



Inclusive Universities Leading To Inclusive Societies

National Report Lithuania



VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY
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Part A: Desk research results

This section will provide information on the status of LGBTIQ+ people in the Lithuanian academic environment, LGBTIQ+ awareness sessions, good practices implemented in Lithuanian universities and useful contacts of organisations working on LGBTIQ+ and Human Rights issues in Lithuania.

1. The status of LGBTIQ+¹ people in the national academic environment

Statistical data, analysis, and scientific articles on the status of LGBTIQ+ people in the national academic environment are almost non-existent. Therefore, in an attempt to understand the public attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ and the situation regarding equal rights and discrimination in Lithuania, this part will present key findings from the European Union and Lithuanian reports presenting statistical data and analyses of the situation.

The Law on Equal Opportunities of the Republic of Lithuania aims to ensure the individuals' equal rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania are implemented and to prohibit any direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of age, sexual orientation, disability, race or ethnicity, religion or belief. Article 4 of the Law also states that educational, research, and study institutions must implement equal opportunities regardless of age, sexual orientation, disability, racial or ethnic origin, religion, or belief. However, neither the Constitution nor the Law do not mention discrimination on the grounds of gender identity and sex characteristics. It is worth mentioning that Lithuania is one of the six EU member states that do not have legal recognition for same-sex couples (European Commission 2020). However, public attitudes are changing in favour of supporting same-sex partnerships. A survey conducted by the news portal delfi.lt in 2022 showed that 49.6 percent of Lithuanian respondents supported same-sex civil unions (Delfi.lt 2022). The lawmakers introduced the latter term in 2022 to reduce the tensions in society related to the same-sex partnership law.

Nevertheless, various studies and statistics show that discrimination based on sexual orientation,

¹ LGBTI is the official acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people. Source: The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Association (ILGA) website https://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/glossary/letter_l (accessed 05 11 2023). The project also uses the broader term LGBTIQ+. While different sources also use different formulations of this acronym, this document also uses terms such as LGBT, LGBT*, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA+, and LGBT+, depending on the source in question.

gender identity, and gender characteristics, as well as homophobic attitudes, still prevail among Lithuanians. In 2020 the EU LGBTI Survey II, prepared by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, revealed the prevalence of homophobic attitudes and a lack of tolerance in Lithuania. 73 percent of survey respondents avoid often or always holding hands with their same-sex partner in Lithuania, and 55 percent felt discriminated against in at least one area of life in the year before the survey. It is essential to mention that only 16 percent of respondents are now often or always open about being LGBTI in Lithuania, and only 14 percent in Lithuania believed that their national government effectively combats prejudice and intolerance against LGBTI people. This data shows that LGBTIQ+ people in Lithuania cannot feel free to express their sexual identity and feel safe in the country. When it comes to the secondary education area, the statistics are mainly lower than the EU average: only 12 percent of LGBTI teenager respondents (15-17 years old) in Lithuania said that their school education at some point addressed LGBTI issues positively or in a neutral way (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020).

According to the Public Attitudes Survey, 35.9 percent of respondents would not want to live in a neighbourhood with LGBT individuals, and 24.2 percent would not want to work in the same workplace. 57.8 percent said their attitudes towards homosexual individuals had even worsened (Lietuvos socialinių mokslų centras, Diversity Development Group 2022). According to a Global Europe 2021 report, only 53 percent of Lithuanian respondents would agree that gay, lesbian or bisexual people should have the same rights as heterosexual individuals. Although sexual orientation is regulated in equality legislation beyond employment, Lithuania does not have an approved LGBTIQ+ Equality Action Plan, and, as mentioned before, gender identity and gender characteristics are not included in the equality legislation (Fitzpatrick 2021).

The Rainbow Rankings, which consider how laws and policies affect the lives of LGBTIQ+ people, show that Lithuania ranks 22nd out of 27 countries in equality and non-discrimination, 15th in hate crime and discrimination, and 20th in legal recognition of gender (Rainbow Europe n/a). Lithuania is listed among nine European countries in 2021 that are experiencing growing resistance or regression in the area of transgender rights, including the right to recognition of gender identity in relation to gender equality (ILGA Europe 2021).

According to ILGA Europe Annual Review 2023 of the human rights situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people in Europe and Central Asia, concrete cases also showed various gaps in the implementation of equality. For example, during the migration crisis in 2021 in Lithuania,

there were cases when several LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers went on a hunger strike because of poor living conditions, medical care, and anti-LGBTIQ bias (ILGA Europe 2023). The latter data discloses that Lithuania remains a country where a certain amount of ignorance of human rights and discrimination based on SOGISC continues to be visible.

Public debates about the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) also touched LGBTIQ+ rights in Lithuania.² According to conservative politicians and religious actors, the term gender used in the text of the Istanbul Convention could demolish the ‘natural’ roles of men and women, bring confusion to society and promote LGBTIQ+ rights and acceptance (Pocė, Skulte 2023). Thus, public debate has highlighted the prejudice against LGBTIQ+ rights and equal opportunities among certain groups in Lithuanian society.

