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The attitudes towards LGBT people among workers delivering key public services: The first regional study in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Introduction

Over the past two decades, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) movements in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA), particularly in post-Soviet states, have begun to gain greater public visibility. Belarus was the first former Soviet country to hold a pride festival in 1999 [Forum Lambda,

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1999]. Prides in the Baltic nations started in 2004 [Aavik, 2020]. There have also been attempts to organise LGBT prides in Moldova (since 2001), Russia (since 2006) and Ukraine (since 2012). Still, not all of them were successful: in some cases, participants were dispersed and detained by police, or attacked by their opponents [“Moldovan police halt LGBT march”, 2017; “Russia LGBT activists detained”, 2018]; in other cases, the organisers had to cancel the event [Amnesty International, 2012, 2015]. In 2019, pride marches took place in Tbilisi (Georgia)¹ [Amnesty International, 2019] and Skopje (North Macedonia) [Twigg, 2019]. Furthermore, the Kyiv Equality March (Ukraine), which brought together about 8,000 participants in 2019, was recognised as the biggest and most peaceful LGBT demonstration in this country [Zinets, 2019].

Unfortunately, many similar initiatives still face substantial opposition and even open aggression from the so-called traditionalist movements and right-wing nationalists [“First gay pride rally held in North Macedonia”, 2019; John, 2019; “Plans for Bosnia’s first Pride parade”, 2019; “Small LGBT pride rally held in Tbilisi”, 2019]. Both the LGBT community and those standing up for their rights often become victims of hate crimes, persecution and violence. For example, Yelena Grigoryeva, a Russian LGBT campaigner, was stabbed to death after her name had appeared on a homophobic website [“Russian LGBTIQ+ activist killed”, 2019]; Elzbieta Podlesna, a Polish civil rights activist, was arrested and detained for putting up images of the Virgin Mary with a rainbow halo [Easton, 2019]; in highly conservative Chechnya² dozens of gay people were imprisoned and tortured by the authorities and even murdered because of their sexual orientation [“Chechnya LGBT”, 2019].

The CEECA region (especially the post-Soviet space) is characterised by rather low acceptance of LGBT individuals, which oftentimes leads to discriminatory laws [Zinchenkov et al., 2011: pp. 15–19], refusals to investigate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), as well as stigmatisation of these people [Zinchenkov et al., 2011: pp. 15–19, 20, 101]. This point can also be illustrated by referring to Rainbow Europe Index³, according to which only Estonia stands out from the rest. This country occupied the 23rd spot in 2018, whereas Georgia and Ukraine came in 33rd and 36th respectively. Lithuania, Latvia, North Macedonia, Belarus and Moldova ranked even lower — from 39 to 43; Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan were placed at the bottom of the list [Shestakovskiy & Kasianczuk, 2018: p. 13].

Similarly, the data of public opinion polls conducted in some CEECA countries suggest that a considerable portion of the population of those countries display an unfriendly attitude towards LGBT people. According to a nationwide survey carried out by the Levada Center in 2019, only 3% of the Russian Federation’s residents held positive views on the LGBT community. 56% of respondents perceived these people somewhat negatively, and 31% said they would break up with their friend (or acquaintance) if they learned that he/she was gay or lesbian [Volkov, 2019]. A cross-national study performed by Pew Research Center in 2017 showed that homosexual behaviour

1 It was the first event of that kind in the South Caucasus.

2 A constituent entity of the Russian Federation.

3 The Rainbow Europe is ILGA-Europe’s annual benchmarking tool, which ranks 49 countries in Europe on their LGBTI equality laws and policies [ILGA-Europe, 2021].

is considered “morally wrong” in a number of CEECA countries (particularly in Orthodox-majority ones). This position was taken, for instance, by 83% of Ukrainians, 85% of Russians and 85% of Belarusians, as well as 90% of Georgians, 91% of Moldovans and 98% of Armenians. However, less than half as many Poles (48%) shared this view. Among young adults (18 to 34-year-olds), who are regarded as being less opposed to homosexuality, only 3% in Georgia, 4% in Armenia, 8% in Moldova, 9% in Russia and 11% in Ukraine favoured same-sex marriage. Interestingly, the corresponding figure for Belarus is noticeably higher — 22% [Pew Research Center, 2017]. A survey conducted by a North Macedonian civil society organisation called “Subversive Front” (2016) revealed that young LGBTI people are more than twice as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to experience everyday discrimination in this country [ERA — LGBTI Equal Rights Association for Western Balkans and Turkey, 2016]. In Kyrgyzstan, according to a small-scale study undertaken by “Kyrgyz Indigo” in 2017, 84% of respondents had experienced physical violence and 35% had been victims of sexual violence [Arnold, 2017]. 90% of LGBT persons in Serbia claim that medical institutions do not adequately meet their physical and mental health needs [UNDP in Europe and Central Asia, 2017: p. 9]. It is therefore not surprising that LGBT people (especially youth) are at higher risk for suicide: as findings from over 30 studies show, LGBT adolescents are more than three times as likely to kill themselves as their heterosexual peers [Carroll, 2018].

At the same time, one should not overlook the fact that some of the above-mentioned countries have recently taken important steps to greater LGBT equality. For example, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine managed to introduce legal mechanisms protecting against SOGI-based discrimination [ILGA-Europe, 2012; The Law of Ukraine № 785-VIII, 2015; United Nations in Georgia, 2021]. These mechanisms are not always applied in practice; nevertheless, they mark a gradual shift in the sphere of LGBT rights in the aforementioned countries. North Macedonia ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2017 [UN Women — Europe and Central Asia, s.a], and two years later, the parliament of this country passed a new version of the Law “On the prohibition of and protection against discrimination”, which includes an explicit mention of SOGI in the list of protected grounds¹ [Fedorovich & Yoursky, 2020: p. 28]. Transgender people were designated as a key population at high risk for HIV infection in Kyrgyzstan’s National HIV Plan [Chikhladze, Kasianczuk, Orbelyan, & Sheremet, 2019: p. 16], and a law on same-sex unions started being drafted in Serbia at the beginning of this year [Bjelotomic, 2021]. These measures are a sign of slow but steady progress in respecting the rights of LGBT people and recognising them as equal members of society.

