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Alice Sophie Sarcinelli, Stefania Santilli, Léa Lomba

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# **ENACT** **Enhancing the capacity of civil society organisations to support victims of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes**

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## **National Report**

Italy

Rete LENFORD

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January 2025



**ENACT**

Enhancing the capacity of civil  
society organisations to support  
victims of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes

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**Author(s):** Alice Sophie Sarcinelli, Stefania Santilli, Léa Lomba.  
**Project coordinator:** Rete Lenford Avvocatura per i diritti LGTBI  
**Graphic design:** Universitat de Girona, Vivian Fernàndez  
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## Table of contents

<b>Highlights</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Legal and political context on anti-LGBTI hate crimes</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1. Context	9
1.2. Legal framework	10
Timeline of Key Milestones	10
<b>2. Findings</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1. Survivors of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes and discrimination	11
2.1.1. Experiences	11
2.1.2. Knowledge	16
2.1.3. Needs	17
2.1.4. Expectations	18
2.2. Professionals working with survivors of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes	19
2.2.1. Experiences	19
2.2.2. Knowledge	23
2.2.3. Needs	25
2.2.3.1 Training needs	27
2.2.3.2 Other needs	28
2.2.4. Expectations	29
<b>3. Overall evaluation: SWOT analysis</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>4. References</b>	<b>39</b>

# Highlights

Interviews highlight the **need to have laws** to protect victims and tackle hate crimes. Overall there is a clear consensus that :

- Under-reporting of hate crimes is widespread.** Many hate crimes victims are unaware of their rights or are not in the position to be able to claim them (because of their migrant status, because of the hierarchical positions within their family in family-related crimes, because they have to think about their basic needs).
  
- It is a privilege to be able to stand trial.** . Moreover, it is urgent to provide potential victims with concrete instruments to help them navigate criminal justice.
  
- An intersectional understanding of the impact of hate crimes requires a **victim-centred approach**, based on proximity toward the beneficiaries.
  
- Visibility matters.** It helps LGBTQI+ people feel welcome, signalling that it's a safe space for them where their identity matters and they are accepted. It is vital that Italian LGBTQI+ NGOs become more visible, especially for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
  
- Training (as well as diversity in recruitment)** for law enforcement and criminal justice professionals is necessary in order to help them take a critical look at their own personal biases.

# Introduction

*“It would be important to start to write and provide data about real facts (...) to show that unbelievable things really happen. We can talk about it, but if there isn’t anything written, our words get lost in the wind” (26-year-old survivor)*

The **Enact project** seeks to fill the lack of official and reliable data on anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes by investigating their legal, social, and systemic dimensions. This report provides an overarching context **of the Italian situation** and delves into insights gathered from survivors of hate crimes and professionals through in-depth qualitative interviews and focus groups. We will point out critical aspects, such as **a)** the specific needs of victims; **b)** factors facilitating and obstacles to reporting and contributing to revictimization; **c)** the engagement of public bodies in fighting anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes; **d)** quality, and interconnection of the available services. Finally, the report identifies gaps and formulates strategies to guarantee an effective and coordinated response to survivors’ specific needs, while fostering a safer and more inclusive society.

**Recruitment** was realized through various channels, including **a)** personal and professional contacts of the researchers and the **Rete Lenford** association; **b)** networks such as **“Rete contro l’odio”** (“Networks against hate”); **c)** social media platforms (i.e. public groups like **“Gruppo VARCO-REFO di Milano e Lombardia”** as well as through **influencers** on the subject), **d)** other socio-cultural associations and no-profit organizations; **e)** **snowball sampling**. However, recruiting survivors hasn’t been an easy task. Many professionals were reluctant to suggest the interview to survivors, citing their state of confusion and high psychological and social suffering. Some survivors expressed the desire to simply forget the traumatic episodes experienced, while others were too disappointed with the judicial system. To meet the interviewees’ preferences, some interviews were conducted in their mother tongue (English and Portuguese).

## Interviews with survivors

The sample of survivors is heterogeneous in terms of nationality, social class, age, sex, gender identity and expression. The sample includes two lesbian women, who experienced discrimination rather than a hate crime. This aligns with

professionals' observations that lesbians rarely seek support from discrimination and violence support centers.

	<b>YEAR OF BIRTH</b>	<b>GENDER IDENTITY</b>	<b>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</b>	<b>INTERSEX STATUS</b>	<b>TRANSGENDER STATUS</b>
<b>V1</b>	1981	M	G	NO	
<b>V2</b>	2004	F	N.D.	NO	T
<b>V3</b>	1998	M	B	NO	
<b>V4</b>	2005	F	N.D.	NO	T
<b>v5</b>	2002	M	G	NO	
<b>V6</b>	1981	M	G	NO	
<b>V7</b>	1965	M	G	NO	
<b>V8</b>	1998	M	G	NO	
<b>V9</b>	2002	Gender-fluid	P	Gender-fluid	
<b>V10</b>	1967	Non-binary	N.D.	No	T
<b>V11</b>	1987	M	G	NO	
<b>V12</b>	2001	M	A	NO	T
<b>V13</b>	1996	M	G	NO	
<b>V14</b>	1974	Non-binary	P	I	
<b>V15</b>	1969	M	G	NO	
<b>V16</b>	1978	F	L	NO	T
<b>V17</b>	1958	M	G	NO	
<b>V18</b>	1965	M	G	NO	
<b>V19</b>	1973	M	G	NO	
<b>V20</b>	1975	F	L	NO	

M = Male, F = Female, T = Transgender, I = Intersex, G = Gay, L = Lesbian, N.D = not declared, B= Bisexual, A= Asexual, P= Pansexual.

## Interviews with professionals

The sample of professionals is heterogeneous in terms of the professions represented (lawyers, social workers, educators, psychologists, and a judge), sex and age; however, they are all of Italian nationality.

	<b>YEAR OF BIRTH</b>	<b>GENDER IDENTITY</b>	<b>HIGHEST FINISHED EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION</b>	<b>ROLE IN THE ORGANISATION</b>
<b>P1</b>	1965	M	Master degree	Lawyer, anti-discrimination center



<b>P2</b>	1971	Fluid	Bachelor's degree	Coordinator, anti-discrimination center
<b>P3</b>	1997	F	Bachelor's degree	Psychologist, anti-discrimination center
<b>P4</b>		M	Bachelor's degree	Educator at shelter for LGBTQI+ people
<b>P5</b>	1978	F	Master's degree	Coordinator at LGBTQI+ shelter
<b>P6</b>	1980	M	Bachelor's degree	Coordinator, anti-discrimination center
<b>P7</b>	1996	F	Master's degree	Social worker, LGBTQI+ violence center
<b>P8</b>	1956	M	Master's degree	Magistrate and president of network assisting crime victims
<b>P9</b>	1987	F	Master's degree	Psychologist, center for LGBTQI+ violence
<b>P10</b>	1982	M	Master's degree	Legal consultant and lawyer
<b>P11</b>	1994	F	Doctorate	Lawyer
<b>P12</b>	1957	F	Upper secondary education	LGBTQI+ association's executive board
<b>P13</b>	1985	M	Upper secondary education	Coordinator of LGBTQI+ welcoming desk
<b>P14</b>	1992	M	Upper secondary education	Social worker, anti-discrimination center
<b>P15</b>	1976	M	Master's degree	Coordinator, anti-discrimination network for LGBTQI+ refugees
<b>P16</b>	1965	M	Master's degree	Discrimination and equality lawyer
<b>P17</b>	1973	M	Master's degree	Discrimination and equality lawyer
<b>P18</b>	1972	F	Master's degree	Fertility and family lawyer
<b>P19</b>	1954	M	Master's degree	Discrimination lawyer for refugees
<b>P20</b>	1995	F	Master's degree	Discrimination and social rights lawyer

