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4 inclusion

TOOLKIT *for educators*

Guidelines for the inclusion of LGBTQAI+

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion represents one of the most significant challenges in the field of human rights and social policies today. This toolkit aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current situation within the legal, social, and cultural contexts of three European countries: Romania, Italy, and Malta. In addition to examining legislative and social aspects, the toolkit emphasizes the importance of visual storytelling as a powerful tool for promoting inclusion and understanding. By leveraging the universal and emotional language of images, videos, and visual narratives, visual storytelling can break down barriers, foster empathy, and give voice to marginalized communities. This approach not only helps to educate and raise awareness about LGBTQ+ issues but also serves as an effective way to engage various audiences and promote a culture of respect and acceptance.



VISUAL STORYTELLING AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT



Introduction to Visual Storytelling

Introduction to Visual Storytelling

Visual storytelling refers to the process of constructing and organising the ‘telling of a story’ that makes use of visual elements as a means of communication. Among the elements that can be used are images, drawings, graphics, animations or videos that aim to tell a story that is interesting to those who watch it. What Visual storytelling proposes is to harness the power that images have in creating stories with a high immersive content, thus enabling the viewer to be involved on a deeper level, conveying an experience capable of creating identification and empathy.

Visual storytelling is therefore based precisely on the immersive experience: the harmonic union between images and text is able to arouse attention, reinforcing the message and improving the assimilation of the memory of what has been observed.

Indeed, narratives accompanied by images, thanks to their structure, have the ability to make sense of what one is looking at, highlighting connections between events so that they are easily internalised.

This is because visual communication is immediate, comprehensible and effective: the human brain processes visual information 60,000 times faster than textual information, while it takes only 13 milliseconds to process an image. Moreover, 90% of the information transmitted to our brain is visual. Visual content works precisely because it is immediate, emotional, evocative, engaging and able to move the deepest part of the human being.

Another advantage of communicating through images is the duration of the memory: after three days we can remember 10% of the information contained in a text, but if it is combined with an image, the percentage rises to 65%.

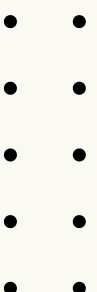
Ultimately then, visual storytelling requires the knowledge and application of specific operational rules in order to create visual narratives. In essence:

- visual storytelling fosters greater speed of learning;
- with visual storytelling, greater engagement can be achieved, as it is more evocative due to its ‘universal’ language.

Introduction to Visual Storytelling

By its characteristics, therefore, visual storytelling:

- It captures attention and involves emotionally: the viewer identifies with the protagonists, the stories, the situations told in the video. This is because a good story is built on elements that evoke situations, emotions, desires, problem-crisis-solution mechanisms that the audience can recognise and interpret as closer.
- It conveys values, motivations, meanings: when you decide to tell an aspect of your experience/life/context through video storytelling, you do so to convey a message that others can identify with and understand.
- It offers content that is easy to memorise and assimilate. A video that is striking, attention-grabbing or simply tells an effective story is easy to remember. In addition, it develops an immediate connection with what you want to convey.
- Often, though not always, it shows through images and does not describe. It is the classic narrative principle of 'show, don't tell', which engages the viewer by prompting him or her to form his or her own viewpoint on the images.
- it has a narrative approach that is more familiar and meets with less resistance from the audience, especially if composed of Millennials;
- offers simplified access to abstract concepts and meaningful messages, thanks to the support of images and videos;
- creates a high degree of engagement and, consequently, reinforces learner motivation and commitment;
- stimulates the creation of new stories, encouraging the collaborative exchange of knowledge, critical comparison and the search for new interpretations.

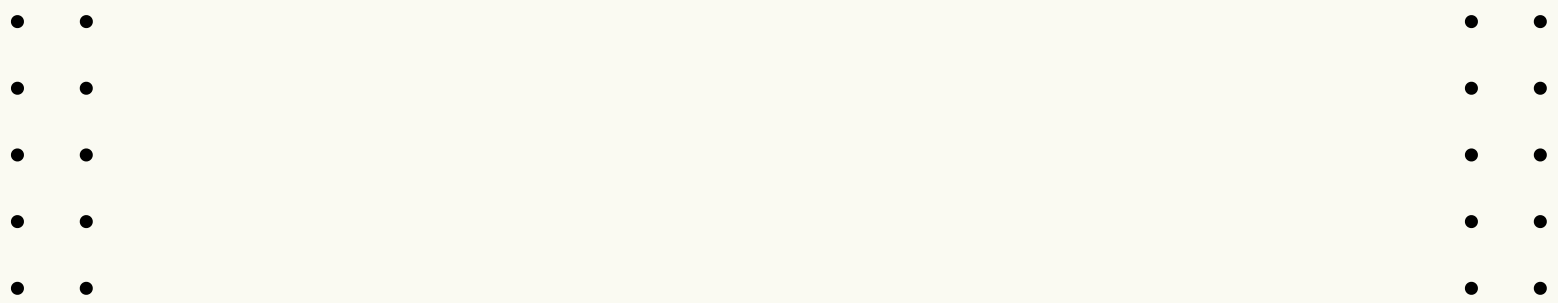


Introduction to Visual Storytelling

Visual Storytelling to Foster Inclusion

Visual storytelling is a form of communication that uses images, graphics, video and other visual elements to tell a story or convey a message. This mode of communication has gained increasing importance in the context of social and cultural inclusion, as it can break down language barriers, promote intercultural understanding and give a voice to marginalised or underrepresented groups. Inclusion is the principle of ensuring that all people, regardless of their differences (gender, race, ability, religion, sexual orientation or social class), are fully involved and participate in social life.

In this context, visual storytelling is a powerful tool to promote inclusion in different fields, such as education, work, and society as a whole. Breaking down Language Barriers One of the main advantages of visual storytelling is its ability to communicate beyond words. While words can limit understanding to speakers of a particular language, images and videos have universal power. A picture can convey emotion, context and deep meaning without the use of verbal language. This is especially useful in multicultural contexts, where people with different language backgrounds can interpret images more intuitively than written texts. For example, in awareness-raising campaigns on human rights or climate change, the use of powerful images can speak to people from different countries and cultures, conveying a shared message. In a globalised world, where migration and international mobility are increasingly common, using images that overcome language barriers becomes an essential vehicle for including everyone in the public discourse.



Introduction to Visual Storytelling

Promoting Intercultural Understanding

Visual storytelling can also facilitate intercultural understanding by representing different cultures, stories and perspectives in a respectful and authentic way. Often, traditional media tend to represent ethnic and cultural groups with stereotypes or prejudices, contributing to divisions and misunderstandings. In contrast, visually telling the stories of different communities provides an opportunity to present their experiences and realities from an inside perspective, humanising the subjects and fostering empathy.

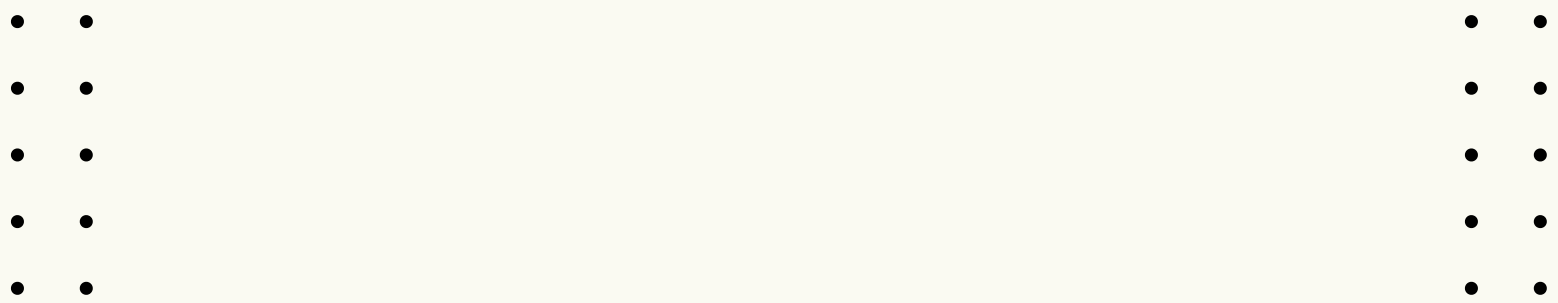
In educational contexts, the inclusion of visual narratives representing cultural diversity, migration stories and indigenous traditions can help students develop a greater awareness of and respect for the other. Visual documentaries, animations or artistic representations that show the daily lives of people from different backgrounds are valuable tools for breaking down prejudices and building bridges between different cultures.

Giving Voice to Marginalised Communities

Visual storytelling also provides a platform for marginalised communities, which often do not have access to traditional means to tell their stories.

Through images and videos, people can share their life experiences, overcoming barriers created by inequalities of power and access to media. This can help challenge dominant narratives and give voice to those who have historically been excluded from public discourse.

An effective example is the use of visual storytelling in the disability rights movement. Often, mainstream media ignore or misrepresent the experiences of people with disabilities, focusing only on the limiting aspects of their lives. However, through visual projects created by and for people with disabilities, it is possible to portray a more complete, authentic and respectful view of their lives, highlighting their strength, resilience and uniqueness. This not only fosters greater understanding, but also contributes to a more inclusive society, where differences are celebrated rather than ignored.



Introduction to Visual Storytelling

Inclusion in the World of Work

In the world of work, visual storytelling can also play an important role in promoting inclusion. In companies and organisations, the use of images, videos and infographics can be an effective way to educate employees on diversity and inclusion issues.

For example, interactive videos or short documentaries can make employees aware of the obstacles faced by people from minority groups, thus encouraging the creation of a more equal and welcoming work environment.

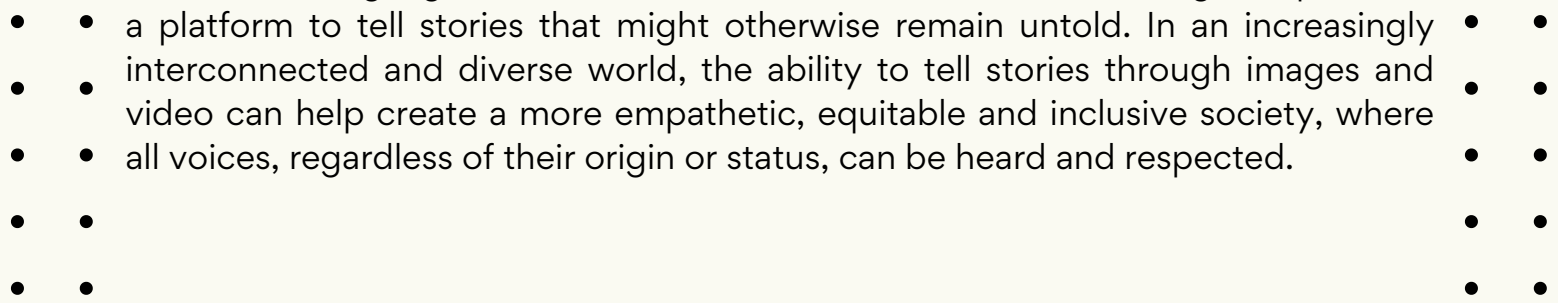
Furthermore, visual storytelling can be used to promote inclusion policies within organisations, making visible initiatives that aim to make the workplace more diverse and inclusive. Effective visual representation can help convey the importance of inclusion not only as an ethical value, but also as a factor that brings concrete benefits in terms of innovation, creativity and productivity.

In conclusion, visual storytelling is a powerful tool to promote inclusion as it overcomes language barriers, facilitates intercultural understanding and provides a platform to tell stories that might otherwise remain untold. In an increasingly interconnected and diverse world, the ability to tell stories through images and video can help create a more empathetic, equitable and inclusive society, where all voices, regardless of their origin or status, can be heard and respected.

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Case study

The case study is a social research method that is particularly suitable for dealing with complexity, analysing systems of relationships and studying unique and unrepeatable cases: it makes simultaneous use of a plurality of both qualitative and quantitative social research techniques. It is also a method that lends itself well to classroom presentation and allows for the opening of a discussion on the specific subject matter. Through the Case Study it is therefore possible to analyse successful Visual Storytelling cases.

Examples of successful Visual Storytelling: Visual Storytelling in Marketing

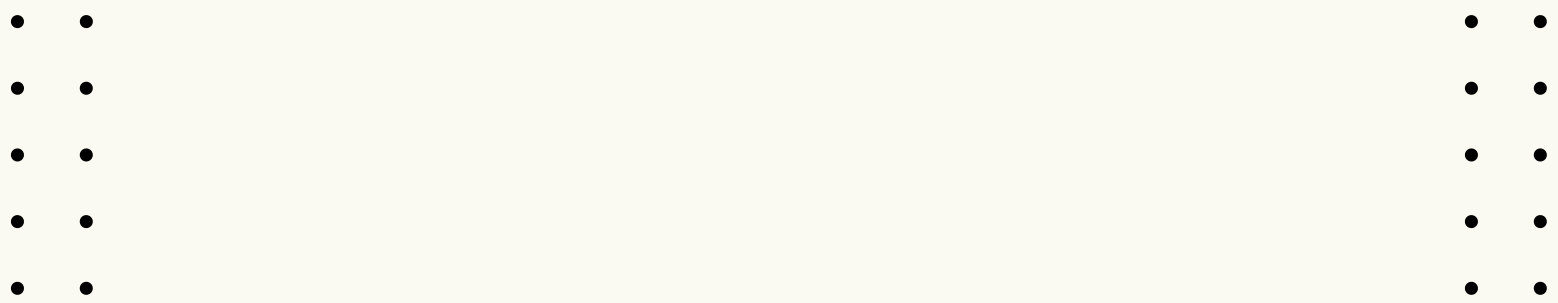
A successful visual storytelling can be exemplified by the video made by Huawei in 2018. Created to promote the launch of a new smartphone model, the commercial, through a story featuring a small alien and a young teenager, shows the full potential of the new device. The story focuses and revolves around the theme of 'choice'. As the concluding tag line reads: 'It's in your hand', i.e., 'The choice is yours'.

The human protagonist, in fact, after meeting the little alien in the woods, as his first reaction takes a photograph.

A flashforward is then triggered, in which the boy imagines everything that might happen to the little alien if its presence were shown to the world. He then chooses to delete the photo and walk away.

The video is also a good example of a narrative that develops solely through images and little else. And it seems to directly call the viewer into question by asking, 'And you, what would you have done?'. Full video here:

https://youtu.be/_m3PIkZW6o8



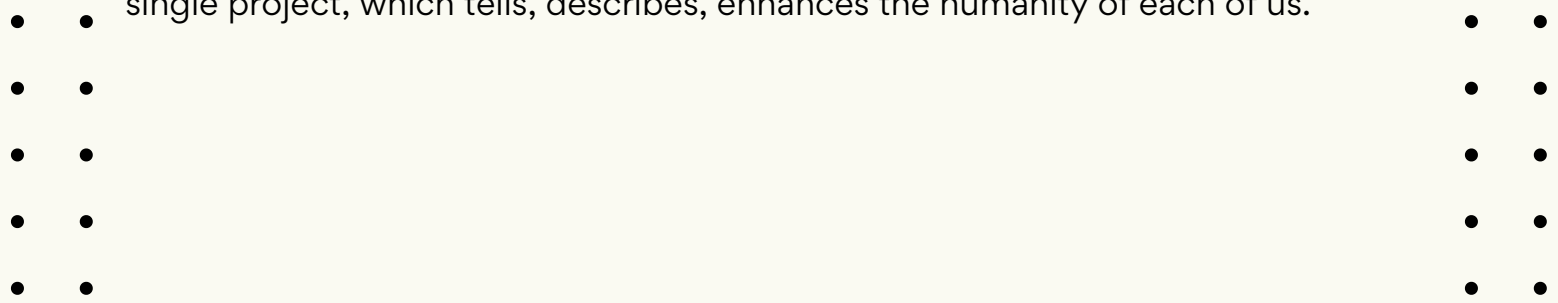
Case study

Examples of successful Visual Storytelling: Visual Storytelling for Social Reality Storytelling

In 2010, photographer Brandon Stanton decided to revolutionise the genre of travel literature by developing a project on New York, a city overflowing with streets, neighbourhoods and people. In order to create a photographic census of all the city's inhabitants, he collected hundreds of testimonies -including images and statements- from those he met. He thus began to ask men, women, children or the elderly a question or two about their past or their future.

These were simple but meaningful questions: what they wanted to be when they grew up, or what had been the saddest moment of their lives. The reactions and answers of the interviewees make up the book, which has about four hundred pages. 'Humans of New York: stories': the very title of the photo book encapsulates the sense of the author's research, who admitted that he wanted to show the images and stories of those who 'are trying to achieve or are living the American dream.' As the collection of portraits and interviews filled up, it became clear that containing them all in one book would not be enough. Stanton therefore decided to place the various testimonies and photographs collected within www.humansofnewyork.com. The project eventually gathered more than 20 million followers. The author's project is constantly evolving: five years ago he decided to extend his research from New York to twenty other countries around the world, and today the site is overflowing with episodes and photo stories of people from Mexico to Ukraine, Congo to Vietnam, India to Iraq. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Stanton decided for the first time to stop looking for stories and let them come to him: he asked all his followers

to narrate their 'most extraordinary stories, to inspire people during the crisis', believing that it might be useful to read about 'memories of a normal life, of normal happiness, of normal love'. This is an example of how, through visual storytelling, it is possible to connect, to excite, to involve thousands of people in a single project, which tells, describes, enhances the humanity of each of us.



