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01 **Chapter**

02 **The Quest for Inclusion and the**  
03 **Pitfalls of Invisible Homophobia:**  
04 **A Case Study on European Higher**  
05 **Education Institutions**

06 *Alessandra Viviani and Gaia Ciccarelli*

07 **Abstract**

08 The PrEcIOUS project – Promoting pluralistic education in European universities  
09 to combat invisible discrimination related to LGBTQ+, funded under the Erasmus+  
10 program, stems from the assumption that Higher Education (HE) can fully achieve  
11 its goals only if the academic community is diverse and plural, a place where each  
12 member feels not only safe but also seen and valued as a person. Within such a  
13 context, both respect of fundamental human rights and active participation need to  
14 be promoted, empowering students to become active citizens sharing EU fundamen-  
15 tal values. At the same time, HE institutions must strive to create educational paths  
16 capable of supporting such competencies. This is particularly urgent considering  
17 discrimination grounds such as gender, gender identity and sexual orientation are  
18 still very much a part of everyday life for many individuals. To do so, PrEcIOUS has  
19 developed a Learning Outcomes Framework based on different levels of competen-  
20 cies as well as a related Training Package for the acquisition of said transversal skills.  
21 This paper will analyse the challenges faced in fostering inclusive education paths  
22 challenging invisible homophobia and gender-based discrimination within HE  
23 institutions.

24 **Keywords:** LGBTQIA+ inclusive education, human rights, invisible homophobia,  
25 global citizenship education, SOGIESC discrimination

26 **1. Introduction**

27 This chapter discusses the approach adopted and the first results achieved within  
28 the project PrEcIOUS – Promoting pluralistic education in European universi-  
29 ties to combat invisible discrimination related to LGBTQ+, co-funded in 2022 by  
30 the European Commission under the Erasmus+ program, (2022–1-ITA-KA220-  
31 HED-000088686). PrEcIOUS involves four partner universities: Aristotle University  
32 of Thessaloniki - AUTH (GR), Jagiellonian University of Krakow - JU (PL) and  
33 Klaipeda University - KU (LT), coordinated by the University of Siena - UniSi (IT).  
34 The challenges and opportunities that as educators and researchers we are facing

01 carrying out the activities of the project represent, in our opinion, good examples on  
02 the central issues concerning the value and the impact of HEIs as promoters of social  
03 inclusion.

04 In recent years, cooperation among higher education institutions (HEIs) has been  
05 increasingly focusing on questions related to inclusive educational practices. The  
06 Erasmus Program (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University  
07 Students), since its launch in 1987, has promoted not only mobility for students,  
08 teachers and staff but also active cooperation and capacity building [1], changing  
09 the approach to institutional life in many universities. Questions as to the capacity of  
10 the program to lead to more inclusive mobility have been often raised [2], but in this  
11 paper, we would like to discuss how participation in the Erasmus scheme has given the  
12 possibility to some HEIs to reason together on improving their institutional readi-  
13 ness and capacity to deal with diversity and inclusion issues, with a specific focus on  
14 the contrast to discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender  
15 expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)<sup>1</sup>.

16 Our hypothesis in the project is that the persistent character of SOGIESC discrimi-  
17 nation still permeates HE and that there is a need to adopt transformative educational  
18 practices to contrast such phenomenon. More specifically, we consider that focusing  
19 on global citizenship education (GCED) with a human rights-based approach is the  
20 possible key to making a fruitful impact in academic life, promoting pluralistic educa-  
21 tion, developing personal competencies and raising awareness towards more inclusive  
22 societies.

23 Before moving towards the analysis of the results of the PrEcIOUS project, it is  
24 important to adopt a number of definitions guiding us in this discussion.

25 As it is clearly demonstrated by the abundance of data and research, there has  
26 been in the last two decades a strong interest on questions related to inclusion in  
27 education, to GCED as well as to social inclusion in general. We consider these con-  
28 cepts strictly related, and we have adopted them as the drivers in the reflections and  
29 activities developed throughout the project. The existing relationships between social  
30 inclusion, inclusive education and GCED rely on the human rights-based approach  
31 which forms, in our opinion, the most relevant framework for discussing the role of  
32 HEIs [3]. Social inclusion is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various aspects  
33 of social, economic and cultural life. Social inclusion aims to ensure that all individu-  
34 als have equal opportunities to engage in economic, social and cultural activities and  
35 to enjoy a standard of living and wellbeing that is considered normal in their society.  
36 This concept encompasses not only social integration and better access to the labour  
37 market but also equal access to facilities, services and benefits. For this reason, social  
38 inclusion is closely tied to human rights, particularly the right to participation, which

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<sup>1</sup> A brief note on the terminology used within this chapter. Designated gender and sexuality identifiers, whether presumed or self-proclaimed, have evolved over the years. Acronyms for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual or agender such as LGBT+ and LGBTQIA+ are often used as Western signifiers to describe individuals living outside heteronormative and cisnormative status quo, keeping in mind that in certain locations the letter order varies and that the acronym is never presumed to be absolute or exhaustive. The acronym for sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) has evolved within international institutions, such as the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, and the World Bank, as an additional way to describe components attributed to gender and sexuality. In this chapter we will be using the acronyms LGBTQIA+ and SOGIESC because they are regularly used identifiers, but will keep the chosen acronyms of authors and works we cite.