Discrimination based on SOGISC and its reporting in Lithuania is another essential aspect to discuss. Official statistics are limited to the number of criminal offences registered, i.e. the number of criminal proceedings initiated by law enforcement authorities. For example, the 2022 report of the Lithuanian Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson states that there have been four complaints about possible discrimination based on sexual orientation (Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba 2023). However, this does not reflect the actual number of hate crimes in cases where the victim does not want to initiate legal proceedings or simply does not want to report the incident to law enforcement authorities. The 2019 Qualitative Study of Communities Vulnerable to Hate Crimes in Lithuania study revealed that the actual number of hate incidents may be higher than the official statistics showed. This can be explained by the fact that reporting a hate crime itself can be complicated and highly sensitive, as reporting a hate crime can, in many cases, also mean 'outing' oneself for victims, making victims with LGBTIQ+ identities particularly vulnerable, but it can also be relevant for victims with other characteristics, or victims with intersecting identities as well. Under-reporting of discrimination and hate crimes is a persistent problem in Lithuania, especially when it comes to incidents related to homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia (Morou et.al. 2023). According to a study carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2013, 61 percent of Lithuanian LGBT respondents reported discrimination or harassment based on their sexual

² The Istanbul Convention was signed by Lithuania in 2013 and was not ratified yet when the report was prepared.

orientation, while only one in ten reported such crimes to the relevant authorities (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2013).

National Report on Hate Speech and Euroscepticism 2022 showed that verbal insults were the most common hate incident in Lithuania. The report highlighted that the majority of research participants seek to be unrecognisable and invisible: “Therefore, the LGBTQIA+ community tends to live in a “social bubble” and distrusts outsiders. The interviewees claimed that they are most hurt by degrading and insulting comments spread by public figures in the media, online, and through social networks. This group also experiences negative attitudes expressed towards them by their families and close relatives. They also often encounter institutional discrimination and harassment, for example, in the workplace. Especially vulnerable to verbal and physical attacks are transgender people, as it is more difficult for them to hide their identity. The research also found that the more open and visible members of the LGBTQIA+ community were, the more vulnerable they were to verbal insults and even physical attacks” (Adutavičiūtė, Jurevičiūtė 2022, 15). What is more, this report showed that discrimination against LGBTIQ+ individuals is still prevailing: the survey showed that 48 percent of the respondents stated they experienced hate speech; among them, 65.5 percent said it was because of their gender, and 26.3 percent said it was because of their sexual orientation (Adutavičiūtė, Jurevičiūtė 2022). A qualitative research on hate crimes against vulnerable communities (Labanauskas 2019) showed that interviewees encountered hate speech and hate crimes in schools, universities, public institutions, social circles, public spaces, the media, and online (Adutavičiūtė, Jurevičiūtė 2022). Also, the research conducted in 2022 showed that LGBTIQ+ individuals felt insecure and in precarious positions in the Lithuanian academic environment. Students, lecturers, and administration staff reported various forms of discrimination based on SOGISC and experienced intolerance within the academic environment. Research also highlighted an existing gap between the declarative openness to LGBTIQ+ people within many Lithuanian universities and persisting stereotypes towards them (Ališauskienė et.al. 2023). To sum up, the above presented data allows to conclude that the official statistics usually do not correspond to the actual situation of LGBTIQ people and the extent of their discrimination in Lithuania.

According to the National LGBT Rights Organisation Lithuanian Gay League report in 2022, the Lithuanian Government still has not prepared a comprehensive strategy for preventing and combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Action Plan for Promoting Non-discrimination 2017–2019 and Action Plan for Promoting Non-discrimination 2021-2023 did

not include LGBTIQ+-related issues, measures and specific recommendations (National LGBT Rights Organization Lithuanian Gay League 2022).

2. LGBTIQ+ awareness sessions and good practices

Currently, there are no unified national regulations on the prevention, monitoring and regulation of incidents of discrimination on SOGISC grounds in the Lithuanian academic environment. Most Lithuanian higher education institutions follow the principles of prevention of discrimination on the grounds of SOGISC and equal rights management enshrined in national and EU legislation. Lithuanian higher education institutions are guided by a code of academic ethics or ethical guidelines, which, among other grounds, contain a definition of discrimination from the 2003 Republic of Lithuania Law on Equal Opportunities, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

The 2016 Republic of Lithuania Labor Code obliges organizations to implement equal opportunities policies. Universities and other organizations are encouraged and obliged to implement equal opportunities and gender equality policies according to Article 26 of the Labor Code, which stipulates that employers with more than fifty employees are obliged to implement the principles of gender equality and nondiscrimination on other grounds and to develop and communicate to their employees the equal opportunities policy and the measures for its implementation and supervision.

Since 2022, most Lithuanian higher education institutions have adopted Gender Equality Plans, which is a mandatory document for public bodies, higher education establishments, and research organizations planning to participate in the Horizon Europe research program. For example, Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) was among the first universities in Lithuania to develop and implement a Gender Equality Plan in 2021 based on the methodology developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). Also, VMU adopted the Equal Opportunities Policy and its Implementation Programme in 2017, which forbids discrimination on the grounds stipulated in the Law on Equal Opportunities (including SO), and safeguards equal opportunities for all people. What is more, a special reporting mechanism (Trust line) has been established for academic personnel and those seeking employment in cases of discrimination on various grounds, including SO. VMU implements various EU-funded projects to educate both the public and academic members about LGBTIQ+ experiences of discrimination, equal rights and the need for inclusive practices (e.g. Universities

towards Diversity - (UniDiversity); Supporting and Implementing Plans for Gender Equality in Academia and Research (SPEAR).

Vilnius University Diversity and Equal Opportunities Strategy 2020-2025 aims to create a learning and working environment at the University that fosters individual, social and cultural diversity and ensures equal opportunities for members of the University community. The University therefore aims to promote diversity and ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender, race, nationality, citizenship, language, origin, social status, religion, beliefs or opinions, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, marital status, intention to have a child(ren) or any other discriminatory grounds. In 2021 Vilnius University adopted Gender Equality Plans for its departments and Gender-Sensitive Language Guidelines, a document defining the variations in the use of gender-sensitive language in written and spoken language at the University. These guidelines were treated as a starting point for discussion and attention to important issues of discrimination, inequality and disrespect between genders or other identities.