Case study

The analysis of a case study requires a systematic approach to examine the collected data and draw meaningful conclusions. Below are the steps to process it within a classroom:

1. Understand the context/problem

- Reread the case study: Before starting the analysis, it is necessary to fully understand the context of the case. What is the main problem? What are the circumstances, actors involved and objectives?
- Identify the research question: Determine the key question or objective of the study. This will guide you throughout the analysis.

2. Organise the data

- Collect the facts: Classify the data collected during the case study. For example, divide the information into categories such as financial data, operational data, behavioural data, etc.
- Create a diagram or model: It is often useful to create a diagram, matrix or mind map to visualise the relationships between the various elements of the case.

3. Identify themes and patterns

- Look for patterns: Analyse the data to identify recurring themes or repeating patterns. Dynamics may emerge that were not apparent at first glance.
- Contrasts and divergences: Also look for dissonances or divergences that might indicate problem areas or opportunities for improvement.

4. Apply theories or conceptual models

- Compare with existing theories: Assesses how the case at hand relates to theories or models in the field.
- Identifies practical implications: Considers how the results may relate to real situations and what they may mean for the case studied or other similar cases



Case study

5. Decompose causes and effects

- Cause-effect: Analyses the link between the actions taken in the case and the results obtained. Identifies the main causes of problems or successes.
- Identify key factors: Try to isolate the factors that had a significant impact on events. What decisions or actions led to certain outcomes?

6. Critical evaluation

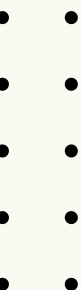
Strengths and weaknesses: Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the case. What was done well? Where were there gaps? Opportunities and threats: Examine the opportunities the case presents and possible threats or risks. If you are analysing a company, also assess market or competitive conditions.

7. Comparison with other cases

Benchmarking: Compare the results of the case study with those of similar cases to see if similarities or differences emerge. This can help you draw stronger conclusions or better understand the case in question.

8. Drawing conclusions

Answer the research question: Once you have analysed the data, answer the main research question. The conclusions must be supported by the facts and patterns identified. Recommendations: Provide practical recommendations based on the analysis. What changes could be implemented to improve the situation? What could be done differently in the future?



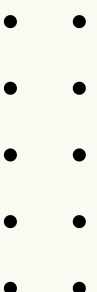
Case study

9. Synthesis and communication

- Presentation of results: Finally, present your results in a clear and structured manner. Organise the analysis so that it follows a coherent logic and supports your argumentation.

Useful tools for analysis:

- **SWOT analysis:** Assesses strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- **PESTEL analysis:** Considers political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal factors.
- **Porter's five forces analysis:** Assesses the level of competition in an industry.
- **Decision models:** Uses the Vroom-Yetton decision-making model or the situational leadership model.



Tools for visual storytelling

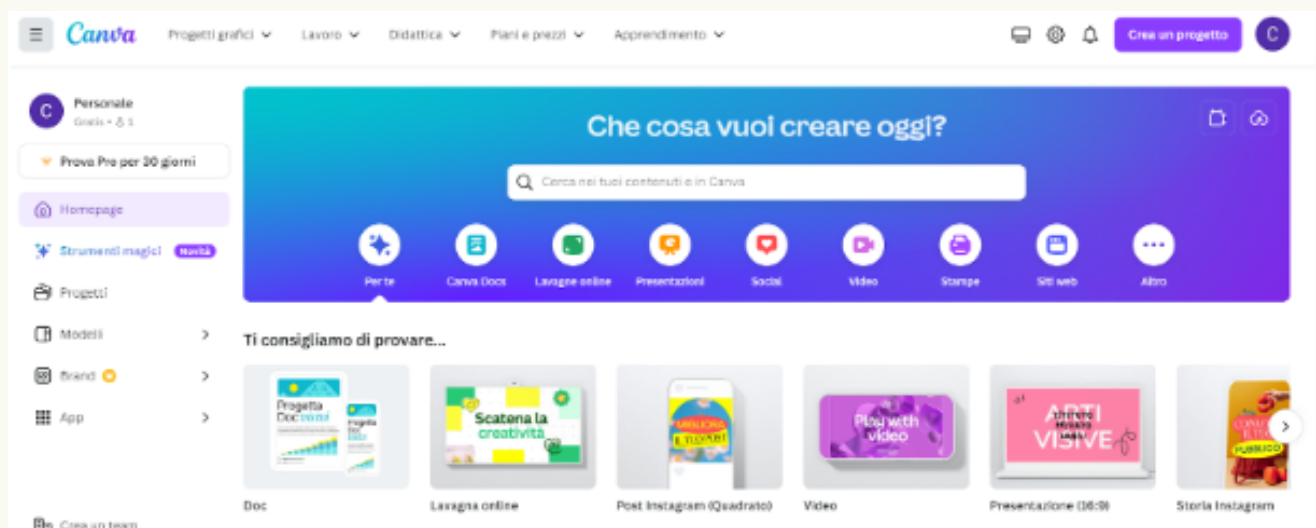
This Module will mainly deal with all those computer tools and software for visual storytelling of different types.

This Module will examine two types of visual elements for visual storytelling: photographs (or images) and videos.

Canva

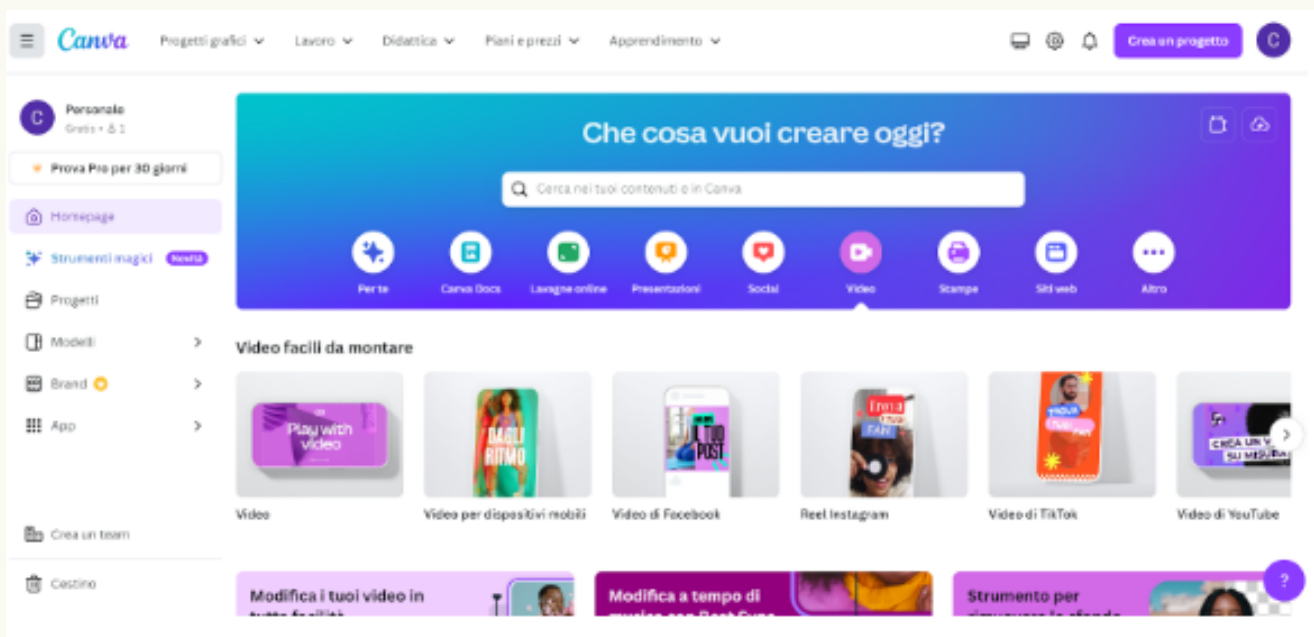
Canva is a simple and free tool for producing graphics and videos of various kinds and for various purposes. It offers the possibility of creating a wide range of content of a graphic nature, from the creation of attractively designed resumes to the editing of videos. The official website can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.canva.com/>

Navigation of the tool is very simple and intuitive.

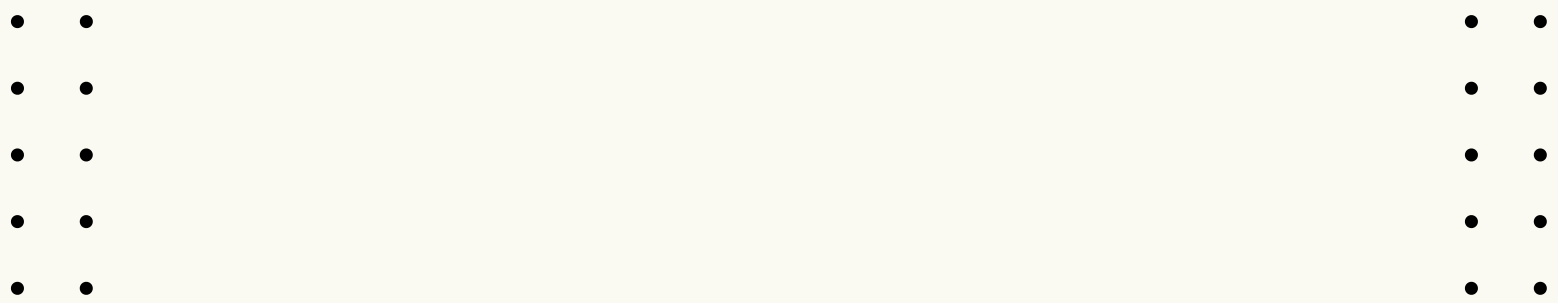


Tools for visual storytelling

From the start screen, you can see all the main functionalities of the tool. The most interesting features for Visual Storytelling are 2: the Editor (video and images) and the photo collage feature. It is possible to move around the tool either by means of the menus on the left and at the top, or by means of the menu of suggestions in the centre of the screen.

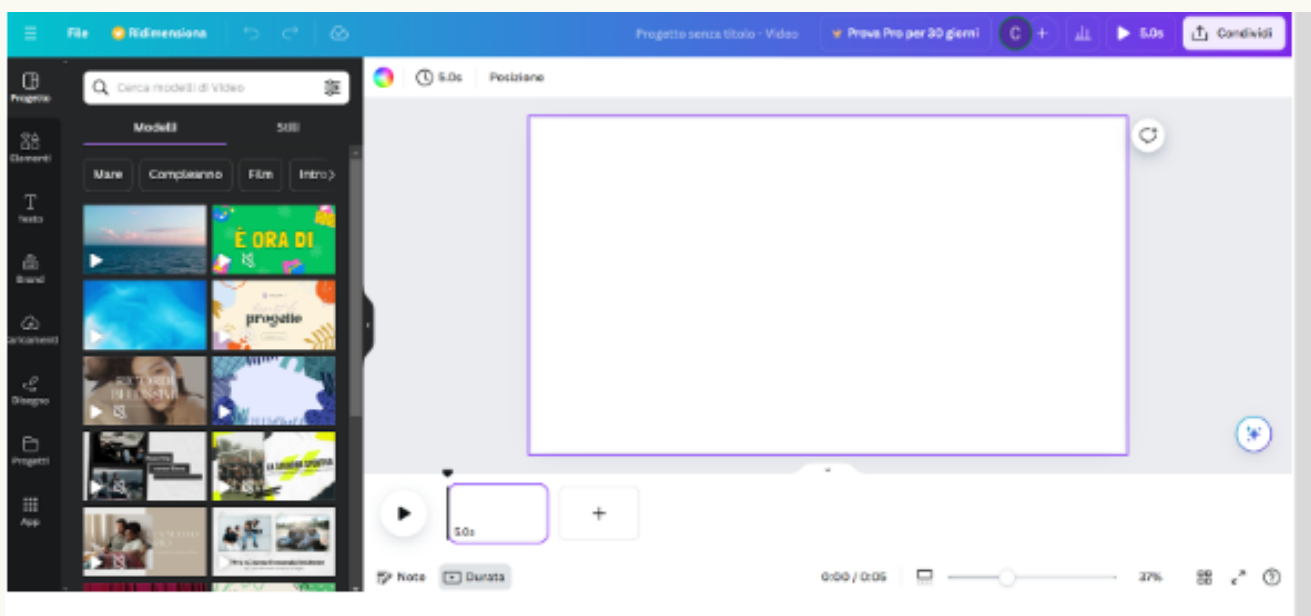


Once the type of content to be created has been selected, a 'Project' will open. Using the side menu, it will be possible to insert different types of content, from graphic elements to textual content. By selecting Templates, it will be possible to define how you want to present your content (playback speed, spatial

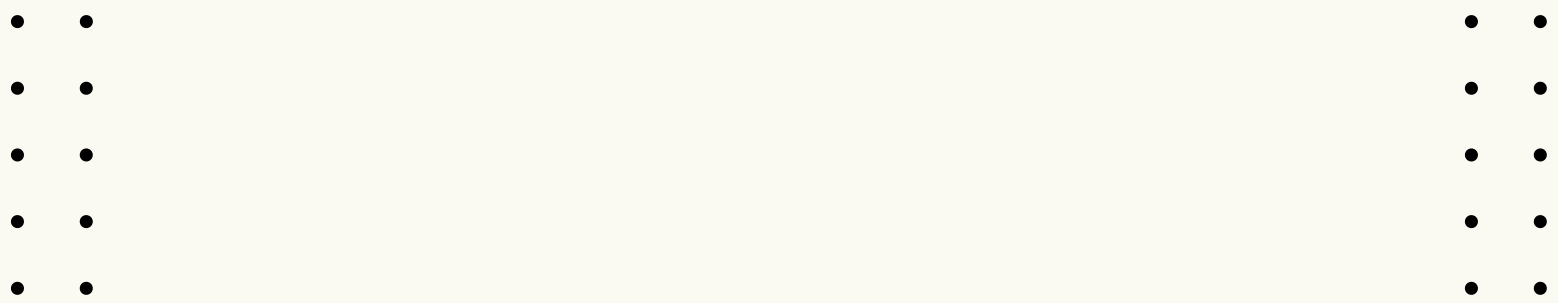


Tools for visual storytelling

organisation of content, possible insertion of audio in the case of videos). By selecting Styles, it will be possible to define colours and fonts.



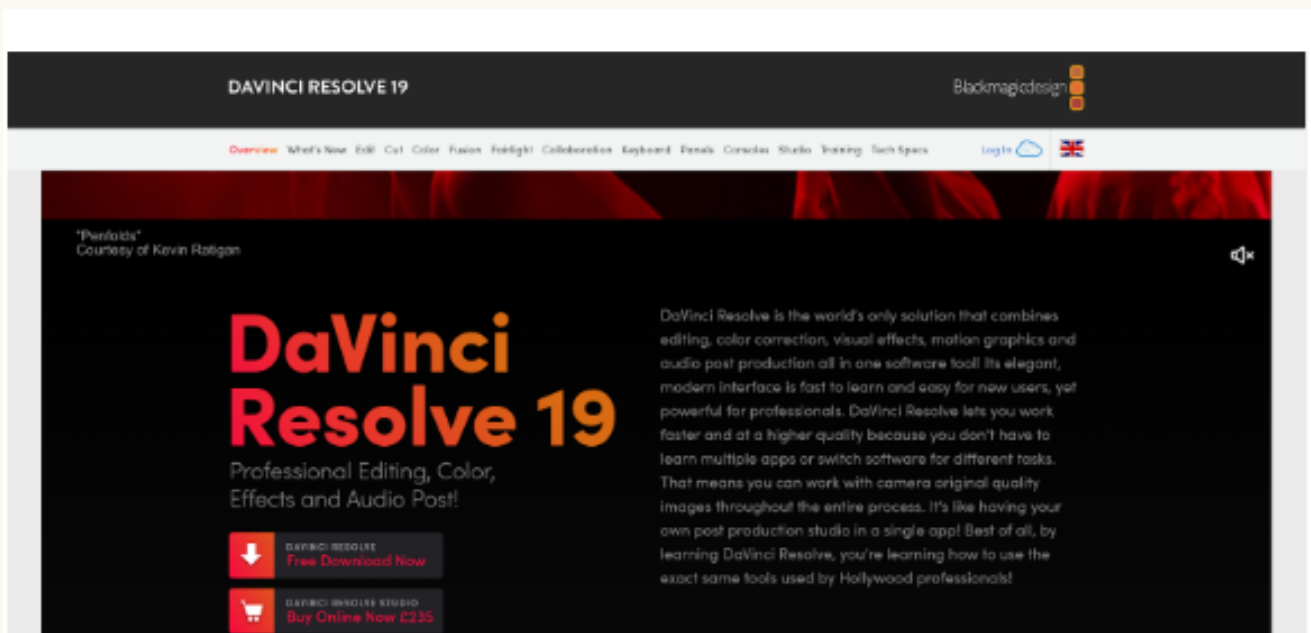
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Tools for visual storytelling

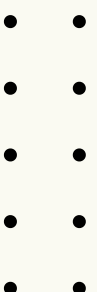
DaVinci Resolve 19

An application available in different languages, Davinci Resolve is a viable alternative for video editing that can also be downloaded as a free version.



