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PROUD AMBASSADORS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LGBTQIA+ YOUNGSTERS SUPPORT

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Entrepreneurship
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pal network
fighting discrimination and anti-discrimination

LEGEBITRA

REGIONAL EMILIA
CASA
delle persone

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1. Executive summary

The project entitled “*Support of the Inclusion and Reporting of LGBTQIA+ Youth and their Mental Well-being in Europe - Proud Ambassadors*” (Ref. N. 2024-1-SE02-KA220-YOU-000250648) is a European initiative funded under the Erasmus + programme committed to advancing the rights and well-being of LGBTQIA+ youth across the continent. The project aims to **promote inclusion and support for LGBTQIA+ youth, with a particular focus on protecting their mental well-being**, which is often negatively impacted by persistent discrimination. This situation frequently leads to underreporting of their experiences and a lack of adequate support.

To address this, the project engages a diverse range of stakeholders — **LGBTQIA+ organizations and activists, mental health professionals, youth workers and volunteers, educational and research institutions, local and national authorities and centers promoting mental well-being** — to foster a more responsive, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ young people across Europe.

To achieve its goal, the activities of the project are structured around four interconnected pillars:

1. **Policy reform:** the project engages in **advocacy efforts at local/national and European levels** to promote equality. This includes suggestions for inclusive policies that safeguard LGBTQIA+ individuals from discrimination.
2. **Educational Development:** the initiative develops **inclusive curricula and targeted training programs** aimed at fostering understanding and acceptance within schools and other educational institutions. These resources are designed to create safe and supportive learning environments for all students.
3. **Training Opportunities:** the project provides specialized training for educators, policymakers and advocates, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to support LGBTQIA+ youth with sensitivity and competence.
4. **Peer Guidance:** central to the project is the creation of mentorship and support networks, empowering LGBTQIA+ youth through connection, shared experiences and community-led guidance.

The partners cooperating on this project are:

- **Sensus from the Region Stockholm-Gotland (Sweden)**, Lead Partner – A network of organizations working on citizens’ rights, health and well-being.
- **CUBE NGO– Institute of Support and Studies on Entrepreneurship, Social Development and Cohesion (Greece)** – An institute focused on supporting and researching entrepreneurship, social development and social cohesion.
- **PAL Network (Belgium)** – A European network fighting discrimination and promoting the integration of vulnerable groups in education and employment.
- **Municipality of Reggio Emilia (Italy)** – In particular with the engagement of the Equal Opportunities office.
- **Legebitra (Slovenia)** – Cultural Information and Psychosocial Counselling for LGBTQIA+ Association – an LGBTQIA+ civil society organization.

This Policy Brief is the culmination of collaborative work carried out by the Proud Ambassadors partnership. This document represents the outcome of the efforts implemented under the first pillar of the project “Policy reform”: the report that brings together local realities, institutional practices and the voices of youth and professionals from across several European countries. Within this document, you will find a collection of good practices, an account of the barriers still standing in the way of equality and a set of 25 targeted recommendations for public institutions, policymakers, educators and service providers. This brief gathers the knowledge and commitment of communities working to make Europe a more just and inclusive place for LGBTQIA+ youth. It is both a record of what has been done and a call to action for what must come next. The document aims to guide policy reforms, institutional capacity building and community-led strategies for inclusive youth support.

2. Introduction

LGBTQIA+ youth across Europe face a spectrum of challenges, from social exclusion and discrimination to limited access to health and education services. While some countries have made legislative strides, gaps in implementation persist.

The Proud Ambassadors project seeks to elevate youth voices and community perspectives into the policymaking arena. In particular, the Work Package 2 “LGBTQIA+ Youth Mental Health: Good Practices and Policy Recommendations” is aimed at mapping the existing contexts of partners’ countries, in terms of good practices and positive legal, framework and regulatory interventions regarding the support towards LGBTQIA+ youngsters and their mental health and - from these inputs and from the engagement of stakeholders (experts, young professionals, activities, etc.) - drafting policy recommendations.

This brief is the culmination of work under WP2 and it aims at:

- Summarising partners’ findings, good practices and problematic areas;
- Presenting shared policy recommendations as possible active solutions for identified areas of intervention.

European Policy Context and Institutional Background

Across the European Union, the protection of LGBTQIA+ rights and the promotion of mental well-being for all young people have become growing policy priorities. The Proud Ambassadors project is embedded within this evolving EU framework and directly responds to institutional strategies aimed at reducing discrimination, advancing inclusion, and strengthening mental health systems.

EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025

The European Commission’s LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025 sets out a bold vision for building an EU “where everyone is free to be themselves.” The strategy prioritizes action across four pillars:

- Tackling discrimination, with a focus on hate crimes, workplace inequality, and institutional bias;
- Ensuring safety, including protection from hate speech and gender-based violence;
- Building inclusive societies, notably in education, health, culture and sport;
- Leading the call for equality globally, through diplomacy and international cooperation.

The strategy calls on Member States to improve national laws on non-discrimination and legal gender recognition, and to adopt national action plans on LGBTIQ equality. The Proud Ambassadors' recommendations align directly with these priorities, especially in the domains of inclusive education, access to healthcare, and institutional accountability.

European Youth Strategy (2019–2027)

The EU Youth Strategy promotes youth participation, inclusion, and empowerment across Europe. It emphasizes mental health, non-discrimination, and equal access to services, aligning closely with the project's goals. Two of the 11 European Youth Goals are particularly relevant:

- Goal 3: Inclusive Societies – aims to ensure equal rights for all young people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Goal 5: Mental Health and Well-being – promotes mental health education, access to services and the reduction of stigma.

Through its youth-led focus groups and advocacy for inclusive youth policy, Proud Ambassadors contributes to the implementation of these goals on a transnational level.

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union enshrines the principles of dignity, equality and freedom. Article 21 prohibits discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation and other characteristics. Article 24 protects children's rights, including the right to express their views and have them taken into account in matters affecting them.

The policy proposals advanced in this brief seek to ensure that these rights are not only upheld in law but also realized in everyday institutional practices, particularly for LGBTQIA+ youth.

European Pillar of Social Rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights, adopted in 2017, provides a foundation for social inclusion and equal access to quality healthcare, education and employment. Principle 1 guarantees the right to equal treatment and opportunities. Principle 16 ensures access to healthcare and principle 11 emphasizes quality and inclusive education.

The project's focus on structural reforms in schools, mental health services, and workplaces supports the implementation of these rights, especially for marginalized LGBTQIA+ youth.

Despite these institutional frameworks, lived experiences across Europe show a persistent gap between legal rights and real-world inclusion for LGBTQIA+ youth. According to the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 62% of LGBTI youth aged 15–24 reported avoiding public displays of affection for fear of assault and nearly half of trans and non-binary youth faced discrimination in education settings¹. Mental health data is equally concerning: LGBTQIA+ youth remain three to five times more likely to face depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts than their cisgender heterosexual peers². These statistics underscore the urgency of translating EU commitments into tangible, youth-centred reforms at national and local levels.

In this broader context, the Proud Ambassadors project serves as both a response to and a mechanism for advancing EU priorities on equality, inclusion, and youth mental well-being. The following sections detail the participatory and research-based methods used to ground these policy goals in real-world experiences across five Member States.

¹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), “**A long way to go for LGBTI equality**” (2020)
<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/eu-lgbti-survey-results>

² ILGA-Europe, “**Mental Health and Well-being of LGBTI People in Europe**” (2023)
<https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/mental-health-and-well-being-of-lgbti-people-in-europe-2023>

3. Methodology

The methodology employed for drafting this report, includes specific activities implemented by all partners:

- Identification of local good practices in each partners' country
- Online International Inception Meetings
- Local Focus Groups

a. Identification of good practices in each partners' country

Each territory conducted a national report to map existing good practices and positive legal and/or political interventions with regards to the support given to the LGBTQIA+ communities, with emphasis to young people and the compliance with the EU standards, in order to identify problematic areas. Desk research has been conducted by each partner for mapping the current situation and existing good practices at local/regional/national level. At the end, 5 national reports were produced with a total of 51 good practices.

