

Social attitudes towards LGBT+ issues in Hungary

SEPTEMBER 2019



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SZEPTEMBER 2019

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Hungarian LGBT Alliance, 2019

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Executive summary

This report summarizes the findings of a representative survey research commissioned by the Hungarian LGBT Alliance, and carried out by Medián Polling Agency in September 2019.

The research found that Hungarians are rather divided on LGBT+¹ issues. Most people (78%) have never heard the term 'LGBT', which is most often used by civil society organizations, the scientific community, and some parts of the media. Nearly half of the people do not know a word to describe transgender people.

Most people think homosexuality is a sickness (36%), a private matter (27%) or a deviation from social norms and rules (18%). Only 12% think choosing a same-sex partner is a fundamental human right. Only 24% of Hungarians know an LGBT person personally.

29% of Hungarians support same-sex marriage, 35% support second parent adoption. A majority of people (57%) think a registered same sex couple raising children should be considered a family.

58% of Hungarians agree that the topic of homosexuality should be covered in the school curricula, 54% would be fine with a lesbian, gay or bisexual teacher teaching their children.

Most Hungarians (57%) would react positively or neutrally if their colleague at work came out to them as lesbian, gay or bisexual: 14% would even welcome this act, since they would take it as a sign of trust; 43% said their relationship with the person would not change. Only 16% would welcome positive steps for LGBT inclusion at their workplace; 39% would not welcome it, but would not be bothered either.

71% of Hungarians agree that transgender people should be allowed to change their name and gender in their documents, although they are divided on what criteria should be applied.

34% of Hungarians think that only medically necessary surgeries should be performed on intersex babies, all other interventions should be delayed until the persons themselves can consent to them. A quarter of respondents think that doctors (27%) and every 8th person (13%) that parents should make a decision.

Only very few Hungarians can name an LGBT organization (8%), and most of them (87%) would not support such an organization financially. A majority of Hungarians (92%) do not support the Pride March, but only a third of them (34%) would ban it.

The electorate of political parties have significantly different views on LGBT+ issues: voters of left-of-center opposition parties tend to be more accepting, governing right wing parties and extreme right wing parties in opposition are less supportive.

In terms of framing, privacy and equality narratives seem to resonate the most with Hungarians. Professionals, most importantly doctors and psychologists are the most trusted source of information on LGBT people. Politicians, priests, colleagues of LGBT organizations and LGBT persons themselves are deemed the most untrustworthy when communicating about LGBT issues.

The report closes with a list of recommendations for public bodies and civil society organizations working to promote the social acceptance of LGBT+ people.

An interactive data browser with all the data from this research is available at:

<https://datastudio.google.com/s/oPpREq60hIQ>



¹ The research used the term 'LGBT' to refer to sexual and gender minorities. When directly quoting research results, this report will use that term. When making broader statements, the report will use the term 'LGBT+' to indicate that the group includes others whose identities are not named in the acronym.

1 • Methodology

The public opinion poll was conducted by Medián Opinion & Market Research Ltd., one of Hungary's most trusted polling agencies. Data collection took place at the end of September 2019. The sample consisted of 1196 persons aged 18 and above. The sample was representative of the Hungarian population aged 18 and above per gender, age, education and settlement type. The poll was part of Medián's monthly omnibus survey that contained socio-demographic background variables, and questions on several other issues as well. The margin of error is $\sim \pm 2,9\%$.

The LGBT+ block of the survey questionnaire was developed by researchers at the Hungarian LGBT Alliance and Háttér Society in cooperation with polling experts at Medián. The block contained 34 questions related to LGBT+ topics, some questions consisting of several items. Background variables included age, gender, settlement type, county, religion, religiosity, highest level of education, family status, size of household, number of children and elderly in household, personal and household income, labour market position, employment sector, type of employment, number of employees, willingness to vote and party likely to vote for.

2 • Naming

Social communication about any social group is dependent on the existence of a widely shared and understood terminology to name the group. In the last two decades the term LGBT (or LGBTQ, LGBTQI) came to dominate discussions about this social group among civil society organizations, the scientific community, and some parts of the media. The research assessed whether Hungarians are familiar with this concept, and whether they understood its content. This was the first question of the LGBT+ block to make sure that responses to this question were not influenced by other questions about the topic.

Familiarity with the concept of LGBT is rather low in Hungary: only 22% of respondents said they have heard this concept before, and among those only 45% said they know exactly what it means. Another 48% said they more or less knew what it meant, while 7% had no idea what the concept means. The research did not check whether

the respondent's knowledge of the meaning of the concept was in fact correct or not, only how they felt about their own knowledge.

Two separate open questions were also asked to assess how respondents would refer to people attracted to their own gender and people who do not identify with their sex assigned at birth. While most people (79%) could provide a name for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, nearly half (46%) of the people did not provide a name, or explicitly stated they did not know how to refer to trans people. Regarding sexual orientation, 30% of all respondents suggested gay, 16% homosexual, 15% 'different', 11% fagot ('buzi'), 9% lesbian, and 6% some – often hurtful – derivative of homosexual. Regarding gender identity, of all respondents 18% suggested some version of trans (transgender, transsexual or trans), 10% transvestite and 10% a term that refers to sexual orientation.

FIGURE 1.

