



# Colourful Childhoods

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

## National Report Hungary

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## Introduction: research design and sample

Colourful Childhoods: Empowering LGBTIQ children in vulnerable contexts to combat gender-based violence across Europe is a project co-funded by the European Union aiming to prevent and combat all forms of violence against LGBTIQ children in vulnerable contexts related to the covid-19 pandemic. The negative effects of the covid-19 pandemic can be particularly hard for LGBTIQ children in vulnerable contexts, whose specific needs regarding the prevention of gender-based violence can be overlooked in the current climate of social and economic crisis. Colourful Childhoods is being carried out between 2022 and 2024 in 6 EU countries by 8 partners: University of Girona (Spain) as project coordinator, Centro de Estudos Sociais – University of Coimbra (Portugal), Hatter Society (Hungary), Lietuvos Geju Lyga Asociacija (Lithuania), Resursen Tsentsar Bilitis (Bulgaria), Sindikat Obrazovanie Kam Kt Podkrepa (Bulgaria), Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Spain) and Università Degli Studi di Palermo (Italy). Colourful Childhood's innovative approach will create different materials and initiatives aimed at raising awareness and trigger action to prevent and combat violence against LGBTIQ children in vulnerable contexts.

Stage 1 of the project in each country consisted of an assessment of the violence faced by LGBTIQ children as well as their well-being. It involved focus groups with children (where applicable), interviews with professionals and organisations, and a survey for LGBTIQ children. The Colourful Childhoods (C-Child) research project followed the C-Child Ethical Considerations as well as the ethical obligations applicable in each country where the research was conducted, including securing clearance from Ethics Committees when applicable. In addition, each partner followed the C-child Child Protection Policy.

The aim of this report is to introduce the current situation of LGBTIQ children in vulnerable contexts in Hungary. For the desk research we collected data from already existing studies and research reports including those published by Háltér Society. To explore these areas from the view of stakeholders we conducted personal interviews and collected information through an online survey. The Hungarian national fieldwork was carried out in July-November 2022.

The online survey included 39 questions in 6 sections: Socio-demographic questions, Knowledge, Beliefs, Experiences, Resilience processes, Expectations. The goal was to assess the experiences, knowledge and needs of LGBTIQ children with special focus on their resilience processes regarding the covid-19 pandemic.

We have chosen Limesurvey as a platform to conduct our survey, which fulfilled the technical and security requirements needed for the research. The questionnaire was anonymous and voluntary. The recruitment for the questionnaire was done by contacting schools and other partner organisations working with children, and publishing it in the monthly newsletters of the Diversity Education Working Group and Háltér Society. We also promoted the survey through our organisational Facebook page, posted it in relevant professional groups, and created targeted advertisements on social media.

Survey dissemination started in August and was ongoing until November. While promoting the survey we initially encountered some difficulties to reach enough

participants. In recent months the algorithms of social media platforms were changed and it became significantly harder to reach young people with our messages. To solve this problem we created targeted ads on Facebook and Instagram to encourage participation, and we managed to significantly surpass the target numbers that we have set out. Participants from all over Hungary have answered our questions and thus we were able to extract valuable information from the data collected.

The target group of this study were children who identify as LGBTIQ and being between the ages 15 and 17. In total 932 people started filling out the survey of whom 556 people finished at least the first section while 243 people answered all the questions. We have excluded those from the sample who did not identify as LGBTIQ, and those who didn't disclose their age, thus not belonging to our intended target group. Partly due to the hostile political climate towards LGBTIQ people in Hungary, we also had to exclude some false and “troll” responses from our dataset. The final sample contains the answers of 484 participants.

The average age of respondents was 16.54 years. 25,5 % of the participants identified as men, 52,8% as women, 12,9% as non-binary, 4% as “other” while 4,8% answered that they would rather not say. 13,7% identified themselves as transgender. Regarding the sexual orientation of participants, 2,7% of them were heterosexual (and not cisgender), 31,7% gay or lesbian, 45,3% bisexual, 4,6% of them would rather not say, 15,7% of them described their sexual orientation as none of the above. 97% of the respondents were born in Hungary, and 95% of them have Hungarian citizenship. The majority do not identify with an ethnic minority (94,3%). The participants' 76,3% live with their parents, while 6,9% of them live with a foster family or in residential care.

Besides the survey 9 interviews have been conducted with stakeholders working with children starting in July. In preparation for starting the national fieldwork, we have translated the methodological guide and consent forms provided by CES, and started mapping potential candidates for the interviews with stakeholders. We have encountered some professionals who were reluctant to speak with us about this subject – since the issues of LGBTIQ youth are highly politicised in Hungary – but we managed to recruit professionals who have helped us to have a better understanding of the challenges and needs of LGBTIQ youth in vulnerable contexts. We were able to reach a diverse group of professionals in terms of their gender and sexual orientation. In order to reach professionals from all around Hungary, some of our interviews were conducted via video calls, then converted into audio files and thus anonymized.

We interviewed professionals who we thought would have good insight and experience regarding children in vulnerable contexts, therefore we chose four children's psychologists with different areas of expertise and work experience, a child psychiatrist, a youth worker, two social workers and an educator.

Four of the interview subjects identified themselves as LGBTIQ, while five of them identified as cisgender and heterosexual. Three of the interviewees identified as male and six as female. Considering how women are vastly overrepresented in caring professions in Hungary, we can conclude that we managed to create a generally balanced sample.

The semi-structured interviews were approximately an hour long and followed an outline constructed by the consortium, but some other relevant topics were also examined, as

the discussion organically developed. For example recent legislation and the political atmosphere in Hungary were mentioned in all 9 interviews conducted. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed and anonymized. All interviewees participated voluntarily and gave their informed consent after the researchers gave them all relevant information about the research process and the project.

## 1. Legal and political context regarding LGBTIQ rights

### 1.1. Timeline of LGBTIQ rights in Hungary

- 1961: Decriminalisation of homosexuality (but the age of consent for homosexual relationships was raised to 20 years)
- 1996: Cohabitation legislation (two people living in a shared household) equally applied to heterosexual and same sex couples
- 1997: Prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation in the area of health
- 1997: First Pride March in Budapest
- 2002: Equalisation of ages of consent
- 2003: Act No. CXXV on equal treatment and the promotion of equal opportunities: prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in the field of employment, health, education, service provision
- 2005: Assisted reproduction procedures extended to single women
- 2009: Act No. XXIX on registered partnership (for same-sex couples) providing similar rights to marriage
- In 2010, the Parliament revoked the previously adopted Civil Code and the new Civil Code, adopted in 2013, does not allow cohabiting partners to adopt each other's children.
- 2011 and 2012: the National Police Headquarters prohibited the Budapest Pride March. This decision was ruled by the court to be not only illegal, but also discriminatory.
- 2011: the Parliament adopted a new constitution, the Fundamental Law that cemented the ban of same-sex marriage on a constitutional level.
- 2016: without public consultation prescribed by law, the government submitted a bill to the Parliament to strip registered partners from all their rights. The proposal was eventually withdrawn.
- 2019: Speaker of the Parliament László Kövér drew a parallel between paedophiles and same-sex couples raising children, adding that “normal homosexuals” try to adapt and don't want equality. From this point onwards, homophobic and transphobic government statements have become more frequent.
- 2020, March: During the first wave of the pandemic legislation is passed banning legal gender recognition (registration of sex at birth, which cannot be changed in documents)

- 2020, April: Ban on MSM donating blood is lifted
- 2020, November: Equal Treatment Authority abolished, which beforehand played a particularly important role in the legal protection of LGBTIQ people.
- 2020, December: Parliament passed an amendment to the Fundamental Law that stigmatised trans people. Also, a bill making it more difficult for unmarried people to adopt children was passed that mandates Minister Katalin Novák, a politician and not a professional as the person to single-handedly make decisions in the future on who is suitable to become an adoptive parent. Novák publicly confirmed that the purpose of the law is to prevent adoption for same-sex couples.
- 2021, June: a few days before the final vote, pro-government MPs submitted a bill to the Parliament to ban all products, advertising and media content featuring gay or transgender people for people under the age of 18, banning the appearance of LGBTIQ people in public service advertisements as well as any school programme that “promotes” homosexuality, being transgender, or transitioning.

## 1.2. Overview of LGBTIQ rights in Hungary

Hungary’s existing laws and policies position it towards the middle of the Rainbow Europe country ranking<sup>1</sup> – but that only reveals part of the experience for LGBTIQ people living in the country. The rhetoric around human rights and LGBTIQ equality must be examined alongside what exists in the legislation. Since 2010, the right-wing Fidesz-KDNP government has been in power and has been reelected for the 4th term in 2022. Their politics have been strongly criticised by international institutions for the disregard of the rule of law, democratic principles and basic human rights.<sup>2</sup> Many of these legal and political developments disproportionately affected the most vulnerable groups of society, among them LGBTIQ people, especially children.

