Minimum standards to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying

IGLYO

The Minimum Standards are the combined result of IGLYO's Working Group on Education and the conference *Stop H8: Tackling Bullying in Europe,* which took place is Oslo, Norway in June 2013.

Introduction

IGLYO - the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Queer Youth and Student Organisation - actively opposes any form of discrimination that is based on real or perceived differences. This document addresses a particularly troubling form of discrimination: homophobic and transphobic bullying in formal education settings[1].

Below, you will find IGLYO's Minimum Standards to Combat Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying, along with a brief explanation of each standard. Following the standards are principles that characterise the overall context of an inclusive education environment. Indicators are then provided to give an idea of how the standards can be measured in local, national, and international contexts. This document ends with a section on IGLYO's history in the field of education and LGBTQ youth activism.

This document is primarily aimed at educational institutions and authorities, including schools and ministries of education. Other stakeholders include youth and student organisations, LGBTQ-focused NGOs, and other advocacy groups.

Minimum Standards

As the title of this document indicates, the standards listed herein should be used as a benchmark of the minimum requirements to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying. They should be used in parallel with the IGLYO Guidelines for an LGBTQ-Inclusive Education[2], which provide further information and guidance on creating a safe and inclusive learning environment, as well as the IGLYO Position Paper on Education[3], which outlines key issues and offers concrete recommendations.

1. While IGLYO opposed all forms of discrimination and harassment based on real or perceived differences, this paper refers to homophobia and transphobia as the predominant forms of discrimination affecting the LGBTQ community.
2. IGLYO, 2007. Guidelines for an LGBTQ-Inclusive Education. http://www.iglyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/IGLYO_Guidelines.pdf
3. IGLYO, 2012. Position Paper on Education. General Assembly 2012. http://www.iglyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/GA2012-19-Position-Paper-on-Education-updated.pdf

Educational institutions must mandate diversity and/or anti-bullying policies or strategies that explicitly include sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression; all staff including teachers and administrators must receive training in order to have the competence to discuss topics and issues relating to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Educational institutions must introduce diversity and anti-bullying policies that explicitly reference sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, while communicating such policies and their importance.

Efforts to implement strategies should include students, staff and parents. In order to be able to identify and tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying, all staff members must be provided with diversity training that includes issues relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Homophobic and transphobic remarks or conduct must always be challenged, whether inside or outside the classroom or lecture theatre. Furthermore, staff must not support or perpetuate passive educational environments by blaming exposed persons when they are bullied.

The Global Alliance for LGBT Education's Toolkit Working Schools 1.0[4] is a useful resource for school-level initiatives and stakeholder engagement.

4. Dankmeijer, Peter, 2011. GALE The Global Alliance for LGBT Education. GALE Toolkit Working with Schools 1.0: Tools for school consultants, principals, teachers, students and parents to integrate adequate attention of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender topics in curricula and school policies. http://www.lgbt-education.info/doc/gale_products/GALE%20Toolkit%20Schools%201.0_EN%20%282011%29.pdf

All students and particularly those exposed to homophobic or transphobic bullying must have access to sufficient support services.

Effective and reliable support systems must be in place for students exposed to or affected by bullying. Students must be provided with information of where they can seek help; support must be easily accessible and tailored to the needs of each individual. Unless the learner wishes otherwise or a legal obligation exists, confidentiality must always be guaranteed.

In addition to the support provided by educational institutions, learners should be signposted to relevant organisations, such as LGBTQ youth groups. Conflict resolution and intervention programmes aimed at eradicating tensions between learners should be implemented, with the well being of the bullied person given priority.
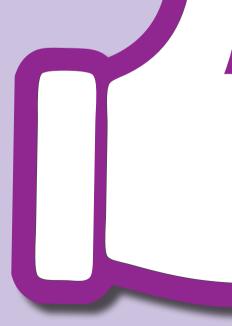
Statistical data on homophobic and transphobic bullying in educational institutions must be collected systematically with the aim of identifying and monitoring the nature, extent and impact of bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Data on homophobic and transphobic bullying can provide a useful basis for the formulation of policies, strategies, training, support and interventions required to address the phenomenon. Data collection must be performed systematically in order to monitor progress.

