



Tool 1

Executive Summary

Policy Guidance on Addressing SOGIESC-based Bullying in Schools



What is this tool?

Developed by the Council of Europe SOGIESC Unit in partnership with IGLYO, this tool is part of a three-part toolkit supporting LGBTQI-inclusive education in schools. **Tool 1 – Policy Guidance on Addressing SOGIESC-based Bullying in Schools** sits alongside:

- **Tool 2 – Countering Anti-Rights Discourse in Education**, which builds resilience against disinformation, polarisation and hostile narratives;
- **Tool 3 – Framework for a Training Module on SOGIESC for Educators**, which supports the design and implementation of competence-based teacher training on LGBTQI-inclusive schools and curricula.

Together, the three tools form a coherent package that connects **policy frameworks, narrative resilience** and **educators' competences** into a systemic approach to advancing LGBTQI-inclusive education.

Who can use this tool?

Tool 1 is designed as a modular resource that can be used by different actors depending on their roles and contexts. It is primarily intended for **education authorities and schools**, including **policymakers, school leaders, teachers** and **counsellors**, and can also support **equality bodies, LGBTQI NGOs** and other civil society organisations working on safe, inclusive and democratic education.

Why is this tool necessary?

Across Europe, bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC-based bullying) remains one of the most entrenched and harmful forms of violence against children and young people. Despite strong human-rights obligations, many LGBTQI learners – especially trans, non-binary and intersex students – continue to face harassment, exclusion, misgendering, denial of facilities, and targeted abuse in school. Recent data from FRA's LGBTIQ survey III, show that nearly half of [LGBTQI young people aged 15–17 experienced bullying in the previous year](#), with schools as one of the main sites where this violence occurs.

Online spaces magnify this harm: (cyber)bullying often originates with school peers and follows learners home through social media, gaming platforms and messaging apps. Many young people do not report incidents for fear of being outed or dismissed, leaving them without protection or support. The consequences are severe: poorer mental health, absenteeism, disengagement from learning and, for some, dropping out of education altogether.

Tool 1 responds to these gaps. It offers a rights-based, adaptable framework to help education systems:

- prevent and respond to SOGIESC-based bullying and (cyber)bullying;
- protect learners' safety, dignity and participation;
- equip education authorities and schools to act, even in restrictive or polarised contexts.

What does this tool do?

The toolkit synthesises evidence from European and international bodies, including the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and UNESCO, as well as civil-society and academic research, to provide:

- **Clear policy guidance** on preventing, prohibiting and responding to SOGIESC-based bullying.
- **Concrete steps** for schools to build safe, inclusive environments.
- **Adaptable models** based on human rights frameworks.
- **Practical tools** such as reporting protocols, leadership actions, and implementation checklists.

Core Insight: Safety Is Structural

The central conclusion of the toolkit is clear: SOGIESC-based bullying cannot be addressed through isolated school initiatives or individual teacher goodwill. It is a systemic rights violation that demands systemic responses. Sustainable protection depends on four interlocking conditions:

- **Robust legal and policy frameworks.** States must explicitly prohibit SOGIESC-based bullying and discrimination, define anti-LGBTQI bullying comprehensively (including online harms), and require every school to adopt clear anti-bullying policies, with monitoring, accountability and designated leads.
- **Whole-school inclusion and safe environments.** Inclusion must be embedded across leadership, policies, pedagogy, school climate and family engagement. This includes LGBTQI-inclusive curricula, gender-inclusive facilities, respect for chosen names and pronouns, and visible signs of support that signal to learners that they are valued and protected.
- **Learner-centred safeguarding and confidential reporting.** Protection measures must prioritise confidentiality, non-outing safeguards, trauma-informed approaches and restorative justice responses, with multiple accessible channels for reporting and clear referral pathways to mental-health, child-protection and LGBTQI-competent services.
- **Systemic capacity, data and partnerships.** Effective implementation hinges on trained and supported staff, reliable data and monitoring systems, and strong

partnerships with families, LGBTQI organisations, youth groups, equality bodies and other community actors.

When these elements are aligned, SOGIESC-based bullying becomes both visible and actionable: not a series of isolated incidents, but a preventable pattern that institutions are obliged and equipped to address.

What will you find inside?

The tool is organised into four interconnected sections that move from context and principles to concrete policy action, self-assessment and supporting resources. Users can read it end-to-end or dip into specific sections depending on their role. Together, the sections are designed to help policymakers, education authorities, educators and schools understand SOGIESC-based bullying, ground their responses in human-rights principles, implement coherent measures across key policy areas and monitor progress over time.

Section 1 – Introduction

Section 1 sets the conceptual and political frame. It:

- explains the **purpose** of the toolkit as a practical resource to strengthen the capacity of policymakers and education authorities to recognise, prevent and respond to SOGIESC-based bullying in schools;
- clarifies **how to use** the toolkit and who it is for;
- outlines the **current state of SOGIESC-based bullying**, drawing on recent FRA and UNESCO data and highlighting the specific vulnerability of trans, non-binary and intersex learners;

Section 2 – Pedagogical Foundation and Guiding Principles

Section 2 provides a **definition of school bullying**, including its online dimensions, grounded in Council of Europe and UNESCO formulations.

