

# Youth Work Advancing Equity for LGBTQI+ Youth



Evidencing Safe and Inclusive Spaces for Young LGBTQI+  
People through Quality Youth Work Practices





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# Aim and Vision of the Policy Brief

The policy initiative aims to advocate for inclusive policies and practices within youth work settings, while also emphasizing the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the role of youth work in fostering safe, welcoming, and enabling spaces for LGBTQI+ youth.

Based on the evidence surfaced throughout the Proud Spaces project, this initiative seeks to prompt policymakers and stakeholders, including youth work practitioners to prioritize the development and implementation of enabling, supportive, and effective policies and encourages collaboration in this regard.

**The policy brief aspires to contribute to an enabling policy environment that prioritizes the safety, well-being, and rights of young LGBTQI+ people across Europe.**

The **vision of youth work with young LGBTQI+ people** is defined by practical experience and informed by evidence, which is not only about providing support and resources and being responsive to the specific needs of LGBTQI+ youth, it is also about creating environments that affirm identity, promote inclusion, and empower young people to thrive. It is about fostering a sense of belonging, resilience, and self-advocacy within the LGBTQI+ community, while also challenging systems of discrimination and inequality. Ultimately, **the vision seeks to foster a society where all young people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, can live with dignity, respect, and equality.**

Youth work plays a significant role in addressing and challenging barriers to inclusion faced by young LGBTQI+ people. Amplifying youth work values such as shared learning, inclusion, and participation will benefit young LGBTQI+ people across Europe. This coupled with the awareness of the implementation of effective strategies for supporting human rights can assist in progressing shared European values of inclusion and diversity.



# Policy Analysis

LGBTQI+ youth work exists within an extensive framework of policy, legislation, and international agreements. In the context of LGBTQI+ youth work in Europe, countries are bound by a positive obligation to safeguard young people and children from all forms of discrimination. This commitment is underscored by **key international and regional legal instruments**, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (for EU members), and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). These foundational documents mandate proactive measures to prevent discrimination and uphold the rights of young individuals, encompassing protections against discrimination based on various factors such as age, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

## EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

Prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in all areas, including employment, social protection, education, and access to goods and services.

## European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

Protects the rights and freedoms of individuals within the jurisdiction of the Council of Europe member states, including the right to respect for private and family life (Article 8) and the prohibition of discrimination (Article 14).

The **Council of Europe (CoE)** has developed a comprehensive framework addressing the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals, including youth. This framework is outlined in the following documents. Each document provides valuable guidance and recommendations for member states on promoting equality and combating discrimination.

## Council of Europe Standards - Resolution 1945 (2013) on combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity

This resolution calls on member states to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, including in the fields of education, employment, healthcare, and access to goods and services.



Taking into due account the over-riding interests of the child, member states should take appropriate legislative and other measures, addressed to educational staff and pupils, to ensure that the right to education can be effectively enjoyed without discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity; this includes, in particular, **safeguarding the right of children and youth to education in a safe environment, free from violence, bullying, social exclusion or other forms of discriminatory and degrading treatment related to sexual orientation or gender identity**”

**Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity** provides guidelines for member states on combating discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, including through legislative measures, awareness-raising campaigns, and support for victims.

**Resolution 1952 (2013) on children's right to physical integrity**, while not specific to LGBTQI+ rights, this resolution addresses issues related to bodily autonomy and gender identity, which can be relevant to LGBTQI+ youth.

The principal document is the Union of Equality: **LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025 of the European Union**. Youth is mentioned in **section 1.4** Upholding the rights of LGBTIQ applicants for international protection - the European Commission will support the Member States to improve safe and inclusive education for LGBTIQ children and youth. The Equality Strategy also reaffirms that **young people play a critical role in building inclusive societies**.

In the context of Youth Work and LGBTQI+ youth, it is crucial to highlight the significance of the following documents:

**Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Youth Work**

Emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and equality in youth work practices. While it may not explicitly mention LGBTQI+ youth, the principles outlined in the recommendation promote the creation of inclusive environments that respect the rights and dignity of all young people, regardless of their background or identity. Therefore, the recommendation indirectly supports efforts to foster inclusion and address discrimination in youth work settings.

“Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people’s **active participation and inclusion** in their communities and in decision-making.

“In order to facilitate these outcomes, youth work should create an enabling environment that is actively inclusive and socially engaging, creative and safe, fun and serious, playful and planned. It should be characterised by accessibility, openness, and flexibility and at the same time promote dialogue between young people and the rest of society.

