

FRA's EU LGBT survey

Questions & Answers on the survey methodology



This is a brief overview of some key methodological issues as regards the EU LGBT survey. More detailed information can be found in the *EU LGBT survey technical report*, which also contains the survey questionnaire.

1. Why, when and how was the EU LGBT survey carried out?

FRA conducted an online survey to identify how lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people living in the European Union and Croatia experience the fulfilment of their fundamental rights. The evidence produced by the survey will support the development of more effective laws and policies to fight discrimination, violence and harassment, improving equal treatment across society. The need for such an EU-wide survey became evident after the publication in 2009 of the first FRA report on homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, which highlighted the absence of comparable data. The European Commission then requested FRA to collect comparable data across the EU on this issue. FRA organised the data collection in the form of an online survey covering all EU Member States and Croatia. The respondents were persons aged 18 years and over, who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, anonymously. The survey was made available online, from April to July 2012, in all 23 official EU languages (except Irish) plus Catalan, Croatian, Luxembourgish, Russian and Turkish. In total, 93,079 LGBT persons completed the survey. FRA's inhouse experts designed the survey which was implemented by Gallup, one of the market leaders in large-scale surveys. In addition, civil society organisations including ILGA-Europe (European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) and Transgender Europe (TGEU) provided advice on how to best approach LGBT people.

2. How representative are the results ?

The results reflect the experiences of more than 93,000 individuals who completed the online survey across Europe. The size of the LGBT population or its proportion to the general population is unknown and cannot be identified in population registers or other official statistics. However, although the results cannot be considered as representative of all LGBT people in the EU, they constitute by far the largest collection of empirical evidence of its kind in Europe to date.

3. Why was the survey conducted online?

This methodology was selected after consultation with key experts because it has particular advantages for the purpose of the survey. Online surveys are cost effective and can potentially collect data from a large number of respondents that would be much more costly to contact individually. Online surveys also guarantee anonymity. This allowed a broader spectrum of the LGBT population to be reached compared with more traditional approaches, for example 'hard-to-reach' or 'closeted' LGBT populations. Full anonymity, privacy and confidentiality, which is guaranteed to the respondents, helped obtain reports of sensitive or negative experiences, such as criminal victimisation. The online survey methodology also helps eliminate bias, which could have been introduced by telephone or face-to-face interview approaches when dealing with very sensitive and personal questions, such as sexual orientation, gender identity or experiences of criminal victimisation.

4. How did EU LGBT survey achieve wide participation of LGBT respondents?

In all EU countries, household internet coverage is high enough to guarantee a broad response among the target group. According to Eurostat, 76 % of households in the EU have internet access and 72 % of all households are connected via broadband, not accounting for other ways of accessing the internet (such as internet cafés and public terminals). This is an important argument in support of online surveys. With access to internet being the only requirement, the survey was able to achieve national coverage of each of the survey countries. Respondents could participate in the survey when and where it was most convenient for them, limiting non-response due to inconvenient timing of interviews.

5. Could someone complete the survey multiple times to influence the results?

Different mechanisms were used to discourage multiple responses from the same person. The length and duration (average 30 minutes) of the survey, combined with the concentration and attention required in completing it, was one element. Moreover, close monitoring of the input process in the different countries was performed to identify and

avoid possible efforts of falsification of results. Allowing multiple survey responses from the same internet address (or Internet Protocol, IP), despite the risk of duplication, was an important and deliberate choice, in order to protect confidentiality and anonymity, and to encourage participation also of populations without personal access to internet (for example via internet cafés) or in the same household. Given the large number of responses, a smaller number of double entries would in any case have minimal or unnoticeable effect on the main findings and conclusions. FRA did not trace any falsification efforts. In view of the large number of respondents (93,079), even a minimal influence or distortion of the results would require a massive effort of hundreds of working hours.

6. Which topics were covered by the questionnaire and how was it prepared?

The questionnaire covered a variety of issues linked to the enjoyment of fundamental rights, such as experiences of discrimination, victimisation by violence and harassment, daily life behaviours and perception of public attitudes towards LGBT people, as well as views and awareness about law and policies against discrimination and towards the respect and protection of the fundamental rights of LGBT persons. In developing the questionnaire FRA consulted a multinational panel of experts in the area of scientific research on sexual orientation and gender identity. Furthermore, the questionnaire was extensively discussed with various stakeholder groups and FRA's own Scientific Committee.

7. Could non-LGBT persons respond?

The objective of the survey was to identify what LGBT people themselves think and experience. Therefore, the survey started with a self-identification question that allowed only those identifying themselves as LGBT to continue. A number of other questions in the questionnaire was also used to filter and secure the participation of LGBT people. Data on the attitudes and views of the general population already exist. For example, Eurobarometer collects data about the general public's perceptions of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. The analysis of the results in the *EU LGBT survey – Main results* report compares some Eurobarometer data with the EU LGBT survey results.

8. If the participation of LGBT people in the survey differed from country to country how can you ensure the results are comparable?

In order to correct for any type of under- or overrepresentation of any particular lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender group or nationality in the sample, data weighting was applied to the EU LGBT average. This is a statistical procedure that ensures that the opinions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender respondents from each country are represented proportionally and according to the country's total population (based on all people living in the country, not only LGBT people – as the number of the latter is not available). In addition, national averages (representing the responses of all LGBT people in the country) were also weighted to correct for the differences in the LGBT composition in the survey countries. The statistical weighting was based on two assumptions: First, that the relative size of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups within the overall LGBT population is similar in all countries and close to the proportions achieved in the survey for EU27 and Croatia overall. Group weights are therefore computed as an average of the share of each group (L, G, B and T) in the total data set across all countries; second, the weighting assumed that the differences in the relative size of the LGBT population over the age of 18 between the EU Member States and Croatia are equal to the differences in the relative size of the total adult population in each EU Member State and Croatia. Statistical country weights were computed based on Eurostat data.

9. How was the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of respondents assured?

FRA took several measures to guarantee data security, privacy and confidentiality of the survey respondents. To ensure privacy, the survey did not collect information on individual respondents or their computers (such as IP address) other than what respondents voluntarily provided in the survey questionnaire, and what was necessary for administering the survey. The full respondent web session during the time the online questionnaire was being filled in was protected using internet high security protocols, with no option to access the survey in an unprotected insecure mode. The data collection and the analysis process were performed without any personal or sensitive data capable of identifying persons collected or elaborated guaranteeing full confidentiality of the information provided.