

# RESEARCH EVERYDAY LIFE OF TRANS PERSONS IN SLOVENIA

## SUMMARY AND GUIDELINES



TRANS  
*Akcija*

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## RESEARCH REPORT

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# SUMMARY

*Everyday life of trans persons in Slovenia* is the largest trans specific research to date as it was conducted with the highest number of trans respondents in a research in Slovenia.

113 trans people aged between 14 and 50 years took part in the research. The majority of the respondents belong to the age group 14-30 years (83%).

A third of the respondents (34%) identify as trans men, a third as non-binary persons (31%), and 19% as trans women, which is third largest group based on self-identification.

## MAIN FINDINGS

### Demographic data:

- ➔ The highest percentage of the respondents identify as bisexual (33%) or pansexual (24%) persons. Thus at least every other trans person (57%) identifies as bi+ or as a non-monosexual person.
- ➔ Two thirds (65%) of the respondents live in the Osrednjeslovenska region, where the capital city Ljubljana is, the rest are mostly proportionately distributed across the whole country, with least of respondents living (or least have been reached) in Pomurje, Koroška, Zasavje and Posavje regions and in south-eastern Slovenia.

### Being out as trans and acceptance of gender identity

- ➔ Trans persons in Slovenia are most often fully out in the LGBT+ community (58%), with their partner(s) (55%) and friends (54%).
- ➔ There is a high level of trans persons who are not out among wider family and relatives (45%), in public spaces (41%) and with teachers (35%).
- ➔ Due to disclosing their gender identity, one out of three trans persons has experienced an ending of friendship (36%) and rejection from their parent(s)/legal guardian(s) (33%). A tenth (12%) of the respondents ceased to receive financial support from their parent(s)/legal guardian(s) after coming out.

### Trans affirmative healthcare and treatment within the general healthcare system

- ➔ 33% of the respondents are users of trans affirmative healthcare services thus within the process of medically transitioning, 42% are not in this process and 17% are planning to enter the process. Media representation which exclusively portrays trans people as people who medically transition or speaks solely of the body of trans persons as such automatically excludes approximately half of trans people in the country.
- ➔ Every other trans person (50%) who is in the process of medical transition reports a very positive impact of hormonal replacement therapy on their self and body-image, self-acceptance and their relationship to their body.
- ➔ Only 1 person reported hormonal replacement therapy having had a negative effect on them, and if we look at all of the categories of the procedures, none of the persons reported negative effects/ a negative impact, a very negative impact or a not negative nor positive impact on their self-image and self-acceptance.

- ➔ Based on these findings we can refute the all-present myth about potential regret upon starting the process of medical transition, which is one of the central arguments for prolonging the process of medical transition used by institutional gatekeepers.
- ➔ The respondents reported the following experiences in relation to their gender identity and/or gender expression when receiving or seeking care in the general medical system: being referred to with the incorrect pronouns (50%), lack of basic knowledge and information about trans persons and topics (48%), invasive and inappropriate personal questions (37%), healthcare professionals' lack of knowledge about trans persons and topics with regards to specific medical fields (36%), being called by their wrong name/deadname (35%), inappropriate comments about their body (parts) (27%).
- ➔ 5% of the respondents have reported experiencing sexual harassment when accessing general medical care – specifically requests for examination of their genitalia, even though such examinations were not at all relevant from the medical perspective.

## Mental health

- ➔ Two out of three trans persons have experienced depression (65%), and three out of five suicidal thoughts (58%) and anxiety (56%).
- ➔ The respondents reported that their mental health is very negatively impacted by the duration of the process of trans affirmative healthcare (33%), followed by negative media representations of trans people (22%) and the inability to self-determine their gender on the identification documents/living with documents which do not match their identity (21%).
- ➔ One out of three trans persons (32%) report that they most often do not have anybody to support them with their mental health.
- ➔ The following potential sources of support were mentioned among more than a third of respondents as never being a source of support; telephone helplines (71%), crisis centres (66%), general physician (50%), teachers (41%), siblings (40%), professional workers in school (38%).

## Legal gender recognition

- ➔ 21% of the respondents have already changed their gender marker in the process of legal gender recognition, while 20% report that they have not changed their gender marker yet, but they will.
- ➔ A fifth of the respondents (20%) reported that there is no appropriate option for them to change their gender marker to.
- ➔ Since the founding of TransAkcija Institute in 2014, the number of persons who have changed their gender marker through the process of legal gender recognition has increased by 4,6 times which is a 363% increase.
- ➔ 78% of respondents think that the basis of legal gender recognition should be self-determination.
- ➔ 82% of respondents think that legal gender recognition should be available to minors, of course with consent of their parent(s) or legal guardian(s).

