

Equality has no Alternative

Policy paper based on the results of the 2022–
2023 study of the public attitudes towards
LGBTIQ+ people in Albania, Bosnia and
Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North
Macedonia and Serbia

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ERA – LGBTI EQUAL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION

ERA
LGBTI Equal Rights Association

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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Introduction



The Western Balkans and Turkey region face various challenges, including political instability, corruption, organized crime, weak rule of law, ethnic tensions, human rights violations, and economic difficulties. Progress has been made in human rights, but recent movements promoting misogyny, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia have threatened progress. Understanding the impact of political processes on LGBTIQ+ individuals is crucial for enhancing their well-being and lived experiences. Legal frameworks across the region align with international standards to varying degrees, but implementation and enforcement remain challenging. The Rainbow Map and Index by ILGA Europe highlights the differences in protective policies and laws for the LGBTIQ+ community across European countries. Türkiye and Azerbaijan were rated in 2023 as the most hostile. Homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia have cultural, social, religious, and psychological roots, perpetuated by societal conditioning, negative religious interpretations, lack of education and exposure to diverse perspectives, and psychological factors. Addressing these attitudes and their underlying causes is vital for promoting acceptance and improving the lives of LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Enhancing the well-being of the LGBTIQ+ community and combating homo/bi/transphobia requires understanding the general public's attitudes, decision-makers, service providers, and employers towards LGBTIQ+ individuals. Exploring the underlying causes of negative attitudes and implementing appropriate policy measures are essential to reduce their impact. States are responsible for improving the relationship between the LGBTIQ+ population and the general population, as well as specific populations, and should strive to create a framework that respects the human rights of all citizens, including LGBTIQ+ people. This policy paper can serve as a guideline for responsible states to improve the overall environment and protect LGBTIQ+ rights.



The public opinion poll conducted by ERA – LGBTI Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Türkiye aimed to expand and increase the evidence base concerning public attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer persons in the countries of the Western Balkans region. The objectives of the poll included:

- Collecting data on attitudes and opinions of the general public towards LGBTIQ+ people.
- Comparing public attitudes between 2015 and 2023.
- Understanding the impact of the LGBTIQ+ movement's work in the region.
- Enabling evidence-based advocacy and campaign work.

Ipsos, a renowned market research company with experience executing complex surveys using various methodologies, conducted the study. Ipsos has a network of partners in all the countries of the Western Balkans region and engaged a multidisciplinary expert team for this survey. The research methodology involved a combination of telephone surveys (CATI) and online surveys (CAWI) to ensure representative samples.

The survey was conducted between December 20, 2022, and January 12, 2023, with a minimum of 800 respondents in each country (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia). The questionnaires were translated into local languages by experienced translators from the respective countries.

Overall, the survey aimed to provide an updated understanding of public attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ people in the Western Balkans region and compare changes in sentiment since the previous survey conducted in 2015. The findings can inform future advocacy efforts and contribute to advancing LGBTIQ+ rights in the region.



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Continued efforts are needed to foster acceptance and ensure the safety of the LGBTIQ+ community in the Western Balkans region.

The overall pattern indicates an increasing level of acceptance toward LGBTIQ+ individuals; however, this acceptance does not extend to areas associated with traditional values. Despite this progress, a significant number of people continue to harbor non-acceptance towards LGBTIQ+ individuals, and they express a willingness to engage in acts of rejection, abuse, and physical violence against them.

The public generally does not approve of the open expression of the LGBTIQ+ population, indicating incomplete acceptance. The majority does not support the organization of Pride Parades, although they recognize the motive behind them.

Human rights are generally not perceived to be respected for LGBTIQ+ people, except in Kosovo and Serbia. Many believe LGBTIQ+ people do not deserve the same rights as the majority. Disapproval is dominant when it comes to marriage and parenthood for LGBTIQ+ individuals.

A considerable portion of the population views being LGBTIQ+ as a sickness, reflecting negative beliefs toward the LGBTIQ+ community. Most would not fully support their child, friend, acquaintance, colleague, or neighbor if they were LGBTIQ+.

