



Sociological research report

Problems and needs of vulnerable groups in Dnipro region - LGBTIQ+ community representatives

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Dnipro 2022

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The research is dedicated to problems and needs of LGBT+ community in Dnipro and Dnipro region.

As a result of full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the lives of everyone who lived and stayed in our country changed overnight. LGBT+ community representatives belonged and still belong to vulnerable population categories as they don't have proper legal protection, can fall victims to hate crimes, etc.

The goal of the study was to identify problems and needs of respondents, to document their emotional and psychological state, and to collect experiences of life in the wartime.

To collect information, interviews were used as a method via direct focused conversation of an interviewer with respondent(s) (both offline and online).

The questions for the survey were provided by Maryna SHEVTSOVA, head of Equal Opportunities Platform, and Olha POLIAKOVA, head of Gender Stream.

The questions in the interview were divided into several blocks:

1. “who I was, where I was” (where I lived, what I did, where I worked, financial situation, etc.) before the full-scale invasion of Russia in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and “who I am, where I am” (where I live, what I do/where I work, financial situation, etc.) after the full-scale invasion of Russia in Ukraine on 24 February 2022;
2. personal questions (about a partner, openness about sexual orientation/gender identity, (no) change of social circle, etc.);
3. questions about personal safety (taking into account that all Ukrainian cities are shelled by Russian missiles), psychological state/support, access to medicine, possibility/willingness to evacuate;
4. advocacy questions (personal opinion about registered partnership for same-sex couples, if there is a point now to demand the government to provide equal rights for LGBT+ community, expectations about LGBT+ situation / LGBT+ community rights in Ukraine; whether you believe that the situation will be improving after the war or on the contrary, there will be a step back to more conservative views, etc.);

5. questions for IDPs (why you chose Dnipro and whether you plan to stay, what are the circumstances now, IDP discrimination, problems due to registration, problems with access to public services, etc.).

Respondents were informed about the confidential nature of collected information and asked permission to use the interview in a sociological study.

All the provided information is relevant for the time of interview with each person. The interviews were conducted between 11 and 19 August 2022; 10 respondents were surveyed, their age varying between 19 and 41.

Interview No. 1 on 11 August 2022, woman, 30-35 y.o. Place of residence - Dnipro. Rents accommodation. Works as a psychotherapist (individual entrepreneur) and lawyer's assistant. Lesbian. Has a partner.

Interview No. 2 on 12 August 2022, man, 35-40 y.o. Place of residence - Dnipro. Rents accommodation. Works as an administrator in LGBT community, also an individual entrepreneur. Gay. Has a partner.

Interview No. 3 on 12 August 2022, man, 25-30 y.o. Place of residence - Dnipro. Has own housing. Works as an engineer in a state enterprise. Gay. Does not have a partner.

Interview No. 4 on 12 August 2022, man, 18-20 y.o. Place of residence - a village in Dnipro district of Dnipro region and a student dorm in Dnipro. Full-time student in a Dnipro university. Gay. Does not have a partner.

Interview No. 5 on 14 August 2022, woman, 18-20 y.o. Place of residence - Dnipro. Lives with her parents. Student in a Dnipro university. Lesbian. Does not have a partner.

Interview No. 6 on 15 August 2022, 40-45 y.o. Place of residence - Dnipro. Rents accommodation. Works for an American gift delivery company. Band vocalist, photographer. According to the respondent, does not have a sexual orientation but identifies with LGBT+ community. Has a partner.

Interview No. 7 on 15 August 2022, woman, 18-20 y.o. Internally displaced person (hereinafter, IDP) from Luhansk region. At the moment of the interview, lives with her parents in a rented apartment in Dnipro. Full-time student of a medical college. Lesbian. Does not have a partner.

Interview No. 8 on 16 August 2022, man, 20-25 y.o. Place of residence - Dnipro. At the moment of the interview lives with his parents as he lost a job. Nonbinary transmasculine person. Does not have a partner.

Interview No. 9 on 18 August 2022, man, 25-30 y.o. Place of residence - Dnipro. Rents accommodation. Does not work. Gay. Has a partner.

