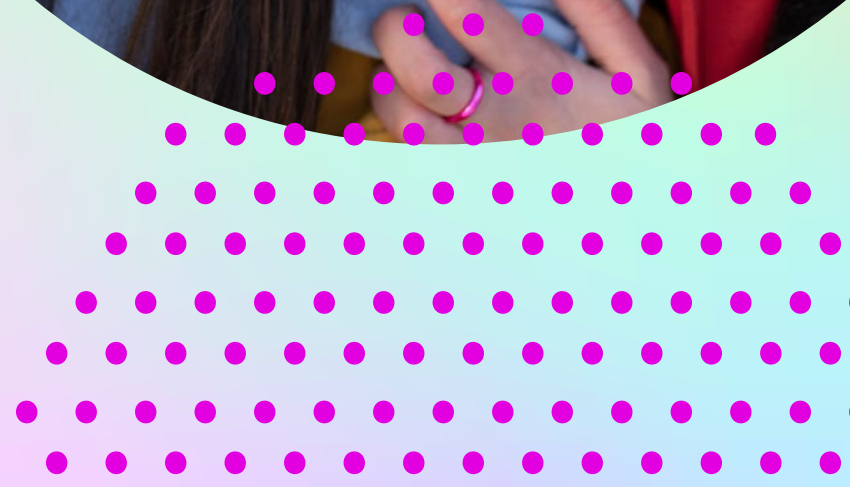




kinderombudsman

Hidden in plain sight

On the rights of LGBTQIA+ children
to grow freely



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) takes a broad view of child development. According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, there are seven issues that are crucial for the development of all children.^a These involve:

1. **the identity of children (the ability to be who you are)**
2. **the vulnerability of children**
3. **the safety and protection of children**
4. **the family environment and other people important to children**
5. **the right to education**
6. **the right to health**
7. **the right to participate (taking part and giving your opinion)**

We discussed these topics with 17 LGBTQIA+ children. From what they told us, it appeared that LGBTQIA+ children are experiencing difficulties when it comes to these topics. Children are receiving insufficient protection. There is also a lack among adults, including professionals, of knowledge regarding what it means to be LGBTQIA+. Partly due to this, there is a lack of good facilities. Furthermore, children cannot always make their voices heard in places in which they should be heard. For LGBTQIA+ children, the topic of ‘identity and identity development’ is the most important topic. Because things are not going well in all other areas, we see that LGBTQIA+ children in our society do not have the space to fully develop their identities. This means that they are unable to be who they are.

^a These elements are elaborated in General Comment 14 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors compliance with the Convention worldwide. General Comments are explanations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the various children’s rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“Sometimes I do think, ‘If I want to marry, it’s easier if I marry a man. Because if I marry a woman, I get registered as gay. And if a fascist government comes to power, then I might have problems. I find worrying about the future the hardest thing.”

Kyria (17 years old) ^b

^b Names in this report have been changed to preserve anonymity. Names are known to the researchers, however.

Introduction

For many years, the Netherlands has been known as a forerunner in the fight for equal rights for LGBTQIA+ people. This role as a pioneer has been under pressure over the last few years. ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map shows that the Netherlands has dropped in the European rankings: the protection of LGBTQIA+ rights has deteriorated.¹ In recent years, dissenting voices also seem to be becoming more frequent and louder.² There are well-organised national and international organisations that seek to undermine the rights of women and LGBTQIA+ people in Europe.³ This movement is also known as the 'anti-gender movement'.⁴ People within this movement claim that they want to protect children⁵. They believe that lessons about diversity in sex, sexuality and gender would influence children or 'brainwash' them.⁶

Consistently lower acceptance

Social acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community is on the decline. Fewer and fewer people from this group are finding that society accepts them.⁷ National discrimination figures from 2024

“When I started teaching [from the GSA], the first time was very easy, but the longer I spent doing this, the more difficult the first class became. I find that quite shocking.”

Ysbrand, 17 years old

show that sexual orientation, alongside ethnic origin, is the most frequently registered reason for discrimination.⁸ The CBS Safety Monitor (2023) shows that violence and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people are increasing.⁹ Within the LGBTQIA+ community, experiences differ. People accept relationships between two men or two women more often, but find it more difficult if somebody does not feel (in the binary sense) like a man or woman.¹⁰

Pressure on vulnerable groups of children

The national government, local authorities and civil society organisations are doing a great deal to improve the position of LGBTQIA+ people. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) is, for example, commissioning research into the decline in acceptance.¹¹ The ministry also promotes acceptance through subsidies for various initiatives and programmes. This includes the Rainbow Cities programmes, which focuses on local acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people.¹² In addition, there are initiatives for parents and children themselves, such as activities organised by the COC, the Gendi website and Gender Sexuality Alliances (GSA networks).¹³ Outside of education, the national government supports the Tailored Healthcare Alliance. This alliance ensures that more attention is paid to specific LGBTQIA+ issues in healthcare and that there is more attention paid to this group within healthcare.¹⁴

Despite this, these positive steps are coming under pressure due to social developments. LGBTQIA+ individuals remain a small group in a society in which the majority of people are heterosexual and cisgender.



For children and young people from this group, the pressure is especially heavy. That also applies to children who are still searching for who they are, and who still have questions about their gender identity, gender expression and/or sexual orientation.

The vulnerable position of LGBTQIA+ children is an important reason for the Ombudsman for Children – and for the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children (ENOC) – to draw attention to the rights of this group.^c

Children are developing rapidly. This development can only run smoothly if they have space in which to discover their identities. To do so, they need reliable information and people they can talk to, along with the security to take up that space.

Parents play an important role in this, but they are not the only ones. Other adults are also important, such as teachers, GPs or other professionals.

It also requires a safe environment in which children and young people can interact with like-minded peers, such as in class, sports clubs and online.

Experiences of LGBTQIA+ children

The Ombudsman for Children wanted to better understand how LGBTQIA+ children in the Netherlands grow up. That is why we entered into dialogue with LGBTQIA+ children. We discussed seven topics that are important for the development of all children.^d This relates to:

1. the identity of children

2. the vulnerability of children

3. the safety and protection of children

4. the family environment and other contacts important to children

5. the right to education

6. the right to health

7. the child's right to participation.

Together, these topics form a good representation of the three types of children's rights from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): rights to provisions, rights to protection and rights to participation.

We spoke with 17 LGBTQIA+ children. We asked them how they are doing in these areas and what problems they are experiencing. We're very grateful to these children for their openness.

^c In this publication, we use the word children, including when we're discussing young people aged between 13 and 18. In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, everyone under the age of 18 is considered a child. There is also a group of children who are growing up with LGBTQIA+ parents but do not or do not yet belong to the LGBTQIA+ community themselves. This group can also encounter problems, but they do not fall under the target group of this research.

^d These elements are elaborated in General Comment 14 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors compliance with the Convention worldwide.

At the same time, we are also aware that we did not reach everyone. For this reason, we also spoke with organisations that had a great deal of contact with LGBTQIA+ children. They know what these children encounter on a daily basis. In addition, we examined recent studies, although these generally focus on LGBTQIA+ adults. This publication is the result of this. We describe how these children are doing in the Netherlands for each topic.^e The stories of the 17 children are central here.