## Violence and discrimination

- ➔ 41% of the respondents reported about experiencing discrimination, violence or unequal treatment based on their gender identity and/or gender expression.
- ➔ In most of the cases, trans persons do not report the discrimination experienced because of their gender identity. Most reports, even though still a very low number, were submitted to trans specific and/or LGBT organizations (17%).
- ➔ 19% of the respondents wanted to report a case to the police, but were afraid to do so.
- ➔ Trans persons experience most discrimination and violence in the streets
- ➔ (48%), in public institutions/while using public services (43%) and in primary/secondary school/at the university (40%).

## Sources of information and support

- ➔ The main sources of support for trans persons' in regards to their gender identity and/or gender expression, that is sources which were listed by at least every other trans person, are their friends (72%), the internet (63%), other trans persons on the internet or social media (60%), trans/LGBT+ organizations (59%), the LGBT+ community (55%) and literature (49%).
- ➔ The findings of very low levels of support for trans persons coming from teachers (8%) and professional workers in school (2%) cause great concern. Slovene school environments are a particularly unsafe space for trans youth, as schools are also one of the spaces where trans persons' experience most discrimination (40%). There are no systemic sources of support or inclusive programs for trans or LGBT+ persons' in educational process in Slovenia.
- ➔ Two out of three trans persons expressed that the following activities/products would have a very positive effect on their lives and wellbeing as trans youth in Slovenia: mandatory trainings on trans topics for social workers, psychologists, social pedagogues, etc. (79%), a handbook for parents of trans persons (72%) and a handbook about being trans/on trans topics for school and kindergarten teachers (69%).

# GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on our research, we've created a set of guidelines and suggestions, the implementation of which would have a significant positive impact on the lives of trans persons in Slovenia. The suggestions outlined here are organised by field of interest and by urgency (based on the survey).

## BEFORE WE PRESENT OUR GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS, WE WOULD LIKE TO EMPHASIZE THE FOLLOWING:

**The findings of the “Everyday life of trans persons in Slovenia” survey have clearly shown that the Republic of Slovenia, its government, institutions and authorities, as well as government officials do not proactively consider trans persons’ needs when developing or implementing health, legal, educational and social protection programmes.**

Legal and social government institutions should work to shield their marginalized social groups and emphasize inclusivity for

all. To ensure the implementation of human rights for all, clear and engaged interest and active information seeking must be displayed by government institutions, as well as keeping in mind the diversity and specifics of marginalized groups when developing systemic structures.

The suggestions, products and activities listed below would have an immense impact on the health, social protection, sense of inclusion, mental health and personal wellbeing of trans persons in Slovenia.

LGBT+ organisations, especially organisations that specifically address (or are inclusive towards) trans and bisexual persons, need the government’s financial support for their programmes. As of now, no government institution is actively supporting programmes, activities or organisations which work specifically on trans and bisexual issues. The only source of financing for such programmes is the Municipality of Ljubljana.

We are calling on all government institutions to either state their support of marginalized groups clearly, including and specifically their support of trans topics, and take responsibility to implement the suggestions below. If they do not, however, they should accept their

share of responsibility for the grievous state of trans persons’ mental health, and the continued violations of their human rights.

## Healthcare including trans affirmative healthcare - medical transitioning

- ➔ The reform of the International Classification of Diseases 11 (ICD 11), which no longer considers being transgender as a mental illness, should be enacted as soon as possible.
- ➔ A protocol for trans affirmative healthcare should be developed by the Ministry of Health, which would standardize all phases of all trans affirmative healthcare processes and procedures alongside with establishing a supervisory body overseeing the implementation of the protocol.

## The protocol should include:

- ◆ The formation of at least two active groups of professionals, which would include experts from the fields of: psychiatry, psychology, endocrinology, plastic, reconstructive and aesthetic



surgery, urology, gynaecology and otorhinolaryngology. The groups would operate based on the Standards of Care version VII (2012), published by World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH).

- ◆ Intuitive and transparent procedures, which are based on informed consent of the persons, not on tests which try to enforce a binary view of gender identity, sexual orientation and gender roles.
- ◆ Education on interacting with and providing healthcare for trans people, which would be mandatory before and during working with this social group.
- ◆ Creating and promoting available appointments outside of Ljubljana, for example, a monthly appointment for examinations in clinical centres in larger towns (UKC Maribor, Izola general hospital etc.).
- ◆ The availability of professional mental and social support for anyone who wants or needs it.