Problems to be studied

In such a varied context, which, on the one hand, highlights a deep-rooted anti-LGBT bias and rejection of these people in many CEECA countries, but on the other, reflects changes in society, both personal and professional attitudes towards LGBT individuals are of great importance. What distinguishes some occupational groups

1 According to the Ontario Human Rights Code, there are 14 protected grounds such as age, ethnic origin, disability, marital status, etc. [Ontario Human Rights Commission, s.a.]

(such as healthcare workers, social workers and the police) is that their services often become critical in a situation where a person needs immediate help. The person's physical and psychological well-being or even life may depend on these professionals. Refusing to provide relevant services (e.g. treatment) or delivering poor-quality services can have serious consequences. Thus, it is crucial that police officers, medical and social workers act in compliance with the highest professional standards, rather than being guided by personal prejudice.

Although public views on the LGBT community in CEECA countries have already become a subject of several studies — for instance, of a survey carried out by Pew Research Center in 2019 [Poushter & Kent, 2020], information about the attitudes of particular occupational groups towards these people is scarce¹. For this reason, we decided to do *research into the attitudes towards the LGBT community among three occupational groups (healthcare workers, social workers and the police, as providers of key public services) in five CEECA countries (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and North Macedonia). In order to ascertain whether these attitudes can change over time, we conducted the research twice, in 2017 and 2019.*

There are a number of studies focusing on the attitudes towards LGBT people [Lewis et al., 2017; Tucker & Potocky-Tripodi, 2006], along with a set of reliable tools for assessing this phenomenon — such as the so-called homophobia scale developed by Herek [1988]. This scale contains, inter alia, statements about public perception of homosexuality, approval/disapproval of same-sex marriages and views on LGBT parenting. The above-mentioned statements are used in public opinion polls conducted in Ukraine [Zinchenkov et al., 2011] and Russia [Kon, 2011]. There is another instrument for gauging a person's attitude towards members of a group other than their own, and this is the Bogardus social distance scale². It has a long history dating back to 1924. Being initially designed to measure the degree of closeness/antipathy felt by Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin to diverse racial groups in the United States, this scale has proved to be applicable to similar phenomena such as ethnic tolerance in post-Soviet Ukraine [Horbachyk, 2005; Panina, 2003] and public attitudes towards LGBT people [Pact in Ukraine, 2017, 2019; Shestakovskiy, Kasianczuk, M., & Trofymenko, 2021]. Perceptions of the LGBT community are shaped by a wide range of factors such as a person's gender, financial status, educational attainment, belonging to a particular religion, adherence to right-wing authoritarianism and experience in communicating with LGBT individuals [Shestakovskiy, Trofymenko, Kasianczuk, & Voznesenskiy, 2016: pp. 48–50].

Research hypothesis. In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Eastern Asia, most of those delivering key public services (healthcare workers, social workers and the police) have a negative attitude on homosexuality; this attitude is shaped by diverse factors (such as work experience/direct communication with LGBT individuals), and it is changing with the passage of time.

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1 To date, we have come across only one work on this topic [Egan, 2020].

2 Named after its developer, a prominent American sociologist Emory Bogardus (1882–1973).

together with Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity (ECOM), within the framework of the regional programme “Right to Health” with the financial support of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Data and methods

The study involved two cross-sectional surveys, which were carried out in 2017 and 2019. As pointed out above, members of three occupational groups (social workers, medical workers and police officers) from five countries (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and North Macedonia) were expected to participate in the research. However, not all of them were surveyed: the police from Armenia, Belarus and Georgia refused to take part in both rounds; social workers from Belarus could not be reached in 2019.

Data were collected by means of a face-to-face interview. For each occupational group, a separate questionnaire was prepared. Three versions of the questionnaire were only slightly different. The tool was translated into six languages: Armenian, Georgian, Kyrgyz, Macedonian, Russian and English [Moskotina, Dmitruk, Trofimenko, Privalov, & Kasianczuk, 2017: p. 20]. Structurally, the questionnaire consisted of a socio-demographic unit, a series of questions/statements concerning a respondent's attitudes towards LGBT people, experience of communication with LGBT individuals (including provision of services to them), as well as the respondent's need for additional information / training on LGBT issues. *This paper only aims to shed light on the attitudes of the aforementioned occupational groups towards the LGBT community and to identify contributory factors, as well as to compare the respondents' perceptions of LGBT people in two different years.*

Prospective participants were supposed to meet certain criteria such as occupying entry- or mid-level positions at the time of the interview (nurses or family doctors for the group of healthcare workers, patrol officers or criminal investigators for the police). These professionals are first to directly interact with a client in order to solve his/her problem (e.g. by clarifying details of an incident, providing assistance or counselling). No more than 10 people from the same clinic, police department (or other institution) could take part in the study, and they were required to have worked for at least two years in the relevant field [Moskotina et al., 2017: p. 20]. In the second round, there were additional participation criteria for social and medical workers: 70% of them needed to have had experience in providing services to LGBT persons while the other 30% did not [Shvab et al., 2019: p. 12].

Respondents were selected using snowball sampling, which means that personal acquaintances or references from colleagues were needed.

