

# **Summary Results of the Social and Economic Problems of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) Individuals in Turkey Research**

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## **Abstract**

Social and Economic Problems of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) Individuals in Turkey Research offers insight to social and economic problems that LGBT individuals face due to the discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Results of the research report diverse forms of discrimination that LGBT individuals encounter in various domains of social policies including employment, health, education, income poverty, housing, participation in the social life, family and ageing. While reporting different forms of discrimination from the perspective of LGBT individuals, the research also demonstrates that the legal system falls short of tackling these forms of discrimination again in the eyes of LGBT individuals.

## **Introduction**

Social and Economic Problems of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) Individuals in Turkey was a joint research project that was conducted by Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (SPoD) and Boğaziçi University Social Policy Forum (SPF).

2875 individuals participated in the online survey[1] and 14 focus group interviews with over 200 people were conducted in 10 cities (İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Eskişehir, Gaziantep, Trabzon, Adana, Antalya, Mersin, Edirne).

We would like to note that it is not possible to conduct a nationally representative survey on LGBT individuals due to the fact that coming out[2] is not easy for many LGBT individuals in Turkey. Therefore, the findings of this study provide information mainly on the individuals who participated in this study and only offer insights to the social and economic problems that LGBT people face in Turkey.

General information about the participants of the survey is as follows:

- 2875 individuals residing in Turkey, who are citizens of the Republic of Turkey and defining themselves as either lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans participated in the online survey.
- 49.8 per cent of respondents is in the age group between 18-25, 31 per cent is in the age group between 26-35, 12.9 per cent is in the age group are between 36-46, and 6.3 per cent is in the age group over 46.
- LGBT individuals from all cities of Turkey, except four, participated in the survey.

- Nearly 90 per cent of the participants identified themselves as gay, lesbian and bisexual, whereas 10 per cent identified themselves as trans individuals.
- Nearly half of the respondents are still students whereas the other half is not.

Below you can find the summary results of the survey organised alongside with the themes that the survey covers:

### **Employment**

- 62.9 per cent of the participants (1803 individuals) reported that they have been employed in the last three months.
- LGBT individuals are represented in nearly every field of employment including but not limited to daily work, medical doctors, civil servants and self-employment.
- 8.9 per cent of the participants (257 individuals) reported that they have been discriminated in their workplace in the last year.
- 8.4 per cent of the participants (241 individuals) reported that they were discriminated while searching for a job.
- The percentage of participants who are not open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity at work is 78.9 (1555 individuals).
- 55.7 per cent of participants (914 individuals) reported that they have seen or heard that a colleague received negative comments/reaction at work against their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 29.1 per cent of the participants (371 individuals) stated that they were treated unfairly in terms of working conditions and salary (leave, retirement etc.) because they had a same sex partner.
- 5.8 per cent of the participants (167 individuals) reported that they could not practice the profession they were trained in.

### **Health**

- 7.6 per cent of the participants (219 individuals) reported that they abstain from accessing health care services or delay their treatment due to fear of discrimination.
- 7.2 per cent of the participants (208 individuals) reported that medical personnel tried to “treat” their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 50.3 per cent of the participants (1447 individuals) reported that they do not know how and where to access sexual health care services.
- 43.2 per cent of the participants (1218 individuals) reported that they thought about committing suicide at least once in their lifetime.
- 23.9 per cent of the participants (686 individuals) reported that they have the need to access mental health services but cannot due to high costs.
- 14.1 per cent of the participants (400 individuals) reported that they do not have any form of health insurance.

### **Education**

- 67.4 per cent of the participants (1312 individuals) reported that they have been discriminated, on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, during their education before the age of 18.
- 8.3 per cent of the participants (153 individuals) reported that they have to drop out of the school before the age of 18 because of the discrimination on the ground of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity they faced.
- 51.7 per cent of the participants (881 individuals) reported receiving negative comments/reactions in their university life, because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 4.7 per cent of the participants (73 individuals) reported that they had to drop out of the university, because of the discrimination on the ground of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity they faced.

### **Income poverty**

- 35 per cent of the participants (987 individuals) reported that their monthly income is either not enough or hardly enough to meet their basic needs.