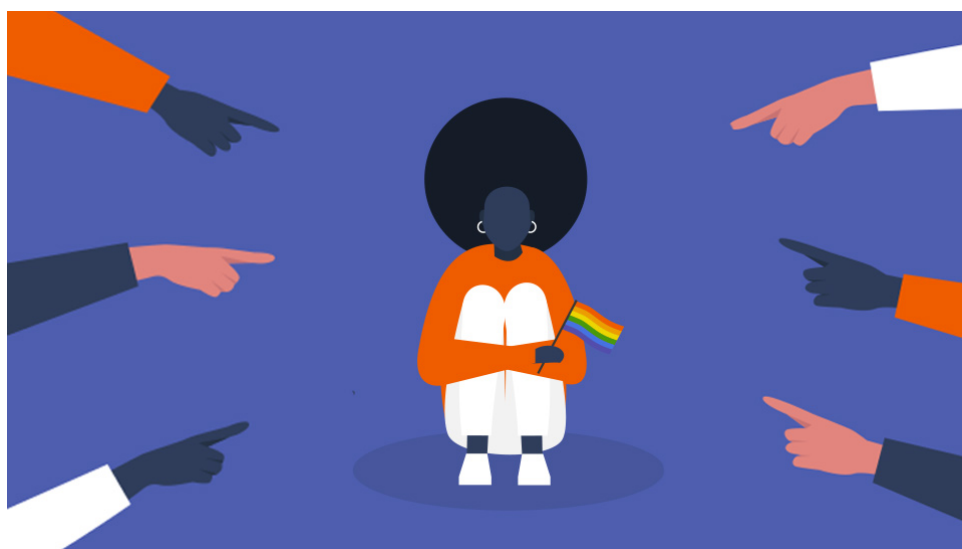
Interview No. 10 on 19 August 2022, woman, 35-40 y.o. Place of residence - Kryvyi Rih, Dnipro region. At the moment of Russia's full-scale invasion lived in Kharkiv. Works in an IT company (individual entrepreneur). Lesbian. Has a partner.

Further on we'll be identifying respondents by numbers of their interviews.

Block No. 1

Before the start of full-scale invasion most respondents had a permanent accommodation (own or rented). Four live with parents because they are still students or lost their jobs. Out of all respondents only one has own accommodation, all the others rent apartments. They don't feel any pressing problems due to the loss of housing.

The hardest situation was described by the IDP (interview No. 7) from Luhansk region. She fled her city together with her parents, found herself in Dnipro though it was not originally planned but stayed here as her parents found jobs in the city. She has problems with renting apartment as the owners of current one are coming back from abroad and they now have to move. When real estate agents or homeowners find out that the family comes from Luhansk region, they refuse to rent out.



Two respondents have lost their jobs and are now on a job search. Five have permanent jobs (out of them three are individual entrepreneurs) and three are students.

Respondents from interview No. 6, 7, 8 and 9 applied for financial assistance from volunteer and/or international organizations.

Block No. 2

Out of ten respondents five have a partner and five don't.

Respondent No. 1 does not hide her sexual orientation and posts about it in her social networks. Mother accepts the choice of her daughter. Her social circle has expanded because she changed her job.

Respondent No. 2 does not hide his sexual orientation from friends and colleagues. He lives with his partner. His parents know about his orientation but needed time to accept it. Now they support him. The parents of respondent's partner don't know about their son's sexual orientation and he doesn't plan to come out to his parents anytime soon. His social circle has narrowed as some of his acquaintances and friends left the city or the country.

Respondent No. 3 hides his sexual orientation from family and colleagues. Presently he doesn't have a partner but until December 2021 he had been in a stable relationship. His social circle has expanded after meeting Men Space, a local LGBT community.

Respondent No. 4 does not hide his sexual orientation from friends. The family does not know about his orientation. His social circle has not changed.

Respondent No. 5 does not hide her sexual orientation and gender identity. He noted that more and more friends and people he knows address him in masculine because he likes it. Mother knows about her daughter's sexual orientation but doesn't know about gender identity. Father has a negative attitude towards LGBT+ community representatives, so respondent No. 5 does not talk to him on these topics. The social circle has not changed. Though in the beginning of full-scale war former friends who were worried about their friend's safety became more active.

