Social attitudes towards LGBTQI issues in Hungary

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Author: Tamás Dombos, Luca Dóra, Alexandra Sipos

Review: Luca Dudits, Eszter Polgári

Typesetting: Zsolt S. Szabó

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the findings of a national representative poll commissioned by Háttér Society, and carried out by Medián Polling Agency in November 2023.

54% of Hungarians **know someone personally who is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)**,[1] although most of them only have one (9%) or a few (37%) of such friends or acquaintances.

The proportion of those who would **accept their children if they were LGBT** increased to 71% from 50% in 2019. Compared to 2019 the proportion of those who would try to convince their children that this is not a good way to live their life decreased from 24% to 16%; and instead of 16%, only 8% would send their children to a doctor or psychologist to cure them in such a situation.

More people totally or rather agree (41%) that **employers should do more** to promote the acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the workplace, than those who disagree (27%).

It turned out to be a false **myth that private matters are not discussed at the workplace**: 75% reported that weekend and other free time activities are discussed among colleagues at least on a monthly basis, while parenting is discussed at least monthly for 71%, politics for 59%, intimate relationships for 55%, and even sex comes up for 43% of Hungarians.

Almost half of Hungarian society, 49%, supports **same-sex marriage**; if those who responded with 'don't know' or refused to respond are excluded, the support is at 51%.

66% totally and another 6% rather agree that members of a **same-sex couple can also be good parents**. This is a significant change compared to 2019, when the proportion of those who totally agreed was only 17%.

73% have heard about the legislation that makes it more difficult for same-sex couples to adopt and raise children. 63% saw it as a problem that many children have to grow up in state care because same-sex couples cannot adopt them; 67% find it a problem that a child cannot inherit from both parents of the same sex; and 77% consider it a problem that if a child's legal parent dies, their same-sex partner might lose custody and the child may be placed in state care.

[1] In this report, we use the acronym LGBTQI to refer to sexual and gender minorities in general. However, some questions of the research only applied to lesbian, gay and bisexual people, while other questions applied to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. When we describe the results of the research, we use the abbreviation LGB or LGBT, corresponding to the wording of the question.

60% believed that the legislation should be changed as **same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt**; 22% would leave the law unchanged; and only 11% would take children away from same-sex couples.

83% have heard of the so-called **"child protection law"** that restricts the access of minors to LGBTQI content.

According to 58%, it is a problem that the state decides what is taught at school instead of parents and teachers; 57% find it a problem that sexual education in schools has been made difficult, and 56% consider it a problem that the state now censors media content. At the same time, only 43% find it a problem that LGBT youth do not have access to content that would help them in their self-acceptance.

The relative majority (45%) would **withdraw the law**, while 19% would introduce further restrictions.

In contrast to "child protection" and adoption laws, only 35% were aware of the **ban on legal gender recognition** for trans and intersex people.

60% consider it a problem that a transgender person cannot find a job because their gender identity is revealed to the employer; 56% that a trans man should use the women's toilet; 53% that a transgender person cannot use their bank card and that they may find themselves in humiliating situations while accessing health care.

73% would **allow transgender people to change their gender and name** on their official documents. According to 32%, this should be based on self-determination, while according to 22% medical diagnosis and to another 19% surgical interventions should be required for legal gender recognition. Only 21% agree with the current legislation, that is the complete ban on legal gender recognition.

Nearly half (48%) of the Hungarian society totally or rather disagree with the statement that the rights of LGBT people are guaranteed in Hungary and that they do not face disadvantages.

57% believe that the **state should take action to counter discrimination against LGBT people**.

According to 84%, it is unacceptable if a politician incites hatred against LGBT people.

The report concludes with recommendations for public bodies and civil organizations working to improve the social acceptance of LGBTQI people.

Methodology

The public opinion poll was conducted by Medián Public Opinion and Market Research Institute, one of Hungary's most trusted polling agencies. Data collection took place at the beginning of November 2023. The sample consisted of 1,002 people over the age of 18. The sample is representative of Hungarian society aged 18 or over in terms of gender, age, education and settlement type. The questionnaire was part of Medián's regular omnibus research, which included socio-demographic background variables and other blocks of questions as well.

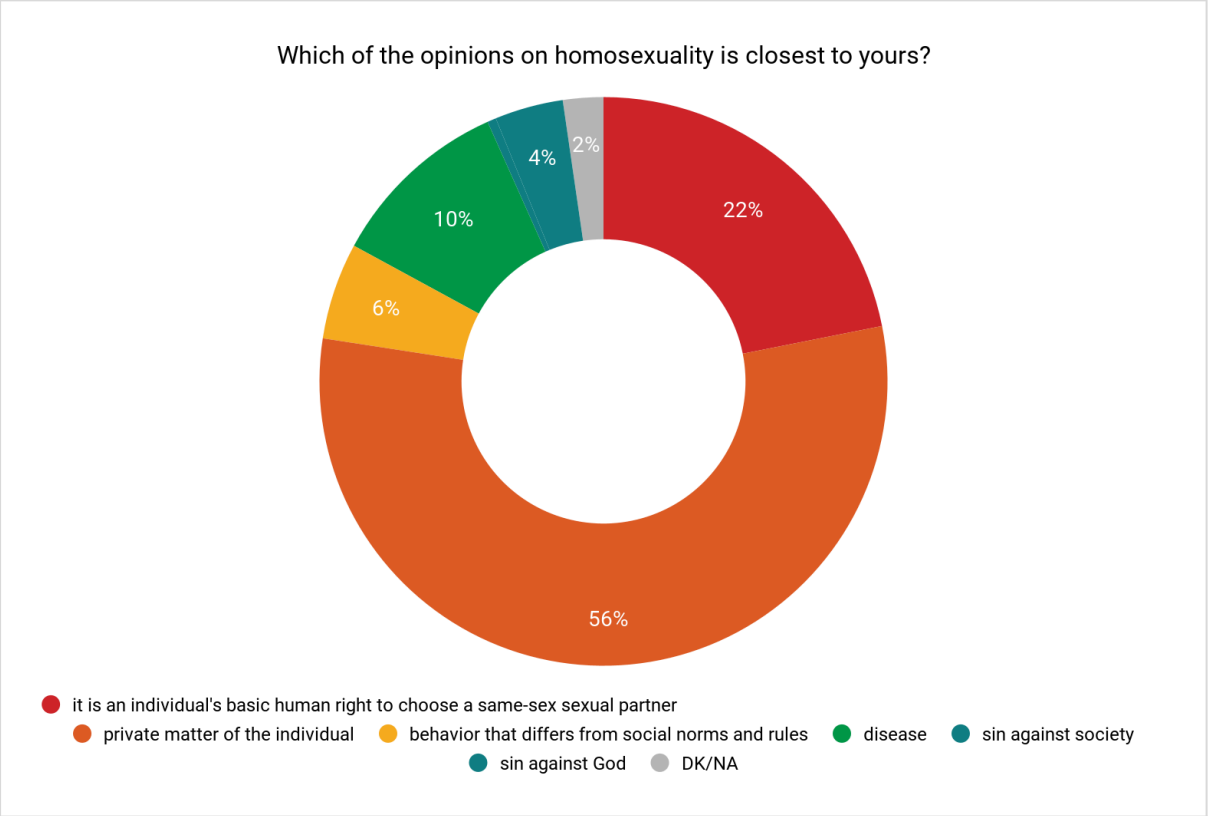
The LGBTQI block of the survey questionnaire was compiled by researchers at Háttér Society in cooperation with polling experts at Medián. The LGBTQI block contained 16 questions, but there were several questions that included multiple sub-questions (items). Background variables included age, gender, settlement type, county, highest level of education, marital status, household income, openness to economic and political issues, labor market situation, and pro-government or opposition political orientation.

The methodology and some of the questions are the same as for the poll conducted in September 2019[2] by the Medián Public Opinion and Market Research Institute commissioned by the Hungarian LGBT Alliance, thus changes in the social attitudes of Hungarian society over the past 4 years can be clearly traced.

