

BEYOND THE LABELS

The Socio-Economic Position of Lesbian,
Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
People in Bosnia and Herzegovina



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**The Socio-Economic Position of Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex People in
Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Sarajevo Open Centre *Human Rights Series*

Publication no. 111

Title: Beyond the Labels. The Socio-Economic Position of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex People in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Publisher: Sarajevo Open Centre, www.soc.ba

For the publisher: Emina Bošnjak

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This publication is the result of the work to promote the human rights of LGBTI people carried out through various programmes of the Sarajevo Open Centre.

The publication was made possible with the financial support of ERA – LGBTI Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Türkiye, as part of the project Work That Works for All: Empowering LGBTI People and Engaging Employers for Inclusive Labour Markets.

The contents of this publication fall under the sole responsibility of the publisher and do not in any way reflect the opinions of the donor.

ISSN 2303-5552



**Funded by
the European Union**

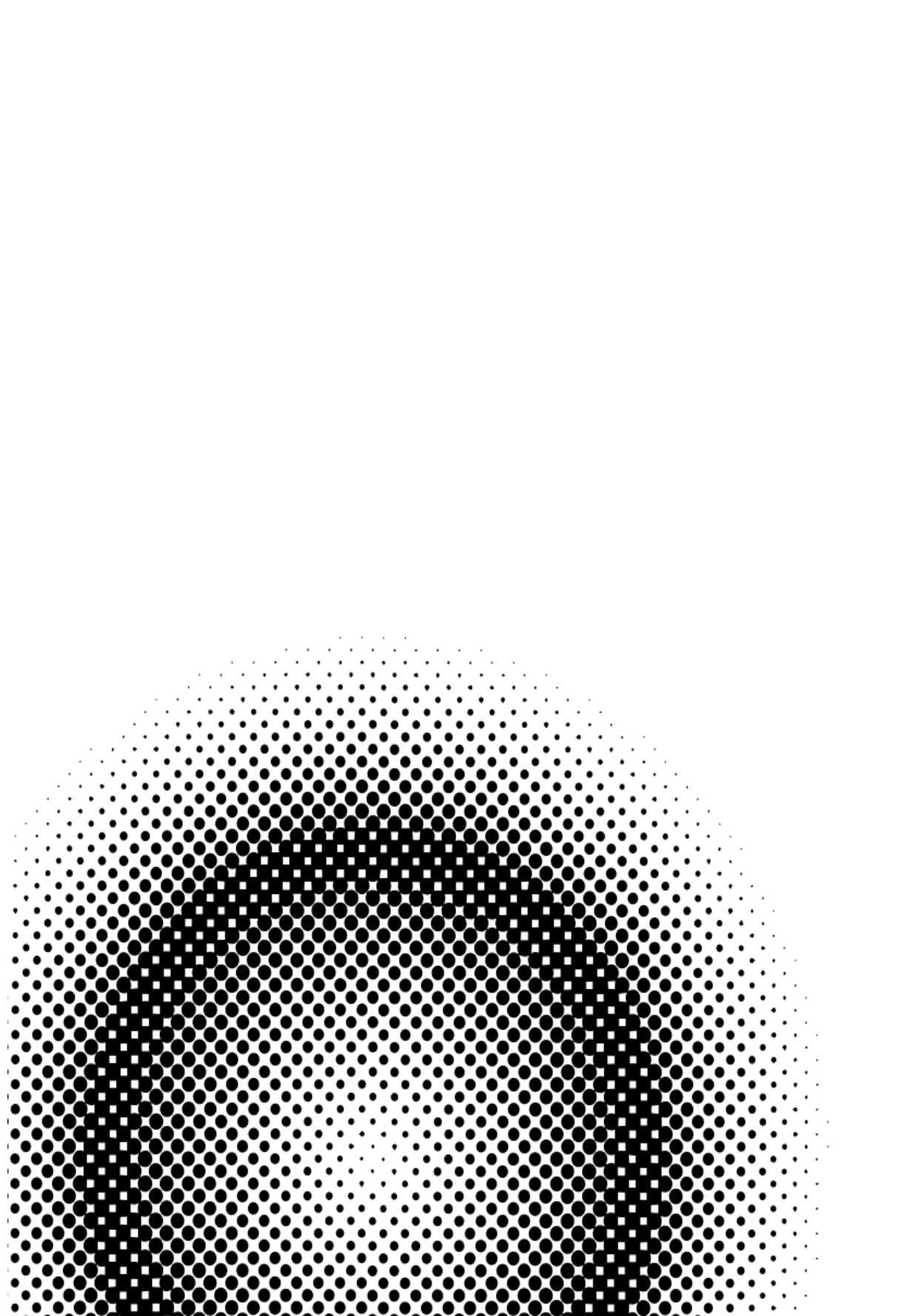
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The project “Work That Works for All: Empowering LGBTI People and Engaging Employers for Inclusive Labour Markets”, implemented by Sarajevo Open Centre, is supported through the “Working Safe: Socio-economic Inclusion of the LGBTIQ+ Community in the Western Balkans and Türkiye” programme. The programme is implemented by ERA – LGBTI Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Türkiye, in partnership with Queer Montenegro, Tuzla Open Center (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Open Mind Spectrum Albania, Center for Social Group Development (Kosovo), Coalition Margins (North Macedonia), Izadi (Serbia), and Kaos GL (Türkiye). This project is funded by the European Union.

This material was produced with the assistance of ERA and the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Sarajevo Open Centre, as the implementing organisation, and do not necessarily reflect the views of ERA or the European Union.

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SUMMARY

This publication presents the findings of research into the socio-economic position of LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on education, work and employment, exercise of labour rights, financial and housing circumstances, and the quality of life. The research builds in part on a 2020 study conducted by the Sarajevo Open Centre, allowing the findings to be compared while taking into account differences in the samples and research instruments used.

Conducted in 2026, the research combined quantitative and qualitative methods. It included 121 LGBTI people from five regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina – Banja Luka, Mostar, Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zenica – as well as a representative sample of 1,000 adults from the general population. Three additional in-depth interviews were also conducted. The LGBTI sample was selected using convenience and snowball sampling. The findings therefore cannot be statistically generalised to the LGBTI population as a whole in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The sample largely consists of younger, highly educated people living in urban areas, meaning that the experiences of older people, those living in rural areas and other harder-to-reach groups are not adequately represented.

The findings reveal a gap between rights formally guaranteed by law and the everyday experiences of LGBTI people. The relatively favourable educational profile of the sample does not, in itself, offer sufficient protection against discrimination and insecurity. Educational opportunities, employment status, income and housing are closely linked to social acceptance, family support and access to effective institutional protection.

In education, most LGBTI respondents feel that they had equal or largely equal opportunities to pursue their education. At the same time, nearly half have, at some point, considered dropping out of education, citing financial difficulties, lack of support, discrimination and violence, among other reasons. Negative experiences are rarely reported. LGBTI issues are

largely absent from educational curricula or, according to respondents' experiences, are presented in stereotypical and negative ways. While some teachers and peers provide support, this does not indicate that inclusive practices have been systematically established across the education system. Among the general population, 40.4% believe that children should be taught at school to accept diverse sexual and gender identities, compared with 60% in the 2020 study.

In the area of work and employment, some findings point to more positive experiences in accessing employment, although insecure forms of work remain widespread. Compared with respondents from the general population, LGBTI people in the sample are more likely to work on a freelance or other short-term basis, or part-time. Half (50.5%) of LGBTI respondents report having combined registered and unregistered work, while 63.6% perceive the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina as completely or largely inaccessible to LGBTI people.

Negative experiences in the workplace are considerably more common among LGBTI respondents than among respondents from the general population. 42% report having experienced jokes about their identity or appearance, 40% comments about their appearance, 21% social isolation, 18% inappropriate touching, and 17% threats or intimidation. Negative experiences are reported not only with colleagues and supervisors, but also with clients and other third parties. At the same time, 39% of respondents reported none of the negative experiences listed, suggesting that there are also workplaces where LGBTI people experience acceptance and a sense of security.

Views among the general population point to persistent barriers to inclusion in the workplace. Overall, 15.5% of respondents categorically reject the possibility of working with LGBTI people, 40.1% would not work for an LGBTI supervisor, and 43.2% would not work for an employer that promotes LGBTI rights. More positive attitudes are more commonly associated with having direct contact with LGBTI people. These findings highlight the importance of education and of creating conditions that enable equal participation in the workplace.

Trust in institutions responsible for protecting labour rights remains low: 67% of LGBTI respondents have no confidence in them, while only 11% express confidence. Higher levels of trust are placed in non-governmental organisations and legal aid services. Compared with the previous study, respondents are more aware of the options available for protecting their labour rights. However, negative experiences continue to be reported only sporadically. Knowledge of rights must therefore be accompanied by safe, confidential and effective mechanisms for protecting and enforcing these rights.

Financial and housing circumstances also reveal disparities within the LGBTI community itself. Some respondents have stable incomes and are in a more secure financial position, while others live with uncertain incomes and rely on support from their families. Renting accommodation without a formal tenancy agreement remains widespread. Differences observed compared with 2020 should be interpreted with caution, given the different composition of the samples, variations in the wording of some questions, and the fact that the previous study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings do not support the conclusion that the socio-economic position of all LGBTI people has improved equally or across the board.

The research recommendations focus on the consistent implementation of anti-discrimination legislation, strengthening institutional protection, improving employers' internal policies, and ensuring ongoing training for teaching staff, management and HR professionals. Cooperation between institutions, employers, trade unions, labour inspectorates and civil society organisations is essential, alongside the meaningful involvement of LGBTI people in shaping measures that affect them. There is a need to strengthen support in education, employment and housing, address the specific needs of trans people, and continue research that better captures the experiences of less visible and multiply marginalised groups within the community.

INTRODUCTION

LGBTI issues entered the political agenda of the post-Yugoslav countries in the context of the violent disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia, the rise of destructive nationalisms, widespread impoverishment and deindustrialisation, insecurity, corruption, human rights violations, and a general lack of stability, predictability and security (Bilić & Dioli 2016, 122). In such circumstances, activists in the 1990s were forced to focus on the war, providing assistance to refugees and opposing nationalist ideology (Bilić & Kajinić 2016, x).

The fact that sexuality and sexual emancipation were often at the heart of heated debates and policies aimed at controlling and instrumentalising women's bodies in the name of the purported 'national cause' also gave rise to a proliferation of feminist activism and theoretical interventions that challenged the very foundations of the ethnonational patriarchal order. The marginalisation of those who did not feel comfortable within the boundaries of the heterosexual/heteronormative canon also contributed to the growth of LGBTI activism, alongside the development of international standards and the increasingly global networks connecting LGBTI activists. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, the growth of LGBTI activism was slower, while homophobia and exclusion became entrenched in ethnopatriarchal structures of power shaped by the war and its post-war legacy (Gavrić & Čaušević 2020). The dysfunctional state and its weak institutions, which often fail to provide even a minimum level of protection for vulnerable groups in society, further compounded the difficulties faced by LGBTI people.

At the same time, certain legislative advances were made under the influence or pressure of international actors. However, these were often adopted by Bosnian and Herzegovinian political elites as necessary steps towards EU integration, without the political will to implement them in practice. As a result, the actual needs and realities on the

ground were largely overlooked when it came to gender equality and, more broadly, the position of marginalised groups in BiH society. This pattern is also widespread in other post-socialist countries across Europe, where legislative advances in the field of gender equality have consequently been interpreted through the lens of neocolonialism (Kulpa 2013). Global adverse trends and attacks on the very idea of gender equality, which have intensified particularly in recent years in the context of economic crises, migration and the COVID-19 pandemic, have also contributed to the rise of right-wing populism, ethnonationalism, toxic masculinity and racism (Agius, Rosamond & Kinnvall 2021). All of this illustrates how different practices of exclusion and violence reinforce and intersect with one another at both the micro and macro levels, readily cross-national borders, and have also found fertile ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the activities of so-called anti-gender actors (Popov-Momčinović 2025).

While attacks on legislative advances have gained particular momentum, economic issues and social rights remain entrenched within the framework of the neoliberal economic and social order that replaced the socialist state and its socio-economic system. The individualistic logic of the new system emphasises 'achievement, meritocracy and individual success', without questioning the structures and foundations of the patriarchal capitalist system or the role of sexuality and gender in its reproduction (Dioli 2016, 154). In this way, within the neoliberal order, and particularly in research concerning LGBTI people that does not incorporate a socio-economic, and especially class, dimension, the question arises as to 'whose experiences are taken into account' when drawing conclusions about LGBTI rights (McDermott 2011, 64).

When it comes to the experiences, rights and everyday lives of LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the gap between *de iure* and *de facto* realities only partially explains the situation. More specifically, given that gender is the most important and visible marker of identity, opposition to non-

heteronormative forms of sexuality and non-binary gender identities, as well as to gender equality more broadly, must be understood in the context of wider social structures and the ways in which the existing distribution of power and resources is reinforced within society, the *status quo* is maintained, and social, political and economic progress is impeded.

Although this study does not seek to address all of the issues outlined above, it is important to acknowledge them, as every theoretical intervention and research study is shaped by the specific social context in which it is situated and by the power dynamics that dominate there. It is particularly important to emphasise the need for ongoing research into the socio-economic position of marginalised groups, in this case LGBTI people, whose experiences and concerns are often overlooked because available statistics and socio-economic research tend to focus on the situation of the so-called general population. Research on these issues is largely left to local LGBTI civil society organisations, which, within the limits of their capacities and available resources and in response to the needs of the community, devote a significant part of their work to these questions. In this respect, this study forms part of the Sarajevo Open Centre's ongoing work and efforts to identify the real-life problems and needs faced by the LGBTI community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It draws in part on Sarajevo Open Centre's 2020 study of the socio-economic position of LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Gačanica 2021), while also seeking to provide a basis for comparing trends over time.

The study is structured as follows:

- The **first section** reviews existing research on the socio-economic position of LGBTI people, drawing on the available literature and relevant reports.
- The **second section** examines the existing evidence on the rights and socio-economic position of LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- The **third** outlines the research methodology.
- The **fourth** presents and discusses the research

findings.

- The **fifth** compares the findings with those of SOC's previous study, conducted in 2020.
- The **sixth** draws the main conclusions, while the **seventh** sets out recommendations for improving public policy and informing further research.

1. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION OF LGBTI PEOPLE – AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION, UNDERLYING CAUSES AND INTERSECTIONAL INSIGHTS

Socio-economic position, or status, is one of the key factors shaping people's life chances, opportunities and everyday lives. People in more advantaged socio-economic positions are better able to meet a range of needs, tend to have a more optimistic outlook on life, and have access to resources – including status and symbolic resources – that enable them to exercise greater political influence, build stronger connections with others (often referred to as social capital), and gain a better understanding of and ability to exercise their rights (Laurison 2015). Research points to a particular paradox: although state assistance is more important to people on lower incomes and institutional support is often indispensable to them, people in higher socio-economic positions have greater access to the mechanisms and resources needed to influence state institutions and public policy (Lawless & Fox 2001). A more favourable socio-economic position is also associated with better health and a more positive outlook on life, which in turn has a direct bearing on mental health. These advantages are also reproduced and passed on to one's children, thereby perpetuating socio-economic inequalities across generations. Growing up in an environment that offers a range of opportunities – most notably access to quality education and opportunities to build relationships with people from more advantaged backgrounds – facilitates the continued reproduction of socio-economic advantages.

Across the world, various marginalised groups, including LGBTI people, not only tend to occupy a more disadvantaged socio-economic position, but, within the realm of symbolic power, their *habitus* also obscures the conditions of their subordination through processes of misrecognition (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu 1991). However, researching the socio-economic position of LGBTI people

presents particular methodological and social challenges, owing to the lack of precise data on their share of the overall population, as population censuses generally do not capture this dimension (Milković & Štambuk 2019, 285). Although sex is a standard demographic variable used in a wide range of studies, respondents are often offered only two options – male and female – which places LGBTI people at a disadvantage. International surveys, such as those conducted by Gallup, provide more precise estimates, and according to them, 4.5% of the US adult population identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (*ibid.*). Other studies in the United States have produced similar estimates and have also found that 15–20% of high school students identify as non-heterosexual (Gonzales & Deal 2022). Recent trends indicate that this is gradually changing: Australia’s 2026 Census included questions on sexual orientation and gender identity for the first time. In addition, a number of OECD member countries collect data on sexual orientation and gender identity in at least one official national survey each year (OECD 2020, 29).

The socio-economic position of LGBTI people is shaped by a range of factors, among which exposure to discrimination is particularly significant, as it affects people’s ability to realise their life chances and fulfil their human potential. For this reason, age is an important factor, given the different generational experiences of older LGBTI people and young LGBTI people. Whether a person grew up during a period when homosexuality was treated as an illness and was illegal is crucial, as this shaped their life opportunities and experiences (McGarrity 2014, 385), and, in particular, their psychological, cultural, social and economic resources (McDermott 2011, 72). These generational differences bring us to the question of intersectionality, a theoretical framework for understanding different group experiences at the points where forms of discrimination intersect (Crenshaw 1991). Indeed, intersectional factors such as sex, ethnicity, health status, migration status, nationality, race, social class and disability can further exacerbate discrimination in the workplace (International Labour Organization 2022, 28).

In line with these intersectional insights, significant differences can also be observed in the socio-economic position of LGBTI people. Research in the United States, for example, shows that transgender people, followed by bisexual people, are among those most exposed to poverty and the risk of poverty (Badgett, Choi & Wilson 2019, 7). Transgender people face serious barriers to employment as a result of social stigma and requirements such as using a legal name or providing proof of identity when applying for jobs. Such systemic barriers further limit equal access to social support intended for people experiencing economic insecurity (Wilson et al. 2020, 26). Research conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), together with civil society organisations, trade unions, employers and academia in several countries around the world, likewise shows that transgender workers report the highest rates of discrimination, violence and harassment in the workplace, particularly when their gender identity does not correspond to the information contained in their official documents (International Labour Organization 2022, 28). The particularly disadvantaged socio-economic position of bisexual people, especially women, is most commonly associated with higher levels of stress and depression compared with other sexual minorities, lower levels of sexual identity disclosure (i.e. outness), and weaker connectedness to the LGBTI community (Wilson, Lin & Bouton 2025, 33). Mental health difficulties, in turn, are an important predictor of labour-market opportunities and disproportionately affect LGBTI people, particularly as a result of internalised stigma (McGarritty 2014, 392).

The emergence of popular television series portraying the lives of gay men in large US cities, particularly those from the upper-middle class, contributed to the emergence of the so-called 'myth of gay affluence' (Shugart 2003), at least in Western, economically developed and democratic societies. This myth is partly supported by the fact that LGBTI people, including gay men, may find it easier to live in larger urban areas, which offer greater opportunities and reduce the risk of discrimination through the relative anonymity they provide. However, as Kuhar and Švab (2014) point out,

the quality of life of LGBTI people cannot simply be inferred from a straightforward rural-urban dichotomy. Rather, it also depends on the presence of particular structures and services that contribute to improving the quality of life of LGBTI people within the local community. Furthermore, meta-analyses and studies that take a range of factors into account show that gay and bisexual men earn less than heterosexual men (McGarrity 2014, 387; Weistroffer et al. 2025, 1856). Differences in income and poverty rates between men and women belonging to sexual minorities can also be adequately explained by the consistent finding that, on average, men earn more than women (Schneebaum & Badgett 2019, 2). Research further shows that, even after controlling for factors such as age, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and disability, both male and female same-sex couples have a lower socio-economic position than heterosexual couples (McGarrity 2014, 386).

There is also considerable variation within the gay population itself. Factors that, so to speak, protect gay men in the United States from poverty include living in an urban area, having a higher level of education, and being less likely to have children (Schneebaum & Badgett 2019, 20, 23). By contrast, gay men of lower socio-economic status tend to live in communities characterised by homophobia and fear of violence, which limits their life prospects and highlights the importance of the intersection of gender, sexual orientation and class when examining socio-economic position and the dynamics of oppression. For example, research in Canada shows that they tend to live in communities where people with lower socio-economic status predominate, increasing their likelihood of experiencing various forms of violence (Mallon 2001). They are also less connected to the community, more likely to conceal their sexual orientation, and are excluded from the so-called commercial gay scene. Because of their lower levels of social acceptance, they are more likely to experience unstable intimate relationships and to engage in higher-risk sexual behaviour (McGarrity 2014, 388). Both quantitative and qualitative research confirm that being LGBTI in combination with lower socio-economic status

constitutes a distinctive and disadvantaged life experience (Wilson et al. 2020, 17–18). Intersectional perspectives further indicate that gay men, as well as LGBTI people more broadly, who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds or occupy lower-class positions face even more severe forms of workplace discrimination (Weistroffer et al. 2025, 1856).

Because patriarchy and capitalism are structured around gendered divisions of labour within both households and the economy, they channel women into lower-paid occupations while placing a disproportionate burden of domestic work on them in heterosexual households. For these and other reasons, lesbians, by rejecting the traditional expectation that women should be primarily oriented towards men, are often perceived as occupying a more favourable socio-economic position than heterosexual women (Badgett & Hyman 1998, 50). Although there are indications that domestic responsibilities affect the wages and working hours of heterosexual women, and that lesbians earn higher incomes than heterosexual women (McGarrrity 2014, 387), other evidence suggests that lesbians experience higher levels of economic insecurity and, like other sexual minorities, make greater use of social services and public assistance than heterosexual people (Deal et al. 2024, 3).¹

More generally, for LGBTI people, one factor that has a particularly strong impact on socio-economic position, and especially on the risk of poverty, is growing up in poverty. This can expose individuals throughout their lives to discrimination, poorer educational opportunities, and fewer opportunities to achieve economic security in adulthood (Wilson et al. 2020, 16). Research from the United Kingdom shows that LGBT young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to leave school or higher education, while those from middle- and higher-class backgrounds are better able to draw on various resources to overcome the disadvantages associated with their sexual orientation or

¹ At this point, it is important to note that many states do not provide LGBTI people with such forms of assistance or institutional support; on the contrary, they criminalise them. Currently, consensual same-sex sexual relations are criminalised in 65 countries worldwide, most of them in Africa and Asia.

gender identity (McDermott 2011, 75). In the United States and other Western societies, this risk is particularly shaped by race and ethnicity, further underscoring the importance of an intersectional approach to research and the role of structural racism.² In Central and Eastern European countries, within the context of the so-called ideology of *familialism*, the family plays a crucial role in providing children with support and safety nets as they grow up, thereby shaping their life prospects. Given the social repatriarchalisation and prevailing heteronationalism³ in these societies, LGBTI children and young people often receive less support not only from society at large but also within their families, which can have adverse consequences for their socio-economic position in adulthood. At the same time, research conducted in Poland suggests that exposure to social homophobia can lead LGBTI young people to place greater emphasis on family and, in particular, intimate relationships. The study also identifies a trend towards greater parental acceptance of LGBTI children, linked to the strong reliance on family, and particularly on children, as a source of support in old age (Mizielińska & Stasińska 2018, 989, 999).

UN reports identify key areas of life that affect the enjoyment of human rights and quality of life, including education, employment, housing, health, public spaces, and religious and political discourse (United Nations 2019). LGBTI children and children of LGBTI parents are frequently subjected to teasing, verbal abuse, violence, isolation, and threats at school, as well as discrimination by teachers and fellow students, which can discourage them from continuing their education and from further investing in their educational development. In some countries, transgender people are denied access to education because their identity documents did not match their current gender

2 Belonging to an ethnic or racial minority increases the likelihood that a person will have fewer resources while growing up, which can result in lower-quality education, fewer employment opportunities, poorer mental and physical health, and a lower likelihood of owning a home (Yearby 2018).

3 Heteronationalism refers to the ideological intersection of nationalism and heteronormativity, whereby heterosexuality and 'traditional family values' are used as criteria for national belonging, national pride, and claims of superiority over other groups. Conversely, in some liberal Western societies, homonationalism uses sexual diversity as a symbol of national pride.

expression (Badgett et al. 2019, 6). Since education is a fundamental determinant of socio-economic position, unequal treatment in schools has long-term implications for the life chances of LGBTI people. For these reasons, Schools are an intensive environment for young people in terms of their sexuality, and research consistently demonstrates that they function as deeply gendered and heterosexual regimes of domination and subordination (McDermott 2011, 70). It is important to note that research shows that LGBTI people who have experienced discrimination in accessing education or acquiring skills are more likely to experience discrimination later in life, particularly in the workplace and in employment (Weistroffer et al. 2025, 1856). Given the importance of education, it is crucial to introduce a compulsory, targeted and implementable curriculum module addressing LGBTI issues; provide school staff with guidance on implementing an LGBTI-inclusive curriculum; and adopt a whole-school approach that ensures a consistent response to LGBTI-phobic language and behaviour whenever they occur (OECD 2020, 33–34).

Furthermore, discrimination and abuse based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression take place in all stages of the employment cycle, from hiring, advancement, training, compensation and termination (United Nations 2019, 25). Many LGBT people report being denied employment because of their sexual orientation, in some cases explicitly during job interviews. Many have also been denied employment because their gender expression (e.g. clothing, mannerisms or voice) was perceived as not ‘matching’ their legal gender identity (International Labour Organization 2015, 2). Although global research has recorded a double-digit increase in public acceptance of LGBTI people over the past two decades in many countries around the world, workplace discrimination remains widespread even in societies with high levels of acceptance and inclusion (Drydakis 2021). For example, although Thailand is widely regarded as a tolerant society, research shows that stigma and discrimination continue to profoundly shape the lives of LGBTI people, limiting their inclusion in the workplace

(International Labour Organization 2022, 27). Data from Central and Eastern European countries likewise indicate that one in four LGBTI people have experienced discrimination during recruitment or in the workplace (Badgett, Waaldijk & Rodgers 2019, 5).

Research indicates that homophobic and transphobic harassment is widespread and includes insults, derogatory jokes and negative comments. LGBTI people also experience significant social marginalisation in the workplace, manifested in refusals to shake hands, sit together or share spaces, as well as exclusion from informal conversations and meetings. There is also discrimination in access to opportunities: LGBTI employees frequently report being unfairly denied training and opportunities for advancement and promotion, while dismissals on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression continue to occur (International Labour Organization 2022, 28).

It is important to emphasise that sexual harassment of LGBTI people in the workplace is highly prevalent, including in developed Western societies. As a result, many people conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity, which can have serious psychological consequences (Weistroffer et al. 2025, 1856). At the same time, research by the International Labour Organization shows that people who come out at work and encounter acceptance perform better, produce higher-quality work, and report higher levels of life satisfaction. Conversely, concealing one's sexual orientation or gender identity for fear of discrimination and violence causes significant anxiety and loss of productivity (International Labour Organization 2015, 1). Prolonged exposure to stigma can also lead to the internalisation of negative attitudes, resulting in a poorer self-image, self-exclusion, isolation in the workplace and suicidal thoughts (International Labour Organization 2022, 27–28).

Even in countries with national legislation prohibiting discrimination, there remains considerable scope for improving employment legislation, particularly in relation to sexual harassment, which affects LGBTI people to a

particularly severe and alarming extent (TUC 2019, 11). Following the emergence of the #MeToo movement, sexual harassment in the workplace received considerable media attention and became a focus of governments, regulatory bodies and employers. However, the experiences of LGBTI people were generally not addressed in these campaigns (*ibid.*, 9).

Work and employment constitute a key dimension of quality of life, but discrimination does not end in the workplace. According to UN data, LGBTI people also face discrimination in housing, including through being denied rental agreements and loans, harassment by neighbours, and forced evictions. These and other negative experiences increase the risk of certain illnesses and mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide. Data indicate that LGBTI people are twice as likely as the general population to experience homelessness, while an additional challenge is that specialised shelters for LGBTI people are unavailable in most countries (United Nations 2019, 6). The European Commission likewise warns that discrimination and inequality remain widespread in employment, education, healthcare, housing and access to services, significantly limiting the life chances and opportunities of LGBTI people (European Commission 2025, 3). Of particular concern is the finding that almost twice as many LGBTI people as people in the general EU population report struggling to make ends meet, pointing to lower quality of life and limited opportunities to fulfil so-called higher-order human needs (*ibid.*, 13).