## Focus groups with professionals

	<b>YEAR OF BIRTH</b>	<b>GENDER IDENTITY</b>	<b>HIGHEST FINISHED EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION</b>	<b>ROLE IN THE ORGANISATION</b>
<b>FG1</b>	1968	M	Bachelor's degree	Educator in LGBTQI+ anti-violence and anti-discrimination center
<b>FG2</b>	1982	F	Bachelor's degree	Educator at shelter for LGBTQI+ people
<b>FG3</b>	1963	F	Bachelor's degree	Socio-pedagogical educator in LGBTQI+ anti-discrimination service
<b>FG4</b>	1984	F	Bachelor's degree	Social Worker in LGBTQI+ anti-discrimination center

<b>FG5</b>	1975	F	Master's degree	Psychotherapist in LGBTQI+ shelter
<b>FG6</b>	1991	F	Bachelor's degree	Professional educator in an LGBTQI+ shelter
<b>FG7</b>	1982	F	Master's degree	Lawyer in an LGBTQI+ advocacy organisation

# 1. Legal and political context on anti-LGBTI hate crimes

## 1.1. Context

According to the latest data provided by ILGA Europe,<sup>1</sup> while social visibility for LGBTQI+ people in Italy is at 100%, the country stands out within Western Europe for its lag in the inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals (ILGA, 2023 & 2024). The first LGBTQI+ association arose with the first gay group '**ROMA-1**' in 1963, followed, after the Stonewall Riots, by the FUORI movement. The 1st public demonstration took place in 1972. In 1979, the **Trans Identity Movement (MIT)** was born in Milan. In 1980 the first nucleus of what later in 1985 became Arcigay<sup>2</sup> was formed. From this point onwards, greater attention and acceptance for LGBTQI+ issues developed: Rome hosted, in 1994, the first Italian Pride and, in 2000, the World Pride. In 2005 Famiglie Arcobaleno was founded, an association focused on same-sex family's rights, and in 2007, the Rete Lenford - Avvocatura per i Diritti LGBTI+ was founded, association of lawyers and jurists specialized on litigation as an instrument for the advancement of LGBTQI+ people's rights.

**ILGA's comparative map of countries** published annually shows that between 2016 and 2024, Italy moved from a score of 20% to only 25.41% in terms of legal and policy practices for LGBTI individuals. Concerning equality and non-discrimination for LGBTQI+ people, Italy scores a mere 8.74%, ranking 36th out of 49 European countries listed. The current government's anti-gender policies are in continuity with Italy's historically prevailing heteronormative and homophobic nature (Sarcinelli & Lomba, 2024). However, there is a **recent augmentation of institutional homo-transphobic attitudes, policies and legislations** as well as of anti-LGBTQI+ positions in the public space. OSCE commitments (OSCE, 2023) on

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org/countries/italy/>

<sup>2</sup> Arcigay is an association nationwide spread created in 1980 as an extension of the national commission for civil rights of ARCI, which is a major cultural association created in 1957 in Florence and currently spread all over the national territory (<https://www.arcigay.it/chi-siamo/>).

hate crimes invite Italy to **a)** collect reliable data and statistics on hate crimes and to report them periodically to ODIHR, **b)** enact legislation providing for effective penalties that take into account the gravity of such crimes and **c)** encourage victims to report. Some hate crimes are reported, but **many go unreported** due to stigma and fear. According to the **Sixth Report on Italy published by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance** (Council of Europe, 2024), Italy has made steps forward<sup>3</sup>, but LGBTQI+ people continue to face prejudice and discrimination. ECRI suggests Italy to **a)** create an independent body for equality given National Office Against Racial Discrimination – “Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali” (UNAR)’s significant role in governmental policies and **b)** work more to stop hate speech and improve law enforcement’s ability to address hate crimes.

## 1.2. Legal framework

Despite a general **legislative vacuum on LGBTQI+ issues**, some progress has been made for LGBTQI+ rights (see the timeline below).

### Timeline of Key Milestones

- 1982 ● Homosexuality decriminalized
- 1982 ● Law on gender reassignment is approved.
- 2003 ● Anti-discrimination protections in employment.
- 2015 ● Removal of surgical requirement for gender recognition
- 2016 ● Civil unions legalized for same-sex couples

There are still some important limits in gender recognition and intersex rights, reproductive and family rights, SOGIESC grounds for asylum and migrant rights. LGBTQI+ people continue to experience stigmatization and **lack of legal protection from discrimination and hate crimes**. There are no direct prohibitions

<sup>3</sup> The recognition of LGBTQI+ unions, the adoption of a National LGBTQI strategy, the development of a data collection system regarding bullying incidents in school, the provision of information on health services for T people, the creation of centres against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, including shelters.

in Italian law on hate crimes against LGBTQI+ groups<sup>4</sup>. In 2021, the Senate blocked “Zan Bill” attempting to include such protections. Consequently, **hate crimes targeting LGBTQI+ individuals are charged as any other crime, ignoring the underlying bias**. Despite several provisions enabling law enforcement agencies to apply for a tougher penalty for hate crimes (i.e. the new section of the Code on “Felonies against Equality” of Article 604 of the Criminal Code), crimes motivated by the victim’s sexual orientation, are not covered specifically, but can be pursued by applying the aggravating circumstance established in Article 61 Criminal Code<sup>5</sup>, which deals with “*futile*” or “*despicable*” motivations, under the case law of the Court of Cassation. Moreover, anti-discrimination laws for jobs don’t protect LGBTQI+ people in other areas, like private and public services. Despite the EU pushing Italy to do more to protect LGBTQI+ people from hate crimes, progress is slow.

## 2. Findings

### 2.1. Survivors of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes and discrimination

#### 2.1.1. Experiences

**Institutional and social discrimination and trans/homophobia** are part of survivors’ everyday life. “Microaggressions”, “small offenses”, “homophobic working atmosphere” are common everyday episodes happening at work, in the streets and even at home. Microaggressions are an **ongoing stress factor** and occur also at the **structural or institutional level**: *“In my municipality they thought I had bought the marriage with my partner; on the day I went to get my identity*

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<sup>4</sup> Although the Italian Constitution provides general protections against such crimes, The “Mancino Law” (1993) bans the incitement of violence for reasons of race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, excluding sexual orientation and gender identity.

<sup>5</sup>

[https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie\\_generale/caricaArticolo?art.versione=10&art.idGruppo=6&art.flagTipoArticolo=1&art.codiceRedazionale=030U1398&art.idArticolo=61&art.idSottoArticolo=1&art.idSottoArticolo1=10&art.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1930-10-26&art.progressivo=0](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaArticolo?art.versione=10&art.idGruppo=6&art.flagTipoArticolo=1&art.codiceRedazionale=030U1398&art.idArticolo=61&art.idSottoArticolo=1&art.idSottoArticolo1=10&art.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1930-10-26&art.progressivo=0)

*card the lady at the counter told me: "Do you really live with your partner?"*

Institutional violence is much harder to report. However, microaggressions do not affect in the same way as the entire LGBTQI++ community. We can talk about *"unequal distribution of stigmatisation"* and of *"degrees of fragility"* (Sarcinelli, 2021) depending on a set of variables, such as: **a)** the gender identity and/or the gender expression of the victim (transgender persons and gender-fluid people are a lot more exposed), **b)** their degree of precarity and the legal status (i.e. being undocumented), **c)** the place of residence, **d)** the age and the hierarchical position within their family and, finally, **e)** the social, cultural and economic capital. Most vulnerable people are constantly adopting tactics to face these everyday attacks they suffer, notably conformity tactics and permanent and/or punctual tactics of invisibility, i.e. *"passing"* as straight (Goffman, 1963). The tactics adopted take into account the difficulty of the choices they are required to make, the limited options available to them, the sense of insecurity and danger they are forced to face, and the multiple negotiations they face. They thus might vary in function of the variables already cited: national, male white gay people with a high social, cultural and economic capital can more easily avoid stigmatisation, discrimination and, to a certain extent, violence.