01 is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international  
02 human rights instruments.

03 Education plays a crucial role in promoting social inclusion by providing equal access  
04 to knowledge, skills and opportunities, thus guaranteeing participation and empower-  
05 ment as key aspects of inclusion. The focus on education within a human rights-based  
06 approach perspective of social inclusion serves two relevant purposes: on the one hand,  
07 it enhances the idea of social inclusion as a process of transformation towards more  
08 equitable and just societies, as defined by normative standards on human dignity; on the  
09 other, it recognises the role of education as a human rights *per se*. This is the approach  
10 adopted by PrEcIOUS according to which inclusive education is both instrumental to  
11 social inclusion as well as a fundamental aspect of the right to education.

12 The discussion on the concept of inclusive education is an ongoing one, and  
13 there is still a debate on a universally accepted definition [4–6]. Having said that, for  
14 the purposes of this paper and within the PrEcIOUS project, we adopted the broad  
15 definition which concerns not only students with disabilities but also all students  
16 from marginalised groups, as it was made clear by UNESCO since the Salamanca  
17 Declaration in 1994 [7–9]. As it has been correctly pointed out, inclusion is not a  
18 separate aim for education but contributes directly to define its overall aim: merg-  
19 ing inclusive education with social inclusion [10]. Inclusive education is therefore  
20 the result of educational practices and environments which guarantee the concrete  
21 recognition and implementation of fundamental human rights of all the individuals  
22 involved in the process, with a particular focus on the students. Non-discrimination,  
23 right to quality education, right to participate and freedom of thought and expression  
24 are thus embedded in the concept of inclusive education as they pave the way towards  
25 social inclusion.

26 Finally, this paper discusses the approach and results of the PrEcIOUS project  
27 from the perspective of global citizenship education. In this context, GCED is seen  
28 as a transformative approach that empowers individuals to become active, respon-  
29 sible and responsive citizens who contribute to building more just, peaceful and  
30 sustainable societies, emphasising the interconnectedness of political, economic,  
31 social and cultural aspects, as well as the link between local, national and global  
32 issues in order to develop a sense of belonging to a common humanity. Within this  
33 framework, GCED fosters positive attitudes and values, like respect for diversity,  
34 empathy, solidarity and human rights, covering three key dimensions of learning:  
35 cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural [11–13]. GCED is grounded in the 2030  
36 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4  
37 (SDG4) on quality education through Target 4.7 of SDG4, which aims to ensure that  
38 all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable develop-  
39 ment, including through education for global citizenship [14].

40 By centring the PrEcIOUS project on social inclusion, inclusive education and  
41 GCED, we advocate for a critical perspective that recognises the reproduction of  
42 social inequality via existing asymmetric educational models, and we intend to adopt  
43 instead a ‘critical and progressive commitment towards human rights, peace, envi-  
44 ronmental sustainability, social justice and economic equality, and a positive attitude  
45 towards diversity’ [15]. In our vision, GCED represents a necessary tool towards  
46 inclusive education and by that towards social inclusion itself.

47 For these reasons, PrEcIOUS stems from the assumption that educational activities  
48 cannot disregard the existence of marginalised groups within our academic commu-  
49 nities and that we need to adopt their perspective to make any meaningful progress  
50 towards quality education for all.

## 01 **2. Higher education institutions and inclusive practices through GCED**

02 The relevance of inclusive education has gained momentum in the field of higher  
03 education and has become part of the strategy of various HEIs [16]. PrEcIOUS builds  
04 upon the idea that HE can fully achieve its goals only if it takes place in a diverse and  
05 inclusive academic community – a community in which all members feel a sense of  
06 belonging and share the same fundamental values. Following the human rights-based  
07 approach, these values can clearly be identified with those enshrined in international  
08 human rights standards and democracy. Accordingly, as stated above, ‘Inclusive  
09 Education’ can be defined as the educational process by which all students can partici-  
10 pate as valuable members of the community without any form of discrimination.

11 Accommodation of multiple diversity and inclusion is therefore an integral part of  
12 the educational mission of HEIs, in order to recognise, include and value each person’s  
13 dignity; to foster understanding and mutual respect and to encourage everyone to  
14 strive for and reach their own potential. Within such a context, both respect of fun-  
15 damental human rights and active participation by all need to be promoted [17]. HEIs  
16 can and should directly contribute to the consolidation of these same values within  
17 themselves as well as agents of progressive change in society. In order to do so, HEIs  
18 need to rediscover their function as a space where individuals grow in knowledge  
19 and understanding of modern complex societies, accept and respect diversity and  
20 embrace their responsibilities as active members of their communities.

