

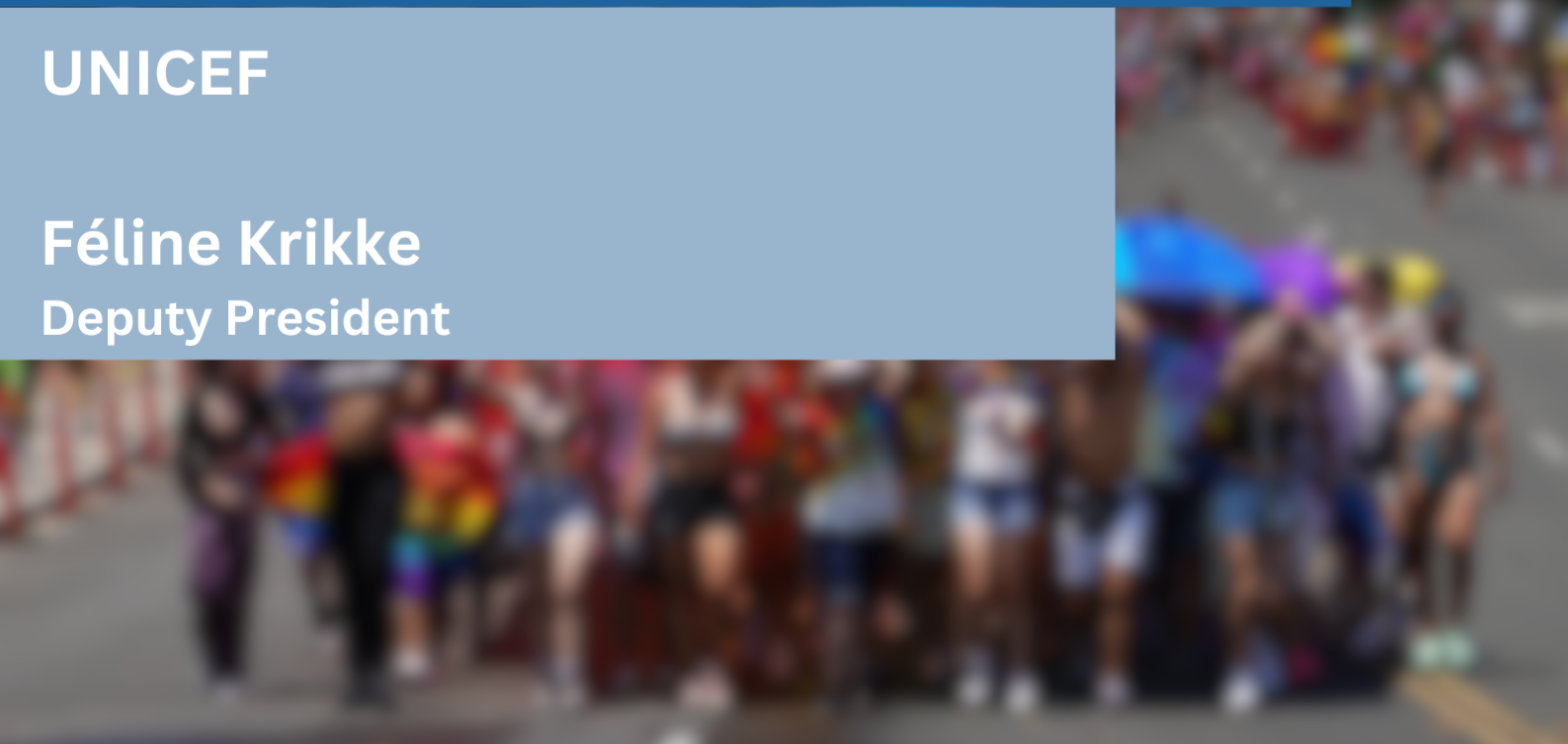


**Ensuring children's freedom of
choice on their sexual
orientation and gender identity**



UNICEF

Féline Krikke
Deputy President



Forum: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

Issue: Ensuring children's freedom of choice on their sexual orientation and gender identity

Name: Féline Krikke

Position: Deputy President

Introduction

Children often find themselves unable to choose their own sexual orientation and gender identity. The main cause of this is the fear of societal judgment and the prevalent negativity that is often directed at members of the LGBTQ+ community. This atmosphere makes some children believe that this kind of behavior towards the LGBTQ+ community is normal. They also might start to believe that they will not be able to come out since they will be met with hatred from the people around them.

When children are unable to freely express their sexual orientation and gender identity, it can have profound impacts on their mental health and future relationships. Which is why this issue should be resolved.