Lack of security and space for identity development

The children's experiences are both profound and distressing. They testify to a high degree of insecurity in their lives, in which they are inadequately protected. This applies at school, in their free time and on the street. There is also often a lack of knowledge and facilities, such as inclusive teaching materials, adequate and timely healthcare, and gender-neutral toilets and/or changing rooms. Finally, LGBTQIA+ children indicate that they are not always involved in decisions that impact them. Many teachers, healthcare professionals and other adults are finding it difficult to support these children and have an open conversation with them.

The rights of these children are not being adequately protected. This concerns both rights when it comes to protection and provisions and rights when it comes to participation. This puts pressure on the right to identity of LGBTQIA+ children, which is very harmful to their development.^f Moreover, as a minority in society, these children are particularly vulnerable. Because of all this, LGBTQIA+ children often feel that they must stay invisible in order to grow up safely.

- e We do not link the children's stories to specific LGBTQIA+ identities, because children are often still developing and do not always speak explicitly about this or label themselves. By not assigning labels, we respect their development process and avoid unintentionally pigeonholing them.
- f Developmental psychologists such as Erik Erikson and James Marcia refer to this as: identity foreclosure (committing to an identity without prior exploration), identity diffusion (not committing to an identity but also not exploring in order to find a suitable identity), identity moratorium (exploring but not committing to an identity) and identity achievement (committing to an identity following a process of exploration). Only this final point is viewed as a healthy identity development.



Terminology¹⁵

Asexual people: people who are asexual experience no or little sexual attraction towards other people.

Bi+ people: the overarching term for all people with a sexual orientation towards more than one gender. Some of these people identify as bisexual, bi+, pan, queer or fluid.

Cisgender people: people who identify with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Gender expression: how somebody expresses their gender identity. Gender expression includes how somebody dresses, behaves and moves.

Gender identity: someone's inner experience of feeling non-binary, female, male or another gender. Gender identity is not something you can see from the outside.

Sex: refers to the distinction between men and women based on physical characteristics.

Homosexual people: men and non-binary people who feel attracted, romantically or sexually, to men.

Heterosexual people: people who feel romantic and/or sexual attraction to persons of the 'opposite (binary) gender', such as women who are attracted to men and men who are attracted to women.

Intersex: people who are born with a body that does not correspond to the image most people have of a man or woman. Intersex has nothing to do with sexual orientation or gender identity. Intersex persons have variations in sex characteristics, hormone balance, or chromosomes.

Lesbian people: women and non-binary people who are attracted, sexually and/or romantically, to women.

Non-binary people: people who identify as non-binary. They feel at home with a gender identity outside the (binary) categories of male and female.

Queer people: people who do not identify with the usual, fixed (binary) frameworks and categories for gender and/or sexual orientation, or who reject these frameworks. Queer is also used as an umbrella term, instead of the abbreviation LGBTQIA+.¹⁶

Gender diversity: the diversity that exists in physical sex characteristics. This relates to all the different variations in hormones, sex chromosomes and external sexual characteristics. Intersex people are born with a body that does not correspond to the image most people have of a man or woman.

Sexual orientation: relates to the gender to which somebody feels (sexually) attracted. A distinction is sometimes made between sexual orientation and romantic orientation. These two orientations do not necessarily have to correspond. The most widely-known orientations are heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual and asexual.

Transgender people: people whose gender identity does not match, fully or partially, with the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender people can be male, female or non-binary, or have other gender identities.

1

The identity of LGBTQIA+ children

Article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees children's right to respect for their identity. Article 8 is based on the developing abilities of a child. A distinction is therefore drawn between static characteristics (such as national origin) and dynamic characteristics such as sexual orientation, religion and beliefs, along with personality. Closely linked to Article 8 are both Article 7, which guarantees the right to a name, nationality and birth registration, and Article 6, which concerns the right to life and development. The right to protection of identity therefore also includes the right of children to develop their identity. General Comment⁹ (GC) 14 also makes it clear that, in addition to a surname, for example, this also concerns personal, physical, social or cultural aspects. This includes the sexual orientation and the gender identity of a child.

Background

LGBTQIA+ people form a diverse group of 'identities' based on their gender identity, sex and/or sexual orientation. This includes (among others) lesbian women, gay men, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, asexual and intersex people, or a combination thereof. Not everyone within this group identifies specifically with "one letter" or wants to be put into a box. What the group has in common is that they are a minority compared to the large group of heterosexual

⁹ General Comments are explanations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the various rights set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child..

“Many queer individuals know each other through GSA, for instance, or similar events. [...] It may sound odd, but there are people there who are similar, so we understand each other to some extent. That’s a great feeling.”

Katy, 16 years old

and cisgender men and women.¹⁷ Recent figures from Statistics Netherlands (CBS; 2024) show that 18% of people aged 15 and older identify with the LGBTQIA+ community.¹⁸ This proportion is higher among young people (aged 15-25) than among adults (aged 25 and over).¹⁹ The proportion of children below the age of 15 who identify with the LGBTQIA+ community is not known. In addition, not all children are 'out', there is often a period of doubt and self-discovery at the start.²⁰

Because they are in the minority, LGBTQIA+ children have a slim chance of encountering other LGBTQIA+ children at school, in their neighbourhood, or in sports and other leisure activities, especially when you look separately at the different 'identities' within the LGBTQIA+ community. In smaller regions, this is even more difficult than in larger cities such as Amsterdam or Utrecht.²¹ Networks, such as GSA networks in schools and Jong & Out communities of the COC, are important ways for these children to find like-minded people. When finding their identity, a role model is also important: this can be a parent, but more often it is another adult and/or someone from the LGBTQIA+ community itself.²²

The experiences of LGBTQIA+ children

“I didn’t like that, because I’m allowed to be who I want to be. I’ve told everyone a thousand times, but they keep asking. I have said many times who I want to be and made difficult choices, but they continue to ask because they can see that I am not comfortable with it.”

Flipyar, 9 years old

“No. I never do that [speaking with friends about the operation], I forget everything then.”

Stitch, 6 years old

Interest groups confirm that it is difficult for LGBTQIA+ children to meet other LGBTQIA+ children, and that finding like-minded people can be of great importance to the development of their identity. Especially since the impact on children is underestimated if they discover that they are not cisgender and/or not heterosexual. They have their own quest to go on, but sometimes also have to deal with fear of rejection. This causes them to hide who they really are. Because it is so difficult to meet other LGBTQIA+ children, the online world plays an

important role for this group. In this world, they can find people from the same community and share experiences. They can also find role models there, from whom they learn how they can deal with pushback.

According to interest groups, institutions with which parents and children have regular contact during childhood – such as health clinics or school doctors – pay little attention to LGBTQIA+ children. Like many general practitioners, they still assume a cisgender and heterosexual norm. These professionals rarely discuss (the possibility of) being LGBTQIA+ with parents or children. Children often have to come up with this themselves, which is not always easy for them. As a result, LGBTQIA+ children (and their parents) find virtually no support in discovering and shaping their identities among these institutions. Interest groups also indicate that rejecting statements by politicians regarding LGBTQIA+ people, give children the impression that they are less likely (or sometimes never likely) to be themselves. Because of this, the future of this group of children and young people feels very uncertain.

