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Advocacy Center
for Democratic Culture

The Position of LGBTQI+ community in Northern Kosovo



Center za
građanske
slobode

Centre for
Civil
Liberties

ERA
SERB Equal Rights Association
SERB Equal Rights Association
for Women's Rights and Gender

csqd
Community Studies
Center for Gender
Studies and Research

OMSA
Open Montenegro
Solidarity Movement



Queer
Montenegro

QUE
ERCE
NTER

TUZLANSKI
OTVORENI
CENTAR

Publisher: NGO Advocacy Center for
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Author: Andrea Todić

Consultants: Ines Aljović, Stefan Kalaba

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LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION of LGBTQI+ PERSONS IN KOSOVO

1. Constitutional and Legal Guarantees

Kosovo is one of the few countries in the region whose Constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation. Article 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on any grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Law on Protection from Discrimination (Law No. 05/L-021), adopted in 2015, further specifies the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics. This law is aligned with international standards, including European Union directives, and obliges public institutions to take proactive measures in preventing discrimination.

The Law on Gender Equality (Law No. 05/L-020) includes provisions related to LGBTQI+ persons, particularly in the context of equal access to education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. This law promotes gender balance and obliges institutions to develop policies that include all gender identities.

However, despite these laws, Kosovo has not yet adopted a unified Civil Code regulating same-sex partnerships. The draft code has been subject to public debate several times but has not been adopted due to political disagreements and resistance to provisions that would enable legal recognition of same-sex unions.

2. Institutional Mechanisms

The Ombudsperson Institution plays a key role in protecting the rights of LGBTQI+ persons. The



Ombudsperson has the mandate to investigate cases of discrimination, issue recommendations, and monitor the implementation of laws. In several cases, the Ombudsperson has acted as *amicus curiae* before the courts, providing legal analysis and support to victims of discrimination.

The Office for Good Governance within the Office of the Prime Minister coordinates activities related to human rights, including LGBTQI+ rights. This office is responsible for policy development, monitoring the implementation of laws, and cooperating with civil society.

Within this office, an intersectoral working group on LGBTQI+ rights has been established, bringing together representatives of ministries, civil society, and international organizations. This group is responsible for drafting and monitoring the implementation of the National Human Rights Strategy.

3. International Standards and Implementation

Kosovo has committed to upholding international human rights standards, including:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948)

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN, 1966)

The European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1950)

Although Kosovo is not a member of the Council of Europe, many international documents are applied through domestic legislation and political commitments. International organizations such as UNDP, EULEX, OSCE, and the Delegation of the European Union to Kosovo provide technical and financial support to Kosovo's institutions in advancing LGBTQI+ rights protection.



4. Practical Challenges and Discrimination

Despite progress in the legislative framework, LGBTQI+ persons in Kosovo continue to face numerous challenges. Discrimination in education, employment, access to healthcare, and public spaces is prevalent, and hate speech in the media and on social networks often goes unpunished.

Examples from practice include the violent eviction of a gay couple from a rented apartment, physical attacks on activists, and family rejection of young LGBTQI+ persons, resulting in psychological trauma and the need for therapy. During debates on the Civil Code, members of parliament used highly discriminatory language, referring to LGBTQI+ persons as “degeneration” and “diseases.”

5. Role of Civil Society

Non-governmental organizations such as CEL Kosovo (Center for Equality and Liberty) and CSGD (Center for

Social Group Development) play a key role in protecting and promoting the rights of LGBTQI+ persons. They provide legal aid, psychosocial support, conduct educational campaigns, advocate for policy changes, and cooperate with institutions at the local and national levels.

These organizations are also active in documenting cases of discrimination and violence, preparing alternative reports for international mechanisms such as the UN and EU, and organizing public events that promote inclusion and tolerance.

6. Statistical Data and Public Opinion

According to data from organizations such as Equaldex and ERA-LGBTI, Kosovo has a relatively progressive legislative framework but a low level of social acceptance of LGBTQI+ persons. Research shows that a large part of the population expresses negative attitudes toward the



LGBTQI+ community, which hinders their integration and everyday life.

Despite this, the visibility of the LGBTQI+ community is increasing, particularly through the organization of the Pride Parade in Pristina, held since 2017 and bringing together a growing number of participants, including representatives of institutions, international organizations, and civil society. These events contribute to normalizing the presence of LGBTQI+ persons in public spaces.

7. Recommendations for Improvement

To enhance the protection of LGBTQI+ persons in Kosovo, it is recommended to:

- Adopt the Civil Code recognizing same-sex partnerships and regulating their rights.
- Strengthen the capacities of the police, prosecution, and

courts to handle cases of discrimination and violence.

- Introduce human rights education, including sexual orientation and gender identity, into the education system at all levels.
- Increase financial and institutional support for civil society organizations working with the LGBTQI+ community.
- Conduct more active campaigns against hate speech in the media, including monitoring and sanctioning violations.
- Develop local policies that promote the inclusion of LGBTQI+ persons in communities across Kosovo.
- Include LGBTQI+ issues in all relevant strategic documents of the Government of Kosovo, including the Human Rights Protection Program 2021–2025.



Conclusion

Kosovo has made significant progress in legally recognizing the rights of LGBTQI+ persons, but the implementation of laws, institutional efficiency, and social acceptance remain challenges. Coordinated action

by institutions, civil society, the education system, and international partners is needed to ensure full protection, inclusion, and dignity for LGBTQI+ persons in Kosovo's society.



INTRODUCTION

The non-governmental organization Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC) conducted a comprehensive public opinion research study focused on the acceptance and quality of life of the LGBTQI+ community in northern Kosovo. The research was carried out over a three-month period and included three complementary methodological approaches:

- **Questionnaires** — conducted both online and in printed form, in order to reach a wider pool of participants and ensure access for individuals who may not be active online.
- **Focus groups** — held with representatives of different sectors and communities in a controlled and more confidential setting, to deepen the understanding of participants' attitudes, dilemmas, and value frameworks.
- **Interviews** — semi-structured conversations that enabled members of the LGBTQI+ community to share personal experiences, challenges, and their perceptions of life in northern Kosovo.

The aim of the questionnaires was to gather public opinions about the LGBTQI+ community and to determine the level of awareness, attitudes, and degree of acceptance among the local population. The focus groups were designed to enable, through direct dialogue, a more detailed understanding of the perspectives of various social actors and to deepen the findings obtained in the quantitative phase. Interviews with LGBTQI+ community members were crucial for collecting authentic experiences that often remain invisible in the public sphere.

The research presented in this document holds particular significance as it is **the first of its kind in northern Kosovo**. This analysis represents an initial but important step toward a systematic understanding of the position of LGBTQI+ persons in this part of



Kosovo and will serve as a foundation for future initiatives, research activities, and public policies.

The importance of the findings also lies in the fact that this is the first time official data on the experiences and challenges of the LGBTQI+ community in northern Kosovo are being presented. The questionnaire was intentionally designed to be simple and accessible, bearing in mind that this is the first study of its kind and that the topic is sensitive and requires a careful approach. The collected information allows us to observe both the level of public knowledge about LGBTQI+ issues and the degree of social acceptance, as well as the personal experiences of community members — thus providing a comprehensive and balanced insight into the real situation on the ground.

QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS

A total of 360 completed questionnaires were collected, of which 288 responses were obtained through the online form, while 72 participants filled out the printed version. This combination of data collection methods made it possible to reach a broad and diverse group of citizens, including those with limited internet access or those who prefer more traditional forms of participation.

