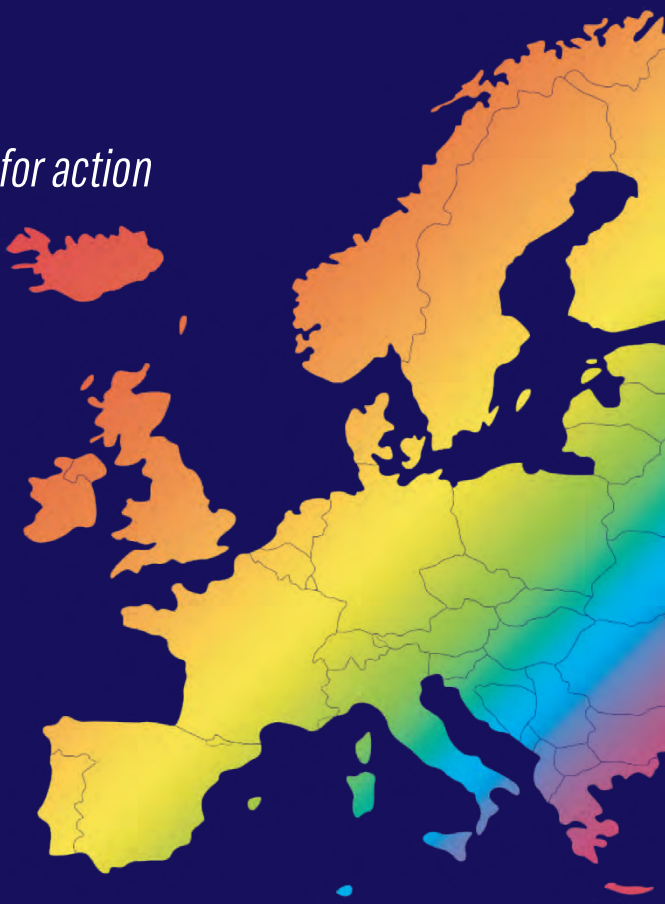
SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY AND SPORT

Selected findings
and recommendations for action

SCOTLAND



OUT SPORT

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

One key concern was to promote the survey in a neutral way, in order to attract LGBTI* individuals both with and without negative experiences related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Accordingly, the words and expressions “negative experiences”, "discrimination" or “harassment” were not used in any of our promotional activities.

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ABOUT OUTSPORT

OUTSPORT is a Europe-wide project that opposes discrimination against LGBTI* people in sport based on their gender identity or sexual orientation[1]. The project is co-financed under the Erasmus+ programme and its central components are research, communication, networking and awareness-raising among athletes and trainers.

In 2018, an EU-wide online survey on the experiences of LGBTI* people was carried out, involving more than 5,500 respondents from all 28 EU member states. In addition, four representatives of Scottish sports federations/ organisations were interviewed about their strategies in the fight against homo-/transphobic discrimination in sport: Community Leisure UK Scotland, whose members are responsible for most of Scotland's publically funded leisure and cultural facilities, sportscotland as the national sports agency in Scotland, Scottish Disability Sport as the leading disability sports agency in Scotland, and Scottish Student Sport as the central organisation for university and college sports.

A detailed report is available on www.out-sport.eu.

Country specific results from Scotland are presented below.

SAMPLE

176 people from Scotland took part in the online survey. The average age of 33 years (±13) is about six years above the overall average of all respondents (EU: 27).

43% of the respondents identify themselves as gay men, 30% as lesbian women and 15% as bisexual. 12% report a different sexual orientation. In terms of gender identity, 48% identify themselves as male, 38% as female and 14% as non-binary.

In total, 19% have a gender identity that does not correspond to their sex assigned at birth.