The children all experience the development of their identity in their own ways. For many of the transgender children we spoke with, it was clear from an early age that their gender

“I didn’t tell anyone, but it was told by a former classmate of mine. I had just come from another school, because I had been threatened there for being trans. I had come out in that school. Then I went to the last school I could attend. Everyone from my primary school class was there. Obviously, they knew me as a girl. Then they were told, even though I hadn’t wanted that to happen.”

James, 16 years old

identity did not (fully) correspond to their birth sex. This is different for children with a non-heterosexual orientation; they usually ‘come out’ at a later age. Parents of transgender children often notice early on that their child behaves or feels differently than expected based on their birth gender. In many cases, children themselves realise at an early age that they feel ‘something’, even though they are unable to put it into words. The feeling that you cannot talk openly about this, or notice that it’s ‘a thing’ sometimes goes together with physical symptoms such as back pain.

Children find it important to be able to choose what they tell, who they tell, and when they tell it. Throughout this, they have to always weigh up whether the situation is safe enough. Several children had to deal with negative reactions, bullying or a lack of understanding. Because they themselves are so cautious about whether or not to reveal their identity, it is especially painful when other children do so for them. That is why some children choose environments in which their identity can remain secret. This means that they sometimes transfer to a secondary school far from home. Recognition among peers, for example through GSA networks or Transvisie's Go groups, is very beneficial for these children. Then they can just be themselves for a while, without really having to talk about it.

“I was right there, but she was talking about it. I didn't want to say just yet. It happened because they asked. I had short hair then, which was noticeable. So then everyone told somebody else while I just watched on. When my mother came home, she said that my teacher had called. I thought, here we go. I had wanted to tell her myself. It's easier than her hearing from other people. My parents reacted well. The only thing my mother was disappointed about was that I hadn't come to her.”

Karel, 14 years old

“I live in a village with just one high school, so everyone goes there. I didn't want to go there, so I deliberately went to a school the next village along. Two of my friends went there. [...]. I was really badly bullied then. I missed school for a week because of how bad it was. My mother got in touch with someone who explained why I wasn't there and what had happened. Then it got a bit better. People didn't get it and it felt as though they were really angry with me and I didn't even know why.”

Penguins, 15 years old

2 LGBTQIA+ children in vulnerable or special situations

GC 14 makes it clear that there may be various reasons why children are (particularly) vulnerable. The vulnerable position in which children find themselves must be taken into account. In an explanation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, GC20 (which deals with adolescence) specifically calls for attention to be paid to the care and protection of LGBTQIA+ children. The minority position of LGBTQIA+ children makes them vulnerable in general, but this vulnerability appears to be greater for specific “identities” within this group, such as intersex and transgender children. Vulnerability increases when it comes to intersectionality with other types of vulnerabilities. Consider refugee LGBTQIA+ children (Article 22 of the UNCRC) or LGBTQIA+ children with disabilities (Article 23 of the UNCRC).

Background

LGBTQIA+ children are generally more vulnerable than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. They have to deal more frequently with bullying and violence, and with feelings of depression and anxiety.²³ Within the LGBTQIA+ group, the various ‘identities’ each have their own particular vulnerability.

“I’m bisexual. I was given all kinds of nicknames at my old school. Especially when I had just come out, everyone looked at me strangely. A lot of people didn’t get it, which I can understand, but still. Some people were very upset about it.”

Katy, 16 years old

For example, non-binary and transgender people are less accepted than gay and lesbian people. While bi+ people face 'double minority stress': they are rejected and discriminated against because they are not heterosexual, and because they are not 'only' attracted to a single gender. Transgender children are more likely than others to experience violence or neglect at home.²⁴ Intersex people often have issues with poor self image and body image, even as young people. They may also undergo (painful) medical treatments, with the risk that they will be assigned a physical sex that later does not transpire to match the way that they feel.²⁵ LGBTQIA+ young people and young adults are at greater risk of homelessness. Transgender young people in particular are not accepted by their parents, meaning they must leave home. Within the group of homeless people it remains the case that they are still an especially vulnerable group: they experience violence more often in shelters and feel unsafe there.²⁶

People with a combination of vulnerabilities (known as "intersectionality") have a particularly difficult time. Consider, for example, non-white LGBTQIA+ individuals, LGBTQIA+ individuals with disabilities, those from religious groups, and/or LGBTQIA+ refugees.²⁷ For non-white LGBTQIA+ individuals, for example, it is not always the case that they are accepted within

De ervaringen van lhbtqia+-kinderen

"I have more friends at school who are girls, and none who are boys. I sometimes wanted to be friends with the boys, but most of them had opinions about it. Some of them showed it, some didn't, and some of them didn't have an opinion. I've heard faggot or homo before, those kinds of words."

Frank, 17 years old

"I was really badly bullied then. They found me strange, and I didn't know why. They knew better than I did that I had gender dysphoria. They could sense it, and they enjoyed bullying me."

Karel, 14 years old

their cultural community for their LGBTQIA+ identity. And in the LGBTQIA+ community, just as in society at large, they face discrimination and racism because of their skin colour and/or origin.²⁸

The **interest groups** recognise that trans and non-binary children and young people are currently having a very difficult time because people do not see or accept them for who they are. However, homosexual boys are still not readily accepted, and lesbian girls are often subjected to sexual remarks. Especially among bicultural LGBTQIA+ children, their cultural background may entail additional risks when they express their identity. They are even less accepted by those around them. In some cases, they even run the risk of becoming victims of honour killings because their 'being' is seen as harmful to the family. In addition, connecting with the LGBTQIA+ community is also difficult. Their identity development differs owing to their cultural and/or religious background, and the LGBTQIA+ community is overwhelmingly white. Intersex children experience difficulties due to ignorance from others regarding their situation. Doctors still advise parents and children to keep their children's intersex status a secret. This increases loneliness among this group of children. Furthermore, secrecy perpetuates ignorance about intersexuality.

“As a queer person, you really have to go looking for someone. You have to check every time with every person whether you can tell them that you’re trans. It’s a bit like a treasure hunt.”

Anakin, 14 years old

“If a transgender person has committed a crime or done something bad for example, people on social media think every transgender person is like that. There are people who say that the Charlie Kirk shooter was transgender. People think that all transgender people are like that. It happens really quickly.”

Nova, 13 years old

We were not able to speak with some **children** who are especially vulnerable within the LGBTQIA+ group, such as LGBTQIA+ children with bicultural heritage. We do not know whether we were unable to reach them, or whether it was too stressful for them to engage in conversation with us. We did however speak with several gender-diverse children, who are often seen as especially vulnerable. From what the children told

us, it appears that the support from parents and family members is crucial for experiencing space in which they can be who they are. Most children who we spoke with experience overwhelming support and acceptance from the families in which they are growing up. Openness within the family makes it easier for children to indicate that they are gender-diverse and/or have a non-heterosexual orientation. This openness also helps with finding like-minded people, for example through youth groups like COC or Transvisie.

Children say that if they do not have that space at home, it is a painful rejection of who they are. It also damages trust in telling others (children or adults) about it. For gender-diverse children, a lack of support from parents also means that choices regarding medical help are ignored or delayed.

Specifically for intersex children, the advice to maintain confidentiality, which doctors still often give, prevents both children and parents from finding other people affected with whom they can share experiences and questions.



“When you have just come out, it is uncomfortable when everyone reacts negatively and no one offers support or guidance.”

