give yourself permission to step back when you feel overwhelmed.
- Take Help from others and other professionals.

Remember: When someone opens to you, it's not your fault nor responsibility that they are struggling. You haven't created anything that wasn't already there, and your questions or attention didn't cause their challenges. Being present and listening can make a big difference without implying blame or responsibility.

Reflect by yourself:

- Take a moment to think about your own boundaries. What do you need to feel safe and grounded while supporting others?
- How can you maintain your well-being while still being present for someone else?
- Write down what you need and save it for yourself.

6. Conclusions

In this module we have explored how small acts of presence and care can make a big difference, how to support others without taking on blame, and the importance of taking care of ourselves in the process.

Before we conclude, ask yourself:

- What key takeaway from this module will you carry into your daily life?
- How can you stay attentive to the small signals from people around you?



- What do you need for yourself to feel well and continue supporting others in a sustainable way?

Closing this module doesn't mean the reflection stops — it's about bringing these insights into your everyday interactions, in supporting others, and in taking care of yourself.



Module 4: Inclusive Communication and Anti-Bias Language Skills

1. Introduction

The module “*Inclusive Communication and Anti-Bias Language Skills*” is an important component of the Proud Ambassadors Training Curriculum, developed under the Erasmus+ project *Support of the Inclusion and Reporting of LGBTQIA+ Youth and their Mental Well-being in Europe*. It responds to an urgent and continuing gap across Europe: while awareness of diversity and equality has increased, the everyday communication used by youth professionals often remains unintentionally biased, exclusionary, or uninformed. Many youth workers report uncertainty about which terms or expressions to use, how to address identity sensitively, or how to respond effectively when hearing discriminatory remarks. This lack of confidence and practical guidance can strengthen invisibility and stigma among LGBTQIA+ young people.

Across Europe, many LGBTQIA+ youth still experience oral harassment, exclusion, and misrepresentation due to unconscious bias or discriminatory language. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2024), 63% of LGBTQIA+ individuals have experienced spoken harassment, while 48% of young respondents avoid expressing their identity for fear of negative reactions. Research from UNESCO (2023) and WHO (2022) confirms that inclusive, supporting language promotes psychological safety, improves participation, and contributes significantly to mental well-being. Similarly, Meyer (2023) notes that reducing stigma through communication can lower anxiety and depressive symptoms among LGBTQIA+ youth.

2. Objectives

This module aims to equip youth workers, educators, and trainers with knowledge, awareness, and skills to identify, challenge, and reformulate biased or exclusionary language into inclusive and respectful alternatives. Participants will learn to apply communication practices that promote trust, empathy, and belonging, recognize the effects of unconscious bias, and engage in empathy-based dialogue to support diverse youth populations.

Specifically, the module’s objectives are to:

Objective 1: Identify and analyze the role of language in reproducing or challenging stereotypes and bias.

Objective 2: Develop awareness and practical skills to reformulate biased or exclusionary expressions.



Objective 3: Apply inclusive communication strategies in professional and community contexts.

Objective 4: Recognize and address unconscious bias in youth work interactions.

Objective 5: Demonstrate empathy, reflective listening, and respect in dialogue with LGBTQIA+ youth.

Methodology

This module adopts a mixed teaching methodology, combining experiential, theoretical, and interactive approaches to equip participants with the skills and knowledge needed for inclusive communication in youth work. The methodology is learner-centered, ensuring participants actively engage with content through exercises, reflection, and discussion. Content-focused methods are applied to foundational theory, including inclusive language, bias, microaggressions, pronouns, intersectionality, empathy, and affirming communication, drawing on authoritative sources such as UNESCO (2023), WHO (2022), GLAAD (2023), and Meyer (2023). To strengthen understanding, the module uses interactive methods and exercises, including matching activities, scenario-based quizzes, multiple-choice questions, true/false, and drag-and-drop exercises, all designed to promote reflection, awareness, and practical application. Through this combination, participants practice identifying biased language, reformulating communication inclusively, and applying reflective listening and empathetic engagement in realistic youth work contexts. This methodology emphasizes active participation, critical thinking, and skill application, ensuring learners not only understand the theoretical principles but also develop confidence in applying inclusive communication strategies in their professional and community interactions.

3. Learning Outcomes

At the end of this module, participants will be able to:

Learning outcome 1: Recognize biased and inclusive language in everyday communication.

Learning outcome 2: Apply inclusive communication techniques in written and verbal exchanges.

Learning outcome 3: Reformulate exclusionary or stigmatizing expressions into supporting alternatives.

Learning outcome 4: Demonstrate awareness of unconscious bias and its effects on interaction.



Learning outcome 5: Engage in empathy-driven dialogue that supports diverse youth identities.

4.Theory

Inclusive communication forms the foundation of equitable youth work. It is not limited to language use, it also includes tone, empathy, and awareness of how words influence perception, belonging, and mental health. According to UNESCO (2023), youth workers who adopt inclusive and bias-aware communication practices promote trust, reduce anxiety, and create safer environments for all young people. This theory section is divided into three interconnected topics that prepare participants for the practical exercises that follow.

4.1 The Power of Language in Inclusion and Belonging

Language is a powerful tool that shapes perceptions, relationships, and access to rights. In youth work, inclusive language is not just a matter of political correctness, it is a matter of equity, safety, and mental well-being. UNESCO (2023) emphasizes that inclusive communication empowers trust and reduces anxiety, especially among marginalized youth.

Language is not neutral, it reflects and forms social attitudes, inclusion, and visibility. The words professionals and individuals choose can either support identity or strengthen exclusion. FRA (2024) data show that over 60% of LGBTQIA+ youth experience verbal harassment, highlighting the importance of conscious, supporting communication.

Inclusive language avoids stereotypes, assumptions, and exclusionary phrasing. It centers the individual's self-identified terms and affirms their lived experiences. For example, using "they/them" pronouns when unsure of someone's gender identity or replacing "manpower" with "workforce" reflects respect and neutrality. Inclusive language is accurate, respectful, and person-centered. It avoids assumptions and uses self-identified terms. For example, replacing "sexual preference" with "sexual orientation" removes the false implication of choice. Gender-neutral expressions such as "everyone" or "friends" are preferred over binary greetings like "ladies and gentlemen." Similarly, phrases like "supporting their gender identity" are more accurate and empowering than outdated metaphors such as "born in the wrong body."

Language also influences mental well-being. As Meyer (2023) notes, supporting environments and inclusive communication reduces stress, increases resilience, and improves self-esteem among marginalized youth. Therefore, every interaction, whether verbal, written, or non-verbal, should express recognition, respect, and belonging.



Below are some important definitions relevant to inclusive communication:

Inclusive Language: Language that avoids expressions or words that exclude stereotypes, or diminish people based on identity. It reflects respect, fairness, and equality. (UNESCO, 2023)

Bias: A predisposition, conscious or unconscious, that influences judgment or communication and may lead to unfair treatment of individuals or groups. (WHO, 2022)

Microaggression: A subtle or indirect comment or action that conveys prejudice or reinforces stereotypes, often unintentionally. (FRA, 2024)

Pronouns: Words used to refer to someone in place of their name (e.g., he/him, she/her, they/them). Using correct pronouns affirms identity and respect. (GLAAD, 2023)

Intersectionality: The understanding that individuals experience overlapping forms of discrimination or privilege (e.g., gender, race, sexuality, class) that shape their lived realities. (Crenshaw, 1989; ILGA-Europe, 2024)

Empathy: The ability to understand, share, and validate another person's feelings or experiences. (Meyer, 2023)

Affirming/Supporting Communication: Language that validates a person's identity, acknowledges their experiences, and contributes to a sense of safety and belonging. (WHO, 2022)

4.2 Identifying and Reformulating Biased Language in Practice

Bias in communication often appear subtly, through everyday expressions, humor, or stereotypes. Biased language includes terms or phrases that perpetuate unequal assumptions or invisibility, for example, saying “manpower” instead of “workforce,” or assuming that all families are “mothers and fathers.” According to GLAAD (2023) and WHO (2022), bias is frequently unintentional, stemming from learned norms rather than conscious discrimination. Recognizing it requires awareness and a willingness to self-correct.

Reformulating biased language means consciously choosing neutrality, precision, and respect. This process involves three key steps: identifying potentially exclusionary phrasing, understanding its impact, and rephrasing with inclusive alternatives. In professional settings, youth workers can model inclusivity by rewording materials, correcting misused terms, and responding to bias with clarity and empathy, for example, changing “That’s just how girls are” to “Everyone expresses themselves differently.”



This skill helps transform communication environments and supports the creation of equitable, welcoming spaces for all participants.

4.3 Inclusive Dialogue and Reflective Listening in Youth Work Contexts

Inclusive communication is not only about vocabulary, but also about how we listen and respond. Reflective listening, a concept based on Carl Rogers' humanistic psychology, involves actively acknowledging and validating the speaker's emotions and experiences.

Inclusive communication extends beyond vocabulary, it is about how we interact. Reflective listening and empathy are central to supporting genuine dialogue. When youth workers validate others' experiences through attentive, non-judgmental listening, they signal respect and safety. Meyer (2023) emphasizes that empathetic communication directly improves mental well-being by reducing minority stress and isolation.

In the workplace or youth setting, reflective listening includes acknowledging feelings ("I can understand why that might be difficult"), asking open questions ("What support would feel helpful for you?"), and affirming self-expression. According to UNESCO (2023), this approach strengthens collaboration, engagement, and mental health outcomes.

Practicing empathy also involves self-awareness, monitoring tone, pace, and non-verbal signals to ensure they align with inclusive values. When bias or misunderstanding arises, a constructive response ("Thank you for sharing that, let's explore it together") promotes connection and growth rather than defensiveness.

5. Exercises and Interaction

The following exercises are designed to support theoretical concepts from the module and provide participants with opportunities to practice inclusive communication, bias recognition, and reflective listening. Learners will engage in a mix of matching, true/false, scenario-based, multiple-choice, and drag-and-drop exercises. These activities encourage reflection, discussion, and practical application, ensuring that participants can transfer knowledge into real-world youth work and professional settings.

5.1 Exercise 1: Terms in Inclusive Communication (Matching Activity)

Purpose: To support understanding of main terms that strengthen inclusive communication.

Matching activity (word ↔ definition).



Terms: a) Lesbian, b) Pansexual, c) Transgender (Trans), d) Bisexual, e) Gay, f) Intersex, z) Asexual h) Queer.

Definitions:

1. An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender is an identity, not a medical condition; not all trans people choose or have access to medical transition. The term should be used as an adjective (“transgender people,” not “transgenders”).
2. A person who experiences emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to more than one gender. This can include attraction to people of the same gender and of different genders, not necessarily at the same time or to the same degree.
3. A person who experiences emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to people regardless of gender identity or sex. Pansexual individuals are attracted to people of all genders or gender expressions. The term emphasizes inclusivity beyond gender binaries.
4. A woman who experiences emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction primarily to other women. The term “lesbian” can be used by women and non-binary people who identify with same-gender attraction. Using self-identification is key, as individuals define their own orientation.
5. An umbrella term for people born with physical sex characteristics (such as chromosomes, hormones, or anatomy) that do not fit typical definitions of male or female bodies. Intersex variations are natural forms of human diversity. Intersex is distinct from gender identity or sexual orientation. A person who experiences emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction primarily to people of the same gender. The term is often used to describe men attracted to men but may also serve as a broader umbrella for same-gender attraction.
6. An umbrella term that can encompass people whose sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression differs from societal norms. Historically used as a slur, “queer” has been reclaimed by many in the LGBTQIA+ community as a positive, inclusive term. However, it should only be used for self-identification or when individuals express comfort with it.
7. A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, and asexual individuals may still experience romantic attraction (e.g., heteroromantic, biromantic). Being asexual is a valid sexual orientation, not a disorder or choice.

5.2 Exercise 2: True or False

Purpose: Build awareness of subtle bias in communication.



Statement

1. Complimenting someone for being “well-spoken” can be a microaggression.
2. Assuming someone’s pronouns based on appearance is acceptable.
3. Inclusive language is only necessary when working with LGBTQIA+ youth.
4. Saying “That’s so gay” as a joke is harmless.
5. Using gender-neutral terms like “partner” supports inclusion.
6. Avoiding a person’s pronouns out of fear of making mistakes is inclusive.
7. Unconscious bias can appear in tone, body language, and phrasing.

5.3 Exercise 3: Inclusive or Not?

Purpose: To help participants identify inclusive vs. non-inclusive communication in realistic workplace and youth work contexts.

Scenario-based quiz (two options: Inclusive or Non-Inclusive).

1. “Let’s divide the group: men on one side, women on the other.”
2. A youth worker says, “Let’s check in with everyone before we start.”
3. “We should assign this task to someone strong; maybe one of the guys.”
4. A team leader says, “Alex uses they/them pronouns, please remember to use them.”
5. “Everyone is welcome to join the meeting, whether online or in person.”

5.4 Exercise 4: Choose the Correct Option (Multiple Choice)

Question 1:

Which of the following is the most inclusive alternative to “manpower”?

- A) Personnel
- B) Workforce
- C) Staff members only
- D) All the above

Question 2:

Which sentence removes gender bias?

- A) “That’s just how girls are.”
- B) “Everyone expresses themselves differently.”
- C) “Boys don’t cry.”
- D) “Mothers and fathers should lead all families.”



Question 3:

A youth expresses frustration about being misunderstood. The most empathetic response is:

- A) "You're overreacting."
- B) "I can understand why that might be difficult."
- C) "Don't worry, it's not a big deal."
- D) "Others have it worse."

Question 4:

Which action demonstrates reflective listening?

- A) Interrupting to give advice immediately
- B) Asking open-ended questions about feelings
- C) Ignoring the speaker
- D) Correcting the speaker's emotions

5.5 Exercise 5: Drag the Correct Word

Question 1:

"Consciously choosing ____, precision, and respect helps transform communication environments."

