Colourful
Childhoods

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

National Report

Portugal

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Contents

Introduction – Research Design and Sample

Fieldwork was successfully conducted, bearing in mind the aims for its different components: interviews, survey and focus groups. Finding professionals to interview was the easiest task and people were genuinely interested in taking part. We were able to involve a variety of actors, from psychologists to public servants, social educators, sociologists and other child-related services from different cities. The child recruitment processes were more challenging. In a sociocultural context like Portugal, marked by a dictatorial past in which there were broad restraints on social participation, the biggest challenge was finding LGBTIQ children who met the inclusion criteria to take part in the survey and in the focus groups. The active involvement of local partner institutions as well as other entities providing support to LGBTIQ children and teenagers was crucial for successful implementation.

Interviews with stakeholders: The semi-structured interview script was conceived by the C-Child research team at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra (CES-UC), led by Dr Ana Cristina Santos and Mafalda Esteves, and a total of eight interviews were conducted. The sample of interviewees was purposive, aiming at involving key actors working with children in vulnerable contexts, such as social workers, psychologists, professionals in child-protection agencies, youth workers and sociologists, among others. Our criteria involved job and post relevance, insertion in networks or professional forums that may benefit from further training in C-child issues and diversity of work experiences. We also privileged access and rapport previously established, when possible, in order to facilitate contact and ensure the timeline would be successfully met. Overall, we interviewed one youth technician based in a city council, three psychologists working in LGBTIQ associations, one director of a platform to support children who have lived in shelters and foster homes, one sociologist from a human rights NGO, one coordinator of a family support association and one social worker from the Commission for the Protection of Children and Young People (CPCJ). In terms of gender balance, we included three participants who identified as male. Regarding sexual orientation, six were heterosexual and two were gay men. All the interviews were cisgender despite our best efforts to introduce gender diversity. The age of the participants ranged from 28 to 61 years old with an average of 51. A total of 600 minutes of qualitative interviews were audio recorded, anonymised and analysed following thematic network coding. Informed consent was secured prior to each interview.

Focus group with children: The script for the focus group was proposed by the CES team and two versions were created to be applied according to the age group (6–11 years and 12–17 years). In a context such as Portugal, finding LGBTIQ children who met the inclusion criteria, answered the survey and participated in the focus groups was the biggest challenge for the team. Therefore, the motivation and active involvement of local partner institutions and other entities providing support to LGBTIQ children and young people was crucial in successfully completing this phase. For the dissemination of the focus groups, outreach materials were created targeting LGBTIQ young people aged 12–17 years (PCP) and disseminated on social media and among different associations working with children and young people. The partner institutions were essential for dissemination to children potentially interested in participating. As we intend to focus on LGBTIQ children from different geographical contexts and seek to reduce inequality in

accessibility and participation in the study, we held focus groups with children aged 12–17 years in a face-to-face format (1) and an online format (1). Both were chaired by Mafalda Esteves. For the first focus group, the young people were contacted through a community association in the city of Lisbon that operates at the level of psychosocial intervention with young people. Once the informed consent of the child and their legal guardian had been obtained, the focus group was carried out (14/11/2022) at the association's premises. The group was initially composed of seven children, but was reduced to four participants, as two did not identify with the theme in question and at the end of the session one child did not agree to participate in the study. Regarding the gender of the participating children, two self-identified as cisgender girls and two as transgender boys and regarding sexual orientation they self-identified as bisexual (1), lesbian (1), pansexual (1) and heterosexual (1). The second focus group intended to involve children from other geographical contexts, including the islands of Azores and Madeira. It took place on 24/11/2022 via the Zoom platform. Prior contacts were established to identify the participants and ensure informed consent. Although the team made all the necessary efforts to accommodate the time constraints and availability of all the children who might participate, from the initially confirmed five children only three were actually present at the meeting. At the moment of implementation of the focus group, regarding gender, one cisgender girl, one cisgender boy and one trans boy were involved and in terms of sexual orientation, they identified as gay (1), lesbian (1) and heterosexual (1). A total of 150 minutes of focus group were audio recorded, anonymised and analysed following thematic network coding. Different group analysis sessions took place. Informed consent was secured prior to each session (by the legal representative and children). The average age was 17 years old.

Survey and Sample: The European Survey on Colourful Childhoods was designed by the C-Child research team at the University of Girona, led by Dr Josan Longarita. After being validated by all partners in the consortium, the survey was translated, adapted to national contexts and applied virtually, using the statistical software LimeSurvey. The online survey methodology helped to eliminate bias, which could have been introduced by face-to-face interview approaches when dealing with very sensitive and personal questions such as the intersection between violence and sexual orientation or gender identity. To ensure that the adaptation of the survey to the national context was valid, an external team was involved and a pre-test was carried out with an anonymous group of children. The target group was LGBTIQ children born between 2004 and 2007 in Portugal. The survey was disseminated online and in a face-to-face format in diverse contexts and we received support from local partner associations and other relevant ones that carry out child counselling. Professional networks prior to this project (Diversity and Childhood project), were also used to support this task. After requesting permission from the Directorate General for Education to disseminate the survey in educational centres, some secondary schools in the areas of Coimbra and Lisbon were contacted to assist in recruitment but the take-up was low. The survey took place between July and November 2022. The levels of participation were partially influenced by the summer holidays.