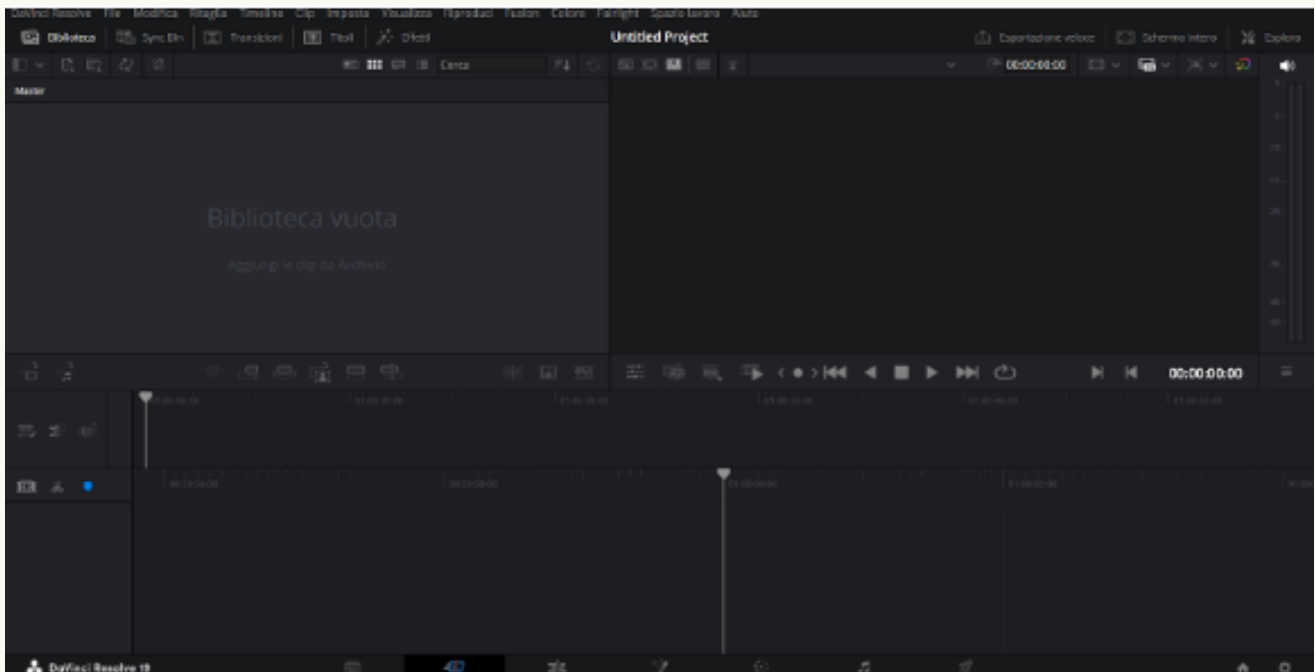
The software offers the possibility of using tools for editing, colour correction, visual effects, motion graphics and audio post production of your videos in a single tool.

Once the programme is installed, you can start with the management of the commands. The software allows you to view multiple features that make up your video, even selecting each individual piece to be edited.



Tools for visual storytelling

The necessary functions can be selected from the menu at the top. As the video is inserted, it becomes possible to break it down, adding music and soundtrack, lyrics and/or mixing various parts of one or more clips.



Once you have finished creating and editing the video, you can extract what you have created into different formats. The tool already provides basic formats valid for YouTube, TikTok, Vimeo.

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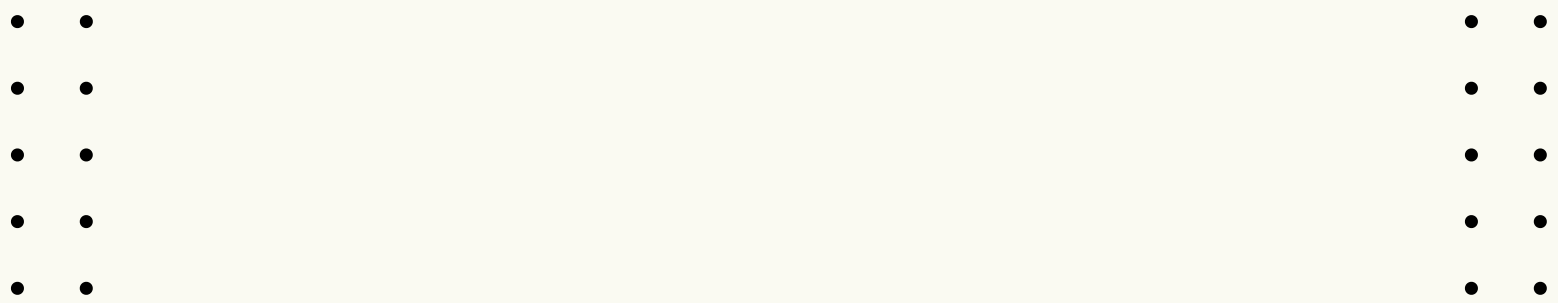
How to create an element of visual storytelling

For the creation of a visual storytelling, be it an image, a collage of images or a video, there are steps to follow and define. These steps are as follows:

- **Define the objective.** What do you want to achieve through visual storytelling? There are several reasons to use visual storytelling: content and form of the narrative should be defined according to the objective and the meaning you want to give to the narrative. It is the meanings, vehicles of values and experiences, that facilitate understanding, activating the emotional response in others and thus making the experience 'immersive'.

- **Identify the target audience.** Who are you addressing? Before actually constructing the story, the 'symbols', keywords, colours or rhetorical figures most suitable and most comprehensible for the target audience must be identified.

- **Construct the narrative.** This involves imagining the story through which to convey the message to the chosen audience. In this phase, a complete description of the video must be drawn up: subject, plot summary, detailed description of the unfolding, scene by scene storyboard), including direction and photography notes and indications concerning (for example) music and voice over. The narrative outline must therefore be clear and have its own coherence.



How to create an element of visual storytelling

- **Planning the shooting of the video.** In this phase we get into the thick of the action: once the script has been approved, we have to coordinate the filming machine, the choice of location and roles, the setting up of the set, and the preparation of the necessary audiovisual equipment, if we intend to create a video from scratch. In this sense, there are other considerations and aspects that must necessarily be taken into account, and they are as follows:

1. Focus on the attention span of users.

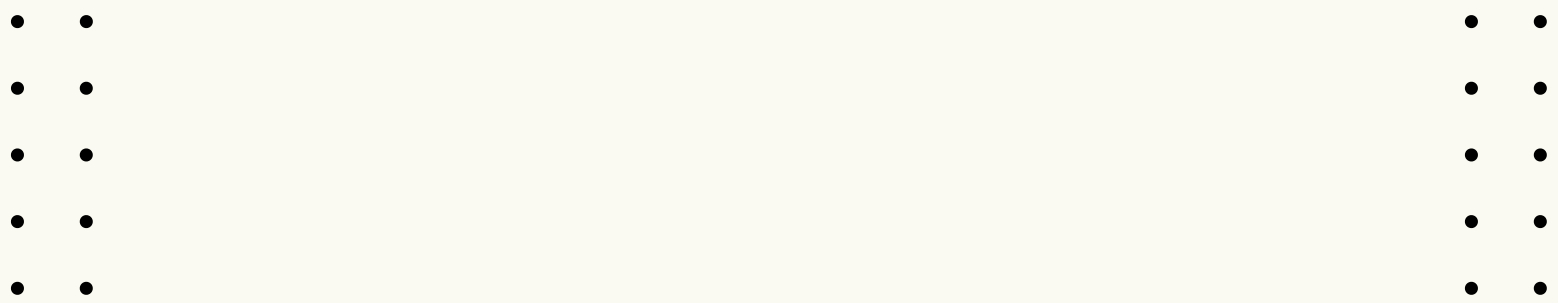
The average user is exposed to social media and video for more than 2 hours a day, so the attention span is low and lasts a few seconds. It is therefore important to manage the video in such a way that it entices the user to continue viewing.

2. Importance of emotional triggers.

Emotions are at the heart of the storytelling concept. It is in fact much more likely that a user will not remember the image he or she saw accurately, while perfectly recalling the emotion he or she felt at the sight of it.

3. Music management.

Music is in fact an emotional trigger and the soundtrack and audio effects are what makes the video a valuable and impactful tool.



Integrating visual storytelling with diversity management

Diversity management is the set of policies adopted by a company to promote diversity within the work environment. The term diversity, in this case, is understood in the broadest possible way and is a managerial and cultural challenge.

Integrating visual storytelling with diversity management policies can be a powerful way to promote inclusion and enhance diversity. A series of techniques and inputs for creating a story in line with the basic constructs of diversity management will be presented below:

1. Visual Representation of Diversity

- **Inclusion of Diverse Voices:** In visual storytelling, it is important that people of different ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, physical abilities and cultural backgrounds are represented. This helps to reflect the diverse composition of the community.

- **Inclusive Characters:** Using images and characters that reflect diversity can help create a sense of belonging for all possible viewers.

2. Authentic Narratives

- **Real and Authentic Stories:** Integrate real stories of people who have unique experiences related to diversity.

This may involve narratives about challenges overcome or successes achieved through diversity, showing the positive results in the medium to long term.

- **Visual testimonies:** Videos and images showing people in their daily activities, highlighting their uniqueness and helping to humanise the concept of diversity.

3. Visual Storytelling as a Training Tool

- **Raising Awareness through Images and Video:** Videos using visual storytelling to address issues of diversity and inclusion can make the understanding of abstract concepts more effective. Telling stories of discrimination, stereotypes or microaggressions through videos or comics can help to better understand these phenomena.

- **Visual Campaigns:** Creating visual campaigns (posters, infographics, animations) that promote the values of diversity, equity and inclusion. These can constantly raise awareness of these issues.

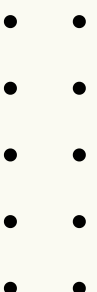
Integrating visual storytelling with diversity management

4. Multidisciplinary Collaboration

- **Involving Diverse Creatives:** Involving creatives with diverse backgrounds in the design of visual storytelling can ensure that stories are authentic and represent different perspectives.

- **Feedback and Participation:** Incorporate a feedback process involving people from diverse backgrounds to evaluate the effectiveness and sensitivity of visual storytelling in enhancing diversity campaigns.

Some examples of how visual Storytelling can be applied to issues of inclusion come from corporate marketing contexts.



Integrating visual storytelling with diversity management

Best practices

1. Generational differences - Apple: The song

In 2014 Apple introduced one of the diversity topics, the difference between generations. In a commercial based on the most classic of ads, that for the holiday season, we see a young girl creating a gift for her grandmother, using Apple technology to turn an old song, “Our Love Is Here to Stay,” into a duet. As her grandmother listens to the song on the breakfast table on an iPad Mini, she looks at the old photographs her granddaughter has collected. In this context, the message conveyed is that technology can bring generations closer together, bringing one into the world of the other, and simultaneously talking about the brand and the product, even if it remains somewhat in the background. The video is available at the link: <https://youtu.be/N2ubgxn8aQ8>

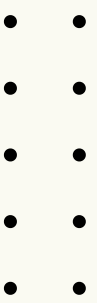
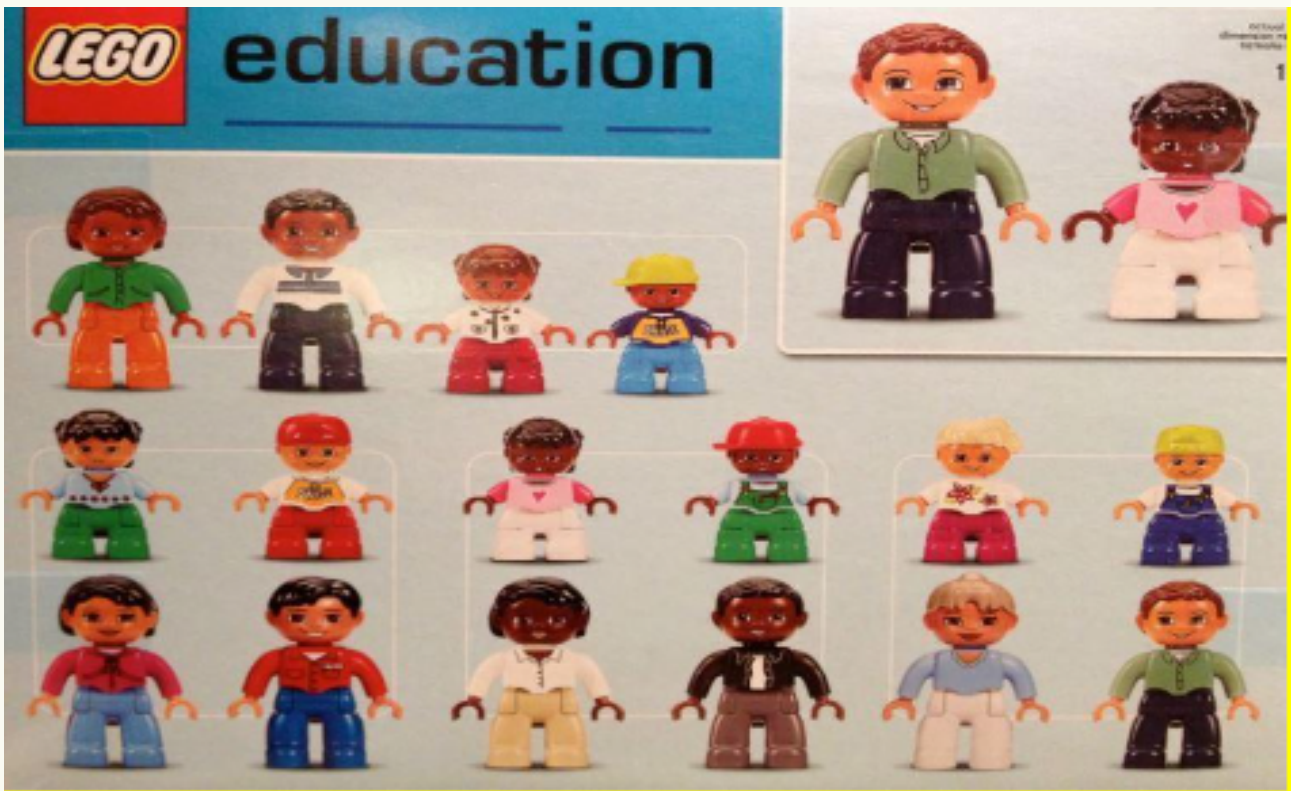
2. Disability - Coca-Cola and the Special Olympics

Every year thousands of athletes, from all over the world, are engaged in competing in a variety of sports including athletics, five-a-side soccer, rowing, artistic gymnastics, etc., during the Special Olympics Summer Games, an event first held in 1968 with the aim of promoting social inclusion among people with and without intellectual disabilities. For more than 20 years, Coca-Cola has been contributing to the project to promote the values of honesty, inclusion, equality and respect, focusing on a fundamental message: the possibility for everyone to achieve great things.



Integrating visual storytelling with diversity management

3. Ethnicity - LEGO and minifigures.



Integrating visual storytelling with diversity management

At the urging of many minority rights groups and its small customers, LEGO has over time introduced a series of darker and lighter-skinned characters beyond the classic LEGO yellow. Not a real campaign, but a change in the production of bricks and Duplo (the series dedicated to toddlers), to make all children feel equal in one of the most challenging and educational activities of their childhood: building. And just to build a more inclusive and equal world for all, including religiously, LEGO has added specific characters, even releasing new darker-skinned characters. For Duplo, in particular, LEGO has also created a multicultural set so families can purchase minifigures that most reflect their ethnic heritage.

4. Genre - Mattel/Barbie: Dads who play Barbie.

The world's most famous doll has transformed in recent years into an innovative brand in gender communication: a new positive role model for little girls globally, capable of expressing diversity first with the 2016 launch of the new multi-ethnic, shorter or more curvy Barbie dolls and then with a campaign that focuses on dads and the importance of their role in raising daughters.

The commercial Dads who play Barbie shows fathers of different ethnicities sitting down to play Barbie together with their daughters in a natural way, laughing, having fun and above all leaving aside the concept of sternness and virility always attributed to the “father of the family.” A new representation not so much for this image as for the message that accompanies it, “You can be anything.” Fathers playing astronaut, doctor, or yoga teacher with their daughters convey to little girls the feeling that in life they have a chance to become anything they dream of.

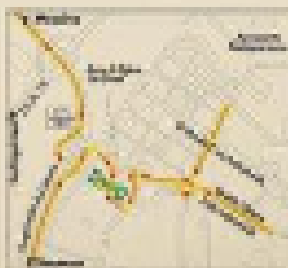
5. Sexual Orientation - IKEA: We are open to all families.