These reports represented the starting point for partners to organise next activities and to start discussing, both locally and internationally, about gaps and positive experiences.

b. Online international inception meetings

In order to exchange good practices from each context, partners started to engage external stakeholders relevant for the project. In particular: young activists, young professionals (e.g. educators, mental health operators, psychologists, youth educators, etc.), experts (professionals within or outside partners' organisations with high expertise on LGBTQIA+ and youth mental health topics). These stakeholders were invited for the first international exchanges with their peers from other countries thanks to the 2 online inception meetings that were organised by the project's partnership. During these meetings, participants could know each other and, in particular, could know other countries' good practices, legal and regulatory contexts and gaps. Participants exchanged and engaged in high level conversations about their own work environment and national/regional/local context. From these discussions, some topics and priorities to tackle emerged.

c. Local focus groups

Five focus groups were conducted - one in each partner country - with diverse participants, including policymakers, youth advocates, educators and mental health professionals (some were the same participants of inception meetings, but not all of them, as the local focus group allowed a wider participation of stakeholders as they were held in local languages). A mix of in-person and online methods ensured accessibility and inclusivity.

Stakeholder Profiles

Each focus group included at least five external stakeholders with relevance to LGBTQIA+ youth issues. Participants represented:

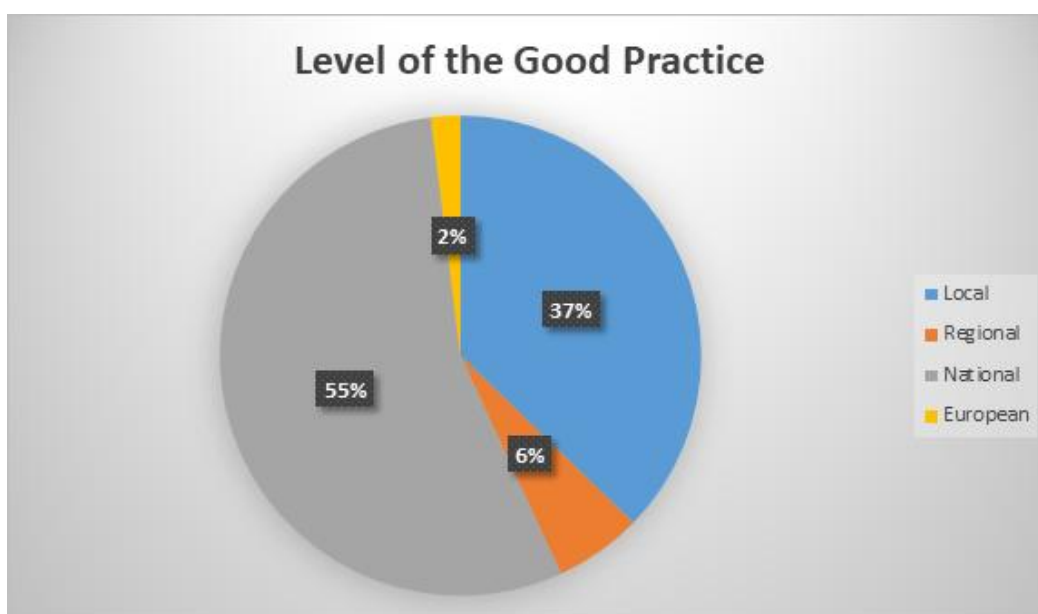
- Local government authorities
- Youth support professionals (psychologists, teachers, social workers)
- Youth activists
- Academic experts
- Civil society organizations
- LGBTQIA+ community leaders

4. Research findings from local Good Practices and Digital Inception meetings

From the search and analysis of existing good practices and digital inception meetings, partners could identify and discuss common challenges and gaps, that were then further discussed within local focus groups. All partners worked to identify the good practices from their own local/regional or national contexts, and then they analysed and described them in national reports. Below, the overview of this work.

Good Practices

A total of 51 good practices were gathered among the 5 partners. An overview of the practices is provided below.





SWEDEN: GOOD PRACTICES

by Sensus – Region Stockholm-Gotland

a. LGBTQIA+ Youth Mental Health in Sweden by SENSUS

SENSUS has investigated national good practices in Sweden that support LGBTQIA+ youth, focusing on legal and policy-driven initiatives aimed at fostering inclusion, combating discrimination, and ensuring equal rights. The analysis highlights the role of civil society in addressing challenges faced by young LGBTQIA+ individuals, alongside a review of key laws, policies and institutional frameworks that influence their everyday experiences. Emphasis has been placed on measures targeting professionals who interact with LGBTQIA+ youth, including educators, healthcare providers and other institutional representatives, as these environments often play a critical role in shaping young people's well-being and sense of belonging.

Good practice	Level	Sector	Topic/s
A strategy for equal rights and opportunities regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (<i>En strategi för lika rättigheter och möjligheter oavsett sexuell läggning, könsidentitet eller könsuttryck</i>)	National	Public/policy recommendation	Enhance the well-being and social participation of LGBTQIA+ individuals, focusing on marginalized groups and youth.
Intervention to educate staff in schools about inclusion for LGBTQIA+ persons, from the NGO Transammans	Local	NGO/education	The training aims to provide educators with tools and knowledge to ensure that schools are safe, inclusive and supportive spaces for all students.
A digital platform for supportive conversations with a social worker for individuals exploring or	National	NGO/service for private persons	Digital platform for supportive conversations with a social worker for individuals exploring or dealing with gender identity-related issues.

dealing with gender identity-related issues			
RFSU's Method Bank for Teaching about Sexuality, Consent, and Relationships	National	Education	Resource for teachers to facilitate lessons on sexuality, consent and relationships.
Online intervention, create safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ persons online	Local/national	Faith-based support, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, social media engagement	Online communities that provide a secure and affirming environment where minorities within the LGBTQIA+ Christian community can connect, share experiences and feel empowered..
Policy development, advocacy and healthcare equality initiatives	National	Healthcare, public policy, human rights	Efforts to address healthcare inequities, with increased awareness and policy adjustments.
Action plan, based on survey results	National	Policy recommendation	Assess and improve the safety and well-being of LGBTQIA+ youth in Sweden
Legal advice, advocacy, support services, informational resource	Local/national	Human rights, social services, legal support, LGBTQIA+ rights	Services aimed at supporting young trans people through gender-confirming processes, with a particular focus on navigating the legal aspects.
Legal framework, anti-discrimination measures	National	Human rights, employment, education	The law aims to prevent and combat discrimination based on various grounds, including gender, gender identity and gender expression, ensuring equal

			rights and opportunities for all individuals.
Policy and legal interventions - Reform of the gender recognition law (Könstillhörighetslagen) to allow self-identification of gender without the need for a medical diagnosis or sterilization.	National	Legislation and Human Rights	Reform of the gender recognition law which allows individuals to self-identify their gender without needing a medical diagnosis or undergoing sterilization.



GREECE: GOOD PRACTICES

by CUBE NGO

b. Creating Space for LGBTQIA+ Youth – A Greek Perspective by CUBE NGO

The Greek good practices are mainly bills in Greek legal context. Based on the lack of specific interventions related to LGBTQIA+ youth and/or their mental wellbeing exclusively, the research focused on the general legal system of the country, which consequently serves the protection of LGBTQIA+ youngsters' rights, at least to some extent.

Good practice	Level	Sector	Topic/s
Law 3500/2006	National	Legal/social welfare	Domestic violence prevention, victim support, legal protection
Law 3896/2010	National	Legal/social welfare	Anti-discrimination in employment and occupation
Law 4356/2015	National	Family Law, Social Services, Human Rights	Recognition of civil partnerships, same-sex couples' rights
Law 4443/2016	National	Application of Equal Treatment	Anti-discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.
Law 4491/2017	National	Human Rights Law, Legal Identity	Gender self-determination, legal gender change
National Strategy for Equality (2021)	National	Legal, Education, Social Services	LGBTQIA+ equality, anti-discrimination, public awareness
Law 5089/2024	National	Legal/social welfare	Same-sex civil marriage, family rights, adoption rights

Thessaloniki Pride	Local/regional/national	Awareness, Advocacy, Education	LGBTQ+ visibility, anti-discrimination, policy advocacy
Athens pride	Local/regional/national	Education, Advocacy, Community Building	LGBTQIA+ visibility, rights advocacy, awareness raising
Colour Youth	Local/regional/national	Education, Advocacy, Legal Support	LGBTQIA+ youth support, anti-bullying, legal and psychological assistance



BELGIUM: GOOD PRACTICES

by PAL Network

c. A European Snapshot on LGBTQIA+ Youth: Mental Health, Rights and Policy Gaps in Belgium by PAL Network

The good practices have been identified through comprehensive desk research, focusing on both legal frameworks and community initiatives supporting LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Simultaneously, grassroots and institutional initiatives, including mental health services and awareness campaigns, were documented for their role in fostering inclusive communities.

