

PrEclIOUS Project

**VADEMECUM ON HOW TO BUILD
HEI COMMUNITIES BASED
ON THE CONCEPT OF "PLURALITY"**

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PrEclIOUS Guidelines on how to build HEI communities based on the concept of “Plurality” with reference to sexual orientation and gender identity

Introduction and glossary of key terms

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Europe are increasingly recognizing the imperative to create inclusive environments that respect and affirm sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). This Vademecum, developed through the PrEclIOUS project, provides comprehensive frameworks for institutional transformation that moves beyond superficial gestures toward structural change embedding plurality as a core institutional value.

The guidelines address four critical areas of institutional life: **inclusive higher education practices, non-violent communication strategies, effective representation mechanisms, and comprehensive regulatory frameworks**. Each area offers conceptual foundations, documented good practices, strategic pathways for implementation, and practical recommendations that institutions can adapt to their specific contexts.

The concept of plurality in this context extends beyond simple diversity to encompass environments where multiple identities coexist without hierarchy or marginalization. This requires challenging heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions while actively institutionalizing intersectionality, acknowledging how gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability, and other identities overlap in lived experiences.

This Vademecum uses several specialized terms throughout the document. Brief definitions are provided here for quick reference. For a comprehensive glossary with additional terms and expanded definitions, please visit the **PrEclIOUS project glossary**: <https://preciousproject.eu/glossary-2/>

- **Inclusion:** A transformative institutional process that moves beyond non-discrimination and superficial diversity measures toward structural change that redistributes power and eliminates hierarchies among identities. Inclusion should not be viewed as a passive process but rather as an active striving towards equity as a foundation for academic environments.
- **Heteronormativity:** The assumption that heterosexuality and cisgender identities represent the norm, shaping social structures, institutional policies, and everyday practices.
- **Cisnormativity:** The assumption that all people are cisgender (identifying with the gender assigned at birth), rendering transgender and non-binary identities invisible or deviant.
- **Intersectionality:** The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability, and class, creating overlapping systems of discrimination or privilege.
- **Tokenism:** Superficial inclusion of marginalized individuals to create the appearance of diversity without meaningful structural change or power redistribution.
- **Third Mission:** Higher Education Institutions' role in social engagement and community transformation, extending beyond traditional teaching and research functions.
- **SOGIESC:** Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics
- **DEI:** Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - initiatives implemented to promote fairness and reduce discrimination against marginalized groups.

Following Alessandra Viviani and Gaia Ciccarelli's¹ remarks on **reflexivity regarding terminology** used in policy papers and reporting documents, in this Vademecum we also include a short note on our approach towards the vocabulary applied to this tool. 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 Organization, and the World Bank, as an additional way to describe components attributed to gender and sexuality. In this Vademecum we will be using the acronyms LGBTQIA+ and SOGIESC because they are regularly used identifiers and support us in highlighting that this is not a marginalized group issue, but a human rights issue.

Areas of action

1. Inclusive Higher Education, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity - JU

1.1 Conceptual Frameworks

Fostering inclusive higher education environments that respect and affirm sexual orientation and gender identity represents a fundamental commitment to social justice and institutional plurality. This commitment extends beyond non-discrimination policies to encompass active engagement in transforming the cultural, pedagogical, and administrative structures of Higher Education Institutions to recognize and respond to LGBTQIA+ diversity.

At the heart of an inclusive higher education approach lies **literacy in LGBTQIA+ vocabulary and concepts**. This foundational competence enables members of the academic community—students, faculty, and staff—to understand the complexities of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Such literacy requires fluency in inclusive and affirming terminology, as well as the capacity to engage with current debates on LGBTQIA+ rights and recognition. Cultivating this understanding helps individuals use language responsibly and inclusively, contributing to the dignity and visibility of LGBTQIA+ persons across campus contexts.

Equally important is the **awareness and deconstruction of stereotypes and prejudices** that often operate invisibly within institutional cultures. HEIs must create spaces that encourage reflection on the origins, mechanisms, and effects of gender- and sexuality-based stereotypes. These biases shape campus culture and interactions in profound ways, often reinforcing exclusionary practices. Academic and administrative actors should be equipped to recognize and challenge stereotypical narratives—such as framing LGBTQIA+ individuals as inherently 'different' or problematic—and to foster educational and everyday practices that reduce stigma while supporting critical engagement with discriminatory discourses.

A meaningful inclusion strategy must also embrace **intersectionality**. Recognizing that individuals' experiences are shaped by multiple and intersecting social positions—including social class, race and ethnicity, disability status, religion, and age—offers a more nuanced understanding of discrimination and privilege. For LGBTQIA+ persons, especially those who also belong to other marginalized groups, the intersections of identity can produce compounded vulnerabilities.

¹ Viviani, A., Ciccarelli, G. (2024). The quest for inclusion and the pitfalls of invisible homophobia: A case study on European Higher Education Institutions. In E. Leung (edited by), *Engaging in Prosocial Behaviours for an Inclusive Classroom and Society*. London : IntechOpen LTD [10.5772/intechopen.1006134].

Thus, inclusive practices must reflect sensitivity to power asymmetries and promote actions that address systemic exclusions across multiple axes of identity.

The **social context** in which HEIs operate significantly influences the lived realities of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Heteronormativity—the pervasive assumption that heterosexual and cisgender identities represent the norm—shapes both social structures and legal frameworks. An inclusive higher education environment must therefore challenge normative assumptions embedded in policies, curricula, and everyday practices. Understanding how laws and institutional regulations can either empower or constrain LGBTQIA+ persons remains critical for creating truly supportive environments.

