NATIONAL REPORT - CYPRUS

WP1: Modelling Non-Discriminatory VET Education Strategy

EqUal iNclusIon of LGBTIQ stUdents in VET: "UNIQUE"

AKMH THE LEADER IN EDUCATION · symplexis · iB Internationaler Bund Polska · Centar za Građanske Inicijative Poreč · NAVETS · ALGEBRA · BK BK-CONSULT

GALE THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR LGBT EDUCATION · KESCOLLEGE

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PROJECT INFORMATION

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Executive Summary

KES College, as a partner of the UNIQUE project, has conducted research to investigate discrimination against LGBTIQ people in Cypriot VET institutions. Desk research was carried out to have a picture of the situation in Cyprus in association with discriminatory practices, legislation and implementation of it, and the educational system of the country. Moreover, secondary research was done through interviews, focus groups and an online survey and results are presented.

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Introduction

The project

Discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people is a reality, even in countries where LGBTQI individuals' civic rights are well established. Despite the progress that has been made and their legal recognition in all OECD countries, LGBT people are still far from being offered equal opportunities in education, work or healthcare. They are stigmatized and frequently refused access to normal jobs. The study of the Eurobarometer on Discrimination 2019 on how comfortable the respondents would feel if one of their colleagues would be a transgender person, is revealing, with the EU average to be below 50%. *The exclusion of LGBTIQ people from the professional field could be further spiralled by early school drop-out and low performance which is an imminent result of constant bullying and direct discrimination* (2015, Overview of Youth Discrimination in the European Union).

Nevertheless, *current educational structure is distant from being characterized as inclusive*. On the contrary, it seems to be lagging the social reality, particularly *in the VET sector, which, counter to the compulsory education, has been neglected.*

Taking those elements into consideration, our project aims at *reversing the perceptions and attitudes towards LGBTIQ learners in VET education*. Classic educational material replicates the traditional gender norms, contributing, thus, to the perpetuation of the discrimination and stereotypes, even unintentionally or unconsciously. Besides, *VET teachers are not trained or prepared to openly discuss* in the classroom issues that are considered "sensitive" or *may be biased themselves.*

The objectives of UNIQUE could be summarized as follows:

- **O1**: **Provide** a **renewed skillset** to VET teachers
- **O2**: Highlight the significance of **diversifying manuals and educational materials**
- **O3**: Introduce **new training methods** which promote the active involvement **of VET teachers**
- **O4**: **Reduce school drop-out rates**
- **O5: Motivate LGBTIQ people and provide a clear pathway towards employment**
- **O6**: Set up **effective monitoring mechanisms**
- **O7: Raise awareness on LGBTIQ issues**, combat stereotypes
- **O8: Promote equality, human rights and EU values**
- **O9: Support local economies with qualified workforce**

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TARGET GROUPS

The UNIQUE project has a solid and coherent ***multi-level approach*** that is going to target both **individuals** (A) and **institutions** (B), ensuring that a useful transition from policy change to policy implementation is succeeded.

More specifically, the project strategy aims at engaging the following target groups:

Individuals

1. LGBTIQ People (i.e., VET students and communities)

2. VET teachers and Staff

3. Others (including): NGOs, Parents of LGBTIQ, employers, representatives of the educational or professional sector, trade unions etc.

Institutions

4. VET Providers

5. LGBTIQ organized communities and established institutions in European and national level

6. European and national authorities

EXPEXTED RESULTS

1) A comprehensive methodology on how to develop gender diversity friendly curricula, avoiding stereotypes and discriminatory patterns

2) A Curriculum that will promote gender-based diversity for the benefit of LGBTIQ students

3) Introduction of UNIQUE Ambassadors in VET environment

4) Roll out of the methodology on the field by screening VET curricula

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Part A: Desk Research Results

LGBTQI+ people in VET sector in Cyprus

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth of Cyprus (MoECSY) is responsible for the administration of public and the supervision of private schools of pre-primary, primary and secondary level as well as the educational institutions of Post-Secondary Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education and Adult Education. The Department of Higher Education of the MoECSY has issued a map of the educational field for the academic year 2018-19. The data was collected from the Educational Institutions of Cyprus and demonstrates that the total number of students who are studying in Cyprus, amounts to 51,086, of which 38,997 are students in universities and 12,089 in Tertiary Schools Education. The most popular courses among all students were: Secretarial Studies, Hotel / Tourist, Security services, Business Administration / Finance, Food Arts, Hairdressing and Aesthetics.

In 2015, participation in initial vocational education and training (IVET) in Cyprus is quite low (15.6%) compared to the EU average (47.3%) (Cedefop, 2017). For female students, the difference is greater (6.9% in Cyprus; 42.0% for the EU). No statistics or data were found regarding LGBTIQ people in the VET sector of Cyprus. This is due to the fact that equality in Cyprus is lagging behind. Unfortunately, very few people are openly LGBTQI according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2020). Moreover, the European Commission (2019) confirms that discriminations are a widespread phenomenon, as 67% of the participants believe discriminations are widespread on the basis of sexual orientation, 54% believe discriminations are widespread based on being transgender, and 52% on being intersex. Only 8% of the LGBTQI population are living openly, where as 49% are never open about their sexuality (FRA, 2020).

As stated by the FRA (2020), at school, the picture is worse when talking about discriminations, as there is a high percentage of 79% hiding their sexuality. Moreover, 67% of the participants said the school had not addressed LGBTIQ issues. When asked about how many schoolmates/ university co-students knew they were LGBTIQ, 41% responded none and 38% responded that only a few knew. Replying to the question "how many immediate superiors/heads of department are you open about being LGBTI" 78% answered none. Furthermore, 27% of participants stated that in the past 12 months they have felt discriminated against due to being LGBTIQ by school / university personnel (as a student or parent). 81% of the participants have heard or seen negative comments or conduct at schools because a peer was perceived to be LGBTIQ, and 44%

experienced these behaviours due to being LGBTIQ. Ridicule, teasing, insults or threats were experienced by 52% of the participants. Unfortunately, 72% of LGBTIQ people did not experience support at school. Furthermore, a large number of participants (71%) stated that the government does not take enough measures to combat prejudice and intolerance against LGBTIQ, and it does not respond adequately to safety needs of LGBTIQ (81%). Cyprus had one of the highest rates of sexual attacks (FDA, 2020). A striking 95% of respondents said they did not report any incidents to any institution/ organisation, and there is distrust with the police. 31% stated the police would not or could not do anything about it, 22% do not trust the police, and 19% are afraid that they will experience homophobic and/or transphobic reaction by the officers. Research from the European Commission (2019) confirm that people find it difficult to report to the police, as only 24% would do so, while 29% of people would report it to the ombudsman. This demonstrates the difficulty to obtain numbers of LGBTIQ in VET sector, let alone to have data regarding anti-LGBTIQ discrimination incidents.

Linguistic Background

Greek is a grammatical gender language, like German and Slavic languages. The Cypriot dialect follows the same grammatical gender rules as Greek, where, every noun has a grammatical gender and the gender of personal pronouns usually matches the reference noun. Since it is very difficult to create accepted gender-neutral forms from existing words, it has been recommended to feminize nouns, i.e., to use the feminine correspondents of masculine terms. Thus, feminine equivalents started to be created, especially in professional contexts, and additionally, replacing the generic masculine with double forms for specific referents is acceptable (European Parliament, 2018).

Cypriot Society and Educational System

Unfortunately, heteronormativity is a widespread phenomenon in the conservative and patriarchal Cypriot society which has an effect on expectations of heterosexuality, and negative predispositions towards various "others" (Katsourides, Moudouros, Evagorou, 2018). The conservative Orthodox Church still has an influence on the society, and as a result, gender inequality is still prevalent, as "traditional gender roles" exist while there are hostile attitudes towards homosexuality as they do not fall into the gender binary (Hadjipavlou, 2010, Katsourides, 2010). Therefore, stereotypes, discriminatory behaviour, intolerance and hate against "others" are part of the social conscience of Cypriots (Dilmac, Kocadal, Tringides, 2021). Furthermore, ELAM, a far-right organisation with ties to the neo-Nazi organisation Golden dawn of Greece have entered the parliament in 2016. In 2021 elections, they doubled their members of the parliament at 4. The presence of ELAM in parliament legitimized and mainstreamed the party in the political

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life of Cyprus. It has provided the platform for normalizing ultra-nationalism and its constituent elements of racism, hate speech and hate crime, violence and exclusion of all "other" communities and minorities. As a result, hate speech discourses are more often (Dilmac, Kocadal, Tringides, 2021, Trimikliniotis and Demetriou, 2012.) The Bishop of Morphou, Neophytos, has stated in the past that gay people have a specific odour that priests can recognise, however the attorney general had found no grounds to bring charges for hate speech (Boff, Renstrom, 2021, In-Cyprus.Philenews, 2019). Moreover, the Church had its oppositions to the development of an LGBTIQ association (Kamenou, 2020). Thus, the inclusion of LGBTIQ issues remains a controversial and stigmatised dispute in the Cypriot educational system (Euripidis, 2020).