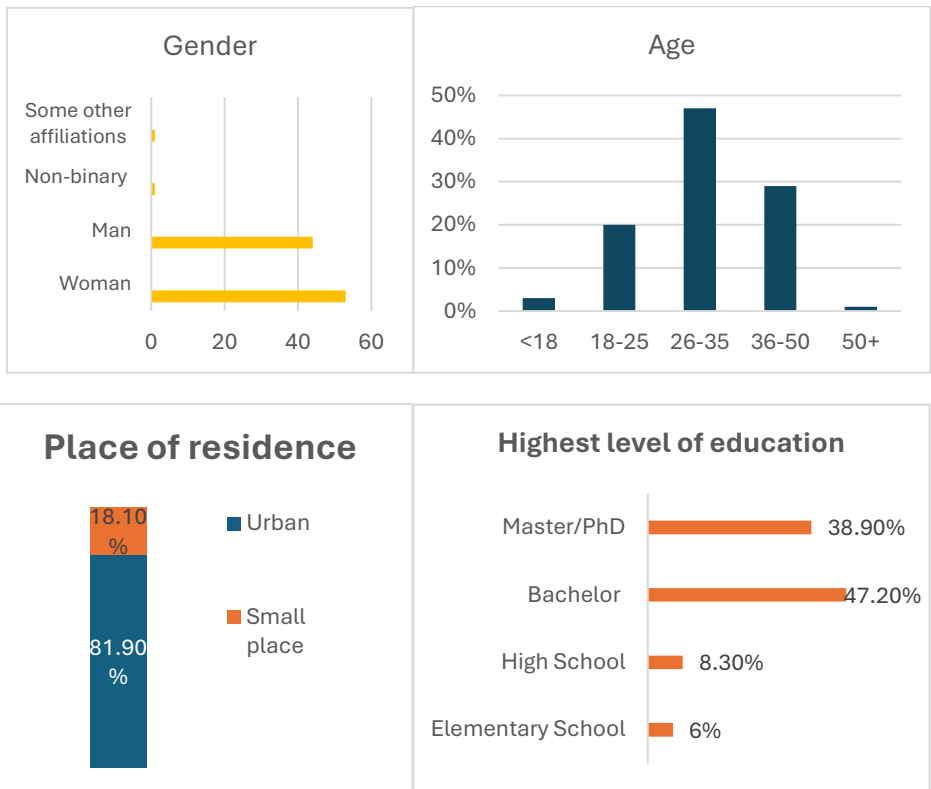
The main goal of the questionnaire was to obtain a clear picture of public opinion in northern Kosovo regarding the LGBTQI+ community. Through carefully selected and designed questions, several key aspects were examined: the level of knowledge among citizens about LGBTQI+ terminology, the understanding of basic concepts related to sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as the level of acceptance and openness toward LGBTQI+ people in everyday life.



The collected responses represent an important starting point for further analyses, as they provide an overview of dominant attitudes, existing uncertainties, and areas where additional efforts are needed to improve knowledge and raise awareness.

Demographics

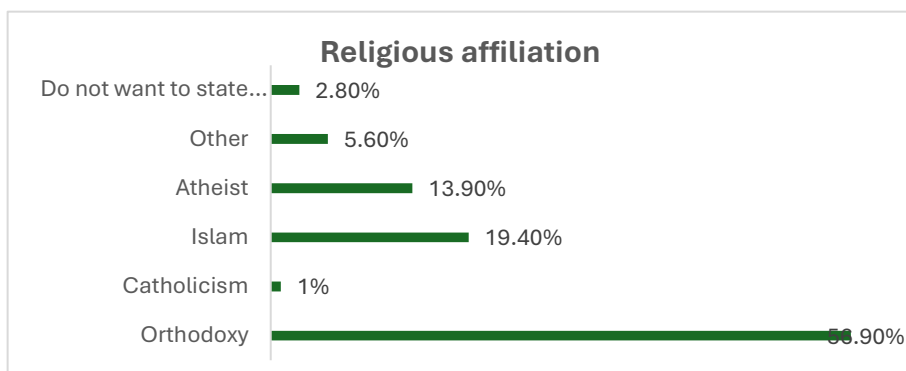
Of the total 360 responses, slightly more than half (53%) identified as women, 44% as men, 1% as non-binary, and 1% as another gender identity, while no participant chose not to answer this question.



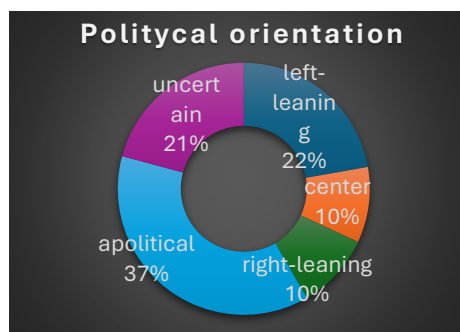
Most participants were between 26 and 35 years old (47%), while the least represented groups were those over 51 (1%) and those under 18 (3%).

A large majority of respondents were from urban areas (82%), while only 18% were from smaller towns.

Respondents were predominantly highly educated: 39% completed master's or doctoral studies, while only 6% completed only primary school. This indicates that the questionnaire largely reflects the opinions of a highly educated, urban, middle-aged population in northern Kosovo.



The majority identified as Orthodox Christians (57%), which corresponds with demographic expectations for northern Kosovo.



A striking 38% of respondents described themselves as apolitical — that is, as people who are not interested in politics at all. This percentage is higher than any other offered option and is therefore very relevant for understanding the broader social context.

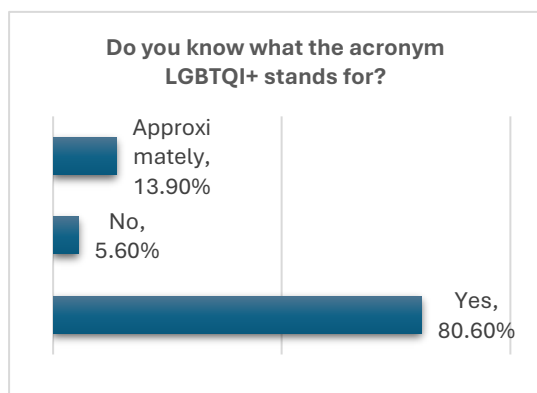


This finding may be interpreted as an indicator of deeper socio-political dynamics in northern Kosovo. A high level of declared political disinterest may signal fatigue caused by long-standing political tensions, a lack of trust in institutions, the feeling that an individual's voice does not matter, or the dominance of political topics perceived as distant from everyday needs.

Practically, this also helps explain why it is often difficult to motivate citizens to participate in social change, initiatives, or activism. When a large portion of the population self-identifies as uninterested, the space for community mobilization becomes limited, directly affecting the effectiveness of campaigns, projects, or reform efforts.

Questions Related to the LGBTQI+ Community

The first question directly relevant to this research concerned the meaning of the abbreviation LGBTQI+. A large majority (81%) said they know what it means, 14% said they approximately know, and only 6% did not know the meaning.



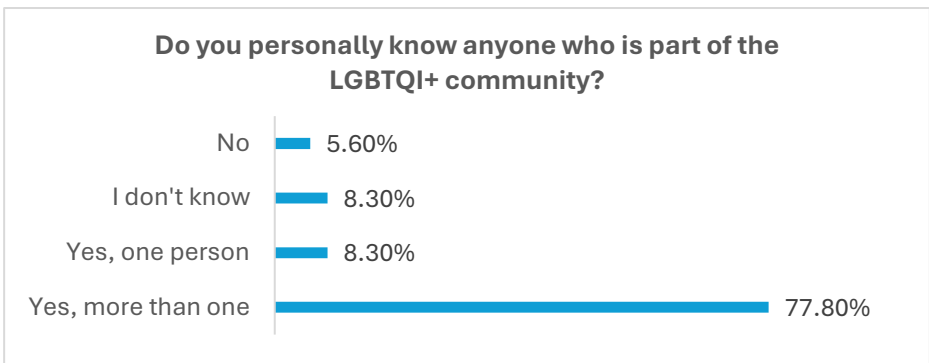
These results are an encouraging sign, both for this and future research. They indicate that the local community is, to some extent, familiar with the existence of the LGBTQI+ community, whether through media, social networks, personal connections, or public discourse.