Viewing from a socio-cultural aspect, Hungarian society has viewed same sex relationships either as a moral or a medical issue (sin or sickness). The medicalizing view is still notably present even though WHO removed homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases in 1990 and several professional organisations have been working on removing this thought pattern.

Same sex relationships were decriminalised in Hungary relatively early in 1961, based on the aforementioned medicalizing view. However, the age of consent was soon raised to 20 in the case of same sex relationships, while it was 14 years for heterosexual relationships. The age of consent was lowered from 20 to 18 in 1978, but the difference in the age of consent regarding hetero- and homosexual relationships was part of Hungarian legislation until 2002.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2021\)050-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2021)050-e)

Anti-discriminatory and equal treatment laws appeared in Hungarian legislation with the democratic transition of the country from its previous socialist regime, when in 1989 the prohibition of discrimination was included in the Constitution.<sup>3</sup> Besides the Constitution there were anti-discrimination regulations in the Labor Code from 1992<sup>4</sup>, in the Act on Public Education from 1993<sup>5</sup>, but sexual orientation only appeared explicitly in 1997 in the Act on Health<sup>6</sup>. In Act CXXV of 2003 on equal treatment and the promotion of equal opportunities<sup>7</sup> both sexual orientation and gender identity are explicitly listed.

The LGBTIQ civil movement in Hungary started briefly before the fall of the communist regime with the first Hungarian gay organisation called the Hungarian Homosexuals' "Homer Lambda" National Association, which was officially registered in 1988.<sup>8</sup> Several other organisations were formed in the 1990s. Háttér Society was founded in 1995 which makes it the oldest and largest still active LGBTIQ organisation in the country. The first Pride March took place in 1997. 2007 was the first year when violent counter-protestors appeared at the March, and ever since there have been constant efforts made by right wing extremist groups and parties to ban the event. In 2021 and 2022, the original route of the march had to be altered due to far-right organisations sabotaging the registration of the event.

The question of marriage equality and the definition of family are neuralgic issues in the polarised Hungarian society, where these are strong call-to-action phrases for conservatives and right wing extremists. In 1996 a change in the Civil Code made it possible for same sex couples to have a legally recognised partnership; in this Act the words "man and woman" were replaced by "two persons." The 2009 Act on registered partnership was preceded by intense political and legal debate. The act was attacked by conservative parties, but the Constitutional Court rejected all of their submissions. However, in 2011, the new Fundamental Law passed by the Fidesz-KDNP majority defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman<sup>9</sup>, therefore precluding same sex couples from the institution of marriage. This same act states that "Family ties shall be based on marriage and/or the relationship between parents and children," thus partners (and not only same sex couples) are excluded from the definition of family.

Parenting by same-sex couples is still a taboo in Hungary, despite a recent successful campaign titled "Family is family"<sup>10</sup>. The Registered Partnership Act specifically excludes same-sex couples from joint adoption, second parent adoption and assisted reproduction. Such legislation and frequent homophobic comments from politicians on

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.alkotmanybirosag.hu/alkotmany-1989> Art. 70/A

<sup>4</sup> Act XXII of 1992 On the Labor Code Art. 5

<https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/E.C.12.HUN.3-Annex4.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Act LXXIX of 1993 on Public Education Art. 7

[http://www.okm.gov.hu/letolt/english/ftv\\_angol.pdf](http://www.okm.gov.hu/letolt/english/ftv_angol.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Act CLIV of 1997 on Health Art. 7.

[https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1056916/227\\_tmpphpooqypA.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1056916/227_tmpphpooqypA.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a0300125.TV>

<sup>8</sup> <https://hatter.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentum/konyvlap/magyarorszagilmbt-tortenelem-2013.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> The Fundamental Law of Hungary Art. L

<https://www.parlament.hu/documents/125505/138409/Fundamental+law/73811993-c377-428d-9808-ee03d6fb8178>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.acsaladazcsalad.hu/>

LGBTIQ families send a threatening message to same-sex couples raising children, and legitimises their discrimination among the wider public. A report of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights found that the authorities implement adoption legislation in an arbitrary manner that might (and in at least one case did) result in discrimination against same-sex couples. In recent years several leading government officials (including the House Speaker, a Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister) commented negatively on same-sex parenting.

As for legislation on hate crime and hate speech, Hungarian law does not refer to “hate crimes” or “hate speech” per se. The Criminal Code,<sup>11</sup> however, defines and punishes (directly or indirectly) bias-motivated criminal acts. Certain instances of hate speech are also sanctioned by the Criminal Code; and hate-inciting speech may also have consequences defined by civil law and media law. In the Criminal Code, there are two groups of relevant acts: *sui generis* acts, where the description of a criminal act explicitly refers to sexual orientation and gender identity bias when defining the motive and the aim of the criminal act; and other criminal acts that do not contain an explicit reference to bias motive, but qualifying circumstances<sup>12</sup> refer to malicious motive (“aljas indok”), which - according to the case law - includes biased motives based on someone’s belonging to a social group. Thus the following criminal acts defined by the Criminal Code can be regarded as LGBTIQ relevant hate crimes: as *sui generis* acts that explicitly refer to sexual orientation and gender identity: violence against a member of a community (CC, Article 216); and incitement against a community (CC, Article 332); indirectly, listing malicious motive as a qualifying circumstance: homicide (CC, Article 160), assault (CC, Article 164), illegal restraint (CC, Article 194), defamation (CC, Article 226), unlawful detention (CC, Article 304), offending a subordinate (CC, Article 449, a military criminal act). Besides the above mentioned acts, the motive and the aim of other criminal acts may also be taken into consideration when imposing sanctions without the law specifying these as qualifying circumstances, e.g. in cases of coercion or causing damage. The underreporting of anti-LGBTIQ hate crimes remains a serious concern in Hungary; research finds that only 10-23 percent of incidents are reported to the authorities.

Research also shows that trans people are especially affected by both hate crimes and discrimination, but anti-trans state action has reached a new low in Spring 2020. Almost two years after the suspension of gender and name change requests, Parliament has passed a bill that prohibits the legal gender recognition of transgender people. Although the European Parliament, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and other international players opposed the bill, the Government did not refrain from introducing the law violating a constitutional fundamental right, and at the end of May 2020, the Parliament passed the bill that renders legal gender recognition in Hungary impossible. (Opposition parties submitted several amendments, which were voted down by the Fidesz-KDNP majority.) The new law amends the Registry Act and replaces the word “nem,” which in Hungarian can mean both “sex” and “gender”, with the word “születési

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<sup>11</sup> Act C of 2012 on Criminal Law, hereafter also referred to as CC.

<sup>12</sup> A qualifying circumstance is a feature of a criminal act specifically included in the definition of the crime in the Criminal Code that imposes a higher sanction for the act. An aggravating circumstance, on the other hand, is a feature of a criminal act that is not specifically listed in the CC, but should be taken into consideration when the judge decides on the sanction.

nem” (“birth sex”), defining it as “biological sex based on primary sex characteristics and chromosomes.” According to the bill, the birth sex, once recorded, cannot be amended.

Looking at the timeline of LGBTIQ rights it is easy to see that after steady expansion of freedom and rights since the 90s, the 2010s have seen a sharp deterioration of civil liberties. The past three years have seen an unforeseen momentum in anti-LGBTIQ sentiment in Hungary. New provisions stigmatising trans people were added to the constitution, and legislation restricting adoption to married couples (excluding same-sex couples) was passed. In June 2021 the Parliament passed legislation that restricts access of minors to LGBTIQ information and restricts which organisations can hold sex education and other educational classes in schools. These legislative changes were accompanied by a hate campaign targeting LGBTIQ people: leading government politicians likened homosexuality to pedophilia, claimed that children should be protected from “LGBTIQ propaganda”, and called on banning the Pride march and similar public events. Extreme right wing groups regularly disrupt LGBTIQ public events, threatening participants and calling for the ban of these events.

On April 3, 2022 an anti-LGBTIQ referendum aiming to “protect children” from “harmful propaganda” was held. The referendum was initiated by the government. Háttér Society - along with 12 other LGBTIQ and human rights NGOs organised a campaign to encourage people to vote in an invalid way. The campaign was successful: over 1.7 million people expressed their disagreement with the nature of the questions with voting invalid, thus the whole referendum becoming invalid as it did not reach the validity threshold.

### 1.3. Statistical data

According to the Eurobarometer<sup>13</sup> survey in 2019, only 48% of Hungarians think that LGBTIQ people should have the same rights as heterosexuals, and 33% agree that same sex marriage should be allowed.

A representative survey<sup>14</sup> commissioned by the Hungarian LGBT Alliance and carried out by Medián Polling Agency in September 2019 found that Hungarians are rather divided on LGBTIQ<sup>15</sup> issues. Most of the respondents (78%) have never heard the term ‘LGBT’. More than half of the people do not know a word to describe transgender people.

Most people think homosexuality is a sickness (36%), a private matter (27%) or a deviation from social norms and rules (18%). Only 12% think choosing a same-sex partner is a fundamental human right. Only 24% of Hungarians know an LGBT person personally.

