

AS IF I WERE IN A ZOO

VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTI STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOLS IN BIH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have official data on peer violence in schools, and there are particularly no data on peer violence motivated by sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics. Research conducted by civil society organisations working on the protection of LGBTI human rights indicates that the LGBTI persons experience most of the discrimination in the field of education (62.6% respondents). Almost 41.2% of the surveyed LGBTI persons experienced discrimination in school while 19.1% experienced it at university. Most of these cases of discrimination have not been reported to the relevant institutions due to the lack of trust in such institutions.

The fact is that peer violence in BiH becomes evident only when it is too late to do anything about it. Such cases include murder or suicide of students as a result of peer violence but even these acts are insufficient to prompt the institutions to be more active. Deterrent activities, education, awareness raising and professionalization of the teaching staff regarding peer violence still only comes from civil society organisations but the teaching staff intervention in case of such violence is still absent. Another issue is the fact that textbooks used in the BiH education system still present incorrect and harmful information and that students do not have a chance to discuss topics and issues of relevance to the LGBTI population. Despite the fact that certain documents have been adopted at the state level to protect the right to education, there is still a lack of a concrete institutional plan to combat peer violence and develop inclusive and tolerant education environment which would include LGBTI persons and other minorities as well as promote tolerance and inclusion in and throughout the education system.

This policy paper gives an overview of the current standards and problems in this field and offers specific guidelines to improve the current situation and create a secure environment for everyone in the education system in BiH. This includes reviewing textbooks and eliminating discriminatory content, raising awareness among the teaching staff in their work with the LGBTI population and other marginalised groups, cooperating with the civil society and creating LGBTI inclusive support programmes for students who have suffered violence.

EXPERIENCE OF LGBTI STUDENTS IN BIH “AS IF I WERE IN A ZOO”

I found out about myself in elementary school and went through a formation process in high school. Only one of my girlfriends knew about it and I could never talk about it with my male friends. I also came out to my high school administration who were really OK. I had most of the problems with the boys and although I did not come out, I was openly pro-LGBTI. And then I fell into an ambush in second grade and several boys physically attacked me because of my status on Facebook. I never reported it to anyone. It happened and now it's over. A. 19 years old, Sarajevo

I always knew. I came out to my parents, my closest relatives, the school counsellor, the psychologist and a couple of teachers in my school. I was always at loggerheads with my teachers. I had a problem with the teacher of religious studies who insisted on telling me that it was immoral, queer...and then I told him one day "Isn't it a sin for you to judge others?" And then he sat down with me and we talked...I entered into fights at school, it was terrible but I never started them. They threw insults at me, faggot this, faggot that and I wondered whether I was not hiding it well but then I stopped caring if someone knew about me or not. I started fooling around with them as a response to their provocations. They call out to me that I am sick and I reply "Yeah, you are right, I have to find a shrink as soon as possible!" The biggest problem is that it is imposed on the guys to be macho-men. For girls it can be cute but for guys never. There is a pattern by which men must behave in our society and if they don't, then automatically there is something wrong with them. B., 20 years old, Sarajevo

Only a couple of friends know about me. Nobody in school or my family knows. I had a physical confrontation with other students several times in school since my best friend is gay and you can really see it on him. It first started with comments "you hang out with a fag, you are this, you are that." Not a day goes by that someone doesn't hit him in the corridors. The teachers also provoke him. For example, he goes to clean the board and the teachers make faces behind his back! In the beginning, I was more absent than present in school. I get up in the morning and start making excuses just so that I don't have to be there. Now it's a little bit easier. S. 17 years old, Sarajevo

I was sitting in the schoolyard during break and that guy just came up to me, I didn't even see him well and he slapped me. I reported him to the administration but he was not punished. I was told that "we are not France". They told me I had to be more socially active, to say hi to him and that he would then apologise to me. After that, I do not speak with anyone in school and nobody wants to speak to me. As if I were in a zoo, I come to school, I go to classes, I go home, I study. I cannot speak intimately to anyone. K., 17 years old, Sarajevo

These are just some experiences of high school students in BiH who identify as LGBTI persons with respect to everyday violence that they experience in school. What is especially worrying is that there is a lack of support within the education system to face such situations - violence is rather justified because of their "nonconformity" and non-integration into heteronormative understanding of "male" and "female."

