

# UNDERSTAND ME! MOM, DAD, TEACHER



Handbook for those working with vocational school students

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# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose and scope of the manual

This handbook was created in response to the growing needs of the educational community, particularly vocational schools, related to ensuring equal opportunities and countering exclusion and discrimination of LGBT+ youth. Its purpose is to provide professionals - psychologists, guidance counselors, school counselors, educators and all those who work with youth - with professional tools based on scientific knowledge and proven practices to support the process of social, educational and professional inclusion. The manual is interdisciplinary and practical in nature. It takes into account both psychological and social aspects, as well as pedagogical and counseling aspects, focusing on the specific context of how LGBT+ youth function in the vocational school environment - a space where issues of gender identity, sexual orientation and social gender roles are often overshadowed by traditional norms and stereotypes.

The main purpose of the study is:

- **Raise awareness among professionals** about the causes and consequences of social, educational and professional exclusion of LGBT+ people and the discriminatory mechanisms operating in the school environment. Special emphasis was placed on the issues of minority stress, heteronormativity and cissexism as systemic barriers affecting the functioning of LGBT+ youth.
- **Equipping professionals with specific diagnostic, educational and intervention tools** to effectively support LGBT+ students - both in everyday situations and in moments of emotional or professional crisis. The techniques presented include supportive conversations, psychological counseling, crisis intervention, as well as methods for working with a peer group and preventive and educational activities.
- **Promoting good practices in inclusive career counseling and equality education**, in line with European and national anti-discrimination standards. The handbook includes examples from Poland, Italy and other European Union countries, showing how to effectively integrate LGBT+ topics in career counseling and education.
- **Strengthen the professional competence of youth workers** in working with LGBT+ people, while taking into account ethical, legal and cultural aspects. The manual's authors emphasize the importance of empathy, informed communication and the need to foster allyship in the school community.

The content ranges from the basic concepts of gender identity and sexual orientation, to an analysis of the mechanisms of exclusion, to advanced methods of psychological and counseling support. In addition, the manual includes numerous **lesson plans, workshop outlines, case studies and a set of recommended diagnostic and educational tools** that can be used in daily professional practice.

The study as a whole aims not only to increase the competence of professionals, but also to build a systemic approach to addressing discrimination in vocational schools. The handbook can also inspire changes in schools' educational policies and support the broader process of transforming institutional culture toward authentic equality and inclusion.

## **The importance of countering the social exclusion of LGBT+ people in education and career counseling**

### **Socio-cultural context**

Social exclusion of LGBT+ people is one of the key challenges of contemporary education and career counseling, especially in vocational school environments, which are often characterized by strong gender norms and traditional social patterns. In many countries, including Poland, non-heteronormative and transgender people often face prejudice, discrimination and limited support from educational and vocational institutions.

The main aspects of the socio-cultural context that affect the exclusion of LGBT+ people include:

- **Heteronormativity and gender binarity** - dominant social norms assume that only heterosexuality and a binary gender identity (male or female) are acceptable. LGBT+ people may experience pressure to conform to these norms, leading them to hide their identities and avoid situations where they could face discrimination.
- **Lack of diversity education** - Many education systems lack sound education about sexual orientation and gender identity, which encourages the reproduction of myths and stereotypes about LGBT+ people.
- **Influence of family and local environment** - LGBT+ youth often grow up in environments that do not offer support and acceptance, leading to increased stress levels, lowered self-esteem and difficulties in planning their professional futures.
- **Discrimination in educational and professional settings** - harassment, verbal and physical violence, and unresponsive teachers and employers can lead to limited access to education and employment for LGBT+ people.

Addressing these issues is key to building a more inclusive and equitable society, in which every young person - regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation - has equal opportunities for personal and professional development.



## The impact of exclusion on the professional and educational development of young people

Discrimination and exclusion in school and work environments can have long-term effects on the development of LGBT+ youth. This impact can be divided into several key areas:

### 1. Reduced motivation for learning and academic achievement

- LGBT+ youth exposed to homophobia and transphobia at school may have difficulty concentrating, which negatively affects academic performance.
- Hostility from peers and teachers can lead to dropping out of active participation and even dropping out of education prematurely.
- Fear of revealing one's identity can cause withdrawal from school life, limiting one's ability to develop social skills and gain the experience necessary for the job market.

### 2. Limited options for choosing a career path

- LGBT+ youth often face prejudices about certain professions, such as stereotypes about "male" and "female" professions, which can discourage them from choosing a path that aligns with their interests.
- Some individuals may avoid jobs that require teamwork or customer contact for fear of discrimination, limiting their career prospects.
- The lack of representation of LGBT+ people in certain professional sectors can create the impression that an industry is not accessible to them.

### 3. Increased risk of mental and emotional problems

- Minority stress, which results from constant exposure to discrimination and microaggressions, can lead to depression, anxiety and self-acceptance problems.
- The lack of psychological support in vocational schools and counseling institutions can cause isolation and difficulties in building healthy interpersonal relationships.

### 4. Impeded access to the job market and limited career opportunities

- LGBT+ people may experience difficulties finding their first job if potential employers use biases when recruiting.
- Discrimination in the workplace, bullying or unequal treatment can result in fewer opportunities for promotion and professional development.

- Fear of coming out in a professional environment can lead to hiding one's identity, which is associated with additional stress and reduced comfort at work.
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## Why is countering exclusion crucial?

Addressing the exclusion of LGBT+ people in education and career counseling is essential to building a society based on equality, respect and social justice. Vocational schools, as places that prepare young people to enter the labor market, should serve as spaces that are safe and open to diversity.

Taking action to counter exclusion:

- **It improves the mental and emotional well-being of LGBT+ youth**, increasing their sense of security and belonging.
- **It strengthens their motivation to learn and develop their professional skills**, enabling them to realize their full potential.
- **It facilitates building self-confidence and mental toughness**, which is key to functioning in a demanding work environment.
- **It changes the school and work culture to a more inclusive one**, which contributes to reducing violence and discrimination in the long run.
- **It prepares young people to function in a variety of work environments**, which is important in a global and rapidly growing employment market.

Measures for the inclusion of LGBT+ people in education and career counseling benefit not only individuals, but society as a whole, leading to greater equality, acceptance and better fulfillment of young people's potential in the future.

## The role and responsibility of psychologists, career counselors and educators in Poland and Italy

### The role of professionals in working with LGBT+ youth

Psychologists, career counselors and educators play a key role in creating an educational and professional environment that supports LGBT+ people and counters their social exclusion.

Their actions have a significant impact on the development of young people, their psychological well-being and professional opportunities.

The main tasks of these specialists include:

- Creating a **safe and inclusive school environment**, free from discrimination.
- **Psychological and emotional support** for LGBT+ youth, especially in the process of self-acceptance and coming out.
- **Career counseling** tailored to the individual needs of youth, eliminating gender and sexual orientation stereotypes.
- **Training for teachers and school staff** on countering homophobia and transphobia.
- **Mediation in conflict situations** arising from manifestations of discrimination.
- **Working with parents and the community** to increase acceptance and understanding of LGBT+ youth

## Comparison of the role of psychologists and career counselors in Poland and in Italy

Aspect	Poland	Italy
<b>Legal status of LGBT+ people</b>	Lack of full legal protection, limited social acceptance, lack of marriage and adoption equality.	Greater legal protection, legalization of civil unions, greater social acceptance.
<b>Education policy</b>	No systemic approach to anti-discrimination education, LGBT+ topic rarely included in the curriculum.	In some regions implemented educational programs based on anti-discrimination and sex education.
<b>Psychological support</b>	Limited number of professionals trained to work with LGBT+ people. Topic rarely addressed in professional training.	In larger cities available specialized psychological counseling centers for LGBT+ people, psychological support programs more developed.
<b>Career counseling</b>	Stereotypes about occupations assigned to specific genders still exist. Lack of targeted strategies to support LGBT+ youth in career planning.	Some schools and vocational institutions have inclusion support programs that promote equal professional opportunities for LGBT+ people.
<b>Institutional support</b>	Limited number of organizations and government programs supporting LGBT+ youth. Most initiatives run by NGOs.	Active activities of NGOs and some government institutions, especially at the local level.



## Psychological support versus social inclusion

Psychological support plays a key role in building an inclusive space for LGBT+ youth. Lack of adequate support can lead to social isolation, lower self-esteem and difficulties in professional functioning.

### Functions of psychological support in social inclusion:

#### 1. Preventing minority stress

- LGBT+ people face chronic stress from having to hide their identity and fear of discrimination.
- Psychologists can help teach strategies for coping with stress and increasing mental toughness.

#### 2. Facilitating the coming out process

- Psychologists can support LGBT+ youth in making informed decisions about disclosing their sexual orientation and gender identity in a safe environment.

#### 3. Building a sense of self-worth and self-acceptance

- Psychological support helps young people accept their identity and develop self-esteem, which is crucial for their educational and professional success.

#### 4. Reduction of anxiety and depression

- LGBT+ people are more likely to suffer from anxiety and depressive disorders due to discriminatory experiences.
- Psychologists and educators can help recognize the symptoms of mental problems and refer young people to appropriate forms of therapy.

#### 5. Building a social support network

- Organizing support groups and working with NGOs help LGBT+ youth build relationships based on acceptance and understanding.

## Ethical and legal aspects of working with LGBT+ people

### Ethical principles for working with LGBT+ people

#### 1. Respect and acceptance

- Every psychologist, educator and professional counselor should treat LGBT+ people with full respect, regardless of their own beliefs.

#### 2. Confidentiality and privacy

- Information about a student's sexual orientation and gender identity is confidential and may not be disclosed without the student's consent.

#### 3. Neutrality and impartiality

- The specialist should avoid judging the identity of an LGBT+ person and imposing certain attitudes or beliefs.

#### 4. Anti-discrimination

- Teachers and guidance counselors should proactively respond to cases of homophobia, transphobia and other forms of discrimination in school and work environments.

### Legal aspects in Poland and Italy

Area	Poland	Italy
<b>Prohibition of discrimination</b>	Lack of comprehensive regulations covering education and the labor market.	Existing anti-discrimination laws protect LGBT+ people in schools and workplaces.
<b>Recognition of gender identity</b>	The process of changing gender legally complicated and lengthy.	Easier procedure for recognizing gender identity, greater protection of transgender rights.

<b>Protecting the rights of LGBT+ students</b>	Lack of systemic legal solutions to support LGBT+ youth in schools.	Some regions are implementing educational policies that support equality and diversity.
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## Review of current research and statistics on LGBT+ exclusion in vocational schools in Poland and Italy

### Poland

In Poland, the problem of LGBT+ exclusion in the school environment is well documented, although specific research on vocational schools is lacking. Nonetheless, the overall data points to significant challenges:

- **Hiding identity:** As many as 72% of LGBT+ youth feel the need to hide their sexual orientation at school, fearing negative reactions from peers and teachers.
- **Experience of violence:** In a survey conducted by the Campaign Against Homophobia, 69% of Polish students admitted that they "always" or "often" experienced or witnessed negative comments or actions toward LGBT+ people in the school environment.
- **Lack of support:** According to the Ranking of LGBTQ+ Friendly Schools, 32% of students do not have a single person at school they can count on in crisis situations related to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Although these figures apply to schools in general, it can be assumed that the situation is similar in vocational schools, especially given the specific challenges associated with this educational environment.

### Italy

Italy lacks detailed research on the exclusion of LGBT+ people in vocational schools. Available data mainly focus on the general school environment:

- **Experience of discrimination:** Research indicates that LGBT+ students in Italy often experience discrimination and exclusion in schools, which affects their educational performance and psychological well-being.

- **Lack of institutional support:** Many Italian schools lack support programs for LGBT+ students, and teachers are often not adequately trained to address homophobia and transphobia.

It should be noted that the situation may vary by region, with better support in larger cities and more progressive regions.

## ***CHAPTER 1: Theoretical and foundations***

### **1.1 Psychosexual and gender identity - basic concepts**

Psychosexual and gender identity is a set of psychological, emotional, social and biological characteristics that affect the way an individual perceives himself and his place in society. It consists of three key elements:

1. **Gender identity** - a subjective sense of belonging to a particular gender (male, female, non-binary or other).
2. **Sexual orientation** - an enduring pattern of romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction to a particular gender group.
3. **Gender expression** - the way an individual manifests his gender identity through dress, behavior, speech or gestures.

All of these aspects are independent of each other, which means that a person can have a particular gender identity that is not necessarily associated with a particular sexual orientation or style of gender expression.

### **Sexual orientation versus gender identity**

#### **1. sexual orientation**

Sexual orientation refers to enduring patterns of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to other people. It is a natural human trait that develops independently of external factors.

#### **Types of sexual orientation:**

- **Heterosexuality** - attraction to people of the opposite sex (e.g., a woman feels attracted to a man, a man to a woman).
- **Homosexuality** - same-sex attraction (gay men, lesbian women).
- **Bisexuality** - attraction to more than one sex.

- **Pansexuality** - an attraction independent of the sex and gender identity of the partner(s).
- **Asexuality** - not feeling sexual attraction to other people (although asexual people may feel romantic attraction).
- **Demisexuality** - sexual attraction occurs only after a deep emotional bond is established.

## 2. gender identity

Gender identity refers to an internal sense of belonging to a particular gender. It is an individual's mental and emotional experience that does not necessarily coincide with biological sex.

