

Executive Summary

Encuesta Nacional LGBTI 2020

National Survey for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and
Intersex People
Dominican Republic

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Executive Summary

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Embassy of the United Kingdom, through the “Being LGBTI in the Caribbean” project, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Institute for Research and Gender and Family Studies of the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (IGEF-UASD) conducted the National LGBTI Survey 2020, with the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), LGBTI civil society organizations and other agencies, funds and programs of the United Nations System in the Dominican Republic.

This research is the first national effort to document the socio-demographic situation and living conditions of LGBTI people in the Dominican Republic. It seeks to determine the structural barriers that hinder the full exercise of their human rights.

The study provides evidence of the impact that stigma has on LGBTI people, as well as the social and economic costs related to the exclusion and discrimination to which they are subjected.

Through the National LGBTI Survey, scientific information is made available to the public and particularly to the Dominican State, to help support the development of public policies that ensure the full exercise of rights of LGBTI people and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda,

ensuring that no one is left behind.

The survey included a desk review, as well as a mapping of LGBTI civil society organizations. This Executive Summary only includes the results obtained from the application of the survey.

The study was developed through a participatory approach. As such, consultations were held to present and discuss the design with organizations, institutions, and representatives of LGBTI people throughout the country. In addition, two committees were created to conduct regular consultations on the methodology, instruments, and their implementation. The Consultative Committee included representatives from each of the population groups, while the Technical Advisory Committee included United Nations system’s agencies, programmes and funds, as well as individuals with research experience in the topics addressed by the survey.

The target population for the study were LGBTI persons who either resided or had resided in the Dominican Republic for at least one year during the last five years, regardless of their migratory status. This means that the survey was filled out by persons living in the Dominican Republic at the time of the study, as well as by persons born in the Dominican Republic residing abroad, and persons who resided in the Dominican Republic at some point during the reference period, but no longer do so, either because they emigrated or

were immigrants who returned to their countries of origin or other destinations.

A website was created for filling out the questionnaire (www.encuestalgbti2020.org) and a dissemination strategy was implemented through social networks and media outlets. The target sample for the study was set at 5,000 cases; however, a total of 7,122 responses were received. As is generally the case with online surveys, there were more completion attempts than actual questionnaires completed; in the 2020 National LGBTI Survey there were 16,000 completion attempts. The difference between the number of attempts and actual questionnaires is due to incomplete attempts, people who did not meet the inclusion criteria or questionnaires that were discarded due to inconsistencies or for other reasons.

The survey questionnaire was designed with the option of completing it in Spanish, Creole or English. In discussions with civil society organisations concerns were raised that some people could experience difficulties in completing the online survey due to limited or no access to internet, particularly in the context of the COVID – 19 pandemic. Therefore, it was agreed to conduct approximately 500 face-to-face interviews. As such, a total of 700 face-to-face interviews were finally carried out by a network of volunteers from collaborating LGBTI organizations. When conducting the face-to-face interviews, efforts were made to equitably interview people of all identities to ensure, as far as possible, that all LGBTI groups were represented in the fieldwork.

Throughout this study the word “identities” is used to refer to lesbian, gay men, bisexual trans, and queer people as well as those identifying as others¹.

As the survey sample is not probabilistic, it is not possible to extrapolate the results of the survey to the entire LGBTI population of the country.

1. It is a neutralization that involves using neutral grammatical forms that do not indicate gender and make language an inclusive tool. Gender-neutral is used to refer to people of non-binary gender (people who are neither male nor female).

Survey results

Sample Characterization

Survey participants were mostly young people, under 30 years of age (73.2%). Persons between 22 and 29 years had the highest representation in the sample with 38%; people under 21 years old represent 35.2% and those 30 years or older comprise 26% of total responses.

Among survey respondents, 8 in 10 (83.4%) identified as cisgender, which refers to people whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth. Nearly half of respondents identified as male (47.1%), while more than a third (36.4%) identified as female. In addition, 6.6% identified as having another unspecified gender identity, 5.4% as non-binary, 2.4% as trans men and 2.1% as trans women.

While efforts were made -from the design stage forward- to reach intersex persons, only six (6) questionnaires were completed by persons self-identifying as intersex. As such, the data obtained for this population was considered statistically irrelevant and, thus, was not included in the analysis nor in the final report, in order not to mischaracterize the intersex population.

Of the total number of people who filled out the survey, 42.6% self-identified as gay, almost three times more than lesbians (16.1%), bisexual people represented 33.7%, while queer people and other identities comprised less than 4%.

In reference to the country of birth, 93.5% said they were born in the Dominican Republic and the remaining 6.5% were born abroad. Among those born abroad, the main country of birth was

Venezuela (2.7%), followed by the United States (1.1%), Haiti (0.9%), and Spain (0.5%). Others (1.4%) mentioned several countries in very small percentages.

The 2020 National LGBTI Survey asked about people's place of residence, to which they responded as follows: 93.8% live permanently in the Dominican Republic and the remaining 6.2% live abroad. Given that the survey population included people who resided in the country at least one year out of the last 5 years, part of those who filled out the survey did not necessarily reside in the country during the period of application but met the inclusion criteria, nonetheless.