The discrimination, violence and hate crimes related are mobbing on the homophobic basis at work and inequality in access to housing, insults and aggressions in the streets, insults written on the victim's car or house, hate crimes and defamation on social networks, stalking and revenge porn, defamation in the press and on social networks. Transgender or gender-fluid people, immigrants or racialized people, reported physical attacks in public places: *"I always suffered from this double stigmatization as Albanian immigrant and, even a faggot"*. Younger survivors reported domestic physical and psychological violence from fathers or stepfathers that had started since childhood as soon as the parents discovered their children's non-heterosexual orientation or non-binary gender identity and augmented in intensity over time, especially when practices and appearances connected to sexual orientation became more evident: *"From the day he came out until he turned 18 he was beaten every day... the blows suffered enter the head, and thinking about suicide comes naturally"*. Survivors related being left out of the house for several nights up to being expelled from the house while still minors (in one case leaving the victim in another country).

Survivors also shared the **barriers** they encountered **in reporting**. First of all, episodes of “soft violence” cannot be reported to authorities: for instance, a gay person receiving constant insults on his FB page could do only 3 lawsuits of 3 specific posts where there was ground for a lawsuit. The episodes of hate crimes, violence and discrimination that the survivor related during the interviews always succeed and precede other episodes of everyday violence and discrimination. This is an obstacle to report them since the **victims are “used to” being victims** and to “survive” since they were young or even children: “... *when you are on the street and you are shouted at you “faggot” what do you denounce, who do you denounce? Creating the “callus” leads to raising the threshold of attention or tolerance and is not always a good thing.*”

Another obstacle to report is that often **victims can’t demonstrate it**: “*I got to know from people who he was in confidence that he didn’t get along with me because I am homosexual. He never told me directly*” – talking about his boss. It is **difficult to show** that the problem is not only the single event, but the **continuum of everyday attacks**. **Furthermore, it is difficult to demonstrate mobbing** for homophobia **without testimony in a trial**: “*we are with hands tied*”.

A specific obstacle is the fact of **denouncing its parents**. An unaccompanied minor taken in charge by a Catholic organization, under age, who doesn’t speak well the national language had to decide whether to report his father who is 45: “*I simply did not think that anyone would have taken me seriously, the social workers in the shelter for non accompanied minors were all practicing Catholics, we went every day to church, it was even harder to express it with them*”.

Another problem is the **non-professional treatment by policemen**. Respondents referred to a lack of trust in law enforcement agencies, considering bias among police. Furthermore law enforcement officers do not take the victim seriously: “*They simply told me to go home, they never took fully into consideration what I was reporting*”. When a teenager went to report that his father was stalking him, the police told him that he was not authorized to take pictures of the father to document the crime (so the victim became the guilty party). In case of domestic violence, there is a **lack of recognition** that LGBTQI++ people have similar experiences of women: “*I went to the police bringing the screenshots and asking for help (...). I remember being really hurt because their first comment was: ‘it’s probably your ex, but he’s suffering (...) I didn’t feel protected and I came out of*

*there even more distressed. if these are the premises what has to happen before you receive protection?". And in some cases, **the police reported the victim herself**: "I was attacked just outside the house and the police reported me for fighting, the way I was treated it seemed I had lured him. At that moment I realised that the state was not protecting me, that the state did not consider me a citizen. It's as if we were second-class citizens".*

Reporting is perceived as time-consuming and an exposure to a risk of escalation. Moreover, victims have a lot of other life problems and reporting often is not considered a priority: *"I had other things to take care of, my top priority is my education".* Another obstacle to reporting is **fear and unequal power relations within the family**: *"I never reported because I was really afraid and because I was a teenager. Although many years have passed and I am sick because of those facts and although I have hidden pictures to prove it, I am no longer up to it"*

Language and culture are also a big barrier for migrants when reporting. As a matter of fact, **migrants** themselves often have complex relations with the police (e.g. for the issuing/renewal of residence permits) because of institutional racism. They may also have encountered the complexity and duration of legal proceedings on such matters, along with the associated stress and did not wish to relive the experience. They can fear negative repercussions and stigmatization, particularly in communities with experiences of abuse of authority. Refugees and asylum seekers may have had traumatic experiences with the administration of the law. Lack of knowledge of language and cultures amplifies the perception that they don't have rights and help also in Italy: *"My body has a different value in Italian society, I am twice exposed, as a migrant and as an LGBT person".* LGBTQI+ migrant people often do not have a safety network, because their community does not always culturally accept them. They shared the burden of summing up their different fragilities: *"Being a minority, being an immigrant, being queer",* which leads us to consider the importance of an intersectional approach in the understanding of the obstacles survivors face in reporting (Wilson, 2023).

However, some **factors facilitate reporting**: **a) direct contacts with lawyers** (having a friend who is a lawyer); **b) having people willing to testify**; **c) a stable professional position**; **d) awareness of one's rights as a victim**; **e) supportive networks**: *"my friends did everything for at least two weeks (...) it was really my salvation, my ray of light. I knew I could count on someone and I wasn't*



*completely alone.*” Other facilitating factors are the **knowledge of anti-discrimination or anti-violence centres and, in the Police station, the presence of a caring and kind reference person.**

Other factors **facilitate the experience of the trial** such as **a)** the desire for the perpetrator to be held accountable for the crime committed; **b)** a strong will that nobody else should live the same experience; **c)** positive experiences with previous complaints; **d)** the individual's resilience and their history of asserting their identity. Many victims commented about reporting with the help of a lawyer.

**Survivors shared several kinds of problems after having reported consequences in professional life:** **a)** impact in the relations with other colleagues not involved in the event; **b)** opacity in the treatment of these reportings; **c)** **directors trying to minimize the event** and to persuade the victim *not* to report saying things such as *“Forget it”, “doing so, you will be wrong”*; **d)** difficulties in demonstrating mobbing because of homophobia. In the case of trials, major problems are : **a)** the **cost of the trial** that probably won't be compensated, **b)** the fact that there is **no law against homophobia** and no compensation for moral damage; **c)** the lack of **economic resources**. Moreover, **trials are long, costly, time-consuming, and a psychological burden for the victims. Making a trial is thus a privilege**, not in terms of personal reparation, but connected to an idea of justice. Moreover, even when the perpetrator received condemnation for defamation after a 4-year trial, he managed not to pay the substantial sum that he was supposed to pay to the victim.

Finally, several factors lead to processes of **secondary victimization**. For example, as a result of the reporting within the enterprise, a multi-professional medical expertise was realised on the victim, to send him to another department. So **the victim became the “problem”** and not the author. They claimed that they intended to transfer him to a *“calmer sector”* because he was very nervous in this period. The victim had to bring papers from his psychologist and psychiatrist to defend himself. He also decided to contact the trade union to defend himself. As the victim put it, *“the person who reports, who is already suffering because he suffered an attack, will be attacked again and will become a victim again. Why reporting then? The victim keeps on being a victim in every way”*.

If we have a wider look, both suffering a hate crime and what comes after have a **clear impact on the physical and mental health** of survivors: *“It affected me like for long mentally, physically and obviously also my life in general. I had to quit my*

*job. I had to seek help, (...) I couldn't feel safe anymore. (...) I start to feel like, I'm not really safe here anymore because the the the homophobia, the transphobia.*" Experiencing hate crimes profoundly disrupts the natural course of life, resulting in a permanent change: life is often viewed in terms of before and after the event. Discrimination, violence and hate crimes do create, at best, a **great sense of fear or anger**, but also panic attacks. After reporting, another big fear is escalation: *"Now I'm afraid of what the person might do, outside and inside the process, I'm terrified he'll find a loophole to get out of it and that wouldn't be fair"*. Often it causes diseases resulting from stress, depression, leading to taking drugs for several years to control it. In worst cases, the repetition of family violences during adolescence leads to several suicidal attempts: *"because of these 4 years of violence, since I was 15 until 19 years old, I tried to kill myself several times, once I have been hospitalized for 8 months. Because I was living in such an unsafe environment, my mental disease increased considerably and got out of control"*.