As mentioned before, a considerable number of potential respondents did not take part in the study (e.g. the police from Armenia, Belarus and Georgia). Lack of experience in delivering services to LGBT individuals and fear of participation in such a survey without management approval were the most common reasons for their refusal. (In a sense, this is an indicator of prejudice against LGBT people in these countries).

Interviewers were hired through local LGBT NGOs. All of them were provided with instructions on specific features of each country and each occupational group. Furthermore, both the interviewers and the other persons engaged in the study (e.g.

programmers) were obliged to guarantee the confidentiality of information obtained from respondents.

Prospective survey participants had to give verbal consent for an interview, which was confirmed with the interviewer's signature at the beginning of the questionnaire. These people were also told that (a) taking part in the survey was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time, (b) the information provided by them would be treated confidentially.

Concise instructions were given both in the introduction to the questionnaire and for each question.

Data cleaning involved, inter alia, removing duplicates and filling in missing values. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS and R.

Main findings

The study polled 712 and 876 people (in 2017 and 2019 respectively) from Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and North Macedonia. As mentioned earlier, the police were interviewed only in Kyrgyzstan and North Macedonia. In the other three countries, police officers totally refused to participate in the survey because it was LGBT-focused. Social workers from Belarus did not take part in the second round either.

As regards the **socio-demographic characteristics** of survey participants, women accounted for the majority of the sample in both rounds. However, the subsample of police officers was represented almost exclusively by men (see Table 1).

Table 1

Socio-demographic sample composition in the two survey rounds^{1, a}

Characteristics of respondents	Total sample		Healthcare workers		Social workers		Police officers	
	2017	2019	2017	2019	2017	2019	2017	2019
Country, %								
Armenia	20	19	18	24	29	21	0	0
Belarus	15	11	25	22	5	0	0	0
Georgia	17	17	17	17	24	25	0	0
Kyrgyzstan	33	37	24	26	26	35	86	78
North Macedonia	15	15	15	11	16	19	14	22
Women, %	57	62	58	72	76	72	5	6
Median age, years	38.5	37	44	42	32	35	30	29
Has completed higher education, %	92	89	94	95	88	84	92	78

1 For more detail see: Socio-demographical characteristics of respondents in five CEECA countries. (2019). In M. Shvab, O. Trofymenko, & M. Kasianchuk, *Study on the attitudes of staff of key social services in five countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia towards LGBT people, conducted as part of ECOM's regional program "Right to Health"* [Analytical report] (pp. 18–32). Kyiv, Ukraine.

Place of residence, %								
capital city	73	72	75	73	61	63	86	85
large city	19	22	17	23	31	33	6	0
small town	8	6	8	4	7	5	7	15
Belongs to a particular religion, %	77	79	69	80	77	71	96	94
Median work experience, years	11.5	10	17	16	6	5.5	7.5	8
Has an LGBT acquaintance (man and/or woman), %	50	44	48	42	47	70	6	3

a Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100.

The median age of respondents was 38.5 and 37 years (in 2017 and 2019 respectively). This value varies significantly by occupational group: from 29 for the police in 2019 to 44 for medical workers in 2017.

Approximately nine tenths (92% by 2017 and 89% by 2019) had completed higher education. Healthcare workers turned out to be the most educated (95% of them had a university degree in 2019), followed by social workers and police officers.

A considerable portion of those surveyed (73% in 2017 and 72% in 2019) were residents of capital cities. Around one in five respondents lived in large cities and under 10% resided in small towns.

Over three quarters (79% in 2019) belonged to a particular religion or denomination: 31% of them were Orthodox Christians, 26% identified as Muslims and 13% were affiliated with the Apostolic church. This composition is not vastly different from that of 2017 [Moskotina et al., 2017: p. 26]. In terms of occupational groups, police officers were the most religious: 96% in 2017 and 94% in 2019 reported having been raised in a certain religion.

The median work experience for all respondents was 11.5 and 10 years in 2017 and 2019 respectively. Medical workers had the longest work experience in the sample (17 and 16 years), followed by the police (7.5 and 8) and social workers (6 and 5.5).

Nearly half of all healthcare workers surveyed (48% in 2017 and 42% in 2019) had at least one LGBT acquaintance (versus 6% and 3% of police officers). In 2019, almost three quarters (70%) of social workers said they had acquaintances among LGBT people (compared to 47% in 2017). Much higher values for medical and especially social workers are not unexpected, given that respondents for our study were recruited through interviewers hired by LGBT organisations. Besides, some of the medical and social workers involved in the study might have been working for such an organisation at the time of the survey.

Respondents' attitudes towards the LGBT community. The following three questions were designed to measure a person's attitude towards LGBT people:

1. *Do you agree that gays and lesbians should have the same rights as the other citizens of your country?* There were five response options: "Completely agree", "Somewhat agree", "Somewhat disagree", "Completely disagree" and "Difficult to say".

2. *Do you believe that same-sex couples should enjoy the right to marry, just like opposite-sex couples?* There were five response options: “Yes, they should have this right”, “There should be exceptions (individualised consideration)”, “No, in no case should this right be granted to them”, “Other” and “Difficult to say”.
3. *Do you believe that same-sex couples should have the right to raise and/or adopt children?* There were the same response options as in the previous question: “Yes, they should have this right”, “There should be exceptions (individualised consideration)”, “No, in no case should this right be granted to them”, “Other” and “Difficult to say”.

Whilst the first question characterises a person’s overall attitude towards the LGBT community, the other two outline the areas that often become a stumbling block in debate on LGBT issues.