“We are open to all families.” With this copy IKEA advertised the opening of its new store in Catania (Sicily, Italy) a few years ago. A simple image, two men holding hands, while one of them holds the classic bag full of Ikea products. Simple, immediate and no pun intended, the furniture company's adv expresses

- the important concept of inclusion, juxtaposing it with another of the brand's
- symbols, the famous orange card, the IKEA Family, designed precisely for
- families. For all families.
-
-
-
-
-

Integrating visual storytelling with diversity management

**Siamo aperti
a tutte le famiglie.**



Per di IKEA la presenza propria come voi la famiglia è la cosa più importante. Ed è per questo che abbiamo pensato alla carta IKEA Member con tanti vantaggi, offerte e tutto il bello di entrare a far parte della grande famiglia IKEA. Diventare soci è facile e gratuito e potete farlo online o in negozio. Vedrete da noi vi sentirete a casa. Perché quello che desideriamo di fare è rendere più comoda la vita di ogni persona, di ogni famiglia e di ogni coppia, qualunque cosa sia.

Ora IKEA è a Catania. Siamo vicini, di casa.

IKEA CATANIA, zona industriale nord. Lun - Dom: 10 - 21



Integrating visual storytelling with diversity management

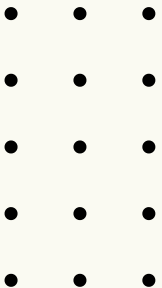
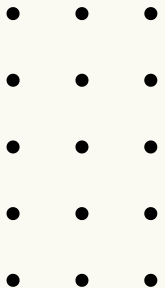
6. Religion – Coca-Cola and Ramadan

Coca-Cola has always held inclusion, friendship and solidarity as core brand values. With the latest spot broadcast on Coca-Cola Netherland's Facebook channel for Ramadan, it conveyed a message that has a profound impact on today's society, where the need for inclusion and the fear of diversity continue to coexist on many levels. A moving video, dedicated to Muslims around the world who observe Ramadan, the Islamic practice of fasting. The brand succeeded in giving equally full and profound meaning to another holiday that had not yet been used so fittingly by advertisers. A kind of exception in western marketing, which helps us today to dialogue around the many stereotypes. In the commercial a young Muslim woman has to endure the last hours of fasting before sunset, but at the same time she has to fight against the obstacles of a daily life still full of prejudice. When the time for Iftar, the evening meal of Ramadan, arrives at sundown, a passer-by in a running suit notices her and decides to offer her a bottle of Coca-Cola. The young Muslim girl initially does not accept. But the other girl understands the situation and decides to wait with her until sunset to share and drink together.

The claim: 'What unites us is greater than what divides us', is as iconic and representative as the mythical glass bottle. https://youtu.be/OXDI1l_zjkA



LEGAL FRAMEWORK





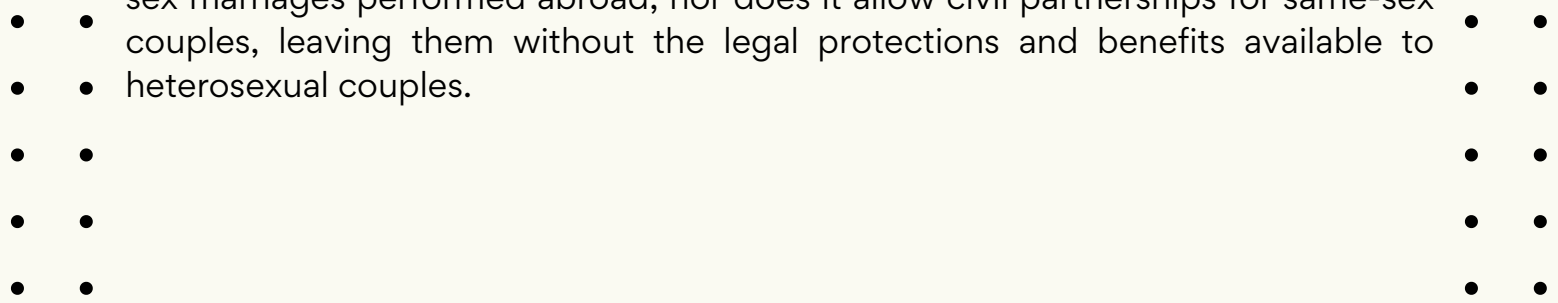
The legal landscape for LGBTQ+ rights in Romania has seen gradual change over the past few decades, with some progress in specific areas, but still encountering substantial challenges characterized by a mix of minimal legal protections and significant gaps in rights and recognition. Same-sex marriage and adoption rights remain out of reach, while access to healthcare and protection from discrimination in employment are limited by legal and societal obstacles.

Although there is some progress, particularly in anti-discrimination laws, the enforcement is often weak, and LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face significant legal challenges. Although the pressure exercised by European Union for further legal reforms and greater social acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals is likely to increase, significant work remains to be done to achieve full equality and protection for the LGBTQ+ community in Romania.

Same-sex marriage

Same-sex marriage is not legally recognized in Romania. The Romanian Constitution defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman, a definition reinforced by the Civil Code, which explicitly prohibits same-sex marriages. In 1996, Article 200 of the Penal Code (1968) was amended to eliminate the criminalization of “sexual relations between persons of the same-sex” (punished until then with 1 to 5 years’ imprisonment). However, at the same time regressive provisions were incorporated into the Code. Article 200(1) now criminalised sexual acts between persons of the same sex "committed in public or if producing public scandal". Additionally, Article 200(5) criminalised "inciting or encouraging a person to the practice of sexual relations between persons of the same sex, as well as propaganda or association or any other act of proselytism committed in the same scope". Both offences were punishable by imprisonment of one to five years.

Article 200 was fully removed in 2001 by Emergency Ordinance No. 89 (2001). In 2018, a referendum aimed at changing the constitution to prevent future legalization of same-sex marriage failed due to low voter turnout, but the legal framework remains restrictive. Additionally, Romania does not recognize same-sex marriages performed abroad, nor does it allow civil partnerships for same-sex couples, leaving them without the legal protections and benefits available to heterosexual couples.





The European Commission launched in 2020 a pre-infringement procedure for the lack of implementation of the Coman judgement, a case involving a Romanian citizen and his American partner, whose marriage was not recognized in Romania, dating back to 2010. The same happened in another case, Buhuceanu and Others v. Romania, when the European Court of Human Rights affirmed the violation of Art.8, recognizing same-sex marriage, by the Romanian state. The Internal Affairs Ministry of Romania then published a legislative proposal for the execution of the Coman judgement and organised a public debate inviting only the Christian Office for Rights and Liberties. After the debate, the Internal Affairs Ministry modified the proposal removing the part mentioning civil unions which was adopted by the Parliament. According to the bill, a Romanian citizen's spouse's right of residence is conditional upon the transcription of their marriage certificate in the Romanian registry.

Adoption rights

Romania's adoption laws are similarly restrictive for the members of the LGBTQ+ community. Same-sex couples are not permitted to adopt children as well as adoption is legally challenging and practically difficult for single LGBTQ+ individuals. The conservative mindset at the legal and political level reflects the broader conservative social attitudes toward LGBTQ+ rights. The legal framework, therefore, denies LGBTQ+ individuals and couples the opportunity to create families through adoption, further marginalizing them and denying them rights available to heterosexual individuals.

Access to healthcare

Although in 2000, Article 2(1) of the Ordinance on the Prevention and Punishment of All Forms of Discrimination banned discrimination based on "sexual orientation", access to healthcare for LGBTQ+ individuals in Romania is an area of concern, particularly for transgender individuals and those seeking gender-affirming treatment.



Although there is no explicit legal prohibition against healthcare for LGBTQ+ individuals, there is a lack of specific legal protections ensuring their access to necessary services. Transgender individuals often face difficulties in accessing gender-affirming procedures due to legal and bureaucratic obstacles, including the requirement for court approval for gender marker changes on identity documents. Moreover, there is little legal guidance or protection against discrimination in healthcare settings, which can lead to inadequate or discriminatory treatment for LGBTQ+ patients.

Regulation of “conversion therapy”

Generally, laws in force in Romania do not regulate or restrict sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression change efforts (SOGIECE), regularly known as “conversion therapies”.

Legal Gender Recognition

Article 43 of the Law on Civil Status Acts (Law No. 119) (1996) establishes that a change of name must be preceded by the judicial authorisation of a change of sex.

However, no requirements are mentioned in the legislation, which has led to many different interpretations among courts, with many of them requiring surgeries and medical treatments in practice. For this reason, in 2021, the European Court of Human Rights ruled against Romania in *X. and Y. v. Romania*, as the European Court's case law does not allow any surgical or medical requirements that might likely result in infertility for LGR. As of January 2024, the Court of Justice of the European Union has been deliberating on the case of Arian Mirzarafie-Ahi, a transgender man with dual Romanian and British citizenship. Arian, who has been legally recognised as male in Great Britain following his gender transition, alleges that Romanian authorities have refused to amend his civil status documents to reflect his gender identity. In February 2024, the District Court of Bucharest 6 reportedly ruled in favour of a trans man from Brăila, allowing for the alteration of his gender marker in civil status records and the issuance of a new birth certificate. The decision exempted the applicant from undergoing surgery as a prerequisite for the change.



Employment and anti-discrimination laws

Romania’s legal framework includes some protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace. The Anti-Discrimination Law, enforced by the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD), explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, the enforcement of these protections is often weak, and LGBTQ+ individuals still face significant discrimination in the job market. Reports indicate that LGBTQ+ individuals in Romania may experience harassment, unfair dismissal, and other forms of discrimination, with limited recourse or support from legal institutions. The fear of discrimination often leads LGBTQ+ individuals to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity in professional environments, further perpetuating inequality.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Freedom of expression and assembly for LGBTQ+ individuals and groups in Romania is constitutionally guaranteed but practically limited.

LGBTQ+ pride events, such as Bucharest Pride, have been held regularly since 2005, but these events often face opposition from conservative groups and require substantial security measures. Legal protection for these events exists, but societal attitudes remain hostile, and participants may face harassment or violence. In addition, LGBTQ+ activists and organizations operate in a challenging environment, where their freedom to express their views and advocate for rights is often met with public and institutional resistance.

1. Criminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual acts LEGAL Since 1996	2. Restrictions to freedom of expression NO KNOWN LEGAL BARRIERS	3. Restrictions to freedom of association NO KNOWN LEGAL BARRIERS		
13. Regulation of so-called "conversion therapies" NO	14. Same-sex unions NO	15. Adoption NO ADOPTION POSSIBLE	16. Restrictions on interventions on intersex minors NO	
17. Legal gender recognition				
Procedure POSSIBLE 1996	Self-ID NO	Surgery REQUIRED	Diagnosis REQUIRED	Non-binary markers NOT AVAILABLE

ITALY



Italy has certainly undergone a strong regulatory evolution from the nineties to now, but it is not among the states that have most equalized the rights in question. Moreover, regional jurisdiction, which intersects with state jurisdiction on various matters, has led to some disparities between one region and another in the country, especially with regard to non-discrimination (not to mention the differences in interpretation between individual municipalities, and even between individual judicial districts, on rules and issues such as marriage or adoption). From this last point of view, the case of the transcription of homosexual marriages registered abroad is exemplary, the subject of a continuous exchange of decisions between the Supreme Court and the Courts.

Civil Unions / Marriage and Adoptions

Law no. 76 of 2016 introduces Civil Unions for the first time in Italy, a law that guarantees all the rights and duties of marriage, with the exception of joint adoption and the obligation of fidelity. The same law also provides forms of protection for cohabiting couples, whether they are made up of people of the same or opposite sex.

This law fills a whole series of gaps in the protection of fundamental civil rights, for example in health matters (visits and the right to information and consent), family and inheritance, which were previously uncovered. Among these, also other rights that previously (in 2016) had also given rise to the intervention of the European Court of Human Rights, such as the denial of a residence permit for family reunification to homosexual couples. Today, Italy is at the same time one of the very few states in Western Europe that does not recognize same-sex marriage contracted abroad (with all the transcription problems that we have already mentioned). On the other hand, co-parental adoption has been recognized since 1983 and regulates the adoption of the partner's child, whether it is through marriage or (starting in 2016) a civil union. The Court of Cassation has recently extended the adoptability of minors to single people, and therefore also to single LGBTQ people. Finally, sex change has been allowed in Italy since 1982.



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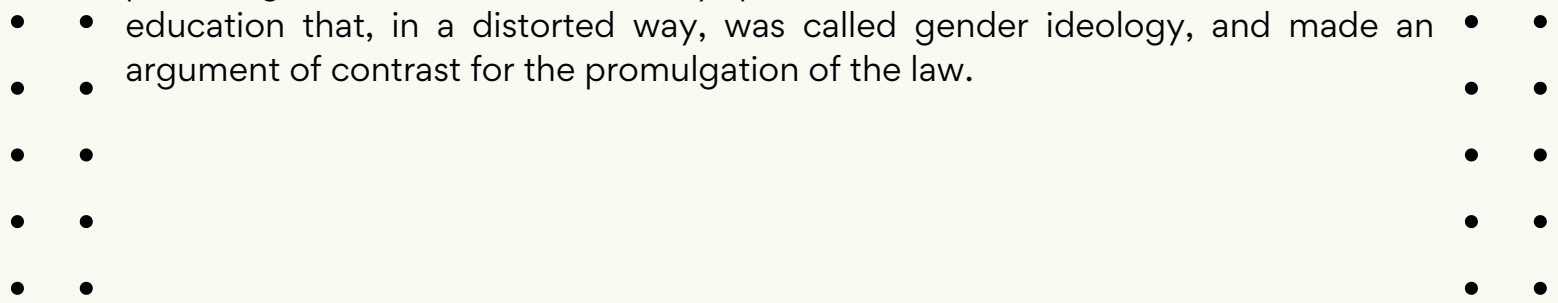
Non-discrimination

The panorama of regulatory interventions on non-discrimination is much more varied. Since the adoption procedure of an EU directive in 2000, which took place in 2003 at the hands of the then center-right government, Italy ended up in infringement proceedings precisely for having failed to recognize some principles of non-discrimination in the area of sexual orientation (specifically, regarding the suitability to enter or remain in the armed forces, police, penitentiary or rescue services).

Obviously, our constitution and various key regulations, such as those relating to the processing of personal data, generally protect sexual orientation and all other personal freedoms and freedoms of expression, but if we go into detail we find that far more protection proposals have been rejected than have been passed by Parliament.

In 2021, a provision was issued prohibiting the display on roads and vehicles of "any form of advertising that proposes sexist or violent messages or offensive gender stereotypes or messages that violate respect for individual freedoms, civil and political rights, religious beliefs, ethnic origin or discriminatory with reference to sexual orientation, gender identity, physical and mental abilities".

At the same time, however, the famous "Zan" bill, which was among those aimed at combating discrimination and hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity, was rejected by secret ballot. We can say that the introduction of new crimes or aggravating circumstances has always been played on the thin razor blade that contrasted the need for new tools to combat such discriminatory behavior with the opposition of those who asserted that homosexuals and transsexuals would in this way have a sort of "strengthened protection", and therefore unconstitutional, compared to the victims of other types of discrimination. And this is the reason why, for example, the amendment to Article 604bis of the Criminal Code speaks generically of instigation of discrimination or the commission of discriminatory acts, without specifying the matrix related to sexual orientation. In the case of other bills, such as the one not approved in 2021, some reasons for the rejection lay in the fact that the proposed law, in addition to punishing hate crimes more harshly, provided for a sort of civic and scholastic education that, in a distorted way, was called gender ideology, and made an argument of contrast for the promulgation of the law.

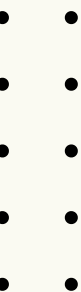
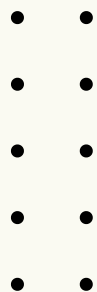


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In any case, this should suggest, for the future, to distinguish, at the level of regulatory introductions, proposals that contemplate the introduction or strengthening of civil and criminal sanctions and other regulatory interventions of a purely social nature, precisely so as not to leave room for an instrumentalization of the political and social contrast on the issue.

Ultimately, we can say that in Italy there are certainly consolidated regulations that protect sexual and gender orientation and that defend the principle of non-discrimination, but those regulations that go into detail to affect, or consider as aggravating, hate crimes, homophobia, etc. are more difficult to pass.



