

RICE 2025

Rainbow Index of Churches in Europe 2025

inclusive-churches.eu

all links are clickable!

CONTENTS

1. <u>Introduction</u>	
<u>LGBTI INCLUSIVITY IN EUROPEAN CHURCHES</u> <u>AND THE REASON FOR THE RAINBOW INDEX</u> <u>OF CHURCHES IN EUROPE</u>	4
2. <u>Research Methodology</u>	10
3. <u>Scores and Ranking of Churches</u>	15
4. <u>Eastern Orthodox Churches</u>	44
5. <u>Roman Catholic Church</u>	77
6. <u>Protestant Churches</u>	101
7. <u>Other Churches</u>	151
8. <u>Ways Forward</u>	159
9. <u>Appendices</u>	
<u>Appendix A – Churches</u>	164
<u>Appendix B – List of</u> <u>Indicators ('Inclusivity Index')</u>	166
<u>Appendix C – RICE 2020 and</u> <u>2025</u>	170
<u>Appendix C – RICE 2020 and</u> <u>2025</u>	174



With the support of the Ministry
of Education, Culture
and Science of the Netherlands

AUTHORS:

Prof. Dr Regina Elsner (University of Münster, Germany), Prof. Dr Pekka Metso (University of Eastern Finland), Prof. Dr Valérie Nicolet (Umeå University, Sweden)

1. Introduction

LGBTI INCLUSIVITY
IN EUROPEAN CHURCHES
AND THE REASON
FOR THE RAINBOW INDEX
OF CHURCHES IN EUROPE

Since its foundation in 1982, the European Forum of LGBTI+ Christian Groups has seen a steady growth in the number of groups that became involved, groups connected from across Europe with members from all major church families. Almost all of them had one thing in common: the lack of inclusivity of their churches, ranging from a vague awareness of not completely fitting in, to being told to leave the faith community altogether. The European Forum has always been, and still is, a safe space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and other queer people of faith to share their stories. Over the years these stories have also been brought together in publications to raise awareness about their all too often marginal position. The lived experiences of LGBTI¹ people collated in volumes have supported those who have sought for change in their churches, to make them welcome, affirming, or in other words, inclusive. However, as important as they are and will always be, they are by definition also incidental and anecdotal and do not provide the reader with information offering a more systematic impression of the inclusivity of the churches that LGBTI people are part of, or used to be part of. In order to be able to appeal to churches or to support them in dialogue, it is helpful and important to collect information that gives insight, namely concrete, measurable and comparable data. This information helps guide both churches and LGBTI people of faith—along with their organisations and allies—toward greater inclusivity. For this reason, the European Forum of LGBTI+ Christian Groups decided in 2018 to create an inclusivity index for churches. This report is the result of a 2nd round of data collection, creating the revised edition of RICE: the Rainbow Index of Churches in Europe.

In 2025, the need for an inclusivity index of churches is as big as it was when the first edition of RICE was published in 2021. Over the past fifty years, Europe has witnessed significant progress in recognising the human rights of LGBTI individuals—a journey that continues today. However, this advancement is increasingly challenged by growing political, societal, and church opposition.

- In 2022, Kirill, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church blamed liberal western values, particularly gay pride parades for the alleged 'need' for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in a Sunday sermon.
- After enacting legislation in 2020 that barred transgender and intersex individuals from legally changing their gender, Hungary proceeded in 2021 to outlaw what it termed 'homosexual and transsexual propaganda.' This trajectory culminated in 2025 with a constitutional amendment that banned public gatherings advocating for the rights of LGBTI people.
- On 12 October 2022, two people were killed (plus the perpetrator), and a third person wounded, in a shooting outside of the front entrance of Tepláren, a gay bar in Bratislava, Slovakia, a well-known spot frequented by the local LGBTI community.
- Although 2025 saw an end to the so-called 'LGBT free zones' in Poland, up until 2024 provinces, towns and municipalities across the country adopted 'family charters' pledging to 'protect children from moral corruption' or declared themselves free from 'LGBT ideology.'