According to the findings of the present study, 82% and 78% of those interviewed (in 2017 and 2019 respectively) agreed, fully or partially, with the statement that *LGBT people should enjoy the same rights as others* (see Figure, the sum of percentages for “completely agree” and “somewhat agree”). Social workers expressed nearly unanimous support for the civil equality of LGBT individuals: 95% (in 2017) and 93% of them (in 2019) approved of this idea. The corresponding figures for healthcare workers were 84% (in 2017) and 77% (in 2019). Police officers were the least favourably disposed to the LGBT community: only 45% (2017) and 48% (2019) thought that these people should have the same rights as the other citizens of their country [Shvab et al., 2019: p. 50]. The results of the 2019 round suggest slightly less support for the civil equality of LGBT people, but the difference between the two rounds is not statistically significant.

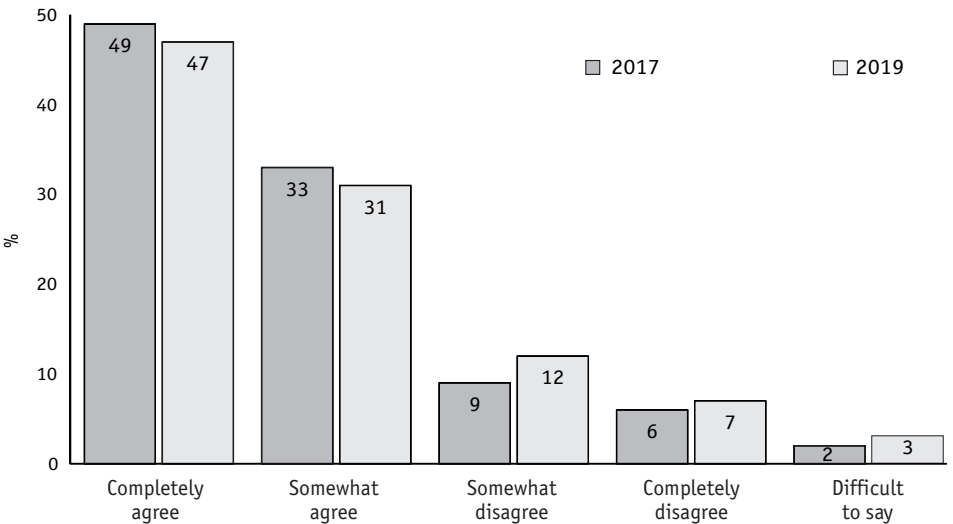


Figure. The answers given by respondents to the question: “Do you agree that gays and lesbians should have the same rights as the other citizens of your country?” in 2017 and 2019, %.

The difference between the two rounds is not statistically significant ($p = 0.2$).

Breakdown per country. The overwhelming majority of respondents in all countries under study (from 71% in Kyrgyzstan to 96% in Georgia in the year 2017) expressed agreement with the statement that LGBT individuals should enjoy the same

rights as other citizens (see Table 2). All occupational groups mostly supported the civil equality of gays and lesbians, except for the police in Kyrgyzstan, where only 41% approved of this idea [Moskotina et al., 2017: p. 41]. In contrast, from 88% of social workers in Armenia to 96% in North Macedonia (data for the year 2019) agreed with the above-mentioned statement. For healthcare workers, these values ranged between 65% in Armenia and 89% in Georgia (2019); for the North Macedonian police, this figure was 60% [Shvab et al., 2019: pp. 50-51]. Women and residents of large cities were more likely to favour LGBT civil equality than men and those living in small towns; in addition, those having an LGBT acquaintance expressed strong support for their rights by comparison with those did not have acquaintances in the LGBT community.

Table 2

The proportion of affirmative answers (“completely agree” and “somewhat agree”) to the question: “Do you agree that gays and lesbians should have the same rights as others?” for subsamples according to country, occupational group, educational attainment, etc., %^a

	2017	2019
Total sample	82	78
Country		
Armenia	82	73
Belarus	90	75
Georgia	96	91
Kyrgyzstan	71	72
North Macedonia	83	84
<i>p-value</i>	< 0.001	< 0.001
Gender		
women	90	84
men	71	67
<i>p-value</i>	< 0.001	< 0.001
Education		
Has a university degree	83	77
Does not have a university degree	77	79
<i>p-value</i>	0.2	0.2
Place of residence		
capital city	80	77
large city	96	79
small town	69	68
<i>p-value</i>	< 0.001	< 0.001
Belongs to a particular religion	81	75
Not religious	84	85
<i>p-value</i>	0.3	0.01

Occupational group		
healthcare workers	84	77
social workers	95	93
police officers	45	48
<i>p-value</i>	< 0.001	< 0.001
Has an LGBT acquaintance (man and/or woman)	95	93
Does not have an LGBT acquaintance	65	60
<i>p-value</i>	< 0.001	< 0.001

a *p-values* were calculated for differences between affirmative answers and other response options in the same round. Statistically significant differences (in this and subsequent tables) are given in bold italic.

The question about the right of same-sex couples to start a family gained significantly less support. Only 32% and 33% of those surveyed (in 2017 and 2019 respectively) believed that *same-sex marriages should be allowed by law*; 19% and 21% held the opinion that this right could be granted to LGBT couples in exceptional cases. On the other hand, 36% and 38% thought that under no circumstances should same-sex unions be permitted (see Table 3).

Table 3

The answers given by respondents to the question about some individual rights that LGBT people should have, %^a

	2017	2019	2017	2019
<i>Do you believe that ...</i>			... same-sex couples should have the right to raise and/or adopt children?	
... same-sex couples should enjoy the right to marry, just like opposite-sex couples?				
Yes, they should have this right	32	33	19	23
There should be exceptions (individualised consideration)	19	21	27	24
No, in no case should this right be granted to them	36	38	40	41
Other	11	1	11	1
Difficult to say	2	7	2	11
<i>p-value</i>	0.2		0.2	

a *p-values* were calculated for differences between the two rounds.