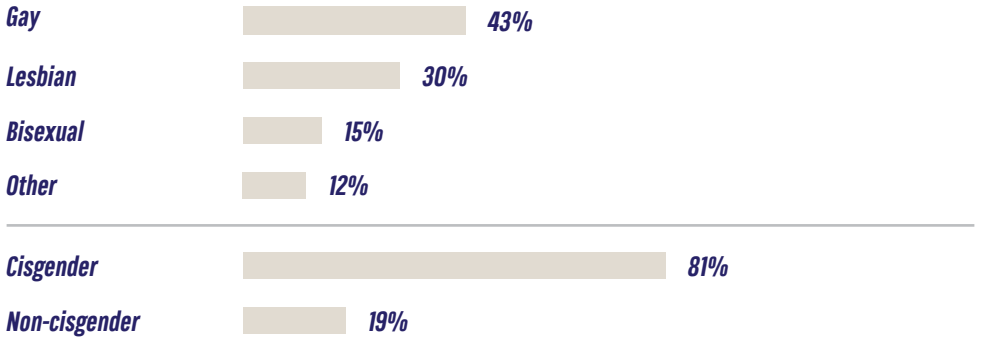

Figure 1: Sexual orientation and gender identity (n=176)

1: The acronym LGBTI denotes lesbian/gay women, gay men, bisexual people, trans people and intersex people. The asterisk denotes queer people that do not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex, but have a non-hetero sexual orientation and/or a non-cis gender identity. As we noticed in the course of this study, the acronym LGBTI (without any further placeholder like an asterisk) is too small to cover the great diversity of people with other sexual orientations or gender identities that diverge from what has emerged as a social norm.*

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF SPORTS ACTIVITIES

72% of respondents were active in sports in the last 12 months, while 20% were active earlier and 8% were never active in sports - apart from school sports. The four most popular sports among active sportspeople are running, cardio-based fitness, football and swimming.

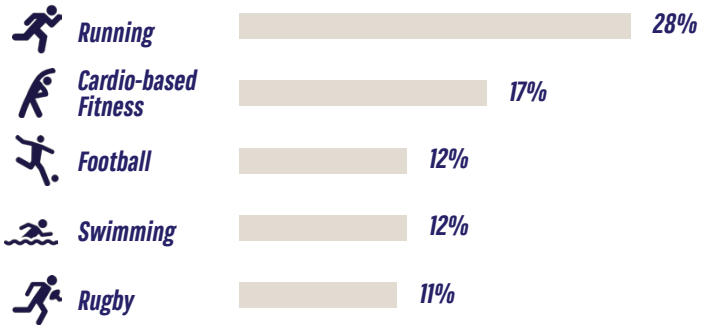

Figure 2: Most popular main sports (n=127)

Overall, individual sports (62%) are more popular than team sports (31%). The main types of sport are predominantly recreational (52%) or competitive (40%), and less frequently high-performance (7%). Sport is most frequently practised in clubs (51%), informal groups (14%) or in other organisational settings (e.g. company sport) (14%).

Sports organisations specifically for LGBTI* people tend to be the exception with 9%.

