

Submission for thematic report: Gender theory, sexual orientation and gender identity



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CHOICE FOR
YOUTH &
SEXUALITY

Table of Contents

Section 1: Gender Opposition

1. Strategies, Tactics and Rhetoric of Anti-Gender Actors and Movements

- 1.1 Combined Strategies, Actors and Policy Adoption*
- 1.2 Critiques of International Ideological Conspiracy*
- 1.3 Nationalistic Defense against Intersectional Diversity*
- 1.4 Pathologizing Non-Heterosexuality and Inciting Parental Panic*
- 1.5 Media Campaigning, Interdisciplinary Coalition Building and Funding*

2. Impacts on the LGBT+ Community and LGBT+ Youth

- 2.1 General Effects on LGBT+ Communities*
- 2.2 Forms and Sites of Discrimination and Violence against LGBT+ Youth*
- 2.3 Life-course Impacts for LGBT+ Youth*
- 2.4 Loss of Civic Space and Participation for LGBT+ Youth*

3. Actions Needed to Counter Anti-Gender Impacts on LGBT+ Youth

- 3.1 Meaningful LGBT+ Youth Participation*
- 3.2 Specific Funding for LGBT+ Youth Organizing and Rights Defense*
- 3.3 Intersectional and Institutional Approach to Discrimination and Violence against LGBT+ Youth*

Section 2: Comprehensive Sexuality Education

4. Comprehensive Sexuality Education

- 4.1 What is Comprehensive Sexuality Education?*
- 4.2 Why is CSE beneficial?*
- 4.3 CSE around the world*
- 4.4 Consequences of providing restricted / uncomprehensive SE*

Section 3: Recommendations

Preface

This report sets out to contribute specific youth contributions to the discussion gender theory and SOGI report, as youth are often minimally discussed in traditional UN spaces. There is more to be done to recognize age as an intersecting form of discrimination throughout the UN Special Procedures mechanism. In 2020, 63% of Special Procedures reports mentioned youth. Only 49% of reports did so in more than one sentence. Youth face unique challenges that are therefore often overlooked or not adequately addressed in Special Procedures Reports. For over half of reports to write one sentence or less about youth rights is therefore a considerable neglect of the needs and rights of a large and often marginalized group.

We have sincerely appreciated the support from the Mandate on SOGI to identify, discuss and advance the issues of young LGBTI over the last years. The mandate's reports to the HRC and UNGA of the last two years explicitly detailed such issues, in addition to the many panels, press releases and other discussions in which Mr Madrigal-Borloz discussed youth issues. We look forward to continuing this work with you, and hope this submission will be useful for your forthcoming report.

About CHOICE

CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality (CHOICE) is a professional youth-led organization that advocates for the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of young people worldwide and for their meaningful participation in the decisions made about their lives. We strengthen the capacity of young people and youth-led organizations on SRHR, meaningful youth participation (MYP), youth leadership and advocacy skills and support them to become leaders and change-makers in their communities, and at national and international level. CHOICE strives to see a world in which all young people have the power to make decisions about their sexual, reproductive, and love-lives, and pays particular attention to those youth which face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and ableism. CHOICE works with young activists across Africa, Asia and the Americas to execute this vision.

SECTION 1: GENDER OPPOSITION

1. Strategies, Tactics and Rhetoric of Anti-Gender Actors and Movements

1.1 Combined Strategies, Actors and Policy Adoption

Anti-gender rhetoric has been adopted both strategically and opportunistically within local to global contexts to create and exploit bubbling social anxieties. Using epistemological means towards political ends, anti-gender rhetoric contributes towards intersecting goals of strengthening conservative religious influence, maintaining patriarchal power systems, and instilling anti-multiculturalism within and across nation states¹. A variety of anti-gender arguments are propelled by diverse tactics that work to destabilize populations and create deeply embodied 'us' versus 'them' polarities to further institutionalize anti-gender actors and goals.

Actors of the Global Right include but are not limited to the following: The Vatican as an epicenter and national Catholic Churches as anchors of anti-gender rhetoric, also especially within Evangelical and Pentecostal branches of the Church. This is seen in most countries with a strong anti-gender movement, but is specifically powerful within Brazil², Poland³, Russia⁴, and Colombia⁵. The utilization of transnational networks of Catholic institutions has also been documented in Germany⁶. Besides Catholicism, conservative Islamic institutions and Muslim actors are also present in the anti-gender movement, both through Western countries such as Canada and Belgium⁷ as well as through South-East Asian countries such as Indonesia⁸. The institutionalization of anti-genderists as right-wing politicians is seen in abundance globally but has shown particularly present in governmental departments, legislature, and leadership in Poland⁹ and Brazil¹⁰. Additionally, socially and politically conservative organizations such as 'pro-life' groups, think-tanks and purportedly 'independent' foundations are vital to the intellectual and financial economy of the anti-gender movement¹¹. Three major influencers of funding nationally and internationally to push anti-gender campaigning are the Heritage Foundation based in the United States¹², the Odo Iuris Institute from Poland¹³ and the Saudi Arabian charity Al Haramain¹⁴.