<sup>13</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/ebs\\_493\\_data\\_fact\\_lgbi\\_eu\\_en-1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/ebs_493_data_fact_lgbi_eu_en-1.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> [http://lmbtszovetseg.hu/sites/default/files/mezo/file/lmbtszov\\_kutatas2019szept\\_hu.pdf](http://lmbtszovetseg.hu/sites/default/files/mezo/file/lmbtszov_kutatas2019szept_hu.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> The research used the term ‘LGBT’ to refer to sexual and gender minorities. When directly quoting research results, this report will use that term. When making broader statements, the report will use the term ‘LGBTIQ’ to indicate that the group includes others whose identities are not named in the acronym.

29% of Hungarians support same sex marriage, 35% support second parent adoption. A majority of people (57%) think a registered same sex couple raising children should be considered a family.

However, according to a more recent representative study commissioned by Háttér Society and Amnesty International Hungary in 2021, the respondents' 46% know an LGBTIQ person personally, and 73% of them dismiss some politicians' claim that gay and lesbian people are debauching children. The majority of Hungarian society thinks it should be allowed for trans and intersex people to legally change their name and gender in their documents (74,5%). 59% of them support marriage equality while 69% of them agree that same sex couples can be good parents. In 2019 only 33% of the population supported same sex marriage.<sup>16</sup>

58% of Hungarians agree that the topic of homosexuality should be covered in the school curricula, 54% would be fine with a lesbian, gay or bisexual teacher teaching their children. (However, 25% would move their child to a different class and 11% would initiate firing the teacher.)

Most Hungarians (57%) would react positively or neutrally if their colleague at work came out to them as lesbian, gay or bisexual: 14% would even welcome this act, since they would take it as a sign of trust, 43% said their relationship with the person would not change. Only 16% would welcome positive steps for LGBT inclusion at their workplace; 39% would not welcome it but would not be bothered either.

87% of Hungarians agree that transgender people should be allowed to change their name and gender in their documents, although they are divided on what criteria should be applied. 34% of Hungarians think that only medically necessary surgeries should be performed on intersex babies, all other interventions should be delayed until the persons themselves can consent to them. A quarter of respondents think that doctors (27%) and every 68th person (13%) that parents should make a decision.

Only very few Hungarians can name an LGBTIQ organisation (8%), and most of them (87%) would not support such an organisation financially. A majority of Hungarians (92%) do not support the Pride March, but only a third of them (34%) would ban it.

The electorate of political parties have significantly different views on LGBTIQ issues: voters of left-of-center opposition parties tend to be more accepting, governing right wing parties and extreme right wing parties in opposition are less supportive<sup>17</sup>.

The 2019 FRA survey shows that a very low percentage (13%) of LGBTIQ people report hate-motivated crimes and only 7% report hate-motivated harassment, even though 35% experienced harassment for being LGBTIQ in the past 12 months<sup>18</sup>. The underreporting of anti-LGBTIQ hate crimes is well documented by research in Hungary. A large-scale survey in 2010, by the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.amnesty.hu/tortenelmi-csucson-a-melegek-elfogadottsaga-magyarorszagon/?fbclid=IwAR2O58YQ5zqIY8egKTyieeGk8XOGb\\_sopSWag1lxm84FstkB0-6W5k1FVjw](https://www.amnesty.hu/tortenelmi-csucson-a-melegek-elfogadottsaga-magyarorszagon/?fbclid=IwAR2O58YQ5zqIY8egKTyieeGk8XOGb_sopSWag1lxm84FstkB0-6W5k1FVjw)

<sup>17</sup> [http://lmbtszovetseg.hu/sites/default/files/mezo/file/lmbtszov\\_kutatas2019szept\\_hu.pdf](http://lmbtszovetseg.hu/sites/default/files/mezo/file/lmbtszov_kutatas2019szept_hu.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1_en.pdf)

Háttér Society (1674 respondents) found that only 15% of those respondents who had been victims of violence due to their sexual orientation had made an official report.<sup>19</sup>

When looking at the experiences of 15-17 year old LGBTIQ youth from the past 12 months it's visible that while only a relatively small percent of them (9%) had experienced physical or sexual attacks, almost half of them (43%) had experienced harassment due to their LGBTIQ identity. 13% of 15-17 year olds experienced cyber harassment, 22% of them non-verbal in-person harassment and 33% verbal in-person harassment.<sup>20</sup>

The LGBTIQ survey (2019) of the Fundamental Rights Agency shows that in Hungary, 61% are or were hiding their LGBTIQ identity at school, with only 2% being open. At the same time only 13% of LGBTIQ people considered changing or leaving school because of their SOGIESC<sup>21</sup>. Most participants say that their school (75%) hadn't addressed LGBTIQ topics in education and 11% say they did but in a negative way. On IGLYO's LGBTIQ inclusive education index Hungary only got 8.5 points from 100.<sup>22</sup>

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

### 2.1. Context

The two main documents when discussing children's rights in Hungary are the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Hungary in 1991, and the Act XXXI. on the protection of the child, passed in 1997. Act XXXI. outlines the mechanisms and institutions of child protection and also the possible benefits and rights of the child. The Child Protection Act ensures children's rights to *"physical, intellectual, emotional and moral development"*, *"to be protected from circumstances that hinder his or her development"* and *"to be protected from ... abuse, including physical, sexual and emotional violence"* and it states that *"children cannot be exposed to torture, physical punishment and other forms of brutal, inhumane and humiliating punishment or treatment"*. The child is endangered if their *"physical, intellectual, emotional and moral development is obstructed or hindered"*. In this case there is counselling for the family or the child is placed under protection if the family is not able or willing to change the circumstances endangering the child. In case there is no improvement, this can lead to permanent or semi-permanent removal from the family, and placement in residential care or with a foster family<sup>23</sup>.

Even though the legal environment for the protection of the rights of children is present, children in Hungary can still suffer from a wide variety of systemic injustices. From

<sup>19</sup> <https://hatter.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentum/kiadvany/hatter-lmbtkut2010-english.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1_en.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.iglyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/EI-map-and-table-April-2018-WEB.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99700031.tv>

Hintalovon Foundation's<sup>24</sup> latest children's rights report we can outline the main obstacles children in Hungary have to face. Despite extensive legislation and some positive developments, the child protection system in Hungary still has several neuralgic issues. One of the most pressing is how children are still routinely put in residential care facilities due to their caregivers' financial difficulties, despite the law explicitly forbidding this. Children with disabilities are overrepresented in residential care: there is an alarming shortage of foster families willing to care for children with multiple disabilities, consequently most of these children grow up in institutions.<sup>25</sup>

Shortage of labour has become a longstanding obstacle to children receiving the proper care they need. Over a hundred thousand children do not receive adequate healthcare due to the shortage of general paediatric care professionals in some less developed regions of the country. In residential care facilities for children every tenth position remains unfilled while in facilities providing specialist care every fourth position is vacant. The teaching profession is an increasingly ageing line of occupation, that on top of that has to bear other outside pressures, like the change in strike regulations and the dismantling of the freedom of choice regarding study materials. In addition, public education, healthcare and family support services face financial and infrastructural difficulties, partly caused by overcentralization and an overwhelming governmental pressure.<sup>26</sup>

Roma children in Hungary are excessively affected by discrimination in several fields, including education. Roma children are disproportionately involved with the child welfare services and guardianship authorities and displacement is the highest among Roma children, while their return process to their family is often stalled or halted by authorities.<sup>27</sup>

LGBTIQ children can face different manifestations of gender-based violence, like hateful attitudes towards their sexuality, gender identity or sex characteristics. Domestic abuse is also a significant threat to their well-being, and in the case of teenagers, intimate partner violence. It has been found that prejudice-based and gender-based violence and discrimination is even more likely to cause depression and anxiety than other forms of violence.<sup>28</sup>

The current political context in Hungary is proving to become an increasingly hostile environment in which LGBTIQ children need to grow up. While other European countries are increasingly passing legislation to support and protect LGBTIQ children from harm and discrimination, Hungary seems to be going in the other direction. With the effective ban of LGBTIQ content from schools, these children can feel more and more isolated and left alone to find answers to their questions. Due to secrecy and taboo often surrounding this subject, it's hard to have data about how many LGBTIQ children become victims of domestic abuse, but the testimonials of professionals' suggests it's even more prevalent among them, then among the overall population of children. The lockdowns of the covid-19 pandemic were likely to increase the vulnerability of these

<sup>24</sup> <https://hintalovon.hu/en/home/>

<sup>25</sup> [https://hintalovon.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Hintalovon\\_jelentes\\_2021\\_hu\\_final2MB.pdf](https://hintalovon.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Hintalovon_jelentes_2021_hu_final2MB.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> [https://hintalovon.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Hintalovon\\_jelentes\\_2021\\_hu\\_final2MB.pdf](https://hintalovon.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Hintalovon_jelentes_2021_hu_final2MB.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> [https://hintalovon.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Hintalovon\\_jelentes\\_2021\\_hu\\_final2MB.pdf](https://hintalovon.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Hintalovon_jelentes_2021_hu_final2MB.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Out In the Open: Education sector responses to violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. UNESCO, 2016

groups in face of violence – shortage of outside resources and increased dependency on family members could deepen the existing rifts between relatives.