Of the people residing in the country, the largest percentage (59.6%) live in the Metropolitan region and in the Northern region (27.0%), while only a small percentage stated that they reside in the East and in the South (7.21% and 6.12%, respectively).

Regarding self-identification by skin color, respondents mostly identified as mulatto (56%), secondly as white (22.8%) and thirdly as black (15.1%). These data maintain the same trend as data published in 2006 by the Latin American Public Opinion Project survey, according to which the percentage of people who identified themselves as black was 18.3%, while those who said they were mulattoes reached 67.6% and whites 13.6%.

The survey also measured people's level of education. Cross-referencing educational level with



gender identity and sexual orientation shows that only 0.4% of the total number of people who filled out the survey stated having no educational level. On the other hand, LGBTI people who completed the survey have on average more years of education (14.57 years) than the general population who responded to the National Continuous Labour Force Survey (ENCFT in Spanish) in 2020 (9.92 years). Gay and lesbian survey respondents have a higher average number of years of education than other respondents. At the other extreme are trans people, especially trans women, who show a lower average number of years of education (10.93 years) and a stagnation in the distribution of percentiles that places the high school level (12 years of study) as a limit for both trans women and trans men. When comparing these results, it should be considered that this was an online survey, with a non-probabilistic sample and mainly by self-filling; while the ENCFT is probabilistic, face-to-face and mediated by interviewers.

Regarding employment rates, 39.8% of LGBTI people who filled out the survey said they were working. This percentage is distributed in 30.6% who said they have permanent employment, 3.8% who have temporary employment, 2.8% who have employment but are suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic and 2.6% who started having occasional employment. Additionally 25.1% only study, another 16.1% said they work and study, while 13.1% said they are looking for work. This implies that the people who filled out the survey have a lower employment rate than the general population. In 2020, the Dominican Republic's employment rate was 61.5%, according to the Central Bank's report based on data from the ENCFT.

Development gaps

For the purposes of the study, the Human Development Index (HDI) was estimated for the general population and for those who completed the survey. Given that not all the variables used to estimate the HDI at the national level can be replicated for the population that filled out the survey, it was decided to use other indicators for each of the dimensions considered for the HDI. In this sense, for the long and healthy life dimension, access to health insurance was used; for the education dimension the average number of years of studies was taken into account, while for the decent standard of living, the unemployment rate was considered.

It is important to note that, due to the use of different variables, the HDI estimated for LGBTI people who completed the survey is not comparable to the HDI estimated by UNDP annually at the global or local level. For this reason, it was necessary to estimate an HDI with the same methodology as the one calculated for LGBTI people and for the general population, so that they would be comparable.

Based on these indicators and with data from the ENCFT 2020, an HDI of 0.615 was estimated for the general population, while that of LGBTI people who filled out the survey was 0.463. LGBTI people have a better situation in the education dimension (0.912 against 0.624), however, in the healthy life dimensions their situation is more disadvantageous than that of the general population (0.486 against 0.543), but it is in the dignified life dimension where the biggest gap occurs for LGBTI people (0.224 against 0.687 of the general population).

LGBTI people who filled out the survey, despite having a higher level of education than the ge-



neral population, have greater limitations in accessing the labor market in dignified conditions and in maintaining long and healthy lives. These results are congruent with the levels of discrimination and violence reported in the survey.

Exposure to violence and discrimination

The study shows that LGBTI people are exposed to various forms of violence or discrimination from a very young age. 96.7% reported having been victims of or witnessed some form of violence based on their sexual orientation or gender identity during adolescence. This incidence is higher among people who identify as male (gay 99.2%, bisexuals 96% and trans men 95.9%), while it is lower among the rest of respondents (89.3%).

Regarding acts of violence or discrimination suffered by LGBTI people during adolescence, 77.9% reported offensive comments, while 48.9% indicated having suffered sexual violence and 31.9% physical aggression.

Violence and discrimination is reported in other stages of the lives of LGBTI people as well, 44.9% said they have suffered detention, interrogation or unjustified aggression by the police or the military. Furthermore, participants reported being subjected to psychological treatment or involuntary religious interventions in order to change their sexual orientation or gender identity, which caused severe pain and suffering and physical and psychological damage²; other instances included being expelled from home, employment and/or educational centers, as well as being subjected to extortion or blackmail at some point in their lives.

High levels of recent exposure to discrimination and/or violence are also reported among survey participants. In this sense, 42.1% of LGBTI people who filled out the survey said they had been victims of some form of discrimination or violence in the last twelve months. Trans women (74.7%) and trans men (71.9%) were the most likely to report violence or discrimination in the last year. Compared to the general population, LGBTI respondents were 5.16 times more likely to report experiencing violence or physical aggression in the past twelve months.

The results also show that high levels of recent victimization of LGBTI people are based on their gender identity, sexual orientation and/or gender expression. This was indicated by 70% of those who said they had suffered an act of violence in the last year.

The results show that the most serious acts in terms of violence and/or discrimination reported by those who completed the survey were committed by people they knew such as school or university classmates, family members, neighbors and work colleagues. Incidents linked to people connected to educational centers were the most prevalent: 28.6% said they had been victims of some act of violence perpetrated by someone from one of these centers, while almost one out of four people (24%) said they had been victims of violence by an adolescent or a group of adolescents.