The Colourful Childhoods Survey provided participants with confidentiality and anonymity and included five main sections: 1 – *Knowledge regarding gender and gender diversity*; 2 – *Beliefs regarding LGBTIQ children and youth support;* 3 – *Experiences regarding covid-19 lockdown and restrictions*, 4 – *Resilience processes regarding being an LGBTIQ person* and 5 – *Expectations regarding support LGBTIQ children.*

As it was applied online, the survey was answered by children who lived in different regions of the country. Overall, we had a total of 111 responses but, because some were answered by non-LGBTIQ children, in the end we considered a total of 82 full responses. Regarding the participants, the majority of LGBTIQ children were at school in compulsory secondary education (81.7%). The majority were born in Portugal (79), live with their parents (78%), with extended family (6.1%), alone (3.7%) or in a boarding school (2.4%). In terms of gender, 43.9% self-identified as female (36), 26.8% as male (22), 14.6% as non-binary (12), 9.8% as other (8) and 4.9% preferred not to answer (4). In addition, one third (31.6%) claimed to be transgender (25). In terms of sexual orientation, 38.3% self-identified as bisexual (31), 22.2% as gay or lesbian (18), 24.7% with another sexual orientation (20), and 6.2% as heterosexual (5). It should be noted that the answers of young heterosexuals correspond to young people who declared themselves to be transgender or who self-identified with a gender other than male or female.

1. Legal and political context regarding LGBTIQ rights[1]

1.1. Context

Portugal experienced the longest dictatorship in Southern Europe, between 1926 and 1974. The criminalization of homosexuality in Portugal during this time enabled police raids and detention camps targeting gay people (Almeida 2010; Santos 2013). Homosexuality was decriminalized only in 1982, eight years after the 1974 revolution that ended the dictatorship.

It took nineteen years after decriminalizing homosexuality, in 2001, until the Portuguese Parliament approved two laws that changed the face of sexual politics in the country. One of these was the law on shared economy that recognized the legal status of cohabitants regardless of their number, gender or existence of blood ties (Decreto-Lei nº 6/01). This law was particularly promising in the fields of friendship and of consensual non-monogamies, as recognition of partners was not limited in number nor by the existence of sexual bonds between them (Santos 2013). The second change in 2001 was the de facto union law, which granted the same rights to different-sex and same-sex cohabiting couples, regarding next of kin, health and housing, amongst other legal aspects (Decreto-Lei nº 7/01). The legal changes enacted in 2001 interrupted a 19-year period of immobility during which, after the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1982, LGBTIQ issues remained marginal in the political agenda, despite the increasing consolidation of collective action and cultural expectations around the topic. Following the approval of these two laws, other changes occurred and LGBTIQ legal demands slowly but steadily occupied the Constitution, the Penal Code and the Civil Code (Santos, 2013).

In 2004, Portugal became the first European country and fourth worldwide to include in its Constitution the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation. Other legal

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[1] This section draws heavily on work previously written by authors (Santos, Esteves and Santos, 2020).

measures followed, the most controversial of which happened in 2010 when, after fierce social debate involving religious leaders, politicians and activists, the Portuguese Parliament approved a gender-neutral marriage law. In 2016, same-sex parenthood obtained extensive legal recognition (Santos, 2018), including adoption, co-adoption, medically assisted reproduction and even a restrictive version of surrogacy. In 2018 there were important changes regarding gender identity and expression, as well as intersex (Hines & Santos, 2018). Following a revision of the Gender Identity Law from 2011, in 2018 lawmakers finally established the depathologization of transgender people, banning the need for a medical report for people over 18 and teenagers over 16 to change their name and sex in their documents. By default, this law also banned surgeries on intersex babies and established that schools must use the social name chosen by the trans child or youth.[2]

Based on this short overview, it can be observed that from 2001 onwards, Portugal has seen a significant increase in the LGBTIQ movement and also in policies and in Portuguese law concerning not only sexual orientation and gender identity but also sexual citizenship (Carneiro, 2009; Cascais, 2006, 2020; Ferreira, 2015; Gato, 2014; Santos, 2013, 2016). These changes in the law have also been possible due to a strong and resilient LGBTIQ movement that pressured the government through public debate initiatives and lobbying. The push for laws regarding LGBTIQ people also led to an increase in the amount of services recently developed for LGBTIQ people and youth specifically. Examples include the state-funded Centro Gis and Rainbow House (Casa Arco-íris) in Porto and the Qui House (Casa Qui) in Lisbon, which provide services including housing for homeless LGBTIQ people, youth and children.

Despite significant changes in recent years, most specifically regarding legal transformation from the 2000s onwards, dominant cultural expectations encourage a consistent type of linearity in intimate biographies: after reaching adulthood, one is expected to find a (preferably different-sex) partner, to get formal relational recognition (preferably through marriage) and to have children (preferably one's own biological children). In previous work, together with colleagues Roseneil, Crowhurst and Stoilova, we referred to this as the procreative norm (Roseneil et al., 2016: 3). Explanations for the difficulties in changing the cultural context can be partially found based on literature on welfare and gender regimes which describe Southern European countries as family-oriented, procreative and (hetero)normative states (Mínguez and Crespi, 2017; Torres, Mendes and Lapa, 2008; Santos, 2013). Consequently, violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression are reported every year (ILGA Portugal, 2019; OECD, 2019; OECD 2020; rede ex aequo, 2019).

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[2] More information about the 2018 Gender Identity Law can be found at https://dre.pt/home/-/dre/123962165/details/maximized?fbclid=IwAR1EuI7Xt_49Y0VzM83l5tJtDP8LovgjVq6AWwml5uTCshpVWVKIRQCl5lg.

Timeline

1982 – Decriminalization of homosexuality.

1995 – 1st celebration of Stonewall organized by the Homosexual Work Group (GTH).[3]

1996 – New collectives emerge: ILGA Portugal, Clube Safo and the portal PortugalGay.PT.

1997 – 1st Pride Party (Arraial), 1st Lesbian and Gay Film Festival.

2000 – 1st LGBTIQ March in Portugal (Lisbon).

2001 – Recognition of same-sex de facto unions.

2003 – Legislation on workplace LGBTIQ discrimination.

2004 – Portugal becomes the 1st European country and the 4th worldwide to include sexual orientation amongst non-discrimination factors in its Constitution.