21 Complexities and diversity are core concepts when it comes to GCED. It is very  
22 important to stress that in the context of PrEcIOUS, although being aware that ‘the  
23 discourses of global citizenship entail a wide range of agendas, including education  
24 for sustainability, economic competitiveness, equality and human rights, social  
25 justice, and intercultural understanding’ [18], the choice was made to consider GCED  
26 not as merely instrumental to develop competencies and skills needed for the work-  
27 ers of a globalised market [19], as it is somehow suggested by the approach adopted  
28 by the OECD [18], but rather, as affirmed by UNESCO, as a process that leads to  
29 empowerment of all learners ‘to assume active roles in building more peaceful, toler-  
30 ant, inclusive and secure societies’. In order to do so, the three domains (cognitive,  
31 attitudinal and behavioural) of this concept need to all be taken into account, which is  
32 a challenge at the HE level, where very often only the cognitive one is truly developed.

33 In this context, one must be aware of the existing challenges in the definition of  
34 GCED as a competence. First of all, the competence approach might lead to choos-  
35 ing monitoring indicators which are not capable of describing the transformative  
36 implications of such educational practices [14]; secondly, ‘a closer look at the texts’  
37 citizenship-as-competence language shows how the promoted processes and practices  
38 of (citizenship) education actually mainly promote conformity and support for the  
39 societal and political status quo’ [20]. In other words, the concept of GCED is only  
40 apparently neutral, but in reality, it forces educators, researchers and institutions to  
41 make choices to deconstruct realities [21–22].

42 The current debate on GCED has demonstrated that, by bringing together two  
43 apparently contradicting concepts, that is, citizenship and globalisation, two main  
44 drivers to these educational practices have emerged: an instrumental one and a  
45 critical one [18]. Within the former, the focus is on ‘skills and knowledge for eco-  
46 nomic success in global capitalism’, while, concerning the latter, the focus is on the  
47 existence of different and diverse perspectives, the awareness of one self as part of  
48 a global community and the sharing of the values of human rights, democracy and  
49 sustainable development. The second approach can also be divided into two different

01 perspectives: GCED as an expression of the socialisation function of education, where  
02 the stress is on the commitment to universal human rights values, environmental  
03 protection and solidarity; or GCED as subjectification, that is, education which does  
04 not focus on existing normative standards on social justice and human rights but  
05 rather education on plural epistemologies and thinking practices to foster personal  
06 ethical responses [23]. These diverse objectives of GCED are particularly relevant in  
07 the field of higher education [24]. As it has been rightly pointed out, ‘citizenship edu-  
08 cation combines the idea of providing students space and time for self-development  
09 activities, with two of the other main tasks of higher education, namely teaching  
10 and research’ [25]. GCED can be considered as a need for higher education because it  
11 highlights the relevance of preparing responsible citizens, empowering them to play  
12 their role as actors of change towards inclusive and equitable communities.

13 Although it could be argued whether the perspectives of socialisation and subjec-  
14 tification are really mutually exclusive, the position taken within PrEcIOUS is clearly  
15 a combination of the two. PrEcIOUS starts with the assumption that our activities,  
16 with the aim of promoting social inclusion as defined according to universal human  
17 rights standards, enhance inclusive education. These objectives are achieved through-  
18 out practices of GCED not only in terms of promoting awareness on values, respect  
19 for the rule of law and acceptance of diversity but also based on the knowledge and  
20 recognition of these shared values, opening spaces for students to learn, engage,  
21 experiment skills for social inclusion activism and transformation and be aware of  
22 existing power dynamics and paternalistic approaches within our societies.

23 As GCED serves a relevant purpose within the process towards social inclusion,  
24 these practices need to clearly identify their learning objectives. Using the human  
25 rights-based approach strengthens the possibility of clarifying which values need  
26 to be shared and the meaning of respect and solidarity. Adopting such an approach  
27 could guide HEIs in their choices of GCED programs and practices focusing on the  
28 enhancement of non-discrimination principles, which is at the core of human rights  
29 standards. This is particularly the case considering the relevance within our societ-  
30 ies and academic communities of persisting dynamics of power and discriminating  
31 structural behaviours based on grounds of SOGIESC. Adopting the non-discrimina-  
32 tion principle perspective, the PrEcIOUS partnership has opted for the development  
33 of learning paths and practices within European HEIs in order to combat discrimina-  
34 tion against LGBTQIA+ communities.

### 35 **3. LGBTQIA+ communities: the quest for inclusion in higher education**

36 Although the phenomenon of discrimination against LGBTQIA+ communities  
37 is slowly decreasing, still, several concerns have been raised at the international  
38 level. The United Nations human rights treaty bodies have stressed the impact of  
39 discrimination in schools and other educational settings on the possibility for young  
40 LGBTQIA+ persons to enjoy their right to education [26–27].

