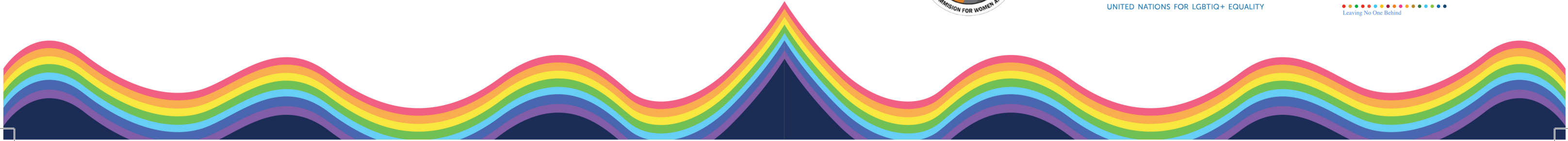


**FOSTERING AWARENESS:**  
ADVANCING **LGBT** + RIGHTS & INCLUSIVITY  
IN BHUTAN



**LGBT +**

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ADVANCING **LGBT +** RIGHTS & INCLUSIVITY IN BHUTAN

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## ACRONYMS

CCA	Common Country Assessment
CSO	Civil society organization
GBV	Gender based violence
GFPs	Gender focal points
ID	Identity card
IPV	Intimate partner violence
LGBT+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender +
LNOB	Leaving No one Behind
MP	Member of Parliament
MOESD	Ministry of Education and Skills Development
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
NGEP	National Gender Equality Policy
RENEW	Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women
SEA	Sexual exploitation and abuse
SOP	Standard operating procedure
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
UN	United Nations
UNFE	United Nations Free and Equal Campaign
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Strategic Development Cooperation Framework
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls



## INTRODUCTION

Bhutan's Constitution provides an overarching framework and foundation within which the principle of equality is enshrined. It guarantees protection of human rights for all Bhutanese, and provides effective remedies when those rights are violated. The Constitution incorporated the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopting 22 articles as fundamental rights. It establishes mechanisms for good governance in line with sustainable and equitable development and promotes human capabilities through provisions such as universal high school education and free basic health care services, amongst others.

Bhutan decriminalized same-sex activity in February 2021 following the royal assent from His Majesty the King. Accordingly, section 213 of the Penal Code of Bhutan was amended to exclude homosexual acts between adults from being classified as unnatural. This is reflective of the growing acceptance by the Government and general public of the LGBT+ community and more importantly, a recognition of the privacy, respect and dignity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning (LGBT+) community. Notably, the repeal of the law criminalizing homosexuality was initiated by the Government, citing its adverse effects on society, rather than through civil society pressure.

The LGBT+ community continues to advocate for further legal recognition, including the recognition of gender identities and marriage equality. The revision of the National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) 2020 to integrate concerns of LGBT+ in 2022 is another notable progress. The Policy provides a guiding framework and reaffirms the commitment of the government to uphold and promote the rights of all individuals, including LGBT+ people, thereby creating an equal and progressive society. It seeks to explore equality through five domains- political, economic, social, education, and health. The latest version revised in September 2024 has been submitted to the Cabinet for approval.

Despite strong political commitment and a supportive legal and policy framework, stigmatization and subtle forms of discrimination continue to affect the LGBT+ community. The community continues to face a lack of comprehensive rights and protection, including acceptance in society and within family units. Due to different gender identities, youth experience sexual harassment and bullying that often leads to dropping out of school, resulting in lower qualifications and increased unemployment rate within the LGBT+ community. Misconceptions exist on the LGBT+ in Bhutanese communities, especially in rural areas. The existing gaps particularly, on lack of awareness is a risk factor towards widening and contributing to the vicious cycle of inequality and exclusion.

LGBT+ individuals are often considered mentally ill or abnormal, and it is believed to be against religion to be one. While few of these misconceptions are home-grown, a lot of them are adapted from within the region. Such misconceptions have resulted in societal stigmatization in Bhutan. It may be noted that while Bhutan has been observing the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia on May 17 since 2016, LGBT+ members privately formed a group in 2014 with five members; however, there is a scarcity of data on these populations in Bhutan, which reiterates the point on lack of awareness.

## 1. UN Free & Equal Campaign

UN Free & Equal campaign is the United Nations' global public information and advocacy campaign for LGBT+ equality and is led by the UN Human Rights Office (UNOHCHR). The campaign aims to support UN-system public advocacy on the human rights of LGBT+ people and to contribute to increasing public support for diverse societies, and for stronger legal protections against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity/expression and sex characteristics. It has supported national level campaigns and events in almost 50 countries around the world since its launch in 2013 [www.unfe.org](http://www.unfe.org)

The UN Gender, Human Rights and Disability Working Group in Bhutan leveraged the expertise of the UN FREE & EQUAL Campaign and worked in partnership with the NCWC and LGBT+ community. A series of activities were undertaken as part of UN Bhutan's campaign which included consultations with the community themselves, including providing them a platform to discuss with policy makers and key stakeholders on addressing the needs and concerns of the LGBT+ community in Bhutan. Another component of the national campaign included developing effective advocacy materials.

These activities were held against the backdrop of the updated National Gender Equality Policy, 2024, which includes LGBT+ inclusive policy provisions and targeted interventions as required.

The engagement helped build on the ongoing advocacy of the UN in Bhutan of vulnerable groups including the LGBT+, thereby strengthening collaboration, communication and mutual understanding between the policy makers and key stakeholders, the LBGTQI+ community and the population at large, leading towards constructive social change. The focus has been on a gradual shift to implementation of frameworks and policies.

The LGBT+ is one of six vulnerable groups identified in the Common Country Assessment (CCA), alongside women and girls, children and adolescents; youth; senior citizens; and persons with disabilities. Bhutan's ability to respond to its most

vulnerable groups is hampered by the limited availability of up-to-date disaggregated data, particularly in the social sectors. Members of these groups often face issues encompassing insufficient access to sexual and reproductive health services; at risk of/or are facing various forms of violence; face issues of mental health and wellbeing, including disrupted family systems; often face a lack of social inclusion and consequent loss of opportunities; and are likely to be impoverished, among other issues. Access to healthcare services, high education opportunities and employment remain key challenges as per the Needs Assessment study conducted by RENEW in 2022.

The joint consultations are in line with UN Bhutan's approach to people-centered development, based on the key programming principles of Leaving No one Behind (LNOB), Human-Rights based approach, gender equality, resilience, sustainability, transparency and accountability. This approach translates into supporting initiatives to enable effective participation of people in policy and decision making, and includes actions to promote greater awareness of all people in relation to their rights and opportunities to engage and participate, building capacities of CSOs to institutionalize mechanisms to effectively provide public feedback for inclusive decision making and public service delivery, strengthening the role of media in responsibly promoting accountability, transparency and Rule of Law (UNSDCF Bhutan, 2023). UN Bhutan has in place a checklist on LNOB for delivering inclusive events that leave no one behind. It is aimed to ensure participation of under-represented groups, event venues to have gender inclusive and disability inclusive restroom, encouraging inclusive communication and access to information/documents to the differently abled. These are building blocks in taking forward this assignment to support the UN Free & Equal National Campaign in Bhutan and ensure that the campaign's objectives are met through strategic actions designed to raise awareness and advocate for the rights of the LGBT+ community.

## 2. Meeting the LGBT+ community

The national campaign took off with an interactive session with the LGBT+ community on 30 October 2024. The members were briefed on the UNFE and its global UN campaigns for equal and fair treatment of LGBT+ people everywhere – primarily through awareness raising and advocacy.

The primary objective of the session was to familiarize the LGBT+ community on the revised National Gender Equality Policy, 2024 and the provisions within it relating to the rights and needs of the LGBT+ community. About 15 members from Pride Bhutan and Queer Voices of Bhutan attended the meeting together with representatives from the UN and the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC). The discussions were open and frank and the community engaged in a constructive dialogue with members of the NCWC and the UN.



The session provided the LGBT+ members an opportunity to review the proposed actions specifically related to them under each of the policy domains of the NGEF, namely – Political, Social, Economic, Health and Education. The revised NGEF will be the legally binding policy that specifically guarantees the rights of the LGBT+ population. Each domain includes inclusive interventions, as well as targeted as needed, for the LGBTIQ community.

### 3. NATIONAL GENDER EQUALITY POLICY OF BHUTAN

#### 3.1. Political Domain

##### Gender Gaps

SI No	Indicators	Male	Female
1	Members of National Assembly	95.70%	4.30%
2	Members of National Council	87%	12%
3	Members of Local Government	87.90%	12.10%
4	* Senior leadership and decision-making position	79.6%	20.4%

The vision of the NGEF is to ensure “a just, equal and progressive society where all individuals have equal opportunities, benefits, and rights to achieve their full potential and contribute to the country”. And one of its objectives is to “recognize LGBT+ as individuals with equal rights”.