Most survivors, even the most "privileged" ones (i.e. white, male, middle-high class) shared a **state of great anxiety all along the trial**: *"It is something that affects you on many non material aspects. It affects everyday life, but your mood, you are worried when you read those comments. I got worried about my own safety because if someone tells you "you should die"...I don't know if a few days after someone comes up to me in the street, maybe not directly him, but someone else who didn't write anything and comes directly in the street"*.

**LGBTQI+ people who suffered violence from their parents** or from their partners carry a clear traumatic experience that affects them: *"My father made me undergo a lot of traumatic experiences (...) traumas that lead me to be a cold person, quite reserved, closed into myself"*. Some effects appear **immediately**: *"I wondered: 'Am I in danger by reporting this person? Will it protect me? Who can guarantee me that he will not become physically aggressive?' for a long time I dreamt that my ex threw acid on me"*. Other effects appear **long-term**: *"The crime deteriorates all your life. Even now that the episodes are finished, I don't trust people. Also, the actual relationship I have as an aftermath, It is something permanent that I will have to deal with"*.

### 2.1.2. Knowledge

More and more people are turning to the Internet in preference to any other source of information and support, including experts and family members. Problem handling shows a consistent tendency for people to manage their legal problems independently, in some cases by choice, and others because they may not realise that help may be available. The lack of awareness about **where to report** also affects the chances that victims of hate incidents will report: *"I didn't report because I don't know my rights as a victim, I didn't know that lawyers could also file complaints; I wouldn't even know who to turn to at national level"*. The same procedure to report is not well known to the victims: *"I previously knew nothing about the procedure to file a complaint"; "Going back, for computer crimes, I would go straight to the postal police"*. Survivors didn't even realise that they could contact an NGO to get help: *"I didn't know, I realised later that I could contact Arcigay. I was so "into" the problem and in the bureaucracy: work, trade union, several directors and I didn't think that I could get the help from Arcigay"*. **Younger people use digital competencies to get information and contacts:** *"With this stuff (indicated her phone) I surf on the Internet and I get information quickly"*. Even when they find information people are depending on lawyers in order to know their rights: *"Before reporting or starting a trial people do not know their rights, it is necessary to wait for a professional lawyer"*. When unable to claim their rights, people think of alternative ways to make their voices heard, such as the media.

### 2.1.3. Needs

The **first need** expressed is that of a **law on hate crimes**, necessary to provide law enforcement authorities and justice professionals the concrete instruments to protect them. Moreover, survivors feel the need of a deep cultural change at several levels, to be legally informed about rights and proceedings (since school). They also express the need to receive assistance in expressing and understanding the internal distress caused by the experienced trauma: *"Life after that is difficult"*. They suggest the State to provide free and quality psychological and sometimes psychiatric support. Survivors also **underline the need for training and awareness raising to prevent any form of violence and discrimination:** *"no one had prepared me for this, there was no talk of these topics, there was talk of*

*violence against women but not against trans people or children*". The lack of proper information leads to the need for **technical support from a lawyer**: *"he/she can cite the articles of the civil code and put down everything in the right way"*. Survivors also underline the importance of **support, from professionals in NGOs as well as from a network of associations and services**, each taking care of an aspect (housing, reporting, health issues), as well as **from friends and LGBTQI+ community**: *"A single world can give you more energy and strength"*. Another crucial aspect is the need for **financial support and free legal aid**. This experience of a very young man who had to leave his mother house, be homeless and pay a lawyer is very informative: *"my step-father came home angry (...) I was much taller than him and the last time he tried to beat me I defended myself and I was injured. I went to the emergency, they called the Carabinieri and from there started all the trial procedures. (...) The Carabinieri guaranteed me that I would have free legal aid and a public defender, but I was never assigned to anyone. (...) It has been very hard to take care of it because I was completely abandoned (...) I regret it because it took me out lots of energy and lots of money. It really drained me. If I had benefited from a public defender and support from the state, it would have been different"*. Finally, **non-Italian-speaking survivors need linguistic facilitation**: *"In my case, I feel like I couldn't really do much, mostly because of the language barrier because I do, I mean, my Italian is okay. I can communicate like the basic stuff. But when it comes to a situation like that, I have to be able to make like a solid conversation, provide, be able to provide enough information, and because I understand them"*

#### **2.1.4. Expectations**

Survivors focused on the expectations that weren't met. First of all, they expect to have LGBTQI+ representativeness in the moment of the reporting, with common work and dialogue between the association, judge and lawyer, transforming the denunciation from a cold and empty moment into a welcoming LGBTQI+ place. It helps victims therefore to have a broad and balanced presence of LGBTQI+ people among legal professionals, law enforcement, medical personnel, trade unions

*"NGO should have representativeness in this reporting tool, a stretch of dialogue between association, police and judge, to have a welcoming denunciation that makes the victims feel not alone, not a cold reporting moment"*. Survivors wish to

receive **more support from the government**, first of all introducing legislation with higher penalties against people committing these crimes and **swift adoption of possible victim protection measures**: *“From the institutions, I would like a protected path that protects the dignity of the victim like a code red legislation that allows a clear and simple path for people”*. They also **expect the government** to put in place a victim welcoming procedure and, foremost, to be taken seriously: *“to have a proper place to be listened to effectively and not underestimate when a person comes to report an episode”; only afterward to offer support to the victims to make the complaint.* Attention and support for survivors should be introduced in the school context, educating the community about respect from the very beginning: *“People need to be educated since childhood to other people’s respect, independently from sexual orientation, gender or any other thing that they see as a flaw”*. **Finally, having more information of what happens to LGBTQI+ people is also vital**: *“It would be important to start to write and provide data about real facts and present a research of anyone, any organization, any psychologist or any researcher in civil law to show that unbelievable things really did happen. Because we can talk about it, but there isn’t anything written, our words get lost in the wind”*.

## 2.2. Professionals working with survivors of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes

### 2.2.1. Experiences

Most professionals involved in the protection of LGBTQI+ victims are themselves members of the LGBTQI+ community. Many services are subcontracted to associations, which are mostly LGBTQI+ associations. Even when they are not per se LGBTQI+ associations, the professionals involved in the projects targeting the LGBTQI+ community are part of this minority: *“I asked and then had the possibility to be a social worker within this service, also because one of the million reasons I had was a question of giving back what I myself have received as a member of LGBTQI+ community. I had my own trajectory (...) that gave me the possibility and the force of my individuality and I think that we need to give back to these young people the possibility to follow their own path.”* Some of them are activists or volunteers, others consider their job as activism. For these reasons, the

professionals involved have a “political and engaged conception of their job and they feel directly involved in the political debates, stating: *“My body is politics, my life is debated in parliament.”*

They deem it essential to take action at political level, including the implementation of strategic litigation measures: *“You have to work on the ground with your neighbours, but have a general perspective because these situations can only be solved at a political or judicial level”.*

Professionals’ experiences confirm **obstacles to report** that emerged also from survivors’ perspectives. Professionals highlight the existence of major **structural barriers** related to the **fragmentation and poor coordination of the social services** involved in the identification, reporting, and treatment of these crimes and their survivors. This coordination problem has been identified at several levels that we will develop below.