## 2.2. Statistical data

In Hungary there is a steady rise in the number of children who receive foster care or residential child care: 21 418 children have received such care in 2010, while for 2022 this number increased to 23 327<sup>29</sup>. This tendency is despite the fact that Hungarian society – like many others in Europe – is an ageing society, with birthrates showing a declining trend since the 2000s<sup>30</sup>.

Almost a third of children receiving some sort of residential care are taken from their families for financial reasons despite the law explicitly forbidding this. Roma children are especially vulnerable to discrimination and negative treatment, and the disparities of regional health providers can deepen these disadvantages.<sup>31</sup>

A survey commissioned by UNICEF Hungary shows that most Hungarians don't think it's okay to educate your child with physical punishment (83%), while 14% see no problem with it. 38% of respondents thought an occasional slap will not harm the child. The same number of people thought that children first and foremost have responsibilities, more so than rights. The study shows that the higher the education of the respondent, the less likely they were to accept physical violence against children. 30% of the respondents thought that verbal abuse counted as abuse and they found that withholding love from one's child was the most abusive practice.<sup>32</sup>

178 children aged 0-13 became victims of sexual abuse in 2021, which is slightly less than the number of victims in 2020 (194) but is still a significant increase compared to the number in 2019 (120). The number of children becoming victims of child pornography increased in 2021 (as it did in the past couple of years).<sup>33</sup> According to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, teenage pregnancy is still a considerable problem in Hungary, though it has been steadily decreasing since 2016. It is also apparent that most under 20 mothers' socio-economic situation is in the lowest 20% of the population.<sup>34</sup>

Most studies agree that the uncertainty, isolation and pressure that came with the covid-19 pandemic has made the world a more dangerous place for children. According to estimates, up to 30% more children became victims of abuse during this period.<sup>35</sup> An independent study shows that 62% of teachers felt they didn't get proper support during the pandemic to be able to tackle the challenges of digital education. Parents also admitted that it was an extra burden that they had to spend a significant amount of time

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.ksh.hu/stadat\\_files/szo/hu/szo0016.html](https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/szo/hu/szo0016.html)

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.ksh.hu/stadat\\_files/nep/hu/nep0001.html](https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0001.html)

<sup>31</sup> <https://unicef.hu/ezt-tesszuk-itthon/hazai-kutatasok/alternativ-jelentes>

<sup>32</sup> <https://unicef.hu/igy-segitunk/hireink/ismerd-fel-es-tegyel-ellene-gyermekbantalmasas-elleni-kampanyt-inditott-az-unicef-magyarorszag>

<sup>33</sup> [https://hintalovon.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Hintalovon\\_jelentes\\_2021\\_hu\\_final2MB.pdf](https://hintalovon.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Hintalovon_jelentes_2021_hu_final2MB.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.demografia.hu/kiadvanyokonline/index.php/demografia/article/view/2814/2702>

<sup>35</sup> <https://unicef.hu/ezt-tesszuk-itthon/hazai-kutatasok/gyermekbantalmasas>

to study together with their children<sup>36</sup>. Meanwhile, the number of teachers in schools has been showing a decreasing trend for years: in the 2019/2020 school year 75.428, in the 2020/2021 school year 75.157 and in the 2021/2022 school year 74.481 teachers were employed<sup>37</sup>.

Poverty affects 21,7% of Hungarian children, while about 10% of them smoke tobacco regularly. Digital education during the pandemic highlighted the disadvantages of children in vulnerable contexts. Children of the poorest families found it difficult to participate in education due to lack of digital resources and the absence of internet access.

According to the LGBTIQ Survey (FRA, 2019), Hungarians have their first thoughts of being LGBTIQ at the age between 10-18. 26% of trans people realise that their gender identity does not match their gender assigned at birth between the ages 10-14 and 15% between the ages 15-17. More than one third (37%) of LGB people had their first realisations of being LGB between the ages 10-14 and 27% between the ages 15-17. The study shows 36% of LGB people came out first in the above mentioned age range (10-17). 29% of trans people have not come out to anybody yet, but 26% came out first as trans between the ages of 10-17. From these data we can see that coming out can happen at an age range when children are very sensitive to the reaction and opinions of others, especially important others<sup>38</sup>.

Háttér Society conducted the National School Climate Survey<sup>39</sup> in cooperation with GLSEN following the 2016-2017 academic year with 919 LGBTIQ student respondents aged 13 to 21. The majority (82%) reported being verbally harassed at some point in the past year based on their personal characteristics. LGBTIQ students most commonly reported experiencing verbal harassment at school because of their sexual orientation (64%) or how they expressed their gender (56%) and 13-22% of them reported physical harassment or physical assault. Underreporting defines the experience of students, too: 66% of them had never reported such incidents, mostly due to fear of being outed or thinking that school staff would not do anything.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Children's needs

For healthy development, LGBTIQ children need positive models and accurate information about LGBTIQ issues, which are scarcely available in the Hungarian public school and child protection system. Our interview subjects also professed how political propaganda prevents many schools and teachers from freely talking about LGBTIQ topics, and the general unaccepting climate is more and more characteristic of schools

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.cka.hu/felmerest-keszítettünk-a-szülők-es-a-pedagógusok-körében/>

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.ksh.hu/stadat\\_files/okt/hu/okt0008.html](https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/okt/hu/okt0008.html)

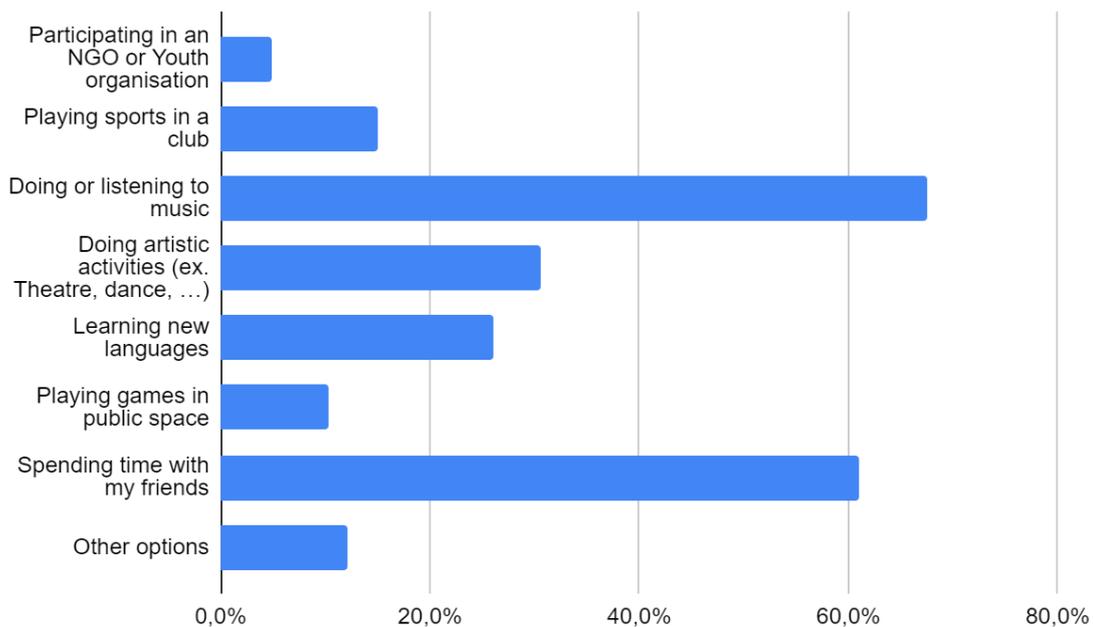
<sup>38</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1_en.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> <https://en.hatter.hu/publications/supportive-friends-unprepared-institutions>

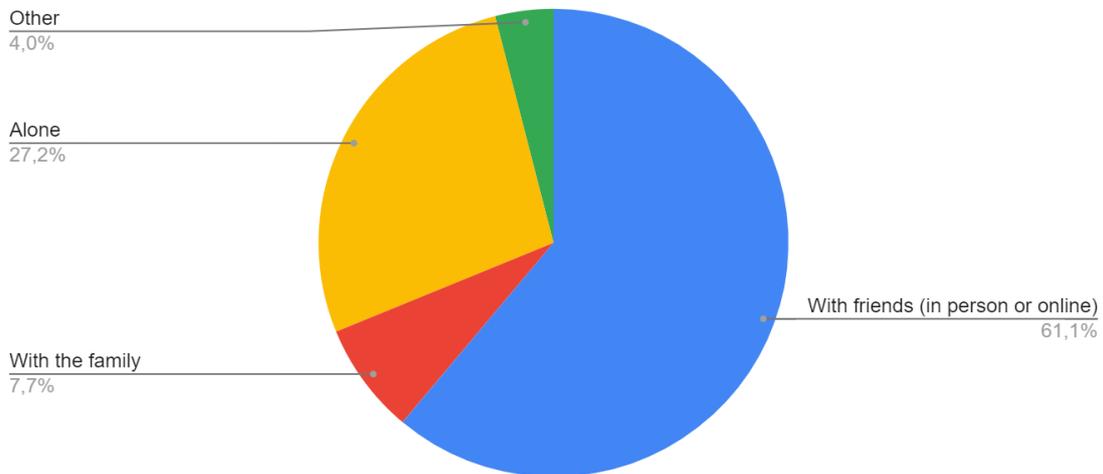
as well. Only the most legally conscious professionals working in schools decide to keep talking about these topics and give students the necessary information for their development. Most teachers and other professionals are afraid of consequences and use self-censorship in fear of losing their jobs.