Katy, 16 years old



Protection and safety of LGBTQIA+ children

Many rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child relate to the protection of children from harmful influences. This is most explicitly reflected in Article 19 on the right to protection from violence, abuse and neglect. Articles 32, 34, 36 and 37 also explicitly refer to protection against economic, sexual or other forms of exploitation and protection against torture. But protection and safety are also about giving children the space to develop and receive care (GC 14). Parents have a responsibility in this regard (Article 18 of the CRC), but so do other adults along with the government (Article 4 of the CRC). GC 13 provides further explanation of Article 19. This makes it clear that all (professional) adults, in addition to parents, have a role to play in protecting children from all forms of violence. It also addresses violence among children themselves.

“I feel pretty unsafe at school. I’m not bullied exactly, but you can’t openly say that you’re trans. I wouldn’t want to either. I always go walking in the evening for an hour or so. Sometimes I see a group of boys, or a group of young people riding on fat bikes or walking. They walk behind me and I think, do they know that I’m trans? Are they going to do something?”

Anakin, 14 years old

“Then I started the second class, and that was really unsafe. That was when I became trans for the first time too. There was a huge amount of discrimination and bullying. By the end of the year, things had got to the point where there were death threats. My school didn’t handle it well. I had to apologise to the person who sent me death threats for a death threat that was made against me.”

Robin, 15 years old

Background

Further research into bullying by the Ombudsman for Children (2022) has shown that children are often bullied because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This bullying mainly occurs at school, but also in other places such as in the neighbourhood or online.²⁹ Further studies have shown that LGBTQIA+ children experience more insecurity than average at school, when going out and on the street.³⁰ At school, they are regularly bullied or insulted and receive little support from teachers. When going out, LGBTQIA+ young people sometimes explicitly seek out queer nightlife venues because they are treated negatively in other environments.³¹ Violence against and discrimination of LGBTQIA+ individuals (aged 15 and older) has been on the rise in recent years.³² LGBTQIA+ pupils felt less safe at school in 2021 than in 2018.³³ Pupils who do not identify as either male or female are particularly at risk of being bullied. This applies to both primary and secondary education. Among adults in the Netherlands, acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people is slightly better. At least, when it comes to homosexual men or lesbian women. For bi+, non-binary or trans people this is different.³⁴

There are two sides to the safety experienced in the online world. On the one hand, young people who identify as “other”^h appear to be happier online than offline; for young people who identify as girls or boys, the opposite is true. They feel happier offline than online.³⁵ The online world offers many opportunities for LGBTQIA+ children to find like-minded people. At the same time, LGBTQIA+ people (and other minorities) often encounter hateful comments online and/or are outed without their consent or desire.³⁶

^h As part of the study, children and young people are asked to indicate whether they are boys, girls, or ‘other’. The ‘other’ group includes a broad range of gender identities. Some children reveal themselves to be transgender or non-binary in their answers to open questions, but homosexual and lesbian children and young people also sometimes tick ‘other’. In addition, the options ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ may also include children and young people with homosexual or bisexual preferences. No further questions in the study are asked on this point. All in all, the ‘other’ group is not a uniform representation of the LGBTQIA+ community.

The experiences of LGBTQIA+ children

“In the past, it was mostly just name-calling. That was as bad as it got. Now it’s also about bumping into each other or throwing things at each other. I’m seeing it more and more often. That people are deliberately trying to cause harm.”

Karel, 14 years old

“In group 6, someone said that he wished I didn’t exist.”

Flipyar, 9 years old

The interest groups talk about a growing movement that opposes gender diversity (including non-binary and transgender people). They also observe that tolerance towards their LGBTQIA+ peers is declining among young people. At gatherings, they are seeing aggression and open hatred more often. School is also becoming less and less of a safe place for this group, and participation in GSA networks is on the decline. Cisgender heterosexual young people who are involved in the GSA also report that they face threats, for example when they wear something with rainbow features or if they wear something purple on Spirit Day. The counter-movement is small in itself, but it makes itself heard. This means it is no longer a matter of course for all schools to (explicitly) celebrate Spirit Day. At the same time, school is the place in which children often speak about their feelings for the first time; in the first stage it often feels safer with a teacher than with parents. There are often differences in tolerance among teams of teachers.

Interest groups also express their concerns about the online world, in which LGBTQIA+ children are often bullied and threatened. They face hateful reactions and the distribution of videos aimed at shaming people. But they also see that the online world brings more positive

“I started off getting changed with the boys. A few of the boys then said they didn’t feel comfortable with me changing in front of them. Then I had a cubicle with the boys that I was able to close where I would get changed. I really liked that, but then they started knocking on my door the whole time. And then I thought, I’m moving away from you and you’re still bullying me. I thought that was a bit silly. It’s little things. I didn’t want to use the toilets at school either, which was really difficult.”

Penguins, 15 years old

“The people in my town know. When I am walking in the city or on the street, I often have this feeling that there might be someone here who dislikes me and might suddenly do something.”

Frank, 17 years old

than negative aspects for LGBTQIA+ children, in terms of finding information more easily, online contacts, role models, and being able to experiment with pronouns.

The children say that they experience being unsafe both at school and in their free time. They are taunted and given nasty nicknames and occasionally have to contend with violence. Many stories show that children are alert when they go for a bike ride or a walk, for example, or that they make conscious decisions about where and when to go outside. Trans children speak about sports clubs in which parents of other children have a negative view of their participation in the sports team. For gender-diverse children in particular, sport or gym at school can be stressful; both changing rooms and sports teams are designed for a binary world of boys and girls.

“With the advent of the internet, you encounter people you would not otherwise meet and stories you would not otherwise read. One factor is that it creates some kind of unity. It is also counterproductive because you’re in your own bubble. But that sense of community or recognition is definitely something positive.”

Kyria, 17 years old

“I feel safe now. I had a period of being bullied outside. I felt unsafe, and I only went outside when I had to go to the shops or to school. I avoided the streets, and took the long way round. Now school’s started again, it happens less. During the holidays it’s worse, because the kids are hanging around on the streets. I don’t know what they’re doing, but they’re outside the whole day.”

Karel, 14 years old

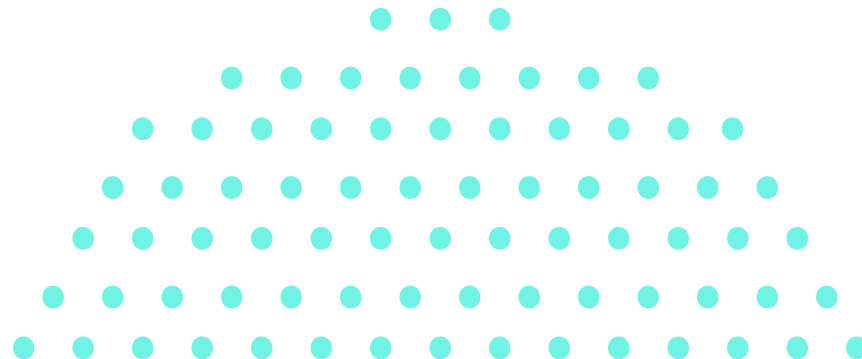


Even when sports clubs or gym teachers create the option of a separate changing room for these children, some children continue to bully them.