Intersectional perspectives also show that lesbian, bisexual and transgender women are more likely to be excluded from women's economic empowerment projects. LGBTI young people are particularly vulnerable because of their economic dependence on family and community and are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Older LGBTI people often experience social isolation and loneliness as a result of family rejection and a lack of support, while people with disabilities who depend on caregivers are often unable to express their sexual orientation or gender identity

freely (United Nations 2019, 11–13).

At the same time, the International Labour Organization points to positive trends. An increasing number of workplaces are introducing inclusive measures such as maternity protection, family-friendly policies, parental leave, and health insurance coverage for LGBTI employees. The number of governments adopting policies that support LGBTI workers is also increasing, while trade unions and employers are incorporating inclusion issues into training programmes and collective bargaining. Globally, case law has contributed to strengthening the protection of LGBTI people in the workplace (International Labour Organization 2022, 28, 35).

It is important to emphasise that many studies recognise that the socio-economic position of LGBTI people is linked to the development and prospects of society as a whole, and that the inclusion of LGBT people and economic development can mutually reinforce one another. The economic costs of discrimination included reduced productivity, underinvestment in human capital, and inefficient allocation of resources resulting from discrimination in education and employment (Badgett, Waaldijk & Rodgers 2019, 2–3). At the same time, evidence shows that companies that actively promote diversity and inclusion are more likely to attract and retain talent, foster innovation, and achieve stronger financial performance (European Commission 2025, 13). In this context, many employers are taking a leading role in protecting LGBT rights in the workplace, in many cases going beyond the protections required by law (International Labour Organization 2015, 3). European Commission strategies note that cities that are open and inclusive towards LGBTIQ+ people have stronger ‘innovation ecosystems’, a greater concentration of skills and talent, higher levels of entrepreneurship and a better quality of life (European Commission 2025, 3). In this regard, it is important to raise awareness that excluding and discriminating against LGBTI people in recruitment and the workplace undermines economic development across society as a whole.

2. EXPERIENCES FROM BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Discrimination and the disadvantaged socio-economic position of LGBTI people and other minority groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is one of the most pressing, yet at the same time most neglected, socio-political issues. LGBTI people are particularly vulnerable in the context of the broader re-traditionalisation and repatriarchalisation of post-war Bosnian society, in which discourses of what is considered 'normal' and 'desirable' permeate all spheres of life in a Foucauldian manner, sometimes through overt forms of violence and at other times in less visible ways.

A paradox has emerged between legal advances and the extremely slow progress in improving the quality of life and securing the rights of LGBTI people in BiH and other countries of the Western Balkans. This process has been accompanied by so-called backlash against existing legal advances, efforts to prevent further progress (such as the legal recognition of same-sex partnerships) and broader social regression (Kuhar & Zaharijević 2026, 218, 227). Unlike the so-called traditional homophobia that characterised the post-war period in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, the backlash against the human rights of LGBTI people in recent years has been directed primarily at trans people (*ibid.*, 238). Similar trends can be observed in BiH, as evidenced by the regression in Republika Srpska's legislation, where gender identity is no longer explicitly recognised as a ground of discrimination (Popov-Momčinović 2025, 465). Moreover, inconsistencies in legislation across different levels of government create additional obstacles to the exercise of LGBTI people's rights and freedoms (Banović 2013).

With regard to work and employment, research points to inadequate legislation, which often fails to specify the grounds on which discrimination based on these characteristics is prohibited. For example, the Labour Law of Republika Srpska recognises only sex as a prohibited ground of discrimination, while the Labour Law of the Federation of Bosnia and

Herzegovina and the Labour Law of Brčko District use the inadequate term 'sexual preference' (*spolno opredjeljenje*). This term does not encompass sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics, thereby leaving room for legal gaps and inadequate protection (Gačanica 2021, 21–22). In addition, certain labour rights are guaranteed exclusively to women in connection with pregnancy and motherhood, including maternity leave, the right to breastfeed and the right to work half of the full-time working hours (*ibid.*, 22). Although such provisions are important for protecting women's rights at work and safeguarding maternity, they also reveal the limited scope of the broader concept of gender equality within labour legislation.

In the broader social context, Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries of the Western Balkans are characterised by particularly low levels of acceptance of LGBTI people (Radoman & Petrović 2024, 425), shaping the social environment in which LGBTI people are educated, work and live. At the same time, existing research points to some, albeit limited, progress in reducing negative attitudes and hostility towards LGBTI people among the general population in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

For example, a comparison of research findings from 2013 and 2023 indicates greater acceptance of LGBTI people, increased support for certain rights, as well as greater awareness of LGBTI people themselves and of issues affecting them (Popov-Momčinović 2013; Bošnjak 2023). However, given that research shows that these issues continue to receive very little attention within the education system, these changes can largely be interpreted as the result of advocacy efforts and awareness-raising campaigns carried out by local NGOs, rather than of institutional and political action (Bošnjak 2023, 9). The attitudes of churches and religious communities also contribute to intolerance, while major political parties have shown little willingness to address these issues or have adopted openly hostile positions. It is therefore unsurprising that, despite the aforementioned progress, a significant proportion of the

population continues to hold strongly exclusionary and hostile attitudes, alongside a noticeable proportion of people who remain neutral or passively supportive of LGBTI rights. The smallest segment of the population is made up of those who are actively supportive of LGBTI people and their rights, pointing to the limited extent of social inclusion (Bošnjak 2023, 34–36).

The education system in BiH plays a crucial role in shaping these patterns of values and attitudes. Previous research on discrimination against LGBTI people in BiH indicates that schools and universities are the settings in which discrimination occurs most frequently (see Numanović 2017). The education system in BiH is highly fragmented and dysfunctional, and largely serves to reinforce existing ethnic divisions in society and prepare young people for future confrontations (Mujkić 2010, 45). This is achieved through exclusionary practices and the promotion of ethno-nationalist and patriarchal values. From an economic perspective, the education system does not adequately prepare young people for the labour market. In the absence of this important educational function, it has increasingly become a vehicle for ideologically driven and politicised curricular content.

In this regard, available research shows that the education system, and textbooks in particular, do little to foster critical thinking, creativity and active learning. Instead, the so-called national group of subjects largely promotes particularistic values at the expense of universal values such as equality, tolerance, solidarity and social justice (Soldo et al. 2017). Minority groups, such as Roma people, are portrayed in stereotypical ways; migrants in Europe are presented exclusively as Muslims; atheists as immoral and lacking a sense of purpose in life; and women primarily as mothers, while girls are portrayed as beautiful, kind, and virtuous. All of this points to the strong presence of ethno-nationalist and patriarchal values, reinforced by the conspicuous absence of LGBTI issues from the curriculum.

Furthermore, topics related to sexuality are addressed

only partially in biology textbooks, while people who fall outside the male–female binary are excluded, further reinforcing a heteronormative order (Bilčević & Čaušević 2017, 38–39). The only subject that approaches these issues differently is *Healthy Lifestyles* (*Zdravi životni stilovi*), which includes questions of sexual orientation and gender identity (*ibid.*). However, its introduction met with resistance in Sarajevo Canton during the pilot phase. Since 2023, the FBiH Ministry of Education and Science has been working to introduce the subject in other cantons as well, with the aim of preventing violence in schools, promoting diversity, and improving physical, sexual and reproductive health. Although this represents a significant step forward, decisions on incorporating these topics into the curriculum remain uncertain and continue to depend on decisions taken at the cantonal level.⁴ In Republika Srpska, growing pressure on non-governmental organisations and the shrinking space for their activities and cooperation with educational institutions have further limited opportunities to address these issues through informal education, including by halting projects such as *Living Libraries* (*Žive biblioteke*). The project also included so-called ‘books’, i.e., personal stories shared by members of the LGBTI community, whom students could listen to and meet as part of the project activities (Čengić 2024, 2).

Of particular concern is the lack of legislation in the areas of health, social protection, and education addressing comprehensive sexuality education. Although topics related to sexual and reproductive health are included in curricula and are addressed to some extent in biology, class meetings, nature and society, and health and physical education classes, topics such as contraception, sexually transmitted infections, sexual abuse, and gender issues are absent (Puhalo 2024, 29). Previous analyses have shown

4 FBiH Ministry of Education and Science ‘Zdravi životni stilovi’ kao izborni predmet: Noviteti u obrazovanju u FBiH (Healthy Lifestyles’ as an Elective Subject: New Developments in Education in the FBiH. <https://fmon.gov.ba/Obavjest/Pregled/1028> (Accessed 2 June 2026); SDP (2023). Noviteti u obrazovanju u FBiH: ‘Zdravi životni stilovi’ kao izborni predmet. (New Developments in Education in the FBiH: Healthy Lifestyles’ as an Elective Subject) <https://www.sdp.ba/noviteti-u-obrazovanju-u-fbih-zdravi-zivotni-stilovi-kao-izborni-predmet/> (Accessed 2 June 2026)

that initiatives to introduce these topics have largely been driven by non-governmental organisations, while schools and educational institutions more generally have remained largely passive in this area (Dračo et al. 2013).

The attitudes and values formed and internalised during schooling affect the socio-economic position and quality of life of LGBTI people, as social rejection is also reflected in rejection and discrimination in the workplace and limits their ability to meet a range of human needs. For example, previous regional research found that 30% of respondents from the general population would stop speaking to a person they worked with if they learned that the person had a different sexual orientation or gender identity, while 23% would try to help their colleague to 'cure' them (UNDP 2017, 23).

At the same time, LGBTI people have insufficient trust in institutions in BiH, creating a vicious cycle that allows violence, discrimination, and institutional inaction to persist. Previous research by the Sarajevo Open Centre indicates that most institutions in BiH are neither aware of nor keep records of cases of violence and discrimination against LGBTI people in the workplace, while many did not respond to the research request at all (Banović & Sprečaković 2013, 30). According to the SOC's 2025 Pink Report, based on research conducted in 2023, as many as 90.63% of LGBTI respondents who had experienced discrimination did not report it. Discrimination was most commonly reported in schools (29.33%), while many respondents had also experienced discrimination in the workplace (8.21%), at police stations (4.69%), in healthcare institutions (4.99%), at universities (12.02%), and in hospitality establishments (13.20%) (Bošnjak & Pandurević 2023, 18). Individual cases documented by the SOC during 2024 further confirm the reluctance to report such incidents to the relevant authorities (Adilović et al. 2025, 31). The failure to report cases of violence and discrimination in the workplace is linked to the fact that only a small proportion of employed LGBTI people have disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity to colleagues or employers, and that most do not feel comfortable discussing

their private lives at work (UNDP 2017, 23).

With regard to work and employment, previous research indicates that, compared with the general population, LGBTI people are significantly less likely to work in their field of study after completing their education and have limited access to the traditional public and private sectors. The extent to which they are able to exercise their labour rights is considerably lower than among the general population, while experiences of discrimination and sexual harassment are more common (Gačanica 2021, 43–44). The aforementioned study found high levels of distrust in institutions and organisations responsible for addressing labour rights (such as trade unions), among both the general population and LGBTI people. However, it is important to emphasise that socially vulnerable groups, including LGBTI people, require greater assistance and support in addressing the challenges they face in their everyday lives, including negative experiences and discrimination in the workplace and when seeking employment. Previous analyses show that discrimination in the sphere of work and employment in BiH particularly affects transgender people undergoing transition (UNDP 2017, 23).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To gain a deeper insight into the socio-economic position of LGBTI people, a study was conducted between April and July 2026. The study is both an academic contribution and an emancipatory tool: it is a scientifically grounded process that empirically documents patterns of inequality, while also pursuing a broader social and activist goal of empowering the community and encouraging change in public policy.

The main research question concerns the socio-economic position of LGBTI people in BiH, with a focus on the spheres that shape or influence this position (access to and opportunities in education, employment opportunities, the exercise of rights in the workplace, opportunities to disclose one's sexual orientation, and experiences of violence and discrimination at school and at work), as well as those that reflect it (including housing, financial circumstances, perceptions of life opportunities and needs).

The study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to adequately capture these diverse and complex dimensions. The research methods included a questionnaire comprising a range of open- and closed-ended questions, as well as in-depth interviews.

In designing the study, alongside the principal researcher, the Sarajevo Open Centre team made a significant contribution, particularly Darko Pandurević and Ali Kontić. Through intensive consultations throughout March, and drawing on the research conducted in 2020, the main research instrument, i.e., a questionnaire designed for LGBTI people, was defined and subsequently refined. Together with field researchers from different parts of BiH, the questionnaire was reviewed and refined at a joint meeting, with identified shortcomings addressed and removed.

To gain a better understanding of the position of LGBTI people, which is to a large extent shaped by the attitudes and, in particular, prejudices of the general population,

a structured questionnaire was also developed for the general population. It contained fewer questions than the questionnaire for LGBTI people, given that the survey was planned and conducted by telephone using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). Nevertheless, it included a number of identical or similar questions in order to enable a comparison of the position of the general population and the LGBTI community. Following a pilot study conducted from 15 to 16 May to assess the logical flow of the questions, their comprehensibility for different groups of respondents, and the time required to administer the questionnaire, the instrument was substantially revised and improved to ensure a higher response rate and to refine the wording of the questions and response options. Following the pilot testing of the revised questionnaire, which showed that there were no obstacles to commencing fieldwork, the survey of the general population was successfully conducted from 23 May to 7 June 2026.

Both questionnaires comprised six groups of questions: demographic characteristics, housing, financial circumstances, education, work and employment, and expenditure and needs. To obtain deeper and more nuanced insights, the questionnaire for the LGBTI sample included a larger number of open-ended questions. During interviews with LGBTI people, field researchers were asked to record their impressions, as well as verbal and non-verbal communication with the people they interviewed. The interviewees were also invited to share their impressions of the research process itself, with the aim of overcoming the dichotomy between the so-called subject and object of research. The research process itself was conceived as a process of transforming ourselves, while also creating space for interviewees to express their lived experiences, problems and concerns, as well as any discomfort arising from possible limitations of the research process itself.

Data collected from the LGBTI sample were entered into Excel, where descriptive statistics were also calculated for the responses obtained. The open-ended questions for

the LGBTI sample were analysed using a combination of inductive and deductive coding. Custom Concept d.o.o., the agency that conducted the telephone survey, provided the dataset, codebook, main analytical results, statistical significance tests (Z-tests), and the coding results for the open-ended questions. A comparative analysis of responses from LGBTI people and the general population was also conducted wherever this was possible and relevant to the main research question, and non-parametric significance tests were used. Qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyse the in-depth interviews in order to identify key patterns in the interviewees' experiences.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the researchers' own positionality. The principal researcher is a cisgender heterosexual woman, a full professor at a university, active in the feminist movement in BiH, and a long-standing external collaborator of the Sarajevo Open Centre. Some of the field researchers came from the LGBTI community, while others did not. This enabled both groups to broaden their knowledge, strengthen their connections with the community in the field, and reflect critically on their own attitudes and experiences.

The interviewees' experiences were rich and diverse. Some reported feeling relaxed and described the atmosphere as pleasant and friendly, while others particularly appreciated being able to play an active part in this intensive research process. Some interviewees said that the research prompted them to reflect on experiences of discrimination they had encountered during their education and in the workplace, and that the research process made them more aware of discrimination. It is particularly noteworthy that interviewees whom the researchers assessed as living in relative isolation from the LGBTI community were given space to talk, which was also reflected in the greater length and detail of their responses. A small number of participants, albeit a minority, were observed to be reluctant to answer the questions and, as one researcher noted, appeared eager to bring the interview to an end as quickly as possible. This may be

partly attributable to research fatigue resulting from their participation in various studies. Some interviewees offered recommendations and criticism because the questionnaire did not cover a particular set of questions relating to private and family life, while others pointed to methodological shortcomings, suggesting that fewer questions be asked during the in-depth interviews, allowing for deeper and more detailed responses. All of these suggestions were taken very seriously. Following the completion of the questionnaire-based data collection, three additional in-depth interviews were therefore conducted to gain further insight into the dynamics identified during the research. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who responded to the invitation to participate and took part in the research at all its stages, and in particular for sharing their personal experiences, which we believe will contribute to advocacy efforts and help bring about positive change.

The importance of sharing personal experiences, and the broader social significance these experiences can have in improving the position of LGBTI people in BiH, is illustrated by the testimony of one interviewee:

Honestly, I'm really glad that I had the opportunity to take part in this interview and in the whole process in general. I hope that by being honest and sharing personal information, I might help even one person in a similar situation. [If that happens], I will be incredibly happy [...] and I hope that my answers will help, or at least make some small contribution, to the LGBT community as a whole. (In-depth interview, transgender man)

3.1. SAMPLE

3.1.1. LGBT sample

A **convenience sampling** approach was used to investigate the situation of LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with participants recruited based on their availability and willingness to take part in the study. Five field researchers were tasked with establishing contact across five regions (Banja Luka, Mostar, Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zenica) with LGBTI people who were willing to share their experiences and perspectives. Recruitment was facilitated through mailing lists, existing networks and personal contacts. The Sarajevo Open Centre, together with partner organisations in local communities, provided support throughout this process, helping to establish contacts and build trust with potential participants. In the Banja Luka region, UNSA Geto provided significant support in identifying and recruiting LGBTI people to participate in the research. In Tuzla, the research was conducted with the support of the City of Tuzla Youth Centre (*Prostor za mlade Grada Tuzle*), coordinated by the Tuzla Open Centre.

This approach was complemented by **snowball sampling**, whereby individuals who had already participated in the study referred other potential participants, allowing the pool of participants to expand organically through existing social networks. The final sample comprised 121 respondents with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and other demographic characteristics, thereby ensuring substantial coverage of the characteristics relevant to the study.

It is important to note that this was a **non-probability sample**, meaning that the findings cannot be considered statistically representative of the LGBTI population as a whole in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nevertheless, this combined approach made it possible to reach a population that can be difficult to access and provided valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of LGBTI people across different local contexts.

It should also be noted that participation in the study was limited. This reflects the fact that many LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina remain hidden due to fears of stigma and discrimination, as well as a certain degree of research fatigue within the community. In addition, a considerable number of LGBTI people who were contacted reported that they no longer live in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Alongside broader population outmigration trends, this may also point to a particular propensity among LGBTI people to migrate. This, in turn, reflects their unfavourable socio-economic and broader social position, as well as the regressive trends discussed above. In any event, given the difficulties involved in conducting the research through face-to-face engagement, further efforts are needed to strengthen trust within the community and create additional safe spaces with adequate capacity.

The composition of the LGBTI sample according to key characteristics – sex, gender and gender identity, type of settlement, age and level of education – is presented in **Table 1**, while sexual orientation and relationship status are shown in **Figures 1 and 2**.

The LGBTI sample is notably dominated by people living in urban areas (83.5%). Meanwhile, the 45–65 age cohort is only modestly represented (4.1%), and there are no respondents aged over 65.

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage %
Sex	Male	54	44.6%
	Female	66	54.5%
	Intersex	1	0.8%
Gender and gender identity	Cisgender man	49	40.5%
	Cisgender woman	55	45.5%
	Non-binary	6	5%
	<i>Gender non-conforming</i>	<u>1</u>	<u>0.8%</u>
	Gender queer	1	0.8%
	<u>Transgender woman</u>	2	1.7%
	Transgender man	4	3.3%
	No answer provided	3	2.5%
Type of settlement	Rural	19	15.7%
	Urban	101	83.5%
	No answer	1	0.8%
Age	18–24	36	29.8%
	25–44	80	66.1%
	45–65	5	4.1%
Education	Education not completed	1	0.8%
	Primary education	0	0%
	Secondary education	49	40.5%
	Post-secondary education	6	5%
	Higher education	45	37.2%
	MA / MSc / PhD	20	16.5%
Total (N)	121		<u>100%</u>

Table 1: Composition of the LGBTI sample by key demographic characteristics

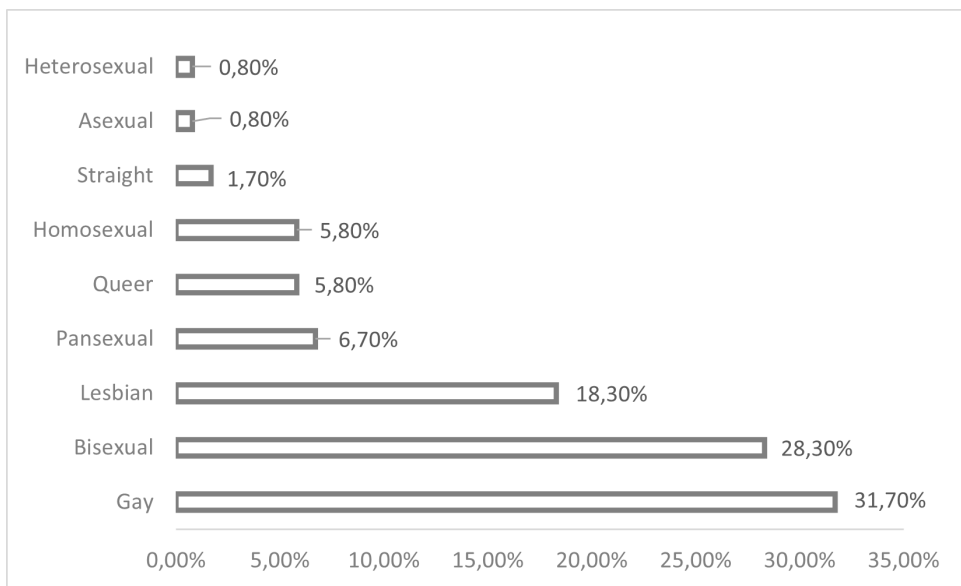


Chart 1: Sexual orientation – LGBTI sample

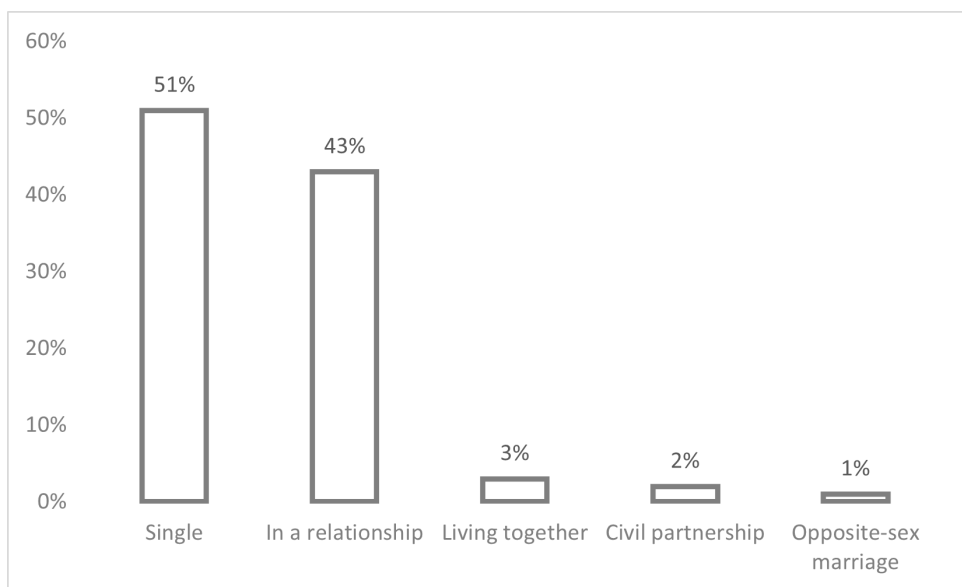


Chart 2: Partnership status – LGBTI sample

3.1.2. General population sample

When it comes to the survey of the general population, a double-stratified random sample was used, representative of the general population aged 18 and over. The sampling frame was based on the results of the 2013 Census, as well as data from the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2016. To minimise selection bias, telephone numbers were randomly selected from databases of landline and mobile numbers operated by all three telecommunications providers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For landline numbers, i.e., where households were contacted, respondents within each household were selected at random using the latest birthday method. The survey response rate was 14.62%.

The sample comprised 1,000 respondents ($N = 1,000$). Given the census population of 2,838,458 people aged 18 and over, the margin of error at a 95% confidence level was ± 3.1 percentage points ($p \leq 0.05$). This means that the actual population value – that is, the prevalence of the phenomenon being measured – may fall within the range obtained by adding or subtracting the stated margin of error from the survey result.

In designing the sample, care was taken to ensure that the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska and Brčko District were represented proportionally to the number of inhabitants living in each area. Within each entity, all administrative units, namely cantons, regions and/or municipalities, were likewise represented proportionally. The sample distribution by gender, type of settlement and age broadly reflected the corresponding population proportions, and the data were weighted in accordance with the results of the most recent census.

Sample structure is shown in **Table 2**.

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Sex	Male	485	48.5%
	Female	515	51.5%
Type of settlement	Urban	430	43%
	<u>Rural</u>	570	57%
Age	18–24	113	11.3%
	25–44	351	35.1%
	45–65	359	35.9%
	65+	177	17.7%
Education	Education not completed	43	4.3%
	Primary education	163	16.3%
	Secondary education	538	53.8%
	Post-secondary education	66	6.6%
	Higher education	160	16%
	MA / MSc / PhD	30	3%
Total (N)	1000		100%

Table 2: Composition of the general population sample by key demographic characteristics

3.2. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research was conducted in strict accordance with ethical standards to protect participants and ensure the integrity of the data. The public opinion research agency and the research team at the Sarajevo Open Centre complied with all applicable laws governing research involving human participants, including those applicable to face-to-face, telephone, and online surveys in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as data protection and privacy legislation.

Anonymity was guaranteed throughout the research. The general population questionnaire did not contain any questions that could compromise participants' anonymity. In the case of LGBTI participants, any information that could potentially identify them was removed from open-ended responses and transcripts of in-depth interviews. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary. Participants were given a clear explanation of the research objectives and what their participation would involve, and informed consent was obtained verbally, with participants assured that they could withdraw at any time.

Particular attention was paid to the sensitivity of the questions. They were phrased and administered in a manner appropriate to the participants' age, gender, ethnic background and social background, without victimisation or judgement. The interviews were conducted in the participants' mother tongue, and an interview was discontinued if continuing could have had a negative impact on the participant. In the LGBTI sample, field researchers took particular care when asking about participants' experiences of coming out and violence experienced in educational institutions or the workplace. Participants were free at any point to decline to answer sensitive questions or questions they found personally uncomfortable.

The use of the data was restricted strictly to research purposes. All documents were stored securely, with access restricted to authorised individuals. In the LGBTI sample, each document was assigned a code consisting

of the participant's initials and the last two digits of their telephone number. This provided an additional safeguard for participants' identities while also facilitating data management. LGBTI participants who wished to do so were invited to provide an email address for potential follow-up evaluation and possible participation in future research. These contact details were stored separately from the research materials and in a way that prevented them from being linked to participants' responses.

These measures ensured that the research was conducted lawfully and ethically, with a strong focus on protecting participants, while also enabling reliable analysis of the data.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1. EDUCATION

4.1.1. *Access to education*

Access to education is one of the key determinants of socio-economic status. Similar patterns were observed in both samples: the majority of participants reported having equal or largely equal opportunities compared with other students. In the LGBTI sample, the largest group consisted of those who felt they had had completely equal opportunities (60.3%). In the general population, the proportion was considerably lower (20.2%), as participants from rural areas, as well as women, were more likely to report that their opportunities had been limited or only partly equal. These differences are statistically significant and point to the presence of patriarchal patterns and structural inequalities between rural and urban areas that adversely affect equal access to education.

In this context, the fact that participants from urban areas were significantly overrepresented in the LGBTI sample (83.5%) appears to have contributed positively to their perception of access to education. The majority of LGBTI participants also reported that resources such as educational materials, scholarships, and support were equally available to them: 43.8% said they were fully available, 20.7% mostly available, and 24% partly available. Only 7.4% felt that such resources were not available to them at all, while 4.1% were unable to say.

