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# The School Equality Map

The Evolution of the Polish  
LGBTIQ+ School Ranking



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The executor of this research paper is the GrowSPACE Foundation, which is the operator of the LGBTIQ+ Friendly Schools Ranking. This report is published by Forbidden Colours vzw.

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# INTRODUCTION

## LGBTIQ+ Teenagers Engage



The LGBTQ + Friendly Schools Ranking was created for the first time in 2018 and was initiated by Dominik Kuc, who was back then still a pupil at one of Warsaw's high schools. In 2021, thanks to the funding from Forbidden Colours and ILGA-Europe, the first nationwide edition of the study took place.

Initially, the aim of the study was to systematise and analyse the situation of LGBTQ+ people in particular schools, intended to serve pupils during recruitment to secondary schools. Along with the development of the research team and the growing interest in the research, the Ranking was expanded to cover the entire country and achieved great success - 22,000 answers from pupils were collected in the nationwide edition. Based on the results, the Ranking is created each year and the 10 most tolerant schools in Poland are prized with Equality Diplomas.

Since 2015, the Polish government has been waging several campaigns against the LGBTIQ+ community. In 2019, over 130 local entities declared themselves 'LGBT Free Zones'. During the presidential election campaign of 2020, PiS-candidate, and current president, Andrzej Duda called the LGBTIQ+ community an "*ideology worse than communism*".

Initiatives to increase inclusivity of LGBTIQ+ pupils at schools have received plenty of attacks over the last year. An event to raise attention for the LGBTIQ+ communities at schools, called “Rainbow Friday”, has received a lot of criticism by the ultraconservative government. In 2019, Deputy Prime Minister Jacek Sasin warned that “indoctrination should not be allowed, especially in schools”. He suggested that “it is necessary to seriously consider whether the state should introduce regulations” to prevent schools from participating in such events in future.

In 2021, Poland’s Education Minister Przemyslaw Czarnek has called LGBTIQ+ people an “insult to public morality”. In 2022, the Polish Lower House (Sejm) has voted on an education reform that will prevent LGBTIQ+ inclusive education to organise workshops in Polish schools.

It is within this context, that the success of the Equality Map should be seen. In 2019, founder Dominik Kuc was listed as ‘25 under 25’ by Forbes & McKinsey. In 2021, the team behind the Equality Map received the Equality Crown by the Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH).

## **Ranking over the years 2018-2021**

### **2018**

The first edition of the Ranking was created as a completely bottom-up, pupil initiative in the form of an online quantitative research. The tool consists of 31 single-choice closed questions, and the most important leveling determinants are: presence and visibility of LGBTIQ+ people in a given school community; cases of discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people in the school space; declarative opinions of pupils about LGBTIQ+ people; observable attitude of teachers and female teachers towards the LGBTIQ+ community.

Over 4,000 people participate in the study. Pupils from all over Warsaw, and 51 schools receive a representative number of responses – at least 50 correctly completed questionnaires.

### **2019**

During the second, Warsaw edition of the Ranking, over 6,000 answers were collected. For comparative reasons, the research method has not been changed, and the questionnaire has been shortened to 23 single-choice closed questions. 51 schools located in Warsaw again qualified for the ranking.

The 10 most tolerant institutions were awarded with Equality Diplomas, and the Ranking was held for the first time under the honorary patronage of the Mayor of the City Rafał Trzaskowski. The initiative was also awarded by Gazeta Wyborcza and Natwest LGBTQ+ Business Awards.

*“Our commitment to promoting the Ranking is not just news. By publicising the articles and results of the ranking, we provide information and put pressure on educators, local governments and government officials to introduce the equality policy into the education system” – journalist, NaTemat (translated from Polish).*

## **2020**

Due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, in 2020 the Ranking was replaced by a comparative study (both quantitative and qualitative) monitoring the situation of LGBTIQ+ people during lockdown and remote learning. The results of these edition are excluded from a comparative analysis.