41 In 2023, the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) third survey on the  
42 topic shows its persistent and pervasive nature: 36% of the respondents felt discrimi-  
43 nated against in their everyday life in the year before the survey compared to 42%  
44 in 2019 and 37% in 2012. In fact, although the 2023 Rainbow Map of the European  
45 region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association  
46 (ILGA-Europe) shows that tackling homophobia and related discrimination against  
47 LGBTQIA+ persons and communities remains a priority in many EU countries [28],

01 discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people persists throughout the EU as data show  
02 that ‘for several LGBTIQ respondents it is still unsafe to show affection publicly, to  
03 be open about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex  
04 characteristics without feeling threatened’ [29]. An important number of LGBTQIA+  
05 people are also at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and not all feel safe to report  
06 verbal abuses and physical violence to the competent authorities. Trans and intersex  
07 people still experience the most discrimination. In this context, it must be underlined  
08 that prejudice and intolerance continues throughout the course of studies and extends  
09 to sports environments and at work. Moreover, as large-scale studies have also dem-  
10 onstrated, LGBTQIA+ students seem to experience an increased risk of psychological  
11 distress [30] compared to their heterosexual peers [31]. This situation has also been  
12 addressed at the level of the United Nations in several recommendations [32–34].  
13 The 2023 FRA LGBTIQ survey further indicates that 37% of LGBTQIA+ people said  
14 they had experienced this type of discrimination in their lifetime, when looking for  
15 housing and health or other social services, as well as at university or in shops or  
16 entertainment venues – the figures are higher for transgender (55%) and intersex  
17 (59%) persons. Overall, percentages were higher, compared to the European aver-  
18 age, in all countries participating in the project, namely Greece, Italy, Lithuania and  
19 Poland. This is also clearly demonstrated by the data of the Eurobarometer survey on  
20 discrimination which, for example, reported in 2023 an EU average of 69% of posi-  
21 tive answers to the statement ‘Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people should have the same  
22 rights as heterosexual people’ when referring to marriage, adoption and parental  
23 rights but registered much lower percentages when focusing on single country data in  
24 the countries of the PrEcIOUS project: 44% in Greece, 59% in Italy, 35% in Lithuania  
25 and 49% in Poland.

26 The choice to focus PrEcIOUS educational activities on the issue of discrimination  
27 based on sexual orientation and gender identity is reinforced by the mentioned FRA  
28 LGBTIQ survey showing that discrimination decreases in locations where LGBTQIA+  
29 equality is more publicly discussed and that prejudice, intolerance and violence can  
30 also drop as LGBTQIA+ individuals become more visible in daily life. This evidence  
31 supports the objective of the project in combating discrimination related to SOGIESC  
32 in HEIs through envisaging GCED practices involving all HEI stakeholders.

33 The role of LGBTQIA+ inclusive education has gained attention in research in  
34 recent years. Questions related to promoting non-discrimination attitudes within  
35 schools and HEIs have been raised with different results by various commentators  
36 [35]. Nonetheless, although there is evidence of policies adopted at the institu-  
37 tional level to guarantee that members of the academic community (staff, students  
38 and teachers) are not discriminated against on grounds of SOGIESC, episodes of  
39 prejudices and harassment are still present involving both other students and staff  
40 members [36]. At the same time, research shows that students experiencing such  
41 forms of discrimination are more likely to consider dropping out of university [37].  
42 The vulnerability of LGBTQIA+ individuals [38] within the academic context calls  
43 for specific educational measures addressing their quest for inclusion. In particular,  
44 commentators have stressed the positive impact of specific training of the educational  
45 community as one of the tools to foster LGBTQIA+ inclusive education [39].

46 Within this approach, GCED focused on non-discrimination represents, in our  
47 perspective, the most appropriate tool to guarantee to all students, within higher edu-  
48 cation settings, the possibility of feeling recognised and of getting in touch with other  
49 people’s identities. LGBTQIA+ students are in fact usually exposed to heterosexual  
50 and cisgender identities, and they can seldom identify themselves with staff and

01 teachers. Conversely, heterosexual and cisgender students need the concrete possibil-  
02 ity to recognise and experience other identities in a space which is safe and deprived  
03 of any judgemental features. Realising such educational environments and practices  
04 also represents a step towards counteracting the ever-present hate narrative against  
05 LGBTQIA+ persons [36]. The analysis of the campus climate for LGBTQIA+ persons  
06 stresses the relevance of perceptions and experiences of LGBTQIA+ persons, as well  
07 as of perceptions about LGBTQIA+ persons; but it also questions the presence and  
08 efficacy of policies and measures aimed at improving the life of LGBTQIA+ individu-  
09 als within the academic community [40]. This analysis represents a necessary starting  
10 point for any educational activity fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusive education.

#### 11 **4. PrEclIOUS and the challenges posed by invisible homophobia**

12 Following the above-described approach, the general objective of PrEclIOUS is  
13 to promote an unbiased academic community capable of counteracting prejudices  
14 and phenomena such as homophobia or transphobia, as well as fostering a culture  
15 of differences. The project addresses the promotion and implementation of best  
16 practices and strategies which would better equip HEIs in providing students with  
17 responsible and active citizenship competencies, as well as tools that help them grow  
18 in awareness and deconstruct personal bias. Furthermore, the aim is to produce a  
19 strong cultural change by acting on structural dynamics and finding new collective  
20 perspectives of meaning, thus empowering students, and all the academic commu-  
21 nity, in combating stereotypes and prejudices related to SOGIESC.

