



# Colourful Childhoods

EMPOWERING LGBTIQ CHILDREN  
IN VULNERABLE CONTEXTS TO COMBAT  
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ACROSS EUROPE

## National Report Italy

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## Author

Cirus Rinaldi and Marco Baccio, University of Palermo, Italy.

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## Introduction – Research Design and Sample

The Italian national fieldwork was carried out in September-November 2022 by the University of Palermo (UNIPA) team. The total number of interviews with professionals working with children is 15, with 2 focus group with teenagers (in both cases, the age group was 16-19 years old). The survey dissemination started in early September and lasted until November.

In preparation for the national fieldwork, we translated the methodological guide and related consent forms provided by CES. We also started mapping potential candidates for the interviews at national level, beyond the local and regional areas of Palermo and Sicily. For this reason, most of the interviews were carried out online. All the professionals were recruited through Italian LGBTIQ associations. We found no difficulties in recruiting candidates for the interviews, and the response rate was exceptionally high. The interviews followed the scheme provided (available in the methodological guide), and averaged 60 minutes (90 minutes in a couple of cases).

Conversely / On the other hand, finding children and teenagers for the focus groups was more challenging. In Italy, according to law, minors must have at least one parent's consent in order to be able to participate in academic projects. Consequently, children who are not 'out' or who have problems with their families were not able to join the focus groups. Moreover, we decided to have the focus group in-person, in a dedicated room inside our department, which means that only teenagers living in Palermo and the surrounding areas would be able to part. Participants were recruited through word of mouth by two PhD students of our department: they asked first year undergraduate students if they knew younger people who could potentially be interested in the study, and these young university students spread the word among their group of friends. In recruiting teenagers, we observed how embarrassment and concealment were pivotal for their decision to join this project or not. In both focus groups, we recruited 8 participants, but only 5 teenagers showed up each time (the total number of teenagers participating in the focus group part is 10). Like the interviews with professionals, even the two focus groups followed the scheme provided (also available in the methodological guide), and they both reached 90 minutes in length.

Finally, a total of 199 answers were collected, which accounts to 51 less than the target. This was primarily due to the lack of youth groups among national LGBTIQ associations. To reach a more significant number of responses, we thus decided to purchase advertising on different social networks (Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok). Moreover, we got in contact with young Italian influencers and you-tubers, who shared information on the survey through their pages and stories. As a result, participants from all over Italy answered our questions, allowing to extract valuable information from the data collected.

### Demographic data

A total of 15 professionals were interviewed. The youngest professional we met was 27 years old (an ONG local volunteer), the oldest was 71 (an ONG local and regional

president). The mean age is 51 years old. This means that we covered a huge range of cohorts, cutting across different generations of LGBTIQ Italians. With regard to their sexual orientations, the majority (9) identified as heterosexuals, while 2 self-defined as bisexuals, 2 lesbians, and 2 pansexuals. Their gender identities are a bit more diverse: 11 identifies as women, but 6 of them added they were 'cis-gender' too; 2 stated to be men; 1 self-defined as transgender (FTM); and, finally, 1 described themselves as non-binary. Since recruiting passed through Italian LGBTIQ associations, the large number of the interviewees were volunteers in these organisations (7). We also met 4 psychologist/psychotherapist, 1 social worker, 1 counsellor, 1 educator, and 1 endocrinologist.

For the focus group, we met with 10 teenagers. The youngest was 16 years old (we got both the consent signed from one of his parents and himself) and the oldest was 19 years old. The mean age was 18 years old. This means that the age gap among the interviewees was only 4 years. Their sexual orientations are as follows: the large category was bisexual with 4 teenagers; then, 3 choose pansexual; 2 self-described as gay; finally, 1 labelled as 'bisexual-pansexual-polyamorous'. No self-identifies heterosexuals were interviewed. Just like the professionals, the gender identities chosen by the teenagers were more diverse: the large category was girls (3), followed by boys (3, but 1 of them added 'cis-gender'), 2 were non-binary, 1 transgender (FTM), and 1 gender-fluid.

Finally, we present the numbers coming from the survey, which got 199 respondents. The age mean is equal to 16.87 and the standard deviation (SD) is just above 1. The educational credentials are low. Indeed, 67.7% of the respondents (or 127 teenagers) did not go beyond primary school. Unfortunately, Italy is well known for its general low educational qualifications among the countries of the Western world. Not surprisingly, almost 80% of the respondents were living with their parents. At the same time, more than 94% of the teenagers that live in Italy have Italian citizenship. Other useful data for our analysis are gender identity, sexual orientation, transgender status, and religion. We observed that the majority (53.7%) said to be women, followed by men (22.1%), and non-binary (15.8%). It is possible to note that sexual orientation is more diverse: 41.3% self-described as bisexual, 23.8% adopted the 'other' category definition, 19% is gay or lesbian, 5.3% is heterosexual, and 10.6% prefer not to declare their orientation. Another important aspect to highlight is that 34.4% of the respondents (equal to 65 teenagers) identified as= transgender. This is the highest percentage among the countries involved in the project. Finally, it is also very interesting to highlight that 75.3% of the teenagers declared to not have a religion. This is an astonishing feature, considering the influence of the Catholic church in Italy as well as the presence of the Vatican.

## 1. Legal and political context regarding LGBTIQ rights

### 1.1. Context

LGBTIQ' rights and expectation of protection today have found a much greater space in terms of public sensibility and policies focusses on these issues. However, basic

human rights of LGBTIQ people in Italy are often undermined due to **incomplete legislation**. During the last decade, under the European Union direction, legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and – to some extent – gender identity in both public and private employment has been introduced. Indeed, according to the ILGA-Europe report for 2022, if we compare Italy to the right's protection offered to LGBTIQ people by other Western European countries, we find that our country has higher levels of discrimination (ILGA Europe, 2022). At present, Italy does not allow same sex marriage, does not have a proper law against discrimination and homo-transphobic attacks, and lacks a specific law protecting parents, adoptions, and IVF.

An analysis of Italian public opinion about LGBTIQ issues, based on surveys results collected between 2019 and 2021 (Equaldex, 2023) shows that **same sex marriage** is seen as largely positive from Italians with only 10% of respondents declaring to be against it, whereas an overwhelmingly 83% of people is supportive. **Adoption** rights are still seen as more problematic: 36% disagree, while 59% agree. **Same-sex couples as parents** is a divisiveness topic for Italians. Indeed, the majority (42.2%) disagree on their abilities to be good parents, while only 26.9% are supportive. Finally, according to Eurobarometer (2019) the prevalence of discrimination against sexual orientation in the European Union and Italy is widespread, with almost 70% who agree, and only 26% who consider it uncommon; on the other hand, 42% of Europeans and Italians is not supportive of **transgender** people changing their legal gender, while only 43% are supportive.

