

Policy Brief

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# Cyberbullying & LGBTQI Youth: Priorities for the EU Action Plan



Authored by



IGLYO



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## 1. Introduction

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Cyberbullying has become one of the most pressing digital safety concerns for young people across Europe. For LGBTQI youth, who already face disproportionate discrimination and exclusion in schools, communities, and families, online harassment is an extension of offline violence. The anonymity and reach of digital platforms amplify these risks, leaving many minors and young people exposed to targeted abuse, social isolation, and long-term harm to their mental health and well-being.

We welcome the European Commission's initiative to develop an EU Action Plan against Cyberbullying, as announced in President von der Leyen's political guidelines for 2024–2029. To be effective, the Action Plan must explicitly include LGBTQI youth, adopt an intersectional approach, and ensure meaningful participation of youth-led and civil society organisations. Without this, the lived realities of some of the most targeted groups in Europe will remain invisible.

As the world's largest international LGBTQI youth and student network, representing more than 130 member organisations across over 40 countries, IGLYO, together with ILGA-Europe, TGEU and OII Europe, urges the Commission to adopt a comprehensive, rights-based, and youth-centred strategy against cyberbullying.

## 2. The Reality of Cyberbullying for LGBTQI Youth

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### High prevalence and serious consequences of cyberbullying

The [2023 Fundamental Rights Agency \(FRA\) LGBTIQ Survey](#) found that 55% of LGBTQI respondents reported having experienced hate-motivated harassment in the past 12 months, with young people aged 15–24 being the most targeted. Among minors (15–17 years old), over 70% reported having experienced hate-motivated harassment in the previous year, and 14% reported having experienced a physical or sexual attack in the past year.

Online spaces, particularly social media and gaming platforms, are frequent sites of abuse. Alarmingly, **35% of LGBTIQ minors (15–17 years old) reported often encountering online calls for violence, and 11% said they had always encountered such calls in the past year.** For young adults aged 18–24 years old, the numbers were almost the same (35% reporting having often encountered online calls for violence in the past year, and 10% having always encountered them). Beyond direct threats, **three-quarters of minors (76%) and more than four-fifths of young adults (83%)** reported often or always seeing online claims about so-called "LGBTIQ propaganda" or "gender ideology." Likewise, **73% of minors and 72% of young adults** frequently encountered content portraying LGBTIQ people as "unnatural" or "mentally ill."

The consequences of witnessing such content for the well-being of LGBTQI young people are severe. **Four in ten minors (43%)** reported feeling downhearted or depressed most or all of the time in the past two weeks, with similar rates among young adults (39%). Almost **one-third of minors (30%)** said they often or always thought about suicide in the past year, and **22% reported having attempted suicide**, and among 18–24 year-olds, **21% reported having attempted suicide.**

Cyberbullying is particularly insidious because it follows young people into their private spaces, including the home environment. Unlike bullying that occurs in schools or in public settings, cyberbullying can be constant, invisible to parents, teachers and carers, and therefore extremely isolating.

For LGBTQI young people who are not out to their families, educators or peers, speaking up about cyberbullying can risk unwanted or unsafe disclosure of their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or sex characteristics, putting them at risk of peer-on-peer or family abuse. This leaves many LGBTQI young people unable to seek support if they experience cyberbullying.

For LGBTQI youth, cyberbullying often means:

- **Being targeted because of who they are**, attacks based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics.
- **Risk of outing** and threats to disclose personal information without consent, which can endanger safety in unsupportive families or communities.
- **Heightened mental health risks**, repeated exposure to threats and hostile rhetoric is linked to depression, social anxiety, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts, with trans and non-binary youth at the highest risk.

### Intersectional vulnerabilities

Cyberbullying rarely occurs in isolation. LGBTQI youth who are racialised, migrants, disabled, or from low-income families face compounded risks. Racialised LGBTQI youth are disproportionately subjected to online harassment, often combining racist and queerphobic abuse. These overlapping vulnerabilities mean that for support services to be effective, they must explicitly acknowledge those intersecting barriers and be truly inclusive.

## 3. Key Gaps in Current Responses

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Despite the scale of the problem, most national and EU strategies fail to address the specific experiences of LGBTQI youth:

- **Absence in national action plans or policies**; Few Member States explicitly name LGBTQI youth as a priority group in anti-bullying or digital safety strategies. Even fewer address the unique barriers faced by trans and intersex youth within the LGBTQI groups, who are disproportionately affected.
- **Inaccessible reporting tools**; Many platforms lack child-friendly, anonymous, faceless or LGBTQI-inclusive reporting systems and reporting systems that can be accessed by minors. Fear of retaliation or forced disclosure of SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics) prevents young people from reporting.
- **Inadequate content moderation practices**; moderation systems and platform policies often disproportionately flag or remove LGBTQI-related content, including educational material on comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and supportive community content, while failing to consistently detect and remove anti-LGBTQI hate speech and online violence. Worse, they algorithmically amplify and auto-generate hateful content. This restricts LGBTQI young people's access to vital information and online spaces of belonging, further isolating them and reinforcing harmful narratives.
- **Lack of disaggregated data**; most surveys exclude minors or fail to collect data on SOGIESC. This invisibility of LGBTQI minors and youth undermines evidence-based policymaking.
- **Underfunded civil society**; Youth-led organisations, often the first place LGBTQI young people turn to when established systems fail them, lack sustainable funding. They provide essential alternative community support systems, including vital peer-to-peer support, yet too often they cannot access or participate in formal consultation mechanisms.

