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## **“I Just Want to Be Me”: The Silent Struggle of LGBTI Youth in Europe**

In many parts of Europe today, growing up as a young LGBTI person means living between fear and invisibility. Although legal progress has been made in some countries, everyday life tells a different story—one of threats, exclusion, and quiet suffering.

“I stopped going to school for a while,” says Lucas, a 17-year-old from Poland. “I came out as gay, and suddenly I wasn’t safe in my own classroom. Even some teachers turned their backs.” His story is not unique. Across the EU, LGBTI youth report bullying, verbal abuse, social isolation, and, in some cases, physical violence—often without institutional protection or support.

A disturbing trend is also unfolding at the political level. In several EU countries, political leaders and public figures openly attack LGBTI communities, accusing them of spreading ‘gender propaganda’ or threatening traditional values. These narratives don’t just stigmatize—they legitimize discrimination. When young people hear their identities condemned by those in power, the result is lasting psychological harm. Online spaces, which once offered refuge, have also become hostile. Social media platforms are flooded with hate speech and targeted abuse. “I used to post photos and connect with queer friends,” says Sara, a 16-year-old transgender girl in Italy. “Now I mostly stay silent. It’s safer to be invisible.”

In some regions, laws and education policies reinforce silence. Schools omit LGBTI content from curricula. Teachers lack training on how to support queer students. Parents fear backlash if their children speak out. The result? Many LGBTI youth grow up without representation, affirmation, or a sense of belonging. The psychological toll is immense. Studies consistently show that LGBTI youth are at higher risk of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide compared to their non-LGBTI peers. Not because of who they are—but because of how the world treats them.

But despite the fear, many young people are refusing to give in to hate. They are building informal support networks, creating anonymous platforms to share their stories, and calling out discrimination when it happens. Their resilience is powerful—but it should not be a survival strategy. Safety, dignity, and acceptance must be guaranteed rights, not privileges granted by luck or location.



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In the end, one message keeps surfacing in the voices of LGBTI youth: “We don’t want special treatment. We just want to be seen, heard, and respected—like anyone else.” That simple wish should not be so difficult to fulfill in a society that calls itself democratic.



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