\* Presentation on NGEF 2024, NCWC.



Two out of the 5 policy provisions of the NGEF are specifically on the LGBT+ community – to guarantee non-discrimination in the exercise of rights in the electoral process for transgender individuals and, to integrate LGBT+ in the national statistics. The remaining three provisions are inclusive of LGBT+ participation and leadership in decision-making positions in public administration, Parliament, local government, private and corporate sectors. These provisions are further disaggregated into specific statements supported by proposed actions and sub-activities, to be implemented.

**“To recognize LGBT+ as individuals with rights” is an objective of the NGEF**

Specific actions related to LGBT+ under this domain include strengthening sexual harassment prevention mechanisms and safe reporting tools; conduct leadership and empowerment programs; establish effective support desks, and institute temporary special measures to improve their representation in the political and public spheres.

Continued advocacy through media literacy programs to educate on harmful social and gender norms to encourage their participation in governance encompasses another key action to enable transgender individuals to participate in electoral

**“Our own gender identity has become a threat due to social norms and stigmatization”**

processes. The need to review and revise relevant regulatory and legal procedures for gender identity change and accessible procedures for legal gender recognition by expanding the available services and system is also emphasized. Research and analysis in critical gender equality issues and opportunities within the political and public spheres supported by disaggregated data collection methodologies in national surveys, census statistics and administrative data has also been identified.

Representatives from the LGBT+ appreciated the affirmative measures proposed to bring them at par, but mentioned that their own gender identity has become a threat given the social norms and stigmatization. The main goal they said is to mainstream and integrate them and their needs such as through the proposed temporary measures to build their skills to sustain their livelihood. Political participation by the LGBT+ community was found to be under represented at all levels. Transgender population especially transgender women’s participation is comparatively poor, which could be associated with social and cultural barriers that prevent them from coming out in public places, including their low education levels.

### 3.2. Health Domain

SI No	Indicators	
1	Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	53%
2	Teenage pregnancy	32%
3	Discrimination at Health Centers for Transgender men	47.6%
4	<sup>1</sup> Some form of discrimination at Health Centers for Transgender women	55.9% (of 34 respondents)
5	Discrimination at health centres for Transgender men	47.6% (of 124 respondents)
6	* Discrimination at health centres for MSM	18.5% (of 273 respondents)

This domain is focused on implementing gender-responsive health interventions that take into consideration the differential needs of women, men and LGBT+. Two of its seven policy provisions are specifically targeted to LGBT+: the introduction of health services based on specific needs of the LGBT+, and, addressing discrimination and stigmatization against LGBT+ availing health services. Other provisions integrate LGBT+ needs alongside the needs of women and girls to ensure gender equality. Key ones include a review of the penal provisions on abortion in the Penal Code of Bhutan 2004 to address unintended and unplanned pregnancies; integration of LGBT+ needs into existing health policies and guidelines to help enhance access to health and rights services and information.

To ensure access to care, the LGBT+ proposed the integration of treatment services for the community in all healthcare services across the 20 districts, given the rise in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) particularly among LGBT+ individuals. Intimate partner violence (IPV) and gender-based violence (GBV) are common, with transgender men at risk of rape and pregnancy, with many seeking abortions in high-risk environments across the border town in India. The LGBT+ called for a need to collaborate with enforcement agencies to establish supportive channels for reporting. Many victims are afraid to report such violence due to fear of prosecution.

**Societal norms tend to suppress open discussions about sexuality**

<sup>1</sup> Department of Public Health, Mapping & Population size estimation, 2019  
 \* Presentation on NGEP 2024, NCWC.

While noting that there are no specific services for transgender individuals like hormone replacement therapy or gender affirmation services in the country, the group highlighted the need for a legal provision for corrective surgeries within the recommended age of 21-24 years, and proposed for counselling services for parents/families prior to the treatment. Reluctance to openly address sexuality issues hamper access to vital information and interventions.

RENEW<sup>2</sup>, a civil society organization that provides holistic services to survivors of gender-based and domestic violence, recognizes that the LGBT+ community faces unique challenges, including higher rates of physical, emotional, social, and domestic violence. However, many LGBT+ individuals are reluctant to seek help due to fears of stigmatization and concerns that their issues may not be understood or addressed properly.

To overcome this barrier, RENEW has established a Rainbow Help Desk at their office. This desk is staffed by an LGBT+ member with extensive experience working with LGBT+ individuals. The purpose of the Rainbow Help Desk, is to provide a safe and supportive space, and the first of its kind dedicated to LGBT+ individuals to access help, so that their specific needs are met in an inclusive and empathetic manner.



### 3.3. Education Domain

SI NO	Parameters	Male	Female	Total
1	Gross Enrolment Rate (Tertiary within Bhutan)	16.33%	15.59%	
2	Gross Enrolment Rate (secondary VII-XII)	62.69%	75.27%	
3	* LGBT+ with high school qualification	86.6% of 292 registered with Pride Bhutan <sup>3</sup>		

Bhutan has fulfilled its goal of gender equality in enrolment of primary and tertiary education as per the annual education statistics, but very few members of the LGBT+

<sup>2</sup> Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women

<sup>3</sup> Pride Bhutan Information Management System

\* Presentation on NGEF 2024, NCWC.

continue to secondary and tertiary levels, with a majority of them dropping out by high school. Hence, the objective of this domain is to improve the participation of girls, young women and LGBT+ at all levels of education, so that they don't miss out on other opportunities in their career. Five of the six policy provisions address LGBT+ needs, while fourteen proposed actions explicitly relate to addressing the community's needs.

Key proposed actions specifically on increasing LGBT+ attendance in schools include a review of existing policies to cater to LGBT+ needs and address issues such as anti-bullying and non-discrimination.

**All parents – teachers’ meetings to include an awareness session on LGBT+ community**

Strengthening SOGIESC in comprehensive sexuality education at all levels, and expanding the reach to out of school youth, the communities and families and religious institutions; creating an enabling, safe and inclusive environment such as designating existing facilities to include gender-neutral restrooms, hostels and changing facilities have been proposed across all educational institutions. Implementation of temporary special measures to overcome social barriers and improve participation and retention of girls and LGBT+ in educational institutes as well as building capacities of teachers on stereotypical gender norms and practices through professional development programs for teachers are other actions being proposed. For instance, advocacy and awareness on LGBT+ is now a mandatory agenda during the parents-teachers meeting in schools.

Another social barrier that prevents retention of LGBT+ members in regular schools is the dress code. LGBT+ suggested the need to include an appropriate action through a policy directive or as part of the National Education Policy. Currently, dress code is reflected as an indicator in the M&E plan of the NGEF.

**3.4. Social Domain**

SL no	Types of violence	VAWG	
		Lifetime	12 months
1	Sexual Violence	4.50%	2.3%
2	Economic Violence	10.90% 6.70%	
3	Emotional Violence	15.80%	8.60%
4	* Physical Violence	13.90%	5.10%



5	Controlling Behaviour	35.30%	24.30%
6	* Once in a lifetime	44.60%	30.00%
Acceptance that a man is justified in hitting his wife		53.40%	
Social Stigma		35.4% MSM(out of 273 respondents); 91.2%trans women(out of 34 respondents); 95.2% (out of 124 respondents)	

The social domain primarily aims to change mindsets and attitudes around gender issues and sexual orientation. Three of its six policy provisions are directly targeting LGBT+ community: these include ensuring respectful portrayal of LGBT+ through multimedia and other platforms, enhancing access to information on rights and relevant legal provisions and services, and ensuring adequate, appropriate and accessible support services to survivors of GBV and LGBT+ women in difficult/discriminatory circumstances.

Proposed actions include expanding engagement with community leaders, faith-based organizations and CSOs to promote a culture of respect and zero tolerance to GBV, stigmatization and discrimination against LGBT+ individuals and women; institute prevention efforts in collaboration with service providers and conduct awareness campaigns to advocate for zero tolerance to GBV, stigmatization and discrimination. Conducting awareness campaigns on relevant Acts, rules and regulations related to discrimination and GBV, including instituting integrated information support desks to enhance access to information; strengthening the criminal justice system to be LGBT+ sensitive are other actions proposed to ensure full protection from discrimination, stigmatization and GBV.