The educational system and Curricula at schools are found to be conservative, which is a reflection of the society as aforementioned. Heteronormativity is illustrated as the socially acceptable norm to conform to and deviations are perceived as taboo and treated with embarrassment (Trimikliniotis and Karayiannis 2008; Lesta, Lazarus, and Essén, 2008). There was a Curriculum reform in 2010, which included issues of sexual health; e.g. non-binary families and safe practices, and this information on sexual orientation features in health education at primary and secondary levels (Council of Europe, 2018). However, Comprehensive Sexual Education is not a mainstream feature at schools. There is evidence that heteronormativity obstructs participation of LGBTIQ students through the fear of having their sexuality disclosed, or what is discussed in class does not reflect them, and as a result they disengage from the class activities. LGBTIQ-related topics seem not to have a place in school classes as people who have attempted to approach such issues were met with verbal harassment or teachers' neglect (Evripides, 2020).

Policies, strategies and good practices at national level
Historical Background, EU and Cypriot policies

Cyprus had claimed membership in the European Union (EU) since 1990. During the Accession negotiations between Cyprus and the EU in 1998, the Cyprus government was forced to implement and amend the law of criminalising homosexuality, as there was a court case pending. In 1993, Alecos Modinos won a legal court case against the Republic of Cyprus at the European court of Human Rights (European Court of Human Rights, 1993), as the court ruled that the Cypriot Criminal Code violated his right to private life. Moreover, until 2000, promotion of homosexuality was a criminal offence. In addition to these facts, the consenting age for sexual relationships for homosexuals was 18 years, but for heterosexuals and lesbians, the age was 16 years. In 2002, the consenting age became the same for heterosexuals and homosexuals, which is 17 years old.

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"Accept LGBTIQ Cyprus" was the first LGBTIQ organisation in Cyprus and was founded in 2012. The first Pride March took place in 2014 in Cyprus.

The European Union has issued two anti-discrimination directives in 2000, "prohibit discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin (Directive 2000/43/EC) and, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation (Directive 2000/78/EC)". Both directives provide protection in various aspects of life such as; "employment and vocational training, education and healthcare, and access to and supply of goods and services." They "prohibit various forms of discrimination direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, instruction to discriminate and victimisation" and necessitate Member states "to provide efficient sanctions and remedies." Following the European Union's Employment Framework Directive of 2000, Cyprus implemented two legislations, by 2004; the Equal Treatment in Occupation and Employment Law and Law on Combating Racial and Other Forms of Discrimination. These two pieces of legislation aim at prohibiting any form of discrimination in regards of colour, religion, national / ethnic group and sexual orientation. The acquis Communautaire led Cyprus to the establishment of the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman) and the Gender Equality Committee in Employment and Vocational Training (GECEVT) so that there are entities to guarantee transparency of the processing of complaints. GECEVT's legal basis is the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Law of 2002 (L.205.1/2002 and L.150.I/2014). Its mandate is to monitor enforcement, training, awareness and research, and to provide independent assistance to victims of discrimination, including legal aid (European Institute for Gender Equality – EIGE, 2019).

In 2011, Cyprus adopted to transpose the Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA, which states that hate speech is a criminal offence (Council of Europe, 2016). The Combatting Certain Forms and Expressions of Racism and Xenophobia by means of Criminal Law of 2011, Law No. 134 (I)/ 2011 states that any person that deliberately transmits in any way violence or hatred against a group or a member of a group determined by race, colour, religion, genealogical origin, national or ethnic origin, in such manner to cause public disorder, or has a threatening, abusive, or offensive character is liable to 5 years of imprisonment and/or a fine up to 10 000 Euros in the case of conviction. In 2015, the criminal code was amended to include the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. However, the penalty for hate speech on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity pose lower penalties (3 years imprisonment and / or up to 5

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000Euros fine) compared to racially motivated hate speech (Council of Europe, 2016.) This, in turn, creates different standards.

The Cyprus government has ratified various international and European Treaties, Agreements and Conventions to support the right to sexual education of children and youth (MoECSY, 2015.) Namely, it has ratified the United Nations Convention on Human Rights Child, which states that children have the right to Information (Article 17), in Health (Article 24 (1) and in Protection from All Forms of Sexual Exploitation and Violence (Article 34). There is a European Parliament report on sexuality and reproductive health and rights (2013/2040 (INI)) which calls on Member states to make sex education accessible for all students in primary and secondary education, with an emphasis on issues of respect of women and gender equality and to be provided in a safe atmosphere without taboos, which will allow the interaction between students and teachers. Moreover, there is a recommendation from the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity (CM/Rec(2010)5), which covers inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in sex education. It was agreed upon as a consequence of the rising numbers of discrimination against lesbians, homosexuals, bisexuals and transgender people. Research from the Observatory on Violence (2011) found that 36.2% of primary school students and 53.2% of secondary school students were victims of violence, however, they never reported. According to civil society organisations, this remains unreported due the lack of policies to deal with these cases (IGLYO, 2018).

Thus, topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity were introduced in education (MoECSY, 2017). In 2012, the Shield against Homophobia in Education an anti-bullying plan, was implemented in order to support LQBTIQ children and to create a safe and supportive environment at schools. The training was done by Cyprus Youth Council and the Cyprus Family Planning Association. Professionals were trained to become empowered so as to prevent and handle homophobic incidents at schools.

In 2014, following the recommendation of the Authority against Discrimination of the Ombudsman's Office, the Ministry of Education and Culture set up an anti-racism policy. In the academic year that followed, a few schools participated in a pilot project based on the Code of Conduct Against Racism and Guide for Management and Recording of Racial Incidents (MoECSY, 2015). The pilot implementation of the Code and Guidelines was actively supported by the

Authority against Discrimination on the Ombudsman Office and Human Rights and the UN High Commissionaire for Refugees. In this protocol, the identity of individuals in relation to their sexual orientation is embodied. Violent incidents on the basis of gender diversity, gender identity or sexual orientation are defined as racist and are treated with the appropriate sanctions. There is also a special mention on homophobia and transphobia; hostility, discrimination, or disgust against LGBTIQ people, or individuals expressing their gender identity (IGLYO, 2018). Thus, the code notes that zero tolerance should be shown regarding incidents racism or any form of discrimination due to gender, nationality, appearance, religion, sexual orientation, disability or other aspects of identity. In 2017, the Combating HOMophoBic And Transphobic bullying in schools – HOMBAT project was carried out in Cyprus, to create a solid and sustainable framework for the prevention and combatting of Homophobic & Transphobic (HT) bullying at schools. Professionals such as educators and psychologists were trained to prevent and address homophobic bullying.

Useful contacts

The table below is a short description of organisations that support LGBTIQ people. Some of the organisations are not only targeted at LGBTIQ people, but deal either with sexual education or the rights of the child, and LGBTIQ matters fall under the umbrella of their actions.

Accept LGBTI Cyprus	ACCEPT LGBTI CYPRUS works towards; defending, fighting for, and promoting the human rights of LGBTIQ persons and the elimination of prejudices, stereotypes, stigma, and social exclusion, raising awareness, informing, and training the society itself, the public, families, various actors, and professionals, on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. Educating the public against LGBTIQ-phobia, heteronormativity, sexism, toxic masculinity, and all forms of exclusion and discrimination. https://accept.cy/en/home/
The Cyprus Family Planning Association	The Cyprus Family Planning Association (1971) is one of the oldest and most well-established Non-Governmental, non-profit, voluntary organizations in Cyprus with a rich contribution in the field of sexual rights, health and education, especially to young people. One of its main priorities is the application of sex education at all levels of education and the organization and implementation of seminars, lectures, experiential workshops for children, young people, parents and professionals in matters of sexual health and well-being.