**Difficulties in reporting their family members.** *“At arrival, the victim may express the will to report their parents, but this is not an easy process. What we saw during the years is a desire to keep ties with the family. So when they reflect upon it, they decide not to report despite all the violence they suffered.”*

**High risks of secondary victimization.** *“The risk of secondary victimization is really high, despite the request of law enforcement or lawyers to relay all that happened. (...) In this situation they have to go to lawyers or to law enforcement who might not treat them well, because it doesn’t depend on a systematic situation, but on the person that they find (...) You have in front of you a person that you don’t know if you can trust, this is the first huge obstacle for the LGBTQI+A community.”*

**Risks that the victim faces when reporting.** People with a higher socioeconomic status often feel more protected when filing a complaint, while those in situations of migration or psychological vulnerability struggle more to access justice. Marginalized groups face additional challenges when trying to report or receive help for abuse: when reporting violence, the victim may be subject to administrative measures, such as fines (in the case of a sex worker) or expulsion (in the case of a person without a residence permit). Law enforcement should

ensure that victims of hate crimes can report to the police being recognised and treated in a respectful, tailored, professional and non-discriminatory manner.

**Lack of recognition or direct interest from public institutions.** LGBTQI+ NGOs do not feel considered as legitimate interlocutors by institutions, even after having established networks with other territorial entities. Institutions seem disinterested in directly understanding the issues faced by LGBTQI+ individuals and in integrating the necessary competencies into their services, but prefer to delegate cases involving victims of anti-LGBTQI+ violence to LGBTQI+ NGOs, thereby perpetuating the marginalisation these victims experience, even with social services: *“Territorial social services that receive reports about individuals in these kinds of situations, that lack specific training on the subject, tend to call on specialized associations. They try to build networks, but partly with the aim of delegating such cases to those who are already dealing with these issues.”*

**Lack of formal coordination between associations.** Associations find it challenging to collaborate effectively with one another: *“Each LGBTIQ association is isolated, working for itself, the associations are afraid of diluting themselves with the others’... “it is a programmed suicide, we need to merge skills and knowledge between associations, create coordination and relations in the field commit to common goals.”*

**Absence of systematic practices and procedures.** There are no clear and standardized procedures for collaboration between LGBTQI+ associations and other public services or non-LGBTQI+ organisations. There are no formalized practices or shared objectives that would facilitate effective and efficient collaboration. This lack of coordination directly impacts the quality of support provided to victims of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes. Beyond coordination issues, professionals identify major additional obstacles, of a systemic and institutional nature, in supporting victims of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes.

**Lack of adequate training in LGBTQI+ issues.** Public services are not specialized to work with LGBTQI+ victims (especially trans individuals). Training is insufficient on sexual orientation, gender identity and domestic violence, and presents the risk of secondary victimisation when reporting: *“As an NGO, we have some reservations regarding law enforcement due to past experiences. I personally accompanied a*

*transgender woman to make a complaint. I was shocked: even though she was very feminine, she still had a mixed passing, policemen all the time addressed her in masculine; So there was already this kind of violence. **He also made comments that minimized the issue**, stating, "and among you (LGBTQI+ people), it is known that strange things are done" when we were reporting that she had been raped."*

Good practices generally result from individual training or knowledge on LGBTQI+ issues rather than within the framework of structured training.

**Lack of understanding of violence between LGBTQI+ people.** *"It is important to recognize that **individuals of any gender can be perpetrators**. Instead, the same dynamics that happen between men and women also exist in same-sex couples; the man who controls you and does sexual, psychological, physical and economic violence can be a transgender lesbian person."*

**Dominance of the binary model "male/female" in public sector services.** This complicates access to these services for individuals who do not conform to the dominant "male/female" categories. *"The system fails to accommodate LGBTQI+ people, particularly transgender and non-binary individuals, **due to its binary structure**. In services, there are "men's" or "women's" rooms, and people are always placed within this binary categorization. There are millions of examples because our system is binary."*

**Lack of continuity of LGBTQI+ anti-discrimination centers** leading to a fragmented and isolated approach to each situation, where each professional and/or service acts independently, without a shared vision. The quality of the assistance is described as depending on the "good heart" of the professional, that is, on their level of awareness of LGBTQI+ issues and their knowledge of the appropriate intervention and support tools for the specific situation. As Carey (2014) highlights, fragmented social services often lead to "inconsistent and unreliable services," creating risks for service recipients. The **absence of information sharing** makes it difficult to follow the victim's case coherently and to offer an appropriate support pathway. This lack of information sharing is found also inside some anti-discrimination centers where each professional doesn't have a clear vision of the overall support. Moreover, asking a victim of an anti-LGBTQI+ hate crime to repeat the same procedures (i.e. recounting their story multiple times) can have a **counterproductive effect**, worsening **psychological distress** and **secondary victimization**. Consequently, the interactions with institutional structures can reinforce stigmatization, leading to **less effective**



**support and increased marginalization of LGBTQI+ victims.** This is particularly evident in varied experiences with the police, where interactions can range from increased sensitivity to instances of secondary victimization, where law enforcement sides with the family. Professionals identified these issues as stemming from the **insufficient awareness of LGBTQI+ specific concerns and needs within social services**, as well as a lack of understanding of how to approach and support LGBTQI+ individuals effectively. This is echoed in the focus group discussions about the importance of inclusive language and specialized training. Performative aspects of language (Butler, 1990) illustrate how the use of inappropriate and/or non-inclusive language can unconsciously marginalize individuals, even from the care provider. More generally, the counterproductive effects of victims' contact with support services can be traced back to their embeddedness within a **dominant heterosexual normative system** (Lomba, 2024), which is of course also a cis system where LGBTQI+ individuals are either misunderstood or marginalized. This "heteronormative matrix" (Butler, 2005) is evident in testimonies that point out the difficulty in understanding that violence can occur outside the traditional heteronormative framework of male dominance. This issue is also visible in the tendency of these institutions to categorize gender identity **within a "male/female" dichotomy**, as seen in public services that structure their facilities exclusively around these two categories. The system perpetuates norms that exclude and marginalize transgender and non-binary individuals who do not conform to these categories. These obstacles are not merely the result of "individual missteps," but rather the product of **a broader social framework** that does not systematically account for the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities (Bastien Charlebois, 2011). This is why it is more relevant to speak of **"generalized heteronormativity"** rather than "internalized homophobia" to explain the structural aspects highlighted by the professionals interviewed: support services and their professionals – even those who do not consider themselves homophobic or who are sensitized to the issue – may fail to offer consistent and appropriate support to LGBTQI+ victims (Lomba *ibid*).

### 2.2.2. Knowledge

The interviews have been conducted with professionals who have a thorough understanding of the normative definition of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes and discrimination: *"Hate crime is the unwanted act, which also has a criminal*

*qualification, that is enacted because of actual or supposed membership of those protected categories”.* Some professionals also try to use a broader definition, given the fact that Italy doesn't have a definition. A justice professional specifically said: *“I use a more flexible interpretation and believe it is important to understand what the victim perceives as a hate crime. The limitation of the regulation, even if it were to be redefined, probably lies in incorporating into a legal definition everything that could be understood as a hate crime. If it doesn't fit the criminal definition, I still try to identify other protective measures.”*

**Professionals also regularly update their knowledge** on these matters, particularly through regular contributions from legal experts who provide training for practitioners: *“Each of us in the firm is a member of newsletter groups, legal groups rather than academic groups or different associations; then by word of mouth between colleagues and by taking training courses from the Bar Association.”*

In several cases, professionals are aware of LGBTQI+ issues but rely on lawyers for the technical aspects. Professionals stressed the importance of LGBTQI+ associations as a first point of contact: *“Our role is to bring this issue to light, but what is missing is follow-up. A person tells their whole story, and then what?”*

The **family or social network does not necessarily provide support**: *“It depends a lot on the individual. There are cases where people do not want to express or share what they are going through with their family often due to fears of discrimination.”*

There is also a recognized need for a different approach to managing the process of filing complaints with the police: *“In my opinion, victims should be able to turn to the police and find greater support there, this would mean that certain behaviors are effectively recognised by society as crimes and, as such, must be addressed.”.*

Teams also seek specific training when new and complex situations appear:

*“When one of us feels that there is a theme to further explore we talk about it and we actively look for a way to respond to this training need.”* There is, however, a recognized need for additional training. **The first topic is how to welcome and support victims** of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes and discrimination: *“Associations are often the first point where discrimination emerges, where it is externalised and help is sought. it is an important role they have a known competence, taken for granted by those who turn to them”.* More specifically, training should enable **to**

**engage with the victims**, while respecting their autonomy, dignity, and personal boundaries: *“I would like to see trained people who receive the complaints and the presence of an effective network that acts immediately and gives legal but also practical support (home and work) and ensure as much security and privacy as possible”*. Interviewees emphasised the importance of continuous training opportunities, preferring hands-on models to develop relational, psychological, and legal skills: *“Whoever supports the victim needs a relationship with the other actors that may be involved in the helping relationship; (...) it is clear that it is this type of network that makes the work not only more effective but also easier to carry out than being isolated”*.