Respondent No. 6 does not hide his sexual orientation or gender identity but at the same time says that his identity is a human. He has a partner but is always open for a new relationship. He

has only a mother as a family who is not interested in him. He has a stable social circle but during the period of full-scale invasion it has expanded due to volunteering activities.

Respondent No. 7 does not hide her sexual orientation from friends and acquaintances. Mother knows about her daughter's orientation but believes that it is temporary and she'll "grow out of it". Father doesn't know; the respondent believes he won't understand her. Social circle has significantly narrowed as friends have departed for places all over Ukraine or gone abroad. Now the girl tries to find new friends.

Respondent No. 8 does not hide his sexual orientation or gender identity. The family knows about them and supports their son. After his coming-out his mother didn't talk to him for two months but then went to a psychotherapist who helped her move from denial to acceptance. Grandmother is expecting her grandson "to bring a girlfriend to family dinner" [*Interview No. 8 of 16 August 2022, p. 5*]. Respondent No. 8 had a narrow social circle even before the war so it didn't change significantly.

Respondent No. 9 hides his sexual orientation and can be himself only among LGBT+ community representatives. Mother needed a long time to accept information about her son's sexual orientation but now treats him and his partner well. The respondent's social circle was narrow before the start of full-scale war so it didn't change.

Respondent No. 10 hides her sexual orientation from people around her. Mother does not accept her choice. The social circle has not changed.

Therefore, most (seven) did not hide their sexual orientation and/or gender identity before 24 February 2022 and do not hide it at the moment of interview. I have to note that the respondents don't tell about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to a casual acquaintance but if they are asked about it, they give an honest answer. Three respondents hide the abovementioned aspects from people around them.

Six respondents are understood and/or supported by mothers; however, each of those mothers had to come her way of acceptance or is still on that way. As for fathers, the respondents are in no hurry to tell them about their orientation and identity. The only exception is respondent No. 2: "I have been living with a guy for five years... My parents know about us, they visit us at home, all that, this is good. Mom likes him a lot. She had a hard time accepting it but still did... it just takes time." [*Interview No. 2 of 12 August 2022, p. 1*]

Respondent No. 10 faced a complete lack of acceptance; three didn't tell their families about this side of their personality.

For five respondents, their social circle hasn't changed; for three, it has expanded, mostly due to work; for two, it has narrowed. The most critical changes in social circle happened for respondent No. 7 who is an IDP from Luhansk region, as her friends left for all over Ukraine or abroad.

Block No. 3

Respondent No. 1 hasn't faced open discrimination (either before or after full-scale war) as she stays in a tolerant and friendly environment and feels safe. The only exception was her participation in a gay pride (before 24 February 2022): "... with the pride it's clear, this is a place where you understand what it is about. We were walking down the street, and the guys started saying stuff. When we were walking back, they started chasing us, we had to run... and hide. But this is a situation specifically of a pride; it has never been like that just in a city." *[Interview No. 1, 11 August 2022, p. 4]*

Besides, she has access to medical assistance and doesn't require any special medication. She has consulted a psychiatrist and is in therapy (twice a week). What supports her psychologically: meetings with family and friends, sports, walks, watching favorite TV shows, and volunteering.

Respondent No. 1 can leave the city in case Russian troops assault Dnipro. Her possible direction of movement would be the west of Ukraine; in the worst-case scenario, she'd go abroad but won't abandon her professional practice.

Respondent No. 2 does not feel safe but not because he is a part of LGBT+ community but because of his fear he'd have to go to war (he talked about draft notices given out by military unit representatives in public places). He has access to all necessary medical services and medicines. He can leave for Lviv if needed; he has friends there. Besides, he can also go abroad because he has a disability and also somebody to stay with there, if our region is occupied.

What supports him psychologically: he moved to live in the suburbs where he doesn't hear air-raid sirens; self-suggestion: "First of all, I know that if it lands somewhere, it won't just keep doing that... Two or three missiles and that's it, then I can say that for two or three weeks nothing will be aiming for Dnipro. I tell everyone immediately: 'Okay, calm down and go to sleep. Nothing is gonna happen this week.'" *[Interview No. 2 of August 12, 2022, p. 11]*

Respondent No. 3 does not feel safe due to overall mobilization even though he under a so-called "reserve". He hasn't faced any dangers as an LGBT+ community representative. He can go abroad

but will use this opportunity only in case of direct assault on Dnipro. What supports him psychologically: sports, friends, communication, started smoking.