[2] Tamás Dombos (2019): *Social attitudes towards LGBT+ topics. September 2019*. Hungarian LGBT Alliance

Framing

More than half of Hungarian society (56%) believes that homosexuality is a private matter, and another 22% believe that choosing a same-sex partner is a fundamental human right. 10% agree with the statement that homosexuality is an illness, and 6% believe that it is a deviation from social norms. 4% consider homosexuality a sin against God, while only 1% consider it a sin against society.

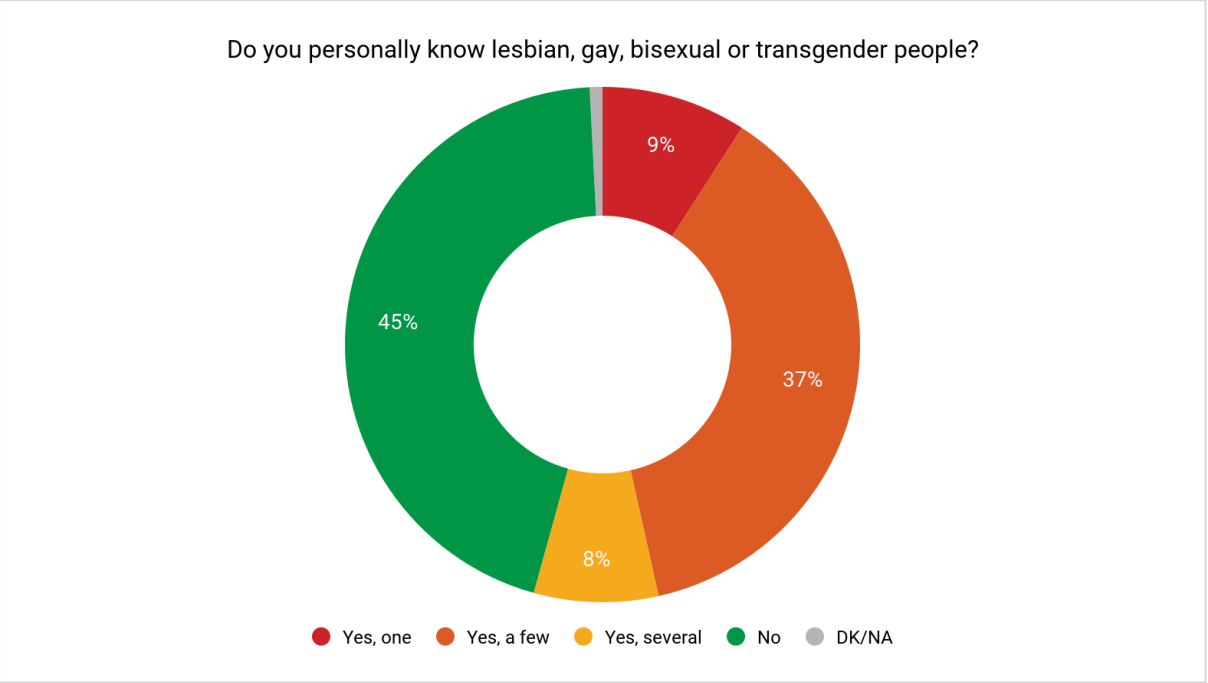


Compared to the results of the 2019 survey, a significant positive change can be observed: in 2019 the relative majority considered homosexuality an illness (36%), while only 27% considered it a private matter, and 18% considered it a deviation from social norms. In contrast to 22% in 2023, in 2019 only 12% thought that choosing a same-sex couple was a fundamental human right.

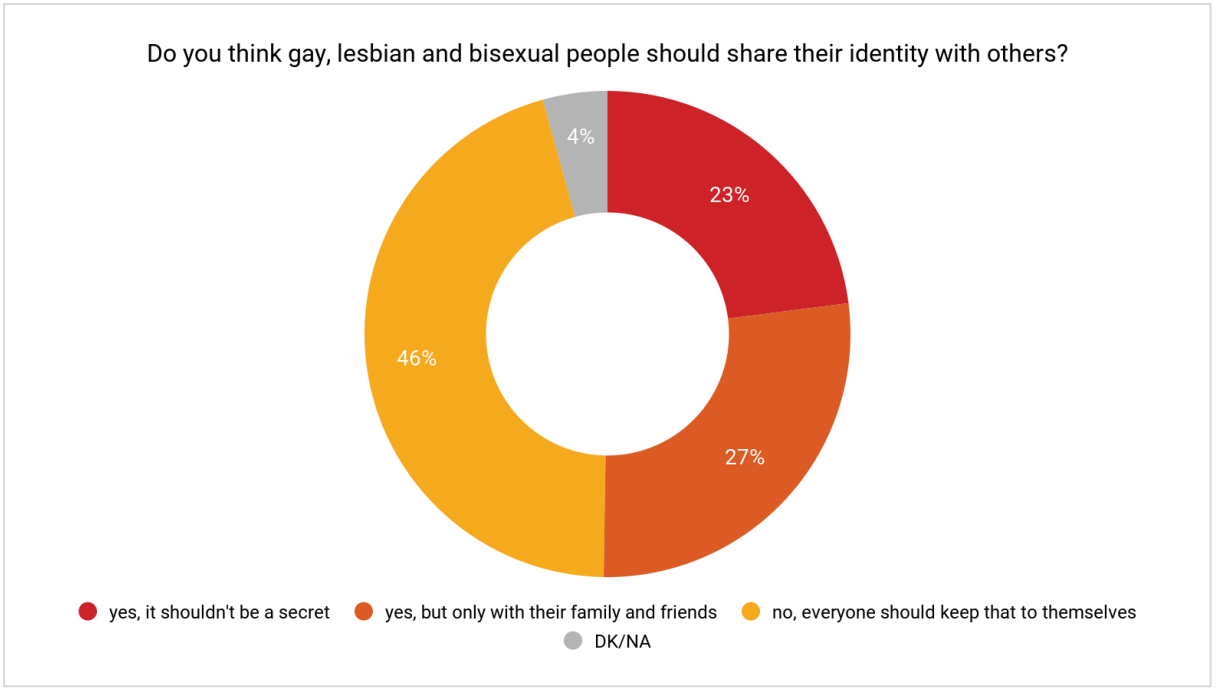
Coming out and personal contact

The proportion of people who personally know LGBTQI persons is an important indicator, since previous research has clearly found that personal contact with members of a social group can reduce prejudice against the group and it correlates closely with positive attitudes towards the group (Allport, 1954).

54% of Hungarians personally know at least one lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person, while 45% do not have such a friend or acquaintance. Compared to the 2019 data, this is a particularly significant improvement, as then only 24% reported that they had an LGBT acquaintance. In addition, the vast majority (84%) of those who have an LGBT acquaintance do not have just one such acquaintance: 37% have a few, and 8% have many LGBT acquaintances.