As regards occupational groups, social workers were the most inclined to favour same-sex marriage: 59% and 58% of them (in 2017 and 2019) agreed that LGBT couples should enjoy the right to marry. These values were substantially lower among medical workers (23% and 27% respectively). Police officers overwhelmingly opposed same-sex marriage: 87% (in 2017) and 77% (in 2019) believed that in no case should LGBT couples have this right [Shvab et al., 2019: p. 52].

There was no significant change in relation to the respondents' support for same-sex unions over two years.

Breakdown per country. In 2019, 51% of Belarusians answered positively the question about the right of same-sex couples to marry in all cases and 32% chose the second option (in exceptional cases). The corresponding figures for Armenians were 19% and 15%. This country represented the opposite end of the spectrum. Social workers were most likely to favour the legal recognition of same-sex unions: from 52% of them in Armenia to 68% in North Macedonia supported this idea. The views of healthcare workers on this issue differed markedly depending on the country: just 2% of them in Armenia versus 58% in North Macedonia took the position that LGBT couples should enjoy the right to marry. Meanwhile, a third (33%) of Macedonian police officers thought that same-sex marriages could be permitted in exceptional cases while another third (30%) did not give a definite answer to this question.

The study revealed dramatic changes in respondents' attitudes towards same-sex unions over time, such as more than a threefold rise in support for same-sex marriage among Belarusians, practically the same growth in opposition to this idea among Armenians and a sharp (sevenfold!) drop in support for the right of LGBT couples to marry among Armenian medical workers, etc. [Shvab et al., 2019: pp. 52–54].

As for *the right of same-sex couples to raise and/or adopt children*, only 19% and 23% of those interviewed (in 2017 and 2019 respectively) expressed support for this idea. 43% of social workers (in both rounds) held positive views on LGBT parenting, whereas 93% (in 2017) and 71% (in 2019) of police officers believed that this right should not be granted to LGBT couples. In the second round, moreover, nearly a quarter of these respondents chose the option “difficult to answer” (versus 4% in 2017) [Shvab et al., 2019: p. 55].

All five countries under study demonstrated relatively low support for same-sex adoption: for example, only 18% of Armenians, 20% of Belarusians and 29% of Georgians (data for the second round) thought that same-sex couples should enjoy this right in all cases [Shvab et al., 2019: p. 57].

The alienation of LGBT people from society. In order to determine the degree to which LGBT persons are accepted or rejected by society, we used the above-described Bogardus social distance scale. This scale ranges from 1 to 7, and each item corresponds to a lesser or greater social distance, i.e. a respondent's perceived sense of closeness to those in groups that are different from his/her own. Within the framework of our study, respondents were asked to select the most appropriate statement for each LGBT subgroup (gays, lesbians, bisexual men, bisexual women and transgender people) in regard to the level of acceptance of that subgroup in various capacities such as close kin, friends, colleagues, tourists, etc. The last (seventh) response option concerned the exclusion of a particular LGBT subgroup from the country.

According to our findings, those interviewed were mostly willing to have LGBT individuals as family members/close friends, as well as residents of (or visitors to) their country. Fewer respondents were ready to accept LGBT people as co-workers and neighbours. A certain (but not large) percentage of the survey participants said they would not let LGBT persons come to their country (see Table 4).

The study did not reveal any significant changes in social distance felt by respondents to the LGBT community over two years. Moreover, estimates given to different LGBT subgroups within the same year showed high convergence. (Cronbach's alpha

was 0.99 for 2017 and 0.96 for 2019.) This allowed us to conduct further analysis using a generalised scale, without specifying the LGBT subgroup (see Table 5).

Table 4

Social distance at which respondents would accept LGBT persons in 2017 and 2019, %

Year	2017	2019	2017	2019	2017	2019	2017	2019	2017	2019
<i>I agree to accept ...</i>	Gays		Lesbians		Bisexual men		Bisexual women		Transgender people	
As family members	18	18	18	16	19	17	19	16	16	15
As close friends	23	30	21	17	22	15	21	16	17	13
As neighbours	8	9	9	9	7	8	8	7	8	9
As co-workers	9	8	10	7	10	9	10	10	8	6
As fellow citizens	19	21	20	26	20	29	21	27	25	30
As tourists / visitors to my country	14	9	14	14	14	14	14	13	16	15
I would not let them come to my country	9	5	8	10	8	9	8	11	9	13
<i>p-value</i>	0.9		0.8		0.7		0.8		0.9	

Table 5

The dynamics of perceived social distance to LGBT people in general, according to the 7-point Bogardus scale^a

	2017	2019
Total sample	3.7 (3.6–3.8)	3.9 (3.7– 4.0)
Country		
Armenia	4.1 (3.9–4.4)	4.3 (4.0–4.6)
Belarus	2.9 (2.7–3.2)	3.2 (2.9–3.5)
Georgia	3.8 (3.5–4.1)	3.2 (2.9–3.5)
Kyrgyzstan	4.3 (4.1–4.6)	4.5 (4.3–4.7)
North Macedonia	2.5 (2.2–2.8)	3.8 (3.5–4.1)
Gender		
women	3.1 (2.9–3.3)	3.7 (3.6–3.9)
men	4.2 (3.9–4.4)	4.4 (4.1–4.6)
Education		
Has a university degree	3.7 (3.5–3.8)	4.0 (3.9–4.1)
Does not have a university degree	3.0 (2.5–3.5)	3.8 (3.4–4.2)
Place of residence		
capital city	3.7 (3.5–3.9)	3.9 (3.8–4.1)
large city	2.9 (2.6–3.2)	3.9 (3.7–4.1)
small town	4.2 (3.7–4.8)	4.7 (4.2–5.2)

Belongs to a particular religion	3.9 (3.7–4.0)	4.2 (4.1–4.3)
Not religious	2.7 (2.4–2.9)	3.1 (2.9–3.4)
Occupational group		
healthcare workers	3.8 (3.7–4.0)	4.1 (3.9–4.2)
social workers	2.7 (2.5–2.9)	2.9 (2.7–3.1)
police officers	6.0 (5.7–6.3)	5.2 (5.1–5.3)
Has an LGBT acquaintance (man and/or woman)	2.4 (2.3–2.6)	2.4 (2.2–2.5)
Does not have an LGBT acquaintance	4.7 (4.5–4.9)	5.3 (5.2–5.5)

a For each item, the arithmetic mean and 95% confidence interval (CI) are given.