## **2021**

In 2021, the first nationwide edition of the LGBTIQ+ Friendly Schools Ranking took place. Survey responses were provided by a total of slightly over 22 thousands pupils from Polish schools. During rewarding ceremonies in the winning institutions, the 10 most tolerant schools were prized with Equality Diplomas, signed by local governments and partner organisations.

The Ranking team was also awarded the Equality Crown in the Equal Treatment category, as one of the most important initiatives supporting the LGBTIQ+ community in 2021.

*“It is not that the same schools occupy the top positions every year. In my opinion, this proves that more and more schools are open to LGBTQ + youth and that providing these people with a sense of security is becoming a norm in an increasing number of schools.” – teacher in one of the TOP10 Schools (translated from Polish).*

## **Team**

The operator of the LGBTIQ+ Friendly Schools Ranking is the Growspace Foundation.

Dominik Kuc is the founder of the LGBTIQ+ Friendly School Ranking since 2018. He was Awarded in Forbes 25 under 25, 'Supporting Diversity' category.

Agata Zapora is a social researcher and activist for the promotion of diversity and anti-discrimination education. In the Ranking team, she is responsible for content coordination.

Ewa Ulicz is a social researcher and activist for well-being in the workplace. In the Ranking team, she is responsible for the technical side of the project.

In addition to the core team, the Ranking was also carried out by a promotional team: social media coordinator, graphic designer, an 8-person regional team as well as 3 IT specialists.



# METHOD

## Social Research For Change



After two years of pilot studies in Warsaw, work began on the nationwide edition of the LGBTQ + Friendly Schools Ranking.

***The main objectives of the yearly repeated study are:***

- Diagnosing the situation of LGBTQ + people in secondary schools all over Poland;
- Equipping young people with an additional criterion for selecting a secondary school at the recruitment stage;
- Selecting and awarding the most tolerant centres in the country, thus showing the good practises applied in them;
- Determination of the regions where the situation of LGBTQ + youth is particularly difficult - serving as information in which parts of the country anti-discrimination measures are particularly needed;
- Motivating the school communities to take up the topic of tolerance and safety of LGBTQ + people in the school space.

*“When I applied to secondary schools, I chose only those that have a friendly attitude in the Ranking - thanks to this, I knew how I would be treated as a transgender person at school” – LGBTIQ+ pupil (18 years old).*

## **Methodology and course of the study**

The survey was carried out via a website dedicated to the project - <https://maparownosci.pl/>, on which an interactive map was placed, containing every post-primary school in Poland. The entire research was quantitative. Pupils selected their institution using the search engine, and then answered 17 survey questions. The most important determinants of the Ranking were: visibility of LGBTQ + people in the school space; the incidence of any kind of discrimination against LGBTQ + people; engagement and attitudes of the teachers and the school staff for LGBTQ+ persons as well as systemic questions (for instance: proms, usage of preferred pronouns, Rainbow Friday etc.).

The survey was opened on 11th of April 2021 and until its closure, on 30th of May 2021, a total of slightly over 22.000 responses were collected. This contributed to answers from over 2500 schools from which 250 were assessed across Poland. To be assessed as school, at least 20 students per school from different classes and educational stages needed to take part in the survey. The results of the Ranking were published on 8th, June 2021 during a press conference in Warsaw.

The 10 most tolerant institutions were awarded with Equality Diplomas during the ceremonies held in each of them. Additionally, the diplomas were signed by local authorities and partner organisations.

## **Research sample**

All members of the school community had the opportunity to respond to the survey - both pupils and pupils, teachers, principals and school staff. However, only answers from pupils who currently attend particular schools were taken into consideration.

Due to the bottom-up nature of the initiative, information about the research was disseminated through three channels: social media of the LGBTQ + Friendly Schools Ranking, traditional media (press, radio, television) and through direct promotion. The last was held by an 8-person promotional team that contacted pupil groups, youth councils, NGOs and other informal youth groups.