According to **Osservatorio dei Diritti** (2019), 'Italian institutions have been issuing some regulations in the past decade in order to act against violence, bullying and discrimination in schools but they do not explicitly address homophobia and transphobia. Few measures have been undertaken against homophobia in school but none of them is structural and transphobia is constantly neglected. The national research entitled "Be Proud! Speak Out!" shows a hostile environment for LGBTIQ youth in schools: among derogatory terms, offenses, verbal, and physical harassment, it does not seem to be a priority of Italian schools to welcome and to respect diversity'.

Failure to accept LGBTIQ people puts them at high risk of discrimination, verbal, and physical abuse. International data reveal that LGBTIQ people are penalised with respect to employment status and remuneration. OECD data about Italy confirms that this penalty reflects labour market discriminations: with the same curriculum vitae, homosexual Italian applicants are about 30% less likely to be invited to a job interview than their heterosexual counterparts (OECD, 2019).

Paradoxically, in Italy, homosexuality was **decriminalized** earlier than other Western countries (as early as in 1889, with the promulgation of a new penal code). Yet, although Italy was one of the first countries to decriminalize homosexuality, same sex relationships have not to cross the limit between private and public sphere, and have thus remained a private affair, something hidden from society.

A similar paradox can be observed with regard to **transgender people rights**. Italy approved its Gender Recognition Law already in 1982 (law n. 164 of 14 April 1982).

The process starts with an application to the local courthouse asking for the authorisation for sex reassignment surgery, and/or legal name change, and gender marker update. At the same time, a person needs to start a 'gender-affirming pathway': both psychological and medical documentation certifying the irreversible will to change one's own gender. Indeed, the process almost entirely depends on medical reports. If the application succeeds, sex reassignment surgeries are provided for free by the Servizio Sanitario Nazionale (Italian National Health System), and legal name change and gender marker updates follow accordingly. Moreover, at this point, the person can also marry and file an adoption application (that in Italy is possible for legally married couples only). But from the early '80s, no further specific legislation to regulate personal data for intersex individuals whose gender identity may not correspond to their medically assigned sex has been implemented. Finally, gender identity is a source of discrimination in the country, in that transgender people still face problems in employment, access to goods and services, housing, education, and health care.

Until 1986, 'sexual deviance' was a reason for exclusion from the military. At the time, some men claimed to be homosexual just to avoid the draft. Lesbians have never been banned from the Italian army, but only because women were first allowed to serve in 2000. In 2010, discrimination against gays and lesbians in the military was officially banned, whereas for transgender people the situation remains unclear. It has been estimated that 5-10% of Italians in the military or the police identify as LGBT. Discrimination is not uncommon for these people, in spite of the legislation. The differences in sexual development (dsd/intersex) are still considered health issues, instead possible natural variations in human sexual development.

**Freedom of association** is expressly provided for and regulated by Article 18 of the Italian Constitution. There is no form of formal or substantial discrimination against LGBTIQ organizations within this context.

**Adoption and foster care** are regulated by Law n. 184 of 1983. Adoption is permitted to married couples of the opposite sex. According to Italian law, there are no restrictions on foster care for homosexual couples. In a limited number of situations, the law allows for 'adoption in particular cases', that is, by a single parent. Some Italian courts have interpreted this law – including on the appeal court level –, to extend the right of **stepchild adoption** to unmarried (opposite-sex and same-sex) couples.

According to the Italian civil code, children of same-sex parents are denied the right to be maintained, cared for, educated, and instructed by the non-legal parent; to have guaranteed affective continuity in the event of separation of the same-sex couple or the death of the legal parent; to acquire the kinship (grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, etc.) of the non-legal parent; to be the heir of the non-legal parent and the non-legal parent's relatives, except when this is indicated in a will and it lasts the amount available but with different tax treatment than applied to legally recognized children. In addition, the non-legal parent is not recognized as the child's parent in the performance of daily activities, such as taking them to school and back, taking them to the doctor, etc.

On 21 July 2015, the **European Court of Human Rights** ruled that by not recognising any form of civil union or same-sex marriage Italy was violating international human rights. Italy then promulgated Law 76 of 2016 which introduced **civil union** / partnerships between same sex and cohabiting couples. In October of the same year, after the implementing decrees were also approved, the law was effective. A number of civil unions were celebrated across the country. It is interesting to note that this law is limited to same-sex couples: heterosexual couples may choose to marry. Anyway, this legislation provides for equality in matters of tax, social security, and inheritance. It is important to highlight that the Civil Unions Act does not erase discrimination: even if improvements have been made, LGBTIQ families are still discriminated against, since they are not considered 'real' families, which is still a privilege only heterosexual couples can enjoy. Civil unions are not the same as marriages. LGBTIQ families are still stigmatised, and, somewhat paradoxically, this discrimination is institutionalised as part of The Civil Union Act.

Gay and bisexual men have been allowed to **donate blood** since 2001. Discrimination regarding sexual orientation in employment has been banned since **2003**.

As far as **discrimination and health** is concerned, in 2020, Campania, in southern Italy, adopted a 'PEP & PrEP' protocol to scale up the fight against HIV. In 2018, the Italian Guarantor of Private Data decided that a dentist who refused to provide care to an HIV+ patient, and who shared this information with them in the waiting room, was actually violating the patient's privacy. The dentist was fined 20.000 euro. Moreover, due to the covid-19 pandemic, some LGBTIQ organisations raised concerns about asking trans people for the vaccine certificate and ID documents that were not matching their gender identity.

As stated above, Italy does not have a proper LGBTIQ antidiscrimination law; however, over the last twenty years, there have been many instances where Italy was confronted politically with this theme. An interesting episode was the '**DDL Zan**', an antidiscrimination law proposed in 2018, which was approved by Parliament in 2020 and then rejected by the Senate in 2021. The proposal was drafted by Alessandro Zan, a young Italian politician and member of the Italian Democratic Party (a centre-left party), with strong opposition from Lega, Fratelli d'Italia, and even by the powerful CEI [Italian bishops' conference]. The public debate on the long-awaited changes to the Italian penal code continued for years, but the bill was finally 'killed' by a procedural vote in the Senate after the senators from both left and right parties failed to reach a compromise. The DDL Zan would have introduced a specific article in the penal code aimed at giving physical offenders a proper sentence, as well as other norms, which would lead to broader cultural changes in Italian society in the long term.