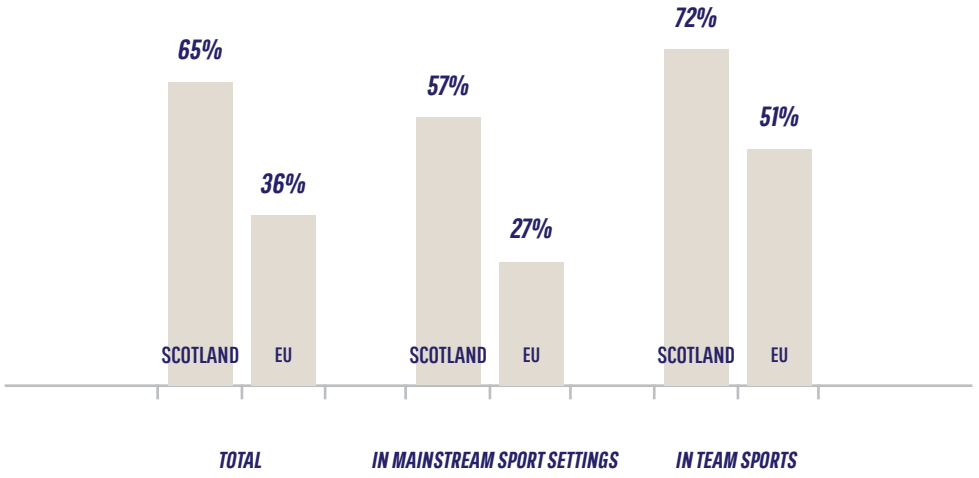

Figure 3: Share of people who are out in their sport (n=162)

Although respondents from Scotland are more open about their sexual orientation and gender identity in sport than the European average, the interviewed organisations are aware of there being a challenging environment facing LGBTI* athletes and are taking steps to tackle that environment, at present.

"So, for example, last year we got a lot of feedback that there was still an ignorance around LGBTI participation in sport."* (sportscotland)

FEELING UNWELCOME IN SPORTS

Almost every third respondent (31%) feels excluded from certain sports due to sexual orientation or gender identity, a higher number than the EU total (19%). This is particularly true of football, rugby and swimming.Transgender people feel excluded more frequently overall (58%).

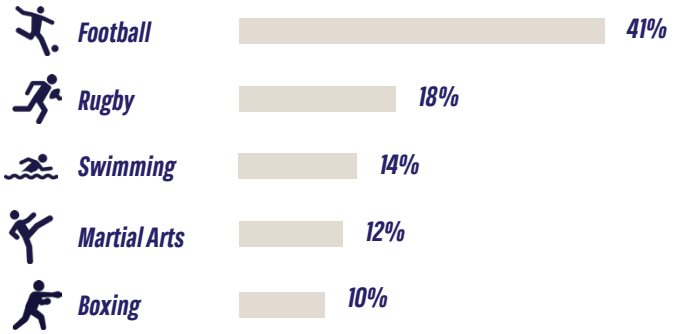

Figure 4: *Sports that people feel excluded from (Multiple choice; n=51)*

Potential exclusion from specific sports is not only perceived by the respondents, but also by the organisations. Community Leisure Scotland, for example, is working to identify possible causes for exclusion experienced due to sexual orientation or gender identity in Scottish sport, as well as to take action to address those causes.

"So I suppose there's been quite a bit of work that we've done to try to identify barriers for people engaging with our members, or with physical education more generally and trying to understand why people don't or choose not to or feel like they can't – and barriers in every sense of the word. (...) So that gave us a whole range of issues. Some of which would cut across a whole different sector – things like confidence, things like image, things like it's not the place for me (...)." (Community Leisure Scotland)

HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC INCIDENTS IN SPORTS

Homophobia and transphobia in sport, i.e. prejudices or discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, are a well-known phenomenon. The majority of respondents believe that homophobia and transphobia are each a problem within sport, at 94% (homophobia) and 94% (transphobia) respectively'. Homophobic and transphobic language use is widespread in sport in general, as well as in leisure activities other than sports and in professional and educational contexts

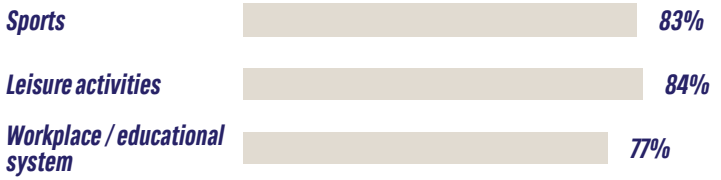

Figure 5: *Witnessing of homophobic and transphobic language (n=162)*

In the context of their own chosen sport, homophobic or transphobic language is witnessed by 45% of active sportspeople, 88% of whom feel attacked or discriminated against. Homophobic and transphobic language mainly occurs in team sports (62%) and at higher performance levels (58%).