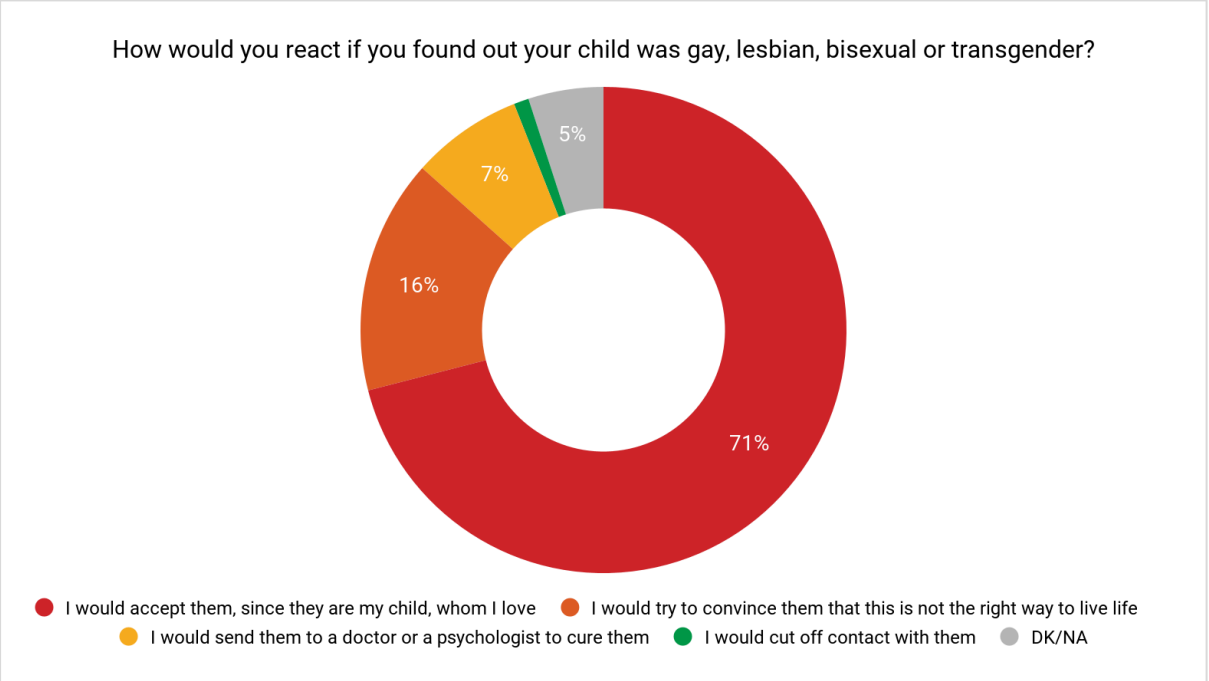


Although these numbers show that LGBT people are more likely to come out, attitudes related to coming out – in line with the general attitude regarding homosexuality as a private matter – are rather negative: the relative majority (46%) believes that sexual orientation should not be shared at all, everyone should keep this information to themselves. According to 27%, only family and friends should be told if someone is gay, lesbian or bisexual, and only 23% believe that sexual orientation should not be a secret.


Do you think gay, lesbian and bisexual people should share their identity with others?
4%
23%
46%
27%
yes, it shouldn't be a secret
yes, but only with their family and friends
no, everyone should keep that to themselves
DK/NA

Family acceptance

Almost three quarters of Hungarian society (71%) would accept if their child were lesbian, gay or bisexual. This is a significant increase compared to the 2019, when this rate was only 50%. In the last four years, the percentage of those who would try to convince their child that this is not the right way to live life decreased from 24% to 16%; instead of 16%, only 8% would take their child to a doctor or psychologist in such a situation; and instead of 3%, only 1% would cut off contact with their child after their coming out.



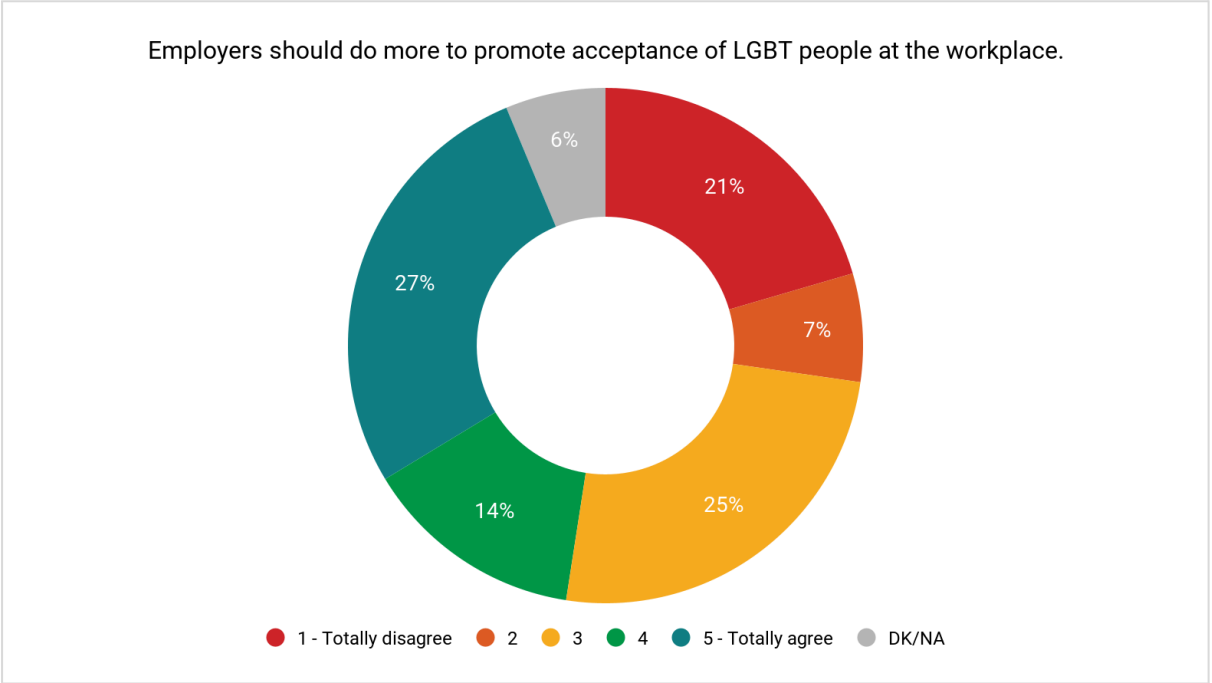
In the questionnaire, we also asked who among the respondents was raising children under the age of 18 in their household,[3] thus it is possible to compare the attitudes of those who are currently raising children and those who are not. There was no significant difference in the proportion of those showing an accepting attitude (70% of those raising children and 71% of those not raising children agreed with this option). Among those raising children, more (21% vs. 14%) would try to convince their child that this is not the right way to live life; at the same time, fewer (5% vs. 8%) would consult a doctor or psychologist; and none of those currently parenting would cut off contact with their child.

[3] When asked whether they are currently raising a child under the age of 18 in their household, 25% answered yes, and 75% answered no.

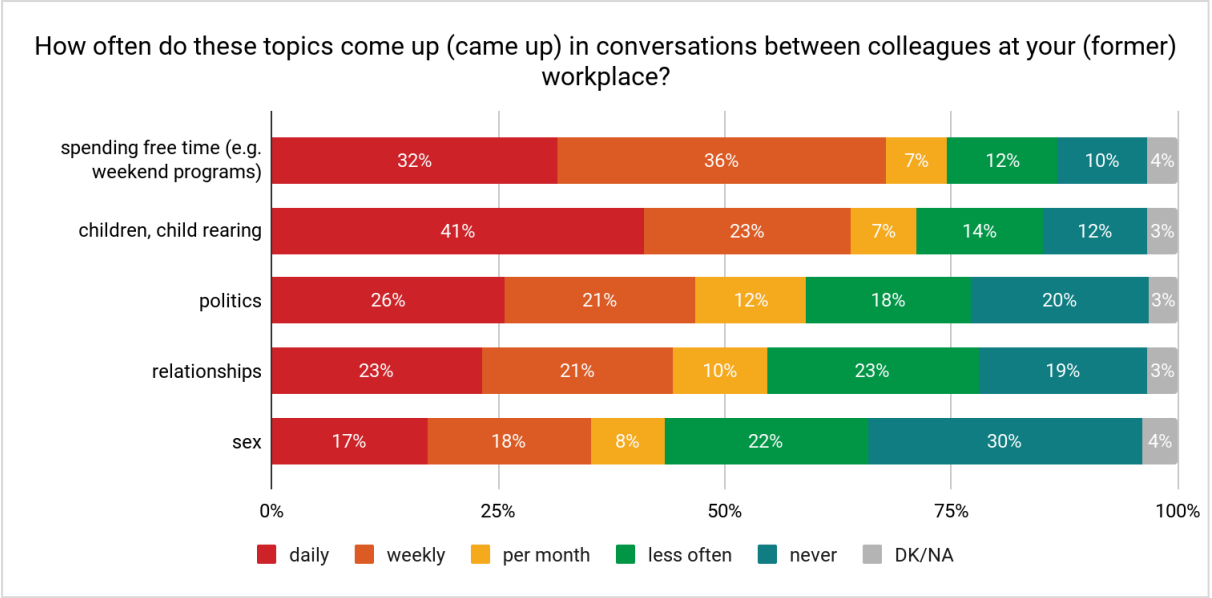
Workplace inclusion

In addition to the family environment, the workplace is also an important sphere of life as people spend a significant amount of their time there. Spending 40 hours a week in a homophobic, transphobic environment is very stressful and frustrating for an LGBTQI person. That is why it is important that as many workplaces as possible take steps to become more inclusive towards LGBTQI people.