Options to drag:

- Neutrality
- Bias
- Humor
- Stereotype
- Judgment
- Prejudice

Question 2:

"Reflective listening involves acknowledging ____, asking open questions, and affirming self-expression."

Options to drag:

- Feelings
- Facts only
- Opinions only
- Silence





- Criticism
- Authority

Question 3:

“Biased language often appears subtly through ____, humor, or stereotypes.”

Options to drag:

- Everyday expressions
- Scientific facts
- Policies
- Training manuals
- Silence
- Praise

Question 4:

“Empathetic communication in youth work supports ____ by reducing minority stress and isolation.”

Options to drag:

- Mental well-being
- Productivity
- Competition
- Ignorance
- Exclusion
- Conflict

Question 5:

“Inclusive language replaces exclusionary phrasing with ____ alternatives.”

Options to drag:

- Respectful
- Casual
- Sarcastic



- Ambiguous
- Aggressive

Suggestions for follow-up activities

After completing the exercises, participants are encouraged to continue practicing and boost inclusive communication skills. They can keep reflection journals to record situations where inclusive language or reflective listening was applied, noting successes and areas for improvement. Engaging in peer feedback through role-play scenarios allows participants to give and receive constructive input on the use of inclusive or biased language. Observation tasks, such as monitoring meetings, group interactions, or youth activities, help identify subtle biases or inclusive practices in real-world contexts. Developing personal or team action plans ensures consistent implementation of inclusive language and empathetic communication in professional or youth work settings. Group discussions analyzing examples from media, policies, or organizational communication further support understanding by identifying biased language and proposing inclusive alternatives.

6.Conclusions

Inclusive communication is essential for creating equitable, safe, and welcoming environments in youth work and professional settings. Bias often occurs subtly, which requires awareness, self-reflection, and a willingness to correct language and behavior. Using inclusive language, practicing reflective listening, and demonstrating empathy strengthens belonging, mental well-being, and engagement for all participants. Practical exercises allow participants to apply theory to realistic scenarios, supporting the ability to identify and reformulate biased language effectively.



Module 5: Creating Inclusive and LGBTQIA+ Friendly Workplaces

1 Introduction

Module 5 “Creating Inclusive and LGBTQIA+ Friendly Workplaces” aims to raise awareness, build understanding, and develop practical competencies among participants regarding inclusive and LGBTQIA+ friendly work environments. It aims to help learners recognize the social and professional value of inclusion and diversity, understand the specific challenges LGBTQIA+ individuals may face in workplace settings, identify inclusive strategies and tools that promote equality, allyship, and belonging, as well as reflect on their own attitudes, biases, and responsibilities as members of diverse teams. The module combines theoretical and practical learning.

Topics of the Module:

- Understanding inclusion and diversity at work (introducing key concepts, terminology, and frameworks related to equality and LGBTQIA+ inclusion, barriers, and challenges in the workplace)
- Examining barriers and challenges in the workplace
- Analyzing Strategies for Creating Inclusive and LGBTQIA+ Friendly Workplaces

2.Objectives of the Module

- To enhance understanding of inclusion and diversity in the workplace, with a focus on the rights and experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals
- To equip participants with practical strategies and tools to create inclusive, equitable, and LGBTQIA+ friendly workplace environments
- To promote reflection and active engagement among employers, managers, and employees in addressing discrimination and fostering belonging for all

3.Learning Outcomes

1. Define and explain key concepts related to equality, equity, diversity, inclusion, and SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics)
2. Identify barriers and challenges that LGBTQIA+ individuals face in workplace environments, including structural, cultural, and interpersonal factors
3. Recognize the relevance of international and European human rights frameworks (e.g., UDHR, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, ILO Convention No. 111) in promoting inclusive employment

4. Apply inclusive practices and strategies at organizational, team, and individual levels to support LGBTQIA+ inclusion and well-being at work
5. Demonstrate awareness and allyship skills by challenging discriminatory behaviors and fostering a culture of respect, visibility, and psychological safety

4. Theory

4.1 Understanding Inclusion and Diversity at Work

In today's interconnected and multicultural societies, workplaces bring together people with different experiences, identities, and perspectives. Diversity refers to the presence of this variety among individuals — including but not limited to gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, ethnicity, religion, ability, and socio-economic background. Inclusion, on the other hand, is the practice of ensuring that this diversity is welcomed, valued, and integrated into all aspects of organizational life.

A workplace can be diverse without being inclusive. True inclusion goes beyond representation; it is about creating a culture where every person feels respected, supported, and empowered to contribute fully. Inclusive workplaces recognize that people's differences enrich teams and drive innovation, collaboration, and employee satisfaction.

Key Concepts and Definitions

To develop inclusive practices, it is essential to understand a few fundamental terms and principles:

- **Equality**: Ensuring that everyone has the same opportunities, access, and rights within the organization.
- **Equity**: Recognizing that individuals have different needs and starting points and providing specific support to ensure fair outcomes.
- **Diversity**: The range of visible and invisible characteristics that make individuals unique.
- **Inclusion**: The active, intentional, and ongoing effort to create an environment in which all individuals feel a sense of belonging and respect.

These concepts are closely connected to the idea of SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics), which helps

us understand the diversity within human sexuality and gender beyond binary frameworks.

4.2 The Importance of Inclusion and LGBTQIA+ Diversity at Work

Creating inclusive and LGBTQIA+ friendly workplaces is not only a matter of social justice — it is a strategic advantage for organizations. Research consistently shows that inclusion enhances team creativity, innovation, and performance. When employees feel safe to be their authentic selves, they are more engaged, productive, and loyal.

Inclusive workplaces also reflect a commitment to human rights, aligning with international standards such as:

- **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 23)**, which recognizes the right to work without discrimination.
- **The European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights** prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation.
- **The ILO Convention No. 111**, addressing discrimination in employment and occupation.

For LGBTQIA+ employees, inclusion means more than tolerance — it involves visibility, voice, and validation. It requires systems and cultures that celebrate diversity rather than merely “accept” it.

More specifically about these international standards:

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights — Article 23: Right to Work Without Discrimination

Article 23 (full text) declares that *“everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.”*

It also states that *“everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work,”* and that workers have a right to “just and favourable remuneration... and the right to form or join trade unions”.

The Declaration frames labor rights as part of universal human rights, emphasizing that these are rights enjoyed by all simply by virtue of being human.

The fact that Article 23 emphasizes that the right to work must be enjoyed *without discrimination* provides a normative foundation for rejecting discriminatory employment practices based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or other attrib-

utes (i.e., SOGIESC). Additionally, it affirms that employment is not a privilege, but a human right that must be accessible under fair conditions to everyone, which supports arguments that workplaces should proactively remove barriers to equality for LGBTQIA+ persons. In contexts where legal protections are weak or contested, having this universal standard helps advocates and organizations anchor their policies or training modules in a recognized human rights norm.

Some considerations or limitations could be that the UDHR itself is not legally binding in domestic law, but it carries strong moral, normative, and interpretative weight in many jurisdictions and international human rights discourse. Also, its provisions are broad and aspirational; implementing them in specific contexts (e.g., dealing with harassment, microaggressions, or hostile cultures) requires translation into concrete laws, regulations, and workplace policies.

2. European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights — Prohibition of Discrimination (Article 21)

Article 21 of the EU Charter is the central non-discrimination provision. It states:

“Any discrimination based on any ground such as ... sexual orientation shall be prohibited.”

And it further provides that *within the scope of EU law*, any discrimination on grounds of nationality shall be prohibited too.

The Charter’s protections apply to EU institutions **and** member states **when implementing EU law**.

The legal basis for anti-discrimination measures in EU law is Article 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), which empowers the EU to combat discrimination (including on sexual orientation) via legislation.

The Charter was made legally binding with the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), meaning that its provisions, including Article 21, can be invoked in court in appropriate cases.

4.3. ILO Convention No. 111 — Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)

ILO Convention No. 111, adopted in 1958 (entered into force in 1960), is one of the International Labour Organization’s “fundamental conventions.”

Article 2 requires ratifying states to adopt a national policy promoting equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and occupation, with a view to eliminating discrimination.

The Convention defines **discrimination** to include any distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national extrac-

tion, social origin, or “*any other ground*” that nullifies or impairs equality of opportunity/treatment.

The Convention applies to the following scope: access to vocational training, access to employment, terms and conditions of employment, and occupations.

Article 3 obliges ratifying states to enact legislation, promote educational programs, repeal inconsistent laws, and cooperate with employer and worker organizations to implement anti-discrimination policy.

Article 4 clarifies that distinctions based on inherent job requirements (i.e. bona fide occupational requirements) are not deemed discriminatory if justifiable.

4.4 Barriers and Challenges in Workplaces

Although progress has been made in promoting diversity and equality, many LGBTQIA+ individuals still face barriers and discrimination in professional environments. Discrimination and exclusion at work can be overt- such as harassment, denial of promotion, or firing- or subtle, including microaggressions, heteronormative assumptions, and exclusion from informal networks.

Such barriers negatively impact not only individual well-being but also organizational performance, innovation, and retention (OECD, 2019; ILO, 2021).

Research across EU member states shows that LGBTQIA+ people continue to experience higher rates of workplace discrimination than their non-LGBTQIA+ peers (FRA, 2020).

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights found that 21 % of LGBTQIA+ respondents reported feeling discriminated against in employment within the past year, while one-third avoided being open about their identity due to fear of negative consequences (FRA, 2020).

Structural and Institutional Barriers

These are systemic issues embedded in organizational structures, policies, and cultures:

1. Lack of explicit anti-discrimination policies.
In many companies, especially SMEs, workplace policies fail to explicitly mention *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, or *sex characteristics*, leaving gaps in protection
2. Inadequate implementation of equality laws, even though legal frameworks exist, they are often poorly enforced. A lack of monitoring mechanisms, reporting procedures, and accountability allows discrimination to persist (European Commission, 2020).

3. Binary and heteronormative HR systems, meaning administrative systems often recognize only male/female categories, lack inclusive restrooms or uniform options, and may require employees to use legal rather than chosen names—particularly affecting transgender and non-binary staff (OECD, 2019; ILO, 2022).
4. Limited representation and leadership diversity.
Few LGBTQIA+ individuals are represented in leadership roles, meaning that decision-making rarely reflects diverse perspectives. This perpetuates organizational cultures that overlook inclusion (Catalyst, 2021).

Interpersonal and Cultural Barriers

These are systemic issues embedded in organizational structures, policies, and cultures:

1. Workplace harassment and bullying because many LGBTQIA+ employees report being the target of jokes, slurs, or gossip (FRA, 2020). Even when not overtly violent, repeated microaggressions contribute to psychological distress and disengagement.
2. Pressure to conceal identity (“staying in the closet”).
Fear of discrimination, ridicule, or social exclusion leads many employees to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity at work (Badgett et al., 2019). Concealment correlates with lower job satisfaction and mental health outcomes.
3. Implicit bias and stereotyping and specifically biases, conscious or unconscious, that may lead to unequal opportunities in hiring, promotion, or task assignment (McKinsey, 2021). For example, assumptions about gender roles or “appropriate” appearances can disadvantage LGBTQIA+ staff.
4. Hostile workplace culture. When homophobic or transphobic attitudes are tolerated, employees may feel unsafe reporting incidents, further perpetuating a cycle of silence and normalization of discrimination (ILO, 2021).

4.5 Mental-Health and Well-Being Implications

1. LGBTQIA+ employees are at higher risk of stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout due to minority stress, the chronic strain of navigating prejudice and stigma (Meyer, 2015).
2. Lack of social support and psychological safety at work can lead to lower productivity, higher absenteeism, and turnover (OECD, 2019; WHO, 2022).

3. Inclusive environments, on the other hand, have been shown to enhance engagement, innovation, and organizational loyalty (McKinsey, 2021).

4.6 The intersectionality of discrimination

Discrimination is not experienced in isolation. An LGBTQIA+ person may also belong to other marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, or migrants, compounding exclusion.

For example, lesbian women of color may face both sexism and racism on top of homophobia, while trans refugees may experience intersecting barriers in legal documentation and employment (UNDP, 2023).

Intersectional approaches help organizations understand the *diversity within diversity* and design inclusion strategies that address multiple, overlapping identities (Crenshaw, 1991; ILO, 2021).

4.6 Organizational Consequences of Non-Inclusion

- Reduced productivity: Discrimination undermines team morale and performance.
- Talent loss: Skilled employees leave unwelcoming organizations, raising turnover costs.
- Reputation risk: Companies known for exclusion may face public backlash, consumer boycotts, or difficulty attracting diverse talent.
- Legal exposure: Non-compliance with anti-discrimination directives can result in sanctions or lawsuits (European Commission, 2020).

Inclusive workplaces, conversely, benefit from stronger cohesion, better problem-solving, and improved brand reputation (McKinsey, 2021).

Strategies for Creating Inclusive and LGBTQIA+ Friendly Workplaces

Creating workplaces that are inclusive of LGBTQIA+ people is not only a matter of compliance with laws and policies — it is a matter of organizational ethics, innovation, and sustainability. Inclusive workplaces foster environments where all employees can express themselves authentically, leading to higher engagement, creativity, and productivity (McKinsey & Company, 2021; OECD, 2019).

For LGBTQIA+ employees, inclusion requires more than tolerance: it requires proactive efforts to eliminate discrimination, recognize diverse identities, and embed equality into everyday practices and structures.