### Timeline:

- **1889**
  - Homosexuality decriminalization and legalization of same sex sexual activity.
- **1982**
  - Transgender people allowed to legally change their gender.
- **1986**
  - 'Sexual deviance' is not a reason anymore for exclusion from the military service.
- **2001**
  - Gay and bisexual men are allowed to donate blood.
- **2003**
  - Discrimination for sexual orientation in employment is banned.
- **2015**
  - The European Court of Human Rights ruled that Italy in not recognizing any form of civil union or same-sex marriage, was violating international human rights.
- **2016**
  - Approval of a law (number 76) regulating civil partnership and cohabitation among non-heterosexual people.
- **2018**
  - DDL Zan bill proposed in the lower house.
- **2020**
  - DDL Zan approved by the lower house.
- **2021**
  - DDL Zan rejected by the Senate.

## 1.2. Relevant statistical data about LGBTIQ situation in your country

According to Eurobarometer (2019) data, the agreement that gay, lesbian, or bisexual people should have the same rights as heterosexual people change significantly between the European states: if in Sweden and Norway the percentage is nearly 100 and in countries as Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia the number is well under 40%, Italy has an agreement of 68%. The European average about the perception that there is nothing wrong in a sexual relationship between two person of the same sex is 72%.

In spite of the data, which describe a general increase of acceptance during the last five years, 61% of LGBT people in Europe often or always avoid holding hands in public with their same-sex partner. In Italy, this situation reflects the general trend described previously, with 62% of people who confirm these data. Moreover, 30% of LGBT Italians often or always avoid certain locations for fear of being assaulted. In the EU-28, is the percentage is 33% (FRA, 2020), although there is a lack of recognition of the issues related to hate crimes and incidents motivated by sexual orientation and gender identity. Research carried out by Italian NGO Arcigay shows that roughly 20% of gay men and lesbians interviewed have been insulted or harassed because of their sexual orientation. The percentage reaches 30% amongst gay men under 25. The Italian agency UNAR, an anti-discrimination national agency, shows that almost 10% of the cases of discrimination openly denounced concerns LGBTIQ people. This percentage does not take into account the fact that, in most cases, victims do not feel safe in denouncing the nature of the aggression or the discrimination (Arcigay, 2006).

If we take into account standard daily activities in Italy, like going to a café, restaurant, hospital or to a shop, 40% of LGBT people felt discriminated at least once in the year preceding the survey. In this case, the European average is similar, with 42% of EU-28 (FRA, 2020).

An analysis of harassment and violence statistics by FRA.Europa (2020) shows that 32% of LGBT people in Italy say they were harassed the year preceding the survey, whereas the EU-28 stands at 38%. 8% of them had been attacked in the 5 years before the survey, the EU-28 is 11%.

There are no significantly differences between Italy and the others European countries with regards to discrimination in the workplace (23% of Italians compared to the average 21% in Europe; FRA, 2020).

Moreover, 67% of Italian LGBTIQ teenager respondents (15-17 years old) say their peers or teachers have often or always supported LGBTIQ people, in the EU-28 this was 60%. In 2019, Among young people (18-24), less people (41%) hide being LGBTIQ at school. In 2012, it was 47%. According to an ISTAT survey (2011) 24% of the homosexual populations have revealed that they have been discriminated during high school and university, versus the 14% of the heterosexual population.

There are no available data on the discrimination of transexual people for these generations (Save the Children, 2019). Save the Children (2019) found out that, among the students who claimed to have witnessed discriminatory behaviour towards their peers, 16% said that this was due to their sexual orientation.

Only 8% of Italians believe their national government effectively combats prejudice and intolerance against LGBTIQ people. In this case, the data vary significantly: for the EU-28, it is 33% (OECD, 2019). These data were collected by the OECD (2019) as part of a study on perceptions of social well-being within each country, with particular attention to policies that can improve LGBTIQ inclusivity. Despite improvements in the legislation, as shown by FRA.Europa, acceptance of homosexuality remains limited; acceptance of homosexuality is measured on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means that homosexuality is never justifiable and 10 means that it is always justifiable. Italy has a rating of nearly 3.

As far as trans people are concerned, 24.8% of Italians would refuse to condemn discriminating behaviour against a trans person; 30.5% do not want a trans person as neighbour (Istat, 2012).

## 2. Children's rights and LGBTIQ diversity in childhood – brief overview

### 2.1. Context

Italy is traditionally a very religious country. Although the process of secularisation is also affecting our country, the level of influence of the Catholic Church on both the society and politics is still very high. This means that in the contexts of children, childhood, school, sexuality, and so on, great attention is devoted to what the Vatican and its apparatuses consider the 'right thing to do'. For example, children are merely seen as weak individuals in need of protection, and this protection should come from the family, that is, from their mothers and fathers. That children are not able to decide what they are and how to behave in society, and that their parents have the right to decide for them, has huge implications in the sphere of sexuality, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation.

Just like all European Union countries, Italy has adopted all the international conventions for the rights of children and childhood. The Laws aimed at protecting children are numerous and well established. For example, if we take the Italian constitution as a benchmark, it is possible to find four different references to 'child/children'. The first comes in Article 30, first paragraph, under the second title 'Ethical and Social Rights and Duties', saying that: 'It is the duty and right of parents to support, raise and educate their children, even if born out of wedlock'. The second quotation, Article 30, third paragraph also highlights the rights of children born out of

the wedlock to be entitled to the same rights as those born in a marriage. At the same time, the following article, number 31, highlights the role of the family: 'The Republic assists the formation of the family and the fulfilment of its duties, with particular consideration for large families, through economic measures and other benefits. The Republic protects mothers, children and the young by adopting necessary provisions'. Like children, women, as mothers, are considered weak and in need of protection. The same kind of comparison is made in the fourth and last articles: Article 37, under the third title of the Italian Constitution, titled 'Economic Rights and Duties' declares that: 'Working women are entitled to equal rights and, for comparable jobs, equal pay as men. Working conditions must allow women to fulfil their essential role in the family and ensure appropriate protection for the mother and child'. The second part of this article highlights how women are first of all mothers and, even when they work, they must have time left to comply to their roles as mothers and wives. Moreover, children are protected and, if too young, they are excluded from working. These brief examples are interesting in that they highlight how Italian law would tend to protect their children but that this is contingent on total control from their parents. Finally, Articles 33 and 34 are devoted to school rights. Indeed, the first paragraph of article 34 states: 'Schools are open to everyone'.