2006 – Porto is the 2nd city to have an LGBTIQ March.

2007 – Age of consent is equalized; homophobic hate crimes made more severe in the Penal Code; reframing of domestic violence includes same-sex domestic violence.

2010 – Gender neutral marriage law.

2010 – Coimbra is the 3rd city to have an LGBTIQ March.

2011 – Gender Identity Law – includes name change in documents with the obligatory registry and a medical report signed by two medical professionals.

2016 – Same-sex couple adoption and same-sex co-parent adoption law.

2016 – Medically assisted reproduction, regardless of sexual orientation.

2018 – Gender Self-Determination Law (Revision of the Gender Identity Law) – depathologization, no need for medical report; schools must treat trans students by their social name and give access to safe toilets; surgeries on intersex newborns are banned.

2018 – Government issues a National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination (Portugal + Igual), with a plan for sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

2018 – Queer Tropical, a collective which aims at supporting the Brazilian LGBTIQ community, is born. This is the 1st collective of its kind, followed by Casa T (in 2020) targeting racialized trans migrant people, and by the collective The Blacker The Berry (in 2021), designed by queer black people to support queer black people.

2019 – Government orders schools to respect the use of students' social names and their choice related to uniforms and toilets and suspends the administrative fee of €200 previously charged to change one's name.

2021 – Prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation in blood donation.

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[3] Read more about the group: http://portugalpride.org/orgs.asp?id=gth

2021 – The court declares the order establishing the implementation of the Law on Gender Self-Determination in schools unconstitutional, stating that it must be the Assembly of the Republic that regulates these matters.

1.2. Relevant statistical data about LGBTIQ situation in Portugal

In 2020, the European LGBT Survey (FRA, 2020) indicated situations of violence mainly in the public space (26%), at school/university (26%) and at work (22%). Almost half of the participants (54%), report having been ridiculed, teased, insulted or threatened because of being LGBTI+. The abuser profile is someone unknown (46%), someone from school or college (16%) or a family member (9%). Aggressors are mostly male and the incident occurs in the public space (street, square or car park). Portuguese participants report that they did not communicate the hate-motivated harassment to the police (81%) nor another organization (91%) because they did not consider it serious enough (45%), or because they did not think they would do anything (28%), or because they took care of it (18%), or last because of shame and embarrassment (16%). Previously, in 2013, 51% of the respondents in Portugal said they had been discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity or sexual orientation in their lifetime, including being victims of harassment and violence in public spaces (FRA, 2013).

ILGA Europe (2020), in their review of human rights for LGBTI people in Europe and Central Asia, reported cases of discrimination in law, as well as incidents of violence in public spaces based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) issues, in Portugal.

According to Transgender Europe's (TGEU) 2019 map of Trans Rights in Europe and Central Asia , including 29 categories and a list of 53 countries, Portugal meets 17 of the evaluation criteria and is one of the most advanced countries regarding law that supports and protects trans people. A total of 274 people, including 21 minors, used the new gender recognition law and changed their gender marker in Portugal. (ILGA Europe, 2020).

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

2.1. Context

The child protection system in Portugal started in the 1960s but until the 1990s a child was not considered a subject with rights. After the revolution of April 25, 1974, the Constitution of 1976 recognized that the child is entitled to protection by society and the state in relation to his or her full development. Subsequently, the Portuguese state ratified the United Nations Convention. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1990, led to a deep reformulation of the system based on a new paradigm that sought, on the one hand, the protection of children and young people in situations of danger,

victims of circumstances of diverse nature; and on the other hand of responsibility, centred on the "education for the law" of those between 12 and 16 years of age who had committed acts that, under criminal law, would be considered crimes. At the end of the 90s, two new laws about childhood and youth were approved, focused on the higher interests of the child:

- The *Law on Educational Guardianship, Law 166/99, of 14 Septembe*r ("Lei Tutelar Educativa"), which recognizes that a child aged between 12 and 16 years old is a subject with judicial rights.

- The *Law of Protection of Children and Young People at Risk, Law 147/99, of 1 September* (LPCJP), revised by *Law 142/2015, of 8 September*, which regulates the state's intervention in the promotion and protection of the rights of children in risk situations, when the parents or legal representative places at risk the safety, health, education and development of the child.

Portugal has been in line with international and European guidelines in the area of childhood, reinforcing the protection and inclusion of children in order to break intergenerational cycles of poverty and thus improve their well-being and opportunities in the near future. According to the report on Policies from Children in the area of Social Security (DSRIC, 2015) led by the Portuguese government, the commitment to these goals has resulted in several measures focusing on strengthening early childhood intervention in areas such as health and education, investing in the quality and availability of child support services, prioritising access to the most vulnerable families and guaranteeing minimum resources through a combination of cash benefits and in kind.

The Protection of Children and Young People in Danger Act itself defines the role of each of the parts of the system, by stating that "the promotion of the rights and the protection of children and young people in danger is the responsibility of the entities with competence in childhood and youth matters, the commissions for the protection of children and young people and the courts". It is in this scope that the National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Young People emerged with a child protection policy based on a child protection model, in force since 2001. Its aim is the active participation of the community, creating a partnership relationship with the state, materialised in the Commissions for the Protection of Children and Young People (CPCJ), capable of establishing local community-based networks.