### Types of gender identity:

- **Cisgender** - the situation when a person's gender identity agrees with his or her assigned sex at birth.
- **Transgender** - people whose gender identity differs from the one assigned to them at birth (for example, a person assigned as a woman identifies as a man).
- **Non-binary people** - do not fully identify as male or female; they may feel their gender identity is a mix of both genders or identify with neither.
- **Agender** - people who do not identify with any gender.
- **Genderfluid** - people whose gender identity changes over time.
- **Demiboy/Demigirl** - people who identify themselves partially as male or female, but not fully.

Gender identity does not depend on sexual orientation - for example, a transgender person can be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, etc.

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## The spectrum of LGBT+ identities

The term LGBT+ covers a wide range of identities related to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. "Plus" means including all people who do not fit into traditional binary divisions of gender and sexuality.

### Examples of identity in the LGBT+ spectrum:

- **Queer** - an umbrella term for people who do not identify with traditional gender and sexual orientation norms.



- **Intersex** - people who are born with biological characteristics (chromosomal, hormonal, anatomical) of both sexes.
- **Two-Spirit** - a term used by some Native American communities to describe people who possess both masculine and feminine spiritual and social characteristics.

The LGBT+ spectrum shows that both sexual orientation and gender identity can take many forms and should not be confined to rigid divisions.

## Gender expression and its importance in the social context

**Gender expression** refers to the way a person presents his or her gender in society through:

- Clothing, hairstyle and makeup.
- The way of speaking, the tone of voice.
- Behavior, gestures, body posture.
- Preferences for toys, activities and occupations.

**Types of gender expression:**

1. **Feminine (feminine)** - expression that conforms to traditional norms of femininity.
2. **Masculine (masculine)** - expression that conforms to norms of masculinity.
3. **Androgynous** - combines masculine and feminine traits.
4. Gender-neutral expression that does not fit the traditional divisions of masculinity and femininity.

**The importance of gender expression in society:**

- It affects the way a person is perceived by others - people often judge gender and identity based on gender expression.
- It can lead to stereotyping and discrimination - people whose gender expression deviates from social norms may experience prejudice and exclusion.
- It is crucial for psychological well-being - being able to express oneself freely contributes to a greater sense of acceptance and psychological well-being.

## 1.2 Mechanisms of social exclusion and their impact on LGBT+ people

Social exclusion is a process in which individuals or social groups experience marginalization and restrictions on access to resources, rights and opportunities for advancement. LGBT+ people are particularly vulnerable to a variety of exclusionary mechanisms that can manifest themselves at the institutional, social and individual levels. This process often leads to serious consequences in the psychological, professional and social spheres.

Exclusion can take many forms, from overt discrimination to more subtle manifestations of systemic inequality, such as microaggressions, structural marginalization and legal restrictions. Countering these mechanisms requires not only a change in legislation, but also extensive public education and action at the level of institutional and cultural policies.

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### Forms and causes of discrimination against LGBT+ people

Discrimination against LGBT+ people is deeply rooted in social, cultural and religious norms that have shaped traditional models of gender and sexuality for centuries. The causes of this phenomenon are multidimensional and include both systemic barriers and individual social attitudes.

#### Forms of discrimination

##### 1. Legal discrimination

- Many countries lack laws to ensure that LGBT+ people are protected from discrimination in work, education or access to health care.
- Lack of marriage equality and restrictions on adoption for same-sex couples result in unequal civil rights.
- Difficulties in the gender-reconciliation process for transgender people, including requirements for surgery or psychiatric diagnosis.

##### 2. Institutional discrimination

- The lack of anti-discrimination policies in educational and professional institutions means that LGBT+ people often lack access to adequate support.
- Inadequate health care approaches to the needs of LGBT+ people, including limited access to hormone therapy for transgender people and a lack of properly trained specialists.
- Failure to include LGBT+ topics in curricula leads to further marginalization and lack of public awareness.

### **3. Social discrimination**

- LGBT+ people are often excluded from their families and local communities.
- Stigmatization leads to reduced opportunities to build interpersonal and professional relationships.
- Bias-motivated violence, including physical and verbal aggression, significantly affects the quality of life and sense of security.

## **Causes of discrimination against LGBT+ people**

### **1. Cultural and social norms**

- Heteronormative family models and the division of gender roles are deeply ingrained in many societies, leading to the marginalization of people who do not fit into these patterns.

### **2. The influence of religion and tradition**

- Many traditional religious doctrines reject homosexuality and transgenderism, resulting in social stigma and exclusion in religious settings.

### **3. Lack of education and public awareness**

- In societies where the topic of LGBT+ is not widely discussed, stereotypes and myths often operate that lead to prejudice and discrimination.

### **4. Structural legal barriers**

- States that do not enact protective policies for LGBT+ people perpetuate their marginalization and increase the risk of exclusion.

## Microaggressions and their psychological consequences

Microaggressions are subtle, often unconscious forms of discrimination that may seem trivial, but in the long run lead to serious psychological consequences. They are common in school, work and social settings, and their accumulation can significantly affect the well-being of LGBT+ people.

### Types of microaggressions

1. **Microattack**
  - Overt but subtle forms of humiliation, such as ironic comments about sexual orientation or gender identity ("Well, after all, you look normal for a gay man").
2. **Microimage**
  - Situations in which LGBT+ people are treated differently, even unconsciously ("You really don't look trans - that's a compliment").
3. **Microinvalidation**
  - Disparaging the experiences of LGBT+ people, such as by denying the existence of homophobia ("No one is homophobic anymore, you're exaggerating").

### Consequences of microaggressions

- **Increased minority stress** due to the need to adapt to a hostile environment.
- **Reduced self-esteem**, which can lead to depression and anxiety disorders.
- **Avoiding social situations**, making it difficult to develop interpersonal and professional relationships.
- **Impact on career choices**, as LGBT+ people may avoid certain environments for fear of exclusion.

## Heteronormativity and cissexism as structural barriers

### Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is a set of beliefs assuming that heterosexuality is the only "natural" sexual orientation. This is one of the main factors leading to systemic discrimination against LGBT+ people.

#### Examples of heteronormativity:

- Assuming that every person is heterosexual until they "come out of the closet."
- The expectation that LGBT+ people should conform to heterosexual social norms.
- Lack of representation of LGBT+ people in textbooks, media and mass culture.

### Cissexism

Cissexism is a set of beliefs that assume that cisgender people (i.e. those whose gender identity agrees with the sex assigned at birth) are more "natural" and "real" than transgender people.

#### Examples of cissexism:

- Requiring transgender people to undergo surgery to obtain legal recognition of their gender.
- Treating transgender people as "unnatural" or "less authentic."
- Limited access to health care for transgender people.

Both of these mechanisms are deeply rooted in societies and lead to the systemic marginalization of LGBT+ people, which requires conscious efforts to eliminate them.



## 1.3 Impact of social exclusion on individual's mental health and functioning

Social exclusion of LGBT+ people leads to serious psychological, emotional and social consequences. Its effects range from the individual experiences of individuals to broad systemic conditions that affect their functioning in society. LGBT+ people are particularly vulnerable to minority stress, discrimination and its health consequences. At the same time, an important factor in reducing the negative effects of exclusion are protective mechanisms that promote an individual's psychological resilience and ability to cope with a hostile environment.

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### Minority stress and its consequences

#### Definition and mechanism of minority stress

**Minority stress** is chronic stress resulting from living in a society that stigmatizes, marginalizes and discriminates against certain social groups. It is a psychological concept that describes how minority people - including LGBT+ people - experience chronic emotional and psychological strain as a result of their social situation.

#### Elements of minority stress:

1. **Objective external stressors** - direct experience of discrimination, physical and psychological violence, microaggressions, exclusion from social or professional life.
2. **Expectation of negative experiences** - fear of revealing one's identity, anticipation of rejection, fear of negative reaction from the environment.
3. **Identity concealment** - a defensive strategy of not revealing one's sexual orientation or gender identity for fear of the consequences.
4. **Internalization of negative social messages (internalized homophobia/transphobia)** - assimilation of negative social opinions about one's own identity, which can lead to low self-esteem, feelings of shame and self-destructive behavior.

## Consequences of minority stress

Long-term functioning under minority stress leads to a number of negative consequences, including:

- **Elevated anxiety and depression** - LGBT+ people are more likely to experience anxiety disorders and depressive episodes.
- **Adaptive disorders** - difficulties in coping with stress, undertaking unhealthy defense mechanisms (such as social isolation).
- **Increased rates of suicide and suicidal thoughts** - studies show that LGBT+ people are many times more likely to attempt suicide compared to heterosexuals.
- **Problems in the area of identity** - internal conflicts related to one's orientation or gender identity, uncertainty and difficulties in accepting oneself.

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## Health and psychological effects of discrimination

Discrimination, regardless of its form (direct, indirect, institutional), has a long-term impact on the mental and physical health of LGBT+ people.

### Mental health

#### 1. Depressive and anxiety disorders

- Experiencing systemic oppression leads to lowered mood, loss of motivation and a sense of hopelessness for the future.
- LGBT+ people are more likely to report chronic feelings of anxiety that affect their ability to function in daily life.

#### 2. Social isolation and withdrawal

- Fear of rejection and discrimination can lead to reduced social contact, increasing the risk of loneliness and emotional problems.

#### 3. Low self-esteem and lack of confidence

- Perpetuated negative stereotypes about LGBT+ people in society can be internalized, leading to feelings of inferiority and insecurity in interpersonal relationships.

## Physical health

### 1. Increased risk of somatic disorders

- Chronic stress leads to elevated cortisol levels, which can result in cardiovascular disorders, cardiovascular disease and a weakened immune system.

### 2. Higher levels of risky health behaviors

- LGBT+ people may be more likely to turn to psychoactive substances (alcohol, drugs) as a way to cope with stress.
- Risky sexual behavior can result from low self-esteem and lack of access to LGBT+-inclusive sex education.

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## The role of protective factors and building mental toughness

Although exclusion and discrimination have a devastating impact on the mental and social health of LGBT+ people, there are protective mechanisms that can strengthen an individual's mental resilience.

## Protective factors

### 1. Social support

- A strong support network (family, friends, social organizations) acts as a protective factor against the effects of minority stress.
- LGBT+ communities offer a space where individuals can build a sense of belonging and acceptance.

### 2. Positive identity and self-acceptance

- The process of self-acceptance plays a key role in building a healthy identity and mental resilience.

- Education about one's identity and the history of the LGBT+ movement helps strengthen one's sense of self-worth.

### 3. Access to professional psychological support

- Psychotherapy, especially affirmative approaches, can help LGBT+ people cope with trauma, stress and depression.
- Crisis intervention programs and telephone support lines reduce the risk of suicide.

### 4. Equality action and social activism

- Active involvement in movements for LGBT+ rights can provide a sense of agency and power.
- NGOs running anti-discrimination campaigns are helping to change public perceptions of LGBT+ people.

## Building mental toughness

- **Development of stress management skills**, such as through mindfulness techniques, cognitive-behavioral therapy or meditation.
- **Building healthy relationships** with people who support and accept LGBT+ identities.
- **Taking action for one's own well-being**, such as developing passions, educating about mental health, taking care of physical activity.

The above mechanisms allow LGBT+ people to better cope with the negative consequences of exclusion and help build a more inclusive and supportive society.

## ***CHAPTER 2: The situation of LGBT+ youth in vocational schools***

The situation of LGBT+ youth in vocational schools in Poland, Italy and across the European Union varies and depends on a number of factors, such as educational policies, the level of social acceptance and current legislation.

### **Poland:**

In Poland, LGBT+ youth often experience discrimination and exclusion in the school environment. Studies show high levels of homophobia in Polish schools, which negatively affects the well-being and educational outcomes of non-heteronormative students. The Ombudsman's 2019 report highlights the lack of systemic solutions to address discrimination against LGBT+ people in educational institutions.

### **Italy:**

In Italy, the situation of LGBT+ youth in vocational schools is also a challenge. While the country has made progress on LGBT+ rights, there are still cultural and social barriers to full acceptance. Comprehensive research on the specific situation in vocational schools is lacking, but overall data suggests the need for further educational and legislative action to ensure a safe environment for all students.

### **European Union:**

At the European Union level, there are numerous initiatives to promote equality and prevent discrimination against LGBT+ people in the educational systems of member states. Nevertheless, the situation of LGBT+ youth in vocational schools varies from country to country. In 2019, 76% of Europeans believed that gays, lesbians and bisexuals should have the same rights as heterosexuals, indicating growing social acceptance. However, in practice, LGBT+ students still face challenges of discrimination and lack of support in the school environment.

In conclusion, despite progress on LGBT+ rights in Europe, young people belonging to this community in vocational schools still experience various forms of exclusion and



discrimination. There is a need for further action at the national and European levels to ensure a safe and inclusive educational environment for all students.

## 2.1 Specifics of the vocational school environment and challenges for LGBT+ people

The vocational school environment is characterized by a specific structure that differs significantly from traditional comprehensive high schools. A key aspect of this system is the strong link between education and the labor market and the practical orientation of education. Young people attending vocational schools often come into contact with the future professional environment as early as the educational stage, with internships at workplaces or businesses. This structure makes issues of social inclusion, equality and acceptance particularly important, especially for students belonging to the LGBT+ community.