Nearly one in five LGBTI people reported experiencing violence from strangers. Among the respondents, 16.6% said the aggression came from someone belonging to a religious group, while 15.3% indicated that their neighbours were the aggressors. Overall, 13.4% of the participants recognised that the most serious aggression they have suffered was committed by people who did not accept the human rights of LGBTI people.

2. See report: Practice of so-called “conversion therapies”. Report of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. Available at: <https://undocs.org/es/A/HRC/44/53>

More than one out of ten respondents indicated that the most serious aggression they have suffered was perpetrated by the police or the military, while almost one in ten (9.9%) said the same about people related to their workplace.

Reporting acts of violence is uncommon among the people who participated in the survey, almost nine out of ten (88.7%) said they had not done so. The National Police (4%) is the institution where most reported having made the complaint, followed by the media or social networks (2.8%) and the Prosecutor's Office (2.7%).

The most frequently mentioned reason for not reporting violence was that respondents considered that the police would not do anything, which was pointed out by 31.2% of the people who participated in the survey. Another 26.1% of people said they felt ashamed or embarrassed, which was the second most common reason. Almost one in four persons (23.7%) said that what happened was insignificant. Similarly, 13.1% said they felt it was their fault.

Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they avoided certain actions or places as a mechanism to avoid being victims of discrimination or violence. The results show a strong tendency towards isolation and social concealment as a form of protection.

In this regard, more than eight out of every ten people (85%) said they stopped doing various activities. It is noteworthy that almost three out of four (73.5%) said they avoid showing affection in public, while almost half of the survey's participants (49.7%) avoid freely expressing their gender identity or sexual orientation and 44.9% have stopped frequenting public places, while a fifth (20.6%) do not attend events or activities at work or school.

The results also show that for the majority of LGBTI people who filled out the survey, the acts of violence and discrimination they have suffered have serious consequences on their lives: 73.7% said they have had some kind of consequence, especially emotional ones, as 57.9% said they have become depressed, while another 32.7% considered taking their own life and 17.8% actually tried to commit suicide.

Another group of LGBTI people said they had thought about or have taken actions to distance themselves from the spaces where they were victimized or from spaces where they may come into contact with the people who assaulted them. In this sense, 16.8% said they had moved to another neighborhood or province, while another 12.5% said they had thought about changing their school, 7.4% said they had changed schools and 4.4% decided to drop out of school. In the same vein, 6.1% said they had changed jobs.

Personal satisfaction

LGBTI respondents were asked about their level of satisfaction with their lives. The aggregate results for all LGBTI respondents show that the majority (73.2%) chose responses that reflect satisfaction and unconditional self-acceptance of their gender identity and sexual orientation.

The disaggregated analysis, according to the various identities included in the survey, shows only three identity groups whose levels of personal self-satisfaction/self-acceptance linked to their gender identity or sexual orientation are above the average proportion. These are lesbians (82.3%), trans women (80.5%) and gay men (77.9%). On the other hand, bisexual men (59.3%), other identities not disaggregated (63.3%) and queer people (64.7%), are the three groups with the lowest self-acceptance rates.



The health system and LGBTI people

The results show that 85% of the respondents are seeking medical help for any health problem. The access gap (15%) is distributed among those who solve their health needs from self-medication (8.6%), those who appeal to natural preparations (5.5%) and those who do not receive any professional health care (4.8%). However, this situation is not homogeneous. Among LGBTI people in the Dominican Republic, access to health services varies between different identities, age groups, places of residence and birth.

The responses obtained show that the gap in access to health services ranges from (31.3%) to (11.1%) amid the various identities. Those who identify as gay have achieved the greatest access to medical services (88.9%), followed by lesbians (86.0%).

In reference to access to health services, the people who filled out the survey show a reduced demand for these services, especially trans and cisgender people who identify as men.

Only 77.2% of native-born LGBTI people said they sought medical help when they fell ill. This is a considerable gap with the rest of the immigrant population residing in the country, as the National Immigration Survey (2017, p. 163) reports that 92.7% of the Haitian-born persons sought medical help when they required it, the same as 97.8% of the rest of the foreign-born individuals.

The gap in access to health insurance is large for all LGBTI people who participated in the survey, but even larger when disaggregating among the various identities. Trans people are the least protected by health insurance, and even more so in the case of trans women, given that more than 4 out of 10 are totally unprotected, almost half are affiliated to the Family Health Insurance

(SFS) (54.0%), but only 1 out of 7 has managed to access the Contributive Regime -RC-. When establishing a parallel between the conditions necessary to access the Subsidized Regime of the Dominican Social Security System, the fact that trans women (38.7%) and trans men (30.6%) are the highest segment of those who responded with affiliation to this regime, means that they live in more precarious conditions, a situation that affects trans women more profoundly.

Among those who filled out the survey, 3.7 out of 10 people said they had experienced some form of discrimination or had a negative experience in health care facilities.