Portugal approved the National Strategy for Children's Rights (ENDC) for the period 2021–2024 (which is aligned with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Children). The ENDC is based on an integrated and comprehensive definition and its main goal is to build the pillars of a new approach in terms of childhood and youth to be implemented in the next few years. This represented a very important step in ensuring the protection of children in special situations of vulnerability as well as sexual and gender diversity amongst other intersections. The ENDC includes five strategic areas for children and is configured into five priorities which are developed into strategic objectives: Promote well-being and equal opportunities (Priority I), Support families and parenthood (Priority II), Promote access to information and participation of children and young people (Priority III), Prevent and combat violence against children and young people (Priority V), and Promote the production of tools and scientific knowledge to foster a comprehensive view of children and young people's rights. Moreover, the Portuguese government also shows interest in promoting sexual and gender diverse children's well-being through the

National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination (ENIND 2018–2030) – "Portugal + Igual" – approved by the XXI Constitutional Government on 8 March, 2018 (Council of Ministers Resolution No. 61/2018, of 21 May). Recognizing equality and non-discrimination as a condition for building a sustainable future for Portugal, the XXI Constitutional Government defined strategic axes and objectives until 2030.

In relation to gender identity and expression as well as intersex issues, in 2018 there were important changes (Saleiro 2017; Hines and Santos 2018). Following the revision of the Gender Identity Act (2011), in 2018 legislation established the depathologization of trans people, dispensing with a medical report for adult people and for children (over 16 years old) who wish to change their name and gender on their official documents. This law also includes the prohibition of unjustified surgeries (which do not pose a danger to health) on intersex babies and establishes that schools and other educational centres must use the social name and pronouns of the transgender child or young person.

By ensuring equality and non-discrimination in the education system in Portugal, a path has been made through the creation of several public policy instruments that seek to ensure the protection of LGBTIQ children and young people: the law on sexual education in the school context (Law no. 60/2009) and the creation of the Student Statute and School Ethics (Law no. No. 51/2012 of 5 September) allow students, from 2012, to claim the right to be treated with respect and correction by any member of the educational community, and discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity cannot happen under any circumstances. In 2019, Order No. 7247/2019, which establishes measures for the implementation of Law No. 38/2018 in the school context and provides for the respect of the student's social name and the right to use uniform and bathroom according to their self-determined gender identity was also approved. Despite these significant advances, recent setbacks render null and void the norm issued by the Ministry of Education on specific measures to be implemented by schools regarding gender diversity. Decision No. 474/2021 noted that three measures fall within the competence of Parliament. This event can be classified as a step backwards in the legal and policy developments regarding equality and anti-discrimination of LGBTIQ children (Santos et. al, 2023).

In the sphere of the protection of LGBTIQ children in healthcare, in 2019 the Ministry of Health/ Directorate General of Health launched the National Health Strategy for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People: Volume 1 Promotion of the health of transgender and intersex people that enables compliance with Law No. 38/2018.

These laws and political measures represent recognition by the Portuguese state that gender diversity manifests itself throughout the life course, therefore recognizing that gender expression in childhood and ensuring respect for the self-determination of trans, intersex and non-binary children and young people is crucial (Diversity and Childhood 2020). However, some attention should be paid to the effects of the right-wing movement and anti-gender campaigns (Santos, 2022) and the lack of measures regarding conversion "therapy".

2.2. Relevant statistical data

Studies about the impact of covid-19 on LGBTIQ children in Portugal are still scarce. However, those that already exist reinforce the idea that LGBTIQ children are particularly

vulnerable, especially when they are in hostile environments and feelings of deep isolation from LGBTIQ friends increase significantly. Also access to LGBTIQ social and political spaces has been made more difficult (Gato, J.; Leal, D. & Seabra, D., 2020).

So far, the largest survey (Gato et. al., 2019; Pizmony-Levy et al., 2018) conducted in Portugal addressing the situation of LGBTIQ young people in schools finds that for many participants (n = 663) around two in five students said they felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation and almost one third because of their gender expression. Around a quarter of them avoided using spaces such as changing rooms, toilets or sports lessons because of insecurity or discomfort. Areas such as sports facilities (14.2%) or the school lunchroom or bar (13.3%) were also avoided. The majority (61.1%) heard homophobic comments at school regularly or frequently from peers (three quarters) or teaching and non-teaching staff (one third). Two thirds of the sample reported having been the target of verbal aggression because of personal characteristics, the majority because of gender expression (66.6%). The number of reports of episodes of violence remains low, with only one in three students making at least one report to teaching and non-teaching staff. In the cases where a report was made, only one third considered that the response to the situation was effective on the part of adults (teaching and non-teaching staff). Only a little more than a third revealed having reported it to their family and in 40.6% of the cases in which there was such a report, the family never broached the subject at school. In her study Freitas (2019) identified that young LGBTIQ people were more likely to report being victims of bullying than young heterosexual people.

The 2018 Education Report produced by rede ex aequo shows that only 25% of young respondents have ever spoken of gender or sexual diversity in school and more than half of the teachers had witnessed bullying and violence due to gender expression, identity and sexual orientation. Moreover, another study on LGBTIQ youth in Portuguese schools revealed that many students experience LGBTIQphobic verbal abuse and other forms of violence (ILGA Portugal, 2017).

According to FRA (2020), 24% of LGBTI+ children and young people felt discriminated against by school/university staff due to homo/bi/transphobia. However, the vast majority (92%) do not report the incidents because they feel that: 1. nothing would happen or change (34%); 2. because they did not want to reveal their sex/gender identity (23%): 3. because they felt it was not worth reporting the incident (21%).

According to the results of the Diversity and Childhood project, the lack of access to workplace resources to support LGBTIQ children and young people is still a reality (Esteves, Santos & Santos, 2021). On the other hand, in his analysis of ENAE data, Fernandes (2020) revealed that the presence of inclusive policies could be associated with the quality of school experiences of LGBTIQ students.

