

## **LGBTI+ YOUTH WELLBEING ACROSS EUROPE: IMAGINED FUTURES IN TURBULENT TIMES**

Despite progressive moves towards lesbian and gay equality, societal stigmatisation and discrimination persists across Europe. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans & intersex (LGBTI) people still experience significant inequalities in well-being, with these particularly pronounced for young LGBTI+ people who are at higher risk of depression, anxiety and suicidality than heterosexual youth. These risks have been compounded by numerous crises: for example, the pandemic, growing economic insecurity, and the rise of populist anti-LGBT / anti-gender political movements. Many young LGBTI+ people across Europe are growing up in a period of profound turbulence which may prevent them achieving their full potential in adulthood. Yet LGBTI+ youth remain significantly neglected in well-being research, despite sustained evidence of their unaddressed needs. Across research, policy, and civil society, the question of how to enhance LGBTI+ youth wellbeing for the future needs urgent attention.

This pan-European consortium of academics, policy makers and NGOs, will generate unique, in-depth data on how inequalities in well-being are experienced, and how LGBTI+ youth build networks of resilience and resistance in times of crisis. The overarching aim of this pan-European project is to explore how LGBTI+ youth wellbeing can be enhanced via a participatory exploration of LGBTI+ young adults' imaginings of 'better futures'. The project has four key research questions as follows:

- RQ1: What does 'wellbeing' mean to LGBTI+ youth across different European nations, and what do they feel are the current barriers to, and enablers of, good levels of wellbeing?
- RQ2: How do LGBTI+ youth imagine their individual and collective futures whilst growing up in a period of crisis and uncertainty, and what are their visions for a future in which their wellbeing is enhanced?
- RQ3: How might policy makers and NGOs tackle inequalities in wellbeing by learning from the innovative visions of 'better futures' envisaged by LGBTI+ young adults?
- RQ4: How might examining LGBTI+ youth voices and visions help us rethink empirical measurements and conceptual understandings of wellbeing?

It will be the first qualitative study to examine LGBTI+ youth well-being across diverse national contexts: Estonia, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. Its focus is on LGBTI+ youth on the cusp of adulthood (aged 18-24), exploring the challenges they face as they develop their identities and plan for their futures in the face of political and economic uncertainty. Creative participatory methods will produce in-depth data about what LGBTI+ youth think, and feel, about their lives and imagined futures. The project will let LGBTI+ young adults define what well-being means to them, and will open-up space for them to construct collective visions for a future in which their well-being can be enhanced. A key objective is to identify how policy makers can best tackle inequalities in LGBTI+ well-being by learning from the innovative strategies and visions developed by young LGBTI+ people themselves.

The project has high potential to bring positive changes to wider society and to have a substantive impact on the wellbeing of LGBTI+ youth. The research is of significant value and interest to a range of stakeholders. While there is extensive evidence highlighting wellbeing inequalities among LGBTI+ youth, there is a lack of in-depth research to help policy makers and practitioners better understand how these inequalities are experienced, navigated and resisted in everyday life. This study sets out to address these knowledge gaps by listening closely to the voices and visions of LGBTI+ young adults.