The **European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027** upholds inclusion as one of the guiding principles of the strategy. The EU Youth Strategy aims, in particular, to “create more and equal opportunities for all young people to participate in education and in the labour market. Support the active citizenship, social inclusion, and solidarity of all young people.”

In connection to the EU Youth Strategy, it is important to discuss **the EU Youth Goals** which are all interconnected, however, the following two goals are particularly relevant for LGBTQI+ Youth Work. Together with the Member States, the Commission collected their opinion through the EU youth dialogue process, which led to 11 European youth goals that call for (among other things) the equality of all genders and for inclusive societies.

### **Goal Number 2: Equality of all Genders**

The background of this goal mentions that equal opportunities and access to rights need to be ensured for young people of all genders including non-binary and LGBTQI+ young people. The sub-goals of Goal Number 2 are also important in achieving the overarching aim, specifically the one that targets ensuring equal access to **formal and non-formal education**, and that the design of education systems follows gender-sensitive approaches.

### **Goal Number 3: Inclusive societies**

Enable and ensure the inclusion of all young people in society.

Relevant sub-goals:

- Provide legal protection and enforce international legal instruments to fight against all kinds of discrimination and hate speech, recognising that young people are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination.
- Provide more spaces, opportunities, resources, and programmes to foster dialogue and social cohesion, and combat discrimination and segregation

The **Final Declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention** mentions that *“Youth work, as one of the facets of civic education, should also focus on power relations, intersectionality, social justice, emancipation, and true engagement of young people. It should be a guide to addressing inequalities, putting young people into focus and giving them opportunities to be competent co-creators of the European policy.”*

It should be pointed out that the declaration does not explicitly mention LGBTQI+ youth. Instead, its provisions indirectly address the issues of intersectionality, inclusion, and support for vulnerable groups. As it is known, the so-called **“Bonn Process”** is responsible for putting the youth work agenda into action. Such processes are important for strengthening the standards and quality of youth work. The next process after the 4th European Youth Work Convention should specifically target better inclusion practices.

As part of the policy analysis, the **Youth Sector Strategy 2030 of the Council of Europe (CoE)** should also be discussed. The LGBTQI+ youth is specifically mentioned in the priority of living together in peaceful and inclusive societies.

“ This priority covers the Council of Europe youth sector’s well-established work on appreciation of diversity, peacebuilding, combating all forms of racism and intolerance, intercultural dialogue and learning, and specific work with communities of young people structurally and disproportionately affected by such phenomena (Roma, refugees, LGBTQI, young people disabled by society).

The significance of **LGBTQI+ youth work** concerning these policies cannot be overstated. Youth work contributes to reducing discrimination and social exclusion by empowering young individuals to advocate for their fundamental rights. Furthermore, LGBTQI+ youth work takes proactive steps in advancing intersectional inclusivity, encouraging active citizenship, and guaranteeing equal opportunities for LGBTQI+ youth.





# Overview of the Shortcomings and Current Challenges

Even though a number of youth work and related policies have specific indications on LGBTQI+ youth, the absence of recognizing the unique challenges faced by LGBTQI+ youth and the role of youth work in overcoming those challenges is noticeable. The policies both on European and national levels lack the intersectional approaches and explicit mention or consideration of LGBTQI+ issues, particularly those belonging to marginalized communities based on race, ethnicity, disability, or socioeconomic status. Intersectional approaches are needed to tackle the multiple forms of discrimination and oppression faced by LGBTQI+ youth comprehensively. These shortcomings often lead to insufficient attention and resources being allocated to address the specific needs of LGBTQI+ youth.

One of the critical challenges lies in the area of **anti-discrimination measures**. While there may be laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, enforcement mechanisms and support services are often inadequate. This leaves LGBTQI+ youth vulnerable to discrimination and harassment in various settings, including education, employment, and healthcare. The rise of online hate speech and cyberbullying, fueled by anti-gender movements and extremism, may not be adequately addressed by existing policies, leaving LGBTQI+ youth vulnerable to harassment and abuse in physical and digital spaces.

The LGBTQI+ community, including youth, is profoundly affected by the **shrinking space for civil society**, as it directly impacts their ability to advocate for their rights, access support services, and create safe and inclusive environments. Limited advocacy opportunities hinder efforts to address discrimination in employment, housing, and healthcare, while increased vulnerability to discrimination leaves individuals at risk of harassment and human rights violations. In the motion for a European Parliament Resolution on Shrinking Space for Civil Society in Europe ([2021/2103\(INI\)](#)) it is mentioned that the European Parliament “Condemns the **hostile rhetoric and smear campaigns by political figures and allied media outlets designed to undermine public trust in and support for CSOs and human rights defenders**, and often designed to target minority groups such as migrants, refugees and LGBTIQ+ people”.