National anti-genderist policy adoptions have been noted in all the countries mentioned above and more. Laws and policies against 'homo propaganda' are well documented within Poland and Russia, though similar national free-speech violations on LGBT+ information and visibility has passed in Hungary, Lithuania, Moldova, and the Ukraine¹⁵. Further laws prohibiting

¹ Piotr Żuk & Paweł Żuk (2020) 'Murderers of the unborn' and 'sexual degenerates': analysis of the 'anti-gender' discourse of the Catholic Church and the nationalist right in Poland, *Critical Discourse Studies*

² Brandão, E.R. & da Silva Cabral, C. (2019) Sexual and reproductive rights under attack: the advance of political and moral conservatism in Brazil, *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters*, 27:2, 76-86

³ Korolczuk, E. (2020) The fight against 'gender' and 'LGBT ideology': new developments in Poland, *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, vol 3, no 1, 165–167

⁴ Suchland, J. (2018) The LGBT specter in Russia: refusing queerness, claiming 'Whiteness', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25:7, 1073-1088

⁵ Beltrán, W. and Creely, S., 2018. Pentecostals, Gender Ideology and the Peace Plebiscite: Colombia 2016. *Religions*, 9(12), p.418.

⁶ Rohde-Abuba, C., Vennmann, S. and Zimenkova, T., 2019. The Destruction of the Heterosexual Family? The Discourse of Opponents of the Gender Mainstreaming Educational Curriculum in Baden-Württemberg, Germany. *Sexuality & Culture*, 23(3), pp.718-736.

⁷ Hooghe, M., Claes, E., Harell, A., Quintelier, E. and Dejaeghere, Y., 2010. Anti-Gay Sentiment Among Adolescents in Belgium and Canada: A Comparative Investigation into the Role of Gender and Religion. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 57(3), pp.384-400.

⁸ Ridwan, R. and Wu, J., 2018. 'Being young and LGBT, what could be worse?' Analysis of youth LGBT activism in Indonesia: challenges and ways forward. *Gender & Development*, 26(1), pp.121-138.

⁹ Piotr Żuk & Paweł Żuk (2020)

¹⁰ Brandão, E.R. & da Silva Cabral, C. (2019)

¹¹ Global Philanthropy Project, 2018. RELIGIOUS CONSERVATISM ON THE GLOBAL STAGE: THREATS AND CHALLENGES FOR LGBTI RIGHTS. [online] Available at: <https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/2018/11/04/religious-conservatism-on-the-global-stage-threats-and-challenges-for-lgbti-rights/>

¹² Heritage Foundation (2019). Sexual Ideology Indoctrination: The Equality Act's Impact on School Curriculum and Parental Rights.

<https://www.heritage.org/civil-society/report/sexual-ideology-indoctrination-the-equality-acts-impact-school-curriculum-and>

¹³ Korolczuk, E. (2020)

¹⁴ Ridwan, R. and Wu, J., (2018)

¹⁵ Suchland, J. (2018)

the formation of LGBT+ advocacy, freedom of expression and assembly have been noted in Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, and Uganda. In efforts to further legitimize gender theory as 'gender ideology', the Prime Minister of Hungary banned all gender studies programs from University teaching¹⁶. In Latin America, Colombia and Brazil are leaders of anti-gender movements. In Colombia, anti-genderists have successfully swayed the public and politicians to stop increased protections for LGBT+ youth in the form of manuals and training to decrease discrimination in public schools. Such manuals were meant to built acceptance of diverse gender and sexuality identities and to increase the sexual and reproductive health knowledge of youth but were demonized and publicly rejected as pushing 'gender ideology' by the Republic's president¹⁷. Through Brazil's most recent political change to the far right, several actions have been taken against the LGBT+ community. The Brazilian government has published documents excluding LGBT+ from policies promoting human rights and from policies for their National Council for Combating Discrimination¹⁸. They have further issued a 'family statute' which reaffirms the 'natural foundation' of the family as the union between a man, a woman and their children while also abolishing the Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy and Inclusion which managed public school training and coordination around integrating diverse gender and sexual orientation perspectives¹⁹. In the U.S., parental lawsuits supported by the Heritage Foundation have worked to continually stop the advancement of the proposed Equality Act which would extend civil rights to include sexual orientation and gender identity as a protected class, specifically within public education²⁰. The government in Indonesia has also been extremely vocal regarding homophobic statements, overlooking violence against the LGBT+ community, outing LGBT+ organizations and demanding that the UNDP cease all funding related to LGBT+ rights²¹. Furthermore, the policing (both moral and legal) of colonial era laws against homosexuality persist today with devastating effects in former colonies such as Indonesia²² and Jamaica²³.

1.2 Critiques of International Ideological Conspiracy

In efforts to discredit and diminish the efforts of LGBT+ activists and allies, anti-gender proponents have framed gender theory and its embrace of social constructivism, gender fluidity and thus a questioning of gender binary or bio-sexual essentialism, as a 'gender ideology'. Utilization of 'ideology' plays on fears of a nation's loss of agency and identity, and anti-gender proponents have created buzz worthy warnings against impending 'gender colonization', 'homosexual dictatorship', 'gender totalitarianism', and 'gender Marxism'^{24,25}. LGBT+ activists and allies are framed as being part of conspiracies against nation states, working to push 'gender ideology' at the interest of foreign elites²⁶, thereby identifying any national actors supporting LGBT+ rights as non-patriots²⁷ or enemies of the state²⁸. Critiques of anti-gender efforts are labeled as critiques of national sovereignty through democratic, secular, or universal human rights claims²⁹ and gender itself is seen as a revived neocolonialist project of the U.N. and Western international organizations. As a part of this conspiracy, LGBT+ activists and allies are taken to

¹⁶ Eslen-Ziya, H., 2020, 'Right-wing populism in New Turkey: Leading to all new grounds for troll science in gender theory', HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 76(3),

¹⁷ Beltrán, W. and Creely, S., 2018. Pentecostals, Gender Ideology and the Peace Plebiscite: Colombia 2016. Religions, 9(12), p.418.