This framework addresses three fundamental dimensions of institutional life. For people in the academy—**students, academics, and administrative staff**—inclusivity means ensuring that individuals can participate fully without fear of discrimination or marginalization. Students require access to appropriate facilities, correct addressing through chosen names and pronouns, and affirmation rather than erasure of their identities. Academic staff need institutional support for teaching and research on sexual and gender diversity, along with training to support students with diverse identities. Administrative staff must be equipped with inclusive practices for all procedures while themselves receiving equitable treatment as full members of the academic community.

In **teaching content**, inclusivity demands critically examining what is taught and what is omitted. This involves challenging assumptions that heterosexual, cisgender experiences represent universal norms while integrating queer perspectives across disciplines. Such integration extends beyond adding content to interrogating dominant knowledge paradigms and ensuring that LGBTQIA+ contributions to scholarship are acknowledged and valued.

University **governance and communication** must embed LGBTQIA+ rights and representation into institutional structures, policies, and decision-making processes. This includes ensuring meaningful representation in governance bodies, implementing comprehensive anti-discrimination policies, and adapting institutional systems to accommodate diverse gender identities. Institutional communication—both internal and external—must reflect inclusivity through affirming language while actively challenging heteronormative privilege.

1.2 Good practices

AT A GLANCE - Good Practices in this Area:

- Inclusive Name and Gender Policies
- Peer Support Networks
- Comprehensive Staff and Faculty Training
- Curriculum Review and Reform
- Infrastructure Development
- Data Collection and Accountability Mechanisms

Several Higher Education Institutions across Europe have implemented promising practices that advance inclusivity with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity. These initiatives demonstrate how institutional commitment can translate into concrete actions that improve campus climate and support LGBTQIA+ community members.

Inclusive Name and Gender Policies

- Allow students and staff to use chosen names and self-identified gender markers across all administrative systems
- Example: University College London (UCL) comprehensive support framework:

- Name and gender marker changes without requiring legal documentation
- Confidentiality protections for personal information
- Facility access matching gender identity
- Workplace support for transitioning individuals
- Training programs promoting trans inclusivity throughout the community

Peer Support Networks

- Student-led LGBTQIA+ organizations and mentoring programs providing community-building opportunities
- Example: University of Edinburgh's LGBTQ+ Mentor program (Edinburgh University Students' Association):
 - Confidential support from trained mentors
 - Social and wellbeing assistance
 - Advocacy and guidance on university procedures
 - Safe spaces for community building
 - Grassroots support complementing broader institutional policies

Comprehensive Staff and Faculty Training

- Mandatory workshops ensuring all institutional personnel develop competencies for supporting LGBTQIA+ community members
- Training components include:
 - LGBTQIA+ vocabulary and concepts
 - Unconscious bias recognition
 - Inclusive communication strategies
 - Understanding institutional impact of heteronormativity
- Co-designed and delivered with LGBTQIA+ community members to ensure authenticity and relevance

Curriculum Review and Reform

- Embed queer theory, LGBTQIA+ histories, and intersectional analysis across academic disciplines
- Implementation approaches:
 - Inviting guest lecturers from the LGBTQIA+ community
 - Co-creating syllabi with students
 - Systematic review of course content for inclusivity and representation
 - Extension beyond specialized programs to mainstream curriculum

Infrastructure Development

- Accessible, safe, and gender-inclusive facilities affirming diverse needs
- Key elements include:
 - Gender-neutral restrooms
 - Inclusive housing options
 - Healthcare services recognizing diverse experiences
 - Physical spaces supporting trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals

Data Collection and Accountability Mechanisms

- Systems enabling assessment of community needs and progress measurement
- Effective approaches include:

- Voluntary SOGI demographic tracking using inclusive categories
- Regular campus climate surveys assessing discrimination experiences and comfort levels
- Bias incident reporting systems with follow-up protocols
- Annual diversity reports with transparency and accountability measures

1.3 Strategic paths

Institutionalizing inclusivity regarding sexual orientation and gender identity requires comprehensive strategic approaches that embed change throughout organizational structures and cultures. These pathways move beyond individual initiatives toward systematic transformation:

- **Auditing and reforming institutional policies and practices** provides the foundation for meaningful change. Comprehensive reviews of current policies, protocols, and documents can identify heteronormative assumptions and gaps that undermine inclusion. Such audits should examine everything from admissions procedures to graduation requirements, using findings to implement reforms grounded in principles of dignity and equity.
- **Establishing institutional accountability structures** ensures that inclusion efforts receive ongoing attention and resources. Creating LGBTQIA+ advisory boards or inclusion councils with meaningful representation in decision-making processes can provide oversight and guidance. Assigning diversity officers or ombudspersons with specific mandates related to gender and sexual diversity helps institutionalize responsibility for inclusion outcomes.
- **Fostering a culture of reflexivity and learning** encourages all community members—from leadership to students—to reflect on their own privileges, biases, and roles in shaping pluralistic university environments. This cultural shift requires sustained effort and institutional support for difficult conversations about power, privilege, and systemic change.
- **Integrating LGBTQIA+ inclusion into mission and vision statements** signals deep institutional commitment by explicitly referencing sexual and gender diversity in strategic plans, equality charters, and public values statements. Such integration helps ensure that inclusion remains central to institutional identity rather than peripheral to core functions.
- **Developing alliances with external LGBTQIA+ communities** creates opportunities for collaboration, expertise sharing, and accountability. Partnerships with local and national organizations can enhance programming while ensuring that university efforts remain relevant and responsive to community needs.
- **Investing in data collection and research** enables evidence-based policy development and program evaluation. Systematically collecting disaggregated data on LGBTQIA+ experiences—with appropriate ethical safeguards—can inform institutional decisions while tracking progress toward inclusion goals.