	Part of its mission is to raise public awareness and enlightenment, and to promote policies and legislation to those responsible for Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, with the aim of designing and implementing policies and actions. The Association has a rich collection of informative and educational material and provides information and support through Line 1455. It also conducts research programs, and organizes information campaigns aimed mainly at young people. https://www.familyplanning.org.cy/
The AIDS Solidarity Movement	The main goals of the Movement are to support people whose lives have been affected by HIV, their friends and family, and people with AIDS, as well as to combat the prevailing prejudice and discrimination in weight of these individuals. http://asmcyprus.org/asm/AIDS_Solidarity_Movement_gr.html
The Association for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family	Goals: Prevention of domestic violence. Provide direct help to people experiencing or exercising domestic violence. Provide shelter and protection to victims of domestic violence. Provide information and support to battered women through counselling. Provide theoretical and practical training to people who are interested in offering their voluntary help. Provide information and raise awareness to competent authorities and citizens about the social phenomenon of domestic violence. Locate shortcomings and weaknesses in legislation and formal procedures and submit suggestions to the related national services in order to undertake correctional measure and develop a wider policy of domestic violence. https://domviolence.org.cy/en/
"Hope For Children"– CRC Policy Center	International humanitarian and independent Institution based in Nicosia, Cyprus. The Institution is established on standards and principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and European Union Law. It works on humanitarian and development policy relevant to the defence and promotion of children's rights. It does so through research, grassroots program design and

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	implementation and advisory services offered to governments and international organizations. https://www.uncrcpc.org/
Youth Board of Cyprus	The organization's main role is advisory but it also undertakes youth related projects, following the approval of the Council of Ministers, either during the approval on the organization's annual budget or under another special decision. As an advisory body, the Board of Directors submits proposals on the formation of a comprehensive and specialized youth policy to the Council of Ministers, via the Minister of Education and Culture. There are counselling services for youth too.
Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman)	Main competence to examine individual complaints regarding decisions or actions taken by public authorities as to whether these decisions or actions violate the provisions of law, human rights of the complainants, or principles of good administration and proper behaviour. Since then, additional competencies have been assigned to the institution. Specifically, since 2004, with Cyprus accession to the EU, the Commissioner's competence has been extended to act as the country's Equality Body with the responsibility to combat discrimination in Cyprus. http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/index_en/index_en?opendocument
Gender Equality Committee in Employment and Vocational Training (GECEVT)	The Committee has an advisory role and undertakes matters falling within the purpose and scope of this Law. Specifically, it advises, within its competencies, on national policy and legislation and supervises the implementation of the Law through the competent Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. In addition, it submits, by its own initiative, complaints or accepts complaints and forwards them for action to the Chief Inspector. http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/dl.nsf/All/73F76DFAF245BAA4C22580E6003E55F8?OpenDocument

Agency for Quality Assurance and Certification of Higher Education (DIPAE)	It is the competent independent Authority which is responsible for quality assurance and for supporting the procedures provided by the relevant legislation and the principles of the creation of the European Higher Education Area, for the continuous improvement and upgrading of higher education institutions and their curricula, in order to comply with the European Standards and Quality Indices (ESG) and for the European Policy on mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications. It also seeks to promote a culture of quality in higher education institutions in Cyprus. http://www.dipae.ac.cy/index

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Part B: Primary Research

Interviews with VET Teachers and LGBTQI Experts

KES College has conducted interviews with 5 VET teachers/ trainers and 2 LGBTQI experts to detect discriminatory behaviours based on gender diversity against students and teachers and also inclusive practices that might be applied in vocational education. Trainers came from different academic backgrounds and organisations, including KES College, that offer VET training sessions with a range of experience between 4 to 14 years. One of the LGBTQI experts is the current president of the LGBT NGO in Cyprus and they have been involved in the organisation since 2016, and the other expert was one of the co-founders and 1st president of the organisation (the organisation was approved in 2011 but the procedures had started before), and at the moment is one of the Advisors to the President of the Republic.

Definitions & Examples

Trainers have defined discrimination on the grounds of identity, sexual orientation and/or sex characteristics as the change in behaviour towards LGBTIQ people because of their perception that someone could be LGBTIQ. This could be indirect discrimination, e.g., assumption of gender because of external characteristics such as, "a boy is a boy because of short hair." Moreover, discriminations can be seen when teachers might not accept students and not treat them equally. The experts noted any sort of different approach and or/treatment of any person on perceived grounds of SOGIESC (Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.) Discriminations occur usually socially because of perceived stereotypes, i.e., because someone does not fit these socially constructed stereotypes.

An incident was mentioned where a primary school teacher was verbally attacked by parents because they considered him gay and as a result, the principal restricted his duties. When talking about discrimination among students, these could be in the forms of marginalisation and psychological abuse / humiliation and verbal abuse. In the cases of domestic violence, same sex relationships are not treated equally with heterosexual relationships, as "straight relationships are accepted and validated" but not same-sex relationships.

These discriminatory practices can occur when applying for a job and being rejected or losing a promotion, or in health settings when a transgender person is refused hormone treatment. In educational settings they include behaviours like being excluded, humiliated and attacked. Other examples include discriminations that have to do with adoption or vitro fertilisation (IVF) funding,

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as LGBTIQ people are not allowed either of the two in Cyprus, even if they signed a civil partnership agreement.

National Legal Framework and Referrals

The trainers assume that there is national legal framework on discrimination of LGBTIQ, however, they have not come across it. They were unsure whether or not there is a legislation to protect LQBTIQ people in VET environments, but again they assume there is since schools/ colleges and universities are places that should offer equal rights for all people.

The experts on the other hand, have mentioned that technically there is legislation for the work place that only protects sexual orientation, but nothing specifically for VET environments or education in general. The Ministry of Education and Culture has issued guidelines in the form of "code of conduct," which is activated in the cases of discrimination. The code includes many forms of discrimination such as racism and LGBTIQ discrimination. The person that is being discriminated against has to report to the principal, and they activate it. Part of the action is that Accept LGBTI Cyprus can go to the school and offer training to the teachers. However, this has not happened yet. There are also lesson plans that talk about diversity, but are not specific to LGBTIQ, "they mention 'we love all people' and leave it there, and LGBTIQ issues are hidden under the diversity umbrella. But you need to name it!"

For transgender people, the situation is harder as there is no legal gender recognition law. However, there are guidelines from the Ministry of Internal Affairs for people to be able to change their personal details on their travel documents. "There was an unfortunate case in the welfare office, where all three children would be removed from parents. The oldest son was 16 years old, was not removed, because he didn't fit in the socially contracted way men do, he wore dresses. The result was that the two younger siblings were removed from their parents, but the trans boy remained with them, because the office did not know where to place them and no legislation was invoked to protect them."

Trainers would refer people that experience discrimination to Accept LGBTI Cyprus, or to a good lawyer that would help with the complaint. Some have mentioned the police as well, while others were hesitant about it, since they believe the "police officers would not listen or attend to the complaint." Participants were unsure whether they would refer students or personnel to the college administration, since they do not know what the college would do in such cases as they are not aware if there are internal guidelines.

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Experts would report an incident to the Commissioner of Administration and the Protection of Human Rights, and to the Committee on Human Rights and on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women of the Parliament. One of the experts stated that depending on the incident, they would refer the person to the police. Moreover, if the incident happened in the workplace, the person should go internally, in the case of educators, and the Ministry of Education should be informed. One of the experts said that if a complaint is reported at the police, people should inform Accept LGBTI Cyprus with the case/complain number, so that they can follow-up and lobby about the case.

The Situation in Cyprus

Trainers have stated that discriminations in the Cypriot society are widespread, however, in VET environments people do not hear about actions that would tackle discrimination or information about incidents - there is no information. They believe there are circulars from the Ministry of Education and Culture, however, they talk about diversity in general and are not LGBTIQ specific. They believe there is prejudice in colleges, as "us Cypriots have a culture of being afraid of what we do not know." One of the trainers mentioned that they do not separate discriminatory LGBTIQ instances from racist instances, since they are both minorities. "In 2021, we shouldn't be talking about these things, they should have been settled by now." They went further on to give a very recent example where a black student was refused to attend the graduation ceremony at her school because her hair was in braids, and according to the principal, this went against school regulations. Both experts mentioned the incidence in the University of Cyprus, where the rainbow flag was lowered and have stated that if it happens in the university premises, incidents happen elsewhere too since they are reflections of our societies.

There is little education and lack of awareness about such issues and as consequence discriminations take place. The Cypriot society is conservative and homophobic, even though there is progression the last 20 years. However, gender stereotypes are still prevalent, even from kindergarten ages. One of the trainers mentioned that from a sociological perspective, because of the geographical position of Cyprus, we have been invaded by many others, "and we have come to believe that anything foreign is bad." Moreover, one of the experts mentioned that even Greek is a binary language which makes it difficult to come up with pronouns. In English we can use pronouns like "they" or "Ze," whereas we do not have something similar for non-binary people. Moreover, we use derogatory words used to humiliate LGBTIQ to describe other "bad" things.