¹⁸ Brandão, E.R. & da Silva Cabral, C. (2019)

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Heritage Foundation (2019)

²¹ Ridwan, R. and Wu, J., (2018)

²² Ibid

²³ Smith, D.E. (2018) Homophobic and transphobic violence against youth: The Jamaican context, International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 23:2, 250-258

²⁴ Beltrán, W. and Creely, S., 2018..

²⁵ Rohde-Abuba, C., Vennmann, S. and Zimenkova, T., 2019.

²⁶ Korolczuk, E (2020) 7

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Beltrán, W. and Creely, S., 2018.

²⁹ Brandão, E.R. & da Silva Cabral, C. (2019)

be inherently deceptive, with dark agendas towards dismantling the 'traditional' heterosexual family. This family structure is posited as the core of a healthy child, a healthy family, and thus a healthy nation; all pillars of a "moral civilization"³⁰.

1.3 Nationalistic Defense against Intersectional Diversity

The utilization of 'political homophobia' and 'heteronationalism' are thus engaged as defense mechanism against the believed decay of this nationalistic family³¹. Anti-gender proponents claim victimization to justify the protection of the family through whatever means necessary³². Aligned with this, proponents of anti-gender movements see themselves as salvationists and protectors on a 'moral crusade' against the supposed degeneration LGBTI+ acceptance would bring, including increased selfishness, individualism, and hedonism³³, alongside a decrease of the reproduction of a supposedly morally pure population. The connection between nationality and sexuality converges here to place LGBT+ as deviant non-citizens. Anti-gender is seen to also have crossovers with ethno-nationalism through which its rhetoric works to create a broad umbrella of otherness that often includes migrants and immigrants³⁴. These battles on who can claim true citizenship to a nation state see the intersection between gender, sexuality and race wherein anti-gender proponents are propelling a form of racialized biopolitics to influence their populations' reproduction of a desired purity. Anti-genderism additionally has crossovers with issues of class, where past class disputes within nations have been reframed as disputes over national identity through anti-gender rhetoric. While opposition to the anti-gender movement is still often viewed by feminist and LGBT+ advocates as a battle between social minority rights and the (often religious) ruling class, anti-gender actors cloak their neoliberal measures of control. This is most clearly seen through an emphasis on neoliberalist conceptions of gender equality^{35,36} where 'equality feminism' which allows or even promotes women to work outside the home, while adhering to a biological sex binary and conservative gender roles, is accepted in opposition to 'gender feminism'³⁷. In intersections with ethnicity, race, and class the anti-gender movement is actively capitalizing both on national social anxieties but also on the known divides within broader feminist and LGBT+ movements.

1.4 Pathologizing Non-Heterosexuality and Inciting Parental Panic

There is a notable increase in historic strategies regarding the pathologization of diverse gender identity and sexual orientation. Besides pushing the fear that LGBT+ persons are sex obsessive, child trafficking, pedophiles³⁸, anti-gender proponents posit that increased acceptance of LGBT+ is a danger to youths' mind, body, and spirit. They claim that to teach young people about the diversification of gender and sexual orientation will inappropriately sexualize them, harm their natural development³⁹, destabilize their well-being⁴⁰, and lead to an increase in dysphoria which will push them to seek 'harmful' treatments such as hormones or gender affirming procedures⁴¹. Non-heterosexuality is cloaked in pathologizing language which stokes fears of

³⁰ Korolczuk, E (2020)

³¹ Jennifer Suchland (2018) The LGBT specter in Russia: refusing queerness, claiming 'Whiteness', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25:7, 1073-1088

³² Korolczuk, E (2020)

³³ Piotr Żuk & Paweł Żuk (2020)

³⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵ Jennifer Suchland (2018)

³⁶ Eslen-Ziya, H., 2020, 'Right-wing populism in New Turkey: Leading to all new grounds for troll science in gender theory', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76(3)

³⁷ Beltrán, W. and Creely, S., (2018)

³⁸ Korolczuk, E (2020)

³⁹ Rohde-Abuba, C., Vennmann, S. and Zimenkova, T., 2019

⁴⁰ Eslen-Ziya, H., 2020

⁴¹ See Heritage Foundation (2019) <https://www.heritage.org/civil-society/report/sexual-ideology-indoctrination-the-equality-acts-impact-school-curriculum-and>.