1.4 Practical Recommendations

- **Implementing self-identification systems** enables students and staff to indicate gender identity and chosen names on internal platforms, independent of national legal frameworks. Such systems should be user-friendly, confidential, and integrated across all relevant institutional databases and communications.
- **Mandating inclusion training** for all university personnel ensures that academic, administrative, and leadership staff develop necessary competencies for supporting LGBTQIA+ community members. Training should be regular, comprehensive, and tailored to different roles and responsibilities within the institution.
- **Developing and disseminating inclusive language guidelines** creates institutional standards that support non-discriminatory, affirming communication. Comprehensive glossaries and style guides should cover all forms of institutional communication, from official correspondence to social media presence.

- **Reforming curriculum accreditation standards** can integrate gender and sexual diversity into course evaluation and program accreditation criteria, encouraging interdisciplinary and inclusive content across academic programs.
- **Ensuring inclusive facilities and infrastructure** requires providing gender-neutral restrooms, adapting housing policies to reflect diverse needs, and ensuring that signage and digital systems reflect inclusive terminology and assumptions.
- **Creating feedback channels and reporting mechanisms** establishes safe, confidential systems for addressing discrimination, misgendering, or harassment. Response protocols should be trauma-informed, supportive, and linked to meaningful institutional action.
- **Celebrating visibility and belonging** through events such as LGBTQIA+ History Month, Pride activities, or Trans Awareness Week demonstrates institutional commitment while providing opportunities for community building and education.
- **Developing external partnerships** strengthens institutional capacity while extending impact beyond campus boundaries. Collaborations with LGBTQIA+ organizations can enhance programming, provide expertise, and create accountability mechanisms that ensure ongoing responsiveness to community needs.
- **Training in active listening, empathy, and affirmation practices** helps faculty and staff develop skills for genuine inclusion. Structured techniques emphasizing validation over assumptions can transform daily interactions while creating safer spaces for all community members.

2. Non-violent, Effective and Inclusive Institutional Communication - KU

2.1 Conceptual Frameworks

Institutional communication represents far more than information transfer; it constitutes a fundamental practice that shapes relationships, culture, and power dynamics within higher education institutions. To be non-violent, effective, and inclusive, communication must avoid harmful language while actively promoting respect, dignity, clarity, and belonging. This requires sustained reflection on how institutions speak, write, and represent themselves, and whether such practices reinforce or challenge structural inequalities.

At the heart of inclusive communication **lies recognition of language as both empowering and excluding**. Language frames realities, influences perceptions, and constructs meaning in ways that can either welcome or alienate community members. Students, faculty, staff, and leadership must therefore cultivate literacy in inclusive vocabulary, ethics, and context-sensitive messaging. This involves not only adopting appropriate terminology but also developing competence to affirm identity, respect diversity, and build trust among diverse stakeholders.

The **dismantling of communicative violence represents** an equally important dimension of inclusive communication. Subtle harms such as microaggressions, dismissive tones, or erasure of marginalized groups often surface in bureaucratic correspondence, policies, or public statements. HEIs should therefore train academic and administrative actors to identify bias in speech and writing while fostering dialogue where differences can be acknowledged without hostility. Raising awareness of such invisible violence proves crucial for shaping safe, supportive institutional cultures.

Inclusive communication must also **embrace intersectionality**, ensuring that messages reflect the diversity of audiences and recognize overlapping categories of identity such as gender, race, disability, religion, and socioeconomic background. Communication strategies that affirm gender inclusivity while ignoring accessibility needs reproduce exclusion rather than addressing it comprehensively. Embedding intersectionality ensures that communication remains sensitive to compounded vulnerabilities while enabling diverse publics to access and engage with institutional messages.

The **broader social and institutional context** significantly influences communication practices. Bureaucratic traditions often employ technical language that alienates recipients. As social actors, HEIs have responsibilities to model ethical communication that counters discrimination while promoting inclusion across diverse communities.

Affirmative practice represents another core element of inclusive communication—the intentional use of language to validate identity and encourage constructive engagement. This includes addressing people correctly by name and pronoun, using accessible formats, and maintaining responsive feedback channels. Institutions should adopt clear protocols for preventing symbolic violence in digital environments where miscommunication frequently occurs.

This framework addresses three key dimensions of institutional life. For people in the academy, **inclusive communication** means that students receive clear and respectful messages about academic and social life through transparent information and affirming recognition of identities. Academics should feel confident that their work and identities receive fair representation while being equipped to support students effectively through inclusive communication practices. Administrative staff must communicate respectfully and clearly in all daily interactions while having their own identities recognized within institutional policies.

In **teaching content and pedagogy**, inclusive communication concerns both what is conveyed and how it is presented. Learning materials should be accessible, culturally sensitive, and free from exclusionary language. Educators must model respectful dialogue, attentive listening, and constructive feedback while fostering safe participation and open inquiry. Curricula should integrate reflection on communication as a social practice, encouraging students to critique dominant narratives while practicing inclusive discourse.

At the **governance and public representation level**, inclusive communication requires transparency in decision-making, accountability in messaging, and representation of diverse voices in policy articulation. Communication must be proactive, informing and consulting community members rather than issuing directives. Externally, HEIs must ensure that public representation reflects institutional diversity rather than privileging dominant groups, recognizing that communication is never neutral and addressing power imbalances accordingly.

2.2 Good practices

AT A GLANCE - Good Practices in this Area:

- Inclusive Communication Policies and Guidelines
- Transparent Governance Communication
- Staff and Faculty Training in Non-violent Communication
- Accessible and Inclusive Campus Communication
- Feedback and Reporting Mechanisms
- Regular Climate Surveys and Accountability Measures

Higher Education Institutions across Europe have begun implementing promising practices that advance non-violent, effective, and inclusive institutional communication. These initiatives demonstrate how intentional policies, training programs, and accountability mechanisms can foster clarity, respect, and belonging in both internal and external communication.