The following strategies present a multi-level approach — organizational, interpersonal, and individual — to building workplaces that are affirming and safe for all employees, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

Organizational Strategies

A. Adopt and Enforce Comprehensive Non-Discrimination Policies

- Policies should explicitly include sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (ILO, 2021).
- Anti-discrimination clauses should be integrated into all HR policies, including recruitment, promotion, training, and grievance procedures (UNDP, 2023).
- A clear and confidential reporting mechanism should exist for employees who experience or witness discrimination.
- Policies should be communicated visibly (e.g., on the intranet, induction sessions, and posters).

Example: A company policy stating “We do not tolerate discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression” sends a clear signal of inclusion.

B. Leadership Commitment and Role Modeling

- Leadership plays a central role in setting the tone of inclusivity.
- Senior leaders should publicly affirm support for LGBTQIA+ inclusion and integrate equality goals into the organization’s mission and KPIs (Catalyst, 2021).
- Appoint Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) champions or establish an LGBTQIA+ advisory group.
- Managers must receive specific training to identify bias, respond to discrimination, and support diverse teams effectively (European Commission, 2020).

C. Inclusive HR Practices

- **Recruitment:** Use gender-neutral language in job postings and ensure interview panels are diverse (ILO, 2022).



- **Data collection:** Collect voluntary, confidential diversity data to monitor representation and inclusion outcomes.
- **Trans inclusion:** Ensure administrative systems allow for chosen names and pronouns. Provide gender-neutral facilities and health insurance that covers gender-affirming care.
- **Career progression:** Promote equal access to training, mentoring, and leadership programs.

D. Education and Awareness

- Implement regular training on unconscious bias, LGBTQIA+ terminology, and inclusive communication (FRA, 2020).
- Encourage “bystander training” — equipping staff to intervene safely when witnessing discrimination.
- Use inclusive language in all communications (e.g., “partner” instead of “husband/wife”).
- Celebrate international awareness days such as IDAHOBIT (17 May) or Pride Month to foster visibility and solidarity.

E. Organizational Culture and Visibility

- Create visible signs of support: rainbow lanyards, posters, or employee resource groups (ERGs) that foster community.
- Establish safe spaces or support networks for LGBTQIA+ employees.
- Review visual and written content (e.g., website photos, materials) to ensure representation of diverse families and identities (UNDP, 2023).
- Develop internal campaigns promoting respect and allyship across all departments.

2. Interpersonal and Team-Level Strategies

- Encourage Allyship, meaning the training for non-LGBTQIA+ colleagues to act as allies — to listen, challenge discriminatory language, and amplify marginalized voices (Catalyst, 2021), and recognize allyship as a leadership competency.
- Promote Inclusive Communication: use correct pronouns and chosen names, avoid assumptions about gender, relationships, or family struc-



tures, and model inclusive behaviors in meetings and communication channels (ILO, 2022).

- Develop Supportive Team Dynamics: encourage open dialogue about inclusion and psychological safety as well as foster teamwork that values

Individual-Level Strategies

- Self-Reflection: Examine personal biases and assumptions.
- Continuous Learning: Stay informed about LGBTQIA+ rights, terminology, and experiences.
- Courageous Conversations: Speak up respectfully when witnessing exclusionary behavior.
- Mentorship: Offer mentorship to LGBTQIA+ colleagues, particularly those early in their careers.
- Intersectional Sensitivity: Recognize that inclusion must account for race, disability, class, and other intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

Monitoring and Evaluation

To sustain progress, inclusion must be measured and reviewed regularly.

- Conduct employee surveys on belonging and workplace climate.
- Track representation and retention rates of LGBTQIA+ employees.
- Use anonymous feedback tools to identify issues early.
- Benchmark against frameworks such as the ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map or Stonewall Workplace Equality Index.
- Include inclusion targets in organizational performance indicators (European Commission, 2020).

Inclusive workplaces are not built overnight — they are the product of continuous learning, accountability, and authentic engagement with diversity.

5. Exercises & Interaction

5.1 Exercise 1: Multiple Choice Quiz

Instructions: Choose the correct answer for each question.

1. What is the main difference between *diversity* and *inclusion* in the workplace?



- a) Diversity focuses on numbers; inclusion focuses on belonging
 - b) Diversity ensures equal pay; inclusion ensures promotions
 - c) Diversity means hiring minorities only
 - d) Inclusion is only about physical accessibility
2. Which of the following best describes *equity*?
- a) Treating everyone exactly the same
 - b) Giving everyone the same tools regardless of need
 - c) Providing different levels of support to achieve fair outcomes
 - d) Ignoring individual differences
3. The concept of SOGIESC helps organizations:
- a) Identify only visible differences
 - b) Understand diversity in sexuality and gender beyond binaries
 - c) Limit diversity to legal categories
 - d) Exclude sex characteristics from consideration
4. According to research, inclusive workplaces tend to show:
- a) Lower employee engagement
 - b) Decreased innovation
 - c) Increased creativity and collaboration
 - d) Higher turnover rates
5. Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that:
- a) Employment is a privilege for certain groups
 - b) Employers can decide who deserves equality
 - c) Only citizens are protected in workplaces
 - d) Everyone has the right to work without discrimination
6. Which statement best describes the *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights*?
- a) It only applies to private organizations
 - b) It has no legal weight since 2009
 - c) It is not recognized within the European Union
 - d) It prohibits discrimination, including on sexual orientation
7. Article 21 of significant because it: the EU Charter is particularly
- a) Allows discrimination if justified by tradition
 - b) Applies only to gender and religion
 - c) Explicitly names sexual orientation as a protected ground
 - d) Replaces all national equality laws
8. The *ILO Convention No. 111* addresses discrimination in:
- a) Housing and education



- b) Employment and occupation
 - c) Political representation
 - d) Environmental protection
9. Although ILO Convention No. 111 does not list sexual orientation explicitly, it is still relevant to LGBTQIA+ rights because:
- a) It applies only to countries that mention LGBTQIA+ in their laws
 - b) It limits protections to gender only
 - c) It excludes emerging discrimination types
 - d) Its wording allows broad interpretation to include new grounds
10. Why is creating an LGBTQIA+ inclusive workplace considered a *strategic advantage*?
- a) It helps organizations meet quotas
 - b) It improves reputation only
 - c) It fosters innovation, engagement, and productivity
 - d) It prevents all legal challenges automatically

5.2 Exercise 2: Multiple Choice Quiz

Instructions: Choose the correct answer for each question.

1. What does Article 23 of the UDHR guarantee?
 - a) Free healthcare
 - b) B) Right to work without discrimination
 - c) C) Voting rights
 - d) D) Freedom of expression
2. Which of the following is explicitly prohibited under the EU Charter?
 - a) Age discrimination
 - b) Sexual orientation discrimination
 - c) Language discrimination
 - d) Political opinion discrimination
3. The concept of SOGIESC helps organizations:
 - a) Identify only visible differences
 - b) Limit diversity to legal categories
 - c) Understand diversity in sexuality and gender beyond binaries
 - d) Exclude sex characteristics from consideration
4. ILO Convention No. 111 focuses on:
 - e) Health and safety in workplaces



- f) Discrimination in employment and occupation
 - g) Minimum wage standards
 - h) Working hours
5. Which concept ensures fair outcomes by acknowledging different starting points of employees?
- a) Equality
 - b) Diversity
 - c) Inclusion
 - d) Equity
6. Inclusion in the workplace means:
- a) Actively ensuring all individuals feel respected and valued
 - b) Tolerating differences
 - c) Hiring quotas
 - d) Only hiring diverse candidates
7. According to research, inclusive workplaces tend to show:
- a) Lower employee engagement
 - b) Decreased innovation
 - c) Increased creativity and collaboration
 - d) Higher turnover rates
8. Although ILO Convention No. 111 does not list sexual orientation explicitly, it is still relevant to LGBTQIA+ rights because:
- a) It applies only to countries that mention LGBTQIA+ in their laws
 - b) Its wording allows broad interpretation to include new grounds
 - c) It excludes emerging discrimination types
 - d) It limits protections to gender only
9. What makes the *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights* particularly powerful in workplace equality?
- a) It is legally binding across EU institutions and member states
 - b) It applies only to private companies with over 250 employees
 - c) It is a symbolic document without enforcement
 - d) It replaces all national equality legislation
10. What is the primary goal of *inclusion* as defined in this module?
- a) Ensuring representation through quotas
 - b) Creating a culture of belonging and respect for all



- c) Avoiding discussions on diversity to prevent conflict
- d) Offering benefits only to marginalized employees

5.3 Exercise 3 : Multiple Choice Questions (10 Questions)

Instructions: Choose the correct answer(s) for each question.

1. Which of the following is an overt form of workplace discrimination against LGBTQIA+ employees?
 - a) Microaggressions
 - b) Denial of promotion
 - c) Heteronormative assumptions
 - d) Exclusion from informal networks
2. Which percentage of LGBTQIA+ respondents in the EU reported feeling discriminated against in employment within the past year?
 - a) 10%
 - b) 21%
 - c) 35%
 - d) 50%
3. What is a structural barrier in organizations that affects LGBTQIA+ employees?
 - a) Microaggressions
 - b) Workplace harassment
 - c) Lack of explicit anti-discrimination policies
 - d) Pressure to conceal identity
4. Binary and heteronormative HR systems often:
 - a) Recognize only male/female categories
 - b) Offer inclusive restrooms
 - c) Allow employees to use chosen names
 - d) Encourage diversity in leadership
5. Which of the following is an interpersonal or cultural barrier?



- a) Lack of reporting procedures
 - b) Implicit bias and stereotyping
 - c) Weak equality laws
 - d) Organizational policy gaps
6. Concealing one's sexual orientation or gender identity at work is associated with:
- a) Higher job satisfaction
 - b) Lower mental health outcomes
 - c) Increased innovation
 - d) Stronger social support
7. Which of the following is an example of a *structural or institutional barrier*?
- a) Jokes about LGBTQIA+ colleagues
 - b) Fear of coming out at work
 - c) Lack of explicit anti-discrimination policies
 - d) Low self-esteem among employees
8. What is the main problem with binary and heteronormative HR systems?
- a) They make recordkeeping more efficient
 - b) They can exclude employees whose identities do not fit the "male/female" categories
 - c) They improve consistency in communication
 - d) They focus only on performance and not identity
9. Limited LGBTQIA+ representation in the leadership positions can result in:
- a) Reduced awareness of inclusion in organizational culture
 - b) More innovative decision-making
 - c) Increased employee engagement



- d) Better communication with diverse teams
10. A workplace culture that tolerates homophobic or transphobic jokes is an example of:
- a) Structural discrimination
 - b) Hostile workplace culture
 - c) Policy misinterpretation
 - d) Neutral organizational behavior
11. What typically happens when employees feel pressured to hide their identities (“stay in the closet”)?
- a) Job satisfaction and mental health decline
 - b) Productivity and engagement increase
 - c) They become more integrated into teams
 - d) They face fewer challenges in communication
12. Which of the following best describes *implicit bias* in the workplace?
- a) Conscious efforts to exclude someone
 - b) Open acts of discrimination
 - c) Visible forms of harassment
 - d) Hidden stereotypes that influence decisions without awareness

5.4 Exercise 4

Concept	Description/ example
1. Lack of explicit anti-discrimination policies	A. LGBTQIA+ employees are overlooked in promotions and leadership roles
2. Binary and heteronormative HR systems	B. Systems only recognize male/female categories and lack inclusive facilities
3. Workplace harassment	C. Repeated jokes, slurs, or gossip targeting LGBTQIA+ staff
4. Pressure to conceal identity	D. Employees hide sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid negative consequences



5. Implicit bias and stereotyping	E.Assumptions about “appropriate” appearance or behavior affecting opportunities
6. Intersectionality	F.Experiencing multiple forms of discrimination due to overlapping identities
7. Organizational consequences of non-inclusion	G.Reduced productivity, talent loss, reputation risk, and legal exposure

5.5 Exercise 5: True or False: Strategies for LGBTQIA+ Inclusion

Instructions: Read each statement carefully and indicate whether it is **True (T)** or **False (F)**.

1. Collecting voluntary, confidential diversity data helps organizations monitor LGBTQIA+ representation and inclusion outcomes.
2. Using gender-neutral language in job postings is an example of an exclusionary HR practice.
3. Celebrating international awareness days like IDAHOBIT or Pride Month is a visible strategy to support LGBTQIA+ employees.
4. Managers should ignore unconscious bias because it has little impact on workplace inclusion.
5. Creating safe spaces, support networks, or ERGs contributes to an inclusive organizational culture.
6. Encouraging allyship means training non-LGBTQIA+ colleagues to actively support and amplify marginalized voices.
7. Self-reflection and continuous learning about LGBTQIA+ rights are considered individual-level strategies for inclusion.
8. Leadership commitment has minimal effect on inclusion since policies alone are sufficient.
9. Using correct pronouns and chosen names in communication is a form of inclusive team-level practice.



10. Monitoring and evaluating inclusion is unnecessary if policies and trainings are already in place.

5.6 Exercise 6 (Additional Ex.)



Interactive Activity Plan:

Role Plays and Group Exercises on Inclusion & Exclusion

- The Trainers can indicatively divide their team into 3 people, each one of them will have one of the following roles: **1) CEO, 2) HR Manager, 3) A Young person who is facing discrimination**
- The team will present a short scene of a workplace showcasing either an inclusive or a non-inclusive workplace.
- They will have 10 minutes for the sketch preparation
- They will have 3-5 minutes to present their 'performance'
- Each scene should show a realistic workplace situation, highlight inclusion or exclusion, offer a possible solution or best practice.

5. Conclusions

Creating truly inclusive and LGBTQIA+ friendly workplaces requires more than compliance with legal frameworks—it demands a sustained commitment to cultural transformation, intersectional awareness, and psychosocial well-being. Inclusive environments recognize the interdependence between equality, mental health, and empowerment, ensuring that all individuals can contribute authentically without fear of exclusion. The integration of human rights principles, diversity management, and community engagement forms the foundation of this process, while continuous education and policy innovation sustain it. Ultimately, fostering inclusion in the workplace is not only an ethical obligation but a strategic investment in social cohesion, innovation, and the democratic values at the heart of the European project.