Personal experience and attitudes to significant others in case they are LGBTIQ+ individuals:

On average, three out of ten citizens in the Western Balkans personally know someone who is LGBTIQ+, with higher rates in Montenegro (41%) and lower rates in Albania (18%) and Kosovo (19%). Analysis reveals that women in the Western Balkans region are generally more supportive and open to the LGBTIQ+ community than men, except in Kosovo, where the numbers are comparable. In Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, women report having more contact with LGBTIQ+ individuals than men. The most significant distinction is observed in Albania, where 20.8% of women know someone LGBTIQ+ compared to 15.4% of men.

The majority of the Western Balkans population would not offer complete support if their child identified as LGBTIQ+, with the typical reaction being to try to change them by finding a cure. The highest percentage of this position is in Kosovo (57%) and the lowest in Albania (39%). On average, 22% of the Western Balkan population would fully support their child. The highest percentage of this position would be in Montenegro (29%) and Albania (28%) and the lowest in Kosovo (15%). Higher education and larger settlements are associated with a higher likelihood of offering full support to LGBTIQ+ children. There is a strong relationship between viewing being LGBTIQ+ as not a "sickness" and readiness to provide full support to one's child. In this case, we notice a potential improvement in attitudes compared to 2015. When looking at the percentage of parents who would offer full support to their children, in 2015 the average regional support was a regional average of 7% compared to 22.3% in 2023.

The majority of the population would also not offer complete support for close people like friends, acquaintances, colleagues, or neighbors. Personal interaction with LGBTIQ+ individuals significantly impacts attitudes, with those who have personal contact being more supportive.



Attitudes, and prejudices towards the LGBTIQ+ population.

The majority of the public believes that LGBTIQ+ people deserve the same rights as everyone else (64%), but a significant portion opposes this (33%). The public is generally against LGBTIQ+ couples having children. There is a perception that LGBTIQ+ ideas are imported from the West, and some still view transgender people as a danger to women. The public is divided on whether LGBTIQ+ people are exposed to psychological violence, with perceptions varying by country.

Overall, attitudes in the Western Balkans show a mix of acceptance and non-acceptance toward the LGBTIQ+ population, with some positive changes and improvements observed compared to 2015.

Seven selected questions measured prejudice, disinformation, and homophobia. The highest average rating were found for statements opposing public exposure to LGBTIQ+ identities, belief that LGBTIQ+ ideas are imported, and objections to LGBTIQ+ couples having children. The lowest average rate has been measured for statements suggesting that transgender people are a danger to women and that children raised in heterosexual families cannot become LGBTIQ+.

Education plays a significant role in shaping attitudes towards the LGBTIQ+ community, with higher education levels associated with more supportive attitudes and a better perception of human rights. Those with higher education are more likely to support protection for LGBTIQ+ individuals when their rights are violated.

Education also increases knowledge and understanding of LGBTIQ+ issues, leading to more empathetic and supportive attitudes. Higher education levels expose individuals to diverse populations and cultures, fostering acceptance and appreciation of differences. Personal interaction to LGBTIQ+ individuals is significantly different among different educational groups, with higher education correlating with more personal interactions.

The size of the settlement in which a person lives influences attitudes towards the LGBTIQ+ community. People in smaller settlements have less exposure to LGBTIQ+ individuals, potentially leading to more negative attitudes due to lack of familiarity. Conversely, those in larger urban areas have more opportunities to interact with the LGBTIQ+ community, leading to greater acceptance. Living in a diverse and inclusive environment positively impacts attitudes.

Opinion on same sex marriage:

The attitudes towards same-sex marriages was measured through six questions (items), covering various aspects of legal recognition and rights for same-sex couples. These items assess support for survivor's pensions, inheritance rights, family rights, visitation rights, healthcare rights, all supported by the majority of respondents, and parenting rights. Respondents showed the highest opposition to parenting rights for same-sex couples, opposed by 68%. There is a significant and strong improvement from 2015 across all values items of the scale.