catching⁴² or being contaminated⁴³ by a peer contagion⁴⁴. Non-heterosexuality continues to be presented as a social and mental illness which needs to be prevented, treated, or cured⁴⁵. Instigating panic amongst parents and communities, anti-gender proponents further attach this pathologization with a recruitment hypothesis which connects back to the rhetoric of a LGBT+ conspiracy, all of which reinforces the need for parents and ‘moral citizens’ to utilize ‘protective homophobia’ to shelter their youth⁴⁶. The weaponization of youth and the instrumentalization of parents are essential and powerful elements of the anti-gender movement. The inciting of moral panic amongst parents has been seen to be incredibly effective in mobilizing large numbers of a population to engage in high profile protests, petitions, and media appearances against the LGBT+ community and any proposed policies in governments or public educations to mainstreaming diversity education⁴⁷. Using the fear of degeneration through non-heterosexuality exposure, anti-gender proponents also consciously or subconsciously hinder the potential for increased understanding and acceptance within public education of other diverse identity categories such as race, ethnicity, class, and their intersections⁴⁸. Public schools are an important site of contestation, where the disciplinary power of schools is understood as an asset to both anti-gender advocates and LGBTI+ advocates. However, re-framing gender theory as oppressive ideology and pushing the pathologization of non-heterosexuality surfaces real fears for parents. Alongside these fears, anti-gender proponents have given parents an avenue to re-gain a sense of control through the fight for parental rights. Through parental rights, anti-gender actors and parents can pull on legal and religious language to push the prerogative of parents as taking precedence regarding the development of their youth⁴⁹. It is important to note that anti-gender strategies focus heavily on parents, their rights, their roles and their responsibilities to their children and their nation. However, discussions or considerations of youth as active agents are omitted, as for parents to be saviors, youth must be passive. In parental rights, youth are taken as incapable of critical thought or even knowing who they are. In essence, all youth are infantilized to the point in which their rights are superseded by parents who are influenced by anti-gender rhetoric and strategies, thus keeping these macro-level debates within the realm of private, family matters.

1.5 Media Campaigning, Interdisciplinary Coalition Building and Funding

The use and creation of media content by anti-gender actors is a vital strategy towards spreading their rhetoric to parents and communities. This media often takes the form of false information campaigns, using a campaign strategy taken by past right-wing and fascist groups to uplift the voices of a ‘silent majority’⁵⁰. Alongside touting LGBT+ information as ‘propaganda’, and even having government restrictions against it as in Russia⁵¹, the anti-gender movement is effectively using digital, written and in-person external communications to show their unification; attempting to capitalize on the divides within broader feminist and LGBT+ movements⁵² while also capitalizing on the global to local reach of conservative church leaders to their followers⁵³. Additionally, although centering on independent and purist nationalism, the anti-gender movement utilizes diverse transnational coalitions, learning best practices from other countries

⁴² Ridwan, R. and Wu, J., 2018. ‘Being young and LGBT, what could be worse?’ Analysis of youth LGBT activism in Indonesia: challenges and ways forward. *Gender & Development*, 26(1), pp.121-138.

⁴³ Beltrán, W. and Creely, S., 2018.

⁴⁴ Heritage (2019)

⁴⁵ See *Out of the Margins* (2020) <https://outofthemargins.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Out-of-the-Margins-report-2020.pdf>

⁴⁶ See Global Philanthropy Project (2018). RELIGIOUS CONSERVATISM ON THE GLOBAL STAGE: THREATS AND CHALLENGES FOR LGBTI RIGHTS. <https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/2018/11/04/religious-conservatism-on-the-global-stage-threats-and-challenges-for-lgbti-rights/>

⁴⁷ Heritage Foundation (2019)

⁴⁸ Rohde-Abuba, C., Vennmann, S. and Zimenkova, T., 2019

⁴⁹ Heritage Foundation (2019)

⁵⁰ Elizabeth S. Corredor (2019) Unpacking “Gender Ideology” and the Global Right’s Antigender Countermovement. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2019, vol. 44, no. 3

⁵¹ Suchland (2018)

⁵² Rohde-Abuba, C., Vennmann, S. and Zimenkova, T., 2019

⁵³ Piotr Zuk & Paweł Zuk (2020)

but also collecting academics, medical doctors, and psychologists⁵⁴. These expert coalitions work to found anti-gender discourse as a new and truer alternative science⁵⁵ in opposition to 'gender ideology'. Funding these experts to create knowledge products supporting claims that biological determinism is more scientifically accurate than gender fluidity⁵⁶ and proposing that gender theory is non-academic⁵⁷ pushes anti-gender discourse as a valid source for evidence-based advocacy to influence opinion, policy, and practices. This aspect gains importance when noting how effective anti-gender actors have been in resource mobilization. Within the years 2013-2017, anti-gender actors raised three times the amount of money feminist and LGBT+ actors did: 3.7 billion versus 1.2 billion⁵⁸.

2. Impacts on the LGBT+ Community and LGBT+ Youth

2.1 General Effects on LGBT+ Communities

Broadly, advancements of the anti-gender movements have hindered LGBT+ political and social participation by closing the civic space for LGBT+ advocacy, while threats and acts of violence, even resulting in death, have been reported against LGBT+ activists^{59,60}. Fear regarding retaliation from public support of LGBT+ persons⁶¹ further excludes them from needed personal, community and societal networks. There has been either a stagnation or growth of restrictive legal systems and LGBT+ persons globally continue to lack legal protections, even if UN signatories⁶². Globally, increases of national homophobia can strengthen impunity towards violence against LGBT+ persons and decrease their reports of violence, especially familial violence⁶³.

2.2 Forms and Sites of Discrimination and Violence against LGBT+ Youth

LGBT+ persons generally and LGBT+ youth particularly face both direct and indirect forms of discrimination⁶⁴, strengthened by the advancements of the anti-gender movement. These forms of discrimination within youths' social ecologies, including their societal institutions, can present through the following inconclusive listing: stigma, prejudice, victimization, isolation, exclusion, bullying, shaming, physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, threatening, and outing. Amongst these forms there are commonalities in their forced corrective undertones^{65,66} especially when combined with pathological rhetoric. It must be emphasized that LGBT+ youth are a diverse group within themselves, and that violence done unto them is often compounded by their intersecting identities, resulting in complex and heightened discrimination using similar oppressive rhetoric and tactics seen through sexism, racism, ethnic discrimination, class discrimination, and ableism.