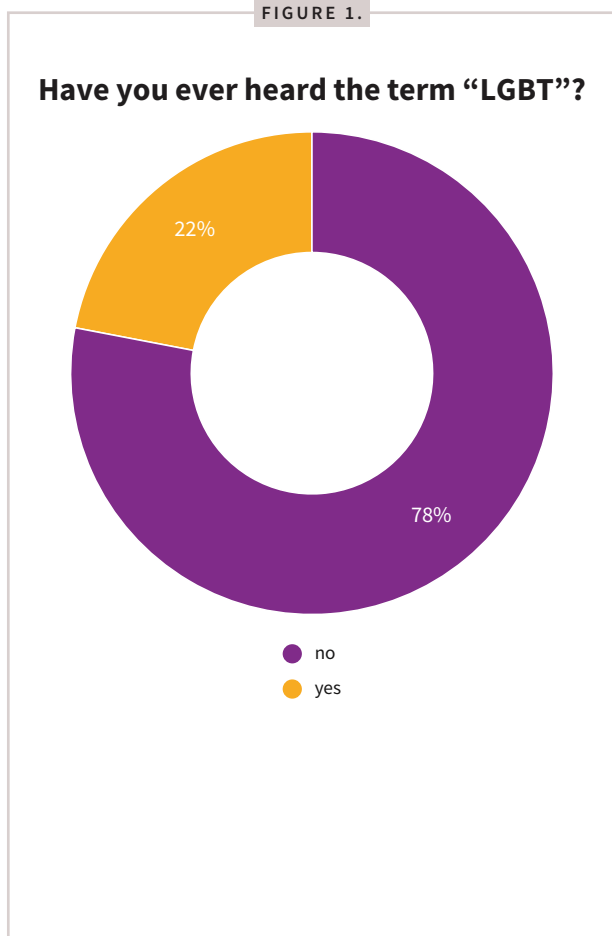
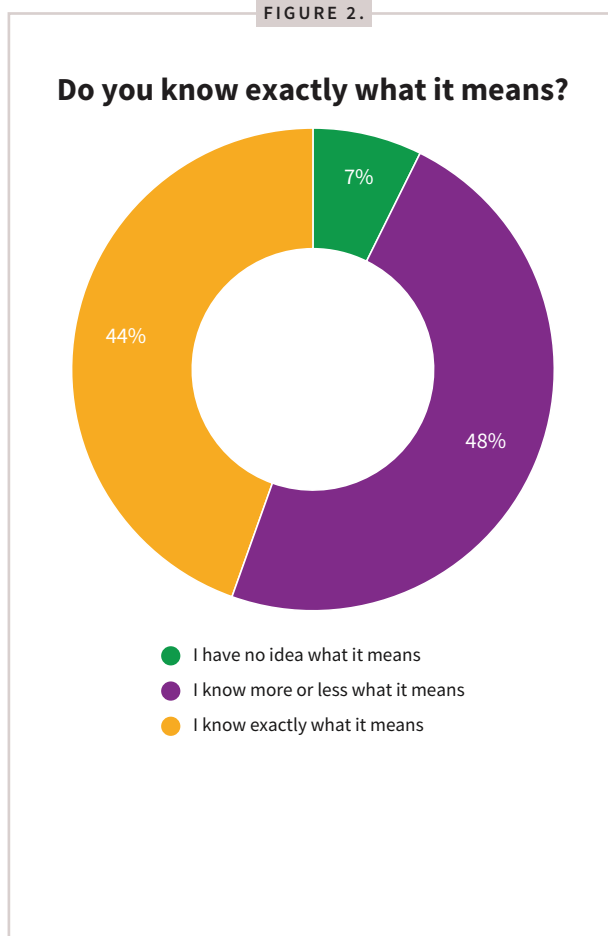


FIGURE 2.



3 • Framing

A relatively high number of people, 35% think that homosexuality as a sickness; 27% think it's a private matter; 18% think it's a deviation from social norms and rules; 12% think choosing a same-sex partner is a fundamental human right. Only 5% think homosexuality is a sin: 3% consider it a sin against society, 2% against God.

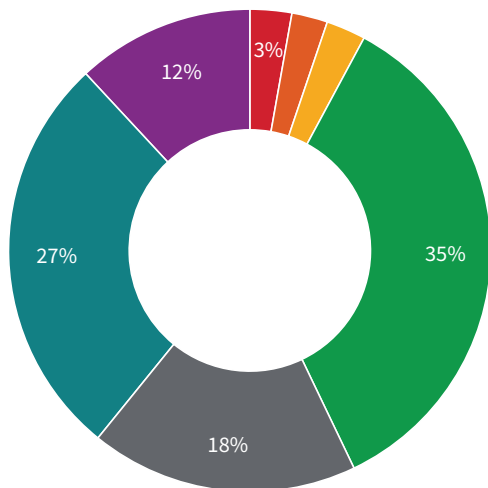
The largest proportion (36%) of Hungarians think homosexuality is a connate, genetical condition, 21% think it's the result of mental and environmental influences, while

21% think it's a choice. 5% think it is the result of upbringing, and 4% that it is the result of advertisements or propaganda.

Most Hungarians have a relatively precise estimate about the number of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. 40% think 1-5%, 19% think 6-10%, and 6% think more than 10% of Hungarian have such a sexual orientation. 16% think the number of lesbian, gay and bisexual people is less than 1%, while 19% say they do not know.

FIGURE 3.

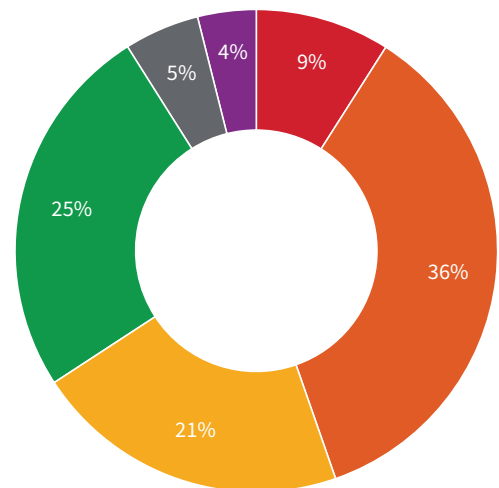
What do you think homosexuality is?



- don't know
- sin against God
- sin against society
- sickness
- deviation from social norms and rules
- private matter of the individual
- it is a fundamental human right of a person to choose a same-sex partner

FIGURE 4.

What do you think causes homosexuality?