Module 6: Legal Frameworks and Rights of LGBTQIA+ Youth

1. Introduction

Module 6 “Legal Frameworks and Rights of LGBTQIA+ Youth” examines the legal rights and protections available to LGBTQIA+ youth in selected European countries: Greece, Sweden, Italy, Slovenia, and Belgium. While many countries have made significant progress in recognizing and safeguarding the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals, challenges do exist, particularly for young people who may face discrimination in education, healthcare, or public spaces. Understanding national legal frameworks is essential for promoting equality, inclusion, and safety. This module highlights key laws, policies, and protections that impact LGBTQIA+ youth, while also pointing to areas where legal and social gaps persist. When it comes to comparing approaches across these countries, trainers can gain insight into effective strategies for advocacy, support, and policy development in the European context.

Topics of the Module:

- To examine and compare the legal rights and protections available for LGBTQIA+ youth in selected European countries
- To raise awareness of ongoing challenges and gaps in the legal and social protection of LGBTQIA+

2.Objectives

- Greek Legal Framework
- Swedish Legal Framework
- Slovenian Legal Framework
- Belgian Legal Framework
- Italian Legal Framework

3.Learning Outcomes

1. Identify and describe key laws and policies protecting LGBTQIA+ youth in Greece, Sweden, Italy, Slovenia, and Belgium.
2. Compare national approaches to LGBTQIA+ equality and assess how these frameworks differ across European contexts.
3. Recognize persistent legal and social challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ youth, including discrimination and barriers to inclusion.
4. Analyze how legislative measures can be leveraged to create safer, more inclusive educational, social, and professional environments.



5. Apply knowledge of legal protections and best practices to develop advocacy and training strategies that promote equality and human rights for LGBTQIA+ youth.

4.Theory

- **European Union: Commitments to LGBTQIA+ Equality**

Before analyzing in detail the crucial legal framework regarding the national legal contexts of the EU countries, the project's partners, it is important to highlight the directives that the EU is taking into force to protect LGBTQIA+ rights.

- **EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025**

EU Policy Strategy (horizontal, cross-sectoral)

The first comprehensive EU strategy dedicated specifically to LGBTIQ equality, structured around four pillars: 1) Tackling discrimination, 2) Ensuring safety, 3) Building inclusive societies, 4) Leading equality globally

- **Victims' Rights Directive (Directive 2012/29/EU)**

EU Directive (cross-cutting)

Minimum standards for the rights, protection, and support of victims of crime, including victims of hate crime.

- **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021–2024)**

EU Strategy

A comprehensive EU framework to protect children's rights, including: 1) Protection from discrimination, 2) Safe and inclusive education, 3) Mental health and well-being

- **EU Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia (2008/913/JHA)**

EU Framework Decision (criminal law cooperation)

It requires Member States to criminalize hate speech and hate crime and while originally focused on racism, it has been used in conjunction with national laws to address homophobic and transphobic hate crimes

- **EU Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2020–2025**

EU Equality Strategy



It explicitly recognizes intersectionality, it acknowledges discrimination affecting lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women, and it addresses gender-based violence, education, and health.

- **European Pillar of Social Rights (Principle 3 – Equal Opportunities) (2017)**

EU Social Framework

It established equal opportunities regardless of sexual orientation, and it applies broadly to education, social inclusion, and access to services.

1. GREECE

Legal Frameworks and Gender Recognition

Law 3500/2006- Prevention and Addressing Domestic Violence

Introduced Greece's first comprehensive legal framework to prevent and address domestic violence, protecting all victims regardless of gender or sexual orientation. It recognized physical, psychological, and economic abuse and aligned national legislation with international standards such as the Istanbul Convention. The law extended protection to LGBTQIA+ individuals and minors, ensuring access to counselling, protection orders, and social support services.

Law 3896/2010–Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation

This law promoted equal treatment in employment, combating discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. It harmonized Greek law with EU Directive 2006/54/EC, strengthening equality and providing legal recourse for victims of workplace discrimination. The law marked a decisive step toward embedding non-discrimination principles in professional and institutional settings.

Law 4356/2015–Recognition of Same-Sex Civil Partnerships

Recognized same-sex civil partnerships and granted rights similar to marriage, including inheritance, property, and next-of-kin status. This legislation was a landmark for family rights and LGBTQIA+ inclusion in Greece, representing the country's first formal legal recognition of same-sex relationships. It advanced equality and brought Greece closer to European human rights standards.

Law 4443/2016–Strengthening Anti-Discrimination Protections

Expanded anti-discrimination safeguards by prohibiting unequal treatment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion, and ethnicity. The law designated the Greek Ombudsman as the main authority for handling dis-



crimination complaints. It enhanced equality in employment, education, and public services and increased public awareness of citizens' rights to protection and fairness.

Law 4491/2017 – Legal Gender Recognition

Established the right to legal gender affirmation based on self-identification, without the requirement of surgery or medical diagnosis. It enabled individuals aged fifteen and above to affirm their gender with parental consent and court approval. This law represented a major advancement for transgender rights in Greece, promoting personal autonomy and aligning national practice with European equality standards.

Law 4604/2019 – Gender Equality and Prevention of Gender-Based Discrimination

Broadened Greece's legal equality framework by introducing policies to prevent discrimination and promote gender balance across public and private sectors. It explicitly recognized multiple discrimination grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity. The law required public institutions to develop equality action plans and promoted awareness and inclusion through education and training initiatives.

Law 5089/2024–Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage.

Legalized same-sex marriage and extended full parental and adoption rights to same-sex couples, marking Greece as the first Orthodox-majority country to achieve this milestone. The law amended key Civil Code articles to ensure equal recognition for LGBTQIA+ families. It signaled a transformative step toward full equality, reflecting both legal and cultural progress.

Healthcare Rights

Law 4368/2016 – Universal Access to Healthcare

Guaranteed access to public healthcare services for all residents, including uninsured persons, migrants, and vulnerable populations. It strengthened equal treatment within the healthcare system and improved access for LGBTQIA+ people, particularly transgender individuals seeking psychological or medical support. The law reinforced the principle that healthcare is a universal right, regardless of identity or socioeconomic status.

Ministry of Health Circular (2019) – Inclusive Healthcare Guidelines

Issued by the Ministry of Health, this circular promoted inclusive practices in healthcare institutions, ensuring respectful treatment of transgender and LGBTQIA+ patients. It provided guidance on gender-affirming procedures, confi-



dentiality, and staff sensitization. The circular marked an administrative effort to translate legal equality into practical improvements in healthcare delivery.

Empowerment through Knowledge

NGO Collaborations (Colour Youth, Checkpoint)

Civil-society organisations such as Colour Youth and Checkpoint have played a key role in peer education and youth empowerment by providing inclusive information on sexual health, LGBTQ+ issues, and human rights. Through workshops, awareness campaigns, and peer-led support services, they complement state efforts by reaching young people in safe, community-based environments.

Ministry of Education Initiatives (2020–2024) – Inclusive Sexuality Education

Introduced pilot programs on inclusive sexuality education addressing gender identity, sexual orientation, and respect for diversity. These initiatives aim to reduce stigma and bullying in schools while fostering empathy and acceptance among youth. Collaboration with NGOs such as Colour Youth and Checkpoint has strengthened implementation through peer education and teacher training.

2. SWEDEN

Legal Frameworks and Gender Recognition

Decriminalization of Same-Sex Relations (1944)

Sweden decriminalized same-sex sexual relations, marking one of the earliest legal steps toward LGBTQIA+ equality in Europe. • This reform placed Sweden among the first European states to remove criminal penalties for same-sex relations, laying an early legal foundation for later LGBTQIA+ rights reforms.

Legal Gender Recognition Act (1972)

Sweden became the first country in the world to allow legal gender affirmation; originally, it required sterilization, unmarried status, and a diagnosis. Although groundbreaking globally, the law reflected the medicalized understanding of the time, and its coercive requirements, such as sterilization, were fully abolished only decades later, following human rights criticism.

Registered Partnership Act (1995)

Introduced legal partnership for same-sex couples, granting almost all marriage-equivalent rights except joint adoption and access to assisted reproduction. The act represented a major step toward legal equality by formally recognizing same-sex couples, while also highlighting remaining gaps compared to heterosexual marriage.



Adoption Rights for Same-Sex Couples (2002)

Sweden became one of the first countries to allow same-sex couples to apply for joint adoption and stepchild adoption. This reform reinforced Sweden's child-centred welfare approach by prioritizing stable family environments regardless of parents' sexual orientation.

Discrimination Act (2008)

Prohibits discrimination based on gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation across all areas of public life. Supervised by the Equality Ombudsman, it ensures protection and redress for victims. The Act remains a cornerstone of Sweden's equality framework and a model for inclusive legislation in Europe.

Marriage Equality Act (2009)

Sweden legalized gender-neutral marriage, automatically converting registered partnerships unless couples chose otherwise. This law completed the transition to full marriage equality in Sweden, granting same-sex couples identical legal status to different-sex couples and symbolically affirming LGBTQIA+ inclusion within civil institutions.

LGBTQIA+ Equality Strategy (2014, updated 2022)

A national strategy guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. It promotes inclusion in education, healthcare, and employment, with a focus on mental health and social participation. Implemented jointly by government, municipalities, and civil society, it reflects Sweden's integrated approach to equality.

Self-Identification and Gender Recognition Reform (2022, updated and got into force in 2025)

Allows individuals to affirm legal gender based on self-identification without medical or sterilization requirements. It simplified administrative processes and strengthened personal autonomy. The reform marked a major human rights advancement, though non-binary recognition remains pending further legislative action.

Healthcare Rights

Removal of Homosexuality from the National Disease Register (1979)

Decision by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*). The decision by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare formally ended the classification of homosexuality as a mental illness, marking a





crucial

shift toward depathologization and recognition of LGBTQ+ rights in Sweden.

Amendment to the Legal Gender Recognition Act – Abolition of Sterilization Requirement (2013)

It removed the mandatory sterilization requirement for legal gender affirmation, strengthening bodily autonomy and trans healthcare rights. This amendment in Sweden aligned legal gender recognition with human rights standards by ending forced sterilization, significantly advancing bodily autonomy and transgender healthcare rights.

Patient Act (2014)

Guarantees every patient the right to equal access to healthcare and informed participation in decisions affecting them. It emphasizes respect for personal autonomy and protects individuals from discriminatory treatment. This law reinforces inclusivity and cultural competence within Sweden's healthcare system.

National Board of Health and Welfare Guidelines (2017)

Issued to standardize gender-affirming healthcare, ensuring high-quality and equitable treatment for transgender individuals. The guidelines focus on psychological support, informed consent, and collaboration among medical professionals. They promote respect for human dignity and consistency in service delivery nationwide.

Expansion of the Discrimination Act to Cover Trans Identity & Expression (2019)

“Transgender identity or expression” was explicitly added as a protected ground, prohibiting discrimination in healthcare, education, employment, and public services.

Health Inequities and Discrimination in Healthcare Reports (NBHW, DO)

Studies by the Discrimination Ombudsman and National Board of Health and Welfare identified persistent healthcare barriers for transgender and migrant populations. They called for better provider training and stronger enforcement of equality standards. These reports guide national efforts to ensure fair access to medical care.

Empowerment through Knowledge

MUCF Report “Unga hbtqi-personers trygghet och utsatthet”



Analyzed the safety, well-being, and mental health of LGBTQIA+ youth in Sweden. The report highlighted vulnerabilities in rural and disabled communities and informed national and local support programs. It underpins Sweden's evidence-based policies on youth inclusion and equality.

National Agency for Education (Skolverket) Initiatives

Promote inclusive education through teacher training and anti-bullying programs addressing gender and sexual diversity. The initiatives aim to make schools safer and more accepting environments. These measures ensure that equality principles are embedded in daily educational practice.

Mandatory Sexuality Education & 2022 Curriculum Reform- 1955 (mandatory since), revised in 2022

Sweden has required sex education in schools since 1955. In 2022, the curriculum was updated to "*Sexuality, Consent, and Relationships*" and teacher training was strengthened to ensure educators are equipped to teach inclusive topics, including LGBTQIA+ issues.

3. SLOVENIA

Legal Frameworks for Protecting LGBTIQ+ Persons from Discrimination

Civil Partnership Registration Act (2006)

This law introduced formal recognition of same-sex partnerships, granting limited legal rights mainly in the areas of property rights and social security. However, it did not include key family rights such as the right to marry, joint adoption, and full parental recognition.

Administrative Legal Gender Recognition Procedure (2011)

Slovenia established an administrative procedure allowing transgender people to affirm their legal gender without mandatory surgical intervention. Despite this progress, the process remained medicalized and dependent on expert assessments.

The Protection Against Discrimination Act (ZVarD 2016)

The Protection Against Discrimination Act was adopted in April 2016 as the central Slovenian legal instrument that comprehensively prohibits unequal treatment. The Act protects every individual from unjustified discrimination based on personal circumstances, including explicitly mentioned sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. The Act prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, as well as incitement to discrimination, and ensures protection in all areas of life, including employment, education, social security, healthcare, and access



to services. The main innovation of the law was the establishment of an independent state body – the Advocate of the Principle of Equality – which oversees the implementation of the law in practice.

Law on Civil Partnership (2017)

The law established a system of registered and unregistered partnerships, which expanded the rights of same-sex couples. It equated most partnership rights with those of marriage, with three exceptions: the ability to marry, joint adoption, and access to medically assisted reproduction.

Constitutional Court Ruling (2022) – Act Amending the Family Code

The Constitutional Court of Slovenia ruled that excluding same-sex couples from marriage and joint adoption was unconstitutional. As a result, the right to marry and the right to joint adoption were extended to all couples.