The fact that the topic is not entirely unfamiliar provides a solid foundation for further work, especially in education, awareness raising, and improving social acceptance.



This level of basic knowledge opens space for more meaningful dialogue and allows future interventions to focus on deepening understanding, breaking stereotypes, and strengthening tolerance. In other words, the research shows that the community is not starting from “zero,” which creates more favorable conditions for future support programs and public campaigns.

Another positive finding is that 78% of respondents personally know more than one LGBTQI+ person.



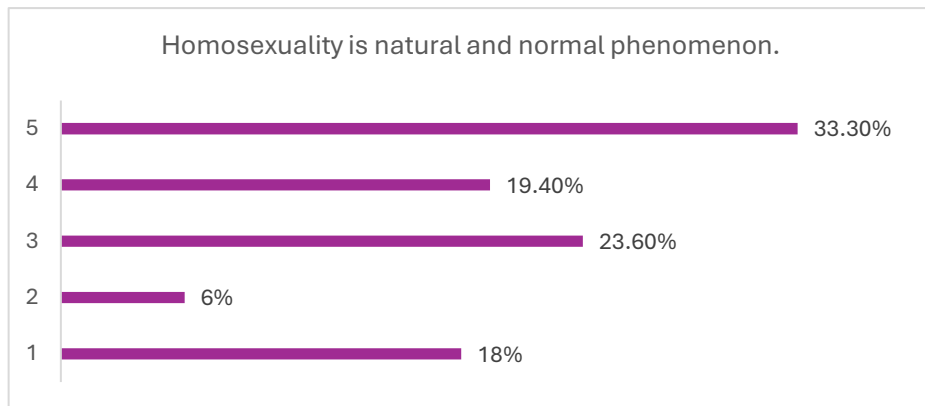
Only 20 respondents reported not knowing anyone from the LGBTQI+ community, which is significantly fewer than expected. This suggests that the topic is present in everyday life more than commonly assumed, through friendships, acquaintances, workplace interactions, or other social connections.

This result allows for an important interpretation: if nearly 80% of citizens have at least indirect contact with LGBTQI+ individuals, there is a higher likelihood that some level of understanding, empathy, or awareness has already been developed. Social research consistently shows that direct contact with marginalized groups often reduces prejudice and fosters more positive attitudes.

Therefore, this finding can be considered an excellent starting point for further action — both for educational campaigns and initiatives aimed at improving the social



climate and encouraging positive change. Existing contact lowers barriers and makes the community more receptive to work on acceptance and inclusion.



The next set of questions was designed as a series of statements, with respondents asked to assess the degree of their agreement or disagreement with each one. A five-point scale was used, allowing for more precise measurement of attitudes and the intensity of opinions. On this scale, the value 5 indicates “strongly agree,” while the value 1 means “strongly disagree.”

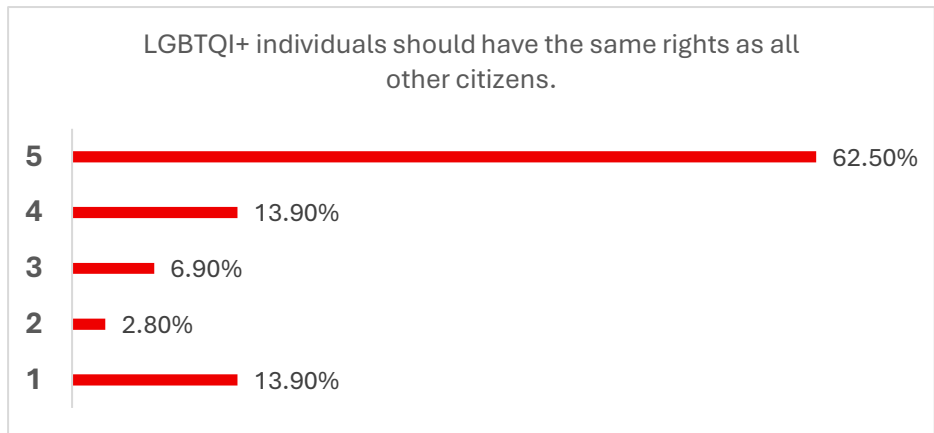
This approach provides a more detailed insight into the nuances of citizens’ views, as it does not measure only binary answers (yes/no), but also the strength of the beliefs behind them. As a result, it offers a higher-quality and more informative data set for subsequent analysis, particularly on a topic that requires understanding of complex social and emotional reactions.

Responses to the first question in this section show significant diversity, with a similar pattern appearing across other statements. Still, the highest share of responses appears in the upper end of the scale, suggesting that many respondents accept homosexuality as a natural phenomenon.



The second most frequent response was 3, which indicates a neutral position (“neither agree nor disagree”). This type of answer represents an interesting and important indicator: it suggests that a significant number of citizens occupy an undecided position, whether due to a lack of information, personal dilemmas, fear of social judgment, or simply insufficient exposure to the topic. This “central” response appears throughout much of this section, further confirming the presence of a broad segment of citizens who still do not take a clear stance on LGBTQI+ issues.

The following findings present a mix of encouraging insights and causes for concern.



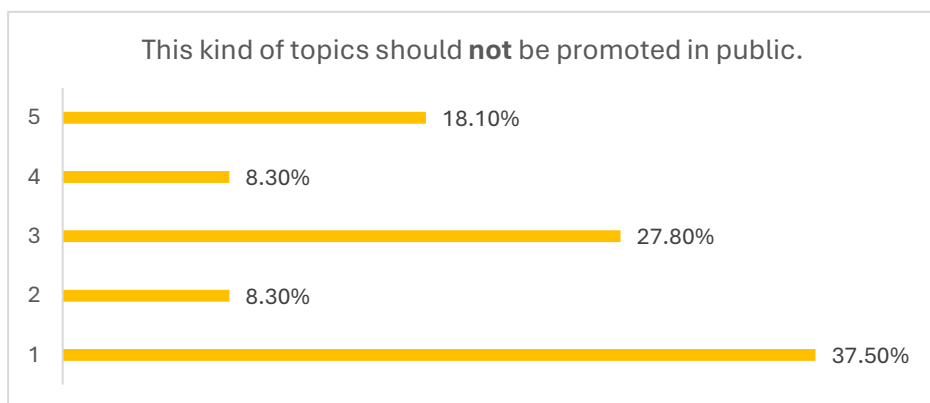
It is encouraging that 63% of respondents fully agree with the statement that LGBTQI+ people should have the same rights as all other citizens, signalling broad support for the principles of equality and basic human rights.

On the other hand, it is concerning that 14% of respondents completely disagreed with this statement. This means that 50 individuals believe the LGBTQI+ community does not deserve the same rights as other members of society — a significant number, especially considering the total sample of 360 participants.



This finding points to the existence of deeply rooted negative attitudes within a portion of the population, representing a serious challenge for all future efforts aimed at advancing human rights and social equality.