Inclusive Communication Policies and Guidelines

- Ensure all official correspondence, teaching materials, publications, and social media adopt inclusive language
- Example: University of Vienna comprehensive inclusive language guidelines:

- Gender-sensitive language requirements
 - Accessible format standards
 - Training resources for staff
 - Accountability mechanisms for compliance
- Position communication as shared responsibility for promoting inclusion and reducing symbolic violence

Transparent Governance Communication

- Build trust through accountability while avoiding top-down directives
- Example: University of Helsinki participatory model for institutional announcements:
 - Consultation processes for community feedback on draft policies
 - Accessible summaries in plain language
 - Multilingual outreach (Finnish, Swedish, English)
 - Digital platforms enabling ongoing dialogue
- Reduce communication hierarchies while affirming community members as active participants

Staff and Faculty Training in Non-violent Communication

- Equip personnel with tools to avoid communicative harms
- Example: University of Amsterdam regular workshop program:
 - Active listening skills development
 - Bias awareness training
 - Constructive feedback techniques
 - Conflict mediation approaches
- Enhance institutional culture ensuring daily interactions reflect non-violence and respect

Accessible and Inclusive Campus Communication

- Ensure all communication channels remain available to diverse community members
- Key implementation elements:
 - Web accessibility standards compliance
 - Easy-to-read document summaries for complex policies
 - Sign language interpretation and captioning services
 - Visual representation depicting diverse identities
- Guarantee communication reaches and affirms all community members regardless of ability or background

Feedback and Reporting Mechanisms

- Create safe channels for addressing harmful communication with clear follow-up protocols
- Example: University of Copenhagen online feedback portal:
 - Confidential reporting system
 - Responsive action through inclusion office review
 - Transparency through annual progress reports
- Strengthen accountability while signalling institutional commitment to non-violent communication

Regular Climate Surveys and Accountability Measures

- Monitor communication inclusivity while identifying systemic issues
- Example: University of Barcelona biannual communication climate surveys:
 - Clarity of governance messages assessment
 - Respect in classroom and administrative interactions evaluation
 - Experiences of microaggressions or exclusion tracking
 - Accessibility of information channels review
- Survey findings inform training programs, policy revisions, and leadership accountability

2.3 Strategic paths

To institutionalize non-violent, effective, and inclusive communication, HEIs can pursue the following strategic paths:

- **Establish Policy and Governance Frameworks:** Create comprehensive institutional policies providing foundation for inclusive communication through official guidelines covering language, representation, and communication ethics integrated into broader diversity and equity strategies.
- **Build Institutional Accountability Structures:** Develop systems ensuring that inclusion efforts receive ongoing attention and resources through communication advisory groups with meaningful representation in decision-making processes and specialized personnel with mandates related to inclusive communication.
- **Foster a Culture of Reflexivity and Learning:** Promote campus culture where all community members are encouraged to reflect on their communication practices, biases, and roles in shaping inclusive university environments through sustained institutional support.
- **Integrate Inclusive Communication into Mission Statements:** Signal institutional commitment by explicitly referencing communication ethics and inclusive practices in strategic plans, equality charters, and public values statements to ensure centrality rather than peripherality.
- **Develop Alliances with External Communication Experts:** Collaborate with local and national organizations specializing in inclusive communication to offer expertise, co-develop training programs, and ensure accountability of university efforts.
- **Invest in Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** Systematically collect data on communication experiences and climate through regular surveys, feedback mechanisms, and assessment tools to inform policy development and track progress toward inclusion goals.

2.4 Practical Recommendations

Based on the identified strategic paths, the following practical steps are recommended:

- **Normalize Pronoun Sharing:** Incorporate pronouns in introductions, email signatures, and name tags while creating environments where sharing is welcomed rather than imposed, supported by clear institutional guidance.
- **Avoid Presumptive Language:** Use inclusive terms like "student," "colleague," or "partner" to prevent alienation while demonstrating respect for diverse experiences and identities.
- **Reform Administrative Communication:** Ensure all systems, forms, and platforms accommodate self-defined gender identities and chosen names through updated database categories and procedural language.
- **Implement Inclusive Campus Signage:** Use clear, respectful language and symbols throughout campus spaces that reflect institutional values while helping community members navigate environments safely.
- **Center Affirmation over Correction:** Focus communication responses on respect and learning rather than defensiveness when mistakes occur, maintaining accountability while moving forward constructively.

- **Adapt Accessible Communication Formats:** Avoid academic jargon and overly formal language, creating welcoming engagement rather than barriers to participation.
- **Build Structured Feedback Opportunities:** Create regular mechanisms for community input on communication practices, demonstrating institutional responsiveness to needs and concerns.
- **Prepare Empathetic Crisis Communication:** Ensure incident responses emphasize empathy, speed, clarity, and accountability while providing appropriate support resources for affected communities.
- **Use Authentic Inclusive Imagery:** Reflect community diversity in visual communications through representation that goes beyond tokenism to genuine inclusion.
- **Learn from Communication Mistakes:** Acknowledge errors publicly, explain corrections clearly, and outline improvement actions to demonstrate commitment to continuous learning and accountability.

3. The question of effective representation and institutional level - AUTH

3.1 Conceptual Frameworks

Many Higher Education Institutions across the European Union have made formal commitments to incorporate Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policies. However, the lived realities of LGBTQI+ students and staff continue to reflect significant gaps between policy aspirations and practice. A vital and often neglected component of genuinely inclusive and pluralistic higher education spaces involves effective, respectful, and comprehensive representation of marginalized identities that extends far beyond numerical presence.