Many of the children enjoy the online world. It gives them the opportunity to find LGBTQIA+ communities and feel connected to other LGBTQIA+ children. They can also learn from other people who have gone through the same process. Although adults express concerns about online bullying, this is not the experience of most children we spoke with. However, they do make informed choices about which platforms they use and what they do or do not share online. In this way, they try to prevent unpleasant reactions or comments. The children mention misinformation or negative comments under videos as negative aspects of the online world.

“The thing is, I haven’t told many people in [my town] about being trans, just one very close friend who I know won’t talk to others about it. As for the rest, my parents only found out recently, just a year ago. The reason why I wouldn’t say something like that in [this town] is because I know how unsafe it is. I heard that someone I used to know, who was apparently also trans, literally had to move out of [this town] because of discrimination.”

Robin, 15 years old



4 Preserving the family environment and important contacts for LGBTQIA+ children

According to Articles 5 and 18 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to care, guidance and education from their parents. It is explicitly the responsibility of parents to guide their child in a way that is appropriate to their child's stage of development. For example, parents' cultural or religious beliefs may compromise Article 6 (the right to life and development). GC 7 and 14 emphasise that it is essential for young children (aged 0 to 8) in particular to receive guidance and physical and emotional care. GC 4 and 20 specifically addresses adolescence. Regardless of age, the government must provide appropriate assistance to parents or children themselves. This prevents children from encountering problems later in their development (Article 4 of the UNCRC).

“My parents have always stood totally behind me. At a certain point, it even gets irritating. Our entire bookcase is filled with: ‘What happens if my child is trans’ or ‘My child is trans, what now’? These are all information books. My mother and father read all of that, and they sometimes ask questions from the book. Do you have that too? Do you feel that way too sometimes? Then I think: just stop asking these questions. I always felt fine coming out to my parents. I was certain that they would accept me.”

Anakin 14, years old

Background

Parents are generally open to discussing their child's sexual orientation and/or gender identity with them. However, there is sometimes a lack of awareness and/or they think that their child is not waiting for a discussion.³⁷ Specifically when it comes to intersex children, parents, on the advice of doctors, sometimes suggest to their children that they keep it a secret for fear of disapproval. This secrecy is difficult for the child and contributes to the development of a negative self-image.³⁸

Various organisations offer information and support to parents of LGBTQIA+ children, or to parents who suspect that their child may be LGBTQIA+.ⁱ For children themselves, parents are not always the first people they go to. Certainly children who are bullied because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity stay quiet about it and prefer to find help online.³⁹ Other (non-LGBTQIA+) children often seek support from their parents. Another factor that plays a role here is that the religious or cultural background of the family can be an obstacle to openness about sexual orientation or gender identity. This brings the right of children to life and development into conflict with the right of parents to raise their children according to their own educational views.

Experiences of LGBTQIA+ children

“My mother had expectations in a way, but she was pretty negative. I never showed it, so she thought it wasn't possible. My father didn't get it. He did some really serious things, like praying, so that I'd become normal, even though he isn't religious.”

Robin, 15 years old

“My cousin is pansexual. When I came out, she became very open about it, which meant I got her support and the family became more accepting.”

Katy, 16 years old

Interest groups say that in the initial discovery phase, parents are not the first people that LGBTQIA+ children go to. Others, such as teachers or the Sense consultation hours offered by the Municipal Health Service (GGD), are important discussion partners for children and young people who have questions and are searching for answers during this phase. Contact with like-minded people of a similar age also helps: people of a similar age are, after all,

ⁱ See, for example: iedereenisanders.nl, transvisie.nl or nji.nl

important contacts for all children. Professionals at health clinics or childcare centres can play an important role in breaking down gender norms. But they are mostly working from a cisgender and heterosexual perspective. When making contact with parents, they should consciously make space for a more open approach to ‘the norm’.

The children consider support from parents to be important, and need their support in order to develop properly and safely. When parents find it difficult to accept, or they deny that their child is LGBTQIA+, this has a direct impact on the child. This in turn makes it more difficult to trust other adults. Children also described how painful it is when, for example, they are still addressed by their old name or the wrong pronoun by one of their family members. In addition to parents, other family members also play an important role in accepting children for who they are. Although the family members of the children we spoke with are generally supportive, it can sometimes be more difficult for other family members. Anecdotes show, for example, that parents are sometimes accused of talking their child into it.

“For my parents, it was easier when I was saying that I was bi. But when I said I’d prefer to be known as Sam, because I didn’t fully identify as a girl, that was harder. [...] My father said that he would just keep on calling me Veerle.”

Sam, 16 years old

“I noticed it myself when I came out to my parents as transgender. They didn’t believe me, and they didn’t want to support me. Now I notice that I distrust adults in general. This makes me nervous about telling the teachers.”

Yara, 17 years old

“My family is pretty queer on both my mother’s side and my father’s side. They were very accepting when I came out. I have come out as non-binary, but I have not come out sexually. I said that I met a nice girl who is really wonderful. Not very much was done with that. They thought that I should handle that myself to some extent.”

Dipper, 13 years old



The right to education among LGBTQA+ children

In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right to education is elaborated in Articles 28 and 29. Whereas Article 28 mainly concerns the right to education that every child has, Article 29 focuses more on the content of education. This is further fleshed out in GC 1. It is important that education focuses on the child's overall development, including a sense of identity and belonging, and respect for human rights. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, education should focus on preparing children for a responsible life in a free society, in which there is respect for everyone. In addition, GC 13 elaborates that it is also the duty of schools (and school staff) to protect children from violence in any form.

“The only thing I learned that wasn’t about heterosexuality during sex education at school was the comment that homosexuality also occurs in the animal kingdom.”

Sam, 16 years old

Background

Attention to diversity, including gender identity, is a legal requirement for schools.⁴⁰ The law does not set out how in-depth this should be, or in what way. Research from 2025 shows that only one in five primary schools in the lower and middle grades pay attention to (respecting) sexual and gender diversity. In upper secondary education, this proportion increases to 77%. The main reason that primary schools do not pay attention to this is resistance from

“We did cover it in social studies, but that was more about how politicians viewed it. The fact that it’s more a topic of debate than the fact that it exists.”

James, 16 jaar

parents.⁴¹ There are also significant differences in the organisation and implementation of sex education lessons in secondary schools. In addition, the quality and quantity of sex education depends to a great extent on individual teachers.⁴² Several organisations offer support to teachers to facilitate discussion of the subject at school and in the classroom.^j

However, teachers sometimes find it difficult to engage in conversation about sexual and gender diversity.⁴³ They do not see the urgency, or they find it a tense subject to talk about. Children themselves (including non-LGBTQIA+ children) would like to see a broader approach to sexual and relationship education. They also want teachers to be able to talk about these topics with confidence.⁴⁴ There is also a group of teachers who have a negative attitude towards sexual and gender diversity. It appears that LGBTQIA+ children are more often bullied by teachers than their heterosexual peers.⁴⁵

This has a significant impact on the sense of security of LGBTQIA+ children. For example, it causes more school-related problems, such as changing schools, dropping out or long-term absenteeism.⁴⁶

LGBTQIA+ characters are completely absent from teaching materials such as school textbooks. The texts are also usually written from a heterosexual perspective. This can affect both the identity development and sense of inclusion of LGBTQIA+ children.⁴⁷

^j See for example: gendi.nl and COC’s ‘Teach with Pride’

Experiences of LGBTQIA+ children

“I think it comes down to how they are treated in school themselves. Nothing came up about sexuality at all in the school in which I was badly treated. The other school does a bit with GSA and Spirit Day.”