# RESULTS

Change Is Coming From Poland



**90%**

of pupils know  
LGBTIQ+ classmates

**32%**

of young people were  
witnesses of  
open discrimination

Results of the LGBTIQ+ School Ranking in Poland in 2021



## General Conclusions

According to the results of the nationwide edition of the LGBTIQ+ Schools Ranking, the visibility of LGBTIQ+ people in Polish secondary schools is high - 90% of respondents declare knowing at least one non-heterosexual person in their schools and 48% - at least one transgender person. Among the teachers, these results are also high - almost 85% of teachers indicate that they know about at least one non-heterosexual person, and 69% - about at least one transgender person.

Despite such a high awareness of school communities, 32% of pupils declare that they have witnessed a situation where it was the teacher who discriminated against LGBTIQ+ people in the form of stabbing, queer-phobic statements or a positive reaction to such statements. Among pupils who noticed such a situation, only 37% declared that the person targeted by the discriminatory statements received support from a teacher.



30% of respondents predict teachers to object pupils going to prom with a same-sex partner.

34% of pupils believe that the teachers would mind if a same-sex couple showed affection (e.g. holding hands) in the school space, and 30% predict that the teachers would have something against a same-sex couple at the prom.

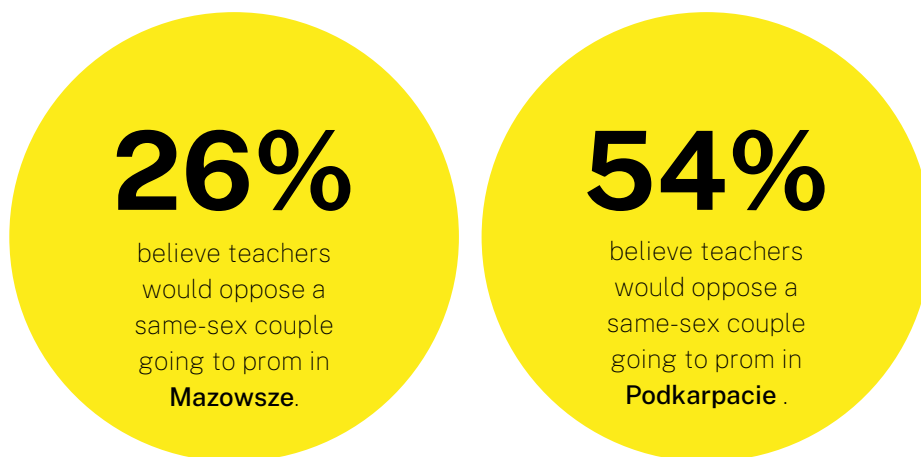
Despite the high visibility of LGBTQ + people, school environments show and allow open discrimination - also on the part of school employees and employees. Queer youth cannot always count on the support of adults, as they are also the perpetrators of psychological violence.

## Regional Variation

The biggest inequalities occur between the voivodships: Mazowieckie and Podkarpackie (a voivodship located in the southern-eastern part of Poland which, due to being included in the "LGBT-free zone", has lost subsidies from the European Economic Area Funds).

Among the respondents from the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, 26% believe that teachers would oppose a same-sex couple at the prom. In the case of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, this opinion is shared by almost 54% of pupils (nationwide - 30%. Manifestations of discrimination against LGBTQ + people (e.g. in the form of invectives, exclusion from the peer group, jokes) are noticed by 48% of pupils from the Mazowieckie Voivodeship and 76% from the Podkarpackie Voivodeship (58% - nationwide).