Also characteristic of vocational schools is the strongly entrenched division of professions according to traditional gender norms. There are industries that remain heavily dominated by one gender, leading to the perpetuation of stereotypes about "male" and "female" professions. In such an environment, LGBT+ youth may face additional acceptance difficulties, whether from peers, teachers or employers. Transgender or non-binary people whose identities transcend the gender binary may find it particularly difficult to access certain professional paths, not only because of prejudice, but also because of a lack of institutional adjustment, such as documentation or workplace dress codes.

These challenges are further compounded by the fact that many vocational schools lack comprehensive educational programs that address the topics of diversity and inclusion. Instances of discrimination, homophobic or transphobic comments are often not adequately addressed by teachers and management, leaving LGBT+ students to feel invisible or even forced to hide their identities. The lack of psychological support and counseling tailored to the specific challenges faced by LGBT+ youth negatively affects their psychological well-being and motivation to learn and develop their careers.

An additional factor complicating the situation for LGBT+ people in vocational schools is their contact with the labor market already during their education. Apprenticeships, which are a key component of education, can become a source of additional stress if they take place in a non-diversity-friendly environment. Employers are often unprepared to work with LGBT+ people, which can lead to situations in which students feel compelled to hide their identities to avoid unpleasant situations or even lose opportunities for further professional development.

Despite these challenges, there is a growing awareness of the need for changes in the vocational education system to address equality and anti-exclusion issues. In countries that are more open to LGBT+ issues, educational programs and initiatives are emerging to increase

the acceptance and inclusion of non-heteronormative people in school and work environments. It is becoming crucial to implement anti-discrimination policies, educate teachers and employers, and create safe spaces for LGBT+ youth to develop professionally and socially without fear of exclusion and stigmatization.

The future of vocational education should be based on equality principles that ensure that all students - regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation - have the opportunity to participate fully in society and the workplace. The integration of LGBT+ people in vocational schools is not just a matter of their well-being, but also part of building a fairer, open and more effective labor market that benefits from the full potential of all individuals, regardless of their identity.

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## Social structure and educational specifics of vocational schools

Vocational schools are characterized by several key features that distinguish them from general educational institutions.

### 1. student profile and social structure

- **Socioeconomic diversity** - vocational school students often come from diverse backgrounds, including families with lower socioeconomic status, which can affect their experiences in education and attitudes toward social equality.
- **Strong gender norms** - Many vocational education industries (e.g., construction, mechanics, catering, hairdressing, health care) have traditional gender divisions that can lead to stereotypical perceptions of students and the exclusion of LGBT+ people.
- **High role of apprenticeships** - students spend a significant part of their education in workplaces, which means they need to integrate into the labor market early in their education. This can create additional challenges for LGBT+ people, especially in industries that are less open to diversity

### 2. education model and teaching system

- **Dual education (theory + practice)** - vocational schools combine theoretical classes with apprenticeships, which increases students' contact with the reality of the labor market.
- **Orientation to specific qualifications** - education in vocational schools is focused on preparation for specific professions, which makes students less likely to participate in classes that develop general human competencies, including knowledge of equality and social diversity.

- **Fewer hours devoted to civic and social education** - Compared to general schools, vocational schools may have limited education on human rights, diversity and anti-discrimination.

### 3. the culture of the school environment

- **Strong group hierarchy** - vocational school students often function in more hierarchical group structures, where norms based on dominant patterns of masculinity or femininity may apply.
- **Presence of discriminatory language and behavior** - homophobic and transphobic behavior persists in some vocational education environments, and the language used among students may contain elements of symbolic aggression against LGBT+ people.
- **Low level of institutional intervention** - teachers and educational staff may not be sufficiently prepared to respond to incidents of discrimination, leaving LGBT+ people without sufficient support in cases of harassment or exclusion.

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## Challenges of choosing a career path for LGBT+ people

LGBT+ youth face specific barriers and difficulties related to career choice and functioning in the work environment. Choosing a career path can be determined not only by interests and skills, but also by concerns about acceptance in a particular industry and the ability to function openly in the workplace.

### 1. limited career choices due to stereotypes

- Some professions are socially assigned to specific genders (e.g., mechanic - male, beautician - female). Non-heteronormative and transgender people may feel additional pressure from having to fit into traditional gender roles.
- Stereotypical thinking about occupations means that LGBT+ people may avoid industries in which they could face exclusion or ostracism, leading them to limit their career choices.

### 2. difficulties related to acceptance in the labor market

- Many jobs, especially in traditionally conservative sectors of the economy, may be less open to diversity.
- Apprenticeships, a key component of vocational education, can become a source of stress and uncertainty for LGBT+ students if their workplace is not inclusive.
- Transgender people may face additional difficulties in having to use a name that matches their documents if they have not undergone formal gender correction.

### **3. lack of role models and mentors in the industry**

- LGBT+ people often have limited access to mentors and role models in their chosen industries, which can affect their career decisions and limit their aspirations.
- In some sectors, there is a lack of openly LGBT+ people in leadership roles, which can create the impression that a professional environment is not welcoming to diversity.

### **4. pressure to hide identity in the workplace**

- LGBT+ people may feel pressure to hide their identities, which increases minority stress and makes them less comfortable at work.
- Having to hide one's orientation or gender identity can lead to job burnout, difficulty integrating with co-workers and lowered self-esteem.

### **5. lack of equality policies in technical and professional sectors**

- Many vocational training industries have yet to implement anti-discrimination policies, which means that LGBT+ people may not be able to assert their rights in cases of unequal treatment.
- Some workplaces still lack equality standards for dress, restrooms or the use of a name consistent with gender identity.



## 2.2 Educational and social barriers for LGBT+ youth in Poland and Italy

LGBT+ people in the education systems of Poland and Italy face a variety of educational and social barriers that affect their academic, emotional and professional development. Despite growing awareness and progress on human rights in Europe, unequal treatment, lack of access to adequate support and systemic gaps in education policies continue to pose serious challenges for students belonging to the LGBT+ community. Particularly in vocational schools, where education is geared toward practical preparation for specific professions, LGBT+ individuals may experience specific difficulties due to both structural and cultural constraints.

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### Unequal treatment and restrictions on access to education

LGBT+ youth in Poland and Italy continue to face discrimination and limited educational opportunities due to heteronormative school structures and insufficient legal regulations protecting against discrimination in schools.

Poland lacks systemic mechanisms to counteract the exclusion of LGBT+ people in educational institutions. According to a report by the Campaign Against Homophobia and research by the Ombudsman, most schools do not have equality policies in place to provide LGBT+ students with a safe learning environment. These students often face a lack of acceptance from both peers and teaching staff. In some cases, expressions of homophobia and transphobia are ignored or downplayed, further isolating LGBT+ people.

Similar challenges exist in Italy, where despite progress in protecting the rights of LGBT+ people in public spaces, education remains an area where uniform anti-discrimination standards are lacking. Conservative gender norms remain in place in many vocational schools, and LGBT+ youth face social exclusion and symbolic violence in the form of stereotypical comments, deprecation of their identities, and the omission of sexual diversity from curricula.

One of the key constraints for LGBT+ students is also the lack of inclusive content in textbooks and educational materials. In Poland, the topic of sexual orientation and gender identity is often left out of curricula, leaving students without access to sound knowledge about diversity and equality. In Italy, the situation is somewhat better in some regions, where educational programs promoting LGBT+ awareness are in place, but there are still no nationwide guidelines on the issue.



An additional barrier for LGBT+ youth is restrictions on access to equal educational spaces. Many schools, especially vocational schools, may have strong gender divisions that make it difficult to integrate non-binary and transgender students. Examples include divisions in practical classes or the requirement to use locker rooms and restrooms consistent with the gender assigned at birth, which can lead to discomfort and additional stress for transgender students.

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## **Lack of adequate pedagogical and psychological support**

One of the most serious problems affecting LGBT+ youth in the education system in Poland and Italy is the lack of access to adequate psychological and pedagogical support. In many schools, teachers, educators and psychologists lack adequate training to work with LGBT+ students, leading to their marginalization and lack of intervention in crisis situations.

In Poland, despite the existence of school counselor and psychologist functions, many professionals are not trained to support LGBT+ people. Lack of education in this area results in insufficient understanding of the problems faced by non-heteronormative and transgender students. Sometimes school educators do not know how to respond to incidents of discrimination or mistakenly treat sexual orientation as a problem that needs to be "solved." In extreme cases, LGBT+ youth even face attempts at "conversion therapy" or the suggestion that their identity is just a passing phase.

In Italy, the situation varies more by region. In large cities and more progressive communities, access to psychological support for LGBT+ people is better developed. There are NGOs working with schools on anti-discrimination education and psychological support for LGBT+ youth. However, in many traditional and conservative regions of Italy, the topic of sexual and gender diversity is still treated as taboo, leading to a lack of systemic solutions to support LGBT+ students.

A significant problem in both Poland and Italy is the lack of safe spaces for LGBT+ youth. Students often do not have the opportunity to receive anonymous psychological support or turn to teachers who can help them in difficult situations. Additionally, many schools do not have anti-discrimination policies in place to provide formal safeguards against unequal treatment.

The lack of psychological support also translates into the overall well-being and mental health of LGBT+ youth. High levels of minority stress, resulting from lack of acceptance and the need to hide one's identity, lead to an increased risk of depression, anxiety disorders and suicidal thoughts among LGBT+ youth. Studies show that LGBT+ students are significantly more likely to experience social isolation and difficulty building peer relationships, with long-term consequences for their psychological well-being and professional futures.

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## The need for change and systemic action

To counter educational and social barriers, it is necessary to implement comprehensive measures to improve the situation of LGBT+ youth in vocational schools in Poland and Italy. Key changes should include:

- Introduce topics related to sexual and gender diversity and anti-discrimination into curricula.
- Training for teachers, psychologists and educators in working with LGBT+ youth.
- Create safe spaces in schools, such as support groups for LGBT+ students.
- Strengthening anti-discrimination policies in schools and educational institutions.

Ensuring equal access to education and effective psychological support for LGBT+ students should be a priority in building a more inclusive education system that enables every young person to develop and realize their potential without fear of exclusion or discrimination.

## 2.3 Experiences of LGBT+ youth with peers, teachers and career counselors

Vocational schools provide a specific educational environment in which young people prepare for specific career paths, often operating within highly hierarchical and traditional social structures. In the context of LGBT+ individuals, these experiences can be particularly challenging, as peer norms, the way teaching staff function, and the approach of career counselors often fail to take into account the diversity perspective of gender identity and sexual orientation.

### Relationships with peers

Relationships with peers are fundamental to young people's mental and social health, especially during adolescence, when an individual's identity and need to belong to a group are developing. For LGBT+ youth, these relationships can be a source of both support and exclusion.

The vocational school environment in Poland and Italy is often dominated by traditional attitudes toward gender roles and social norms. In some vocational fields (e.g., construction, mechanics, industry), these norms are particularly strong, which can put additional pressure on LGBT+ students who may deviate from the usual patterns. In school communities where tolerance for diversity is low, LGBT+ individuals may experience ostracism, social exclusion and even verbal and physical aggression.

For many LGBT+ students, functioning in professional and educational settings means having to conform to prevailing norms. Many choose to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid negative social consequences. Having to mask one's identity leads to increased levels of minority stress and can negatively affect their mental health.

In Italy, the situation in vocational schools is more diverse - in larger cities such as Rome and Milan, acceptance of LGBT+ people is increasing, and some establishments are implementing equality programs. However, in conservative regions of the country, especially in the south, there is still a strong gender divide and prejudice against non-heteronormative people.

## Relationships with teachers and career counselors

Teaching staff and guidance counselors play an important role in shaping the educational environment. Their approach to LGBT+ issues can affect the level of social acceptance and support students receive.

In Poland, there is a lack of systemic training for teachers on working with LGBT+ students. Many educators are unaware of how they can actively support LGBT+ youth, and in some cases show indifference to the problems of these students. The lack of response to incidents of homophobia and transphobia on the part of teachers makes LGBT+ people feel invisible or left alone in the face of exclusion.

Similar problems exist in Italy, where the level of support for LGBT+ youth depends on local initiatives and the individual approach of teachers. Attempts are being made in some regions to introduce classes on diversity and inclusion, but there are still no uniform guidelines at the national level.

Career counselors in vocational schools are crucial to students' futures, but often fail to take into account the specific challenges faced by LGBT+ youth. In many cases, career counseling is conducted in a way that does not take into account the limitations of discrimination in the labor market. LGBT+ individuals may find it difficult to choose a career path if they don't see role models for success in certain industries or feel that their identity may become a barrier to career advancement.

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## Homophobia and transphobia in the vocational school space

In vocational schools, homophobia and transphobia can manifest themselves in many ways - from verbal aggression to structural discrimination to unconscious biases present in the content of teaching. Examples of such phenomena include:

- **Symbolic violence**, such as the use of offensive language against LGBT+ people, ridiculing transgender students in the context of their gender identity.
- **Structural discrimination**, e.g., lack of inclusion of LGBT+ people in educational programs, restrictions on clothing choices or restrooms consistent with gender identity.
- **Passive tolerance of homophobia and transphobia**, such as the failure of educational staff to respond to displays of aggression against LGBT+ students.

## Defense mechanisms and adaptation strategies of LGBT+ youth

LGBT+ youth use a variety of adaptive strategies to survive in a school environment that is not always welcoming to their identity. Among the most common mechanisms are:

- Hiding one's identity, which reduces the risk of discrimination, but at the same time leads to chronic stress and health problems.
- Avoid certain peer groups to minimize the risk of violence or ostracism.
- Seeking support from after-school organizations that offer safe spaces for LGBT+ youth.
- Developing mental resilience through activism or community involvement, which helps build self-esteem.