Most of the young people who answered the questionnaire spend their free time with friends (61,1%), but almost a third of them spend it alone (27,2%), and only 7,7% of them spend it with their family. As for the specific activities they mostly spend their free time with, the most popular ones were doing or listening to music (67,6%), spending time with their friends (61%), doing artistic activities (30,6%), and learning new languages (26%). It is an interesting finding, that Hungarian respondents to the survey were the most likely to spend their free time studying languages, compared to the other respondents from countries of the Colourful Childhood project consortium.

### How do you mainly spend your free time?

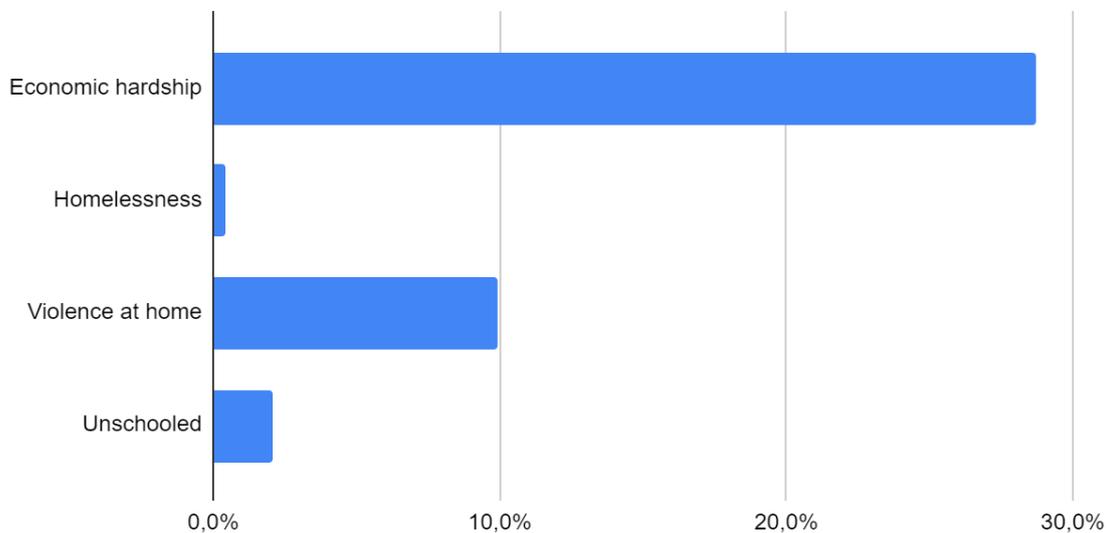


Who do you mostly spend your free time with?



Almost the third of the participants admitted to experiencing economic hardship (28,7%), while almost 10% of them have experienced violence at home. Most did not consider themselves a person with a disability (93,2%), and most did not consider themselves to be physically unhealthy either (85,6%).

Thinking about your personal life, do you identify with one or more of the following situations?



Mental health issues are however significantly more prevalent among the sample than physical health problems - more than half of the participants admitted to having some sort of mental health problems (50,4%). Substance use also seems to be widespread among the young people who have answered - 33,5% have used tobacco, 38,1% have used alcohol and 5,3% have used marijuana in the past week.

In the section where we tried to explore the conceptual knowledge of young people, the majority have answered correctly to the questions regarding what sexual orientation and gender identity and sex characteristics mean, though the answers for gender identity were a bit more varied, while the meaning of sex characteristics was the least known to the respondents. When asking about the legal environment and rights of LGBTIQ people, 18 respondents thought it's possible to get married and adopt as a same sex couple in Hungary, and 51 respondents thought that legal gender recognition was still legal. Considering the widespread debate and publicity surrounding these issues, that is quite remarkable. We have also asked the meaning of some sentences to identify young people's knowledge about SOGIESC: the sentence "Laura is intersex." seemed to cause the most confusion, a high number of respondents stated that they do not know the answer.

To map the belief systems of LGBTIQ children we've asked them to mark how much they agree with several statements (1=not at all agree 5=totally agree). The statement most agreed with was that "Families should support their LGBTIQ children.", while the least popular was that "Gender-affirming treatments for transgender youth should be covered by the public health system". From these answers we can conclude that even among LGBTIQ children transgender people's needs have less support.

Indicate how much you agree with the following statements: (1 = Not all agree; 2 = A little agree; 3 = Somehow agree; 4 = Quite agree; 5 = Totally agree)		
Families should support their LGBTIQ children.	Mean	4.88
	SD	0.449
There should be equal rights for same-gender couples –marriage, adoption, inheritance, health insurance coverage, etc.	Mean	4.85
	SD	0.588
People should be able to show affection in public spaces regardless of their sexual orientation.	Mean	4.72
	SD	0.709
Transgender people should be able to change their legal name and gender freely in their official documents.	Mean	4.71
	SD	0.745
Professionals who work with teenagers should have relevant knowledge on intersex matters and their specific needs.	Mean	4.61
	SD	0.761
Education centres should promote a positive view of sexual and gender diversity.	Mean	4.48
	SD	0.856
Discrimination and attacks against LGBTIQ people should be punished by the law.	Mean	4.42
	SD	1.033
Transgender people should be able to use restrooms and locker rooms according to their gender identity.	Mean	4.47
	SD	0.879
LGBTIQ people should have enhanced and positive visibility in public space and media (ex. series, advertisements, etc.).	Mean	4.19
	SD	1.038

Gender-affirming treatments for transgender youth should be covered by the public health system.	Mean	3.69
	SD	1.225

We wanted to know how young LGBTIQ people coped with hardships and isolation during the covid-19 pandemic, and we asked them to state how much different groups of people helped them to overcome their struggles. From the next table it is visible that they got the most help from friends (3,98), but the points still didn't come close to the maximum five points. We can also assume from the results that according to their experiences mothers were significantly more likely to help them than their fathers (3,62 points compared to 2,68 points).

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. (1 = Not at all; 2 = A little; 3 =Somehow; 4 = Quite; 5 = Totally)	Hungary	
Friends	Mean	3.98
	SD	1.102
Partner	Mean	3.47
	SD	1.564
Mother	Mean	3.62
	SD	1.259
LGBTIQ organisation	Mean	3.42
	SD	1.421
Sibling	Mean	2.98
	SD	1.44
Mother (in case you have two mothers)	Mean	3.44
	SD	1.667
External professional (doctor, social worker, psychologist)	Mean	2.73
	SD	1.412
Father (in case you have two fathers)	Mean	2.62
	SD	1.758
Father	Mean	2.68
	SD	1.397
Coworker	Mean	2.5
	SD	1.427
Other NGOs or social organisation	Mean	2.72
	SD	1.559

Grandparent	Mean	2.55
	SD	1.461
Extracurricular instructor (Coach, youth leader, ...)	Mean	2.59
	SD	1.389
Classmates	Mean	2.56
	SD	1.312
Other relatives (uncle, aunt, cousin,)	Mean	2.27
	SD	1.399
Foster care worker	Mean	1.67
	SD	1.155
Stepfather or stepmother	Mean	2.41
	SD	1.402
Teachers	Mean	2.38
	SD	1.206
Neighbours	Mean	1.48
	SD	1.032

From these figures we can conclude that family acceptance is still an issue for LGBTIQ children. Rejection experienced by their closest relatives can be a risk factor for many mental health issues, like depression, anxiety, self harm and suicidal behaviour.

LGBTIQ youth do not have many places for safe socialisation and for developing personal connections in Hungary, and during the pandemic this isolation was even more pronounced. While social media could be a refuge to these young people during these hard times, it didn't prove enough to prevent a deterioration of their mental health.

On a 1 to 5 scale where 1 means not at all and 5 means totally, the majority of our respondents stated that they have experienced a significant amount of mental health issues: anxiety (3,72), loneliness (3,67), depression (3,38).