3. Findings

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

Our findings show that violence motivated by sexual and gender prejudice characterizes the lives of LGBTIQ children participating in the study before, during and after the covid-19 lockdown restrictions, both offline and online. According to the results of the survey, the places where discrimination occurred most regularly were in school (about 44%) and in the family (37%). Also, LGBTIQ young people reported that the period of lockdown was additionally demanding and characterized by great personal ambivalence regarding feelings and emotional distress. Regarding physical violence because of being an LGBTIQ person since the covid-19 pandemic started, the majority answered "not at all" and "a little". On the occasions that it was reported, the perpetrators were housemates in a foster home, roommates and strangers.

Several participants disclosed their sexual orientation and gender identity to their families during lockdowns. Such moments were particularly difficult at an emotional and psychological level, especially in family environments where support was scarce or null. Without the support of family members, psychological suffering was high, especially because they were far from their significant others. That reason was especially important because most of the young people who answered the survey in Portugal spend their free time with friends (48.8%).

Next, we present our findings regarding gender violence experiences against LGBTIQ children. Based on the reports by children, we structured these experiences according to key areas.

❖ **Families**: It was clear from the reflections of the LGBTIQ children that the mandatory lockdown sometimes led to a forced coming out within the family. Varying reactions from different family members were identified, some showing support but others triggering gender-based violence. Likewise, episodes where children had to listen to negative comments or insults directed to the LGBTIQ population, regular psychological violence, threats of expulsion from home or more subtle manifestations characterised by the questioning and invalidation of the young person's identity were some of the examples shared. An illustrative example was the case of a trans boy who, after revealing his gender identity to his mother, was asked by the mother to hide it from his father for fear of negative consequences such as expulsion from home. When discussing the negative impacts of the experience of lockdown, children highlighted the social isolation, loneliness and sadness that, in some cases, remained beyond the period of confinement and they feel that social contact has still not been re-established. In some cases, interpersonal relationships with friends, schoolmates and relevant adults were also affected. The prolonged imposition of a physical distance on LGBTIQ children caused a separation from their safe and affective network and contributed to the development of a sense of disconnection with others and a rupture with interpersonal relationships that were apparently solid. Although they consider that lockdown damaged friendships and that this had consequences in terms of well-being, they also recognised that this period allowed them to reinforce other friendships by overcoming demanding moments such as those

experienced in this period. The negative effects on mental health were widely acknowledged as well as the essential role of psychology professionals in supporting children; however, they recognise that access to it is not universal and depends on the family's economic resources. About one third of respondents admit to having economic hardship (37.3%/31), 9.6% (8) already experienced violence at home and 34.1% (28) think they have mental issues.

❖ **Public space**: Public toilets were identified by LGBTIQ children as being gendered and very problematic spaces. They mention several episodes of direct social discrimination, especially directed at trans/non-binary children. In cases where there are episodes of physical violence and exploring the opinions about the role of the police authority in preventing and stopping violence, it is considered that police action, which is expected to be essential, is often not effective because the response is late. Another element related to gender violence in the public space is the social judgement expressed in "disapproving looks" that they constantly receive in their daily lives on the street. They feel rejected and criticized and agree that, although these are not episodes of physical violence, they cause great discomfort and insecurity. Everyone agrees that these episodes take place in many other contexts and not just on the streets, with an emphasis on school and public health provision such as hospitals and health centres.

❖ **Schools:** According to the survey data, the majority agree that educational centres should promote a positive view of sexual and gender diversity. During focus groups, it was evident during the discussions that the school context is the space where most experiences of violence are experienced by LGBTIQ children. They also indicate that schools are the spaces where a large part of the LGBTIQ community is based. Furthermore, it is shared that LGBTIQphobic violence does not stop in school playgrounds; it also enters the classroom and on occasions by the hands of teaching staff. They report several situations of bullying that, when facing gender violence by a heterosexual/cisgender peer, the teaching staff did not protect the victims and did not guarantee the children self-determination. Also some adult staff still refuse to use the children's social name and pronouns. With regard to the activities in physical education classes, the trans and non-binary children stated that physical education activities continue to be organised according to the binary gender marker (masculine/feminine; boys-girls), dealing with certain situations that create great discomfort, vulnerability and exposure in front of the other classmates as well as demanding emotional management, since these children get confused as they do not know which group to address or which they belong to. Regarding the profile of the perpetrators, LGBTIQ children identified that besides the adults in schools (teaching and non-teaching staff), peers and even the parents of peers carry out the majority of the attacks. In cases when aggression comes from the classmates, they discuss the situations of physical and psychological violence they have suffered and highlight the presence of hate speech against the LGBTIQ population among children, as well as the importance of demystifying the idea that young people are not conservative. In this regard, they consider that work should be done to deconstruct the LGBTIQphobia present and to provide alternatives, especially when the family context has a great influence on their beliefs and opinions.

Several narratives indicated a low motivation to be in school and some indicated that they hated school.

❖ **Health**: Hospital and health centre environments were identified as places where transgender and non-binary children experience LGBTIQphobic violence. Some trans children shared episodes in hospitals both in general services and in child-related services of disrespectful treatment, the non-use of trans children's social name and pronouns being the most common. On the other hand, waiting rooms are identified as being places of great exposure to violence, since children are often called by their "dead" name and not by their (social) name. They feel disrespected and that they have to justify their existence.

❖ **State:** The sexual and gender-diverse children discussed the role of the state in the creation and maintenance of gender violence. As a result of this debate, they recognized its huge importance in the protection of LGBTIQ children in terms of equal rights and guaranteed protection in contexts such as schools, where the LGBTIQ community is large and violence is still a daily routine. Considering the multiple challenges they have to deal with in their daily lives, they consider that state actions are insufficient and the existing responses are not effective. They stress that there is a discourse of an advanced legal framework in Portugal designed to protect them, but that it is not respected and therefore the right to education is at risk. A similar opinion was shared regarding the contexts of health care provision and protection of LGBTIQ children.

