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1. Introduction

LGBTQI+ people face various forms of discrimination, violence, harassment and hate crimes in different areas of their life, as the results of the 2020 FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) survey on LGBTQI+ equality reveal. Their protection from discrimination and access to rights largely hinges on their active participation and inclusion in decision-making processes, however this is largely lacking. The United Nations' Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (United Nations, N.D.) highlights the importance of financially supporting LGBTQI+'s equal access to political participation at all levels in order to achieve social, economic and political inclusion, gender equality on a global level, human rights and sustainable democratic governance.

The project VoiceIt- Strengthening LGBTQI+'s Voice in Politics (Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme) aims to facilitate LGBTQI+ participation in politics and to raise awareness among government officials, representatives of political institutions at different levels of governance, LGBTQI+ people and the general public in Cyprus, Greece and Italy. In the framework of the project, this survey aims to assess the needs and identify misconceptions about LGBTQI+ rights. The literature review shows that:

- At the EU level, several pieces of legislation ban discrimination against LGBTQI+ people, however its coverage is scattered and patchwork;
- In Italy, even if discrimination based on sexual orientation/gender identity is forbidden at the workplace, homo/bi/transphobic discrimination is not banned in other contexts;
- The 2019 Eurobarometer survey underlines that acceptance of LGBTQI+¹ individuals slightly increased compared to 2015 (the percentages vary across member States). For those who perceive an increase in intolerance towards LGBTQI+ people the most common reason cited was negative stance and discourse by politicians (FRA 2020);
- LGBTQI+ people continue to face discrimination and violence in all areas of life (FRA 2020). ILGA (The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) charts show that Italy ranks 35th out of 49 countries for the achievement of LGBTQI+ human rights.
- LGBTQI+ persons from a minority ethnic or immigrant background tend to face additional forms of discrimination (FRA 2020), often coming from their own minority communities (EU-MIDIS II 2017);
- In the EU, LGBTQI+ political participation in a broad sense has improved in recent years (Reynolds 2013). In Italy, there remain few LGBTQI+ identifying political representatives.
- In Italy, the approval of a law banning trans-homophobic discrimination is currently being debated in the Senate. Also, the recognition of marriage, adoption and stepchild adoption for same-sex couples is debated within civil society.

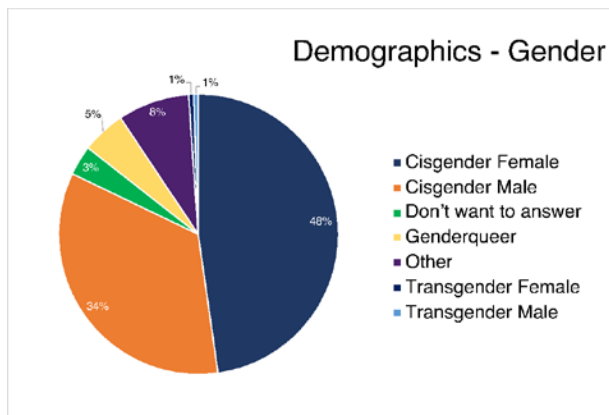
¹ Acronym used by Eurobarometer survey and ILGA.

2. Methodology

The desk research consisted of a review and analysis of relevant legal and statistical data and resources in relation to:

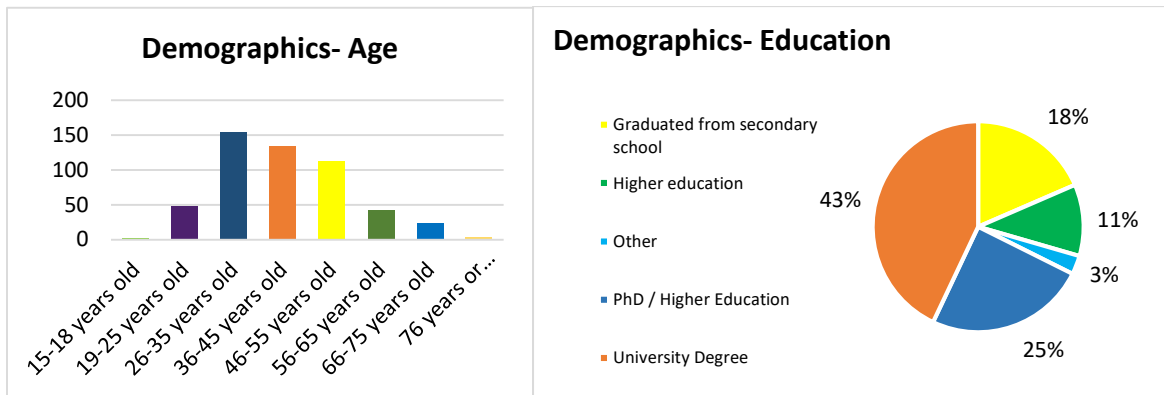
- LGBTQI+ participation in politics and the form that this takes nationally;
- discriminatory behaviours against LGBTQI+ individuals;
- national and EU provisions concerning LGBTQI+ rights;
- the existing legal framework that protects LGBTQI+ individuals.