It also sets out the foundations underpinning all recommendations:

- whole-school approaches;
- intersectionality;
- learner-centred protection and confidentiality;
- restorative rather than punitive responses;
- sustainability and context sensitivity.

These principles link human-rights standards to practical implications for policy, school governance and classroom practice. This section also discusses **implementation challenges and strategic considerations**, structural barriers, inequities in representation, safeguarding needs and the importance of grounding action in existing human-rights obligations.

Section 3 – Key Areas for Action and Policy Recommendations

Section 3 translates the guiding principles into concrete measures across eight key areas of action. It brings together analysis, examples and recommendations on: strengthening laws and policies; treating cyberbullying as a core priority; implementing LGBTQI-inclusive curricula; training teachers and school staff; building safe and inclusive school environments; establishing safe and confidential reporting systems; improving data collection and monitoring; and engaging families and communities.

Rather than prescribing a single model, the section offers policy options and practical entry points that can be adapted to different social, legal and political contexts. It emphasises explicit SOGIESC protection, confidentiality and non-outing safeguards, accessible reporting and support, realistic training and workload expectations, and sustained partnerships with civil society, LGBTQI and youth organisations, equality bodies and other community actors. The aim is to support coherent, system-wide responses where legal frameworks, school-level practice, data, and community engagement reinforce each other.

The key chapters of this section are:

- **Strengthening Laws and Policies:** Provides guidance for governments and education authorities on explicit SOGIESC-based protections; standardised definitions of bullying; accountability mechanisms and designated leads; and safeguarding of student rights, including privacy and non-outing.
- **Treating Cyberbullying as a Core Priority:** Offers models for integrating online harms into bullying frameworks, training educators, partnering with mental-health and LGBTQI organisations, and ensuring accessible reporting.
- **Implementing Inclusive Curricula:** Translates inclusion into practical steps across subjects, with adaptations for restrictive settings through integration into human-rights, citizenship or digital literacy approaches.
- **Training Teachers and School Staff:** Details training components on SOGIESC understanding, intersectionality, trauma-informed responses, and strategies for addressing parental or community resistance.
- **Building Safe and Inclusive School Environments:** Sets out school-level practices including gender-inclusive facilities, visible allyship, peer-led groups, and partnerships with support services.
- **Establishing Safe and Confidential Reporting Systems:** Provides guidance on multiple, child-friendly, anonymous and trauma-informed reporting pathways, with clear referral mechanisms.
- **Data Collection and Monitoring:** Outlines approaches to disaggregated data collection, climate assessments and privacy-preserving monitoring.
- **Engaging Families and Communities:** Shares strategies for evidence-based communication, partnership with NGOs, and constructive engagement with parents and community actors.

Section 4 – Institutional Checklist

Section 4 consolidates the toolkit into a **practical checklist** that helps policymakers, authorities and schools assess their current situation and identify priorities. It covers:

1. Anti-bullying policies and legislation
2. School environment
3. Reporting, support and response
4. LGBTQI-inclusive curricula and digital safety
5. Training and capacity building
6. Data collection and monitoring
7. Partnerships and community engagement.

The checklist is designed as a light-touch diagnostic tool that can feed into national strategies, local action plans and school-level improvement processes.

Closing perspective

This toolkit is more than a set of recommendations or a catalogue of good practices. It offers a **systemic roadmap** for embedding protection from SOGIESC-based bullying into the everyday functioning of education systems – from legislation and policy to curricula, teacher training, school environments, reporting mechanisms, data systems and community partnerships.

It starts from a simple premise: SOGIESC-based bullying is **preventable**. The conditions that allow it to flourish – silence, stigma, weak policy, lack of training, absence of data and isolation of schools and learners – are the result of institutional choices, not inevitabilities. With political commitment, institutional accountability and sustained collaboration, these conditions can be transformed.

When governments, education authorities, school leaders and civil-society partners use this toolkit in conjunction with the tools on countering anti-rights discourse (Tool 2) and LGBTQI-inclusive teacher education (Tool 3), they are better positioned to:

- safeguard LGBTQI learners from violence and exclusion;
- uphold educators' professional integrity and capacity to act;
- build democratic, inclusive school cultures in which all young people can learn, participate and thrive, free from fear and discrimination.

In this sense, protection is relational and systemic: a shared responsibility carried by institutions, communities and states, rather than an individual burden placed on learners or isolated educators.



Schools and education authorities play a central role in safeguarding young people's rights, safety and well-being. Yet across Europe, bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC-based bullying) — including (cyber)bullying— remains widespread and deeply harmful. **Tool 1 supports ministries of education, policymakers, inspectorates, school leaders and school communities to prevent, prohibit and respond to SOGIESC-based bullying through clear, rights-based policy guidance and practical implementation support.** It helps translate human-rights obligations into concrete measures: reporting and response protocols, leadership actions, whole-school prevention steps and checklists that can be adapted to both supportive and more restrictive contexts.

Tool 1 is part of the **Inclusive Education Toolkit for Preventing and Tackling SOGIESC-based bullying and anti-rights discourse in schools and classrooms**, developed within the EU-Council of Europe joint project "[Combating anti-LGBTIQ violence and hate speech and strengthening awareness-raising and fact-based narratives about LGBTIQ persons.](#)"

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