Good Practice	Level	Sector	Topic/s
Belgium's Comprehensive Sexual Education Policy (2012)	National	Education and training	Gender identity, sexual orientation, consent
Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage (2003)	National	Legal and civil rights	Marriage equality, LGBTQIA+ rights
National Action Plan Against Homophobia and Transphobia (2018-2022)	National	Equality and inclusion	Anti-discrimination, violence prevention
LGBTQIA+ Action Plan in Wallonia (2020-2024)	Regional (Wallonia)	Human rights, social services	Healthcare, employment, education
Legalization of Adoption Rights for Same-Sex Couples (2006)	National	Legal and civil rights	Adoption equality, family rights
Anti-Discrimination Law	National	Anti-discrimination, legal protection	Workplace equality, hate crime prevention
Lumi	National	Mental health support, social services	LGBTQIA+ youth support, identity struggles

Gender Recognition Law (2018)	National	Legal, civil rights	Legal gender change, transgender rights
Rainbow Houses Network	Local/regional	Social inclusion, education, support services	Safe spaces, community support
School & Welzijn Alliance	Regional (Flanders)	Education, social welfare	LGBTQIA+ inclusion, bullying prevention



SLOVENIA: GOOD PRACTICES

by Legebitra

d. A Slovenian perspective by LEGEBITRA

The investigation was conducted on a nationwide scale, initially focusing on policies developed to enhance the mental well-being of LGBTQIA+ youth. However, during the course of our research, it became evident that there is a scarcity of comprehensive, policy-based initiatives dedicated specifically to LGBTQIA+ mental health. This gap highlighted the need to broaden the approach to include a wider range of practices. Therefore, the investigation was expanded to incorporate good practices from NGOs and educational institutions, which have been instrumental in addressing the needs of LGBTQIA+ youth at the community level.

Good Practice	Level	Sector	Topic/s
National Program on Youth 2016-2022	National	Government / Public Policy	Youth development, education, employment, social inclusion
National Mental Health Program 2018-2028	National	Healthcare	Mental health, community-based care, anti-bullying, stigma reduction
Municipality of Ljubljana Youth Strategy 2016-2025	Local	Youth	Social inclusion, mental health, safe spaces, diversity
LGBTQIA+ Youth Center	Local	Youth	Safe spaces, mental health, social resilience, community engagement
LGBTQIA+ Psychosocial Counselling Program	National	NGO Counselling /	Psychosocial support, mental health, discrimination, safe spaces
Legal Counselling for LGBTQIA+ People	National	Law	Legal rights, discrimination, hate crimes, administrative support

Programme for Minority Stress Relief Sqvot	National/International	Social Welfare / NGO	Housing exclusion, mental health, emergency accommodation
Harm Reduction in Nightlife and Drug Use Prevention	National	Social Justice	Drug and alcohol harm reduction, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, psychosocial support
Good Practices of LGBTQIA+ Inclusion and Support in Schools	National	Primary and Secondary Education	Inclusivity, anti-bullying, safe spaces, diversity
Maribor skozi rožnata očala	Local	Community / Education	Awareness, inclusivity, LGBTQIA+ visibility



ITALY: GOOD PRACTICES

by Municipality of Reggio Emilia

e. An Italian perspective by Municipality of Reggio Emilia

The good practices gathered from the Municipality of Reggio Emilia concerns different aspects of LGBTQIA+ issues: regulatory, communications, network, recognition, support and training and covers several years of activities. They are promoted by the Municipality of Reggio Emilia together with several stakeholders; in particular, practices n. 1 and 2 set regulatory and operational frameworks that allow several other initiatives.

Good Practice	Level	Sector	Topic/s
Agreement with Arcigay Gioconda Association	Local	Community, Information, Social Services	LGBTQIA+ support, awareness, counseling, anti-discrimination
Inter-institutional Table for Fighting Homotransnegativity and LGBTQIA+ Inclusion	Local	Education, Health, Justice, Civil Society	Cross-sector policy, anti-discrimination, institutional cooperation
Participation in the RE.A.DY Network	Local/National	Governance, Social inclusion	Anti-discrimination policy, network building, local governance
Regional Observatory on Discrimination and Violence	Regional	Social welfare, Public health	Data collection, policy monitoring, regional coordination
Alias Identity for Transgender People	Local	Education, Public administration, Services	Gender identity, self-determination, administrative recognition
Trans Desk	Local	Health	Gender-affirming care, psychosocial support, trans health services
Rainbow House "Pier Vittorio Tondelli"	Local	Housing, Social support	Emergency shelter, LGBTQIA+ youth, migrants, trans people
Training Course: Detention and Transgender People	Local	Justice, Training	Prison inclusion, professional training, trans rights

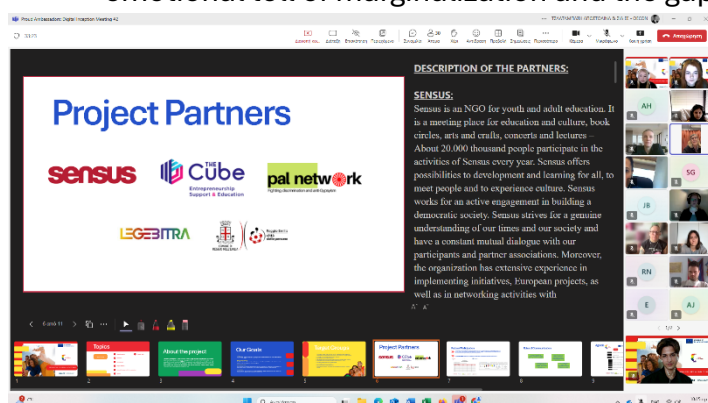
European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award	European	Communication , Governance	Visibility, institutional recognition, inclusive policymaking
Initiatives for World Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Interpersonal Violence	Local	Culture, Education	Awareness-raising, visibility, LGBTQIA+ history and representation
Training Course for Educators and Teachers on Inclusion and Student Well-being	Local	Education	School inclusion, teacher training, gender and affectivity education

Digital Inception Meetings

Besides this thorough local/national work implemented by partners in each context, international exchanges brought added value to the research. In particular, thanks to two online digital inception meetings, participants with different backgrounds and perspectives about LGBTQIA+ and youth mental health met to discuss national/local contexts, in terms of good practices and common challenges. These meetings brought together a dynamic and diverse group of participants, including policymakers, educators, researchers, youth workers, legal advocates, social workers, municipal representatives and LGBTQIA+ activists. The richness of their experiences, both professional and lived, shaped a common understanding of the structural, cultural and emotional dimensions of LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

Across both meetings, **more than 40 professionals from Belgium, Sweden, Greece, Slovenia and Italy engaged in structured discussions.** Participants included:

- Policy experts and municipal officials, such as representatives from the Municipality of Reggio Emilia and the Greek NGO CUBE, offering insight into institutional frameworks and public administration.
- Educators and trainers, especially from Sweden's Sensus, who have been at the forefront of LGBTQIA+ educational reform and teacher training.
- Legal and anti-discrimination specialists, including staff from Swedish and Belgian anti-discrimination bureaus and Slovenia's Legebitra, providing technical knowledge on gender recognition, reporting mechanisms and justice sector gaps.
- Grassroots activists and youth workers, many from LGBTQIA+ associations from Reggio Emilia and Belgium and the Christian Rainbow Movement, who highlighted community resilience and lived realities, especially in faith-based and rural settings.
- Health and mental well-being professionals, including psychologists and researchers from cooperatives and associations, who stressed the emotional toll of marginalization and the gaps in care.