Looking at the larger picture, it is easy to notice that, in the capital and other large cities, especially in the western half of Poland, the visibility and the support for non-heteronormative people is significantly higher. On the other hand, eastern Poland, especially the south-eastern regions, have a relatively lower LGBTQ + visibility index, but the lack of equality and inclusiveness manifests itself primarily in other areas (respondents know about non-heteronormative people, but at the same time declare that their environment would not accept same-sex couple at prom, human rights trainings, open manifestation of symbols of minorities and teachers less frequently refer to transgender people by their preferred name). This includes the Podkarpackie, Podlaskie and Lubelskie voivodships. The regions have the majority of right-wing voters as well as are associated with the traditional name of the "eastern wall".



## TOP 10 Schools & LOW 10 Schools

Apart from the ranking places, the school ratings are also presented on the scale in the form of awarded stars (5 stars means the most friendly and engaged schools, 1 star - the least friendly).

The school, which took the first place in the Ranking, obtained a score of 4.32, thus earning the title of a friendly and engaged school. On the other hand, the school which was in the last place obtained a score of 2, which is the value indicating a school hostile to the LGBTIQ+ community.

After analyzing the average results of the top 10 and the worst 10 schools, it can be concluded that the visibility of non-heterosexual people remains at a similar level - in the case of the 10 friendliest schools, the answer "I know about a few non-heterosexual people in my school" received a score of 4.8 / 5, and in the case of the 10 least friendly schools - 4.6 / 5. What is interesting, the visibility of transgender people is definitely low in the most unfriendly schools - the answer "I rather don't know about such people in my school" obtains a score of 4.4 / 5.

The reasons for placing institutions in high or low places are for instance the amount of support and engagement of the school community for LGBTIQ+ persons' rights. In the case of discrimination on the part of the teachers (e.g. in the form of bullies, making fun of young people of the LGBTIQ + community), the answer denying the perception of such situations in the 10 most friendly schools gets a score of 4.7 / 5, and the answer confirming the frequency of such incidents - 1,4 / 5 in the most unfriendly schools. It has to be mentioned that when asked if the school would mind if a same-sex couple wanted to dance during the prom, the result of 4.6 / 5 was answered "definitely no" in the most friendly 10 schools, and 1.2 / 5 - the answer "definitely yes" in the least friendly schools.

Despite the knowledge that LGBTIQ + people belong to school communities, in schools with the lowest results, young people cannot count on equal treatment and respect for their rights - pupils may be afraid of negative reactions from the teaching staff or management, worse treatment or even permission to apply violence.

## TOP 10

Visibility of non-heterosexual people in school.



Teachers would not discriminate against young people or the LGBTIQ+ community.



Pupils think their teachers would try to prevent them from going to prom with a same-sex partner.



## LOW 10

Visibility of non-heterosexual people in school.



Teachers would not discriminate against young people or the LGBTIQ+ community.



Pupils think their teachers would try to prevent them from going to prom with a same-sex partner.



## Comparative Analysis Across The Years

During the three editions of the Ranking, Warsaw schools had the opportunity to take action to improve their position and at the same time the situation of LGBTIQ + pupils. Some of them were suggested by survey questions - especially those related to the organization of rainbow initiatives or support from the teachers and principals. The team of LGBTIQ+ Friendly Schools Ranking monitored these activities, both by maintaining contact with the institutions and by means of the next editions of the Ranking.

Furthermore, an example of such an institution is the 1 SLO “Bednarska” (First Social High School) which organised the rainbow dance during the prom. According to tradition, during the prom, pupils open the ball by dancing the polonaise. In 2019, in the 1st SLO, high school pupils were dancing it in same-sex couples, as a sign of support for the LGBTIQ + community. Thanks to this initiative, later in 2019 the school won the first place in the Ranking. Moreover, Liceum Społeczne przy PJATK (Social High School at the Polish-Japanese Academy of computer techniques) that scored quite low in the second edition of the social research (2019, under 30th position) has used the evaluation and the survey of the Ranking to make progress. As a result, in the 2021 edition, the school was placed in 2nd position.