The first and only organization in Lithuania that unites LGBTIQ+ students, staff, alumni, and their supporters – the University LGBT+ Group - was established by Vilnius University academic community members in 2018. This group aims to promote equality among the members of the VU community and to help instill societal respect towards them to foster the culture of respect for people and their views, promote the protection of human rights as well as tolerance towards the members of the LGBT+ community, and encourage the integration of minorities and to unite the LGBT+ people of VU and the supporters of the organization for joint action, strengthen mutual cooperation and assistance, promote international and national cooperation, organization and initiative. Vilnius University also has a Trust line where experienced or observed sexual harassment, discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or any other discriminatory grounds could be reported. Kaunas University of Technology has also adopted a 2022–2025 Gender Equality Plan to promote gender equality and diversity, it touches on activities focused on work-life balance, organizational development, organizational culture, recruitment and promotion, and gender representation in management positions and participation in decision-making governing bodies.

Both VMU and VU have developed Gender Equality Plans in the context of the Horizon 2020 project Strengthening and Implementing Gender Equality in Academia and Research 2019-2022 (SPEAR). The actions of the Kaunas University of Technology (KTU) Gender Equality Plan 2022-2025 are in line with the European Union's requirements regarding the European Horizon Programme.

Initiatives that are not directly related to academia but promote the idea of inclusion include Pride events such as Baltic Pride, Vilnius Pride, and Kaunas Pride, which attract not only the LGBTIQ+ community but also their supporters. These events encourage public institutions, universities, and various businesses to support the LGBTIQ+ community (Adutavičiūtė, Jurevičiūtė 2022).

3. Useful contacts³

Contact information of LGBTIQ+ and other Human Rights and Equality bodies, organizations, and institutions in Lithuania:

- *Lithuanian Gay League* - www.lgl.lt/en/

The national lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights association LGL is the only nongovernmental organization in Lithuania exclusively representing the interests of the local LGBT* community. LGL is one of the most stable and mature organizations within the civic sector in the country as it was founded on 3 December 1993. The main principle that characterizes the activities of the association is that of independence from any political or financial interests, with the aim of attaining effective social inclusion and integration of the local LGBT* community in Lithuania. Based on its expertise in the fields of advocacy, awareness raising and community building, accumulated during twenty years of organizational existence, LGL strives for consistent progress in the field of human rights for LGBT* people.

CONTACT: office@gay.lt

- *Tolerant Youth Association* - <https://tja.lt/apie-tja>

Tolerant Youth Association was founded in 2005. It aims to foster public respect for people, their choices and attitudes. To promote respect and tolerance for different social groups, the protection of human rights and the integration of minorities. To unite tolerant young people and all other tolerant individuals in common activities, to strengthen mutual cooperation and assistance, and to promote international cooperation, political activism, organization and initiative.

CONTACT: info@tja.lt

³ Descriptions of organizations are taken from their websites and in some cases translated to English.

- *The University LGBT+ Group - www.universiteto.lgbt/en/*

A Vilnius University association that unites LGBT+ students, staff, alumni, and their allies. It is a voluntary, non-profit, public youth organization that strives to bring together the VU LGBT+ community as well as the supporters of LGBT+. This organization also aspires to promote equality among the members of the VU community and to help instill societal respect towards them. All students, auditors, alumni, exchange students, and present or past staff members who agree with the goals of the University LGBT+ Group can become members of the association.

CONTACT: info@universiteto.lgbt

- *The platform “išgirsti” - www.isgirsti.lt*

“išgirsti” (which means “to hear” or “to be heard”, depending on where you put the stress) is a concise and systematic resource on many topics relevant to LGBT+ community, their family members, friends, teachers, psychologists and support providers. Understanding that LGBT+ experiences are too varied to be entirely covered by a single source, we hope that the information presented here can serve as an introduction and a gateway to further exploring the issues you might care about. “išgirsti” is also a physical cultural-social space in Vilnius devoted to small cultural and social happenings and psychological support. It is also open for other queer initiatives and meetings. The initiative started in 2015, and since 2020 been supported by the Active Citizens Fund, EEA Grants.”

CONTACT: info@isgirsti.lt

- *Center for Equality Advancement - Vilnius-based NGO carrying its work since 2003 – <https://gap.lt/en/>*

Center for Equality Advancement – Vilnius-based NGO carrying its work since 2003. For almost 20 years, it has changed stereotypes for individuals to feel safer. This organisation implements informational campaigns, advocacy, provides training courses and seminars, publishes articles, manuals and other publications, carries out research, and provides expertise on the themes of gender equality, diversity and human rights. Organisation’s vision – women* being safe and free (*Considering themselves women and/or socialized as women). Organisation’s mission – to identify and address gender inequalities.

CONTACT: info@gap.lt



- Vilnius University Student Representation Programme "Without Labels" - <https://beetikeciu.lt/about/>

Vilnius University Student Representation Programme "Without Labels" were founded in 2010 and are active in various fields such as LGBTQ, emotional well-being and the photo project "VU Faces". The core values of this organisation are equality, openness and respect for the individuality of each person. This organisation hopes that the activities of their programme will encourage the university community to develop its own level of tolerance towards different groups of people - everyone from people of different races to people who suffer from depression. This organisation wants to break the myths that surround members of the LGBTQ+ community, and the beliefs that follow people who suffer from various psychological illnesses. Their vision is a Vilnius University community where everyone is accepted for who they are. The organisation hopes to work towards this utopian idea!