Respondent No. 2 doesn't feel any dangers as an LGBT+ community representative. He has access to medical assistance and medicines. What supports him psychologically: communication with friends, walks. He was not too confident about the possibility to leave in case Dnipro region is assaulted because it is the parents who would make this decision.

Respondent No. 5 hasn't faced any discrimination as an LGBT+ community representative. She has access to medical assistance and medicines. What supports her psychologically: psychotherapist sessions after 24 February 2022; communication with a friend. She has an opportunity to leave for Chernivtsi region or abroad (Poland).

Respondent No. 6 hasn't faced any cases of discrimination: "Those who hated me still hate, those who loved me still love." *[Interview No. 6 of 15 August 2022, p. 7]*. He has access to medical assistance. In the beginning of full-scale invasion there was an issue with medicines: it was hard to obtain prescription drugs. Friends and volunteers helped. At the time of the interview, the situation had stabilized. Had been in therapy but after 24 February 2022 stopped having sessions with his psychotherapist as he lives in Russia. He doesn't consider the option to leave the city or region because he needs money for that; he'll also need to take his professional equipment and old cat. What supports him psychologically: friends, cat, working in the studio, possibility to record tracks and film music videos.

Respondent No. 7 says that her whole safety system has fallen through. She hasn't faced any discrimination as an LGBT+ community representative. She has access to medical assistance and medicines. Besides, her parents and brothers work in a hospital. If the frontline gets closer to Dnipro, she will leave together with her parents but she doesn't know where. She doesn't want to go abroad. What supports her psychologically: friend, habits, discussions about life with people in a similar situation.

Respondent No. 8 noted that the feeling of not being safe grew after 24 February 2022: "When I spent several days in Zakarpattia it was a bit scary, because only men remained and they were not really in an adequate state. When the girls I knew and I were going abroad, one man treated us very aggressively because we all looked like 20-year-old small girls, let's be frank, we are all so short, the tallest among us is 162 cm, and the guy was so aggressive that we were leaving and they were staying here to die. Though that guy was either drinking some tincture next to the pharmacy or something else..." *[Interview No. 8 of 16 August 2022, p. 12]*

In case Dnipro is assaulted, the respondent has plans to go to the west of Ukraine but not abroad. What supports him psychologically: creative practice (drawing), awareness of his professional development.

Respondent No. 9 hasn't faced any cases of discrimination and has ambiguous attitude about that. On the one hand, it is good nothing like that happened to him; on the other hand, if it happens he doesn't know the sequence of actions to take. He has access to medical assistance and medicines. What supports him psychologically: communication with friends, trips to visit his mom. Can hypothetically leave Dnipro for the west of our country if Russia assaults the city.

Respondent No. 10 hasn't faced any cases of discrimination. She has access to medical assistance and medicines. She has an opportunity to leave for Hungary and work there but wants to stay in Ukraine. As for means of psychological support, she hasn't named any but instead related that she had been that source of support for her family and friends.

Therefore, not a single respondent faced discrimination or violence based on sexual orientation and/or identity though they read and heard about such cases happening in Ukraine.

The respondents do not feel completely safe due to full-scale war, missile and artillery hits on Ukrainian territories. Two men said that they are worried about general mobilization.

All respondents have access to medical assistance and medicines. The only exception is prescription drugs for respondent No. 6: "Look, there was this scary situation, right in the beginning of this full-scale invasion I ran out of my pills, I have a psychiatric diagnosis, a fun one, anxiety-depressive disorder. Uhmm, it's very fun to live with it now, as you understand... And I had to spend two or three weeks without my pills at all. It was very hard, I couldn't sleep normally."
[Interview No. 6 of 15 August 2022, p. 7]

Means of psychological support among respondents are based on the following pillars: family, friends, and communication. Sports, volunteering, creative practice and work also help them to stabilize their psychological state. Two respondents became sources of support for others, namely respondent No. 7 and No. 10.