22 More specifically, PrEclIOUS aims to combat *invisible homophobia*. With the  
23 term *invisible homophobia*, we refer to behaviour which is considered as normal  
24 and accepted by a majority of individuals in society although it is harmful to the  
25 LGBTQIA+ communities. In this case specifically, said majority is intended as the  
26 heteronormative and/or cis-normative status quo [41]. The difference between ‘visible  
27 homophobia’ and ‘invisible homophobia’ is that the former is intentional and easily  
28 recognised as discrimination and a hate crime on the grounds of SOGIESC, as well as  
29 punishable by law in certain countries, while the latter can be unintentional, socially  
30 acceptable and not seen as discriminatory in a heteronormative and/or cis-normative  
31 society. Some practical examples of what *invisible homophobia* is are homophobic  
32 jokes; avoiding contact with LGBTQIA+ individuals, or those perceived to be as such,  
33 even simply by changing sidewalks in the street or deciding not to become friends  
34 or colleagues with a person who does not identify as heterosexual and/or cisgender.  
35 These behaviours can lead to exclusion, anxiety as well as intensifying *minority stress*  
36 [42], which affects the wellbeing of the individuals who are stigmatised and discrimi-  
37 nated against. In fact, *invisible homophobia* may seem less impacting because of its  
38 covert nature but is a pernicious and still ongoing type of injustice as greater social  
39 acceptance and support for equal rights ‘have yet to be translated into clear improve-  
40 ments in LGBTQ+ individuals’ lives’ [43].

41 In order to tackle issues of discrimination based on SOGIESC with a multi-  
42 disciplinary approach encompassing law, human rights, science of education and  
43 sociology, considering the analysis of the campus climate within partner institu-  
44 tions, PrEclIOUS proposes educational tools based both on Transformative Learning  
45 theory and on Experiential Learning theory. Both these approaches encourage  
46 students to develop their understanding of the world and of themselves, allowing  
47 a potential change to their perspectives and frames of reference [44]. In particular,



01 within Experiential Learning, knowledge and meaning are contextualised in actual  
02 experiences [45], as better visualised through the lens of Kolb's *Learning Cycle*,  
03 which explains how individuals learn through a continuous process of experiencing,  
04 reflecting, conceptualising and experimenting [46]. In this sense, Kolb's Learning  
05 Cycle provides a pedagogical framework apt to implement our GCED perspective  
06 on LGBTQIA+ inclusive education to give students opportunities to mirror diverse  
07 identities, to reflect on the impact of implicit bias and invisible homophobia, to  
08 conceptualise these elements within the wider framework of human rights and  
09 democratic values and to adopt transformative behaviours within and outside the  
10 academic community. Therefore, all PrEciOUS educational activities are built on this  
11 educational model which has proven particularly effective in human rights non-for-  
12 mal educational settings. Moreover, this structure is consistent with the perspective  
13 on global learning recently suggested, that is, the idea that GCED must recognise the  
14 existence of different epistemological frames and choose to adopt the most coherent  
15 one with the expected results. More specifically, dealing with invisible homophobia  
16 within academic communities cannot only be centred on the traditional 'learning  
17 about the difference' approach that focuses on knowledge and notions and does not  
18 challenge existing power dynamics within societies; nor is it sufficient to adopt the  
19 perspective of 'learning from difference' which, although guaranteeing the engage-  
20 ment and empowerment of involved learners towards positive personal changes, does  
21 not address structural issues of inequality and exclusion. The more coherent perspec-  
22 tive is 'being taught by difference' within an educational process, which not only  
23 entails cognitive aspects but also requires an emotional dimension for the learners  
24 when challenging acquired beliefs and understandings [47].

25 This approach informs the organic evolution of the whole life cycle of the project:  
26 firstly, desk research and qualitative results comparing existing realities on combating  
27 discrimination related to SOGIESC in European HEIs represent *Concrete experience*;  
28 secondly, through the development of the Learning Outcomes Framework, partners  
29 engage in *Reflective observation*; thirdly, with the development of the Training Package  
30 devoted to the main issues concerning invisible homophobia and discrimination  
31 related to SOGIESC, partners engage in *Abstract conceptualisation* through an intersec-  
32 tional lens; finally, students should be able take action as unbiased citizens contrast-  
33 ing invisible homophobia, and members of the academic community should adopt  
34 guidelines and policies in their field of work, thus closing the learning cycle with  
35 *Active experimentation*.

## 36 5. Project results and future objectives

37 Taking a closer look at the project development so far [48], as of June 2024,  
38 PrEciOUS has accomplished numerous objectives and deliverables: a report on *invisible*  
39 *homophobia* and its impact on HEI communities, which includes a desk research on  
40 national and international good practices; an LGBTQIA+ lexicon glossary; an empiri-  
41 cal qualitative research comprised of an anonymous questionnaire as well as multiple  
42 focus groups done with students, academics and staff of all partner HEIs; the Learning  
43 Outcomes Framework: a matrix of competencies comprised of transversal skills and  
44 knowledge which are key in fostering unbiased HEI communities; an implicit bias test  
45 to measure implicit personal bias and prejudices related to SOGIESC, which will be  
46 preliminary to the Training Package. All mentioned project milestones and deliver-  
47 ables are available in English and have been translated in all partner languages.