The responses recorded are shown in descending order:

- Concealing their gender identity, sexual orientation or being intersex (20.5%).
- Difficulty in seeking or finding LGBTI-friendly health professionals (9.1%).
- Inappropriate curiosity (8.0%).
- Being treated unequally by medical staff (5.2%).
- Having to change GPs and specialists because of their negative reaction (4.6%).
- Specific needs ignored (not taken into account) (3.7%).
- Forgoing treatment for fear of discrimination or intolerant reactions (3.6%).
- Difficulty accessing health care (3.3%).
- Health personnel minimize the condition (3.0%).

Protection and social programs

In the case of LGBTI people who responded to the survey, more than 5 out of 10 do not have Old Age, Disability and Survivors' Insurance (SVDS). When compared to national data, the overall number of respondents is below 6.5 out of every 10 people in the economically active population (EAP) who are unprotected by the SVDS.

Of those who responded, the remaining proportion is 44.9% who are affiliated to a Pension Fund Administrator (AFP in Spanish), 2.2% who stated that they have savings in the old pay-as-you-go system and 1.7% reported having other saving mechanisms.

Overall, 72.1% of respondents do not benefit from any social program. Of the LGBTI people surveyed, few are proportionally beneficiaries of social programs, with the exception of one of the programs, with no more than 19% for any program, in any identity group. The programs with the highest percentage of beneficiaries among respondents were those linked to reducing the harm caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. the "FASE", "Quédate en casa" and "Pa'ti" programs, of which 17.0%, 3.6% and 1.6% reported having received benefits, respectively.

Social and political participation

Those who completed the survey show a lower level of abstention from political processes than what was registered at the national level during the 2020 elections. When survey respondents were asked if they voted in the 2020 elections, nearly one-third (32.0%) said they did not vote. The percentage of those who report having voted in the presidential elections (64.1%) is higher than the one registered in the municipal (48.5%) and congressional (47.4%) elections.

The analysis of electoral participation by identity shows higher percentages of abstention among trans men (44.9%) and bisexual women (39.0%). It is also high among others (38.7%) and trans women (36.2%). The lowest abstention rate is among gay men (26.1%). The latter registered percentages above 55% in all the elections of 2020, reporting 70% in the presidential elections.

Compared to the percentage who stated attending the Plaza de la Bandera, fewer participated in the LGBTI pride caravan (27.3%) or joined marches for women's rights or LGBTI people (16.3%). The same is observed with respect to the Green March (16.0%).

It is observed that almost half (48.6%) of the respondents said they had participated in the Plaza de la Bandera protests following the suspension of the municipal elections in February 2020, showing a high degree of participation.

Participants were asked about their participation in various organizations. Slightly more than three out of four (76.5%) said they were not part of any organization, while slightly less than one in twelve (7.3%) were affiliated with a sports or cultural club and a similar proportion with an LGBTI NGO.

Similarly, one in twenty (5.9%) said they belonged to a political party. Participation in non-LGB-

TI non-governmental organizations registered a comparable incidence (5.2%), while only 0.9% said they were part of an association of parents and friends of the school.

The percentages of respondents' participation in the organisations that were asked about varied among people of different identities. In general, trans people, both trans men and trans women, reported participating more than all other identities, especially in LGBTI organizations, mainly through the activities and assistance they receive.

Three in four LGBTI people who completed the survey said they consider themselves part of a religious faith, while only one in ten are atheist (9.0%) and another 17.1% consider themselves agnostic.

People who consider themselves to be non-religious believers (37.3%) are the most prevalent, followed by those who consider themselves Catholic, who represent a quarter of survey respondents. Some respondents (6.2%) said they considered themselves to be of a non-Catholic religion.

Migration and legal status

Of those who said they were born in the Dominican Republic, 5.4% (358 persons) reside abroad permanently or seasonally. When asked about the reasons for leaving the Dominican Republic, improving their economic conditions (55.8%) was the main reason given, followed by those who indicated that they left to study (45.0%).

In terms of the reasons for migrating, reasons associated with gender identity, sexual orientation or gender expression were mentioned by a third of those surveyed (33.9%), while family reunification was mentioned by just under a quarter

(23.6%). This indicates that there seems to be some relationship between discrimination faced by LGBTI persons and the motivation to migrate.

Migration, associated with being LGBTI, varies considerably and significantly among the different identities. In this sense, the greatest difference is observed among trans persons, while no trans woman indicated having migrated because of her identity, trans men (40%) registered the highest percentage who gave this response.

People who stated being born outside the national territory were asked their current condition of residence in the country. Most of them said they were under some kind of legal status: 31.5% said they were nationalized, while 17.6% said they had legal residency, another 8.7% said they were in the process of obtaining residency, 3.9% were in the process of naturalization and another 3.9% at some stage of the asylum process.

Finally, 28.5% of the people said they were residing in the country in an irregular situation (22.8%) or without documents (5.7%).

The results reveal significant differences in the residency status in the country among LGBTI people who filled out the survey and were born abroad. In particular, a situation of a higher percentage of naturalization is observed among people born in the United States, while no Haitian person reported being naturalized. However, the highest percentage of irregular status is reported by Venezuelans (40.9%), since almost half of them are involved in some form of irregularity. Among Haitians, irregularity, although lower, is also significant (25.4%).

Persons born in Haiti register a much higher percentage of those who indicate that they are awaiting a response to their asylum application (16.9%). Legal residency status is reported more among persons of other nationalities (27.7%), followed by those born in Venezuela (16.7%) and Haiti (10.2%).