Regarding the reasons for choosing a secondary school or university, the most frequently reported reason in both samples was the desire to pursue education in an area of interest to them (50.1% in the general population sample and 55.4% in the LGBTI sample). The second most frequently reported reason was 'better opportunities in the labour market', which was considerably more common in the general population sample than in the LGBTI sample

(33.6% compared with 19%). Among LGBTI respondents, the response 'to feel accepted and safe' was somewhat more common (5.8% compared with 3.8% in the general population sample), while 'to stay close to people I know and my friends' was more common among respondents in the general population sample (9.4% compared with 7.4%).

Although these differences are not large, they nevertheless suggest that acceptance and a sense of safety may represent greater challenges for LGBTI people, while maintaining existing social connections and friendships appears to be a somewhat more prominent consideration among respondents in the general population sample. The response option 'to be closer to the LGBTI community', which was included only in the LGBTI questionnaire, was selected by a small proportion of respondents (2.5%). This finding may be associated with lower levels of coming out and limited awareness of the resources and activities of the LGBTI community among younger people. At the same time, it is important to recognise that, alongside its social dimensions, education primarily serves to prepare people for their future careers and employment, while also supporting personal development. In line with this, only 1.5% of respondents in the general population sample identified 'being with people of the same or a similar socio-economic background' as their main reason for choosing a school or university.

A small proportion of respondents in the LGBTI sample cited other reasons. These most commonly related to pressure, influence, or encouragement from parents and other family members, as well as financial and practical considerations, such as the location of the school. For example: 'I mainly wanted my secondary school to be as close to home as possible because I came from a village and the transport was very poor.' Gay man from Sarajevo

Some responses also highlight the importance of personal experiences, both negative and positive. In one example involving a negative experience, a lesbian woman from Čitluk reported that she chose her school because she wanted to leave the town where she had experienced abuse.

In contrast, a pansexual woman from Tuzla highlighted the importance of her identity in choosing to study medicine, motivated by a desire to improve the situation in the field: 'I'm studying medicine, and I wanted there to be greater understanding of queer people in healthcare. I wanted to make some kind of change.'

A separate set of questions included only in the LGBTI questionnaire sheds further light on respondents' experiences and highlights some of the specific challenges, motivations and barriers they encountered during their education. Although just over half of LGBTI respondents (52.9%) reported that they had never considered leaving education, almost half said they had considered it 'often', 'sometimes' or 'rarely'. The most frequently reported reasons were financial difficulties, sometimes compounded by challenging personal circumstances, as illustrated by the experience of a bisexual woman from Banja Luka who said she had considered leaving education 'because of a parent's illness and a difficult financial situation'. Poor educational conditions were another commonly cited reason, while lack of emotional support and experiences of discrimination were mentioned less frequently.

Some respondents also cited personal reasons, such as losing the will or motivation to continue, as well as a combination of personal and structural factors that negatively affect the educational experiences of LGBTI people. A transgender man from Banja Luka attributed this to 'a personal lack of interest, plus transphobia from some professors'. A pansexual man from Banja Luka similarly pointed to 'teachers' lack of interest in addressing bullying', which can be particularly harmful to LGBTI students.

It is encouraging that only a small proportion of respondents (4.2% in total) had actually changed or left their school or university because of discrimination or fear of coming out. In most cases, this involved leaving university and discontinuing their higher education. Nevertheless, experiences of violence and discrimination during education remain a significant concern, as discussed in

the following section. The lack of an inclusive education system for LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina also means that changing educational institutions does not necessarily protect them from experiencing similar forms of discrimination or violence elsewhere. The experience of a lesbian woman who reported in an in-depth interview that she had changed schools because of peer violence, only to experience violence again at her new school, illustrates this point. Against this backdrop, the lack of systemic support and viable alternatives may help explain why relatively few respondents change educational institutions in response to violence or discrimination. This may further contribute to feelings of constraint and insecurity throughout their educational experience.

4.1.2. Discrimination and violence in education

The findings indicate that LGBTI respondents face significant challenges throughout their educational experience. A large majority of respondents (62.8%) reported having experienced verbal or physical violence, which clearly indicates the scale of the problem. The frequency of such experiences varied. A significant number of respondents reported experiencing violence occasionally (24.8%) or rarely (24.0%), while 9.1% said they experienced it frequently and 5.0% almost constantly during their education. By contrast, 37.2% reported never having experienced violence (Chart 3). These findings indicate that experiences of violence among LGBTI people in schools are widespread, occurring with varying frequency and severity, clearly suggesting that the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not provide equal opportunities for all.

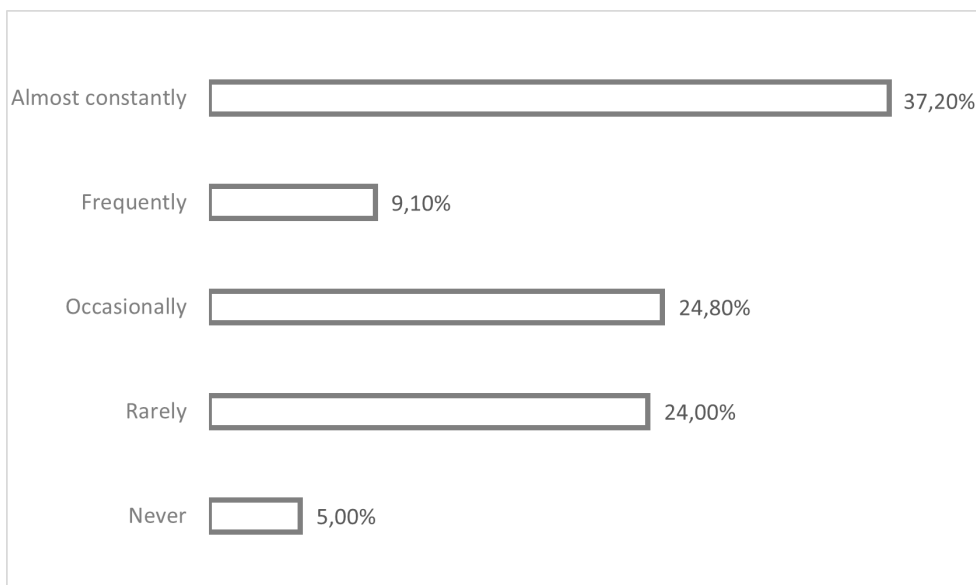


Chart 3. Experiences and intensity of violence against LGBTI people in schools

Accounts shared during the in-depth interviews indicate that violence against LGBTI people most commonly occurs during primary school, where it tends to be more overt and physical. A gay man reported experiencing 'physical violence several times' during primary school, alongside persistent verbal aggression and support from peers for those perpetrating the violence. A lesbian woman described experiences of peer violence, while a transgender man reported being told 'to behave like a man'. He also described how his best friend, a gay student, was frequently targeted because, as he put it, he was 'somehow feminine' and 'had known from an early age that he was gay'. Experiences during secondary school were more varied. A lesbian woman continued to experience violence, while a gay man described positive experiences, including open support and assistance from both students and teachers. A transgender man described this period as 'average', without any significant positive or negative experiences.

At university, participants reported more subtle forms of discrimination. A lesbian woman described gossip and

negative comments about herself and LGBTI people more generally, while a transgender man reported experiences of sexual harassment and misogynistic attitudes among teaching staff, including instances of internalised misogyny among some female lecturers: 'We would go to a lecture and a female lecturer would talk and talk, and then she would simply say, *Well, you girls don't really need to listen to this anyway, as you'll get married soon enough.*' The findings from the in-depth interviews indicate that violence does not necessarily cease as individuals progress through education. Rather, it may shift from more direct forms of physical violence to subtler forms of discrimination and harassment that can be equally harmful and can leave a lasting impact on those affected.

Despite the prevalence of violence, the vast majority of LGBTI respondents (81.8%) reported that they had never reported discrimination in an educational institution, while 6.6% said they had considered doing so but ultimately did not. Among respondents who did not report discrimination, 35.8% said they had not experienced discrimination at school, 22.3% cited a lack of trust in institutions, 6.6% cited fear of the consequences, and 5.8% said they did not know whom to contact in such cases. A further 10% did not provide a reason, while others gave a range of explanations. These primarily related to fear, a lack of trust in institutions, and an unwillingness or inability to pursue formal complaints or legal action and risk further exposure. Other reasons included a desire to conserve personal resources, the perception that reporting would be futile from the outset, and concerns that doing so could lead to further unwanted consequences:

I was afraid that it would affect my education in both primary and secondary school, and that I would be subjected to even greater pressure from my peers. And especially in primary school, I was terrified of how my parents would react if they found out what the others were calling me. (Transgender woman from Banja Luka)

Fear of social isolation and rejection at school was also evident:

And if I had complained, everyone would have known who it was, and I didn't want to be excluded from the group. So I'd rather put up with it than be left out and have everyone look at me with hostility. (Pansexual woman from Tuzla)

Other responses reflected attempts to rationalise or minimise the problem, such as the view that discrimination could be 'forgotten' because school lasts 'only' from eight until one, as well as the process of becoming accustomed to and normalising discriminatory practices. This is illustrated by the following response:

The main reason was that, in a way, I had already got used to discrimination. I'd been used to it since childhood, so when these things happen, they somehow become normal to you, and in the end, you don't even have anyone to report them to. (Gay man from Sarajevo)

Among those who said they had not experienced discrimination, it is important to consider that, for some respondents, this may have been related to an inability to recognise discriminatory behaviour at that stage of their lives. This is partly reflected in the response of one participant, who explained why she had not reported discrimination during her education:

I didn't because I didn't know discrimination could be so subtle. I didn't know what types of discrimination existed back then. (Bisexual woman from Tuzla)

In some cases, respondents also reported that they had not yet fully understood or identified their own sexual orientation at the time, which further complicated their ability to report discrimination: 'I wasn't sure who I was, exactly, so I didn't know who to report it to.' (Gay man from Mostar) 'At the time, I didn't know what my sexual orientation was, but people were calling me names because of it, so I didn't even

know what it meant to report it.' (Queer cisgender woman from Tuzla) A lesbian woman from Banja Luka further noted that the issue was not taken seriously at the time she was attending school, which meant that she did not see reporting discrimination as a viable option.

Only 14 respondents (11.6% of the total sample) reported having experienced discrimination in an educational institution, with some reporting the incident to more than one person/institution. Overall, reports were most commonly made to teaching staff (11 cases), a school counsellor or psychologist (9), the institution's management (8), a non-governmental organisation (5), and the police (2). One gay man from Tuzla reported the discrimination to his parents. Another, from Sarajevo, described referring the case to a friend working for an NGO, who prepared a letter for the police but ultimately did not submit it. This indicates that the respondent ultimately did not proceed with the report, despite initially stating that he had reported the incident.

Even among the small number of reported cases, the issue was fully resolved in only two cases and partially resolved in six, while four respondents reported that the issue remained unresolved. In one case, no feedback was received, leaving the outcome unknown. One respondent, a gay man from Sarajevo, reported that his account was simply not believed. These findings point to limited sensitivity within the education system to the experiences of LGBTI people who face discrimination, as well as limited institutional capacity to respond appropriately to their needs. This may contribute to a lack of trust in institutions that can develop as early as the school years.

The experience of one gay man who reported violence at school to the police on several occasions suggests that the response may depend heavily on the individual police officer or investigator handling the case. He reported receiving different responses on each occasion, suggesting that institutions are neither sufficiently sensitive to these issues nor equipped with a systematic approach to providing appropriate support in cases of violence against

LGBTI people in educational settings.

It is also important to consider how the general population perceives the treatment of LGBTI people within the education system, as these perceptions provide a broader context for understanding the environment in which discrimination occurs. Overall, 43% of respondents believed that LGBTI people were not denied equal treatment in schools, while 37.3% were unable to say, and 19.7% believed that they were denied equal treatment. This distribution of responses may indicate a lack of sensitivity among the general population, as well as the limited visibility of LGBTI people in schools and a lack of awareness of, or interest in, the challenges faced by this marginalised group. **Respondents who had contact with LGBTI people during their education, as well as those aged under 45, were significantly more likely to believe that LGBTI people are denied equal treatment in educational institutions.**

4.1.3. Diversity and coming out

When considering experiences during education, it is important to recognise that educational settings can either facilitate or limit exposure to diversity, thereby shaping the broader educational environment for members of marginalised groups, including LGBTI people. In the general population sample, questions about experiences with different groups were asked of respondents with secondary or higher education (N = 795). The vast majority reported having encountered people of a different religion (89.9%) or nationality (86.7%) during their education. A total of 64% reported having encountered Roma people, while 57.8% had encountered people with disabilities. By comparison, contact with LGBTI people was considerably less common: only 28.5% of respondents reported having encountered LGBTI people during their education, while 53.6% said they had never encountered an LGBTI person in an educational setting.

These findings may partly be explained by the smaller

proportion of LGBTI people in the population compared with other groups, as well as by their lower visibility. At the same time, the findings point to the marginalisation of this aspect of identity within the education system and society more broadly. This is further reflected in the fact that 17.9% of respondents were unable to say whether they had encountered LGBTI people, compared with considerably lower proportions for the other groups considered (0.5% for people of a different religion, 0.9% for people of a different nationality, 1.3% for Roma people, and 2% for people with disabilities). These findings also suggest that the education system does not provide a sufficiently safe environment for LGBTI people to express their sexual orientation and identity openly, further highlighting their limited visibility and the potential vulnerability they face in educational settings.

The findings on coming-out experiences among respondents in the LGBTI sample are consistent with this interpretation. During their education, 56.2% reported having come out only to a small circle of people, while just 14.9% said they had been open about their sexual orientation or identity. A further 12.4% had not come out to anyone, while 9.9% selected the response option 'no, but others commented on my presumed sexual orientation/identity'.

Some respondents selected 'Other' and described a range of experiences: 'only to one classmate'; 'people knew, but I didn't talk about it'; 'at first, it was only a small circle of people, but once word got around, I became more open'; 'I only came to terms with it very late, towards the end of my education, so I didn't really talk to others about it'; 'I first came out to people I was close to, whom I knew would support me, and then, in my third and fourth years, I gained the courage to tell people who followed me on Instagram as well'.

These findings point to what may be described as limited coming out, reflecting an educational environment in which institutions do not necessarily provide supportive conditions for coming out or adequate support for those who are still coming to terms with their identity. At the same time, fear of possible reactions among those who had not

come out to anyone (36.1% of cases) suggests that the educational environment may be experienced as hostile, while for another proportion of respondents it remained at least uncomfortable (30.6% of cases).

In this regard, respondents who had come out or whose sexual orientation or identity had been disclosed by others most commonly reported noticing a change in how they were treated by other pupils (45.4% of the sample). In a smaller proportion of cases, respondents reported changes in treatment by teachers (18.1%), while changes in treatment by the management of the educational institution were reported only occasionally (8%).

This distribution of responses may point to a degree of disengagement among teaching staff and institutional management when it comes to supporting students with diverse sexual orientations or gender identities. While peers were more likely to respond in some way – including through acts of violence – institutional actors appeared to remain more distant. This points to a lack of systemic support and limited proactive efforts to create an inclusive educational environment. This is also reflected in the experiences of respondents who only came to understand their identity later in life. For example, a lesbian woman from Mostar said that she ‘only came to understand her identity at the age of 30’, while an interviewed transgender man reported that he did not come out until the age of 28. These examples suggest that schools and teaching staff do not provide sufficient space for the process of self-discovery, which is further constrained by the lack of comprehensive sexuality education and the absence of LGBTI-related topics from formal curricula.

By contrast, among respondents in the general population sample, it is encouraging that only 13 respondents (1.8% of the sample) reported negative experiences with people from other groups. Of these, 14.7% said that they had had such experiences with LGBTI people. In the open-ended responses, the reasons given included the perception that LGBTI people were ‘pushy’ or that their behaviour constituted

'harassment', reflecting broader social stereotypes. It is important to note, however, that these purportedly negative experiences were reported by only two respondents, and may also be related to the limited visibility of LGBTI people and issues in educational institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4.1.4. Curriculum content and teaching staff

Attitudes towards the inclusion of LGBTI-related topics and LGBTI teaching staff in education are considerably divided among respondents in the general population sample. Although the largest proportion of respondents (40.4%) believe that children should be taught to accept diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, a substantial proportion oppose this (32.1%), while 27.7% are unsure (Chart 4). With regard to teaching staff, 45% of respondents said they would not have a problem with LGBTI people being members of teaching staff, while 29.4% were unsure and 25.6% said this would be a problem for them. Although there was no statistically significant difference in levels of acceptance, the findings indicate that opposition to teaching children about diverse identities is more pronounced than opposition to LGBTI people being represented among teaching staff. This difference may, tentatively, be related to the perception that teachers do not themselves teach these topics but instead follow the official curriculum. Alternatively, it may reflect greater sensitivity towards people and personal identities – in this case, LGBTI teaching staff – than towards what are perceived as more 'abstract' curricular topics.

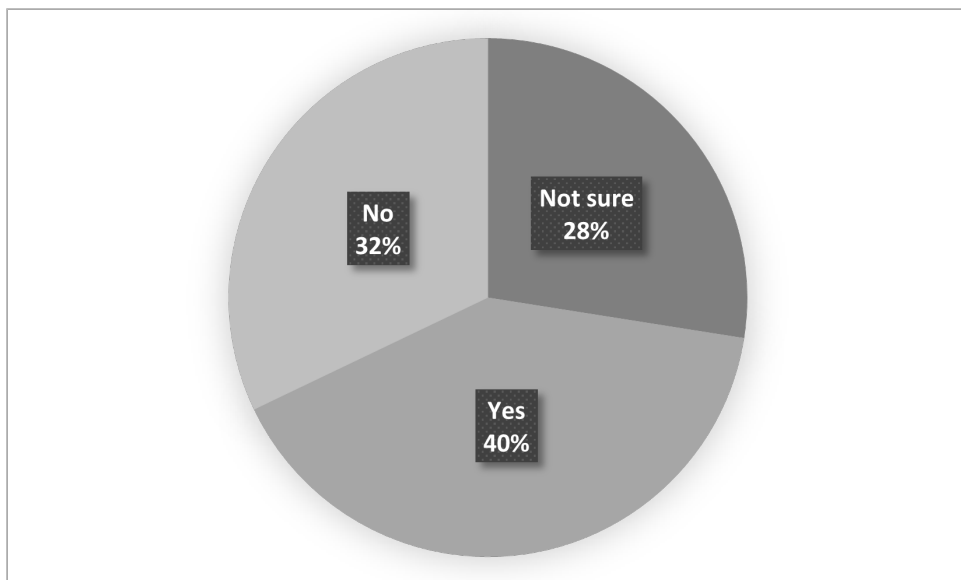


Chart 4. Attitudes in the general population towards the need for education on diverse gender and sexual identities

Positive attitudes were more common among respondents who had encountered LGBTI people during their education. This finding is consistent with the social contact theory, which has also received support in previous research in Bosnia and Herzegovina (e.g., Popov-Momčinović 2013; Bošnjak 2023). It points to the potential importance of creating opportunities for interaction with and greater visibility of LGBTI people within the education system, as such opportunities may contribute to reducing prejudice and fostering more inclusive attitudes.

The reasons given for positive attitudes were most commonly related to acceptance of diversity and equality (52.1%), followed by the educational dimension (14.9%), social progress (7%), and human rights values (6.1%). A proportion of respondents expressed what may be described as 'conditional acceptance' (11.1% of cases), while 5.3% did not know or did not wish to answer, and 3.5% of responses were categorised as 'other'. With regard to LGBTI people among teaching staff, positive attitudes were most commonly

based on the view that competence and professionalism should be the primary considerations (24.9%), followed by general acceptance (17.6%), the right to work without discrimination (15.1%), the view that private life is irrelevant to professional work (11.3%), and the value of diversity or positive personal experiences (1.9%). At the same time, a significant proportion of those who expressed acceptance of LGBTI people among teaching staff did so on the condition that they should not 'promote' or 'impose' their sexual orientation (19.3% of cases), reflecting the persistence of stereotypes in Bosnian and Herzegovinian society. A further 9.4% did not know or did not wish to answer.

Reasons for opposing education about diverse identities included the belief that children should not need to know about such issues (22.5%), the view that such education should not be supported (20.5%), fears of a negative impact (13.4%), the belief that such matters should be addressed within the family (10.6%), prejudice (9.8%), religious and traditional reasons (7.8%), and support for what is considered 'natural' (4%). With regard to LGBTI people among teaching staff, the most commonly cited reasons for non-acceptance were social stigma and general non-acceptance (38.4%), the view that they would not be good role models for children (23.2%), fears of 'imposing' their views or values on others (21.9%), and religious, traditional or patriarchal reasons (6.5%). In both cases, a proportion of respondents (8.2% and 7.4%, respectively) did not know or did not wish to answer.

The views and experiences of LGBTI people further confirm that, in practice, there is virtually no space for addressing these issues or implementing inclusive practices within Bosnia and Herzegovina's education system. The majority of respondents (62%) believe that LGBTI-related topics are not present at all in the curriculum, while almost 30% believe that they are presented negatively or stereotypically. Only a negligible proportion consider these topics to be addressed adequately, even in part (Chart 5). About the sensitivity of teaching staff, almost half of

respondents believe that teaching staff show no sensitivity towards LGBTI issues at all. Around a quarter believe that they show neither sensitivity nor insensitivity, while a small proportion perceive some degree of sensitivity among teaching staff. The proportion who consider teaching staff to be fully sensitised is negligible (Chart 6). At the same time, a comparison of the responses shows that perceptions of the sensitivity of teaching staff are somewhat less negative than perceptions of the curriculum content itself.

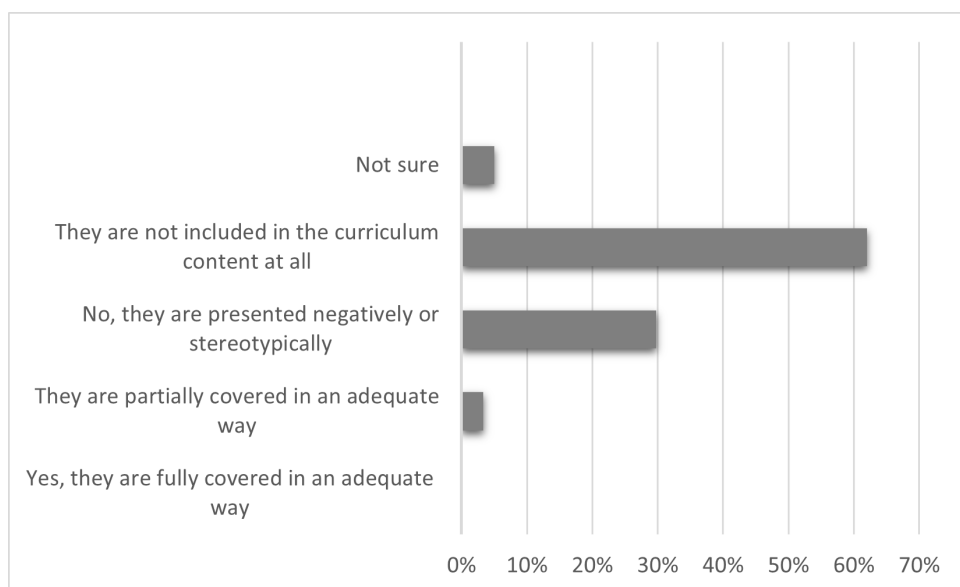


Chart 5. Perceived representation of LGBTI topics in the curriculum – LGBTI sample

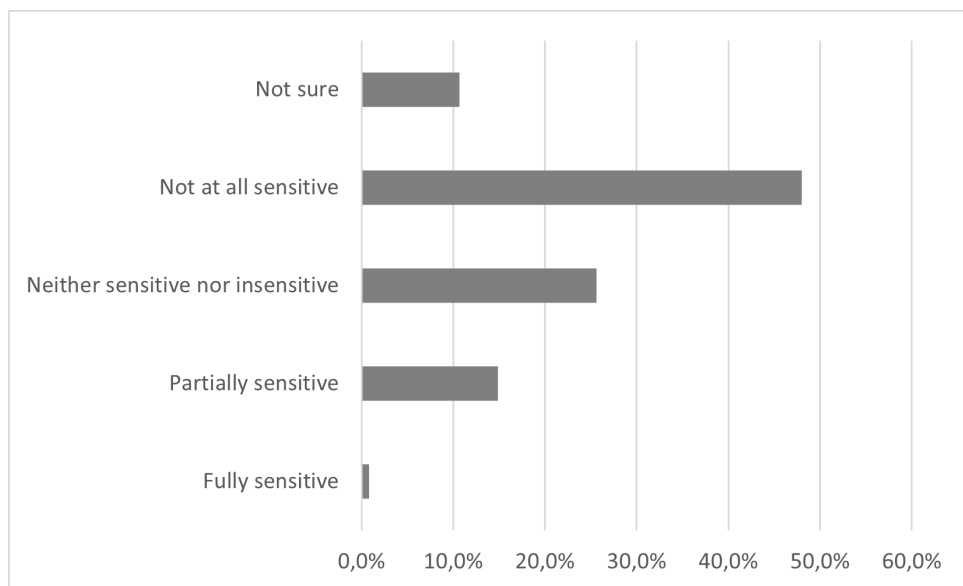


Chart 6. Perceived sensitivity of teaching staff to LGBTI issues – LGBTI sample

However, during their education, only a small proportion of LGBTI respondents (14%) approached teaching staff for support in relation to discrimination or coming out. Half of the sample (50.41%) reported that they had never sought such support because they had had no need to do so, while almost 30% cited a lack of confidence in a positive outcome as the main reason. Responses to open-ended questions provided further explanations, pointing to the limited inclusiveness of educational institutions and teaching staff towards LGBTI people. These included responses such as ‘no, because I had not come out’ and ‘yes, but not for support, rather in relation to the situation at the time’. The experience of a gay man from Prijedor who did approach teaching staff is particularly illustrative. He stated: ‘I did, and I still have trauma from it.’ His account points to a serious failure to provide an adequately supportive and sensitive response in his case.

On the other hand, positive examples of support do

exist. When asked whether there were teachers, university lecturers or peers who had shown understanding and provided support in relation to their identity or sexual orientation, almost 59% of respondents answered in the affirmative. This finding indicates that support is available within educational institutions, but that it is largely provided on an individual basis rather than as a result of systemic inclusion. It is important to note that the question covered not only teaching staff but also peers, namely other students. This further suggests that support is more often the result of individual initiatives than of established institutional practices, a pattern also reflected in the experiences shared during the in-depth interviews.

In this regard, one gay interviewee noted that addressing LGBTI issues in schools largely depends 'on the individual teacher and whether they're willing to engage with these topics (...), but I wouldn't say that happens very often.' He further emphasised the particular importance of these issues within the education system, given that this is a period of maturation, when young people first encounter such questions and begin to have their own personal experiences. For this reason, he stressed the importance of ensuring that students are informed, including through the education system, as education plays a key role in shaping attitudes and supporting young people as they develop a greater understanding of themselves. The experience of a transgender man is particularly indicative. He reported that his fellow students at university often reacted with confusion or asked questions that he personally found acceptable. Such reactions may nevertheless suggest that gaps in education and knowledge extend into, and persist within, higher education. The experience of an interviewed lesbian woman is consistent with these findings, as she reported that she had learned most about these issues through informal education provided by the non-governmental sector. This points to significant gaps in formal education within formal education at different levels.

The distribution of responses to the question about satisfaction with the way the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina ensures equality and acceptance of LGBTI people further demonstrates the absence of systemic inclusive educational practices. As shown in Chart 7, a large majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction, either completely (67.8%) or to some extent (19%).

