Policy Brief on Cyberbullying & LGBTQI Youth: Priorities for the EU Action Plan

publication, youth and families, advocacy resources, lgbti

Together with our partner organisations IGLYO — The International Youth & Student Organisation, ILGA-Europe, and OII Europe, we have put forward recommendations and priorities to protect LGBTQI youth from cyberbullying in this policy brief.

Executive Summary

Cyberbullying is one of the most urgent digital safety challenges facing young people in Europe today. For LGBTQI youth, it is not simply a matter of online conflict but an extension of the discrimination, harassment, and violence LGBTQI children and youth already encounter in schools, families, and communities. The anonymity, speed, and reach of digital platforms magnify these risks, exposing minors and young adults to targeted abuse, social isolation, and serious, long-term harm to their mental health and well-being. Recent data highlight the alarming scale of the problem.

According to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency's 2023 LGBTIQ Survey, more than half (55%) of LGBTQI respondents reported experiencing hate-motivated harassment in the previous year, with young people aged 1524 the most frequently targeted. Among minors, over 70% reported hate-motivated harassment, and 14% reported a physical or sexual attack in the past year. Online spaces are key sites of abuse: over one-third of LGBTQI minors reported regularly encountering online calls for violence, while three-quarters frequently saw hostile content portraying LGBTQI people as unnatural or promoting harmful stereotypes.

The consequences are severe, with high levels of depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts consistently reported, with trans (including non-binary) and intersex youth facing the highest risks. Cyberbullying is particularly harmful because it invades the private sphere and can follow young people anywhere, at any time. Unlike bullying that occurs in classrooms or playgrounds, online harassment is constant, often invisible to parents, teachers, or carers, and challenging to escape.

For LGBTQI minors who are not out to their families or educators, reporting abuse may carry the added danger of forced disclosure of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics, further deterring them from seeking help. Intersectional factors, including race, migration background, disability, and socio-economic status, compound these risks and create additional barriers to support.

Despite the scale and urgency of the issue, LGBTQI youth remain largely invisible in most national cyberbullying strategies. Few Member States explicitly name LGBTQI youth as a priority group, and existing measures often fail to address the unique barriers faced by trans (including non-binary) and intersex young people. Reporting tools remain inaccessible or unsafe for minors, content moderation systems frequently remove supportive LGBTQI material while allowing hate speech to circulate, and reliable data on sexual orientation, gender identity, and age are scarce.

Youth-led organisations, which often provide the first and only source of peer support, continue to face chronic underfunding and limited access to policy processes. The forthcoming EU Action Plan against Cyberbullying offers a critical opportunity to close these gaps. To succeed, it must explicitly include LGBTQI youth, adopt an

intersectional and rights-based approach, and guarantee the meaningful participation of youth-led and civil society organisations.

Targeted measures, such as inclusive definitions, disaggregated data collection, accessible reporting mechanisms, and sustainable funding for community support, are essential to protect those most at risk and to fulfil the EU's commitment to equality and fundamental rights in the digital age. More information and detailed recommendations can be found in the policy brief.

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Demands to the European Commission

1. Explicitly name LGBTQI youth as a priority group in the Action Plan, with a particular focus on trans and intersex youth who are disproportionately affected.
2. In line with Commission's own guidance note on the collection and use of data for LGBTIQ equality, require disaggregated data collection on cyberbullying, including all SOGIESC-based bullying.
3. Guarantee LGBTQI-inclusive support services for victims across all Member States.
4. Hold online platforms accountable for preventing and addressing SOGIESC-based bullying.
5. Ensure sustainable funding and participation of youth-led and LGBTQI civil society in the implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan.

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Authored by

The Policy Brief was drafted by IGLYO — The International Youth & Student Organisation, ILGA-Europe, TGEU, and OII Europe.

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