People should be respectful to all people, regardless of their ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. The more educated people are, and have experiences outside their own culture, the more open they become to differences/ diversity, since critical thinking will develop too. Age was another factor that was mentioned by trainers, the older people are, the harder for them to change perceptions.

Even though there are circulars and ethics codes in schools, practically nothing happens. There are no consequences for perpetrators. One of the trainers said "I am saddened by the fact that I do not know more on discriminations of LGBTIQ. Sometimes you need to face an obstacle to search for the appropriate help. We definitely need training and education."

Forms of Discrimination

One trainer has mentioned that during the pride month and the march we have, incident rates go up. Other examples include, nasty comments/ labels/ name calling, stigmatisation, shaming, humiliation, exclusion/ marginalization from other students and educational personnel, deprivation of socialisation, physical attacks, cyber bullying and/or bullying, victim blaming, discouragement to claim human rights. However, it was stated that LGBTIQ people "shouldn't provoke" to avoid such behaviours, showing the lack of comprehension of victim blaming.

Policies & Strategies that facilitate participation and safety for LGBTQI

The experts mentioned that there are European directives to ensure equal treatment and opportunities in the work place and educational environment, however in Cyprus the directive does not include gender identity, which needs to change. Moreover, there is a law about hate speech but it is not working and needs modification. The trainers have mentioned that they do not know about policies or strategies implemented by the government to facilitate the access and equal participation of LGBTIQ, and the creation of LGBTIQ safe and inclusive environment. Some were aware of the HOMBAT programme, which was co-founded by the European Union and carried out by Accept LGBTI Cyprus, however, the programme is directed at primary school teachers. Recently, there are more actions by Accept LGBTI Cyprus, such as HEI4Diversity – Building Capacities to Prevent and Respond to any Form of Violence against the LGBTQI+ community in Higher Education Institutions in Europe and VoiceIt aiming at increasing the participation and the direct involvement of LGBTQI+ individuals in the political decision making. However, these are voluntary.

There is an assumption from trainers that for employment, equal opportunities exist. Another trainer mentioned that she does not believe there is a problem of access but integration of LGBTIQ students in the college environment.

There are NGOs that promote non-discrimination; however, they are not targeting LGBTIQ people in particular. They believe the Cypriot society is not ready to tackle LGBTIQ issues openly, in fear of being perceived as radicals. Moreover, the society is not ready for direct confrontation with the church, which slows the progress made. Unfortunately, the church still has a lot of influence in government decision-making and perceptions people hold. Training and educational programmes that are offered today are not sufficient, according to all the participants, but need to become a mandatory part of education.

Recommendations

The government should ratify conventions as they are, and not the pieces they can address only, especially the Istanbul Convention. There is a need for a legal framework to clearly protect LGBTIQ people, especially in VET institutions. Moreover, Cyprus now has an Advisor to the President of the Republic on issues of promoting Multiculturalism, Acceptance and Respect for Diversity, which is a step forward, but they also need the authority to execute actions and coordination and cooperation of different ministries e.g., ministry of education, health, labour, internal and foreign. Moreover, the state needs a clear strategy with a mandate plan, clear goals, otherwise it is difficult to change attitudes and beliefs.

The experts mentioned that there is a need for collaboration between the ministry of education and culture and the ministry of labour. The first should ensure safety of students in educational environment, and the latter to hold accountable their staff so as to follow protocols and guidelines. Moreover, trade unions should be involved.

"Education and legislation go hand in hand." Education was mentioned by all participants as a crucial factor in changing perceptions, "as you cultivate competencies, challenges are tackled in more efficient methods." It was stated that education of virtues and values should start very early on, from very young ages i.e., kindergarten, "best time to promote equal rights for all" so during the years that follow, issues like respect, tolerance and diversity will become mainstream. Moreover, gymnasiums have other issues of teenage challenges to deal with, respecting sexuality shouldn't be one of them if it is tackled earlier on.

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VET organisations like KES College can be pioneers in promoting safe and inclusive environments in Cyprus, and hopefully it will be affecting other institutions as well (the ripple effect). They can get good practices from abroad, since other countries are more progressive. One of the trainers shared their experience in a UK university where "the librarian had painted nails and wore skirts, however, identified as a man. You can imagine what a safe space the university was for him!"

KES College could initiate a children's book or a children's TV show, where gender stereotypes are tackled when talking about occupations, e.g., gardening and personal training courses should not only demonstrate men in brochures or beauty courses only women, but illustrate that anyone can study what they like. Moreover, KES should have campaigns to raise awareness, seminars and events, to celebrate pride month, flying the rainbow flag or placing rainbow stickers in the college, having a mini pride march in the college, creating LGBTIQ student committees/clubs and allies' groups, showing documentaries, having gender neutral WC. Colleges should be in a position to offer psychological help to students, especially for crisis interventions and to empower people. VET organisations can contact Accept LGBTI Cyprus to organise events like the human library. These actions will not only help Cypriot students and "silent LQBTIQ" who are watching, but also foreign students that might come from even more conservative countries, where homosexuality might still be criminalised. "We have a responsibility to people returning to their countries, to be more educated. We need to understand that identities are multiple, for example, an LQBTIQ person from a different ethnic background. Now, the LGBTIQ part is lost and we focus only on the ethnic part." Organisations need to create smaller safe spaces and build on these.

Colleges could and should offer training to newly employed teachers/ trainers about issues of diversity and LGBTIQ specifically. Furthermore, they should have circulars, protocols and codes of conducts to ensure that there is a procedure to follow in case of a discrimination incident and a zero tolerance in these. In the case of an attack on an LGBTIQ person in the society, organisations like KES college should issue notices that they condemn the attacks.

Development of relevant training materials

All of the participants mentioned that the development of relevant training material for VET teachers would be a useful measure, but in no case a sufficient one, and to be effective it needs assessment and continuity/ follow-ups. One trainer suggested of having training sessions, not only in the beginning of the academic year but during the following semesters too.

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Topics to be covered: definitions and modules on diversity, discrimination, toxic masculinity, class discriminations, heteronormative, patriarchy, feminism, respect, acceptance, inclusion, awareness of diversity and visibility, tackling gender stereotypes, equal rights, the legal framework in Cyprus and the European Union, participation of psychologists, sociologists and lawyers as to have a holistic approach and understanding of such issues, which in turn will increase the emotional intelligence of people. Theory is important as well as practical steps on how to use this knowledge. Moreover, "we need to wake the feeling of "filotimo" in Cypriots" was mentioned by one trainer (filotimo = love of honour. It is a very difficult word to translate in other languages, as it encompasses ideas and virtues such as honour, justice, courage, dignity, pride, self-sacrifice, respect, freedom, gratitude and hospitality.)

Closure and Final Remarks from Interviewees

"Unfortunately, the Cypriot society still does not understand the purpose of Pride marches, and they still consider them parades, thinking that they are celebrations. We need to understand that Pride marches are done in the fight of human rights."

"We need solidarity, education and collaboration" one of the experts said, and "we can build on small changes and this project is a move in the right direction!" concluded the second one.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted at KES College with a total of 10 student participants, all attending the college. Ages ranged from 19 to 39 years old. Participants came from different courses: Five people studying beauty therapy, one person studying to become a medical representative, one person personal training and group fitness coach, one person journalism with public relations, and two people culinary arts, bakery and pastry. Eight were women, one person identified themselves as trans, and one man were the participants of the two groups.

In both focus groups, students said that they have not heard of any person being openly LGBTIQ, except our trans participant, who informed the rest of the students that LGBTIQ people do attend KES College, but they are not open about it. He is open about his identity and sexuality, both in their educational and personal environment, since "he doesn't care what other people think." He stated that it is a matter of self-confidence, since when he came out to his family, they stopped talking to him for the duration of 3 months and he had to leave the house. Even though now they talk to each other, the family does not accept it but "I am not going to change to please them and

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oppress myself." The reasons why other people are not openly LGBTIQ might be the fact that the college is a small place and "closed society" compared to universities where people may express themselves more openly, and if something was to be heard, it would be the subject of mockery. Someone who is considered psychologically strong can deal with possible incidents of discrimination. They mention that in VET institutions, there are gender stereotypes, e.g., a beautician is considered a "female" profession, men that have hair removal treatments, or are professional hairdressers or make-up artists, are gay. Students mentioned other reasons that people might not be openly LGBTIQ are; conservative and religious families which makes it difficult to talk about such issues especially since there is no appropriate support from family members, particularly in rural areas, and the distrust and fear people feel to talk about such issues. It is clear that they need a safe space in order to be open. Others state it is "reprehensible" in our society, even though people should not hide their identities. One participant who is a mother of a child with autism, believes LGBTIQ people face similar discrimination to her child, "as our society cannot accept diversity because they are afraid."