CONTACT: vadovas@beetikeciu.lt

- Human Rights Monitoring Institute - <https://hrmi.lt/en/about-us/>

The Human Rights Monitoring Institute (HRMI) is a non-governmental, non-profit human rights organization. Since its establishment in 2003, HRMI has been advocating for full compliance of national laws and policies with international human rights obligations and working to ensure that rights are effective in practice. The team of HRMI's social, humanitarian, and health sciences experts conducts research, drafts legal and policy briefings, compiles reports to international human rights bodies, undertakes strategic cases before domestic and international courts, engages in various national and international projects, conducts educational activities, delivers training and e-learning courses for professionals.

CONTACT: hrmi@hrmi.lt

- The Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights - <https://ztcentras.lt/>

This organisation focuses on monitoring the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities, recognition and reduction of domestic violence and violence against women, equal rights for LGBTI persons and the right to register family relationships, recognition of hate crimes and promotion of support mechanisms for victims, and reduction of Romaphobia. These areas are priorities for their work. The organisation works in the fields of human rights advocacy, education and public



information and comments on laws and legislation, and has established and continues to develop the human rights portal manoteises.lt - the largest and most important source of information on human rights in Lithuania.

CONTACT: info@lchr.lt

- *The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson - <https://lygybe.lt/en/about-office/>*

The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is a budgetary institution financed from the state budget. Ombudsperson, by proposal from the Speaker of the Seimas, is assigned for a term of five years by secret voting in Parliament. Ombudsperson is accountable to Parliament and is responsible for the enforcement of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and the Law on Equal Treatment. Competence of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson: investigates complaints, carries out investigations on his/hers own initiative; performs independent researches, related to discrimination, and independent surveys on the discrimination state, provides conclusions and recommendations on any issue related to discrimination; carries out preventive and educational activity, secures equal opportunities mainstreaming; controls the implementation of UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provisions, related to securing equal opportunities; exchanges information with various institutions and agencies from Lithuania and foreign countries, international organisations.

CONTACT: lygybe@lygybe.lt

Part B: Empirical research results

This section will present the main findings of the “INCLUusive universities leading to inclusive SocietIES (INCLUSIES)” research that was addressed to members of the Lithuanian academic community (university teaching staff and undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD students). In line with the general scope of the INCLUSIES project (investigating, tackling, and making national-wide visible homo/ trans/ biphobia phenomena in universities), the research aimed to uncover the forms of discrimination, using two innovative qualitative methodological approaches (photo-elicitation and

autophotography). The participation of students and university teaching staff in research helped increase the comprehensive awareness of LGBTIQ+ individuals' situation in Lithuanian universities. In more detail, the research attempted to map the existing situation in LGBTIQ+ individuals' everyday lives in universities and outside of them in terms of discrimination according to SOGISC and the need for inclusive practices.

This information about the project and invitation to participate in the research was shared with various youth and LGBTIQ+ organizations and representatives of Lithuanian universities who were asked to share it with the wider academic community, including students and teaching staff. Also, the invitation to participate in the research was shared with various LGBTIQ+ social media groups. The research was implemented in Lithuania from May to December 2023.

1. Rationale of the applied methods

The “INCLUsive universities leading to inclusive SocietIES (INCLUSIES)” research used two innovative qualitative methods – photo-elicitation and autophotography – to understand the LGBTIQ+ individuals' experiences and the need for inclusive practices in an academic environment. Photo-elicitation (researcher-driven photos that are selected by the researchers) constitutes a simple method of enriching participants' data along a qualitative interview with the use of photos (Radley 2010). Photos communicate symbolic representations that cannot be expressed through text, as happens in a classical qualitative interview, and according to some researchers (e.g., Harper 2002), they provide a different type of information than verbal communication. Under this approach, photos were used as cues for discussion within a qualitative interview with the participants, akin to a set of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview (Cleland, MacLeod 2021).

During this research, the photo-elicitation method used six photos representing relevant LGBTIQ+ topics: 1) homophobic attitudes, discrimination, hate speech and inappropriate behavior based on SOGISC; 2) the level of visibility of LGBTI+ individuals, issues and support in an academic environment; 3) incidents, experiences related to sexual harassment; 4) incidents, experiences related to violent behavior; 5) questions about Lithuania as a safe and open society for LGBTIQ+ people; 6) perceptions regarding collective actions for advocating LGBTIQ+ rights and relevant awareness, sensitivity activities in academic environment. During the interviews, the participants were asked to

reflect on what they saw in the photos and to share what associations and examples the images evoked. The researcher also asked several additional questions related to the topic of each photo to discuss the topic and issues more deeply.

The second method used in this research was autophotography, which allowed the receipt of photos provided by the participant (participant-driven; for a detailed review, see also Cleland, MacLeod 2021). Regarding the first type, researcher-driven, the images are selected by the researcher, who determines the content of the photos (theme, scene settings, physical properties such as luminance and combination of colors) and their potential significance in line with research goals. In autophotography, the control of photo selection and, therefore, of data collection is being given to participants who freely gather the photos most salient to them again in agreement with the study goals. In total, five questions were presented to research participants who were asked to submit photos related to these five questions and describe the photo's choice and their experiences: 1) How do you see yourself when you experience/observe different forms of discrimination at university? 2) How do you think others see you when you experience/observe different forms of discrimination at university? 3) What makes it difficult for you to be yourself? What challenges do you face when trying to remain yourself? 4) What helps you to remain yourself? What gives you strength in the face of challenges at university? 5) What kind of help from others would you consider appropriate in different experiences of discrimination? What kind of help could this be?

To sum up, the photo-elicitation and autophotography methods, which used researcher-driven and participants-driven photographs, allowed researchers to grasp the most common forms of discrimination and inappropriate behavior in the Lithuanian academic environment and the need for various inclusive practices.