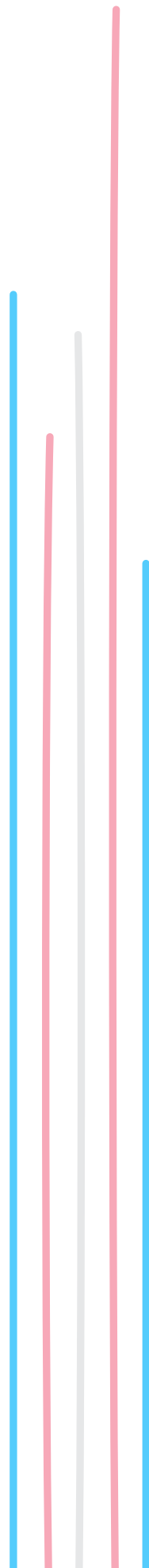
Of those who said they were born abroad, 3.8% (18 persons) also indicated that they had applied for asylum in the Dominican Republic. The majority of these persons, 3.4% (16 persons) said that they were awaiting a response to their refugee application, while 0.02% (1 person) said that their application had been denied and another indicated that their refugee application had been approved.

Two out of every three people who requested refuge (66.7%, 12 people) were born in Haiti, while the remaining third comes from Venezuela (22.2%, 4 people) or from other countries (11.1%, 2 people).

Almost all of the persons born in the country who completed the survey (98.5%) have some form of Dominican identity document, mostly an identity card (90.9%) and, to a lesser extent, only a birth certificate (7.6%). This means that the 1.5% (100 persons) who do not have any document may have limitations in exercising certain human rights.

Haitian-born people are less likely to hold a passport from their country of origin (55.9%) than those born in Venezuela (81%), the United States (75%) or other countries (72.9%).

Nearly a third (30.1%) said they had a Dominican birth certificate and 15.6% a Dominican passport. This indicates that they are persons with dual nationality, being more common among persons born in the United States (43.4%), other countries (26.4%) and Venezuela (14.3%) than among those born in Haiti (1.7%, 1 person).



Conclusions and recommendations

The results of the National LGBTI Survey of the Dominican Republic are extensive and leave ample space for reflection on various aspects that concern the population under study. This chapter develops a synthesis of some of these issues and defines some lines of action for the future.

Data

This survey is an effort that should serve as an example for Dominican State institutions to begin or strengthen LGBTI-inclusive data collection. Improving data disaggregation is critical for the full implementation of the SDGs to meet the ambition of the 2030 Agenda to achieve sustainable development, leaving no one behind. It is recommended that the Dominican government, through the National Statistics Office, continues to implement policies for the collection and analysis of statistical data on violence and discrimination affecting LGBTI people and on the various aspects of LGBTI people's lives. Based on the collection and analysis of this information, it will be possible to design and implement better public policies, as well as to evaluate and formulate necessary changes in existing policies.

Young people with a high level of education

The respondents to the survey are mainly young people under the age of 30, coming from provinces with a large urban population. Their level

of education is high in relation to that from the general population and all comparisons must be made bearing this reality in mind. This can be explained based on multiple factors, some of which are evident in the results of the report.

The survey was completed online, which in itself is a challenge for populations with connection difficulties and literacy limitations. Although efforts were made to overcome these situations through the application of face-to-face interviews, this however had limitations, since it encountered problems of apprehension on the part of LGBTI people at being "exposed". This is one of the lessons to be taken into account for future studies.

As indicated, most of those who completed the survey said that they resided in provinces with a high urban concentration, but also in those with the largest populations in the country. However, given the number of people who filled out the survey, it was possible to count on residents from all over the national territory and abroad in sufficient numbers to respond to the objectives set out.

Increasing coverage in the eastern and southern regions of the country, as well as various provinces in the north, is one of the aspects to be taken into account in future studies. Likewise, the study shows that being LGBTI was an important factor in the decision of the Dominican diaspora to migrate. There is a need to delve deeper into this population in the future.

Participation of people of different gender identities and sexual orientations

The survey involved people of all gender identities and sexual orientations so it was possible

to document different experiences and establish different needs based on each identity. However, the number of intersex respondents was very low, and this has proven to be a limitation in several national surveys implemented throughout the world, it is recommended that it is addressed in targeted research.

A population with high unemployment

Despite having higher levels of education than the general population average, LGBTI people who completed the survey had higher levels of unemployment relative to the national average.

Private sector are encouraged to address discrimination in recruitment, employment, working conditions, benefits, respect for privacy and deal with harassment. At the same time, they are encouraged to formulate inclusive policies, exercise due diligence and, where their decisions or activities have had an adverse impact on the enjoyment of human rights, remedy such impacts. They would also benefit from installing mechanisms to monitor and report on their compliance with human rights standards. In situations where a large number of violations of the human rights of LGBTI people have been documented, companies should exercise enhanced due diligence to ensure that they respect the rights of LGBTI people.

Businesses should create a positive and affirming environment within their organizations so that LGBTI staff can work with dignity and without stigma. Companies are encouraged to use their position to contribute to the promotion of human rights and workplace inclusion of LGBTI people.