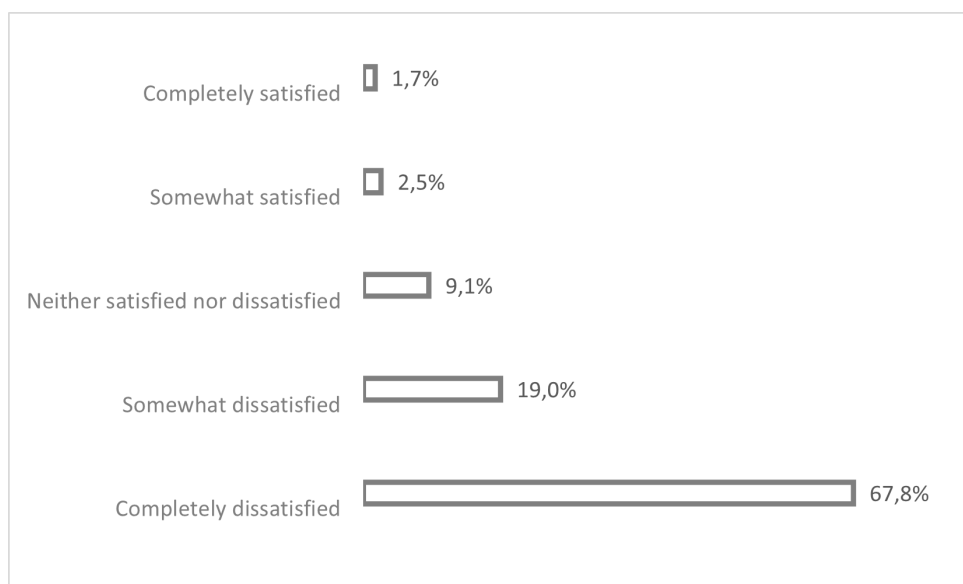


Chart 7: Satisfaction of LGBT people with the inclusiveness of the education system in BiH

As many as 34.7% of respondents reported that their experiences during education had not had a significant impact on their subsequent professional or personal opportunities, while a notable proportion (22.3%) were unable to say. A negative impact was identified by 15.7% of respondents, while 27.3% believed that their experiences had had a positive impact. The presence of positive perceptions among just over a quarter of the LGBTI sample may be associated with individual strategies for making use of educational resources, or with the opportunities available

to respondents and their ability to use them for personal and professional development.

In this regard, 78.5% of LGBTI respondents in the sample reported having had opportunities during their education to participate in extracurricular activities, such as clubs, student councils and sports competitions, while only a very small proportion chose not to participate because of their sexual orientation or identity. Taken together with the findings on the prevalence of violence and discrimination in schools, this finding may indicate that LGBTI people demonstrate considerable agency in pursuing available opportunities and maintaining participation and social inclusion during their education, despite potentially challenging educational environments.

4.2. WORK AND EMPLOYMENT

4.2.1. Employment and access to the labour market

In the LGBTI sample, 67.8% of respondents were employed, 15.7% were students, and 11.6% were unemployed. The remaining 5% reported that they were studying while also working part-time or undertaking temporary work, including project-based and undeclared work, as well as internships. The largest proportion of LGBTI respondents were employed in the private sector (58.51%), while smaller proportions worked in the public sector (13.83%), non-governmental organisations (12.77%), and international organisations (7.45%). A further 7.45% of responses fell into the 'other' category. By comparison, respondents in the general population sample most commonly worked in the private sector (66.8%) and public sector (31.9%), while employment in the non-governmental and international sectors was almost negligible (0.4% each), and only 0.5% selected 'other' (Chart 8).

Although the private sector was the predominant area of employment in both groups, respondents in the general population sample were significantly more represented in

the public sector, as indicated by the difference between the observed and expected frequencies. In addition to sexual orientation and gender identity, age is also an important factor. In the general population sample, respondents under the age of 44 were more likely to work in the private sector, while the LGBTI sample was itself predominantly composed of younger age cohorts. Nevertheless, the relatively low representation of LGBTI respondents in the public sector raises questions about whether this sector may be less open or accessible to LGBTI people. At the same time, sexual orientation and gender identity may play a role in engagement with civil society and international organisations, as suggested by the substantial difference between the observed and expected frequencies. This is also consistent with the positive experiences reported by some LGBTI respondents after moving into the non-governmental sector. For example:

I feel much more at ease now. I'm not anxious; I feel free, and that has made a real difference to my productivity. After coming from such a toxic environment, this feels like being given a new lease on life. (Gay man from Sarajevo)

Interestingly, one interviewee suggested that the greater openness of international organisations towards LGBTI people warrants further investigation:

The only place where, for certain positions, people from minority groups are given an advantage is in international organisations. So, I think it would be interesting to look more closely at how that advantage comes about. Do people actually disclose openly in their applications that they belong to one of these minority groups? (Gay man from Sarajevo)

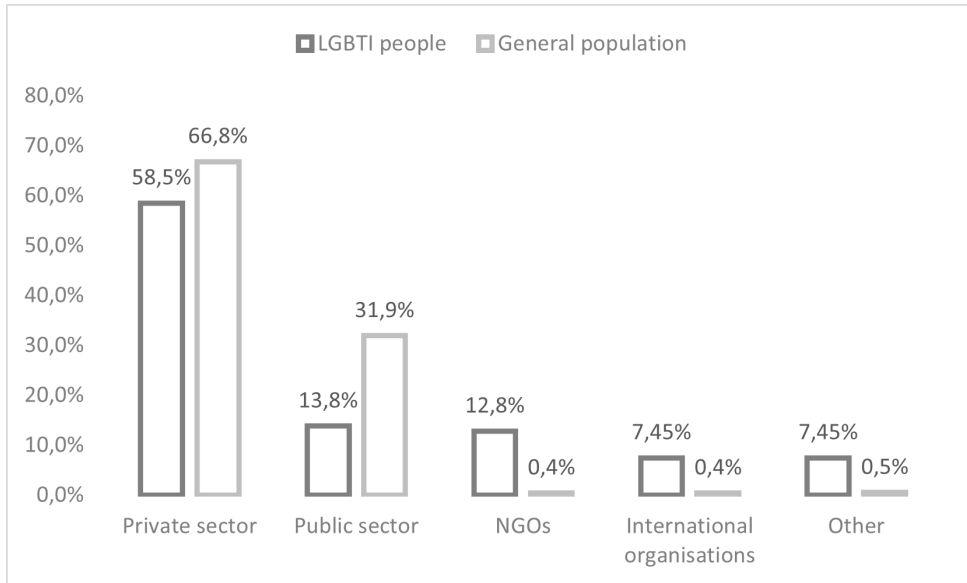


Chart 8. Employment of LGBTI people and the general population by sector

At the same time, the low level of willingness among employers in the general population sample to hire LGBTI people (Chart 9) suggests that significant barriers may also exist in the private sector. None of the employers in the sample selected the response option ‘yes, I have already employed an LGBTI person’⁵.

⁵ When interpreting this finding, however, it is important to bear in mind that the survey was primarily designed to examine the general population. Employers were therefore included through random sampling and accounted for only 2.5% of the total sample.

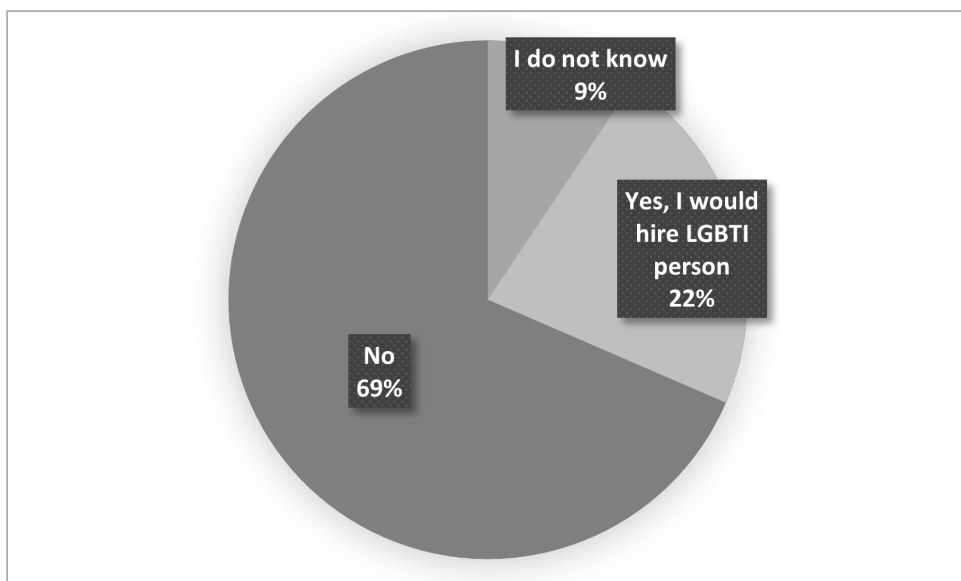


Chart 9. Willingness of Employers in Bosnia and Herzegovina to Hire LGBTI People

With regard to current employment arrangements, full-time employment under a contract was the predominant form in both groups, although it was considerably less common among LGBTI respondents (71.3%) than among respondents in the general population sample (89.4%). In the general population sample, 4.8% of respondents owned their own business or company, while no such responses were recorded in the LGBTI sample. By contrast, 11.7% of LGBTI respondents reported working as freelancers, whereas no freelancers were currently represented in the general population sample.⁶ LGBTI respondents were more likely than respondents in the general population sample to undertake freelance or part-time contract work (see Chart 10). The higher proportion of seasonal work in the general population sample is also associated with the representation of respondents from rural areas, who, in addition to seasonal work, most commonly undertake casual or short-term work.

⁶ Three respondents initially identified themselves as freelancers when answering the question on employment status at the beginning of the survey, whereas the question here referred specifically to their current employment arrangement.

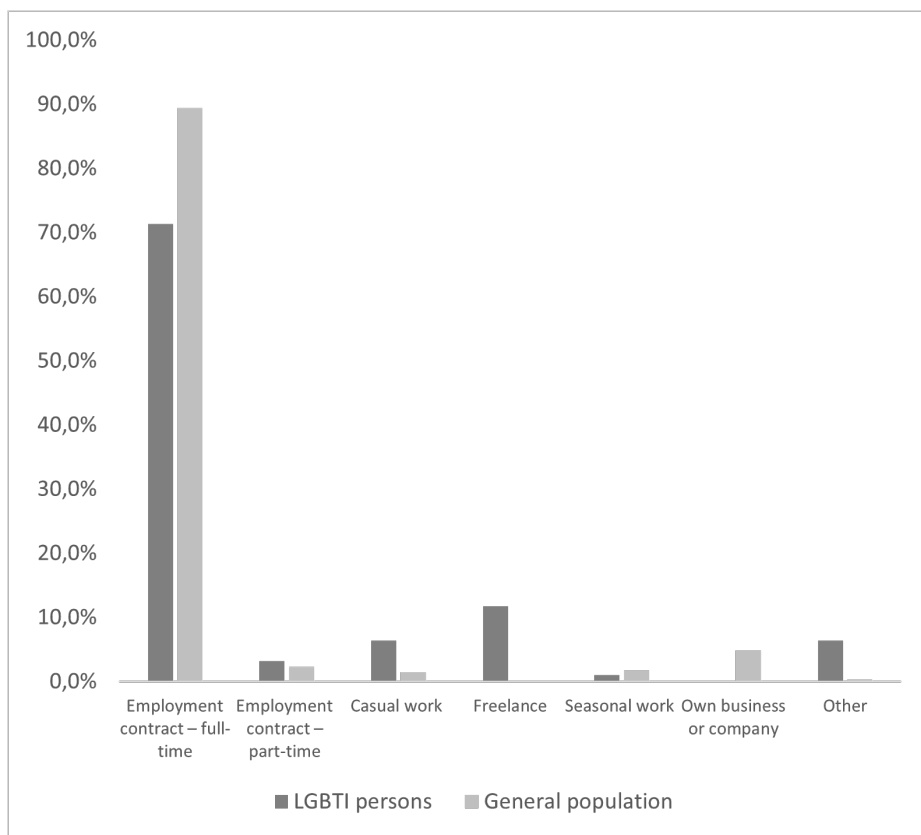


Chart 10. Differences in current employment patterns between LGBTI people and the general population

In addition to sexual orientation and gender identity, age is likely to influence the distribution of employment patterns within the LGBTI sample. Younger cohorts are more likely to be exposed to less secure forms of work, such as seasonal employment, paid internships and work without a formal contract. Full-time employment predominates among the middle-aged cohort, although freelance work, casual or short-term engagements and part-time employment are also present. This points to more diverse employment patterns and also reflects the fact that this is the largest cohort in the sample. Respondents aged over 45 are most commonly employed under standard full-time

employment contracts, with a smaller proportion engaged in freelance work, although it should be noted that this age group comprises a very small number of respondents.

In addition to sectoral representation and types of employment, it was important to examine employment opportunities and the extent to which the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina is open to LGBTI people. After completing their education, 83.8% of respondents entered employment immediately. Of these, 43.4% worked in their field of study, 13.25% worked partly within their field, while 43.4% worked in areas unrelated to their education. These findings indicate that, although the majority of LGBTI people who participated in the study were able to find employment immediately after completing their education, a substantial proportion work or have worked outside their field of study.

Among those who did not enter employment immediately after completing their education and registered with the employment service, experiences varied considerably in terms of the duration of unemployment:

- **Short-term unemployment:** one month (2), a few months (1), five months (1), half a year (2).
- **Medium-term unemployment:** one year (1), two years (3), two and a half years (1), three years (3).
- **Long-term unemployment:** five years (1), six years (1), many years (1), several years (1).
- **Specific cases:** one respondent noted that the employment service did not have any occupation listed that matched her professional profile.

A substantial range in the duration of unemployment is also evident among LGBTI respondents who are currently unemployed. While a larger number have been registered with the employment service for only one to a few months, some respondents reported being unemployed for several years, pointing to the existence of long-term barriers to accessing the labour market for some LGBTI people.

In the LGBTI sample, 44.4% of respondents felt that their sexual orientation or gender identity had no impact,

and had never had any impact, on their ability to find employment. However, a significant proportion reported experiencing barriers either occasionally or on an ongoing basis: 26.4% sometimes, 12.5% rarely, 9.7% often, and 7% almost always. A comparison with the general population, where 85.7% of respondents reported that they had never felt that their personal characteristics affected their employment prospects, further indicates that LGBTI people are considerably more likely to perceive their identity as a potential barrier in the labour market.

When these findings are considered alongside perceptions of how open the labour market is to LGBTI people – with 63.6% of respondents describing the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina as completely or largely inaccessible or closed to LGBTI people (Chart 11) – a complex pattern of discrimination becomes apparent.

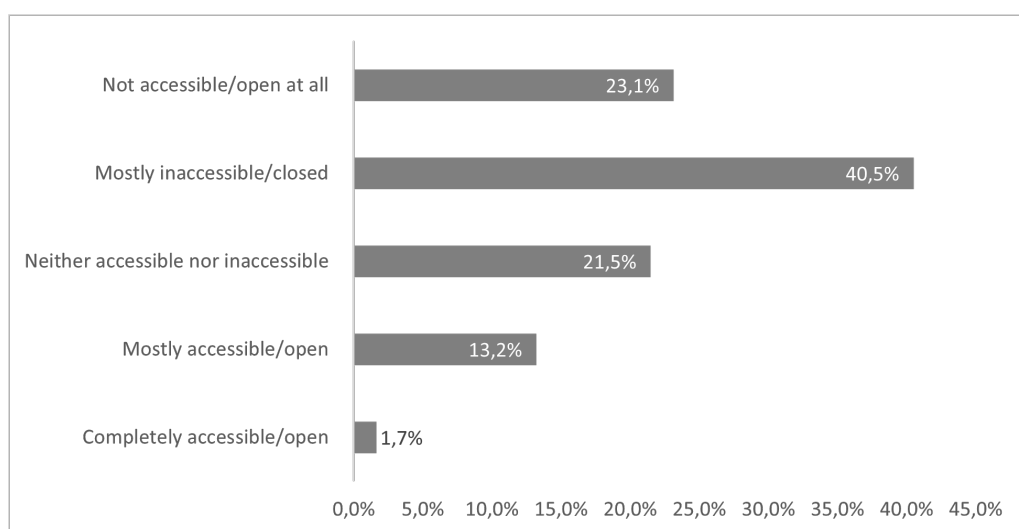


Chart 11. Perceptions of LGBTI people regarding openness of the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina

These differences, together with the finding that 26.25% of LGBTI respondents had been asked intrusive or uncomfortable questions about their personal lives when applying for jobs, compared with 6.1% in the general population sample, clearly point to specific barriers and social prejudices that shape the position of LGBTI people in the labour market. At the same time, 28.7% of respondents in the general population sample believe that it is more difficult for LGBTI people to find employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while 39.8% were unsure and 30.4% did not believe it was more difficult. Furthermore, 61.9% agreed that everyone, including LGBTI people, should have equal opportunities to obtain employment. This view was statistically significantly more common among younger respondents, women and those with higher levels of education, as well as among respondents who had worked with LGBTI people. These findings indicate that, among part of the general population, there is an awareness of the more difficult position of LGBTI people in the labour market and of the importance of inclusion.⁷

Of particular concern is the previously noted lack of sensitivity among employers: only 22.1% said they would hire an LGBTI person, while 68.5% said they would not, and 9.4% were unsure. The in-depth interviews revealed only sporadic examples of employers who were sensitive to the needs of LGBTI people. This was also linked to a broader lack of sensitivity towards marginalised groups, including LGBTI people and people with disabilities:

It is very difficult, particularly for transgender colleagues, to find a job where they can feel safe and use their own names... The biggest obstacle is finding a place where the rights of LGBT people will be respected. Things are lagging here, starting with people with disabilities and then the LGBT community.
(In-depth interview, gay man)

⁷ However, the presence of more inclusive attitudes is also partly attributable to the way the question was worded, as it did not refer exclusively to LGBTI people but asked: 'Do you agree that everyone, including LGBTI people, should have equal opportunities to obtain employment?'

One interviewee linked this lack of sensitivity among employers to patriarchal power structures that emerged during the war and to attitudes shaped by wartime experiences:

The fact that most employers are from the older generation, 50 and over, means, I think, that they are not capable of being good employers because they carry the mentality of the war with them. I think younger people should be given the opportunity to start their own businesses, so that older people cannot exploit them.
(Bisexual woman from Tuzla)

4.2.2. Workplace experiences of LGBTI people: discrimination, harassment, coming out and navigating barriers

The workplace experiences of LGBTI people reveal complex patterns of discrimination and harassment, challenges related to coming out, and various strategies for navigating barriers, all of which shape their day-to-day experiences at work.

Although the majority (60%) reported that they had not experienced discrimination in the workplace, as many as 52.5% of respondents reported experiencing harassment, namely behaviour that creates a hostile, humiliating, or intimidating work environment.⁸ **In the general population sample, the corresponding figure was 10.4%. This striking difference in reported experiences of workplace harassment points to the structural vulnerability of LGBTI people in the workplace.**

Several dominant patterns emerge from the responses of LGBTI respondents describing their experiences:

⁸ It is important to note that these figures are based on responses to two different questions. Although the majority (60%) reported that they had not experienced discrimination in the workplace, more than half reported in the subsequent question that they had experienced harassment, namely behaviour that created a hostile, intimidating or humiliating work environment. This finding clearly suggests that some respondents in the LGBTI sample may not have been sufficiently familiar with the concept of workplace discrimination itself.

- **Discrimination and homophobia** – frequent comments, ridicule, hate speech, and homophobic or transphobic attitudes among colleagues and superiors:

Intimidating and humiliating (...) because I am openly transgender and an activist, so I was asked what my name used to be, and there were discussions internally about how I couldn't host the Ramadan programme on television, and so on. (Transgender man from Tuzla)

*That was a few years ago. I had some nice colleagues, but one female colleague held quite conservative views. She didn't know about me, but she would talk about these issues, and I felt uncomfortable. When Pride Month came around... she started speaking out against it, **and I had the opportunity to see that someone disagreed with my very existence.** (Gay man from Sarajevo)*

Most of them were indirect comments, but very discriminatory, particularly after the Pride [March], when LGBTQI people are most visible in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Lesbian from Mostar)

It was never direct, but rather subtle comments made in passing, loud enough for me to hear, describing my feminine mannerisms and different style of dress, to the point where they were even associated with drug use. (Gay man from Sarajevo)

- **Workplace mobbing and harassment** – verbal and psychological abuse by managers, directors or colleagues, humiliation and intimidation, excessive workloads and inadequate pay, including instances of overt violence and threats:

I experienced workplace mobbing in one of my jobs, where the manager and owner of the company would regularly verbally abuse the employees and treat us as though we were a 'lower race'. (Queer cis woman)

from Zenica)

This took the form of being overloaded with unrelated tasks, all of which were presented as urgent, receiving unclear and contradictory instructions, and being criticised for an alleged lack of organisation. Requests for basic resources were often ignored, while responsibility for other people's mistakes, shortages of goods and poor results was unfairly shifted onto me. (Lesbian from Sarajevo)

*Threats, verbal abuse, physical violence, **having rubbish thrown at me**, being threatened with being outed, being fired after people found out I was gay, unequal treatment. (Gay man from Sarajevo)*

- **Sexual harassment** – experiences of inappropriate comments, unwanted advances and a lack of sensitivity towards women, including cases of sexual assault:

I work in a café, where older customers seem to think they are the only people there, particularly older men who make comments about me and other girls who walk past or are sitting in the café... (Bisexual woman from Zenica)

Definitely uncomfortable because of negative comments about the LGBT community (...) and inappropriate behaviour by male colleagues, including unwanted advances and comments about it. (Bisexual woman from Sarajevo)

I experienced discrimination from male colleagues because I was a woman, and because I was very young at the time. (Bisexual woman from Banja Luka)

I experienced sexual assault by my manager. (Lesbian from Maglaj)

- **Distrust and insecurity** – a sense that it is safer to remain silent about one's sexual orientation, fear of colleagues' reactions, being outed against

one's will, and persistent discomfort caused by microaggressions and a toxic work environment:

I worked at a television station where the environment was extremely homophobic. My attempts to address and reduce this discrimination ultimately led me to go to HR and tell them that I did not feel safe, but they outed me without my permission. (Bisexual woman from Banja Luka)

If you are an LGBT person, it is better to keep quiet and not tell anyone unless you notice that your colleagues are OK with it, because there are quite a lot of homophobic people here. (Gay man from Sarajevo)

I think there is a lot of microaggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it is something you encounter quite often here. And it can make you feel very uncomfortable, whether someone is joking with someone else, or someone says that something looks 'gay', and you are sitting there and suddenly feel uncomfortable because you realise how people think. You no longer feel safe around your colleagues, and it makes you really uncomfortable. Maybe it is not direct or intentional, but it still makes you uncomfortable. (Gay man from Sarajevo)

- **Structural barriers** – working in sectors without trade unions, nepotism, temporary work without worker protection, breaches of employment contracts, and inadequate working conditions:

A textbook case of workplace mobbing. I used the available legal remedies – an appeal, formal complaints, and the code of ethics. My complaint about the mobbing was rejected with the comment: 'Take a look at her surname, then take a look at yours. (Gay man from Sarajevo)

Before this call centre, I worked for the Bosnia and Herzegovina Lottery. It was a really unpleasant

experience working for any betting company. People who come there come to take their frustrations out on the female employees. (Pansexual woman from Tuzla)

One year, I worked on the elections, and the working conditions there were far from humane. Too much work, too little pay. (Bisexual woman from Tuzla)

To assess the extent to which respondents are exposed to unwanted forms of behaviour and violations of their labour rights, the same set of questions was asked of both LGBTI respondents and respondents in the general population sample. The results are presented in Table 3 and Chart 12.

Negative experiences in the work-place	LGBTI persons	General population
Comments about your appearance	40%	2.5%
Jokes about your appearance or identity (LGBTI sample); jokes about your sex, ethnicity, religion or other form of identity or affiliation (general population)	42%	2.1%
Inappropriate touching	18%	0.2%
Being subjected to sexual propositions or requests	16%	0.3%
Threats or intimidation	17%	2.4%
Being denied promotion	15%	2.1%
Denial of employment rights (such as difficulties in taking sick leave or annual leave, denial of occupational health and safety protections, etc.)	11%	4.3%
Job loss (dismissal)	9%	3.9%
Demotion	7%	0.9%
Deliberately being given no work ('empty desk')	14%	1.3%
Isolation from colleagues	21%	1%
Other	3%	1.7%
None of the above	39%	87.6%

Table 3. Differences in the prevalence of negative workplace experiences among LGBTI people and the general population

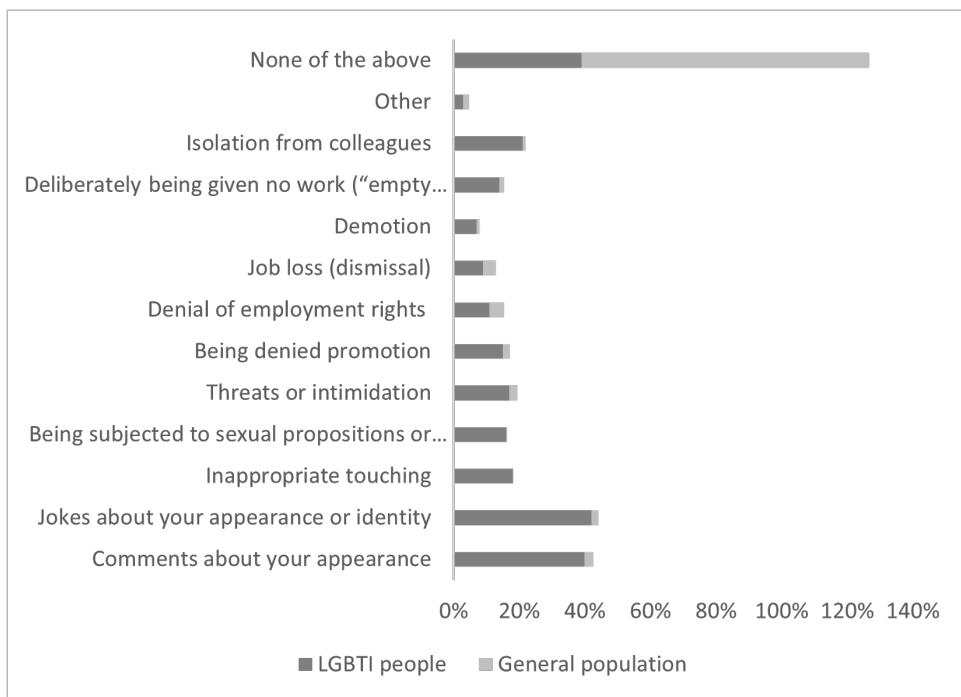


Figure 12. Differences in the prevalence of negative workplace experiences among LGBTI people and the general population

The findings point to the following:

- **There is a profound and structural difference in experiences of workplace discrimination and harassment between LGBTI people and the general population.** This confirms that the workplace can often become a setting for systemic discrimination against LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Verbal harassment:** Comments and jokes targeting people's appearance or identity are reported by a strikingly high proportion of LGBTI people (40–42%), compared with just around 2% of the general population, where such experiences are almost negligible. This points to **a specific form of stigmatisation** in the workplace linked to sexual orientation and gender identity.
- **Sexual harassment:** Inappropriate touching (18% vs. 0.2%) and propositions of a sexual nature (16%

vs. 0.3%) show that LGBTI people are several times more likely to be exposed to these forms of workplace harassment.

- **Threats and intimidation:** 17% of LGBTI respondents reported experiencing threats in the workplace, compared with 2.4% in the general population, indicating **direct victimisation of LGBTI people**.
- **Structural discrimination:** Being denied promotion, being isolated from colleagues, being transferred to a less favourable position or being assigned an 'empty desk' occurred considerably more often among LGBTI respondents (7–21%) than in the general population (1–2%). This points to **multiple barriers** faced by LGBTI people in carrying out their everyday work.
- **Job loss:** 9% of LGBTI respondents reported having lost their jobs, compared with 3.9% in the general population. This difference suggests that sexual orientation and gender identity may be a direct factor contributing to dismissal.
- **None of the above:** The vast majority of respondents in the general population sample (87.6%) had not experienced any of these forms of behaviour, whereas the proportion was considerably lower among LGBTI respondents (39%). This finding clearly demonstrates **the disproportionate exposure of LGBTI people to workplace discrimination**.
- **Experiences of different forms of workplace violence and discrimination:** Of particular concern is the fact that a significant proportion of LGBTI respondents (almost 25%) had experienced almost all, or a large proportion, of the negative experiences listed above in the workplace. This finding further suggests the presence of structural discrimination against LGBTI people in the workplace, with some members of the community facing additional vulnerability.