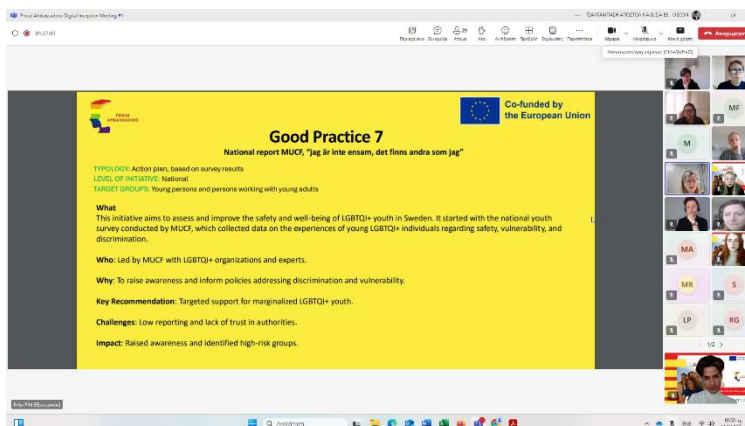
What set the Proud Ambassadors inception meetings apart was not just the diversity of the countries represented — but the diversity of voices, lived experiences and fields of expertise that converged. The

meetings drew on a rich tapestry of professional and personal perspectives, enabling conversations to move beyond abstract policy talk into the real-world terrain where laws are lived — or not lived — by LGBTQIA+ youth.

As participants shared their insights, common threads began to emerge. Regardless of borders or legal systems, **young queer people across Europe are still navigating many of the same systemic challenges**. Legal protections, where they exist, often fail to fully encompass the identities and needs of non-binary, transgender and intersex individuals. In many cases, laws that look progressive on paper falter at the level of implementation, leaving significant gaps between rights and reality. **Access to mental health support is another deeply felt concern**. Particularly in rural areas or among migrant and multiply marginalized youth, services are either unavailable or unequipped to respond with cultural and identity competence. Even when support structures are in place, too many professionals remain ill-prepared to offer affirming care. In schools, meanwhile, LGBTQIA+ students continue to face discrimination — from outdated curricula to educators lacking adequate training — further entrenching isolation and vulnerability.

The **absence of safe spaces — both physical and emotional** — was a recurring theme. For many young queer people, there simply are no environments where they can feel secure, validated and supported. Where discrimination does occur, underreporting is the norm. Mistrust of institutions and fear of backlash discourage youth from speaking out, highlighting the urgent need for systems that ensure both protection and accountability.

While these issues were widely shared, the meetings also made clear that each country and locality brings its own unique context. Belgium was recognized for having a strong legal foundation, especially in gender recognition, but struggles with uneven recognition of non-binary and intersex identities. Sweden's progressive policies and educational inclusion were praised, but concerns remain around access to gender-affirming healthcare, particularly for rural and



marginalized populations. In Greece, legislative gains — such as self-identification laws and same-sex marriage — stand in tension with deeply rooted cultural resistance. Italy's national-level conservatism has slowed progress, yet municipalities like Reggio Emilia demonstrate how localized leadership and collaboration with civil society can push inclusion forward. Slovenia, meanwhile, has pioneered promising mental health and youth center initiatives, though these remain under-resourced and fragmented.

These nuanced conversations brought forward not only problems but also pockets of innovation and hope. Slovenia's LGBTQIA+ youth center in Ljubljana was celebrated for its holistic approach — blending peer support, mental health resources, and community building in a youth-led environment. In Italy, alias identity policies implemented in public institutions are offering trans youth everyday recognition without medical or legal gatekeeping. Sweden and Belgium's comprehensive teacher training programs were frequently cited as examples of systemic integration of LGBTQIA+ issues into school life. Even religious spaces, often viewed as exclusionary, were reimagined through initiatives like Sweden's Rainbow Movement, showing how faith and inclusion can coexist. Municipal frameworks, such as Reggio Emilia's inter-institutional tables, illustrated the power of cross-sector collaboration in creating sustainable, locally rooted LGBTQIA+ policies.

From these discussions, the Proud Ambassadors project began shaping a strategic roadmap for change. Several priorities crystallized across the meetings. Chief among them is the **need for legal reform** that includes non-binary and intersex identities, along with stronger enforcement mechanisms to ensure that anti-discrimination laws are not just symbolic but actionable. Participants also called for national-scale rollout of localized initiatives like alias identity systems.

Equally important is the **transformation of educational spaces**. There was a strong consensus on introducing mandatory, SOGIESC-responsive curricula, accompanied by expert-led teacher training and student well-being programs. In the realm of mental health, the expansion of affirming services — particularly in underserved areas — was identified as a cornerstone for youth support, alongside funding and institutional backing for LGBTQIA+ centers and community safe spaces.

Public institutions also came under focus. Stakeholders urged the adoption of mandatory sensitivity and anti-bias training for law enforcement, public sector professionals, and healthcare workers. Specialized, intersectional training modules were recommended to support professionals working with LGBTQIA+ migrants, young people, and persons with disabilities.

Finally, accountability structures must be strengthened. Participants stressed the need for accessible, confidential reporting tools and clear institutional procedures for addressing discrimination, backed by monitoring and evaluation systems that can track progress over time.

Common Good Practices

From these exchanges, the following common good practices and initiatives emerges:

- Youth-led peer support networks and safe spaces
- Civil society partnerships with schools and municipalities
- Public campaigns for visibility and education (e.g., Pride events, drag story time)
- Non-formal education initiatives led by NGOs
- Legal progress in gender recognition and anti-discrimination

These practices demonstrate how community efforts can succeed even in policy-constrained environments.

Common Challenges and Gaps

Across countries, several key challenges emerged:

- Lack of LGBTQIA+ training for educators, counsellors and public sector professionals
- Inconsistent or absent implementation of anti-discrimination laws
- Limited mental health resources tailored to LGBTQIA+ youth
- Institutional cultures that reinforce gender binaries or stigmatize non-conformity
- Insufficient visibility and safe contact points in schools
- Political backlash or resistance to inclusive reforms

5. Focus Groups

From these common points, partners started to organise and engage local experts, activists, youth and educators in order to implement local focus groups to further discuss these aspects from a more local/national perspective. The starting questions of the focus groups were:

- Concerning the topics emerged and discussed during the digital inception meetings, what are the positive initiatives that exist in our contexts?
- What are the main challenges and barriers?
- What other main needs and topics relevant for the experts and youth engaged?

Here is an overview of the discussion that emerged from these 5 local focus groups.

Sensus, Sweden

The focus group conducted by Sensus was aimed at exploring the mental health landscape for LGBTQIA+ youth in Sweden. This initiative gathered perspectives and insights from stakeholders with different backgrounds, including activism and professional expertise, and provided perspectives to reflect on both the strengths and critical shortcomings of Sweden's current support systems. **While the country has long been regarded as a leader in LGBTQIA+ rights, the conversations revealed a more complex and nuanced reality**, where formal protections often fail to translate into lived safety and inclusion.

Participants described an **ecosystem in which civil society organizations are at the forefront of change**. These groups are not only creating safe spaces and peer support networks, but are also advocating for policy reforms and providing education in areas where state institutions fall short. Meanwhile, cultural initiatives and public media platforms are helping amplify queer voices, counteracting stigma through visibility and storytelling.

However, professionals emphasized that mental health support remains deeply uneven across the country. Access to competent care for LGBTQIA+ youth, particularly those in rural areas, is limited. Only three clinics in Sweden provide trans-specific healthcare to youth, resulting in long waiting lists and, at times, denial of essential treatments such as puberty blockers. This geographic disparity is mirrored in education, where inclusivity depends largely on the attitudes of individual teachers and administrators. **Schools**, despite legal obligations to ensure safe environments, are frequently reported as unsafe or unwelcoming. Trans and non-binary students often face institutional barriers, such as being

forced into gendered spaces or denied recognition of their identities. Teachers may lack the training — or the confidence — to address LGBTQIA+ issues effectively, with some even turning to students themselves to explain these topics to their peers. Recent political and parental pushback against inclusive curricula has only added pressure, prompting fears of censorship and regression.

Sweden's legal landscape presents a similar contradiction. On paper, progress continues: the **Gender Recognition Act** has been updated to allow individuals as young as 16 to change their legal gender and non-binary identities are increasingly acknowledged. Yet, the Discrimination Act still operates within a binary framework, leaving non-binary individuals in a legal gray area. Furthermore, while new legislation such as the “Proud and Safe” plan outlines stronger rights for LGBTQIA+ people through 2027, parallel reforms to teacher education threaten to remove human rights content, undermining years of progress in inclusion.