Representation in this context must be reconceptualized to encompass **meaningful enhancement of LGBTQI+ voices within institutions**, empowering individuals to contribute authentically to academic life. This participation extends from curriculum design and governing structures to research agenda development, substantive decision-making processes, and visible engagement in campus services, unions, and committees. Additionally, effective representation must consider the variety of identities and their intersections within individual experiences, recognizing that multiple discrimination grounds intensify oppression.

Meaningful representation moves beyond symbolic gestures of tokenism or superficial inclusion by effectively shifting power dynamics in aspects of academic life where LGBTQI+ students and staff have historically been underrepresented, silenced, or dismissed. By reflecting **actual structural inclusion and power redistribution**, **LGBTQI+ individuals** become not merely acknowledged but empowered to participate actively in shaping their academic environments. Consequently, effective representation becomes a crucial pillar in transforming HEIs toward truly pluralistic communities.

Representation also encompasses **visibility in curricula, research, and extracurricular activities**. These dimensions prove vital not only for LGBTQI+ individuals but for entire institutional communities, demonstrating institutional commitment to discovering new realities and perspectives beyond established assumptions.

LGBTQI+ representation in HEIs refers to **unrestricted visibility and inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals across all academic positions and institutional levels**, from students to teaching and administrative staff. This representation must be substantive rather than superficial, providing genuine opportunities for influence and leadership.

DEI policies encompass initiatives implemented to promote fairness while **reducing discrimination against marginalized groups**. In an era where such commitments face challenges globally, the European Union's dedication to these principles becomes increasingly important as a counterbalance and paradigm for democratic leadership.

Tokenism represents perfunctory policies or actions superficially implemented to prevent criticism while creating illusions of diversity without meaningful change. Genuine representation requires moving beyond tokenistic gestures toward structural transformation.

Intersectionality (see Glossary) describes interconnected ways in which multiple identities intersect within individual experiences, creating overlapping realities of oppression that require comprehensive rather than single-issue approaches to inclusion.

3.2

3.3 Good practices

AT A GLANCE - Good Practices in this Area:

- LGBTQI+ Staff and Student Unions
- LGBTQI+ Advisory Boards
- Curriculum Reform Initiatives
- Dedicated Leadership Positions
- Specialized Mental Health Support
- Comprehensive DEI Initiatives
- Coalition Building with External Organizations

Effective LGBTQI+ representation requires not only including individuals within existing structures but transforming those structures to redistribute power, recognize difference, and cultivate genuinely pluralistic academic communities. Universities have implemented various measures and practices to promote authentic representation while avoiding tokenism (see Glossary).

LGBTQI+ Staff and Student Unions

- Organizations comprised of LGBTQI+ individuals providing specialized expertise
- Key functions include:
 - Addressing homophobic or transphobic discrimination within institutions
 - Drawing upon members' lived experiences of LGBTQI+ identity
 - Recognizing intricate ways heteronormative power structures create challenges
 - Providing culturally competent support and advocacy services

LGBTQI+ Advisory Boards

- Leadership structures with genuine decision-making authority
- Characteristics include:
 - Led by LGBTQI+ academic or administrative staff
 - Integration of LGBTQI+ perspectives into university governance
 - Function as knowledge resources for institutional policy development
 - Active participation in promoting inclusive practices throughout institutions

Curriculum Reform Initiatives

- Integration of LGBTQI+ perspectives across academic disciplines
- Implementation approaches:
 - Courses led by LGBTQI+ faculty members
 - Advisory board assistance in redesigning curricula
 - Challenge marginalization of queer knowledge
 - Information systems making LGBTQI+-related courses accessible across faculties
 - Explicit institutional stance supporting LGBTQI+ rights

Dedicated Leadership Positions

- Specialized roles focusing on LGBTQI+ inclusivity

- Examples include:
 - Vice Dean or Vice Rector positions for LGBTQI+ inclusivity
 - Student union board members addressing discrimination
 - Leadership roles facilitating amplification of LGBTQI+ voices
 - Positions driving systemic change and addressing inclusion gaps

Specialized Mental Health Support

- Services recognizing complex effects of discrimination on mental health
- Key features:
 - Support facilities staffed by LGBTQI+ mental health experts
 - Understanding of intersectional impacts of multiple identities
 - Culturally competent guidance and assistance
 - Recognition of compounded effects of homophobia and transphobia

Comprehensive DEI Initiatives

- Programs challenging heteronormative power structures
- Components include:
 - Amplification of LGBTQI+ presence in academic environments
 - Institutional stance against discrimination and harassment
 - Collaborative events demonstrating non-neutrality regarding discrimination
 - Efforts to prevent and address discriminatory acts and speech

Coalition Building with External Organizations

- Partnerships extending institutional impact beyond campus
- Benefits include:
 - Knowledge exchange with LGBTQI+ NGOs and organizations
 - Awareness raising on LGBTQI+ issues
 - Demonstration of institutional commitment to broader social justice
 - Collaborative events showing institutional non-neutrality toward discrimination

3.4 Strategic paths

To strengthen effective LGBTQI+ representation at institutional levels within HEIs, strategic interventions can pursue the following pathways:

- **Integrate LGBTQI+ Inclusion as Foundational Principles:** Embed inclusion and diversity within university charters, strategic plans, and quality assurance frameworks to provide institutional commitment supporting subsequent policies while ensuring continuity beyond leadership changes.
- **Establish Participatory Governance Structures:** Create meaningful representation in decision-making bodies with substantive influence rather than symbolic presence through designated seats, inclusive criteria, and permanent LGBTQI+ councils enabling continuous dialogue.
- **Foster a Culture of Capacity Building:** Promote comprehensive training programs for university staff and students on LGBTQI+ issues, inclusive language, and intersectionality co-designed with LGBTQI+ professionals and embedded within professional development frameworks.