At the same time, the fact that almost 40% of LGBTI respondents had not experienced any negative treatment indicates that more inclusive workplace environments do

exist. Some respondents emphasised this in their responses to the open-ended questions. A bisexual woman from Sarajevo said, 'I haven't had any particularly bad experiences; overall, it was OK', while a lesbian from Tuzla described the atmosphere in her workplace as 'fairly relaxed'. These examples show that, despite the numerous challenges and experiences of discrimination, there are also workplaces where LGBTI people experience acceptance and a sense of safety. In this regard, 44% of respondents reported that they had had opportunities for career progression at work. This is further supported by the fact that the majority rated communication in their current workplace as 'very good' or 'good' (Chart 13).

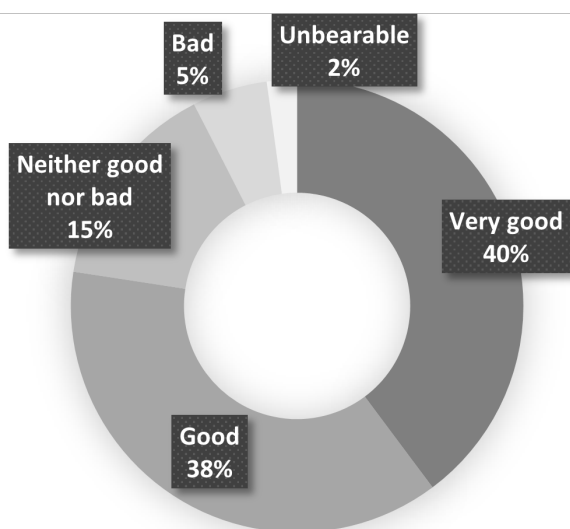


Figure 13. LGBTI people's perceptions of communication in their current workplace

However, despite these positive findings, the majority emphasised that their communication with colleagues and supervisors was unrelated to their sexual orientation or gender identity, and instead centred on professional responsibilities and the general dynamics of the workplace: 'It is not something that is brought up, and they are not

aware of my private life.’ (Bisexual woman from Banja Luka); ‘I consider it the least interesting thing about me, so our communication is mostly focused on work-related matters.’ (Bisexual woman from Sarajevo); ‘It has nothing to do with that because I personally don’t talk about my transition, and no one asks me about it.’ (Trans woman from Banja Luka).

In some cases, respondents highlighted positive aspects of their current work environment, including an inclusive atmosphere, experiences of coming out, and working for companies that take steps to prevent discrimination: *On my current job/in my current position, my colleagues and supervisors have accepted me expressing myself authentically.* (Gay man from Tuzla) *It definitely has an impact because we are all very open with each other.* (Lesbian from Banja Luka) *Yes, we are completely open about everything.* (Pansexual woman from Banja Luka) *I think it’s good because I’m in a position where I can be out safely.* (Transgender woman from Banja Luka). However, in some cases, good communication in the current workplace is contrasted with previous toxic experiences: *They are more mindful of discrimination and things like that in this company.* (Bisexual woman from Banja Luka) *I feel more relaxed, I’m not anxious, I feel free, and that has an impact on my productivity. After going through a toxic environment, this feels like being given a new lease of life.* (Gay man from Sarajevo); In other cases, positive communication is attributed to personal characteristics and communication skills: *I think it’s because of my personality that we have a good relationship.* (Pansexual woman from Dobož). Where communication was described as poor, this was sometimes linked to the generally difficult situation in the workplace: *I think it’s generally poor. Maybe some of it is influenced by my identity, but I can’t say whether that is the only reason.* (Lesbian from Tuzla). In other cases, poor communication was associated with the unfavourable position of the LGBTI community in the local environment, which was perceived as also affecting the workplace: *Generally speaking, it’s difficult for LGBT people in Mostar.* (Lesbian from Mostar)

Although communication in the current workplace was generally rated positively, in most cases it was unrelated to respondents' sexual orientation or gender identity. At the same time, the numerous negative experiences that LGBTI people have encountered throughout their working lives should not be overlooked. **Despite this, only four respondents reported taking legal action in response to situations they had experienced in the workplace.** In only one case was the outcome conditionally positive, in that it resulted in a concrete response from the relevant authorities: *The police warned the man not to do it again.* (Bisexual woman from Banja Luka) This finding points to a particularly low level of trust in institutional protection mechanisms, as well as the limited effectiveness of legal remedies in practice.

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to explain why they had not taken any legal action in cases of workplace discrimination. Their responses reveal a wide range of reasons and motivations:

- **Distrust in institutions** – a perception that the justice system does not function effectively and that legal proceedings would have no meaningful effect. For example: *I feel that, when it comes to our justice system, it is already a losing battle from the outset.* (Bisexual woman from Tuzla)
- **Fear of consequences** – concerns about losing one's job, facing difficulties finding employment in the future, stigma or further discrimination. For example: *I didn't want to put myself in difficult situations with the relevant authorities.* (Transgender man from Banja Luka); *I thought it would cause more trouble than it was worth.* (Gay man from Zenica)
- **Difficulty proving discrimination** – the belief that the discrimination could not be substantiated in legal proceedings, that colleagues would not be willing to testify, or that there was no clear legal basis for a complaint. For example: *At the time, I wasn't sure how I should proceed or whether my complaint would even be taken seriously, and that discouraged me from*

- taking any action.* (Pansexual woman from Tuzla)
- **Practical barriers** – high costs, employers' strong legal teams, undeclared work and financial insecurity. For example: *It would have been pointless, given that the company had a very strong legal team...* (Gay man from Sarajevo); *Because it would have cost me money to take on a company.* (Pansexual woman from Tuzla); *Because I was working undeclared.* (Bisexual woman from Tuzla)
 - **Perceiving the situation as unimportant and minimising the problem** – the view that the situation was not serious enough, that it could be resolved personally, or that there were 'more important problems' in the workplace. For example: *Well, I don't know. I just don't think it was that significant, and I don't think there was any malicious intent behind it.* (Gay man from Sarajevo); *I think there are far more important problems at my workplace that need to be addressed, such as getting paid regularly and earning a better salary, compared with some stupid attempt at making a joke about my appearance.* (Gay man from Sarajevo)
 - **Avoidance strategies** – withdrawing from the situation, including by resigning from the job. For example: *It was easier to quit than to fight it.* (Gay man from Sarajevo)
 - **Alternative solutions** – attempts to resolve the problem internally, for example by speaking to a manager or colleagues: *I approached my manager and supervisor within the company.* (Bisexual woman from Banja Luka)

In-depth interviews with LGBTI people show that even those who are satisfied with their current workplace and work experiences still encounter uncomfortable situations and have to navigate their working environment, even when it appears LGBTI-friendly on the surface. They also pointed to the experiences of other colleagues, including one case involving a male member of the community who wore

nail polish at work, which prompted numerous negative reactions from parents and the school management. Of particular concern is the fact that, despite the relatively positive situation in their current workplaces, all interviewees pointed to a pronounced sense of fear about the future and the possibility of experiencing further unpleasant situations. Cases of LGBTI-inclusive employers remain sporadic, meaning that even positive experiences do not guarantee lasting security.

At the moment, my experiences are quite positive, and I work with people who really inspire me... although I can't always say that I have had experiences like this throughout my life. There have been occasions when someone has asked me about my sex life or my sexual orientation, asking quite uncomfortable questions. And almost every time, it has been an employer or a colleague at work, even though they had known about my sexual orientation from the outset. (In-depth interview, gay man)

The experience of a transgender man who works *online* further illustrates this ambivalence. Although he is currently able to adapt to his working environment and 'manage' through a range of strategies, there is a persistent sense of uncertainty about the future:

At the moment, I still don't have a problem, but that's because I somehow manage... I shave my moustache, put on a bit of make-up... put on a wig... I actually pass as a woman there... I can still manage for now. But how long I'll be able to manage, we'll see. (In-depth interview, trans man)

The fact that throughout the interview this respondent repeatedly emphasised that he had 'been lucky' also clearly points to the presence of structural barriers. These barriers can sometimes be circumvented - either by chance or through individuals' own strategies for avoiding difficult situations - but they are difficult to overcome in the long term, particularly in light of the experiences of other

members of the community:

I know from the experiences of some other trans men as well... they always have problems finding work, with whether society accepts you, whether society understands you... I may have been very lucky... and because of that, when it came to work, I always tried to avoid putting myself in uncomfortable situations... (In-depth interview, trans man)

It is noteworthy that uncomfortable situations arise even in jobs that primarily focus on LGBTI issues and employ LGBTI people, including those of an activist nature. Pressure from wider society and the surrounding environment in such contexts can make their work more difficult and contribute to a sense of insecurity.

With regard to the sources of negative experiences in the workplace – a question asked of both LGBTI respondents and those in the general population sample – LGBTI respondents most commonly reported that these experiences came from both colleagues and supervisors (41.4%), followed by colleagues alone (36.2%), while a considerably smaller proportion reported supervisors alone (12.1%). A smaller proportion of respondents (9%) identified other sources, such as customers, third parties connected to their work, or a combination of sources ('mostly customers, but also my bosses'). By contrast, in the general population sample, unwanted forms of behaviour in the workplace most commonly came from supervisors (51.7%), followed by a combination of colleagues and supervisors (21.8%), while 16.7% reported that such behaviour came from colleagues alone. Other sources were identified by 9.8% of respondents. A comparative overview of the reported sources of these forms of behaviour is presented in Chart 14.

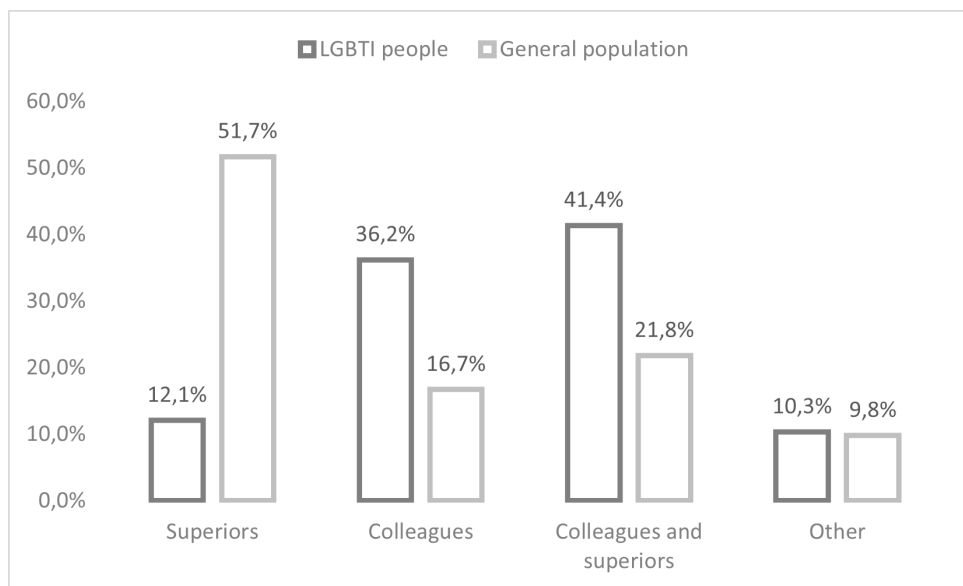


Chart 14. Perceived sources of unpleasant situations and rights violations in the workplace: a comparative overview of the experiences of LGBTI people and the general population

These data point to differences in power dynamics and social relations in the workplace. Among LGBTI people, discrimination comes from multiple directions simultaneously – from colleagues, supervisors, and third parties – whereas in the general population it is predominantly associated with hierarchical relationships in the workplace. This distribution of responses is likely also influenced by the fact that LGBTI people are more likely to engage in informal forms of work, where there is less of a conventional hierarchy but also less security. In addition, the fact that colleagues are reported as a source of unwanted behaviour considerably more often among LGBTI respondents is likely related to their sexual orientation or gender identity being perceived as ‘different’ in everyday workplace interactions. In this regard, respondents in the general population sample who had experience working with LGBTI people were also more likely to report that colleagues treat LGBTI people differently (27%) than employers do (9.5%).

At the same time, the findings show that the majority of

respondents in the general population sample would not have a problem with LGBTI people working in their workplace, or simply do not consider it an issue. A smaller proportion expressed some degree of reservation – some said they would find it difficult but would nevertheless work with LGBTI people, while others said it would bother them but that they would not show it. There was also a smaller group of undecided respondents, while 15.5% categorically rejected the possibility of working with LGBTI people (Chart 15).

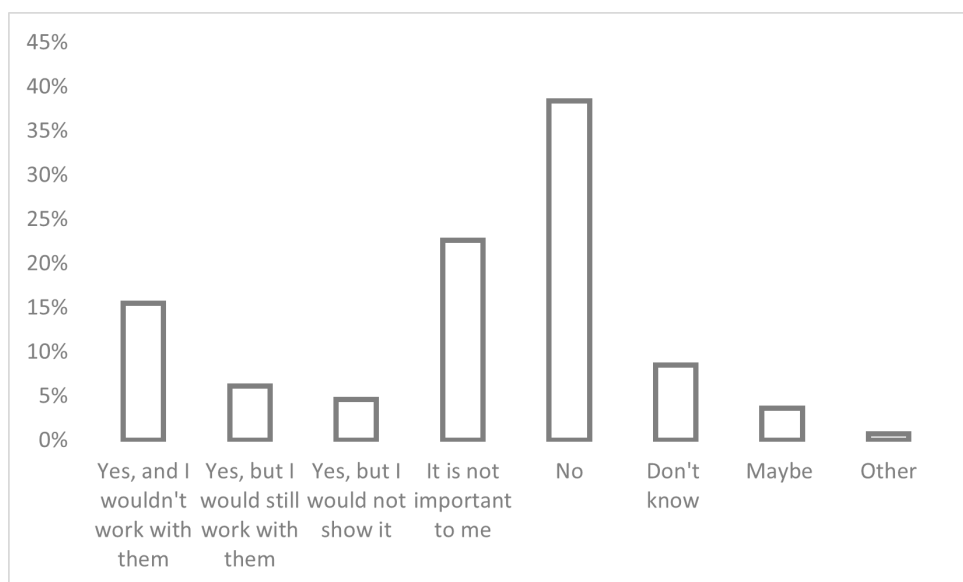


Chart 15. Willingness of the general population to work with LGBTI people
(Response to the question: Would it be a problem for you to have LGBTI people in your workplace?)

It should be borne in mind that the workplace is an environment in which people are expected to work together, **as the workplace is generally not a matter of individual choice**. The attitudes expressed by respondents should therefore also be considered in this context. Furthermore, the fact that the largest proportions of respondents categorically stated that they would not work for an LGBTI supervisor (40.1%) or for an employer who promotes LGBTI rights (43.2%) indicates that workplace inclusiveness

remains a significant concern (Chart 16).



Chart 16. Willingness of the general population to work for an LGBTI supervisor or an employer who promotes LGBTI rights

This may also be influenced by the lack of direct experience: only 9% of respondents had worked with LGBTI people, while the majority reported that they had not noticed employers or colleagues behaving differently towards LGBTI people in the workplace. Nevertheless, the findings reported directly by LGBTI people point to a high prevalence of negative experiences, highlighting the lack of awareness and sensitivity towards LGBTI issues. At the same time, those who had worked with LGBTI people showed a greater willingness to accept employers who protect LGBTI rights and supervisors who are LGBTI. These findings confirm the importance of LGBTI people coming out in the workplace, but this requires a supportive and conducive workplace climate and environment.

In this regard, despite the numerous negative workplace experiences described above, a significant proportion of LGBTI respondents nevertheless chose to come out at work (47%), while a smaller proportion reported that they had been outed by others (8%). It is important to note that coming

out voluntarily may have taken place in a different context and not necessarily in a workplace where respondents had previously experienced negative treatment. At the same time, a substantial proportion of respondents (42%) had no experience of coming out at work. The most commonly cited reasons were the right to privacy – with some respondents emphasising that they wanted their colleagues to get to know them as whole individuals rather than through a predefined identity – and fear of the consequences, including reactions from others, losing their job, or the possibility of being outed outside the workplace. Working remotely was also mentioned, as it reduces the need to come out because there is less direct interaction, while some respondents cited a combination of several reasons. A smaller proportion did not explain or chose not to answer.

The relationship between coming out and experiences of workplace harassment is not straightforward, except in cases of being outed. Among respondents who had chosen to come out themselves, as well as those who reported having no experience of coming out at work, those who had and had not experienced harassment – or behaviour that created a hostile, intimidating, or humiliating work environment – were present in approximately equal numbers. By contrast, negative experiences were more common among respondents who reported having been outed by others, although this represents a relatively small segment of the sample. These findings suggest that coming out in itself is not necessarily a key risk factor; rather, the context and circumstances in which it occurs may be more important. At the same time, given the range of negative experiences described throughout the research, concealing one's identity may be understood as a survival strategy in the workplace.

4.2.3. Exercising labour rights in the workplace

Throughout their working lives, LGBTI respondents were most commonly both formally registered as employees and engaged in undeclared work at the same time (50.5%), while 44.3% were formally registered and 5.2% worked or had worked exclusively in undeclared employment. By comparison, formal employment predominated in the general population: 69.6% of respondents reported having been formally registered, while a combination of formal and undeclared work was reported by 20.2%, and 10.2% had worked exclusively in undeclared employment (Chart 17).

For LGBTI people, the fact that a combination of formal and undeclared work was the most common arrangement points to greater employment insecurity and more limited access to labour rights compared with the general population, where formal employment predominated. An analysis of the differences between observed and expected frequencies shows that LGBTI respondents were statistically significantly less likely to be formally registered, considerably more likely to have experience of combining formal and undeclared work, but also less likely to have worked exclusively in undeclared employment than respondents in the general population. The results of the chi-square test confirm that these differences are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 44.491$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.01$).

In the general population, experience of undeclared work is more commonly associated with people from rural areas, women, younger people (aged 18–24), and those with incomplete or only primary education. Among LGBTI respondents, the small number of participants from rural areas and the absence of respondents with only primary education are likely to contribute to the somewhat lower prevalence of undeclared work compared with the general population. In the LGBTI sample, people from rural areas were likewise more likely to be represented among those working undeclared or combining formal and undeclared employment.

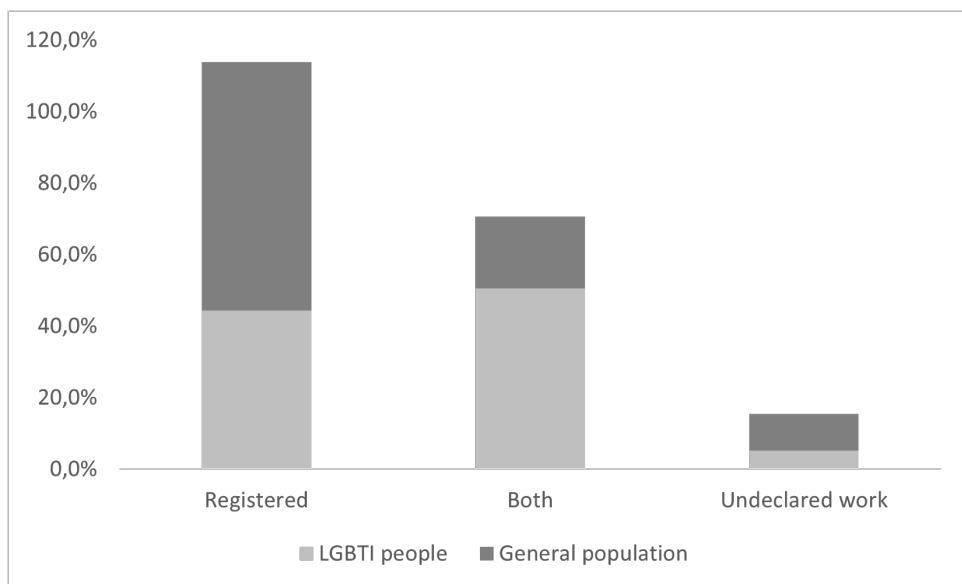


Chart 17. Employment experiences, formal and informal work: a comparative analysis of LGBTI people and the general population

Data on types of employment contracts, collected exclusively from LGBTI respondents, reveal several significant trends concerning the stability and security of employment among LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH):

- **Prevalence of Multiple Contract Types** – The largest proportion of respondents (38.1%) reported having had *two types of employment contracts*, while a further 18.6% reported having had *three types of contracts*. This points to frequent changes in, or combinations of, different contractual arrangements over the course of their working lives.
- **Fixed-term contracts** – The relatively high proportion (24.7%) indicates that insecure forms of employment are prevalent.
- **Permanent contracts** – Only 8.2% of respondents reported having had a permanent employment contract, pointing to low levels of job security.
- **Service contracts** – 4.1% of respondents reported working under this type of contract, confirming the presence of flexible but insecure working

arrangements.

- **Working without a contract** – One respondent in the LGBTI sample, an intersex person, reported having worked without a contract, further highlighting the complete lack of legal protection and the marginalisation experienced in employment.
- **Diversity of contractual arrangements** – The responses ‘four types of contract’ and ‘other’ indicate that some respondents experience highly fragmented and non-standard forms of employment.

These findings also confirm a high degree of employment insecurity among LGBTI people, characterised by temporary and multiple contractual arrangements, while stable employment (on a permanent basis) is relatively uncommon. Age appears to have some bearing on these trends, with permanent employment contracts being somewhat more common among the middle-aged cohort than among the other cohorts. However, given the considerable variability and diversity of contractual arrangements within this cohort as well, it is difficult to draw more definitive conclusions.

These patterns are also likely to affect the **creditworthiness** of LGBTI people. A total of 34% are fully creditworthy, with regular income and a good credit rating. Just over 19% are partially creditworthy, also pointing to a degree of employment and financial insecurity. The high proportion of those who are not creditworthy or are unable to determine their credit rating (43.6%) further highlights the considerable uncertainty surrounding their economic stability.

When it comes to employment rights, regular income is an integral component of these rights and a key aspect of job security. The distribution of responses shows that the general population is somewhat more likely to receive a regular salary, and considerably more likely to receive regular meal allowances and travel expenses. These findings point to lower levels of access to employment rights among LGBTI people and greater insecurity in employment relationships. These differences are illustrated in Figure 18.

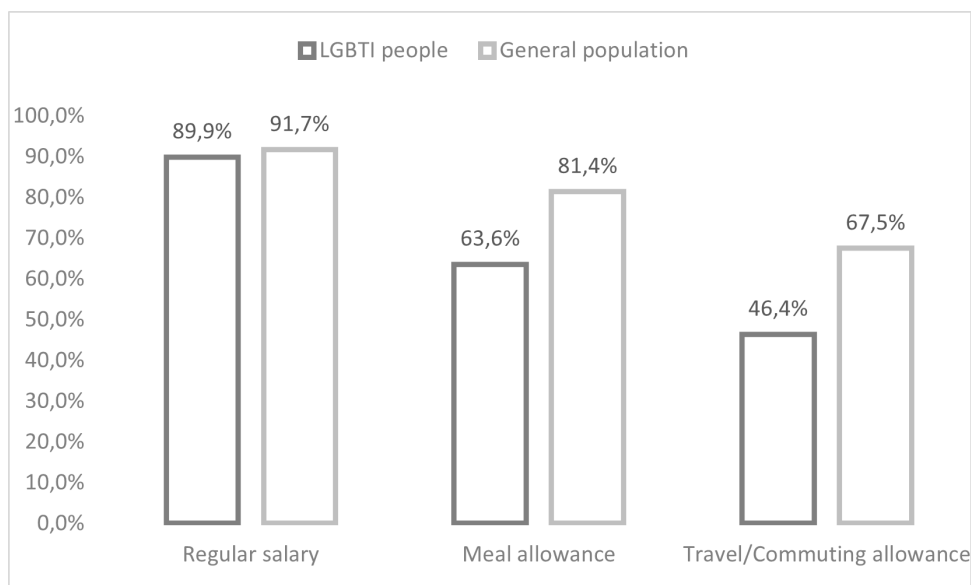


Chart 18. LGBTI People and the general population with regular income

Knowledge of employment rights is an important competency and resource for employees, as it enables rights guaranteed by law to be not only formally recognised but also effectively exercised in practice. A lack of awareness of one's rights increases the risk of insecurity, discrimination and being denied employment benefits. **The findings show that only 41% of respondents in the LGBTI sample are aware of the options available to them for protecting their rights, while 37% are unsure and 22% report that they do not know what options are available.** By contrast, in the general population, 72.8% of respondents report being aware of these options, 11% are unsure, and 16.2% say they are not aware of them. The differences between the observed and expected frequencies confirm that LGBTI people are less aware of their rights and the options available to protect them than the general population. These differences are supported by the results of the chi-squared test ($\chi^2 = 58.3285$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.01$), confirming that the findings are statistically significant and revealing a marked awareness

gap that further exacerbates inequalities in the exercise of employment rights among LGBTI people.

Among LGBTI people, awareness of workplace regulations governing specific employee rights is only slightly above 50%, while almost half of respondents are either unfamiliar with these regulations or unaware of their existence. Among those who are familiar with them, 70% report knowing that these regulations include a prohibition on discrimination based on sex, gender and sexual orientation, a figure almost identical to that for the general population (69.5%). This finding may reflect greater interest in specific legal provisions. However, it is important to note that, within the LGBTI sample, this figure refers only to respondents who reported being familiar with workplace regulations, while a substantial proportion are not familiar with them at all.

The gap between LGBTI people and the general population is also evident in levels of trust in institutions responsible for protecting employment rights (Figure 19). Within the LGBTI sample, the majority of respondents report having no trust in these institutions (67%), while 22% are undecided and only 11% express trust in them. By contrast, the largest proportion of respondents in the general population express trust in these institutions (43.8%), although a substantial proportion also report having no trust (36.1%). The differences between the observed and expected frequencies, as confirmed by the results of the chi-squared test ($\chi^2 = 45.4845$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.01$), are statistically significant. These findings confirm a disparity in perceptions of institutional support and point to the greater vulnerability of the LGBTI community.

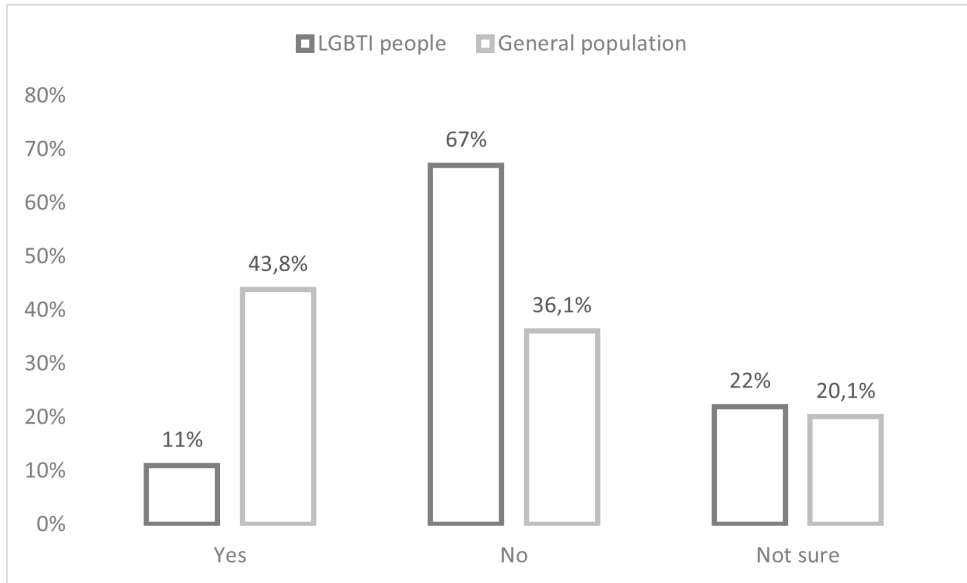


Chart 19. Levels of trust in institutions responsible for addressing employment rights: a comparison of LGBTI people and the general population

Unlike their trust in institutions, LGBTI people express considerably higher levels of trust in organisations that provide support in addressing employment rights, with trade unions being the exception. Compared with the general population, the difference is reflected in substantially higher levels of trust in non-governmental organisations and, to a lesser extent, in legal assistance, while trust in trade unions is considerably lower (Chart 20).