Gaps identified by the children include the insufficient implementation of sex education in schools, the presence of prejudices against the LGBTIQ community among teaching staff, the intrusion and invasion by teaching and non-teaching staff in matters that concern young people, the lack of respect for children's self-determination trans/non-binary, the lack of gender-neutral bathrooms, and the ongoing devaluation of adults who devalue, belittle, and disrespect children's experiences and needs (arguing that they are too young, that they don't know, and that the experiences they have and what they feel is temporary).

A topic which emerged from the debates was youth policies and some gaps were identified in the way these policies are proposed and designed: laws which are designed with children in mind affect their lives, but do not take their opinions and needs into account. They feel that they are not properly listened to and consider the legal aspect of age as an obstacle to achieving a more direct participation, particularly in decision-making issues which are relevant to their lives, such as gender and sexuality. It is clear that for these children there is still a long way to go on this matter.

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

Regarding the strategies adopted by LGBTIQ children during and after the period of confinement caused by covid-19, they reflected on individual mechanisms and resources that were activated to respond to LGBTIQphobic violence to which they were exposed,

both in face-to-face contexts such as school (after lockdown) or staying at home (during lockdown) and online contexts.

The individual strategies that were shared show that the difficult task of stopping situations of gender-based violence often falls to the child. Through the discourse that emerged from the focus groups as well as the results of the survey, it some strategies could be identified:

(1) Leaving the situation: they abandoned situations in which they felt unable to resolve the situation or that they were afraid;

(2) Alienation: occupying free time sleeping, thus avoiding managing challenging situations (especially when locked down at home);

(3) "An eye for an eye" – facing the aggressor using the same type of response that was used and reciprocating in the same way;

(4) "Being connected" – To reduce social isolation and maintain relationships with significant people (in particular other children), internet and social networks were massively used to communicate, play and hold other types of virtual encounters with classmates with whom LGBTIQ children were closest. Thus, in an autonomous and self-managed way, the children organized meetings on the platforms used by the school after the school period to socialize, reduce loneliness and escape the hostile environment that often characterised their daily lives. It highlights the essential role of digital platforms where classes took place as a gateway to other living spaces and became a communication channel outside the home. Furthermore, according to the results of the survey, the influence of social networks for children was quite strong during the covid-19, as they learnt about LGBTIQ issues, and asked and solved questions about these topics.

(5) "Occupy and resist" – As a way of dealing with the violence they were subjected to in the educational context, not only by colleagues, but also by teachers, a strategy adopted was to place images of the LGBTIQ flag in the background of the computer screen. This action became a strategy for affirmation in terms of sexual and gender diversity, as well as resistance in a protected and safe context, especially in cases where young people were bullied at school.

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

According to the children: Children and young people involved in the study discussed the importance of creating and identifying their safe network of young people or adults who they can trust to share their issues and ask for help if needed. Regarding adults, they believe that they play an important role in supporting LGBTIQ children in situations of violence, as they have the power to prevent some acts of LGBTIQphobic violence, especially referring to family and educational contexts. In this way, supporters of LGBTIQ children, via whom the child maintains a close relationship with members of their safe

network, can sometimes have a professional profile (psychology professionals, social workers, teachers, etc.).

Children also spoke of the importance of turning to young people who are trusted friends (peers) in difficult situations related to gender and sexuality. Some of the reasons given for preferring to resort to other young people rather than adults were: 1. feeling judged by adults, 2. their opinions being devalued by adults and 3. recognizing the presence of prejudice and discriminatory behaviour in adults. They also think that, when the subject is related to issues of sexual and gender diversity, adults should show respect and not interfere, but for this to come about, consistent work is necessary to train people and change mentalities among this population.

At school, some interventions by teaching staff were mentioned by children. These professionals create relationships of trust by showing availability to intercede and mediate in any existing conflict between young LGBTIQ people and their family. These professionals also sought to guarantee and apply the law of self-determination of the young person's gender, guaranteeing the use of their chosen social name and pronouns by other teaching colleagues.

Also, when home is not a safe and supportive context and children face violence, they turn to friendly people, and these are the ones who will sometimes act and intercede with adults and ask for help when the child victim has difficulty. They are usually other young people or adults such as teachers, psychology professionals or friends. When they see the suffering to which the friend is exposed, they decide to act and report the case to an adult person with the aim of triggering actions that interrupt the cycle of violence. In cases where there is physical violence, the intervention of police authority was considered essential to stop violence.

If the public space is permeable to LGBTIQphobic violence, it is also a space where LGBTIQ children can feel safer, more protected and respected. Although briefly, participation and collective organization were also pointed out as a useful resistance strategy. In this context, the visualization of symbols such as the LGBTIQ flag is seen as positive and offers a message that that place/neighbourhood is a space where the LGBTIQ population is welcome. Certain neighbourhoods have a large number of LGBTI+ flags on the windows of their buildings and, according to the children, they have a positive effect because they convey greater protection and a feeling of being part of a community.

Community-based associations aimed at young people were also mentioned as platforms that play a crucial role in eliminating violence against LGBTIQ children. These structures of a psychosocial nature aim at promoting autonomy, self-esteem and self-determination, building meaningful interpersonal relationships and guaranteeing respect and active listening. Peer learning and group cohesion are also promoted in these spaces. These action principles will trigger essential civic participation mechanisms to promote the well-being of LGBTIQ children. Regarding professional practices in these support structures for young people (psychology professionals, social workers), it is essential to create relationships of trust so that the child knows that they can count on the adult and ask for help if there is a problem. On the other hand, individual and collective monitoring ensures that they are respected and heard in this space. The use of the correct social name and pronouns, self-management and dynamization of activities are some of the examples that help children to feel that they can be who they are and feel respected. About the activities that they develop there, they believe that they

should be transferred and applied to other contexts such as school, a place children identify as being in urgent need of LGBTIQ-oriented intervention.