- don't know
- it is inherited, genetic
- it is the result of mental, environmental factors
- it is based on a person's own choice
- it is the result of upbringing
- it is the result of advertisements and propaganda

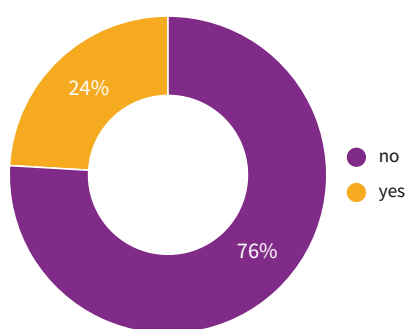
4 • Personal experiences

Having first hand, personal experiences with LGBT+ people is an important metric: it shows the level of out-ness among LGBT+ people, and – according to existing research – is strongly correlated with positive attitudes towards the community. 24% of people said they knew LGBT persons, which is in line with similar research studies published recently.

Of those knowing an LGBT person, 3% know many LGBT people, 64% know a few, and 33% know only one. The most common LGBT acquaintances are friends (36%), colleagues (34%), neighbors (19%) and classmates (18%). Less than 1% of those who know an LGBT person personally, know that person in their immediate family and 11% in their extended family.

FIGURE 5.

Do you personally know a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person?



5 • Stereotypes

Unfavourable social attitudes towards LGBT+ people are based on widely shared negative stereotypes about members of the community. The research measured to what extent Hungarians agree with some of the most widespread negative stereotypes about LGBT+ people. Questions on these stereotypical views were asked at the end of the survey so that being exposed to them does not influence responses to previous questions.

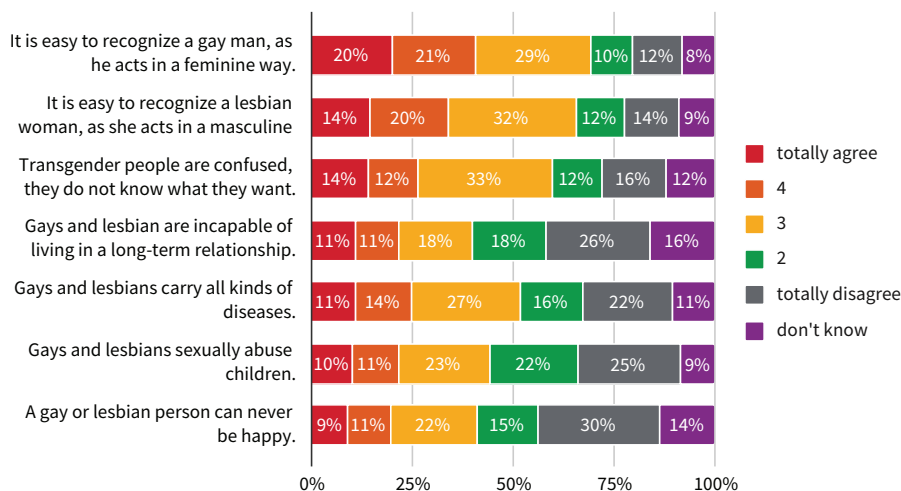
20% of Hungarian think that gays and lesbians can never live a happy life, 22% think they cannot live in a long-term relationship, 21% think they sexually abuse children and 25% think they carry all kinds of diseases. While these proportions are relatively low, people with undecided views on these questions (those who neither agree, nor disagree combined with those who do not know) are rather high, 36%, 34%, 32% and 38% respectively.

Stereotypical views about the gender expression of gays and lesbians are shared by a larger proportion of Hungarians. 41% think that gay men are easy to recognize because they act in a feminine way, while 34% think that lesbian women are easy to recognize because they act in a masculine way. Those undecided are relatively high: 38% and 41% respectively.

26% people think that transgender people are confused, and do not know what they really want, while another 45% is undecided whether this is true or not.

FIGURE 6.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



6 • Family acceptance

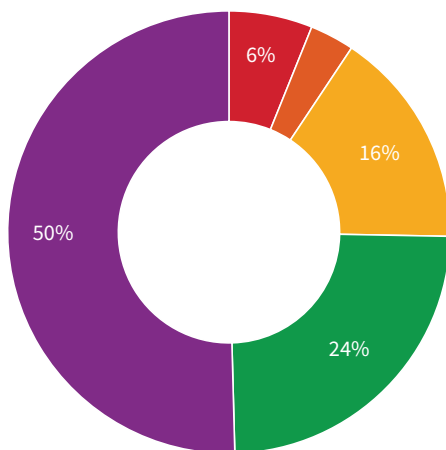
As seen above, only a very low number of people know that they have at least one LGBT+ person in their families. Rather than asking about how they reacted when they learnt about the sexual orientation or gender identity of their family member, the research asked a hypothetical question in case such a thing happened to them. 50% expressed fully supportive views stating that they would accept if their child came out to them as gay or lesbian, since they love their children; 24% would try to convince them that this is not a good way to live their life; 16% would send their child to a doctor or psychologist; and

3% would stop seeing their child altogether. A relatively high proportion of people (6%) did not know how they would react.

Reactions to having a trans child showed a similar, although even less favorable pattern: 48% would accept their child; 22% would try to convince them that this is not a good way to live their life; 19% would send their child to a doctor or psychologist; 3% would stop seeing their child; and 6% did not know how they would react.

FIGURE 7.

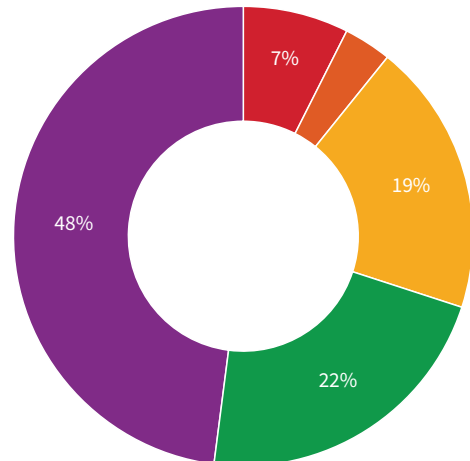
How would you react if you found out your child is lesbian, gay or bisexual?