There are more people (41%) who totally or rather agree with the statement that “Employers should do more to promote acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people at the workplace", than those who totally or rather disagree (27%). A quarter of them (25%) chose the neutral option, and there were quite a few who could not or did not want to answer this question (6%).

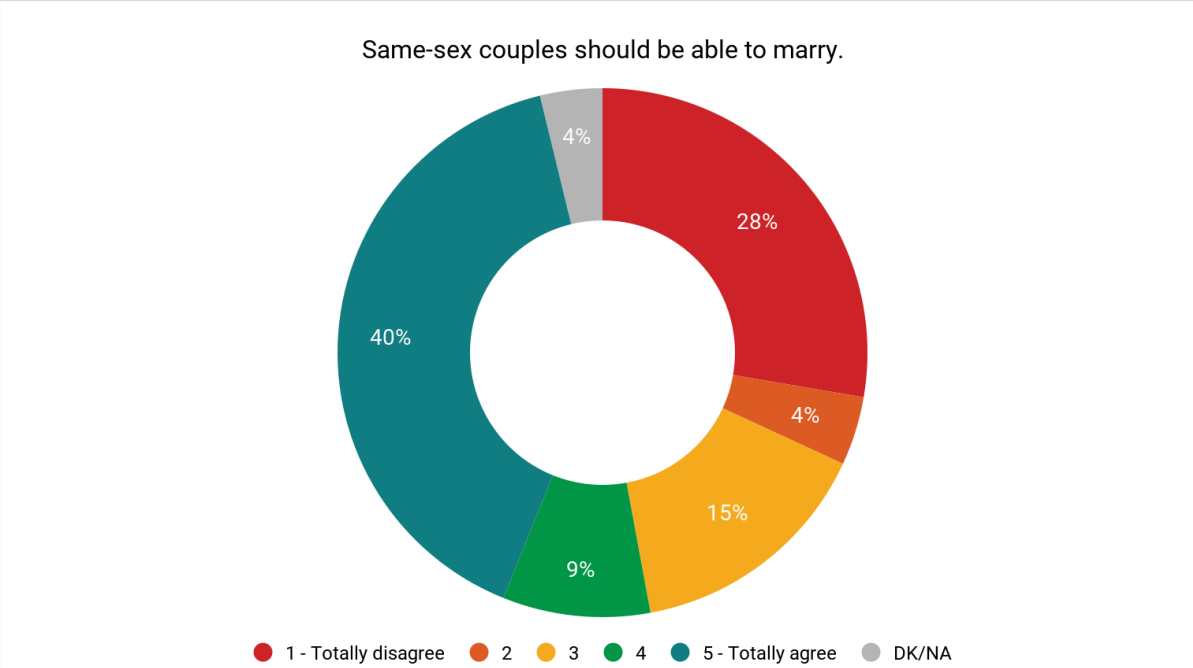


The counter-argument most often voiced in connection with LGBTQI inclusion at the workplace is that sexual orientation and gender identity are private matters, and therefore this topic is not suitable for the workplace. In our research, we therefore asked how true it is that private matters do not arise in workplace conversations. The research found that these topics are actually very present at the workplace. 75% reported that the topic of spending one’s free time (e.g. weekend programs) comes up at least once a month in conversations among colleagues. 71% mentioned parenting, 59% politics, 55% partnerships, and 43% sex as topics that come up at least once a month. Raising children is a daily topic for 41%, spending free time for 32%, and even sex for every sixth respondent (17%). There were only 4% for whom none of these topics ever come up in workplace conversations.


How often do these topics come up (came up) in conversations between colleagues at your (former) workplace?
spending free time (e.g. weekend programs)
32%
36%
7%
12%
10%
4%
children, child rearing
41%
23%
7%
14%
12%
3%
politics
26%
21%
12%
18%
20%
3%
relationships
23%
21%
10%
23%
19%
3%
sex
17%
18%
8%
22%
30%
4%
0%
25%
50%
75%
100%
daily
weekly
per month
less often
never
DK/NA

Marriage

Almost half of Hungarian society, 49%, agrees that “Same-sex couples should be able to marry.” If we only take into account the responses of those who were able to answer this question (excluding those who declined to answer or those who chose the “don't know” option), the proportion of supporters is 51%. The increase is very remarkable compared to 2019, when only 28% were supportive.

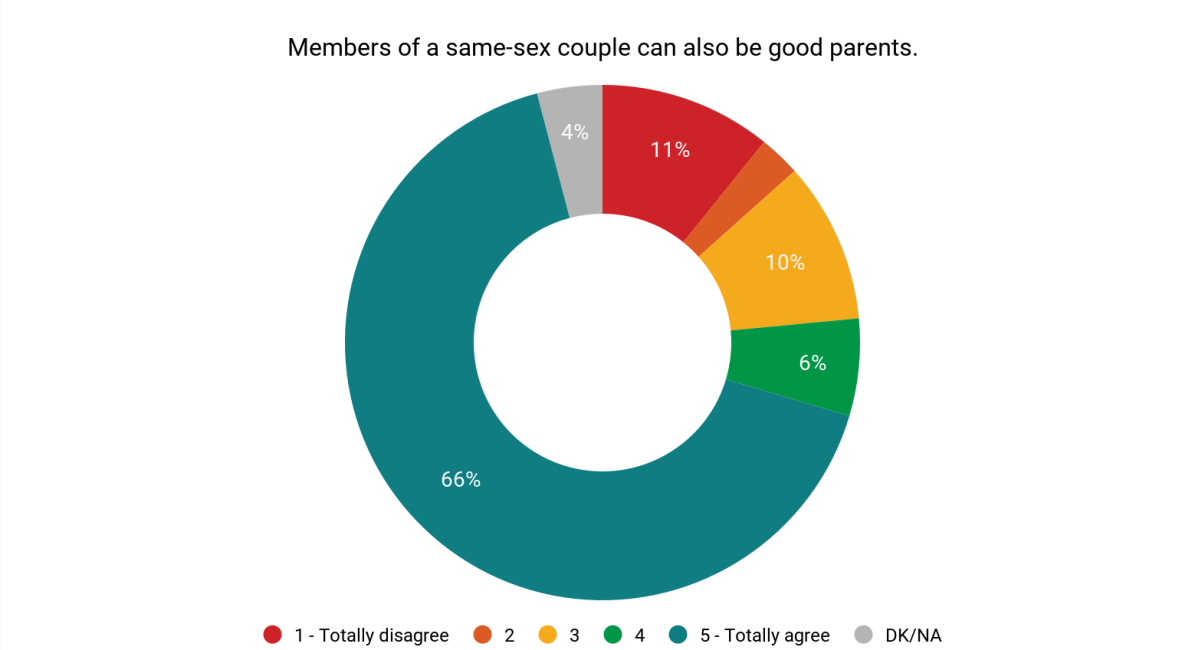


To the best of our knowledge, the current one is the first public opinion poll in Hungary that measured an over 50% support for same-sex marriage among those who were able to take a stance. At the same time, this result is in line with the trend shown by other polls conducted in recent years. Ipsos’s Spring 2021 research found support support for same-sex marriage in Hungary at 46%, their Spring 2023 research at 47%. According to the Spring 2023 research, in addition to 47% support for marriage, another 20% supported other forms of legal recognition (such as registered partnership), so over two-thirds of Hungarians support the legal recognition of same-sex partnerships.