Since nearly all the participants do not know any openly LGBTIQ people in the college, they have not heard of incidents of violence. Only one participant mentioned that there might be some marginalisation of perceived gay men, and other men might avoid socialising with them, due to "the fear of the unknown" which, ultimately, contributes to exclusion of people. The trans participant mentioned that he was verbally attacked in the previous schooling years, now in college he says others do not seem to care about his identity. People should have the support of others when there are incidents of discrimination. Additionally, participants were not aware of any practices carried out in the college premises to prevent and/or combat discriminations. All have mentioned that UNIQUE project and its activities (focus groups and online research) is a step forward in the right direction and hopefully more actions in the near future will follow as they are much needed.

Recommendations for KES College

Practices that should be implemented by the college should include: employment of more LGBTIQ people, having a protocol with clear guidelines to follow in a case of a homophobic incident (e.g., procedure how to report to the police) and consequences for perpetrators, research, planning events and campaigns, raising awareness by bringing other LGBTIQ people to talk to college students and offer a safe space for discussions, education through seminars and discussion groups, tackling gender stereotypes, empowering people that have experienced discriminations through groups and/or one-on-one sessions with specialists, the development of

student groups where there is safety to express themselves, to help them accept themselves and feel free, preventive measures that prohibit such behaviour, awareness of the legal framework and human rights. As one participant said optimistically, "it is never too late to educate people!"

Recommendations in general

It should be a priority to take preventive measures, rather than carrying out crisis interventions. A multilevel approach is needed, where a legal framework is developed, the police are involved and trained, and people should be educated on issues of discrimination, respect and equality. Moreover, the representation of LGBTIQ people in the media as caricatures should stop as it leads to humiliation of them, and representation of same-sex relationships is needed to provide visibility.

Online Survey

KES College conducted an online survey with a total number of 101 participants, with VET students (70) and VET teachers (31). Women participated at a high percentage of 88.1%, whereas just the 9.9% of participants were men (2% did not want to answer this question). The majority of participants were between the ages of 20-29 years (38.6%), followed by the ages between 30-39 years (25.7%), and the ages 15-19 years (21.8%). Identified as heterosexuals was 81.2% of participants, just 2% identified as gay/lesbian, 5% as bisexual, 3% as other and 8.9% did not want to answer. There were many positive responses, especially from students that would be friendly and professional and take the needs of LGBTIQ persons into account, which is encouraging, but on the other hand, it is obvious that discriminations do take place and people are not respected and do not feel safe to be openly LGBTIQ.

Figure 1: LGBTQI people generally respected in VET environments in Cyprus
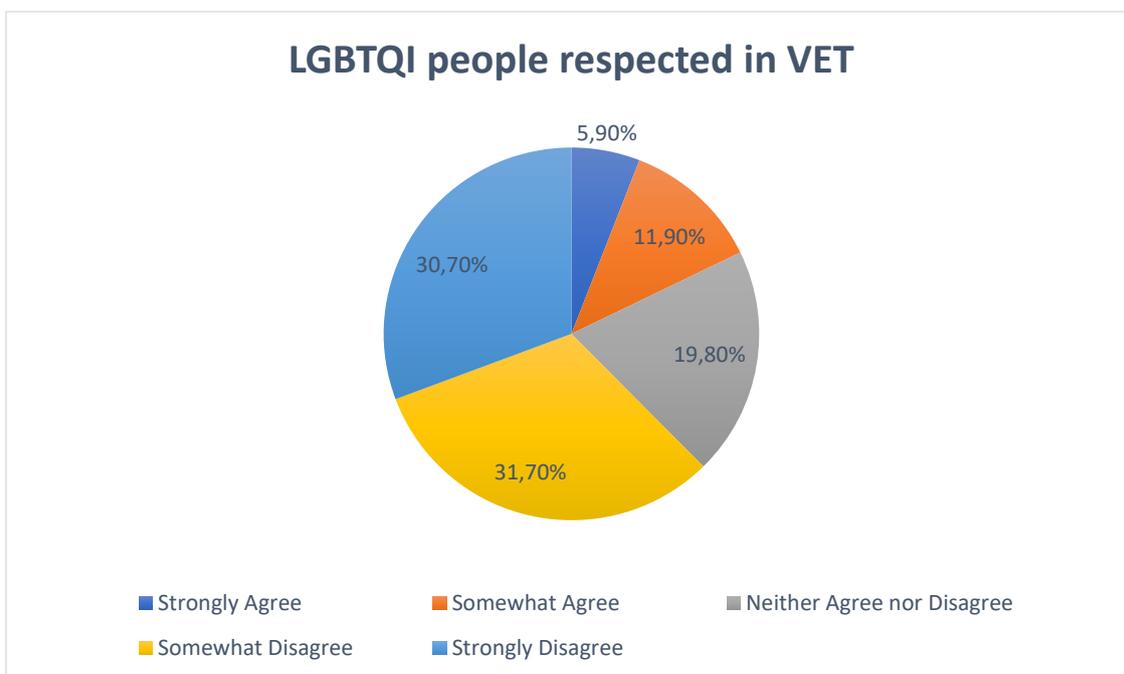

LGBTQI people respected in VET

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Figure 2: A VET student can be openly LGBTQI in a VET environment

VET students openly LGBTQI in VET

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10,90%
6,90%
24,80%
25,70%
31,70%
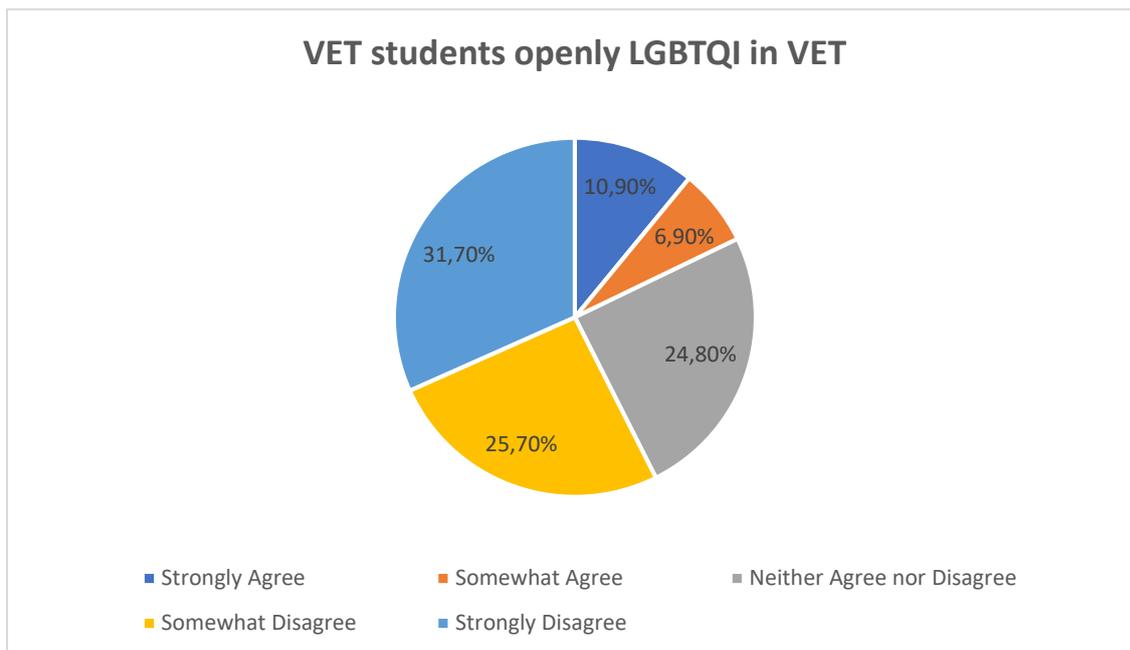
Figure 3: VET environments are safe and inclusive for LGBTQI for students in Cyprus