2. Participants' social-demographic profile

The “INCLUusive universities leading to inclusive SocietIES (INCLUSIES)” research gathered opinions, stories, and experiences from 17 individuals studying or teaching in Lithuanian universities. To be more precise, a total of ten students from Lithuanian universities participated in the photo-elicitation interview. The students' age vary between 20-40; five students are studying bachelor's studies, two are studying master's studies, one is a PhD candidate, and two interview participants have just graduated from bachelor's and master studies. Two research participants were students from



Russia and Georgia who currently study at Lithuanian universities. The students who participated in the research studied social sciences (sociology, psychology, regional studies, and public governance). Additionally, six students (aged between 19-27, four women, one man, one trans man) and one teacher (woman, age 52) from Lithuanian universities participated in the autophotography survey.

3. Results from the empirical research

This part will present key results of the “INCLUusive universities leading to inclusive SocietIES (INCLUSIES)” research with university students and teaching staff implemented in Lithuania. The results extracted from the empirical research are presented in four main topics, which are 1) discrimination, hate speech and inappropriate behavior based on SOGISC in the academic environment; 2) the level of visibility of LGBTI+ individuals, issues and support in the academic environment; 3) strategies employed for overcoming and or subsiding discriminatory incidents; 4) perceptions regarding collective actions for advocating LGBTIQ+ rights and relevant awareness, sensitivity activities in the academic environment.

Discrimination, hate speech and inappropriate behavior based on SOGISC in the academic environment

When asked about discrimination, hate speech and inappropriate behavior based on SOGISC, most research participants stated that they had not experienced or observed evident, active incidents of discrimination in an academic environment. Several participants noted that their academic environment (teachers, peers, teaching materials) is supportive, safe and inclusive for LGBTIQ+ persons. One student even gave an example of how one person's gender transition was very well managed and accepted at their university.

All participants in the study expressed that they had never experienced violent behavior and sexual harassment in their academic environment. However, they had heard of one or more cases when students experienced sexual harassment, and the perpetrators were teachers. Several participants said that they felt that gender power is still pervasive in academia, with men in a position of power and women as victims.

It is important to note that most of the research participants said that they have created their own “safe bubble” in the academic environment, so they often don't notice discrimination or bad language. According to the participants, a “safe bubble” is a circle of people who do not have homophobic attitudes, with whom the research participants feel safe and can be themselves.

Moreover, most participants acknowledged that their academic environment is safe because they study social sciences, which include LGBTIQ+ issues in one or other of their courses, and that teachers are more open and committed to creating a safe and inclusive learning and research environment. They feel that the environment in social science departments is safer and more inclusive than in the natural and technology sciences. Most research participants believe that stereotypical mindsets and even homophobic attitudes are still prevalent in natural science departments. Several students said they had heard of several incidents where teachers from natural sciences and technology departments had spoken negatively about sexual minorities. One participant in the study shared that both teachers and students from Catholic Theology Faculty have very strong homophobic attitudes and that it is not nice to interact with them.

Although the research participants said they have not experienced or observed evident discrimination in the academic environment, they identified the lack of inclusive language, inclusive practices and knowledge about them as one of the biggest problems in the Lithuanian academic environment: “<...> often, due to a lack of knowledge, others do not notice, or because of a negative opinion, ignore, and sometimes because of their image, accept various forms of discrimination” (Participant 11). According to research participants, a lack of understanding of the situation of queer people, insensitivity, ignorance to the difficulties they face, and homophobic attitudes still exist in the Lithuanian academic environment. As most participants stated, forms of discrimination in the academic environment are often not open, discrimination is not active, and at the same time, not everything that could be done in terms of introducing and promoting inclusive practices is done. Research participants identified the following examples of inappropriate language, ignorance about inclusive practices, and discrimination in academic settings: 1) feeling uncomfortable when other people start talking about their partners: “It's like you have to do that coming out of the closet thing every time and it's very exhausting and painful and frustrating, and you don't know how people are going to react to it” (Participant 3); 2) light jokes with no bad intentions from students and lecturers on LGBTIQ+ issues; 3) lack of use of inclusive language and gender-neutral pronouns, and lack of knowledge on how to use them (one participant said that lecturers address students using the word

“girls”). 4) Several participants in the study have heard university staff speak offensively about LGBTIQ+. For example, one student said, *“In one seminar, a lecturer equated homosexuality with zoophilia and pedophilia”* (Participant 15); 5) dead-naming; 6) focus on heteronormative attitudes, for example, the emphasis on heterosexual love: *“If it's about love, relationships, family, then it's first and foremost about the relationship created between a man and a woman. It feels like... I wouldn't say it's discrimination. I don't know what it is, but maybe it is discrimination”* (Participant 6); 7) failure to address sensitive topics, for example, in one lecture, students were asked to debate whether to allow medical gender confirmation services or puberty blockers for trans minors; 8) One participant, a transman, told that he constantly experiences discrimination due to the use of name-calling and negative comments: *“More common is the silent discrimination, which I can only report from the transgender side: the use of legal names and pronouns, the unwillingness to address people as they are asked to be addressed (both by students and lecturers), and the mild, “uneducated” comments about a person's appearance or experiences”* (Participant 12).