**LGBTQI+ inclusive education, including non-formal education**, is inconsistently implemented across European countries. Gaps exist in training, curriculum development, and support services for LGBTQI+ youth. Youth work organisations and youth workers have identified a need for a youth work policy to recognise the contribution of effective LGBTQI+ youth work. However, youth work organizations and initiatives supporting LGBTQI+ youth may struggle to secure funding and resources, limiting their capacity to provide comprehensive support and advocacy.

There is a notable **lack of inclusive data collection on the experiences and needs of LGBTQI+ youth**, making it challenging to assess the effectiveness of existing policies and interventions. Improved gender-sensitive data collection methods are necessary to understand the realities of LGBTQI+ youth better and inform evidence-based policymaking.

Moreover, LGBTQI+ youth often find themselves underrepresented in decision-making processes and policy development related to youth issues. Ensuring their **meaningful participation and representation** in such processes is crucial for addressing their concerns and priorities effectively.

Addressing these gaps requires a **comprehensive, Human Rights-Based, and intersectional approach** that recognizes the diverse experiences and needs of LGBTQI+ youth and ensures their full inclusion and participation in society. This involves not only strengthening existing policies but also implementing new initiatives and allocating resources to support the rights and well-being of LGBTQI+ youth across Europe, including by **investing in quality youth work**.

In terms of monitoring and implementation of policies, there is a need for increased awareness of anti-gender movements and a thorough needs analysis to identify areas for policy change and improvement. Efforts should be made to consolidate and coordinate the provision of LGBTQI+ youth services, recognize the contribution of effective LGBTQI+ youth work, and enhance inclusion for LGBTQI+ young people.



# Policy Recommendations - Advancing Equity for LGBTQI+ Youth

The following **policy recommendations** aim to tackle the identified gaps and challenges in policies related to LGBTQI+ youth work in Europe, promoting equality, inclusion, and respect for the rights and well-being of LGBTQI+ youth across diverse contexts. While not exhaustive, these recommendations offer a strong foundation for additional initiatives and measures moving forward.

1. First and foremost, It is essential to **recognize and acknowledge the existing contribution and role of youth work in fostering inclusion, particularly in providing supportive environments for LGBTQI+ youth.** Youth work initiatives already serve as vital platforms for creating “Proud Spaces” where LGBTQI+ youth can express themselves freely and engage in activities that promote intersectional inclusion. Emphasizing this contribution is crucial to validate the efforts of youth workers and highlight the importance of continued support for youth work programs.

2. **Increase funding and resources on both national and European levels** to support youth work organizations and initiatives focused on LGBTQI+ youth, including peer support groups, advocacy programs, and leadership development activities. Enhance the visibility of LGBTQI+ issues in European funding schemes, such as Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, European Youth Foundation, etc.

3. The potential update of the **EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy beyond 2025** presents an opportunity to acknowledge and integrate the pivotal role of youth work in advancing equality. By recognizing youth work expertise and its significant contributions, the strategy can amplify its positive impact on fostering inclusive environments and achieving equality for all.

4. It is also recommended that the agenda for the upcoming **European Youth Work Convention** includes dedicated discussion on LGBTQI+ youth issues and adopts a more intersectional approach overall. By prioritizing the inclusion of LGBTQI+ youth concerns and recognizing the intersecting identities and experiences within youth populations, the convention planned for 2025 can foster more comprehensive and effective strategies for promoting diversity, equity, and social justice in youth work practices across Europe.

5. **Advocate for the implementation of comprehensive education and awareness programs aimed at reducing stigma, promoting acceptance,** and increasing understanding of LGBTQI+ issues among youth, families, educators, and communities. Furthermore, it's crucial to strengthen the skills and knowledge of youth workers in supporting LGBTQI+ youth, including promoting the use of inclusive language, understanding diverse terminology, and respecting individuals' chosen pronouns. It is also important to integrate inclusivity into the daily practice of youth workers rather than solely relying on specialized services and referrals.

6. **Foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing among youth work practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and LGBTQI+ advocacy groups** to identify and promote effective strategies for supporting LGBTQI+ youth across Europe. All stakeholders must accelerate efforts to establish and develop comprehensive services and **reduce fragmented service provision** to ensure that LGBTQI+ youth have access to holistic support systems that address their diverse needs effectively.