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## The importance of allies in the integration process

Allies - whether teachers, guidance counselors or peers - play a key role in integrating LGBT+ youth into the school environment. Their support can significantly reduce minority stress and increase LGBT+ students' sense of security.

Schools that implement equality policies and programs that support diversity create a space where all students can thrive without fear of exclusion. Initiatives such as anti-homophobia programs, anti-discrimination workshops and support groups for LGBT+ youth are crucial to building an inclusive environment.

The presence of allies in school spaces not only supports LGBT+ students, but also contributes to broader social change, leading to greater acceptance and equality in educational and professional spaces. Developing empathy and anti-discrimination education are key elements that can change the way vocational schools in Poland and Italy function as institutions open to diversity.



## 2.4 Impact of hostile environment on learning motivation and career choices of LGBT+ youth

Education plays a key role in shaping the career aspirations and development of young people. In a welcoming, supportive environment, students have the opportunity to realize their full potential and make informed decisions about their future. But for LGBT+ youth, vocational schools, where traditional gender role divisions and conservative social norms are often firmly entrenched, can become a place of exclusion, discrimination and lack of support.

The experience of a hostile school environment can lead to reduced motivation to learn, reduced career aspirations and, in extreme cases, to dropping out of further education. Symbolic, verbal or physical violence, the lack of representation of LGBT+ people in educational content, and the inadequacy of the career counseling system to meet the needs of this group of students can have far-reaching consequences not only for their individual career path, but also for society as a whole and the labor market.

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### Self-censorship and abandonment of career aspirations

One of the most serious consequences of operating in a hostile school environment is so-called **self-censorship**, i.e. the conscious limiting of one's professional and educational aspirations by LGBT+ people for fear of negative social consequences.

Vocational school students often have to confront gender norms and stereotypes and social roles in the profession as early as the educational stage. Under such conditions, LGBT+ youth may adapt their educational and professional choices to the expectations of their environment, which not only limits their development, but also leads to a lack of career satisfaction in later years.

These mechanisms manifest themselves in several areas:

- **Avoiding certain professions** - LGBT+ youth may opt out of certain career paths that they perceive as particularly intolerant or conservative. Transgender, non-binary or gay people may not choose professions that require intense social interaction (e.g., education, government work, media), fearing prejudice and disapproval from co-workers and customers.
- **Adapting to heteronormative norms** - for fear of negative social reactions, LGBT+ people may choose to choose professions considered "neutral" in terms of gender and sexual orientation, which is not always in line with their actual interests and talents.
- **Hiding one's identity in the workplace** - LGBT+ youth who have experienced exclusion at school may later avoid revealing their identity in the workplace, which is associated

with additional stress and can lead to decreased professional effectiveness and burnout.

Self-censorship in educational and career choices leads to wasted potential for many individuals and limits their impact on the development of particular industries. Fear of rejection makes LGBT+ individuals less likely to choose careers in demanding professional sectors that could match their actual skills and passions.

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## Impact of negative school experiences on future career decisions

The long-term effects of operating in a hostile school environment extend beyond the educational period and significantly affect the future career choices of LGBT+ youth. A long-standing experience of exclusion and discrimination can lead to a lack of self-confidence, a reduction in ambition and the abandonment of further education.

### Lack of self-confidence

LGBT+ individuals who have experienced discrimination at school may have **lower self-esteem**, which affects their ability to take on challenges and achieve ambitious career goals. Long-term exposure to homophobia and transphobia leads to learned helplessness - individuals convince themselves that regardless of their competence, they will be discriminated against, resulting in giving up the pursuit of professional success.

### Reluctance to continue education

LGBT+ youth are more likely to drop out of continuing education after graduating from vocational school. Experiences of negative treatment in the school environment result in a **lack of trust in educational institutions** and a fear that they will face the same barriers at higher levels of education. As a result, these individuals may choose careers that require minimal contact with the formal education system, limiting their opportunities for advancement and career advancement.

## Adoption of conformist professional roles

LGBT+ people who have experienced exclusion at school may seek to find work in environments they perceive as more neutral or "safe." This often means choosing occupations where they will not have to disclose their orientation or gender identity. This approach can result in a lack of professional satisfaction, as the choice of career path is motivated by fear of exclusion rather than personal interests and aptitude.

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## Consequences for the labor market and the economy

Negative school experiences and their impact on the career choices of LGBT+ youth also have implications for the labor market and society. Limiting this group's aspirations and opportunities for advancement results:

- **Reduced diversity in the workplace**, which limits innovation and creativity in many industries.
  - **Lost talent** that could have contributed to the economy if LGBT+ people had equal career opportunities.
  - **Elevated levels of stress and job burnout** - LGBT+ people often work in conditions that force them to hide their identities, leading to a decrease in efficiency and job satisfaction.
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## Implementation of systemic solutions to support LGBT+ youth

In order to counter exclusion and the negative effects of an unfriendly educational environment, system-level measures are needed, including:

- **Training for teachers and guidance counselors** in supporting LGBT+ youth.
- **Mentoring programs and support networks** for LGBT+ students to help them develop their career aspirations.
- **Introduce equality policies in vocational schools** to eliminate homophobia and transphobia.
- **Promote diversity in the labor market** so that LGBT+ youth have viable role models for career success and a sense that their identity is not a barrier to career advancement.

Through these measures, it is possible to create an inclusive educational and professional environment in which LGBT+ youth can realize their full potential, contributing to economic growth and building a more open society.

## CHAPTER 3: Psychological aspects of supporting LGBT+ youth.

Psychological support plays a key role in shaping the psychological and social well-being of LGBT+ youth, especially in educational and vocational contexts. Experiences of discrimination, stigma and exclusion can lead to psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, lowered self-esteem and minority stress. Effective psychological help should include both individual intervention and systemic measures at the level of educational and social institutions.

This chapter will discuss the main psychological challenges faced by LGBT+ youth and support strategies that can be implemented by psychologists, guidance counselors, teachers and other youth workers.

### 3.1 Psychological consequences of coming out in vocational schools

Coming out, or the process of revealing one's sexual orientation or gender identity, is one of the most important experiences in the lives of LGBT+ people. It is a complex, multi-stage and often lengthy process that has a significant impact on an individual's psychological functioning, especially in social, educational and professional contexts.

In a vocational school environment, where traditional gender and social norms are sometimes strongly entrenched, the decision to come out can have both positive and negative consequences. From the perspective of psychology, it is crucial to understand the mechanisms that influence the process of self-acceptance, the reactions of those around us, and the effects of these experiences on the mental health of LGBT+ youth.

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#### The process of revealing orientation and gender identity

Coming out is a process that can be divided into two main aspects:

1. Coming out internally - refers to a person's acceptance of his or her own sexual orientation or gender identity.
2. Coming out externally - involves revealing one's identity to other people, such as family, peers, teachers or future employers.

#### Psychological aspects of the coming out process

The decision to come out is complex and can stem from both the need for authenticity and the desire to belong to a community where one can feel accepted. The process is often determined by several psychological factors:



- Self-knowledge and self-acceptance - at an early stage, an individual gradually becomes aware of his or her sexual orientation or gender identity, which may involve internal conflict, especially in conservative environments.
- Fear of rejection - LGBT+ youth in vocational schools may fear negative consequences of revealing their identity, such as social isolation, discrimination or aggression from peers and teachers.
- Adaptive strategies - depending on the perception of risk, coming out can take the form of selective disclosure to selected individuals or full transparency in the wider social environment.

In the vocational school environment, coming out can be hindered by strong gender divisions within certain professions. For example, transgender individuals may feel additional pressure to choose clothing, toilets or a name that aligns with their gender identity, but may face disapproval from those around them.

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## Stages of acceptance of one's own identity

Coming out is a gradual process, which psychologists describe in several stages. Each involves specific psychological and emotional challenges.

### 1. becoming aware of one's sexual orientation or gender identity

At this stage, an LGBT+ person begins to recognize their difference in terms of sexual orientation or gender identity. This can lead to:

- anxiety and uncertainty,
- attempts to negate and suppress their feelings,
- seeking information about the LGBT+ community and their own identity.

### 2. exploration and attempt at self-determination

In this stage, a person begins to define his or her identity more consciously, which may include:

- seeking roles and role models among other LGBT+ people,
- exploration of the LGBT+ community (e.g., through the media, the Internet, support groups),
- Making the first attempts to reveal themselves to loved ones.

### 3. coming out to the environment



This is a key stage that can involve both relief and stress. The reactions of the environment affect the further psychological development of the individual, and depending on their nature can lead to an increase in self-esteem or a decrease in self-esteem.

#### **4 Adaptation and integration**

At this stage, the individual achieves stability in his functioning, accepts his identity and interacts socially in a way that does not require hiding his sexual orientation or gender identity.

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### **Reactions of the environment and their impact on mental well-being**

The reactions of the environment to coming out in vocational schools can be extremely different and affect the mental health of LGBT+ youth. They can be divided into three categories:

#### **1. positive reactions**

- Acceptance and support - students who receive support from peers and teachers show higher self-esteem and better social functioning.
- Normalization of identity - coming out is not treated as something special, which is conducive to lowering stress and improving psychological well-being.
- Allyship - people outside the LGBT+ community engage in activities that support inclusivity and anti-discrimination.

#### **2. negative reactions and their consequences**

- Social rejection and isolation - can lead to depression, anxiety and feelings of exclusion.
  - Discrimination and aggression - LGBT+ youth can be victims of psychological or physical violence, with long-term consequences for their mental health.
  - Internalization of negative social messages - can lead to lowered self-esteem, feelings of guilt, and a tendency to hide one's identity in the future.
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## How can psychologists support LGBT+ youth after coming out?

School psychologists and youth mental health professionals should take supportive measures that help LGBT+ people adapt socially after coming-out. Key strategies include:

- Affirmative therapy - based on acceptance and support of the client's gender identity and sexual orientation.
- Crisis interventions - psychological assistance in cases of social rejection, depression or suicidal thoughts.
- Training and education for teachers - increasing their competence in working with LGBT+ youth.
- Creating safe spaces - introducing support groups for LGBT+ students and developing mentoring programs.

## 3.2 Psychological and counseling intervention based on the experience of Poland and Italy

LGBT+ youth attending vocational and trade schools often face challenges related to social acceptance, lack of psychological and counseling support, and risk of professional exclusion. An important task for psychologists, educators and career counselors is to create a safe and supportive environment that will enable LGBT+ students to fully develop personally and professionally.

In Poland and Italy, there are various initiatives to support LGBT+ youth, both through systemic educational interventions and individual and group therapeutic techniques. This chapter will present effective methods of psychological and counseling support, taking into account the specifics of vocational schools and the experience of selected European countries.

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### Techniques for working with LGBT+ youth attending vocational and trade schools

Working with LGBT+ youth requires interdisciplinary methods of support that address both psychological, social and educational aspects. Effective interventions should focus on building a safe space where students can talk openly about their experiences and difficulties, while developing coping skills to deal with potential challenges.

#### 1. the role of empathy and active listening

Empathy and active listening are key competencies for psychologists and counselors working with LGBT+ youth. In the context of vocational schools, where students often function in an environment with strongly defined gender norms, the ability to create open and non-discriminatory dialogue is particularly important.

### **Empathetic communication as a basis for working with LGBT+ youth**

- Active listening - carefully receiving the student's messages, not interrupting speech, using paraphrasing and asking deepening questions.
- Using inclusive language - respecting the student's gender identity by using appropriate pronouns and avoiding normative language.
- Avoiding judgment and interpretation - instead of making judgments, the specialist should help the student independently understand and interpret his own experience.

### **The impact of empathy on a student's psychological well-being**

An empathetic approach promotes self-esteem and reduces minority stress in LGBT+ youth. It also helps reduce depressive and anxiety symptoms resulting from experiences of rejection or lack of acceptance.

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## **2. individual support strategies**

Individual psychological and counseling support is crucial for LGBT+ youth in vocational schools, especially in the context of their educational and career choices.

### **Individual psychological consultations**

- Creating a safe space for conversation where students can openly express their emotions and experiences.
- Work on building mental resilience and coping strategies to deal with discrimination and microaggressions.
- Helping people accept their own identity and identify positive role models.

### **Career counseling that takes into account the specifics of LGBT+ students**

- Recognizing LGBT+ friendly professions and industries.
- Assist in preparing for interviews in a way that allows the student to present their competencies in a safe and comfortable range.
- Work on developing assertiveness skills and building a professional support network.

In many cases, LGBT+ youth experience limitations due to heteronormative educational and professional structures. Psychologists and counselors should actively help students break down these barriers by developing their self-awareness and social competence.

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### 3. group support strategies

Group forms of support are extremely effective in working with LGBT+ youth and enable them to build relationships based on mutual understanding and acceptance.

#### Support groups for LGBT+ youth in vocational schools

- Regular meetings to share experiences and emotions.
- Strengthening peer bonds through joint efforts to build a more inclusive school environment.
- Work on self-acceptance and coming out strategies in a safe and supportive environment.

#### Educational and anti-discrimination workshops

- Organizing workshops for teachers and students on the rights of LGBT+ people in education and the labor market.
- Education on how to recognize and respond to homophobia and transphobia.
- Implement equality programs at the institutional level that promote diversity and integrate the LGBT+ perspective into educational strategies.