The Scottish organisations are highly aware of the significance of using sensitive and inclusive language in the context of discrimination and disadvantage in sport:

"And I think particularly with LGBTI [inclusion], you want to have language that is inclusive (...) because it does, it seems to change quite a lot." (Scottish Disability Sport)

NEGATIVE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

20% of the active athletes have had negative personal experiences in sport in the last 12 months due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, slightly more than the EU total (16%). Homophobic and transphobic incidents occur in different forms and frequencies. Most of them are verbal hostility and structural discrimination, but there are also verbal threats, e-bullying and physical assaults.

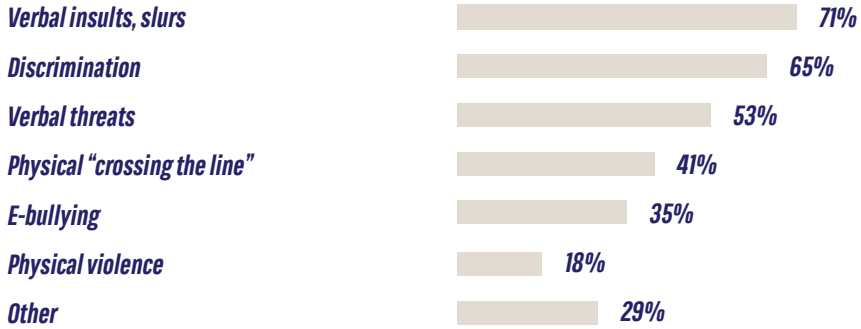

Figure 6: *Forms of negative experiences in sport (n=17)*

Transgender people (46%) suffer significantly more often than cisgender people (13%).
Gay men (16%) and lesbian women (16%) are slightly more affected than bisexuals (5%).

WHO CAN BE CONTACTED?

91% do not report homophobic or transphobic hostility to official bodies. The main reasons are that effective intervention is doubted (55%) or harassment is perceived as an insignificant problem (33%). In terms of awareness, 46% know of potential contact points within the sports system (EU: 26%) and 39% know of contact points outside the sports system. 27% can´t think of any contact points at all (EU: 38%).

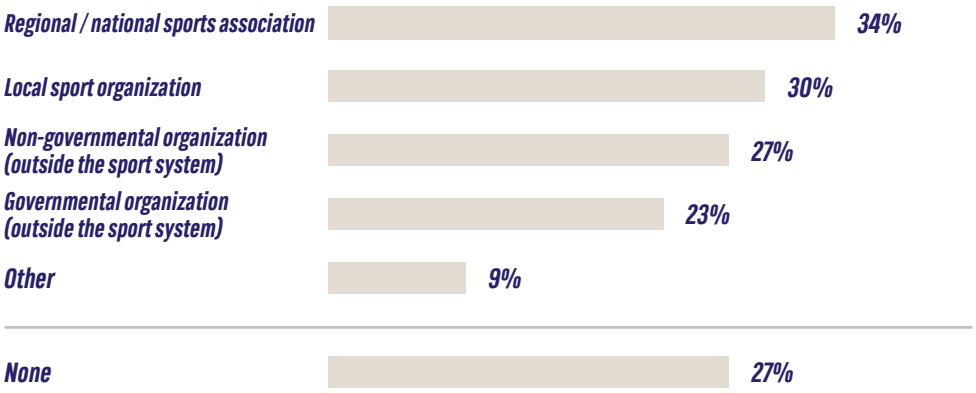

Figure 7: Awareness of organisations or individuals to get in touch with (Multiple choice; n=44)

There are no specific contact points or contact persons to whom LGBTI* people can turn to in event of anti-LGBTI* discrimination or disadvantage, as the organisations confirm.

In Scotland, however, there is a central body for all complaints, which then refers individual cases to the relevant organisations.