Consider the daily emotional toll of being constantly exposed to negative comments from strangers or even the people closest to you, based only on your sexual orientation and gender identity. No one, but especially children, should endure this kind of hatred, seeing as they are inherently vulnerable and impressionable.

Definition of Key Terms

Ally

An ally is someone who is not part of the LGBTQ+ community but does support and accept all members of the community.

Aromantic

Someone who is Aromantic feels no romantic attraction toward any gender. This does not necessarily mean they do not feel any sexual attraction toward any gender because sexual attraction and romantic attraction are two different things.

Asexuality

Asexuality refers to having no feeling of sexual attraction to any gender. That they do not feel any sexual attraction does not mean they cannot be in a relationship because sexual attraction is something else than romantic attraction. There also exist AroAce people, these people are Aromantic as well as Asexual.

Bisexuality

Bisexuality refers to the sexual attraction toward two or more genders. The best-known definition of this is the attraction toward one's own gender and the gender opposite of their gender. It sometimes is used as an umbrella term for all multisexualities, such as pansexuality (the attraction to people of all sexes and gender identities, wherein gender plays no role in one's attraction) and omnisexuality (the attraction to people of all sexes and gender identities, wherein gender does play a role in one's attraction).

Cisgender

Someone who is cisgender identifies as the same gender as the gender they were assigned at birth.

Discrimination

Discrimination is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of ethnicity, age, sex, or disability.

Gender identity

An individual's gender identity is the gender they identify with, this does not have to be the same gender they were assigned at birth.

Genderqueer

Genderqueer is an umbrella term for a wide range of gender identities that do not lie within the traditional gender binary. Examples of these are non-binary, and genderfluid (people who identify as genderfluid feel like their gender changes over time. This change can happen once a year, but also multiple times a week).

Heterosexuality

Heterosexuality refers to the sexual attraction toward the gender opposite of your own. So for example a heterosexual woman would be attracted to a man. Heterosexual is also referred to as straight.

Homophobia

Homophobia is discrimination on the grounds of sex.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality refers to the sexual attraction toward one's own gender. Commonly referred to as gay.

LGBTQ+ community

The LGBTQ+ community refers to everyone who does not identify as heterosexual or cisgender. LGBTQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer +. Variations of this abbreviation are LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender), LGBTI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex), LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic), LGBTQIAP+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic, Pansexual), and a lot more.

Neo-pronouns

Neo-pronouns are non-traditional pronouns (later the definition of traditional pronouns is given) an individual might use to be referred to as. They are often used by people who identify as non-binary or genderqueer. Examples of neo-pronouns are “ze/zir”, “xe/xem”, and “ey/em”, but there are a lot more.

Non-binary

Someone who is non-binary does not identify themselves as any gender, they just simply are a person. Non-binary people often use they/them or neo-pronouns.

Pride Marches

Pride marches are colorful, celebratory events held annually in various cities worldwide, uniting the LGBTQ+ community and allies to commemorate LGBTQ+ identities, advocate for equal rights, and foster visibility, acceptance, and inclusion.

Pronouns

Pronouns are words that people use to refer to other people or things without using the name. The traditional pronouns are I, you, we, it, “she/her”, “he/him”, and “they/them”. There are also non-traditional pronouns referred to as “neo-pronouns” these were explained earlier.

Sexual Orientation

An individual's sexual orientation is based on what gender(s) that person is sexually attracted to. Most people confuse this with romantic attraction, which is different though they often do go hand in hand.

Stigma

Stigma is a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person.

Umbrella term

An umbrella term is a term that can be used to cover a broad category of things rather than a specific item.

General Overview

Societal norms and expectations

The society we live in today is a lot more supportive of sexual orientations and gender identities that differ from what is considered “normal” but there are still numerous aspects that could need some improvement. What people consider as “normal” or acceptable is often dictated by cultural norms. That people are starting to be more supportive of “unconventional” sexual orientations and gender identities is incredible. However, the fact there still are people who consider anything other than heterosexual and cisgender “unnatural” is what causes children, and others, to still feel as if they need to abide by the norm instead of being who they are. These societal norms and expectations are all over social media, telling everyone’s opinion on the matter. When people notice that others think that who they are or who they want to be is unacceptable, they tend to change themselves because they are under the impression that that is the only way for others to respect them in this society. Children are on average the ones most affected by this since they are used to being told what to do or who to be by others, such as their parents. Another reason for this is that children are still in school, where you have a divide in

popularity between cliques. Most children want to be popular, to fit in, to be liked, so they listen to the media and try to be “normal” and in exchange ignore who they are.

