



Module Summary: Homosexuality & Migration

This module explores how migration is affecting the experiences of LGB pupils, including – but not only - those from immigration groups. It considers what challenges increasingly diverse classrooms present to teachers and pupils, and how those challenges might be addressed to create safe spaces for all LGB pupils from all backgrounds. Lastly, the module points towards focal points and agencies that may prove useful for LGB immigrants or refugees in need of practical, psychological or legal advice.

1. Leaving and arriving

Part 1 offers an overview of the **persecution, criminalisation and stigmatisation of LGBT in countries of origin** of Europe's migrants: their (lack of) legal rights and protections; human rights violations; stereotypes and stigmas; and public and personal persecutions. According to a comprehensive analysis of sexual orientation laws conducted by the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) in May 2018, physical relations between people of the same sex are still illegal in seventy-three countries (37%) of UN members. Four of them - Sudan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Yemen - still demand capital punishment. Recent years brought gains as well - in India, for example, which finally decriminalised homosexuality in September 2018 - but the overall picture is gloomy. Tanzania leads the way in cracking down on the LGBT community in Africa; conservative trends in Europe and Latin America, too, are cause for concern. All in all, the LGBT community is likely to look for refuge in safe havens for some time to come.

Building on this, part 2 explores **homosexuality in the destination countries**. What happens when migrants arrive? Not all destination countries are gay-friendly - or migrant-friendly, for that matter. How can LGBT migrants or refugees settle and integrate? Firstly, this section outlines the conventions and legislation that govern the arrival of refugees and the (potential) granting of refugee status and asylum. Being recognised as a refugee on the grounds of persecution for your sexual orientation and/or identity is not easy. The burden of proof sits with the applicant, and evidence is often hard to come by. Even when asylum is granted, LGBT refugees tend to face an uphill battle. In addition to a difficult road to integration in their new country, many of them are or feel rejected by members of their own communities. And there can be repercussions back home, too. An Iranian refugee in the Netherlands reported that he was granted asylum "but was deeply saddened by the fact his choice had had a major negative influence on his family back in Iran and suffered extreme bullying from other families". The story of Tofik Dibi, A Dutch MP of Moroccan descent, is equally revealing; his biography details a long struggle with coming out in order to protect his family.

The final section of this part digs a little deeper into **homosexuality and religion**, looking at the ways in which ethnicity and religion affect the acceptance of homosexuality among migrant groups. Religion stands out as a major driver of anti-LGBT sentiment (Buddhism being somewhat of an exception). Christianity, Islam and - to a lesser extent - Judaism all have shameful records when it comes to the rejection and active persecution of the LGBT community. While tones have softened somewhat in recent decades, in particular in Western societies, religious teaching remains largely opposed to same sex relationships and leaves little room for recognition, respect, or - in a growing number of societies, sadly - the protection of basic rights.

For pupils, parents and teachers, these realities bring obvious challenges, but they also offer opportunities. Careful and considered reflection on religion, ethnicity and culture should be part and partial of a child's education. That is not yet happening in every homo'poly country, and even in the more progressive ones - the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, for example - it is not yet happening in every school. But more diverse classrooms offer more diverse views and ask for broader discussions. As the next part will illustrate, this has much potential, but also some important pitfalls schools should be mindful of.

2. Gay and lesbian pupils with a migration background

The first part examines **barriers for LGB immigrant group pupils** by considering why it is difficult for LGB pupils to come out and by exploring religious and cultural factors as well as home situation and family background. One of the main problems migrant LGBs face is reconciling their sexual orientation with the dominant religious beliefs disclosed by the host culture, or even the migrant's own culture. A young person born into a family with an immigration background might, depending on the family's cultural and religious affinities, find it even more difficult to come to terms with his or her sexuality. Teachers should be aware of the such sensitivities, so that they can provide a safe and secure environment for them to come out at school if they choose to do so. Making a pupil - any pupil - feel recognised and respected in this way can make an invaluable contribution to their personal and academic development.

Beyond the school gates, community and family life has a critical impact on young LGB immigrants as well. Members of immigrant communities may fear not only the judgment of society at large, but that of their family and peers. This makes not only their coming out more difficult, but also their integration and into society more difficult. How can LGB students be made to feel secure when their environment might not (fully) accept homosexuality? Here, too, the role of teachers can be critical. While a teacher cannot and should not seek to intrude on a pupil's personal or home life, a better understanding of their home situation will allow them to offer appropriate support. Where a school has the commitment and the resources, involving the parents - through parent teacher meetings and info evening, as [this school in Birmingham](#) is doing - can be particularly productive.

Lastly, to **inspire action and showcase success**, this part concludes with a story on the 'heroes' project. This one focuses on the specific situation of LGB adolescents of foreign birth or origin in Germany, attempting to examine religious and cultural factors and also the question what kind of support institutions may be able to offer where a

home environment might not (fully) accept homosexuality. This is exemplified by an inspirational project for young men from so-called cultures of honour whose aim it is to fight oppression in the name of honour and to promote equal opportunity and equality irrespective of gender and sexual identity.

3. Roles and fears

Schools and classes are characterized by an increasing number of different people (ethnicity, religion, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion and lifestyle). Sexual orientation plays an important role in personal development, especially in adolescence, and school is a place where peers meet (by force) with different ideas of life. **Tackling homosexuality in increasingly diverse classrooms** requires a constructive debate as well as ideas and guidelines on how the organization school deals with this topic.

There is no doubt that the school is an important place in the life of every human being. It is at school that successes are taking place, but also where failures first occur. It is where most people first experience love, as well as disappointment. Discrimination, too, is often first experienced in school. Discrimination and violence exist in virtually every school, and LGB pupils – regardless of their background – face more discrimination, bullying and violence than their heterosexual peers. In a context of increasingly diverse schools and classrooms, **tackling discrimination and violence** is a challenge that looms large. This is why it's so important to draw clear lines in the sand, and to listen and learn from students when addressing these issues. Working with them, not for or against them, is the most effective way to ensure a safe school environment. In the process, bullies can become allies - but that requires time, patience and determination to invest in this issue.

Teachers, as the backbone of the education system in a country, have a vital role to play in **building such acceptance among a diverse pupil population**. They can take steps to make the learning environment more democratic and open to the “other” - but only if they are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills. Both experienced teachers and trainee teachers should learn about acceptance of diverse groups in their classrooms and about ways to make their learning environment more open to individual expression. Ideally, a ‘whole school policy’ is in place to support them doing this.

4. Supporting and consultancy institutions

The last part of this module provides **an overview of LGBT organisations and focal points** that can offer support in crisis situations, with particular reference to migration and refugees (incidences of violence, questions around refugee status and asylum and so on), and organisations providing psychological and social support services. By providing (trainee) teachers with this information, it is hoped that they can reach out to learn more about these issues should they choose to, and, most importantly, that they know where to direct future pupils in need of professional support.