Accordingly, the organisations interviewed do not see themselves as the first port of call for athletes, but as partners of Scottish clubs in cases of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in sport.

"What would happen generally, if someone had a query, a concern that they wanted to raise, a complaint – we have a sort of generic route initially where it´s put into the system and then depending on the nature of the topic is then allocated to certain people." (sportscotland)

PROMOTING TRANSGENDER INCLUSION

All the interviewed organisations take up and largely deal with the issue of transgender inclusion in sport. Currently, the concerns of transgender athletes are handled and decided individually by the responsible organisation, depending on the individual case. Nevertheless, there are efforts to develop generally binding regulations and guidelines in order to find strategies and solutions that are satisfactory for all participants.

"And what we're trying to get the governing bodies to understand is, at a domestic level, you govern the sport in Scotland. So you can actually be flexible, you don't have to adhere to what your international and your world organisation is doing. Because a lot of them are rather far behind. You can lead the way in a lot of areas." (sportscotland)

In this process, the interviewed organisations successfully cooperate with each other, for example by offering workshops and other events together.

"And we're also going to the workshop that sportscotland are running in a few weeks, to sort of set up an action plan on how we get in place a trans policy. (…) so we're always taking opportunities when we can to make sure we are inclusive to everyone." (Scottish Disability Sport)

SUPPORT STRATEGIES

The fight against homo-/bi-/transphobia in Scottish sport is driven in large part by increasing public and political focus on the rights of LGBTI* people, and the barriers facing them.

The interviewed organisations further identified that having a welcoming organisational culture and robust inclusive values in place are each instrumental in helping to actualise LGBTI* inclusion within their fields of work.

"(…) we definitely live and breathe our values, so we talk about them in one to one with all our staff, we talk about them in team meetings, when we're doing planning for the next academic year, they're discussed when we're running events, we try and theme things around them. So, our values are at the core of everything we do so inclusion is there." (Scottish Student Sport)

Although the interviewed organisations report a high level of commitment to implementation by their team members, they nevertheless identify a lack of resources. This is also a limitation in the implementation of new campaigns or other measures.

However, there is close cooperation which supports and simplifies the integration of LGBTI* issues into sports clubs and organisations. In addition, official regulations, guidelines and charters, e.g. the LGBT Sports Charter of the Equality Network and workshops for employees or board members are beneficial.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION FROM LEAP SPORTS SCOTLAND

The findings of the Outsport project highlight a picture of LGBTI inclusion in sport in Scotland, which is one of both community and sports sector-led efforts to tackle exclusion, but also the persistence of individual, cultural and systemic barriers to LGBTI inclusion in sport with real impacts on LGBTI people accessing, participating and excelling in sport.

Our recommendations:

• The sports sector should recognise that LGBTI-phobia exists in sport, that this has an impact on engagement, and that LGBTI people may, therefore, need additional measures to encourage and maximise participation.

• LGBTI inclusion should be approached as a holistic issue pertaining to all parts of the sport system.

• Priority should be given to including LGBTI community members in measures to determine policies or initiatives concerning LGBTI inclusion and equal participation within sports, and policies should be assessed for impact on LGBTI people.

• Inclusion in sport must be understood as an intersectional matter; barriers to LGBTI inclusion in sport include wider barriers of affordability, racism, and ableism among others.

• Athlete-led and fan-led measures to tackle problematic attitudes and cultures in sport should be supported, to promote ownership of pro-LGBTI initiatives from within sports and to embed and signpost cultures of solidarity.

• Sports Governing Bodies should embrace opportunities within their own jurisdictions to provide fair and equal access to sport for trans, non-binary and intersex people, who are frequently particularly excluded, and consider ways in which they can influence long-term change on this matter.

• There are worrying findings detailing the nature and extent of negative experiences in sport settings. More in-depth work is required to better understand LGBTI people's experiences of physical violence and where behaviour has physically crossed the line.

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