The differences between the observed and expected frequencies corroborate these patterns, while the results of the chi-squared tests clearly indicate that they are statistically significant. LGBTI people express significantly greater trust in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) than the general population ($\chi^2 = 29.0359$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.01$), as well as greater trust in solicitors and legal assistance ($\chi^2 = 2.2979$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.01$). However, the lower χ^2 value for legal assistance suggests that this difference is less pronounced than the difference in trust in NGOs, despite being statistically significant. Trust in trade unions is also

significantly lower among LGBTI people ($\chi^2 = 23.8032$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.01$).

These findings clearly show that the LGBTI community relies primarily on alternative support mechanisms, particularly NGOs and legal assistance, while trust in trade unions remains markedly low. This further highlights the structural gap between LGBTI people and the general population in terms of the protection of employment rights.

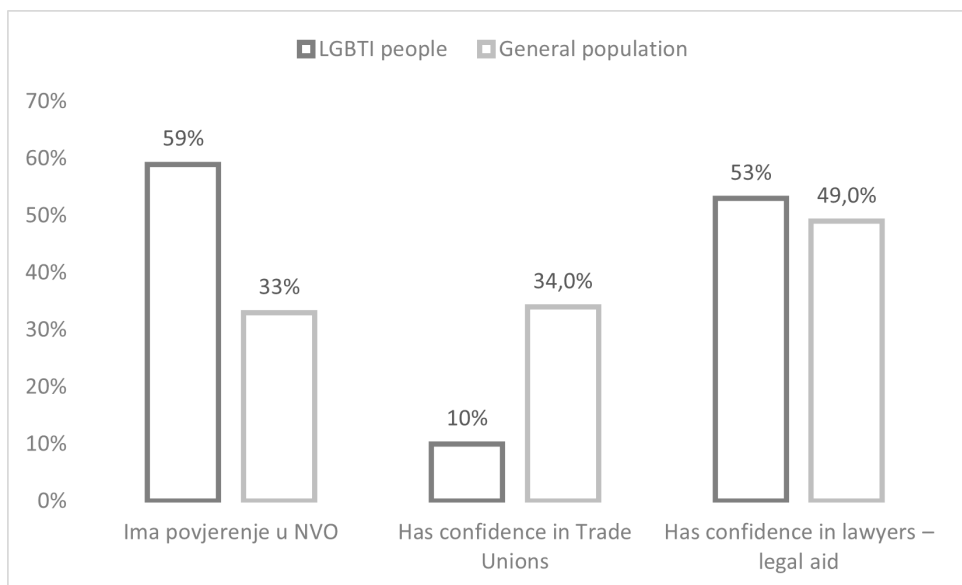


Chart 20. Percentage of respondents who trust organisations assisting with employment rights: a comparison of LGBTI people and the general population

Further differences are evident in trade union membership: only 9% of respondents in the LGBTI sample are trade union members, compared with 12.9% in the general population. This finding confirms that low levels of trust among LGBTI people are accompanied by lower levels of trade union participation, further limiting their opportunities for the collective protection of employment rights. The generally low rate of trade union membership in the general population also reflects the longstanding crisis of trade union organisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the limited capacity of trade unions to protect employment

rights. This further disadvantages vulnerable groups in the workplace.

Among LGBTI people, the **reasons for joining trade unions** are largely instrumental, relating to benefits such as subsidised trips, access to information about salaries, and a greater sense of security through support in the event of sick leave or similar circumstances. These motivations are not related to sexual orientation or gender identity. The same applies to the **reasons for not joining a trade union**, which are considerably more numerous and varied:

- **Structural factors** – The sectors in which respondents work often lack trade unions, including freelance work, insecure employment, undeclared work and employment in the private sector.
- **Lack of information** – Not knowing whether a trade union exists or what a trade union actually is.
- **Lack of interest** – The perception that trade unions serve no meaningful purpose.
- **Negative experiences and distrust** – The view that trade unions are politicised, corrupt, or ineffective.
- **Personal reasons and circumstances** – Lack of interest, plans to change jobs or intentions to leave the country.

It is important to note that, in both samples, a substantial number of respondents express uncertainty about their trust in institutions and the aforementioned organisations involved in protecting employment rights. This suggests that trust in mechanisms for protecting employment rights is generally low and fragile, but that the trust deficit is particularly pronounced among LGBTI people, leaving them especially vulnerable when seeking to exercise their employment rights.

4.3. QUALITY OF LIFE

4.3.1. Financial Situation and expenditure

For the majority of LGBTI people, their main source of income is employment (69.7%), while 11.8% report relying on occasional work. Dependants account for 9.2% of the sample, and 3.3% of respondents identify a scholarship as their main source of income. In addition to these main categories, a small number of respondents report combining different sources of income, such as employment and temporary work, a scholarship and a family pension, a scholarship and occasional work, or a scholarship combined with social assistance and maintenance payments.

Average monthly income among the LGBTI sample and the general population is presented in **Chart 21**.

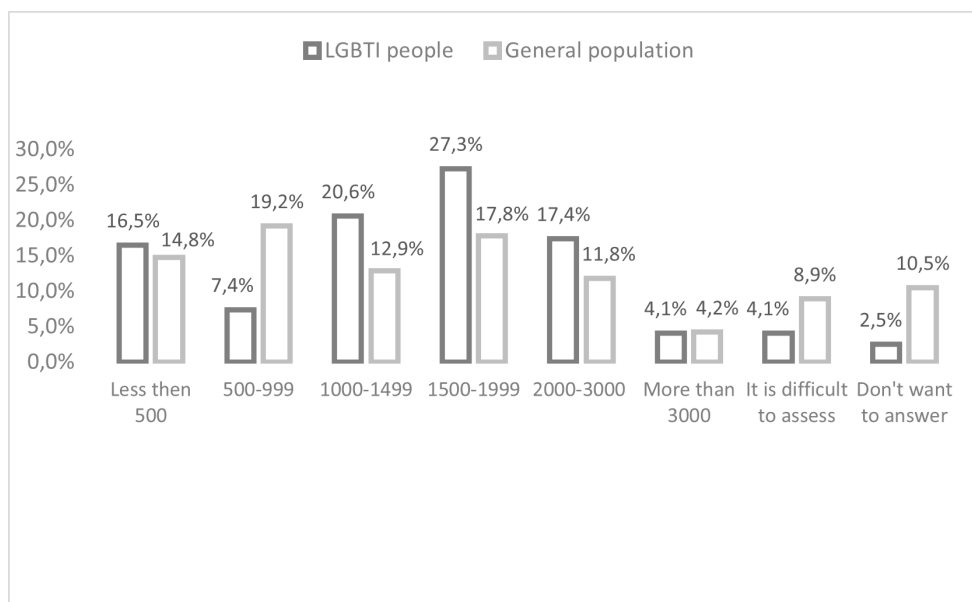


Chart 21. Distribution of monthly income among LGBTI people and the general population

The distribution of monthly income shows some differences between the LGBTI sample and the general population. Overall, the largest proportion of respondents report monthly incomes in the range of BAM 1,500–1,999 (27.3% of the LGBTI sample and 17.8% of the general population), followed by the BAM 1,000–1,499 bracket (20.6% and 12.9%, respectively).

In the general population, however, the most common income bracket is the lower range of BAM 500–999 (19.2%). This difference can be partly explained by the significant proportion of pensioners in the general population sample, who are not represented in the LGBTI sample. Within the BAM 500–999 income bracket, 7.4% of respondents are primarily young people who are studying, combining work and study, working informally or undertaking temporary jobs. Among the general population, freelancers⁹ are most commonly found in the BAM 2,000–3,000 income bracket, while employers generally report monthly incomes above BAM 3,000. The LGBTI sample does not include any employers, while freelancers report monthly incomes across all income brackets represented in the sample, with the exception of the category below BAM 500. In both samples, incomes below BAM 500 (16.5% in the LGBTI sample and 14.8% in the general population sample) are most commonly reported by students and unemployed respondents.

Financial assistance and support represent an important source of financial security for the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but this is particularly pronounced among LGBTI people. While 47.1% of respondents in the LGBTI sample report receiving financial assistance from someone else, the corresponding figure for the general population sample is 23.1%. In both groups, parents are the most important source of financial support: they account for 42.4% of cases in the general population and

⁹ Three respondents in the general population sample identified themselves as freelancers at the beginning of the survey, in response to the question on employment status. However, none reported being a freelancer when asked about their current employment status. The data on monthly income were cross-tabulated with respondents' employment status as reported at the beginning of the survey.

as many as 81% among LGBTI respondents who receive financial assistance. **The distribution of responses, and the high prevalence of parental support in particular, is likely also influenced by the fact that the LGBTI sample is considerably younger than the general population sample.** In the general population, financial support from children plays a significant role, accounting for 38% of cases, particularly among economically inactive respondents and pensioners. Among LGBTI respondents, financial support from a partner is reported in 5.2% of cases. In the general population, support from a spouse is reported in 12.7% of cases, while support from a partner is reported in 2.7%. The lower prevalence of financial support from partners among LGBTI respondents may, to some extent, be associated with the lack of legal recognition of same-sex marriages and partnerships. In the general population, some respondents report receiving financial assistance from other family members (9%) or from extended family members (2.2%). In the LGBTI sample, only two respondents report receiving this type of support: one in combination with support from their parents, and the other receiving simultaneous support from parents, a partner and other family members.

Social assistance is reported by 7.7% of respondents in the general population sample, while only one person in the LGBTI sample reports receiving this form of support, alongside financial assistance from their parents. These findings point to potential limitations and additional barriers to accessing social rights faced by this marginalised social group. Support from humanitarian organisations or fundraising initiatives is reported by 2.9% of respondents in the general population sample, while one respondent in the LGBTI sample reports receiving support from a safe house for LGBTIQ+ people. The limited capacity of such support mechanisms should also be taken into account, as this further highlights the vulnerability of the LGBTI population in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Taken together, the findings point to the strong presence of **familism** in BiH society. Against the backdrop of the

generally challenging economic situation, it is encouraging that parents provide support to their LGBTI children. At the same time, the findings indicate that LGBTI people face additional socio-economic vulnerability. Existing legal restrictions prevent them from marrying or formally registering same-sex partnerships, while same-sex couples also face limitations in the legal recognition of parental and other family relationships. This legal status may restrict access to various forms of mutual economic and social security associated with family status.

The additional vulnerability of LGBTI people is further reflected in the fact that as many as 48.8% of respondents reported having had to forgo education, healthcare services or social activities due to financial difficulties. In the general population sample, 21.1% of respondents reported similar experiences. This indicates that a significant proportion of the general population also faces or has faced financial difficulties in meeting basic needs and participating in everyday activities, but that this issue is considerably more pronounced among LGBTI people (Figure 22). The differences between the observed and expected frequencies, together with the results of the chi-square test, show that LGBTI people are statistically significantly more likely to forgo these needs and activities for financial reasons ($\chi^2 = 48.2904$, $df = 2^{10}$, $p < 0.01$).

¹⁰ The degree of freedom (df) is two, not three. The response categories 'I am not sure' and 'I do not wish to answer' were combined because of the low frequencies in these categories.

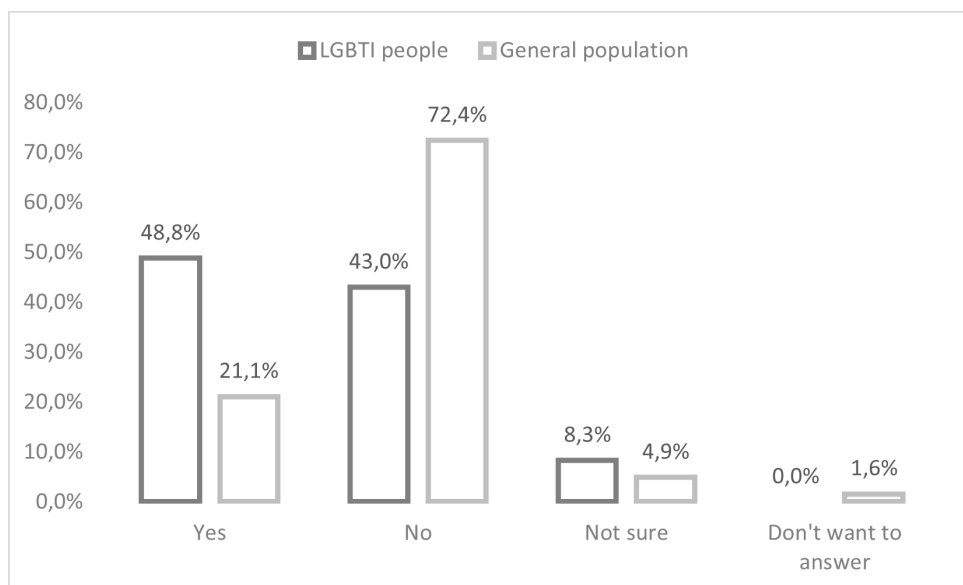


Chart 22. Going without basic needs due to financial difficulties: LGBTI vs. general population

During the in-depth interviews, for example, one transgender man described the substantial costs associated with treating multiple sclerosis, which had been diagnosed at an early age, as well as the costs of his gender transition. His parents bore a considerable financial burden, with his father even working two jobs to provide the necessary funds. This experience further demonstrates the crucial role of family support, while at the same time highlighting the considerable burden placed on families and the institutional neglect faced by transgender people.

When asked, *Is the income you currently earn from your work sufficient to live on?*, almost 16% of respondents in the LGBTI sample reported that they live very well on their employment income and can afford many things, a proportion almost identical to that in the general population sample. A total of 41.4% of LGBTI respondents consider their income sufficient for a normal, average standard of living, compared with a considerably higher proportion in the general population sample (59.2%). By contrast, 11.7% of respondents in the LGBTI sample report that their

income covers only their basic needs, a proportion broadly comparable to that in the general population sample (11.2%). The response 'Sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't' is considerably more common among LGBTI respondents (19%) than in the general population sample (10.8%). Finally, 10.6% of LGBTI respondents consider their income insufficient to live on, compared with just 2.2% of respondents in the general population sample. In light of these findings, while a small proportion of LGBTI people report being financially comfortable, overall, a significant proportion **live with financial insecurity or inadequate income** (Figure 23). Within the LGBTI sample, age is a significant factor, as respondents in the middle and oldest age cohorts are more likely to report that their income is sufficient for a normal or average standard of living, or that they live very well and can afford many of the things they would like.

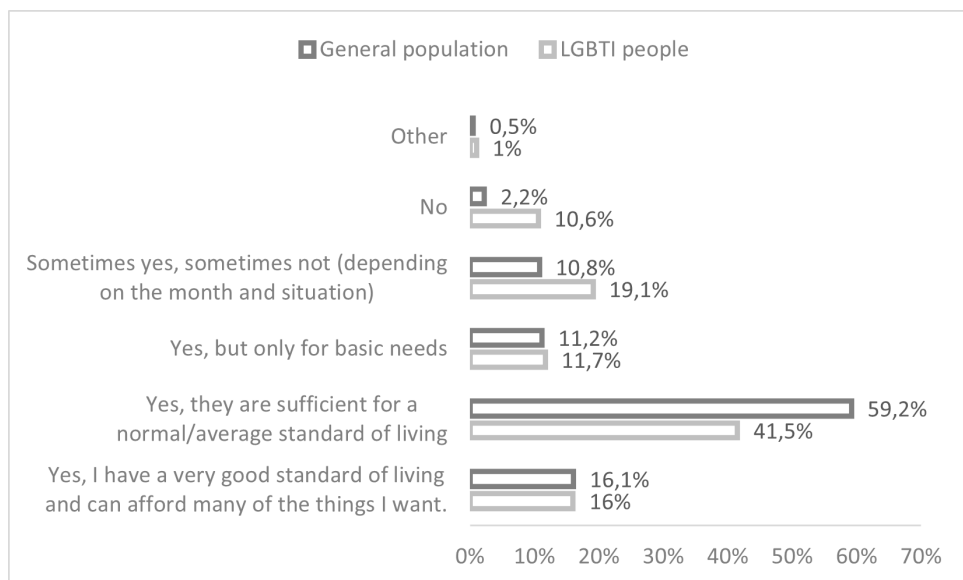


Chart 23. Income and standard of living: comparison of LGBTI People and the general population

Furthermore, the set of questions asked exclusively of LGBTI respondents reveals a marked division in their assessment of their current financial situation. One group is either fully or partially satisfied (42.5% in total), while another is either fully or partially dissatisfied (36.7% in total); 20.8% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. These findings confirm that LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina should not be viewed as a homogeneous group, and that a substantial proportion of the community faces significant difficulties in meeting their everyday needs.

The in-depth interviews further indicate that even among those with a relatively stable income who are satisfied with their current financial situation, this should not be understood as an indication of complete financial security. Significant anxiety and uncertainty about the future remain, with one gay man interviewed also linking these concerns to the inability to marry and establish a family.

Financial concerns are also widespread: just over 27% of LGBTI respondents report worrying about their finances intensely ('always' or 'often'), while the same proportion report worrying 'sometimes'. A further 25.6% worry 'rarely', while 19.8% report 'never' worrying about their finances. Respondents who live with their parents, with a partner, or alone are represented across all of these groups. This suggests that the key factors underlying the presence or absence of financial concerns among LGBTI people lie primarily in broader socio-economic conditions and the lack of institutional support, rather than in the absence of support or assistance from family members or partners.

4.3.2. HOUSING

The findings show that LGBTI people most commonly live in a property owned by their parents or other family members (47.9%), while a substantial proportion rent their accommodation (34.7%). Almost 10% of respondents have purchased a property independently, while only 2.5% live in a property they have inherited. In 1.7% of cases, the property is owned by the respondent's partner, while joint property purchase with a partner is reported in only 0.8% of cases. The vast majority of respondents (76%) feel completely or mostly secure in the accommodation in which they live.

In the general population sample, the most common housing arrangement is living in a property purchased jointly with a partner or spouse (41.5%). A further 27.3% live in a property owned by their parents or other family members. In 12.3% of cases, respondents have purchased their property independently, while 11.8% live in an inherited property. A further 2.5% rent their accommodation, while in 1.2% of cases the property has been made available to the respondent for their use. The findings are presented in Figure 24.

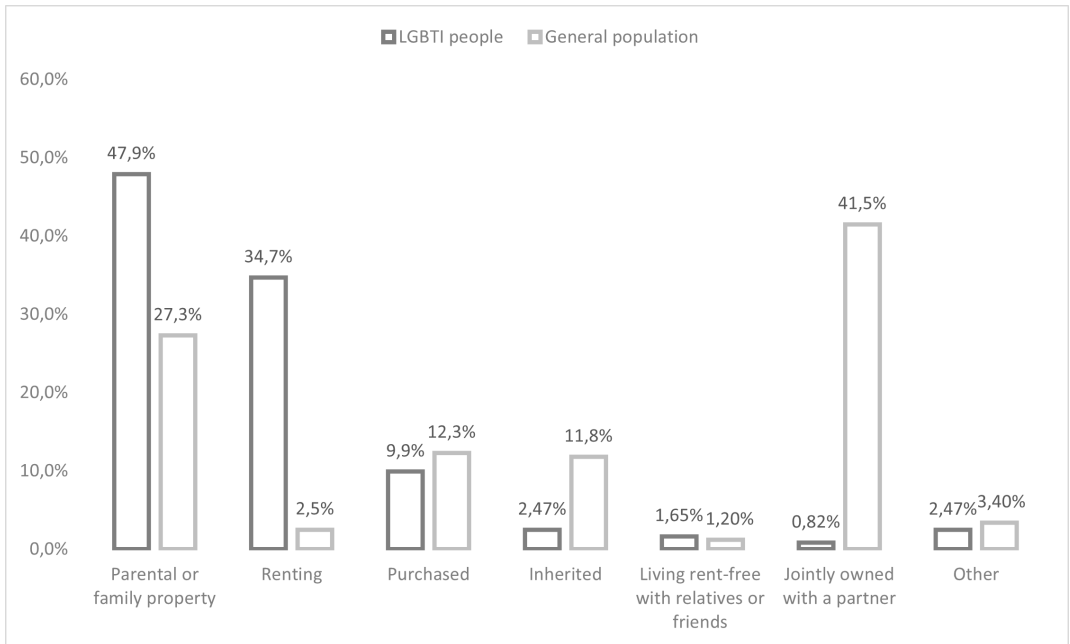


Chart 24. Housing and property ownership: comparison of LGBTI People and the general population

Significant differences can be observed between the general population and LGBTI people in terms of housing. LGBTI people are considerably less likely to own their own property and most commonly live in a property owned by their parents or other family members, or in rented accommodation. These findings should be considered in the context of the younger age profile of the LGBTI sample compared with the general population sample, as well as the less favourable socio-economic position of many LGBTI people. In particular, insecure employment and irregular income may prevent many from purchasing their own home. In this regard, although 53% of employed LGBTI respondents are fully or partially eligible for credit, a substantial proportion are either not **creditworthy** or do not know their credit status. Among respondents who rent their accommodation, both situations are reported in almost equal proportions, which may contribute to this pattern of housing tenure given the limited access to housing loans.

Furthermore, joint property purchase with a partner is negligible. This may be associated with the lack of legal recognition of same-sex marriage and partnerships, as the applicable family-law frameworks define marriage exclusively as a union between a woman and a man. In addition, only 19% of LGBTI respondents live with a partner, while the majority live alone or with their parents. This may also be associated with low levels of disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity, living in an unfavourable social environment, and the lack of legal recognition of same-sex partnerships.

The fact that joint purchase of residential property is the most common housing arrangement in the general population clearly points to the adverse impact of discriminatory legal provisions on LGBTI people's ability to own property. These findings confirm that the legal framework and social context, together with greater exposure to insecure employment – including jobs that may nevertheless be relatively well paid – have a decisive impact on housing arrangements and contribute to substantially lower housing security among LGBTI people.

Concerning experiences of renting, 7% of LGBTI respondents with previous or current experience of renting reported encountering problems related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Negative experiences were not reported during the in-depth interviews; instead, some positive experiences were described, including that of one transgender man: *When it comes to housing, both the landlord and my flatmate have been wonderful.* Nevertheless, many LGBTI people are recognised as facing high levels of stress when renting accommodation, while transgender people may face additional difficulties related to changing gender markers in identity documents.

Furthermore, the comparative data indicate significant differences between the experiences of LGBTI people and those of the general population when renting accommodation. As many as 73.2% of LGBTI respondents with experience of renting accommodation reported having rented without

a formal tenancy agreement, compared with 15.6% in the general population sample. Unpleasant experiences involving neighbours were reported by 25.4% of LGBTI respondents, compared with 11.6% in the general population sample. Being asked to leave rented accommodation was reported by 12.7% of LGBTI respondents, compared with 4.6% in the general population sample. Negative experiences related to personal characteristics were reported at almost the same rate in both groups (7% among LGBTI respondents and 6.2% in the general population sample). However, this may be associated with low levels of disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity ('living within four walls') and the fact that LGBTI people are more likely to live alone than with a partner.

4.3.3. NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF LGBTI PEOPLE

The findings reveal considerable diversity in LGBTI people's experiences in terms of the extent to which their needs are met and their overall quality of life. This diversity reflects patterns identified earlier in the report: while some respondents report positive experiences during their education and/or employment, others describe highly negative experiences, including exposure to violence. Some respondents report that they have a very good quality of life and are able to afford a range of things, while others do not have the same opportunities. Interestingly, during the in-depth interviews, respondents frequently described themselves as satisfied with their current quality of life:

- *I would say that the quality of my life right now is very good. The biggest contributors to my quality of life are my circumstances, my job, and my family. (Interview, gay man)*
- *My quality of life is currently very good, especially considering that I am a transgender man, a queer man, and that I live in Bosnia. (Interview, transgender man)*
- *I concentrated mainly on my studies and took up*

freelance jobs. I had a satisfactory income and could afford to go to university, live in another city, and travel through this work and with the help of my parents. (Interview, lesbian)

However, despite the fact that high rates of satisfaction were reported, interview participants often put this satisfaction in perspective, citing various challenges in education and employment, which are also reflected in the experience of many other research participants. The findings also point to a range of coping strategies, including working multiple jobs while continuing to live with parents, concealing one's gender identity, and maintaining limited connections with the LGBTI community. In one case, an older respondent also reported living in a heterosexual marriage.

A significant proportion of LGBTI respondents are considering leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina: 30.5% report thinking about leaving frequently, while 33.9% do so occasionally. A further 9.9% have already taken concrete steps towards leaving. By contrast, in the general population sample, the majority of respondents do not wish or intend to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina (56.4%), although younger respondents are more likely to consider moving abroad. The LGBTI sample is predominantly younger and, in addition to the broader social challenges and specific difficulties faced by young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, sexual orientation and/or gender identity may represent an additional factor contributing to their consideration of leaving the country.

It is also important to highlight the experiences of respondents living in particularly difficult circumstances, both socio-economically and in terms of their wider living conditions. As one of the field researchers noted following an interview with a gay man from Sarajevo who holds a university degree and shared several negative experiences:

This young man had the most negative experiences I have heard about so far, and he had quite a sad expression throughout the interview, which I found difficult to see.

As a heterosexual, I knew that I could not tell him 'I understand you', as that would not be true. At the same time, I was of course aware of the kinds of normalised microaggressions he was describing, as I am part of the same society from which these comments originate.
(Field researcher's note)

An example is a lesbian from Sarajevo who is currently staying in a safe house for LGBTI people, is studying, works informally in the private sector, and reports a monthly income of less than BAM 500. Another is a queer cisgender woman from Tuzla who is formally unemployed but works as a waitress. Due to financial difficulties, she had to leave university and has experienced a number of negative experiences in the workplace. A gay man from Sarajevo described severe experiences of violence both at school and in the workplace, including verbal and physical violence and being dismissed from his job. Although he has a university degree and is employed, with a monthly income of BAM 1,500–1,999, he frequently experiences financial concerns. The experience of the only intersex person in the sample, from Banja Luka, further illustrates the vulnerability. She lives with her mother, while her father provides child support. She is studying while also taking on temporary jobs, and reports frequent experiences of discrimination at school and in the workplace. A transgender man from Tuzla, who undertakes various project-based and informal jobs, lives alone in accommodation made available to him and reports an average monthly income of BAM 500–999. He has also experienced various negative situations at school and in the workplace.

One positive trend identified in the research, although it warrants further and more in-depth examination, is the presence of parental support. Such support may provide greater opportunities to meet basic needs, contribute to a safer environment for emotional development, and make it easier to cope with challenges later in life. As one respondent noted:

I also think that coming out and family support have

a significant impact on a person's financial situation... The opportunities for studying and employment are not the same for someone who has family support and someone who does not. (Transgender man from Tuzla)

In this context, respondents who report having lower incomes and being dissatisfied with them nevertheless often do not express concern about, or dissatisfaction with, their quality of life. This may be related to the fact that they live with their parents. However, parental support should not be the only source of support available to LGBTI people. Institutional mechanisms in the areas of education, work and employment need to be strengthened to ensure equal opportunities and reduce the structural barriers faced by LGBTI people. Alongside legal and institutional mechanisms, it is also necessary to foster a culture of equal treatment through education and training, including efforts to enable people to recognise and manage their own biases.

Respondents' answers to questions about recommendations concerning the right to work and employment ranged from very brief and general responses to detailed accounts and proposals. This variation may be linked to differences in respondents' personal experiences in the workplace. Given the context in Bosnia and Herzegovina, respondents frequently emphasise the need to ensure a legal minimum, including consistent enforcement of existing legislation and, where necessary, its improvement through stronger penalties and sanctions, alongside efforts to address stereotypes and change social attitudes. Some respondents highlight the importance of revising internal company policies and introducing affirmative measures, while others point to the difficulty of changing people's attitudes and perceptions. The importance of interpersonal relationships and acceptance in the workplace is also frequently recognised. Some responses emphasise the role of educational institutions and education as key factors in bringing about longer-term changes in social attitudes. Targeted training for HR staff is also mentioned, as are

specific issues such as the position of trans people, with these concerns being raised not only by trans respondents themselves. Finally, some responses point to a broader need for change, emphasising that action is needed at all levels, from the legal framework to the development of a culture of inclusion.