At the same time, the XV Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Narcyzy Żmichowskiej (Secondary School of General Education with bilingual departments named after Narcyza Żmichowska) which in the first edition of the Ranking (2018) gained the 1st place, in 2021 came 5th in Warsaw, probably under political influence. In 2020, during the Women's Strike in Poland, the school drew consequences from pupils who supported this initiative. The youth, who had not been afraid of expressing their views so far, felt pressure from the institution. It also influenced the freedom of expression and the sense of security of pupils, which contributed to lower ratings in the Ranking.



The 1 SLO “Bednarska” organised a rainbow dance during their prom.  
(Photo by [polonezrownosci.pl](http://polonezrownosci.pl))

## Political Influence

These inequalities can be noticed in the context of the “LGBT-free zones” existing in Poland - areas of the country covered by a queerphobic resolutions of the local governments declaring them “free from LGBT ideology”. Those local laws are lobbied by right-wing groups and organisations (eg. Ordo Iuris).

In 2021, the European Commission initiated proceedings in this matter, which resulted in the resolution only being repealed in a few of the more than 100 local governments that adopted it. In further proceedings, the Commission may decide to refer the case to the Court of Justice of the European Union. These zones are mainly located in the following voivodships: Podkarpackie, Lubelskie, Małopolskie and Świętokrzyskie.

In addition, the current Minister of Education, Przemysław Czarnek, known for his homophobic statements, is now introducing new education reforms, leading to the transfer of greater control over the management of institutions to probation officers. In the event that the school's management fails to comply with the recommendations, it may be suspended by the probation officer/ guardian.

This is especially dangerous in regions where probation offices are run by representatives and representatives of right-wing parties carrying out a hateful narrative towards LGBTIQ + people.

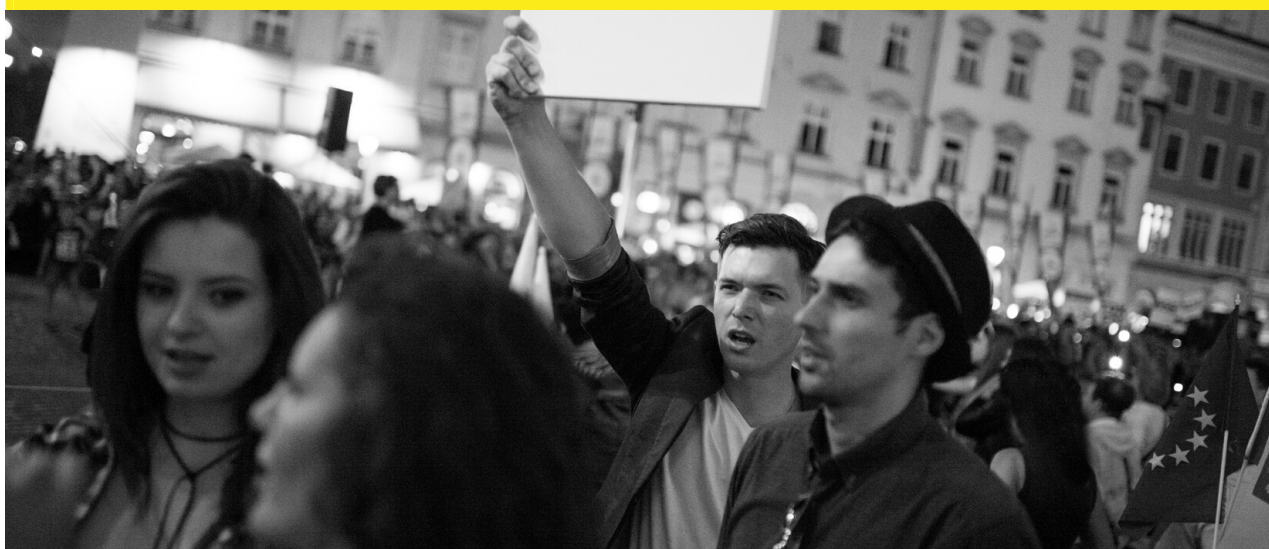
The board of trustees will also gain greater decision-making power on establishing cooperation between schools and non-governmental organizations, which gives the possibility to suspend all activities offered by NGOs involved in the protection of human rights and anti-discrimination activities.