Participants identified several urgent gaps. **Training** on LGBTQIA+ inclusion is inconsistent and often absent. Certification programs like LGBTQIA+-labelling may give the illusion of safety without ensuring substantive change. Legal processes are frequently opaque or inaccessible, with public consultations sometimes scheduled during holiday periods — effectively excluding smaller organizations from contributing. Civil society, once a cornerstone of Sweden's equality movement, is facing funding cuts that reduce its capacity to respond.

Despite these challenges, the tone of the discussions was not defeatist — it was determined. Participants called for a set of clear and systemic reforms. These included mandatory LGBTQIA+ competency training across all public-facing sectors, expansion of gender-affirming healthcare, and reforms to the Discrimination Act to recognize non-binary identities. They stressed the need for inclusive educational policies that guarantee student dignity and safety, alongside legal reform processes that genuinely include marginalized voices.

Participants also proposed more community-focused solutions: local mental health hubs specialized in LGBTQIA+ care, support programs for inclusive parenting, and expanded access to safe leisure spaces and sports for queer youth. They also highlighted the need to heal tensions between feminist and trans movements through dialogue and collaboration—recognizing that sustainable change requires solidarity across all struggles for equality.

In sum, while Sweden remains a global benchmark in LGBTQIA+ rights, the lived experience of young queer people tells a more uneven story. Through the voices of professionals and community members, this focus group underscored that policy must be lived, practiced and continuously adapted — until every LGBTQIA+ young person can feel truly supported.

CUBE NGO, Greece

In March 2025, CUBE NGO brought together a diverse group of professionals, activists and young leaders in a focus group to confront one of Greece's most pressing challenges: the mental health and social inclusion of LGBTQIA+ youth. Conducted online and led by experienced facilitators, the session served as both a reflection on the current reality and a platform for building concrete proposals.

The focus group revealed a powerful contrast. **On paper, Greece has made significant legislative strides.** Laws recognizing civil partnerships, protecting against discrimination and allowing legal gender recognition without medical intervention are already in place. The 2024 law legalizing same-sex marriage and the establishment of a national strategy for LGBTQIA+ equality further demonstrate this commitment.

“When a law is passed,

that does not necessarily mean it will be implemented”

Yet, as participants emphasized, passing a law does not mean it's implemented. Across sectors — from education to healthcare to employment — support mechanisms remain inconsistent, under-enforced or entirely absent. Schools, in particular, are lagging. Teachers often lack even basic training on LGBTQIA+ issues and higher education programs, including psychology faculties, fail to prepare professionals to address queer mental health concerns effectively. The lack of coordination between schools and families often leaves LGBTQIA+ youth unsupported, caught in environments where acceptance is conditional or entirely lacking. Participants - from legal, activist and public sector backgrounds - also pointed out that in both public and private workplaces, especially in small businesses, discrimination is common and mechanisms for redress are weak or non-existent. In healthcare, LGBTQIA+ individuals experience layered stress: the psychological burden of marginalization often manifests in psychosomatic conditions, yet health professionals remain untrained in providing affirming care.

Despite these challenges, the group offered a vision of hope grounded in realism and backed by policy proposals.

One of the central recommendations was to make **SOGIESC-responsive training** mandatory for educators at all levels—starting in kindergartens and extending through to universities. Participants stressed that inclusivity must be embedded early and reinforced often. Another call to action centered on strengthening **detection and reporting systems**, including reforming the Greek Ombudsman mechanism and launching public awareness campaigns to encourage reporting of discrimination.

The need for systemic reform extended to law enforcement. Participants noted the absence of mandatory LGBTQIA+ **training for police and judicial officers** and advocated for a legally binding framework to address this. Without it, LGBTQIA+ individuals remain vulnerable not only to violence but to a justice system ill-equipped to protect them.

Local action was also a priority. While major cities like Athens and Thessaloniki host pride events and support networks, smaller cities and rural areas often lack visibility and resources. The group proposed **localized awareness campaigns** run in cooperation with NGOs to tailor efforts to regional needs, breaking the monopoly of capital-based advocacy. Similarly, they urged the Ministry of Education to ensure the anti-bullying platform introduced under Law 5029/2023 is not just a symbolic tool, but a widely used and understood mechanism, particularly by LGBTQIA+ students and their families.

In addition to policy, participants suggested grassroots community actions that could be immediately pursued. These included organizing parental education programs, giving employees time off to attend inclusion seminars, and establishing local mental health infrastructure to offer urgent and specialized care for LGBTQIA+ youth. The overarching message was clear: institutional change must be matched with every day, personal engagement.

Ultimately, the focus group was more than a discussion—it was a moment of shared urgency and coordinated vision. While Greece has taken commendable legislative steps, a gap remains between intention and impact. Bridging that divide will require legal reform, professional training, community engagement and a willingness to reimagine public systems through the lens of equity.

PAL Network, Belgium

On March 10th, 2025, PAL Network convened a multinational online focus group to tackle the challenges affecting LGBTQIA+ youth across Europe, particularly in relation to mental health and social inclusion in Belgium. The discussion brought together professionals and activists from Belgium, Romania, Armenia, Greece, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria. Their diverse perspectives painted a mosaic of regional disparities, legal advancements and pressing needs.



At the heart of the session was Belgium — a country often praised for its progressive LGBTQIA+ legislation. Belgium’s legal landscape includes adoption rights for same-sex couples, gender recognition laws and anti-discrimination statutes. The country has also pioneered good practices such as comprehensive sex education, inclusive school policies and a national action plan against homophobia and transphobia. Yet, **participants agreed that real-world implementation lags behind the law**. For transgender youth, access to gender-affirming healthcare is still fraught with

long waiting times and a shortage of trained professionals. Mental health services, while available, are often ill-equipped to meet the unique needs of queer youth.

Beyond Belgium, participants from Armenia, the Czech Republic, and Greece shared common frustrations — especially around employment discrimination, school-based bullying and healthcare inaccessibility. In many countries, LGBTQIA+ individuals are still forced to navigate legal grey areas or face outright barriers to recognition and care. In Armenia, trans individuals are often confined to insecure work without contracts. In Greece, while anti-discrimination laws exist, weak enforcement leaves youth vulnerable. Across the board, **the need for inclusive education and trained, affirming professionals was a recurring theme**.

The focus group also spotlighted promising models. Belgium’s Lumi helpline, regional Rainbow Houses and inclusive curricula show what’s possible when policy meets practice. Yet, even these are often underfunded or concentrated in urban centers. Rural areas — across all represented countries — remain underserved and socially conservative, where LGBTQIA+ youth are more likely to experience isolation and invisibility.

Participants didn’t just share concerns — they proposed bold, concrete changes. First, they emphasized the need for standardized, universal access to gender-affirming and mental health care—including legislation that guarantees these services through public healthcare. They called for inclusive education reforms, including compulsory teacher and psychologist training and the integration of gender and sexual diversity into school curricula. These steps, they argued, are essential to create safe, affirming learning environments.

Legal reform was another priority. While **Belgium's Gender Recognition Act** allows for self-declaration, it still involves medical procedures that violate the principle of self-determination. Participants proposed fully depathologized

gender recognition laws, allowing individuals to update legal documents without medical gatekeeping. On the employment front, they suggested a “Workplace Inclusion Act” that goes beyond banning discrimination to actively promoting diversity through training, monitoring, and inclusive hiring practices.

Media also came under scrutiny. While many laws prohibit discriminatory content, few actively promote diverse representation. Participants recommended laws to mandate fair and accurate LGBTQIA+ visibility in television, film, and journalism—backed by public awareness campaigns to challenge stigma and normalize inclusion.

Outside of formal policy, the focus group proposed grassroots and community-led actions: expanding queer visibility in rural media, setting up inclusive support networks, empowering LGBTQIA+ individuals through cultural initiatives, and ensuring parents and caregivers have access to education about gender and sexual diversity.

In closing, the PAL Network’s focus group offered an assessment and also a collective commitment to change. While laws have progressed, implementation gaps persist. Real equality demands a synchronized effort: one where laws are enforced, professionals are trained, communities are empowered and every LGBTQIA+ young person can access rights, respect and support they deserve.

LEGEBITRA, Slovenia

On April 8th, 2025, Legebitra hosted an in-person expert focus group in Slovenia to address the systemic gaps affecting LGBTQIA+ youth, particularly in relation to mental health and social inclusion. The discussion brought together 5 academic researchers, mental health professionals and policy practitioners to evaluate the state’s institutional response and to propose pathways for meaningful reform.