The challenges within family circles

There are considerable challenges for LGBTI people in the family sphere, both in terms of relationships with their families, as well as in the configuration of their own family arrangements. In the first case, families appear as a space of less discrimination than public spaces and other immediate environments, which differentiates the results of this survey from the findings of other studies.

This does not imply an absence of discrimination within families, the results continue to show the persistent patterns of discrimination towards LGBTI people in these spaces. For example, it is worrying that still more than one in five experienced mistreatments by family members.

The study shows that aggressions against LGBTI people within the family are not usually included in the State's crime statistics, as they are generally not reported, with the family as the origin of the aggression being the main reason for not reporting.

Inclusive education, a national challenge

There is a need in the Dominican Republic for the implementation of public policies for non-discrimination in the educational sphere based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or intersexuality. The majority of MINERD documents are not explicit in the defense of the rights of LGBTI persons, which could explain the diversity of situations evidenced in this survey with respect to the approach to these issues in Dominican classrooms. The responses show an increasing trend in the presence of negative ex-

3. Refers to texts/key messages published in social media adverts.

4. Refers to a code that allows to connect with platforms including the brand.

pressions towards LGBTI people in schools and colleges throughout the country.

Educational centers are exposed as spaces where early experiences of discrimination against LGBTI people occur, while educational programs do not cover important concerns of awareness and equity. In addition, one in every 24 people participating in the survey reported having been expelled from an educational center for being LGBTI.

This situation makes it imperative to face the challenge of meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4: Access to Education, with a comprehensive vision of inclusion, reduction of inequalities and special attention to the problems faced by LGBTI youth. As long as students continue to suffer as a result of discrimination or experience violence on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation, it will not be possible to meet the 2030 Agenda in its entirety.

It is recommended that all normative documents of the Dominican educational system explicitly state the responsibility of schools, the management and members of the educational communities to promote respect for all persons regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or intersex status, and that these principles be made operational in institutional procedures, curricular reforms, and capacity building for teaching and support staff, in order to contribute to the realization of the human rights of LGBTI persons in the school environment.

It is recommended that the country's challenges in terms of access to comprehensive sexuality education based on science, with a focus on rights, equity and respect for all people, including LGBTI persons, be addressed by expanding the implementation of the subjects, methodologies and materials developed within the framework of the Budgetary Support Program for the Education Sector in the Dominican Republic -PAPSE

II-, which are only being implemented in pilot territories.

Health and discrimination

The survey was interested, among other important issues, in identifying the presence of people with disabilities who identify as LGBTI persons. The proportion of the survey respondents who reported living with a disability (12.3) was very close to the proportion of people living with disabilities in the general population (12.4%), as recorded in the 2010 census. Regarding the frequency distribution of the types of disability reported by LGBTI respondents, psychosocial disability is the most prevalent (5.9%), followed by visual (5.4%), others not broken down (1.1%), and physical-motor and auditory (0.6%); intellectual disability is the least frequently reported (0.4%). It should be noted that this differs from the existing national data, where the most frequent type of disability is physical-motor, followed by visual, intellectual, auditory and speech. It would be of great relevance to carry out an analysis with the objective of deepening the existing differences in the frequency of the types of disability, and the high declaration of psychosocial disability among the LGBTI population in comparison with the general population with disabilities.

The issue of the quality of health services was studied from the point of view of the experience of negative and discriminatory situations experienced by LGBTI persons when seeking health care, which were reported by almost 4 out of 10 respondents.

In this regard, the Ministry of Public Health (MSP) has an important responsibility to improve access to quality health care for LGBTI Dominicans. It is recommended to prioritize a line of research regarding the health profile of LGBTI people and the availability of services with the required res-

ponse capacities to meet the needs of this population group. These results should be used as a starting point for the regulation of health interventions from an inclusive perspective that guarantees LGBTI people access to the best options, with scientific evidence, for the promotion, recovery and rehabilitation of their health, as well as for the prevention of diseases, through protocols, guides and manuals, among other normative and operational instruments.

It is recommended that the National Health Service, private sector health facilities, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, and educational institutions participate in a process of sensitization and training of the staff that works in health facilities and their administrative institutions, in order to guarantee dignified and appropriate treatment for LGBTI people. For the sustainability of the process, it must be emphasized that these actions must include permanent measures in the training of health professionals from the technical level to the postgraduate level.

LGBTI activists are advised to use the oversight and social participation mechanisms established by the MOH, the Regional Health Services Network Model and the Health Care Model, in order to monitor respect for the right to health of this population group, advocate for the transformation that the Dominican health system requires to be inclusive and respectful of the rights of LGBTI persons, and participate in the decision-making spaces that exist in the different institutions of the system.

It is recommended that the Ministry of Public Health guarantees trans persons access to health services, including gender affirmation procedures, without stigmatization, discrimination or abusive requirements.