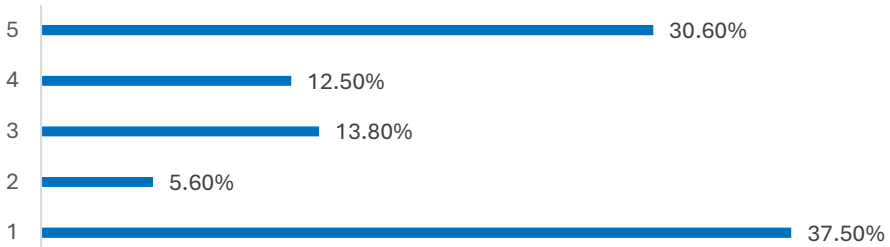
Naturally, the next question concerned the public promotion of these topics. Most respondents believe that such promotion is acceptable, but the proportion of the respondents is not very high – only 38% think this way.



This question is formulated in a negative form, which may be confusing for some respondents and make direct interpretation of the answers more difficult. Since the statement suggests that LGBTQI+ topics “should not be promoted” or should not be discussed, a positive acceptance coefficient is considered when the majority of respondents disagree with this stance. In other words, most citizens implicitly support open discussion on this topic, which serves as an important indicator of the community’s readiness for more inclusive public discourse.



Children in schools should learn about different types of sexuality and identities.



However, despite the majority's disagreement, it is concerning that 65 individuals believe *LGBTQI+ topics should not be discussed publicly*. This represents a significant number of people who still prefer silence, taboo, or disregard on this issue. Such a stance indicates the presence of deeply rooted stigma and social barriers, which can hinder efforts aimed at education, visibility, and the protection of human rights.

The following statement in the questionnaire yields a fascinating result: the number of respondents who completely agree is almost identical to the number of those who completely disagree. Such a symmetrical distribution indicates strong polarization of opinions within the community, with respondents clearly divided into two nearly equal groups—one that strongly supports the statement and another that opposes it just as strongly. This type of result points to the existence of a sensitive and contentious issue within society, where value judgments are expressed at extreme ends, and the “middle ground” is considerably smaller than in previous questions.

The following data show strong polarization regarding the inclusion of diverse identity topics in school curricula. As many as **31% of respondents** fully support the idea that children should learn about sexuality and gender identity in school



However, an almost equally strong but opposite stance comes from **38% of respondents**, who believe that such topics *have no place in the school curriculum*. This group perceives identity-related issues as sensitive, inappropriate for children, or as content that should be kept out of formal education, reflecting the presence of deeply rooted social reservations toward LGBTQI+ topics.

A more detailed look at the distribution of responses is also interesting. When the table is broken down according to degrees of agreement and disagreement, the result is almost perfectly symmetrical:

- **43.1% of respondents** *somewhat agree* with the statement,
- **43.1% of respondents** *somewhat disagree*,
- while **13.8%** remain in the *undecided* category.

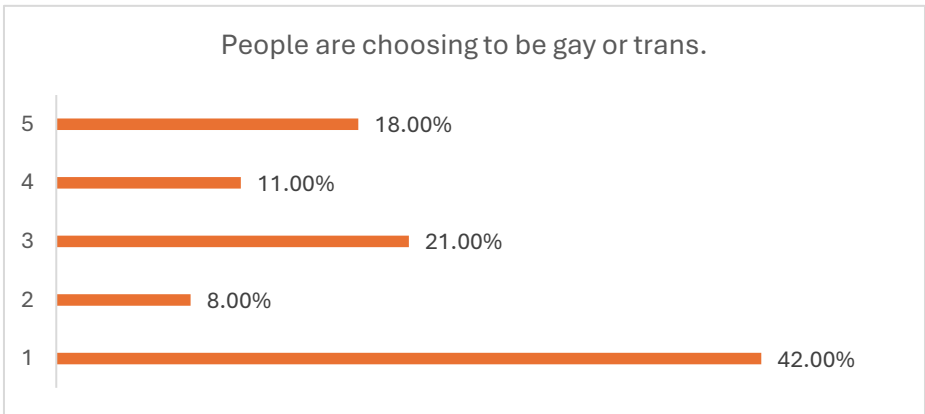
Such a distribution indicates emphasized social division and clearly formed opinions at both ends of the spectrum. At the same time, the relatively small percentage of undecided respondents shows that the topic is sufficiently present and “emotionally charged” for most citizens to already hold a position—whether positive or negative. This is important information for the design of future educational programs, campaigns, and public policies, as it suggests that even small shifts in communication could significantly influence one of the two equally strong sides.

One positive observation can be highlighted in this segment of the results: a larger percentage of respondents fall into the lower agreement ratings with the statement that sexual orientation and gender identity are a matter of free choice. This indicates that a significant portion of the population recognizes that sexuality and gender identity are



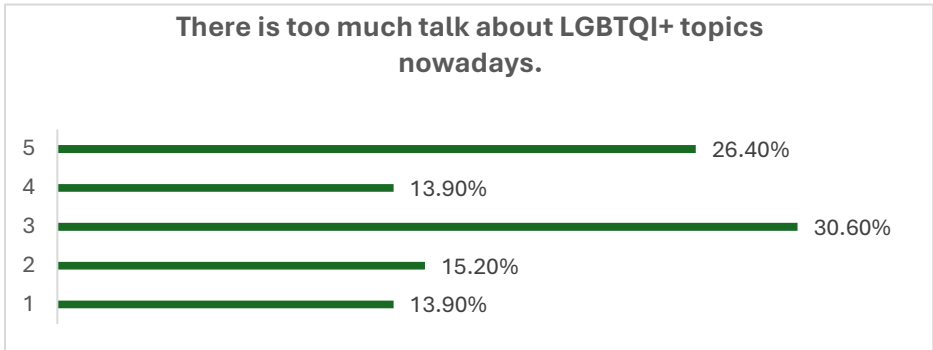
complex dimensions of personality, not simply a matter of personal decision or current preference.

However, a concerning finding is that as many as **29% of citizens** still believe that sexual orientation and gender identity can be “chosen.” This percentage indicates the presence of deeply rooted misconceptions and a lack of awareness about basic facts that have long been established in psychology, medicine, and contemporary social sciences. Such beliefs can contribute to stigma, false expectations, and discriminatory attitudes toward LGBTQI+ people.



Additionally, it is surprising that **21% of respondents** take a neutral stance (“neither agree nor disagree”). This percentage suggests that a significant portion of citizens is either insufficiently informed about the concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity or simply has no formed opinion on the matter. Such a result strongly implies that in northern Kosovo, it is essential to invest in education and public information to provide citizens with basic, scientifically grounded knowledge and reduce the space for misunderstandings. Together, these data point to a real need for continuous awareness-raising efforts, as tolerance and social support cannot be built without adequate understanding.





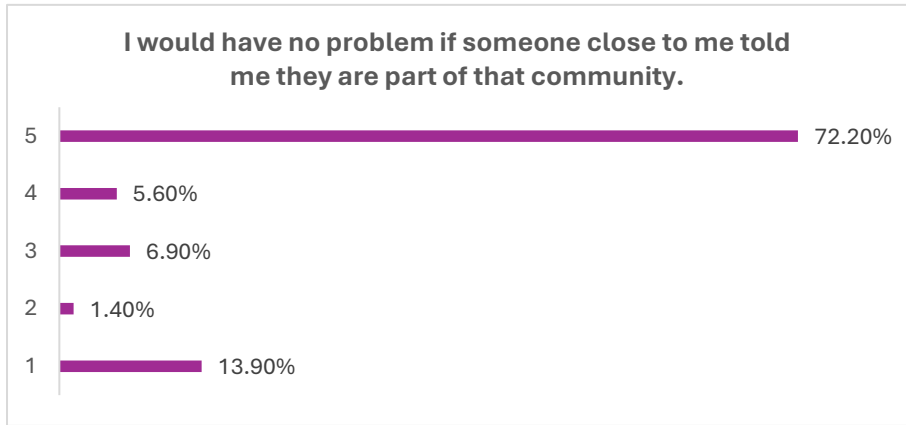
This statement proved to be the most polarizing in the entire questionnaire. No single response option received an absolute majority, and answers were spread across the entire scale, indicating a strong division of opinions among respondents. The largest number of participants fell in the middle of the scale—those who were unsure whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement. This suggests a high degree of indecision, as well as a certain level of confusion or lack of information on the topic itself.