¹ Editor's note: Throughout the document, the term **LGBTI** is used to refer to queer people, except in quotations or in the titles of referenced documents.

-
- Although the world has come to know the late Pope Francis as the first Pope who strongly appealed for change in pastoral attitudes towards homosexual people, in 2024 during a symposium he yet again spoke out against gender theory describing it as an 'ugly ideology of our time', because, according to the Pope, it erases all distinctions between men and women. To cancel this difference, the Pope claimed, 'is to erase humanity.'
 - In 2025, the proposal to make it possible for transgender people to themselves change the gender marker on their birth certificate was withdrawn in the Netherlands. According to the Dutch government, this proposal was 'politically unfeasible' at that point in time.
 - Also in 2025, the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom ruled that the legal definition of a woman should be based on biological sex, a decision set to have far reaching implications for who can and cannot access single sex services and spaces. At the same time, the Church of England remains in a prolonged stalemate on LGBTI inclusion, immobilized by the fear that any step forward could fracture the Anglican Communion.
 - Most recently, on 26 September 2025, the Parliament of Slovakia changed the country's constitution to define gender strictly as 'biological sex at birth,' effectively banning legal gender recognition for trans people. The same amendment introduces further restrictions on adoption rights — gravely undermining the dignity, safety and human rights of LGBTI individuals and families.

These examples illustrate how, since the inaugural edition of RICE in 2020, sexual and gender diversity has remained—and in some cases become even more of—a central focus in post-secular debates over conflicting values within contemporary pluralistic societies. They are an expression of the so-called 'culture wars' that have also found their way to Europe. In these conflicts there is a close connection between a fundamentalist or traditionalist interpretation of religion and populist, conservative, illiberal or extreme-right perspectives on sexuality, gender and the human rights of LGBTI people.. Global alliances of fundamentalist and authoritarian powers pay special attention to the situation in Europe, not only because of the historical dominance of that region in setting the trends for other regions, but also because of the progress in the area of human rights achieved by European countries and such fellowship and solidarity frameworks as the Council of Europe and the European Union. The backlash this war against progress has caused, and is still causing, are more systematically documented within the reports of ILGA-Europe, which focuses on political and social developments that impact LGBTI equality in Europe. These reports are published in the Annual Review and Rainbow Map. Rainbow Map is ILGA-Europe's digital 'benchmarking tool' for advocacy and policy work. ILGA-Europe ranks 49 European countries on their LGBTI equality laws and policies, but the annual report also provides an impression of how the laws and policies of European countries impact the everyday lives of LGBTI people. Introducing the Rainbow Map of 2025, ILGA-Europe states on its website:

The data [of the Rainbow Map] highlights how rollbacks on LGBTI human rights are part of a broader erosion of democratic protections across Europe. (...) They are merely the most striking examples of a broader trend in which LGBTI human rights are being systematically dismantled under the guise of preserving public order. In reality, such measures pave the way for sweeping restrictions on fundamental freedoms, including the rights to protest and to political dissent.²

² <https://www.ilga-europe.org/press-release/press-release-uk-joins-hungary-and-georgia-with-the-biggest-drops-on-annual-lgbti-rights-ranking/>