LGBT+ representative mentioned that the Standard Operating Procedure(SOP) for GBV reporting applies to everyone, irrespective of LGBT+status, however the issue remains on how to deal sensitively with matters specific to the LGBT+. The introduction of separate cells for transgender individuals and incorporating specific LGBT+ needs/issues and how to address them in the trainings for service providers such as the enforcement agencies, the Pema Centre and other CSOs. LGBT+ individuals proposed the inclusion of legal aid support in the existing legal aid guidelines and suggested the inclusion of Pride Bhutan and Queer Voices of Bhutan as collaborating agencies in the drawing up of specific provisions on the LGBT+. Several members emphasized the importance of empowering parents, families, and caregivers with the necessary knowledge and skills

**Promote a culture of respect and zero tolerance to GBV, stigmatization & discrimination against LGBT+**

\* Presentation on NGEP 2024, NCWC.

to provide vital support for LGBT+ individuals. Family support is described as helping a child grow in a positive environment, rather than solely protecting them from bullying and shaming.

**“Coming out should be your choice. Work hard to grow yourself.”**  
**- Trans member**

A trans community member who now works as an advocate shares her experience of transitioning, emphasizing that coming out should be a personal choice and not rushed. She advises others to focus on personal growth, as this can make the transition

smoother and empower them to represent their community more effectively. Another key suggestion from the community is to include social protection provisions for the LGBT+ senior citizens. Over the next ten years a significant number of transgender people without financial security or social support will be above 65 years.

### 3.5. Economic Domain

SI No	Parameters	Male	Female	Total
1	Overall unemployment rate	3.1%	4.5%	3.7% (2024)
2	Regular paid employment	41.7%	26.2%	
3	Employment in agricultural sector	34.7%	51.6%	
4	* Overall unemployment of LGBT+	28.4% of 180 respondents		
5	LGBTIQ employed	71.6% of 180 respondents		Majority in entertainment and private sector

This domain aims to ensure greater engagement and contribution by women and LGBT+ in the formal labour market. Three out of the six policy provisions are related to the LGBT+. These include the implementation of targeted interventions to increase employment of LGBT+ and women; mainstreaming women and LGBT+ needs in workplace policies, and, a review of economic-related policies to be more inclusive. There are eight broad actions proposed with specific mention of LGBT+.

With the objective to provide entrepreneurship and skills development support for women and LGBT+ individuals, creation of a special financial gateway to develop exclusive trade opportunities for women and LGBT+ has been proposed such as by instituting government incentive mechanisms (subsidies, cost-sharing means) and targeted skilling programs.

\* Presentation on NGEF 2024, NCWC.

Provisions to incorporate specific priority interventions for employment of women and LGBT+ in the sectoral policies has been recommended, as well as reviewing existing workplace policies to make them responsive to women and LGBT+ needs. Local governments will also assess the prevalence of vulnerable groups to ensure inclusive citizen's engagement in local development processes and implement engagement strategies targeting underrepresented groups.

In Bhutan, religion plays a significant role in shaping society, with religious leaders highly respected and influential in guiding communities. These leaders are key advocates in promoting human development and social change, including raising awareness about gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and reproductive health. The UN has worked with the Central Monastic Body to incorporate messages on these issues into traditional mask dances performed during festivals across the country. Khenpo Phuntshok Tashi, a prominent Buddhist Master, emphasizes that the core goal of Buddhism is enlightenment, which is accessible to all, regardless of identity. He highlights that overcoming ignorance, desire, and anger - known as the "three poisons" in Buddhism—is essential. Khenpo further underscores that Buddhist teachings are inclusive and everyone can participate, and aimed at awakening society, with the ultimate purpose of mutual support and community well-being.

## 4. OUTCOMES, CHALLENGES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTIONS

### 4.1. Fostering Open Dialogue and Engagement

There has been a notable shift in the openness of the LGBT+ community in Bhutan, with individuals now willing to share their issues, engage in discussions, and suggest solutions. This shift marks significant progress since the needs assessment conducted in 2021. The change in attitude can be attributed to continuous advocacy, awareness programs, and supportive policies like the National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP), which has fostered an enabling environment.

**Recommendation:** It is essential to build on this progress by creating a sustained momentum of engagement between the LGBT+ community and key stakeholders such as the NCWC, the United Nations and CSOs. This engagement will further strengthen collaboration, improve communication, and promote mutual understanding between

**LGBTQI+ community is increasingly open to sharing their issues, engage in discussions and suggest solutions.**

policymakers, the LGBT+ community, and the larger population. Ultimately, this dialogue can lead to constructive social change. The revised NGEP offers a platform for ongoing engagement to both implement proposed actions and evaluate their impact.

## 4.2. Strengthening UN Support for LGBT+ Rights

The UN's development approach in Bhutan is firmly rooted in a people-centered framework that prioritizes inclusion and equity. Within the UN Country Development

**The UN prioritizes LGBT+ individuals as one of six vulnerable groups to support.**

Framework (2024-2028), LGBT+ individuals have been identified as one of six vulnerable groups to be supported. This targeted commitment addresses the unique challenges faced by the LGBT+ community, particularly in areas such as

access to justice, legal support, and the broader protection of human rights. There is a progressive curve in terms of the discussions, a significant shift from policies and frameworks to actual implementation through agreed actions and activities.

**Recommendation:** The UN's framework emphasizes improving access to justice for LGBT+ individuals by enhancing the responsiveness of Bhutan's legal system. This includes making the justice system more accessible and gender-responsive, particularly for marginalized populations. Additionally, the UN seeks to strengthen legal aid and support mechanisms that address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the LGBT+ community.

## 4.3. Building Local Partnerships for a Supportive Environment

Partnerships with local governments and community-based organizations play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment for the LGBT+ community.

**Local partnerships are key to creating a supportive environment for the LGBT+ community**

These collaborations aim to promote equitable gender and social norms, challenge harmful cultural practices, and encourage positive behaviors that respect the rights of LGBT+ individuals.

**Recommendation:** By working with local structures, the UN seeks to create lasting societal change that fosters an inclusive and supportive environment for the LGBT+ community. These efforts will not only address immediate needs but also contribute to long-term transformation in societal attitudes, ensuring full integration and recognition of LGBT+ individuals within Bhutanese society.

## 4.4. Integrating LGBT+ Members in Capacity-Building Initiatives

It is critical to integrate LGBT+ members into capacity-building initiatives and, where needed, provide targeted programs to address their unique needs. Government



agencies, the NCWC, and CSOs already conduct advocacy and awareness programs for vulnerable groups, which offer a solid foundation for these efforts.

**Recommendation:** To ensure the effective participation of LGBT+ individuals in capacity-building activities, it is important to involve as many community members as possible. This ensures that everyone has the opportunity to engage equally, fostering an inclusive approach to capacity development.

## 5. INTERACTIVE SESSION BETWEEN THE PARLIAMENTARIANS, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY

In line with the revised NGEF which outlines proposed actions for its implementation, the LGBT+ community engaged with the Members of Parliament, officials from the Judiciary, the Office of the Attorney General and the Cabinet Secretariat. The session brought together 26 LGBT+ members, 11 Members of Parliament inclusive of Chairpersons and members of relevant Committees<sup>4</sup>, officials from the Royal Court of Justice, the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the Cabinet Secretariat. Participants deliberated on potential solutions as outlined in the revised NGEF and how Parliamentarians could support these solutions.

The open discussions and the sharing of lived experiences by the LGBT+ individuals, helped broaden their views and understand the challenges faced by the community. For most MPs, and the LGBT+ individuals, this was the first such interaction of its kind. Members of Parliament emphasized that this was their first direct meeting with the LGBT+ community, where they not only acknowledged their concerns but also voiced strong support. They urged the NCWC and UNFPA of more awareness programs for a broader group of MPs.

To kick start the discussions, participants were introduced to the UN Bhutan Policy on Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), emphasizing a zero-tolerance stance on sexual exploitation and abuse. The UN in Bhutan and the Pema Secretariat have collaborated to address sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) complaints with a focus on victim-centered and human rights-based approach.



<sup>4</sup> Women, Youth and Children Committee; Human Rights and Foreign Relations; Legislative Committee; Social and Cultural committee

This collaboration reiterates UN's support to the Government's commitment to addressing SEA in Bhutan. UNFPA representative presented key topics including inclusivity, population dynamics, gender-based violence, and access to sexual and reproductive health services. Insights were also shared on the need for gender-sensitive revisions to the Penal Code of Bhutan, particularly regarding compensation for offences against married women and abortion. The current revisions provide additional compensation to the husband, alongside the victim's compensation, and require revision for greater gender sensitivity. It was noted that current provisions lack flexibility for implementation guidelines, but revisions to the Penal Code are planned, and all concerns raised during the workshop will be carefully considered.

In a virtual session with the Free & Equal Campaign (UNFE), Gabriel Alves de Faria, Human Rights Officer commended Bhutan for decriminalizing same sex activity in 2021 and congratulated the Government for revising the NGEP to include provisions for the LGBT+ individuals. UNFE as part of its global campaigns will continue to support advocacy initiatives including providing technical assistance to States on legal reforms through the UN Offices. UNFE has supported national level campaigns in 50 countries since its launch in 2013. The global campaigns have provided a platform for dialogue at the national levels and has had positive impact on different challenges faced by the LGBT+ individuals.