- **Develop Leadership Pathways and Networks:** Create opportunities for increasing numbers of openly LGBTQI+ individuals in decision-making roles through mentoring programs, affirmative visibility policies, and specialized support networks.
- **Invest in Coalition-Building and External Partnerships:** Establish consortia at national and European levels for knowledge sharing, curriculum co-design, and policy advocacy to enhance visibility and strengthen collective impact.
- **Implement Data Collection and Accountability Systems:** Systematically collect information on LGBTQI+ representation, experiences, and needs to enable evidence-based policy design while ensuring transparent reporting and co-management with LGBTQI+ stakeholders.

3.5 Practical Recommendations

Based on the identified strategies for effective representation, the following practical steps are recommended:

- **Establish Funded LGBTQI+ Advisory Bodies:** Create formalized structures with decision-making authority including both student and staff representation, ensuring secure institutional funding rather than temporary resource dependence.
- **Ensure Governance Participation:** Guarantee LGBTQI+ representation in key decision-making structures through designated seats or inclusive recruitment processes encompassing multiple institutional levels.
- **Implement Inclusive Recruitment and Promotion:** Review procedures to eliminate bias while adopting affirmative action plans increasing LGBTQI+ participation, particularly in leadership positions with historically limited representation.
- **Provide Continuous Training Programs:** Offer mandatory and voluntary training adapted to specific stakeholder groups, developing competencies in LGBTQI+ inclusivity, intersectionality, and anti-discrimination practices with recognition mechanisms incentivizing participation.
- **Create Safe Reporting Systems:** Establish visible, accessible, and confidential mechanisms for addressing discrimination or harassment, ensuring adequately trained staff manage systems with consideration for specialized ombudsperson roles.
- **Promote Visibility through Communication:** Highlight LGBTQI+ achievements, events, and role models via official channels using inclusive language while ensuring visibility during significant awareness periods.
- **Develop External Partnerships:** Collaborate with LGBTQI+ organizations and stakeholders for campaign development, internships, and expert involvement, increasing impact and credibility while providing external accountability.
- **Monitor Progress through Data Collection:** Conduct regular surveys and needs assessments using results to inform institutional planning with public reporting demonstrating accountability while maintaining confidentiality.
- **Integrate Curricular Perspectives:** Encourage departments to mainstream LGBTQI+ viewpoints across disciplines while supporting specialized courses, providing incentives for interdisciplinary teaching and identity-focused student projects.

4. Regulatory instruments and tools, the relevance of the Third mission of HEI - UNISI

4.1 Conceptual Frameworks

Higher Education Institutions today increasingly embrace plurality while recognizing sexual orientation and gender identity as integral components of institutional diversity. This recognition aligns with international understanding that beyond teaching and research, HEIs possess a "Third Mission" involving social engagement for inclusive societal transformation that extends institutional impact beyond traditional academic boundaries.

Plurality in this context encompasses **cultivating environments where multiple identities coexist** and receive respect without hierarchy or marginalization. This framework extends from rejecting heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions (see Glossary) to actively institutionalizing intersectionality (see Glossary), acknowledging how gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and other identities overlap in complex lived experiences.

Higher education institutions represent complex organizations where diverse needs of teaching, research, and community engagement must find adequate space and recognition. The **regulatory framework structure becomes essential for guaranteeing that plurality and diversity** become embedded in institutional daily life rather than remaining aspirational goals. Both binding rules and non-binding guidelines require careful formulation to ensure full respect for European Union non-discrimination principles.

The regulatory framework encompasses elements **referring not only to governance and strategic planning but also activities concerning communication, teaching, and student services**. Six main areas require inclusion of plurality and diversity principles to enhance institutional capacity for contributing to societal transformation toward more inclusive communities aligned with European values on democracy and fundamental rights.

Recognition of non-discrimination principles based on gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation must be embedded within regulatory frameworks including institutional statutes, codes of ethics, conduct codes, and disciplinary procedures. This recognition provides legal foundation for all subsequent inclusion efforts.

Establishment of **specific governing bodies** aimed at supporting LGBTQIA+ communities within institutions through observatories, counseling services, and advocacy offices creates structural support for inclusion initiatives while providing ongoing institutional capacity for addressing community needs.

Development of **adequate and effective reporting systems** for addressing homophobia, transphobia, and invisible discrimination within institutions ensures that harmful behaviors receive appropriate responses while creating safer environments for all community members.

Implementation of communication guidelines and regulations requiring plural-affirming language across all administrative spheres establishes standards for respectful interaction while preventing exclusionary practices in institutional discourse.

Normative support for **curriculum inclusivity models** such as awareness-building approaches that avoid discriminatory language, integration of LGBTQ+ content and role models, critical engagement with heteronormative assumptions, and development of institutional allyship provides educational foundation for broader cultural transformation.

Financial framework integration ensures that promotion of plurality receives adequate budgetary support through transparent allocation of resources to structures and initiatives addressing discrimination and invisible homophobia, demonstrating genuine institutional commitment rather than symbolic gestures.

4.2 Good practices

AT A GLANCE - Good Practices in this Area:

- Institutional Leadership and Advocacy
- Safe Zone Implementation
- Gender-Affirming Infrastructure
- Pedagogical Innovation Programs
- Discipline-Sensitive Curriculum Integration
- Intersectional Programming Approaches

Drawing from international experiences, numerous HEIs demonstrate how regulatory instruments can be effectively operationalized to foster LGBTQ+ inclusion. These cases highlight the interplay of policy, pedagogy, infrastructure, and community engagement in constructing affirming and pluralistic university environments.