VET is Safe & Inclusive for LGBTQI

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4%
15,80%
19,80%
30,70%
29,70%
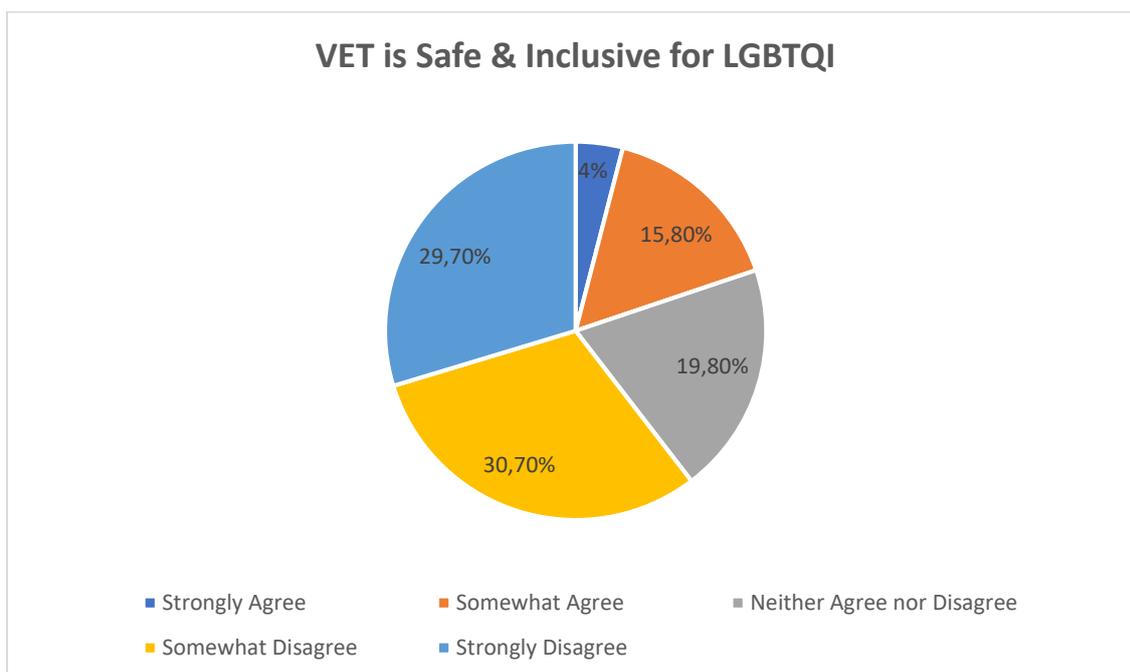
More than 60% of the participants disagree either strongly or somewhat to the notion that LGBTIQ people are respected in VET environments and a small percentage believe that they are respected. Only 17% of the participants believe students can be openly LGBTIQ, 24.8% do not know, and more than 57% of participants believe students cannot be openly LGBTIQ. This is consistent with the fact that 60% of the participants stated that VET is not safe and inclusive for

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LGBTIQ, and barely one in five people either believed the environment was inclusive or were neutral, and thus, demonstrates that discriminations are a widespread phenomenon.

Figure 4: Students are often harassed, bullied and/or discriminated against for being LGBTIQ in VET environments (in the country).

Harassed, bullied and/ or discriminated against for being LGBTQI

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
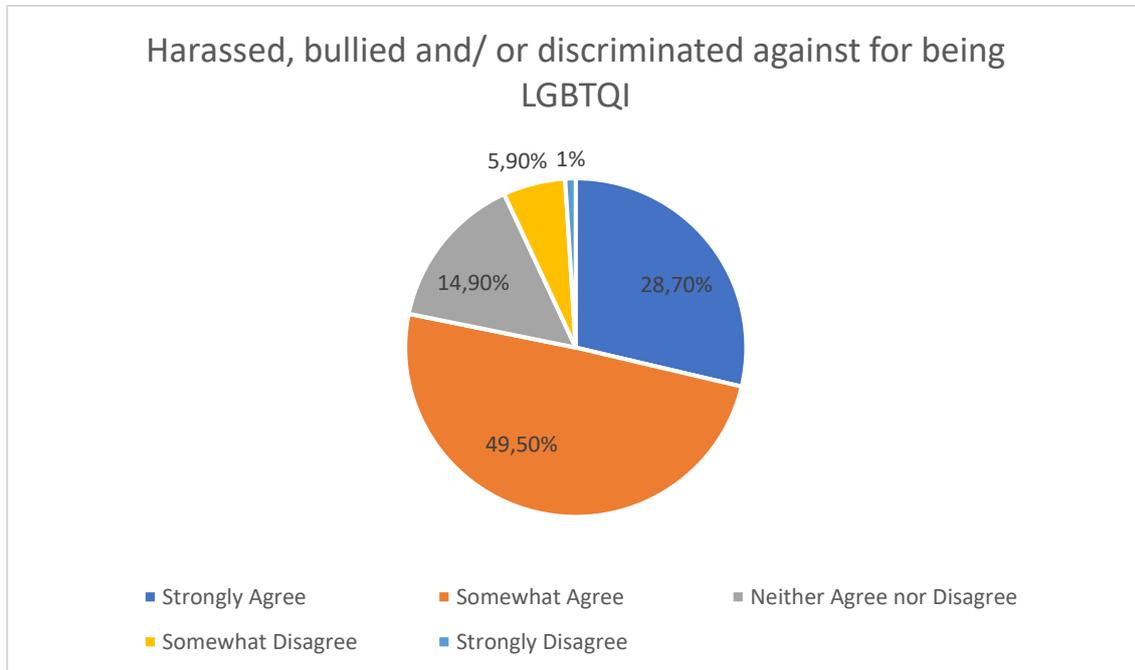- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Figure 5: VET teachers/trainers usually have the proper skills to effectively handle cases of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination against LGBTIQ

Teachers having proper skills to handle cases of bullying

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
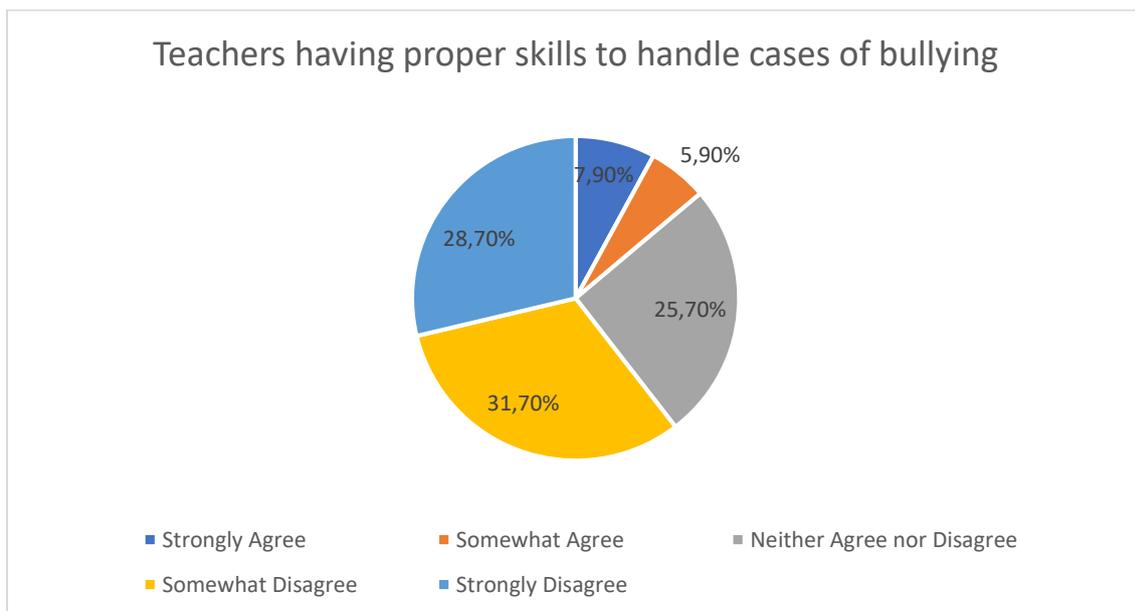- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Figure 6: People who (possibly) bully, harass and or discriminate against LGBTIQ VET students/trainees in a VET environment, are **usually** other VET students/trainees.
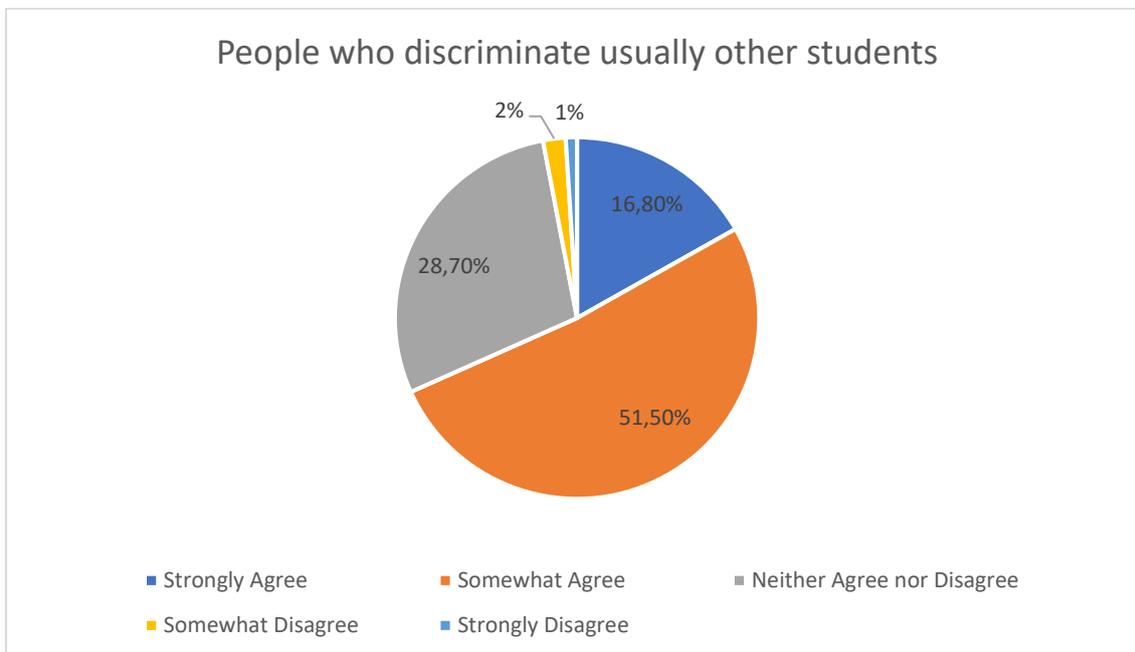