### **Housing**

- 6.4 per cent of the participants (185 individuals) reported that they have to pay higher rent than the normal rate because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 29.5 per cent of the participants (848 individuals) reported that they feel obliged to live in certain parts of the city.
- 8.8 per cent of the participants (254 individuals) reported that their neighbours disturbed them because they knew about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

### **Participation in the social life**

- 57.9 per cent of the participants (1631 individuals) reported that there is no place (tea garden, café, restaurant, youth centre, political party office etc.) that they can travel in half an hour where they can feel safe in being open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 10.5 per cent of the participants (302 individuals) reported that they have been discriminated in the last year in a shop or store.
- 18.5 per cent of the participants (531 individuals) reported that they were harassed because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in public transportation.

### **Family**

- 38.5 per cent of the participants (1094 individuals) reported that they came out to at least one of their family members.
- 22.2 per cent of the participants (639 individuals) reported that they did not receive any negative response from their families.
- 6.6 per cent of the participants (190 individuals) reported that their family used violence against them because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

- 3.2 per cent of the participants (92 individuals) reported that family member or members threatened them to death because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- 2.8 per cent of the participants (80 individuals) reported that their family forced them to leave the family house because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

### **Ageing**

- 62 per cent of the participants (1771 individuals) reported that they do not feel secure about their own ageing.
- 51.8 per cent of the participants (1297 individuals) reported that they believe they will not get necessary support when they need care in their old age.

### **Trans men and women**

- Trans men and women are more visible to the public in comparison to gays, lesbians and bisexuals and they reported higher rates of discrimination in almost every area that the survey covers.
- The share of trans individuals who reported that they could not choose the profession they wanted to practice and who cannot practice the profession in which s/he was trained in is higher than expected.
- The share of trans women who reported that their monthly income do not cover their basic needs is higher than expected.
- The share of trans individuals who have high school degrees or less is higher than expected.
- The share of trans individuals who reported that they do not have any kind of health insurance is higher than expected.
- The share of trans individuals who feel insecure about their own ageing is higher than expected.
- The share of trans individuals who thought of committing suicide at least once in their lifetime is higher than expected.
- The share of trans individuals who filed a complaint in a case of discrimination they faced is higher than expected.
- The share of trans individuals who stated that they have been discriminate during their school years is higher than expected.
- 50.4 per cent of trans individuals (71 individuals) reported that they have difficulty in accessing sufficient information about gender reassignment process.

### **Law and access to justice**

- 46.1 per cent of all participants (1324 individuals) reported that they faced discrimination on the grounds of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Only 10 per cent of those faced discrimination before (133 individuals) stated that they filed an official complaint.
- Out of LGBT individuals who filed complained, only 16.5 per cent (22 individuals) had a satisfactory result.
- Out of LGBT individuals who reported discrimination but who did not file a complaint, 604 of them stated that they thought it would not make a difference, 587 of them stated that they did not want their gender identity/sexual orientation to be known by others, 328 of them

stated they did not know how to file a complaint and 209 of them stated that they did not have the necessary money for taking a legal action.

### **In lieu of conclusion**

The results of the research on the Social and Economic Problems of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) Individuals in Turkey demonstrates that LGBT individuals, whose existence has long been denied, are everywhere, live in all cities of the country, part of all sectors of the society. According to the results of the survey, LGBT individuals report that they face discrimination in almost all areas of life including areas that are necessary to pursue ordinary lives. Most LGBT individuals who reported that they face discrimination do not take legal action. Two main reasons why they do not take legal action against discrimination are the following: distrust towards the legal system and anxieties over the possible breach of their right to privacy during legal processes. Most of those who took legal action against discrimination reported that the result did not satisfy them. These results indicate that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity is rampant in Turkey, yet legal ways of fighting this form of discrimination are limited.

Research results underline the urgent need for the adoption of a comprehensive policy approach in Turkey that is based upon the concept of equal citizenship that includes gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans individuals. We strongly believe that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity –that has become part of international human rights law- should be openly prohibited and egalitarian social policy approach that mainstreamed LGBT rights should be put in practice in order to ensure that LGBT individuals can pursue their life with dignity like all other citizens of Turkey.

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### **Endnotes**

[1] The online survey was conducted with the support of Infakto Research Workshop and with the support of LGBT rights associations, initiatives, university student clubs and online dating websites.

[2] Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), a research institution based in Vienna, conducted a methodologically similar research project conducted last year and shared the results with the European audience. In designing our study on the social and economic problems of LGBT individuals in Turkey, we benefited from the FRA’s survey.