However, a particularly concerning finding is that 26% of respondents firmly believe that “there’s too much talk” about the LGBTQI+ community. This stance is especially significant given the objective fact that, by June 2025, no events, initiatives, research, or projects dedicated to LGBTQI+ topics had been held in northern Kosovo. This contrast reveals a perception that any visibility of the community—even minimal—can be perceived as “too much,” highlighting societal sensitivity to the issue and indicating that visibility itself is often seen as an unwanted pressure.

On the other hand, the next finding brings a note of optimism and opens the space for a more positive narrative of acceptance. As many as 72% of respondents stated that they would have no objection if a close person disclosed that they are part of the LGBTQI+ community. This clearly indicates that, despite divisions around public visibility of the topic, the majority of citizens demonstrate a high level of personal tolerance on a micro-social level—within family, friendship, and close relationships.

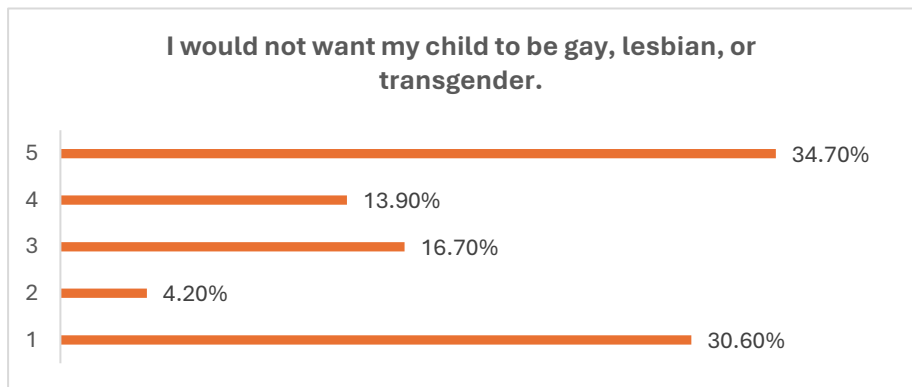


This is an extremely important resource for future initiatives, as it shows that the potential for social change exists precisely in the realm of personal interactions and interpersonal connections.



Empathy is clearly already present among the residents of northern Kosovo, representing an important first step toward future initiatives for positive change.

Unfortunately, the following response does not yield such positive results.



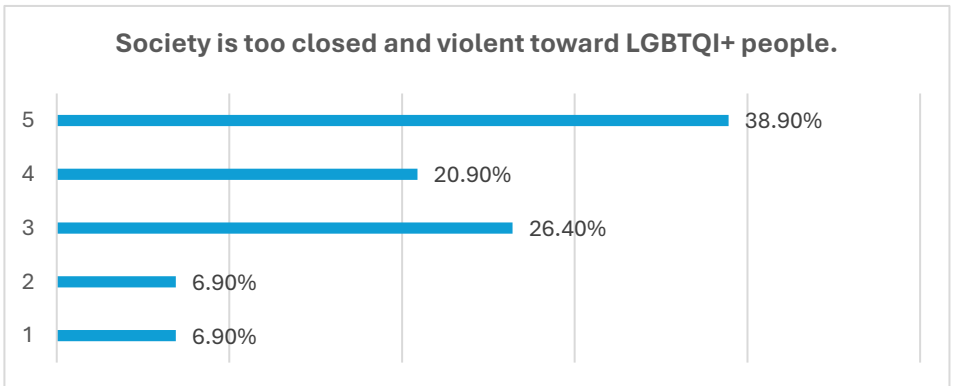
The results show that the majority of respondents are distributed across the two extreme response categories, indicating strong and clearly defined opinions on this



issue. Notably, 34.7% of respondents consider it unacceptable for their child to be part of the LGBTQI+ community. This percentage represents the largest group for this question and clearly highlights that parental acceptance remains an extremely sensitive area.

This result suggests that, although some previous questions indicate a relatively high level of tolerance toward LGBTQI+ individuals in the context of friendship or social relationships, when the topic moves into the realm of family intimacy, reactions become significantly more restrictive. This is a common pattern in research of this nature and reflects deeply rooted social norms and fears related to parental expectations, societal pressures, and concerns about the child's safety in a more conservative environment.

This finding is important for the planning of interventions and campaigns, as it indicates that efforts must focus not only on general tolerance but also on fostering understanding and support within family frameworks—the spaces where LGBTQI+ individuals most often experience both their first support and their first discrimination.



Based on the responses to this question, it can be concluded that a significant portion of society recognizes the problem of invisibility faced by LGBTQI+ individuals, as well as the various forms of violence and discrimination to which they are subjected.



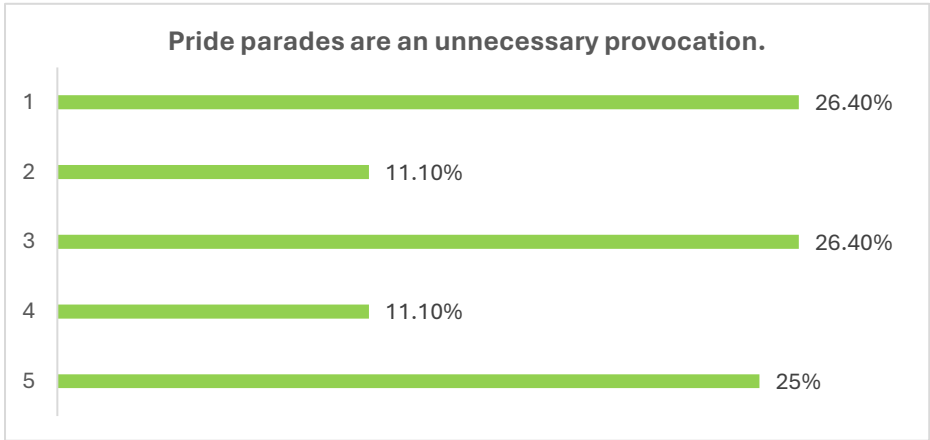
This belief is reflected in the fact that over 50% of respondents placed themselves in the upper part of the agreement scale, expressing clear awareness of the challenges the community faces.

Such a result indicates that, despite limited public visibility and a lack of institutional initiatives on this topic, citizens in northern Kosovo still recognize the existence of systemic and social barriers affecting the quality of life of LGBTQI+ people. This points to latent empathy and understanding of the situation, even among those who may not have direct contact with members of the community.

This finding represents an important indicator that a segment of the population is ready to accept arguments and information regarding the needs, rights, and status of LGBTQI+ individuals, providing a solid foundation for future campaigns, educational programs, and public discussions aimed at reducing discrimination and improving safety.

However, despite a certain level of awareness about the challenges faced by the LGBTQI+ community, a significant number of respondents still consider Pride parades an unnecessary provocation. This stance indicates that part of the population does not recognize the real significance of such events, nor do they understand their role in the struggle for equality, visibility, and community safety.





The perception of Pride as a provocative event often stems from a lack of information about its historical and social context—namely, that these manifestations emerged in response to systemic violence, discrimination, and unequal treatment of LGBTQI+ individuals. Therefore, this finding highlights the need for further education to better explain that Pride is not an act of provocation, but an expression of the collective struggle for fundamental human rights, freedom of identity, and equal visibility in public spaces.