The responses can be grouped into the following categories:

Better legal protection and sanctions

- *Clear legal recognition of specific rights, including protection in the workplace.*
- *Stricter legal penalties for discrimination, with fines substantial enough to have a meaningful financial impact on employers.*
- *A legal framework that protects people's rights and enables them to live decent lives.*
- *Stronger legal protection for LGBT+ people, greater visibility, and effective sanctions for discrimination, since financial sanctions are frequently what produce the greatest effect.*
- *Laws should be strengthened to ensure that workers' rights are clearly defined and better protected.*
- *A law should be adopted covering all minority groups, in addition to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, which is not being adequately enforced.*
- *Laws should be introduced to protect LGBT people from discrimination.*

Institutional mechanisms and internal company policies

- *Internal policies that promote the greater inclusion of LGBTI people in the labour market.*
- *In terms of ensuring the right to work, employers should have appropriate mechanisms in place, including clear rules and procedures.*
- *Companies should include protection against discrimination against LGBT+ people in their internal*

policies and foster an LGBT+-friendly workplace.

- Identifying and recognising LGBT+-friendly employers.*
- Safe spaces, particularly within HR departments, as HR staff are often the first point of contact.*

Education and awareness raising

- Training for employers and stronger enforcement of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination.*
- Alongside the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, there should be greater efforts to educate the wider population, as well as children and students in schools.*
- Some form of education on sexuality and diversity, including trans people, drag and related topics, should be introduced.*
- Police officers should also receive training on LGBT+ issues.*
- Some form of training or awareness-raising programme could be introduced. Training for HR staff, as well as awareness-raising among colleagues, is important.*
- Education and greater visibility are needed to raise collective awareness of the human rights of LGBT+ people.*
- Education on human rights.*
- Education and awareness-raising among employers and within the workplace.*

Inclusion and security

- Greater acceptance and a workplace free from discrimination.*
- Ensuring that the workplace is safe and secure.*
- A safe working environment.*
- Violence must be addressed as a priority, with tougher penalties for perpetrators.*
- Preventing discrimination and strengthening protections against intrusive questions about employees' private lives.*

Equality in employment

- *No discrimination in recruitment, including based on a person's appearance when they submit a CV.*
- *Recruitment should be based on education and skills, without regard to a person's religion, nationality or sexual orientation.*
- *Everyone should be given an equal opportunity to work, regardless of who they are or how they identify.*
- *A person's sexual orientation or any other personal characteristic should have no bearing whatsoever on recruitment decisions.*

Visibility and challenging stereotypes

- *Challenging prejudice.*
- *Challenging stereotypes.*
- *Increasing visibility and strengthening legal protection against discrimination in the workplace.*
- *Changing society as a whole and its closed attitude towards difference.*
- *Raising awareness that LGBT people are OK.*

Specific needs and vulnerabilities of trans people

- *Addressing issues affecting trans people and ensuring a positive experience in the workplace.*
- *The rights of trans people; I would say that these are not really addressed, as broader terminology is generally used.*
- *Some form of education on sexuality and diversity, including trans people, drag and related topics, should be introduced.*

Participants in this research also identified several areas and specific issues that should be explored further in research on the socio-economic position of LGBTI people:

Private life and support networks: relationships with family, friends and the wider social environment; support in private life and within the community, and how these factors relate to socio-economic circumstances:

I think it would be important to ask people whether they have support, whether they have friends who know about their situation, and what their relationship with their family is like, because all these things affect the work experiences and mental health of LGBTQI people. (Gay man from Sarajevo)

Mental health: questions about respondents' psychological well-being, their sense of safety at work, access to psychological support and free legal assistance, as well as their social lives:

There were no questions about the respondents' mental health, whether the workplace is a safe and secure environment, and there were not many questions about their social lives. (Pansexual woman from Banja Luka)

Questions about the availability of free legal and psychological support for LGBTIQ people in the workplace. (Bisexual woman from Tuzla)

Intimate relationships: partner support, violence in intimate relationships, marital status, and respondents' plans and wishes regarding family life, which also represents an important determinant of socio-economic circumstances:

Perhaps there should be a section on intimate relationships, as well as violence within them. (Queer cisgender woman from Banja Luka)

Questions about marital status, i.e., respondents' plans and wishes in this regard. (Gay man from Sarajevo)

Verbal violence and hate speech: more in-depth exploration of experiences of ridicule, stereotyping and negative comments in the workplace, as well as hate speech in wider society:

Hate speech could be addressed more thoroughly. (Lesbian from Mostar)

I have been hurt and offended, but nothing was said directly to me because, for my own safety, I remain silent and do not say anything, as society is still not ready to accept us as normal. (Bisexual woman from Sarajevo)

Intersectionality: the relationship between LGBTI identity and other factors, such as education, disability, rural background and similar circumstances:

Perhaps a more intersectional approach to this issue would be useful, as I feel this is not sufficiently emphasised in the questionnaire, even though it is very important in shaping the experiences a queer person may have in public spaces and at work in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Gay man from Mostar)

I have a stutter, for example, and I don't think this was addressed in the interview. Yet it is an important factor in terms of my access to employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and even a much greater obstacle than my sexual orientation. (Gay man from Tuzla)

Differences within the LGBTI community: systematically examining how labour rights, experiences of discrimination and inclusion differ across various identity groups (gay men, lesbians, bisexual, trans, non-binary and intersex people):

Would a gay person and a trans person have the same rights in the workplace? (Transgender man from Gradiška)

Professional and work context: exploring in greater depth the sectors in which LGBTI people work:

It would be interesting to find out which sectors people work in, for example, whether they work in education, science, or heavy industry. (Bisexual woman from Tuzla)

Insecure forms of employment and institutional protection: examining in greater detail how undeclared work and informal employment affect LGBTI people, particularly

in terms of access to employment rights and the ability to report discrimination:

I think that undeclared work received somewhat less attention in this research, even though it is highly problematic when someone works without an employment contract and has no one to turn to to report any problems or inappropriate comments.
(Transgender man from Tuzla)

5. CHANGES 2020–2026

This section presents a comparison of the key findings from two studies on the socio-economic position of LGBTI people, conducted in 2020 and 2026.

➤ METHODOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

- **Sample size:** The LGBTI sample in the 2026 study was considerably smaller (121 respondents, compared with 300 in 2020). This was offset by a greater emphasis on the qualitative approach. In both studies, a non-probability convenience sampling method was used, meaning that the findings are not representative of the LGBTI community as a whole in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Education structure:** Although respondents with secondary-level qualifications predominate in both studies (partly due to the inclusion of students), the 2026 LGBTI sample includes a higher proportion of respondents with a university degree (37.2%, compared with 33%), a slightly lower proportion with higher vocational qualifications (5%, compared with 8%), and a substantial proportion holding postgraduate academic degrees (16.5%), a group not represented in the 2020 study. The higher proportion of respondents with university-level qualifications, together with the significant presence of those holding postgraduate academic degrees in the 2026 sample, made it possible to examine whether education – a factor that generally contributes to a more favourable socio-economic position – can ‘offset’ the discrimination LGBTI people face in employment and the workplace.
- **Sex, gender and sexual identity composition:** In both samples, women slightly outnumbered men (54% and 54.5%, respectively). However, the 2026 study included a smaller proportion of intersex respondents (0.8%, compared with 3% in the previous

study). There are also differences in the distribution of respondents by sexual orientation. The proportion of gay men is considerably higher in the 2026 sample (32%, compared with 20%), while fewer respondents identify as homosexual (6%, compared with 15%). The proportion of lesbians is slightly lower (18%, compared with 22%), while the proportion of bisexual respondents is almost unchanged (28%, compared with 27%). The 2026 sample also includes a higher proportion of non-binary respondents (5%, compared with 1%). Importantly, trans people are better represented in the 2026 sample: 1.7% of respondents are trans women and 3.3% are trans men, compared with just 1% trans men in the previous study. The greater inclusion of trans respondents provides a more substantial evidence base on the experiences of one of the groups facing particular vulnerabilities in education, employment and the workplace.

- **Employment status:** The 2026 sample includes considerably fewer unemployed respondents (11.6%), compared with 44% in 2020. This provided a broader insight into the sphere of work, but the very small number of unemployed respondents made it impossible to adequately compare the experiences and needs of employed and unemployed respondents.
- **Partnership status:** The 2026 study includes a higher proportion of LGBTI respondents who are in a relationship (43%, compared with 35%).
- **Research instrument:** Some questions were not included, while others were reworded to improve clarity. This has, to some extent, affected the comparability of the results obtained.
- **Statistical significance:** Where possible, the 2026 study highlights statistically significant differences between the LGBTI sample and the general population sample. Where statistically significant differences were identified within the general population sample, these were also taken into account. This represents a shift away from an exclusively descriptive approach to the analysis.

- **Qualitative approach:** The analysis in the 2026 study placed greater emphasis on the qualitative dimension, using thematic analysis of open-ended questions and highlighting illustrative and particularly pronounced experiences. This approach is particularly recommended in qualitative research to capture the diversity and depth of the data. In addition, three in-depth interviews were conducted, providing further insight into the respondents' life circumstances and the specific challenges faced by LGBTI people.

➤ **COMPARISON OF RESULTS**

• **EDUCATION**

Reasons for choosing a school/university and discontinuing education: In both studies, the main reason LGBTI respondents chose a particular school or university was an interest in the field of study. However, in the 2026 study, considerably fewer LGBTI respondents cited a desire to be closer to the LGBTI community as a reason (2.5%, compared with 16%), which calls for further research.

The proportion of respondents who decided to discontinue their education was also considerably lower in the more recent study (4.2%, compared with 18%). It is important to note that the 2026 study included a direct question about discrimination or fear of coming out as a reason not only for discontinuing education, but also for potentially changing school or university. By contrast, in the 2020 study, the main reason given for discontinuing education, more specifically university studies, was financial difficulties, while only a very small number of cases were related to sexual orientation or gender identity. Against this background, the differences between the two studies cannot be considered significant in terms of the impact of discrimination on discontinuing education.

Experiences of discrimination in education: In the 2026 study, almost 63% of LGBTI respondents reported

having experienced violence in educational institutions. This information was not collected in the 2020 study and was therefore not analysed or reported in that publication. The findings on reporting negative experiences and discrimination are fairly similar: very few respondents chose to report such incidents – 16 in the previous study and 14 in the current one. However, the two studies had very different sample sizes, which may have contributed to the slightly higher number of reports in the 2020 study. In any case, the difference is extremely small. In both studies, reports were generally not followed by satisfactory outcomes.

In the 2026 study, respondents gave a number of reasons for not reporting negative experiences, including fear of the consequences, lack of trust in institutions, a desire to avoid further exposure, concerns about social stigma, and a tendency to downplay or normalise negative experiences. A lack of awareness of the different forms discrimination can take during the school years was also identified as an important factor.

Coming out during education: When it comes to coming out during education, in both studies the largest proportion of respondents had come out only to a small circle of people. This group was 7 percentage points larger in the 2026 study. By contrast, a considerably smaller proportion of respondents said they had been open about their sexual orientation or gender identity (14.9%, compared with 25%). In both studies, respondents more often reported changes in the behaviour of other students following coming out than changes in the behaviour of teachers or school management.

Exposure to diversity in education: The 2026 study examined in greater detail, from the perspective of the general population, the extent to which respondents had come into contact with people from different backgrounds. Contact with LGBTI people was found to be considerably less common than contact with people of a different nationality or religion, Roma people, or people with disabilities. A significant proportion of respondents were unsure whether

they had ever come into contact with LGBTI people. This is likely to be linked to the fact that relatively few LGBTI people are open about their sexual orientation or gender identity, and to the community's lower visibility.

While no respondents in the general population sample reported negative experiences involving LGBTI people during their school years in the 2020 study, two respondents reported such experiences in the 2026 study. This is a negligible difference in numerical terms. However, the 2020 study found a considerably higher proportion of general population respondents who believed that LGBTI people were not treated equally in educational institutions (55%, compared with 19.7%). The more recent study, by contrast, recorded a higher proportion of respondents who were unsure. These findings could point either to some improvement in the educational environment or to a lower level of awareness of the problems LGBTI people face. Interpretation is not straightforward, partly because respondents were reflecting on experiences from earlier stages of their lives, particularly in the case of older participants. However, responses to other questions asked of the general population suggest a possible decline in awareness and understanding of these issues.

In both studies, younger respondents and those with higher levels of education showed greater awareness of the challenges LGBTI people face during their education. This underlines the importance of educational attainment and generational differences in shaping attitudes.

Curriculum content and teaching staff: In both studies, the vast majority of LGBTI respondents felt that LGBTI issues were not adequately covered in the curriculum: they were either presented stereotypically or negatively, or not covered at all. In the 2026 study, most respondents (62%) said that LGBTI-related content was entirely absent from the curriculum. In the 2020 study, the question of whether such content was included was asked separately. In that study, 68% of respondents said it was absent. Those who said it was included were then asked to specify how the subject

was covered, with the overwhelming majority saying that it was presented stereotypically.

As regards teaching staff and their awareness of LGBTI issues, perceptions were somewhat less negative in the more recent study. However, this should be considered alongside the fact that a significant proportion of respondents (around a quarter) felt that teaching staff were neither particularly sensitive nor insensitive to these issues. The 2020 study found that younger teaching staff tended to be more aware of and sensitive to the needs of LGBTI students. This aspect was not examined separately in the 2026 study. Nevertheless, the findings may, at least in part, reflect generational change, as older members of the teaching workforce gradually retire.

The 2026 study also recorded examples of individual teachers offering support to LGBTI students. However, these appear to be isolated instances rather than evidence of established institutional practice. It is important to note that the question covered not only teaching staff and lecturers, but also other students. This further suggests that support is more likely to come from individual initiatives than from an institutional culture of inclusion.

Attitudes towards the inclusion of LGBTI topics and LGBTI teaching staff: Of concern is the fact that, in the 2026 study, a considerably smaller proportion of general population respondents felt that children should be taught to accept different sexual orientations and gender identities as part of their education (40.4%, compared with 60% in the 2020 study). This may, with some caution, be linked to the increasingly negative climate in recent years, particularly in the context of so-called anti-gender mobilisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Attitudes towards LGBTI people working as teachers, however, were less concerning, although the proportion of respondents expressing negative views was also somewhat higher than in the previous study (26.9%, compared with 20%). It is worth reiterating that attitudes towards LGBTI teaching staff were less negative than attitudes towards the inclusion of LGBTI topics in schools.

This suggests that advocacy campaigns could potentially be more effective if they focused specifically on this aspect. The fact that respondents who had had contact with LGBTI people expressed more positive attitudes on these issues also underlines the importance of further efforts to increase visibility and promote acceptance.

In both studies, the reasons given by general population respondents for accepting or rejecting LGBTI-related content in education and LGBTI people working as teachers followed similar patterns. These ranged from general acceptance or rejection, through arguments based on human rights and social progress, the right to privacy and conditional acceptance, to stereotypes, fears of 'imposing' certain views, perceptions of a negative influence on children, claims that being LGBTI is 'unnatural', and religious and traditional patriarchal arguments. Interestingly, in both studies, around 10% of respondents felt that these topics should be addressed exclusively through education at home.

➤ WORK AND EMPLOYMENT

Access to the labour market: A considerably higher proportion of LGBTI respondents in the 2026 study said they had been able to find work immediately after completing their education (83.8%, compared with 59% in the 2020 study). While this may be a positive indication, the findings should be viewed in the context of the much smaller proportion of unemployed respondents in the 2026 sample, which had a significant bearing on the distribution of responses in the earlier study.

In both studies, LGBTI respondents were more likely than those in the general population to report having been asked intrusive questions about their private lives during job interviews. The proportion reporting such experiences was considerably lower in the more recent study (just over 26%, compared with 44%), suggesting some improvement in this respect. At the same time, a much smaller proportion of general population respondents now believe that LGBTI

people face greater difficulties in finding employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina (around 29%, compared with more than 50% in the previous study). This could be interpreted as a sign of a more positive trend, but it may also point to a decline in awareness of the difficulties faced by LGBTI people.

However, when these findings are considered alongside other results from the two studies, there are certainly reasons for concern. In the 2026 study, only 22.1% of respondents who were employers said they would be willing to employ an LGBTI person, compared with as many as 64% in the 2020 study. When interpreting these figures, it is important to bear in mind that the research was primarily designed to survey the general population, meaning that employers were included only incidentally, through the sampling process. They accounted for 14% of respondents in 2020, compared with just 2.5% in 2026.

Also concerning is the fact that the proportion of general population respondents who said they would be willing to work for a manager who supports or promotes LGBTI rights has fallen by half. This points to a potentially negative trend in wider social attitudes towards LGBTI people. At the same time, the majority of LGBTI respondents in the 2026 study (just over 63%) considered the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina to be either completely or partially closed to LGBTI people. On the other hand, a significant proportion (around 45%) said they had not felt that their sexual orientation or gender identity affected their chances of finding employment. This apparent contradiction points to the complexity of the current situation.

Formal and informal work by sector: Both studies found that LGBTI people were more likely to combine formal and informal employment – that is, to work both on a declared basis and ‘off the books’ (50.5% in the 2026 study, compared with 56% in 2020) – and were less likely than the general population to have formal employment. While 16% of LGBTI respondents in the previous study reported having worked exclusively ‘off the books’, this proportion was considerably

lower in the more recent study (5.2%). At the same time, the proportion of respondents with experience of formal employment only also fell (44.3%, compared with 52%).

These findings point to continued insecurity in LGBTI people's employment, with a combination of declared and undeclared work remaining the most common pattern. The decline in exclusive undeclared work may represent some improvement, but does not in itself indicate a substantial improvement in the exercise of employment rights. It should also be noted that the previous study included a considerably higher proportion of formally unemployed respondents, which is likely to have contributed to the higher proportion reporting experience of undeclared work only.

In both studies, LGBTI people were found to be underrepresented in the public sector compared with the general population, while they were most commonly employed in the private sector and more likely to work in the NGO sector and international organisations. In the 2026 study, the proportion of LGBTI respondents employed by international organisations was higher than in the previous study (7.45%, compared with 2%), while their representation in the NGO sector decreased slightly (12.8%, compared with 14%).

These findings may be partly explained by the composition of the sample, as LGBTI respondents who participated in both studies were, on average, considerably younger than those in the general population. However, this issue calls for further research. It is particularly important to note that the representation of LGBTI people in the public sector remained almost identical and stable (13.8%, compared with 14%). **The comparison suggests a degree of closure within the public sector towards LGBTI people and points to the need for further advocacy.**

Discrimination and violence in the workplace: Experiences in the workplace reported in both studies show that LGBTI people face a range of challenges. Sexual harassment, workplace mobbing and pressure, denial

of employment rights, as well as jokes and comments about appearance or identity, are reported considerably more frequently by LGBTI respondents than by those in the general population. These unwanted forms of behaviour most commonly come from colleagues and supervisors, although instances involving third parties, such as clients or customers, have also been reported. Although comments and jokes about appearance or identity were the most common form of negative behaviour in both studies, the 2026 study recorded a considerably higher proportion of respondents reporting that they had been propositioned for or asked to engage in sexual relations (by about 10% more). More precise comparisons are difficult because, in the 2020 study, questions about negative experiences were asked only of respondents who had come out or had been outed in the workplace.

In the more recent study, a slightly higher proportion of LGBTI respondents had come out at work (47%, compared with 39% in the previous study). The reasons for concealing one's sexual orientation or gender identity remain similar: fear of the consequences or the view that it is a private matter. In both studies, very few respondents chose to report negative experiences, **pointing to a persistent lack of trust in institutional protection mechanisms.**

Exercising rights in the workplace: pay, benefits and confidence in protection mechanisms: In both studies, LGBTI people were less likely than those in the general population to receive regular income and employment-related benefits, particularly transport allowances and meal allowances. Confidence in institutions responsible for protecting employment rights remains low, although the 2026 study recorded a slight increase (11%, compared with 7% in the 2020 study). At the same time, LGBTI people expressed greater confidence in alternative protection mechanisms. Confidence in NGOs increased from 45% to 59%, while confidence in lawyers and legal assistance rose from 47% to 53%. Confidence in traditional protection mechanisms, such as trade unions, remained unchanged

(10%). Trade union membership was low in both studies, although a slight increase was recorded in the more recent study (9%, compared with 4%). Differences in sample size are likely to have influenced this distribution to some extent. Nevertheless, the findings clearly point to a persistent lack of confidence in institutional protection mechanisms and LGBTI people's reliance on alternative forms of support.

Awareness of employment rights protection: The proportion of LGBTI people who are aware of the available options for protecting their employment rights increased from 32% in the previous study to 41% in the 2026 study. At the same time, the proportion of those who were unsure also increased, from 23% to 37%. There was also an increase in the proportion of LGBTI people who were familiar with workplace policies governing specific employment rights, rising from 32% to just over 50%. While 59% of respondents in the previous study were unsure whether workplace policies prohibited discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender and sexual orientation, 70% of respondents in the more recent study said they were aware that such provisions existed.

These findings suggest that awareness of employment rights has increased. This may be partly explained by the higher proportion of respondents with higher levels of education and postgraduate academic degrees in the 2026 LGBTI sample, as well as by advocacy activities undertaken by NGOs in the intervening period. **Nevertheless, the findings confirm the need for continued efforts to ensure systematic access to information and knowledge about employment rights, so that awareness of these rights becomes the norm.**

➤ NEEDS AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Financial circumstances: In both studies, the largest proportion of LGBTI respondents reported that their income was sufficient to live a normal life. Although this proportion was slightly lower in the 2026 study than in 2020 (41.5%, compared with 46%), 16% of respondents in the 2026 study

said that they were living very well and could afford many of the things they wanted. This response option was not included in the previous study.

At the same time, a proportion of LGBTI respondents continue to experience financial insecurity, although this appears to be less common than in 2020. Notably, the proportion who said that their income was insufficient to meet their living expenses fell from 17% to 10.6%. These results may be associated with the higher proportion of respondents with higher education qualifications and academic degrees in the more recent study sample, which is likely to have contributed to a more favourable distribution of financial circumstances. In addition, the proportion of respondents who are not considered creditworthy decreased substantially in the current study, from 55% to 24.5%.

Taking these findings into account, and bearing in mind the methodological limitations noted above, the results suggest that LGBTI people were in a more favourable financial position in 2026 than in 2020.

Housing circumstances: In both studies, LGBTI people living in a parental or family-owned property represent the largest group. However, this proportion decreased substantially, from 74% to 47.9%. The proportion of respondents living in rented accommodation remained almost unchanged (34.7% compared with 36%), while the proportion reporting that they had purchased a property themselves increased from 7% to 10%. At the same time, the proportion of respondents who had inherited a property decreased from 18% to 2.5%. This further points to differences in the composition of the two samples, given that inheritance represents a relatively stable housing category.

It should also be taken into account that the previous study was conducted during the COVID19 pandemic, which may have led some LGBTI people at the time to return to their parental or family homes. Furthermore, the 2026 study included an additional response option for respondents who

had jointly purchased a property with their partner, allowing for a more detailed comparison with the general population. While this is the most common form of securing housing in the general population (41.5%), it was reported by only 0.8% of respondents in the LGBTI sample. These findings provide a clearer indication of the impact of discriminatory legal provisions on LGBTI people, as the lack of legal recognition of partnerships prevents partners from jointly purchasing and holding property as a legally recognised couple.

The widespread practice of renting accommodation without a formal contract has remained largely unchanged, at 72% in the previous study and 73.2% in the current study. At the same time, there was a decrease in the proportion of respondents reporting having been evicted from rented accommodation (from 18% to 12.7%), as well as a substantial decrease in negative experiences related to sexual orientation or gender identity (from 18% to 7%).

These findings point to some positive developments, although the decrease in negative experiences may partly be associated with the phenomenon of 'living behind closed doors', referring to limited disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity and the lower visibility of LGBTI people in this context. Nevertheless, compared with the general population, LGBTI people continue to report less favourable experiences when renting accommodation, although one aspect of the 2026 findings warrants particular attention. Specifically, the gap between the two groups in terms of negative rental experiences related to personal characteristics was considerably smaller in the 2026 study. In the previous study, 18% of LGBTI respondents reported such experiences, compared with 7% in 2026. At the same time, the proportion in the general population increased from 2% in the previous study to 6.2% in 2026.

➤ **REVIEW OF FINDINGS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The findings from both studies point to the continued presence of **structural discrimination** against LGBTI people in education, employment and the workplace. The education system continues to fall short in providing education that promotes diversity, while a lack of awareness and sensitivity among teaching staff remains evident, albeit to a somewhat lesser extent. This appears to be largely associated with individual forms of support rather than systemic solutions. Experiences of violence in schools remain widespread, while disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity remains limited and reporting of violence continues to be extremely rare.

Structural barriers also persist in employment and the labour market. Employment characterised by combined forms of contracts remains prevalent, while the public sector shows clear indications of possible barriers to the inclusion of LGBTI people. Trust in alternative forms of workplace protection, including NGOs and legal assistance, has increased, while trust in trade unions remains low, despite a slight increase in trade union membership. Persistent distrust in institutions is reflected in the negligible number of reported cases of violence and discrimination in the workplace across both studies. The high prevalence of sexual violence and harassment remains shocking.

Of additional concern is the decline in sensitivity among the general population towards the inclusion of LGBTI-related content in educational curricula, as well as towards working with LGBTI people or having a supervisor who promotes LGBTI rights. Positive attitudes are more commonly associated with higher levels of education, familiarity with LGBTI people, and younger age groups. The decline in employers' sensitivity, while subject to the relevant methodological caveats, also represents a concerning trend. This decline may be associated with an unfavourable socio-political climate, increasing intolerance, and the growing prominence of anti-gender initiatives. This influence is particularly evident in lower levels

of coming out in educational settings, while the proportion of LGBTI people who have come out in the workplace has increased. This difference may be explained by the fact that educational institutions are often a primary focus of anti-gender initiatives, which may further hinder inclusion and acceptance in educational settings.

At the same time, several **positive developments** were identified: an improvement in the financial situation of at least some LGBTI respondents; a decrease in negative experiences when renting accommodation related to sexual orientation or gender identity (subject to certain caveats); and a substantially higher level of awareness among LGBTI people of their rights in the workplace. The latter may be partly associated with the educational profile of the sample, as well as with advocacy activities undertaken by NGOs. The focus on qualitative data in the current study also made it possible to identify positive experiences in individual workplaces and to highlight the importance of family support for LGBTI children and young people in fostering social acceptance and helping them overcome barriers throughout their education and working lives.

Across both studies, LGBTI people essentially call for the same changes: legal reforms to strengthen the protection of their rights, more effective institutional protection mechanisms, and a shift in public attitudes, in other words, a change in the 'mindset' of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The disadvantaged socio-economic position of LGBTI people is a global concern. This is reflected in research conducted by various international organisations, including the ILO, the European Commission and the UN, as well as in relevant academic literature (Badgett, Choi & Wilson 2019; Deal et al. 2024). Although some progress has been made, LGBTI people continue to experience unequal treatment and face numerous challenges compared with the general population, particularly in the areas of education, employment, work and housing.

The situation becomes more complex when an intersectional approach is applied, highlighting additional forms of vulnerability arising from the intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity with socio-economic background, race and ethnicity, age, disability or migrant status. Within the LGBTI community itself, transgender people are particularly affected, while bisexual people are more likely to experience stress and adverse life circumstances, including discrimination in the workplace (Badgett, Choi & Wilson 2019; McGarrrity 2014; Wilson, Lin & Bouton 2025).