Constitutional Court Ruling (2024) – Access to Assisted Reproductive Technology

In its decision, the Constitutional Court confirmed that regulations preventing single women and lesbian couples from accessing medically assisted reproduction are unconstitutional (U-I-418/20, U-I-847/21).

Healthcare Rights

Access to Trans-Specific Healthcare (Public System Coverage)

Transgender people in Slovenia can access gender-affirming medical procedures, such as hormone therapy, surgical procedures, and psychological support, through the public health insurance system. Cases are reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Board for Gender Identity Confirmation, which operates within the University Medical Center Ljubljana. In practice, access may be affected by long waiting times and limited availability of specialized providers; furthermore, the centralization of services can restrict access for people living outside the capital.

The Patient Rights Act (ZpacP 2008)

Discrimination in healthcare is specifically addressed in Article 7 of the Patient Rights Act (“Article 7 – Prohibition of Discrimination”), which states that a patient has the right to equal treatment in healthcare “regardless of gender, nationality, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, or other personal circumstances.” This provides an important legal basis for equal access to healthcare services for LGBTQ+ individuals.



University Psychiatric Clinic Ljubljana – Treatment of Individuals in Medical Gender Confirmation Procedures

Since 2013, the University Psychiatric Clinic in Ljubljana has operated a Sexual Health Clinic, which also serves as the point of entry for all transgender individuals entering the process of medical gender affirmation (within the framework of the Interdisciplinary Board for Gender Identity Affirmation). Since its inception, the scope of work has expanded to include psychiatric care and the treatment of children and adolescents with gender dysphoria.

Education and LGBTIQ+ Youth

Protocol for the Detection and Handling of Peer Violence in Educational Institutions (2023 – ongoing)

The Protocol for identifying and addressing peer violence is included in the National Education Program for the period 2023-2033. While a specific chapter addresses vulnerable groups of young people and the prevention of discrimination, the issue of homophobic and transphobic violence is not explicitly mentioned.

Resolution on the National Youth Program 2013–2022 (ReNPM13–22)

This resolution established a strategic framework to strengthen youth participation, social inclusion, and equal opportunities. It supported measures benefiting marginalized youth groups, but the issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are not explicitly mentioned.

Draft Resolution on the National Youth Program 2024–2032 (ReNPM-32)

The draft Resolution on the National Youth Program for the period 2024–2032 placed greater emphasis on sexual orientation as a basis for the discrimination in question, but still did not explicitly mention gender identity and gender expression. The proposal has been under consideration since 2023, but the new Resolution has not yet been adopted as of 2026.

4. BELGIUM

Legal Frameworks and Gender Recognition

Comprehensive Sexual Education Policy (2012)

Belgium's Comprehensive Sexual Education (SE) Policy, established in 2012, mandates inclusive and age-appropriate SE in all schools nationwide. The curriculum integrates topics such as gender identity, sexual orientation, and consent, aiming to promote respect, inclusivity, and reduce stigma toward LGBTQIA+ students. Backed by the Ministry of Education, it aligns with international standards and is regularly updated to reflect societal changes.



Results include reduced bullying and improved mental well-being among LGBTQIA+ youth. Despite its success, the policy faces regional implementation disparities and resistance from conservative groups.

Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage (2003)

Belgium became the second country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage in 2003, marking a milestone in global LGBTQIA+ rights. The reform granted same-sex couples equal marital rights under the Civil Code, later expanded to include adoption (2006) and cross-national marriages (2004). Driven by strong advocacy and political support, it positioned Belgium as a pioneer in equality legislation. The initiative significantly improved legal protection and social acceptance of LGBTQIA+ individuals, though initial opposition from conservative factions reflected broader cultural resistance to change.

Legalization of Adoption Rights for Same-Sex Couples (2006)

The 2006 reform extended Belgium's equality framework by granting same-sex couples full adoption rights, ensuring equal parental recognition and protections for children. This legal advancement stemmed from sustained advocacy by LGBTQIA+ organizations and reinforced Belgium's commitment to family diversity and child welfare. It enhanced social legitimacy for same-sex families and aligned domestic law with international human rights principles, though cultural prejudice and religious opposition persisted during implementation.

LGBTQIA+ Action Plan in Wallonia (2020–2024)

The Walloon Regional Government's Action Plan (2020–2024) outlines region-specific measures to promote LGBTQIA+ inclusion in healthcare, employment, and education. Focused on addressing disparities in rural areas, the plan emphasizes accessibility, intersectoral cooperation, and continuous evaluation. Outcomes include strengthened collaboration between local authorities and LGBTQIA+ organizations and the creation of regional support networks. Challenges remain regarding funding and public awareness in smaller municipalities.

Anti-Discrimination Law

Belgium's Anti-Discrimination Law, aligned with EU directives, prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, race, and other grounds. Implemented by bodies such as UNIA and the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men (IEFH), the law provides accessible reporting mechanisms and legal recourse for victims. The legislation has led to thousands of successful prosecutions and heightened public awareness. However, rural outreach and lengthy case processing remain areas for improvement.



Gender Recognition Law (2018)

The 2018 Gender Recognition Law marked a major advancement for transgender rights in Belgium, allowing individuals to affirm their legal gender through self-declaration—without medical or surgical requirements. The law, developed through collaboration between the Federal Government and advocacy groups like Çavaria, reinforces self-determination and bodily autonomy. Its implementation has led to greater visibility and rights for trans individuals, though continued advocacy seeks recognition for non-binary identities and improved administrative training at the local level.

Healthcare Rights

Federal Action Plan on LGBTI+ Health (2023–2027)

This federal action plan aims to reduce health inequalities faced by LGBTI+ people by promoting inclusive healthcare policies and practices. It places particular emphasis on improving transgender healthcare, professional training for healthcare providers, and data-informed policymaking.

Sciensano Monitoring Framework

The Sciensano coordinates ongoing research and data collection on LGBTQIA+ health and well-being at the national level. This framework supports evidence-based public health strategies and helps identify disparities in access, outcomes, and quality of care.

Empowerment through knowledge

Comprehensive Sexual Education Policy (2012)

Belgium introduced compulsory, comprehensive sexual education in schools with an inclusive approach to sexual orientation, gender identity, consent, and relationships. The policy aims to promote equality, prevent discrimination, and support young people's sexual and emotional well-being.

UNIA & IEFH Awareness Campaigns

UNIA and the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men run awareness campaigns focused on LGBTQIA+ rights, anti-discrimination, and gender equality. Their activities include professional training, youth workshops, and community outreach to foster inclusion and empowerment.

5. ITALY

Legal Frameworks and Gender Recognition



Law No. 164/1982

This law established the legal framework for gender recognition in Italy through a judicial procedure. It marked an early step in recognizing transgender identities, though it initially reflected a highly medicalized approach.

Constitutional Court Rulings (2015, 2017)

These rulings progressively expanded transgender rights by strengthening legal recognition standards and protections. They also emphasized the best interests of minors and greater judicial flexibility in gender recognition cases.

Removal of Mandatory Surgery Requirement (Court Decision, 2015)

The Constitutional Court of Italy ruled that gender-affirming surgery is not a prerequisite for legal gender affirmation. This decision significantly advanced bodily autonomy and aligned Italian law with human-rights principles.

Law No. 76/2016 (“Cirinnà Law”)

This law introduced civil unions for same-sex couples, granting most rights associated with marriage. However, it explicitly excluded joint adoption and full parental recognition.

Legislative Decree No. 216/2003

The decree transposed EU anti-discrimination directives into Italian law, prohibiting discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation. It strengthened workplace equality protections but did not explicitly cover gender identity at the time.

Constitutional Court Recognition of Trans Rights Expansion (2017)

The Court reaffirmed gender identity as a fundamental personal right protected by the Constitution. It clarified that judicial approval for legal gender recognition can be granted without mandatory medical or surgical intervention.

Healthcare Rights

National Health Service (SSN) (2015)

Italy’s National Health Service (SSN) provides access to gender-affirming healthcare within the public system. However, because healthcare is regionally decentralized, availability and waiting times vary significantly across the country.

Trans Healthcare Guidelines (2017–2021)



Updated national medical guidelines support access to psychological care and hormone therapy for transgender people. In practice, implementation differs by region, leading to unequal standards of care and access.

Empowerment through knowledge

MIUR Directive (2015)

Issued by the Ministry of Education, this directive promotes inclusive education and requires schools to address bullying and discrimination, including that based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It encourages awareness-raising activities and respect for diversity within the school environment.

National Strategy for LGBTI Rights (2013–2015, updated 2022)

Italy's national strategy aims to promote LGBTI inclusion across key areas such as education, employment, health, and security. The 2022 update aligned national priorities with EU LGBTIQ Equality frameworks and strengthened coordination among public institutions.

National Anti-Discrimination Office (UNAR) Establishment (2003)

The National Anti-Discrimination Office (UNAR) was established to prevent and combat discrimination in line with EU equality directives. It plays a key role in monitoring discrimination, supporting victims, and promoting public education on equality, including issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

5. Exercises and Interaction

5.1 Exercise 1: True or False

Instructions: Decide if each statement is True  or False .

1. Greece became the first Orthodox-majority country to legalize same-sex marriage.
2. In Sweden, gender affirmation requires surgery and psychological evaluation.
3. Italy's legal gender recognition process is still handled through the courts.
4. Belgium legalized same-sex marriage before granting adoption rights to same-sex couples.
5. Slovenia's 2024–2032 Youth Program includes specific actions for LGBTQIA+ mental health and inclusion.



6. Greece's Law 4443/2016 prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
7. Sweden's Discrimination Act only applies to employment cases.
8. Belgium's Gender Recognition Law (2018) allows legal gender affirmation without surgery.
9. Italy's Cirinnà Law (2016) legalized same-sex marriage.
10. All five countries studied now allow same-sex adoption.
11. Since 2022, Swedish schools are required to teach "Sexuality, Consent and Relationships" as part of the national curriculum.
12. Slovenia legalized same-sex marriage and adoption through a Constitutional Court ruling in 2022.
13. The EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025 is the first comprehensive EU strategy dedicated specifically to LGBTQIA+ equality.
14. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child explicitly promotes inclusive education and protection from discrimination for all children, including LGBTQIA+ youth.

Purpose: To help trainers differentiate the legislation per country and understand the progressiveness of each country.

5.2 Exercise 2: Multiple Choice

Title: *Spot the Right Answer!*

Instructions: Choose the correct answer.

1. Which Greek law legalized same-sex civil partnerships?
 - a) Law 3500/2006
 - b) Law 4356/2015
 - c) Law 4443/2016
 - d) Law 3896/2010
2. Which country introduced same-sex marriage in 2003?
 - a) Italy
 - a) Belgium
 - b) Sweden
 - c) Greece



3. In which year did Greece legalize same-sex marriage?
 - a) 2015
 - b) 2017
 - c) 2024
 - d) 2010
4. Which of the following allows gender affirmation through *self-identification*?
 - a) Italy
 - b) Sweden
 - c) Belgium
 - d) Both b and c
5. Italy's Law No. 164/1982 concerns:
 - a) Marriage equality
 - b) Employment discrimination
 - c) Legal gender recognition
 - d) Healthcare rights
6. Slovenia's Constitutional Court ruling of 2022 achieved:
 - a) Same-sex marriage & adoption equality
 - b) Trans healthcare reforms
 - c) Education law reform
 - d) Civil union rights
7. Which Swedish law protects people from discrimination in employment, education, and healthcare?
 - a) Equality Act 2009
 - b) Discrimination Act 2008
 - c) Gender Identity Law 2012
 - d) Civil Code Reform 2010
8. Belgium's Gender Recognition Law (2018) was significant because:
 - a) It required medical certification



- b) It introduced non-binary recognition
 - c) It allowed self-declaration for gender affirmation
 - d) It repealed marriage equality
9. Which country has most recently achieved marriage equality?
- a) Greece
 - b) Sweden
 - c) Slovenia
 - d) Belgium
10. Which Italian law established the legal procedure for gender recognition?
- a) Law 76/2016
 - b) Law 164/1982
 - c) Decree 216/2003
 - d) Constitutional Court Ruling 2015
11. What did the 2022 Constitutional Court ruling in Slovenia achieve?
- a) Only civil partnership rights
 - b) Civil unions with limited protection
 - c) Marriage & adoption equality for same-sex couples
 - d) A national LGBTQIA+ curriculum
12. What is the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025?
- a) A binding EU regulation
 - b) An EU employment directive
 - c) A national action plan for Member States
 - d) A cross-sectoral EU policy strategy addressing discrimination, safety, and inclusion

Purpose: Reinforce the key ideas without requiring deep memorization.

5.3 Exercise 3: Multiple Choice

Title: *Spot the Right Answer!*



Instructions: Choose the correct answer.

1. Which Greek law ensures universal access to healthcare for vulnerable groups, including trans people?
 - a) Law 4368/2016
 - b) Law 4443/2016
 - c) Law 4604/2019
 - d) Law 5089/2024
2. Sweden's Patient Act (2014) guarantees:
 - a) Free healthcare only for minors
 - b) Equal treatment and informed consent for all
 - c) Gender-affirming surgeries for all
 - d) Regional health autonomy
3. Which country monitors LGBTQIA+ health data through *Sciensano*?
 - a) Italy
 - b) Sweden
 - c) Belgium
 - d) Slovenia
4. Italy's National Health Service (SSN) provides gender-affirming care:
 - a) In every region
 - b) Only where approved regionally
 - c) Only for minors
 - d) Not at all
5. Slovenia's Sexual Health Clinic in Ljubljana specializes in:
 - a) LGBTQIA+ education
 - b) Gender affirmation healthcare
 - c) Legal advocacy
 - d) Gender studies research
6. What significant reform did Sweden implement in 2013 concerning legal gender recognition?