- don't know
- I would break off my relationship with them
- I would send them to a doctor or psychologist to cure them
- I would try to convince them that this is not a good way to live their life
- I would accept them, they are my child whom I love

FIGURE 8.

How would you react if you found out your child is transgender?



- don't know
- I would break off my relationship with them
- I would send them to a doctor or psychologist to cure them
- I would try to convince them that this is not a good way to live their life
- I would accept them, they are my child whom I love

7 • Partnership and parenting

Social and political debates around LGBT+ people have mostly focused on the issues of partnership and parenting: whether same-sex couples should be able to marry and adopt children. 29% of people totally or rather agree that same-sex couples should be allowed to marry, while 42% totally or rather disagree with it; 30% do not know or neither agree nor disagree.

Hungarians are also very divided on whether same-sex couples should be allowed to raise children. More people agree that same-sex couples can also be good parents and that a child is better placed with a same-sex couple than in foster care than not (42% vs. 31% and 38% vs. 31%, respectively). Hungarians are equally divided on whether a child is better-off being adopted by same-sex couple or better-off being adopted abroad (33% vs. 35%). 35% (as opposed to 31%) agree that if a child is raised by a same-sex couple, the non-biological parent should be able to adopt the child, and another 28% is undecided. While Hungarians are divided on whether same-sex couples should be encouraged to have children, they also strongly reject government interference in the life of rainbow families: only 17% think that authorities should take away a child from their parents if they find out the child is raised by a same sex couple, while more than three times as many (52%) would oppose such a measure.

Political debates in recent years often focused on the concept of ‘family’ in Hungary: since 2013, the Fundamental Law (the Hungarian constitution) defines family only with reference to marriage and parent-child relationships. The research found that Hungarians do not agree with such a restrictive understanding of family. Neither children, nor the form of partnership is crucial in making a family a family: while 70% of Hungarians agree that a married different-sex couple without a child should be considered a family, a significantly higher number, 88% think that an unmarried different-sex couple with a child and 79% that a single parent with a child should be considered family. The majority (53%) also thinks that unmarried different-sex couples without children are also family.

Hungarians are less likely to consider same-sex couples a family, but the majority (57%) even consider a same-sex registered partner couple with a child a family. Less than the majority, but a significant number (41%) think that same-sex couples should be considered family if they register their partnership, even if they do not have a child.

FIGURE 9.

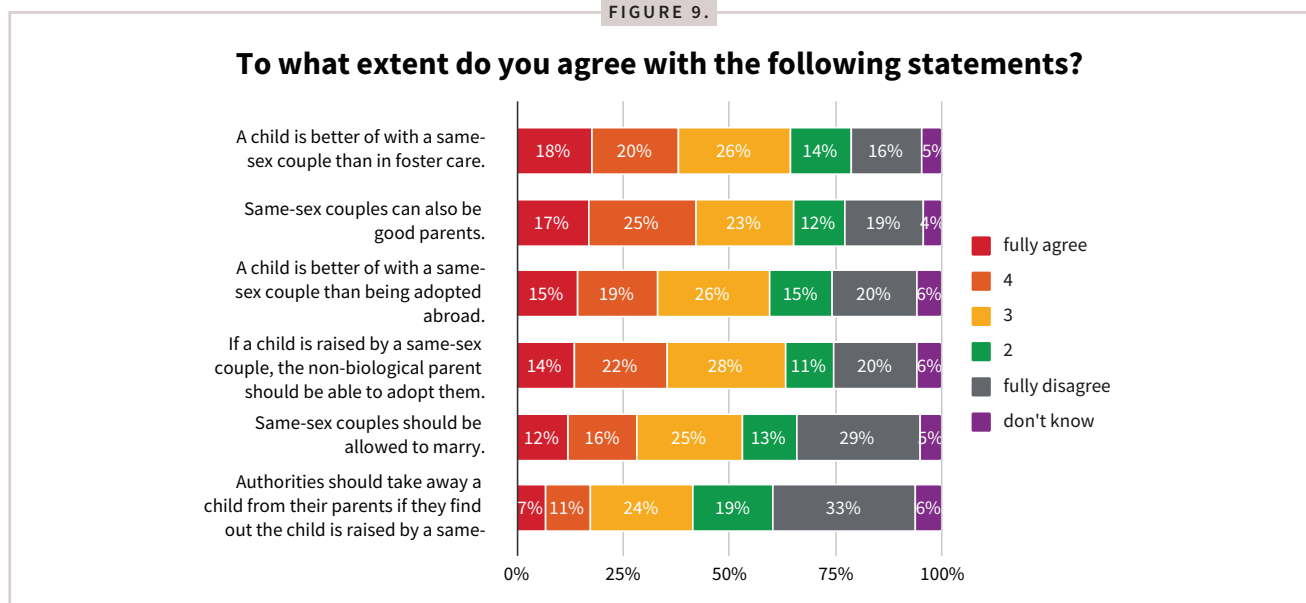
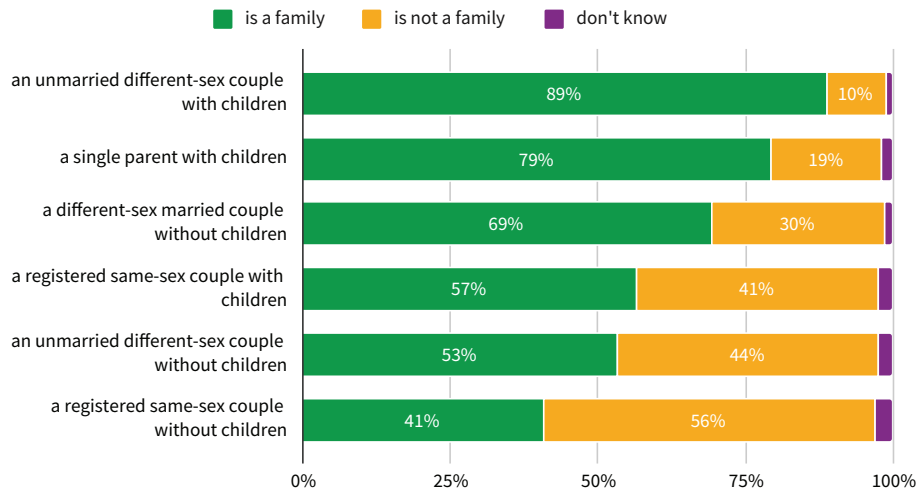


FIGURE 10.