Figure 7: People who (possibly) bully, harass and or discriminate against LGBTIQ VET students/trainees in a VET environment, are **usually** VET professional staff (e.g., VET teachers/trainers, administrative staff etc.).
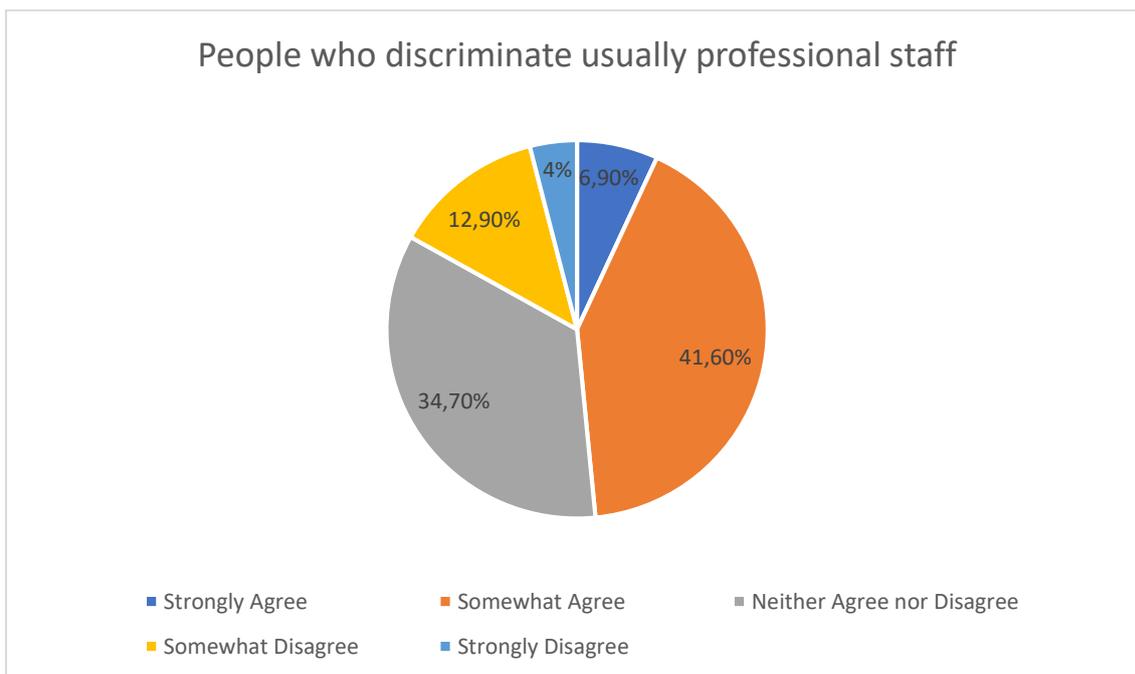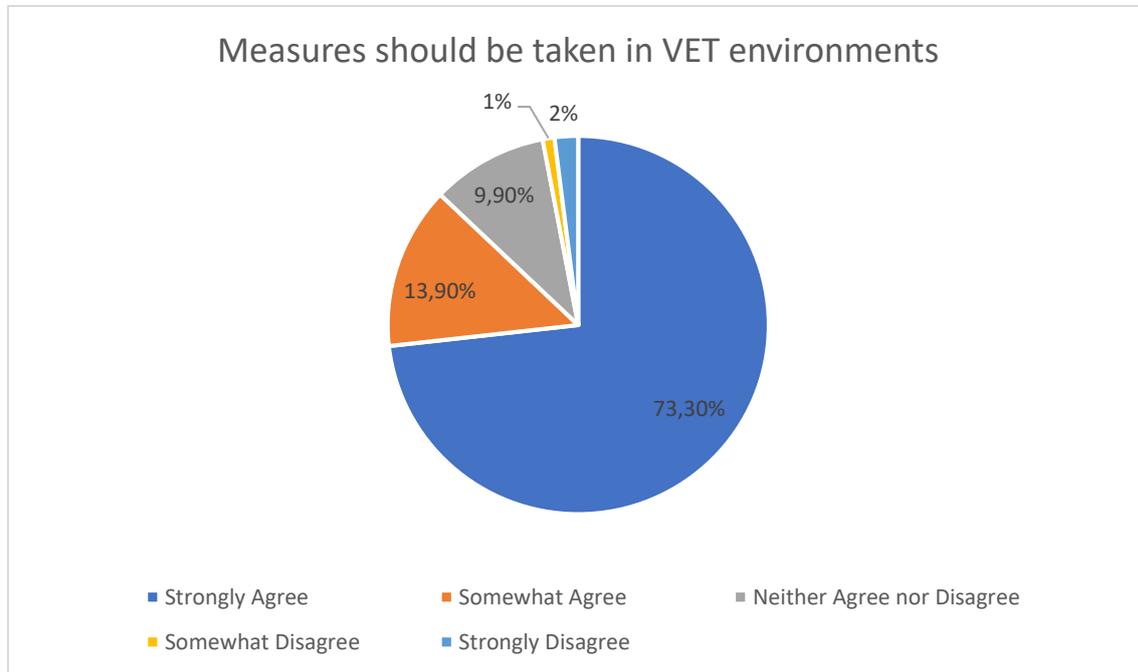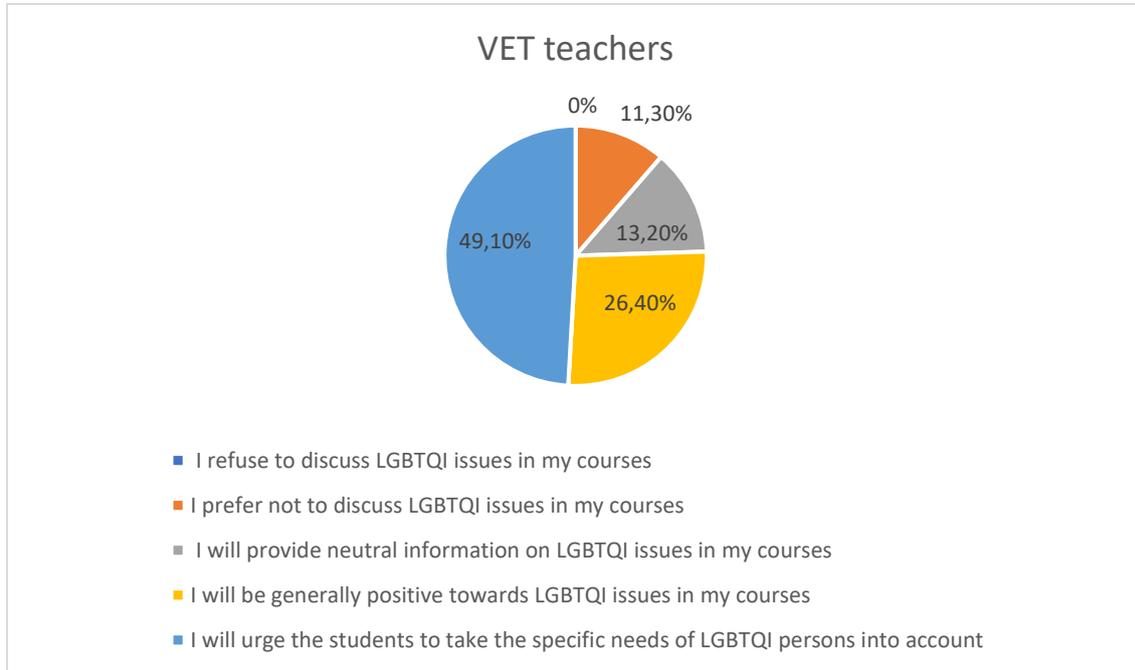
Figure 8: Measures preventing and combatting bullying, harassment against and/or discrimination against LGBTIQ students/trainees should be taken in VET environments.