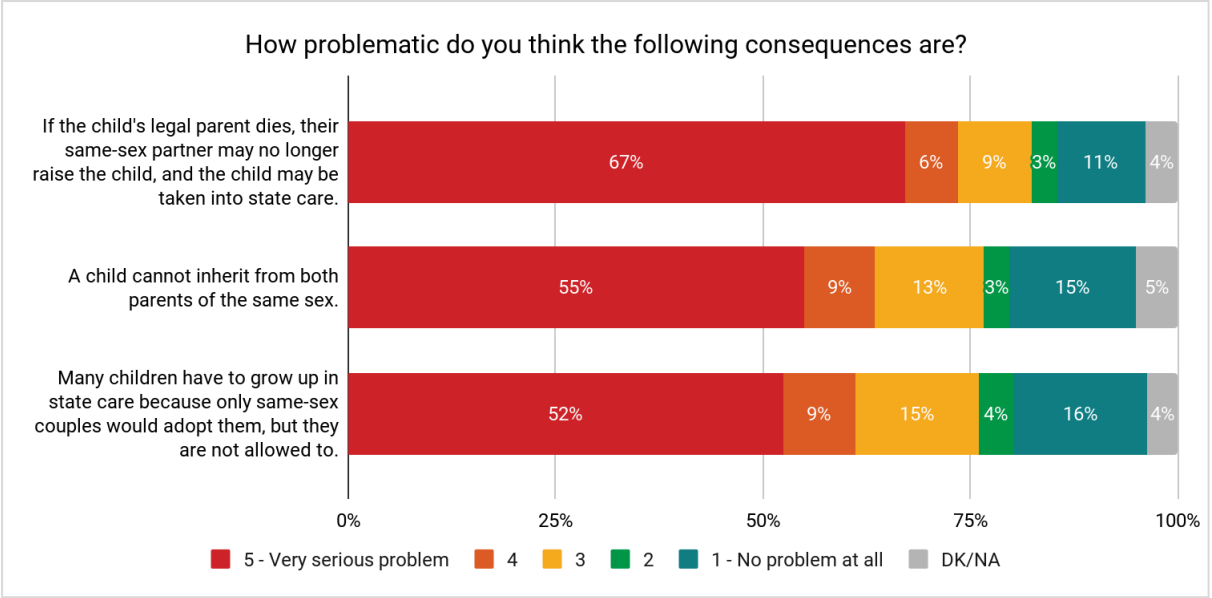
Rainbow families

In addition to marriage, the debate about the rights of same-sex couples focuses primarily on the question of parenting. In Hungary, same-sex couples have never been able to jointly adopt a child, and both members of a same-sex couple cannot be legal parents of a child even if they have been raising them together for years. In 2021, the parliamentary majority further restricted adoption by non-married persons (including e.g. those living with their same-sex partners) by making it subject to a special ministerial permit. A significant majority of those surveyed, 73%, have heard of these laws.

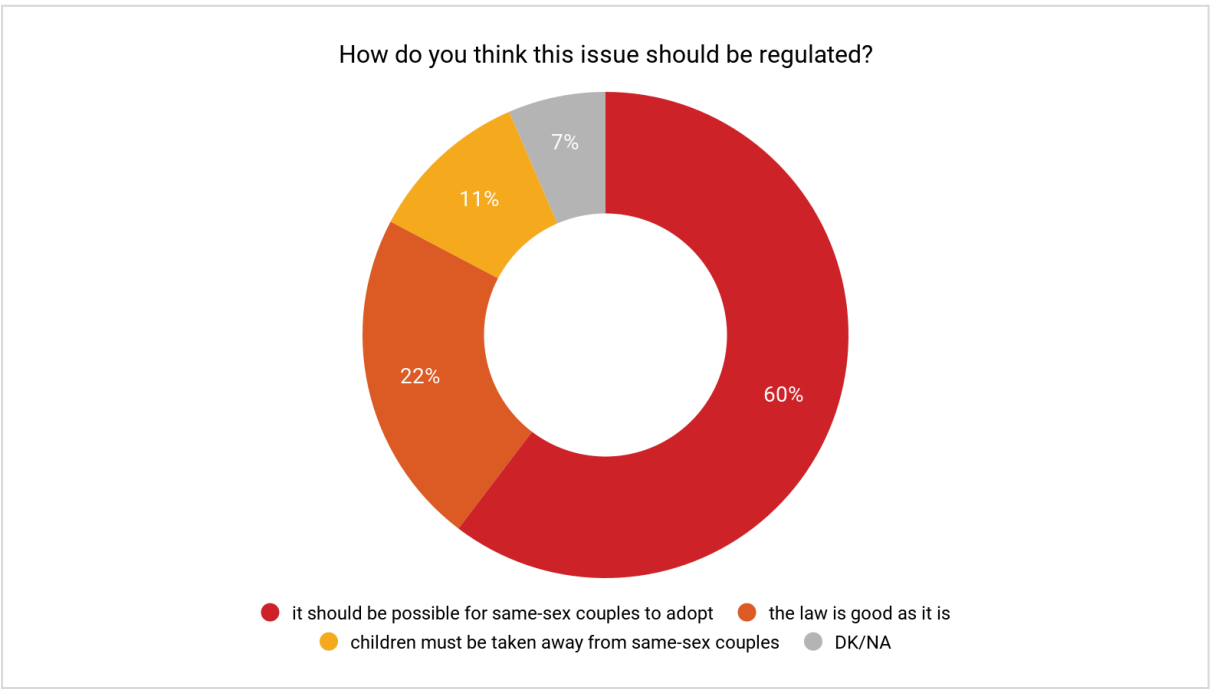
Almost three quarters of people totally agree (66%) or rather agree (6%) with the statement that "Same-sex couples can also be good parents". This is a significant increase compared to the 2019 data, as only 17% totally agreed and 25% rather agreed with it then. Currently, 13% disagree with this statement, and the proportion of those who are neutral towards this topic is also relatively low (10%).



We also asked questions about how problematic participants considered the consequences of the current legal regulations. According to 61%, it is a problem (according to 52% a very serious problem) that many children have to grow up in state care, because they would only be adopted by same-sex couples, who are in turn excluded from adoption. According to 64%, it is a problem (according to 55%, a very serious problem) that a child cannot inherit from both parents of the same-sex. And finally, 73% consider it a problem (67% a very serious problem) that "If the child's legal parent dies, their same-sex partner may no longer raise the child, and the child may be taken into state care."



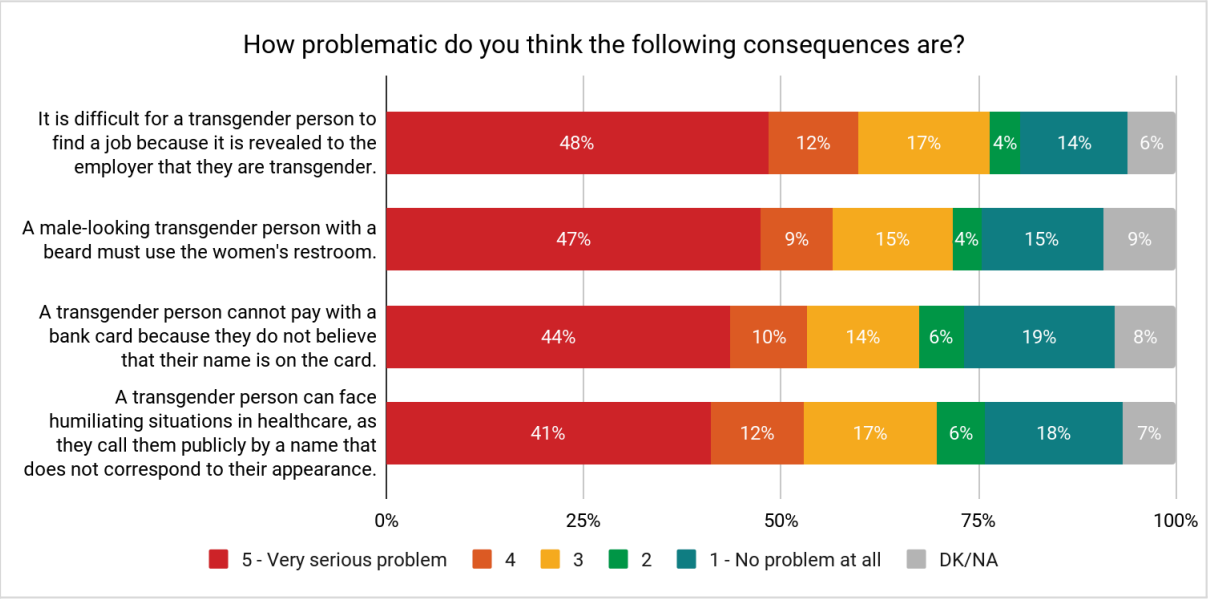
When asked how they would regulate the issue of same-sex parenting, the majority (60%) answered that same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt. 22% would leave the legislation unchanged, and according to 11% children should be taken away from same-sex couples. 7% could not or did not want to take a position on this issue.