Taking into consideration the role of the Catholic Church and the Italian State on matters of childhood and schools, it does not come as a surprise that Italian schools tend to not be innovative in matters of school programs on gender and sexuality / sexuality and relationship education. Indeed, in the last few years, newspapers have raised attention on the number of courses and activities available on gender identity, sexual orientation, and related matters. It all comes as a scandal. Indeed, parents' associations, almost always attached to the Catholic Church have tried to block these activities labelling them as 'gender theory', that is, as attempts at making their children gay, open to sexual exploitation and harassment. Usually, these activities are conducted by external school resources (e.g., local volunteers from NGOs associations, not necessarily linked to LGBTIQ rights associations). Anyway, especially in the southern regions of the country (the most conservative) headmasters do allow these activities in their schools, but then they have to confront parents and their opposition. Parents and their associations are sustained by right-wing politicians. Since schools are a devolved matter to Italian region, local politicians can make effective decision and take control over the school system. As it will be presented later (section 3), these courses are aimed at clarifying standard concepts, providing definitions and concrete examples on what we mean for words like 'gender', 'gender expression', 'sexual orientations', and so on. Unfortunately, this is turned into a political instrument, as it is assumed that children should not listen or care about this. The conservative attitude sees children as ontologically heterosexual, with a gender matching their biological sex (since there is no division between the two), so activities that expose them to alternative narratives can only trouble them and let them vulnerable and exposed to harm. According to this narrative, children should be protected and schools should refrain from telling them about sex and sexuality. Unfortunately, as we will see later, children and young people in general are all very well aware of themselves. Indeed, the teenagers we interviewed regretted the lack of

moments in school devoted to 'gender' and 'sexuality'.

## 2.2. Relevant statistical data – Childhood situation

According to the OECD (2017), on many measures, and compared to other OECD countries, Italy could do more to promote child well-being. Children in Italy enjoy average disposable income levels that are not far from the OECD average, but the child relative income poverty rate is comparatively high (19.3%, compared to an OECD average of 13.4%), with many children living in overcrowded households (41%, compared to an OECD average of 22%). Indeed, in the last few years, and especially after the economic crisis of 2007-2008, the level of poverty in the country increase dramatically, especially in the Southern regions, which still account for the poorest areas of Italy.

As far as health is concerned, Italy compares well on infant mortality – at 2.9 deaths per 1000 live births, the current infant mortality rate in Italy is well below the OECD average (3.9) – but slightly worse on other measures. The Italian National Health System provides free access to care to everybody and, in general, it is among the highest in terms of quality, in both the European Union and the Western world.

Italy performs below the average for the following statistics provided by the OECD (2017): a) the frequency of low-weight births; b) 15-year-olds skipping breakfast or dinner; c) for the share of 11-15 years that are overweight or obese, and d) especially for the share of 11–15-year-olds that are regular smokers.

Roughly 9% of 11–15-year-olds in Italy report smoking at least once a week, almost twice the OECD average (5%), and this increases to 21% when looking at 15-year-olds only. 15-year-olds in Italy are more likely to live in homes with books to help with schoolwork, and the share with access to a desk and quiet place to study is little above the average. However, the share of 15-year-olds who feel like they 'belong' to school (67%) is lower than the OECD average (73%), whereas those who are feeling anxious about school tests even if they are well-prepared (70%) are among the highest in number in the OECD. The average performance on the OECD's PISA reading and mathematics tests is also around or just below the average. Indeed, although Italy provides free access to schools to everybody, the school system tends to perform not as good as other European Union countries. In particular, the number of those who achieve the highest level of education (e.g., tertiary education in general or university degrees) is among the lowest in OECD countries.

Overall, self-reported life satisfaction among teenagers in Italy is below the average. About 24% of 15-year-olds in Italy report feeling very satisfied with their life as a whole (compared to an OECD average of 34%), while roughly 15% report that they are not satisfied with their life (compared to an OECD average of 12%) (OECD, 2017).

Italian families are increasingly made up of a small number of individuals. Recent years have witnessed an increase in the number of single families (from 31.9% in 2017 to 33.2% in 2021). Then, we found people in a family with two persons (from 27.5% to 27.7%). The number of more numerous families decreased over the years: three people families lowered from 19.6% to 18.9% in 5 years; in the same amount of time, families made by four people decreased from 15.7% to 15.2%; and those made by five people

from 4.1% to 3.9%; finally, families with six or more people remained stable to 1.2% (ISTAT, 2022).

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Children's needs to combat LGBTIQ-based violence

The needs of young LGBTIQ people concerning violence based on sexual orientation and gender diversity are mainly related to an extended **need for recognition** both within the family and in schools. Interviewees perceive a lack of **spaces for confrontation** where they can communicate and define themselves. The **lack of training**, such as teachers, is perceived as burdensome for carrying out school activities and daily life. Another aspect that the interviewees defined as a need refers to the absence of **gender-fluid toilets** in schools and aggregative/recreational spaces. Finally, young LGBTIQ people feel the need to extend the **"ALIAS careers"** to all Italian schools, making it more accessible. The following paragraph outlines the main needs that emerged from the focus groups.

What emerges from the analysis of the focus groups' material is, first, **a variety in terms of sexual orientations and gender(s)**: no majority prevails in these terms. Almost all participants find it difficult to rely on spaces of recognition, both within the home and at school, and only a few interviewees **feel protected and represented in family relationships**, where they can enjoy the support of their parents even in the context of external forms of violence.

For example, Maria states: "sometimes, I have to defend myself from them": this sentence alone, and other reported aspects, helps illustrate how the family can be perceived as **a place of violence and discrimination**. As another interviewee put it: "I would like to receive a 'how are you?' from my family": it is therefore expected, and partly hoped, that the adults of reference do something to be present in their children's lives. On the other hand, all interviewees find space for confrontation, support, and help mainly in their **group of friends**, which is often represented as a unique place of relational dynamics where their self-expression is allowed / not policed. The institutional level, in terms of **services, associations, and the public sector**, is not among our interviewees' known sources of help/support. Indeed, only a few are aware of or have turned to the reception desks to receive help or support. Scepticism, and often a lack of trust in these institutions makes the request for help mostly prohibitive; only one participant defined himself an activist who is involved in territorial activities. **No one else participates in volunteering or activism in LGBTIQ associations**. Despite the lack of knowledge of what is present in their geographic areas and considering the scarcity of associative spaces, most interviewees expressed the need **to create spaces where they can identify, confront, and communicate**. Only a small number of interviewees said that they were part of online

communities on **social networking** such as Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, and Tik-Tok because of the fear that, in joining these pages, they might become victims of **homophobic comments**; others, on the other hand, rely on social networks and the Internet in general as spaces of confrontation and training. It is possible to compare these statements with the survey and, in particular, with table **D3** “How have social networks influenced you in the following issues, during the covid-19 pandemic?”: out of 12 items, Italians have responded above the general mean in 9 of them. This, highlight **the huge importance of social networks for Italians teenagers**. In particular, the items “**Relating to already existing friends**” and “**Learning about LGBTIQ issues**” scored 4.35 and 4.23 respectively. The highest mean of all items for all countries involved in the project.