Would you consider the following forms of living together family?



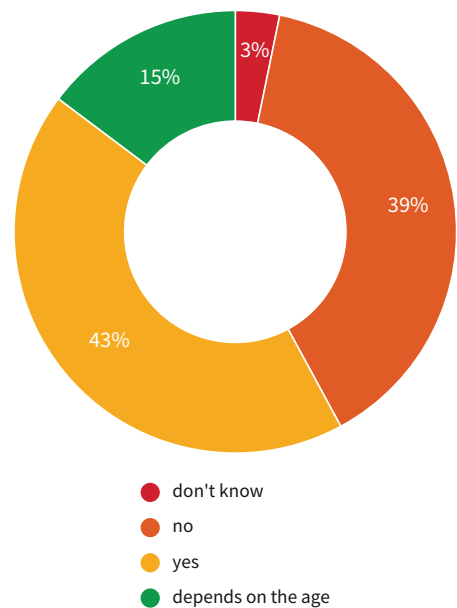
8 • Education

Besides partnership and parenting, education has been the other topic at the forefront of political discussions in recent years. As opposed to the political rhetoric, the majority of Hungarians (58%) agree that the topic of homosexuality should be covered in the school curricula, although 15% emphasize that this should be done in an age-appropriate manner. Of those that think homosexuality should be discussed, 44% think it should be discussed with students aged 14-18, 28% think with students aged 10-14. 11% think the topic should be discussed with all age groups in line with the maturity of the children. Only 7% think the topic should only be discussed with students who have reached the age of 18.

Hungarians are also less likely to fear lesbian, gay or bisexual teachers than some politicians think. 54% would be completely fine with a lesbian, gay or bisexual teacher teaching their children, 25% would move their child to a different class and 11% would initiate firing the teacher. It is worth noting that for those likely to have a school aged kid (aged 30-50) the support for lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers is even higher (60%).

FIGURE 11.

Should children learn about homosexuality as part of school curricula?



9 • Workplace

Besides schools and families, the third sphere where acceptance is crucial for LGBT+ people is the workplace. Having to spend eight hours a day in a homophobic or transphobic environment, or having to hide one's sexual orientation or gender identity is frustrating and tiring, hence more and more employers take active measure to promote the inclusion of LGBT+ people at the workplace. Most people (57%) would react positively or neutrally if their colleague came out to them as lesbian, gay or bisexual: 14% would even welcome this act, since they would take it as a sign of trust. 43% said their relationship with the person would not change due to a coming out. 32% would avoid this topic with their colleague, and 8% would try to arrange that they do not have to work with an LGBT person. The proportions are similar for a trans person coming out: 13%, 41%, 34% and 9% respectively.

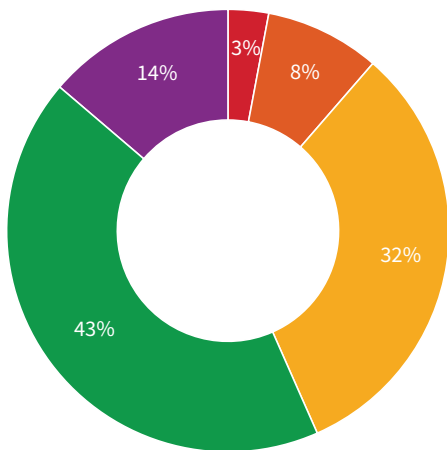
Support for active measures by employers are less well received: only 16% would welcome pro-active measures; 39% would not welcome them, but would not be both-

ered either; 37% would be bothered by such a policy since they think this issue does not belong to the workplace; and 4% would go as far as leaving the company. It is worth noting that those performing intellectual labour are significantly more supportive than those performing manual labour (13% v. 21% respectively).

The belief that the discussion of LGBT+ issues does not belong in the workplace because it is a private matter holds strong among many, even in senior management positions. The research concluded this belief to be untrue: topics that touch upon the issues of sexuality and partnership are very often discussed in the workplace. 50% of respondents said they often discuss how they spend their free time with their colleagues, 45% said the same about parenting, and 32% about partnership issues. Even sex directly is discussed frequently among colleagues for 12% of the population. The proportion of people who say such topics never come up at the workplace are only 13, 18, 20 and 46% respectively.

FIGURE 12.

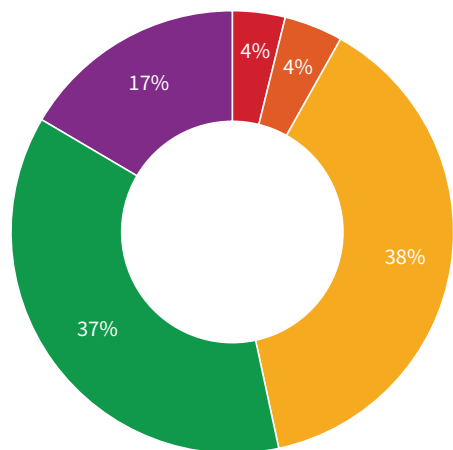
How would you react if a colleague at work came out to you as lesbian, gay or bisexual?



- don't know
- I would try to arrange that I don't have to work with them
- I would avoid this topic with them
- I would accept it, our relationship would not change
- I would be happy they trusted me

FIGURE 13.

How would you react if your employer took steps to improve the situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people?