Respondent No. 7 needs psychological help because she has lost a feeling of at least relative safety; she has lost her home and her family was under shelling. She holds on as much as she can: "It's like that for everyone now, and if I start talking, I try to hold on... hold on to myself because if you fall into this hole you won't help others and make it only worse for yourself so you're holding on and supporting yourself, trying to cheer other people up... those who are around me... when I am holding on, everything is fine. If we all start crying here, we won't make it better."
[Interview No. 7 of 15 August 2022, p. 15]

Respondents have the opportunity to leave Dnipro if an assault, massive missile attacks or occupation start. The majority plans to move to the west of our country. At the moment of the interview the respondents do not plan to go abroad.

Block No. 4

Respondent No. 1 supports the introduction of registered partnership for same-sex marriages but believes that the answer of Ukrainian president about the petition is not specific enough; she gets an impression that this is not a priority for him now. She understands that it is impossible to amend Ukrainian Constitution during the martial law but an exception could have been made because it is about human rights.

LGBT+ community rights should be advocated during the war as well. This can be done through telling stories about people from this community who are defending Ukraine on the frontlines and actively volunteer. That is, through real stories we should explain to the society that “we are there”.

After our victory the situation with LGBT+ community rights will improve because we are on the way of joining the European Union and the state will be harmonizing its legislation accordingly.

Respondent No. 2 has a lukewarm attitude to registered partnership for same-sex couples, explaining his opinion by saying that most gays are not ready to take responsibility in a relationship; instead, they seek to enjoy life. However, he supports the opinion that everybody in the society should have equal rights, and registered partnership for same-sex couples will only help that.

Besides, respondent No. 2 believes that often LGBT+ community representatives themselves can discredit the community by their behavior: “A person is appreciated not for orientation. A person is always appreciated for some human qualities. I have already seen a lot of that. Like, an LGBT guy may come to us and we see that he is a very negative person and he complains to me that everyone tells him he is so and so, right out there in street, all that. I say: ‘Your problem is not that you’re gay but that you behave like that. Yes, because you present yourself to people this way.’”

[Interview No. 2 of August 12, 2022, p. 15]

After Ukrainian victory the situation with LGBT+ community rights will improve because our country is on the way of joining the EU. Representatives of this community will become much more visible because at the Prides there’ll be columns of warriors defending Ukraine. This is going to have a major impact on our society’s opinion about the community.

Respondent No. 3 supports the introduction of registered partnership for same-sex marriages believing that this increases responsibility in relationships and solves some legal issues: access to ICU, child adoption, etc. It is time to stand up to the rights of LGBT+ community representatives as they work as much as they can for Ukrainian victory.

As for the change of situation for LGBT+ community after our victory, “it will improve first of all because [deep sigh] war is a marker of free will expression and freedom. Freedom first of all, and LGBT is also a manifestation of freedom, freedom and the right for.... equal relations. So I think it will improve. Because many LGBT are at war.” *[Interview No. 3. Part 2 of 12 August 2022, p. 4]*

Respondent No. 4 supports the introduction of registered partnership for same-sex couples but romanticizes this process: “... Well, as they say, [a small pause], a ring on the finger [speaks in a somewhat different tone, as if flirting].” *[Interview No. 4 of 12 August 2022, p. 9]* However, the respondent also talks about responsibility and the legal side of the issue. He believes that after our victory the situation of LGBT+ community representatives will improve.

Respondent No. 5 supports the introduction of registered partnership for same-sex couples and believes it should be a norm, not an exception. That is why fighting for LGBT+ community rights is important now, during the war. In her opinion, after the victory Ukraine will prioritize economic problems, not social, but if the state plans to move towards the EU it'll have to solve issues with LGBT+ community rights.

Respondent No. 6 believes that our society needs introduction of registered partnership for same-sex couples as it guarantees a range of legal rights. She quotes similar regulations from Ukrainian Civil Code recognizing a heterosexual couple which didn't register their marriage as equal to a married couple. After the victory of Ukraine, the legal situation of LGBT+ community representatives should improve, especially given the fact that our country is moving towards the EU.

Respondent No. 7 supports the introduction of registered partnership for same-sex couples and believes one should always fight for one's rights and legislation is needed to protect LGBT+ community representatives.