Victim support organizations have expressed particular concerns about the most fragile victims. **Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers** face more difficulties in reporting crimes because of the **language** and **cultural barriers**: *“Requests from people suffering from double discrimination (because of their national origins, their gender identity and/or sexual orientation, social class) augmented a lot”*. Additionally, many migrants lack family support or **endure violence from their families** because of their sexual orientation or gender identity: *“We saw an augmentation of second-generation foreigners who are coming from given cultural backgrounds”*

**Transgender** beneficiaries are the most vulnerable, especially when they are migrants: *“The requests we receive are often from foreign young people, half of them are transgender people, who are really the emergency at this moment, because they are simply more visible”*. Transgender individuals face specific difficulties such as **a)** alias career issues both at school and in the workplace; **b)** anti-LGBTQI+ violence during the non-passing phase; **c)** Prejudice, **d)** housing difficulties; **e)** health issues; **f)** working conditions and access to employment.

### 2.2.3. Needs

The main need expressed by most professionals is the establishment of a **law on hate crimes**. More generally, the need is for serious public instruments to do what third sector associations are currently doing, namely: *“There should be a possibility to have first an online report, followed by an individual conversation, eventually in person, with someone able to address the victim by collecting the*

*information, analyze the situation and provides the opportunity to report in case of a penal crime and, meanwhile, recommends professionals, even public ones, to take care of the psychological state of the victim, and suggests the solutions and the professionals that can take care the restorative conduct by the author of the hate speech or hate crime (...) the request should be gathered in the first place by the State thought as a collectivity able to offer a first service of protection to be followed by an answer depending on the kind of discrimination..."*

Professionals emphasized the need to end with this institutional violence against LGBTQI+ population: *"the problem is that there is really a legalized institutional violence on this matter, people are legitimated by the politicians and, more generally, by institutions "*.

They also express the need for training both school teachers and law students: *"Schools aren't prepared to teach anything on discrimination or rather everything relies on teachers' awareness. There isn't any national strategy for school education. This is missing. And it is also missing the training of the trainers, that is to say of teachers. This is what is missing in any grade of school, including lifelong training. There should be specific training for lawyers. Often students graduate in case law with little knowledge on discriminatory law. This says a lot."*

Professionals also face language barriers that impede effective communication and support. They expressed a significant need to have linguistic competencies (or to be assisted by other professionals who possess them) that reflect the diversity of languages spoken by the people they serve: *"We are about to welcome three LGBTQI+ migrants from Cameroon who speak French and we need to widen our team with someone having competences in French, but also competencies in the field of migration."*

Finally, professionals underline that transgender individuals who haven't changed their birth certificate yet face difficulties accessing employment: *"some parents fear that it is inevitable that their own daughter being a trans woman will end up being a sex worker"*. Hormones are free only at prescribing centres: *"there are 6 prescribing centres and they are all in the north; people come from the south to the north"*. Staff must therefore be trained on the issues related to the transition process and the possibility of accessing financial support measures to cover the associated costs: *"There are long waiting lists and during the transition path every economic fragility has an impact (e.g. children of separated parents have*

*more problems "dad doesn't give me the money for maintenance let alone the money for psychological support, he doesn't sign the excuse slips at school let alone sign the request for hormones".*

### *2.2.3.1. Training Needs*

Professionals working with victims of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes must first be made aware of the influence of dominant social structures on their professional practices, rather than focusing solely on individual/organisation-level intervention: *"As an association, we intervene in schools, but these efforts must become structural and not depend on the goodwill of individual organisations; they must be institutionalized and become part of the system."* Professionals consider training not as a one-time effort but must be a long-term, systematic approach that incorporates the lived realities of LGBTQI+ individuals. Therefore, it is essential to raise awareness and provide in-depth training on the impact of social and cultural biases throughout all stages of intervention, from reporting to support, including the following:

**Training on the lived realities of LGBTQI+ individuals.** An essential aspect of professional development is addressing the widespread lack of understanding of the specific situations faced by LGBTQI+ victims of hate crimes or violence. To achieve this, the training must provide insights into the institutional and individual factors that act as barriers to LGBTQI+ individuals' willingness to report or seek help. It must also help professionals understand the cumulative effects of marginalization on their mental health and trust in public institutions and social services. In this perspective, law enforcement, social workers, and other support and care professionals must be trained to interact appropriately with LGBTQI+ individuals during critical processes, such as reporting hate crimes. As one professional emphasizes: *"There is a need for training at all levels, starting from law enforcement because, except for few who are more sensitive, there isn't certainly a widespread culture and information on LGBTQI+, the needs they have and how to receive them during the reporting process. This is a top priority."*

**Providing multidimensional and integrated support for survivors of anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes** Adopting "an anti-oppression approach" and examining "the parallels with other forms of oppression" (Bastien-Charlebois, 2011): sexism, racism, heteronormativity, etc. This involves integrating these analyses into professional practices by adopting an intersectional perspective: training professionals to identify these multiple systematic inequalities and their potential interactions, and developing explicit internal policies that oppose not only internalized homophobia, as is already the case (Lomba, 2024), but also structural oppressive norms.

**Moving beyond homophobia as an explanatory framework and raising awareness of the presumption of heterosexuality in support services.**

Internalized homophobia, often perceived as an individual flaw or pathology, obscures the institutional and systemic dimensions of discrimination. In this sense, a focus on homophobia may inadvertently reinforce an individualising interpretation of discrimination without addressing the dominant norms that underpin it. Based on this observation, professional training must necessarily go beyond solely addressing individual prejudices to include the identification of potential structural biases that may influence support intervention.

**Addressing harmful internal dynamics within the LGBTQI+ community.** This other training need, rarely assessed, represents a reality described by several victims within the community LGBTQI+ itself. Transgender individuals, for example, often feel that their needs are overlooked by the lesbian and gay (LG) community. Following the initiative of certain associations, which have recognized the importance of addressing the needs of the entire LGBTQI+ spectrum noting that trends people can be pansexual, asexual, or homosexual, all professionals must be provided with an inclusive approach that acknowledges the specific struggles faced by each group. Training on issues related to anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes must move beyond the confines of community-based organisations and associations, and extend throughout society as a whole. Privileged training places should be prioritized: **a) the workplace**, encouraging training on these issues not only for the human resources department, but for all workers to reach very wide age groups, and families; **b) trade unions**, actors known to workers and privileged

interlocutors in collective bargaining; **c) the very moment a new association is set up**, it must be put in contact with the associations already present in the area and vice versa; the knowledge of the counters of the professional orders, (e.g. Order of Lawyers, Psychologists) and their operating methods must be promoted.