Unfortunately, there are still no official data on peer violence in BiH schools which would paint a clearer picture on this issue. Certain studies indicate a correlation between war and post-war traumas and violence in schools (2008; 2013).¹ According to these findings, every sixth student experiences violence from their peers, while 7% of children continuously inflict violence over other children. A survey conducted by a citizen's association "Kap" in 2016 indicates that 43% of students in BiH suffer peer violence. However, most of them keep quiet about it as they do not believe that there are mechanisms in schools that could protect them but also because of a prevailing opinion that peer violence is simply a "part of growing up".²

Additional problem is also posed by the new forms in which peer violence appears, notably over Internet or social networks. Opening fake profiles, making threats through comments, recording physical violence or verbal abuse and posting them online - these are all situations from which the young people cannot protect themselves and for which the institutions (schools, relevant services) have no adequate responses.³

There is no systematic response to this problem nor continuous public awareness work on the events occurring at schools and the consequences of such violence. Actually, peer violence becomes evident once it is too late to do anything about it - after a tragedy such as the murder of Denis Mrnjavac (2008) or suicide of Mahir Rakovac (2015). The current initiatives mostly come from the NGO sector and they mostly relate to deterrent work in schools. There are still no mechanisms of protection that the students facing violence can rely on. *Guidelines on the response system in cases of violence against children in BiH*⁴ have been adopted in 2013 and generally treat all forms of violence against children, not only peer violence. There are no precise data whether and how these guidelines are applied in practice. It is important to underline that a Children's Council has been in effect since 2002 as an inter-sectoral body. A *2015-2018 Action Plan for Children in Bosnia and Herzegovina* has also been adopted but peer violence in schools is not listed as a specific problem and there are no clear mechanisms of protection and prevention.⁵

1 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23697244> i <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18717000>

2 This data were presented to the media on the occasion of marking the international Pink Shirt Day, the international day against bullying in schools. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/dan-ruz-ic-astih-majica-u-bih-prvi-put-obiljezavanje-medjunarodnog-dana-prevencije-vrsnjackog-nasilja/160220041>. However, the final results of research have not been published yet nor are there other relevant research that give specific data on this issue in BiH schools.

3 An organisation that has actively dealt with this issue as well as with educating young people, notably girls, on Internet safety is One World SEE. For more on the organisation, visit: <http://oneworldsee.org/>

4 Document available on the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3TfIASAFJI&index=7&list=RDEMOW_A8Wl6XaEDCFiENmjL-A

5 Action Plan available on the following link: https://www.unicef.org/bih/ba/akcijski_plan_za_djecu-HR-web.pdf

VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTI STUDENTS IN BIH HIGH SCHOOLS

Absence of systemised data on the intensity of peer violence

Considering the general absence of data with respect to peer violence in schools, the issue of violence against LGBTI student becomes even more complex. In a research conducted in 2005 by an Association Q on a sample of 210 LGBTIQ people, 17.1% respondents indicated schools as places where they experienced discrimination on the grounds of their sexual orientation as well as gender identity: harassment, verbal abuse, mockery, lower grades...etc.⁶ A similar research conducted in 2013 once again indicated that education is the field where most LGBTI persons experience discrimination (62.6% respondents)⁷, while the results of the same research published in 2017 are unfortunately bleak. As much as 41.2% of LGBTI respondents experienced discrimination in school while 19.1% of the respondents experience violence at university. Most of these cases of discrimination were not reported to the relevant institutions.⁸

Data from other countries indicate that there is lack of intervention from the teaching staff in such cases of violence; that the students do not have an opportunity to talk about topics and issues of relevance for the LGBTI population. Furthermore, another vulnerable group are transgender children whose gender expression does not fit into the heteronormative frames of "real boys" and "real girls." As many as 84% of children self-inflicted injuries while 45% of them attempted suicide.⁹ ILGA Europe, an umbrella LGBTI organisation, initiated a dialogue in 2006 on the issue of violence against LGBTI students in schools which they defined as one of the main reasons of social exclusion of LGBTI persons in a society. A research conducted at the time in 37 countries of the EU showed that 61.2% of the respondents experienced some form of discrimination in school.¹⁰ Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights proposed a set of recommendations that should improve the position of LGBTI persons in the education system including making changes to textbooks with discriminatory content towards the LGBTI population; raising awareness among the staff in the education system; preventing violence against LGBTI students.¹¹ Despite being mandatory for BiH, these recommendations have not been implemented yet.