**INTRODUCTION: LGBTI INCLUSIVITY IN EUROPEAN CHURCHES
AND THE REASON FOR THE RAINBOW INDEX OF CHURCHES IN EUROPE**

As the reality of the ‘culture wars’ becomes increasingly obvious also in Europe, it is important to recognise that churches are not the keepers of traditional values per se, as they are portrayed by conservative, nationalist and populist parties and movements. Despite the claims of the anti-gender movement,, none of the religions are inherently opposed to LGBTI inclusion and neither do they present a monolithic front. Even in the years that have passed since the publication of the 1st edition of RICE in 2021, there have been quite a few positive updates. For example, the Synodal Path chosen by Pope Francis for the worldwide Roman Catholic Church has given women and LGBTI people a voice in the church. As a prominent expression of this visibility and acknowledgement, an LGBTI pilgrimage took place in September 2025 at the Vatican, as part of the Jubilee Year, involving over 1,400 participants from 20 countries. Francis’ successor, Pope Leo XIV, made clear he will continue the Synodal Path of Pope Frances, and will not change the pastoral welcome Francis has extended to those LGBTI people that belong to the church. Another example of progress is the 2025 decision of one of the smaller and more traditional Reformed denominations in the Netherlands, ‘The Dutch Reformed Churches’ (de Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken), to grant homosexual couples the right to receive Holy Communion and to permit their inclusion in church leadership roles such as minister, elder, and deacon.

The European Forum of LGBTI+ Christian Groups is one of the member organisations of ILGA-Europe. The European Forum’s main aim is to realise equality and inclusion for LGBTI people in Christian churches and other religious bodies in Europe. In 2019, the European Forum invited researchers from the Protestant Theological University (PThU) in Amsterdam to research the LGBTI+ inclusivity of churches in Europe and to construct an index for ranking European churches according to their inclusivity, analogous to ILGA’s Rainbow Map and Index. As already described earlier, the European Forum saw the need for ‘hard facts’ on European churches’ inclusivity, to provide them with an incentive to work towards a higher level of inclusivity and to share with these churches practices and policies that could strengthen their effectiveness. The PThU agreed on a research contract with the European Forum beginning in January 2020, and which resulted in the first report and presentation of RICE 2020 in May 2021.

ILGA-Europe’s Rainbow benchmarking tool, which serves as a model for RICE, does not highlight the term ‘inclusivity.’ The term ‘inclusivity’ is not included in ILGA-Europe’s glossary of the most commonly used phrases and acronyms when it comes to LGBTI people. Rather, ILGA-Europe’s project title speaks of the ‘human rights situation’ of LGBTI people. However, the researchers of the PThU stated that “‘Inclusivity’ adequately describes the intrinsic nature of the church as an institution and community that can only be properly understood from both a social scientific and a theological perspective.’ The researchers elaborated on this statement in four arguments. Based on these arguments, they constructed the ‘inclusivity index’. The index was translated into a questionnaire. Co-researchers, members and partners of the European Forum provided the researchers with their answers to the questionnaire and they then analysed the data.

The underlying assumption and the four supporting arguments identified by the researchers at PThU remain unchanged in the second edition of RICE. In the report from the first edition, the researchers articulated the following regarding these four arguments:

As theologians researching inclusivity, we started with the argument that Jesus' practice of radical hospitality and commensality sets the rule for churches on diversity, equality, and the affirmation of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. How does this rule define the recognition of LGBTI people in churches? What are the implications of Jesus' words and practices for inclusion in the sacraments and the ordination of clergy; the representation in leadership and decision-making in the church; the inclusivity of liturgical language; the acknowledgement of the church's role in the discrimination toward LGBTI people; the public statements of the church and its political interference? Furthermore, based on the performance of Jesus, we decided to research the lived experiences of LGBTI people with churches, and not settle with the churches' own presentation of what they perceive as their inclusivity. Thirdly, the research was not limited to written statements and policies, but attempted to probe the operant practises of inclusion, to detect possible illusory, symbolic, or peripheral acts of inclusion, and possible strategies of silencing. Finally, we argue that inclusivity is a reality with social, economic, political, and other dimensions. That is why we investigated several practices that affect the operant churches' inclusivity, for example, the churches' actions with regard to human rights issues of health and safety, employment and education, freedom of expression and organisation.