Finally, all interviewees accused the **lack of training** for both the teaching staff and their own personal training needs.

The participants in the focus groups felt the need to be trained and educated on everything that sexuality entails, including **non-heterosexual sexual relations and education on sexual pleasure**; in this sense, one of the interviewees states, “When we talk about homosexual sex, we only talk about AIDS”: the almost automatic association, even within institutional training, between **homosexual sexual relations and the transmission of sexual diseases**, is a long-term prejudice of our society. Two of the young people described the sexual education they received at school as being profoundly limited to heterosexual intercourse, **procreation and the potential risk of having an unwanted pregnancy**. One participant, including the two mentioned above, also said that during primary school, the teacher divided males and females into two separate rooms as if there was **different sex for each gender**, as stated by one respondent: “Females learn the sex of females and males learn the sex of males; because there is nothing else”. The same young man, who described himself as homosexual, later states that he is constantly afraid of making mistakes and possibly not being well-informed about sexually transmitted diseases or sexuality in broader terms. He found information on these things on the Internet.

All the participants who declared themselves bisexual and having a female gender identity stated that the lack of sex education on homosexual relations is greatly accentuated when discussing **homosexual sex among women**. Indeed, they perceived the total absence of references and dialogue, as ironically reported by one respondent: “Of course, because the only way to have sex is with penetration”. Thus, for all interviewees **the need for sex education appears to be a priority**. Furthermore, for those who defined themselves as **bisexual women**, a different form of heteronormative discrimination emerged, where the bisexual relationship is reduced to a fetish of **gaze evil** (Mulvey, 1975). A person who declared herself **pansexual**, on the other hand, experienced another form of patriarchal discrimination by her boyfriend who is quoted as stating: “I am already jealous of boys, do I have to be jealous of girls too?”, the effect here is invisibility and inability to understand the need of the partner.

A further need, primarily but not only related to the **school environment**, is the correct use of **pronouns and elective nouns**. One interviewee said: “For example, I

tried to come out to one of the teachers by saying my pronouns and my name, and she took it as a joke and said, ‘what is this cartoon name of yours?’”. The lack of recognition of one’s sexual identity leads to increased **mistrust and scepticism** towards education and support services by adults who belong to older generations, who do not show interest but are often arrogant in responding superficially to questions and needs coming from the underaged. Most of the interviewees also felt in a kind of invisibility in their families, with three interviewees recalling a history of **eating disorders** or that families of origin have mostly failed to support their children or, in one case, did not even notice the child’s illness. The survey offers another insight. Indeed, table D7, labelled “During the pandemic lockdown and restrictions have you had the following emotions” highlights that Italian teenagers felt **anxiety, loneliness, and depression** scoring between 3.61 and 3.95, on a 5.00 points scale. Again, the numbers are higher than the general mean, although both Lithuania and Portugal scored higher points.

Many of the interviewees who consider the acronym LGBTIQ useful, argued that it can also be **a sort of cage and part of a broader labelling process**: most interviewees express the need to self-declare and define themselves, building the **fluidity** of self-representation and perception. As far as suggestions and proactive actions to improve the condition of young LGBTIQ teenagers are concerned, the totality of interviewees suggests, beyond the transversally reiterated **education**, the introduction of **gender-fluid toilets** not only in schools but also in other places, such as pubs. One MTF respondent said “I, for example, when I am with my family, or in a pub, I feel compelled to go to the female toilet to avoid possible fights or problems”. A gender-fluid bathroom is perceived as essential for a more **serene experience of the school premises** themselves. In addition, some interviewees felt the need for **qualified personnel at school**, with a specialisation in what can be issues related to **bullying** on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender. Indeed, bullying and homophobic attacks are common features in the life of the teenagers we met. Some interviewees also started and then stopped **psychotherapeutic sessions**, when they felt neither understood nor supported for the difficulties they experienced, as these sessions are offered for free in Italian schools but only for purely school-related issues.

A further need that emerged from the focus groups refers to the **Alias careers**. Although the Alias career has been included in the procedures of some Italian schools, the difficulty of accessing it remains high, due to the bureaucracy required, both in schools and universities; in this sense, a major need that emerged is how to simplify access and to make more common these careers in all Italian schools. At the same time, without them, discrimination, both social and institutional, seemed to increase.



### 3.2. Children's strategies of resistance against LGBTIQ-based violence

The resistance strategies implemented by minors against violence on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender are mainly related to the support given by the **peer group**, distancing themselves from difficult situations or verbal violence and, in some cases, the implementation of **justification processes** referred to the aggressor. Furthermore, what emerges from the focus groups is the support that can be offered by **online groups and social networks in general**. Some interviewees use Instagram, a few Facebook and Tik-Tok, to read articles and posts as a database through which educate themselves on topics related to the LGBTIQ community. Social networks also allowed young interviewees to stay in touch during the **covid-19 pandemic**; thus they became tools to maintain their friendship comfort network. Some interviewees actively pursue **education**, both in schools and their private lives, aimed mainly at adults. Following episodes or phases characterised by **acts of bullying**, some interviewees have learnt, , to react without being overwhelmed by violence through **constructing their own identity as a reaction to what they have suffered**; as one respondent, Marta, states: 'I have decided to give a bit of a shit about others and present myself as no longer feminine because that is how I feel internally'; Sofia adopted a similar model of resistance: 'I told myself 'there is no time for shame''.