6 Reference: Ivana Dračo, Mladen Lakić, Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović (2013). *Prava LGBT osoba u Bosni i Hercegovini: Obrazovanje*. Sarajevo: Fondacija Heinrich Boell – Ured za BiH/Fondacija CURE/Sarajevski otvoreni centar. p. 5.

7 Jasmina Čaušević (2013). *Brojevi koji ravnopravnost znače. Analiza rezultata istraživanja potreba LGBT osoba u Bosni i Hercegovini*. Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar. p. 48. Available at: http://soc.ba/site/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Analiza-istrazivanja-bhs_web-verzija.pdf

8 Amar Numanović (2017). *Brojevi koji ravnopravnost znače 2. Analiza rezultata istraživanja problema i potreba LGBTI osoba u Bosni i Hercegovini u 2017. godini*. Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar. p. 29. Available at: http://soc.ba/site/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Brojevi-ravnopravnost_04.10.2017.-WEB-11.pdf

9 <http://skolegijum.ba/tekst/index/1351>

10 European Parliament puts homophobic bullying on its agenda. Published on 15 September 2006. Available at: <https://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/news/latest-news/european-parliament-puts-homophobic-bullying-its-agenda>

11 Damir Banović (2013). *Izveštaj o homofobiji, bifobiji i transfobiji u školama u BiH*. Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar. Available at: <http://soc.ba/izvjestaj-o-homofobiji-bifobiji-i-transfobiji-u-skolama-u-bih/>

Sarajevo Open Centre has been documenting cases of violence against LGBTI persons in BiH since 2002. A very disturbing tendency has been recorded since the beginning of 2017 in the form of rising trends of domestic violence, homophobia and transphobia and peer violence in education institutions. The homophobia and transphobia trend in the education institutions and the inadequate response by the Ministry of Education and the relevant institutions to homophobic and transphobic peer violence has unfortunately continued from the previous two years. Homophobic and transphobic peer violence is a continuous problem in 7 out of 18 recorded cases in 2017. Some of these cases were reported to the relevant Ministries of Interior and social welfare centres and although these institutions reacted in cooperation with the schools to stop the specific cases of peer violence, there is still a clear absence of a concrete institutional plan to eliminate peer violence and develop inclusive and tolerant education environment that would also include the LGBTI perspective. However, the undertaken measures were untimely and did not respond to the intensity of the violence but were mostly focused on “reconciliation” between the victim and the bully without specific consequences for the perpetrator.

Right to quality education – homophobia and transphobia in textbooks

Nongovernmental organisations that work in BiH on promotion and protection of rights have been active in the field of education for years. As far as the right to education of LGBTI persons is concerned, this is perceived through several dimensions.¹²

The right to education of LGBTI persons without discrimination and deprivation of opportunities for education and professional development is guaranteed by BiH laws on education and prevention of discrimination. The BiH legislation that governs the right to education is: Constitution of BiH, constitutions of the Entities and Cantons, the Statute of Brčko District of BiH, relevant regulations at the level of the Republika Srpska, ten Cantons in the Federation of BiH and Brčko District of BiH, as well as the Framework Law on Elementary and Secondary Education in BiH.¹³ Furthermore, the Anti-Discrimination Law adopted in 2009 and amended in 2016 underlines the prohibition of discrimination in the field of education (Article 6) while sex characteristics, gender identity and sexual orientation are specifically listed as prohibited grounds for discrimination (Article 2).¹⁴

Another area which needs further work in order for LGBTI persons to exercise their right to education is to eliminate homophobia, biphobia and

¹² Damir Banović (2013). *Izveštaj o homofobiji, bifobiji i transfobiji u školama u BiH*. Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar. Available at: <http://soc.ba/izvestaj-o-homofobiji-bifobiji-i-transfobiji-u-skolama-u-bih/> Str. 22

¹³ Ibid. 21

¹⁴ Text available on the following website: <http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/LjudskaPrava/ZakonOZabraniDiskriminacijaNacrt.pdf>

transphobia from the curricula and to address LGBTI related topics in a professional and pedagogical manner.