Respondent No. 8 supports the introduction of registered partnership for same-sex couples and is sincerely surprised that this happened right during the war. It is necessary to advocate human rights all the time, even moving in small steps. After the victory of Ukraine the legal situation of LGBT+ community representatives should improve as now we are already cooperating with various international human rights organizations and their representatives will know they can keep cooperating with us and that we are efficient.

Respondent No. 9 has an ambiguous opinion about introduction of registered partnership for same-sex couples. On the one hand, this means recognition and protection from the legal point of view; on the other hand, it will lead to conflicts from people who do not recognize LGBT+ community. The guy is not prone to conflicts so he wants to avoid this lack of acceptance and open quarrels. Still, he believes that fighting for rights is relevant. And after our victory the situation will gradually change for the better.

Respondent No. 10 supports the introduction of registered partnership for same-sex couples; it is relevant to fight for the rights of LGBT+ community representatives. We need equality. People who saved themselves from the war will come back and are coming back to Ukraine; they have lived in Europe for some time, looked at the human rights standards there and will want the same. That is why after the victory of Ukraine the legal situation of LGBT+ community representatives should improve. Besides, future accession to the EU will require amendments in the national legislation in this aspect.

Therefore, respondents support the introduction of registered partnership for same-sex couples but there are some nuances. First of all, this is just a small step towards recognition of LGBT+ community rights; secondly, there are legal obstacles - it is impossible to amend the country's constitution during martial law; thirdly, there is opposition from the public as we live in a patriarchal society; fourthly, subjective factors are also important (a person's openness, willingness to register a relationship, level of responsibility, etc.) The respondents note that this process will be accelerated by Ukraine's accession to the EU as it will be required to amend/improve national legislation on human rights.

Study participants believe that fighting for human rights is always relevant, even more so in hard times because they highlight problems in the society.

In the opinion of respondents, after the victory of Ukraine the situation with LGBT+ community rights should improve. There is belief in better future and at the same time understanding it won't happen instantly and more work is needed. They note that now Ukrainian society is being actively transformed to be ready for changes. We have to note that many representatives of LGBT+ community are now defending Ukraine with arms and also volunteer - i.e., they make their contribution to victory and this cannot be denied.

Block No. 5

Respondent No. 7 has an IDP status. She evacuated from Luhansk region.

The main problem she and her family faced is the search for accommodation. According to the girl, homeowners do not want to rent out their apartments to IDPs from Luhansk region: "... they hear about Luhansk registration. They [real estate agents] say that the owners don't want to see Luhan... people from that region as their tenants. I don't know why though I talked... [small pause] to the locals, I don't know... I suspect that it is about... hostilities of 2014, there were lots of refugees from my region, from Donetsk region, and we don't have a very good reputation and here

they don't like much [small pause] people from Donetsk, Luhansk region for some reason.”
[Interview No. 7 of 15 August 2022, p. 4]

If apartments are offered, the price is inflated and their state is not fit for living: “... it can even happen that an apartment is rented out for a very high price but the living conditions, as they say, you are IDPs... You are given... this is already an apartment. But the living conditions, we... I don't know, it's all very bad there. I don't know... very-very Soviet-style renovation, very bad quality and costs nine thousand.” *[Interview No. 7 of 15 August 2022, p. 4]* At the moment of the interview the family was looking for accommodation as the owners of their rented apartment were supposed to come back from abroad.

The following issue is the search for a job. The parents of respondent No. 7 used to work in a hospital, her elder brother is a surgeon. So they found work in Dnipro.

Respondent No. 7 doesn't work as she is a full-time student of a medical college. This institution is presently located in Dnipro but doesn't have its own facilities so it will work online. Bursary payouts are delayed and nobody knows when the money will arrive.

The family applied to international and civil society organizations for financial assistance. A UN agency provided financial help. State administration of their town also moved to Dnipro so the members of this community have access to public services.

The psychological state of the girl is very complicated because she lived under shelling; on the way to her town, when her family was going to pick up some things, their car was shot at; her social circle has significantly narrowed (friends are far away); there are problems with accommodation search; her family is nervous; the pillars of her own safety have been destroyed. Respondent No. 7 is trying to hold on and support her family psychologically; she repeats that there are people who have it much worse so she shouldn't complain.

The report has been prepared by Anastasiia MYSHUSTA, interviewer

25 September 2022