Concerning the aspect related to justify processes carried out by teenagers, reference is made above all to some circumstances reported by the interviewees where the **tendency to normalise verbal violence** is manifested without even being able to define it as such; in this sense, one interviewee states: "In the street, it happened, maybe in [a street in Palermo's city centre] they were shouting faggot at me from 200 metres away. This yes, but it can be, these are normal things, in a sense". The normalisation of the discriminatory acts, in this case of a verbal kind, can be interpreted as a justification projected onto the behaviour of others, that is, an example of justifications as those actions that "protect the identity of the subject as when denying the harm or victim of a behaviour; they are usually used to neutralise the action and its effects" (Mills *et al.*, 2019, p. 17). The justificatory projection proceeds to another moment in the interview, where the same person cannot understand why the discriminatory acts occurred, since he was not even dressed flashily: "No, whatever, I called it normal in the context of [that street] in Palermo. I was not dressed that flashy". Again, the projection of neutralising the harm suffered (Mills *et al.*, 2019, p. 27) defines a **defensive strategy** of living with everyday violence.

Being a member of **associations** is a fundamental part of the **coping strategy** to handle with violence based on sexual orientation and gender diversity. One of the teenagers interviewed consider activism, including training activities in schools, was a means of making oneself useful and sharing experiences and knowledge peers.

### 3.3. Professionals' good practices in empowering LGBTIQ children to combat violence

The fifteen professionals interviewed belong to different jobs and sectors. The most significant actions promoted by the interviewees include **activities in schools**, especially aimed at **children's empowerment**; introducing **Alias careers** in some institutions; setting up **training courses for professionals**, which can contribute to reduced discrimination in intervention settings; establishing **safe spaces** for personal growth, whether online or offline, for LGBTIQ minors; **networking** with the families of children taken care of by psychologists, doctors, and social workers. All professionals share an approach aimed at **welcoming and listening to the minors**.

Each participant shared a key theme, which is the importance of **listening the children**, that is, an active mode of listening that sees children as the protagonists of their own stories. Each professional in his or her field works toward **greater acceptance** to help create a solid network in which the child can feel protected and free to express himself/herself, his or her discomforts, his/her fears and in which he or she can **effectively self-determine**. In particular, the four **psychologists** agreed on this point, and went on to describe their intervention as directed towards **welcoming** and listening to the child.

These four professionals are actively involved in training on LGBTIQ issues through courses aimed at other psychologists and health practitioners. They have specific training in working with LGBTIQ minors and thus promote the idea of the need for **constant training** of professionals to avoid some recurrent problems, such as, the lack of preparation in working with **trans or non-binary minors** (from using the wrong pronouns to underestimating the principles of self-determination of minors or not being aware of gender dysphoria). For these psychologists, the risk is to reproduce the same forms of violence that lead minors to seek help with professionals.

The psychologists as well as the other figures interviewed also insisted on the importance of **involving families** if and when possible. Eight of them are member of **Agedo** (an Italian associations made of parents and family members of LGBTIQ children) in different Italian cities, either as volunteers, social workers, psychologists, or presidents. The interviews show that the families that turn to Agedo are usually **supportive, not rejecting**. In other cases, as indicated by the **endocrinologist** interviewed, families can be an obstacle to their children's self-determination, especially in the **transitioning process**. It is fundamental to be able to transmit and to provide the best tools to children's families precisely to assist children development and well-being.

Agedo's, interdisciplinary, activism does not only involve families, but it also directs its intervention to **schools**. A common feeling of all interviewees is that schools seem to take away their responsibility in relation to LGBTIQ children's issues by reproducing or legitimising various **forms of discrimination**. Both Agedo and other associations approached, such as Stonewall and AzioneTrans, promote **training and**

**information courses in schools**, in some cases aimed at teachers or else, exclusively at students. The most effective intervention aimed at reducing discrimination against trans people is **Alias careers** in high schools, as discussed above. As pointed out by a social worker, today, only **160 schools** have promoted the Alias career, which, however, still presents major problems: some trans\* students explained that despite the introduction of this measure, in the online classrooms, during the covid-19 pandemic, the deadname of the trans\* person remains, making the initiative ineffective.

It was precisely during the **covid-19 pandemic**, according to all interviewees, that many critical issues emerged. There is general agreement that LGBTIQ **children have suffered from isolation**, in particular, in some of them were obliged to share spaces with **unwelcoming families** due to lockdown policies. Several interviewees, particularly psychologists, used video calls as a tool to curb this problem, recreating virtually safe spaces where children could feel listened to and helped at a time of heightened social vulnerability. Indeed, the survey confirms these assumptions. In particular, table D1, labelled “Thinking about the covid-19 pandemic lockdowns and restrictions: How have the following people helped and accompanied you? We are referring to the people who have significantly helped you” shows that **friends** and **partners** were the most helpful resources for Italian children, respectively with a mean of 3.76 and 3.50. But, in both cases, the general mean is higher. This shows that Italian LGBTIQ children felt lonely and widely isolated during the covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, table D2, “Thinking about your needs during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns and restrictions. How do you feel about the following statements?”, highlights the fundamental role played by **friends**, **peer groups**, and **siblings** to cope during this difficult period of isolation. Indeed, the item “I felt I could behave like myself with my **friends**” got the highest mean, equal to 4.20 – above the general mean and the highest mean among all countries involved in this project. In second position, we found the item “I felt I could behave like myself with my sibling(s)”, with a mean equal to 3.41 – again, above the general mean and the highest mean for this item.

Beyond the virtual space, the professionals we interviewed agree for the need of **safe physical spaces** where children can meet and support one another. Two interviewees suggest that the problem of gathering is particularly evident in small towns. A psychologist working in a small Sicilian town recalled the organisation of the first local **Gay Pride**, which, despite low general expectations, was attended by more than 1.000 people, including families and children. According to professionals, creating events and places for debates and growth allows people to **gain agency** and fight for their own self-determination, which is particularly important for more remote contexts.

A social worker explains that “the fact that they think that someone has to protect them means that there is discrimination going on”, so **self-determination**, **the empowerment of children**, whether in virtual or physical environments, is crucial to the success of such interventions.

Sometimes professionals found it hard to intervene in situation involving **minors**. In order to activate supportive activities, the authorisation of one of the parents is strictly necessary, even more in case of **transition processes** because, as the endocrinologist we interviewed explained, in Italy, it is not possible to start the process before the age of eighteen. However, as pointed out by a psychologist, there are specific **guidelines** promoted by the “National Observatory on Gender Identity”, which provide the possibility to carry out the transition process even before the majority age. The endocrinologist advocated for the need for **specific training** for health personnel to avoid promoting different forms of discrimination. The same need is shared by the psychologists we interviewed. The “Italian Association of Doctors in Endocrinology” has activated courses throughout the country aimed at updating and informing doctors on LGBTIQ issues, with a specific attention to **transsexual children** and **teenagers**.