This data also suggests a significant gap between theoretical awareness of the community's problems and understanding of the concrete mechanisms through which these issues are addressed, which is crucial for planning future campaigns and public initiatives.



The influence of education on tolerance and understanding

When comparing the views of respondents with different levels of education, it becomes evident that higher levels of education generally go hand in hand with greater tolerance and understanding toward LGBTQI+ individuals.

1. Meaning of the acronym LGBTQI+ (Do you know what it means?)

Level of Education	Yes	Kind of	No
Higher (Bachelor's, Master's)	~90%	~8%	~2%
Secondary (High school)	~75%	~15%	~10%
Lower (Primary school)	~50%	~25%	~25%

Conclusion: Familiarity with the term correlates with the level of education. Half of the respondents with only a primary education do not know its meaning.

2. "Homosexuality is a natural and normal occurrence."

(Here, the proportion of those who agree is considered — responses 4 and 5 on a scale from 1 to 5.)

Level of Education	Agreement (Scores 4 & 5)	Neutral (Score 3)	Disagreement (Scores 1 & 2)
Higher (Bachelor's, Master's)	~75%	~15%	~10%
Secondary (High school)	~55%	~20%	~25%
Lower (Primary school)	~25%	~25%	~50%



Conclusion: The view that homosexuality is natural is directly correlated with education. Among highly educated respondents, 3 out of 4 agree with this statement, while among those with primary education, only 1 in 4 agrees.

3. “LGBTQI+ people should have equal rights.”

(Here, the proportion of those who agree is considered — responses 4 and 5 on a scale from 1 to 5.)

Level of Education	Agreement (Scores 4 & 5)	Neutral (Score 3)	Disagreement (Scores 1 & 2)
Higher (Bachelor’s, Master’s)	~85%	~10%	~5%
Secondary (High school)	~70%	~15%	~15%
Lower (Primary school)	~50%	~25%	~25%

Conclusion: Support for equal rights is exceptionally strong among more educated groups. As many as 85% of highly educated respondents support equal rights, which is the clearest indicator of the impact of education.

The data clearly show that the level of formal education is one of the strongest factors shaping awareness, acceptance, and support for the LGBTQI+ community.

The difference in attitudes between respondents with higher and primary education is strong and consistent across all three examined aspects.

Conclusions



Based on the results of the questionnaire, several key findings can be drawn, offering a complex yet clear picture of the attitudes of citizens in northern Kosovo toward the LGBTQI+ community:

- **Citizens recognize that problems exist, but lack sufficient knowledge about the topic.**

Respondents demonstrate some awareness of the challenges faced by LGBTQI+ individuals, but at the same time, a large portion of the population lacks adequate understanding of the concepts of gender identity and sexual orientation. This lack of information leaves substantial room for stereotypes and misconceptions..

- **Empathy is present, but not open tolerance toward public visibility of the community.**

The results indicate that citizens generally do not express open hostility towards LGBTQI+ people, but are significantly reserved about their visibility in public space. In other words, empathy exists - as long as it does not involve public speaking or collective representation of the community.

- **Personal tolerance is higher within close social circles, but decreases significantly when it concerns one's own child.**

Most respondents would have no issue if a close friend or acquaintance belonged to the LGBTQI+ community. However, the same does not apply when the matter concerns their own children, pointing to strong social norms and parental fears shaped by conservative surroundings.

- **A large number of respondents believe that sexuality and gender are a matter of personal choice — or have no opinion at all.**



These findings point to a serious deficit in knowledge about fundamental aspects of human identity, further emphasizing the need for education. At the same time, many respondents believe such topics do not belong in the school curriculum, revealing a contradiction in attitudes.

- **There is awareness of social exclusion and violence against LGBTQI+ people, yet Pride parades are perceived as provocation.**

Respondents acknowledge the existence of discrimination, but do not support visibility mechanisms and advocacy tools such as Pride. This ambivalence points to a lack of understanding of the purpose and historical significance of public demonstrations.

- **Level of education strongly influences attitudes.**

Individuals with higher education demonstrate significantly greater tolerance, better understanding of gender and sexuality concepts, and greater acceptance of LGBTQI+ people both in public life and within their families.

Based on all the findings, one overarching conclusion emerges:

Northern Kosovo urgently needs high-quality, continuous, and inclusive education on LGBTQI+ rights, as well as increased visibility of the community through real stories, content, initiatives, and presence in the public sphere.

Citizens must be given opportunities to learn about the real lives of queer people and, through direct information and humanized examples, gradually develop more positive, stable, and informed attitudes.



FOCUS GROUPS

A total of three focus groups were conducted with participants representing different communities, sectors, and areas of expertise. The primary goal of these discussions was to gather more detailed, personal, and context-specific information about the attitudes, knowledge, and experiences of residents in northern Kosovo regarding the LGBTQI+ community. The focus groups made it possible to complement the quantitative data from the survey with real voices, nuances often absent from statistics, and explanations that shed more light on everyday social realities.

The first and nearly universal point of agreement among participants was the view that LGBTQI+ issues are insufficiently discussed in northern Kosovo. Participants emphasized that the topic is almost invisible in the public sphere and that information on LGBTQI+ matters is scarce or superficial. This impression was further reinforced by reflections on local media, where it was pointed out that these topics are almost never covered. However, it is important to note that local media representatives who took part in the focus groups expressed readiness to provide space for interviews with LGBTQI+ community members and to follow events, initiatives, and human rights issues related to the community. This shows that there is potential for improving visibility — provided that trust, safety, and adequate support are established.

The most troubling finding from this phase of the research concerns the complete invisibility of LGBTQI+ persons in the public and semi-public sphere in northern Kosovo. Focus group participants stated that they do not know a single person from the community who has openly declared their identity. This total absence of “out” community members further reveals the level of stigma, fear, and perceived risk within the local environment.



A similar situation was noted regarding transgender persons. Participants reported that they do not know anyone from northern Kosovo who is undergoing or has completed medical transition. They said that they have “never heard of” a trans person in their community, although there are individuals who are “assumed” or “suspected” to possibly belong to the trans community. These statements point to profound social invisibility, as well as the existence of taboos that prevent open discussion, support, and understanding.

This part of the research clearly shows that LGBTQI+ persons in northern Kosovo live within an environment of concealment, fear of discrimination, and the absence of public spaces where they could freely express their identity. As the findings demonstrate, invisibility does not mean that the community does not exist — rather, it reflects a society that is still not safe for living openly.

„Generally, openly declared transgender persons are not known in northern Kosovo, but there are several examples of people who behave and dress in ways that differ from the sex assigned at birth.“

Most focus group participants said they know at least one person who belongs to the LGBTQI+ community, but that these individuals are not publicly out and share their identity only with close friends or family members. The wider community is largely unaware of this, which maintains complete discretion. This pattern clearly shows that the community’s visibility is extremely limited and that coming out publicly still carries a high level of perceived risk.

During the discussions, participants frequently referred to assumptions and unspoken suspicions that certain people in their surroundings might belong to the LGBTQI+ community — including individuals from their closest social circles. They described a



situation in which there is a kind of “informal knowledge,” based on intuition and subtle signs, but where other people’s identities are never openly discussed. This atmosphere of semi-understanding and silent agreement reflects a social context in which many LGBTQI+ identities remain private — not because individuals wish it, but because openness is perceived as potentially dangerous.