The participants were familiarized with the key aspects to understanding human sexuality and gender diversity with a presentation on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) that highlighted the struggles LGBT+ face in understanding and accepting their identities. The session conducted by Pride Bhutan stressed the need to create safe

spaces, particularly in the early stages of identity development and dispelled the misconception that being LGBT+ is a choice, stressing it as an innate aspect of identity. While national data estimates more than 1000<sup>5</sup> LGBT+, Pride Bhutan has registered only 353 with many hesitant to join due to fears of identification.

<sup>5</sup> PSE, MoH, 2019: 1,670 MSM, 74 TGW, and 292 TGM

SOGIESC	N=353	REGION	N=353
Lesbian	5	Central	28
Gay	91		
Bisexual man	40	Southern	54
Bisexual woman	2		
Transman	176	Western	231
Transwoman	26		
Questioning	7	Eastern	36
Queer	1		
Pansexual	4	Overseas	4
Asexual	1		

The NCWC presented an overview of the National Gender Equality Policy, 2024, with a focus on the LGBT+.

Discussions centered on the low representation of women in decision making roles. Women hold only 20.4% in senior leadership and decision-making with similar underrepresentation in the National Assembly (4.3%) and National Council (12%). Local government offices reflect similar disparities with only 12.1% female representation. While women participation is increasing, stereotyped, cultural and structural norms persist. The meeting recommended a study to assess the causes, as the last such study was conducted in 2014.



The role of Gender Focal Points (GFPs) to promote gender equality and its mainstreaming in legislations, policies, plans and programs was discussed. GFPs have been appointed across all 20 districts including in Thromdes, Central agencies and CSOs. However, the functions of GFPs are performed by District officials in addition to their core responsibilities due to shortage of manpower.



Regular consultations with the LGBT+ were recommended, not tied to specific projects. The participants were apprised that all proposed national policies and studies conducted are presented to the MPs for their views prior to endorsement by the Cabinet Secretariat. The recently concluded study on Social Norms impeding Gender Equality, a joint initiative of NCWC in partnership with the UN will offer insights into current social and gender norms. NCWC is due for its next study to assess the change in attitude and mindsets on gender equality across all sectors, both of which would provide further insights on appropriate and targeted interventions.

### 5.1. Governance Domain:

Two of the Policy provisions under the Governance domain specifically on the LGBT+ community were discussed:

- i. Guarantee non-discrimination in the exercise of right in the electoral process for transgender individuals
- ii. Integrate LGBT+ data in the national statistics

**“The revision of the NGEF to integrate concerns of the LGBT+ reaffirms Bhutan’s commitment to uphold and promote the rights of all individuals, including the LGBT+ people”**

**- Member of Parliament & Chairperson of Women, Youth and Children Committee**

A transwoman shared her experiences of discrimination during voting when she was required to vote in the male line, despite her ID card indicating she was female. The need for a gender recognition policy to address issues like this including challenges with ID cards and dress code in institutions was emphasized.

Existing procedures to change ID cards were discussed, and it was suggested that solutions be proposed in line with legislative processes. While ‘social structures do hinder’, participants emphasized the importance to sensitize policy makers. The restrictions on immediate changing of ID cards could be because of the ‘questioning period’ that the LGBT+ go through in their development phase.

The LGBT+ community also stressed the importance of including community’s data in national statistics. Current studies mainly focus on barriers to service access, but without solid data, their impact is limited. It was agreed that incorporating LGBT+ data in national statistics is essential to support targeted interventions and ensure credibility.

Members of Parliament expressed empathy for the LGBT+ community’s concerns and suggested engaging relevant government agencies to discuss solutions, including updating ID card procedures to be more inclusive. Another MP clarified that support



is not lacking, and emphasized that policy changes take time and stressed the importance of ongoing dialogue and sensitization efforts with relevant government agencies to drive meaningful change.

## 5.2. Health Domain:

### Two key Policy provisions targeting the LGBT+ community were discussed:

- i. Integrate LGBT+ individuals' needs in the existing health policies, procedures and guidelines
- ii. Introduce health services based on specific needs of LGBT+ individuals such as hormone replacement therapy, breast reduction services, anal pap smear, among others as essential health services

Discussions highlighted the stigma and discrimination faced by LGBT+ individuals at health centres. Data shows that 91% of transwomen experienced stigma and 55%<sup>6</sup> faced discrimination when accessing health services. A recent survey revealed that many gay men avoid anal pap smear tests, while other members do not visit health centres for services.

A trans man shared the need for a dedicated support desk for the LGBT+ community. Teenage pregnancies and safe abortion are challenges for trans men, particularly, as many resort to sex work due to limited jobs opportunities caused by low education. The community members requested services like hormone therapy, surgery services, anal pap smear, among others. Many currently seek these services in neighbouring Indian towns.

**“The dual approach – offering services while generating demand – ensures that people are not only aware of the services available to them, but also confident in utilizing them.”**  
- LGBT+ member

Participants emphasized the need for dialogue to break the cycle of stigmatization, raise awareness among service providers, and encourage LGBTQ+ individuals to seek necessary services. It was noted that alongside providing services, there must be

a concerted effort to generate demand to create an environment where individuals feel safe seeking services. The need for comprehensive substance use prevention and treatment programs as well as inclusive mental health services was highlighted.

## 5.3. Education Domain:

Two key Policy provisions aimed at supporting the LGBT+ community were discussed:

<sup>6</sup> Pride Bhutan Data



- i. Mainstream the needs of women, girls and LGBT+ individuals in education related policies to improve their participation in schools and tertiary, technical and religious institutions
- ii. Strengthen the existing standard operating procedures and referral mechanism to ensure prevention and timely and appropriate response to GBV, including sexual abuse and exploitation against children and young adults (LGBT+ individuals in particular), in schools, religious, training and other institutions.

The school drop-out rate of LGBT+ individuals is high with most of them completing only high school. Almost 86.6% of 292 registered with Pride Bhutan have a high school qualification.

A trans woman shared her experiences of growing up, describing school as a place of constant fear and isolation due to bullying and harassment.

She recalled being pressurized to conform to gender norms, with teachers telling her to “act like a man”. Despite excelling academically, she struggled with mental health issues, including suicidal thoughts. Eventually, she channeled her stress into fashion design, which gave her the courage to leave home and embrace her true identity. Now an LGBT+ advocate, managing the first Rainbow Desk in Thimphu, she is seen not only as a trans woman but as a representative of her community. She stressed the need for schools to be safe, inclusive spaces where all children, regardless of their identity, can learn and grow. Support programs to reduce dropout rates among transgender women and feminine gay people was emphasized. This testimony deeply impacted some of the participants who acknowledged the challenges LGBT+ students face. They commended the community’s advocacy efforts, supported by international agencies, and pledged to address these concerns in their role as Members of Parliament.



According to the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MOESD), several initiatives are underway to prioritize gender inclusivity and address the needs of the LGBT+ students. Anti-bullying mechanisms and LGBT+ inclusive Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have been implemented across all schools

in collaboration with the Pema secretariat. Comprehensive sexuality education is now part of the school curriculum from pre-primary levels till Grade XII. Since 2023, online counselling services have been made available to ensure students have easy access to mental health resources. Additionally, existing parenting programs will now incorporate LGBT+ awareness to help sensitize parents about their crucial support

role for children with diverse sexual orientations. Anti-bullying awareness programs, with a zero-tolerance policy are also being rolled out in schools.

**“It is important for the ministry and schools to create a safe environment for LGBT+ to be in schools. We have to reduce discrimination be it at homes, communities or schools”**

**- Education Minister**

Educators are receiving trainings to create inclusive environments and to identify and safely refer children displaying unusual behavior. The Ministry also plans to conduct a study on school dropout rates.

#### 5.4. Economic Domain:

The discussion focused on addressing the economic challenges faced by the LGBT+ community under the two policy provisions aimed at supporting the LGBT+ community:

- i. Provide and enhance access to finance, market opportunities, and provide entrepreneurship and skills development support for women and LGBT+ individuals
- ii. Mainstream the specific needs of women and LGBT+ individuals in the overall framework of national employment and workplace policies.

The overall unemployment rate in 2024 stands at 3.7%, with women at 4.5% and men at 3.1%<sup>7</sup>. Among the LGBT+ individuals, 28.9% (of 180 respondents) are unemployed, with 71.1% employed mostly in the entertainment and private sectors.

However, LGBTQI + members face significant barriers, including low education levels, limited access to entrepreneurship programs and financing, forcing many into odd jobs and unstable living situations. With little family support, they lack safety net. Income insecurity is widespread, with 51.2%<sup>8</sup> of LGBT+ individuals reporting having no income, while 4.2% earning under Nu.5000 a month. The aging transgender population faces additional challenges due to a lack of financial and social security. Of the 353 individuals registered with Pride Bhutan, 74.2% are aged 15-26, with only 7% aged 33 and above.