7. All stakeholders should upscale their work to **combat online hate speech and bullying** which includes strengthening regulations and enforcement mechanisms to address online hate speech, cyberbullying, and harassment targeting LGBTQI+ individuals, including youth. As well as increased efforts to support awareness campaigns and **digital literacy** initiatives to promote responsible online behavior and empower LGBTQI+ youth to safely navigate digital spaces.

8. The **anti-discrimination legislation and enforcement needs to be strengthened,** existing anti-discrimination laws should explicitly include protections for LGBTQI+ individuals, including youth, and address intersectional forms of discrimination. It is critical to strengthen the enforcement mechanisms and provide adequate resources for monitoring and addressing discrimination, including training for law enforcement and judicial personnel.

9. Prioritize **gender-sensitive data collection and research initiatives** to comprehensively understand the experiences, needs, and challenges encountered by LGBTQI+ youth. By gathering thorough data, policymakers, stakeholders, and organizations can develop evidence-based policies, tailor programs, and allocate resources effectively.

10. In light of the concerning trend of shrinking space for civil society, It is crucial that governments and international organisations take proactive steps to protect the fundamental freedoms of association, expression, and assembly. This includes refraining from imposing unnecessary restrictions on civil society organizations, ensuring transparent and inclusive policymaking processes, protecting human rights defenders, and fostering an environment for **civil society participation**. By upholding the principles of democracy, human rights, and rule of law, governments can mitigate the **adverse effects of shrinking civic space and uphold the values of an open and inclusive society**.

While not exhaustive, these recommendations provide an incentive for policy changes. These recommendations stress the urgent need to better support LGBTQI+ youth across Europe, promoting equality, inclusivity, and the protection of their rights and well-being. Aimed at policymakers on both national and European levels, as well as youth work practitioners, LGBTQI+ advocacy groups, and other stakeholders, these proposals call for concrete steps to address current gaps and obstacles. Stakeholders are also called to collaboratively strive to establish safer and more enabling environments for LGBTQI+ youth.

It is important to recognise the essential role youth work can and should play in advancing equality and equity for LGBTQI+ youth. Investing in and providing more support for youth work is crucial to fostering social inclusion.



PROUD SPACES

# Toolbox



EVIDENCE REVIEW OF  
EFFECTIVE LGBTI+ YOUTH  
WORK PRACTICE



MOVING LGBTQI+ YOUTH  
WORK TOWARDS  
PROMISING PRACTICES



BROCHURE FOR THE  
MULTIPLIER EVENT IN  
POLAND

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## The list of legal and policy documents

General Assembly resolution 44/25 (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000/C 364/01)

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf)

European Convention on Human Rights

[https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention\\_ENG](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG)

EU Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025 Brussels, 12.11.2020 COM(2020) 698

[https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/5100c375-87e8-40e3-85b5-1adc5f556d6d\\_en?filename=lgbtiq\\_strategy\\_2020-2025\\_en.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/5100c375-87e8-40e3-85b5-1adc5f556d6d_en?filename=lgbtiq_strategy_2020-2025_en.pdf)

Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/framework-decision-on-combating-certain-forms-and-expressions-of-racism-and-xenophobia-by-means-of-criminal-law.html>

Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on youth work

<https://rm.coe.int/1680717e78>

Resolution 1952 (2013) on children's right to physical integrity

<https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=20174>

Resolution 1945 (2013) on combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity

<https://rm.coe.int/168047f2a6>

Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity

[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cf40a](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cf40a)

Resolution 2048 (2015) on discrimination against transgender people in Europe

<https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/xref/xref-xml2html-en.asp?fileid=21736>

EU youth strategy (2019–2027)

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/eu-youth-strategy-2019-2027.html>

European Youth Work Convention and Bonn Process

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/eywc-2020>

Youth Sector Strategy 2030 of the Council of Europe (CoE)

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/youth-strategy-2030>

Motion for a European Parliament Resolution on Shrinking Space for Civil Society in Europe (2021/2103(INI))

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0032\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0032_EN.html)

## Resources

Evidence Review of Effective LGBTI+ Youth Work Practice (2023)

<https://www.youthworkireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Youth-Work-Ireland-Proud-Spaces-Booklet-May-2023.pdf>

Moving LGBTQI+ Youth Work Towards Promising Practices (2023)

<https://www.youthworkireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Moving-LGBTQI-Youth-Work-Towards-Promising-Practices-for-Printing.pdf>

Online hate speech and hate crime

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cyberviolence/online-hate-speech-and-hate-crime>

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<https://www.youth.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Youth-Work-with-LGBTQI-YP-Conference-Report-July-2023.pdf>

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<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10438919/>

European Commission (2017) Data collection in relation to LGBTI People



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