Same-sex marriage is generally opposed (72%), but there is an increasing trend of support.



Attitudes towards Pride Parades

Pride Parades are often recognized as a means to bring attention to the unequal position of the LGBTI community, but a majority does not support holding them. Support for Pride events is influenced by the perception of rights deprivation faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals. Younger people who have interacted with the LGBTIQ+ community are more likely to support Pride. Raising awareness about the struggles of the LGBTIQ+ community fosters greater support and allyship. However, factors of gender, personal interaction, size of settlements and education in the regression model can only account for a small portion of the variance in negative attitudes, suggesting that other factors, such as personality traits, cultural norms, religion, ideological affiliation, may also play a significant role.

Attitudes towards political parties supporting rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals

Despite a political party's ability to address major state problems, a significant majority (60%) of the public would not support a party that focuses on protecting the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals. This trend is consistent even in Albania, where responses are more positive but still indicate a majority against such a party. The lowest support is observed in Kosovo, with 71% opposed. This trend extends to the engagement of openly LGBTIQ+ candidates, with 52.8% of the public indicating they would not vote for a party with an openly LGBTIQ+ candidate. Kosovo again exhibits the lowest support, with 69% opposed.

Compared to 2015, there has been a notable increase in the percentage of people willing to vote for a party that prioritizes LGBTIQ+ rights. The average support in 2015 was only 6%, but it has since risen to 21%. The most significant changes are observed in Montenegro (from 8% to 32%) and Albania (from 5% to 24%). This suggests that a portion of the public has become more aware of the importance of political parties' support for LGBTIQ+ rights.

However, despite some progress in public support, there remains active resistance from a portion of the population. In 2015, more than half (54.5%) of the population would definitely not vote for a party promoting LGBTIQ+ rights, which has decreased to 42.8% in 2023. Except for Kosovo, the improvement in support is minimal.





Conclusion 1

More work is needed to ensure acceptance and safety for LGBTIQ+ individuals in the Western Balkans region, despite some progress in attitudes since 2015. Education and personal interaction with LGBTIQ+ individuals play a crucial role in shaping supportive attitudes, challenging stereotypes, and promoting understanding. Increasing personal contact and public outreach efforts can foster acceptance and support for LGBTIQ+ people. Targeted outreach and education efforts aimed at men are necessary to promote understanding and acceptance, as women tend to be more accepting of LGBTIQ+ rights.

Conclusion 2

Efforts should also focus on enacting comprehensive legal protections, recognizing gender identity self-determination, and ensuring equal rights in areas such as inheritance, healthcare, and parenting. There is a need of a better understanding of the rights and their role in society. Awareness raising campaigns need to accompany these laws. Those campaigns could include the personal stories, and possibility of direct contact with LGBTIQ+ individuals. Diversification of events and support, including in rural areas, is essential. Tailored messaging for different age groups, raising awareness of violence and discrimination, addressing cultural factors, and educating younger generations are important steps toward creating a more inclusive society. Further studies and research can provide valuable insights for future strategies.



Recommendations for Policymakers:



Promote Comprehensive Civic Education on Gender and LGBTQ+ Rights: It is essential to ensure comprehensive civic education on gender and LGBTQ+ rights through publicly funded formal and non-formal education. This education should aim to foster understanding, respect, and acceptance of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.



Integrate LGBTQ+-Specific Topics into Healthy Lifestyle Education: In order to promote inclusivity and address the specific needs of the LGBTQ+ community, it is important to include LGBTQ+-specific topics in publicly funded formal and non-formal healthy lifestyle education. This will contribute to a more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals.



Strengthen Anti-Discrimination Laws and Legal Framework: Continued efforts are necessary to enhance antidiscrimination laws and develop a robust legal and policy framework that supports the self-determination of gender identity, recognizes same-sex relationships, and ensures equal rights in areas such as inheritance, healthcare, and parenting. Prioritizing the enactment of progressive laws and focusing on effective implementation and enforcement mechanisms is crucial.