Research should seek to identify what forms of bullying are most prevalent; these may include negative comments or conduct, verbal or physical harassment as well as cyber-bullying. Common themes regarding possible impacts emerging from research on homophobic and transphobic bullying across various countries include feelings of insecurity at school, reduced attendance and educational attainment, change of future plans for education, as well as repercussions on mental health and wellbeing, including suicidal thoughts and tendencies[5].

Responses to bullying must therefore address each of these issues, as well as any other issues that emerge from research.

5. IGLYO on Bullying, Issue 22, Summer 2013. http://issuu.com/iglyo/docs/iglyo_on_bullying

Anti-bullying policies and strategies that are inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression must be pursued by all relevant stakeholders locally, as well as regionally, nationally and internationally.

At the local level, as mentioned in Standard 1, educational institutions must introduce diversity and anti-bullying policies and develop comprehensive implementation strategies that explicitly recognise and address bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Ministries of education and other relevant educational authorities must take the necessary initiatives and/or create the appropriate regional and national frameworks requiring educational institutions to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying. Additionally, support and guidance should be available to educational institutions in their efforts to combat bullying. Countries' fulfillment of minimum obligations for ensuring the right to education for all learners, as agreed at international level, should be monitored regularly. Student and youth organisations, NGOs, as well as LGBTQ organisations should be actively involved at all levels. More specifically, detailed multilevel recommendations can be found in IGLYO's Position Paper on Education.

Principles

The principles described below serve as a starting point for the Minimum Standards. They emerged from the *Stop H8* conference[6]; they do not solely concern the application of the Minimum Standards, but they apply across activism in the education sector more generally. As such, the principles set the framework in which the Minimum Standards should be considered and applied.

A comprehensive understanding and definition of bullying

While there several definitions of bullying are used internationally, there is no one singly accepted definition. Participants at the IGLYO *Stop H8* conference brainstormed their own definitions, which coincide to a large extent with UNESCO's definition of bullying:

"A learner is bullied when [that learner] is exposed repeatedly over time to aggressive behaviour that intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort through physical contact, verbal attacks, fighting or psychological manipulation. Bullying involves an imbalance of power and can include teasing, taunting, use of hurtful nicknames, physical violence or social exclusion. A bully can operate alone or within a group of peers." [7]

In addition to the above definition, participants also mentioned that bullying often targets real or perceived differences and involves unwanted interactions between people, instigated by bullies, who lack empathy and evoke vulnerability. The definitions often referred to a power dynamic that could not be changed by the bullied student. Importantly, participants challenged the use of the word 'victim' due to its passive connotation, and they preferred to use the terms 'bullied person' or 'exposed person'.

6. See Section 5 (Background) for information on the 'Stop H8' conference

7. www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/health-education/homophobic-bullying/bullying/ (Accessed 2 October 2013)

Education: a universal human right

Education and learning environments should be accessible, safe and inclusive for all learners, who have the right to respect within the learning environment. The duty of states to ensure the right to education for all learners is not a new concept; it has been agreed internationally through legally binding documents, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,[8] the Convention on the Rights of the Child[9] and the European Convention of Human Rights.[10]

The human rights-based approach to education fosters inclusion, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, and has three dimensions, as described by UNESCO;[11] firstly, the right of access to education for all on the basis of equality of opportunity and without discrimination on any grounds. Secondly, the right to quality education for every learner to fulfill their full potential, realise opportunities for employment and develop life skills on the basis of a broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum and learner-friendly, safe and healthy environments. Finally, the right to respect within the learning environment entails equal respect for every learner, including respect for identity, integrity and participation rights, and freedom from all forms of violence.

Visibility and awareness: mainstreaming sexual orientation and gender identity issues

LGBTQ people exist in all countries and societies. As a first step towards equality, recognition and celebration of diversity is fundamental in raising the visibility of the LGBTQ community as well as awareness of the systematic discrimination faced by people who belong or are perceived to belong to this community. At a societal level, positive exposure through media, key public figures and institutions as well as pop culture plays a central role in facilitating dialogue across diverse societal groups and stakeholders. In an educational context, mainstreaming includes an unbiased approach towards sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression avoiding heteronormative[12] language and attitudes, as well as acknowledgement of important LGBTQ literary, scientific, historical and other figures with open reference to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression through inclusive course curricula, thus promoting positive role models.