Although global research has documented a double-digit increase in public acceptance of LGBTI people over the past two decades in many countries, workplace discrimination remains widespread even in societies with high levels of inclusion (Drydakis 2021; Weistroffer et al. 2025). On the other hand, there have also been positive developments in case law, as well as among employers promoting 'LGBTI-friendly' policies (International Labour Organization 2015), although critical perspectives caution that such initiatives are often profit-driven, suppress emancipatory politics and activism, and have a negative impact on vulnerable groups within the LGBTI community (Burchiellaro 2023). In this context, LGBTI people who are better able to navigate the neoliberal capitalist order and who come from more privileged class backgrounds tend to occupy a more

favourable position within the LGBTI community (McDermott 2011; Dioli 2016; Burchiellaro 2023). By contrast, LGBTI people from working-class backgrounds and those from families with lower economic status face additional and significant vulnerabilities (Wilson et al. 2020).

In any case, education, employment and healthcare are, under the International Covenant on Human Rights, key areas for individual development. Yet these are precisely the areas in which LGBTI people most frequently experience discrimination and exclusion (OECD 2020, 32), as also confirmed by this study of the socio-economic position of LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, together with the engagement of field researchers and a public opinion research agency, enabled the collection of rich and relevant data. The findings document experiences of violence and discrimination in schools and workplaces, while also highlighting positive examples that offer grounds for optimism that broader social change is possible.

The study confirms the importance of early life experiences shaped by the family environment, friends, wider family networks and, in particular, the school environment. The data indicate that family support is generally present, although the dynamics of this relationship warrant further investigation, as family support was not included in the research design as a potential indicator but was, to some extent, identified through the data collected. Other research from around the world likewise confirms the important role of the family, and particularly the importance of LGBTI children being accepted by their families. Such acceptance contributes to the development of a positive self-image and enables LGBTI people to cope more effectively with challenges they may later encounter at school or in the workplace. The need for acceptance also means that LGBTI people are more likely to seek out more inclusive working environments (Drydakis 2021, 13).

By contrast, school emerges as a first and often early-life barrier: a setting in which LGBTI people in Bosnia

and Herzegovina struggle not only for access to education and future career opportunities, but also for acceptance and understanding. School also emerges as the setting in which many experience violence for the first time within an institutional context. Such violence takes different forms and varies in intensity, but remains a persistent feature. LGBTI-related topics continue to have little or no place in educational institutions, while prejudice among the general population undermines efforts to bring about improvements. Nevertheless, there is a segment of the general population that demonstrates greater sensitivity and recognises the importance of working towards such improvements. Coming out remains limited and cautious, negative experiences are rarely reported, and awareness-raising among teaching staff remains insufficient and largely dependent on individual efforts. The findings clearly show that the education system fails to ensure equality and inclusion for LGBTI people at the institutional level, and that positive experiences and perceptions stem primarily from individual coping strategies and efforts to overcome barriers, rather than from systemic support. The findings are consistent with global research showing that schools represent an intense environment for young people in relation to their sexuality and operate as deeply gendered and heteronormative regimes of dominance and subordination (McDermott 2011, 70).

On the labour market, most LGBTI people manage to find employment immediately after completing their education, but a significant proportion work outside their field of study or experience periods of unemployment of varying duration. Although many do not report experiencing direct discrimination, their identity is often perceived as a latent barrier to employment. There is a gap between personal experience and broader perceptions: while a majority of respondents do not feel that their identity affects their employment prospects, most perceive the labour market as systemically closed or partially closed to LGBTI people. This is further supported by the prejudice and lack of sensitivity among employers identified in this study.

The findings show that LGBTI people are more likely to find employment in the NGO sector and international organisations than in the public sector. The indication that the public sector may be less open to LGBTI people calls for further research. The high representation of LGBTI people in the private sector may partly be explained by age, given that the LGBTI sample consists of a younger population, while younger people in the general population are statistically significantly more likely to work in the private sector. The higher prevalence of freelance work may enable LGBTI people to avoid social prejudice more easily, but it also entails greater insecurity. Part-time work, fixed-term contracts, and combinations of different forms of employment and contractual arrangements point to coping strategies used by LGBTI people to navigate the labour market. The lack of regular income, and particularly the absence of employment benefits, further exacerbates economic disparities and insecurity, while financial support from family often represents a key mechanism for both financial and emotional survival. This support calls for further investigation, particularly in light of available evidence indicating that LGBTI young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are at risk of family violence, including being forced to leave the family home, which further increases their risk of homelessness (Huremović 2025, 26).

LGBTI people have lower levels of awareness of their employment rights and greater distrust in institutions, accompanied by low levels of trade union involvement and greater reliance on NGOs and lawyers (legal assistance) rather than traditional forms of workplace protection. The data indicate a higher risk of harassment, discrimination and victimisation in the workplace compared with the general population. The study documented severe cases of various forms of violence shared by participants during the research. Verbal violence and sexual harassment against LGBTI people in the workplace are widespread, reflecting deeply rooted prejudice and stigmatisation, as also documented in previous research (Gačanica 2021, 42–43). At the same time, this study – particularly its qualitative component – also

identified more inclusive working environments. However, these remain in the minority, while positive experiences often depend on 'fortunate circumstances' or individual strategies for avoiding conflict.

Discrimination against LGBTI people in the workplace comes from multiple directions – colleagues, supervisors, and third parties – whereas, among the general population, it is largely associated with workplace hierarchies. Colleagues emerge as the main source of unwanted behaviour, suggesting that discrimination is not solely a matter of power, but also of social norms reproduced through everyday interactions in the workplace, with colleagues effectively acting as 'gatekeepers' of these norms. The high proportions of respondents who would reject working for an LGBTI supervisor or an employer who promotes LGBTI rights, combined with limited actual experience of working with LGBTI people, point to a deeply rooted lack of sensitivity among the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Positive and inclusive attitudes are most prevalent among those who have encountered or worked with LGBTI people during their lives, followed by younger and more highly educated respondents, and, to some extent, women. The findings also confirm the relevance of social contact theories in reducing prejudice and stereotypes in the spheres of education, work, and employment.

The quality of life of LGBTI people cannot be measured solely by income levels, but also needs to be considered in terms of insecurity, violence, uncertainty, and lack of protection, all of which directly affect emotional and psychological well-being. The low rate of home ownership is associated with the inability to legally enter into marriage or establish a legally recognised partnership, further contributing to insecurity in other areas of life. Given the extent to which familialism shapes Bosnian and Herzegovinian society, and the significant influence of family support on people's life opportunities, the inability to enter into marriage or establish a legally recognised partnership places LGBTI people in a particularly socially vulnerable position in the current

context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while also contributing to more negative outlooks for the future. Taken together, these factors may contribute to LGBTI people's intention to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina, representing a significant potential loss for the state and society – one that needs to be recognised and addressed.

Finally, it is important to note that the LGBTI people who participated in the study are predominantly younger, highly educated (37.2% have completed university, while 16.5% hold a postgraduate degree – a master's or doctorate) and from urban areas, which to some extent shapes the findings obtained. It can be assumed that these are people who are, to some extent, able to navigate the existing social and economic circumstances and overcome at least some financial difficulties, although not necessarily social stereotypes, as evidenced by the numerous negative experiences documented in this study. At the same time, it is concerning that high levels of education and professional qualifications, which are otherwise important determinants of better life opportunities, do not provide sufficient protection for LGBTI people to enjoy a dignified and decent life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Particularly concerning is the presence of a significant segment of the LGBTI community in Bosnia and Herzegovina whose socio-economic position is highly vulnerable and whose financial circumstances are extremely difficult.

A more adequate and in-depth understanding of this issue requires further research, particularly qualitative research, as well as the application of an intersectional approach. Such research could provide greater insight into the experiences and perspectives of LGBTI people whose voices may be less visible in existing research, particularly older people, those from rural areas, people with disabilities, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION OF LGBTI PEOPLE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

➤ BROADER SOCIAL CONTEXT

- **Challenging prejudice and stereotypes** – implement public awareness campaigns and educational programmes aimed at raising awareness and promoting more inclusive social attitudes.
- **Social visibility** – support initiatives and activism that increase the visibility and representation of LGBTI people in the public sphere and the media.
- **Changing political and public discourse** – move from stigmatisation towards inclusion through responsible communication by political leaders and public institutions.
- **EU integration and policy alignment** – strengthen the alignment of education, labour and employment policies with EU human rights standards.
- **Family empowerment** – develop support programmes for families as key sources of protection and support for LGBTI people.
- **Legal recognition of same-sex partnerships** – establish legal recognition of same-sex marriages/partnerships to ensure equal rights.
- **Cross-sectoral cooperation** – strengthen cooperation between schools, NGOs, employers and public institutions to support coordinated action against discrimination.
- **Population censuses** – ensure that future population censuses consider the inclusion of data on sexual orientation and gender identity to enable more effective analysis of the socio-economic position of LGBTI people.
- **Economic empowerment** – develop support programmes for LGBTI people in vulnerable

circumstances, including employment, training and financial assistance programmes.

➤ **LEGAL PROTECTION**

- **Consistent enforcement of legislation** – require institutions to ensure the more rigorous and systematic enforcement of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, with regular monitoring of its implementation.
- **Stronger sanctions** – introduce more stringent sanctions for employers who violate the law to deter the recurrence of discriminatory practices.
- **Legislative harmonisation** – adopt new legislation or amend existing legislation, aligning it with EU standards, to ensure that all forms of discrimination are covered, including discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.
- **Strengthening trade unions and labour inspectorates** – strengthen the role of trade unions and labour inspectorates in monitoring and protecting workers' rights, including mandatory mechanisms for reporting irregularities.
- **Institutional protection** – develop stronger institutional protection mechanisms, formalise employment relationships, and ensure confidential channels for reporting discrimination and harassment.

➤ **COMPANY INTERNAL POLICIES**

- **Consistent implementation and review of workplace policies** – ensure that internal workplace policies explicitly cover all forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, with mandatory periodic reviews.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** – introduce requirements for regular reporting on the implementation of equal opportunities policies, with results made publicly available in a transparent manner.
- **Involvement of NGOs and trade unions** – ensure the participation of civil society organisations and trade unions in monitoring the situation regarding LGBTI people's workplace rights, to support independent evaluation and strengthen trust.
- **Reporting mechanisms and HR protocols** – establish safe and confidential channels for reporting discrimination and harassment, supported by clearly defined HR protocols and protection against retaliation.
- **Recognition of LGBTI-friendly employers** – develop a certification scheme and public awareness campaigns to recognise employers that actively promote equal opportunities policies.
- **Promoting an inclusive workplace culture** – work continuously to foster a culture of tolerance, mutual respect and inclusive language in the workplace.
- **Psychological support** – ensure access to psychological support services for LGBTI people and all victims of violence or discrimination in the workplace.
- **Training** – introduce mandatory training for managers and HR staff on LGBTI rights, preventing discrimination and promoting inclusive practices.
- **Integrating LGBTI rights into corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies** – incorporate LGBTI rights into companies' CSR policies to promote sustainability, strategic commitment to inclusion

and alignment with international corporate social responsibility standards.

➤ **TRAINING, EDUCATION AND AWARENESS**

- **Training for employers and employees** – provide ongoing training and workshops to raise awareness of LGBTI rights, prevent discrimination, and promote inclusive workplace practices.
- **Information and support for LGBTI people** – develop educational programmes and awareness-raising campaigns providing information on employment rights and workplace protection mechanisms.
- **Improving school curricula** – incorporate LGBTI-related content into existing subjects to promote acceptance of diversity and prevent the perpetuation of stereotypes.
- **Removing stereotypes from textbooks** – review curricula and textbooks to remove discriminatory content and ensure the use of inclusive terminology.
- **Introducing comprehensive relationships and sexuality education in schools** – ensure that such education covers the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, responsible decision-making among young people, and inclusive content relevant to LGBTI young people.
- **A whole-school approach** – establish and implement zero-tolerance policies on discrimination and violence against LGBTI people in schools.
- **Professional development for teaching staff** – ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills needed to deliver an inclusive curriculum and prevent and respond appropriately to discrimination.
- **Training and support for school psychologists and pedagogues** – ensure that school-based professional support staff provide appropriate psychological support to LGBTI students.
- **Joint school-NGO initiatives** – develop partnerships to address prejudice and stereotypes through

educational and cultural programmes.

- **Engaging parents** – provide training for parents through schools, with a focus on the wellbeing of all children and support for LGBTI young people.
- **Awareness-raising in smaller communities** – implement awareness-raising campaigns in smaller towns and rural areas, where prejudice may be more pronounced.
- **Specialist training for public institutions and law enforcement** – provide training to help relevant personnel recognise and respond appropriately to violence and discrimination in schools and the workplace.

➤ **SPECIFIC NEEDS OF TRANS PEOPLE**

- **Education on transgender identities** – incorporate relevant content into school and university curricula to promote greater understanding and acceptance of transgender people, alongside mandatory training for teaching staff.
- **Support for families** – develop counselling and psychological support programmes for transgender people and their families during the transition process.
- **Promoting positive employment experiences of transgender people** – highlight positive stories and experiences of transgender people in Bosnia and Herzegovina to help reduce stigma and foster a more inclusive workplace culture.
- **Amending personal documents** – establish faster, accessible, transparent, and non-discriminatory procedures for changing names, sex markers, and other personal data in identity documents.
- **Legal protection** – clearly define the rights of transgender people in legislation and companies' internal policies, including protection against discrimination and requirements to respect individuals' gender identity.

➤ **HOUSING AND HOUSING SECURITY**

- **Affordable housing loans for LGBTI young people** – develop affordable housing loan schemes for LGBTI young people, supported by local authorities and public funds, to reduce the risk of housing and economic insecurity.
- **Legal and regulatory framework** – ensure that housing and property legislation explicitly prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- **Inclusive neighbourhoods** – promote the development of inclusive and tolerant communities through local awareness-raising campaigns, urban planning policies and support for initiatives that strengthen social cohesion.
- **Local authority support** – involve municipalities and local authorities in developing housing security programmes for LGBTI people, including subsidies and public–private partnerships.
- **Safe houses** – increase the capacity of shelters and crisis centres for LGBTI people exposed to violence or discrimination within their families and communities.
- **Prevention of homelessness** – develop mechanisms for the early identification of homelessness risks among LGBTI people, alongside emergency social support and temporary accommodation programmes.

➤ **CONDUCTING CONTINUOUS RESEARCH**

- **Involvement of statistical agencies** – require official statistical agencies to collect data on LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina to improve institutional visibility and inform relevant public policies.
- **Cooperation between NGOs and academia** – strengthen partnerships and knowledge exchange between civil society organisations and academic institutions to support higher-quality, methodologically robust research.

- **An intersectional approach** – examine how different forms of discrimination intersect and affect LGBTI people, in order to develop a deeper understanding of complex social inequalities.
- **Quantitative research** – conduct research using larger, representative samples of LGBTI people to generate reliable and comparable data.
- **Qualitative research** – undertake in-depth studies documenting experiences of discrimination, inclusion and resilience, in order to capture lived experiences and inform evidence-based policy development.

GLOSSARY OF LGBTI TERMS

ANTI-GENDER ACTIVITY

Organised social, political or institutional activity that portrays gender equality, LGBTI rights, comprehensive sexuality education or the very concept of gender as a threat to the family, children, religion or the nation. Such activity may seek to restrict existing rights and policies, limit educational content, or constrain the space in which civil society organisations can operate.

ASEXUAL PERSON

A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to other people. Asexuality does not preclude romantic or emotional attraction, intimate or romantic relationships, or intimacy, and is distinct from a conscious decision to abstain from sexual activity.

BISEXUAL PERSON

A person who experiences sexual and/or emotional attraction to people of more than one gender.

CISGENDER PERSON

A person whose gender identity corresponds to the sex they were assigned at birth. The ‘cisgender’ prefix describes a person’s gender identity and does not determine their sexual orientation.

COMING OUT

A term derived from the English expression ‘coming out of the closet’, now widely used to refer to the disclosure of one’s sexual orientation (in the case of lesbian, gay and bisexual people), gender identity (in the case of transgender people), or sex characteristics (in the case of intersex people). Coming out can take place on two levels: as a process of self-discovery and as the disclosure of one’s identity to others, whether privately or more publicly. Coming out can be significant for LGBTI people as a way of affirming their identity and may have an important bearing on their psychological well-being and quality of life.

DE IURE / DE FACTO

Latin terms referring to the distinction between the legal or normative situation and the situation in practice. *De iure* means that something is recognised or regulated by law, whereas *de facto* describes what actually occurs in practice.

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, restriction or other form of treating a person or group of persons less favourably on a particular ground. There are different grounds, or characteristics, based on which a person or group of persons may be placed at a disadvantage. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people may be discriminated against based on their sexual orientation; trans* people (including, among others, transgender and transsexual people) based on their gender identity and gender expression; and intersex people based on their sex characteristics. It is therefore important that all three grounds – sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics – are legally recognised as protected grounds on which discrimination is prohibited.

GAY

A man who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to other men. The term can also be used as an adjective (e.g., gay person) and, in this usage, may refer to both men and women who are attracted to people of the same sex.

GENDERQUEER

A term used by some people to describe a gender identity that falls outside the conventional binary division between men and women, or to reject such a division. The term may overlap with non-binary people, but its meaning ultimately depends on the individual's self-identification.

HETERONATIONALISM

The ideological linking of nationalism and heteronormativity, whereby heterosexuality and so-called traditional family values are presented as measures of national belonging, social acceptability, or national pride.

HETERONORMATIVITY

The social assumption that all people are heterosexual and cisgender, and that heterosexual relationships and a binary division between men and women are the only expected or desirable forms of identity and life. This assumption may be embedded in language, rules, institutions and everyday practices.

HOMOPHOBIA

Irrational fear, intolerance and prejudice towards gay men and lesbians. It manifests as a belief in the superiority of heterosexuality. Such a belief can give rise to violence against non-heterosexual people, justified by a perception of one's own superiority and their supposed inferiority. Violence may take the form of verbal or physical attacks, as well as discrimination.

HOMOSEXUAL

An outdated clinical term for people whose sexual orientation is directed towards people of the same sex, i.e., people who experience sexual and/or emotional attraction to people of the same sex. The term is now generally considered inappropriate, and many gay men and lesbians consider it offensive. The preferred terms are gay(s) (for men) and lesbian(s) (for women).

HOMOSEXUALISM

An outdated clinical term formerly used in medical contexts to refer to same-sex sexual orientation. The term is considered offensive because it implies that homosexuality is a condition requiring treatment. Given that the World Health Organization confirmed in 1990 that homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is a natural variation of human sexuality, the term is no longer used.

HOMOSEXUAL PERSON

A person who is attracted to people of the same sex.

INCLUSIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

A working environment in which policies, procedures and everyday practices ensure equal opportunities, dignity, safety and a sense of belonging for all employees. For LGBTI people, this includes protection against discrimination and harassment, confidential reporting mechanisms, respect for privacy, names and identities, and equal access to employment, career progression and employment rights.

INTERNALISED STIGMA

A process in which a person internalises negative social messages, stereotypes and prejudices about their own sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. It may lead to feelings of shame, concealment of one's identity, self-exclusion, isolation and impaired psychological well-being.

INTERSECTIONALITY

An approach derived from the sociological theory of intersectionality, which examines discrimination as a complex system in which different forms of discrimination are based on different categories of identity, such as gender, sex, race, class, sexual orientation and gender identity. These identities are interconnected and influence one another, and must therefore be considered together when examining discrimination.

INTERSEX PEOPLE

People whose sex characteristics, including chromosomes, gonads and genitalia, differ from typical binary notions of male and female bodies. Intersex variations occur in different forms. People may therefore be classified by sex as male, female, or intersex. Like male and female people, intersex people have their own sexual orientation and gender identity. Historically, intersex people were often referred to as hermaphrodites, but this term is considered discriminatory and medically inaccurate.

LESBIAN

A woman who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to other women.

LGBTI

An umbrella term used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* (gender) and intersex people. The term refers to a heterogeneous group commonly referred to by the acronym LGBTI in social and political activism.

LGBTI-FRIENDLY EMPLOYER

An employer that actively establishes and implements equal opportunities policies and policies for the protection of LGBTI people, and works to ensure that inclusiveness is not reduced to a public message or label. This includes clear internal policies, trained staff, safe reporting mechanisms, respect for privacy, and accountability for discrimination and harassment.

LGBTIQ+

An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer people. The plus sign includes people with other sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sex characteristics who use different terms to describe their own identities.

LGBTTIQ

An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, and queer people.

MOBBING

A form of non-physical workplace harassment involving repeated acts that have a humiliating effect on a person, the purpose or effect of which is to degrade their working conditions or professional status.

NON-BINARY PERSON

A person whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female. A non-binary person may experience their gender as being between, beyond, or a combination of binary gender categories, or may not identify with any gender. Non-binary identity is distinct from intersex status.

OUTING (INVOLUNTARY DISCLOSURE OF IDENTITY)

The disclosure of another person's sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics without their knowledge or consent. Such conduct constitutes a violation of the right to privacy and may expose the person to discrimination, harassment, loss of employment, rejection by their family, or violence.

PANSEXUAL PERSON

A person who may experience romantic, emotional, and/or sexual attraction to other people regardless of their gender or sex. This does not mean being attracted to everyone, but rather that a person's gender or sex is not a determining factor in attraction.

PRINCIPLE OF NON-DISCRIMINATION

Equal treatment of individuals or groups, regardless of their specific characteristics. The principle is also used to assess apparently neutral criteria and practices that may produce effects that systematically place people with certain characteristics at a disadvantage.

QUEER

Queer was historically used in English as a derogatory term for non-heterosexual people. LGBTI people subsequently reclaimed the term and began using it to describe themselves. Some people particularly value the term because it conveys defiance and encompasses diversity not only among gay men and lesbians, but also among bisexual, transgender and intersex people. It can also include heterosexual people who see themselves, or live their lives, outside heteropatriarchal norms.

GENDER IDENTITY

Gender identity refers to an individual's personal experience and understanding of their own sex and gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth. Gender identity may, among other things, relate to a person's experience of their own body, clothing, and manner of speaking. A person whose gender identity corresponds to the sex assigned to them at birth is referred to as a 'cisgender person', while a person whose gender identity does not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth is referred to as a 'trans(gender) person'. Transsexual people, as a subgroup of transgender people, are people whose gender identity does not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth and who intend to undergo, or are undergoing, medical or other forms of transition.

GENDER-AFFIRMING HEALTHCARE

A broad range of healthcare services needed by transgender, gender-diverse and intersex people that affirm or support a person's gender identity or sex characteristics. The term 'sex reassignment' is also used, but it has a narrower meaning than gender-affirming healthcare and may imply a more medicalised understanding of the transition process.

GENDER EXPRESSION

The visual and outward presentation of a person, including aspects of their appearance, behaviour and manner that are considered masculine or feminine within a particular culture and period, and are therefore associated with typical male or female social roles.

GENDER-NON-CONFORMING EXPRESSION

Appearance, behaviour or manner of expression that differs from social expectations associated with the gender assigned to a person. Gender non-conformity, in itself, does not determine whether a person is transgender or non-binary, nor does it indicate their sexual orientation.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

A person's emotional and/or sexual attraction to, or affection for, people of the same and/or different sex or gender. Sexual orientation is commonly classified as 'heterosexual', referring to attraction to people of a different sex; 'homosexual', referring to attraction to people of the same sex; and 'bisexual', referring to attraction to people of the same and different sexes. In the law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the terms sexual orientation, sex orientation, sexual preference and sex preference, among others, are also used, but sexual orientation is the recommended term.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Any unwanted form of verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature whose purpose or effect is to violate a person's dignity, particularly where it creates an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, degrading or offensive environment.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION

The position of a person or group in society shaped by their access to education, employment, income, housing, healthcare and social protection, property and other resources important to quality of life. It is also influenced by social inequalities, discrimination and the ability to exercise rights guaranteed by law.

SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Sex characteristics of individuals, such as chromosomes, gonads and genitalia, may differ from typical binary notions of male and female bodies. People may therefore be classified by sex as male, female or intersex. Intersex people may consequently face discrimination or be targeted by hate crimes because of their sex characteristics.

STRUCTURAL DISCRIMINATION

A pattern of inequality embedded in institutions, regulations, procedures, social norms and the distribution of resources that systematically places a particular group at a disadvantage. It may also exist where no explicit discriminatory intent has been expressed.

TRANSPHOBIA

Irrational fear, intolerance and prejudice towards transsexual and transgender persons.

TRANSGENDER PERSON

A term used for persons whose gender identity does not match the sex assigned to them at birth. Transgender includes those persons who feel, prefer, or choose to present themselves differently than in the expected gender roles traditionally given to them based on their sex assigned at birth, either through the way they dress, speak, their mannerisms, make-up, or bodily modifications. Transgender also refers to persons who do not identify as either male or female, transsexual persons, transvestite, cross-dressers, agender, non-binary, gender-fluid, and other gender-variant people. A transgender man is a person who was assigned the female sex at birth, but his gender identity is male or is somewhere on the spectre of masculine gender identities. A transgender woman is a person who was assigned the male sex at birth, but her gender identity is female or is somewhere on the spectre of feminine gender identities.

TRANSEXUAL PERSON

A person having a clear desire and intention to change/adjust his/her sex, as well as a person who has partially or fully modified his/her body (including physical and/or hormonal therapy and surgeries).

VICTIMISATION

Unfavourable treatment of a person because they have reported discrimination or harassment, intend to report it, have participated in proceedings for protection against discrimination or harassment, or have supported another person in doing so. Protection against victimisation is important to ensure that reporting wrongdoing is safe and effective.

HATE CRIME

This term refers to criminal offences motivated by prejudice toward a person or a group of people. Hate crimes include intimidation, threats, property damage, harassment, homicide, or any other criminal offence where the victim became the target due to an actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics, or the victim was linked with, belonged to, supported or was a member of an LGBTI group.

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ABOUT THE SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE

Sarajevo Open Centre is a civil society organisation that works on advancing human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We initiate and create systemic social changes, emphasising gender equality and the position of LGBTI+ persons.

Here, we highlight just some of our achievements in advancing equality for LGBTI people and women. Alongside providing psychosocial and legal support, we continued to run the country's only LGBTI media outlet, the www.lgbti.ba online portal. We organised training sessions for the police, prosecutors and courts, focusing on hate crimes, hate speech and the application of anti-discrimination law; for medical professionals and healthcare workers, focusing on trans-specific and trans-inclusive approaches to gender-affirming care; and for the LGBTI community. We also worked intensively to establish a local institutional support network for LGBTI people in Sarajevo Canton; improve the regulation of medically assisted reproduction in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; advance women workers' rights in relation to sex-based discrimination and maternity leave; introduce gender-sensitive language in parliaments and universities; support the adoption and implementation of cantonal gender action plans; and raise awareness of gender-based violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Over the past several years, a number of our legislative and *policy* initiatives have progressed to government or parliamentary consideration. We have focused our advocacy efforts on policies promoting equality for women and LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina; women's and men's reproductive rights; parenthood and the reconciliation of private and working life; the freedom of assembly of LGBTI people; and strengthening the institutional framework for protection against violence and discrimination. We also intend to continue our work on issues affecting transgender and intersex people, same-sex couples, their social inclusion, and the position of LGBTI people in education, healthcare, employment and the labour market.

We have also run media campaigns that have reached more than one million people across Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we organise the LGBTI film festival *Merlinka*, which, since 2021, has taken the form of the local *Kvirhana festival*, organised in cooperation with the Tuzla Open Centre.

More information about our work is available at www.soc.ba.

This publication is part of the Human Rights series published by the Sarajevo Open Centre.

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She has published numerous academic articles in national and international journals and has contributed to publications by, among others, the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brill, De Gruyter, Edward Elgar Publishing and Routledge. She is the author of two monographs on the women's movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as a monograph on the gender perspective in peacebuilding and reconciliation. From 2012 to 2022, she participated in research on reconciliation processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh. As a Konrad Adenauer Foundation fellow, she was a visiting researcher at the Hannah Arendt Institute for Research on Totalitarianism in Dresden. She is a member of the Committee for Political Sciences of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Regional Network for Gender and Politics Research in South-East Europe (GenPolSEE).

For many years, she has worked with civil society organisations to promote gender equality and advance the rights and position of marginalised groups. She speaks English, German and French. Her current research focuses on anti-gender mobilisations and the far right, and their impact on the position of children, women and LGBTI people.