## 01 5.1 Qualitative data analysis

02 In the initial phases of the project, attention was devoted to a qualitative research  
03 analysis through focus groups (FG) carried out between February and September  
04 2023, by partner universities. The FG involved a total of 79 interviewees: 31 students,  
05 16 persons from administrative staff and 32 academics, organised among peers and  
06 those of the same role to facilitate discussion and avoid inhibition caused by possible  
07 power dynamics between different roles and positions within the HEI, for example,  
08 students and teachers. The purpose of these FGs was to gather intel and receive inputs  
09 on the actual situation in their HEI in regard to SOGIESC discrimination and the pos-  
10 sible actions each partner university should undertake in order to improve the fight  
11 against discrimination vis-à-vis LGBTQIA+ communities in HEIs.

12 All FGs were carried out in a way as to create a space in which students and those  
13 working with students could share experiences and discuss the notion of invisible  
14 homophobia, regardless of their identification as LGBTQIA+ individuals; evaluate  
15 actions taken by their respective universities so far to combat visible and invisible  
16 homophobia and create an academic environment free from prejudices and stereo-  
17 types and gather suggestions on the necessity of measures to be implemented by  
18 HEIs to combat visible and invisible homophobia. In all FGs, the discussion on the  
19 relevance of contrasting all forms of discrimination was underlined. This was par-  
20 ticularly the case with students and teachers. In the case of administrative staff, some  
21 participants tended to see the issues related to LGBTQIA+ communities more as an 'on  
22 fashion' topic rather than a real necessity within institutional life.

23 Good practices have been put in place, and the majority of participants of the FGs  
24 supports these practices and is open to engaging in them. In this regard, there was  
25 a clear generational difference: younger members of the HEI community seemed  
26 more open and supportive of these initiatives, such as gender-neutral language or  
27 restrooms, while older members of the HEI community did not see how it would  
28 positively affect change. All respondents had a clear stance of support for LGBTQIA+  
29 individuals and manifested their readiness to not only be engaged in events and initia-  
30 tives but also be active in reporting any discrimination.

## 31 5.2 Quantitative data analysis

32 In addition to the results of the FGs, the empirical qualitative research comprised a  
33 total of 1517 questionnaires answered throughout all partner universities both by stu-  
34 dents and academic and administrative staff. Results confirmed data collected during  
35 the FGs, but although the majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with their  
36 respective HEI's initiatives and actions to safeguard equality and non-discrimination  
37 on the grounds of SOGIESC, it also shed light on important challenges as well as dif-  
38 ferences among partner HEIs. Indeed, all partner universities report high numbers of  
39 perceived discrimination on the grounds of SOGIESC in their respective countries (to  
40 the question *In my country, people are discriminated against because of their sexual ori-*  
41 *entation*, we registered a high number of positive responses: 100% of KU students and  
42 90% of students at JU answered 'Strongly agree' or 'Agree' but differ when it comes to  
43 positionalities regarding equal rights and the promotion of inclusive education and  
44 specific teachings on SOGIESC. In fact, we registered negative responses (respon-  
45 dents answered 'Strongly disagree' or 'Disagree') to the following questions: 1. *It is*  
46 *right for same-sex couples to get married, if they wish* (16% KU staff, 12,8% AUTH staff  
47 and 8% UniSi); 2. *Universities should promote inclusive knowledge and develop teachings*

01 on sexual orientation and gender identity (24% AUTH students, 50% KU students).  
02 Finally, to the question *LGBTQIA+ are a threat to everything I consider good and moral*  
03 *in society* we also registered concerning data as circa 12% of respondents at AUTH,  
04 both students and staff, and 30% of students at KU answered positively (respondents  
05 answered ‘Strongly agree’ or ‘Agree’).

### 06 **5.3 Learning outcomes framework**

07 These results confirm our belief that a much needed and more coherent per-  
08 spective of ‘being taught by difference’ can in fact better equip all members of HEIs  
09 with the tools needed to bridge the gap towards more equitable learning environ-  
10 nments for all, which, supported both by the *Learning Outcomes Framework* and  
11 Training Package, is the intended goal of the PrEciOUS project. Five main areas  
12 in which competencies should be further developed were thus defined: *Literacy,*  
13 *Stereotypes and Prejudices, Intersectionality, Social Context and Communication.*  
14 Although these areas are interconnected in practice, the proposed categorisation  
15 is intended to facilitate the organisation of the various competencies which are at  
16 the basis of LGBTQIA+ inclusive education. More specifically, the *Literacy* area  
17 refers to competencies in recognising sexual and gender diversity and navigating  
18 the social processes related to that diversity. The second section, *Stereotypes and*  
19 *Prejudices,* refers to understanding the mechanisms of stereotyping, the sources of  
20 prejudice and their social and individual consequences. Recognising stereotypes  
21 that directly relate to LGBTQIA+ communities is also paramount, and we provide  
22 numerous examples that pertain to the discrimination on the grounds of SOGIESC.  
23 The concept of *Intersectionality,* in turn, emphasises the importance of recognising,  
24 also within the academic community, complex societal power dynamics in  
25 society and of understanding how they can impact the situation of LGBTQIA+  
26 individuals, bearing in mind that this social group is also internally diverse. In  
27 the *Social Context* area, we look at the situation of LGBTQIA+ individuals more  
28 broadly: examining heteronormativity and its social consequences, as well as the  
29 legal framework that shapes our chances and opportunities. Competencies in this  
30 domain, specifically, should enable the identification of disparities in access to  
31 rights based on SOGIESC. The final domain, *Communication,* facilitates the devel-  
32 opment of skills for interacting with others in a manner grounded in dignity and  
33 respect, such as non-stigmatising communication and acquiring specific abilities  
34 for affirmative and inclusive interaction.