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## The experience of Poland and Italy

### 1. examples of activities in Poland

In Poland, there are initiatives to improve the situation of LGBT+ youth in vocational schools. Non-governmental organizations, such as the Campaign Against Homophobia, run psychological and educational support programs.

An example of successful efforts is the report "Islands of Support," which outlines good practices for supporting transgender people in public schools. The document emphasizes the importance of:

- Creating safe educational spaces.
- Implement training for teachers on working with LGBT+ youth.
- Adjust school documentation to accommodate transgender students.

## 2. examples of activities in Italy

In Italy, there are organizations working with educational institutions to raise awareness about gender diversity and sexual orientation. The "Scuola e Diversità" initiative includes:

- Anti-discrimination programs targeting teaching staff and peers.
- Organizing support networks for LGBT+ students.
- Monitoring the situation of LGBT+ people in education and the labor market in order to implement more effective solutions.

## 3.3 Prevent and counteract self-exclusion of LGBT+ youth in vocational schools

Self-exclusion, or the process of an individual's voluntary isolation from social, educational and professional life, is one of the most common threats to LGBT+ youth in school settings, especially in vocational and trade schools. Faced with prejudice, lack of acceptance and discrimination, young people may gradually withdraw from active participation in social life, limit their career aspirations and avoid interaction with the community.

Research confirms that LGBT+ youth are more vulnerable to negative psychological consequences resulting from social exclusion. As Rankin (2003) points out, *"LGBT+ individuals who experience discrimination in educational settings exhibit higher levels of anxiety, depression, and reduced motivation for learning and professional development."* Similar conclusions are drawn from the research of Meyer (2003), who points to the phenomenon of minority stress as a key factor leading to mental problems in LGBT+ people.

In the context of vocational schools, this issue is particularly relevant, as traditional gender divisions in certain professions and limited public awareness of LGBT+ people can lead to their marginalization and hinder their professional development.



## Building confidence and self-esteem

**Self-esteem and identity is a fundamental determinant of an individual's development in society and functioning in the labor market.** For LGBT+ youth, a strong identity and positive self-esteem can act as a buffer against the effects of minority stress and allow them to effectively counteract self-exclusion.

According to Baumeister (1999), *"self-esteem is a key element of psychological resilience that allows an individual to successfully cope with social and professional challenges."* Badgett (2009), on the other hand, points out that *"LGBT+ individuals who have positive self-esteem and access to social support perform better in education and are more engaged in professional development."*

## Factors influencing the development of self-esteem of LGBT+ youth in vocational schools

1. Support from teachers and guidance counselors - Institutional support can effectively boost LGBT+ students' self-esteem and counteract their social isolation.
2. Presence of inclusive role models in vocational education - being able to identify with LGBT+ successful professionals is crucial to building self-confidence.
3. Protecting against violence and discrimination - eliminating microaggressions, homophobia and transphobia in school spaces is essential for the psychological well-being of LGBT+ youth.

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## 2. support in mental crises

LGBT+ youth in vocational schools are more likely to experience psychological crises, which can result from both the daily experience of microaggressions and prolonged social isolation. As Russell (2011) points out, "LGBT+ youth in educational settings are more likely to report symptoms of depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts than their heteronormative peers."

Various strategies to support the mental health of LGBT+ people are being implemented in Poland and Italy, but their effectiveness largely depends on the level of public awareness and the willingness of teachers and counselors to respond proactively to mental crises.

## Effective mental health support strategies for LGBT+ youth in vocational schools



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1. Individual psychological support - one-on-one consultations with a school psychologist to identify and manage minority stress.
  2. Peer support groups - allowing LGBT+ students to interact with others with similar experiences can effectively reduce isolation and loneliness.
  3. Training for teachers and educators - improving the competence of teaching staff in preventing exclusion and supporting the mental health of LGBT+ students.
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### **3. promote proactive attitudes and resourcefulness in life**

Proactivity and resourcefulness in life are qualities that can help LGBT+ youth overcome social and professional barriers. Those who develop the ability to make decisions independently and to set and achieve goals are less prone to self-exclusion and adapt more easily to a changing work environment.

*According to Schwarz (2006), "individuals with high levels of life resourcefulness show greater resilience to stress and cope better with adversity, allowing them to pursue their career goals more effectively."*

#### **How to develop proactive attitudes in LGBT+ youth?**

1. Social and professional skills workshops - classes that develop the ability to communicate, negotiate and build professional relationships.
  2. Mentoring and professional support networks - programs that connect LGBT+ youth with professionals who can help them advance their careers.
  3. Activism projects and volunteering - engaging LGBT+ students in social and civic activities helps them build a sense of influence and competence.
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## **CHAPTER 4: Countering exclusion in school and work practice**

The social, educational and professional exclusion of LGBT+ people is a significant problem that requires systemic action at the school and vocational levels. People belonging to the LGBT+ community often experience discrimination, microaggressions and lack of representation in education and the labor market, which leads to their marginalization and lowered self-esteem.

Research conducted by the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) indicates that LGBT+ youth in Europe often face unfavorable treatment in educational settings, which affects their motivation to learn and their career aspirations. A 2009 FRA report highlighted that in many EU member states, including Italy, LGBT+ people experience discrimination in various spheres of life, including education and employment.

In the context of Italy, research points to significant challenges related to the exclusion of LGBT+ people. According to data presented in the report "Poverty and Gender Violence in Europe" (2019), there is a lot of research in Italy on poverty and social exclusion as factors leading to gender violence.

In order to prevent exclusion, it is necessary to implement educational and professional strategies that promote equality, acceptance and inclusivity. This chapter will discuss effective practices for preventing the exclusion of LGBT+ people in school and professional settings.

Vocational schools, like other educational institutions, should provide all students with equal opportunities to develop and learn in a safe environment. Unfortunately, LGBT+ students still often face discrimination, violence and unequal treatment, which negatively affects their self-esteem, motivation to learn and career prospects.

According to a report by the Campaign Against Homophobia (2020), up to **70% of LGBT+ students in Poland** have experienced negative reactions from peers and teachers. Similar problems exist in Italy - a study by the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT) indicates that **34% of LGBT+ students in vocational schools in Italy reported experiencing discrimination or psychological violence** from peers or teachers.

Implementing equality and anti-discrimination policies is an essential step in ensuring an inclusive and safe educational environment. This chapter will discuss anti-discrimination standards and procedures in vocational schools, as well as strategies to prevent violence against LGBT+ people.

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## 4.1 Anti-discrimination standards and procedures in vocational schools

## Introducing equality policies in vocational schools

Vocational schools should actively implement equality policies and anti-discrimination procedures, which include:

- Prohibition of discrimination and violence - clear provisions in school regulations to protect LGBT+ students from physical, verbal and symbolic violence.
- Responding to incidents of discrimination - mechanisms for reporting discriminatory incidents, procedures for intervention, and the responsibility of teachers and school administration.
- Education of teachers and school personnel - training on countering homophobia, transphobia and microaggressions in the school environment.

## Create reporting and intervention procedures

To counter discrimination in vocational schools, an effective reporting and intervention system must be implemented, including:

- Anonymous reporting systems - enabling students to report incidents of discrimination and violence in a confidential manner.
- Response on the part of teachers and educators - every case of discrimination should be analyzed by the Equality Commission, and perpetrators should face consequences in accordance with the school's internal regulations.
- Psychological support for victims of violence and discrimination - the possibility of using a school psychologist and NGOs supporting LGBT+ youth.

## 4.2 Strategies to counter school violence against LGBT+ people

### Anti-LGBT+ School Violence and Diversity and Inclusion Education Programs



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Violence against LGBT+ students in vocational schools can take many forms, including physical violence, verbal violence, cyberbullying and social exclusion. Comprehensive strategies including prevention, response systems and victim support are needed to reduce it.

### **Introducing classes on diversity and human rights**

- Integration of equality topics into the curriculum - LGBT+ rights and the importance of diversity in the workplace can be discussed in WOS lessons, ethics or entrepreneurship classes.
- School awareness campaigns - organizing thematic days, such as the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT).

### **Workshops and training for students**

- Nonviolent communication and conflict resolution classes - building students' social competence in constructive dispute resolution and avoidance of aggressive behavior.
- Education on allyship (LGBTQ+ Allyship) - training for heteronormative students to help them understand how they can support their LGBT+ peers.

### **Systems for reporting incidents of violence and discrimination**

To ensure the effectiveness of equality policies, schools should implement:

- Anonymous systems for reporting incidents of discrimination and violence (e.g., reporting boxes, online platforms).
- Intervention response teams - groups of teachers, psychologists and student representatives responsible for analyzing reports and taking action.
- Rapid intervention procedures - introducing a maximum time limit (e.g., 7 days) for taking action on a reported case of violence.

### **The role of allies in the school community**

Vocational schools should actively support the formation of alliance groups (LGBT+ allies) that include teachers, psychologists and heteronormative students who support LGBT+ people.



Within this model:

- Teachers can act as mentors, offering support to LGBT+ students and monitoring their situation at school.
- Older students can participate in mentoring programs, helping younger LGBT+ students adapt to the school environment.
- Student groups can organize initiatives for acceptance and equality, such as art, theater or sports competitions to promote diversity.

### 4.3 Creating a safe space in the school and workplace for LGBT+ people: Standards, challenges and recommendations

A safe space in educational and professional environments is a key factor in the psychological well-being, social integration and professional development of LGBT+ people. In the context of vocational schools and workplaces, non-heteronormative people often face barriers due to homophobia, transphobia, microaggressions and structural biases.

According to a report by the **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2019)**, **more than 60% of LGBT+ youth in Europe say they feel uncomfortable in the school environment**, which negatively affects their engagement in education and career aspirations. In the Italian context, research conducted by the **Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT, 2022)** found that **34% of LGBT+ students in vocational schools have experienced psychological violence**, and **27% of LGBT+ individuals reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace**.

Therefore, the development and implementation of anti-discrimination strategies in vocational schools and in the labor market is a priority in building an inclusive society. This analysis focuses on the role of teachers, educators and career counselors in creating a welcoming environment, as well as on equality programs and inclusive educational practices.

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## The role of teachers, educators and career counselors in creating a safe space

Teachers and educators have a key function in countering discrimination and integrating LGBT+ students into the school community. Their attitude and actions have a direct impact on whether a vocational school will be a place that fosters diversity and equality.

### Key aspects of their role include:

- **Modeling attitudes of acceptance and respect** - teachers should set an example in terms of tolerance and openness, which translates into the culture of the entire school community.
- **Respond to manifestations of discrimination and microaggressions** - any form of aggression, from social exclusion to homophobic comments, should be met with an immediate response from teaching staff.
- **Introducing inclusive language in school communication** - using gender-neutral language and respecting students' gender identity is crucial to their psychological well-being.

Career counseling in vocational schools should take into account the needs of LGBT+ students, who often face additional barriers to accessing employment.

### The tasks of career counselors in this context include:

- **Individual educational and career counseling** - supporting students in choosing a career path, taking into account their identity and possible workplace challenges.
  - **Promoting industries and employers that support diversity** - pointing students to companies and sectors where equality policies are realistically implemented.
  - **Preparing for challenges in the labor market** - learning strategies for dealing with potential discrimination and knowing your labor rights.
- 

## Equality programs and inclusive educational practices

### Anti-discrimination education in vocational schools

Vocational schools have a specific character - they prepare students to enter the labor market, where they may encounter a variety of environments and organizational structures. Therefore, it is extremely important to provide young people with the knowledge and competencies to function in diverse teams and deal with possible discrimination already at

the educational stage. Shaping openness and acceptance among students not only affects the atmosphere in the educational establishment, but also prepares young people to build a society based on respect and equality.

**The most effective measures include:**

- **Integration of diversity content into the core curriculum** - One of the key aspects of anti-discrimination education is the integration of human rights, equality and diversity content into the core curriculum. Traditional teaching models often omit these issues or treat them marginally, leading to a lack of knowledge and the growth of stereotypes among young people.

To counter these problems, vocational schools should integrate issues related to equality and the rights of LGBT+ people into various subjects. In civics lessons, students should gain knowledge of international human rights regulations, protection against discrimination, and systemic tools to combat inequality. Within ethics, the topic of cultural and social diversity can be introduced, emphasizing the importance of respect and acceptance of different identity groups. Professional subjects, especially those related to teamwork and management, should include modules on inclusivity in the workplace, making students aware of how modern organizations that promote equality function.

It is also important to develop new teaching materials that comprehensively present diversity issues. Standard textbooks and curricula often omit issues of gender identity and sexual orientation, so it is necessary to update them in accordance with the results of scientific research and recommendations of international institutions.

- **Organizing equality campaigns and events** - In addition to systemically implementing anti-discrimination content into the curriculum, vocational schools should actively engage the school community in campaigns and events that promote equality. Initiating educational campaigns raises awareness among both students and teachers, while enabling open dialogue about the challenges faced by LGBT+ people. One of the most effective solutions is to organize an Equality in Education Day, during which students can participate in workshops, debates and lectures on countering social exclusion. Such events help break down stereotypes and build empathy among young people, which in the long run leads to the creation of a more accepting school environment. Another important element is the creation of mentoring programs and support groups for LGBT+ students, where older students or alumni can share their experiences with younger colleagues. Such initiatives allow LGBT+ students to feel part of the school community, reduce feelings of loneliness and increase their self-confidence. It is also important to encourage students to actively participate in external initiatives, such as local equality marches, human rights conferences or

volunteer programs at organizations that support LGBT+ people. Integrating the school with community activities strengthens young people's commitment to equality and increases their civic competence.