Trans rights

Although legal gender recognition (the procedure for changing one's gender marker and name in official documents) has never been codified in great detail in Hungary, since the beginning of the 2000s, a procedure based on customary law has been in place to process such applications. This procedure was first suspended by the government in 2016 and then in 2018, and finally in May 2020, the Parliament banned legal gender recognition. In contrast to amendments to adoption legislation and passing the "child protection law", only 35% were aware of the ban on legal gender recognition, while 64% had not heard of this change in law.

We asked participants questions about how problematic they considered various consequences of the current regulation. According to 60%, it is a problem (according to 48%, a very serious problem) that it is difficult for a transgender person to find a job because it is revealed to the employer that they are transgender. A similarly large proportion (56%) consider it a problem (47% a very serious problem) that a transgender person who passes as a man and has a beard has to use the women's toilet. 53% say it is a problem (44% a very serious problem) that a transgender person cannot pay with a bank card because they do not believe that their name appears on the card. According to the same proportion, 53% it is a problem (for 41% a very serious problem) that a transgender person can face humiliating situations in healthcare, as they call them publicly by a name that does not correspond to their appearance.

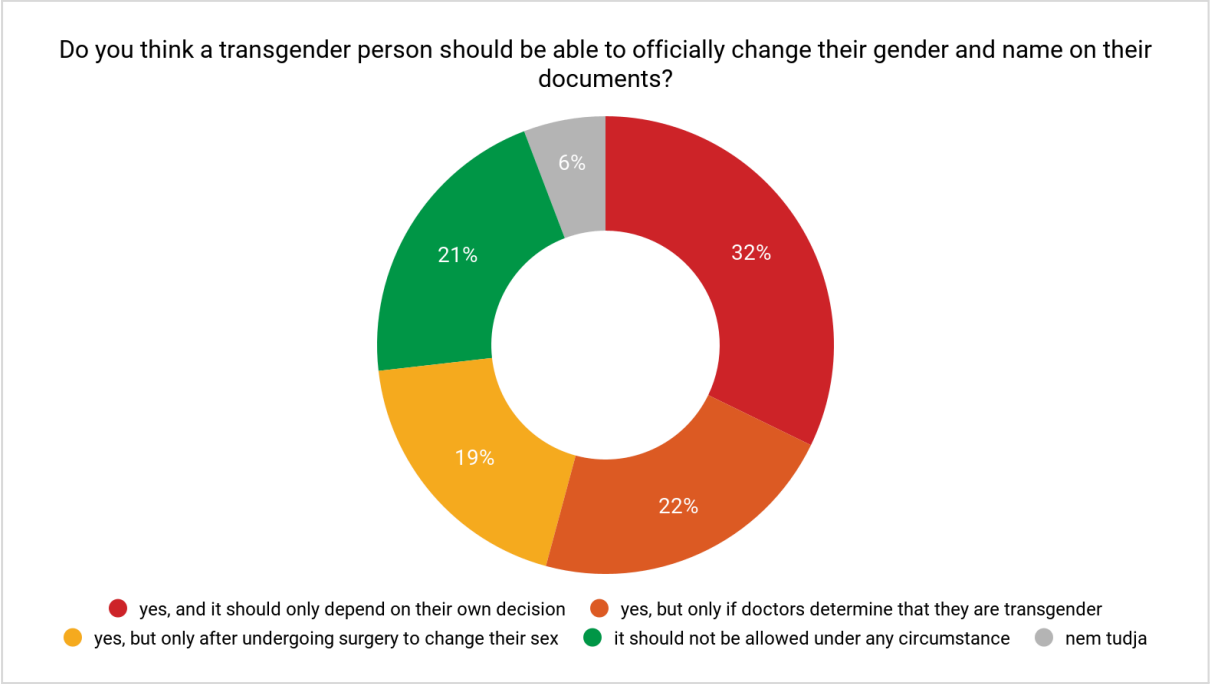


It is important to note that for all four statements there were quite a few people who took the middleground (14-17%) and those who could not or did not want to answer (6-9%).

We also asked what Hungarian society thinks about whether a transgender person can change their gender marker and name in their official documents, and if so, under what conditions.

Overall, more than two-thirds (73%) took the position that the current legislation should be amended and it should be possible for transgender people to change their gender marker and name in their official documents. This is slightly higher than the 2019 result (71%).

At the same time, society is rather divided as to what requirements this should be subject to. Around one-third (32%) think it should only depend on the person's own decision (self-determination), while almost a quarter (22%) think it should be linked to a medical diagnosis. Another 19% said that they would only allow people to change their gender marker and name if they have undergone surgical interventions. Only 21% agree with the current legal regulations (*i.e.* that there is no legal gender recognition under any circumstances).

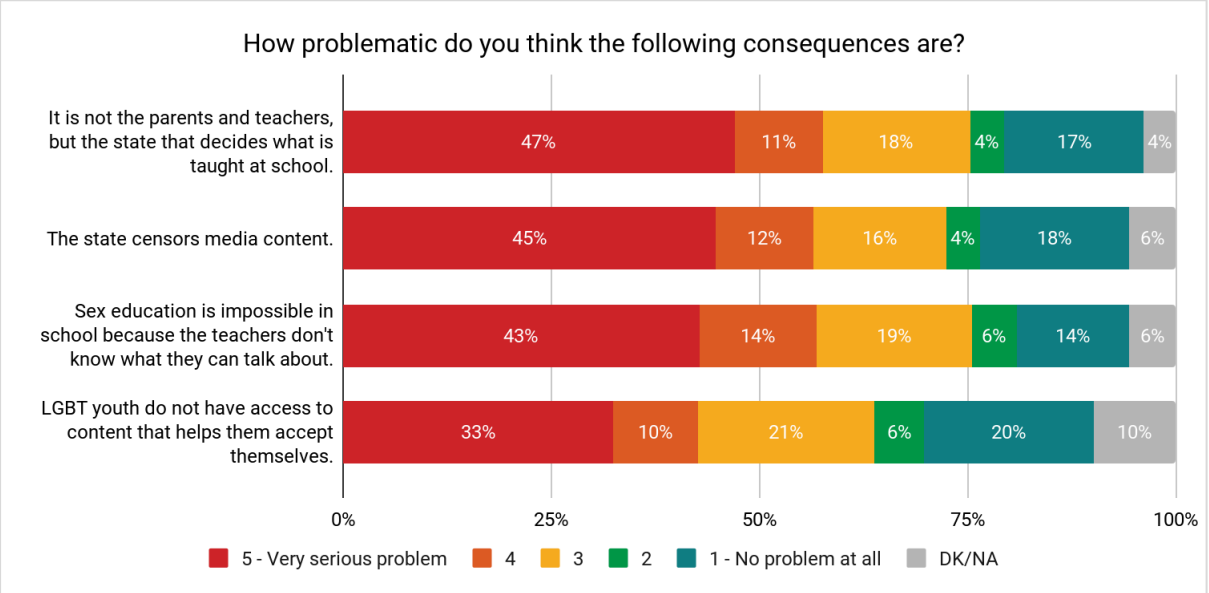


Compared to the 2019 data, support for the two "extreme" positions somewhat increased: in 2019 the proportion of supporters of self-determination was 26% and for the total ban 17%. However, it is important to note that while in 2019 the proportion of those who could not or did not want to answer was 13%, this had decreased to only 6% by 2023.