- don't know
- I would find an new place to work
- it would not bother me, but I would not welcome it
- it would bother me, this topic does not belong to the workplace
- I would be happy, it is important that noone is discriminated at the workplace

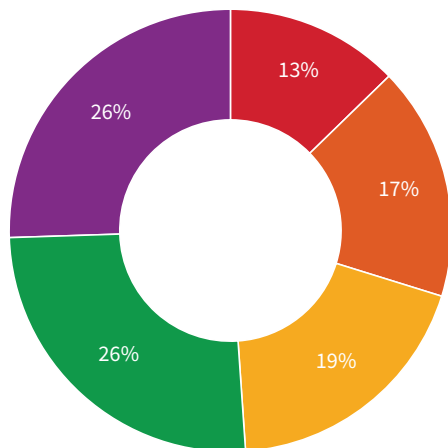
10 • Trans and intersex issues

Policy issues concerning trans and intersex persons receive significantly less attention in social and political discussions. Since May 2018, trans persons cannot have their legal gender recognized, as such procedures have been suspended by the authorities. The large majority of Hungarians do not agree with such a measure: only 17% think that transgender people should not legally change their gender under any circumstance, 26% think gender registration should be fully based on self-declaration, 26% would link it to medical diagnosis, and 20% would allow a legal change only after gender confirmation surgeries have been performed. A relatively high number of people, 13% do not know what to think of this issue.

Hungarians think similarly of normalizing surgeries on intersex children as well: 34% think that only medically necessary surgeries should be performed, and all other interventions should be delayed until the persons themselves can consent to them; 27% would relegate such decisions to doctors and 13% to parents. Only 17% think that intersex babies should be operated on as soon as possible, and be raised clearly as a girl or a boy. 9% of respondents are undecided.

FIGURE 14.

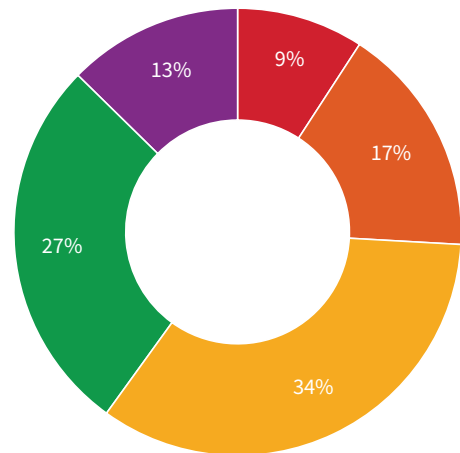
Should transgender people be allowed to change their name and gender in their documents?



- don't know
- it should not be possible under any circumstances
- yes, but only after their sex was changed surgically
- yes, but only if doctors diagnose them as transgender
- yes, and it should be based solely on the decision of the person

FIGURE 15.

If a child is born with ambiguous genitalia based on which it is impossible to decide if the child is a boy or a girl, what should doctors do?



- don't know
- a surgery should be performed as soon as possible, the parents should raise the child as a boy or a girl
- only medically necessary surgeries should be performed, other surgeries should be made a decision delayed until the person themselves can
- doctors should make the decision
- parents should make the decision

11 • Activism

Civil society organizations play a crucial role in shaping social attitudes and political agendas. According to our research, LGBT+ organizations in Hungary are relatively unknown compared to other civil society organizations. While 77% heard about Greenpeace, 56% about NANE (domestic violence NGO) and 37% about the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ), only 17% have heard about the Hungarian LGBT Alliance and 12% about Háttér Society. The most well-known Hungarian LGBT+ NGO is the Budapest Pride, with 48% having heard about them (and among them 16% claiming to know the work of the organization). Before asking about specific organizations, we also asked respondents to list organizations that work for LGBT people. Altogether, 8% could name an LGBT+ organization: 46 people named the LGBT Alliance, 38 people Budapest Pride, 2 person Háttér Society and 1 person Szimpozium Association. 8 persons named the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ) as a mainstream human rights organization, while 15 named other NGOs that do not work on LGBT+ issues.

Not only are LGBT+ organizations not very well known, but Hungarians are also very hesitant supporting their work. 87% of them would never support an LGBT organization, 9% would, 4% does not know.

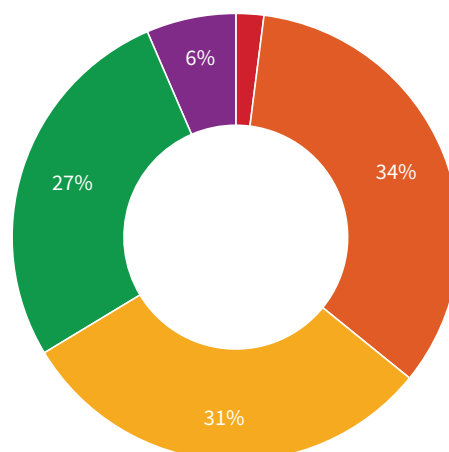
Pride marches play a very important role in the political and cultural life of the LGBT+ community, and have been taking place in Hungary annually since 1997 with strong political opposition. The population is very divided on the issue of the Pride March, even those who in general favor LGBT+ rights. Only 7% support the March; 27% agree with its aims, but not its form; 31% does not agree with it, but accept that everyone has the right to organize marches; while 34% would outright ban the Pride March.

In recent years, not only civil society organizations, but also companies organized campaigns to promote the equality of LGBT+ people. The #loveislove campaign by Coca-Cola in August 2019 received particularly large at-

tention, with several politicians and conservative organizations calling for a boycott against the company. While the number of people opposing the campaign were larger in number than those welcoming it (29% v. 11%), the majority of people (54%) neither opposed nor welcomed it. In general, companies that try to promote LGBT+ equality are not welcome: while only 4% said they would more likely buy a product if its producer supported LGBT people, 22% said they would less likely buy such a product, and 12% would not buy at all from such companies. The majority of people (59%) claim that such a campaign would not influence their buying habits.

FIGURE 16.