The lower the value, the shorter is the perceived social distance to LGBT individuals and the greater is tolerance for them.

The figures indicate that respondents keep LGBT people neither too close nor too far away: the value of social distance is 3.7 (in 2017) and 3.9 (in 2019) for the whole sample, and it varies from 2.4 (for those having an LGBT acquaintance, in both rounds) to 6.0 (for the police in 2017). Meanwhile, perceived social distance to LGBT individuals among respondents who do not LGBT acquaintances is more than twice as long as among those who do.

When it comes to occupational groups, social workers tend to be the friendliest towards the LGBT community unlike police officers who exhibit a wary attitude to these people. Yet, perceived social distance to LGBT persons in this group was reduced to 5.2 in 2019. For medical workers, social distance to LGBT individuals was somewhat greater than for social workers but lesser than for the police.

Belarusians and Macedonians would not mind having LGBT people as friends and neighbours, whereas respondents from Armenia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan are ready to accept them only as colleagues, residents of their country or simply as tourists. On the other hand, a growth in LGBT-related social distance within the sample of North Macedonia was recorded in 2019.

The study also found out that perceived social distance to the LGBT community does not depend on a respondent's work experience, and a university degree is not an important factor either. What seems to be of importance is the respondent's gender (women are more tolerant of LGBT people than men), belonging to a particular religion (religiously unaffiliated participants demonstrate greater tolerance), as well as occupation and LGBT acquaintances (as it has already been mentioned). However, social distance to LGBT people in the first two subsamples increased over two years.

Discussion

The available studies on LGBT topics (for instance, a cross-national survey conducted by Pew Research Center in 2019) show that LGBT issues are perceived differently throughout the CEECA region [Poushter & Kent, 2020: p. 3] although these countries have the common communist past. In our piece of research, by contrast, the overall attitude of three occupational groups (healthcare workers, social workers and the police) towards the LGBT community can be described as somewhat positive. The majority of respondents take the position that (a) homosexuality should be accepted by society, (b) LGBT people should enjoy the same rights as other citizens. However,

the respondents are less willing to recognise the right of same-sex couples to marry and raise/adopt children.

It is worth noting that the attitude towards the LGBT community varies depending on the occupational group: social workers almost always demonstrate quite a high level of acceptance of LGBT people and a positive attitude towards them — in comparison with the two other groups, particularly police officers who have the least favourable attitude towards these people (see Table 2). It can be inferred that if the police of Armenia, Belarus and Georgia had also participated in the study, the indicator for this occupational group would have been even worse.

The results for the value of social distance towards LGBT people (see Table 5) are generally consistent with the distribution of answers to the question regarding LGBT civil equality. For the five countries under study, these values range between 2.5 (North Macedonia, 2017) and 4.5 (Kyrgyzstan, 2019); in other words, it is closer to the favourable pole. LGBT-related social distance varies more widely among the three occupational groups — from 2.7 for social workers (2017) to 6.0 for the police (the same year). Women, residents of large cities and those with LGBT acquaintances are more tolerant of the LGBT community than men, residents of small towns and those who do not have an LGBT acquaintance. Besides, those who hold a positive view on the LGBT community are more ready to accept LGBT individuals as family members, friends, neighbours or co-workers — rather than just as fellow citizens or tourists.

All things considered, the hypothesis of the current study has only partially been confirmed. It is worth reminding that our hypothesis was as follows: in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Eastern Asia, most of those delivering key public services (healthcare workers, social workers and the police) have a negative attitude towards homosexuality; this attitude is shaped by various factors (such as work experience or direct communication with LGBT individuals), and it is changing with the passage of time.

The figures, however, show that only police officers perceive LGBT people mostly negatively, whereas medical and especially social workers tend to display a positive attitude.

Our data are also consistent with the findings of the aforementioned Pew Research Center survey. This study revealed, *inter alia*, that a person's perception of the LGBT community correlates with their age, gender, educational attainment and religious affiliation. Younger adults, women, those who have greater levels of education and those who see religion as less important in their daily lives tend to be more accepting of homosexuality than their older, less-educated or religious counterparts [Poushter & Kent, 2020: pp. 5, 9–11, 14]. In our survey, as it has already been said, police officers were least likely to approve of homosexuality. According to the data, they were less educated (only 78% of them had completed higher education by 2019 versus 95% of healthcare workers and 84% of social workers) and more religious than the rest of the sample; in addition, this subsample consisted almost entirely of men. Medical workers were the most educated but at the same time the oldest in the sample, and they maintained a bit cautious but still positive attitude towards LGBT individuals. Women were largely predominant among social workers, who were the most favourably disposed to LGBT people.

As far as attitudinal changes over the period under study are concerned, the survey results seem contradictory. On the one hand, practically no change in terms of support for LGBT rights was recorded (see Table 3 and Figure); on the other hand, there was

an increase in LGBT-related social distance within the sample of North Macedonia (see Table 5).