- a) Mandatory surgery was introduced
 - b) Sterilization requirement was abolished
 - c) Same-sex adoption was legalized
 - d) Gender-neutral healthcare cards were created
7. Belgium's 2012 Comprehensive Sexual Education policy focuses on:
- a) Abstinence and family values
 - b) Gender identity, consent, and inclusion
 - c) Employment equality
 - d) Reproductive rights only
8. Greece's recent Ministry of Education initiatives (2020–2024) aim to:
- a) Train police on hate crimes
 - b) Promote inclusive sexuality education
 - c) Provide legal aid to LGBTQIA+ adults
 - d) Reform asylum policy
9. Sweden's MUCF report addresses:
- a) Marriage equality
 - b) Trans healthcare funding
 - c) Employment policy
 - d) LGBTQIA+ youth safety and mental health
10. Which country's youth policy (ReNPM-32) explicitly includes LGBTQIA+ empowerment?
- a) Greece
 - b) Italy
 - c) Slovenia
 - d) Belgium
11. The main challenge for most countries today is:
- a) Creating new laws
 - b) Improving law enforcement and public awareness



- c) Abolishing equality bodies
- d) Restricting youth education

12. How is gender-affirming healthcare provided in Italy?

- a) It is fully centralized under national law
- b) It is illegal in all regions
- c) It is available but varies by region under the public health system
- d) It is provided only to minors

5.4 Exercise 4: Drag and Drop

Title: Match the law with the country and the Policy with its focus area

Instructions: Match the correct country and policy with each statement.

LAW	COUNTRY
1. Law 5089/2024 – Same-Sex Marriage	A. BELGIUM
2. The Protection Against Discrimination Act (ZVarD 2016)	B. SLOVENIA
3. Law 164/1982 – Legal Gender Recognition	C. SWEDEN
4. Discrimination Act (2008)	D. GREECE
5. Federal Anti-Discrimination Act (2007)	E. ITALY

POLICY	FOCUS AREA
1. Law 4368/2016 (Greece)	a. Inclusive school curricula
2. Comprehensive Sexual Education Policy (Belgium)	b. Regional equality strategy in healthcare, employment, education
3. Constitutional Court Ruling on Marriage & Adoption Equality (2022, Slovenia)	c. Gender Recognition



4. MUCF Report (Sweden)	d. Universal healthcare access
5. National Strategy for LGBTQI+ Equality (Greece)	e. Cross-sector inclusion policy
6. Law 164/1982 – Legal Gender Recognition (Italy)	f. Legal Frameworks and Family Rights
7. EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025	g. Inclusion, Equality & Safety
8. EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021–2024)	h. Youth Protection & Well-Being
9. Wallonia Action Plan (Belgium)	i. Youth safety and vulnerability

5.5 Exercise 5 : Matching exercise using dropdown menus

Legislation	Level		Theme
EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025	EU Level	National Level	Legal gender recognition
EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021–2024)	EU Level	National Level	Family & partnership rights
Italy – Law No. 164/1982 (Legal Gender Recognition)	EU Level	National Level	Equality & non-discrimination
Slovenia – Constitutional Court Ruling (2022) - Act Amending the Family Code	EU Level	National Level	Safety from hate crime
Victims’ Rights Directive (2012/29/EU)	EU Level	National Level	Youth protection & well-being



5.6 Exercise 6 (Additional Ex.) : Reflection

- Divide into 5 groups — each represents one of the countries (3 people per group).
- Each group identifies:
 1. One key strength in LGBTQIA+ inclusion (e.g., healthcare, education, or legal reform).
 2. One remaining challenge that young LGBTQIA+ people might face there.

Participants have 5 minutes to reflect and discuss the above-mentioned areas and then they have 5 more minutes to present their points.

6. Conclusions

The development of legislative frameworks governing LGBTQIA+ rights has become both a litmus test and a stimulus for inclusive social change in the changing European equality landscape. For instance, Greece's adoption of marriage equality represents both official legal acknowledgment and a larger cultural trend toward accepting all types of families. In the meantime, advancements like Sweden's extensive anti-discrimination law and Belgium's 2018 reform that permits legal gender affirmation without medical requirements highlight how institutional architecture and procedural clarity are just as important as legislative content. However, the sheer existence of laws does not ensure lived equality; in order to close the gap between de jure rights and de facto inclusion, strong administrative frameworks, inclusive healthcare practices, and aggressive youth empowerment initiatives are crucial. Mental health outcomes, peer support systems, and educational settings that uphold identity and dignity are just as important to young LGBTQIA+ individuals as their legal status. Because gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, and disability interact in complex ways to form lived experience, intersectionality further complicates these relationships. As a result, policy must be sensitive to both the internal diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community as well as to the group as a whole. Going forward, the focus must change from "which rights exist" to "how rights are realized." Whether legal advancements result in meaningful inclusion will depend on monitoring mechanisms, disaggregated data collecting, and sincere interaction with youth and civil society. The promise of these legal reforms will ultimately be upheld by inclusive businesses, educational institutions, and healthcare systems that incorporate respect, choice, and voice, guaranteeing that equality becomes a lived reality for all young people rather than a written legislation.



Module 7. Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQIA+ Youth

1. Introduction of Module 7: Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQIA+ Youth

Creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQIA+ youth is a shared responsibility. We all have different experiences, identities, and needs. What feels safe for one person may feel unsafe for another. Therefore, safety cannot be assumed – it must be actively created together.

This module focuses on understanding how norms shape inclusion and exclusion, how safer spaces can be created in practice, and how adults and professionals can contribute to environments where LGBTQIA+ youth feel safe enough to participate, express themselves, and belong.

Trigger Warning

This module addresses topics such as exclusion, discrimination, violence, and norm-related pressure. Participants are encouraged to take breaks and seek support if needed.

2. Objectives

The purpose of this module is to support participants in building respectful, responsible, and inclusive environments where more people feel a sense of belonging. It encourages active listening and shared reflection in order to identify common values and approaches that strengthen inclusion within a group.

The module introduces the concept of a “Safer Space” as a collaborative method in which the facilitator and participants jointly create guidelines for how they want to interact. By co-creating these shared principles, the group establishes a foundation where everyone feels safe enough to participate, express themselves, and engage openly.

In addition, the module provides concrete tools for creating safer and more inclusive encounters with LGBTQIA+ individuals, supporting participants in translating inclusive values into everyday practice.

3. Learning Outcomes

This module will:

Provide concrete tools for creating safer and more inclusive encounters with LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Strengthen your ability when meeting LGBTQIA+ persons in different contexts.



Give better conditions to see and respond to each individual's needs and id

Deepen your understanding of how norms affect LGBTQIA+ individuals and how you can contribute to safe, inclusive environments. entity.

⚠ Trigger Warning, good to know before start This module addresses sensitive topics such as mental health challenges, discrimination, self-harm, and suicide. Participants are encouraged to take breaks when needed and to seek support if the content feels overwhelming.

Why do we do this?

We are all different. We have different experiences, different ways of being, and different needs. What feels safe for one person may feel unsafe for another. That is why we need to talk about our needs – instead of guessing or assuming that everyone functions the same way.

Safety is something we create together.

This module helps us listen to each other and find shared ways of showing respect, taking responsibility, and creating an inclusive environment where more people feel they belong.

Disclaimer: These are topics that can trigger reactions.

The aim is not to blame anyone but to start seeing what we need to feel safe and which norms affects us in daily life.

4.Theory

4.1 Safe space introduction

"Safer Space" is a method where the leader and group jointly create guidelines for how we want to be together – so that everyone feels safe enough to participate.

The tool is built around two simple but important questions:

What do you need to feel safe enough to participate?

What do we all need to feel safe enough to participate?

The answers to these questions become the foundation for shared agreements – guidelines that both facilitators and participants are responsible for keeping alive.

Reflection Exercise – Reflect and write down

What do you need to feel safe in a meeting with a new person/group?



What might all individuals need to feel safe in a group or environment?

Tip: Use these reflection questions when meeting a group or an individual, to set a safe space from the beginning, what do you need to feel safe and what do we need to do in order for us to feel safe?

This can be done in different ways, group discussion, private notes that the group shares etc.

4.2 Norms and Norm Criticism

Norms are unwritten rules that guide our behaviour, our expectations of ourselves and others, and shape the conditions for how we interact in different contexts. These norms can be both formal – such as laws and regulations – and informal, like unspoken expectations of how we should behave in social situations.

One could say that norms function as a form of social control. They set boundaries for what is considered acceptable – and what is not. Sometimes this is positive, because it creates structure and makes it easier to live together. But other norms can be limiting.

4.3 Norms Create (In)equality

Norms come in different ways. They affect who has access to what, and who encounters barriers. These barriers can be both physical and social/psychological.

The physical barriers can be gendered bathrooms but also the lack of wheelchair ramps to bars, busses etc. These physical barriers affect our access to the city and mental wellbeing.

There are also norms around love, gender, ethnicity, religion, age – in fact, almost every part of our lives. And when social structures are only adapted to certain experiences and bodies, injustices arise.

The system of norms becomes narrow – and that means many people are excluded.

4.4 Everyday examples of how norms create barriers

Using the bathroom

A non-binary or trans person avoids using the bathroom at a café or shopping mall because there are only “women” and “men” signs. This can create stress and discomfort.



Getting around the city

A wheelchair user cannot join friends at a café because there are steps at the entrance. Over time, they may stop accepting invitations.

Taking the bus

A person with a visual impairment feels anxious when bus stops are not clearly announced, making it easy to miss the right stop.

Showing affection in public

A same-gender couple avoids holding hands in public due to fear of negative reactions or comments.

Filling out forms

A medical or school form only offers two gender options. The person feels invisible or forced to choose an option that does not reflect who they are.

6. Sexuality and Norms

There are many norms connected to gender and sexuality. They are often context-bound – they can change over time and between places.

There are spoken and unspoken norms.

Norms limit behavior. They can be enforced through punishment or social pressure. Sometimes they are hard to put into words, which makes them harder to challenge.

One of the strongest norms is the hetero norm - a norm that assume that

- 1) there are two genders
- 2) that these are the opposite to each other
- 3) and that these "naturally" attract each other.

This affect the way men and women expect to act, dress, look, feel, talk, what we can work with etc.

The hetero norm is shown in every part of the society, it's social and structural. Besides being very limiting for both men and women it also ignores the existence of nonbinary and genderfluid people.

Practical exercise, reflect and write down.

Can you think of other norms that influence or control how we express our sexuality and/or gender? These norms may appear in families, schools, media, workplaces, or cultural and religious contexts. How do they affect what feels “acceptable,” safe, or visible in everyday life—and who is expected to adapt or stay silent?



Answer: couple norm, love norm, ability norm, purity norm, heteronorm, cishnorm, reproduction norm, body norms, whiteness norm.

Norms are context-bound.

They are often shaped by society, the group, family, relatives, friends, school. This means they can change over time and between places. The context who shaped the norm can also enforce it through punishment or social pressure. Social pressure can be a mother who really wants their child to get married and get children. It can also be a soccer team where teammates often make homophobic jokes, a form of social pressure on the group to act heteronormative. This can also involve honour-related violence and oppression such as a family/relative that say that you are not welcome home if you're LGBTQIA+, use violence if you're not following rules of the family or threats about violence.

These threats of violence, violence and social pressure is limiting our behavior and of course effects our physical and mental health.

But a friend group, a school, a youth club can also use social pressure to enforce inclusive and positive norms to create a safe space

4.5 Multiple Norm Systems

Because of norms being contextual, there are a lot of different expectations put on youth connected to love, sexuality, and relationships.

Many young people we meet live within multiple norm systems – the one they grew up with at home, the one they encounter in society, in their safe space amongst friends etc.

This can be challenging for the youth. It's can put pressure to choose between these systems and can be exhausting to be forced to adjust their behavior all the time depending on what context they are in.

Practical Exercise, Reflection question.

How do different norms apply to different people?

How can norms set limitations?

Who decides the norm?

How can someone be made to stay within the norm?

Concept	Description
1. Safe Space Agreements	A. The process of questioning which behaviors and identities are seen as “normal”

2. Norms	B. Shared guidelines created so everyone feels safe enough to participate
3. Norm-Critical Thinking	C. Unwritten rules that shape expectations, belonging, and power

Norms exist everywhere

What norms do you have in your groups. Ex, friend group, study group?

Example: In a friend group, people often assume everyone is straight and cis-gender. Conversations revolve around “boyfriends and girlfriends,” and jokes are based on traditional gender roles. Those who fit these norms feel relaxed and included.

For an HBTQI+ youth: This norm can result in that a LGBTQIA+ person may avoid talking about their crush, partner, or identity to avoid awkward questions or being singled out

Who feels comfortable in your context? Fit or not fit the dominant norm.

If you fit the dominant norms — for example, those who are heterosexual, cis-gender, extroverted, able-bodied, or from the majority culture — often feel relaxed and confident in social settings and contexts. They rarely have to explain themselves or worry about being questioned.

For an HBTQI+ youth: , the experience is often very different: They often need to think carefully about what they say or do, in order to avoid conflict or exclusion.

Simple things, like talking about a partner, holding hands, or expressing gender identity, can create stress, anxiety, or fear.

Over time, these experiences can affect self-esteem, confidence, and mental wellbeing, and make participation in group activities or social life more challenging.

What do we mean by "context"

When we talk about context, we mean a specific group or environment where you spend time and interact with others. This could be a friend group, a scout group, a workplace, a study group, a sports team, or your family.

Every context has norms — often unspoken — about how people are expected to behave, speak, dress, express emotions, or talk about relationships and identity. These norms shape those who feel safe, welcome, and “at home,” and who feels the need to adapt, hide parts of themselves, or stay silent.

Reflection exercise, norms in your context.