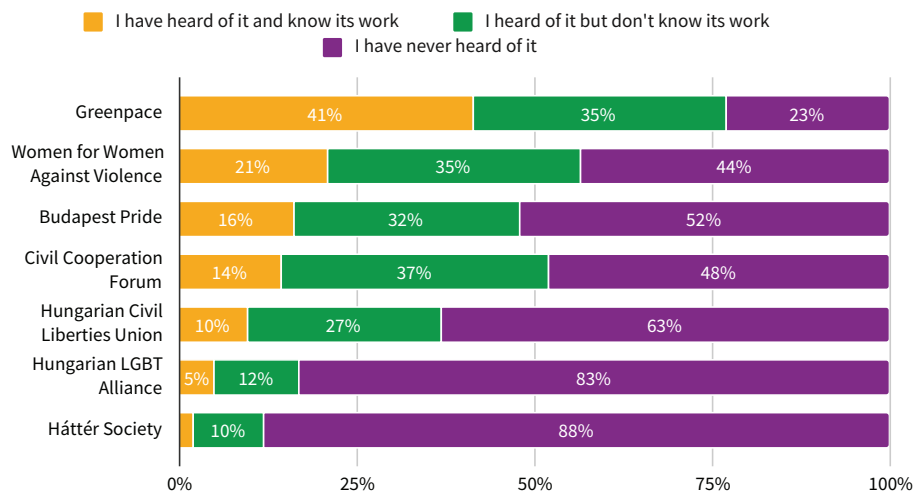
What do you think about marches held every summer to call attention to discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons?



- don't know
- such marches should be banned
- I don't agree with them, but they have a right to march
- I agree with the aims, but the march is too provocative
- I support it, it is important to call attention to this issue

FIGURE 17.

Have you heard of the following civil society organizations?



12 • Politics

The acceptance of LGBT+ people strongly correlate with political opinions: while 46% of Momentum (progressive liberal), 32% of MSZP (social-democratic), 29% of LMP (centrist-green), and 27% of DK (progressive liberal) voters support same-sex marriage, only 23% of FIDESZ (nationalist), 18% of Jobbik (radical right) and 14% of Mi Hazánk (nationalist Fidesz-proxy) supporters do so. The correlation is similar for other policy issues, for example 44% of Momentum, 38% of MSZP, 37% of DK and 29% of LMP voters would support second parent adoption for same-sex couples, while only 33% of FIDESZ, 32% of Jobbik and 23% of Mi Hazánk supporters would do so.

Voters, overall, would react more negatively than positively (7% v. 34%) towards a political party or candidate that stands up for the equality of LGBT people, but the majority (54%) would not be affected by such a position. It is interesting to note that while the voters of DK were among the least supportive of the left-of-center parties, it is the voters of DK who would react the least negatively to a party or candidate standing up for LGBT rights.

13 • Messaging

One aim of the current research was to help LGBT+ organizations improve their awareness-raising and communication activities. To measure this, the research explored what kinds of messages Hungarians are most likely to respond to. The privacy frame seems to be the one that most Hungarians resonate to: 36% of respondents would agree that LGBT people should be left to live their life as they wish, 28% agree that all persons are equal including LGBT persons, 26% feel respect towards LGBT people that stand up for themselves, 18% consider it important to stand up for the rights of LGBT people, and equally 18% think LGBT people are in a difficult position and deserve the help of society.

Besides the content of the message, it is also important to carefully select the messenger: the population has a very sharp opinion about whom they would listen to when it comes to LGBT+ issues. The most trusted are doctors and psychologists (52% and 51%); followed by close acquaintances: parents, children and friends (39-39%, and 36%); followed by other professionals: lawyers and teachers (29-29%). The least trusted are politicians and clergy (16% and 18%). Interestingly, LGBT people and their organizations are among the less trusted messengers: only 21-22% trusts an LGBT acquaintance, an LGBT celebrity or member of an LGBT organization.

FIGURE 18.