Child protection

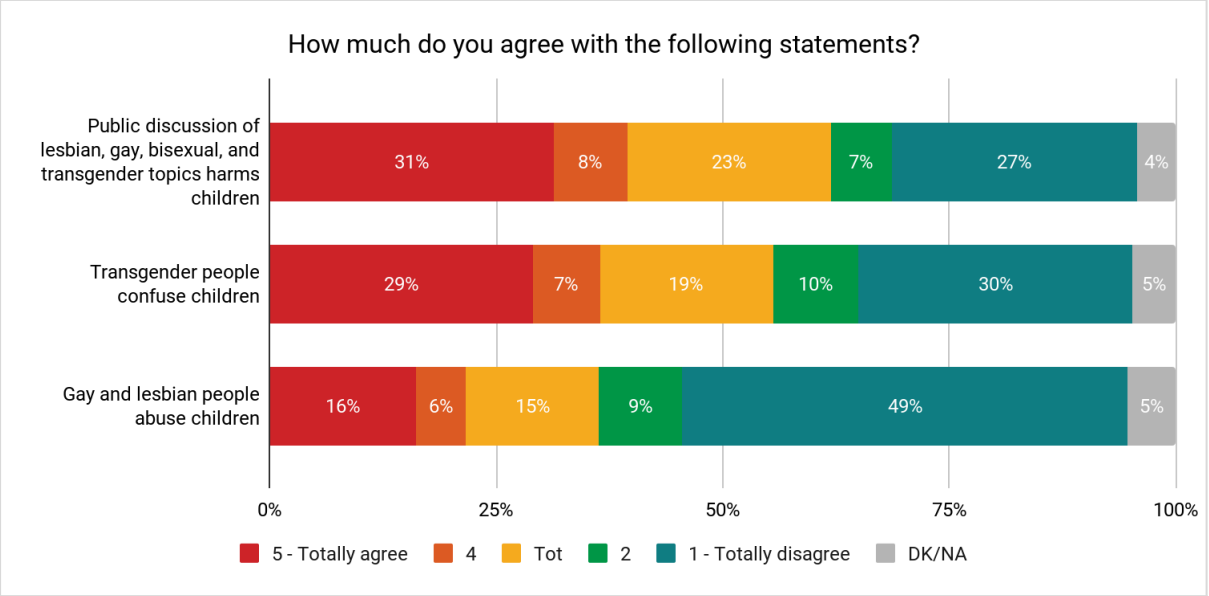
In the last three years, a central topic of political discussions on LGBTQI rights revolved around the issue of “protecting children”. A bill, which was originally intended to strengthen action against pedophilia, was amended at the very end of parliamentary discussions by government MPs to introduce new provisions to restrict access of minors to accessing content depicting or promoting homosexuality, trans identities and sex change. A national referendum was held on the topic at the same time as the 2022 parliamentary elections. In light of these, it is not surprising that the vast majority (83%) have already heard of this legislation.

We asked participants how problematic they found the possible consequences of the law. According to the majority (58%), it is a problem (according to 47% a very serious problem) that the state decides what to teach in schools instead of parents and teachers. 57% consider it a problem (43% a very serious problem) that sex education is impossible in schools because the teachers do not know what they can talk about. 56% consider it a problem (45% a very serious problem) that the state censors media content as a result of the law. Only 43% consider it a problem (and only 33% a very serious problem) that gay and lesbian youth do not have access to content that helps them accept themselves. At the same time, the proportion of those who could not or did not want to answer this question was 10%.



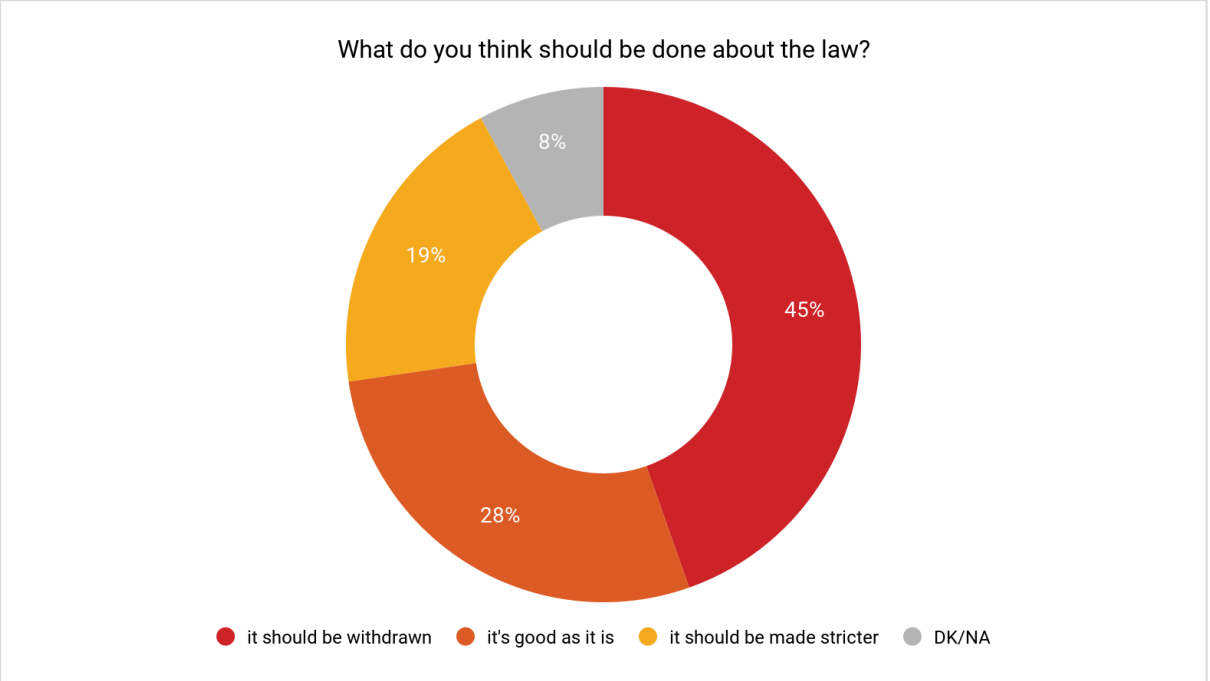
Although the majority is aware of the negative consequences of the legislation, at the same time, key aspects of the government’s narrative resonate well with the attitudes of a significant part of Hungarian society. 31% totally and 8% rather agree with the statement that “Public discussion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender topics harms children”. Only 34% said they somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement, and many, nearly a quarter (23%), took a neutral position.

29% totally agree and 7% rather agree with the statement that “Transgender people confuse children”, the proportion of those who totally disagree or rather disagree was slightly higher, 40%. People agree less with the statement that “Gay and lesbian people abuse children”: only 16% totally agree with this, and another 6% agree, while the majority of respondents (58%) reject it.



Compared to the results of 2019, this shows a slight improvement in the attitude of the public, but at the same time indicates a significant polarization: the proportion of those who totally agree with the last statement has increased from 10 to 16%, while the proportion of those who somewhat agree decreased from 11 to 6%. At the same time, the proportion of those who do not agree with the statement at all increased from 25% to 49%, while those who rather disagree decreased from 22 to 9%. The proportion of those taking a middle position decreased from 23% to 15%.

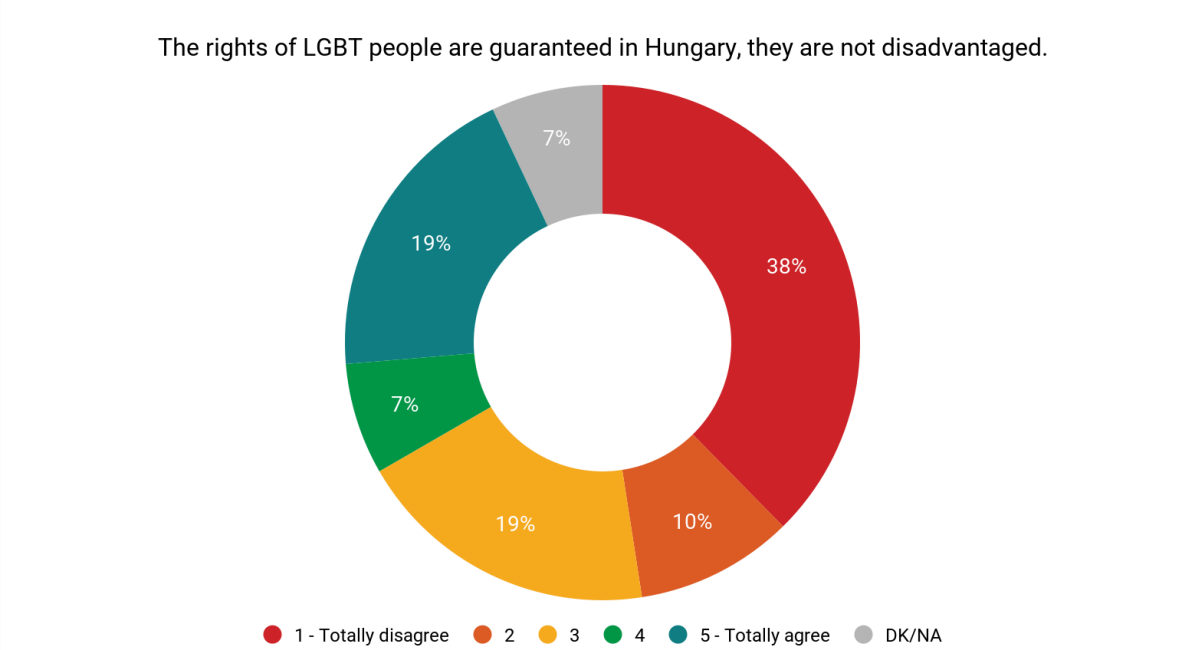
Finally, the questionnaire also asked what should be done with the so-called “child protection” law. The relative majority (45%) answered that it should be withdrawn, 28% believe that nothing should be changed, and 19% would make it even stricter. At the same time, 8% could not or did not want to take a position on this issue.