The rise in heteronationalism and political homophobia continue to create an environment in which LGBT+ youth are engaging in harmful internalizations of seeing themselves as deviant,

⁵⁴ Brandão, E.R & da Silva Cabral, C. (2019) Sexual and reproductive rights under attack: the advance of political and moral conservatism in Brazil, *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters*, 27:2, 76-86

⁵⁵ Eslen-Ziya, H. (2020)

⁵⁶ Heritage Foundation (2019)

⁵⁷ Eslen-Ziya, H. (2020)

⁵⁸ See Global Philanthropy Project (2020). MEET THE MOMENT: A Call for Progressive Philanthropic Response to the Anti-Gender Movement.

<https://globalphilanthropyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Meet-the-Moment-2020-English.pdf>

⁵⁹ H. Logie, C., Lee-Foon, N., Jones, N., Mena, K., Levermore, K., Newman, P., Andrinopoulos, K. and Baral, S., 2016. Exploring Lived Experiences of Violence and Coping Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth in Kingston, Jamaica. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 28(4), pp.343-353.

⁶⁰ Brandão, E.R & da Silva Cabral, C. (2019)

⁶¹ See Advocates for Youth (2016) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth in the Global South.

<https://www.advocatesforyouth.org/resources/fact-sheets/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-lgbt-youth-in-the-global-south/>

⁶² Delores E. Smith (2018) Homophobic and transphobic violence against youth: The Jamaican context, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 23:2, 250-258

⁶³ Advocates for Youth (2016)

⁶⁴ Wilson, C. and Cariola, L., 2019. LGBTQI+ Youth and Mental Health: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Research. *Adolescent Research Review*, 5(2), pp.187-211.

⁶⁵ Advocates for Youth (2016)

⁶⁶ Out of the Margins (2020)

abnormal and sinful persons^{67,68}. They face bullying in schools not only by their peers but also by their teachers and counselors⁶⁹ while many schools continue to lack protective policies for them or adequate enforcement of such policies⁷⁰. Connectedly, LGBT+ youth have higher risks of educational truancy and drop-out⁷¹. The exploitation of parents on the part of anti-gender actors creates extremely moralistic and absolutist environments for youth, with many LGBT+ youth facing familial rejection⁷² often resulting in homelessness^{73,74} or familial ostracization resulting in neglect, both of which are framed as natural, even logical responses to something deemed a social contagion⁷⁵. By not adhering to conservative gender and sexuality roles, LGBT+ youth face a higher risk of familial violence against them⁷⁶. LGBT+ youth thus feel heightened pressure to conceal or suppress their diverse gender or sexual identity^{77,78} and simultaneously suffer from much higher rates of depression, self-harm and suicide compared to their cis-gendered and heterosexual peers^{79,80}.

2.3 Life-course Impacts for LGBT+ Youth

It is important to note that these impacts on LGBT+ youth continue their vulnerabilities throughout their older years⁸¹. If they do not drop out beforehand, bullying can extend well through their university experiences⁸² while mental health risk factors related to anxiety, depression, substance abuse and suicide have been found to extend across their lifetime⁸³. Furthermore, broad social and political homophobia impacts the intertwining of social and economic exclusion of LGBT+ youth as they grow up. This can show up in a continued lack of stable shelter, food security, education, healthcare, personal security, and work. Youth are extremely vulnerable economically as they are heavily dependent on their families⁸⁴, leaving them open to economic manipulation if they stay or a complete cut off if they leave or are kicked out. They are further often excluded from employment, with employers able to cite fear of public and consumer backlash as a reason for work discrimination^{85,86}. Additionally, the rise of anti-genderism amongst youth themselves (who are often religious and male-identifying^{87,88}) such as the Catholic-Nationalist All-Polish Youth organization⁸⁹ and conservative church youth groups⁹⁰, is not only an example of weaponizing youth against youth but is a counter argument to any who claim that anti-genderism will simply age-out.

2.4 Loss of Civic Space and Participation for LGBT+ Youth

⁶⁷ Wilson, C. and Cariola, L. (2019)

⁶⁸ Smith, D.E (2018)

⁶⁹ Out of the Margins (2020)

⁷⁰ Reid, G. (2019). For LGBTQ Youth, Human Rights Day Has Special Meaning. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/10/lgbtq-youth-human-rights-day-has-special-meaning>

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Hailey, J., Burton, W., & Arscott, J. (2020) We Are Family: Chosen and Created Families as a Protective Factor Against Racialized Trauma and Anti-LGBTQ Oppression Among African American Sexual and Gender Minority Youth, *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 16:2, 176-191

⁷³ See Trevor Project (2020). National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2020/?section=Introduction>

⁷⁴ Reid, G. (2019)

⁷⁵ Smith, D.E (2018)

⁷⁶ H. Logie, C., Lee-Foon, N., Jones, N., Mena, K., Levermore, K., Newman, P., Andrinopoulos, K. and Baral, S., (2016).

⁷⁷ Advocates for Youth (2016)

⁷⁸ Reid, G. (2019)

⁷⁹ Trevor Project (2020)

⁸⁰ Wilson, C. and Cariola, L. (2019)

⁸¹ Reid, G. (2019)

⁸² H. Logie, C., Lee-Foon, N., Jones, N., Mena, K., Levermore, K., Newman, P., Andrinopoulos, K. and Baral, S., (2016)

⁸³ Wilson, C. and Cariola, L. (2019)

⁸⁴ Out of the Margins (2020)

⁸⁵ H. Logie, C., Lee-Foon, N., Jones, N., Mena, K., Levermore, K., Newman, P., Andrinopoulos, K. and Baral, S., (2016)

⁸⁶ Hooghe, M., Claes, E., Harell, A., Quintelier, E. and Dejaeghere, Y., (2010). Anti-Gay Sentiment Among Adolescents in Belgium and Canada: A Comparative Investigation into the Role of Gender and Religion. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 57(3), pp.384-400.