Slovenia served as the central context for the session. **While legal frameworks referencing LGBTQIA+ inclusion exist in national strategies**, participants were unanimous: **implementation is lacking, especially in rural and school-based settings**. Queer and trans youth continue to face environments where services are either unsafe or nonexistent. Public mental health services fail to provide affirming care, and there are no dedicated support systems designed specifically for LGBTQIA+ youth within the public sector.

“We’ve heard enough about how these services are ‘for everyone’—but in reality, they’re built around a default straight, cis, and neurotypical young person”

The discussion underscored several pressing issues: a widespread lack of LGBTQIA+ competency among psychologists, teachers and social workers; persistent homophobia and transphobia, especially outside urban centers; absence of privacy protections, which expose youth to involuntary outing: these barriers result in emotional exhaustion and avoidance of support systems. As one participant said:

“Young people are not just avoiding support, they are strategically adapting to systems that consistently harm or erase them.”

Despite these challenges, participants shared examples of community resilience. Good practices often stem from the dedication of individual professionals or NGOs — such as peer-led support groups, short-term education workshops and affirming private practitioners. However, these efforts are isolated and unsystematic. A major theme was the disconnection between symbolic policy and lived experience. Participants critiqued state institutions for enacting vague, unenforceable policies that give the illusion of progress while justifying inaction. Without funding, oversight, or accountability mechanisms, institutional commitments remain rhetorical.

During the focus group, participants put forward a series of actionable reforms designed to ensure meaningful and systemic support for LGBTQIA+ youth across sectors. A key recommendation was the mandatory implementation of **LGBTQIA+ competency training for all professionals in education, youth services and mental health**. This training would be tied to professional licensure and reinforced by accountability mechanisms, ensuring that inclusive practices are not optional, but embedded in professional standards. Another critical proposal was the designation of trained staff members in every school who are equipped to provide affirming support to LGBTQIA+ students. Participants also advocated for the establishment of regional LGBTQIA+ mental health hubs, fully integrated into public health systems. These centers would provide both crisis intervention and long-term mental health care, delivered by professionals with specific training in LGBTQIA+ affirming practices. To combat ongoing discrimination, the group called for enforceable anti-discrimination protocols, complete with clear consequences for harmful behaviors such as misgendering, outing or the refusal of care. These protocols would set a new standard for accountability within institutions. Finally, participants emphasized the **need for permanent collaboration mechanisms between civil society and government**, allowing for the co-development and monitoring of inclusive policies. These mechanisms must ensure meaningful, resourced participation from affected communities, particularly LGBTQIA+ youth, to keep policies grounded in lived experience and evolving needs.

Participants also emphasized the power of community action. Recommendations included increasing queer visibility in institutional spaces, building informal networks of affirming professionals, advocating for local government funding of inclusive programs and offering parental education to counter isolation and stigma. Crucially, they urged professionals to “stop pretending neutrality is a safe option,” calling for active advocacy within institutional settings.

In conclusion, Legebitra’s focus group illuminated the stark gap between policy and practice in Slovenia. While formal commitments to inclusion exist, they are insufficient without infrastructure, enforcement and grassroots participation. True equality for LGBTQIA+ youth demands more than legal recognition — it requires structural change, cultural shift, and the centering of queer lived experience at every level of society.

Municipality of Reggio Emilia, Italy

On April 2nd, 2025, the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, supported by E35 Foundation, hosted a local online focus group as part of the Proud Ambassadors project. The event brought together 7 external participants and 4 internal staff among local policymakers, educators, activists and professionals working in youth support, health, education and LGBTQIA+ advocacy to explore the challenges and opportunities surrounding the mental well-being and social inclusion of queer youth. The group was diverse in background and expertise: representatives from territorial anti-discrimination services, head of equal opportunities office of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, coordinator of rainbow house and expert in LGBTQIA+ immigrants, youth educators working with migrants and refugees and LGBTQIA+ activists from local association contributed to a rich and candid conversation.

Che cosa ricomprende il concetto di "benessere mentale"?

13 responses

uguaglianza

non discriminato
sicurezza normalità
consapevolezza no giudizio
cura posti sicuri
equilibrio ascolto
serenità diritti
contesto accogliente

(Q: What does the concept of “mental wellbeing” include? A: no judgement, non-discriminatory, security, awareness, normality, equality, care, safe places, balance, listening, serenity, rights, welcoming environment)

The discussion centred on four major themes that emerged during the previous online international inception meetings and relevant for the participants: **language, environments of support, training and policy reforms**. Language emerged as a powerful tool — and challenge — in building inclusive mental health environments. Participants stressed the need for culturally sensitive, non-binary and emotionally aware communication. Particularly when working with youth from migrant backgrounds, literal translation was seen as insufficient. Instead, the group recommended a shift toward ethno-cultural adaptation that incorporates visual tools and active listening. Asking individuals directly what language they prefer was highlighted as a simple yet radical gesture of respect and empowerment.

Support environments were another key theme. While services like the **Reggio Emilia Anti-Discrimination Node** and the **Pier Vittorio Tondelli Rainbow House** were praised, participants emphasized that inclusive spaces must go beyond crisis support. They advocated for community hubs integrated into libraries, family centers, and clinics, where listening and social interaction coexist. Such spaces, they argued, must be accessible, decentralized, and collaboratively run with local LGBTQIA+ associations.

Concerning training, participants pointed to both progress and significant gaps. The University of Modena and Reggio Emilia was noted for its online training modules and alias career policies, but these were often limited to senior staff. There was strong consensus on the need for intersectional, mandatory training for educators, HR staff and public officials, covering gender identity, anti-discrimination protocols and response strategies to microaggressions. The group also proposed expert-led sexual and affective education in schools, replacing outdated curricula and supporting both students and staff.

The focus group concluded with a set of recommendations aimed at creating more inclusive and supportive environments for LGBTQIA+ youth. One of the primary proposals was the introduction of expert-led sexual and affective education at all levels of schooling. This education would go beyond basic curriculum to address relationships, identity, and respect in a comprehensive and affirming way. Participants also called for the creation of listening and support centres embedded within public institutions, such as libraries and health clinics. These centres would serve as accessible, community-based spaces where young people could seek guidance, mental health support, and affirmation. Another key recommendation was to redesign intake forms and service documentation across

public services to use inclusive, visual, and culturally sensitive language. This change would help remove barriers to access and ensure that all individuals feel seen and respected when engaging with public systems. In addressing structural discrimination, the group urged that each municipality establish an anti-discrimination service. Rather than relying on a single fixed location, this would function as a territorial network capable of reaching different communities effectively and equitably. Lastly, the focus group emphasized the need for universities to implement robust anti-harassment codes and to establish dedicated anti-violence desks. These mechanisms would ensure higher education institutions are safe, accountable, and equipped to respond to incidents of violence or discrimination.

Participants also highlighted **the importance of sustainability and peer involvement**. They called for mechanisms to ensure that young LGBTQIA+ voices are not only consulted but integrated into policy development and service design.

In closing, the Reggio Emilia focus group reflected a local ecosystem rich in commitment and innovation — but with still structural and cultural inefficiencies. Participants agreed that the road to real inclusion lies in daily practices, sustained collaborations and bold institutional change. With the Proud Ambassadors project offering a transnational platform, this local dialogue will feed into wider European strategies for LGBTQIA+ youth empowerment.

6. Policy recommendations from partners

This document presents 25 comprehensive policy recommendations derived from the focus group findings and national reports of Proud Ambassadors project partners from Italy, Sweden, Greece, Belgium and Slovenia. The recommendations are grouped by thematic area and attributed to the respective partner(s).

Mental Health and Healthcare Access

1. LGBTQIA+ Mental Health Hubs in Each Region

Establish dedicated LGBTQIA+ mental health centers within the public health system. These hubs should offer long-term counseling, crisis intervention and family support.

2. Publicly Funded Gender-Affirming Healthcare

Make gender-affirming care available through public healthcare. Services should include puberty blockers, hormone therapy and related mental health support.

3. LGBTQIA+ Competency Training for Health Professionals

Healthcare workers must receive structured training on LGBTQIA+ identities, health disparities and affirming care. Tie training to professional licensing.

4. Local Access Points for Mental Health Support

Create municipal-level support desks that offer psychological services, guidance and referrals in collaboration with local libraries and clinics.