The first research that analysed representation of sexuality or topics related to the LGBTI community in secondary school textbooks was conducted in 2010 by Association Q.¹⁵ The analysis of 62 textbooks of biology, psychology, sociology, religious studies and all three curricula indicated that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are in fact “cemented” in the education system. In addition to LGBTI topics, the analysis also showed that gender inequality and a very patriarchal presentation of male and female gender roles are also evident in textbooks. One of the examples specified in the analysis was the following:

“It must be said that there are certain deviant characteristics that slightly depart from normal behaviour and are labelled as deviant. Examples of such characteristics are inclinations towards crime or suicide, drug or alcohol abuse, homosexuality...” (Biology for Grades 1 and 2 of Secondary School, Dragoslav Marinković, Katica Paunović and Veljko Terzija, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva; Srpsko Sarajevo, 2002).

Six years later, another analysis was published relating to the textbooks of biology, sociology, psychology, clinical psychology and pedagogy, religious studies, gynaecology and democracy and human rights for secondary schools in Canton Sarajevo.¹⁶ This analysis also showed that topics related to sexual orientation, gender identity, LGBTI rights were presented in a discriminatory fashion or have not been sufficiently covered.

*“In most of the content, these topics are viewed through the biological prism of gender while homosexuality is mostly interpreted as a deflection from heterosexuality, very often as a deviation, perversion and an aberration. There is very little or no talk about the rights and prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. The terminology used in the textbooks is non-uniform, often outdated and incorrect and does not follow the global trends of respecting the rights of the LGBTI community. Only in rare, isolated cases distinction is made between sex and gender while men and women are generally presented through gender roles and binary oppositions. Another problem is keeping silent about these issues in places where they are almost implicit.”*¹⁷

Analysis of elementary school textbooks conducted in 2017¹⁸ also indicated that there was insufficient and inadequate presentation of topics relating to sexuality. In fact, this analysis confirmed that education is primarily used for consolidation of ethnic and nationalistic policies. *“In view of this, it would be illusive to expect that this narrative on sexuality in*

15 Svetlana Đurković (2010). 1+1=0: *Analiza srednjoškolskih udžbenika o LGBTIQ pojmovima*. Sarajevo, Udruženje Q.

16 Lamija Begagić (2016). O čemu šutimo kada šutimo o pravima LGBT osoba u udžbenicima. Fondacija Cure. Available at: <http://fondacijacure.org/files/Publikacija%20O%20cemu%20sutimo%20LGBTI.pdf>

17 Ibid, 27.

18 Fatima Bilčević, Jasmina Čaušević (2017). *LGBTI teme u osnovnim školama? Analiza postojećeg sadržaja i prijedlozi za uvrštavanja tema o različitim rodnim i spolnim identitetima i seksualnoj orijentaciji u udžbenicima za osnovne škole Kantona Sarajevo*. Available at: <http://fondacijacure.org/files/ANALIZA%20LGBTI%20teme%20u%20udžbenicima%20za%20osnovne%20skole.pdf>

general and subsequently sex and gender identities and their different manifestations would take any, let alone satisfactory place in textbooks even within the subjects and teaching units where it would be considered necessary.”¹⁹ Almost a single positive change that occurred from 2010 to today is the development of an elective subject in schools called Healthy Lifestyles that is taught in 40 elementary schools in Canton Sarajevo.²⁰

Education and awareness raising of teaching staff – necessary step to combat violence

Finally, prevention of physical and verbal violence against LGBTI persons by other students in the educational process is perhaps the most important segment on which the least work has been done.