⁸⁷ Korolczuk, E (2020)

⁸⁸ Hooghe, M., Claes, E., Harell, A., Quintelier, E. and Dejaeghere, Y., 2010

⁸⁹ Piotr Żuk & Paweł Żuk (2020)

⁹⁰ Global Philanthropy Project, 2018.

With such social and economic exclusion and fears of violence, LGBT+ youth also have particularly low civic and political participation⁹¹, which may also extend through their adulthood creating a continued disparity between them and the highly mobilized anti-gender electorate. Closing of civic spaces open to the LGBT+ community further cuts LGBT+ youth off from potential supporters, peers and elders who act as important resilience factors for their mental and social well-being⁹² and as mentors for their potential advocate lives.

3. Actions Needed to Counter Anti-Gender Impacts on LGBT+ Youth

3.1 Meaningful LGBT+ Youth Participation

In direct opposition to anti-gender advocates' invalidation of LGBT+ youth and their allies' agency, efforts to improve the well-being of LGBT+ youth and to secure their rights must include them, especially in decision making processes that shape their socio-cultural environments⁹³. Efforts must be taken to advance LGBT+ youth's meaningful participation in their respective local, national, and global societies, centering on their needs and embracing their capabilities. Followingly, there is need for increased LGBT+ youth-centered and youth-led research and documentation to build strong evidence that is centered on lived experiences to influence policy makers^{94,95,96}. More comprehensive feminist and LGBT+ advocacy strategies that explicitly and meaningfully include youth are needed. If local and global feminist and LGBT+ advocacy movements continue to tokenize, discriminate, or exclude LGBT+ youth they leave themselves open to be divided and increasingly vulnerable to the tactics of anti-gender movements. LGBT+ youth must be seen and embraced as collaborators in these strategic efforts.

3.2 Specific Funding for LGBT+ Youth Organizing and Rights Defense

Resources should be allocated to LGBT+ youth organizations and human rights defenders working on increasing their civic capacities, leadership positions, and advocacy efforts, not just to organizations that act as service providers for LGBT+ youth. These resources must also go specifically to grassroots, local and national based organizations, as strong interventions by international groups have been found to worsen local situations⁹⁷ and can strengthen anti-gender claims of attacks against sovereignty. To counter efforts to silence LGBT+ voices, nations must repeal 'anti-propaganda', 'homo propaganda' and other laws restricting the freedom of expression, association, and assembly of LGBT+ youth.

3.3 Intersectional and Institutional Approach to Discrimination and Violence against LGBT+ Youth

Lastly, the compounded nature of discrimination LGBT+ youth face, with higher risks of rejection and violence intersecting with racism, sexism, class, and ethnic discrimination,^{98,99,100,101,102} needs to be acknowledged and accounted for. Furthermore, our understanding of violence against LGBT+ youth must expand to a framework of complex structural violence, necessitating institutionalized and explicit policies of anti-discrimination^{103,104}. Additionally, there is a dire need for inter- and trans-national human rights and feminist organizations to address the socio-historical complexities of Western feminism and its

⁹¹ Out of the Margins (2020)

⁹² Hailey, J., Burton, W., & Arscott, J. (2020)

⁹³ Advocates for Youth (2016)

⁹⁴ Ridwan, R. and Wu, J., (2018)

⁹⁵ Out of the Margins (2020)

⁹⁶ Smith, D.E (2018)

⁹⁷ Ridwan, R. and Wu, J., (2018)

⁹⁸ Hailey, J., Burton, W., & Arscott, J. (2020) We Are Family

⁹⁹ Piotr Żuk & Paweł Żuk (2020)

¹⁰⁰ Out of the Margins (2020)

¹⁰¹ Wilson, C. and Cariola, L., (2019)

¹⁰² Global Philanthropy Project, (2018)

¹⁰³ Out of the Margins (2020)

¹⁰⁴ Hooghe, M., Claes, E., Harell, A., Quintelier, E. and Dejaeghere, Y., (2010)

intersections with the heterosexuality of colonial projects and their continuing impacts. Progressive actors must explicitly work to build intersectional solidarity that lay these hurts and anxieties bare so that they do not continue to create international divides that can be weaponized by the anti-gender movement.

SECTION 2: COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

4. Comprehensive Sexuality Education

4.1 What is Comprehensive Sexuality Education?

UNESCO defines Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as “... a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives”¹⁰⁵. CSE is education that is scientifically accurate, incremental, age- and developmentally appropriate, curriculum based, comprehensive, based on a human rights approach and gender equality, culturally relevant and context appropriate, and transformative¹⁰⁶. The current international technical guidance on sexuality education by UNESCO and others pays attention to aspects of vulnerability, such as SOGI and disability, and refers to the need to develop more relevant content for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) youth¹⁰⁷.

4.2 Why is CSE beneficial?

CSE is imperative to reach the Sustainable Development Goals, especially target 3.7, 4.7 and 5.6¹⁰⁸, and the commitment to leave no one behind¹⁰⁹. CSE that is delivered well, supports the empowerment of youth by improving their analytical, communication, and other life skills for health and well-being in relation to sexuality, relationships, cultural and social norms, sexual behaviour, violence, consent, and sexual abuse^{110,111}.