Education and School Inclusion

5. Mandatory LGBTQIA+ Training for Educators

All educators must undergo recurring training on LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Training should address anti-bias practices, trauma-informed approaches and affirming care. It should be linked to certification/licensure and professional development.

6. Sexual and Affective Education by Experts

Sexuality education should be fact-based, non-judgmental, and led by trained professionals. Content must cover gender identity, relationships, and emotional well-being in age-appropriate, inclusive ways.

7. Inclusive Curriculum and Learning Materials

Revise national curricula to incorporate LGBTQIA+ history, literature, and rights. Establish monitoring systems to ensure compliance and inclusivity.

Evidence from the field

The Flemish Ministry of Education, in partnership with LGBTQIA+ advocacy groups such as Çavaria and KliQ, has actively supported the integration of sexual and gender diversity into school curricula.

Key initiatives supporting this reform concern:

- *Thematic materials & toolkits (e.g., Gender in de blender) made available to teachers for use in history, ethics, and social studies classes.*
- *Professional development training organized for school staff on inclusive pedagogy and anti-bias education.*
- *LGBTQIA+-inclusive reading lists promoted in school libraries, ensuring representation in classroom materials.*
- *KliQ provides school-wide workshops and audits to assess inclusivity levels and support policy implementation.*

Monitoring by the Onderwijsinspectie (Education Inspectorate) has shown improved school climate and greater awareness of gender and sexual diversity among students. The initiative is considered a model for mainstreaming inclusion without relying solely on extracurricular efforts.

8. Designated Safe Staff in Every School

Every school should have a trained and visible LGBTQIA+ advocate (e.g., counselor or teacher) tasked with supporting students, advising on inclusive practices, and reviewing anti-bullying protocols.

Evidence from the field

*In **Region Stockholm**, the **Anti-Discrimination Office Stockholm (Diskrimineringsbyrån)** has collaborated with the education sector to offer **compulsory LGBTQIA+ awareness training** for teachers and school staff, particularly in municipalities where schools had reported higher rates of discrimination or harassment. These initiatives are supported by public funding and sometimes carried*

out in partnership with RFSL (The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights).

Moreover, **Swedish national curriculum (Läroplanen)** includes explicit requirements for **norm-critical pedagogy** and **value-based education** that emphasizes equality and respect for all regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. However, implementation varies significantly between municipalities and individual schools.

In response to the **lack of inclusive changing facilities**, some **upper secondary schools in Malmö and Gothenburg** have introduced **gender-neutral changing rooms** and **opt-in physical education models**, particularly for transgender and non-binary students. These initiatives were informed by student surveys and in collaboration with youth LGBTQIA+ organizations.

Still, studies (e.g. from MUCF – The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society) show that **trans and queer students in rural areas often lack access to informed and supportive educators**. Therefore, there are calls for **nationwide, mandatory LGBTQIA+ training for all school personnel**, not just those who opt in.

9. Inclusive School Facilities

Ensure that students can access bathrooms and changing rooms aligned with their gender identity. Physical infrastructure must reflect non-binary and trans inclusion.

Employment and Workplace Inclusion

10. Workplace Inclusion Act

Mandate non-discrimination in hiring and workplace conduct. Require employers to offer LGBTQIA+ training and implement regular equity audits.

Evidence from the field

Since 2013, the Rainbow Charter (Charte Arc-en-Ciel / Regenboogcharter) initiative has supported employers in Belgium-especially in the public and non-profit sectors-to institutionalize LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the workplace.

Key components include:

- Employers voluntarily sign the Rainbow Charter, committing to non-discrimination, active inclusion measures, and internal policy audits.
- Developed by the Brussels-Capital Region in cooperation with local NGOs such as RainbowHouse and Tels Quels.
- Participating organizations receive guidance on implementing internal protocols, creating inclusive HR policies, and offering LGBTQIA+ awareness

training to staff.

- *External evaluation and certification mechanisms ensure follow-up and credibility.*

Over 60 public and private employers in Belgium have adopted the Charter. Internal evaluations showed increased visibility of LGBTQIA+ staff, improved workplace climate, and integration of LGBTQIA+ concerns in diversity management frameworks. The model has been replicated in several municipalities and supported by EU social inclusion funds.

11. Protected Participation in Awareness Programs During Work Hours

Allow and encourage employees to attend inclusion workshops during paid working hours as part of corporate social responsibility policies.

Legal and Institutional Reform

12. Legal Gender Recognition Based on Self-Determination

Transgender individuals should be able to change their legal gender markers without medical or psychological evaluations. Laws must recognize self-declaration as the sole criterion, respecting privacy and bodily autonomy. Procedures should be simplified, accessible, and aligned with international human rights standards.

Evidence from the field

*In 2017, Greece adopted **Law 4491/2017**, allowing individuals to change their legal gender based on **self-determination**. Individuals aged 17 and above can apply to change their legal gender through a simplified court procedure, while minors aged 15–16 may also access this right with parental consent and a supportive medical opinion.*

13. Expand Anti-Discrimination Laws to Include Non-Binary and Intersex Individuals

Legal frameworks must explicitly protect non-binary and intersex individuals. This includes revising existing discrimination statutes and updating public and administrative documents to recognize gender diversity beyond the male/female binary.

Evidence from the field

*In **Slovenia** it was adopted an anti-discrimination law in 2016 that adds sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression to the list of personal circumstances. Intersex people are included under the personal circumstance of sex. This is the overarching law that is above all other regulations or documents regarding discrimination.*

Swedish anti-discrimination agencies and organizations have actively worked to broaden legal protections to explicitly include non-binary, trans, and gender-diverse individuals. Key efforts include:

- **RFSL (Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Rights):** Has been a leading advocate, providing policy recommendations, reports, and direct dialogue with lawmakers to push for explicit inclusion of non-binary identities in anti-discrimination legislation. RFSL also promotes norm-critical education in schools and public institutions.
- **Local Anti-Discrimination Bureaus (e.g., Diskrimineringsbyrån Stockholm):** Conduct educational workshops and seminars aimed at raising awareness among decision-makers and the public about the limitations of existing laws and the need for expanded gender protections.
- **Intersectional Initiatives:** Regional organizations emphasize the complex realities of discrimination faced by people with multiple marginalized identities, including non-binary and intersex individuals, advocating for comprehensive legal reform.
- **Collaboration with the Swedish Equality Ombudsman (DO):** These agencies work closely with DO, providing real-world case data and reports to support recommendations for updating laws and guidance to better protect all gender identities.

Together, these efforts have helped build political and social momentum for reforming Sweden's anti-discrimination laws to recognize and protect gender diversity beyond the male/female binary.

14. Strengthen Enforcement of Anti-Discrimination Policies

Existing laws often lack enforcement. Institutions should establish clear disciplinary protocols for violations (e.g. misgendering, outing), with robust oversight, reporting mechanisms, and independent adjudication.

Evidence from the field

With adopting the anti-discrimination law in 2016 Slovenia also gained an independent state body "The Advocate of the Principle of Equality", that is mandated to deal with discrimination. The tasks of the body are:

- *conduct independent research on the position of people with certain personal circumstances and other issues regarding discrimination;*

- *publish independent reports and make recommendations to state authorities, local communities, holders of public authorisations, employers, business entities and other bodies regarding the established situation of people in certain personal circumstances (i.e. relating to preventing or eliminating discrimination and adopting special and other measures to eliminate discrimination);*
- *conduct tasks of supervisory inspection on the basis of complaints;*
- *provide independent assistance to persons subject to discrimination when enforcing their rights regarding protection against discrimination in the form of counselling and legal assistance for clients in other administrative and judicial proceedings related to discrimination;*
- *raise awareness of the general public on discrimination and measures to prevent it;*
- *monitoring the general situation in the Republic of Slovenia in the field of protection against discrimination and the situation of people in certain personal circumstances;*
- *propose the adoption of special measures to improve the situation of people who are in a less favourable position due to certain personal circumstances;*
- *participate in judicial proceedings involving discrimination.*

The competences of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality extend to both public and private sector.

15. Transparent and Inclusive Legal Reform Processes

Policymaking should be transparent and inclusive, involving LGBTQIA+ organizations, youth representatives and marginalized communities. Avoid reforms during inaccessible periods (e.g. holidays), and ensure broad consultation.