- ◆ Medical staff ensuring the availability of relevant scientific information about specific bodily changes and processes, as well as potential side effects for people in medical transition.
  - Basic guidelines and information should be taught to medical staff, especially general physicians, nurses and medical technicians. The guidelines should be formed in cooperation with the Medical Chamber of Slovenia, the Medical Association of Slovenia, the Slovene family medicine society and Nurses and Midwives Association of Slovenia. The Slovenian Ministry of Health should also be involved in their creation, and should fund the project.
  - Unprofessional and unequal treatment of trans persons in healthcare – trans affirmative or general – should end immediately and be sanctioned.
  - Trans topics should be included in the curriculum of medicine majors at the respective Faculties of Medicine in Ljubljana and Maribor universities.
  - The basics of trans identities, especially trans children and youth, should be included in pre-birth parent education.

## Legal gender recognition

- ◆ Laws and legal procedures which would implement legal gender recognition should be developed.

### Laws and procedures should include:

- ◆ Legal gender recognition based solely on self-determination.
- ◆ Be in accordance with ICD 11, which removed trans identities from its list of mental illnesses.
- ◆ The possibility to change gender markers outside of the binary gender system – a neutral gender marker of the legal gender.
- ◆ Minors being able to change their gender marker with either the consent of their parents or guardians, or a tasking ability certificate.

The Council of Europe suggests that legal gender recognition procedures should be accessible, transparent and immediate. The optimal procedure for legal gender recognition should be a simple and quick administrative matter, based on an individual's self-determination. Such a procedure is reversible, as it is not based on irreversible

medical procedures, and as such it is available to persons who do not wish, or are unable to (due to medical conditions or chronic illness) go through said medical procedures.

Complete depathologization includes the removal of psychiatric-medical classifications in their entirety, as well as revoking the medical institutions' control and gatekeeping over legal gender recognition processes.

- ➔ Basic guidelines for working with trans people and offering them inclusive and respectful treatment should be put in place with administrative staff. The guidelines should be formed and implemented in cooperation with The Slovene Association of Administrative Staff.
- ➔ The Slovenian Ministry of Public Administration should also be involved in the development of these guidelines, and should fund the project.

## Education and Schools

- ➔ Basic guidelines and other educational materials (textbooks, workshops, pamphlets and posters etc.) on trans topics and respectful treatment of trans persons should be developed and implemented. These materials should be aimed at teachers and other educational workers, as well as school counsellors. The guidelines should be formed in cooperation with the Teacher's association of Slovenia and the Federation of Educational workers of Slovenia. The Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sports should also be involved in their creation, and should fund the project.
- ➔ Trans topics should be included as part of the mandatory curriculum for educational workers at university.
- ➔ Trans topics should be included in all levels of education, as well as school textbooks and spaces within the school environment. The presentation of these topics should be developed in cooperation with organisations that do work in the field of trans education and human rights.
- ➔ School libraries should ensure the presence of books on trans topics, from informational and educational works as well as literature, poetry and fiction.
- ➔ Sex education should include trans topics and should present diverse body types and it should not be limited to presenting heterosexual and/or penetrative sex.
- ➔ Schools should invite NGOs that work on trans topics to present these topics as part of relevant curricular and extracurricular activities.
- ➔ Educational modules should be formed with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, which should fund the projects.
- ➔ Schools and faculties should create gender neutral bathrooms. In the cases where the institution cannot provide a separate gender-neutral bathroom, the previously gendered bathrooms should be changed into gender neutral, which can be introduced alongside already existing mens' and womens' bathrooms.
- ➔ Schools should end gender segregation in curricular materials and activities. These include but are not limited to e.g. physical education, specific activities on school trips and camps, extracurricular activities etc. If not, there should at least be a gender-neutral option, or a clear indication that students can choose the activities based on their personal interests, not on their gender.



## Mental health

- ➔ Public institutions should proactively take responsibility for the mental health of trans people.
- ➔ Both essential procedures – legal gender recognition and trans affirmative healthcare – should be entirely formalized in accordance with international standards of human rights of trans persons. Both procedures have a massive impact on trans persons' mental health and optimizing both procedures would significantly lower mental health issues among trans persons.
- ➔ A system for mental health care specifically for trans persons should be established, and should include preventive as well as curative programmes for ensuring better mental health of trans persons. Such a preventive system would contribute to a decrease in mental health issues among trans people. Currently, the responsibility for secondary prevention and treatment is placed solely on non-government organisations. This does not meet the needs of trans people in Slovenia.
- ➔ The government should direct resources towards educating experts from the fields of psychology, social work, psychiatry, psychotherapy etc. for working with trans

persons. Currently, the governmental system in place causes trans persons a lot of distress yet provides them with no means of institutional support. This is unacceptable.