Noting the concerns shared, the members of Parliament suggested continued dialogue with relevant government agencies to help address the issues raised. The Ministry of Education and Skills Development has introduced a 5% quota for Persons with Disabilities and the LGBT+ individuals in skilling programs, which is a positive

<sup>7</sup> NGEF, 2024

<sup>8</sup> PRIDE Bhutan

step. Further sensitization programs and targeted initiatives are necessary to ensure that LGBT+ community have access to educational, financial and social security opportunities.

### 5.5. Social Domain:

Discussions under the Social domain focused on two policy provisions related to the LGBT+ individuals:

- i. Enhance access to information on rights, relevant legal provisions and services to ensure full protection from discrimination, stigmatization and GBV against women and LGBT+ individuals
- ii. Create a culture of prevention and zero tolerance to GBV, stigmatization and discrimination against LGBT+ individuals and women.

Discrimination against LGBT+ individuals often begin at home, where societal norms isolate trans children, leading to rejection by family and siblings. Without family support, many LGBT+ individuals resort to odd jobs to survive. Workplace discrimination, sexual harassment and abuse are widespread. In Bhutan, 44.60% women have faced some form of violence (sexual/economic/emotional/physical) in their lifetime. 53.40%<sup>9</sup> believe that it is justified for a man to beat his wife. Sexual violence is particularly prevalent within the LGBT+ community and seeking help is challenging when service providers lack understanding of trans issues.

**“Family support isn’t just about protecting a child from bullying or name-calling; it’s about accepting them for who they are and creating a positive environment and helps them thrive and grow.”**

*- Trans member*

A trans woman shared her personal experience, highlighting that many transgender individuals work in bars and entertainment venues for acceptance and visibility. Rejected by their families and stigmatized by society, some turn to sex work for income, exposing themselves to health risks and discrimination.

She dropped out of school because she was forced to wear clothing that did not align with her identity, and left a hotel job due to a dress code requiring traditional male attire. Fearing restrictions based on her identity card’s sex designation, she never pursued government jobs. Today, she creates content on TikTok.

While societal attitudes have improved, with some private businesses allowing transgender individuals to dress as they choose, such jobs are often low-paying and confined to bars and entertainment

**Active engagement of LGBT+ individuals is crucial in advocating for their rights & helping others better understand their struggles, ultimately promoting greater acceptance & inclusion**

<sup>9</sup> NGEF, 2024

centers. While towns are more accepting, rural areas continue to view LGBT+ individuals as immoral and a source of shame for families, she added.

Participants emphasized that raising awareness and advocating for LGBT+ is everyone's responsibility. While changing attitudes may take time, it is essential. LGBT+ individuals were encouraged to actively engage in forums to advocate for their rights and help others understand their experiences better.

## 6. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

### 1. **Advocacy, Policy Integration, and Electoral Rights for LGBT+ Individuals:**

Continue advocacy efforts to raise awareness about LGBT+ issues, including ensuring that national policies reflect the rights and needs of the community. Specific focus should be placed on the electoral process, ensuring transgender individuals can vote in alignment with their gender identity, and engaging LGBT+ people in policy development. The LGBT+ community must play an active role in these advocacy efforts, contributing to campaigns that promote family support, educate about gender diversity, and raise awareness of the community's needs within society.

**2. Research, Data Collection, and Education on LGBT+ Issues:** Regularly conduct research to monitor LGBT+ experiences, including the representation of women in leadership roles, and track progress on addressing systemic barriers. This research should inform educational campaigns that raise awareness about LGBT+ rights, services, and inclusion within the community and society.

**3. Protection from Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Harassment:** Strengthen protections against GBV and harassment, particularly in schools and educational settings, ensuring LGBT+ students are safeguarded. Establish protocols for creating a supportive, safe environment for all individuals and ensure effective responses to incidents of discrimination or violence.

**4. LGBT+ Support in Healthcare and Social Services:** Establish LGBT+ support services within healthcare facilities and social support systems to address stigma, provide tailored assistance, and ensure equal access to healthcare, legal protections, and social services. This includes the creation of LGBT+ support desks and strengthening legal protections for safe employment.

**5. Targeted Education, Skilling, and Financial Support:** Expand access to education, upskilling programs, and financial support for LGBT+ individuals, particularly those from marginalized groups such as the aging transgender population. These initiatives should focus on improving employment opportunities and offering financial security, including loans and social welfare programs, to reduce economic vulnerabilities.

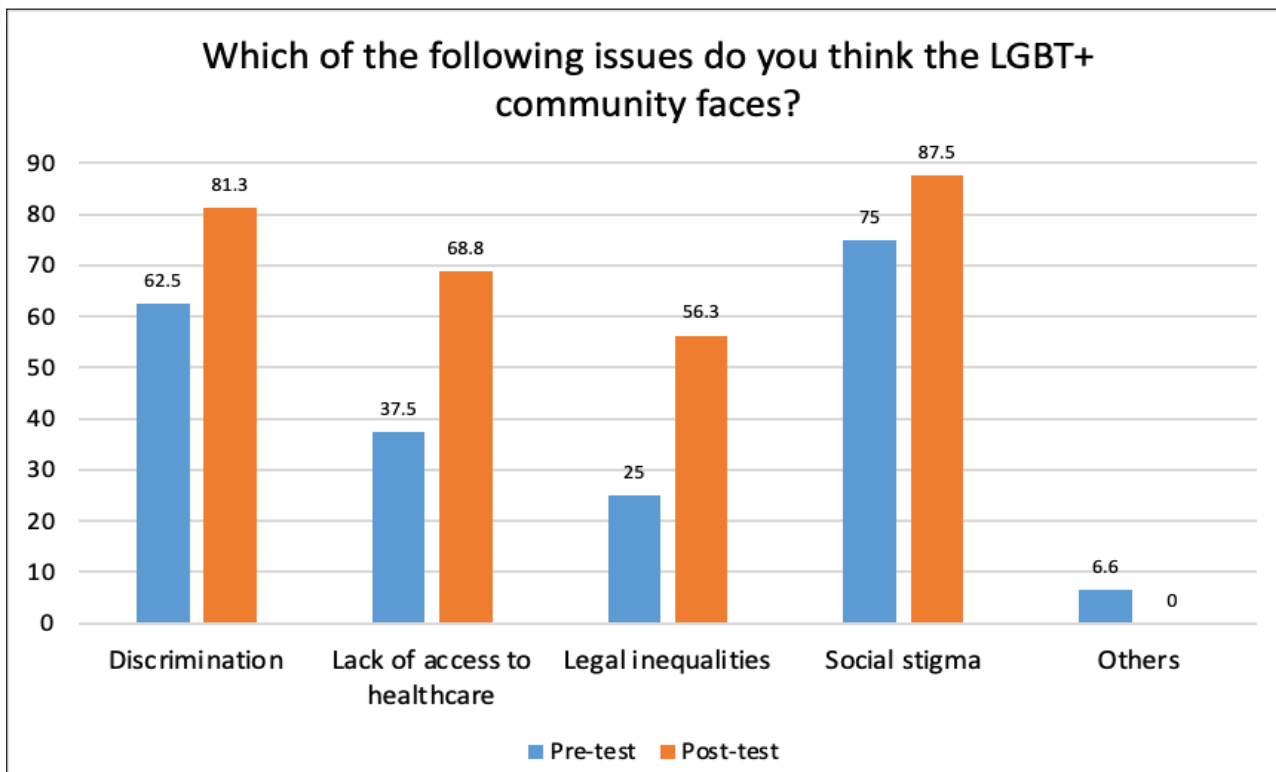


## 7. PRE AND POST TEST ANALYSIS

With the objective to assess the understanding, knowledge and general acceptance and, identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats about the LGBTIQ+ community, a pre and post test was conducted with the participants. The questionnaire itself was categorized into four main topics: Knowledge: Attitude: Practice, including Policy interventions. While the sample size is relatively small, however the data adds further insights into the attitudes of policymakers towards the challenges faced by the LGBT+ community and the perceived effectiveness of current policies in addressing these challenges. Social stigma stood out as the key issue that the community faces, followed by discrimination. Lack of access to healthcare and legal inequalities were identified as the third and fourth issue(s) respectively, that the LGBTIQ+ community faces in Bhutan. However, only 50% of the responses felt that these issues were being addressed "somewhat well" in the current policies; 37.5% of the responses felt that they were "not well" addressed.