16. Permanent State-Civil Society Collaboration Mechanisms

Governments should institutionalize co-governance structures with LGBTQIA+ organizations, ensuring they co-design, implement, and monitor policies. Collaboration must be funded and formally recognized.

Evidence from the field

*Since 2003 the **Municipality of Reggio Emilia** has an Agreement with Arcigay Gioconda - an association that has been fighting discrimination and prejudice against LGBTI+ and migrant people since 1996 and with the aim to promote opportunities for socialisation and confrontation in the province of Reggio Emilia. The Agreement was aimed at the implementation of a joint programme of initiatives to promote equal opportunities and*

combat sexual discrimination. Since then, the collaboration has strengthened and opened to new activities implemented at territorial level.

The activities managed within the framework of the agreement between the Municipality and the association are:

- *Consulting through a dedicated telephone number and communication on social channels; reception at the association's headquarters by adequately trained volunteers*
- *Meeting groups at the association's headquarters aimed at discussion and dialogue*
- *Punto Arcobaleno (Rainbow Point): a place for listening and initial reception, open to anyone who needs it: individuals, couples, families and also service operators. In addition to listening, Punto Arcobaleno offers information, orientation to services in the area and counselling (using professionals as needed)*
- *Information/awareness-raising: implementation of public information and awareness-raising campaigns aimed at spreading a culture of respect for differences and against homotransphobia and homophobia and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, to be addressed in particular to the younger generations, LGBT+ migrants, families and the world of school and work.*
- *Documentation centre: possibility of consulting written and audio-visual material stored at the Association's headquarters*
- *Participation in the Inter-institutional Table for Combating Homotransnegativity and LGBT+ Inclusion of the Municipality, to dialogue with all relevant stakeholders from the territory and adoption of the commitments undertaken by signing the Operational Protocol*
- *Designing a home for LGBT+ people who are victims of violence or discrimination linked to sexual orientation and gender identity*

Safety, Justice and Law Enforcement

17. LGBTQIA+ Training for Police and Judicial Staff

National legislation must mandate LGBTQIA+ awareness training for police, judicial authorities and prison staff. Training should focus on hate crimes, victim support and bias mitigation.

Evidence from the field

Recommendation Based on the TRUST COOP Project 2020 - 2022

The TRUST COOP project, in which Legebitra partnered with Slovenian Police, represents an important step towards establishing an effective national support system

for LGBTI victims of hate-motivated criminal acts. In collaboration between the Slovenian police and the NGO Legebitra, a comprehensive training program was developed and implemented to equip police officers with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to identify, address, and record such crimes. As part of the project, a dedicated LGBTI Response Group was established at the Police Academy's Centre for Research and Social Skills, serving as a bridge between the community and law enforcement.

The project addressed key shortcomings highlighted in national and European studies – most notably, the lack of trust in the police and the underreporting of violence. Through targeted trainings, alliance building, and awareness-raising within both the police and the LGBTI community, the project laid the foundations for a safer and more inclusive support system.

This project was the first of its kind in Slovenia. It was a good start but in practice, the education of police officers should be organised continuously and be part of the curriculum at the Police Academy. Only with long-term commitment and collaboration can we ensure that LGBTI people no longer remain invisible victims of violence.

18. Anti-Discrimination Desks in Every Municipality

Municipalities should create desks (virtual or physical) for reporting and addressing discrimination, with trained staff and multilingual services.

19. User-Friendly Reporting Tools for Rights Violations

Develop online and mobile platforms to report discrimination anonymously and track response rates. Publicize tools widely.

Evidence from the field

In response to **Law 5029/2023** (“Living in Harmony Together – Breaking the Silence”), Greece launched a **national online platform** (<https://stop-bullying.gov.gr/>) for reporting **school-based bullying and violence**. Even though the platform is not yet fully tailored to the specific needs of LGBTQI+ students, the platform is available for **Kindergartens, Primary Schools, and Junior High Schools** and is a step toward institutionalizing user-friendly reporting tools in the education system.

Institutional Accountability and Policy Evaluation

20. Monitor School Compliance with Inclusion Policies

Introduce oversight mechanisms to ensure schools enforce anti-bullying and inclusion protocols. Link compliance to public funding.

21. Institutional Accountability for Professional Misconduct

Define and penalize discriminatory behavior (e.g., misgendering) by professionals. Build complaint systems and enforce transparency in disciplinary actions.

22. Youth and Civil Society Representation in Policy Review

Ensure LGBTQIA+ youth and civil society are formally represented in education and legal policy design, review, and reform processes.

Community Engagement and Social Inclusion

23. Local Awareness Campaigns in Rural and Conservative Areas

Fund and co-create community-level campaigns with NGOs to challenge stigma and educate residents in underserved regions.

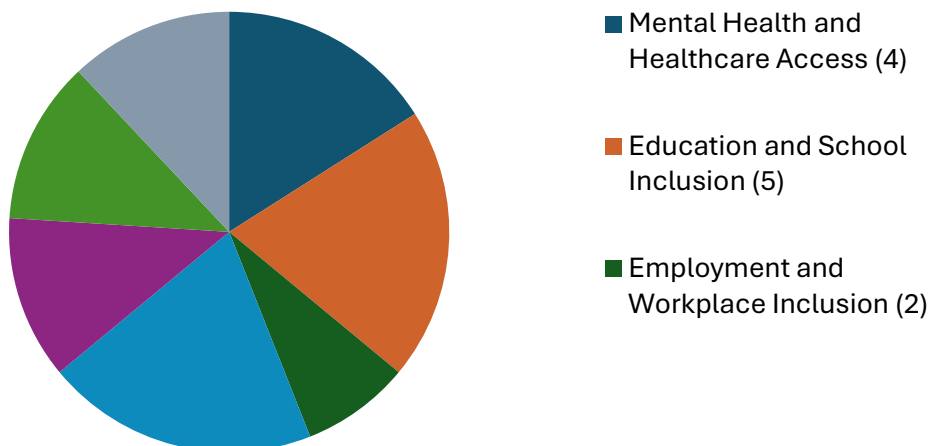
24. Legislation for Inclusive Media Representation

Introduce legal requirements for accurate LGBTQIA+ representation in media. Fund public awareness programs and media literacy initiatives.

25. Cross-Movement Solidarity and Dialogue

Support collaborative spaces for feminist, trans, and other social justice movements to align on shared goals through funded roundtables and joint advocacy.

Recommendations



7. Additional Community-Level Proposals

While structural reforms and institutional policy are essential, community-level action plays a crucial role in shaping everyday experiences of inclusion and safety for LGBTQIA+ youth. The following proposals emerged from local insights and reflect practical and context-sensitive approaches that can be implemented by municipalities, grassroots actors, educators and professionals across sectors. These actions aim to foster visibility, support networks, cultural sensitivity and inclusive environments in the places where young people live, learn and grow.

- **Visibility in Institutions:** Display inclusive signage, posters, and pronoun badges in public spaces to signal LGBTQIA+ safety and belonging (Slovenia).
- **Peer Support Networks:** Build informal networks of LGBTQIA+-affirming professionals across sectors to facilitate safe referrals and collaboration (Slovenia, Belgium).
- **Parental Education:** Offer workshops to help parents understand and support LGBTQIA+ children, reducing stigma and family rejection (Greece, Slovenia).
- **Everyday Advocacy:** Encourage professionals to challenge exclusion in their workplaces—at meetings, in training, and through policy review (Slovenia).
- **Municipal Funding for Community Programs:** Advocate for funding of LGBTQIA+ spaces and events at the local level, even in conservative areas (Slovenia, Greece).
- **Inclusive Sports and Recreation:** Develop extracurricular activities, especially in physical education, that include and welcome LGBTQIA+ youth (Sweden, Greece).
- **Local Collaborations:** Partner with regional authorities, chambers of commerce, and grassroots groups to increase the visibility and impact of LGBTQIA+ initiatives (Greece).
- **Ethno-Cultural Communication Tools:** Use visual and culturally adapted materials to engage migrant communities more effectively in health and social services (Italy).
- **Digital Platforms for Reporting:** Create and promote youth-friendly, anonymous online tools for discrimination reporting and support (Greece).
- **Inclusive Media Training:** Train journalists and content creators to use respectful language and increase accurate, diverse LGBTQIA+ representation (Belgium).



Creating Space for LGBTQIA+ Youth to Thrive