Demonstrate Support from Prominent Authorities: Publicly showcasing support from prominent authorities in the country and emphasizing the importance of personal interaction with the LGBTQ+ community can significantly contribute to creating a more inclusive and accepting society. This involves fostering a culture of respect, empathy, and understanding towards LGBTQ+ individuals at all levels of society, including top leadership.

Recommendations for Policymakers:



Publicly Support Pride Events: It is important for policy makers to show public support for Pride events. This can be achieved by actively endorsing and participating in Pride parades, rallies, and other related activities. Such visible support from policy makers sends a powerful message of inclusivity, acceptance, and solidarity with the LGBTIQ+ community.



Allocate Resources for Pride Events: Policy makers should allocate resources, both financial and logistical, to support the organization and successful implementation of Pride events. This can include providing funding, permits, security, and infrastructure to ensure a safe and well-organized celebration of diversity and equality.



Collaborate with LGBTIQ+ Organizations: Policy makers should actively engage and collaborate with local LGBTIQ+ organizations in the planning and execution of Pride events.



Promote Pride Event Visibility: Policy makers should use their platforms and resources to promote the visibility of Pride events. This can involve publicizing the events through official channels, including social media, government websites, and press releases. Increased visibility will not only attract more attendees but also serve as a positive signal to the broader society about the importance of LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusion.

Recommendations for Policymakers:



Improve Access to Resources: Policy makers should prioritize improving access to resources and support services for LGBTIQ+ individuals and their organizations in rural areas. This can include establishing community centers, helplines, and online platforms specifically tailored to address the unique challenges faced by rural LGBTIQ+ individuals. Additionally, efforts should be made to ensure that mental health services, healthcare providers, and legal support are available and accessible in rural communities.



Sensitize Service Providers: Policy makers should implement training programs to sensitize service providers, especially those working in rural areas, including healthcare professionals, law enforcement officers, and social workers. This training should focus on understanding the unique needs and challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals and promoting inclusive and respectful practices. By ensuring that service providers are knowledgeable and supportive, policy makers can improve the quality of services available to rural LGBTIQ+ individuals.



Strengthen Law Enforcement and Judicial Response: Policy makers should ensure that law enforcement agencies and judicial systems have the necessary resources, training, and protocols in place to effectively address and respond to acts of violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals. This includes establishing specialized units or task forces within law enforcement agencies to handle hate crimes and violence targeting the LGBTIQ+ community. Additionally, promoting collaboration between law enforcement, legal authorities, and LGBTIQ+ organizations can help ensure that incidents of violence are thoroughly investigated and perpetrators are held accountable.



Raise Awareness and Trainings: Policy makers should invest in public awareness campaigns and training programs aimed at educating the general public, including schools, community organizations, and workplaces, about the consequences and societal impact of violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals. These campaigns should promote empathy, understanding, and respect for diversity while challenging stereotypes and prejudices. Training programs should be provided to professionals in relevant fields, such as law enforcement, healthcare, and education, to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to address and prevent violence effectively.

Recommendations for Policymakers:



Support Victims and Survivors: Policy makers should establish comprehensive support services for victims and survivors of violence within the LGBTIQ+ community. This includes providing access to safe shelters, counseling services, legal aid, and healthcare resources tailored to the specific needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals who have experienced violence. Adequate funding should be allocated to support these services and ensure their availability in both urban and rural areas.



Encourage Reporting: Policy makers should work towards creating an environment where victims and witnesses feel safe and encouraged to report incidents of violence. This can be achieved through community outreach programs, public campaigns that highlight the importance of reporting, and ensuring confidential and supportive reporting mechanisms are in place. Whistleblower protections should also be implemented to safeguard individuals who come forward with information about acts of violence.



Collaborate with Civil Society Organizations: Policy makers should actively engage and collaborate with civil society organizations, including LGBTIQ+ advocacy groups and human rights organizations, to address violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals.



International Cooperation: Policy makers should actively participate in international forums and collaborations to exchange best practices and learn from the experiences of other countries in combating violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations and Media



Diversification of Events: Encourage the organization of public events targeting the general public to increase understanding of the needs, issues, and challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals. Collaborate with various stakeholders and groups in society.