The researchers responsible for the theoretical framework of the 1st edition of RICE were Rein Brouwer, Associate Professor of Practical Theology, Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam and Heleen Zorgdrager, Professor of Systematic Theology and Genderstudies, Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam. They were supported by Wielie Elhorst (Former Co-President of the European Forum and RICE 2020 Research Volunteer), Misza Czerniak (Board Member of the European Forum), and Rachael Stockdale (RICE 2020 Research Officer). During the last three months of this research project (January–April 2021), Rachael became part of the PThU research team and contributed to the organisation of the results and supporting the analysis of the data as a research assistant. She took over from Pilar d'Alo, research assistant until December 2020.

In the years that passed since the 1st edition, the European Forum has gathered extensive feedback relating to the overall framework and methodology of the research from the co-researchers, as well as from members and partners of the European Forum. The opportunity to embark upon the journey of creating a revised index came as a result of a strategic partnership between the European Forum and the Netherlands Government. In 2024–2025, thanks to a grant from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, in cooperation with its Emancipation Directorate, the European Forum was able to significantly intensify its advocacy, capacity-building, research, internal diversity and professionalisation work, aimed at responding to the anti-gender movement and narratives from a religious perspective.

While methodological adjustments to the RICE framework will be outlined in the following chapters, one of the key organisational developments was the expansion of the project team. The Academic Team for the 2nd edition consisted of professors of theology from different countries and church families, namely Valérie Nicolet (France/Sweden) and Pekka Metso (Finland). In the early stages of the work, Prof. Siobhán

**INTRODUCTION: LGBTI INCLUSIVITY IN EUROPEAN CHURCHES
AND THE REASON FOR THE RAINBOW INDEX OF CHURCHES IN EUROPE**

Garrigan (Ireland) advised in her capacity as an academic advisor and later Prof. Regina Elsner (Germany) joined the team. The Academic Team was coordinated by Dr Rachael Stockdale. Rachael also served once again as the Research Officer for the European Forum, in close cooperation with Wielie Elhorst and Misza Czerniak (now Co-President of the organisation).

To raise the profile of the research, we gathered an Advisory Committee consisting of Prof. Mariecke van den Berg (Netherlands), Dr Talvikki Ahonen (Finland), Dr Michael Brinkschröder (Germany) and Dr Gabor Petri (Hungary), initially also joined by Prof. Regina Elsner, who later transferred to the Academic Team.

Finally, this research would not have been possible without the remarkable group of questionnaire respondents, whose invaluable first-hand expertise leads us to regard them as full co-researchers:

Agnes Burg, Alain Fohal, Alexander Zidar, Ana de Carvalho, Andrea Rubera, Andrii Kravchuk, Bernhard Bergler, Bob Kagenaar Voorn, Christopher Vella, Claudia Marlen Schröder, Colm Holmes, Erik Gyll, Eva Winiarski, Frans Bossink, František Kuminiak, Hendrik Johannemann, Igor Ahmedov, Ionut Biliuta, Julián Muñoz Pérez, Kees Goedegebuur, Kerstin Svertberg Thorell, Kristína Buchelová, Kuisma Savisalo, Laura Kallatsa, Marie-Pierre Cournot, Martin Franke-Coulbeaut, Martin Pendergast, Márton Makrai, Michael Brinkschröder, Michael Clifton, Mikheil Bieridze, Miroslav Maťavka, Nadège Bousquet, Paraskevi Arapoglou, Pehr Thorell, Per Höjeberg, Rik Renckens, Robert Frede, Stefan Grotefeld, Talvikki Ahonen, Tarja Pyykkö, Thomas Pöschl, Tomasz Puchalski, Tomasz Puła, Urszula Pawlik. *(There were also several co-researchers whose names are not disclosed for reasons of safety, due to the risk of harassment or retribution).*

The contextual knowledge and lived experiences of these individuals—rooted in diverse denominational and geographical backgrounds—form the essential foundation of our research. Their insights not only enrich the data but also enable observations from a broad, continent-wide perspective. We hope that this edition of the Rainbow Index of Churches in Europe, grounded in robust evidence and thoughtful recommendations, will bear meaningful fruit and support religious communities across Europe and beyond in becoming more inclusive and true to their spiritual calling.