Lack of health protection

Affiliation with social security schemes and the availability of friendly and improved sexual health services appear to have an important association with the type of facility from which health services are demanded. The majority of LGBTI people participating in the survey use the private network, regardless of age, region of residence and country of birth, with the exception of transgender people, who mostly use the public health system and record the highest proportion of use of NPOs centers (NGOs). People residing in the Southern region have the least access to private health services, while the East has the highest proportion of those accessing NPOs facilities. The latter have historically played a role in offering prevention and treatment services for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; health conditions for which LGBTI people present important vulnerabilities and for which NPOs have received funding, along with the public network, in order to improve access and acceptance of user-friendly services for this population group, under the auspices of the National Response to the HIV epidemic.

The results of the LGBTI survey as it relates to the affiliation with Family Health Insurance point to various findings, among which the following stand out:

- Difficulties in accessing formal employment or continuing education could explain part of the gap in access to FSS for younger populations.
- The family dynamics of some LGBTI respondents make it difficult for them to access the family unit coverage when they turn 18.
- The non-recognition of LGBTI couples prevents the family unit from enjoying extended family protection when one of its members enters formal employment.

- Among LGBTI people in the survey there may be a high level of ignorance of the DSSS, its FSS and the decisions implemented, especially in the months following August 2020, which may lead them to be unaware of their affiliation to the subsidized regime of the FSS, the rights and duties derived from that affiliation, and therefore the existence of the risk of loss of care opportunities and the maintenance of a high out-of-pocket expenditure linked to health care.

In order to guarantee the right to health of LGBTI persons in the Dominican Republic, it is recommended that, in collaboration with civil society organizations, the Directorate of Information and Defense of Social Security Affiliates (DIDA) implements an information campaign regarding the Dominican Social Security System, aimed at LGBTI persons, with emphasis on the identities and provinces that reported less access to these services; and the National Health Insurance (SeNaSa) should conduct a family health insurance enrolment or affiliation campaign that prioritises the beneficiary population according to the most vulnerable groups shown in the results of this study.

To the National Congress of the Republic, it is recommended that de facto marital unions between persons of the same gender be recognised in the Civil Code, so that they may have access to fundamental rights such as health or social protection, which in the country's legal structure are tied to the recognition of family units, such as Family Health Insurance, Old Age, Disability and Survivors' Insurance, and certain social protection programs, among other services.

It is recommended that the Ministries of Labor and Youth establish programs to facilitate access to formal and dignified employment for LGBTI persons, from a rights-based approach and with a gender equality perspective, overcoming stereotypes, stigmas, and glass ceilings with respect to occupations.

Discrimination and violence as a daily occurrence

The survey results show that LGBTI people are exposed to egregious levels of discrimination and violence from the earliest stages of their lives. These levels vary by identity, but are high in all cases. The situation of trans people, both trans men and women, is of particular concern.

This survey shows that, in the Dominican Republic, since adolescence LGBTI people are subjected to experiences of discrimination and violence that do not diminish throughout their lives. These situations are both lived experiences and observed towards other LGBTI people. Although discriminatory verbal attacks and expressions were common, the findings showed a considerable incidence of much more serious acts of violence, such as physical aggression and sexual violence.

The acts described by the LGBTI people who filled out the survey are not limited to strangers but in many cases are perpetrated by people from their own environment, including people from their neighbourhoods, family, members of the same church and even educational authorities and civil or military authorities.

The place of residence appears as the place of greatest exposure to acts of discrimination or violence towards LGBTI persons. Other public spaces such as restaurants and bars are no exception in this regard.

The Judiciary and the Attorney General's Office must adopt all necessary measures to guarantee the standard of due diligence in the prevention, as well as effective, prompt and impartial investigation, punishment and reparation of discrimination against LGBTI persons, or those perceived as such, as indicated by the IACHR²⁸.

The justice system must be strengthened to include respect for and protection of the human rights of LGBTI people.

It is recommended that the Ombudsman establishes a specialized department to respond to the situation of violence and discrimination faced by LGBTI persons in their interaction with public authorities.

It is recommended that Congress and the Executive Branch ensure that LGBTI people and LGBTI organizations are consulted in the development of legislation and policies that affect their rights and that their participation in such processes is encouraged.

Fear, depression and hiding

As a result of exposure to acts of discrimination and violence, most LGBTI people reported being depressed, while others have reported considering suicide. It is no coincidence that across the country a significant proportion of LGBTI people do not allow themselves to engage in various everyday activities, such as those that involve public expression of gender identity or sexual orientation.

This is associated with the notion that the acts of discrimination and violence suffered are mostly related to being LGBTI, but also with the distrust of the authorities and the levels of protection they can expect in a society with high levels of discrimination.

It is recommended that the National Congress of the Republic approves the law on equality and non-discrimination, as well as criminalizes hate crimes, hate speech, sexual violence, discrimi-

nation and torture based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and sexual characteristics.

It is recommended that the Executive Branch includes the protection of the LGBTI population in the draft bill to be submitted to the National Congress for the strengthening of existing mechanisms towards the creation of a national, comprehensive and integrated system for the promotion of a life free of violence, the prevention and punishment of gender-based violence, domestic violence and violence against women and the protection of survivors of such violence. Similarly, a sensitization process is recommended for anyone working in the public sector to identify and reject violence against LGBTI people, such as hate crimes. It is also recommended that training programs are implemented to develop the attitudes and skills necessary to prevent the re-victimization of LGBTI survivors of gender-based violence.