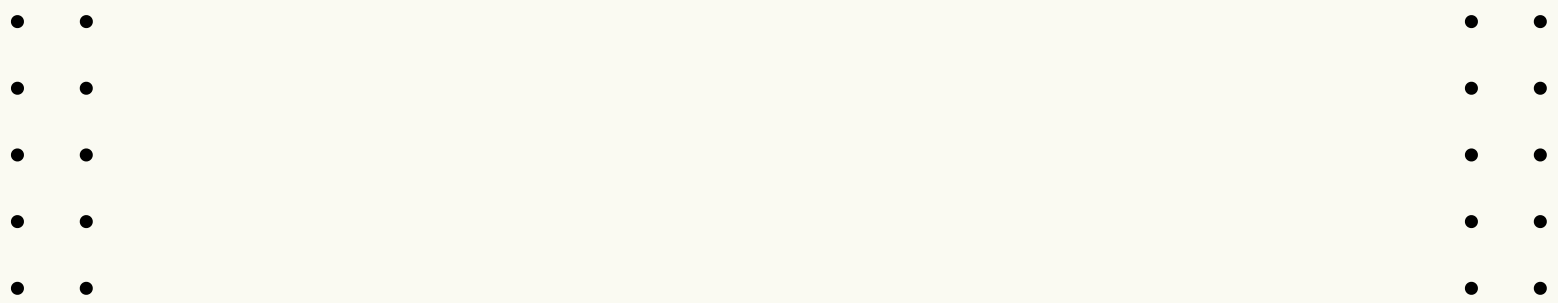


Historical Context of LGBTQ+ Rights in Malta

To be able to identify the current legal context for the rights related to LGBTQ+ in Malta, one will have to delve and elaborate on the historical background. Malta was, until the very recent past, a far cry from this image of a progressive state. Under British colonial rule, homosexuality was criminalized—a legal framework that persisted into the post-independence period. It took until 1973, almost ten years after Malta became independent, for homosexuality to be removed from the criminal code. But again, even with this legal change, LGBTQ+ citizens were socially stigmatized and discriminated against. The first time the legal framework with regards to LGBTQ+ rights changed materially was in the early 2000s, when Malta was preparing for its accession to the European Union. EU membership, secured in 2004, brought Malta within the ambit of European human rights legislation. The initiation of this process is evidence of wider movement towards ensuring respect for the rights of sexual minorities. Membership of the EU entailed commitments to promote policies of nondiscrimination, defense of civil liberties, and adherence to principles of equality (European Commission Report, 2020).

It also empowered activist groups for LGBTQ+, who became more vocal and agitated for far-reaching legal changes.

All of this was realized in 2015, when the Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics Act was passed (GIGESC Act); it was a critical new step in Maltese law toward LGBTQ+ people. This, together with subsequent laws like the Marriage Equality Act in 2017, made Malta a leading country in LGBTQ+ rights in Europe (Malta Legal Network, 2015).

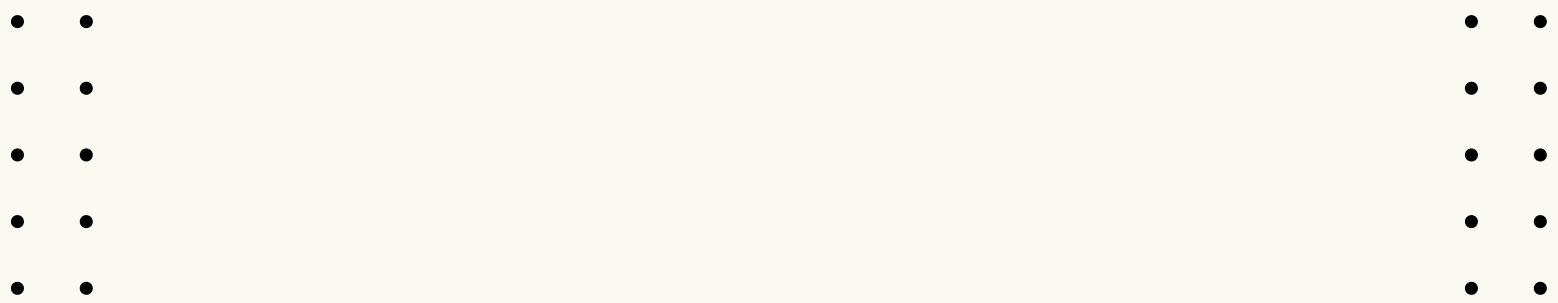




The Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics Act (GIGESC)

The *Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics Act* (GIGESC) was enacted in 2015 and is one of the most liberal pieces of legislation in the world on the issues of gender identity and expression. It allows for a person's gender to be legally changed through a mere administrative procedure without any kind of evaluation, medical or psychological. This is in stark contrast to the practices followed in most other countries, where transgender persons have to undergo severe medical procedures, hormonal treatment, or psychiatric evaluations in order to get their gender legally recognized.

Furthermore, the GIGESC Act clearly has provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gives protections to the intersex community. The GIGESC Act criminalizes these many non-consensual surgeries, performed to "correct" the bodies of intersex people, unless there is fully informed consent of that person and thus leaves the body control in the hands of that person. The legal innovations of the GIGESC Act go far beyond just recognition of transgender identities (Malta Legal Network, 2015). The Act compels all public authorities to ensure that official documents, starting from passports to identity cards, reflect a person's chosen gender identity. Such a thorough approach on gender recognition really does set Malta apart on the international stage of human rights law in this area (European LGBTQ+ Network, 2017). From a legal perspective, the GIGESC Act fundamentally takes a new direction from the approaches used in gender recognition until now. The act is based on principles of autonomy, self-determination, and bodily integrity, which are hallmarks of contemporary human rights laws. .





Its provisions heavily drew on international frameworks like the Yogyakarta Principles, detailing global standards for using international human rights law in addressing issues concerning sexual orientation and gender identity (Maltese LGBTQ+ Workers Association, 2020). The real radical difference, however, in the GIGESC Act is the focus on self-determination. In many jurisdictions, to get recognized as a transgender individual, one has to undergo psychological evaluations or medical treatments in order to "prove" one's gender identity. Often, such requirements are slammed for being invasive and pathologizing of an identity that should not have to be diagnosed or fixed. By contrast, the Malta law recognizes that the best judges of an individual's identity are the people themselves, and therefore eradicates undesirable gate-keeping mechanisms. Similarly, the GIGESC Act is finally focusing long-overdue attention on a key human rights issue: the non-consensual surgeries performed on intersex children. Intersex advocacy groups have long called an end to "normalizing" surgeries, citing these procedures as stripping children of their bodily autonomy and frequently causing long-term physical and psychological harm. By embedding protections for intersex individuals within its gender identity law, Malta has taken a leading role in recognizing the rights of this marginalized community (Malta Legal Network, 2015).

Equal Treatment and Anti-Discrimination Legislation

In parallel to the GIGESC Act, Malta has brought out a comprehensive series of antidiscrimination laws for protecting LGBTQ+ individuals in various dimensions of life. The Equal Treatment Act of 2014 is one of the biggest moves by the country toward ensuring that LGBTQ+ people face no discrimination in matters related to employment, education, health, and service access. This Act prohibits discrimination against a person based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression in every aspect of public life. With the establishment of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), further commitment to anti-discrimination is evident on the part of Malta. In fact, this commission is responsible for investigating complaints about discrimination and supporting people who are treated unfairly. It is through its work that the NCPE plays a vital role in ensuring that the rights enshrined in Maltese law are effectively put into practice. In spite of the comprehensiveness of the anti-discrimination framework, challenges still abound in Malta. Public awareness concerning such laws is not universal, and the legal requirements may not be totally met, especially by smaller businesses or institutions situated in rural areas. The NCPE has acknowledged that



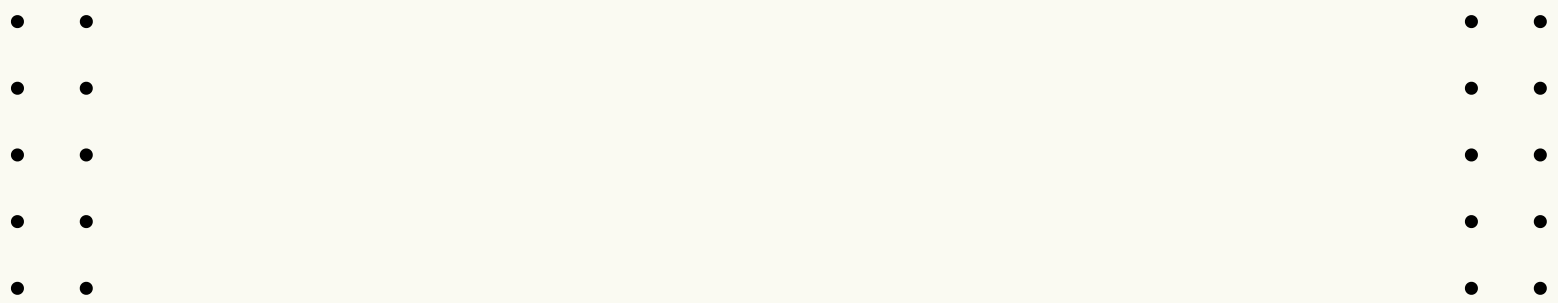
a further effort to make these protections known is necessary, particularly with vulnerable groups who may not know their rights (NCPE Annual Report, 2022).

Marriage Equality and Family Rights

One of the most significant milestones in Malta’s journey toward full LGBTQ+ equality came with the passage of the Marriage Equality Act in 2017. This law granted same-sex couples the right to marry and afforded them the same legal protections and obligations as heterosexual couples. The legislation also provided same-sex couples with the right to adopt children, thereby extending full family rights to LGBTQ+ individuals.

The Marriage Equality Act was a result of many years of dogged advocacy by LGBTQ organizations, at the forefront of which was the Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM).

This law followed years of engaged lobbying and passed with practically universal support in the parliament of Malta. But it also faced opposition from more conservative sections of society, notably the Catholic Church, which is known to be firmly against same-sex marriage (MGRM, 2021). The passage of marriage equality legislation in Malta, therefore, becomes quite remarkable because of the very strong Catholic character of the Maltese people. In most countries where faith is deeply ingrained in the social fabric, the struggle for marriage equality has had to face strong opposition and consequently got bogged down in legal changes for a prolonged period of time. In Malta, though, political leadership and public support finally came together and coalesced to pass the law, thus offering one of the leading examples of how progressive reforms can succeed in a religiously conservative society (European LGBTQ+ Network, 2017).



DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT





ROMANIA

Diversity management involves creating inclusive environments that value differences in ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and other characteristics. In Romania, businesses and public institutions are increasingly recognizing the importance of diversity in the workplace. However, challenges remain, particularly due to societal prejudices and pressure from the conservative establishment.

Legally, Romania's framework for diversity is mainly driven by anti-discrimination laws, particularly the Anti-Discrimination Law enforced by the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD). Although these laws prohibit discrimination based on various grounds, including ethnicity, gender, age, disability, and sexual orientation, the implementation of diversity management practices varies significantly across sectors. Multinational companies operating in Romania often lead the way in promoting diversity, driven by global corporate policies and the need to comply with EU standards. These companies typically implement diversity and inclusion (D&I) programs that focus on recruitment, retention, and creating inclusive workplace cultures.

In contrast, Romanian-owned businesses and public institutions may lag in adopting formal diversity management strategies.

While some progress has been made, particularly in big cities and in sectors such as IT and finance, there remains a significant gap between legal requirements and actual practices. Many organizations lack comprehensive D&I policies, and unconscious bias in hiring and promotion processes remains a challenge. Gender diversity is one of the most visible aspects of diversity management in Romania. While women are increasingly represented in the workforce, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions. As a matter of fact, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality, Romania is the worst-performing EU country in gender equality (<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023/country/RO>). Efforts to promote gender equality include initiatives aimed at closing the gender pay gap and encouraging the participation of women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. However, cultural attitudes toward gender roles can still act as a barrier to achieving true equality. Ethnic diversity, particularly concerning the Roma population, presents another significant challenge. The Roma, who make up a substantial minority in Romania, face systemic discrimination and exclusion.



Efforts to integrate the Roma into the workforce have been met with limited success, and many Roma continue to experience poverty and social marginalization. Programs aimed at improving education and employment opportunities for the Roma are in place but have had varying degrees of effectiveness.

LGBTQ+ inclusion

While anti-discrimination laws provide some protection, LGBTQ+ inclusion is an area where Romania is still developing. Societal attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals can be conservative, making it difficult for businesses to fully embrace LGBTQ+ diversity. Few companies have comprehensive policies in place to support LGBTQ+ employees, and there is limited visibility of LGBTQ+ issues in the workplace. Nonetheless, there are signs of progress, particularly among younger, more globally-minded organizations that recognize the value of inclusivity. Therefore, the workplace environment can often be unwelcoming to LGBTQ+ individuals. Many employees face subtle forms of discrimination, such as exclusion from professional networks or lack of support from colleagues and management.

In addition, discrimination in the workplace can have a profound impact on the career advancement of members of the LGBTQ+ community. Due to fear of discrimination, many LGBTQ+ employees choose to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity, which can limit their opportunities for promotion or professional development. One of the significant challenges in combating cases of discrimination, in fact, is the reluctance of LGBTQ+ individuals to report incidents. This reluctance is often due to a lack of trust in the legal system, fear of retaliation, or concerns about further stigmatization. As a result, many cases of discrimination go unreported, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and exclusion. Additionally, those who are open about their identity may face biased evaluations or be overlooked for leadership roles, further entrenching inequality in the workplace. This hostile environment can lead to psychological stress and negatively impact job performance and career advancement. In conclusion, one of the major challenges in implementing effective diversity management in Romania is the persistence of deep-rooted cultural attitudes that resist change.



There is also a lack of awareness and understanding of the benefits of diversity among many Romanian businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These companies may not see the immediate value in investing in D&I initiatives, especially in a challenging economic environment. In fact, the global nature of business means that Romanian companies that embrace diversity are better positioned to compete internationally. There is also a growing recognition among younger generations of the importance of inclusivity, which could drive future changes in corporate and public sector practices.

Recent surveys by ISTAT, in collaboration with UNAR, provide an absolutely interesting picture for understanding the working condition in which LGBT+ people find themselves, both from the point of view of the perception of their situation by individuals and from the point of view of the behavior of companies regarding the application of non-discriminatory measures.



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The situation in Italian companies

What emerged from the interviews given by a range of stakeholders belonging to categories that operate mostly at the national level is, in fact, analyzed. Interviewees were asked to indicate present and future actions, policies or desirable initiatives to make workplaces more inclusive and respectful of diversity in sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The survey shows that, at present, more than one-fifth of companies (20.7%, equal to over 5,700) have adopted at least one non-statutory measure with the aim of managing and valuing diversity among workers related to gender, age, citizenship, nationality and/or ethnicity, religious beliefs or disability.

The implementation of such measures involves 34% of large companies (with at least 500 employees), compared with 19.8% of smaller companies (50-499 employees). Similar results can be found regarding the application of the Cirinnà Law relating to civil unions between LGBT+ people. While all companies were called upon to implement the provisions contained in the law, only 7.7% of those with at least 50 employees in industry and services (amounting to more than two thousand) found themselves in the concrete conditions to apply at the request of workers what is provided by the same Law on civil unions. Companies with at least 500 employees who declared they had to apply the Cirinnà Law at the request of their workers are relatively more frequent in the Center (37.6%) and the North (34.9%), very few in the South, a fact that testifies not only to the attitude of companies, but also to the reticence of workers to openly reveal their sexual orientation. Beyond the Law, requests, application of measures, company policies towards LGBT+ people were also investigated, which can give a fairly clear picture of the attitude of companies and life within them to foster inclusion and valorization of diversity.



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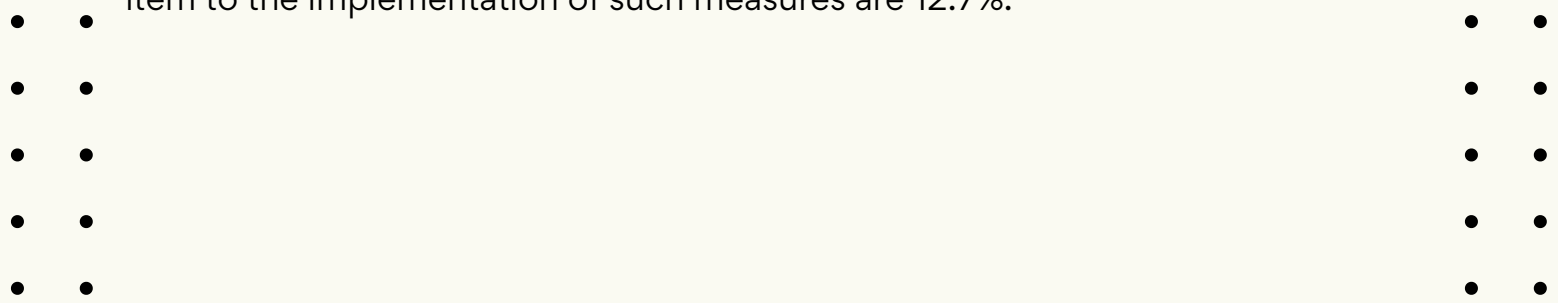
Adoption of measures related to LGBTQ+ people.

The most widely adopted measures are those aimed at transgender workers. 3.3% of companies have provided the possibility for these workers to use toilets, changing rooms, etc. in a manner consistent with their gender identity. The diffusion of such a measure, which is the most indicated among those investigated, varies greatly depending on the size class of the company; it ranges from 3% for companies between 50 and 499 employees to 7.8% for larger ones.

The same can be observed for initiatives guaranteeing transgender workers the right to express their gender identity in a visible manner (including through clothing), which is the third most prevalent measure in the general ranking of measures adopted. This action concerns 2% of companies with at least 50 employees, while among larger companies the share reaches 6.8% (1.7% of companies from 50 to 499 employees).

The second most adopted measure, which affects 2.1% of companies and 8.6% of larger ones, is the implementation of initiatives to promote a culture of inclusion and appreciation of LGBT+ diversity.