Rev. Wielie Elhorst and Misza Czerniak,
European Forum of LGBTI+ Christian Groups
September 2025

2. Research Methodology

The European Forum's (EF) main aim is to bring about equality and inclusion for LGBTI people in Christian churches and other religious organisations in Europe. For this purpose, the EF employs several approaches to engage both with ecumenical bodies and churches at European level, and with civic and political organisations. For example, the EF provides information on religion-based homophobia and advocates for the human rights of LGBTI people within hostile social and religious environments. In Spring 2019, the EF invited researchers from the Protestant Theological University (PThU) in Amsterdam to research the inclusivity of churches in Europe and to construct an index for ranking European churches according to their inclusivity, analogous with ILGA's Rainbow Europe equality index. The EF saw the need for 'hard facts' on European churches' inclusivity, to provide churches with an incentive to work towards greater inclusivity and to provide these churches with practices and policies to improve their performance. The research project was called RICE 2020, an acronym for 'Rainbow Index of Churches in Europe in 2020'. The Index indicates the extent to which European churches are inclusive on LGBTI issues. Consequently, the Index might be an important policy instrument for the European churches, for human rights advocates and organisations, the Council of Europe, and for the European Parliament.

With RICE 2025, the European Forum presents the second stage of the inclusivity survey. Methodologically, the second stage largely relies on the methods, principles and questions from RICE 2020, mainly to provide comparable data and to show shifts and developments. The opportunity to compare developments within single churches and church families, as well as shifts in a more general sense, is one of the core aims of the second stage. It is a unique chance for the churches themselves to reflect on their methods and strategies and to acknowledge the effects of their internal and public policies on the lives of the LGBTI faithful.

Nonetheless, it is essential to identify certain methodological challenges and specificities from the outset to ensure that the observations and findings are approached with due diligence.

In this report we present an 'inclusivity index'. Because inclusivity is not a clear-cut concept, it is not appropriate to apply it directly to the policies and practices of churches. What is possible, however, is to use our theoretical exploration as a heuristic framework for exploring and describing the churches' inclusivity in practice. This implies operationalising our exploratory theoretical framework as a means of uncovering the meaning of sex and gender inclusivity for European churches on a national level. To operationalise the concept of inclusivity, we have broken it down into a series of indicators—observable and measurable elements that allow for a practical definition. When combined, these indicators form what is known as an 'index.'

The 2025 Index consists of 52 indicators to measure the inclusivity of churches (Appendix B), which we made operational as a questionnaire. Co-researchers were invited to submit supporting information that substantiated their responses and scores, along with specific comments to clarify the context and meaning behind their answers. We received only 6 questionnaires out of 47 with no specific comments at all. The received responses – scores and comments – were ranked and analysed in detail by a research team, in collaboration with the Advisory Board and the Board of the European Forum. Each denominational chapter adheres to a consistent structure, while allowing space for tailored emphasis and a distinctive approach that reflects the unique characteristics of the respective church family.

Creating a ranking index using data provided by co-researchers with distinct epistemological perspectives requires a mixed methods approach. 'Mixed method' usually means a sequential triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods, with the intention of enhancing the validity of the research results valid, as well as increasing reliability and generalisability.. 'Rather than employing a mixed methods approach or relying solely on quantitative research, we chose to conduct a pre-structured qualitative survey to assess and rank the diversity among European churches in terms of inclusivity. Epistemologically, the core of this research is grounded in the lived experiences of LGBTI Christians, particularly in relation to church policies and practices concerning inclusivity. This is why we also opted for a relational, or collaborative, research approach, involving LGBTI Christians taken from the local networks of the EF and their partner organisations, as co-researchers. LGBTI Christians were the main generators of data on the churches' inclusivity per country. We used the following research question: *What are European churches' policies and practices on inclusivity in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, as experienced by LGBTI Christians?*