According to the professionals themselves: The private and public institutions where our interviewees work do not have specific internal norms or guidelines which address LGBTIQ children. The argument often used by professionals themselves is that the institution respects human rights in general, and therefore they deem it unnecessary to have another document to deal specifically with this topic. Some of them mention more general laws, such as the law protecting children and young people, or guidelines promoting gender equality, including the protection against harassment. However, later in the interview, some recognized that the existence of guidelines in the institution would indeed facilitate their job in protecting LGBTIQ children. As such, guidelines to protect LGBTIQ children are considered as a good practice in any given sector or institution, even if the majority of institutions lack this type of document.

School was the space most commonly mentioned in interviews as the cornerstone for protecting LGBTIQ children and youth now and in the future. Examples of good practices in schools include:

- Having internal diversity policies or guidelines for LGBTIQ anti-discrimination in schools (this could include celebrating 17th May)

- Calling the student by their number, avoiding the name (hence minimizing the risk of misgendering)

- Using inclusive or gender-neutral language

- Avoiding dress codes that penalise girls

It should be noted that several of these practices emerged from interviews in which professionals were prompted to imagine what could be done differently to protect children, and not from what they actually do or witness in their professional sector, workplace or institution.

Some interviewees underlined the importance of asking end users about their pronouns and social name to avoid discomfort. In one case, the professional identified as a good practice of their institution the fact that any adult attending a child for the first time should present themselves explaining their pronouns and name which they prefer to use, hence creating a safe space where the child is encouraged to do the same.

The importance of involving families came up as a consistent example of good practice, particularly giving training or raising awareness about sexual and gender diversity with families, and not only with professionals or students. In some cases, professionals mentioned the need to act as mediators between the child and their family to promote better understanding and empathy and avoid violence. This was unanimously acknowledged to be challenging, given the risk of outing the child.

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

Adequate training is perceived amongst professionals as the most urgent measure. The need for more and better knowledge through training is justified not only from the point of view of wanting to improve their input as professionals, but also from the point of view of children who will be more vulnerable if they meet unprepared professionals. The fear of failing children was expressed by some of the professionals we interviewed.

However, different types of training will necessarily lead to different results. In one case, an interviewee whose first contact with LGBTIQ issues was in a training session provided by the Portuguese team on a previous project (Diversity and Childhood), mentioned that, although recognizing how crucial that workshop was for her own personal and professional development, she would recommend training that is more hands-on. Role playing and Theatre of the Oppressed were mentioned as specific examples that produce results that will stay for life.

Training for trainers to promote knowledge exchange between peers is considered a very effective form of training, not only for adults (professionals, parents, etc.) but also for children and young people.

In addition to training, professionals also lack protocols and guidelines that explain step by step exactly what to do to support an LGBTIQ child at risk. One interviewee stressed that these guidelines should be produced and shared top down from the government to each Commission for the Protection of Children and Young People (CPCJ).

Another set of needs identified by professionals are related to funding and sustainability. Much of the social work with LGBTIQ children and their families is delegated by the state to NGOs, whose funding is dependent on the EU. Moreover, the number of professionals is too small to provide adequate care to all end users. To ensure adequate care over time would require a wider investment translated into regular funding and a larger number of professionals working in child-related services.

The quality of care provided would also benefit from an increase in the number of LGBTIQ child-related services in all regions of the country, instead of the current small numbers concentrated in three major cities. These services should also change to accommodate the needs of non-binary children more specifically. Finally, professionals also mentioned that appointments with children should be more regular and sustained over time, avoiding long periods (e.g. six months) between appointments with the psychologist or the child psychiatrist.

Other issues emerging from interviews and that present concerns to professionals include the increase in suicide attempts and other mental health issues of children aggravated after covid-19; the apparent lack of interest of young people in joining initiatives in which they would be an active part (e.g. municipalities' Youth Councils); the banality of parent-inflicted violence on children; the biases in the Gender Identity Law which does not include migrants nor refugees, nor children under 16; disrespect for privacy or lack of flexibility in institutions for children at risk; dealing with non-supportive parents or other family members; dealing with misinformation, fake news and lack of

knowledge displayed by institutions (e.g. schools) about existing laws; lack of regulation of existing laws and related failure in implementation (e.g. of the Gender Identity Law in schools).

3.5. Example quotes

Quotes from Interviews with professionals:

I have some difficulty understanding what this [gender] is. And I'm not going to say "There's the feminine", "There's the masculine," but then what? There is more. There are people who don't feel masculine, who don't feel feminine… As a technician I have some difficulty and I would like to learn more in this area because I feel really, zero, almost. And it's not just me. I've already had the opportunity to speak with other technicians and we feel the same… [Vera, Portugal, Youth Worker, 40–44 years old]

We technicians have to work on that and we have to know, but for that we have to be trained and we have to know these issues, we have to know what we are talking about. [...] There are technicians who are doing their job and dealing with LGBTIQ children and do not have any kind of sensitivity and preparation. [Vera, Portugal, youth worker, 40–44 years old]

Training, training that reaches people, deconstruction type of training, it's not repeating information and contents, it's really going deep into beliefs and unbalancing these beliefs to generate a new structure, a new acquisition. This really has to be done. With a lot of time to be able to debate, to discuss the issues, to be able to be there in the relationship with people, so that they see things in a different way and, of course, this has to be done slowly too… [Joana, Portugal, psychologist and NGO coordinator, 50–54 years old]

When the school has LGBTIQ policies, students have much more, they feel much more comfortable and much less ostracised. And it's not because anything special happened. It's really just the feeling you have when the school doesn't have an LGBTIQ policy and that's it, they have much more a feeling that they're in danger, that they can't go down that hallway alone, they can't be somewhere. That is why security is often not about having a person guarding the corridor and security, it is once again the structure, it is the policies, it is the issue of visibility, it is the issue of policies, it is the issue of raising people's awareness and training people… And also about the contents, the materials, everything that is transmitted in schools should also be revised, the whole part of the manuals can be revised either in terms of gender, or in terms of LGBTIQ themes. [Joana, Portugal, psychologist in NGO, 50–54 years old]