This is followed by ad hoc measures to protect the privacy of transgender workers who undertook the transition process before joining the company (1.6%) and training events on LGBT+ diversity issues aimed at top management (1.3%) and workers (1.2%). Even for these measures, the diffusion is greater in larger contexts than in medium ones. In contrast, permits, benefits and other specific measures for LGBT+ workers, in addition to what is required by law, were adopted residually by companies. In all geographic areas and sectors of economic activity considered, the share of companies that have adopted at least one measure in addition to what is established by law to promote the inclusion of LGBT+ workers is higher in larger businesses (500 and more employees). In particular, DM is more prevalent among those in the Center (17.9%) and in the sectors of industry in the strict sense (15.8%) and services (14.2%). Larger companies (500 employees and more) that have adopted at least one LGBT+ diversity measure, additional to those mandated by law, and have also provided a specific budget item to the implementation of such measures are 12.7%.



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Considering all the areas of Diversity Management application (gender, age, citizenship, nationality and/or ethnicity, religious beliefs and disabilities, sexual orientation and gender identity), it can be seen that companies with at least 50 employees engaged with measures not mandatory by law both on the LGBT+ and other diversity fronts are 3.5%, still certainly not an encouraging figure. In fact, in almost eight out of ten cases, companies have not taken any additional measures beyond their legal obligations for either LGBT+ or for measures regarding other diversities.

The picture is markedly affected by the size of the company: among larger companies the share of those engaged on both sides (LGBT+ and other) is three times higher than among small and medium-sized companies. It is equally true, however, that for some time now the issue has begun to have greater relevance even among the latter; a fact that at least gives hope for further improvements and future new investments of resources in this field.

Need for training

On the whole, however, we note that there is still quite a long way to go, and the work of corporate training

and awareness-raising is urgent and needs to be structured in a widespread and capillary manner both among entrepreneurs and managers and employees of various Italian companies. ISTAT is not the only institute to have undertaken surveys on the issue of Diversity Management in recent years. SDA Bocconi's Diversity Management Lab had in fact already carried out a survey in 2014 to measure the degree of DM adoption by Italian companies with more than 250 employees. According to this survey, the adoption rate of diversity management was 20.7% (46% if we consider companies with more than 1,000 employees), a lower figure than that found in other European and/or North American contexts. Moreover, its scope was limited in terms of the social categories considered. Very often, in fact, it was nothing more than traditionalist women management. Only 10% of that 20.7% of adopting companies had directly addressed the issue of sexual orientation. The figure is still low, however, not only compared to international comparisons, but also to a comparison that should take into consideration the level of the Italian context. Italian companies should put much more energy on this front since they are operating in a socially ambiguous and legally backward context.

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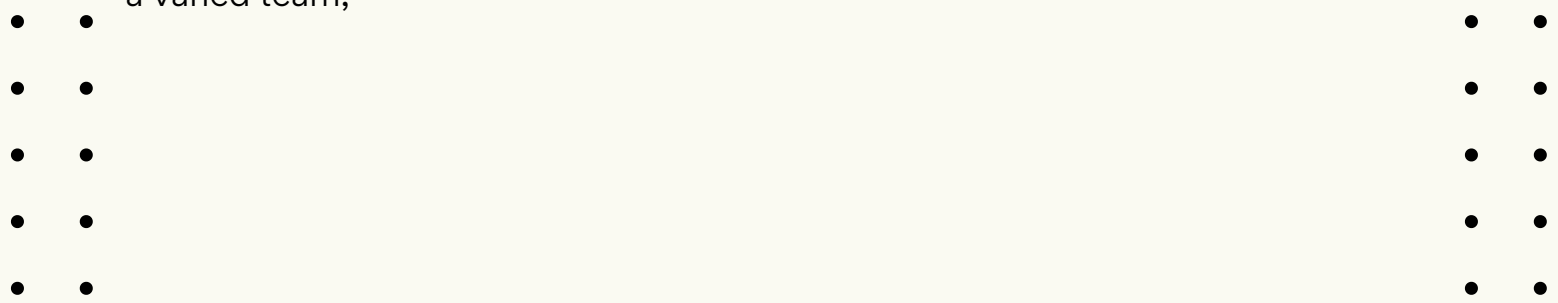


Valuing diversity

Valuing diversity, in the face of a radically changed society, is a necessity today. Demographic changes, diversification of markets and customers, and new ways of working within companies has made it clear how the inclusion of diversity is an asset. Suffice it to say that today four generations, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z, coexist in companies, with absolutely different ways of working, needs, desires and visions of work and the world in general. In fact, if before, companies used to create work environments that were as homogeneous as possible, now this is no longer the case, but there is a strong need for diversification understood as wealth. And this needs to be understood by both large companies and smaller, even laboratory ones.

According to Employer Brand Research of 2022, the ability to value and promote diversity is one of the parameters by which potential (as well as current) employees judge a company and then act within it. According to the study, which involved nearly 163,000 interviewees from 31 countries around the world including Italy, with a sample of 6,590 respondents, it is

especially the younger generation that considers diversity and inclusiveness to be relevant factors, capable of directing them toward one organization rather than another. Young people between the ages of 18 and 25 of Generation Z in particular declared that they look for in companies precisely the enhancement of diversity and inclusiveness along with a pleasant working climate, the possibility of a clear career path and an effective corporate commitment regarding sustainability and the environment. In fact, a work environment in which diversity is not a hindrance but a value is one in which people feel comfortable, thus succeeding in expressing their full potential. The coexistence and fusion of different viewpoints, ideas and experiences will then contribute to innovation and change. According to McKinsey and Deloitte studies, companies that adopt diverse leadership gain several valuable benefits: - They improve their ability to make decisions with which to react to complexity; - They increase their ability to innovate by fully exploiting the greater creativity that comes from the presence of a varied team;



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- They perceive and manage risks with greater capacity;
- They attract, create engagement and retain talent, especially those of the younger generation;
- They build customer and stakeholder loyalty;
- They double cash flows
- They reduce turnover and absenteeism rates and increase the ability to attract qualified staff

Unfortunately, Italy, from this point of view, is still in a condition of cultural backwardness.

Based on the data collected, it is possible to draw a ranking of countries where homosexuality is accepted from a moral point of view and/or escapes the “controls” of morality. The three countries where homosexuality is most accepted and/or is not considered an ethical issue are: Spain, Germany and France. Italy ranks eighth: 42% of Italians interviewed by the various surveys believe that homosexuality is morally acceptable, 31% that it is not an ethical issue, and 19% that it is not acceptable. Thus we can say that the social environment, together certainly with the legal one, help define the space within which enterprises act, i.e. they help define the organizational field.

Indeed, it would be wrong to say that companies “suffer” the organizational environment. Companies, like all other actors, contribute to defining the organizational field. For a homosexual To “choose” the “best” company to which to send his or her CV, a homosexual should try to understand the organizational context, that is, how free the individual-employer is to act out his or her sexuality/affectivity within the organization, and the set of policies and practices adopted on the diversity management and inclusion front. Unfortunately, surveys conducted by the Bocconi University of Milan show that 40.3% of homosexuals (compared with 27.9% of heterosexuals) reported having been discriminated against during their lives at school/university and at work. Also in the same recent surveys, respondents were asked whether the company would be willing to grant a gay worker who had married abroad permission for honeymoon and benefits. The responses were as follows: 50% indicated “Don't know,” 29% “Yes,” and 21% “No.” The very high value of “Don't know” highlights how companies have not yet addressed the topic and how the issue of sexual orientation is still hidden within organizations.

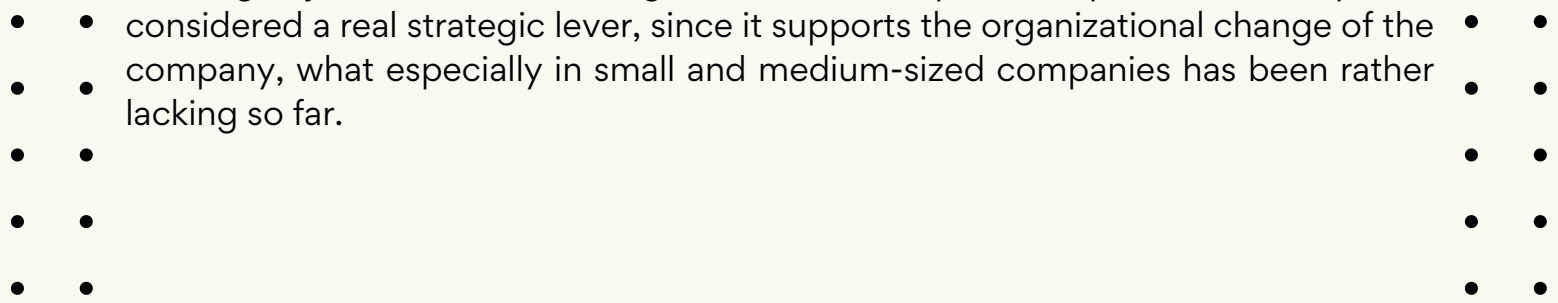
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It was also asked whether the worker in question should communicate the fact that he or she is homosexual and his or her decision to marry to no one, to his/her colleagues and the boss, only to his/her colleagues. The majority of respondents (53%) indicated “To no one,” 44% “To colleagues and boss,” and 3% “Only to colleagues.” The fact that the majority indicated “To no one” highlights how being gay still represents a strong gap within organizations

The climate for diversity can be declined in various ways, that is, we can highlight how negative the organizational climate is for homosexuals or how positive it is. Based on this we can identify a hostile and a gay-friendly climate for diversity. These two typologies, however, do not saturate what can actually happen in companies. In fact, on the one hand, a hostile organizational climate can become repressive if the organization operates in a repressive social and legal context such as that that characterizes countries where homosexual behavior is banned and/or punished with the death penalty and/or those contexts where basic civil rights are banned. On the other hand, the literature is increasingly focusing attention on the shift between accepting diversity and achieving inclusion, the true value to be advanced and promoted in workplaces, schools, and all social contexts.

In fact, acceptance concerns not all possible homosexual identities, but only that homosexual identity that somehow “conforms” to the heteronormative model of the dominant block and the expectations of the heterosexual majority. There is unfortunately a presumption in organizations that the workplace is a desexualized space. In reality, it is still a space in which accepted and positively valued professional conduct is designed on the heterosexual model (heteronormative model). For this reason, the work of training is still long but absolutely urgent to be pursued. In fact, today we talk about Learning Organization, that is, organizations that need to make decisions quickly, to innovate continuously in order to find solutions to meet new market needs, and to employ fewer people but on different tasks regardless of sexual orientation and other similar factors. Training, therefore, concerns not only top management but an increasing number of workers and must be managed in such a way that learning is organizational and no longer just individual and, given its centrality and importance, today it is considered a real strategic lever, since it supports the organizational change of the company, what especially in small and medium-sized companies has been rather lacking so far.





The role of diversity management in the workplace

In addition to the LGBTQ+ community's legal protections, diversity management has been more of the approach that Malta has taken, especially in the workplace. Diversity management is a strategic approach by organizations to encourage inclusion and equality in a manner such that all employees, no matter their background, feel useful and respected. This is, therefore, highly applicable to LGBTQ+ individuals who have been discriminated against and excluded from many professional work setups. The inclusionary efforts or diversity management strategies of Malta have been drawn from its participation in the European Union, which always encourages equality at the workplace among its most cherished policies concerning social issues. Following the EU mandates, organizations in Malta are also supported to establish policies that positively promote equality and discourage possible discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. These policies frequently include employee training on anti-discrimination, the establishment of diversity committees, and acting on inclusive hiring processes (European Commission Report, 2020).

One important initiative in Malta that promotes workplace diversity is the Diversity Charter Malta. Any organization agreeing to sign the Diversity Charter pledges to foster an environment where all employees can thrive, irrespective of their background. The support for this initiative comes from extremely wide-ranging organizations, from huge multinationals to small local businesses. By signing the Charter, they commit themselves to promoting diversity, including inclusivity of LGBTQ+ (Diversity Charter Malta, 2021).

Challenges and opportunities in Diversity Management

Even though Malta has continued to implement the necessary measures for enhancing diversity management, it is still facing some daunting challenges, especially in the operationalization of these policies across various sectors. The majority of larger organizations and those with international operations are at the forefront in developing diversity strategies. Such entities have the necessary capacity to develop extensive diversity training and employee support measures, as well as the development of LGBTQ+ friendly policies.



The diversity management paradigm is increasingly recognized as a business imperative within the key sectors of the Maltese economy, including finance, technology, and tourism. Smaller businesses, however, particularly those located in more conservative or rural areas, may have more difficulties in implementing diversity policies. Investment or expertise to develop and maintain comprehensive diversity programs for such organizations may be lacking. Further, in many areas, conservative views of society about LGBTQ+ people are held, which remains resisting acts of inclusivity. Therefore, the workplaces of such individuals still find themselves grappling with issues of subtle discriminations like being left out in social activities or engaging in microaggressions by their peers (Maltese LGBTQ+ Workers Association, 2020). The Maltese government and civil society have tried making more intentional efforts at promoting diversity management in all sectors. The NCPE is one critical organization that has been instrumental in providing the requisite training, resources, and best practice guidelines through which organizations can develop more inclusive workplaces. As diversity management on the island of Malta continues to develop, there will need to be a great deal more ongoing education

and outreach so that even smaller businesses in all sectors of society can affect changes in diversity policies (NCPE Annual Report, 2022).

The impact of Diversity Management on LGBTQ+ employees

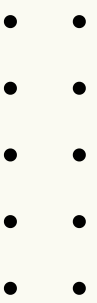
The impact of adopting diversity management policies has greatly affected LGBTQ+ employees. Research from the Maltese LGBTQ+ Workers Association shows workers in organizations having very important diversity policies are more likely to feel safe and valued within their workplace. They report less discrimination and harassment and are likely to feel open regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity (Maltese LGBTQ+ Workers Association, 2020).

Workplaces that truly value diversity and inclusion yield high levels of engagement and productivity. LGBTQ+ employees who feel supported and respected are more likely to contribute in meaningful ways to their organizations, thus yielding better business outcomes. On the other hand, work environments that don't embrace diversity would have a high employee turnover and dissatisfaction rate due to alienation or marginalization of the LGBTQ+ employees

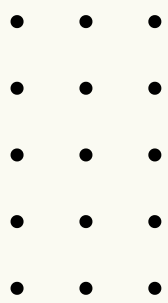
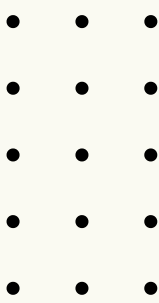
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As much as the overall effect of diversity management is beneficial to the LGBTQ+ employee, there are still some dilemmas. Microaggressions and discriminations are common to the LGBTQ+ people. They include assumptions of sexual orientation, exclusion from social events, and even inappropriate jokes. Addressing these issues requires ongoing education and awareness-raising within organizations to ensure that diversity management policies are fully integrated into company culture, rather than being treated as mere compliance measures (NCPE Annual Report, 2022).



RELATIONSHIPS OF LGBTQ PEOPLE WITH INSTITUTIONS, FAMILIES, SCHOOLS

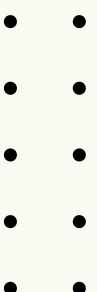
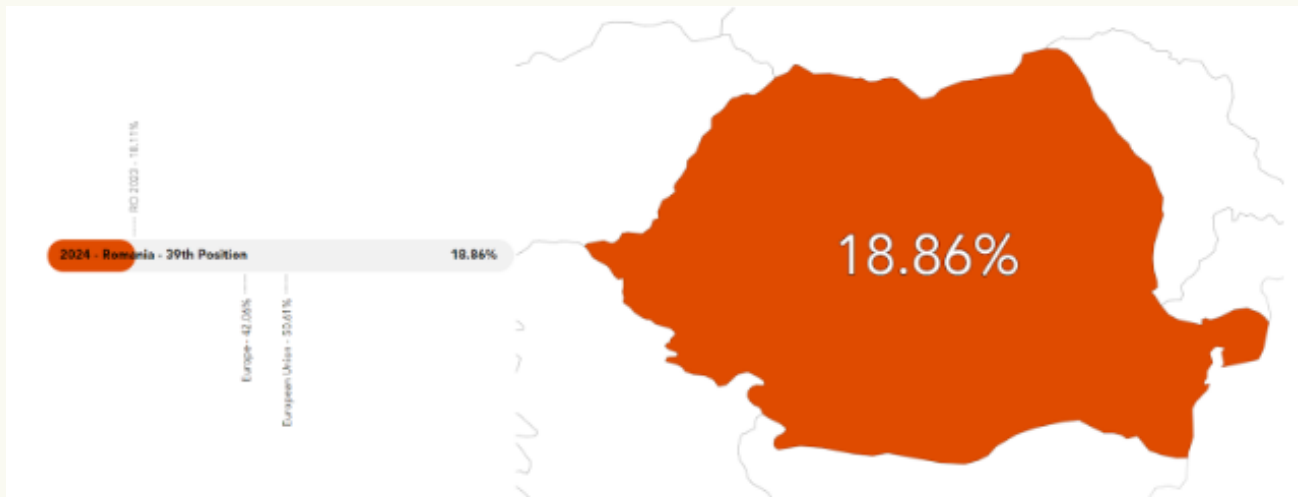


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Relationships of LGBTQ people with institutions, families, schools

Awareness about LGBTQ+ is generally low in Romania. When it comes to sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), 43% of the respondents to a poll conducted by Asociatia MozaiQ LGBT stated that they did not know the meaning of the term “heterosexual” and only 13% were familiar with the term “non-binary” (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vhYRw44dQV4I-Ebuvusn87UITDzliDj1/view>).