The field research collected quantitative and qualitative data through an online survey, which was addressed to LGBTQI+ individuals, government officials, representatives of political institutions and the general public. The data concerned:



- the perception of the occurrence of discriminatory incidents against the LGBTQI+ community as reported by all of the target groups;
 - the frequency of discriminatory incidents, as reported by LGBTQI+ people with and without a minority ethnic and/or cultural background;
 - the discrepancy between the perceptions of target groups regarding the above and regarding the inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals in political decision making.
- The sample size of two of the target groups (i.e., government officials and political representatives) was small, most likely due to the COVID-19 state of emergency.

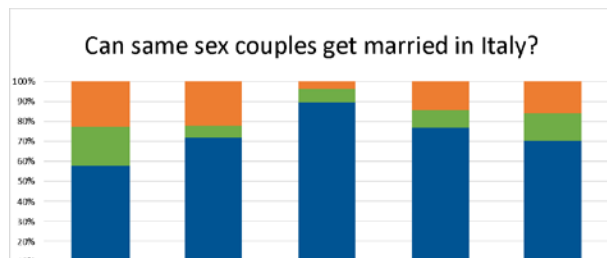
The survey took place in the period 1 January 2020-30 April 2020, and 438 questionnaires were collected from 30 government officials, 31 political representatives, 142 LGBTQI+ individuals, and 235 members of the general public. Chi-square test for association (χ^2) was used to measure the discrepancies amongst the four target groups for the question that could be answered with nominal scale and ANOVA was recommended for the questions that could be answered on a Likert Scale (0-4).



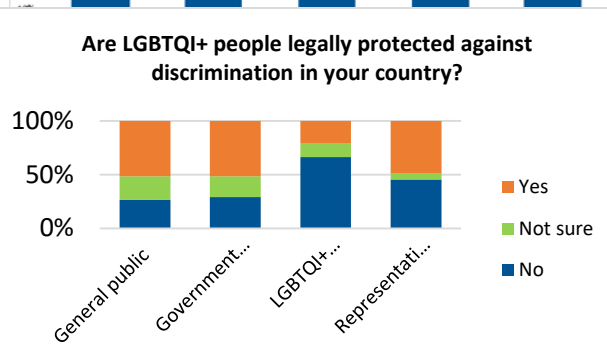
3. Main findings

1. Perceptions about LGBTQI+ rights and discrepancies amongst target groups

Both government officials (23%) and general public (24%) respondents believed **same-sex marriage to be legal** in Italy in higher numbers than LGBTQI+ respondents (4%). Indeed, same-sex couples can only enter civil union (Law 76/2016) .



The lack of information regarding LGBTQI+ rights outside the community also concerns the possibility to **change one's gender marker on legal documents, which is allowed in Italy**: 57% of general public respondents reported that they believed this to be legal, whereas 77% of LGBTQI+ respondents reported that is legally possible (Law 1982 n.164).



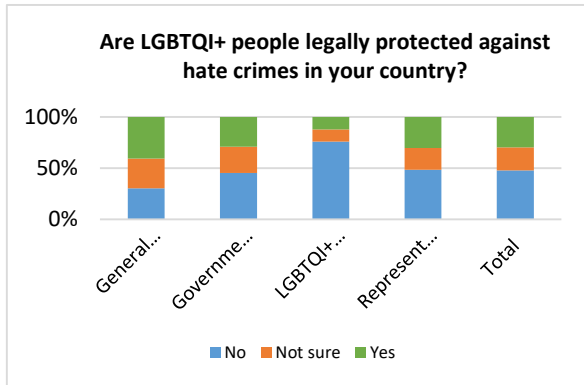
LGBTQI+ respondents reported that LGBTQI+ people are **protected against discrimination**, significantly less than all other target groups. These data might be explained in different ways:

- LGBTQI+ respondents were not so well informed on existing legislation against workplace discrimination;
- This protection is not perceived as being well-implemented in daily life;
- **The respondents referred to protection against discrimination in all areas of life.**

Concerning the **legal protection gap in tackling trans/homophobia**, 40% of general public respondents reported that LGBTQI+ people are protected against hate crimes, while 28% of them were “not sure”. In terms of

discrepancies, the general public was significantly more likely to believe that LGBTQI+ individuals are protected against hate crimes, compared to respondents from the LGBTQI+ community.