## 4. EU-Level Priorities for the Action Plan

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We urge the European Commission to embed the following priorities in the forthcoming Action Plan:

### a) Definitions & Monitoring

- Establish a harmonised EU definition of cyberbullying that explicitly includes attacks based on all SOGIESC grounds.
- Require systematic, disaggregated data collection on cyberbullying by age, gender, SOGIESC, race, disability, and socio-economic background.
- Strengthen monitoring frameworks across Member States, building on FRA surveys and Eurobarometer instruments.

### b) Prevention & Education

- Integrate cyberbullying prevention into EU education initiatives, including the European Education Area and Erasmus+.
- Fund teacher and staff training on preventing and addressing SOGIESC-based bullying, using trauma-informed, restorative, and youth-led approaches.
- Promote positive digital citizenship and media literacy, with campaigns against hate, harmful gender stereotypes and misinformation and disinformation targeting LGBTQI youth.
- Recognise that racialised, disabled, migrant, and low-income LGBTQI youth face compounded risks.

### c) Support for Victims

- Guarantee access to LGBTQI inclusive mental health services, helplines, and peer support networks across Europe.
- Ensure reporting mechanisms include options for anonymous, faceless, and accessible reporting, including to young people and minors, and that they are protective against revictimisation and retaliation.
- Provide clear pathways for victims to access legal remedies and counselling, including specialist support for victims with specific needs.

### d) Addressing Perpetrators

- Combine restorative approaches (counselling, education) with proportionate sanctions where necessary.
- Ensure perpetrators understand the harm caused, particularly in cases of hate-motivated bullying and harassment.

### e) Role of Platforms

- Enforce the Digital Services Act obligations on content moderation, with specific attention to harassment and hateful content on all SOGIESC grounds, including hate speech and incitement to violence.
- Require platforms to develop child-friendly, visible, and safe reporting tools, co-designed with LGBTQI youth and civil society.
- Promote transparency in moderation practices, algorithmic decisions, and response rates to cyberbullying complaints.

## f) Empowering Bystanders

- Develop EU-wide campaigns encouraging peers and educators to intervene safely and effectively report abuse, recognising their responsibilities as upstanders.
- Fund peer ambassador programmes in schools, universities, and online communities.

## g) Civil Society & Youth Participation

- Provide sustainable, accessible funding for LGBTQI youth-led organisations working on cyberbullying and harassment.
- Institutionalise structured dialogue with LGBTQI youth and civil society in the design and monitoring of the Action Plan.
- Protect civic space and organisations that support victims of harassment, smear campaigns, targeted disinformation and political restrictions.

## 6. Conclusion & Call to Action

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Cyberbullying threatens the safety, dignity, and futures of millions of young people across Europe. For LGBTQI youth, it is a daily reality, with alarmingly increasing rates, that too often remain invisibilised in policy responses. If the EU's Action Plan is to deliver real change, it must explicitly include LGBTQI youth, adopt truly intersectional approaches, and empower civil society to act as partners in recognition, prevention, protection, and accountability. The EU must act decisively to protect all young people, and especially those most at risk, from digital violence.

We call on the European Commission to:

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.

## 7. About the Authoring Organisations

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### About IGLYO

IGLYO – The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) Youth & Student Organisation – is the world’s largest network of LGBTQI youth and student-led organisations, representing over 130 members across more than 40 countries in the Council of Europe region. IGLYO works to ensure that the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQI young people are meaningfully represented in European and international policy spaces, including with institutions such as the European Union and the Council of Europe.

**Rú Ávila Rodríguez** (they/them), Deputy Executive Director, [ru@iglyo.org](mailto:ru@iglyo.org)

### About ILGA-Europe

ILGA-Europe (The European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association) is an independent, international non-governmental umbrella organisation uniting over 600 organisations from 54 countries across Europe & Central Asia. ILGA works for a world in which each and every LGBTI person is free, equal and safe, through resourcing and connecting communities, driving political change, = amplifying voices.

**Luca Dudits** (she/her), Advocacy Officer, [luca@ilga-europe.org](mailto:luca@ilga-europe.org)

### About TGEU

TGEU — Trans Europe and Central Asia is a non-governmental umbrella organisation with more than 200 member organisations in 50 countries working for the advancement of the rights and wellbeing of trans people in Europe and Central Asia. TGEU advocates for the rights of trans people at the Council of Europe (where it has participatory status and observer status before the CDADI) and the European Union.

**Ela Gervinská** (she/her), Policy and Advocacy Officer, [ela@tgeu.org](mailto:ela@tgeu.org)

### About OII Europe

OII Europe (Organisation Intersex International Europe) is the European intersex umbrella organisation with 27 intersex-led member organisations in more than 20 European countries. OII Europe advocates for the protection of intersex people’s human rights, raises awareness of intersex issues in society and supports the growth of the European intersex community. OII Europe is a framework partner to the European Commission and holds expert status with the SOGIESC Unit of the Council of Europe.

**Maddalena Bianchi** (she/her), Policy Officer, [maddalena@oiieurope.org](mailto:maddalena@oiieurope.org)

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