### 3.4. Professionals’ (training) needs to combat LGBTIQ violence against children

The professionals interviewed insisted on specific professional training needs that they defined as “**top-down training**” and information courses to prepare professionals to work with LGBTIQ children. Specifically, they insisted on forms of communication and interdisciplinary networks to promote horizontally continuous debate among professionals with different skills and backgrounds. Another important point is the **training of schoolteachers**, their involvement as a curb to loneliness, vulnerability, and discrimination concerning children in their institutions. Another aspect touched during our interviews was the **training of health and social welfare staff**. Indeed, more funds, better-trained staff, and a solid regulatory apparatus that condemns specific forms of violence and softens the bureaucratic dimension for **trans people** appear much needed in the current Italian landscape. Finally, **families** and their involvements in their children’s life can create more tenacious roots to successfully achieve psychological and supportive help for LGBTIQ children.

During the interviews with professionals, a clear path emerged: the need for **specific and constant training**. The fifteen interviewees believed that every person working with other people (doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, health personnel, and social workers) needs to be trained and informed on LGBTIQ issues. While the idea that **active listening** facilitates children and adolescents in their pathways for self-determination is commonly shared, there is also a concern about whether workers from different disciplines are fully aware of working with LGBTIQ children and what it entails. In particular, one interviewee, who is an Agedo activist, emphasised that her training took place autonomously as she had difficulty discovering LGBTIQ issues through other means. Similarly, another activist complained about the process of finding reliable information, claiming that **university courses** in psychology lack practical elements to fully understand the issues and characteristics of the LGBTIQ world.

All interviewees also agreed that **schools** should be more involved, empowered, and informed. Accordingly, training courses for teachers and a greater level of involvement in emerging issues within schools are necessary. Indeed, counting/relying on specific tools would favour integration, reducing vulnerability and discrimination, stimulating **children's empowerment**. Raising **teachers' awareness** is, therefore, a dominant motif in the words of all interviewees.

A psychologist interviewed states that there is a kind of **loneliness** among professionals that deal with LGBTIQ children. In this sense, she would like to see more discussions among social workers, both in terms of **networking** and of raising awareness among colleagues. The other interviewees also take up this point of view; however, one psychologist considers horizontal communication between professionals demanding, because raising awareness can be also interpreted in an offensive, prevaricating way. More than half of the professionals interviewed also emphasised the importance of involving healthcare **workers** more / greater involvement of healthcare workers. The medical endocrinologist explained that during training activities devoted to doctors, LGBTIQ issues, and even more so those related to transitions, have no place, and are only considered as an option among future doctors. Three interviewees (the endocrinologist, a social worker, and an activist) claim(ed) that specific courses should be structured during university degrees that have a clearer focus on these issues.

The issue of **regulatory interventions** was less discussed by the interviewees. Six professionals supported the idea that **laws** to protect LGBTIQ children are **largely ineffective**, one of whom explained that the large ambiguity coming from politics and politicians generates **discrimination**. A psychologist also recounted that although it is no longer legitimate for mental health professionals to use so-called "**reparative therapies**", some colleagues continue to support these treatments without incurring in any sanctions.

Three social workers reported **inadequate resources and personnel** within their intervention settings. This is in line with the low level of specific training for professionals, which in some cases led, the social workers to turn to psychologists who are physically distant from their geographic areas. One social worker also emphasised the rather low level of funding. According to her, more funding and **local political support** is needed. On the other hand, another social worker considered the network of different professionals around her city to be numerous, effective, and functioning well, but, at the same time, she wished for a more significant strengthening of the local social service. Currently, the Italian bureaucracy is making social work very difficult.

The **bureaucratic dimension** was addressed several times. Six interviewees – one endocrinologist, two psychologists, and three social workers – argued that **laws** concerning **sexual transition** should be revised and updated. A social worker and the endocrinologist who are working with underage children, focused on the typical problems of minors in transition processes, such as the need for informed consent to be signed by at least one of children's parent.

There is general agreement, however, that networking also means **involving the parents**. Families are often unprepared, or they lack the cultural tools needed to understand children and their needs. The interviewees, therefore, called for a greater understanding with families, that is, a level of complicity that must involve other professionals, primarily in the social welfare sector. This final consideration is directly linked to one of the points listed above, namely, the centrality of training and information courses to prepare professionals to work with LGBTIQ children.

### 3.5. Exemplary quotes from interviews with professionals and from the focus groups with children

#### *Quotes from the focus groups with children*

##### Quote no. 1, Giuseppe, Italy, 20 years old

In this sense, I still consider myself a male, but it does not mean that my idea of myself is what any male must be. I feel a male because I probably grew up in an environment where I was told that I was male, and it did not bother me over time, so today I am quietly male. But still, I am male, even if I wear nail varnish.

##### Quote no. 2, Giacomo, Italy, 18 years old

Then, when it comes to physical violence, this group of friends, this emotional cooperation does not have the same effect, especially when a group of people who reason with their heads and not with their hands are not as prone to violence as a group of homophobic people can be.

##### Quote no. 3 Maria, Italy, 20 years old

There is also this belief, not too accurate in my opinion, that once you stick something on you, it will be forever, and you cannot change it. The point is exactly that, you can change your mind, but you can also change the perception of yourself, and that is fine. You can be extremely convinced about one gender for a certain amount of time in your life and, at a certain point, you realise that there is also another sphere of you that you have not discovered yet, another moment of you that you did not know, that maybe come out later; at that point it is self-awareness, gender identity is self-awareness.

### *Quotes from interviews with professionals*

#### Quote no. 4 - Beatrice, Italy, social worker, 27 years old

We try to reduce the invisibility of these people since they often come from contexts where they are judged and labelled as wrong for how they feel they are. Therefore, we try not to impose ourselves with definitions or words, but to listen. I believe, both from my personal and professional experience, that gender and sexual orientation can be considered not as a person's limitation, but as an aspect that should be valued and that makes the world more diverse and colourful.

#### Quote No. 5 - Ginevra, Italy, psychologist, 43 years old

It is a sensible issue. I think people who do not have specific training are very much in need of training on these issues because people are not necessarily bad. I mean, maybe people discriminate, because they are ignorant, and they do not know how things are. So, if you want to know the truth, we have much difficulty, even within our organisation itself, in spreading a culture that is respectful of gender diversity and sexual diversity.

#### Quote no. 6 - Massimo, Italy, endocrinologist, 65 years old

The system is still not ready. We need more training. I mean, paediatricians should be the most experienced people to take on board the needs of these children, but it is not part of their education, both doctors in training during medical school and during their specialisation in hospital. Both paediatricians and general practitioners should have more interest on these topics since they are often the first contact with the health world for children and their families.