All participants in this research operated as co-researchers. 'Our decision to adopt this approach is based on a fourfold rationale. First of all, the majority of documents and media sources are available only in the national languages of the respective churches, requiring researchers with proficiency across Europe's linguistic diversity. Secondly, generating the data requires a certain amount of local knowledge regarding the churches sampled. Engaging with the list of research indicators and interpreting them within the specific national context of a given church tradition requires researchers capable of thoughtfully navigating complex and sensitive issues in depth. Thirdly, the sensitive nature of the research also requires researchers who possess a well-informed understanding of the church and its policies and who perhaps have some form of access to the leadership of the church itself. Finally, in order to fully comprehend and experience the church's position on inclusivity, this research requires the researchers to be familiar with the lived experiences of LGBTI people.

However, from a methodological perspective, the participation of local co-researchers poses some challenges. The co-researchers come from various backgrounds and have different roles inside or outside of the churches they evaluated. Some have an insider perspective while others see from the outside;; some are members of the LGBTI community itself, while others are not. Some have a long history in advocating for inclusivity, some are new to the field - this can lead to varying degrees of optimism in terms of what is going in their specific churches. All of this (and other factors) impacts on the data; scores given do not necessarily represent an objective assessment of the facts, but reflect a rather subjective perception of inclusivity in a particular context and timeframe. What is considered success or failure depends largely on the individual experiences of the co-researchers and their perception of what has been already achieved or not.

While RICE 2025 continued to work within the framework developed by the 2020 research team, specific differences should be highlighted:

- Drawing on insights from RICE 2020, the 2025 edition introduces three new indicators that reflect evolving pastoral practices within churches: Q8 (The church's ministries to children and young people are LGBTI-affirming), Q11 (The

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

church recognises secular same-sex marriages and/or civil unions), and Q33 (The church permits the use of LGBTI-related symbols in church spaces or on church buildings). These additions respond to recent developments within church communities and, in themselves, signal emerging inclusive dynamics.

- Two questions have been added to the category of public policies: Q51 (The church actively promotes LGBTI inclusion in ecumenical and/or international settings) and Q52 (The church joins efforts with other local churches in promoting LGBTI inclusion). These indicators address the significance of ecumenical learning and communication as a part of the public mission of the churches both at a local and a global level.
- The categories of RICE 2020 – Category 1: Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (indicators Q1–Q18), Category 2: Church Practices (indicators Q19–Q30), Category 3: Language, Speech and Symbols (indicators Q31–Q39), Category 4: Public Policy (indicators Q40–Q52) – remained unchanged. However, due to the additional questions, the numbers of indicators in the categories changed. The research team worked more consistently with the four categories, except for RICE 2020, indicator Q39 ('The church acknowledges its involvement in (past and present) discrimination of LGBTI people'), which remained in Category 3, while indicator Q40 ('In connection with LGBTI experiences and issues, the church publicly apologized and asked for forgiveness from everyone who was affected negatively by the church's past non-inclusivity') moved to Category 4, in order to address the different audience and impact of the two strategies in dealing with committed harm against LGBTI persons, and to highlight the public dimension of Category 4.
- In RICE 2025, each question now includes an option to indicate the extent to which the church's official position aligns with the lived experiences of LGBTI individuals within the community. This addition enables co-researchers to highlight discrepancies between the church's public stance and the realities experienced by LGBTI members.
- Some co-researchers also featured in RICE 2020, some were new. This also has an effect on the data, because some co-researchers might have approached the questionnaire with the previous evaluation and results in mind. Where critical assessment was necessary, selected scores have been discussed in the report to provide further context and reflection.
- Quite a few respondents from RICE 2020 have since left their church and were not willing to contribute to RICE 2025 due to their changed situation or for personal reasons. This highlights the vulnerable position of many actively engaged Christians who either identify as part of the LGBTI community or who advocate for LGBTI inclusion within their churches.
- Only 5 of the 16 Protestant churches had participated in RICE 2020. A significant number of churches from RICE 2020 were not represented in RICE 2025, making comparisons difficult among Protestant churches.
- While RICE 2020 included pre-populated comments—particularly for the RCC group—to provide a shared interpretive baseline, RICE 2025 did not. Nevertheless, several respondents either reused or referenced those earlier comments, while others chose not to provide any commentary.