Institutional Leadership and Advocacy

- Robust institutional commitment through visible public support
- Example: Southern Cross University (Australia) model:
 - Public advocacy for LGBTQIA+ rights and events
 - Visible executive support for community initiatives
 - Establishment of ally networks interfacing governance and community stakeholders
 - Public-facing institutional voice normalizing LGBTQIA+ inclusion
 - Executive champions driving cultural transformation

Safe Zone Implementation

- Symbolic and practical approaches to creating affirming environments
- Example: Safe Zone Model (Florida State University, USA):
 - Visible "Safe Zone" markers denoting affirming spaces
 - Institutional commitments to educational workshops
 - Resource allocation for inclusion initiatives
 - Peer ally training programs
 - Integration of LGBTQIA+ support into everyday campus life

Gender-Affirming Infrastructure

- Physical spaces and services supporting diverse identities
- Key components include:
 - Gender-affirming restrooms and housing policies
 - Dedicated LGBTQIA+ resource centers providing multiple services
 - Mentorship programs and mental health counseling
 - Safe social spaces fostering resilience amid intersectional marginalizations
 - Infrastructure visibly affirming diverse identities

Pedagogical Innovation Programs

- Integration of queer pedagogies in educational practice
- Example: University of Warwick's "Queering University" initiative:
 - Systematic encouragement of inclusive teaching practices

- Pastoral care improvements for LGBTQIA+ students
- Institutional culture shifts dismantling barriers
- Multi-faceted approach spanning curricular content and support networks
- Community-informed model of pluralistic inclusion

Discipline-Sensitive Curriculum Integration

- Comprehensive approaches to inclusive content across academic programs
- Example: University of Birmingham LGBTQ inclusion project:
 - Student-led, discipline-sensitive integration approaches
 - Evidence-based best practice guides
 - Transformative pedagogy challenging heteronormativity
 - Critical awareness fostering among students and staff
 - Movement beyond additive inclusion toward systemic change

Intersectional Programming Approaches

- Recognition of compounded realities and multiple marginalization
- Key principles include:
 - Acknowledgment that inclusion strategies must transcend homogenizing frameworks
 - Attention to individuals navigating multiple points of marginalization
 - Comprehensive approaches addressing systemic exclusions
 - Avoidance of limited reach through single-issue frameworks
 - Integration of mutually reinforcing policy, pedagogical, and infrastructure elements

However, persistent challenges highlighted in global literature emphasize ensuring that inclusion strategies transcend homogenizing LGBTQ+ identity frameworks to engage intersectionality meaningfully. Without acknowledging compounded realities faced by individuals navigating multiple points of marginalization alongside queer and trans identities, well-intentioned efforts risk limited reach while failing to address systemic exclusions comprehensively.

Thus, effective practices involve a constellation of mutually reinforcing elements: comprehensive policies explicitly embracing sexual orientation and gender identity protections, pedagogical models that integrate queer perspectives with critical rigor, infrastructure that visibly affirms diverse identities, community-building and advocacy networks, and continuous dialogue with affected individuals and communities to refine responsiveness and relevance.

4.3 Strategic paths

To harness the full potential of regulatory instruments within HEIs for fostering pluralistic, LGBTQIA+ affirming environments, comprehensive strategic frameworks can pursue the following pathways:

- **Establish Institutional Leadership Frameworks:** Ensure LGBTQIA+ inclusion becomes embedded within governance structures rather than remaining peripheral to institutional priorities through strategic direction from executive levels shaping resource allocation and accountability mechanisms.
- **Implement Intersectional Strategic Planning:** Integrate approaches recognizing that LGBTQIA+ identities intersect with ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics requiring nuanced programming and equitable resource distribution addressing multiple marginalizations.
- **Foster a Culture of Comprehensive Capacity Building:** Promote ongoing mandatory training tailored to diverse institutional roles, creating allyship skills, cultural competency, and policy literacy through co-designed content shaped by LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities.

- **Integrate Curriculum Transformation into Core Mission:** Require institutional incentives and support for faculty champions integrating LGBTQIA+ perspectives throughout disciplinary content, moving beyond tokenistic references toward critical examination of heteronormativity.
- **Develop Gender-Affirming Infrastructure as Institutional Priority:** Create comprehensive facilities including appropriate restrooms, housing options, health services, and counseling centers that materialize institutional values while tangibly improving community wellbeing.
- **Extend Third Mission Engagement Beyond Campus:** Expand inclusion efforts through community partnerships and advocacy initiatives, enabling continuous engagement with local LGBTQIA+ organizations, legal advocacy groups, and international networks.

4.4 Practical Recommendations

Based on the identified regulatory frameworks and strategic approaches, the following practical steps are recommended:

- **Draft Comprehensive Non-Discrimination Policies:** Develop explicit policies addressing sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression across all institutional aspects including employment, admissions, housing, facilities, curriculum, and social life to establish legal foundation for inclusion efforts.
- **Create Funded LGBTQ+ Resource Centers:** Establish centers offering culturally competent, intersectional support recognizing diverse community needs, including specialized services for individuals facing multiple forms of marginalization simultaneously.
- **Implement Universal Personnel Training:** Provide mandatory training in inclusive language use, best practices for supporting LGBTQ+ populations, and intersectional identity understanding, incorporating programs into professional development and onboarding processes.
- **Integrate Transformative Curriculum Models:** Embed LGBTQ+ content across academic disciplines using approaches emphasizing awareness-building, additive inclusion, and transformative practice ensuring diverse identity representation throughout educational programming.
- **Establish Gender-Affirming Physical Infrastructure:** Create inclusive restrooms, housing options, and support facilities providing tangible support for gender-diverse community members while demonstrating institutional commitment through concrete resource allocation.
- **Develop Leadership and Mentorship Programs:** Foster programs supporting intersectional identities while encouraging student empowerment to lead inclusion efforts, building institutional capacity for community-driven initiatives.
- **Build Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:** Engage in collaborations within and beyond campus advancing broader societal equity while fulfilling Third Mission responsibilities through advocacy and knowledge sharing with external organizations.
- **Implement Assessment and Refinement Systems:** Conduct regular institutional research meaningfully involving LGBTQ+ students and staff voices to ensure policies remain relevant, effective, and responsive to community experiences while tracking progress toward inclusion goals.