- **Cooperation with NGOs** - Vocational schools should establish cooperation with NGOs working in the field of human rights education, anti-discrimination and LGBT+ support. These institutions have the necessary knowledge and experience that can help build educational programs tailored to the needs of students and teaching staff. One of the most effective measures is to invite experts to conduct workshops and lectures on diversity, inclusivity and anti-violence. This allows students to get reliable first-hand information and confront their beliefs with the scientific knowledge and experiences of those actively involved in the fight against discrimination. Organizations can also support schools in developing and implementing anti-discrimination regulations and conducting training for teachers and guidance counselors. Partnerships between educational institutions and community organizations increase the effectiveness of equality measures and enable schools to better adapt to the challenges of the modern world.

## Structural changes in vocational schools

- **Aligning school bylaws with equality principles** - writing explicit provisions into school statutes that protect LGBT+ students from violence and discrimination.
- **Creating support groups for LGBT+ students** - establishing school organizations that provide a space for sharing experiences and mutual support.
- **Establish school equality ombudsmen** - appoint a person responsible for monitoring the situation of LGBT+ people at school and responding to reports of discrimination.



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## Creating a safe space in the workplace

LGBT+ people in the labor market often face barriers related to the lack of inclusivity and diversity in organizations.

### Implementation of equality policies in companies and institutions

Today's labor market is characterized by increasing diversity and changes in approaches to human resource management. The implementation of equality policies in companies and institutions is not only a regulatory obligation, but also a key element of human resource management strategies that affect innovation, organizational effectiveness and employee satisfaction. In the face of global trends of inclusiveness and growing social awareness, companies are increasingly recognizing equality and diversity as a cornerstone of modern organizational culture.

Research conducted by McKinsey & Company ("Diversity Wins," 2020) shows that organizations that actively implement equality policies and promote inclusivity achieve better business results - companies with high levels of diversity are 25% more profitable than those that do not incorporate diversity into their structures. At the same time, the ILGA-Europe report (2023) indicates that **27% of LGBT+ people in Europe have faced discrimination in the workplace**, implying the need to implement effective protective mechanisms.

Effective implementation of equality policies requires a systemic approach, including codes of ethics, employee training and effective mechanisms for reporting discrimination. A key aspect is to ensure that these measures are not only formally implemented, but are actually in place in organizations, influencing a change in attitudes and management practices.

1. Equality-sensitive **codes of ethics** - Codes of ethics are one of the primary tools for implementing equality policies in organizations. These documents should clearly state the company's commitments to equality, non-discrimination and respect for all employees, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity or other protected characteristics.

### An effective code of ethics should include:

- Clear rules on the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, in accordance with national and international legal standards (e.g., the EU Equality Directive).



- Employer and management responsibilities in creating a safe and supportive work environment for LGBT+ people.
- Standards for inclusive language and internal communication that prevent marginalization or stereotyping of employees.
- Commitment to the principles of equality in recruitment, promotions and compensation, providing equal opportunities for professional development for all employees.

One example of good practice is the **Diversity & Inclusion Charter** standard, implemented by many multinational corporations, including Google, Microsoft and IKEA. These companies not only implement anti-discrimination provisions in their codes of ethics, but also monitor their effectiveness and report results as part of their ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) strategies.

2. **Training for employees and managers** - Effective implementation of equality policies requires the involvement of all employees, especially managers. Diversity and inclusion training should be a mandatory component of human resources development strategies. Their purpose is not only to raise awareness of the challenges faced by LGBT+ people, but also to develop skills for building an open and supportive work environment.

**Key elements of effective training programs include:**

- **Awareness of biases and microaggressions** - educating employees about how unconscious biases can influence workplace decisions, including recruitment processes, employee evaluations or promotions.
- **Anti-Discrimination and Bullying** - presentation of specific cases and methods of effective intervention that can be implemented by managers and HR teams.
- **Shaping a culture of allyship** - encouraging heteronormative employees to actively support LGBT+ colleagues by, for example, responding to discriminatory situations, promoting inclusive language or participating in equality initiatives.
- **Creating mentoring programs** - connecting LGBT+ employees with mentors who will help them advance their careers in a welcoming and supportive environment.

According to a study by Harvard Business Review (2021), companies that regularly conduct diversity and inclusivity training see a **35% increase in feelings of belonging among LGBT+ employees** and a significant decrease in reports of discrimination.

3. **Mechanisms for reporting incidents of discrimination** - The implementation of equality policies must not be a mere formality - companies must ensure that effective procedures are in place to enable employees to safely report violations. Lack of

adequate mechanisms can lead to the "chilling effect," i.e. employees' reluctance to disclose incidents of discrimination for fear of reprisals.

Effective mechanisms for reporting discrimination should include:

- Anonymous reporting systems - the ability to report violations through independent platforms, such as electronic reporting systems that do not require disclosure of an employee's identity.
- Clearly defined procedures for handling - defining who and how reports are handled, what the consequences are for perpetrators and what support is available to victims of discrimination.
- Internal Equality and Diversity Ombudsmen - designate individuals within the organization responsible for monitoring compliance with equality policies and providing support to LGBT+ employees.
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of procedures - regular reviews and updates of the mechanisms for reporting violations, based on the actual experience of employees and the results of internal audits.

### Examples of good practices in the labor market

- **Creating employee groups for LGBT+ people** - providing support and integration in the workplace.
- **Promoting equality in the recruitment process** - using inclusive policies when evaluating candidates.
- **Participation in campaigns promoting equality** - supporting events such as Pride Month and Equality at Work Day.

## ***CHAPTER 5: Tools and methods for working with LGBT+ youth learning in vocational schools***

Working with LGBT+ youth in vocational schools requires a comprehensive approach that combines psychological intervention, educational activities and strategies for building an

inclusive environment. Vocational schools often operate in the context of traditionally gender-segregated professions, which can lead to additional challenges for LGBT+ students. Implementing effective support methods, educational programs and psychological interventions is crucial to improving the well-being of this group of students and their integration into the school community.

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## 5.1 Workshops and educational programs on diversity

Educational workshops are one of the most important elements of work with LGBT+ youth in vocational schools. Their purpose is both to raise public awareness of diversity and to provide students with tools to better cope with difficulties related to sexual identity and orientation.

Workshops can include various forms, such as interactive activities, panel discussions and simulation exercises that allow students to better understand the perspective of LGBT+ people. It is important that educational programs incorporate the topics of human rights, social exclusion mechanisms, anti-discrimination and equality support in the workplace.

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### Activation methods in working with young people

Traditional teaching methods are often not enough to effectively engage young people and get them thinking about topics related to diversity and inclusion. Activation methods help students gain knowledge through experience, collaboration and action.

Examples of effective methods include:



- **Case study** - analysis of real-life stories of LGBT+ people and their experiences in school and work environments.
- **Drama and theater techniques** - allowing students to role-play different situations to better understand the effects of discrimination and exclusion.
- **Oxford debates** - developing argumentation and critical thinking skills on LGBT+ rights and equality in society.
- **Empathy map** - an exercise in which students analyze how different people may perceive and experience certain situations related to discrimination.

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## Scenarios of educational activities and exercises

Below are three lesson plans that can be implemented in vocational schools as part of anti-discrimination education, equality building and integration of LGBT+ students. Each scenario includes lesson objectives, working methods, materials and a detailed course of activities.

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### SCENARIO 1: Diversity as a value - how to build an open school community?

#### Class objectives:

- To make students aware of the importance of diversity in school and work environments.
- Strengthening attitudes of respect and openness toward LGBT+ people.

- Development of communication and empathy skills in teamwork.

**Duration: 90 minutes**

**Work methods:**

- A guided discussion
- Working in groups
- Case study

**Materials:**

- Sheets of paper and markers
- Slides with examples of situations of exclusion and acceptance
- Cards with case descriptions of different people to analyze

**Course of action:**

**1. introduction (15 minutes)**

- The presenter starts the class with the question: "What does it mean that the environment is open and safe for everyone?".
- Students share their thoughts, and the presenter concludes by noting the importance of diversity and inclusiveness.
- A short presentation on concepts such as "equality", "inclusion", "discrimination".

**2 Exercise: Case analysis (40 minutes)**

- Students are divided into groups and given cards with descriptions of different situations, such as:
  - Transgender student faces incomprehension from teachers.
  - An employee at a company hides his sexual orientation for fear of discrimination.
  - Peers do not accept a colleague because of his way of expressing his identity.
- The groups analyze the case and think about possible solutions.
- Each group then presents its analysis to the class.

**3. discussion and conclusion (35 minutes)**

- The teacher asks students open-ended questions:
  - What consequences can the lack of acceptance of LGBT+ people have?
  - How can we build an open school community?
  - What can we do as a class to support diversity?



- Summary of the lesson - students write one sentence on a piece of paper that relates to what they learned from the lesson.
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## SCENARIO 2: Fighting stereotypes - deconstructing myths about LGBT+ people

### Class objectives:

- Dispelling myths and false beliefs about LGBT+ people.
- To make students aware of the effects that stereotypes and prejudices can have.

- Formation of critical thinking.

**Duration: 60 minutes**

**Work methods:**

- Working in groups
- Brainstorming
- Debate

**Materials:**

- List of stereotypes about LGBT+ people
- Cards and pens

**Course of action:**

### 1. introduction (10 minutes)

- The teacher asks the students what stereotypes about different social groups are most common and whether they themselves have ever faced discrimination.
- Introduction to the topic - what are stereotypes and what are their consequences?

### 2 Exercise: "Truth or Myth?" (30 minutes)

- The class is divided into small groups. Each group gets a list of sentences, such as:
  - "LGBT+ people choose their own orientation."
  - "Transgender people can easily change their gender in documents."
  - "LGBT+ is just a fad these days."
- The students' task is to decide which sentences are myths and which are truth, and explain their position.
- After discussing the results, each group presents its answers and the teacher gives the factual information.

### 3. discussion and reflection (20 minutes)

- Students consider where stereotypes come from and how they can be counteracted.
- Summary of the class - writing down one thing that students would like to pass on to others in the context of fighting stereotypes.

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## SCENARIO 3: How to respond to discrimination? - intervention and support strategies

### **Class objectives:**

- Teaching effective methods of responding to violence and discrimination.
- Developing an ally attitude toward LGBT+ people.
- Practical exercise of intervention techniques.

### **Duration: 75 minutes**

### **Work methods:**

- Role-playing
- Case study
- Discussion in pairs

### **Materials:**

- Cards with situations involving acts of discrimination
- Intervention strategy sheets

### **Course of action:**

#### **1. introduction (10 minutes)**

- The teacher asks students if they have ever witnessed a discriminatory situation and how they reacted to it.
- A brief overview of different types of discrimination and microaggressions.

#### **2 Exercise: Role-playing (40 minutes)**

- Students work in pairs or small groups. Each group gets a situation to act out, such as:
  - A classmate makes fun of a transgender student.
  - In the workplace, a supervisor uses inappropriate pronouns against an LGBT+ employee.
  - Someone on social media is posting homophobic comments.
- Students first think about how best to respond, and then present their scenes in front of the class.
- The class discusses which responses were effective and why.

#### **3 Summary (25 minutes)**

- The teacher presents effective intervention strategies, such as:
  - Assertive response
  - Reporting cases of discrimination
  - Supporting the discriminated person

- Students write down what they found most valuable from the activity.

Additional lesson plans can be found in handouts prepared by our specialists. These materials include detailed descriptions of exercises, interactive modules and tips for instructors, tailored to work with young people in vocational schools. We encourage you to use the prepared resources, which can support you in conducting equality education and building an inclusive school environment.

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## 5.2 Psychological intervention and support techniques

Psychological interventions should be tailored to the individual needs of LGBT+ students, who may be experiencing various types of emotional difficulties, such as depression, anxiety, lack of acceptance or peer violence.

Among the effective methods of psychological support are:

- **Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)** - to help change negative thought patterns and cope with minority stress.
  - **Relaxation and mindfulness techniques** - supporting students in dealing with emotional tension and difficult situations.
  - **Affirmative support** - acknowledging and accepting the student's identity without trying to change or suppress it.
- 

## Supportive talks and psychological counseling for LGBT+ youth in vocational schools

### The importance of supportive conversations in working with LGBT+ youth

Supportive conversations are one of the most important tools for psychologists, educators and teachers in the context of helping LGBT+ youth studying in vocational schools. LGBT+ individuals often face numerous challenges related to self-acceptance, coming out, relationships with family and peers, as well as concerns about their future careers. In the vocational school environment, where strong stereotypes still exist related to the division of professions into "male" and "female," LGBT+ people may experience additional stress related to the choice of educational path and future workplace.

Conducting supportive conversations in a professional, empathetic and real-life supportive manner is fundamental to their psychological well-being and ability to function in school and work environments. It is crucial that those conducting such conversations avoid judging and imposing ready-made solutions, and instead use an approach that enhances the student's sense of agency and self-esteem.

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## Techniques for effective supportive conversation

Supportive conversations should be based on a few key principles that help LGBT+ youth feel safe and comfortable during the meeting.