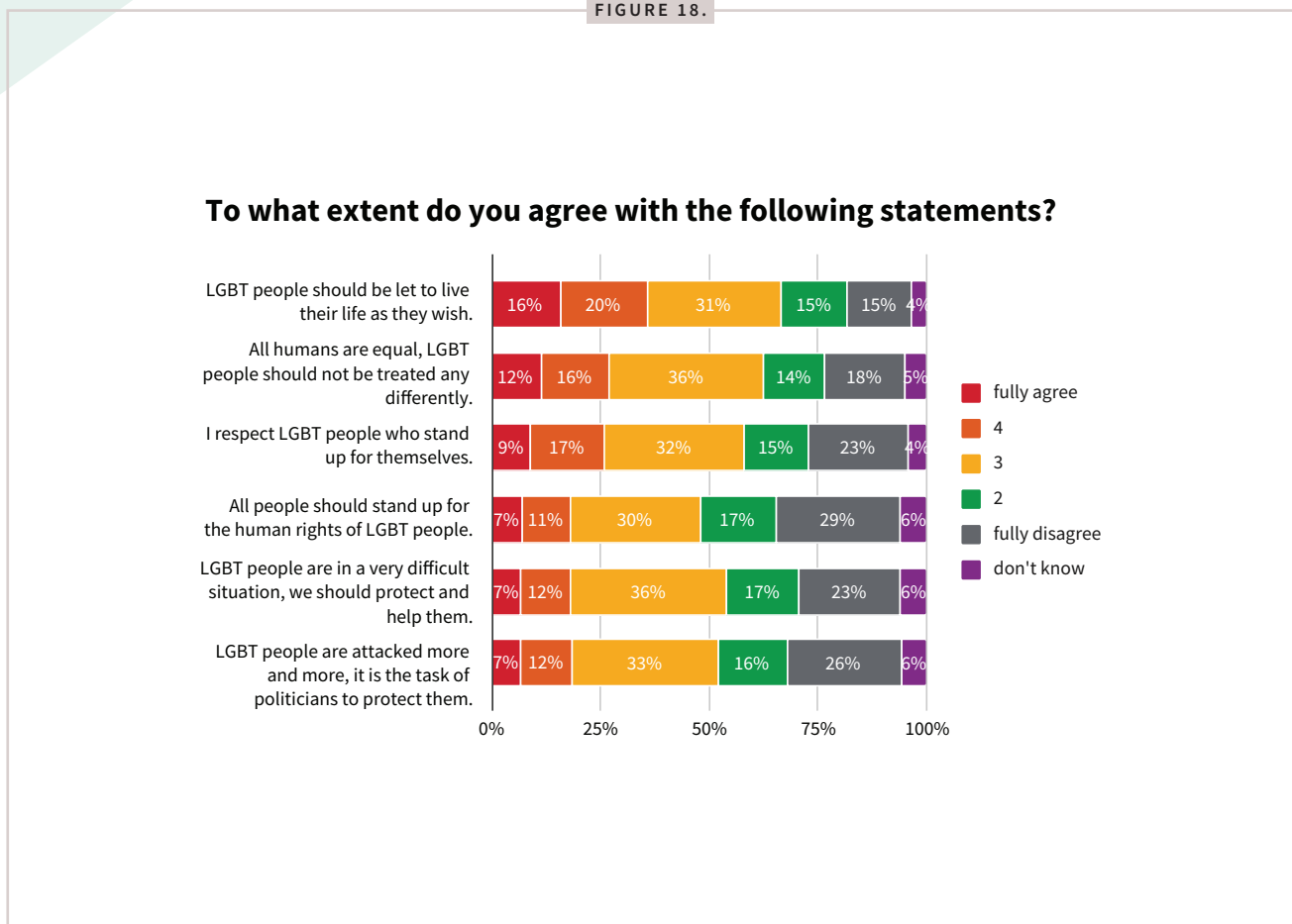
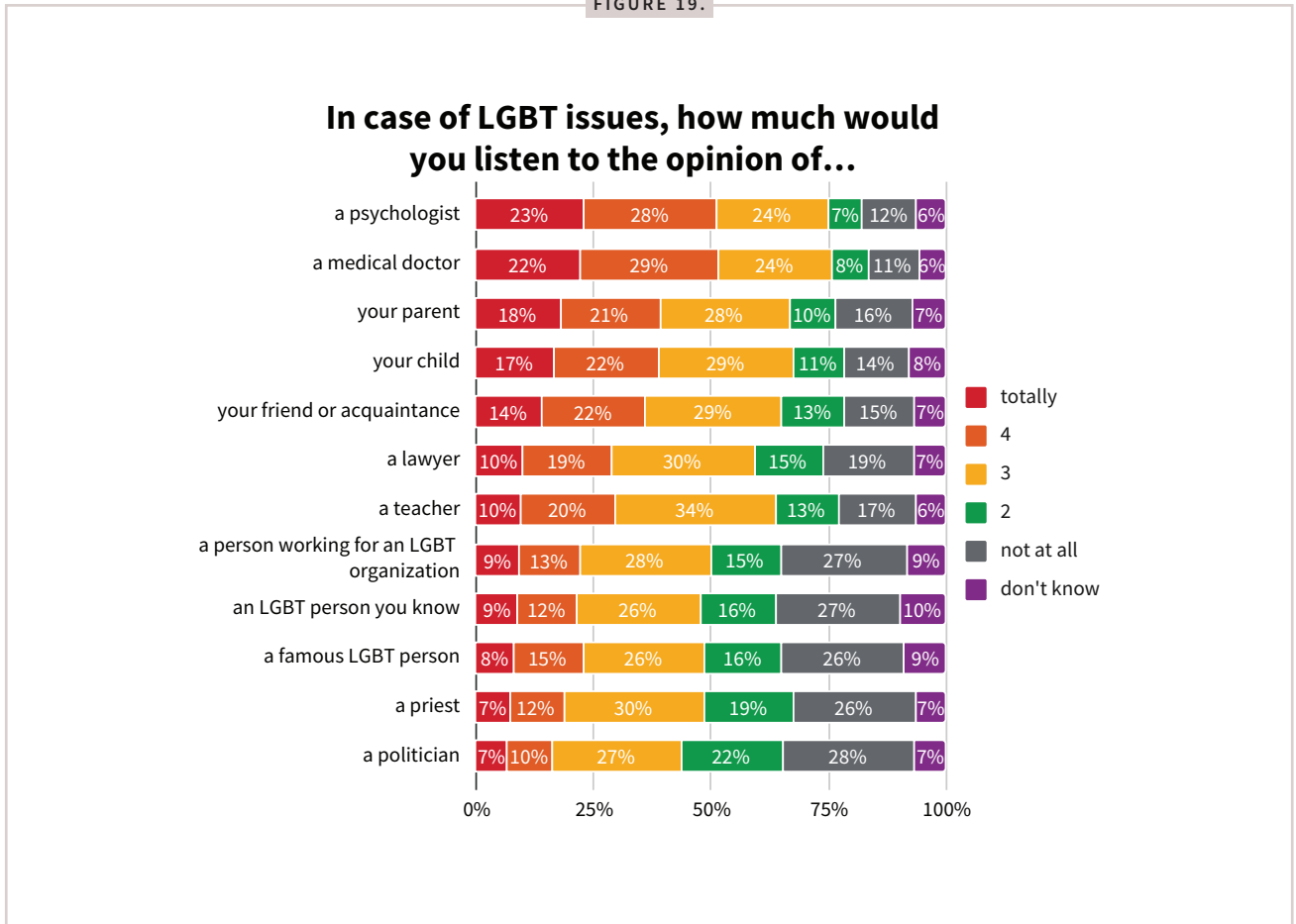


FIGURE 19.



14 • Recommendations

Public bodies and civil society organizations working to promote the social acceptance of LGBT+ people should:

1. Use accessible language and explain terms used, in particular LGBT+.
2. Frame issues in terms of privacy and equality, as opposed to vulnerability.
3. Rely more heavily on professionals to deliver their messages, most importantly doctors, psychologists, lawyers and teachers.
4. Build campaigns engaging youth to talk about LGBT+ issues with their parents and family members.
5. Invest efforts in becoming more well-known in wider society.
6. Rely on the findings of this report when planning their advocacy and communication efforts.