Diversification of Support: Ensure the creation of safe and supportive environments for LGBTIQ+ individuals in all types of settlements, including rural areas. Establish support networks, provide resources, organize events, and promote inclusive policies and practices in schools, workplaces, and community organizations across all Western Balkan countries and regions.



Targeting Different Age Groups: Tailor messaging to reach different age groups effectively. Focus on awareness-raising, inclusivity, and celebrating diversity for younger individuals, while emphasizing equal rights, opportunities, and the negative effects of discrimination for those over 30.



Equal rights for all: Emphasize the importance of inclusion and solidarity beyond the LGBTQ+ community and make coalition with other human rights movements.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations and Media



Raising Awareness of Violence and Discrimination: Increase public awareness of violence and discrimination faced by LGBTIQ+ people to combat the perception that these issues are not significant. Work with state institutions to address violence and hate crimes while providing support to victims. Communicate the struggles and discrimination faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals with care to avoid victimization and patronizing attitudes.



Cultural Factors and Education: Recognize that negative attitudes are influenced by cultural factors. Invest in education and positive engagement to increase knowledge, understanding, and positive attitudes. Understand that legal recognition alone is insufficient; public awareness and acceptance are also essential.



Addressing Youth Attitudes: Acknowledge the negative attitudes among young people in some countries and take active steps to educate younger generations about sexual orientation and gender identity. Collaborate with Ministries of Education and the media to address this issue effectively.



Legal Recognition: Legal recognition of the rights of LGBTIQ+ people is a crucial step towards ensuring equality and protection. Civil society organizations should continue advocating for comprehensive legal reforms that recognize and protect the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals.

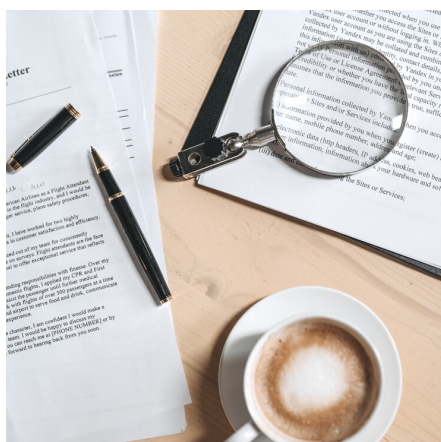
Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations and Media



Supporting Family and Friends: Launching a public awareness campaign targeting families of LGBTIQ+ individuals to foster understanding, empathy, and acceptance. Develop and distribute comprehensive resources and guidance materials specifically tailored for families of LGBTIQ+ individuals. When possible, establish support networks or groups where families of LGBTIQ+ individuals can connect with one another, online or offline. Organize training programs for professionals who interact with families. Share personal stories and testimonials from families who have successfully navigated the journey of accepting and supporting their LGBTIQ+ loved ones. These stories can inspire and provide hope to families who may be struggling.



Intergenerational Dialogue and Education: Initiate intergenerational dialogues that bring together individuals from different age groups to foster understanding, empathy, and education about LGBTIQ+ issues. These dialogues can take the form of workshops, panel discussions, or community events where experiences and perspectives are shared.



Further Studies: Conduct periodic studies and implement further research to explore the relationship between negative attitudes and religion, personal traits, ideology and other cultural norms. In the above discussed study people were not asked about the nature, intensity or sentiment of the interaction with the LGBTIQ+ individuals, which might be asked in the future, to measure which kind of interaction plays an important role.

Further Reading

To read the Analytical Report of the findings of the Regional LGBTIQ+ Public Opinion Poll click here: <https://lgbti-era.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Analytical-Report-2023-LGBTIQ-Public-Opinion-Poll-Western-Balkans-FINAL-compressed.pdf>

For latest updates from our region, click here: <https://lgbti-era.org/news/>

For the latest publications from our region, click here: <https://lgbti-era.org/publications/>

We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to protect and advance LGBTIQ+ rights in our region.

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