### Active listening and empathetic attitude



Active listening involves focusing fully on the interlocutor, showing interest in his or her experiences and using techniques that help him or her feel understood. Psychologists, educators and teachers should take care:

- Maintaining eye contact and open body language.
- Using neutral, reinforcing statements, such as "I understand that this is difficult for you" or "Thank you for sharing this."
- Paraphrase the student's statements to make sure his or her thoughts and feelings are well understood (e.g., "Do I understand correctly that you have concerns about coming out at school?").
- Encourage people to continue sharing their experiences by asking open-ended questions, such as "How do you feel about this?" or "What's the hardest thing for you about this?".

### **Avoid imposing ready-made solutions**

During supportive conversations, it is extremely important not to impose "only right" solutions on the student. Every LGBT+ person has an individual story and experience, so it is important to avoid generalizations and rigid advice. Instead of saying:

- "You should tell your parents as soon as possible" (which can cause additional stress), better to ask:
- "Have you thought about what would be the safest and most convenient solution for you?"

This attitude strengthens the student's autonomy and allows him to feel more responsible for his decisions.

### **Highlighting student competencies and strengths**

Many LGBT+ students in vocational schools struggle with lowered self-esteem due to years of experience of discrimination, microaggressions or rejection from loved ones. Therefore, an important part of a supportive conversation is to reinforce a positive self-image by highlighting the student's strengths. This can be done through:

- Pointing out specific achievements ("I noticed that you are doing very well in your profession. You have a great talent for teamwork").
- Paying attention to the stress management strategies he has already used ("The fact that you can talk about your difficulties shows that you are aware of your emotions and know how to work on them").
- Building realistic hope for the future ("Many graduates of this school who were in a similar situation have found a place for themselves in the job market - we can work together to find safe and friendly companies for you").

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## Support to build mental resilience and social support network

Supportive conversations should not only focus on the student's current difficulties, but also provide tools for dealing with future challenges. Support in developing mental resilience and stress management skills is crucial.

### Building mental toughness

Strengthening mental toughness involves helping the student to:

- Recognizing your emotions and accepting them without guilt.
- Practice the ability to think positively and focus on your achievements instead of your difficulties.
- Work on assertiveness - teaching how to respond to unfriendly comments and how to defend one's boundaries in a calm but firm manner.
- Encouraging people to take care of their own mental health by using relaxation techniques, developing passions and engaging in activities that make them happy.

### Building a social support network

LGBT+ people who have support from peers, adults or organizations are much better able to cope with difficulties related to sexual orientation and gender identity. That's why it's worth emphasizing the importance in supportive conversations:

- Establish contact with other LGBT+ students at school, such as through support groups.
- Use social organizations and initiatives - for example, organizations such as the Campaign Against Homophobia, Lambda Warsaw and the Rainbow Association have numerous outreach programs for LGBT+ youth.
- Talk to allies among teachers and adults - if the student feels comfortable, it is worth pointing out people who can support him at school.

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## Long-term psychological counseling and therapy

In some cases, a supportive conversation may not be enough and it is necessary to refer the student for longer-term psychological counseling or therapy. It is important for school interviewers to be able to recognize situations in which a student requires specialized help, such as when there are:

- Long-term depressive, anxiety states.

- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts.
- Experience of domestic or school violence.

In such cases, the school psychologist or educator should contact the appropriate support institutions and offer the student a safe path for support.

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## **Crisis intervention in difficult situations**

Crisis intervention is essential in situations where an LGBT+ student is experiencing serious mental health problems, such as depression, suicidal thoughts, domestic violence or peer bullying.

Effective interventions include:

- Immediate emotional support - making the student feel safe and listening to his problems.
  - Cooperation with support organizations - referral of students to specialized institutions for mental health and protection of LGBT+ rights.
  - Developing a safety plan - helping to identify risk factors and coping strategies in crisis situations.
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## **5.3 Work with the peer group for integration and acceptance**

Creating an accepting school environment requires working not only with LGBT+ students, but also with their peers. Peer education and inclusive programs can significantly reduce the level of discrimination in vocational schools.

Important elements of working with a peer group include:

- **Diversity and equality awareness campaigns** - raising awareness of the challenges faced by LGBT+ students.
- **Mentoring programs** - older students can act as mentors for younger classmates, supporting them as they adapt to the school environment.
- **School support groups** - creating a space for all students to freely express their experiences and opinions.

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## Building solidarity and support networks

Solidarity is a key element of an effective equality policy in vocational schools. Creating support networks includes working with community organizations, developing school alliance groups, and promoting the values of equality and tolerance among teachers and students.

Anti-discrimination activities and social campaigns can make a significant difference in reducing prejudice and building a more open educational environment. Examples of effective efforts include international initiatives such as "**It Gets Better**," which provide LGBT+ youth with positive role models and psychological support.

## CHAPTER 6: COOPERATION WITH FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Supporting LGBT+ youth in vocational schools requires a multi-level approach that includes not only educational activities in educational institutions, but also close cooperation with the family and the community. Family relationships play a fundamental role in the formation of a young person's identity, self-esteem and ability to cope with social and professional

challenges. At the same time, at the community level, the acceptance and support of the local environment can significantly affect the quality of life and career prospects of LGBT+ youth.

Lack of family and community support can lead to a range of negative psychological and social consequences, including depression, anxiety, lowered self-esteem, and in extreme cases, self-exclusion and mental health problems. For this reason, it is important to develop communication strategies, support programs and anti-exclusion initiatives that include both the family and institutions that work around LGBT+ youth.

## 6.1 How to talk to parents about their child's orientation and gender identity?

For many parents, information about their child's non-heteronormative sexual orientation or gender identity can be challenging. This is often due to ignorance, the influence of cultural social norms or personal religious beliefs. Teachers, psychologists and guidance counselors, acting as mediators and educators, can support parents in their child's acceptance process.

An essential element of an effective conversation with parents is to provide space to express emotions, while providing accurate information about sexual orientation and gender identity. It is crucial to emphasize that being LGBT+ is not the result of "fashion" or choice, but an integral part of a child's identity. Parents may have concerns about their child's future, their social security or their ability to pursue a career - so it makes sense to provide them with reliable data on changes in employment policies and the growing social acceptance of LGBT+ people in various professional sectors.

It is also important to emphasize that family acceptance is fundamental to a child's mental health and well-being. Research indicates that LGBT+ youth who experience family acceptance have a significantly lower risk of depression and suicide attempts than those rejected by their loved ones. Schools can support parents by holding educational meetings, consulting with psychologists, and providing materials that explain issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation.

### Breaking stereotypes and prejudices

Parents and community members may hold ingrained stereotypes about LGBT+ people, which can hinder the acceptance process for their children. Effective strategies to counter these prejudices should focus on education and personal contact with LGBT+ people.

Awareness campaigns, holding meetings with psychologists, and showing positive examples of families that have gone from misunderstanding to full acceptance can play a key role in



changing attitudes. It is worth emphasizing that a child's sexual orientation and gender identity are not an "educational failure," but are a natural aspect of human diversity. Involving parents in dialogue and providing them with the space to ask questions and express concerns is more effective than imposing ready-made solutions on them.

### **Communication techniques and mediation in the family**

Parents who do not accept their child's sexual orientation or gender identity are often driven by fear and a sense of loss due to the discrepancy between their expectations and reality. Family mediation can help build bridges of understanding and find a common space for dialogue.

During mediation sessions, it is crucial to use active listening techniques that allow each party to express their concerns and emotions. The neutral and non-judgmental approach of the psychologist or mediator helps avoid escalating the conflict and focuses on seeking shared values, such as the child's well-being and the need to maintain family ties. The mediation process can also include one-on-one sessions for parents to receive emotional support and gradually work through their beliefs.

## **6.2 Support for families of LGBT+ youth**

Parents and caregivers of LGBT+ youth often face many emotional and social challenges when their child comes out or explores their gender identity and sexual orientation. In many cases, they experience complex emotional reactions, ranging from shock to fear for their child's future to confusion due to a lack of knowledge about LGBT+ issues. The acceptance process

can take time and support from professionals, educational institutions and community organizations.

### Family challenges in the acceptance process

Each family goes through the process of acceptance in an individual way, but research points to some common mechanisms and stages that are characteristic of many parents. The model of adaptation often includes:

- **Initial shock and denial** - parents may be surprised or unprepared for their child's coming out. Some try to downplay the situation or believe it is a "temporary phase."
- **Fear and anxiety** - there is fear of the child's social rejection, peer violence, limited career opportunities or health problems such as depression and minority stress.
- **Information seeking and education** - parents are beginning to ask questions, seek reliable sources of knowledge, participate in support groups and consult specialists.
- **Acceptance and support** - in the final phase, parents work through their emotions, begin to actively support their child and work for his well-being both in the family and in the community.

An important part of supporting parents is to provide them with adequate educational resources and space to share experiences, which can significantly speed up and facilitate the adaptation process.

### Support groups for parents of LGBT+ youth

Support groups for parents are a key part of the support system, offering a space for open conversation, exchange of experiences and emotional support. These meetings should be led by qualified psychologists, family therapists or people who have gone through similar experiences themselves and are willing to support others.

The primary functions of support groups include:

- **Sharing experiences** - parents who have similar stories can support each other, talk about their emotions and the acceptance process.

- **Providing reliable information** - by working with experts, support groups can provide knowledge about sexual orientation, gender identity, and strategies for dealing with parenting challenges.
- **Help to break down social and cultural barriers** - many parents struggle with the fear of rejection from the community, so a support group can provide a safe space for them to work through their fears.
- **Strengthening family ties** - talking to other parents can help find ways to improve communication with the child and strengthen family relationships.

## Structure and organization of support groups

To be effective, a support group should be based on certain organizational principles:

- **Regularity of meetings** - sessions can be held once a month or every two weeks so that parents have time to reflect on the information they have learned and put it into practice.
- **Safe space** - it is important for participants to be assured that conversations remain confidential and that their experiences are not evaluated.
- **Moderation by professionals** - psychologists, family therapists or LGBT+ educators should oversee meetings, providing professional support and moderating discussions.
- **Educational materials** - it is a good idea to provide parents with brochures, books and articles on LGBT+ issues so that they have access to verified information.

Support groups can operate within schools, NGOs, psychological counseling centers, or in the form of online meetings, making it possible to reach parents in smaller towns.

## Available resources and educational materials for families

Parents who want to better understand their role in their LGBT+ child's life should have access to educational materials that provide reliable information. Valuable resources include:

- **Books and guides for parents** - publications such as "Parents, Come Out of the Closet" and "Transgender Children and Youth: Cultivating Pride and Joy with Families in Transition" help to better understand the situation of LGBT+ youth.
- **Websites and organizations** - Campaign Against Homophobia, Trans-Fusion Foundation, Lambda Warsaw - offer online guides and training for parents.
- **Documentary films and audiovisual materials** - productions such as "Disclosure" and "The Family Acceptance Project" show the stories of families that have gone through the process of accepting and supporting their child.

## The role of schools and institutions in providing support to parents

Vocational schools, as educational institutions, should actively engage in the process of supporting the families of LGBT+ youth. To this end, they can:

- **Hold workshops for parents** - meetings with psychologists and experts can help families understand processes related to gender identity and sexual orientation.
- **Create school support points** - within educational institutions it is worth providing a place where parents can get information and assistance.
- **Work with organizations that support LGBT+ people** - schools can refer parents to specialized organizations that offer psychological and legal support.
- **Introduce diversity education modules into school curricula** - awareness and openness **in the** school community can significantly affect the acceptance of families towards their LGBT+ children.

Parents are key allies of LGBT+ youth in their self-development process. Their attitude and acceptance can contribute to a child's greater self-confidence, improved psychological well-being and better social functioning. Offering families adequate support, access to support groups and sound education can make a real contribution to reducing minority stress levels and preventing exclusion of LGBT+ youth.

## 6.3 Building an open local environment



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The local community, including schools, community organizations, public institutions and businesses, can play a significant role in countering the exclusion of LGBT+ youth. It is important for local communities to implement equality measures, including training for officials, educators and employees of public institutions on anti-discrimination.

Initiatives such as local equality campaigns, diversity festivals and inclusive gatherings help break down social barriers and raise awareness of LGBT+ rights. Support for equality policies by local opinion leaders can contribute to a gradual change in residents' attitudes and a greater sense of security for LGBT+ youth.

### **Partnerships with organizations and institutions supporting LGBT+ people**

Schools, social institutions and local governments should actively cooperate with NGOs dedicated to supporting LGBT+ people. These organizations offer a wide range of services, including psychological support, legal advice, educational programs and crisis intervention for youth experiencing discrimination.

Collaborative activities can include organizing training for teaching staff, co-creating educational materials, and offering free consultations for families and students. Partnerships with NGOs can also include joint initiatives such as mentoring programs, social campaigns, or activities that integrate LGBT+ youth into society and work.

Consciously building a support network allows implementing long-term strategies to counter exclusion and provide LGBT+ youth with a safe and welcoming environment to thrive.

## **CHAPTER 7: LEGAL AND ETHICAL ASPECTS OF SUPPORTING LGBT+ PEOPLE**



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Support for LGBT+ people in schools and workplaces should be based not only on psychological and educational aspects, but also on solid legal and ethical foundations. Understanding anti-discrimination laws, the responsibilities of institutions, and professional standards in working with LGBT+ youth is key to effectively addressing exclusion and marginalization.