The main methodological limitation of our survey is that the samples are not nationally representative; therefore, the results cannot be extrapolated to the general population of respective countries, let alone the entire region. Yet, given the absence of representative surveys focusing on this topic, our findings have a certain empirical value as lending insight into the development of social interventions aimed at improving the attitude of particular occupational groups towards vulnerable communities such as LGBT.

Conclusions

The overall attitude of three occupational groups (healthcare workers, social workers and police officers) in five CEECA countries (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and North Macedonia) towards the LGBT community can be characterised as somewhat positive.

The vast majority of survey participants from all countries and occupational groups (except for the police in Kyrgyzstan) believe that LGBT people should have the same rights as the other citizens of their country. About a third of all respondents (33% in 2017 and 36% in 2019) support the right of LGBT individuals to legally wed, and around a fifth (20% and 23%) are in favour of allowing same-sex couples to raise and/or adopt children.

Perceived social distance between respondents and LGBT people varies from 2.4 (religiously unaffiliated, 2017 and 2019) to 6.0 (police officers, 2017) on a 7-point scale. Social workers tend to be the friendliest to the LGBT community, whereas the police take a wary approach to LGBT issues. Women, residents of Belarus and North Macedonia, religiously unaffiliated respondents and those having an LGBT acquaintance are more tolerant of LGBT individuals than men, residents of Armenia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, those identifying with a particular religion and respondents without LGBT acquaintances.

As regards attitudinal changes during the period under study, they do not seem to follow a set pattern: for example, more than a threefold rise in support for same-sex marriage in Belarus contrasts with no significant change in perceived social distance to LGBT people in the whole sample.

Thus, the hypothesis of our study (about a predominantly negative attitude towards the LGBT community among those providing key public services in CEECA countries, which is shaped by diverse factors and tends to change over time) can be considered partly true.

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МАКСИМ КАСЯНЧУК, ОЛЕСЯ ТРОФИМЕНКО, МАРІЯ ШВАБ, ВІТАЛІЙ ДЖУМА

Ставлення до ЛГБТ з боку працівників, що надають ключові публічні послуги: перше регіональне дослідження в країнах Центральної та Східної Європи й Центральної Азії

Сприйняття громадськістю (зокрема посткомуністичних країн) ЛГБТ-спільноти та пов'язаних із нею питань вивчається останніми роками доволі широко. Водночас інформації стосовно того, як ставляться до цих людей представники певних професій, поки небагато. Пропонована стаття покликана деякою мірою заповнити цю прогалину, подавши докладний опис та аналіз результатів емпіричного дослідження щодо ставлення до ЛГБТ з боку трьох професійних груп: медичних працівників, соціальних працівників та поліції. Актуальність обраної теми зумовлена тим, що від якості та своєчасності послуг, надаваних цими працівниками, нерідко залежить фізичне й психічне здоров'я людини, а подекуди й життя. Згадане вище дослідження виконувалося у форматі двох крос-секційних опитувань, одне з яких проводилося 2017 року, інше — 2019-го. Загалом у двох хвилях опитування взяли участь близько 1500 осіб (медичних сестер, сімейних лікарів, працівників соціальних служб, патрульних поліцейських тощо) з п'яти країн Центральної та Східної Європи й Центральної Азії (Білорусі, Вірменії, Грузії, Киргизстану, Північної Македонії). Дослідницький інструментарій складався з розробленого авторами опитувальника (для кожної професійної групи було підготовлено окрему версію) та шкали соціальної дистанції Богардуса. Вибірка формувалася за допомогою методу “снігова грудка”, що передбачав використання особистих контактів респондентів або ж рекомендацій їхніх колег. Дані дослідження показали, що: а) ставлення представників вищезазначених професій до ЛГБТ-спільноти радше позитивне, найсприятливіше — серед соціальних працівників, найбільш насторожене — серед поліції; б) переважна більшість опитаних (за винятком поліцейських Киргизстану) вважають, що ЛГБТ мають бути наділені такими ж правами, як і решта громадян їхньої країни, однак право на укладення шлюбу між особами однієї статі підтримує лише третина респондентів, а на усиновлення дітей одно-

статевими парами — близько однієї п'ятої; в) жінки, мешканці Білорусі та Північної Македонії, нерелігійні респонденти, а також ті, що мають знайомих серед ЛГБТ, вирізняються більшою толерантністю до ЛГБТ-спільноти, ніж чоловіки, жителі Вірменії, Грузії та Киргизстану, респонденти, що належать до певної релігії, й ті, хто не має ЛГБТ-знайомих; г) за два роки відбулися помітні зміни у ставленні до ЛГБТ-спільноти в одних підвибірках (як-от різке зменшення частки тих, хто підтримує одностатевий шлюб, серед медичних працівників Вірменії), незначні (або й узагалі жодних) — в інших підвибірках або у вибірці загалом (зокрема, відсоток респондентів, які підтримують право одностатевих пар на усиновлення дітей, зріс не набагато). Незважаючи на те, що вибірки досліджуваних країн не є національно репрезентативними, отримані результати становлять певну емпіричну цінність, оскільки вони можуть бути враховані під час розроблення програм, спрямованих на прищеплення толерантності та поліпшення ставлення до ЛГБТ у цих країнах.