The protection of the LGBTI community from violence has improved in the legislative sense when the Law on the Amendments to the Law Criminal Code of FBiH was adopted in 2016 that regulates, among others, hate crimes committed on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. We have already mentioned amendments made to the Anti-Discrimination Law adopted in 2016 whereby gender identity, sex characteristics and sexual orientation are specifically indicated as prohibited grounds for discrimination.²¹ However, fear from violence and discrimination are still widely present among the LGBTI population. As indicated in the research of the problems and needs of the LGBTI persons in BiH:

“A particularly worrying fact is that sexual harassment was experienced by 27.5% of the people who were victims to discrimination and that this is the second form of discrimination in the overall share. The respondents most often experienced discrimination in education institutions - 41.2% in school, 19.1% at university - while the rest of them experienced it in restaurants/cafés and shops (34.6% of respondents).”²²

When it comes to violence in schools, a particularly disturbing fact is that very often - according to experiences of our respondents from secondary schools - it was the teachers who would inflict violence, notably verbal violence against LGBTI students. The following is an example of such a situation:

“A couple of teachers are very conservative and religious and they propagated that to students. One day I came to our practical lessons in a T-shirt with LGBTI symbols. And then the teacher started preaching that this was immoral, abnormal and he began telling the story about Lot’s

19 Ibid. p. 6

20 Ibid. p.11. The subject and the textbook (*Zdravi životni stilovi - vodič za učenike, knjiga za peti, šesti, sedmi, osmi i deveti razred osnovne škole*, Lamija Husić ... [et al.]. Sarajevo: Asocijacija XY, 2013.) have been developed thanks to the nongovernmental organisation Association XY which has been working for years on sexual and reproductive health of young people in BiH.

21 Amar Numanović (2017). *Brojevi koji ravnopravnost znače 2. Analiza rezultata istraživanja problema i potreba LGBTI osoba u Bosni i Hercegovini u 2017. godini*. Sarajevski otvoreni centar. Available at: <http://soc.ba/brojevi-koji-ravnopravnost-znače-2-analiza-rezultata-istraživanja-problema-i-potreba-lgbti-osoba-u-bosni-i-hercegovini-u-2017-godini/> p. 3, 6

22 Ibid, p. 29.

tribe, how they were punished by God and he pointed at me while the others laughed. You literally keep quiet and endure because you know what would happen if you came out to everyone."

"My sociology teacher who is very religious and constantly insists on religion and God, called me a terrorist because "people like me" threaten mankind."

Poor awareness among the teaching staff and the tendency to propagate their private views and opinions onto the students is one of the biggest problems when it comes to violence against LGBTI children in schools. This was also indicated by an analysis *The Rights of LGBTI people in BiH: Education* (2013). Most of the teachers usually assume that there is no "such a thing" among their students. Moreover, it is a prevailing opinion that this is a "private issue" that should be kept behind closed doors.

*"My personal view is - let everyone do what they want behind their own closed doors. The same way that I think that it is rude for a boy and girl to make out in the middle of the street or to do those things on a public square, it is just as rude when those things are done by two gay or lesbian people."*²³ In addition to homo-bi-transphobia that the school administration openly presents towards students, they also rarely react adequately once violence occurs and is reported. Our respondents note that most of the efforts are focused on "settling of the situation" and that the bullies/perpetrators are not punished. As noted in the analysis *"the school psychologist and administration are given the space to cover up the real causes. Open homophobia, lack of public condemnation of homophobia and the opinion that homosexuality is a private issue contributes to discriminatory environment."*²⁴

If we add to this a very high level of homophobia among secondary school students, it seems that it is impossible for the LGBTI students to break away from violence. Of the 439 surveyed secondary school students, 19.58% deem that verbal violence against persons of homosexual orientation is justified; 18.9% deem that physical violence against LGBTI persons is justified while 18.9% do not have any opinion.²⁵

Awareness raising trainings for the teaching staff are organised and held by the civil society organisations often without any official support from the relevant education authorities.