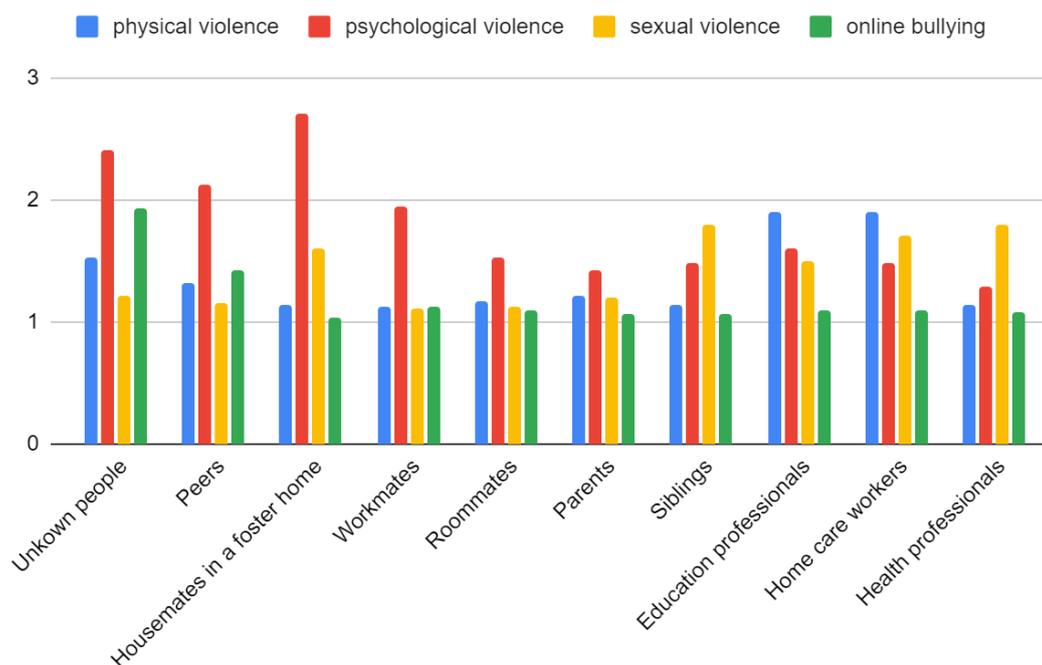
When thinking about their needs during the covid-19 pandemic lockdowns and restrictions a majority of them felt that they could not completely behave like themselves among their adults, while they felt the most like themselves when they were with their friends. The respondents also felt that their experience as an LGBTIQ person during lockdown was only a little harder than to their peers.

Thinking about your needs during the covid-19 pandemic lockdowns and restrictions. How do you feel about the following statements? (1 = Not at all; 2 = A little; 3 =Somehow; 4 = Quite; 5 = Totally)	Hungary	
I felt I could behave like myself with my friends	Mean	3.96
	SD	1.128

I felt I could behave like myself with my sibling(s)	Mean	3.02
	SD	1.503
I felt I could behave like myself with my roommates	Mean	2.89
	SD	1.538
I felt I could behave like myself with at least one teacher	Mean	2.64
	SD	1.410
I felt I could behave like myself with my parents	Mean	2.47
	SD	1.323
I felt that in general my needs about my gender and sexuality have been satisfactorily covered	Mean	2.56
	SD	1.278
I felt I could behave like myself with my workmates	Mean	2.48
	SD	1.344
I felt I could behave like myself with the health professionals I have been in contact with	Mean	2.38
	SD	1.370
I felt I could behave like myself with the care workers in my foster home	Mean	1.74
	SD	1.238
I felt I could behave like myself with the my home mates in my foster home	Mean	1.90
	SD	1.274
I feel that I have had a harder time during the covid-19 pandemic than my non-LGBTIQ mates	Mean	2.02
	SD	1.305

According to our data the most prevalent form of violence LGBTIQ children have experienced since the covid-19 pandemic started was psychological violence. The most likely perpetrators were unknown people followed by parents while the least likely were health professionals. The second most prevalent form of violence was online bullying, where unknown people were the most likely perpetrators with housemates in a foster home being the least likely. In instances of physical violence the most likely perpetrators were unknown people followed by peers while home care workers and health professionals were the least likely. In instances of sexual violence the most likely perpetrators were again unknown but this time followed by workmates while health professionals were the least likely.

Have you experienced the following forms of violence since the Covid-19 pandemic started from the following people? (1 = Not at all; 2 = A little; 3 = Somehow; 4 = Quite; 5 = Totally)



According to respondents, the location where they were most likely to experience discrimination was school settings – 38% of them said this happened to them in the last 12 months. This was followed by the streets (32,9%), and their home (29%). In the experience of the respondents, the places where they could be safest from discrimination were administrative offices (3,6%), and their workplace (4,1%).

### 3.2. Children’s strategies of resilience

One of our psychologist interviewees stated: *“I feel that certain needs or problems became more pronounced (due to the covid-19 pandemic), for example the need to be part of a community. When we were all isolated, (LGBTIQ children) were too: if they had a family, where they couldn’t be themselves, the need to be part of a community became more pronounced. If they had a safe environment in schools, and they had a network of friends, the closing of schools could have a detrimental effect on these needs.”*

One of our interviewees was a social worker who is employed as a caregiver in a foster home for children, and he said: *“The covid -19 pandemic had an effect on a lot of things – it created a crisis in everyone’s life and stirred up a lot of things, (...) and everyone had to deal with a situation they were not prepared for. (...) LGBTIQ youth had an especially hard time (...) and the disruption of personal relationships might have been the main factor here.”*

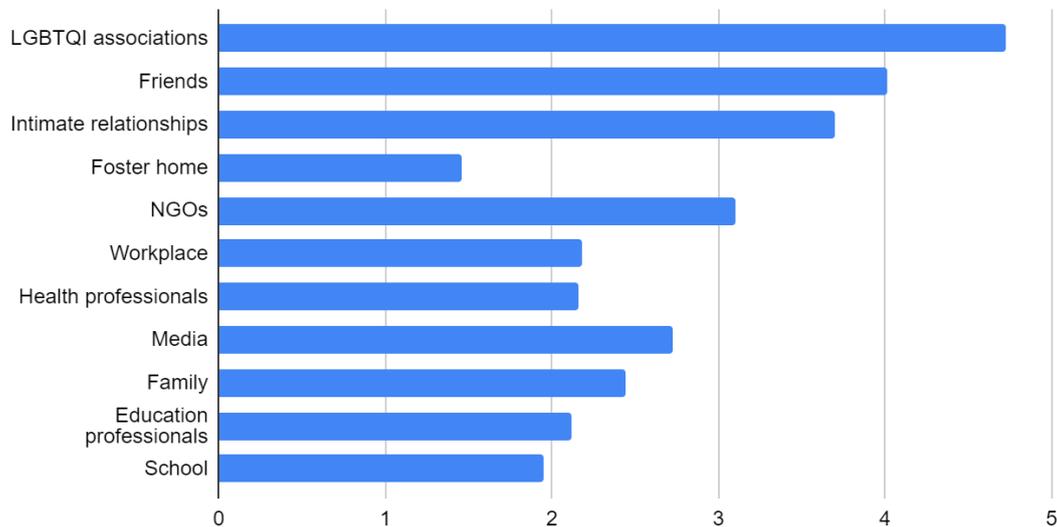
In these complicated circumstances LGBTIQ children had to find innovative ways to cope with the hardships they faced. According to our survey 64,8% think that their close circle might be open to receiving advice on LGBTIQ issues from other people, 73,5% thinks their close circle would want to protect them against LGBTIQ-phobia, and 67,2% think their close circle has a will to adapt to new situations that their members might live in. On the other hand, only 21,7% think they could access services that could be helpful in relation to their LGBTIQ identity, and only 19,7% are aware of campaigns or projects that tackle LGBTIQ-phobia. Only few think that their school provides counselling services that might help them with issues regarding being an LGBTIQ person (7%).

	YES
Do you think that your close circle might be open to receiving advice on LGBTIQ issues from other people?	64.8%
Do you think your close circle would want to protect you against LGBTIQphobia?	73.5%
Does your close circle have a will to adapt to new situations that their members might live?	67.2%
Do you have a sense of belonging in your close circle?	58.6%
Can you easily turn to an LGBTIQ organisation for help or advice if needed?	18.9%
Do you think that your close circle, including yourself, count with information on what to do in case of an LGBTIQphobia attack?	43.4%
Are there any campaigns or projects tackling LGBTIQphobia around you?	19.7%
Can you access any health service or professional that you know will be helpful in relation to being an LGBTIQ person?	21.7%
Does your school count with counselling that might help you with any issues regarding being an LGBTIQ person?	7.0%

From this data we can assume that LGBTIQ young people's resilience processes mainly revolve around their close circle, their friends, their community. In light of this it is apparent that the pandemic has been a significant factor in hindering these strategies, since one of the main impacts was on interpersonal relationships.