### 7.1. Summary of Key Challenges Faced by the LGBT+ Community

- **Social Stigma:** Social stigma remains the most widely recognized issue, with 87.5% of policymakers acknowledging it as a significant challenge in the post-test, up from 75% in the pre-test. This indicates growing recognition of the persistent societal prejudice against LGBT+ individuals.
- **Discrimination:** Discrimination also saw a notable increase in recognition, rising from 62.5% in the pre-test to 81.3% in the post-test. This highlights a growing awareness of how systemic bias affects the LGBT+ community.
- **Healthcare Access:** The challenge of healthcare access gained more attention, with recognition rising from 37.5% in the pre-test to 68.8% in the post-test. This shift suggests an increased understanding of the disparities in healthcare that LGBT+ individuals, especially transgender people, face.
- **Legal Inequalities:** The issue of legal inequalities was also more frequently identified, with 56.3% of policymakers recognizing it as a challenge in the post-test, a significant increase from 25% in the pre-test. This reflects a growing awareness of the need for legal reforms to address LGBT+ rights.
- **Other Issues:** Interestingly, the recognition of "other issues" dropped from 6.6% in the pre-test to 0% in the post-test, possibly indicating that more defined issues (like discrimination and stigma) are taking precedence in policymakers' minds.



Overall, the data suggests a notable increase in recognition of the primary challenges faced by the LGBT+ community, especially regarding discrimination, healthcare access, and legal inequalities.

## 7.2. Summary of Policy Effectiveness in addressing LGBT+ issues

The responses regarding the effectiveness of current policies in addressing LGBT+ issues reveal mixed perceptions, though there is a slight shift towards more positive views. While some policymakers feel current policies are improving, with 12.5% stating they are now addressed “very well” (up from 6.2%), there is a growing concern that current policies are insufficient. The percentage of those who believe policies address LGBT+ issues “not well at all” increased to 37.5%, signaling that there is still much work to be done in policy development.

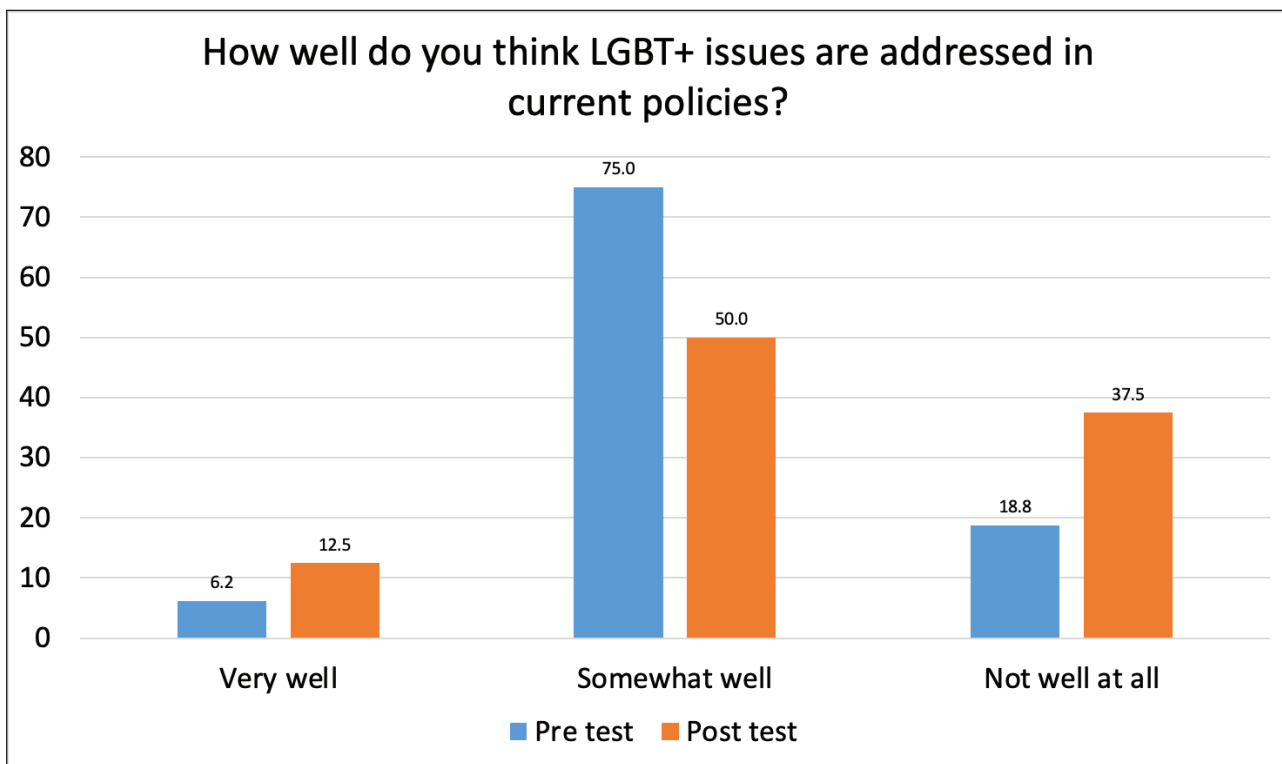
The mixed responses indicate that while there is some acknowledgment of policy progress, there is also a clear recognition that more comprehensive and targeted action is necessary to address the diverse needs of the LGBT+ community. Policymakers seem to feel that current policies, although **somewhat effective**, are not fully achieving their goals, and there is room for improvement.

### Conclusion

In summary, the data shows an increasing awareness among policymakers of the challenges faced by the LGBT+ community, particularly with respect to discrimination,

healthcare access, legal inequalities, and social stigma. However, while the recognition of these issues has grown significantly, there is a sense that current policies are still falling short in effectively addressing these challenges.

The mixed responses on policy effectiveness suggest that there is a need for stronger, more comprehensive strategies to ensure the protection and advancement of LGBT+ rights and well-being in the country. This reflects both progress and areas that require continued focus, particularly in policy development and societal education.



### 7.3. Summary on attitudes towards addressing LGBT+ issues

Based on the survey results, we can observe a significant shift in the attitudes of policymakers toward the LGBT+ community between the pre-test and post-test assessments. The data shows positive developments in key areas, although challenges remain in some aspects of perception and understanding.

#### 7.3.1. LGBT+ Rights as Human Rights

The statement “**LGBT+ rights are human rights**” received strong support across both pre-test and post-test assessments. In the pre-test, **49.9%** of policymakers strongly agreed with the statement, while **43.8%** agreed with it. After the post-test, **81.3%** strongly agreed with the statement, representing a significant increase. On

the other hand, only **18.7%** agreed with it post-test, a marked decrease from the previous **43.8%**. This suggests that while the overall support for LGBTIQ+ rights as human rights has increased, a notable portion of those who initially agreed (but did not strongly agree) moved into the “strongly agree” category, indicating a deeper commitment to this principle.

### 7.3.2. Comfort Discussing LGBT+ Issues in Professional Settings

There is a marked improvement in comfort levels when discussing LGBTIQ+ issues in a professional context. In the pre-test, **56.3%** of participants felt “very comfortable,” and this increased to **75%** post-test. Conversely, the percentage of individuals who felt “not comfortable at all” dropped from **12.4%** to **0%**, signifying that the policymakers are increasingly comfortable addressing these topics in their professional lives.

### 7.3.3. Perception of Public Attitudes towards LGBT+ in Bhutan

The perception of public attitudes towards the LGBT+ community in Bhutan is somewhat mixed. In the pre-test, **43.8%** of respondents viewed the public attitude as “somewhat positive,” but this decreased to **37.5%** post-test. On the other hand, there was a noticeable rise in those who believed the public view was “**very positive**,” from **6.3%** to **18.8%**. However, **6.3%** of participants still considered public attitudes “very negative,” although this dropped to **0%** in the post-test. This indicates that while some progress is being made in the general perception of LGBT+ issues, challenges persist in fully embracing and affirming the community.

### 7.3.4. Support for Equal Opportunities for Transgender Individuals

A strong majority of policymakers continue to support the idea that transgender individuals deserve equal opportunities in education, healthcare, and employment. In both pre-test and post-test results, **87.5%** and **81.3%**, respectively, strongly agreed with this statement. Support remained high, with a slight increase in those who agreed, from **12.5%** to **18.7%** post-test. This demonstrates ongoing endorsement of equal rights for transgender individuals.

### 7.3.5. Views on Transgender Individuals Working with Children

While there was an initial consensus against the idea that “transgender individuals should not be allowed to work with children,” the post-test results reveal a shift. The percentage of those who “strongly agreed” with this statement increased from 0% to **6.2%**, and the number of people who disagreed remained steady at **37.5%**. This indicates a slight movement towards greater acceptance, but it also highlights some lingering discomfort or misconceptions about transgender people in roles traditionally associated with children.