Heinrich Boell Foundation together with their partner organisations Sarajevo Open Centre and CURE Foundation held a training in 2013 for the teaching and administrative staff in secondary schools which was attended by 19 school counsellors, psychologists, class teachers and students of pedagogy and psychology from Olovo, Zenica, Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihać, Visoko, Odžak, Kakanj, Zavidovići and Novi Travnik. Although

23 Ivana Dračo, Mladen Lakić, Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović (2013). *Prava LGBT osoba u Bosni i Hercegovini: Obrazovanje*. Sarajevo: Fondacija Heinrich Boell – Ured za BiH/Fondacija CURE/Sarajevski otvoreni centar. p. 2-3

24 Ibid 28.

25 Ibid. 30.

support for the training was sought from the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Canton Sarajevo, the Ministry did not provide its support, and the event was held only for the teaching staff that responded on voluntary basis to an open invitation issued by these organisations.²⁶

Only in 2014, the Heinrich Boell Foundation together with its partner organisations Sarajevo Open Centre and CURE Foundation organised a training in Bihać with the support of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Una-Sana Canton. The training was attended by 14 school counsellors, psychologists and secondary school teachers from Bosanka Krupa, Cazin, Velika Kladuša, Bužim, Bihać and Sanski Most as well as Ministry representatives. In the beginning of the training, expert associate from the Ministry Adnan Kreso stated that *there were a number of cases where LGBTI students had asked for help and this indicates to the need for all teaching staff and not only 14 of them to be present there so that they can hear how they should act and help LGBT students. The student's sexual orientation can in no case be the reason for the school employees not to react adequately or to create negative relations with these students.*²⁷ A number of negative reactions were published in online media and social network Facebook prior to the training. The organisations reported this directly to the Ministry. Once it was established that the negative reactions and comments were initiated from certain schools, the Minister of education, science, culture and sport of Una-Sana Canton Dario Jurić issued an announcement to all primary and secondary schools which read: *Following up on the informally expressed reactions to the announced educational event for certain teaching staff members which were conveyed through social media as means of electronic public communication where each individual takes responsibility for his/her own words, we draw attention to the school personnel that the stated hate speech relating to basic human and children's rights represents harsh violation of the legal provisions stipulated under the Anti-Discrimination Law and the provisions of legislation on education such as Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Law on Elementary and Secondary Education and Articles 4 and 64 of the Law on Higher Education. Inciting violence or failing to prevent violence motivated by prejudice is an inadmissible act for any education institution and staff.*²⁸

However, such trainings are not very frequent and they depend on the work and funding of civil society organisations and are not a regular practice in education institutions in BiH. Since 2014, not a single training on awareness raising was held in cooperation between the civil society organisations working on human rights of LGBTI population and the ministries of education in BiH.

26 <http://lgbti.ba/adnan-kreso-postojeci-slucajevi-u-skolama-ukazuju-na-potrebu-za-edukacijom/>

27 http://soc.ba/konkretni-koraci-u-radu-nastavnog-i-strucnog-osoblja-sa-lgbt-ucenicima_cama-u-srednjim-skolama/

28 <http://lgbt.ba/ministarstvo-obrazovanja-usk-uputilo-odgovor-povodom-negativnih-reakcija-na-odrzavanje-edukacije-strucnog-osoblja-srednjih-skola/>

Effects of peer violence on LGBTI students

One of the possible definitions of peer violence is that it represents each “conscious (deliberate) violent and non-justifiable act by a child or group of children intended against another child with the aim of inflicting physical or psychological pain.” What is important in peer violence is that this is a repeated act which gives the perpetrator a “sense of satisfaction” while the victim feels oppressed.²⁹

Children victims of peer violence often suffer from anxiety, fear, depression and have low self-esteem. Some typical patterns of behaviour include school dodging, withdrawal, avoiding communication with parents and the environment, poor concentration. Inflicting self-injuries or aggressive behaviour towards others cannot be excluded as well.³⁰

The violence against the LGBTI students by their peers and teachers additionally aggravates the already difficult process of accepting themselves and their sexuality. One of the respondents who had graduated from school last year, notes his experience:

“I was the worst in class, I failed my first year and I changed the programme and in the end I became a part-time student. I felt as if I was going to prison each day, I did not have anyone to talk to normally. I graduated with excellent grades as a part-time student.”

Other respondents have a slightly different experience but it also indicates that the violence that they experienced has had an effect on their attitude towards school.

“Once they began calling out to me that I am not a worthy human being, I told myself “well, we’ll see about that.” I immediately started taking an active part in organisations, extra-curriculum activities. A feeling of spite woke up in me and I wanted to tell them, “look, a sick, decadent, psychopath is better than you. What are you going to do about it?”