Katy, 16 years old

“You do it [teach from a GSA] in a pupil’s mentor class, and a mentor is there to create a nice atmosphere in the class. If the mentor isn’t doing anything about it, who will?”

Ysbrand, 17 years old

Interest groups report that sentiment in schools is increasingly turning against LGBTQIA+ children. Meetings and events for this target group are now preferably held out of sight, for example in a separate classroom or in a corner of the assembly hall. These meetings sometimes come up against resistance from other pupils. Water balloons and stink bombs have been thrown, for example. The GSA networks are becoming less and less active. Interest groups are seeing an increase in mental and physical violence. Even heterosexual cisgender children who are involved in a GSA report that they have to deal with verbal and physical violence. Interest groups are clear regarding the place of LGBTQIA+ in teaching materials: there isn't one. They do note, too, that no minority group is mentioned in the teaching materials. General sex education in schools is inadequate in any case and does not focus on the LGBTQIA+ community. For example, biology does not address intersex children, or it does so insufficiently. Intersex children notice that their teachers lack knowledge about what intersex means. This can lead to confrontational situations, where, for example, a teacher states that intersex children cannot exist. Parents and siblings of intersex children also experience this as a denial of the existence of their child and sister or brother.

“My mentor is gay himself. He told me that because I had told him that I’m trans. I thought that it was a safe place. Even the teachers don’t dare to mention it in class, due to the children’s reactions. They may think, because of their parents, that transgender people or homosexuals are weak, and then it’s used as an insult. Everyone would then see the teacher as the gay teacher. The teachers cannot explain it when they are the ones involved, because then they are confronted with it themselves.”

Anakin, 14 years old

In secondary education, there is considerable difference in the subjects in which sex education is provided and the content of that education. According to interest groups, primary schools pay little to no attention to sexual and gender diversity. These organisations are told by school management teams that gender and sexual diversity within their age group ‘is not an issue’. The interest groups are also seeing that the conservative counter movement – such as the anti-gender movement – is having an impact within schools. This sentiment is not only present among parents and pupils, but also among teachers. When one teacher experiences difficulty with the topic, other teachers join in. Some teachers feel that topics related to

LGBTQIA+ identity are being forced upon them. School management can play an important role in creating a safe environment at school.

The children express considerable frustration regarding the teaching materials, the attitude of teachers and the overall heterosexual, binary perspective held by many schools. There is too little attention paid to non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people in teaching materials, or it is very simplistic or inaccurate. Some children even call it a lack of recognition of their existence. They experience it as if the teaching material is saying “you don’t exist.” Not only the curriculum, but also, for example, not wanting to change your name in the Magister system gives children this impression. It undermines their enjoyment in learning and the trust in teaching materials and in teachers. Children report that teachers do not always stand up for LGBTQIA+ pupils in conflicts between pupils about the content of the teaching materials.

Many children reported that they had the impression that it was precisely this lack of knowledge and learning materials that made their fellow pupils fail to understand them. This exposes them to invasive and inappropriate questions, nasty comments and a lack of understanding. In schools in which there is a good explanation and there are active GSAs,

“We’ve got a new building, and my mother says that she thinks there are now gender-neutral toilets. The letters for the boys are blue, and the ones for the girls are pink. That’s not really gender neutral.”

Penguins, 15 years old

“I’m now making a PowerPoint presentation at school. Lots of kids don’t know much about this, and it’s never explained to them, so I’ll do it myself. I am going to discuss LGBTQIA+ topics, their meaning, and some facts.”

Noah, 11 years old

“My school’s really good about it. I also attended schools in which they didn’t bother to change my name in Magister. That means your birth name is on the digi board. They didn’t want to change it.”

Karel, 14 years old

for example, there is less or no bullying, in their experience. According to children, more knowledge contributes to understanding and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ children. In schools, toilets and changing rooms are places in which children experience a great deal of insecurity and discomfort. These are places in which they are bullied. For gender-diverse children, the division between boys' and girls' toilets is inappropriate and very confrontational. Some children decide not to drink anything at school all day because they want to avoid having to go to the toilet. They also experience a lot of stress from having to go to gym class.



“I’ve switched schools because I’ve had a lot of bullying. They tried to help, but if I think back, it had no effect whatsoever. They tried to sort things out on my end instead of focusing on sorting out the children who were bullying me.”

Jip, 12 years old



The right to health of LGBTQIA+ children

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the right to health and healthcare. GC 15 elaborates on this further and makes it clear that the best interests of the child must be central to all decisions related to health. This must be without discrimination based on, among other things, sexual orientation and gender identity. In the same GC, it is also emphasised that the participation and opinion of the child must be taken into account to a significant extent, in line with article 12. In order to form this opinion, it is important that children and young people also have access to accurate and understandable information (Article 17), which is provided in education, among other places (Article 29). Finally, healthcare institutions must be both available and accessible in accordance with GV 15.

“My parents have always said yes. It was just that the doctors tried to get my parents to say no, both to cycle inhibitors and for a gender dysphoria diagnosis or waiting lists. They (general practitioners) are even more cautious than the final location itself (gender clinic). Maybe they’re scared of doing something wrong. Their understanding of gender dysphoria is really bad. They didn’t know what it involves. It’s complicated to talk about your future with someone who has no understanding of it.”

Karel, 14 years old

Background

The LGBTQIA+ Monitor 2024 has shown that adult LGBTQIA+ people have, on average, poorer mental health than heterosexual and cisgender people. For example, LGBTQIA+ people are more likely to experience depression and suicidal thoughts. Non-binary people, asexual people, people who do not wish to identify with a specific “box,” and LGBTQIA+ people of colour are particularly prone to depression. Trans and non-binary young people (18-30 years old) are at increased risk of suicide.⁴⁸ Certain LGBTQIA+ identities are more likely to experience poorer health than cisgender heterosexual individuals. There is also more of a misuse of resources here. Unsurprisingly, care use among certain LGBTQIA+ groups is therefore also higher. Trans and non-binary adults and adult LGBTQIA+ people with disabilities most frequently have contact with a general practitioner. Almost all LGBTQIA+ people, with the exception of gay men and intersex individuals, have had contact with a psychologist at least twice as often as cisgender heterosexual individuals. Transgender and non-binary people are the most frequent users of psychological care.⁴⁹

“In my opinion, there is a lot of room for improvement in terms of waiting times in mental health care, and especially in hormone replacement therapy for younger people.”