This finding clearly indicates that the invisibility of the LGBTQI+ community in northern Kosovo is not the result of its nonexistence, but a direct reflection of a social climate in which publicly expressing one’s identity is burdened by fear of stigma, rejection, or discrimination. The focus groups therefore highlight the urgent need to create safe spaces, support systems, and positive role models of visibility that could gradually reduce the pressure to remain hidden and open space for normalizing diverse identities.

„There are people who have confided in us and others who do not want to talk about it. In our environment, we all have people we suspect, but we cannot claim someone belongs to the community until they declare it themselves.”

A frequent topic during the focus groups was the relocation of LGBTQI+ persons to larger cities in search of a better and safer life. Participants attributed such migration to the characteristics of the environment in northern Kosovo, which they described as “small,” closed, and prone to more intense prejudice. In their view, stigmatization is particularly pronounced in smaller communities, where anonymity is almost nonexistent, significantly affecting the quality of life of LGBTQI+ individuals. As an illustration of better acceptance in bigger cities, participants mentioned the presence of clubs, pubs, and safe spaces in places like Belgrade and Prishtina, where the community gathers more openly and safely than in northern Kosovo.



Another important topic was violence against LGBTQI+ persons. Interestingly, in the early stages of discussion, participants initially claimed they “did not know” of any examples of violence. But as the discussion progressed, they increasingly recalled concrete situations that clearly constituted violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity. This dynamic — from initial denial to later recollection — is particularly telling and suggests that violence is either normalized, pushed “under the rug,” or so taboo that people initially fail to recognize what counts as violence.

Participants described a case of a teacher in a school in North Mitrovica who is assumed to belong to the LGBTQI+ community. According to them, students have verbally abused him for years, with much of this information originating from within their families. Despite the long-term and ongoing abuse, no official proceedings were initiated, nor did the school take concrete measures to protect the employee. Participants noted that the school is “aware of the problem,” further highlighting the seriousness of the situation and the lack of institutional response.

Another case concerns a video of a sexual act between two young men — suspected to be minors — which circulated on social media among northern Kosovo residents during the past year. Although this was a serious violation of privacy, a potential case of exploitation, and a threat to minors, the public did not react, nor was any police procedure initiated. No media outlet published a story about the case, further confirming the absence of institutional response.

It was later learned that both young men were persons with disabilities, from economically vulnerable family belonging to a minority ethnic community. The only official response came from a social worker outside the Kosovo institutional system, who arranged a personal assistant to help them travel to and from school due to their vulnerable position. Instead of viewing the incident through the lens of their social,



health, and safety needs, the public discourse focused solely on the assumption that the boys were homosexual, further exacerbating their already vulnerable situation.

„For true change in the position of the LGBT community, it is crucial to reshape the family, educational, and social systems. From the earliest age, children are taught to fit in and never stand out. This is especially pronounced in northern Kosovo, where the patriarchal system values individuals only if they adhere strictly to entrenched stigmas.”

Beyond visibility, violence, and migration, the focus groups also covered several additional important topics: **mental health, intersex persons, and institutional protection.**

Mental health as a key challenge

Representatives of mental health centers, social workers, and NGO members emphasized that mental health is one of the most neglected yet most important issues for the LGBTQI+ community in northern Kosovo. Participants stressed that mental health is rarely discussed in the local environment in general, and even less in the context of LGBTQI+ experiences.

The main causes of the problem identified were:

- lack of open discussion about mental health,
- an underdeveloped system of free psychological support,
- absence of experts trained to work with the LGBTQI+ community,



- fear and stigma that prevent community members from seeking institutional help.

According to participants, access to quality psychological support would significantly improve the quality of life for LGBTQI+ persons, particularly those facing family rejection, peer violence, social isolation, or internal conflicts related to identity. They also noted that raising awareness about mental health within the broader community would reduce stigmatization and prejudice, as well as the number of attacks and discriminatory situations targeting LGBTQI+ individuals.

Linguistic and professional inaccessibility of support

One of the key problems identified by the participants is the lack of free psychological support in the Serbian language within Kosovo's institutional system — especially support competent in LGBTQI+ issues. Since Serbian is the mother tongue of most residents in northern Kosovo, this represents a serious systemic barrier.

The lack of support in one's native language further complicates:

- seeking help,
- confidential communication about sensitive issues,
- understanding psychological counselling processes,
- building long-term relationships of trust between users and professionals.

Participants emphasized that LGBTQI+ persons often lack trust in available institutions because they do not believe they will be approached with understanding, expertise, or without prejudice. The absence of LGBTQI+-competent psychologists and counsellors in their native language deepens feelings of isolation and insecurity.



“In our environment, we still do not have adequate psychological support for this community, and that is precisely why I recognized mental health as a key need in my activism, especially among young people who have gone through an extremely difficult path. It is important to clearly identify the problems and involve psychologists, sociologists, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists, because each plays a role in improving society’s mental hygiene. Anxiety levels here are generally higher than in other communities, and the lack of discussion only worsens the situation — which is why education and professional support are necessary to reach every layer of society, including the LGBT community.”

When it comes to intersex persons, focus group participants demonstrated limited understanding of the concept. Most had only a vague idea of the term’s meaning, without confidence in the details. Predictably, some participants had never heard the term before, while others said they had heard it but did not know what it actually refers to.

Among those familiar with the concept, the dominant belief was that intersex variations refer exclusively to situations in which a person has both sets of external genitalia. This misconception is common and stems from a lack of formal education about biological sex and bodily variation.

After a professional explanation was provided — that intersex persons have biological characteristics of both sexes, which may manifest in:

- external genitalia,
- internal reproductive organs,
- hormone balance,



- and even chromosomes — most participants were genuinely surprised.

Participants were particularly struck by the information that intersex variations are not rare, but occur in around 2% of the global population*, which is roughly equal to the prevalence of people with red hair. They also noted that they had never learned about this in school, not even in biology classes, confirming that the formal education system does not provide adequate knowledge about sex characteristics. As a result, many lived under the misconception that only two chromosomal sexes (XX and XY) exist, whereas the reality is far more complex.

“A baby with both sets of genitalia was recently born in the Mitrovica maternity ward. The parents were shocked and didn’t know how to approach the situation.

I don’t know how it ended, but the process took some time.”

The final topic discussed in the focus groups concerned the reaction and support of institutions in cases related to the LGBTQI+ community. Across all three focus groups, participants agreed that institutions provide virtually no meaningful support and do not actively work to improve the quality of life of LGBTQI+ persons in northern Kosovo. In their view, this lack of institutional engagement stems not only from inaction but also from the broader social context in which the LGBTQI+ community is marginalized and invisible.

Although participants did not provide examples of direct discrimination by institutions, almost all expressed a strong belief that belonging to the LGBTQI+ community would negatively influence institutional treatment if someone were to seek help. This belief is based on their previous experiences with institutional responses to other forms of violence, particularly gender-based violence against women.



Participants repeatedly emphasized that, in their experience, the Kosovo Police is often slow, inadequate, or uninterested in addressing cases of violence against women. Based on this, they concluded that the police response to violence motivated by sexual orientation or gender identity would be equally poor — if not worse. In other words, there is deep distrust in the capacity and willingness of institutions to protect members of the LGBTQI+ community, even when their safety is directly threatened.

„I believe that in cases of physical attacks on LGBT persons or their property, the majority of people would report such incidents to the police, but they would omit the motive for the attack — their sexual identity. The victim would want the motive to remain unknown because they would fear the reaction of the community they live in. Police officers must undergo training on this topic!”

The conclusion of each focus group was extremely consistent and fully aligned with the findings from the first two components of the research. Regardless of the participants’ backgrounds, discussion topics, or personal experiences, the message that appeared across all sessions was clear and unequivocal:

Education is absolutely essential — both for the general public and for professionals within institutions.