Think of one group you are part of. For example:

- Your friend group
- Your workplace or study group
- Your family

What norms exist in this group? Consider unspoken rules about gender, sexuality, relationships, appearance, behavior, language, or emotions.

Who feels safe, comfortable, and “at home” in this context?
Who benefits from these norms without having to think about them?

Who might feel invisible, excluded, or pressured to adapt?

"We don't notice a norm until someone breaks it — and if you don't see it, it's because you are part of it."

Understanding the norm and what it do to us

Norms are unwritten rules that shape how we think and act. They are context-bound and define what is seen as “normal.” When we think about someone within the norm we often tend to think of: a white middle-aged man without a disability as the default person.

What does this do us and if you are not the norm you will hear about it several times. Do you remember microaggressions and minority stress from previous modules? This is it.

When we create safe spaces, we can question and change these patterns.

Norms to different categories, the dominant norm

Category	Dominated norm
Age	Middle-age norm: The “typical” adult is assumed to be middle-aged.
Sexual orientation	Heteronorm: We assume people are heterosexual unless stated otherwise.
Function	Function norm: Society is built for people without disabilities — others must adapt or announce needs.

Ethnicity	Skin colour norm: If someone has another skin colour or nationality than the norm we tend to ask these persons "where are you from" however a white person never gets this question.
Religion	Religious norm: We assume that people belong to the majority religions ex. Christianity.
Gender	Gender norm: Middle age cis man as the normative person.
Gender identity/expression	Cisnorm: We assume that everyone identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. Please note: There is a difference between gender expression and gender identity.
Class norm	Unspoken rules and expectations that the persons come from a particular social or economic background.
Body norm	People who fit the body norm are those whose appearance, size, shape, or physical abilities match the socially accepted standards of beauty and functionality.

If you do not fit the norm? Our assumptions.

If nothing else is mentioned, we often assume a person is cis, heterosexual, white, and non-disabled.

People who don't fit these norms are often described differently or asked questions, example, "but do you feel more like a girl or boy?" If you're a non-binary.

As we explained in module 3, this is like a mosquito bit — one is fine, but if you get ten every day, it becomes exhausting. That's what it can feel like for people who constantly have to justify or explain who they are.

4.6 Creating Positive Norms

Norms are not just rules — they are the unspoken agreements in a group about how people behave, communicate, and interact. While some norms can be ex-

clusive or limiting, positive norms help create structure, respect, and inclusion for everyone.

4.7 Examples of Positive Norms and how to create these

Asking for pronouns: Normalizing the practice of asking and sharing pronouns helps everyone feel respected and recognized, especially LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Using easy-to-read language: Writing information in clear, simple language ensures that everyone, including people with reading difficulties or cognitive differences, can understand and participate.

Shorter meetings (max 45 minutes): Structuring meetings to be shorter benefits people with ADHD or concentration challenges but also makes the session more effective and accessible for the entire group.

The important thing is not to know every norm – but to start seeing them. It's not about putting people into boxes. People are more than in their categories. To understand inequality, we need to dare to see the patterns. Otherwise, we don't see why some people constantly must explain themselves, while others just move through life without friction.

Practical Exercise: Reflect by yourself

Do you have any rules, routines, or ways of doing things at your work that might feel inclusive for some but excluding others?

Have you reflected on them yourself, or do you do it without questioning it because the person you work with is part of the dominant norm?

By reflecting on the rules, routines, and norms in your own group, we start to see how unspoken expectations shape who feels included or excluded. This is the foundation of norm pedagogy — an approach that helps us identify invisible norms, question who they benefit, and create more inclusive environments.

In the upcoming text, we will go deeper into norm tolerance pedagogy and norm critical pedagogy.

4.8. Two different approaches: Tolerance pedagogy and Norm-critical pedagogy

Tolerance pedagogy is about the majority – those who follow the norm – learning to better understand and accept “the others,” those who deviate.

For example: “We need to learn to accept people who are different.”

But the norm itself is often left unchallenged. “The others” remain the others.



Norm-critical pedagogy on the other hand, flip the perspective. Here we examine the norm itself. We ask: “What is it that makes some people always fit in – while others do not?”

The goal is to broaden the norm. To make space for more. To make the idea of “normal” less narrow.

– Tolerance pedagogy says: “They should be allowed to join – despite being different.”

– Norm-critical pedagogy asks: “Why are they seen as different – and how can we change that?”

How to see and change norms: Traffic Light Method.

The Traffic Light Method helps us reflect on what feels safe (green), uncertain (yellow), or uncomfortable (red) in a group or situation.

It’s a simple way to discuss behaviors, boundaries, and inclusion without judgment.

- Green: Feels good and respectful
- Yellow: Unsure or mixed feelings
- Red: Feels wrong or uncomfortable

How to see and change norms: Traffic Light Method.

Observe the context: Look at the group, space, or situation you want to assess.

Identify norms and routines: What are the unspoken rules? What behaviors, language, or assumptions are expected? Use the questions on each traffic light slide as a guide to structure your work.

Assess with traffic lights:

Green: Works well for everyone. Keep it!

Yellow: Needs attention — could be adjusted to be more inclusive.

Red: Must be addressed or changed, as it excludes or harms people.

Reflect:

Who benefits from these norms?

Who might feel invisible, unsafe, or excluded?

Plan positive changes:

Turn yellow or red practices into green ones by introducing more inclusive norms.



Small adjustments can include using inclusive language, adapting routines, or creating clearer rules.

5. Exercises & Interaction

5.1 Exercise 1: The Red Light Method – A Self-Study Guide

Step 1: Choose your focus: Pick a group, space, or situation to reflect on. This could be:

- Your friend group
- Family routines
- Your school or workplace
- Online communities or social media

Ask yourself: Do people follow “unwritten rules”? What behaviors are expected or assumed?

Step 2: Observe and write down norms

Look at how people behave, speak, or interact.

What is considered normal or expected?

Are some people always listening to or taken seriously?

Are some people staying silent or adjusting themselves to fit in?

Step 3: Traffic Light Assessment – From Your Own Case

Take the group, space, or situation you chose and examine it using the traffic light method:

Green Light – Inclusive Practices

Which routines, rules, or norms make everyone feel welcome and included?

Example questions to guide you:

Who feels safe and comfortable here?

What behaviors or practices help people participate fully?

Yellow Light – Practices that need attention

Which routines or norms work for some but may unintentionally exclude others?

Example questions:



Who might feel uncomfortable or pressured to adapt?

Are there hidden rules or assumptions that some people must follow to “fit in”?

Red Light – Excluding or harmful practices

Which norms or routines clearly create barriers, exclusion, or discomfort?

Example questions:

Who feels invisible or left out?

What assumptions or behaviors actively prevent inclusion?

Reflect by yourself:

Do I personally benefit from these norms without noticing them?

How would this space feel for someone who does not fit the dominant expectations?

What small changes could make yellow or red practices more inclusive?

5.2 Exercise 2

In the upcoming text, we have gathered the traffic light method and all related questions so you can use them later for your own reflection or analysis. See below:

RED LIGHT

Red light – Stop and discover the norms

The first step is to identify which norms are guiding the situation.

Are participants expected to behave in a certain way?

Are there unspoken rules about how to act, look, function, or express oneself?

Examples:

The norm says it is “normal” to quickly formulate thoughts and share them verbally without preparation.

There seems to be an unspoken expectation of small talk, joking, and correctly interpreting social signals.

There are norms not only about what you say, but also how you say it – and this affects how you are receiving.

YELLOW LIGHT

These norms create insecurity because the person feels they can never really ex-



press themselves in the “right” way. This leads to uncertainty, stress, and a sense of not fitting in. It becomes difficult to fully participate and show their true self.

Who benefits or is disadvantaged?

Those who fit the norm – people who can quickly and spontaneously express themselves socially, adjust their tone, and understand social codes – benefit. They receive more recognition and space.

Those who don’t fit the norm are disadvantaged, as their ways of being and communicating are not seen as equally “correct” or desirable. This can lead them to withdraw or fall silent.

Yellow light, reflect on following questions.

What consequences do they create?

Who benefits, and who is disadvantaged?

Does everyone have equal space to contribute?

Does anyone feel excluded?

By reflecting on this, you can identify which norms may need to be challenged to create a more inclusive environment.

GREEN LIGHT

As a facilitator, you can become aware of the need to encourage different ways of expressing oneself and participating and show that all contributions are valuable.

It may be important to give more time for formulating thoughts, or to prepare the group for a task in advance. You can also ask more direct or concrete questions, such as:

Where do you live?

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

How old are you?

When using the traffic light method or reflecting norms, remember that norms are not always visible or explicitly named. They are not limited to umbrella terms like cis-norms, ability norms, or heteronormy.

Sometimes, the “correct answer” or key insight may involve specific aspects of a broader norm — for example, certain assumptions or practices that are part of the ability norm, rather than the norm.



Pay attention to how norms operate in everyday routines, rules, or expectations, even if they are subtle or taken for granted.

How to start the change. Be aware of the norms and change them!

Start with yourself.

See mistakes as learning opportunities.

Respect pronouns and identities.

Make space for multiple ways of being.

Remind yourself that inclusion is an ongoing process – it is never “finished.”

We don’t notice a norm until someone breaks it — and if you don’t see it, it’s because you are part of it.”

To further practice recognizing norms and how you can challenge microaggressions and the cycle of violence, go to Module 3. For practical and pedagogical tips, go to Module 8.

5.3 Exercise 3: Final Quiz.

1. What is a “Safer Space” approach?

- a) A set of rules decided only by the facilitator
- b) A shared agreement created together to support everyone’s sense of safety
- c) A silent activity where no one expresses needs
- d) A room without strong opinions

2. Which of the following best describes norms?

- a) Personal opinions about identity
- b) Written rules only found in laws
- c) Unwritten expectations that shape how people behave and are perceived
- d) Temporary trends

3. What is the goal of norm-critical pedagogy?

- a) To accept people “despite” being different
- b) To avoid talking about identity
- c) To examine and widen norms so that more people can belong
- d) To make everyone fit into the same norm

4. In a safe space, whose responsibility is it to keep agreements alive?

- a) Only the facilitator
- b) Only participants





- c) Everyone together
- d) Only the most confident people

6. Conclusions

Being inclusive in a meeting with an LGBTQIA+ person is not about reaching a destination — it is a continuous journey of reflection, learning, and openness.

It starts with yourself: embracing mistakes as opportunities, reflecting on your own norms, and sharing your growth. By doing so, you create space for others to do the same. True inclusion thrives when differences are seen as strengths, and leaders actively nurture a culture where everyone feels they belong.

With the right tools, methods, and the understanding that this work is never “finished,” inclusive leadership becomes more than a role — it becomes a mindset, a practice, and a way of being.

Evaluation

What was the most valuable thing you learned from this module?

Which part of the module could be improved and how?

How will you apply what you learned in your work, studies, or daily life?

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?



Module 8: Practical Tools and Innovative Training Techniques for Supporting LGBTQIA+ Youth

1. Introduction

This module is designed to equip professionals, youth workers, mentors, and support staff with practical tools and innovative training techniques to effectively support LGBTQIA+ youth. It focuses on fostering understanding, validation, and empathy through the development of key interpersonal and trauma-informed skills. Participants will explore active listening strategies and trauma-informed methods of engagement to create safer, more inclusive, and supportive environments for young people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Methodology Type and Methods

Type:

- Interactive and experiential learning

Methods:

- Group exercises and simulations to practice active listening and empathy in realistic scenarios.
- Reflective discussions to promote self-awareness and understanding of personal biases.
- Role-playing activities to enhance confidence in applying new communication and support techniques.

2. Objectives

Objective 1 : Understanding, Validating, and Responding with Empathy

This objective focuses on helping participants recognize and validate the diverse experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth. It emphasizes the importance of empathy in communication and aims to strengthen participants' ability to create supportive and affirming interactions.

Purpose: To build emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity, ensuring that professionals can provide nonjudgmental and inclusive support to LGBTQIA+ youth.

Objective 2: Trauma-Informed Method of Work

This objective introduces participants to trauma-informed principles, particularly within the context of supporting LGBTQIA+ individuals who may experience dis-



crimination, rejection, or identity-related trauma. Participants will learn how to recognize triggers, respond appropriately, and offer choices that empower youth rather than re-traumatize them.

Purpose: To ensure that professionals apply sensitivity, awareness, and empowerment-based approaches when engaging with LGBTQIA+ youth, prioritizing safety, autonomy, and respect.

3. Learning Outcomes

This module directly contributes to the project's overall objectives by enhancing participants' capacity to understand and respond to the unique experiences and needs of LGBTQIA+ youth. By the end of the module, participants will be able to integrate active listening and trauma-informed methods to provide empathetic, safe, and empowering support to LGBTQIA+ youth — by holding space for open dialogue, recognizing emotional triggers, and offering informed choices that validate each young person's experience and promote trust, autonomy, and well-being. Expected outcomes are for them to be able to:

- Apply active listening techniques to improve communication and trust with young people.
- Use a trauma-informed approach to ensure emotional safety and validation in youth support settings.
- Recognize and address biases, fostering empathy and inclusion in their professional practice.

The expected result is a more skilled and confident network of professionals who can provide compassionate, informed, and empowering support to LGBTQIA+ youth.

4. Theory

4.1 Understanding, Validating, and Responding with Empathy

LGBTQIA+ youth often experience higher levels of stress due to stigma, discrimination, and social rejection. According to Minority Stress

Theory, chronic exposure to prejudice and internalized homophobia or transphobia can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. By understanding and validating their experiences, professionals can help mitigate these stressors, fostering resilience and emotional well-being.