Ключові слова: країни Центральної та Східної Європи й Центральної Азії, ставлення до ЛГБТ-спільноти, медичні працівники, соціальні працівники, поліція, права людини, толерантність, шкала Богардуса, соціальна дистанція

МАКСИМ КАСЯНЧУК, ОЛЕСЯ ТРОФИМЕНКО, МАРІЯ ШВАБ, ВИТАЛІЙ ДЖУМА

Отношение к ЛГБТ со стороны работников, предоставляющих ключевые публичные услуги: первое региональное исследование в странах Центральной и Восточной Европы и Центральной Азии

Восприятие общественностью (в частности посткоммунистических стран) ЛГБТ-сообщества и связанных с ним вопросов изучается в последние годы довольно широко. В то же время информации о том, как относятся к этим людям представители определенных профессий, пока немного. Предлагаемая статья призвана в некоторой степени восполнить этот пробел, представив подробное описание и анализ результатов эмпирического исследования касательно отношения к ЛГБТ со стороны трех профессиональных групп: медицинских работников, социальных работников и полиции. Актуальность избранной темы обусловлена тем, что от качества и своевременности услуг, предоставляемых этими людьми, нередко зависит физическое и психическое здоровье человека, а иногда и жизнь. Вышеупомянутое исследование осуществлялось в формате двух кросс-секционных опросов, один из которых проводился в 2017 году, другой — в 2019-м. Всего в двух волнах исследования приняли участие около 1500 человек (медицинских сестер, семейных врачей, работников социальных служб, патрульных полицейских и т. п.) из пяти стран Центральной и Восточной Европы и Центральной Азии (Армении, Беларуси, Грузии, Кыргызстана, Северной Македонии). Исследовательский инструментарий состоял из разработанного авторами опросника (для каждой профессиональной группы была подготовлена отдельная версия) и шкалы социальной дистанции Богардуса. Выборка формировалась при помощи метода "снежный ком", предусматривающего использование личных контактов респондентов или же рекомендаций их коллег. Данные исследования показали, что: а) отношение представителей вышеуказанных профессий к ЛГБТ-сообществу скорее положительное, наиболее благоприятное — среди социальных работников, наиболее настороженное — среди сотрудников полиции; б) подавляющее большинство опрошенных (за исключением полицейских Кыргызстана) считает, что ЛГБТ должны быть наделены такими же правами, как и другие граждане их страны, хотя право на заключение брака между лицами одного пола поддерживает только треть респондентов, а на усыновление детей однополыми парами — около одной пятой; в) женщины, жители Беларуси и Северной Македонии, нерелигиозные респонденты, а также имеющие знакомых среди ЛГБТ отличаются большей толерантностью, нежели мужчины, жители Армении, Грузии и Кыргызстана, респонденты, принадлежащие к определенной религии, а также те, у кого нет ЛГБТ-знакомых; г) за два года произошли заметные изменения в отношении к ЛГБТ-сообществу в одних подвыборках (к примеру, резкое уменьшение доли респондентов, поддерживающих однополый брак, среди

медицинских работников Армении), незначительные (или вообще никаких) — в других под-выборках (в частности, процент тех, кто поддерживает право однополых пар на усыновление детей, возрос не намного). Несмотря на то, что выборки исследуемых стран не являются национально репрезентативными, полученные результаты представляют определенную эмпирическую ценность, поскольку они могут быть учтены при разработке программ, направленных на формирование толерантности в обществе и улучшение отношения к ЛГБТ в этих странах.

Ключевые слова: страны Центральной и Восточной Европы и Центральной Азии, отношение к ЛГБТ-сообществу, медицинские работники, социальные работники, полиция, права человека, толерантность, шкала Богардуса, социальная дистанция

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The attitudes towards LGBT people among workers delivering key public services: The first regional study in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Public perceptions (particularly in post-communist societies) of the LGBT community and related issues have extensively been studied in recent years. Still, so far there is little information about how specific occupational groups view these people. The given research paper is intended to somewhat fill this gap by presenting a thorough description and analysis of findings from an empirical study focusing on the attitudes towards LGBT individuals among three occupational groups such as medical workers, social workers and the police. The relevance of the chosen topic is determined by the fact that a person's physical and mental health or even life may often depend on the quality and timeliness of services provided by these professionals. The above-mentioned study consisted of two cross-sectional surveys performed in 2017 and 2019. In total, approximately 1,500 persons (nurses, family practitioners, social care staff, patrol officers, etc.) from five countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia) took part in the two rounds of this study. Research toolkit included a questionnaire (designed by the authors for each occupational group) and the Bogardus social distance scale. Respondents were recruited through snowball sampling, which involved using personal and professional contacts. The survey data indicated the following: (a) the overall attitude of the aforementioned occupational groups towards LGBT people is somewhat positive; in addition, social workers are the most favourably disposed to the LGBT community while the police take a cautious approach to LGBT issues; (b) the overwhelming majority of respondents (except for police officers in Kyrgyzstan) believe that LGBT people should enjoy the same rights as the other citizens of their country; nevertheless, only a third of those surveyed hold the opinion that same-sex marriages should be permitted by law and about one fifth express support for the right of same-sex couples to adopt children; (c) women, residents of Belarus and North Macedonia, religiously unaffiliated respondents and those having an LGBT acquaintance exhibit greater tolerance for LGBT individuals than men, residents of Armenia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, those belonging to a particular religion and respondents without LGBT acquaintances; (d) during the period under study, a noticeable change in the attitude towards LGBT persons occurred in some subsamples: among Armenian healthcare workers, for example, there was a steep fall in support for the right of LGBT couples to marry. However, little or no change was recorded in other subsamples or in the whole sample: a slight growth in the overall percentage of respondents favouring the idea of LGBT parenting is a case in point. Although the samples of the countries in question are not nationally representative, the research results have a certain empirical value because they can be taken into consideration while developing programmes aimed at fostering tolerance in society and improving attitudes to LGBT people.

Keywords: countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, attitudes towards the LGBT community, healthcare workers, social workers, the police, human rights, tolerance, the Bogardus scale, social distance