35 Once the Learning Outcomes Framework had been finalised, partner institutions  
36 moved towards the definition of the structure of the learning activities. Taking into  
37 consideration the importance that the emotional dimension has in acquiring aware-  
38 ness of bias and prejudices and in supporting the promotion of non-discriminating  
39 behaviour, PrEciOUS has produced an implicit bias test focusing on three major  
40 areas: *Gender, Sexuality and General knowledge,* which analyses respondents’ attitudes  
41 towards statements concerning sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as  
42 gender roles within our Western societies. The compilation of the test represents the  
43 first step of the training activities that partner institutions will carry out during the  
44 last year of the project (2025), which will be then concluded by providing all HEI  
45 staff with practical guidelines and a *vademecum* oriented at intervention proposals to  
46 become more accessible and inclusive in regard to SOGIESC and the promotion of a  
47 culture of differences.

## 01 **6. LGBTQIA+ rights as human rights and inclusive education**

02 'Each assault on LGBTQIA+ people is an assault on human rights and the values we  
03 hold dear. We cannot and will not move backwards.' [49].

04 As stated above, PrEclIOUS is grounded on a human rights-based approach to  
05 the quest of defining the role and the tools for HEIs to contrast discrimination and  
06 invisible homophobia. The data collected during the first phase of the project reaffirm  
07 the presence of hidden discrimination and lack of acceptance and understanding of  
08 diverse identities. For this reason, the whole content of the project's results is based  
09 on human rights discourse and on the specific relevance that the right to education  
10 plays in this context. In fact, we argue that GCED can represent an umbrella concept  
11 where human rights, including the right to education, find their due recognition and  
12 implementation.

13 The recognition of sexual orientation and gender identity as human rights has  
14 undergone significant evolution in international human rights law over the past few  
15 decades [50]. In this sense, since the 1990s, several international organisations and  
16 associations have developed a body of rules and case law articulating the human  
17 rights principles that apply to sexual orientation and gender identity, emphasising the  
18 importance of non-discrimination, privacy and the right to be free from violence and  
19 harassment [51–52].

20 The relevance of States' obligation to protect and respect the rights of LGBTQIA+  
21 persons has also been affirmed by the various UN treaty bodies [53–54], even though  
22 in more than 60 states in the world, consensual same sex relations are labelled as  
23 criminal [55]. The situation at the European level appears to be more coherent,  
24 especially when looking at the case law of the European Court on human rights on the  
25 protection of LGBTQIA+ individuals' rights [56–57].

26 In this context, the decisions recognising transgender identity as a protected  
27 characteristic, for example by ruling that the requirement to obtain a prior psychiatric  
28 diagnosis prior to legal recognition of transgender identity is a violation of the right  
29 to private life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (*A.P.*  
30 *Garçon and Nicot v. France* in 2017), also encourage public entities, such as HEIs, to  
31 adopt internal regulations on the protection of the rights of transgender individuals  
32 through mechanisms such as the so-called *alias career*, which allows a student or a  
33 member of the staff to use the elective name instead of the name registered at birth.  
34 The numerous cases decided by the Court on the recognition of legal protection to  
35 same sex couples (see, for example, *Hämäläinen v. Finland* in 2014 and *Taddeucci and*  
36 *McCall v. Italy* in 2016) stresses the necessity within institutions, such as universities,  
37 to provide protection through adequate pension schemes, housing facilities and wel-  
38 fare benefits accorded to students and staff life partners regardless of SOGIESC. Most  
39 recently, the Court has addressed the issue of gender recognition in civil registration  
40 records. In *O.H. and G.H. v. Germany* (2023), the Court held that Germany's require-  
41 ment for a child to undergo hormone therapy and gender reassignment surgery before  
42 changing their gender in their civil registration records was a violation of the right  
43 to private life. Such a decision could also have an impact on the way universities can  
44 support students and staff, through adequate psychological and legal counselling,  
45 undergoing or wishing to undergo gender affirming care.

46 Although there are some uncertainties in the way the issues of discrimination  
47 against LGBTQIA+ persons are addressed at the European level [58], not only by the  
48 Court but also by the Council of Europe as well as by the European Union, the fact

01 remains that State members of the European Convention on Human Rights have legal  
02 obligations to comply with the non-discrimination standards as defined by the above  
03 mentioned case law. Within this context, there is a clear positive obligation to adopt all  
04 necessary measures to contrast discrimination [59] in all its forms, including invisible  
05 homophobia. The concept of positive obligations provides a reasonable framework to  
06 discuss how States and public entities, such as the partner universities in PrEcIOUS,  
07 should conceive measures to guarantee LGBTQIA+ inclusive education [60–63].