There were, in fact, many situations that the teachers brought up regarding the [LGBTIQ] topic and the way the school operated. Colleagues who refused their

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social name, they would say that was their name. Or they went looking for the family without the child's consent, and then found in the family an ally for their own way of thinking and against the child or young person. They would say, "yes, but your father won't allow it and therefore I will not call you by that name either". It has nothing to do with solving the problem. It's creating obstacles, because it is that teacher's personal belief and, therefore resources are mobilized in opposition to the child. [Joana, Portugal, psychologist in NGO, 50–54 years old]

Once we received a call from a school saying we must go there because they were having an epidemic of bisexuals. They said we had to go there because things were getting difficult because the school was full of bisexuals, and that it was an epidemic. Contagious… [Clara and Mateus, Portugal, psychologists in gender-based violence NGO, 30–34 years old]

We're so patronising in the support we offer. [...] And that patronising bias in social intervention is absolutely terrible. [...] I mean, we always doubt about what the child is saying, because there's almost a sort of ageism, an age-based discrimination, because "they're too young", or "immature", or "it's a phase" or "they're not old enough to know", like "you can't even decide what shoes to buy, how will you know whether you're a boy or a girl…" [...] And this stems from our Judeo-Christian roots and what we learned during the dictatorship and all… [Victor, Portugal, psychologist in victim support NGO, 30–34 years old]

Quotes from Focus groups with children

Mainly in public issues, like hospitals and things like that, from my experience, recently even, last week, people don't respect my name, my pronouns because I haven't changed in the registry, and organizations need to inform the people that work there, to know how to act in situations, this would will help a lot. And in schools and other things like that. (Flora, trans girl, 12–17, Portugal)

I agree because when we are going to debate about this kind of subject or when we are going to talk to some adult about this I will say, quote, "Those neutral and non-binary pronouns and whatnot" didn't exist in my time, you are all a bunch of exaggerators" and my answer is usually "wrong, it has existed for a long time but there wasn't enough freedom for these people to show what they really felt", so, I am surrounded by questions: How are we supposed to be heard and who is going to listen to us, because we have been in this impasse for a long time. (Carmen, girl in questioning, Portugal, 12–17)

I think that teachers themselves, they don't care, not all of them, but some of them don't care about the community, but I think they should take that thought of "If you want to stop violence, which is something that practically everyone wants to stop, you have to stop the violence yourself, because teachers think "Ah, but I

don't do violence, I don't hit, I don't talk", but just by looking, by inferiorizing the child, they are already doing violence, because violence is not only physical or verbal, violence is visual, it's the looks... (Luís, self-identified as trans boy, Portugal, 12–17 years old)

4. Overall evaluation: tendencies and absences as regards empowering LGBTIQ children to combat violence in Portugal

Several of the needs mentioned by professionals when asked about what could be done better are related to a general ageist and adult-oriented culture that paternalises children, consistently failing in acknowledging their perspectives and input about matters that are directly related to their own well-being and safety. Sentences such as "You're too young to know" or "You'll grow out of it" were consistently repeated by professionals when referring to difficulties in dealing with family members or, in some situations, teachers. Also, there is the idea that the child cannot have access to gender/sexuality related care (e.g. puberty blockers) while the child experiences depressive traits (self-harm, etc.), when scholarship demonstrates that depressive traits often emerge precisely from homo/biphobia, misgendering and other forms of gender-based violence.

4.1. SWOT analysis on combating violence against LGBTIQ children in Portugal

Strengths:

- ❖ The legal framework of LGBTIQ issues in Portugal is one of the most comprehensive and advanced in the world.

- ❖ Internet and social media as safe spaces and community belonging: online communities supporting LGBTIQ children enable greater knowledge about LGBTIQ issues.

- ❖ Specialized services for LGBTIQ children.

- ❖ LGBTIQ flags and other symbols visible in the public space offer a feeling of being welcome and safe in that neighbourhood/school/youth centre.

Weaknesses:

- ❖ Most professionals lack specific training in LGBTIQ issues.

- ❖ Existing legislation lacks implementation and monitoring.

- ❖ Insufficient implementation of sex education in schools.

- ❖ Conversion "therapies" are still legally performed.

- ❖ The paradigm guiding professional practice in monitoring children and young people reflects a lack of knowledge about LGBTIQ issues and the undervaluation of children's opinions and experiences on issues such as gender and sexuality that affect their lives.

- ❖ Professionals working in the field of childhood and youth have no training to deal with situations that arise in everyday life and a lack of knowledge about existing services.

- ❖ Insufficient culture of coordination between services at local level.

Opportunities:

- ❖ Children's increasing knowledge and awareness of LGBTIQ issues as a direct result of covid-related lockdown.

- ❖ Some professionals are applying the current legal framework. Some professionals have more social awareness about LGBTIQ issues now than in the past.

- ❖ Professionals are acting as allies and mediators between child and family in relation to gender issues (social name, pronouns).

Threats:

- ❖ Adultism as a cultural trait that impacts negatively on the quality of services provided to children, but also on the parent–child relationship.

- ❖ Burnout of professionals due to a lack of human resources, and uncertainty about the future due to irregular funding.

- ❖ Boards and other governing bodies in child services and institutions unwilling to implement the existing legal framework on equality due to personal beliefs based on moral panic, inhibiting safe environments for children at schools.

- ❖ School drop-out rates caused by the inefficiency of schools to enforce the legal framework undermine the right to education.

- ❖ Lack of youth collective participation both in general and regarding LGBTIQ issues.

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