In the case of LGBT youth, strong and culturally appropriate CSE is a necessary step to diminish the health and well-being disparities that they face. Research shows that sexual risk decreases when youth are presented with sexual health information that is relevant to their sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)¹¹². CSE also protects LGBT youth from negative mental health

¹⁰⁵ UNESCO and others. ‘International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach’ (p. 16).

¹⁰⁶ UNESCO and others. ‘International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach’.

¹⁰⁷ Miedema and colleagues. ‘But is it comprehensive? Unpacking the “comprehensive” in comprehensive sexuality education’.

¹⁰⁸ ‘The 17 goals’: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

¹⁰⁹ UNESCO and others. ‘International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach’.

¹¹⁰ ‘Why comprehensive sexuality education is important’: <https://en.unesco.org/news/why-comprehensive-sexuality-education-important>

¹¹¹ Ponzetti. ‘Evidence-based approaches to sexuality education: A global perspective.’ Routledge.

¹¹² Pingel and colleagues. ‘Creating comprehensive, youth centred, culturally appropriate sex education: What do young gay, bisexual, and questioning men want?’.

outcomes¹¹³. CSE challenges homophobia and transphobia by dispelling stereotypes and myths about the LGBT community. This protects LGBT youth against discrimination and violence^{114,115}, which cause negative mental health outcomes, such as depression and anger, and even suicide. Hence, CSE helps save lives¹¹⁶.

CSE that provides factual, non-stigmatizing information on SOGI, includes topics relevant to sexual minority youth, and engages in dispelling common myths and stereotypes about LGBT people, promotes acceptance of a diverse SOGI among all youth¹¹⁷. Educational settings have the potential to be environments where diversity and sensitivity is fostered, and equality for all individuals, including the LGBT community, is promoted^{118,119}. CSE that provides factual information on SOGI as an aspect of human development can allow straight students to evaluate and challenge traditional norms^{120,121}. Furthermore, when SE is trans-inclusive and uses gender neutral language, it can increase the awareness of cisgendered youth about the appropriate ways to refer to the body of a transgender partner¹²². As such, CSE provides an opportunity to present sexuality with a positive approach and to emphasize values such as inclusion, equality, and non-discrimination¹²³.

4.3 CSE around the world

A growing number of governments around the world are confirming their commitment to sexuality education (SE) as a priority to achieve national development, health, and education goals¹²⁴. However, while this is a positive trend, shortcoming is seen in that such education is often not actually *comprehensive*, as LGBT youth around the world still face exclusion, marginalization, and invisibility in existing SE curricula^{125,126}.

¹¹³ UNESCO and others. 'International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach'.

¹¹⁴ Proulx and colleagues. 'Associations of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning-inclusive sex education with mental health outcomes and school-based victimisation in US high school students'.

¹¹⁵ Ponzetti. 'Evidence-based approaches to sexuality education: A global perspective.' Routledge.

¹¹⁶ 'Comprehensive sexuality education protects children and helps build a safer, inclusive society' <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/comprehensive-sexuality-education-protects-children-and-helps-build-a-safer-inclusive-society>

¹¹⁷ Pingel and colleagues. 'Creating youth centred, culturally appropriate sex education: What do young gay, bisexual and questioning men want?'

¹¹⁸ Lee and colleagues. 'Measuring discrimination against LGBTQ people: A cross-national analysis'.

¹¹⁹ 'Comprehensive sexuality education protects children and helps build a safer, inclusive society' <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/comprehensive-sexuality-education-protects-children-and-helps-build-a-safer-inclusive-society>

¹²⁰ Lee and colleagues. 'Measuring discrimination against LGBTQ people: A cross-national analysis.'

¹²¹ 'Comprehensive sexuality education protects children and helps build a safer, inclusive society' <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/comprehensive-sexuality-education-protects-children-and-helps-build-a-safer-inclusive-society>

¹²² Riggs and colleagues. 'Transgender young people's narratives of intimacy and sexual health: Implications of sexuality education'.

¹²³ 'Why comprehensive sexuality education is important': <https://en.unesco.org/news/why-comprehensive-sexuality-education-important>

¹²⁴ UNESCO. 'International guidelines on sexuality education: An evidence informed approach to effective sex, relationships and HIV/STI education'.

¹²⁵ 'Comprehensive sexuality education interactive report': <https://www.ippf.org/resources/cse-report>

¹²⁶ Ponzetti. 'Evidence-based approaches to sexuality education: A global perspective.' Routledge.

In multiple countries across Africa, and in some countries in Asia and South America there are laws regulating and penalizing youth's SOGI^{127,128,129}. In these countries LGBT issues and topics are often excluded from the national SE curricula.

In countries without this type of legislation, LGBT youth are still marginalized and even excluded in SE. On the one hand this is due to its focus on cis straight sexual activities, which renders same-sex practices and diverse gender identities invisible. Many SE programs focus on pregnancy prevention and contraception, omitting relevant content for LGBT youth¹³⁰. Other programs do not include LGBT content due to the persistence of the unfounded and unscientifically accurate fear that discussing LGBT topics, issues and content would “turn youth gay”¹³¹. Much of the SE that youth receive is thereby based on the assumption that it is normal to be cisgender¹³². On the other hand, LGBT youth are excluded in curricula due to the focus of many SE curricula on abstinence-only programs. These programs – aside from overlooking many essential sexual and reproductive health and rights issues - typically overlook diverse SOGI¹³³.