08 The implementation of the principle of non-discrimination in education forms  
09 an essential part of the content of the right to education as enshrined in Article 26  
10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [64–65]. This right is essential for the  
11 development of individuals and societies, and it is critical that education systems  
12 are inclusive and equitable to ensure that all students have access to quality educa-  
13 tion [66]. Through the definition of policies and practices capable of guaranteeing  
14 comprehensive, accurate and age-appropriate information regarding sexuality, with  
15 specific attention to diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and sex characteris-  
16 tics [67–69]. This is why PrEcIOUS included in its results the definition of a common  
17 glossary, in order to make sure that students participating in the project will receive  
18 appropriate and adequate information, as well as the implicit bias test, to facilitate  
19 personal awareness and understanding of the role played by prejudices and structural  
20 power dynamics. At the same time, the project foresees the adoption of guidelines and  
21 specific measures at the institutional level by HEIs as positive actions that European  
22 public entities should adopt as expression of the positive obligations enshrined in  
23 international human rights standards on the right to education and LGBTQIA+  
24 inclusive education.

## 25 **7. Concluding remarks**

26 We posited that HEIs play a key role in creating an inclusive and pluralistic  
27 academic community, an educational environment in which all members can feel safe  
28 and valued, as well as acquire the tools to cultivate understanding and mutual respect.  
29 HEIs must include the concrete development of policies and practices capable of  
30 enhancing empowerment and participation by all members of the HEI community. To  
31 do so, the creation of educational paths capable of enhancing specific competencies is  
32 paramount, guided by GCED.

33 Through the process of learning through experiencing, reflecting, conceptualising  
34 and experimenting, PrEcIOUS aims to make an impact not just in terms of personal  
35 growth but also as an asset to collectively participate and strive towards LGBTQIA+  
36 inclusive education. The data collected so far have highlighted important challenges as  
37 prejudices and stereotypes are still very present in our perceptions and definitions of  
38 others. Both the FGs and the questionnaire results point out pitfalls as discrimination  
39 based on SOGIESC still seems to be considered as an issue involving single and iso-  
40 lated cases and not as a structural consequence and collective concern. Nevertheless,  
41 HEIs have proven to be fertile environments in which members of their communities  
42 are ready to enhance a human rights-based approach to education in fostering diver-  
43 sity, pluralism and non-discrimination.

44 The importance of LGBTQIA+ inclusive education cannot be overstated. Inclusive  
45 education policies and practices can help reduce discrimination and harassment  
46 against LGBTQIA+ students, increase access to resources and support services and  
47 promote academic success.

01 PrEcIOUS takes a stand by affirming the critical role of public entities in advocat-  
02 ing for change; adopting educational policies based on a wide conception of GCED,  
03 which is not focused on competencies for jobs in a global capitalist market, but  
04 rather stressing the commitment to universal human rights values, environmental  
05 protection and solidarity, and fostering plural epistemologies and thinking practices  
06 to solicit personal ethical responses. Following the human rights-based approach to  
07 education, such GCED practices for inclusive education recognise that the right  
08 to education is a fundamental human right that is critical for the development of  
09 individuals and societies. LGBTQIA+ inclusive education falls within this scheme as  
10 it is essential for ensuring that all students have access to quality education and reach  
11 their full potential. LGBTQIA+ inclusive GCED is not simply an ethical discretionary  
12 choice for European institutions, it rather consists in a measure of compliance with  
13 positive obligations vis-à-vis international and European human rights law standards.

14 According to such a vision, HEIs should:

- 15 • Adopt administrative regulations on the use of appropriate and inclusive lan-  
16 guage and communication tools;
- 17 • Adopt administrative protocols on gender affirmation processes (such as the *alias*  
18 *career*);
- 19 • Promote GCED activities based on the contrast against discrimination and  
20 invisible homophobia;
- 21 • Enrich the curricula in order to include queer research and studies;
- 22 • Define safe and accessible environments (such as gender-neutral restrooms),  
23 with adequate measures to respond to cases of discrimination and homophobia  
24 (such as counselling and psychological support, legal and disciplinary support)
- 25 • Guarantee access to university spaces to civil society organisations promoting  
26 LGBTQIA+ communities' rights

27 As PrEcIOUS continues its journey towards the finalisation of all its results, some ele-  
28 ments appear to be already quite evident. Academia, as part of society, suffers from the  
29 presence of implicit bias and prejudices vis-à-vis LGBTQIA+ communities. It is still very  
30 difficult for LGBTQIA+ individuals to mirror themselves in the academic bodies; they  
31 are still subjected to discrimination, and invisible homophobia is widespread. Although  
32 institutional policies and normative frameworks are often already in place, they do not  
33 represent a sufficient barrier against discrimination, and the right to access to quality  
34 education is thus jeopardised. The need for the project to focus not on protecting vulner-  
35 able subjects but rather on empowering them and, more importantly, changing cultural  
36 structures and power dynamics which make discrimination possible and accepted is the  
37 real challenge. GCED LGBTQIA+ inclusive education, by addressing the academic com-  
38 munity as a whole, gives the opportunity to make a step forward in the right direction.

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## 17 **Author details**

18 Alessandra Viviani\* and Gaia Ciccarelli  
19 University of Siena, Siena, Italy

20 \*Address all correspondence to: [alessandra.viviani@unisi.it](mailto:alessandra.viviani@unisi.it)

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