Due to the lack of comparative data, it is currently impossible to state - nationwide - how the above factors will affect the openness of schools to the organization of rainbow initiatives - e.g. lessons on the situation of LGBTIQ + people, workshops for young people or Rainbow Friday.



# CONCLUSION

## Young People Are The Change



Social research, which is the LGBTIQ+ Friendly Schools Ranking, contributes to the improvement of the situation of LGBTQ+ people in Poland, both through continuous activities - having a significant impact on social mood, emphasising the needs related to the safety and well-being of young people - as well as individual support - by introducing an additional criterion during choosing a secondary school, which is the tolerance level in a given institution. Therefore, the project, thanks to funding from the Brussels ministry, will be continued in the form of subsequent editions.

*“When I chose my high school, the rankings did not exist yet. I became interested in this because of my sexual orientation - I wanted to see if I could feel safe in coming out in the school I attended” – pupil of a final grade (19 years old).*

The long-term goal of the project team is to enrol the Ranking to other Member States of the European Union, ensuring a comprehensive diagnosis and the possibility of further activities to support diversity.

In addition to a comprehensive diagnosis of the situation of LGBTQ + people in Polish schools, the Ranking also brings social, educational, and political impact.

In many school communities, the project has initiated the topic of the LGBTQ + community in the school space - it emphasised its existence, the needs of its members and indicated actions that the facility can take to ensure their safety and comfort. The diagnosis is also useful in the context of the work of organisations dealing with the protection of LGBTQ + rights in Poland - it indicates and updates regions where their activities are particularly needed. Based on the example of Warsaw institutions starting from the first edition (2018), schools have made efforts to improve the situation of queer youth, thus earning higher positions in the Ranking.

“The questions of the Ranking indicate the expectations of LGBTQ + people towards the school. This may show the directions of the activities of teachers for LGBTQ+ pupils” – teacher in the secondary school in Warsaw.

Additionally, thanks to the patronage of the cities of Warsaw, Poznań and Łódź and the support of politicians and local politicians who signed the Equality Diplomas, the Ranking also has a political influence. Cities and people who became involved in supporting and promoting the initiative in this way showed support for the entire LGBTQ + community, recognizing respect for their rights, safety and comfort as important, demanding topics.

It has to be mentioned that often the schools themselves promote the results of the LGBTQ+ Ranking. For instance, XXX Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Jana Śniadeckiego (High School named after Jan Śniadecki) publishes each year an information on the website about the position in the Ranking. 21 Liceum im. Grotowskiego (High School named after Grotowski) did hang the Equality Diploma obtained in the 2021 edition on the wall of the school. Moreover, VI Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Joachima Lelewela (High School named after Joachim Lelewel) informed the candidates during open days about the received Equality Diploma.

*This report was published thanks to the partnership of Forbidden Colours with*



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## **This report discusses the impact of the Polish LGBTIQ+ Friendly School Ranking and its evolution since 2018.**

The Ranking of LGBTQ-friendly Schools is a Poland-wide community research which **helps young people to choose a safe, friendly and open school environment**. It gives young candidates to **high schools** additional information about the acceptance of the schools and therefore prevents the homo-, bi- and transphobic situations from happening, and helps schools to have a better idea of the LGBTIQ+ situation in their schools.

The goals are to reach young people with social research, to strengthen the schools that are winning in the Ranking by prizing them with **Equality Diplomas** as well as to **promote the idea of a safe and tolerant school environment** that can serve as role-modelling for other schools.

The project received a lot of recognition in Poland and internationally.