Representatives of political institutions (29%) and general public (23%) respondents indicated that intersex people are protected from “normalising” medical interventions, presenting higher figures compared to 8% of LGBTQI+ respondents.



As regards **respondent’s opinions about LGBTQI+ rights**, people from all four target groups with no between-group differences agreed-to-strongly-agreed that:

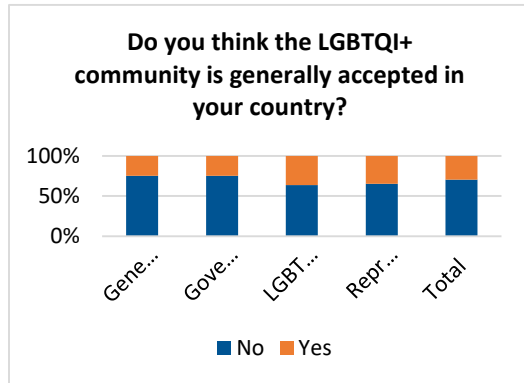
- people should freely express their sexual orientation and/or gender identity;
- LGBTQI+ people should be treated equally;
- It should be illegal to fire/not hire a person because of their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or sex characteristics (SOGISC).

LGBTQI+ respondents felt that **child fostering and adoption by same-sex couples** should be legal in much higher numbers than political representatives/government officials and in somewhat higher numbers than the general public.

2. Perceptions on the occurrence of discriminatory incidents against the LGBTQI+ community

All four groups believed that the LGBTQI+ community is not generally accepted in Italy (no discrepancies among groups). In particular:

- LGBTQI+ respondents perceived negative comments in public places or online against LGBTQI+ individuals as occurring frequently, whereas the general public felt that it occurs much less often;
- LGBTQI+ respondents perceived the incident of people being mocked because they are or are perceived as LGBTQI+ as occurring frequently, whereas the general public felt that it occurs much less often;
- Government officials perceived sexual harassment against LGBTQI+ people as occurring frequently. In terms of discrepancies, government officials were significantly more likely to state this frequency, compared to LGBTQI+ respondents and representatives of political institutions.



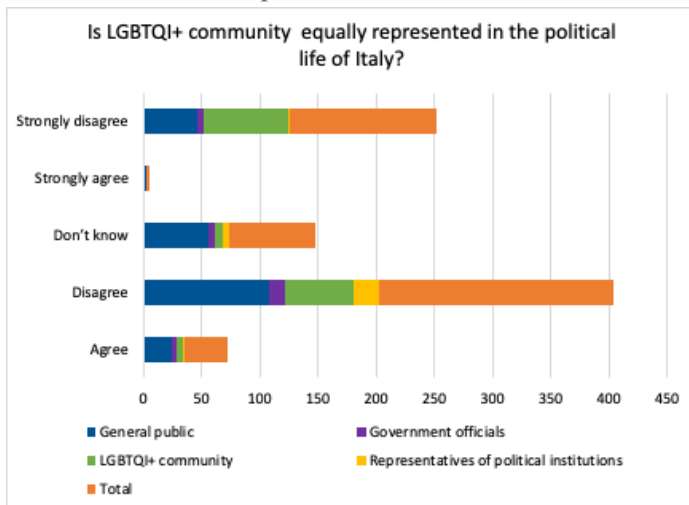
Across all target groups, 80% or more reported that they had heard negative comments towards the LGBTQI+ community made publicly in Italy. Moreover, data show that younger generations seem to be more open and LGBTQI+ people feel more at ease in bigger cities.

3. Occurrence of discriminatory incidents, as indicated by members of the LGBTQI+ community with no minority ethnic or cultural backgrounds

Most of the 136 respondents without a minority ethnic and/or cultural background reported that they rarely-to-sometimes received negative comments (63.2%) or had experienced their LGBTQI+ identity being revealed without their permission (63.4%). The remaining discriminatory incidents (being sexually harassed, experiencing physical attacks, etc.) were reported as occurring less frequently. 57 % of transgender respondents indicated that people used their dead name sometimes or often.

4. Occurrence of discriminatory incidents, as indicated by members of the LGBTQI+ community with minority ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds

All six respondents with a minority ethnic and/or cultural background reported a slightly greater occurrence of discriminatory incidents, compared to non-minority respondents. The most frequent incident was people disclosing that they are LGBTQI+ without their permission (67% responding sometimes or often) and the least reported incidents were sexual harassment and organized physical attacks.