Coming out as an LGBTIQ+ in an academic environment is also one of the most challenging aspects, according to several research participants. Some students said that they had come out in their academic environments and were accepted, but some said that they had not done that because they feared certain reactions from others and of ruining friendships: *“You bury yourself for the sake of a friendship... You always think that you will have to tell at some point because it's not polite to lie either”* (Participant 3); *“In the sense that it is always better not to talk widely and loudly about your sexual orientation. That is always a better strategy. A safe strategy. And of course, it makes it harder to be yourself”* (Participant 13). The fear of coming out is related to the homophobic attitudes. Several participants expressed the idea that although some members of academia have homophobic attitudes, they can't express them out loud for fear of social stigma or even legal misconduct. These thoughts expressed by research participants suggest that there is a kind of “hidden” homophobia existing in the Lithuanian academic environment, which also affects the assurance of a safe and inclusive milieu. Also, the research participants highlighted examples of discrimination, hate speech and inappropriate behavior that were very visible in Lithuanian society, such as 1) the rainbow-colored pedestrian crossing in Vilnius being painted over and over; 2) social media being full of homophobic, offensive and threatening comments against LGBTIQ+ people; 3) negative public reactions and resistance and threats to LGBTIQ+ events; 4) public backlash during Pride events; 5) discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people by the Lithuanian legal system, which does not recognize same-sex partnerships;

6) inability to be oneself in a public space: *“When you think about heterosexual people kissing on the trolley, nobody says anything because it is the norm. But if I take my partner's hand, old ladies are watching, people coming up to say some things”* (Participant 8).

In summary, most research participants expressed that they had not experienced or noticed active, evident discrimination in academia, except for a transgender person who experiences discrimination regularly because of dead-naming and inappropriate comments about their looks. Also, according to the participants, *“silent, hidden”* discrimination is still prevalent in the Lithuanian academic environment, manifested in internal homophobic attitudes and a lack of knowledge about inclusive language and practices. Participants stated that they want a safe and inclusive environment, which members of the Lithuanian academic community still lack the knowledge to provide: *“I need a safe environment that is ready to accept me as I am”* (Participant 7).

The level of visibility of LGBTIQ+ individuals, issues and support in the academic environment

When asked about the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, the research participants said that the situation in Lithuanian society is improving and that many steps have been taken to ensure the rights of LGBTIQ+ people. However, there is still a strong conservative attitude in Lithuania, a legacy of the Soviet mindset, which, according to the participants, influences the societal resistance against equal rights for LGBTIQ+ people and their legal enforcement. According to the research participants, the openness of the academic community and the affirmation of equal rights for LGBTIQ+ in an academic environment is determined by the situation at the state level, and as long as the problems are not solved at the national level, it is difficult to talk about the openness of the academic community: *“As long as the state as a state is not safe, the academia is not safe either”* (Participant 2).

It is also important to note the importance of context in understanding and assessing a safe and open environment. Several participants said that Lithuania still has a lot to do to ensure that the environment for LGBTIQ+ people is like that of Western countries, Denmark, Belgium or the Netherlands. At the same time, several participants said that LGBTIQ+ people have more rights in Lithuania than in countries such as Russia, China or Georgia.

Thus, when discussing specifically the visibility of LGBTIQ+ people in an academic environment, the opinions of the research participants were divided. Some participants shared their experiences that

LGBTIQ+ topics were discussed in the courses they study and that it was not forbidden to prepare a research paper on LGBTIQ+ related topics. While the participants had different experiences and said that LGBTIQ+ topics were not discussed much in their studies and were simply kept untouchable by teachers to prevent political discussions during lectures. Research showed that the teacher was the key actor deciding if the course curricula included the LGBTIQ+ related topics.

Also, most of the research participants identified the lack of strategic documents promoting equality as one of the most important problems – they did not know whether documents on inclusion in their academic environment existed, how these documents were systematically monitored, or if they were monitored at all, and how planned actions are implemented in practice. Various guidelines, according to the participants, are often a matter of choice and not necessarily relevant for all members of the academic community: *“Guidelines are a document where you read it, and it is up to you: you can use it, and you are also able not to use it. It shows that documents are created, but adherence to them is not exemplary. I don't even know if they exist in our university”* (Participant 1).

In summary, research participants found it difficult to discuss equal opportunities for LGBTIQ+ in an academic environment, as they do not have comprehensive information on the documents promoting equality and measures implemented in their universities. Also, it is hard to speak about equal rights as some are not out and are not sure if it is worth the price: *“As some of them do not come out, including me, we have the same rights as the others. <...>The thing is, I don't have any idea what happens if I speak up <..> Should I really try it? I am not so sure”* (Participant 4); *“Queer people are not very visible in academia, both in the sense that we are not discussed very much and in the sense that there are very few out people at university”* (Participant 16). Thus, this shows that the Lithuanian academic environment is not safe and open for LGBTIQ+ people, as they are uncertain about coming out and what equal opportunities and rights they can have and claim to have: *“<...> LGBTI people sometimes do not have their basic needs met. <...> It's sad and angry that we even must think about it”* (Participant 8).

Strategies employed for overcoming and or subsiding discriminatory incidents

Research participants were also asked about individual strategies employed for overcoming and subsiding discriminatory incidents. There was a wide range of responses on how they had reacted or would react to discriminatory incidents, but most said that it is difficult for both the victim and the

witness to react appropriately: *“At that moment you react in the way you think is best”* (Participant 2); *“When you are a victim it is difficult to speak up”* (Participant 6). Most research participants had tried or thought they would try to create social pressure and shame on the person who initiated the incident. Others had tried or thought they would try to warn the person who is using non-inclusive language. Most research participants explained that in the event of such an incident, they would contact their departmental administrators or deans and try to find out what action they should take next. Only one participant, a teacher, explicitly stated that the victim or the witness should contact the University Ethics Committee. Another important point is the ability to react, the adoption of fear and the courage to react during a discriminatory incident. As several participants in the study said, the most important thing is to react, to help and not to be indifferent: *“Probably the first thing and the most important thing is to react, because not everybody understands what has happened, whether it is discrimination or inappropriate language”* (Participant 13).