#### 2.2.3.2. Other Needs

In expressing their needs, professionals highlight a different dimension beyond material, educational, and symbolic needs: the need for support within the socio-legal framework. Professionals consider that the law should establish a robust framework that ensures victims feel secure when filing a complaint. To achieve this, it is essential to build a network of formal and informal relationships, bringing together both institutional and non-institutional actors to provide comprehensive responses to the victims' needs. As professionals underline: *"I expect that already the law, as it happens for women fortunately, that a complete path is created that starts from the complaint, that goes to those associations that deal with that kind of issue there is a whole legal system of support and treatment of the crime that goes to put the victim in a state of serenity, because even the fact that I know that there is a lawyer who knows what he is doing and therefore is correctly supporting me; that there is an association that provides me with social workers, psychologists, hospitals that help me and take me forward,... if I know that I have psychological and pharmacological support and ad hoc assistance, I as a victim feel less of a victim".*

Moreover, opposite to the government's tendency to decrease the funding, professionals express the need to have more resources to meet the growing needs for support: *"The shelters active in Italy are just three (...). The political context doesn't help, the fundings we have are those who are, we have a very high number of requests that we can't meet (...) We have 12 places (...) we would need at least double to be equal with the waiting list (...) plenty of requests are on stand-by until one of the beneficiaries leaves the shelter and this is a major problem (...) Although it is not our fault nor that of our institutions, me and my colleagues suffer because we can't meet all the requests we get."*

#### 2.2.4. Expectations

The main expectations include significant changes. The first one is **the introduction of a law** to effectively prosecute and punish hate crimes and discrimination motivated by homotransphobia. Secondly, the creation of

complaint **procedures integrated** into a territorial network service, designed and delivered as part of a multidisciplinary and integrated intervention. When reporting, the victim must immediately receive, automatically, detailed **information on the services available** on the territory, including contact details and contact persons. In an ideal reporting procedure, victims will have a contact person within the association (or network) who will empathetically support them throughout the whole process, helping to reduce stress at the most vulnerable times and offering personalised and automatic post-traumatic assistance, according to their needs, after the conclusion of the process. **Thirdly**, the growth in authority of the anti-discrimination network, as a privileged institutional interlocutor in reporting and in building. **Finally**, a new welfare for anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes victims considering extraordinary care needs, such as the need for medical and specialist visits for chronic needs.



### 3. Overall evaluation: SWOT analysis

Data was systematised resorting to **Swot Analysis**, which made it possible to highlight '**strengths**' and '**weaknesses**' as well as **possible opportunities and threats**.

#### **Strengths**

**Strengths** here are understood also as **good practices** to ensure that victims are, anytime, recognized and treated in a respectful, sensitive, tailored, professional and non-discriminatory manner. The analyses show the relevance of **a culture based on cooperation, proximity and trust**. As demonstrated by the following examples, this culture is generally found in services provided by LGBTQI+ associations and in services where LGBTQI+ professionals are involved such as anti-discrimination centers, shelters for LGBTQI+ victims of violence, and LGBTQI+ associations.

**Existence of Rete RE.A.DY- Rete Nazionale delle Pubbliche Amministrazioni Anti Discriminazioni per orientamento sessuale e identità di genere** ( National Network of Public Administrations Against Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity) founded in 2006 brings together numerous **local public administrations** actively promoting policies to foster the social inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals and fight discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Visibility of LGBTQI+ association and of LGBTQI+ people.** LGBTQI+ issues concerning them are increasingly discussed in public spaces, thanks to the community's strong commitment to a politics of visibility. Unlike in the past, today's LGBTQI+ individuals are speaking out and making their lives and experiences visible.

**Presence of LGBTQI+ studies.** Among the recent generation of researchers, quite a few of different disciplines (sociology, anthropology, psychology, educational sciences, law, linguistics) have started doing research on LGBTQI+-related issues, contributing to the visibility of the challenges faced by the community.

**Widespread presence of discrimination centres across the country.** A notable strength is the recent **establishment of anti-discrimination centers**, thanks to public funding. Staffed by skilled, legally trained, and welcoming personnel, these centers ensure that victims feel supported and guided from their very first contact. Some centers offer **online and telephone interviews** and this makes their services accessible nationwide, even though they are ‘physically’ located in only a few major cities.

**Skills and holistic approach to the victims’ needs.** Services aimed at vulnerable, or otherwise disadvantaged groups have expertise from multiple fields **beyond the scope of the legal professions**. A key strength of many of the services aforementioned is their **multidisciplinary approach**, which brings together a diverse range of professionals, including lawyers, psychologists, social workers and others.

### **Weaknesses**

Generally, both professionals and survivors agree upon the fact that there are **strong weaknesses** in the system, like:

**Lack of specialisation in anti-discrimination law.** A major weakness lies in **the absence of legislation addressing hate crimes** in Italy. The sources of anti-discrimination law are diverse, fragmented, and lack formal cohesion or consistency, spanning domestic and international rules, often embedded in special or exceptional legislation. Failing to incorporate the bias motive into case prosecution deprives victims of their right to an effective investigation that exposes the underlying discriminatory intent. Professionals in this field also face challenges in staff recruitment and retention due to the emotionally taxing nature of the work. A related issue is the need for appropriate incentives—including career progression opportunities.

**Political climate and institutional homophobia.** Since the establishment of the current government in October 2022, a political alliance with anti-gender movements **has exacerbated institutional homophobia and transphobia**. This

has led to a rise in anti-LGBTQI+ attitudes, policies, and legislation, alongside an increase in anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric in the public space and in the political debate.

**Accessibility challenges in legal proceedings for non specialists.** Legal processes remain **inaccessible to those unfamiliar with legal jargon and specialist vocabulary**. This creates barriers for beneficiaries who lack the resources or knowledge to navigate the system.

**Challenge of reporting microaggressions.** Microaggressions—subtle, often unintentional, offensive remarks or actions—are nearly impossible to report. Although seemingly minor, their **cumulative effects** can severely impact victims' mental health and reinforce harmful societal stereotypes.

**State failures to address survivors' needs.** Fragmented human services models in areas such as housing, healthcare, etc. exacerbate survivors' difficulties. For minors, access to essential services like psychological support service often requires parental consent and signature, creating additional barriers. Shelters for victims of familial violence are only three nationwide and shelters for domestic violence victims cater exclusively to women, excluding gay and transgender individuals. **The third sector frequently steps in to fill institutional gaps** and ensure that victims have access to specialised professionals within the system—such as judicial officers, lawyers, prosecutors, and police. This support allows victims to better navigate interconnected legal, social, and healthcare systems by bridging the divides between legal frameworks and social services.

**Trials: financial, psychological, and emotional burdens.** Legal proceedings are costly, time-consuming, and place a significant psychological burden on victims. Financial precarity, coupled with migrant status, can further hinder victims from reporting crimes. Furthermore, the lengthy duration of trials and the slow, delayed, and poorly communicated flow of information are perceived as a denial of justice. Many victims report experiencing anxiety throughout the entire legal process. Victims may also face requirements to travel, attend court sessions, and testify, sometimes in the presence of their aggressor. These demands can result in substantial psychological, physical, and financial strain.

**Inadequate training for public services. Public services lack systematic training on LGBTQI+ issues**, particularly concerning sexual orientation and gender identity. This gap is especially harmful for transgender individuals, who require more specific and sensitive support.

**Lack of Diversity Equity Inclusion (DEI) education and culture in schools and workplaces.** Schools, as privileged spaces for education on sexuality and identity, do not uniformly provide interventions addressing LGBTQI+ rights or the protection of victims of LGBTQI+ hate crimes. When schools tend to host events on issues like bullying and cyberbullying, similar attention is not given to LGBTQI+-specific topics. The alias career system is not adopted nationwide, and teaching freedom has been increasingly restricted due to influence of the anti-gender movements.

### **Opportunities**

**A procedural justice approach.** The concept of **legal capabilities** draws on Martha Nussbaum's (2011) emphasis on "capability" as a key component of addressing poverty and rights. Rights are meaningful only if individuals are equipped to exercise them. For those who struggle with legal jargon or court procedures, access to justice must be as assured as it is for those adept at navigating the system. As Margaret Hagan (2018) highlights, procedural justice encompasses the "**process quality**"—how people perceive their treatment and fairness—and the "**outcome quality**", reflecting their ability to engage effectively in the system.