Romania ranks 39 out of 49 European countries in the Rainbow Map created by ILGA Europe according to seven categories: equality and non-discrimination; family; hate crime and hate speech; legal gender recognition; intersex bodily integrity; civil society space; and asylum (<https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org/countries/romania/>).





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Despite some improvements, Romania still lags behind many EU countries in showing tolerance and ensuring full equality for LGBTQ+ individuals. If on one side Bucharest Pride 2024 saw the participation of nearly 27,000 people, the largest Pride event ever organized in Romania (<https://www.rferl.org/a/romania-pride-parade-2024-lgbt-rights/33014919.html>), on the other side only a few years ago, in 2018, the country held a constitutional referendum to ban gay unions, which ultimately failed (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45779107>).

The anti-LGBTQ+ part of the Romanian society is highly influenced by the Orthodox Church, coupled by conservative political parties. In 2023, the head of the Romanian Orthodox Church affirmed that “homosexuality was, is and will remain unnatural” (https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2024/02/2024_romania.pdf). A printing house in Bucharest refused to print posters containing pro-LGBTQ+ messages, stating reasons of conscience and Christian values (<https://bit.ly/3Zb5wF6>). They have been under investigation by the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD).

On the day of the Pride march in 2023, as it happened in the past, a counter-demonstration called March for Normality was held in Bucharest (<https://bit.ly/4cSD5iv>). Similar episodes occurred in other major Romanian cities: during the Iași Pride march a small group of far-right protesters shouted hateful slogans and threw water at the participants; in Oradea an anti-Pride gathering in the city centre was held in response to the first Pride march hosted in the city; in Cluj-Napoca one of the gendarmes, in charge of ensuring protection and safety during the march, accused a trans participant carrying a trans flag of waving the “paedophile flag”.

In July 2023, extremist MP George Simion blamed on social media LGBTQ+ people for the weather conditions, considering them a sign of divine punishment. Moreover, in May 2023, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Romania was violating Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights by refusing to recognize same-sex unions (<https://bit.ly/4dR6j2y>). In line with the rooted anti-LGBTQ+ attitude, Romania also did not join the European Commission’s infringement proceedings against Hungary over its anti-LGBT legislation.

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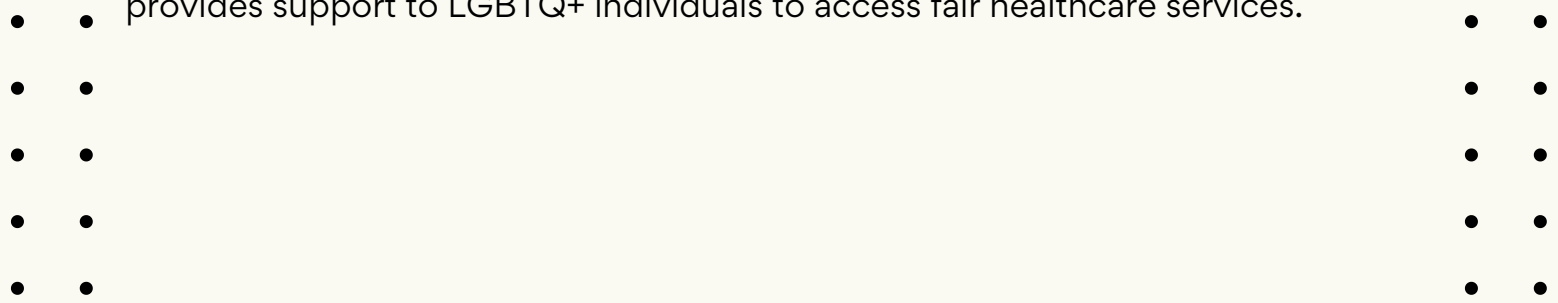
In terms of educational system, the Ministry of Education proposed in 2023 new education laws, intended to replace the National Education Law, which included obligations to promote diversity, inclusion, and tolerance, and banned discrimination based on sexual orientation. 13 religious groups asked to withdraw the law proposal and a protest against these changes was organised by NGOs in front of the Government. As a response, a petition to the Ministry of Education was launched and saw the participation of over 50 civil society organisations, student unions and hundreds of teachers, parents and students to call for inclusion, diversity, and non-discrimination in education. Following the controversy, the majority parliamentary groups deleted the explicit mentions of sexual orientation as a ground, but instead included a reference to the non-discrimination legislation, ensuring in this way that sexual orientation is covered. A report from Campus Pride found that at 34% of faculties, homophobic discourse has been used. 81% of trans respondents stated that their gender identity is not respected in their university. However, testimonials showed that there are an increasing number of allies among colleagues and professors, making Romanian students optimistic about the future.

(www.mozaiqlgbt.ro/raportul-national-campus-pride)

These are only some examples of affirmations and actions against the LGBTQ+ community based on religious reasons, promoted by political propaganda or showing the lack of support from institutions.

On the other hand, civil society is often pushing institutions to improve the legislation of LGBTQ+ rights. Asociația Accept, for instance, submitted eight petitions to the National Audiovisual Council of Romania, which regulates the audiovisual sector nationwide, for the underrepresentation on LGBTQIA+ issues in the TV debates and for hate speech and discriminatory statements. As a result, one of the TV stations was fined for 4,020 EURO and another for 2,010 EURO. In the same regard, Asociația MozaiQ LGBT asked to withdraw a bill proposed by two far-right MPs to ban any visual, audio or video materials about LGBTQ+ people, allegedly for the “protection of minors”.

In response to discrimination in accessing healthcare services, Asociația Accept also published an online database of LGBTQ+-friendly doctors and regularly provides support to LGBTQ+ individuals to access fair healthcare services.





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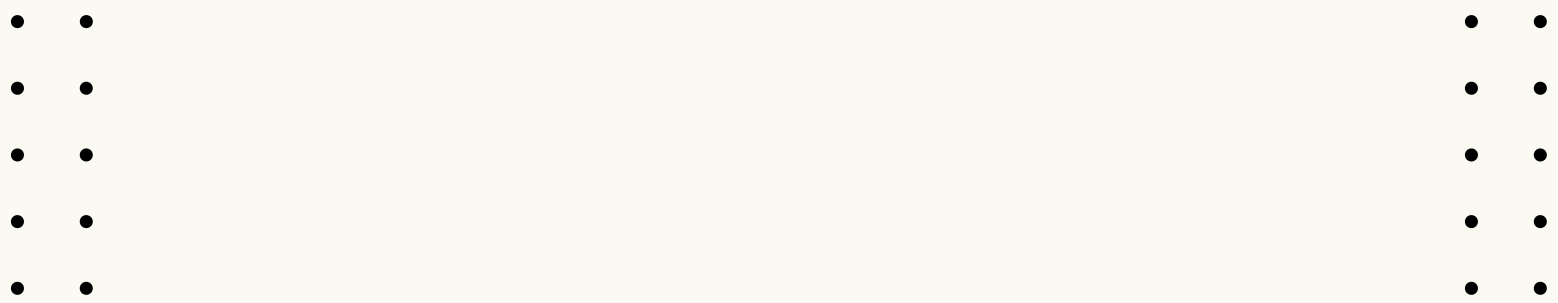
Romanians culturally value their personal relations with their family and community, making difficult from one side to conceive and acknowledge a type of family different from the traditional one and, at the same time, taking up the fights of a minority like the LGBTQ+ community to honor their involvement in the community life.

The survey conducted by MozaiQ LGBT shows that 9 out of 10 respondents agree to teach sex education in schools, recognizing the need of opening up a broader conversation about gender and sex orientation as well. Moreover, 59% of young people (18-27) living in Bucharest support or is neutral to civil partnerships and 70% of Romanians would accept their child if they came out as gay

(<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vhYRw44dQV4I-Ebuvusn87UITDzliDj1/view>). Acceptance varies

according to different aspects. Older generations may be more influenced by traditional and religious values, making acceptance more difficult. Younger family members, who may be exposed to more progressive ideas through education, media, and social networks, are often more accepting and can play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between LGBTQ+ individuals and the older generation.

Differences can be found also between rural and urban areas, the latter being usually more open-minded towards progressive values. All these factors show how much Romanian society is divided on the matter, slowing down the legislation to comply with more progressive and equal standards.



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Relations with institutions: family, healthcare facilities, school

The issue of relations between LGBTQ+ people and institutions represents one of the most delicate and crucial points in the journey toward full recognition of the rights and dignity of these people. Institutions, broadly understood, include the family, healthcare facilities and the school system, each of which plays a crucial role in defining the life experience of LGBTQ+ people. These areas, if well managed, can be an important support and source of protection; on the contrary, if characterized by prejudice and discrimination, they can become places of marginalization and suffering. Precisely for this reason, starting in small steps a change starting with the education of these institutions, family school and health, is crucial in the anticipation of a future in which we expect an initial increase in the level of integration until the almost total disappearance of all diversity, arriving as an ultimate goal at the concept of uniqueness of each individual without the need for any stereotype of reference.

The family: the first institution of socialization

The family represents the first and most important institution in the life of every individual. For LGBTQ+ people, the relationship with family can be extremely complex and ambivalent. Despite the evolution of society and greater social acceptance of the LGBTQ+ identity, the family environment often remains the place where conflicts related to gender identity and sexual orientation manifest themselves most forcefully. In the family structure, parents are the fundamental pillars and thus highly decisive in the psychosexual development of each individual. Relying on a “conventional” family stereotype is, however, physiological since each son/daughter at the beginning of the journey of knowing himself and his own ego

is confronted with new situations and with impulses perhaps different from those accepted by the stereotype closest and most familiar to him/her, therefore, intervention on the family institution with proper education for acceptance and with preparation for the acceptance of any unexpected diversity is crucial, surrounding the individual (son/daughter) by a comfort zone where he/she can feel free to express his/her identity and self.

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Acceptance and rejection:

Some families succeed in supporting their children in their self-discovery and acceptance by fostering a welcoming and safe environment. However, it is not uncommon for coming-outs to be met, even today and at least in Italy, where a very traditional and stereotypical mentality still prevails, with rejection, isolation or even violence. Family attitudes toward LGBTQ+ identity can profoundly affect an individual's mental health, contributing to well-being or, conversely, to the genesis of psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression or suicidal ideation. In fact, a 2023 study reports that numerous research carried out recently in Italy indicate an increase in suicide risk of up to 8.5 times when the family does not welcome their son/daughter's coming out.

Role of family in identity construction:

The family, as the primary socialization agency, has a significant impact on identity construction. In the case of LGBTQ+ people, unconditional support from parents and family members can facilitate the process of self-definition and self-acceptance, while a hostile environment can lead to the internalization of stigma and difficulties in building a solid personal identity.

Psychological support for families:

It is crucial that families are supported by qualified professionals who can help them understand and accept the identity of their loved ones. Family counseling services and support groups can be valuable resources for families facing these issues, enabling them to overcome feelings of loss and helping to create a more inclusive family environment.

Sharing with a community of families who are facing the same problem is surely a secondary tool to a preventive basic education that should take place from the earliest years of each individual's life.

Having even just the idea that our child in his or her growing up might have a different sexual orientation from that of his or her parents could preemptively trigger the basis for future acceptance of each child's sexual orientation. In Italy today, there is a strong gap between the predominantly conservative mindset of many families and the presence of associations that support the families of LGBTQ+ members to undertake a journey of education and awareness. Dedicated to promoting the rights and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual people, these organizations play a crucial role in

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combating discrimination, promoting inclusion and offering assistance in various areas of daily life. We can mention some of them, from Arcigay, founded in 1985, to AGEDO (Association of Parents of Homosexuals), established in 1992, to MIT (1982), which provides legal and health care, including counseling services for gender transition, to Rainbow Families, and many others up to Lenford Network - Advocacy for LGBTI Rights, established in 2007, an association of lawyers offering free legal assistance to LGBTQIA+ people.

3.2 Health facilities: between prejudice and the right to treatment

Health facilities, as places dedicated to the care and well-being of the individual, should be safe and welcoming spaces for all people, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. However, the reality for many LGBTQ+ people is often different, characterized by experiences of discrimination and inadequacy in the care they receive.

Prejudices in the health care system:

A recurring problem in Italy is the presence of prejudices, both conscious and unconscious, among health care professionals.

These may manifest themselves through hostile attitudes, stereotypes, or a lack of knowledge of the specific health needs of LGBTQ+ people. For example, failure to recognize the specificities related to the sexual and reproductive health of LGBTQ+ people, or lack of expertise in managing gender affirmation processes, can severely compromise the quality of care provided.

Access to health services:

Transgender people, in particular, often face significant barriers in accessing health care services, due to bureaucratic barriers, high costs of hormonal and surgical therapies, and especially the lack of trained health care workers. In addition, fear of stigma can lead many LGBTQ+ people to avoid or delay seeking health care, with negative consequences for their physical and mental health.

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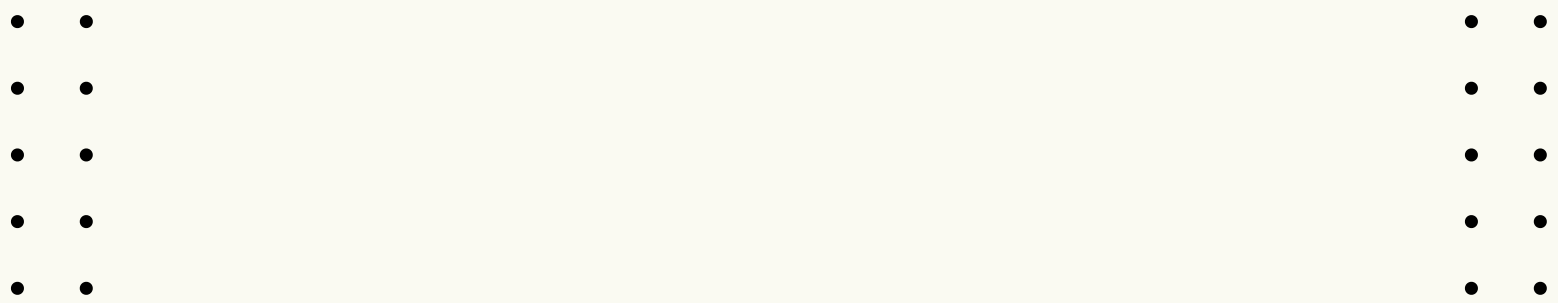
Training and Awareness Initiatives:

To improve acceptance and quality of care in health facilities, it is essential to promote training and awareness programs targeting health professionals. These programs should focus on the importance of an inclusive, respectful, and competent approach recognizing the different needs of LGBTQ+ people and ensuring quality health care for all.

Unfortunately, nowadays the focus on training on health personnel to raise awareness on this issue is very lacking, despite the fact that there has been a lot of input even from the European community starting from the early 2000s with Directive 2000/78/EC and later with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which states that the Union shall aim in all its activities to combat discrimination on the basis of various factors, including sexual orientation, by taking appropriate measures (Art. 10 and 19), and in Art. 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights implemented in our country with the NATIONAL LGBTQ+ STRATEGY 2022 - 2025 for the prevention and fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It is a slow and difficult process that certainly needs due attention and importance as well as investment from institutions.

School: an environment of learning and inclusion

School represents one of the main contexts of socialization for children and adolescents, and therefore plays a crucial role in shaping their identities and consolidating social values. For LGBTQ+ young people, the school environment can be both a place of acceptance and growth and a space of discrimination and suffering.



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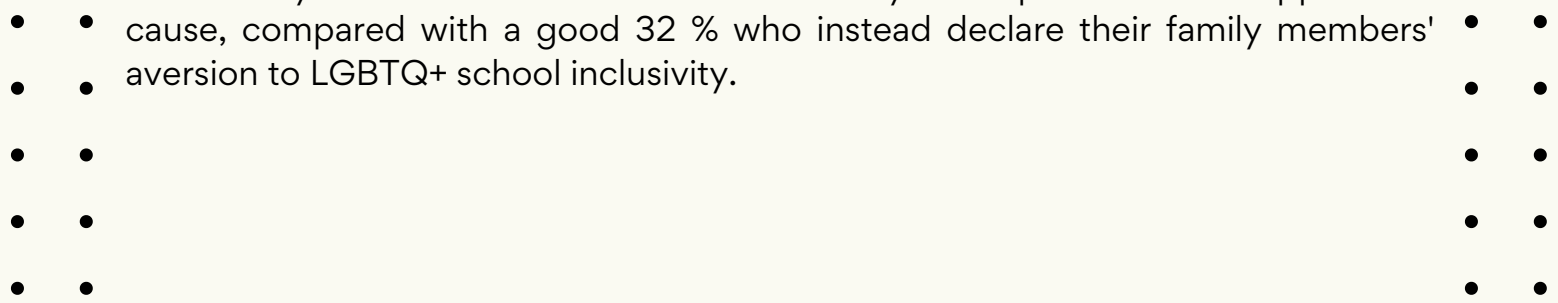
Homophobic and transphobic bullying:

One of the most serious problems faced by LGBTQ+ students is homophobic and transphobic bullying. This type of bullying, which manifests itself through insults, physical violence, social exclusion, and cyberbullying, can have devastating effects on students' psychological well-being and academic performance. Lack of appropriate interventions by school personnel can further aggravate the situation, making the school a hostile and unsafe environment and generating premature dropouts. Let's not forget that school dropout in Italy is quite high, hovering around 13% of high school students, and surely one cause of this phenomenon can be attributed to the marginalization to which an LGBTQ+ adolescent may be subjected.