5. Involvement of the LGBTQI+ people in politics

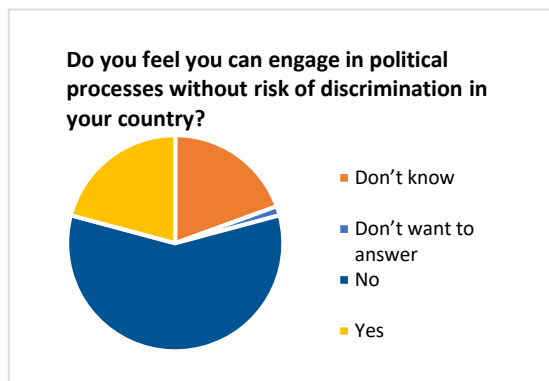
All target groups generally strongly disagreed/disagreed that the LGBTQI+ community is equally represented in political life. In particular, LGBTQI+ respondents were significantly more likely to believe that the LGBTQI+ community is not equally represented in the political life of Italy, compared to the other groups. Respondents also agreed that there are openly LGBTQI+ people in political parties, but strongly disagreed/disagreed that there are enough openly LGBTQI+ people involved in politics. More than half of LGBTQI+ respondents felt that they could not engage in political processes without risk of discrimination. 56% percent of them felt that if they engaged in political processes in Italy, their positions would not be taken into account as much as cisgender heterosexual citizens.

6. Needs for policy reform

The four target groups generally agreed that in Italy there is a need for policy reform in public services, social protection and labour policy, with no between-group differences (the need for health service reform is the less perceived one). LGBTQI+ respondents reported a need for policy reform in civil rights protection, family rights protection, anti-discrimination law and education.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

LGBTQI+ respondents seemed to be more aware of their rights compared to other groups, especially the general public. These data show the need for informing and raising awareness among the general public about LGBTQI+ rights.



Overall, attitudes towards LGBTQI+ rights were generally positive across all target groups. **Attitudes towards child fostering and adoption by same-sex couples** were more positive among LGBTQI+ respondents than in all the other groups, and among LGBTQI+ government officials compared to their non-LGBTQI+ colleagues. More than half of the respondents believe that the LGBTQI+ community is not accepted in Italy. Discriminatory incidents against the LGBTQI+ community in Italy, such as having heard negative comments made publicly, were reported by 80% or more of respondents across all

four target groups.

The perceived occurrence of discriminatory incidents against the LGBTQI+ community was generally high, with incidents perceived as occurring “sometimes-to-often”. Those who considered themselves to be LGBTQI+ persons with a minority ethnic and cultural background reported only a **slightly higher occurrence of discriminatory incidents** compared to LGBTQI+ respondents without a minority ethnic and cultural background. However, the data concerning LGBTQI+ people with a minority ethnic and cultural background cannot be

considered as representative of the whole scenario, due to the limited number of respondents. Additionally, the small size of gender identity sub-groups prevented from testing differences among gender identities in the study variables.

As to the perceived **involvement of LGBTQI+ people in politics**, the target groups agreed that the LGBTQI+ community is not equally represented in Italian political life, especially among LGBTQI+ respondents. More than half of LGBTQAI+ respondents felt at risk of being discriminated and of not being given the same considerations of cisgender heterosexual citizens if they engaged in political processes.

A **need for policy reform** in civil and family rights protection, anti-discrimination law and education was perceived by all target groups, especially among LGBTQI+ respondents.

Recommendations

- Legal reforms in civil and family rights protection, including the right to marry and to adoption;
- More effectively implement the existing anti-discrimination law, both at workplace and in all spectrums of everyday life;
- Adoption of a legislation against homo-bi-transphobia;
- LGBTQI+ - related content should be included in school books and educational curriculum at all degrees of education, as especially expressed by LGBTQI+ respondents;
- Access to affordable treatments, on a continuous basis, for people who undergo gender transitions;
- Promotion of LGBTQI+ people's social participation, above all in small cities and towns;
- Promotion of LGBTQI+ people's political participation;
- Promotion of LGBTQI+ people's voice in the decision-making process at all level of governance;
- Awareness raising actions should be organised, in order to sensitise and inform the public and the LGBTQI+ community on their rights;
- Special focus should be put on LGBTQI+ people with intersectional vulnerabilities, such as LGBTQI+ refugees and migrants;
- Training and capacity building for LGBTQI+ people, especially for those who want to actively engage in political participation.

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