Direct youth participation in all processes

The learning experience is unique; active student participation is paramount for ensuring an informed, inclusive stakeholder approach to tackling bullying. Student involvement in the implementation of the Minimum Standards in educational institutions ensures that students have ownership of the context-specific application of the Standards. Additionally, LGBTQ civil society organisations, particularly those working with youth, often posses expertise in anti-bullying initiatives and interventions, and can be significant and specialised partners in combating bullying.

8. United Nations, 1966. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx

9. United Nations,1989. Convention on the Rights of the Child. www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

10. Council of Europe, 1952. European Convention on Human Rights. www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf

11. UNESCO, 2012. Good Policy and Practice in HIV and Health Education Booklet 8, Education Sector Responses to Homophobic Bullying. www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002164/216493e.pdf

12. Heteronormativity: Reference to cultural and social practices where men and women are being led into believing and behaving as if heterosexuality were the only conceivable sexuality. It also implies the positioning of heterosexuality as the only way of being 'normal' and as the key source of social reward. www.ilga-europe.org/home/publications/glossary

Potential Indicators

The table below provides a list of potential indicators that can be used to measure the extent to which the Minimum Standards have been successfully applied.

The level at which it may be most appropriate to use the indicators, based on the Standard they are intended to measure, is also provided (local level denotes school level). The indicators provided are not exhaustive but may prove to be a helpful starting point.

Potential indicators to measure the extent of implementation and success of the Minimum Standards at various levels.

Minimum Standard	Potential Indicator	Level
Policies and training	A diversity/anti-bullying policy or strategy that explicitly includes sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression is in place	*Local*
	Increase in number of school staff (including teachers and administrators) that receive diversity training that covers sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression	
	Increase in number of school staff that feel comfortable and competent to discuss sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression	
	Decrease in number of students that feel discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression by a member of staff	
Student support systems	Presence of staff specialised in supporting those exposed to homophobic/transphobic bullying (guidance counselors, etc.)	*Local; national*
	Increase in number of students that feel comfortable discussing homophobic/transphobic bullying incidents with members of staff	
	Increase in number of students that are aware of support systems if they are exposed to homophobic/transphobic bullying	
	Increase in number of students that feel confident that incidents of homophobic/transphobic bullying will be handled appropriately by members of staff	
Systematic data collection	Data on homophobic/transphobic bullying is collected	*National*
	Data collection occurs at appropriate intervals	
	Decreasing trend in homophobic and transphobic bullying over time (percentage of students that report having been bullied)	
	Increase in student attendance and school retention rates	
	Academic performance of students	
	Mental health and suicide rates of LGBTQ youth	
Multilevel policies and approach	A framework for addressing homophobic/transphobic bullying at regional/national level exists	*Regional; national; international*
	Increase in number of schools that have a diversity/anti-bullying policy or strategy that explicitly includes sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression	
	Increase in number and extent/reach of initiatives to tackle homophobic/transphobic bullying at national level	
	Adherence to internationally-binding agreements to education as a human right for all	

Background

IGLYO has its beginnings in 1984, when the first International Gay Youth Congress and Festival met in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

IGLYO was officially incorporated several years later, and currently has a staffed Secretariat in Brussels, Belgium.

IGLYO is run by an Executive Board that is mandated by the General Assembly of Member Organisations.

IGLYO's vision is a world where we, young people in all our diversity, are able to express and define our own sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions without discrimination, violence or hatred. We work for a world where we can participate without limitation in our lives and communities, so we can rise to our full potential, enjoying respect, celebration and positive recognition.

IGLYO achieves this vision through programmatic and policy work, including running thematic and capacity building conferences while also lobbying relevant European decision makers. The Minimum Standards to Combat Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying are a result of IGLYO's *Stop H8: Tackling Bullying in Europe* conference held from 18-23 June 2013 in Oslo, Norway. The event brought together lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) youth and student activists from across Europe to learn and exchange knowledge and experiences in a non-formal education setting, and ultimately, to formulate a list of minimum standards for tackling bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression.[13]

The *Stop H8* conference and the resulting Minimum Standards are part of IGLYO's 2013 thematic focus on bullying, and fit within our larger focus area on education. The Minimum Standards are set to be launched at an event at the European Parliament in January 2014, in partnership with the European Parliament's Intergroup on LGBT Rights and Intergroup on Youth.

---

13 Homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and queerphobia are all forms of discrimination and bullying that is based on sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression.

IGLYO

IGLYO
Belgium
www.iglyo.com

Design: www.haiwyre.com