Inclusive education:

Another crucial aspect is inclusive education. Integrating topics related to gender identity and sexual orientation into school curricula can help reduce prejudice and promote a climate of respect and acceptance. The presence of educators and teachers trained on these issues is essential to provide education that respects diversity and promotes inclusion. Nevertheless, these issues are still barely talked about in many institutions: nearly half of the girls and boys involved in a 2024 survey (44 %) reveal that issues such as sexual orientation and gender identity are little considered in their school. That's still better than the 34 % who report that in their institution these topics are almost taboo. In the end, only 1 in 5 frequently have occasion to talk about them in class.

But even among students, not everyone sees it the same way. If, as anticipated, more than 8 out of 10 are fully or partly ready for the change, the rest (17 %), on the other hand, are divided between those who “tend to be against it” and those who are absolutely against it. This attitude is in part the result of the air within the home: only 16% of students confirm that they have parents who support the cause, compared with a good 32 % who instead declare their family members' aversion to LGBTQ+ school inclusivity.



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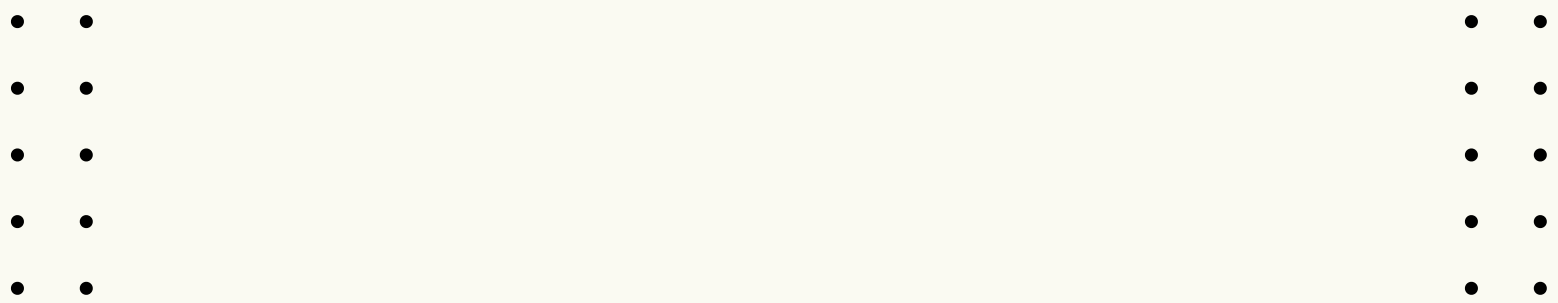
Finally, there is also a shy 19% who reveal that they do not talk about it at all in their families.

Role of school professionals:

It is crucial that teachers, school managers, and counselors are properly trained to recognize and counter homophobic and transphobic bullying. In addition, schools should adopt clear policies and support tools for LGBTQ+ students, such as having competent school counselors and establishing support groups with professionals such as psychologists, lawyers, and primary care physicians.

Starting from these premises, one can better understand why, with regard to the extension and recognition of certain rights to the LGBTQ+ community in schools, while much has been done, there is still much to be done. Let's talk, for example, about the now infamous “alias” career for students who do not identify with the genders “male” or “female.” Just 10% say it has been activated in their school. Half of the respondents (50 percent), on the contrary, say that although it is potentially exploitable by some students, this tool does not exist and is not expected to be activated soon. All others say they have no information about it or have no classmates who might need it.

Moreover, where the “alias” career has been activated, the initiative has almost always been from students: in 77 % of cases with specific requests, while a shy 13 % confirmed that they have manifested for obtaining this tool. Same goes for the introduction of “neutral” bathrooms in schools. Only 17 % have them available, while 72 %, even in the face of potential users, have not found a receptive school. And this was almost always achieved after heated protests (32 %) or at least after a formal request (58 %). Just 1 in 10 schools arrived at these decisions independently. The road in Italy is therefore still long.



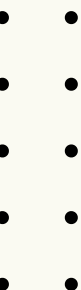
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Conclusions

Relationships between LGBTQ+ people and institutions such as family, health facilities, and schools are critical to the psychological and social well-being of these people. A shared commitment by institutions toward inclusion and anti-discrimination can help create a more welcoming and safe environment for all people, regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation. There is still a long way to go, but a conscious and informed approach can make a difference in ensuring equal rights and dignity for all LGBTQ+ people.

There is definitely a need for simultaneous action on several fronts, family health and schooling need to make a simultaneous journey so that they can assist each other in the process of evolving the society we are a part of regarding this issue.



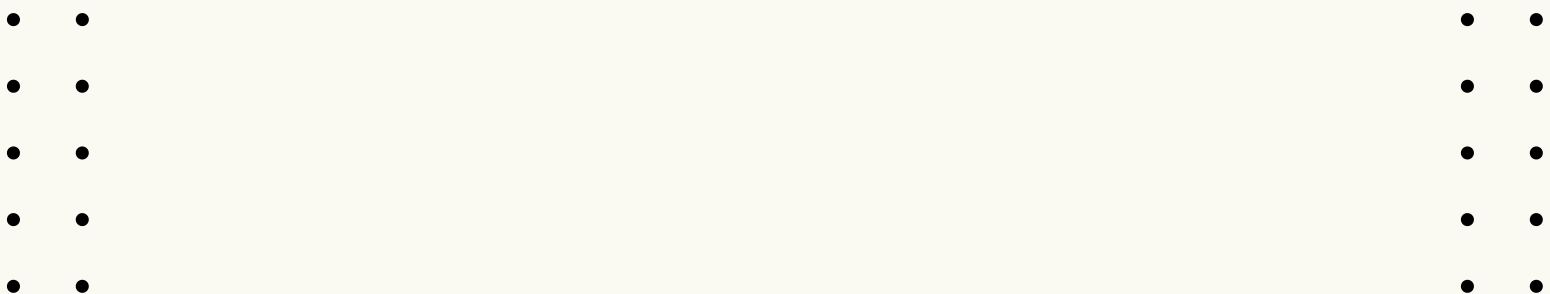


Engagement with government institutions

The relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and government institutions in Malta has developed significantly in the last two decades. Historically, in Malta, the LGBTQ+ community was among the most important groups that encountered obstacles in acquiring legal recognition and protection, further to which the policies pursued by the Maltese government were usually ignorant of the specific needs of the LGBTQ+ community. But as public attitudes matured and LGBTQ+ rights became a hot topic on the national agenda, the Maltese government started getting involved with groups advocating LGBTQ+ rights, and one could see a gradual and now progressive pace of legal reforms.

One of the most prominent and significant LGBTQ+ groups in Malta is the Malta Gay Rights Movement—commonly referred to as MGRM—which has been at the center of driving LGBTQ+ rights. The MGRM has championed and continues to push for legislative reforms, including both the GIGESC Act and the Marriage Equality Act.

With this act, the MGRM, from the onset and in cooperation with government ministries such as the Ministry for Equality and Social Dialogue, secured a platform for LGBTQ+ voices to be heard in the policy-making process of the country (MGRM, 2021). Alongside legislative changes, government institutions have increasingly become more inclusive of LGBTQ+ individuals in both health and educational sectors. In health, for instance, there are training programs by the various health providers that aim to educate their staff on how to meet the needs of certain LGBTQ+ groups, such as transgender clients. These programs are part and parcel of strategies that have been designed to reduce discrimination in healthcare settings, to ensure the LGBTQ+ community receives the same standard of care as their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts. In the education sector, schools have come up with anti-bullying campaigns that are geared toward addressing issues touching on sexual orientation and gender identity. Such programs are made available so that students from this community can be afforded environments that are safer and less tolerant of bullying and harassment than many others in the past.





The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with LGBTQ+ advocacy groups, has designed policies with the aim of promoting an all-inclusive environment within schools in ensuring that all LGBTQ+ students enjoy educational opportunities that are free of discrimination (Ministry of Education, Malta, 2022).

The Impact of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church retains power in Maltese society and has much influence over issues that pertain to sexuality and gender. Malta, being a predominantly Catholic nation, holds a very conservative perspective toward issues like marriage, family, and sexuality. The Church generally held itself in opposition to LGBTQ+ rights, particularly with regard to same-sex marriage and adoption.

Even though the government in Malta has adopted various progressive legal reforms, the Catholic Church has been critical on most occasions, especially with regard to the legislation of the Marriage Equality Act. The position of the Church in such matters is characteristic of the traditional teachings within the Catholic doctrine that guide marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

The Church is also concerned about the legalization of LGBTQ+ rights because this, in its view, would undermine family values, which it sees as the basic unit of morality in society. Lately, there have been efforts to create dialogue between LGBTQ+ activists and people of religious authority. Several of these efforts within the Church have been recognized as needing more compassion and understanding toward LGBTQ+ people, and of making every effort to reconcile one's religious upbringing with the realities of contemporary society. However, the Church continues to assert its conservative influence in Maltese society, especially regarding marriage and family life (Maltese Interfaith Coalition, 2020). Public opinion in Malta is highly swayed by the Catholic Church, mostly among older age groups and rural residents. While younger generations are inclining toward being more accepting of LGBTQ+ rights, older generations continue to be influenced by the Church, which opposes same-sex marriage and adoption. This creates a dynamic where legal reforms often outpace changes in societal attitudes, especially in more religious communities.



Public opinion and social movements

Public opinion in Malta about LGBTQ+ rights has significantly changed over the past two decades. Although predominantly a Catholic country, there has been noted increased support for the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals across its younger citizens. Among these, one can highlight the increased visibility of LGBTQ+ persons within public life, a more progressive government approach towards issues of this nature, and influence from social movements.

Social movements, specifically work by organizations like the Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM), have played a significant part in forming public opinion. These groups have, therefore, gone on to organize Pride events, disseminate public awareness, and organize educational activities aimed at an open and more inclusive environment for all LGBTQ+ persons. Other social changes are taking place through the exposure of LGBTQ+ people through the media and public life; more Maltese citizens continue to get acquainted with LGBTQ+ issues and get to understand what it really means to be LGBTQ+. Nonetheless, despite these optimistic developments, public attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people remain largely mixed in rural or more conservative regions.

Here, it is the conventional values and religious beliefs of the people that continue to mold their opinions, with resistance to the legal and social changes that took place over the last years. This obviously shows that continuous public education and awareness-raising have to be undertaken in order for all strata of society in Malta to support LGBTQ+ rights.

The influence of the European Union

Malta's legal and social policies concerning LGBTQ+ rights have been significantly impacted by the European Union. Malta, as an EU member state, is obligated to comply with the Union's directives on equality, non-discrimination, and human rights. Malta's legal framework has been significantly influenced by these directives, particularly in the areas of gender equality, anti-discrimination policies, and employment law.

- Malta's alignment with broader European anti-discrimination standards is particularly evident in the implementation of laws such as the Equal Treatment Act, which serves as an example of the EU's influence.



The EU has also provided funding and support to LGBTQ+ advocacy organisations in Malta, allowing them to advocate for additional reforms and increase awareness of LGBTQ+ issues. This has been a significant factor in the progression of Malta's LGBTQ+ rights movement, as the EU has provided legal and financial support for initiatives that are designed to foster equality (European Commission Report, 2020).

The EU's broader commitment to human rights and equality has contributed to the establishment of a political and social environment in Malta that is supportive of LGBTQ+ rights, in addition to fulfilling legal obligations. Malta has established itself as a global leader in LGBTQ+ rights by adhering to European principles of non-discrimination and inclusion.

Challenges in expanding transgender and intersex protections

Malta's Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics Act (GIGESC Act) was a pioneering law that established legal recognition and protections for transgender and intersex individuals. Nevertheless, there are still obstacles to ensuring that these individuals can fully exercise the rights that are granted to them by the law.

Healthcare infrastructure constraints and societal awareness continue to restrict transgender individuals' practical access to gender-affirming healthcare, including hormone therapy, surgery, and mental health support (Malta Legal Network, 2015). While the GIGESC Act guarantees the legal recognition of transgender individuals, it will be imperative to guarantee that healthcare professionals are sufficiently trained to address their unique requirements in the years ahead. Furthermore, the enhancement of the accessibility and affordability of gender-affirming healthcare services continues to be a significant obstacle, particularly in smaller healthcare facilities that may not possess the requisite expertise (NCPE Annual Report, 2022). The challenge for intersex individuals is the ongoing shift in cultural and medical practices that continue to attempt to "normalise" bodies that do not adhere to binary gender standards. It will be imperative to educate both families and medical professionals about the legal rights of intersex individuals, despite the fact that the GIGESC Act prohibits non-consensual medical interventions on intersex children. A significant challenge in the years ahead will be to guarantee that medical professionals honour the autonomy and bodily integrity of intersex individuals (Maltese LGBTQ+ Workers Association, 2020).



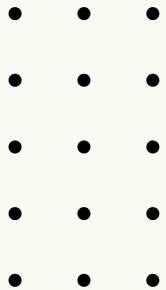
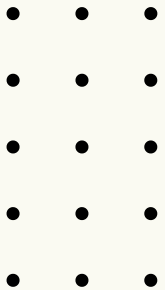
Conclusion

Most people agree that Malta's attitude towards LGBTQ+ rights and diversity management is among the most progressive in Europe. Public and private sectors of the country clearly show its commitment to diversity management, and its legal system provides strong protection for LGBTQ+ people. Even though a lot of progress has been made, there are still problems that need to be solved, especially when it comes to changing the way people think and putting diversity policies into place across all sectors.

The changing relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and Maltese institutions, such as religious and government bodies, shows how hard it is to find a balance between tradition and modernity in a society that is changing quickly. Public opinion, shaped by social movements and the European Union, still influences Malta's path towards more inclusiveness. Malta's leadership in the progress of LGBTQ+ rights and the encouragement of diversity offers insightful analysis for other countries struggling with the complexities of legal reform, social transformation, and the defence of human rights in a cosmopolitan society.

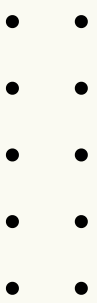


CONCLUSION



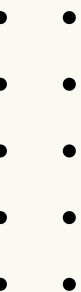
The analysis presented in this toolkit demonstrates the complexity and the ongoing challenges in achieving true inclusion for LGBTQ+ individuals across various national contexts. While countries like Malta have made significant strides, the examples of Romania and Italy highlight the numerous obstacles that persist. In Romania, the advancement of civil rights is hindered by factors such as religious tradition and political conservatism. The lack of legal recognition for same-sex unions, insufficient healthcare protections, and widespread intolerance underscore the urgent need for both educational and regulatory interventions. Without change on both the legal and social fronts, LGBTQ+ individuals in Romania will continue to face discrimination and struggle to assert their rights. Italy, while presenting a more nuanced picture, still faces notable challenges. On one hand, the introduction of civil unions and some anti-discrimination laws marks progress; on the other, regional disparities and cultural resistance limit their effective implementation. This contrast between legislative advancements and social resistance

highlights the need for greater institutional attention, especially in education and professional training. Inclusion must become a lived reality, not just a theoretical principle. Malta stands out as a positive example, showing that legislative reforms and inclusion policies can indeed lead to significant societal change. However, the Maltese experience also emphasizes that legal changes alone are not enough. The full implementation of these laws, along with efforts to raise societal awareness, is crucial to ensuring that recognized rights are genuinely respected and promoted. Even in an advanced context like Malta's, open dialogue with local communities and ongoing training remain essential. Within this framework, the toolkit underscores the fundamental importance of diversity management and inclusive education. It is not just about adopting anti-discrimination policies; it is necessary to promote a culture where diversity is recognized and valued as a resource. This is where visual storytelling plays a pivotal role. As a universal communication tool, visual storytelling has the power to break down linguistic and



cultural barriers, engaging people on a deeper emotional level. Through images, videos, and authentic narratives, it is possible to give voice to LGBTQ+ experiences, challenge stereotypes, and foster empathy. Visual storytelling offers the opportunity to convey stories in an immediate and effective way, helping to build a more inclusive dialogue and positively influence the perception of diversity. It can be used in educational and professional settings to raise awareness, create connections, and promote a culture of respect and acceptance. In this sense, it becomes a catalyst for cultural change, contributing to the creation of a society where every individual, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, can live with dignity, respect, and equal rights.

This toolkit, therefore, not only provides an analysis of the issues but also offers practical tools and suggestions for educators, trainers, and professionals to actively contribute to change. The challenge is undoubtedly complex, but it is essential. The progress seen in some countries demonstrates that moving in the right direction is possible, and visual storytelling can be a fundamental part of this journey toward a more just and inclusive world.





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