### 7.3.6. Perception of Transgender Morality

On the issue of morality, there was a reduction in the number of policymakers who believed that transgender individuals were immoral. In the pre-test, **62.5%** disagreed with the statement that transgender individuals are immoral, and this percentage fell to **31.3%** in the post-test, while the number of those who felt neutral increased from **6.2%** to **18.6%**. This suggests an evolving understanding but also reflects some ambivalence or uncertainty regarding the moral standing of transgender individuals.

### 7.3.7. Transgender Individuals as Viable and Contributing Members of Society

Support for transgender individuals as viable and contributing members of society saw a strong shift. In the pre-test, **31.3%** strongly agreed, and this figure more than doubled to **62.5%** in the post-test. The number of those who agreed dropped from **56.3%** to **37.5%**, indicating stronger affirmation of transgender individuals' roles in society.

### 7.3.8. Transgender Individuals and the Institution of Family

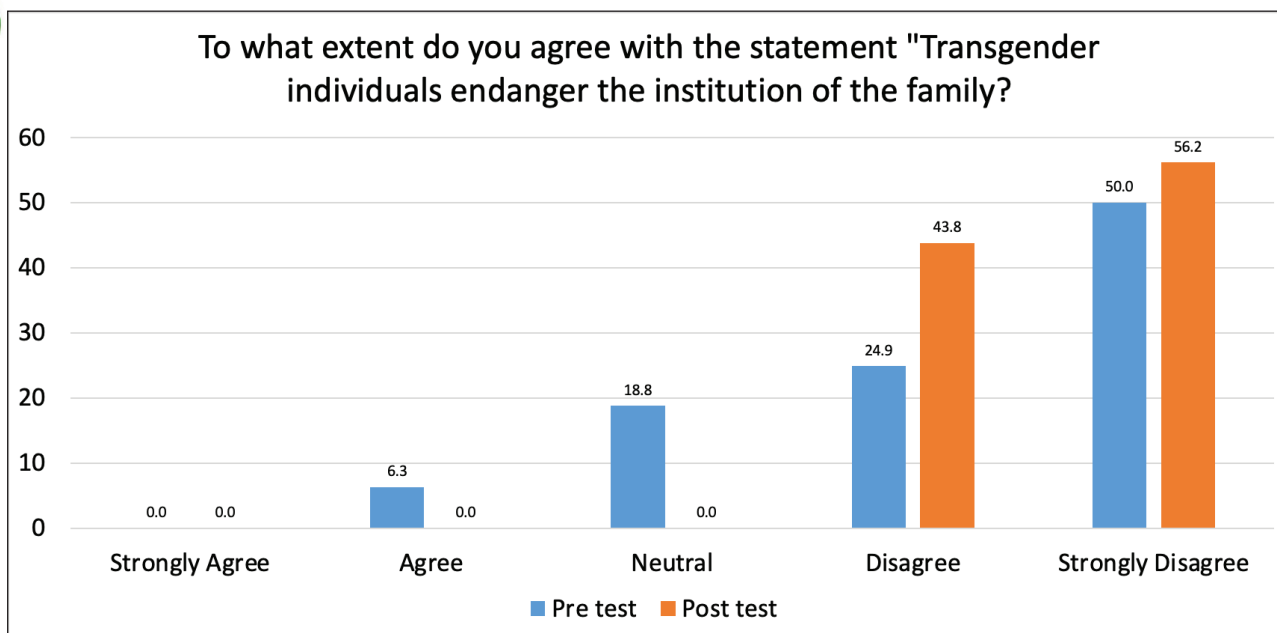
Regarding the belief that "transgender individuals endanger the institution of the family," there was a clear shift towards greater opposition. In the pre-test, **50%** strongly disagreed, and this increased slightly to **56.2%** in the post-test. Conversely, those who agreed with this statement dropped from **6.3%** to **0%**, further signifying growing acceptance of transgender individuals and their families.

### 7.3.9. Avoidance of Transgender Individuals

The trend towards less avoidance of transgender individuals is notable. In the pre-test, **62.5%** of respondents reported never avoiding transgender individuals, and this rose to **81.2%** in the post-test. This change suggests a growing openness and willingness to engage with transgender people in daily life.

## Conclusion

Overall, the data indicates a positive shift in policymakers' attitudes towards the LGBT+ community, especially transgender individuals. The increase in agreement with human rights for LGBT+ individuals, greater comfort discussing LGBT+ issues, and the growing acceptance of transgender people as contributing members of society are key highlights. However, some reservations persist, particularly regarding transgender



individuals' roles in family structures and their perceived morality. These insights offer a promising outlook for the future, suggesting that continued education and advocacy could further improve understanding and acceptance.

#### 7.4. Participants' Practices towards the LGBT+ Community

The survey results offer a mixed picture of policymakers' practices and comfort levels when dealing with LGBT+ issues, particularly regarding transgender individuals. Key trends from the data are as follows:

##### 7.4.1. Support for LGBT+ Rights Initiatives

A significant majority of policymakers (**75%**) reported that they have either implemented or supported initiatives promoting LGBT+ rights in their work, suggesting a positive level of involvement and commitment to LGBT+ causes. However, **25%** have not engaged in such initiatives, indicating that some policymakers may still be less proactive in advancing these rights.

##### 7.4.2. Engagement with LGBT+ Organizations

Engagement with LGBT+ organizations or representatives appears limited. **56.3%** of policymakers reported engaging **rarely**, and **31.3%** engaged **occasionally**, while none engaged **regularly**. This reflects a gap in consistent interaction, which could be important for understanding and addressing the needs of the LGBT+ community.

### 7.4.3. Barriers to Care Due to Staff Attitudes

All policymakers (**100%**) observed that front desk staff in agencies or organizations displayed attitudes or beliefs about transgender individuals that could create barriers to care. This unanimous response highlights a widespread issue that may hinder access to services for transgender individuals, signaling the need for staff training and sensitization.

### 7.4.4. Comfort with Transgender Individuals in Professional and Personal Contexts

When it comes to working closely with transgender individuals, **62.5%** of policymakers expressed being **very comfortable**, and **25%** felt **somewhat comfortable**, indicating a general openness to working with transgender individuals in professional settings. Similarly, when asked about personal comfort with transgender neighbors, **62.5%** reported feeling **very comfortable**, with a further **12.5%** feeling **somewhat comfortable**. These findings show a relatively high level of comfort with transgender individuals in both work and neighborhood contexts.

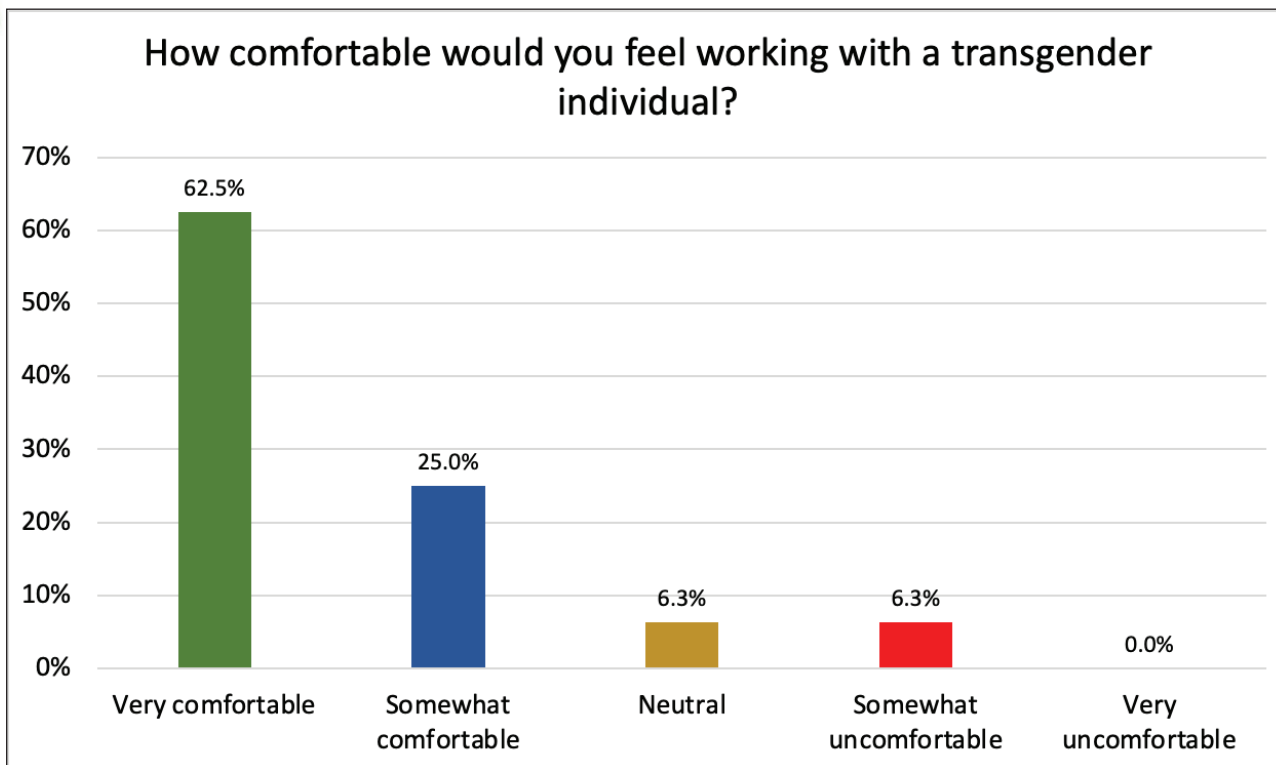
However, comfort levels varied when asked about close family involvement with transgender individuals. While **43.8%** felt **very comfortable** if a close family member were transgender, **18.8%** expressed discomfort, reflecting a potential gap between professional acceptance and personal views.