5 Integration Across the Four Areas

The four areas addressed in this Vademecum—inclusive higher education, non-violent communication, effective representation, and regulatory frameworks—represent interconnected dimensions of institutional transformation rather than isolated initiatives. Successful implementation requires recognition of how these areas reinforce each other in creating genuinely pluralistic academic environments.

Inclusive higher education provides the foundational understanding and cultural framework necessary for meaningful change, while non-violent communication ensures that this foundation translates into respectful daily

interactions and institutional discourse. Effective representation guarantees that LGBTQIA+ voices shape the transformation process rather than merely receiving its benefits, and comprehensive regulatory frameworks institutionalize change through policies and structures that sustain progress beyond individual champions or temporary initiatives.

The intersection of these areas reveals several critical success factors. Leadership commitment must be visible, consistent, and backed by adequate resources across all institutional levels. Intersectional approaches must recognize the complexity of individual experiences while avoiding homogenizing assumptions about LGBTQIA+ communities. Community engagement should involve LGBTQIA+ individuals as partners in designing and implementing change rather than passive beneficiaries of institutional decisions.

Accountability mechanisms must span all four areas, linking policy development to cultural change and individual actions to institutional outcomes. This requires data collection systems that respect privacy while enabling evidence-based evaluation of progress, feedback channels that encourage honest communication about institutional shortcomings, and transparent reporting that demonstrates commitment to continuous improvement.

Implementation Priorities and Sequencing

While institutions may begin their inclusion journey at different points depending on existing capacity and resources, certain foundational elements prove essential for sustainable transformation. Establishing clear policy frameworks provides legal foundation and institutional commitment that supports subsequent initiatives. Building leadership capacity ensures that change efforts receive adequate support and resources while modeling inclusive behavior throughout institutional hierarchies.

Developing community partnerships creates accountability mechanisms while providing expertise that enhances institutional efforts. Training programs build individual competencies while contributing to cultural transformation that makes policy implementation more effective and sustainable.

However, successful implementation requires avoiding linear approaches that delay action until perfect conditions exist. Instead, institutions should pursue multiple initiatives simultaneously while recognizing that progress in one area supports advancement in others. For example, communication training enhances representation efforts by building skills for meaningful participation, while policy development provides framework for addressing issues identified through improved communication.

Measuring Success and Sustainability

Evaluating progress in LGBTQIA+ inclusion requires comprehensive approaches that assess both quantitative outcomes and qualitative experiences. Quantitative measures might include demographic representation in leadership positions, participation rates in inclusion training programs, utilization of support services, and policy implementation metrics across institutional departments.

Qualitative assessment should examine campus climate through regular surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews that capture community experiences of safety, belonging, and empowerment. Such assessment must be conducted with appropriate ethical safeguards while ensuring that evaluation processes themselves contribute to inclusion rather than creating additional burdens for marginalized communities.

Sustainability requires embedding inclusion within core institutional functions rather than treating it as supplementary programming dependent on temporary funding or individual champions. This involves integrating

SOGI considerations into strategic planning processes, budget allocation decisions, personnel evaluation criteria, and quality assurance mechanisms.

Long-term success also depends on developing institutional capacity for adaptation as social understanding of gender and sexuality continues to evolve. Rather than viewing inclusion as a fixed destination, institutions should cultivate learning cultures that remain responsive to emerging needs while building upon established foundations of respect and equity.

Conclusion

Creating Higher Education Institutions that genuinely embrace plurality regarding sexual orientation and gender identity requires comprehensive transformation that addresses policy, culture, communication, representation, and regulatory frameworks simultaneously. This Vademecum provides evidence-based guidance for institutions committed to moving beyond symbolic gestures toward structural change that redistributes power, amplifies marginalized voices, and embeds inclusion as a core institutional value.

The frameworks, practices, and recommendations presented here represent collaborative work across European universities committed to advancing LGBTQIA+ rights and social justice in higher education. However, implementation must be adapted to specific institutional contexts, national legal frameworks, and community needs while maintaining focus on genuine transformation rather than superficial compliance.

Success in this endeavor requires sustained commitment from institutional leadership, meaningful participation from LGBTQIA+ communities, adequate resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms that ensure continued progress. Most importantly, it demands recognition that creating inclusive institutions benefits not only marginalized communities but enhances the educational experience and social impact of higher education for all community members.

This work contributes to broader European commitments to democracy, human rights, and social justice while positioning higher education institutions as leaders in creating more equitable societies. As institutions implement these guidelines, they join a growing movement of educational leaders committed to ensuring that all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, can thrive in environments that respect their dignity, value their contributions, and support their full participation in academic and social life.

The journey toward genuinely inclusive higher education requires courage, persistence, and collaboration. This Vademecum provides tools and inspiration for that journey while recognizing that the destination—institutions where all individuals can flourish authentically—remains worthy of our sustained commitment and continued effort.



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combat invisible discrimination related to LGBTQ+

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