**Possible improvements in education.** Strategies are urgently needed to transform school environments for LGBTQI+ students and dismantle cisnormative, binary frameworks. By adopting practices like respecting students' chosen names and pronouns, schools can better support those in vulnerable situations due to family environments. Guidelines from the Ministry of Instruction, University, and Research (MIUR) regarding alias careers would further validate the needs of transgender students, their families, and LGBTQI+ advocacy organisations (Bourelly & al., 2022).

### **Building trust and knowledge sharing.**

*Early identification of hate crimes:* A key transformative aspect is to ensure that

hate crimes cases and victims of hate crimes **are identified** accurately **as early as possible in the process**. Italy should ensure that victims feel safe reporting hate crimes without fear of encountering discriminatory attitudes from police officers. To this end, Italy, like all other EU member states, must implement measures to prevent and eradicate **institutional discrimination**, counterbalancing the current trend of underreporting hate crimes.

Opportunities in lifelong education: The growing number of professionals requiring **lifelong training** provides a valuable opportunity to develop training on LGBTQI+ related issues, including hate crimes thanks to the capillary presence of LGBTQI+ association, who held a very important expertise, articulating professional skills and activists experience. LGBTQI+ associations might seize this opportunity to find new ways to **disseminate, transfer, and valorize knowledge** among policymakers, professionals (managers leading teams directly interacting with LGBTQI+ people, health institutions staff, school teachers and school staff), students of different grades, and citizens. The **training sessions** will also provide a **source of income** for the associations, fostering their economic stability.

Promoting inclusivity in schools:

A concrete opportunity to promote a major change within the school system is the creation of a **subject called "educazione civica"** (Law n.92, August, 20th, 2019) and the following creation of Guidelines for the curriculum to be implemented. With the *decreto ministeriale* n.35 of June, 22nd, 2020, n. 35, schools have been asked to update their curricula in the first and second cycles of instruction. This new subject, and the generational change among teachers is an opportunity to rethink the school binary system, to integrate inclusive language at school and anti-discriminatory competencies in school curricula.

Advancing LGBTQI+ research: The growth of **Italian LGBTQI+ studies** is an opportunity to promote new EU-funded projects, thus making significant contributions to the necessity to promote social and cultural changes and strives to foster dialogue with societal stakeholders. Obtaining EU-funded projects might counterbalance the lack of fundings expected by the current government and **obtain scientific authority** in a period where the Italian government tends to disqualify LGBTQI+-related research. Such projects might **a)** provide new ways of quantifying hate crimes which are

invisible because of underreporting and because of the impossibility of being qualified as such; **b)** lead to a renewed input focused on hate crimes and barriers in accessing justice.

*Enhancing public engagement and dialogue:* Researchers might amplify their involvement in public engagement, thanks to tailored policy briefs and 'position papers' to be produced and distributed to policymakers, civil society organizations, and professional networks to ensure the uptake of research findings. The new modes of knowledge circulation might disseminate information on how to recognize hate crimes and how to access justice, fostering hate crime victims' autonomy. The research community can inform public action, providing concrete recommendations. **It is thus possible to consider an alliance between researchers, professionals and local** public decision-makers (i.e. **Rete RE.A.DY**) by creating a think-tank bringing together public policy decision-makers, researchers, and civil society members with innovative decision-support methods to ensure recommendations are translated into effective inclusive policies. In the middle-term the think-tank might develop a structured approach to influencing public policy by targeting multiple levels of decision-making, including national ministries (Education, Justice), regional authorities, and local officials. This think-tank might initiate unprecedented collaborations and establish a **multidisciplinary national network**, unlocking the full potential of existing collaborations and having a tangible societal impact by influencing decision-making processes at broader levels. This is a response to the sometimes overly isolated work (activists, researchers and professionals tend to work apart). While each of these actors is distinguished by specific approaches to anti-discrimination, they all share a common commitment to producing and contributing to solving this major contemporary challenge.

*Expanding public awareness and engagement.* The **increased public debate on LGBTQI+ issues** is an opportunity to promote a multi-faceted dissemination strategy and awareness actions. Public debates might involve researchers, professionals from the public and private sector in order to encourage cooperation and to foster dialogue between various professionals, activists and citizens on the theme of hate crimes. It is crucial to **a)** engage the public through events and initiatives and partnerships with cultural institutions and social media; **b)** facilitate dialogue with

policymakers and stakeholders; **c)** use citizen science and social media for research dissemination and empowerment of hate-crime survivors.

**Self-learning platform on the legal system and reporting procedures.** A self-learning platform can empower victims by helping them understand their current stage in the legal process, identify necessary next steps to secure protection, and locate nearby services. This promotes autonomy and reinforces a sense of dignity.

**Active recruitment strategies to promote diversity at all levels.** Diversity in justice professionals and law enforcement agencies can improve institutional understanding of minority issues. Furthermore, LGBTQI+ agents (including in police) will strengthen partnership and trust in the relationship with victims through their visible role and ability to deal with hate crimes and a victim-sensitive approach. Regular forums between law enforcement agencies, civil society and key stakeholders on hate crimes and victim protection can be a strong message to LGBTQI+ victims that the State helps and supports them.

**Enhancing formal coordination and collaboration at national and EU level.**

Allocating human and economic resources for training on inclusive language, enhancing coordination with other associations/institutions and belonging to transnational networks enables a victim-centered approach; it may also allow access to European network funding. This could facilitate the overcoming of competitive logics between LGBTQI+ associations.

**Targeting microaggressions with specific interventions and Granular**

**Dissemination.** Organise conferences and action planning about microaggressions having as speaker also HR and diversity managers.

Multilingual brochures must be left in every place - in the metro, throughout the city, at the station, in the hospital, at school - these leaflets must go around and give clear information on where a victim has to go, how and why he /she has to go, there must be a telephone hotline for homophobic violence

**Free Counselling services.** In person and online, law enforcement personnel should be able to provide a list of contact details of relevant victim-support services, to inform the victims' right to seek free legal advice.

### **Threats**

**Legal vacuum and juridical challenges.** Current criminal law provisions, including procedural rules, often fail to address emerging forms of violence. The limited judicial protection for cases of discrimination in access to services and the political climate is not conducive to drafting the missing laws. On the contrary, there is **a risk of regression in rights.**

**Economic and social inequalities.** The increase of economic inequalities exacerbates fragilities for LGBTQI+ people, impacting their safety, ability to seek protection (e.g. homelessness), and possibility of reporting hate crimes. Victims may internalise harassment and hostility as an inevitable consequence of their identity. Long-term effects on mental and physical health might disproportionately affect the well-being of LGBTQI+ people. Finally, financial barriers, including the cost of legal recourse, make justice inaccessible for many.

**Institutional and legislative threats.** There is a risk of a growing institutional climate of homophobia, transphobia and systemic obstruction of LGBTQI+ protections, as well as a risk of legislative regression and a pervasive government tendency to obstruct LGBTQI+ awareness, education, protection and welcome. In the current situation we risk legislative backsliding, limiting education, protections, and support services. Survivors disillusioned by the judicial system may choose not to report subsequent cases, perpetuating underreporting and lack of accountability. Finally, the insufficient funding for anti-discrimination centers might deepen these challenges.



**Community and service fragmentation.** There is a growing polarisation between LGBTQI+ and non-LGBTQI+ services marginalizing issues and excluding them from standard institutional protocols. Moreover, generational turnover among activists is increasingly difficult, weakening advocacy efforts.

**Cultural and visibility risks.** There are overwhelming cases of violence, discrimination and hate crimes resulting in fewer reports due to discouragement and fear. Increased invisibility practices, such as hiding or avoiding public displays of affection (e.g. kissing), undermine societal acceptance and personal dignity.

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