### 7.4.5. Transgender Rights and Public Appearance

The data suggests a growing acceptance of transgender rights. **75%** of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that transgender individuals should be allowed to dress according to their gender identity in public. This supports a broader cultural shift towards greater respect for gender expression. However, the slight presence of **6.3%** disagreement indicates that some policymakers may still hold reservations.

## Conclusion

The survey results show significant support for LGBT+ rights and a generally positive attitude towards working with transgender individuals. However, there are notable gaps in consistent engagement with LGBT+ organizations and clear barriers to care due to attitudes within agencies. Additionally, while most policymakers are comfortable with transgender individuals in work and community settings, personal comfort with close family relationships involving transgender individuals is more mixed. These findings suggest a need for ongoing education, training, and deeper personal engagement with LGBT+ issues to foster greater acceptance across both professional and personal spheres.



## 7.5. Policymakers' Understanding of Legal Frameworks for the LGBT+ Community

The survey results shed light on policymakers' understanding of the legal provisions and barriers faced by the LGBT+ community in Bhutan. Here's a brief summary of the key findings:

### 7.5.1. Familiarity with Legal Provisions

Policymakers' familiarity with the legal provisions related to gender equality in Bhutan has improved over time. In the pre-test, **43.8%** were very familiar, which increased to **56.3%** in the post-test. However, a significant portion remains somewhat familiar (**37.5%** post-test), indicating that while there is a growing awareness, deeper understanding is still needed.

### 7.5.2. Barriers to LGBT+ Rights

Cultural norms are seen as the most significant barrier to LGBT+ rights, with **87.5%** of policymakers identifying them as a primary obstacle in the post-test (up from **75%** in the pre-test). Other recognized barriers include lack of **legal frameworks (75%** post-test) and **limited access to specific services (62.5%** post-test), highlighting that legal and service-related issues continue to hinder full LGBT+ participation in society.



### 7.5.3. Impact of Legal Reforms

The repeal of provisions criminalizing “unnatural sex” in 2021 is viewed positively by the majority. **68.8%** believe it had a **very positive** impact on the LGBT+ community's rights, indicating broad support for this legal reform. Only **12.4%** thought it had a somewhat negative impact, suggesting that the repeal was generally perceived as a significant step forward.

### 7.5.4. Political Participation

Regarding policies encouraging political participation, opinions are mixed. The perception of policy effectiveness in promoting the participation of LGBT+ individuals, especially trans-women, saw a modest increase in those considering current policies **very effective** (from **6.3%** to **18.8%**). However, **31.3%** of respondents still consider the policies **somewhat effective**, and 25% find them **not effective**, suggesting room for improvement.

### 7.5.5. Need for Additional Legal Provisions

A strong consensus exists regarding the need for additional legal protections for the LGBT+ community. **68.8%** of policymakers agree that more specific laws or policies are required, reflecting a recognition that the current legal framework is insufficient in safeguarding the rights of LGBT+ individuals.

### 7.5.6. Effectiveness of Gender Equality Policies

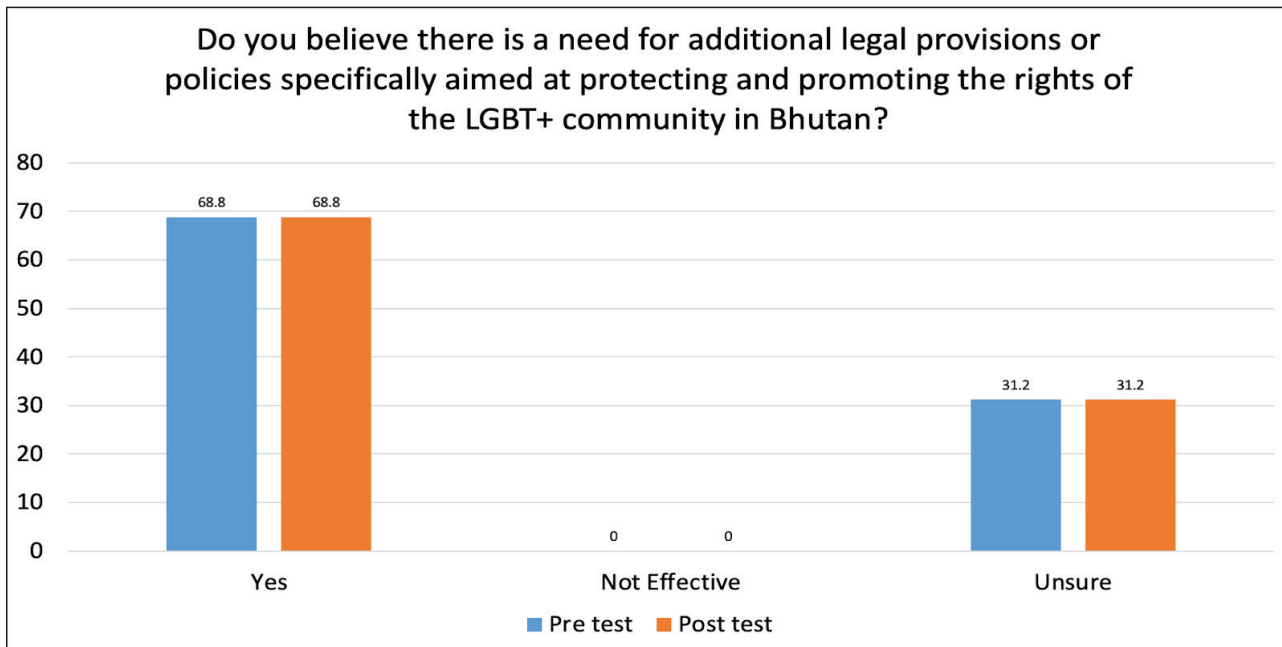
Policymakers' views on the effectiveness of current policies promoting gender equality for LGBT+ individuals in governance have become slightly more positive. Those who consider the policies **very effective** increased from **12.5%** to **31.3%**. However, there remains a significant portion (**37.5%**) who think these policies are only **somewhat effective**.

### 7.5.7. Media's Role in Combating Stigma

Policymakers overwhelmingly agree on the importance of the media in combating stigma and discrimination, with **81.3%** stating it is very important (no change from the pre-test). This suggests a shared recognition of the role media can play in reshaping public perceptions of LGBT+ individuals.

### 7.5.8. Healthcare for LGBT+ Individuals

There is growing concern about the inadequacy of healthcare services for LGBT+ individuals. **50%** of respondents now believe health service providers are **not adequately trained** to address LGBT+ needs, up from **31.3%** in the pre-test. This underscores the need for targeted training and policy adjustments to ensure healthcare access for LGBT+ people.



### 7.5.9. Economic and Educational Barriers

The survey highlights significant barriers to economic participation for LGBT+ individuals, especially **gender stereotypes in employment (93.8%** post-test), and **discrimination in the workplace (50%** post-test). Similarly, **bullying and harassment (75%)** and **lack of supportive environments (93.8%)** were identified as the primary barriers to retention in educational institutions.

### 7.5.10. Support for LGBT+ Individuals

The most common barriers to supporting LGBT+ individuals include a **lack of awareness about available services (81.3%)** and **stigma associated with seeking help (81.3%)**. These findings suggest that improving awareness and reducing stigma could enhance support systems for LGBT+ people.

## Conclusion

The survey results indicate that while there is increasing awareness of the legal frameworks and provisions related to LGBT+ rights, challenges persist in terms of both the adequacy of these frameworks and the barriers faced by the LGBT+ community. There is broad recognition of the need for additional legal protections, more inclusive policies, and better training for healthcare providers. However, cultural norms, discrimination, and stigma continue to present significant obstacles across multiple domains, including healthcare, education, and employment.



**"Together,  
We Can Build an  
Inclusive Bhutan.  
#InclusiveBhutan  
#LGBT+Rights  
#UNFE2024"**