- ➔ Basic guidelines and other educational materials (textbooks, workshops, pamphlets and posters etc.) on trans topics and respectful treatment of trans persons should be developed and implemented. These materials should be aimed at experts in the fields of psychology, social work, psychiatry, psychotherapy etc. The guidelines should be formed in cooperation with the Psychologists' Association, the Association of Social Workers, the Association of Psychiatrists and the Association of Psychotherapists of Slovenia. The Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs should also be involved in their creation, and should fund the project.
- ➔ The media should use guidelines from the Media toolkit for reporting on trans topics ("Priročnik za medijsko poročanje o transspolnosti"), which TransAkcija Institute published in 2017. Negative media representations were listed as the second most negative source of poor mental health of trans persons.

## Social protection

- ➔ All social protection programmes run by the Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia should include education about trans topics and the specific needs of trans persons. This is especially important for programmes which focus on violence prevention, mental health of youth and children, and homelessness, but the basic information should be provided within all programmes run by the institute.
- ➔ The Association of Centres for Social Work in Slovenia should be educated about trans topics, the needs of trans people and the findings of relevant research in regards to the LGBT+ population. Topics concerning trans people should be included in the selection of educational seminars for social workers.
- ➔ Workers and administration staff of crisis centres and safe houses should be educated on trans topics as well as the findings of this research.
- ➔ The Association of Centres for Social Work should run a public campaign to encourage LGBT+ people to use their services.

- ➔ A safe house/crisis centre for trans and/or LGBT+ persons should be established immediately or as soon as possible.
- ➔ NGOs and initiatives working in the fields of mental health, eating disorders, suicide and self-harm prevention, disabilities, primary and secondary prevention and treatment, as well as drug abuse and alcoholism treatments and youth organisations should be informed and educated about trans topics and the findings of this research.

## LGBT+ organisations and the LGBT+ community

- ➔ This research shows that more resources and greater capacities are needed for developing trans-specific and LGBT+ systems of support, activity and activism outside of the central region of Slovenia.
- ➔ There is a need for developing and implementing an inter-organisational strategy for addressing LGBT+ persons outside of the central region, which would include all organisations transparently presenting their own plans or suggest ideas for decentralising LGBT+ activism and community building.
- ➔ There should be a platform for disseminating information and resources about LGBT+ friendly public and private services.
- ➔ LGBT+ organisations should familiarize themselves with key topics and subjects, which trans persons have deemed underrepresented in programmes and products of LGBT+ organisations.

- ➔ LGBT+ organisations should familiarize themselves with the data on how many trans persons feel included in the community, as well as the transphobia, biphobia, panphobia and/or acephobia (bigotry against asexual people) displayed within the community.
- ➔ LGBT+ organisations should address transphobia, bi+ phobia, acephobia, the topics of trans, bi+, intersectional bi+ and trans topics, as well as asexuality and aromanticity.
- ➔ There should be an increase of informing and motivating members of the LGBT+ community on why it is crucial to report violence and discrimination.
- ➔ The trans and LGBT+ community should actively address topics of disability and neurodiversity.
- ➔ The trans and LGBT+ community should actively address the topics of alcohol and drug abuse.
- ➔ The needs and capacities for developing a trans-specific internet forum should be explored.



## About TransAkcija

Zavod Transfeministična Inicijativa TransAkcija (Transfeminist Initiative TransAkcija Institute) is the first and, at the time of writing, only trans-specific organisation in Slovenia.

TransAkcija is run by trans persons, and we work with and for trans persons.

TransAkcija has been active since July 2014, at first as an informal collective, which was then formalized as an institute/organisation in the non-government sector.

Our work includes but is not limited to; addressing and legitimizing human rights, specificities and needs of trans and gender non-conforming people, being an actor in the formation of a trans and gender non-conforming community and addressing legal and systemic erasure of trans and gender non-conforming persons from legislative and social structures with advocacy for trans human rights.

Our main values are rooted in transfeminism, anti-sexism, anti-racism, anti-ableism, anti-fatphobia, pro sex work, anti-biological essentialism. We strive for norm-critical approaches while working towards advocating justice for people of all genders. We believe in social justice principles and intersectionality, and work with constant addressing of power relations and privileges.

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