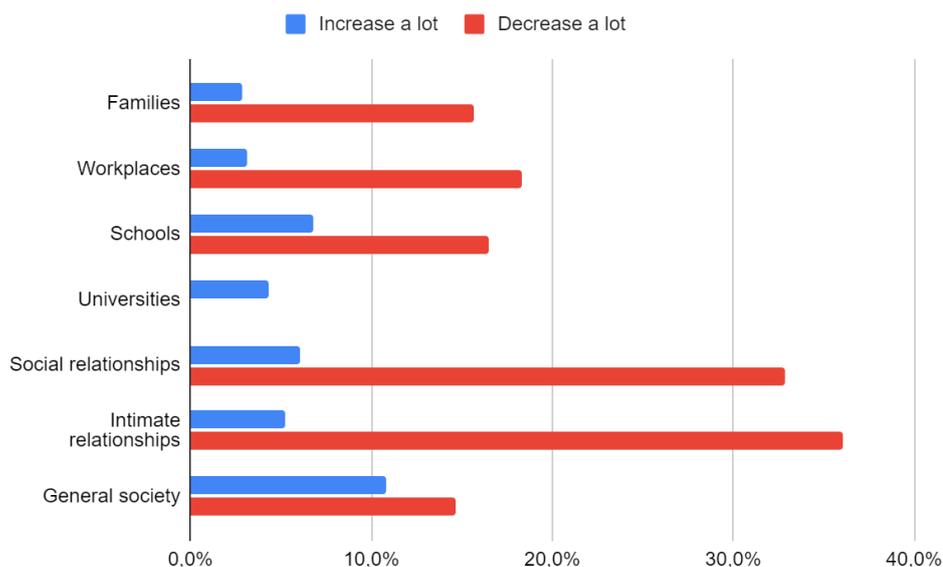
Most young people agree that LGBTIQ associations are the most equipped to offer them support on the sexual and gender diversity issues: where 1 means not at all and 5 means totally, the average of the received answers was 4,72 for these organisations. The second most likely group to offer support were friends, followed by their intimate relationships. LGBTIQ children expected the least support from their foster home (1,46), their schools (1,95), and from education (2,12) and health professionals (2,16). We suspect the reason why schools and education professionals received such a low score has to be connected to recent legislation strengthening bias against LGBTIQ people, especially in school contexts. Another remarkable finding is that even with the current galvanised state of LGBTIQ topics in media, this field still received a higher score from young people, than their families (2,73 points compared to 2,44). This data highlights the importance of education of parents, and preventive measures regarding domestic abuse.

Do you expect these groups, institutions, and spaces to offer support on the sexual and gender diversity of its members? (1 = Not at all; 2 = A little; 3 = Somehow; 4 = Quite; 5 = Totally)



When asked about their expectations, most young people who completed our survey seemed to have an optimistic outlook regarding the future. In all the fields mentioned, the respondents who thought violence against LGBTIQ youth would decrease in the next 10 years far outnumbered those who thought that it would increase. The least divergence between “increase a lot” and “decrease a lot” answers was in reference to general society, and in general this was the area that respondents felt the most pessimistic about.

I believe that in the next 10 years violence against LGBTIQ+ youth will increase, decrease, or stay the same, in the following arenas:



To be able to better help LGBTIQ youth in vulnerable contexts, professionals need to have special focus on finding new and innovative ways to community building. These strategies also need to be future proof and coming from a child centric perspective, thus the digital sphere needs to have a prominent role in all solutions.

### 3.3. Professionals' good practices

Despite the extremely arduous circumstances Hungarian LGBTIQ children are forced to grow up in, there are several initiatives throughout the country that offer support to LGBTIQ youth, their families and the service providers and institutions who come in contact with them. There are civil society organisations that offer programs for schools and professionals working with children in educational settings.

The Diversity Education Working Group<sup>40</sup> is a working group formed by organisations running educational programs to organise a campaign called the School Diversity Week (inclusive of LGBTIQ themes) each spring (in 2022 it was held in the autumn). For this event each participant is provided a package with educational and awareness raising materials. The package includes a collection of lesson plans for teachers, educational videos and a booklet for students and other promotional materials such as stickers, posters and leaflets. Reacting to the needs of educators during the pandemic, in the past two years e-learning materials and courses have also been developed<sup>41</sup>. The aim of the campaign is to tackle bias based bullying and harassment among students. They also provide a wide range of resources and lesson plans on the subject of diversity on their website.

The "Getting to Know LGBTIQ People"<sup>42</sup> program has been running since 2000, and offers programs for schools (both teachers and students). In their workshops they introduce concepts related to being LGBTIQ through personal stories and by the use of interactive activities. Because of the current political climate their invitations are decreasing because school boards are afraid of backlash.

*Hintalovon Foundation's Yelon program*<sup>43</sup> offers an LGBTIQ inclusive sexual education program, and the Foundation<sup>44</sup> operates a legal program for schools to optimize children's rights in their institutions. In 2022 a consortium of Hungarian NGOs led by Háttér Society implemented a project to raise awareness and provide materials to professionals working with children about LGBTIQ inclusive comprehensive sexuality education<sup>45</sup>. The *Hungarian Medical Students' International Relations Committee's* regional groups have regular events and inner training on LGBTIQ topics and they offer LGBTIQ inclusive sexual education to schools.

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<sup>40</sup> <https://sokszinusegoktatas.hu/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://elearning.sokszinusegoktatas.hu/catalogue>

<sup>42</sup> <http://melegsegmegismeres.hu/english/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://yelon.hu/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://hintalovon.hu/en>

<sup>45</sup> <https://szexualisneveles.hu/>

The youth hotline *Kék Vonal - Child Crisis foundation*<sup>46</sup> has been providing inclusive phone and online counselling services to young people who are in need, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation or sex characteristics, and they implemented the importance of LGBTIQ inclusion in their training for the operators. The hotline takes 30.000 calls yearly, out of which approximately 400 are directly about gender identity and sexual orientation. Háttér Society also operates an information and counselling hotline but callers are mainly adults: around 4% of their calls are made by youth under the age of 20.

The Hungarian Psychological Association has an LGBTIQ section since 2013, they translated and published the APA Guidelines on psychological work with LGBTIQ clients<sup>47</sup> and they publicly stand against conversion therapy.

### **3.4. Professionals' needs in combating LGBTIQ violence against children**

There is a general lack of information about the needs of LGBTIQ children in vulnerable contexts among professionals. Professionals not only need information but means of applying them as well. LGBTIQ youth and their problems are usually invisible, professionals need methods to help them open up and articulate their feelings. Encouraging the formation of youth groups could be a method for engaging young people.

Professionals who are open to create LGBTIQ inclusive spaces lack support in practice. Some talked about the need for thematic supervision and the need for forums where they could share good practices. Professionals at child protection services and at children's homes need proper education and understanding on LGBTIQ issues. This bears great importance as they provide the social environment and opportunities for socialisation that a family would do in other cases.

According to our interview subjects, there is a growing openness to learn more about LGBTIQ issues, especially among care professionals, but to reach a wider audience with specific trainings, systematic changes in university education would be necessary.

One of our psychologist interviewees stated that LGBTIQ topics should be integrated into psychologists' university training so they can give appropriate support to LGBTIQ children. *"Everyone should have a systematic knowledge of these subjects, because now it is up to the individual how informed they are, and how up-to-date their informations are about the mental health of LGBTIQ children"* (school psychologist). The need to educate professionals working with children about the correct terminology regarding sexual and gender minorities came up in almost all of our interviews.

Another psychologist interviewee mentioned that there should be a lot more content in education about social issues in general, not just LGBTIQ issues, since while a lot of professionals still hold sexist views, progress in these areas will be stunted. A social

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<sup>46</sup> <https://kek-vonal.hu/>

<sup>47</sup> [https://mpt.hu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/MPT\\_APATerapiasUtmutato.pdf](https://mpt.hu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/MPT_APATerapiasUtmutato.pdf)

worker brought to our attention that to be able to successfully combat violence against LGBTIQ children, professionals should be educated more in general about the signs of domestic abuse, and effective tools to support victims and prevent victimisation.

### 3.5 Exemplary quotes from interviews

“At my workplace there is an intention to create materials and environments that are less heteronormative. If I speak with a young person and I don't yet know their gender identity or sexual orientation, I try to speak with them without preconceptions. If I hear a voice that sounds like a boy, I don't ask them if they have a girlfriend.”

*(INT 3, Hungary, psychologist and hotline operator, 42 years old)*

“It would be very important for (LGBTIQ youth) to have a place where they can live their own reality, because very often I see that they have to experience their hardships on their own.”

*(INT 5, Hungary, youthworker, 28 years old)*

“In my work it is a very important principle to use the name that the young person wants to be called as, and be respectful, even if it changes during our work. (...) I feel that the professional's job is to follow the young person with attention, not to lead them, so they can reach their own identity, so they can feel confident and satisfied with themselves.”

*(INT 8, Hungary, child psychiatrist, 36 years old)*

“(To improve LGBTIQ children's situation in Hungary) the legal background would have to change, in line with a long term communication strategy, that would help the general public to understand and accept (LGBTIQ youth).”