Participants emphasized that:



- the lack of knowledge and accurate information is the main source of fear, prejudice, and misconceptions,
- improving knowledge within institutions (police, schools, social work centers, local administration) directly contributes to better safety and quality of life for the LGBTQI+ community,
- continuous education and sensitization should include both formal and informal channels, including media, educational institutions, and civil society organizations.

Participants stressed that without systemic investment in education, there will be no long-term change in attitudes, no increase in institutional trust, and no reduction in stigma. Education was seen as the fundamental prerequisite for creating a safer, more inclusive, and better-informed community.



INTERVIEWS

This part of the research proved to be the most challenging to carry out, as it was difficult to find members of the LGBTQI+ community from the north who were willing to answer questions about their sexual and gender identity. In the end, volunteers were successfully found, and a total of ten interviews were conducted. For the protection of personal data, privacy, and safety reasons, all interviewees remained anonymous.

AGE	19-28			
GENDER	Women: 4	Men: 4	Nonbinary: 2	
PLACE OF RESIDENCE	North Kosovo			
OUTNESS	Outed: 2	Closeted: 8		
SEXUALITY	Bisexual/Pansexual: 6	Lesbians: 2	Gay: 1	Queer: 1

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A total of ten people participated in the interviews, including four women, four men, and two nonbinary individuals. Regarding sexual orientation, the most represented were bisexual and pansexual individuals — six in total. In addition, two participants



identified as lesbians, one person as gay, and one used the term “queer” as their preferred form of self-identification. All respondents fall within the legal category of youth, with ages ranging from 19 to 28. During the research, attempts were made to include older individuals as well, but no one above this age range agreed to participate, without further explanation, which in itself speaks to the fear, distrust, or sense of insecurity present among older members of the community.

The most striking — yet also the most expected — finding relates to the fact that most respondents are not outed. The most common answer was: “A few of my closest friends know,” while only two people are fully open about their identity. This clearly reflects the social climate in northern Kosovo, where coming out remains an extremely risky step with potentially serious consequences for one’s social life, safety, and emotional well-being.

It is disheartening that none of the interviewees sees their long-term future in northern Kosovo as a realistic possibility. All respondents either actively plan to move or are at least considering the option, and not a single person expressed willingness to stay. This trend points to a deep sense of insecurity and a lack of perspective, especially among young people who, under more stable circumstances, would represent agents of change and progressive social developments.

When it comes to personal experiences, none of the respondents reported experiencing direct physical violence, but eight out of ten stated that they had experienced various forms of everyday discrimination — from “joking” insults, to having their identity ignored and appropriate terms refused, to witnessing the mocking of LGBTQI+ people in their presence or overhearing derogatory comments about themselves that were not said directly to them. Those who reported no difficulties are generally completely closeted; their identity is known to just one person or to no one at all, placing them in a position of “invisibility” that shields them from direct attacks but simultaneously deprives them of the possibility of an authentic and free life.



Not a single respondent feels fully safe being who they are in northern Kosovo. Their sense of security comes primarily from private relationships — the support of close persons or the coping strategies they have developed to navigate the challenges their queer identity brings in a hostile environment. As an important positive element, participants highlighted the existence of interpersonal connection: all respondents maintain contact with other members of the LGBTQI+ community, both in northern Kosovo and beyond, and many receive support at home as well, which is invaluable despite the limitations and challenges of their surroundings.

It must be noted, however, that this is a relatively small sample. It is very likely that many more LGBTQI+ individuals remain completely invisible, with more difficult experiences, whom we were unable to reach due to fear, stigma, or distrust in any form of research, even when anonymous. Additionally, a number of people who were invited to participate declined, further confirming the assumption that most of the community remains deeply fearful and insecure.

Despite all differences in experiences and identities, all ten interview participants agreed on one thing: education is the most important and first necessary step that northern Kosovo must take. In their view, without educating the public, institutions, and professionals, it will be impossible to create even minimal conditions of safety, understanding, and dignified life for LGBTQI+ people.



Conclusions

Based on the interview results, it is evident that projects focused on the LGBTQI+ community are of crucial importance for northern Kosovo. It is necessary to intensify work directly with community members, provide them with psychological, social, and institutional support, and establish protection mechanisms that have so far been neither functional nor accessible in practice. Equally important is the education of the entire population on LGBTQI+ issues, as only through continuous information and exposure to real-life stories of queer people can society develop understanding of diversity and recognize the challenges these individuals face daily.

The interviews show that LGBTQI+ individuals do not feel safe in public spaces, while at the same time, there is no safe and inclusive space in northern Kosovo where they can gather, exchange experiences, and build support networks. The absence of such spaces further deepens the sense of isolation and, consequently, the vulnerability of the community.

Overall, the findings indicate that northern Kosovo needs a comprehensive and systemic approach: work with the general population to reduce stigma, the implementation of additional and deeper research that would include those community members who remain completely invisible, as well as the establishment of new support and protection structures. Without these key steps, LGBTQI+ people will remain exposed to marginalization and forced to live in an environment where their identities are neither safe nor recognized.



MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Awareness and knowledge:

- 81% of respondents understand the meaning of the acronym LGBTQI+.
- 78% personally know several people who belong to the community.
- Education proved to be a key factor, as highly educated individuals are significantly more tolerant.

Public attitudes:

- 63% believe that LGBTQI+ people should enjoy the same rights as other citizens.
- 72% would not mind if someone close to them disclosed belonging to the community.
- However, 35% would not want their child to be gay, lesbian, or transgender.
- Around 30% of respondents remain undecided on many questions.

Reality of the community:

- No member of the community from northern Kosovo is fully open about their identity in public.
- None of the interviewees consider life in the north a realistic long-term option.
- All interview participants either plan to relocate or are seriously considering it.
- The community is almost completely invisible in public space.



Violence and discrimination:

- Cases of peer violence in schools were reported, based on presumed sexual orientation or identity.
- Long-term verbal abuse of a teacher was documented due to his sexual orientation.
- An intimate video of underage boys was shared without any consequences for the perpetrators.
- Hate speech in local media often goes unaddressed by institutions.

Key Problems

- **Invisibility** – LGBTQI+ people in the north do not disclose their identity due to fear.
- **Lack of education** – a large portion of citizens does not have a formed opinion on the topic.
- **Institutional inefficiency** – the police and other institutions are not trained to work with the community.
- **Lack of support** – no psychological support exists in the Serbian language, and there are no safe spaces for gathering.
- **Patriarchal system** – traditional attitudes and social stigma hinder acceptance.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The most important conclusion of this research is the need for a deeper understanding, additional projects, studies, initiatives, support systems, and protection mechanisms for the community, as well as continuous education on LGBTQI+ topics and human rights. In addition, the responses indicate that institutions must make an extra effort to demonstrate a clear commitment to the inclusion of the LGBTQI+ community.

The research confirmed the assumptions we initially had — the quality of life of the LGBTQI+ community in northern Kosovo is not at a satisfactory level. The environment displays a low level of tolerance toward visible expressions of LGBTQI+ identity, which is why most community members are not open about it. As a result, many are considering moving to larger cities, or have already left northern Kosovo.

Most participants in this research state that they know at least one person who belongs to the community, and that they would not mind if someone close to them disclosed that they are part of it. As many as 31% of survey respondents say they would not mind if their child belonged to the community. These are encouraging findings, as they show that a noticeable degree of empathy already exists among residents of northern Kosovo — suggesting that we are at the beginning of a path toward meaningful change.

Since this is the first research of its kind on this topic in northern Kosovo, comparisons cannot be made. For this reason, it would be beneficial to continue conducting similar studies in order to monitor trends in public opinion and the experiences of community members in the future.