Affirmative approaches emphasize recognition and validation of sexual and gender diversity. These models highlight that acceptance and empathy from



trusted adults are linked to higher self-esteem, stronger identity development, and reduced risk behaviors among LGBTQIA+ youth. Responding empathetically reinforces a sense of belonging and counters societal marginalization. We will focus on **two specific tools** we can use daily to reach our objective:

1. Active listening
2. Holding space

We will be using an interactive approach, where we will learn through roleplays and exercises.

4.2 Four Fs of Active Reviewing for Active Listening

The Four Fs of Active Reviewing: **Feel**, **Facts**, **Findings**, and **Future**, are a framework from experiential learning theory that guides structured reflection on experiences. When combined with active listening, this approach provides a deeper, empathetic understanding of LGBTQIA+ youth experiences:

Feel: Encourages recognition and validation of emotions, allowing youth to express feelings safely.

Facts: Focuses on understanding the context and events without judgment, ensuring clarity and accuracy in support.

Findings: Helps identify patterns, triggers, and coping strategies, fostering insight into experiences and challenges.

Future: Supports goal-setting and empowerment, giving youth agency over their next steps.

Fact - What happened?

When youth comes to us with their experiences or stories, the first step is to find out what happened. Given the specific nature of LGBTQIA+ experiences, it is also important to focus on the factual side of the reported side of the story by the young person. In situations where a young queer person decides to share some possibly traumatic or upsetting situation that happened to them, the first approach is to try to find out what actually happened in that situation.

Active Listening Strategy:

-Use open-ended questions to help the youth or youth worker describe the situation without judgment or assumptions. Try to focus on things like, where did the situation happen, who else was there, what was actually said during the situation, is this something that happens often, has it happened before. etc.



-Practice paraphrasing to confirm you understood correctly. Confirm what you have heard from them in your own words, to confirm whether you are understanding correctly without attaching any emotion to the paraphrasing. That way you are signaling that you are listening, but also that you care to understand that person's perspective instead of just sitting quietly and taking in the information.

Examples: - “So what I hear is that the teacher used the wrong pronoun during class?”

Main Goal: Create a shared understanding of the situation — just the facts, not interpretations.

Feelings: “What was that like for you?”

Even though we should focus on finding out what happened factually, emotions and feelings are also important in these situations and we should never minimize how the person reporting has felt during that situation. In order to allow the person to express the emotional side of the story, it is important to create a space where they will not feel judged about how they felt or reacted. Our natural instinct might also be to immediately search for solutions, so we might jump to creating or providing strategies and solutions for tackling the problem at hand. We must not do this when the young person either, a) does not need to hear solutions, or b) is not in the right emotional state to hear out any possible solutions at that moment. Sometimes the purpose of the conversation is to just share an experience or vent.

Active Listening Strategy:

- Listen for emotions, both spoken and unspoken.
- Reflect back feelings and validate them.
- Avoid minimizing or jumping into solutions.

Examples:

- “That sounds really frustrating. Did it make you feel invisible?”
- “I hear a lot of anger in your voice. Is that how it felt at the moment?”
- “Would you like me to help you figure out something you can do about this situation?”

Main Goal: Build emotional awareness and give space for youth to feel heard and accepted, especially important when exploring identity, discrimination, or personal growth.

Findings — “What did you notice or learn?”

In the process of sharing an experience, we can help youth gain some insights about themselves, others, or the situation in general. The way to achieve that is to try to encourage the youth to think introspectively about the situation. By asking guiding questions to the young person, you can help them assess the behaviour, acts and communication that happened in the situation. This can help them come to conclusions, encourage critical introspection and possibly help them decide on next steps.

Active Listening Strategy:

- Use clarifying questions to help them discover insights.
- Resist giving your own interpretation — guide, don’t lead.
- Affirm their personal growth or awareness.

Examples:

- “What did you take away from that experience?”
- “How did it feel to stand up for your friend when they were misgendered?”

Main Goal: Encourage reflection that leads to self-understanding and resilience, particularly when navigating identity or social challenges.

Futures — “What will you do next time?”

If the young person is willing to try to come up with a strategy or a possible solution for the situation they found themselves in, you can also support them in the process of doing so, by focusing on their current resources, skills, and available support.

Active Listening Strategy:

- Help them **problem-solve** or set intentions **based on their own insights**.
- Ask about support they might need and how they want to be heard or helped in the future.
- Remind them that you are also part of the support system they have, and that you are willing to help them if they need or want it.

Examples:

- “What would you want to do differently next time?”

- “What would support look like for you in a similar situation?”
- “How can I or others help you feel more affirmed moving forward?”

Main Goal: Support agency and help the youth build skills for future situations, with a focus on empowerment and growth.

4.3 Holding space vs emotional invalidation

Understanding how to hold space versus giving unsolicited advice is essential when supporting LGBTQIA+ youth. The way we listen and respond can either foster trust and safety or unintentionally silence and invalidate their experiences. Instead of providing a solution that you would think is the best for the situation, our approach should be more passive in order to let the young person build problem-solving skills and analytic abilities. That can be achieved by asking them to think about all the available resources they have and what they would think might be the best outcome for them and for others involved in the situation.

	Holding Space	Dismissing feelings
Definition	Being fully present, open, and supportive without trying to control or fix the situation.	Giving guidance, solutions, or opinions without being asked for them.
Core Attitude	"I'm here with you."	"Let me fix this for you."
Focus	Centered on the other person's emotions, experience, and autonomy.	Often centered on the speaker's perspective or discomfort.

4.4 Trauma-informed method of work

Trauma-informed approach recognizes that many behaviors and emotions stem from past or ongoing experiences of trauma. Instead of asking “*What’s wrong with you?*”, it shifts perspective to “*What happened to you?*” — fostering understanding, compassion, and empowerment.

LGBTQIA+ youth are statistically more likely to experience trauma related to rejection, discrimination, bullying, hate crimes, identity invalidation, and social exclusion. These experiences can deeply affect how they engage with others and how safe they feel in support settings. A trauma-informed approach helps youth workers:

- Recognize signs of trauma and understand how identity-related stress may appear as withdrawal, anger, or mistrust.
- Avoid retraumatization by responding gently, respecting pronouns and boundaries, and allowing the youth to lead their own pace of sharing.
- Offer choice and control, helping young people reclaim agency in spaces where they may have felt powerless.
- Build trust and emotional safety, which are essential for healing, resilience, and self-acceptance.

We will focus on two specific tools we can use daily to reach our objective:

1. **Offering choices**
2. **Recognizing triggers**

Offering choices

Offering choices is a key trauma-informed practice that helps restore a sense of control and autonomy—something often taken away through experiences of rejection, discrimination, or exclusion that many LGBTQIA+ youth face.

When youth are given genuine choices, they feel respected, empowered, and safe. This approach communicates trust in their ability to make decisions about their own lives and identity, reinforcing self-worth and agency. Even small choices, such as how to share their story, what pronouns to use, or whether to discuss a sensitive topic can have a powerful impact.

Examples in practice:

Situation	Choice-Based Language
Group activity	“Would you rather join the group or help with setup?”
Emotional check-in	“Would you like to talk now, later, or write it down instead?”
Sharing pronouns	“You can share your pronouns if you’re comfortable — no pressure.”
Participation	“Would you prefer to observe today or take part?”
Feedback	“Do you want feedback on that now, or just a space to vent?”

4.5 Recognizing triggers

Being attuned to signs that a young person is feeling overwhelmed, shut down, or emotionally activated, and responding with care rather than confrontation, is essential when supporting LGBTQIA+ youth. Common signs of triggers include:

- sudden withdrawal or silence
- angry or defensive reactions
- freezing or zoning out
- tearfulness or panic, and changes in body language such as crossed arms, turning away, or shaking.

Recognizing these cues allows youth workers to respond safely, maintain trust, and support the young person's emotional regulation. Responding supportively transforms moments of overwhelm or activation into **opportunities for connection, validation, and growth**, rather than conflict or withdrawal.

Situation	Supportive response
Youth shut down during a discussion	I noticed you went quiet — do you want to take a break?
Emotional reaction to a topic (e.g., gender, bullying)	“Would it help if we paused or changed the topic?”
Youth seem agitated or overwhelmed	“Is something feeling off for you right now?” or “You don’t have to explain, but I’m here if you want to talk.”
Recognizing your own role in a trigger	“I might have said something that didn’t land well — I’m open to hearing that if you want to share.”

5. Exercises and Interaction

5.1. Micro-Practice Exercise: Active Listening for Youth Workers

Objective: Practice truly listening and holding space for LGBTQIA+ youth.

Time: 5–7 minutes

Instructions: Divide people in pairs. One person is the speaker, the other the listener. The speaker shares for 2–3 minutes about a personal experience or scenario (can be LGBTQIA+ related). The listener focuses fully on the speaker, without



interrupting, judging, or giving advice. Use short reflective phrases: “I hear you...”, “It sounds like you felt...”, “That must have been tough.” Switch Roles: Repeat for the other partner.

Debrief: Each pair shares their insight: 1) How it felt to be listened to, and 2) What helped them stay present and empathetic.

5.2. The Secret Drawing

Objective: To practice clear, precise, and active communication skills, focusing on giving and receiving instructions without assumptions or guessing.

Time: 10 min per drawing

Instructions: Participants work in pairs. One person (the Describer) receives a card with the name of an everyday object written on it (e.g., “side table”). The other person (the Drawer) has a blank piece of paper and a pen or pencil. The goal is for the drawer to draw the object that the describer will describe, based solely on verbal communication. The drawer must not see the drawing.

The Describer’s Role: Without saying the name of the object or any part of it, describe the object step-by-step so the Drawer can create an accurate drawing. Focus on clear, detailed instructions about shapes, sizes, positions, and relationships between parts of the object. Avoid using labels or naming the object directly; instead, describe its features visually or spatially. Encourage the Drawer to ask clarifying questions if needed.

The Drawer’s Role: Draw exactly what is described, asking clarifying questions only to understand instructions better. (e.g., “How long should this line be?” or “Where should I place this shape?”).

Debrief: After the drawing is complete, the pair reveals the object and compares the drawing to the real item or a picture.

5.3. Group Circle: Shared Presence

Objective: Collective holding, community safety

Time: 20-30 minutes

Instructions:

1. Sit in a circle. Establish agreements (confidentiality, pass option, respect).
2. Prompt: “Something that helps me feel supported when I’m struggling is...”
3. One person speaks at a time; no responses or cross-talk.

Debrief:

- What did collective listening feel like?



- How could this be adapted for youth groups or classrooms?

5.4. Using Autonomy supporting language:

Objective: Train youth workers, professionals, to rephrase instructions or directives into choice-based, autonomy-supporting language.

Time: 10 min

Instructions: Create a list of common youth work phrases that are directive (e.g., “Sit down,” “You need to join the group,” “Tell us your pronouns”). In pairs or small groups, challenge workers to rewrite each phrase into a choice-based alternative.

Debrief: Share and discuss which versions feel more respectful or empowering.

5.5. The Repair Practice

Objective: Showcase and teach youth to recognize invalidating responses in interactions. How to call them out and communicate when they occur. How to correct them when they themselves are interrupting or invalidating to someone else.

Time: 20 minutes

Instructions: Role-play a moment where one person unintentionally interrupts, minimizes, or misunderstands.

Practice repairing:

1. Name the rupture (invalidating or interrupting instances)
2. Communicate it in a respectful manner when it happens
3. Invite correction

Example repair:

“I realize I jumped in too quickly. I’m sorry. Can you help me understand what you were trying to say?”

“Interrupting me in the middle of my sentence makes it hard for me to finish my thoughts and I lose track of what I am saying. Could you please try to wait for me to finish my sentence before you speak?”

Debrief:

- What made repair easier or harder?
- How might repair build safety with youth?



Conclusions

The Proud Ambassadors Training Curriculum provides a detailed educational framework designed to strengthen the capacity of youth workers, educators, and professionals to support the inclusion and mental well-being of LGBTQIA+ youth. Through a structured combination of theoretical knowledge, experiential learning, and practical tools, the curriculum equips participants with the competences needed to address discrimination, promote equality, and create supportive environments for young people of diverse identities.

Across the eight modules, participants progressively develop a deeper understanding of the social, psychological, legal, and practical dimensions of LGBTQIA+ inclusion. The curriculum begins by establishing foundational knowledge on identities and terminology, enabling participants to engage respectfully and accurately with LGBTQIA+ youth. It then explores experiences of non-acceptance and discrimination, highlighting how stigma and exclusion affect young people's mental health and social participation.

A significant focus of the curriculum is placed on mental health and resilience, recognizing the strong connection between social inclusion and psychological well-being. By introducing resilience-building techniques and trauma-informed approaches, the training empowers youth workers to provide meaningful support and respond effectively to the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ youth.

The curriculum also emphasizes the importance of inclusive communication, anti-bias language, and respectful interaction, which are essential tools for building trust and fostering safe learning environments. These competences are further reinforced through modules that address inclusive workplace practices and the creation of safe spaces where LGBTQIA+ youth can express themselves freely and confidently.

Another key dimension of the training is the understanding of legal frameworks and rights related to LGBTQIA+ individuals across different European contexts. By familiarizing participants with existing legal protections and policy frameworks, the curriculum supports youth workers in advocating for equality and promoting awareness of rights within their communities.

Finally, the curriculum introduces innovative training techniques and practical tools that can be applied in everyday youth work practice. These methods encourage active listening, empathy, reflective dialogue, and participatory learning, ensuring that youth workers are prepared to respond sensitively and effectively to the needs of LGBTQIA+ youth.





The Proud Ambassadors curriculum promotes a holistic approach to inclusive youth work, integrating knowledge, attitudes, and practical skills. By combining awareness-raising with actionable strategies, the training encourages participants to become active promoters of equality, diversity, and social inclusion.

Through the implementation of this curriculum, youth workers are empowered to act as “Proud Ambassadors” of inclusion, contributing to the creation of communities where LGBTQIA+ youth feel respected, safe, and supported in their personal development and well-being.



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