*(INT 9, Hungary, social worker and educator, 62 years old)*

## 4. Overall evaluation: tendencies and absences

### 4.1. SWOT analysis of Hungary in combating violence against LGBTIQ children

#### Strengths

- discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in school settings and child protection settings is forbidden by legislation
- there's a growing number of professionals working with children who know LGBTIQ children and are interested in discussion and training
- coaching and support meetings for professionals working with children is becoming more and more widespread

- extensive child protection system on various levels, adequate legislation to protect children from becoming victims of abuse
- school psychologists and public nurses working in schools
- existence of children's rights representatives on a regional level
- several services operated by civil society organisations providing specialist services to vulnerable children (hotline etc.)
- family care centres with interdisciplinary teams to help families
- families with LGBTIQ children are getting more visible
- youth community places offered by family care centres
- informational sites on LGBTIQ topics freely available

### Weaknesses

- school psychologists are practically not available (one part-time psychologist for 500 children)
- politicians promote very restrictive and heterosexist "family values"
- the educational system is very centralised, school directors cannot make their own decisions
- there are no effective anti-bullying protocols at most schools, and if there are, most teachers and pupils don't know what it contains
- university curriculum of professionals working with children does not include LGBTIQ topics
- professionals do not have specialised knowledge
- most healthcare, childcare and child protection services are centralised, some services are not available in every region
- lack of social recognition of caring professions leads to low wages and chronic underemployment in these sectors
- long waiting lists for specialist services
- most professionals working with children are overburdened
- teachers are under duress due to recent upheavals regarding strikes
- public services are harder to access in rural areas
- lack of professionals
- rejection is present in a high number of families
- there is no societal focus on LGBTIQ youth and their needs
- no thematic programs allowed in schools
- sexism is still extremely prevalent in most aspects of society
- less opportunities in rural areas
- invisibility of LGBTIQ youth
- no protocols in most caring professions regarding LGBTIQ children
- social media can be a platform for cyberbullying
- children are not taught to check the accuracy of information they see in the media

### Opportunities

- children can still learn about diversity and minority groups in school settings, if their teachers or other professionals with a contract with the school are holding these classes

- there are NGOs that offer free programs and training for professionals working with children
- university teacher and psychologist training seems to be more interested in teaching about diversity and LGBTIQ topics so the new generation of teachers and school psychologists may be more conscious of issues concerning minority groups
- professionals have compulsory trainings, if accredited they would attend LGBTIQ related courses
- the children's nurse system that is unique to Hungary allows nurses to follow the development of the children from pregnancy, they could provide information on LGBTIQ topics for new parents to enhance family acceptance as well
- a growing number of professionals working in the family care sector are eager to learn
- The online sphere can provide a platform for LGBTIQ children to connect with each other and reach information not available to them otherwise
- NGOs provide resources to support families (booklets on coming out, information for parents) and also for professionals working with families (trainings, handbooks)
- after school activities can engage youth more
- with the use of social media and other internet platforms, children and young adults are easier to reach
- articles could give visibility to LGBTIQ topics
- media campaigns can be used for awareness raising

### Threats

- current political atmosphere, possible extremist attacks
- the educational, health and child protection sector is seriously underfunded, the workforce is undermotivated and ageing
- child protection services are not efficient
- infrastructural issues, possibility of more centralization
- young professionals choose to work abroad, or do not choose caring professions
- political communication about families excludes LGBTIQ persons
- child abuse is underreported, we do not know the real numbers
- LGBTIQ topics are taboo at most public places
- public support for LGBTIQ specific programs has not emerged yet, and the general atmosphere will probably prevent it from doing so
- most mainstream media is run by the government and spreads anti-LGBTIQ stances

## 4.2 Conclusions

Adultism is a system of thought and practice that wields power over children, disregarding children's perspectives and experiences, further contributing to their exclusion from processes that affect them. Adultism positions adults at the centre,

undermining and disqualifying the importance of children's experience and knowledge and the ability to decide about their existence. As such, adultism is extremely widespread and considered the norm in Hungary both in private and professional settings – apart from a few NGOs that put special focus on the engagement of children in matters concerning their future.

Despite the best efforts of several NGOs and professionals, Hungarian children's voices are rarely channelled into legislation and policies, and LGBTIQ children's needs and opinions are considered even less. As for what the reasons are, according to an interviewee working as a psychologist in a high school:

*“It does not help in this situation, that the authorities legitimise the violence against them, and they have been erased from public discourse. So that it is not possible to talk about this. I think this is the reason, this systematic repression and regulation.”*

The LGBTIQ community is under constant attack from the right-wing conservative government. Many politicians and their supporters in media outlets are openly homo-, bi- or transphobic. They also use the “pro-family” and “anti-gender” rhetoric to position LGBTIQ people as those who “attack family values” and “traditional sexes”. In May 2020, legislation banning legal gender recognition was passed by the Hungarian Parliament, while the next year in June the infamous “Child protection law” – dubbed by human rights organisations as the “Propaganda Law” – was passed.

In Hungary the general attitude towards LGBTIQ people (strengthened by politicians and state-owned media) is increasingly hostile. However, all of our participants in the interviews said that the situation has become better in the last 10 years, mostly because of more people coming out and having an impact on their communities.

It appears that even in this hostile political climate the societal acceptance of LGBTIQ people is on the rise, especially among young people. According to a representative study commissioned by Háttér Society and Amnesty International Hungary, the respondents' 46% know an LGBTIQ person personally, and 73% of them dismiss some politicians' claim that gay and lesbian people are debauching children. The majority of Hungarian society thinks it should be allowed for trans and intersex people to legally change their name and gender in their documents (74,5%). 59% of them support marriage equality while 69% of them agree that same sex couples can be good parents. In 2019 only 33% of the population supported same sex marriage.<sup>48</sup>

According to the testimony of several of our interview subjects, older professionals are still stuck with the pathologizing view of LGBTIQ persons. Because these topics are underrepresented in the training of professionals they often do not have the knowledge and information to appropriately support LGBTIQ children.

In the current climate the necessary knowledge can only be gained via courses and training offered by civil society organisations, but this poses several challenges. Firstly, people who are likely to participate in such a training are most likely to have a predisposition towards inclusion of LGBTIQ children, and most probably have a preliminary knowledge on the subject. Thus the professionals who could most benefit

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<sup>48</sup>[https://www.amnesty.hu/tortenelmi-csucson-a-melegek-elfogadottsaga-magyarorszagon/?fbclid=IwAR2O58YQ5zqIY8egKTyieeGk8XOGb\\_sopSWag1xm84FstkB0-6W5k1FVjw](https://www.amnesty.hu/tortenelmi-csucson-a-melegek-elfogadottsaga-magyarorszagon/?fbclid=IwAR2O58YQ5zqIY8egKTyieeGk8XOGb_sopSWag1xm84FstkB0-6W5k1FVjw)

from these trainings usually don't even apply. Secondly, the civil sector in Hungary is chronically underfunded with the only opportunity for most of them being occasional grants and private donations. Without a steady financial situation it is increasingly difficult to create constant training programs instead of just occasional courses. Finally, educational and other institutions are in constant fear of backlash, thus not inviting such programs to their workplace.

At this age schools and families are the main areas of socialisation, and the impressions and experiences children get from these institutions are essential in the development of healthy self-esteem, self acceptance and coping mechanisms. Negative effects are further strengthened by experiencing the general attitude of the society towards them.

LGBTIQ youth can often find themselves without support in their local context, thus turn to the online communities to find kinship and agency. While this undoubtedly can have enormous positive effects, several of our interviewees mentioned the potential dangers of the internet. *"Maybe they do find a group where they belong, but they can easily stumble upon people who will hurt them just the same"* (school psychologist).

The covid-19 pandemic had an immense impact on vulnerable LGBTIQ children's mental health and general well being, to extents we are only beginning to discover. According to professionals' testimony, the period of lockdowns and digital education contributed to an escalation of social anxiety and performance anxiety. Also a lot of children experienced *"health anxiety connected to the pandemic, and the general feeling that the world is not a safe place"* (school psychologist).

According to the professionals we spoke to, the needs of LGBTIQ children are not heard at all at the policy makers level. Among the most pressing needs of LGBTIQ children in vulnerable contexts is the need for a supporting environment. *"It would be very important for (LGBTIQ youth) to have a place where they can live their own reality, because very often I see that they have to experience their hardships on their own"* (youth worker). Furthermore, another interview participant stated that change in both the legal and the socio-political situation is essential to achieve long lasting improvements to the situation of LGBTIQ children.

It is evident that in Hungary the level of general acceptance, legislation and the present political atmosphere are rather problematic for LGBTIQ people. Children are especially vulnerable to this, since the current rhetoric acts like LGBTIQ children don't even exist. Even though there are supportive individuals and organisations, most institutions do not have the tools, resources and commitment to appropriately address LGBTIQ children's needs.