“I was an average student in primary school and I wasn’t very interested in studying. But when I came to secondary school and went through everything that I had experienced, I began to study and I am almost the best student. It impacted my success in the way that I wanted to show them that I am much better than them, to prove to some of them that what they are doing to me is not bothering me at all. That’s it.”

Recommendations and guidelines for further actions

Asked what they think should be done to protect LGBTI children from peer violence in school, none of the respondents mentioned “hiding the identity,” silence or similar. To the contrary, they deem that more should be done on increasing the visibility of the LGBTI community and creating peer support groups.

²⁹ Ivana Zečević (2010). *Priručnik: Program prevencije vršnjačkog nasilja u školama*. Zdravo da ste, Banjaluka. Available at: <http://www.zastitimodjecuodnasilja.org/latn/?page=25&kat=2&vijest=27> p. 4.

³⁰ Ibid.

“Teachers should educate themselves because they often present homophobic views although they have LGBTI students. The students’ visibility must be higher and the school must be a safe environment. I painted rainbow colours in the whole school and I had the support of the school administration to create a project against discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation. In those couple of weeks, I felt safe because I knew that there were people who supported us and who would stand behind us.”

“I think we should put up posters so that teachers are careful about what they say. There are a lot of LGBTI children and they cannot stand it so they drop out and start doing stupid things because they think they are alone, but they are not. It is important that we initiate something visible so that everyone can see that there are more of us than they think.”

However, the first step should be mapping of peer violence against LGBTI students in schools so that the data and their experience can be used to define specific needs and activities to be undertaken to reduce peer violence against LGBTI students in schools.

Until then, it is necessary to insist on the implementation of recommendations defined in 2013 which represent **key steps to creating a safe environment for everyone in schools and not an everyday inferno for those who are “different”**.

These recommendations include:³¹

- Include sexual orientation, sex characteristics, gender expression and identity as prohibited grounds for discrimination in education legislation at all levels in BiH;
- Remove discriminatory, stereotypical data on LGBTI persons from the textbooks. Furthermore, improve education of youth on sexuality outside the hetero-normative understanding of gender roles.
- Raise awareness among teaching staff and counselling/psychology services in schools on this issue in cooperation with civil society organisations working with LGBTI persons. Provide additional reading materials.
- Increase visibility of NGOs working with the LGBTI community and enhance cooperation with the ministries and other relevant institutions in the education system.
- Develop support programmes for LGBTI students facing violence or those who have already experienced violence.
- Include topics related to LGBTI persons in courses such as literature, psychology, sociology, biology, philosophy, ethics, democracy and human rights.

³¹ Ivana Dračo, Mladen Lakić, Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović (2013). *Prava LGBT osoba u Bosni i Hercegovini: Obrazovanje*. Sarajevo: Fondacija Heinrich Boell – Ured za BiH/Fondacija CURE/Sarajevski otvoreni centar. p. 34.

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ABOUT SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE

Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC) advocates full respect of human rights and social inclusion of LGBTI persons and women. Sarajevo Open Centre is an independent, feminist civil society organisation which strives to empower LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and intersex) persons and women by strengthening the community and building the activist movement. SOC also promotes human rights of LGBTI persons and women and it advocates the improvement of public policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the State, European and international levels.

Here, we will only mention some of the achievements made in terms of equality of LGBTI people. In addition to psychosocial and legal counselling we also continued running the only LGBTI media outlet in the state – a web portal www.lgbt.ba. We organised trainings for the police, the prosecutor's offices and the courts and we worked intensely with journalists and young lawyers, as well as other future professionals. Over the recent years, several of our legislative and policy initiatives have been submitted to governmental or parliamentary procedures. We also started working with the local level institutions – the level most important for LGBTI persons. Our advocacy focuses on anti-discrimination regulation, as well as regulations relevant for the protection of LGBTI person from violence. We intend to continue working on matters important for trans* people, same-sex partnerships, social inclusion, but also the position of LGBTI persons in education, health, labour and employment. Over the recent years, we had media campaigns that have reached over a million of BiH citizens and we organised the LGBTI film festival Merlinka.

You can find out more about our work at www.soc.ba.

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