Robin, 15 years old

Specifically for transgender people, there are long waiting lists for transgender care, meaning that people sometimes have to wait years before they receive help.⁵⁰ For transgender children, there is the additional factor that they often need, or want, medical assistance before they reach puberty. In addition, gender diverse children experience that the care they receive does not fit the requirements. Many caregivers



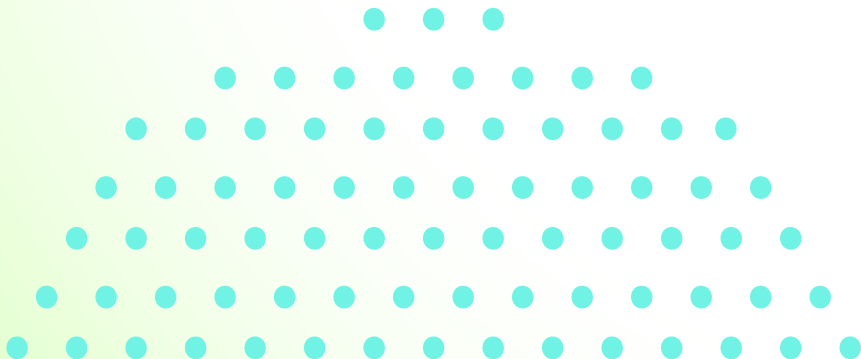
approach them from a medical and binary male/female perspective. For gender diverse children, it is not only a medical issue, but it's also about personal development: the process of discovering who they are and how they want to express it.⁵¹ This binary perspective also plays a major role among intersex children. In the Netherlands, it can still be the case that children who are intersex are made to go through medical and surgical procedures at a young age without their consent. These treatments are intended to ensure that they 'conform' as much as possible to society's image of what a boy or girl should be. After treatment, doctors often advise parents and children to maintain confidentiality and not to tell too many people about being intersex. The Netherlands, the EU and the UN are calling for these unnecessary medical treatments to be stopped without consent and/or made punishable by law.⁵²

Experiences of LGBTQIA+ children

“When I was ten or eleven, I went to the family doctor for a referral to the VU University Medical Centre. He said that I had to speak to a therapist first. So I did that, and the therapist said that I didn't have gender dysphoria, but an anxiety disorder. After two sessions, they sent me away. It took a long time before I had the confidence to go back to the doctor to ask for a referral.”

James, 16 years old

Interest groups say that care is often not specific enough for LGBTQIA+ children, especially when it comes to transgender and intersex children. The physical and psychological care of transgender children is a major focal point. There are long waiting lists, not only for transgender care itself, but also for the psychological support during the time spent on waiting lists. This makes it twice as difficult. GPs could be more involved in this, as could (school) community workers. In that case it is primarily about awareness and openness from these professionals, so that children can at least talk about it. Specifically for intersex children,



medical treatments that are not necessary are carried out without the child's consent. Because the child's boundary is not accepted at an early age, this can later result in a disrupted relationship with their own body. In addition, the confidentiality advice of doctors leads to a negative self-image and these children distance themselves earlier on from peers. This can result in loneliness, and they are bullied more often.

Interest groups report that healthcare professionals, like teachers, are also reluctant to take action when it comes to LGBTQIA+ issues. They are afraid that they do not know enough about it or feel uncomfortable using pronouns. This means that the children do not always receive the care that they need. The result is that these children trust adults less, they withdraw and ask (for help) less quickly. Some children drop out of school because of this. Youth Health Care (JGZ) plays an important role in guiding (and, if necessary, referring) young people who are truant from school. When the right questions are asked there, it becomes clearer at an earlier stage what lies behind the problems. Sense walk-in sessions also emerge here as an important 'discussion partner'. Sex education in schools, too, focuses on the cisgender heterosexual perspective. As a result, little to no attention



“The waiting lists at the gender clinic are long. Nothing can be done about it, but it would be fine as a starting point. That you could hear a bit more or would be able to count down. A system would be great.”

Karel, 14 years old

“I’m at the VU, where I’ve had good support. I’m still getting good support, and I’m happy about that. Other than that, I don’t have anything that I’m struggling with or have struggled with.”

Jip, 12 years old

is paid to, for example, how homosexual and lesbian sex can be practised safely. There is also little to no attention paid to the various issues of care relating to diversity in terms of sex, gender and sexuality.

For **children**, care is primarily a stumbling block when it comes to gender diversity. Transgender children talk about the long waiting lists and how it is unclear to them when they will be able to start treatment. In their experience, they often have to repeat the same story to different professionals. Furthermore, they are not always listened to, but care professionals instead regularly address their parents instead. Children sometimes have to think about topics that they are not yet concerned with at their age, such as whether they want to have children in the future. Some children become physically ill because they have to pretend to be someone they are not. These complaints decrease as soon as they are allowed and able to express themselves as they feel. For parents with intersex children, this means that they must be aware of the medical

“In group one, they kept using my old name. When my mother came to collect me from school, I always had a really bad stomach ache. By the end of group two, everyone really started using Travis. Then the stomach aches stopped.”

Travis, 12 years old

“I’m going crazy with the waiting lists in healthcare.”

James, 16 years old

care that is necessary for their child: Are all the steps necessary or are other considerations also a possibility?



The right of LGBTQIA+ children to give their opinion

The right to express your opinion is derived from Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This article deals with the right to express an opinion on matters affecting the child and to be listened to. This is elaborated in GC 12 and obliges the government to take measures that enable children to participate in a manner consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This also means that children must have sufficient and accurate information to form their opinions (Article 17) and that they are free to form their opinions (Article 13). This also means that a child should be free to express their sexual orientation. GC 12 notes that minority groups in particular experience obstacles in realising this right.

“They [care professionals] think that children need their parents in order to make those types of decisions. Ultimately, it’s the children who know best in terms of their identity. You don’t need the parents for that. They can’t empathise with their children. They don’t know how we feel.”

Anakin, 14 years old

Background

Several parties in the Netherlands are committed to representing the interests of LGBTQIA+ individuals. The COC is the most well-known and largest of these organisations. Within the COC, special attention is also paid to LGBTQIA+ children, for example within the previously mentioned Young & Out groups and the GSA

“It had to come from my end. I didn’t like gym class, and I felt panicked at school. They could’ve done more than just ask if I wanted some water. I was able to go to them to give my opinion. They then did do something, but only after I’d asked a lot. I had to cry out for it.”

Karel, 14 years old

networks. These communities are important for young people finding like-minded people.⁵³ In addition, this helps the COC to gain a clear understanding of what is going on among LGBTQIA+ children. As a result, they can be an effective spokesperson for this group.⁵⁴ At the same time, we are seeing that there are more forms of advocacy for young people and young adults over the age of 18 than for children under the age of 18. For example, the Dutch Youth Council (NJR) has the Gamechanger Advisory Board.⁵⁵ Together with other organisations such as Colored Collective and the Rutgers Foundation, it forms the Alliantie Jong Gelijk (Young Equal Alliance).⁵⁶ This alliance, along with several other alliances focused on gender equality and sexual diversity, is funded by the OCW emancipation policy. They all exist for young people over the age of 18.



The experiences of LGBTQIA+ children

“I hope that schools will teach pupils more about what queer means. A lot of children don’t know what it is. They are quicker to use it as an insult because they don’t really know where their insults are directed. Then it doesn’t matter.”

Dipper, 13 years old

“Everything is very black and white, and there’s very little grey. Polarisation is the biggest problem.”

Kyria, 17 years old

For LGBTQIA+ individuals, it is not always safe to openly express their opinions or advocate for the interests of their community. Visibility, according to research, can lead to negative (counter) responses. This is certainly the case for the groups that do not fall with the binary framework of gender and sexual orientation, such as bi+ people, non-binary people and transgender people. The same research shows that when there is more attention paid to LGBTQIA+ issues in political debate, or when politicians themselves are openly LGBTQIA+, this is often accompanied by more resistance to, for example, “wokism” or lessons on gender and sexual diversity.⁵⁷

Interest groups say that the LGBTQIA+ community is more visible than before, meaning that their needs and interests are coming more clearly to the forefront. But the visibility also has negative consequences, such as negative responses, resistance and people who actively turn against them. This makes it especially

difficult for children to come out and to stand up for the LGBTQIA+ community. At the same time, visibility also makes it easier for LGBTQIA+ children to find each other and feel safe in each other’s company.