LGBT topics, issues or content are thereby rarely included in the sexuality lessons because staff is uncomfortable or lacks confidence to discuss LGBT specific content¹³⁴. Staff is furthermore uneasy about including specific LGBT content due to a fear of retribution from conservative political and religious activists¹³⁵. Even though the current UNESCO guidance refers to the need to develop more relevant content for LGBT youth, it does not provide advice or tools on how educators could do so¹³⁶. In some parts of the world, staff's discomfort is mitigated by LGBT organizations and NGOs supplementing the national curricula with specific teaching materials or education sessions to cater to LGBT youth¹³⁷.

4.4 Consequences of providing restricted / uncomprehensive SE

Excluding LGBT content from SE causes negative health outcomes for LGBT youth. SE that does not incorporate same sex practices exacerbates many of the sexual risk factors that place LGBT youth at a greater risk for HIV and STIs¹³⁸. Research furthermore showed that in a context where trans youth's needs are not covered in SE, youth seek out potentially inaccurate, unfiltered, or biased sources. This could lead to negative outcomes, such as STIs, pregnancy, unsafe binding, and shame about their body and sexual desires¹³⁹.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ UNESCO and others. 'International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach'.

¹²⁹ ILGA. 'State sponsored homophobia report' (2020).

¹³⁰ Ponzetti. 'Evidence-based approaches to sexuality education: A global perspective.' Routledge.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Bradford and colleagues. 'Sex education and transgender youth: "Trust means material by and for Queer and Trans people"'

¹³³ Francis. "'Keeping it straight" what do South African queer youth say they need from sexuality education?'

¹³⁴ Ponzetti. 'Evidence-based approaches to sexuality education: A global perspective.' Routledge.

¹³⁵ Francis. "'Keeping it straight" what do South African queer youth say they need from sexuality education?'

¹³⁶ Miedema and colleagues. 'But is it comprehensive? Unpacking the "comprehensive" in comprehensive sexuality education'.

¹³⁷ UNDP. 'Report of the regional dialogue on LGBTI human rights and health in Asia-Pacific.'

¹³⁸ Pingel and colleagues. 'Creating comprehensive, youth centred, culturally appropriate sex education: What do young gay, bisexual, and questioning men want?'

¹³⁹ Haley and colleagues. 'Sex education for transgender and non-binary youth: Previous experiences and recommended content'.

Marginalizing LGBT youth in SE education can lead to more violence. Being uninformed about sex negates the possibility for informed consent, putting LGBT youth at a risk of sexual and intimate partner violence¹⁴⁰. This is concerning as LGBT youth already have a higher chance of experiencing this type of violence^{141,142}.

Furthermore, when SE is only catered to straight and cis youth, it increases stigmatization and discrimination. Continuing SE that solely pays attention to straight and cis youth sends the message that a diverse SOGI is wrong and should be curtailed¹⁴³. As such, it reinforces stigma, prejudice, and discrimination against LGBT youth.

LGBT youth have a need for SE that is truly comprehensive in recognizing sexual and gender diversity and which does not solely focus on associating non-heteronormative sexualities and identities with issues of disease, deviance, and danger. States should refrain from designing and implementing curricula that provides information on sex solely in terms of straight penetration and reproduction, that assumes that all youth are cisgender or that problematizes LGBT issues¹⁴⁴. It is furthermore imperative that any LGBT content or provision is inclusive of all elements of this acronym, in order for bisexual or trans identities to not only be there in name¹⁴⁵.

The increasing worldwide interest in preventing identity- or prejudice-based bullying provides an opportunity to strengthen and support the inclusion of LGBT identities within SE and make it truly comprehensive^{146,147}.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Edwards and colleagues. 'Intimate partner violence among sexual minority populations: A review of the literature and agenda for future research'.

¹⁴² Edwards and colleague. 'The perpetration of intimate partner violence among LGBTQ College youth: The role of minority stress'.

¹⁴³ Pingel and colleagues. 'Creating comprehensive, youth centred, culturally appropriate sex education: What do young gay, bisexual, and questioning men want?'.

¹⁴⁴ Francis. "'Keeping it straight" what do South African queer youth say they need from sexuality education?'.

¹⁴⁵ Ponzetti. 'Evidence-based approaches to sexuality education: A global perspective.' Routledge.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ UNESCO. 'Out in the open: Education sector responses to violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression'.

SECTION 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, CHOICE recommends that States:

1. Respect, protect and fulfill LGBT+ youth's rights to meaningful participation in research, policy and practices concerning them and their socio-political environments;
2. Provide specific and sufficient funding for local and national LGBT+ youth-led and centered organizations working on human rights activism and advocacy;
3. Repeal 'anti-propaganda', 'homo propaganda' and other laws restricting the freedom of expression, association, and assembly of LGBT+ youth;
4. Institute explicit institutional policies of anti-discrimination to protect LGBT+ youth;
5. Design and implement national CSE curricula that recognises sexual and gender diversity and provides factual, non-stigmatising, inclusive and gender-neutral LGBT content and information to youth of all sexualities;
6. Provide support and training to educators to engage with topics, issues and content that are relevant to LGBT youth by including training on these topics in curricula for teacher education programmes;
7. Commit to protecting educators and schools from the retribution of conservative political and religious activists;
8. Continue their efforts to implement policies and CSE curricula to prevent bullying and discrimination based on SOGI and urge all States to commit to implementing these policies and curricula.