Legal systems in different countries around the world vary in protecting LGBT+ people. While some countries have adopted extensive anti-discrimination regulations, others still fail to provide basic rights, and in extreme cases criminalize gender identity and sexual orientation. In the context of Poland and Italy, which are analyzed in this study, differences in legal protection and implementation of equality policies are evident.

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## 7.1 LGBT+ rights in Poland, Italy and the world

The table below shows key aspects of legal protection for LGBT+ people in Poland, Italy and selected countries around the world, taking into account the issues of same-sex marriage, adoption, protection from discrimination and other regulations.

Category	Poland	Italy	European Union	United States	Canada	Russia
<b>Single-sex marriages</b>	Illegal	Illegal	Legal in most countries	Legal as of 2015. (US)	Legal since 2005.	Illegal
<b>Partnerships</b>	Unrecognized	Legal as of 2016.	Depending on the country	Depends on the state	Legal	Unrecognized
<b>Adoption by same-sex couples</b>	Illegal	Partially legal (individual cases)	Depending on the country	Legal	Legal	Illegal
<b>Anti-discrimination laws at work</b>	Lack of protection at the national level	Legal protection	Protection at the EU level	Protection at the federal level	Full protection	Penalization
<b>Anti-discrimination legislation in education</b>	Lack of detailed regulations	Partial protection	Implemented in many countries	Protection varies by state	Full protection	Penalization
<b>Recognition of the identity of transgender people</b>	Obstructed	Possible, requires diagnosis	Depending on the country	Possible in most states	Possible and easy	Unrecognized

The table shows clear differences in the level of protection of LGBT+ rights across countries. Poland and Italy still lag behind many Western European countries in the implementation of

equality policies, especially when it comes to the formal recognition of same-sex unions and the protection of transgender people.

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## **Anti-discrimination laws and their enforcement**

Anti-discrimination laws are crucial in countering the exclusion of LGBT+ people in education and the labor market. In Poland, the legal basis for anti-discrimination is the Polish Constitution, which provides equality before the law in Article 32, but does not directly address protection based on sexual orientation. In practice, this means that LGBT+ people do not have full legal tools to protect themselves from discrimination.

Italy has more extensive anti-discrimination regulations, especially in employment and education. Legislative Decree 216/2003, which implements EU directives, protects LGBT+ people from discrimination in the workplace, and schools are required to respond to cases of violence motivated by homophobia and transphobia.

At the European Union level, there are several key legal documents, including Directive 2000/78/EC on equal treatment in employment, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. However, the implementation of these laws varies considerably from one member state to another.

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## **Legal protection for LGBT+ youth**

Legal protection for LGBT+ youth involves both educational issues and ensuring a safe environment within the family and society. In Poland and Italy, there is a lack of explicit legislation to ensure that LGBT+ youth are protected from domestic violence and family exclusion. While many Western countries have support programs and shelters for youth who experience family rejection, Poland and Italy lack systemic solutions in this regard.

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## **7.2 Obligations of the school and the employer to prevent discrimination**

Schools and employers are crucial in countering discrimination against LGBT+ people. The responsibilities of these institutions include:

- **Ensuring a safe educational environment** - schools should implement anti-discrimination procedures and conduct equality education activities.
  - **Addressing discrimination in the workplace** - companies should implement diversity and inclusion policies and allow LGBT+ employees to function freely without fear of discrimination.
- 

## Legal standards and recommendations

International organizations such as **the UN, the Council of Europe and the European Commission** have developed a number of recommendations regarding the rights of LGBT+ people. In 2020, the European Commission adopted **the Strategy for LGBTIQ Equality 2020-2025**, which indicates the need to implement anti-discrimination protection mechanisms in all EU member states.

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## Practical aspects of implementing equality policies

Implementing equality policies requires the involvement of both public institutions and the private sector. Examples of good practices include:

- Creating **codes of ethics** in companies and schools.
  - Conducting **anti-discrimination training** for teachers and staff.
  - Monitor violations and implement effective intervention procedures.
- 

## 7.3 Professional ethics of psychologist and counselor in working with LGBT+ youth

Psychologists and professional counselors have a duty to provide unbiased, professional support to LGBT+ youth. Key principles of professional ethics include:

- **Respecting the student's identity and right to privacy.**
- **Avoiding the imposition of one's own worldview beliefs.**
- **Guided by the best interests of the young person.**

Ethical dilemmas can arise in situations where a psychologist's or counselor's personal values conflict with the needs of the student. In such cases, the professional should be guided by the applicable professional standards and recommendations of psychological organizations.

## **SUMMARY**

### **Key findings and recommendations**



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The handbook "**Counteracting exclusion of LGBT+ people in education and career counseling**" reveals the multidimensional nature of the problem of discrimination and marginalization of LGBT+ youth in vocational schools. The analysis takes into account the socio-cultural context, the mechanisms of exclusion, as well as the psychological and professional consequences of the lack of adequate support.

The main conclusions of the analysis include:

1. **High scale of social and educational exclusion** - in both Poland and Italy, LGBT+ youth experience discrimination, homophobia and transphobia, which negatively affects their psychological well-being and career prospects. The lack of an open educational environment leads to self-exclusion, low motivation to learn and limited career aspirations
2. **Insufficient institutional support** - the Polish education system lacks explicit legal regulations protecting LGBT+ youth from discrimination in vocational schools. In Italy, the situation is better, but there are still regions where institutional support is insufficient.
3. **Lack of adequate preparation of teaching staff** - many teachers, guidance counselors and psychologists do not have the knowledge or tools to effectively support LGBT+ students. The lack of training and systemic guidance often leaves these students without real help.
4. **Violence and microaggressions in the school environment** - LGBT+ people in vocational schools often face verbal and symbolic violence. Microaggressions, although less visible, systematically affect their self-esteem and sense of security, leading to minority stress.
5. **Impact of exclusion on career development** - LGBT+ people often avoid certain professions or industries for fear of discrimination. Self-censorship and abandonment of career aspirations are the result of negative school experiences and lack of visible role models for success in a particular industry.
6. **Failure to prepare the labor market for diversity** - companies that partner with vocational schools often fail to implement equality policies. At internship sites, LGBT+ students may experience exclusion, further limiting their professional development.

## Recommendations for systemic actions

Coordinated action at various levels is needed to counter these problems:



- **Implementation of anti-discrimination policies** - it is necessary to develop and enforce regulations that provide protection against discrimination in vocational schools and workplaces.
- **Training for teachers, psychologists and guidance counselors** - the education system should offer programs to train staff in working with LGBT+ youth, including responding to incidents of violence and exclusion.
- **Creating safe learning spaces** - schools should introduce equality programs, support groups and educational initiatives to increase acceptance among students and faculty.
- **Psychological support for LGBT+ youth** - access to specialized psychological counseling centers should be provided, and programs should be introduced to build the mental resilience of students exposed to minority stress.
- **Social campaigns and inclusive activities** - organizing events and initiatives that promote equality in education and the labor market can help change social attitudes and increase acceptance of LGBT+ people.
- **Working with parents and the community** - Families play a key role in the acceptance of LGBT+ youth, so educational and mediation programs to support parents should be developed.

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## Prospects for further development of support for LGBT+ youth in Poland and Italy

The future of support for LGBT+ youth in vocational schools depends on the gradual implementation of inclusionary strategies at both the educational and social levels. Poland and Italy are seeing some positive changes, but the pace of implementation varies.

### Directions for action in Poland

In Poland, it is necessary to implement more systemic solutions for the integration and protection of LGBT+ students in vocational schools. Possible perspectives for development include:

- **Incorporating LGBT+ topics into the core curriculum** - introducing diversity and human rights issues into civic education, social studies and parenting classes.
- **Increasing the number of psychological support programs** - developing equality initiatives and creating a network of counseling centers offering assistance to LGBT+ youth.
- **Adapting career counseling programs** - eliminating stereotypes about career choices and incorporating diversity topics into career counseling.

- **Greater role for NGOs** - LGBT+ organizations can support schools with workshops, educational materials and crisis intervention.
- **Legislative changes** - introducing legislation that obliges schools to actively counter discrimination and promote inclusion.

## Orientations in Italy

In Italy, the situation for LGBT+ people is better than in Poland, but challenges remain in implementing equality policies. Potential developments include:

- **Expand regional equality programs across the country** - currently some regions are implementing initiatives to support LGBT+ youth, but there is a need to unify efforts at the national level.
- **Greater cooperation between schools and companies** - introducing mentoring programs and inclusive apprenticeship sites that are more open to LGBT+ people.
- **Increase the availability of psychological support groups and counseling** - better funding for facilities offering psychological assistance to LGBT+ youth.
- **Social and media education** - information campaigns can help break down stereotypes and build a positive image of LGBT+ people in public spaces.

Both countries face the challenge of adapting their educational and vocational systems to the real needs of LGBT+ youth. It is crucial for institutions, NGOs and LGBT+ people themselves to work together to create a more open and inclusive society.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### List of organizations supporting LGBT+ people in Poland and Italy

Below is a table with selected organizations working for the rights of LGBT+ people in Poland and Italy. These organizations offer psychological, legal and educational support, and run social campaigns for equality and acceptance.

Name of the organization	Country	Scope of activity	Website
Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH).	Poland	Education, legal support, social campaigns	<a href="http://www.kph.org.pl">www.kph.org.pl</a>
Lambda Warsaw	Poland	Support groups, psychological counseling, intervention activities	<a href="http://www.lambdawarszawa.org">www.lambdawarszawa.org</a>
Trans-Fusion Foundation	Poland	Support for transgender people, legal and medical consultations	<a href="http://www.transfuzja.org">www.transfuzja.org</a>
Stonewall Group	Poland	Educational workshops, social events, psychological assistance	<a href="http://www.grupa-stonewall.pl">www.grupa-stonewall.pl</a>
Love Does Not Exclude	Poland	Lobbying for marriage equality, legal advice	<a href="http://www.mnw.org.pl">www.mnw.org.pl</a>

Arcigay	Italy	Italy's largest LGBT+ organization, psychological and legal support, education	<a href="http://www.arcigay.it">www.arcigay.it</a>
Gay Center Roma	Italy	Psychological assistance, legal counseling, initiatives for LGBT+ rights	<a href="http://www.gaycenter.it">www.gaycenter.it</a>
Famiglie Arcobaleno	Italy	Support for rainbow families, educational activities	<a href="http://www.famigliearcobaleno.org">www.famigliearcobaleno.org</a>
Rete Lenford	Italy	Legal aid and counseling for LGBT+ people	<a href="http://www.retelenford.it">www.retelenford.it</a>
Il Grande Colibrì	Italy	Support for LGBT+ people from ethnic and religious minorities	<a href="http://www.ilgrandecolibri.com">www.ilgrandecolibri.com</a>

These organizations are important sources of support for LGBT+ people in Poland and Italy. They offer various forms of assistance, from psychological support to legal counseling to organizing educational and social events.



## Educational materials and recommended literature

### Publications and reports on the situation of LGBT+ people in Poland and Italy

1. **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)** reports on the situation of LGBT+ people in Europe, available at [fra.europa.eu](https://fra.europa.eu).
2. **ILGA-Europe Annual Review** - annual reports on LGBT+ rights in Europe, available at [www.ilga-europe.org](https://www.ilga-europe.org).
3. **"The Situation of LGBT+ People in Poland - Report of the Ombudsman" (2021)** - legal and social analysis of the situation of LGBT+ people in Poland.
4. **"Queer in Europe: Contemporary Case Studies" (Lisa Downing, Robert Gillett, 2011)** - an analysis of the social situation of LGBT+ people in various European countries.
5. **"LGBT+ Rights in Italy: Challenges and Progress" (Lucia Galli, 2022)** - an overview of the legal and social situation of LGBT+ people in Italy.

### Textbooks and guides for teachers and career counselors

1. **"Teaching LGBT+ Issues in Schools: A Practical Guide" (Mark Jennett, 2019)** - a guide for teachers on how to teach about equality and diversity.
2. **"The Safe Space Kit: Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT+ Students" (GLSEN, 2020)** - educational materials for teachers and guidance counselors.
3. **"Parents, come out of the closet" (KPH Foundation, 2021)** - a guide for parents of LGBT+ children.
4. **"Guide for career counselors: Working with LGBT+ Youth" (Lambda Warsaw, 2022)**, a handbook for educational and career counselors.

## Examples of workshop scenarios and exercises - appendices to the manual

The manual contains detailed **scenarios for workshops and educational exercises** that can be used in working with LGBT+ youth in vocational schools. These include activities aimed at LGBT+ students, as well as their peers and teaching staff.

The attachments include:

- **Workshops on diversity and equality** - helping students understand the importance of acceptance and inclusivity in the school community.
- **Anti-stereotyping exercises** - to help break down misconceptions about LGBT+ people and build positive attitudes.
- **Simulations and case analysis** - allowing students and teachers to better understand the problems faced by LGBT+ people at school and in the workplace.
- **Activation methods in anti-discrimination education** - engaging techniques such as drama, Oxford debates, case studies and empathy maps.
- **Crisis intervention scenarios** - patterns for dealing with an LGBT+ student's experience of discrimination, peer violence or family rejection.

These scenarios were developed by specialists in psychology, education and career counseling, providing practical tools for educators, psychologists and educational consultants.

We encourage you to use the attached materials and to implement the proposed methods in your daily work with young people in vocational schools.

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