Visibility also helps to show LGBTQIA+ children where they can go for help and support, and to find the right information. Small symbols, like a little banner or badge, can indicate to children that a place is safe. Interest groups also indicated that in surveys among children, they are not always asked how someone identifies.

“I think keeping it open for discussion and making it open for discussion at certain times is a good way of resolving a lot of things. If it becomes almost a forbidden topic of conversation, you won’t get very far.”

Jip, 12 years old

“It’s a good point that wherever possible, [being LGBTQIA+] is reflected.”

Flipyar, 9 years old

Children can often only choose between 'boy' or 'girl', for fear that fewer children will complete the questionnaire otherwise. However, this means that information about LGBTQIA+ children remains invisible and their specific issues and needs are overlooked.

Not all **children** who we spoke with are active in expressing and advocating for the interests of the LGBTQIA+ community. For example, only a few children were members of a GSA. Some explicitly state that they do not have that need; they just want to be children. They do, however, consider it important that they are spoken to about issues that impact them, which is not always the case. They also see it as positive if more for children is organised, such as more activities for their age group during Pride week. Here, these children notice that society is polarised about being LGBTQIA+. They hear and see the reactions to other LGBTQIA+ people. They experience their rights not being self-evident but instead becoming a topic of discussion. This undermines their self-confidence and their confidence in the future. Although the LGBTQIA+ children are reluctant to actively stand up for their community, they know very well what needs to change. Changes

that can improve their lives and those of other LGBTQIA+ children. Their ideas show what they would commit to if they did participate actively. Many of their solutions were to do with increasing awareness of LGBTQIA+ issues. They particularly mention the attitude of teachers, fellow pupils and the information in the teaching materials. But better representation of LGBTQIA+ children in the media is also emerging. According to the children, unfamiliarity leads to fear, negative reactions or hurtful language, often without others realising how painful that is.

“You could influence the politics in some way. There doesn’t have to be any more debate about the rights of trans and queer people. There should be no more discussion about this, unless something goes very wrong. For example if people are murdered, that is spoken about. We shouldn’t have to talk any more about whether trans people can have their passport changed.”

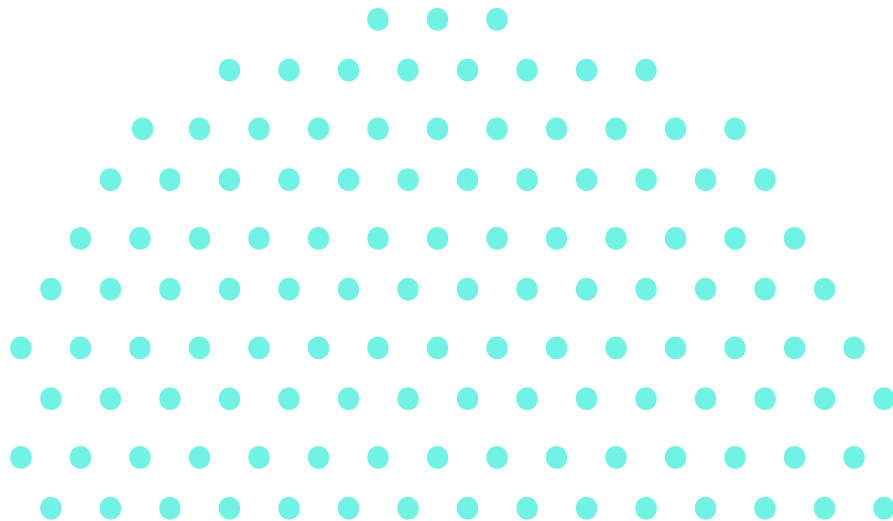
Anakin, 14 years old

Also the binarity, the thinking in terms of boys/ girls, at schools is coming to the fore. Children complain about the lack of gender neutral toilets and changing rooms, or that they are somewhere hidden away in the building. Even when it comes to the coat racks, there is a distinction between the coat racks for boys and the coat racks for girls. More knowledge, both at school and in the wider community, could help here.



“When I watch queer videos, I also see a lot of what’s happening in America and other countries. I know for sure who I want to be and what I am, but it makes me uncertain of the future: are my rights going to be taken away?”

Yara, 17 years old



Sources and references

Both children and interest groups in the field were consulted for this publication. By interest groups, we mean both organisations that specifically focus on LGBTQIA+ children (or specific identities within that group) and organisations that take this target group into account in their broader work.

A total of 12 interest groups and 17 children were interviewed. Some conversations took place individually and others in groups. We would like to thank everyone, especially the children, for their openness during the discussions.

The children are as follows:
All names are pseudonyms:

- Anakin, 14 years old
- Dipper, 13 years old
- Flipyar, 9 years old
- Frank, 17 years old
- James, 16 years old
- Jip, 12 years old
- Karel, 14 years old
- Katy, 16 years old
- Kyria, 17 years old
- Noah, 11 years old
- Nova, 13 years old
- Stitch, 6 years old
- Penguins, 15 years old
- Robin, 15 years old
- Sam, 16 years old
- Travis, 12 years old
- Yara, 17 years old

The following organisations (representing various interests) are involved:

- COC-Nederland
- GGD Haaglanden
- GGD Region Utrecht
- GSA Haaglanden
- GSA Region Amsterdam (Christine (14 years old), Eleanor (14 years old) and Ysbrand (17 years old))
- Movisie
- NNID Foundation, expertise centre on gender diversity
- Rutgers Foundation
- Regenboogloket Foundation
- School and Safety Foundation
- Transgender Network
- Health and Safety Region of Gelderland-Midden

- 1 [Rainbow Map](#)
- 2 [Emancipatie lhbtqi+ personen: twee stappen vooruit, een stap terug \[The emancipation of LGBTQ+ people: two steps forward, one step back\] | Movisie](#)
- 3 [10 keer vraag en antwoord over anti-lhbtqi+ complottheorieën \[10 questions and answers about anti-LGBTQIA+ conspiracy theories\] | Movisie](#)
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- 8 [Combating discrimination and violence against LGBTQ+ persons | Emancipation | Rijksoverheid.nl](#)
- 9 [Discrimination figures in 2024 | Report | Rijksoverheid.nl](#)
- 10 [Movisie \(2025\), Feiten-en-cijfers-lhbtqi+-personen-op-een-rij.pdf](#)
- 11 [Letter to Parliament on the status of research into young people's views on LGBTQ+ persons | Parliamentary document | Rijksoverheid.nl](#)
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- 14 [Equal rights for LGBTQ+ persons | Emancipation | Rijksoverheid.nl; Alliance for Tailored Healthcare - The toolkit](#)
- 15 [Movisie \(2025\). Feiten en cijfers over lhbtqi+ personen op een rij. \[Facts and figures about LGBTQIA+ people at a glance.\]](#)
- 16 [What does LGBTQIA+ mean? | Netherlands Youth Institute](#)
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- 20 [Most LGBTQIA individuals under the age of 25 | Netherlands Youth Institute](#)
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- 22 [A safe environment for LGBTQIA+ young people | Netherlands Youth Institute](#)
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