It is recommended that the Executive Branch sign and ratify the Inter-American Convention against All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance adopted by the OAS General Assembly on 5 June 2013.

Local governments must develop awareness-raising actions regarding the human rights of LGBTI persons with neighborhood councils, community organizations, and institutions and businesses in their territories; become involved in the coordination and organization of the different actions that are programmed for their territories by the State and civil society in order to guarantee LGBTI persons a life free of violence.

LGBTI people, civil society organizations, academia and research institutions should maintain and strengthen LGBTI human rights observatories in order to increase evidence-based publications that serve as a reference for decision-making and promotion of public policies to protect LGBTI peo-

5. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, LGBTI Rights Rapporteurship. Basic Concepts (on line) <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/multimedia/2015/violencia-lgbti/terminologialgbti.html>

ple from gender-based violence.

The Ministry of Public Health must design and implement a regulatory and public policy framework aimed at strengthening access to the highest level of physical and mental health care for LGBTI people, as well as prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sexual characteristics. At the same time, the Ministry of Health should prohibit “therapies” that claim to “modify,” “re-orient” or “cure” the gender identity and sexual orientation of people and monitor and sanction them as appropriate. The training and education of medical personnel specializing in areas that specifically address the needs of LGBTI people should be prioritized. It is recommended that the Ministry of Public Health fund nationwide interventions for the prevention of suicide among LGBTI persons, which should include research, help lines, training of health personnel, as well as the collection and analysis of data.

The Ministry of Women, CONAVIHSIDA, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Youth and the Ombudsman must elaborate and implement policies and programs to promote respect for the rights of LGBTI persons and their social acceptance, especially through education and general culture.

It is recommended that the Ministry of Women continue to strengthen its public administration training programs on gender equality, which address the human rights of LGBTI persons, and promote the participation of police officers, prison officers, border guards, immigration officers and other security force personnel, teachers from the basic, secondary and higher education system, as well as personnel from the justice and public health systems.

Health professional associations, including psychology and psychiatry associations, should publicly position themselves against the pathologization of LGBTI people based on their sexual

orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sexual characteristics. They should also promote more training on how to guarantee access to health care free of discrimination and promote affirmative treatment. It is recommended to develop policies that sanction and prevent discrimination against LGBTI people exercised by those who are part of the professional associations. At the same time, efforts to prevent suicide among LGBTI people should be supported.

Finally, it is recommended that the media projects an objective and balanced image of LGBTI people and their rights and includes the voice of LGBTI individuals and groups in newspapers, television and radio programming.

International protection for LGBTI people

Among the LGBTI migrants in the country, there are cases of persons that came to the Dominican Republic in search of international protection, due to persecution and human rights violations in their countries of origin. Among these, some had submitted a refugee application.

In this regard, it is important that the Dominican authorities that make up the refugee protection system are able to provide timely protection to people who fled their countries because their lives and safety were threatened due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

The challenge of political and social participation

Although LGBTI people showed higher levels of electoral participation than the general population and their integration in various social struggles such as the Green March, Plaza de la Ban-

dera protests and LGBTI pride marches is also considerable, their participation in social justice organizations could be encouraged.

The country also has unfinished business with respect to the social participation of LGBTI migrants, who in general demonstrated lower levels of participation in the various social organizations when compared to LGBTI persons born in Dominican territory.

It is recommended that LGBTI organizations carry out political advocacy aimed at getting Dominican party organizations to identify LGBTI people as a voting bloc that must be included through their active participation in national electoral life, in order to advance the maturity of the country's representative democracy.

The political participation of LGBTI people should be encouraged through national and local awareness campaigns, and an assertive approach to LGBTI communities by the Central Electoral Board and political parties.

It is recommended that political parties take action in favor of the political participation of LGBTI persons, prevent discrimination in their organizations and put an end to hate speech and other public expressions that encourage violence. At the same time, it is recommended that parties ensure the inclusion of LGBTI people in government programs and in public policies they promote.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the Central Electoral Board establishes a protocol to improve the participation of LGBTI voters, with special attention to transgender and bisexual voters, who presented higher levels of abstention in the 2020 elections. During the next elections, the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the protocol should be included as part of the electoral observation processes.

Religion and LGBTI people

The survey reveals conflicting relationships between LGBTI people and religion or churches, with survey respondents reporting experiences of discrimination or violence from religious groups, but also exposure to religious interventions that seek to modify the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of LGBTI people.

More than a third of LGBTI people who completed the survey identified themselves as believers without religion, which together with the reported experiences of discrimination points to a distancing of this population from churches and organized religion. Their rapprochement demands more openness and greater understanding on the part of religious authorities and their communities.

"Freedom in general, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief in particular, are cornerstones of the international human rights framework, and the right to freedom of religion or belief must be recognized for all human beings throughout their lives, including for LGBT persons," said independent expert on protection from violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, Victor Madrigal-Borloz, in a joint statement on the occasion of the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, 17th May 2021. Religious authorities have a responsibility to ensure that religion and tradition are not used to promote discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Certain narratives create the false notion that there is an inherent conflict between the right to religious freedom and the basic human rights of LGBT people. This is a fabricated idea that contributes to their exclusion from all sectors of social life, as well as to the violence perpetrated against them.

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