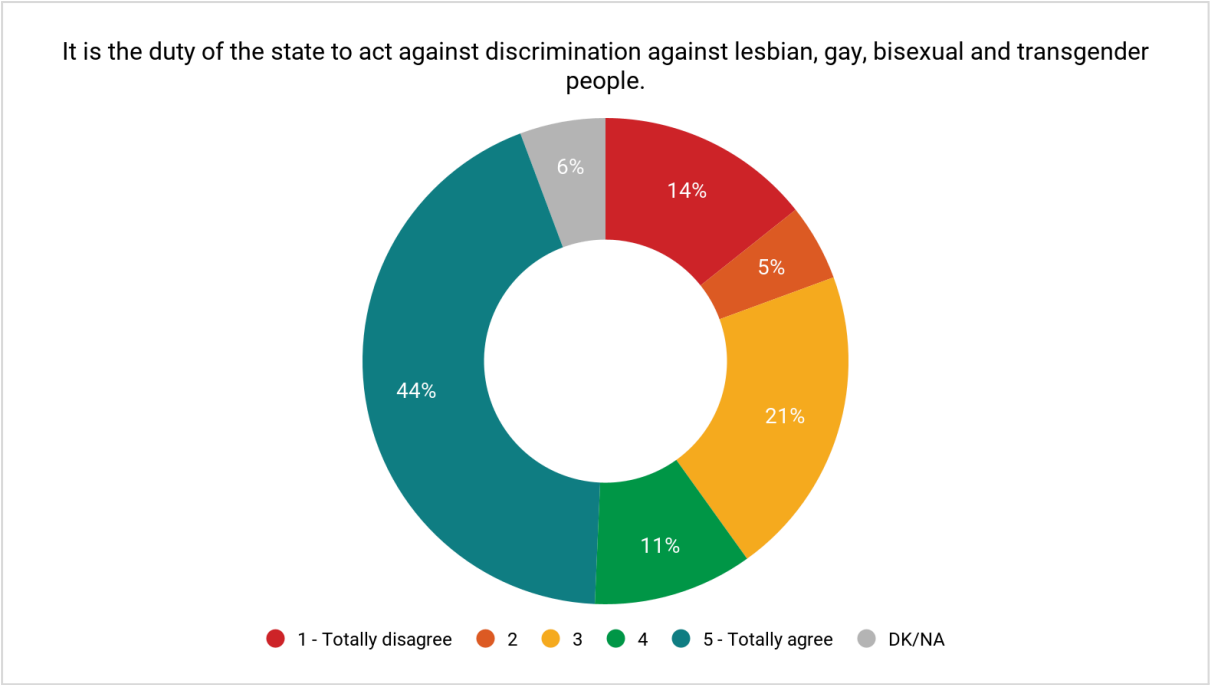
If we examine the question comparing those who currently raise or do not raise children under the age of 18, we get similar results: among those with children, the support for making the law stricter (17% v. 20%) or withdrawing it (43% v. 45%) is slightly lower, while those who want to keep the existing legal regulations is slightly higher (32% vs. 27%).

Responsibility of the state and politicians

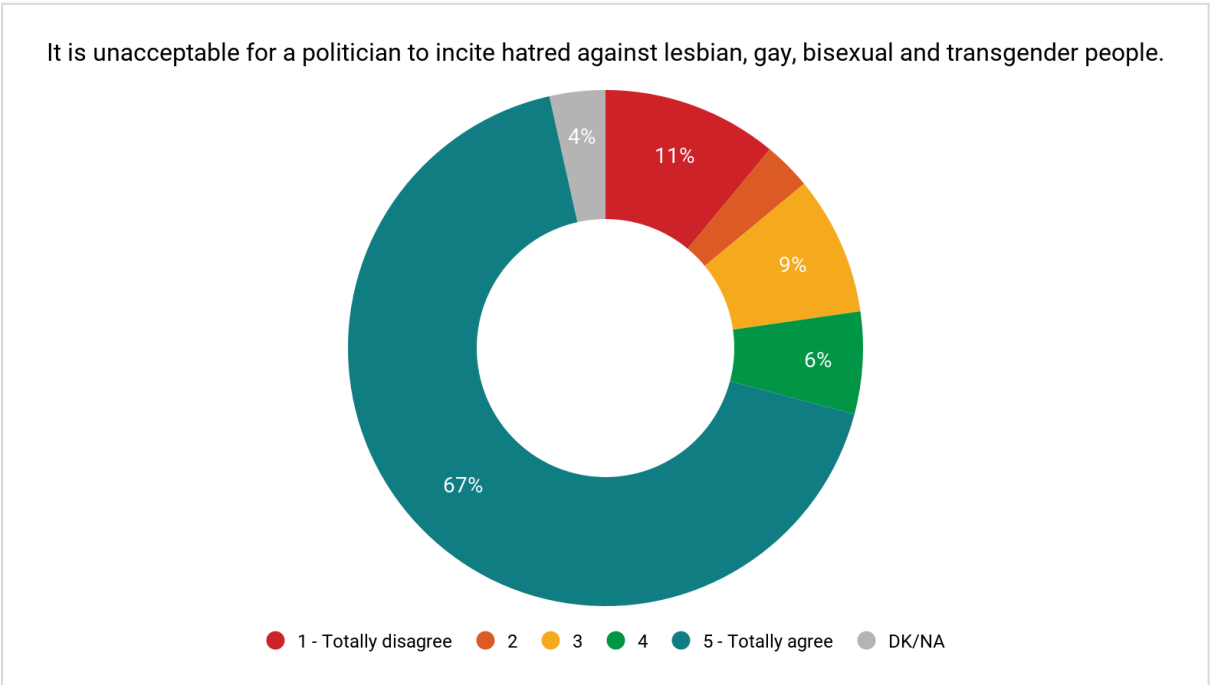
Almost half of Hungarian society (48%) totally disagree or rather disagree with the statement that “The rights of LGBT people are guaranteed in Hungary, they are not disadvantaged”; 19% take a neutral position, and only 29% totally or rather agree with this statement. 7% could not or did not want to take a position on this issue.



The majority is not only aware of the problem, but also assigns responsibility: according to 55%, "It is the duty of the state to tackle discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people." 19% disagree, but at the same time quite a few, 21%, remained neutral.



According to the overwhelming majority of Hungarian society (84%), "It is unacceptable for a politician to incite hatred against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people", 70% of them totally agree with this. Only 7% consider it acceptable to incite hatred against LGBT people, and only 9% take a neutral position.



Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, public bodies and civil society organizations working to promote the social acceptance of LGBTQI people should:

1. Conduct campaigns to reduce discomfort about coming out, to show the personal, social and societal harm of remaining in the closet.
2. Inform Hungarian society about the ban on legal gender recognition, and its negative consequences for the everyday life of trans people.
3. Argue against the “child protection” law primarily on the basis of state censorship and the restriction of teachers’ and parents’ rights, rather than with reference to the limitation of LGBTQI youth’s right to access information.
4. Refer to the supportive position of the majority of society regarding same-sex marriage and parenting.
5. Criticize legislation restricting the rights of LGBTQI people as unjust state interference with the private lives of citizens.
6. Boldly and consistently stand up against hateful statements by politicians against LGBTQI people.