Family beliefs and values

As briefly mentioned before, children are used to listening to what their parents tell them to do since they are the ones who raised them. They have more life experience, so naturally, they know what is best for you. This often is true, to some extent, but this is not necessarily a reason to always listen to them. Everyone has their own opinions and parents often raise their children to have the same opinions as them, and some families do not accept sexual orientations and gender identities that are not considered “normal”, in which case the child will most likely grow up to have the same opinion since they don’t know any better. If this child turns out to not be heterosexual or cisgender, they will repress these feelings because they were taught to do so. This will later on have grave impacts on the mental well-being of that child.

However, some children do not repress those feelings but still do not feel safe sharing their sexual orientation and gender identity with their family because they are afraid of how they will react. When they do tell their family and they react poorly, it can harm what a child thinks of themselves. One of the reactions children tend to get from their parents is that they think the child is too young to know who they are and therefore cannot be a part of the LGBTQ+ community. When parents say this, they are implying that heterosexuality and being cisgender is normal and being part of the LGBTQ+ community is not.

Lack of education and awareness

In many societies discussing sexual orientation and gender identity is taboo due to religious beliefs and historical stigma. The lack of education in schools means that a child usually only gets taught about this topic by their parents and social media. These sources are not always reliable as they are mostly made out of opinions rather than facts, which makes the child think that the opinions are facts and that people who say something about this topic that differs from what their parents or the media told them, they think that those people are factually wrong, instead of thinking that they have a different opinion than them. Also, without the proper information regarding the topic of sexual orientation and gender identity, children may not entirely understand or feel motivated to explore their own identities.

Discrimination and stigma

As mentioned before about social norms, people have to abide by these norms to fit in. In fear of not fitting in, bullying, discrimination, or social ostracization children tend to not openly express their sexual orientation and gender identity when these differ from what is perceived “normal” by society. This will make a child feel alone and give them a sense of alienation, which has again grave impacts on their mental health.

Discrimination is sadly everywhere and there is a lot of it. Not just in school, but also on social media or outside when being in public. Children, teachers, family, but also strangers sometimes feel the need to express that they think that who a child is, is unacceptable. This is very unpleasant to hear, so people would rather avoid it from happening by being who those people want them to be. Hearing that even people who don't even know you think that who you are is unacceptable every day can lead to depression, and sometimes even to suicide.

There are a lot of people using the argument that being part of the LGBTQ+ community is bad because the suicide rates are higher than those of non-LGBTQ+ people, while they often are the reason that those rates are that high. Children however sometimes are not aware of this and start to think that what they say is true.

Legal and policy constraints

In numerous countries, there are still loads of laws against the LGBTQ+ community. Some examples are laws against same-sex marriage, or laws saying that being part of the LGBTQ+ community is unlawful. There are also countries in which it is not necessarily illegal to be part of the LGBTQ+ community, but it is widely known that the country does not approve of it.

This affects a child's freedom of choice on their sexual orientation and gender identity in a different way than the previous ones. Previously it was about opinions, here it is impeding the freedom of choice, since there is no choice, you have to be heterosexual and cisgender because the others are illegal.

Religious or cultural factors

In multiple religions and cultures, it is unacceptable to be part of the LGBTQ+ community. Members of these religions and cultures often have the same opinion because their religion or culture says so. An example of these religions is Christianity. In the Bible, the religious book of the Christians, it says that a man is not allowed to lie in bed with another man as he would with a woman. Some Christians are very extreme about this part of the Bible and tend to be homophobic because of it, so some children with a Christian upbringing will grow up with the belief that the LGBTQ+ community is immoral and unethical. This prevents them from being fully free to express

their sexual orientation and gender identity when this differs from what, in this case, the Bible sees as “normal”.

Mental health

Because of all the discrimination and the opinions of others, the mental health of LGBTQ+ children tends to get very bad. They may get depression because numerous people hate them just because they are different from what society sees as normal and those people express that hate towards them or people like them. They might suffer from anxiety because they feel different from their peers and don't know why or how. For example, when a child is transgender and finds out when being fairly young because they don't feel comfortable with wearing or doing things that are significant for the sex they were assigned at birth while others who were assigned the same sex as them at birth do like those things, they tend to get social anxiety because they think they have to be the same as their peers but are not.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
28th of June 1969	The Stonewall Riots happen in New York, where the police in New York City raid the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich. This raid caused a massive riot among the people in the bar which eventually turned into a six-day-long protest.
28th of June 1970	The first pride marches are held on the first anniversary of the Stonewall Riots in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago.
1973	Homosexuality gets declassified as a mental disorder by The American Psychiatric Association.
1989	Denmark is the first country to legalize same-sex partnerships.
1st of April 2001	The Netherlands is the first country to legalize same-sex marriage.
6th of September 2018	India's Supreme Court unanimously strikes down section 377. Section 377 was a colonial-era law criminalizing consensual homosexual activity, therefore, striking it down decriminalized same-sex partnerships in India.
2000's	Countries are starting to implement LGBTQ+ topics in their school curricula.