## 4. Overall evaluation: tendencies and absences re: empowering LGBTIQ children to combat violence in Italy

### 4.1. SWOT re: combating violence against LGBTIQ children in Italy

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A large number of <b>associations</b> from the ‘third sector’ in local areas.</li> <li>• Application of <b>European good practices</b> in carrying out activities.</li> <li>• <b>Supportive, listening, and back-up services</b> in local areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only a few <b>national regulatory references</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Little or no training</b> for professionals involved in LGBTIQ issues.</li> <li>• Difficulties in accessing the ‘<b>Alias career</b>’.</li> <li>• <b>Little or no funding</b> for associations in the ‘third sector’.</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong commitments of the <b>associations</b> that support LGBTIQ children.</li> <li>• <b>Young people</b> are in a position of improving their existing socio-cultural situation.</li> <li>• Access to <b>medical and pharmacological therapies</b> for children in transition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence of <b>associations</b> that try to hinder rights and protection for LGBTIQ children, both at the local and national level (e.g., <b>pro-life</b> and <b>Catholic</b> associations).</li> <li>• <b>No legal protection</b> in case of homophobic abuse and violence.</li> </ul>

From this report on Italy a mixed situation about the current empowerment of LGBTIQ children, emerges. There are no doubt significant absences (from school to home, from social networks to society at large), but there are also good and positive tendencies. Indeed, what emerges clearly is the strength of Italian children and teenagers to fight for their rights, Especially related to their gender identity and expression and the related sexual rights and freedom.

young LGBTIQ people’s needs of concerning violence based on sexual orientation and gender diversity are mainly related to an extended need for recognition both within the



family and in schools. The lack of training of figures, such as teachers and school personnel, is perceived as a burden for carrying out school activities and daily life, and it appears a tricky problem to solve, since the difficulties in training schoolteachers also for other type of activities. In addition, the students we met highlighted the need for qualified personnel at school, especially people who need to be able to handle issues related to bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender. More in general, students demand specific courses and the need for sex education appears to be a priority.

Another aspect is the absence of gender-fluid toilets in schools as well as the lack of aggregative/recreational spaces. For the first request, gender-fluid toilets, the general debate is still attached to the fact that according to parents linked to Catholic associations, it is not the school that should deal with the matter, but only parents who are in charge of deciding what is best for their children when discussing gender and sex. Moreover, politicians from the right (at the moment, the majority in both regional and national level) seem to favour this Catholic parents' view. Therefore, it seems difficult that schools, even if students are supportive of change, will do something like creating gender-fluid toilets.

Another request, coming from the students themselves and highlighted during our interviews are the so-called 'Alias careers' (e.g., the possibility for trans\* students to be registered with the name they want in the official students' record). At the moment, the 'Alias career' is more widespread in universities than schools, since in the former students are already above eighteen years old and able to decide themselves about their own rights, while in schools, students are still minor and subject to their parents' control and will. Anyway, the teenagers we met asked for making the 'Alias career' more accessible, easier to start and more implemented by all teachers. Moreover, even if the 'Alias career' is not properly implemented, students demand their teachers to use the pronouns and elective nouns they choose for themselves.

It is undeniable that the teenager we worked with are all well informed and able to make decision about themselves. First, a variety in terms of sexual orientations and gender identity emerged, which makes it untenable to discuss the topic based on an assumed majority of one sexual orientation over the other and the same can be said about gender identity.

Nearly all participants found it difficult to rely on spaces of recognition both within home and at school, with only a few interviewees feeling protected and represented in family relationships, where parents assume the role of support even in the context of violence that took place outside the home. Indeed, the need for protection is still high among children. Even if they know how difficult it is/will be to live their life in the Italian society, they also rely on the protection that can be offered them from their families. Unfortunately, parents seem unprepared to deal with issues such as gender identity and expression and sexual orientation. Indeed, families themselves can be a place of violence and discrimination for children who are not accepted.

Therefore, the first source where teenagers feel safe is their group of friends. It is precisely here, and no matter the sexual orientation and gender identity of the other members of the group, that teenagers can freely express themselves and feel protected,

safe, and at home. At the same time, the online space, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, can offer teenagers a space to express themselves. But this freedom comes at a cost. Indeed, it has been reported that social networks (like Instagram and Tik-Tok) can become sources of exploitation and discrimination.

Italy is rich of LGBTIQ right associations. This is true for all levels: from local (towns, cities, and region) to national and international. Although Italy serves a debt in terms of freedom for LGBTIQ rights and that politicians (especially, but not exclusively, from right parties) continue to articulate conservative views of sexuality, the various associations highlight the need for more attention on these topics, more freedom and, ultimately, improved rights.

Today, in Italy, children and teenagers with a gender identity that does not match their biological sex and with a sexual orientation that is non-heterosexual are still facing anxiety, loneliness, and depression. They may become so accustomed to violence as tending to normalise both verbal and psychical forms – a survival strategy, which however places them as vulnerable subjects.

The interviews with the professional confirmed the analysis made with children. Indeed, the lack of training for schoolteachers appear pivotal in combating violence against them, since schools, together with the family, are the first institutions they encounter. Paradoxically, even outside the school environment, specific and constant training is required for professionals who deal with children, like psychologists and psychotherapists, doctors and paediatricians, and other professionals as well. Indeed, the risk of being vulnerable in society at a risk of exploitation remains high for these children.

It is important to highlight again that Italy still lacks specific legislation to protect LGBTIQ people. The current political situation, with the most right-wing government since 1946 (when Italy became a Republic after the war and the Fascism), makes it almost impossible to predict any new or good outcome for those who have a gender identity that differs from their biological sex and with a sexual orientation that is not heterosexual.

Finally, a specific mention is needed for trans people. Indeed, if the situation is difficult for gay and lesbians, transgenders are facing even more problems and, thus, heightened discrimination. Here, it is worth stressing the need of a change the processes that deal with trans people, who still have to go through a lot of bureaucracy when seeking for help and advice. For example, the laws concerning sexual transition should be revised and updated to make them less medicalised and with their actual needs in mind. At the same time, pharmacological therapies should be improved to make them more accessible. The level of discrimination for trans people is still very high and they should be able to access psychological advice more easily, whereas this advice should be cheaper.

Stimulating children's empowerment is at the core of this European project. Therefore, we hope that this contribution from Italy highlights the most important tendencies to follow and gaps to intervene on so as to achieve better life for those who need the most, that is, LGBTIQ children in vulnerable contexts.

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