It is important to mention that most of the research participants believe that some victims of discrimination and hate incidents would not even seek help because they simply do not know their rights, procedures, or actions and do not want to invest time because they know that they will not be able to prove anything: *“They try to resolve everything personally. It usually stays on a personal level. I think people are afraid, and they think that it is not worth starting, that they will not prove anything, that they will lose, that they will only waste time, and they rest their hands because they feel that they are not worthy enough and they do not appreciate their own possibilities, that they are right in the case of discrimination”* (Participant 3). Fear of reporting an incident of discrimination is also, according to the research participants, one of the important factors that encourage them to keep silent about an incident of discrimination or ill-treatment: *“So, first of all, this “insensitivity” to details and the fear to “report”, that is left from the Soviet era, should disappear”* (Participant 16). They also feel that LGBTIQ+ people would receive little help from the public in the event of incidents: *“The public is not inclined to intervene in such cases. And that is the saddest thing”* (Participant 6).

In summary, we can say that the research participants would or thought they would use different strategies to manage a discrimination incident and to help themselves or another victim. However, as the study shows, the participants are not aware of the appropriate procedures and actions that they could take in their academic communities to try to report an incident of discrimination, try to help a victim - all of them would use the strategies that they have come up with. The above discussed data

allows us to conclude that the Lithuanian academic environment usually does not provide accurate, concrete information on what to do in the case of discrimination, or inappropriate behavior and where to report if a discriminatory incident is experienced or observed.

Perceptions regarding collective actions for advocating LGBTIQ+ rights and relevant awareness, sensitivity activities in the academic environment

All research participants agreed that there was a lack of inclusive practices in the Lithuanian academic environment, a lack of signs and actions that would show that there is a support and acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people's human rights. Most of the research participants have not heard or noticed any activities aiming at more inclusivity of LGBTIQ+ people in their universities.

Research participants shared some ideas that could be implemented in the Lithuanian academic environment to make it safe and open for all members: 1) separate recreation areas for LGBTIQ+ people; 2) counselors who could advise LGBTIQ+ people and provide them with all kinds of support during their studies; 3) lectures and seminars, round-table discussions on LGBTIQ+ challenges, inclusive language which could be conducted by professional teachers as well as by students themselves; 4) training on inclusive teaching methods for teachers; 5) development of equality plans, anti-discrimination campaigns and strategies, and appropriate communication about them among members of the academic community; 6) non-binary toilets and separate changing rooms; 7) use of LGBTIQ+ merchandise in university premises that would allow LGBTIQ+ people to be seen and accepted: *"It says that I see you, that I know you are here and that you are welcome. That you are not excluded, that you are not alien. You are just welcome"* (Participant 4); 8) social events on LGBTIQ+ issues; 9) university participation in Pride events; 10) the usage of preferred pronouns and the usage of inclusive language (for instance: using gender neutral nouns; using non-offensive language); 11) communicating without relying on heteronormativity (e.g. talking about relationships, family and love as not only just heterosexual relationships, family or love); 12) trainings for the members of academic community on how to notice and combat the hate speech and microaggressions against LGBTIQ+ individuals; 13) advocacy actions carried out by LGBTIQ+ people themselves; 14) a regular Lithuanian scientific journal dedicated to gender studies research, also a reflection of a broader view of gender, deeper analysis of queer topics in research.

In summary, as this research showed, LGBTIQ+ awareness raising (on LGBTIQ+ issues, inclusiveness, inappropriate language, etc.) would be the key factor for the promotion of a safe and inclusive academic environment. Constant communication and collaboration between LGBTIQ+ individuals and the rest of the academic community and listening to the needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals are essential too. And, finally, the proactive activities by the university community, active messages that would publicly demonstrate the existence of, and the pursuit of, an inclusive academic environment could make a real change: “<...> *there is no public declaration of that acceptance or that active message. <..> I don't doubt that all universities have in their regulations, in all those papers, that it says anti-homophobia, pro-homophobia, pro-this, pro-that, but the point is that there is no such direct vision or vocalization. <...> I think the clear public message is important*” (Participant 6).

Part C: General conclusions

Various studies, reports, and statistics show discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender characteristics, as well as homophobic attitudes, still prevail among Lithuanians. The Republic of Lithuania Government still has not prepared a comprehensive strategy for preventing and combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Currently, there are no unified national regulations on the prevention, monitoring, and regulation of incidents of discrimination on SOGISC grounds in the academic environment in Lithuania. Most higher education institutions in Lithuania are guided by the principles of discrimination and equal rights management provided by the European Union and national legislation. Lithuanian higher education institutions are guided by codes of academic ethics or ethical guidelines, which, among other grounds, contain a definition of discrimination from the 2003 Republic of Lithuania Law on Equal Opportunities, which prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation.

As the above discussed research showed, there is a *hidden* discrimination based on SOGISC in the Lithuanian academic environment, which manifests with internal homophobic attitudes, inappropriate language, and lack of knowledge about inclusive language and practices. The insecurity within the academic environment is reflected in the uncertainty experienced by LGBTIQ+ people about their coming out. The insecurity of LGBTIQ+ people in the academic environment manifests with the fear of reacting to discriminatory incidents and reporting them. As the research showed,

participants were unaware of the appropriate procedures and actions they could take in their academic environment to report a discriminatory incident to try to help a victim - all of them would use the strategies they had devised. The research findings also suggest that the Lithuanian academic environment does not provide accurate, concrete information on what to do, how and where to report if a discriminatory incident is experienced or observed. According to the research participants, the most important aspects of promoting a safe and inclusive academic community are awareness raising, constant communication, and cooperation between LGBTIQ+ people and the rest of the community. It is also of utmost importance that the universities disseminate an active message that publicly demonstrates support for promoting a safe and inclusive environment and the processes and actions of reporting discriminatory incidents.