2023 Multiple states in the US are passing anti-transgender bills. 85 have been passed, 269 bills are active, and 235 bills have failed. That is 589 bills in total proposed spread over 49 states.

Major Parties Involved

Denmark

Denmark was the first country to legalize same-sex partnerships in 1989. In 2023 it was declared the third most LGBTQ+ friendly country in Europe. It has all sorts of laws in favor of the LGBTQ+ community, but sadly still is a lot of discrimination happening on the streets. There is no nationwide curriculum for LGBTQ+ education, but equality, respect, and inclusivity are present in the educational system in all kinds of ways.

Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)

GLAAD is a non-profit organization aiming to aid LGBTQ+ individuals by making them more visible and trying to get better representation in the media.

Human Rights Campaign (HRC)

The HRC is an NGO in the United States that advocates LGBTQ+ rights, which includes initiatives centralizing minors being able to freely explore their sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands was the first country to legalize same-sex marriage on the 1st of April in 2001. It is known for its inclusivity; however, the new prime minister is not the biggest supporter of the LGBTQ+ community and he believes that children should not be educated about what LGBTQ+ is, what types of genders there are, etcetera. Other than that, it is still one of the most inclusive and accepting countries around the world.

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

PFLAG wants to get more education about and better support and advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community. It also helps children and their families with possible issues regarding the topic.

The Russian Federation

Russia is very much against the LGBTQ+ community. It is illegal to change one's gender, non-binary people are not legally recognized, conversion therapy is not banned, same-sex marriage is illegal, there are no protections against employment discrimination, discrimination as a whole is only illegal in some contexts, censorship is fine as a punishment, and it is ambiguous about housing discrimination. Other than that, homosexuality itself is legal, as well as donating blood, but that's about it. The public opinion on it is that LGBTQ+ people should not be accepted into society, so it is not just the legal system that thinks that way.

Sweden

Sweden is also known as one of the most inclusive and accepting countries when it comes to the LGBTQ+ community. In school, they teach children about it and they have open discussions about anything regarding the topic. Sweden was the third country to legalize same-sex partnerships in 1995, however, same-sex marriage only became legal in 2009. The country also has the saying "gay since 1944" since they celebrated the 75th anniversary of the LGBTQ+ right that decriminalizes homosexuality in 2019.

The United States of America (USA)

The USA was always known as the country of freedom where you can be who you want, but recently this has been changing. All over the USA in multiple states, they were trying to pass bills saying that transgender children should be outed, and bullied and that they should detransition. In the last couple of years, 20 states have denied transgender minors at least some medical treatment and various surgical procedures. There are some states now blocking anti-transgender legislation, but still, a lot of them are against transgender minors.

Possible Solutions

Inclusive curriculum implementation

A possible solution to this issue would be to be more open about LGBTQ+ topics in school and implement these topics into the educational system. This way, children will learn what the LGBTQ+ community is and will see that it is not an unspoken topic, but more something normal that people can discuss about. When something is not discussed within families or schools, children might start to believe that it is something adverse, while if they can openly discuss and learn about it, it would promote equality and inclusivity. So, when these children feel like they might be part of the LGBTQ+ community, they will be less apprehensive to accept this, and they will be quicker to

share it with the people around them. Furthermore, it would decrease bullying and promote acceptance and respect.

Support networks and counseling services

Creating support networks and counseling services in schools so that children always have someone they can trust to go to when they need to talk about topics regarding their sexual orientation and gender identity is also a good solution. When children have someone they can openly talk with, when they are unable to do this at home or with their friends, it will take away a bit of the anxiety that comes with keeping such a big part of yourself a secret.

Further Reading

- <https://www.equaldex.com/equality-index>

This is a website where you can find your country's stance on the topic. You can find what laws there are regarding the LGBTQ+ community in your country and what the public opinion is.

- <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>

This is a website that is useful not only for this issue but for any MUN you will attend. On this website, you can find a lot of information about your country, such as the total population, what religion is dominant among the population, and a whole lot of other useful stuff.

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