Nearly 80% of the participants believe that students are often harassed, bullied and/or discriminated against for being LGBTIQ. Almost 70% of participants agree that LGBTIQ people are (possibly) discriminated against by other students and approximately 50% of the participants agree that people who (possibly) demonstrate discriminatory behaviour against LGBTIQ come from the professional staff. Furthermore, three out of five participants (60%) believe teachers/trainers do not have the proper skills to effectively handle cases of bullying, harassment and/ or discrimination against LGBTIQ, and 25% are unsure. This data illustrates the need for measures and a high percentage of participants (87%) agree that measures preventing and combatting bullying, harassment and/or discrimination against LGBTIQ students/trainees should be taken in VET environments.

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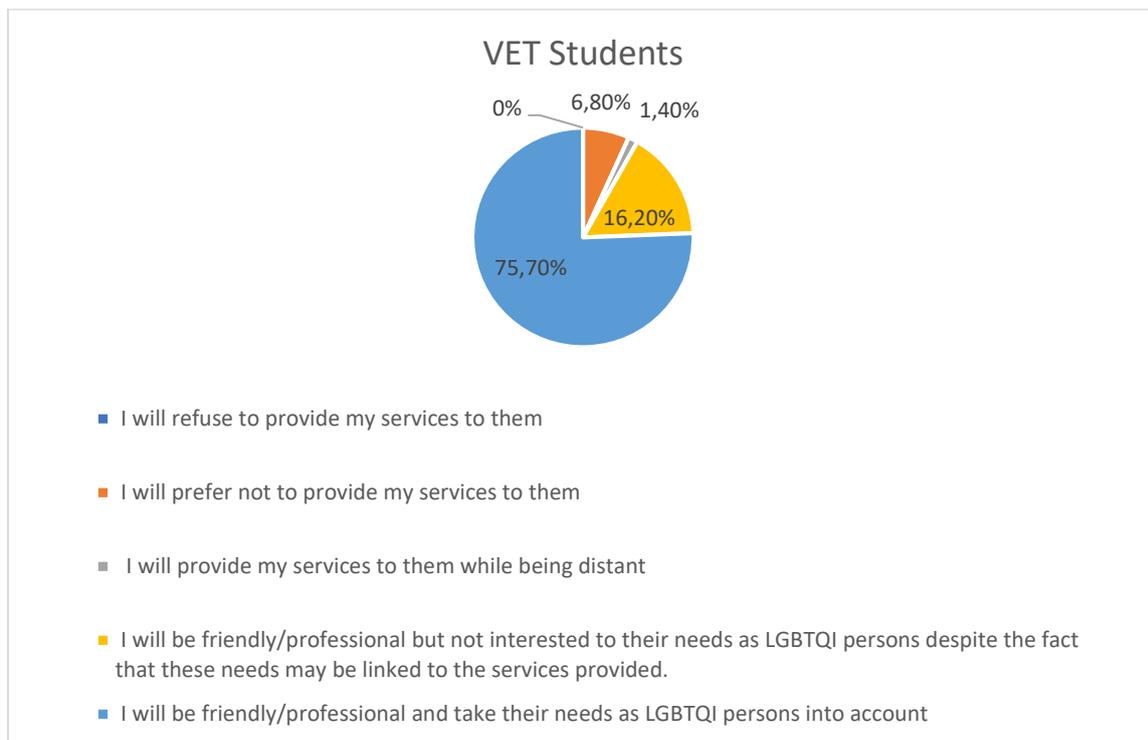Co-funded by the
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Figure 9: For VET teachers/trainers only:

After students have completed their training, they may have to provide LGBTIQ clients with their services. Which of the following answers represents the way you think this should be dealt with in your VET courses?

VET teachers

- I refuse to discuss LGBTQI issues in my courses
- I prefer not to discuss LGBTQI issues in my courses
- I will provide neutral information on LGBTQI issues in my courses
- I will be generally positive towards LGBTQI issues in my courses
- I will urge the students to take the specific needs of LGBTQI persons into account

Figure 10: For VET students/trainees only:

After having completed your training, you may have to provide LGBTIQ clients with your services.

VET Students

- I will refuse to provide my services to them
- I will prefer not to provide my services to them
- I will provide my services to them while being distant
- I will be friendly/professional but not interested to their needs as LGBTQI persons despite the fact that these needs may be linked to the services provided.
- I will be friendly/professional and take their needs as LGBTQI persons into account

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75% of teachers were positive towards LGBTIQ issues, 13.20% were neutral, 11.30% preferred not to discuss such issues in their class, and none of the participants refused to discuss LGBTIQ issues in their courses. More than 90% of student participants replied positive when asked if they would provide their services to LGBTIQ clients, followed by a percentage of nearly 7% of students preferring not providing services, and 1.4% of students being distant while providing services. None of the participants would refuse to provide services to an LGBTIQ person.

General Conclusions

UNIQUE research demonstrated that discriminations are still prevalent in the Cypriot society and that LGBTIQ people are not respected or feel safety to live openly, which is confirmed by the literature review. On the other hand, some of the results from the primary research seem encouraging as participants demonstrated a genuine interest in the subject matter, even though one can wonder how representative this is of the Cypriot society. Research has demonstrated that the probability of women participating in surveys is higher compared to men (Curtin, Presser, and Singer, 2000, Moore & Tarnai, 2002). The gender difference in this case is clear, as only 10 men participated in the online survey, compared to 89 women, and one man participated in the focus groups. Furthermore, the survey topic influences participation. It is known that the younger generation is more accepting of their LGBTIQ peers rather than the older generation, and more likely to participate in surveys compared to older people (Glaad, 2017), which is confirmed by the Cypriot online survey. This could offer an explanation of the optimistic results, which shows things are slowly changing with the younger generations and there is awareness of the discriminations.

It is clear that there is a need for education around sexual orientation which was both illustrated by the UNIQUE research and the European Commission's research (2019). The latter illustrated that 76% of participants agree that school lessons should include information about diversity in terms of sexual orientation. Results from the interviews and focus groups illustrate that there is a need for education, as some participants shifted the responsibility to LGBTIQ people to become empowered and be in a position to deal with discriminations, rather than having a more systemic view of the problem, without realising this too is a problem. In addition to this, some stated that LGBTIQ people should not provoke, which demonstrates their homophobic views.

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Even though there are actions and good practices carried out, recent research focusing on the Cypriot context has demonstrated that teachers have not successfully been engaged in positive discourse surrounding gender and sexual identity (Evripidou and Çavuşoğlu, 2015; Evripidou, 2018). Teachers might choose some other health subjects to teach with which they feel more comfortable. Youth (88%) state that when they have a question/problem related to sexuality issues they usually get information from friends, 30% of them receive it from a health specialist and only 14% receive it from an organisation/clinic. The Commissioner for Children's Rights has publicised a position promoting the right of children to access information and counselling services regardless of parental consent (IGLYO, 2018). Moreover, it is a challenge for teachers to report incidents as there is lack of guidance for the education sector on how to address bullying and harassment against LGBTIQ students, other than the recommendations of HOMBAT project (IGLYO, 2018).

Teachers need to be informed about the harmful effects of heteronormativity, how it hinders LGBTIQ students' participation and helps sustain a homophobic classroom environment. Heteronormativity cannot disappear over a short period of time. Gradual steps must be taken towards its deconstruction for a just world view, and the goal would not be to challenge heterosexuality but questioning the idea that heterosexuality is the only normal or natural form of sexuality, in an attempt to help all students, feel safe and encouraged to participate in the classroom (Euripidis, 2020.)

From the research carried out, it seems that Cyprus has made some steps towards LQBTIQ equality, as there are some guidelines, information on sexual orientation and some pieces of legislation to protect some of the rights of LGBTIQ people in Cyprus. However, it is evident that action is lacked, especially in the cases of discriminatory incidents, and LGBTIQ people do not feel safe to live their lives openly.

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