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Annex

This part represents photos submitted by research participants (autophotography method). Research participants were asked to submit five photos related to five questions. Below you can see the photos that the research participants allowed to publish in the research report, and which were taken according to the research guidelines.

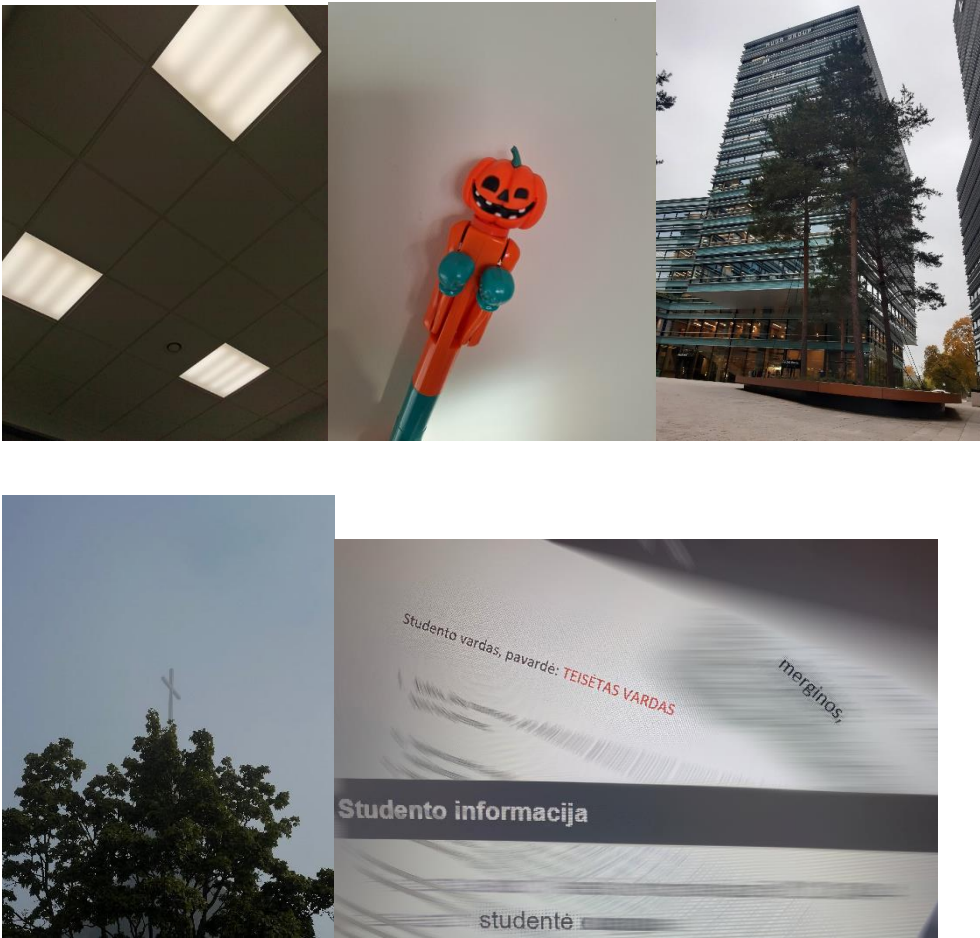
1. How do you see yourself when you experience/observe different forms of discrimination at university?
What forms of discrimination have you noticed in the academic environment, in society?



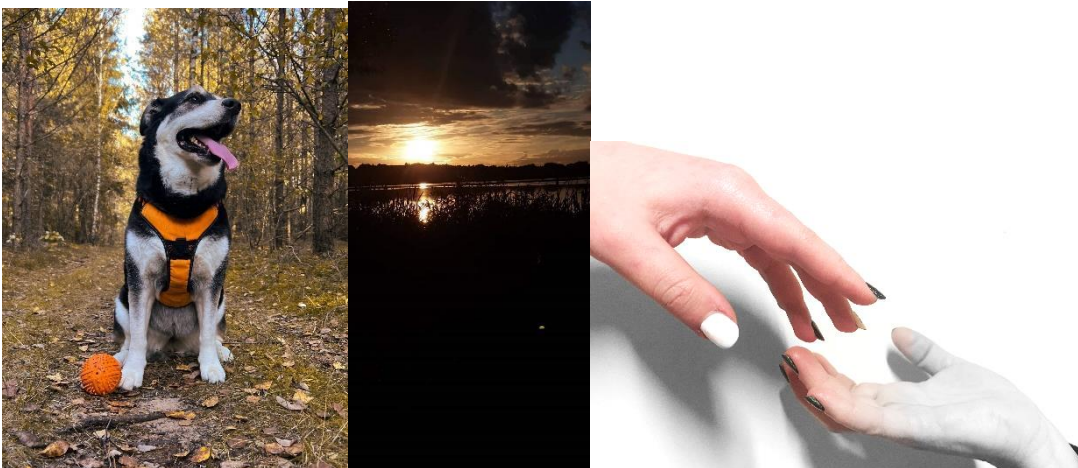
2. How do others see you when you experience/observe different forms of discrimination at university?
Do you react and how do you react when you see discrimination, inappropriate language at university, in society?



3. What makes it difficult for you to be who you are? What challenges do you face when trying to be yourself? What challenges do you think LGBTIQ+ people face in an academic environment?



4. What makes you who you are? What gives you strength in the face of challenges at university? What do you think could create an inclusive and safe academic environment for LGBTIQ+ people?



5. What would you consider to be appropriate assistance from others in different experiences of discrimination? What kind of help could this be?