-
- RICE 2025 does not include additional chapters on specific topics or regional analyses. This decision reflects, in part, the uneven distribution of responses—both in terms of commentary and regional representation. At the same time, the denominational group analyses and the collaborative development of recommendations for European churches offered ample scope for identifying and evaluating broader trends.

RICE 2020 provided a methodological critique of individual indicators based on the feedback of the co-researchers. While most comments were implemented, there were some problems with individual single indicators, which challenged some co-researchers. For instance, Q16 and Q17—concerning access to seminaries and ordination for women and LGBTI individuals—tend to yield similar responses in churches where seminary completion is a mandatory prerequisite for ordination. Additionally, certain indicators within Category 4: Public Policies, such as Q46 (kinship rights), may result in ambivalent high scores when co-researchers consider both affirming and opposing public statements made by the church.

3. Scores and Ranking of Churches

In this section, we will present and list the churches included in the RICE 2025 report from several different perspectives. We will begin by presenting the RICE 2025 scores received by the churches included in this report, along with their respective rankings, which indicate how inclusive they are towards LGBTI people and issues (3.1). This is followed by a more detailed look at majority churches and recent Eurobarometer surveys relevant to LGBTI issues (3.2). Then we will list the ILGA 2025 country ranking of the countries involved in our report (3.3). We close the chapter with a presentation of the data on the member churches of the Conference of European Churches (3.4).

RANK	COUNTRY	CHURCH FAMILY	CHURCH NAME
1	Austria	MCC	Metropolitan Community Church in Vienna
2	Poland	OCC	Reformed Catholic Church in Poland
3	Finland	MCC	Metropolitan Community Church in Finland
4	Sweden	PC (Lutheran)	Church of Sweden
5	Netherlands	OCC	Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands
6	Germany	PC (Lutheran, Reformed and United)	Evangelical Church in Germany
7-8	Netherlands	PC (Lutheran and Reformed)	Protestant Church in the Netherlands
7-8	Slovakia	PC (Lutheran)	Parish of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia, Bratislava Staré Mesto

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

3.1. Score/Ranking per Church

The table below shows the RICE 2025 scores for all the churches in our report, along with some basic information about them.

The highest-ranking churches in each of the three church families are ELC Sweden, RCC Germany and OC Finland. These churches were included in RICE 2020 and had the highest scores within their respective church families at that time as well. They consistently demonstrate good practices for becoming more inclusive, providing the potential for inclusivity within their respective church families.

SCORE (OUT OF 52)	SCORE (%)	PART OF POPULATION (%)	COUNTRY POPULATION (x million)	REPRESENTATION OF DENOMINATION IN COUNTRY (x million)
52	100%	-	9.2	0.0001
51.5	99%	-	36.6	0.0001
49.5	95.2%	-	5.6	0.0001
48.5	93.3%	51%	10.6	5.4
45	86.5%	-	18.0	0.0100
44	84.6%	22%	83.5	18.0
40	76.9%	8%	18.0	1.4
40	76.9%	-	5.4	0.0001

RANK	COUNTRY	CHURCH FAMILY	CHURCH NAME
9	Germany	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Germany
10-11	Austria	OCC	Old Catholic Church of Austria
10-11	Switzerland	PC (Reformed)	Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich
12	Austria	PC (Lutheran)	Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria
13	Austria	PC (Reformed)	Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession in Austria
14-15	Czechia	OCC	Old Catholic Church in the Czech Republic
14-15	Slovakia	OCC	Old Catholic Delegation of the Union of Utrecht in Slovakia
16	Finland	PC (Lutheran)	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
17	Netherlands	PC (Methodist)	The Salvation Army
18	France	PC (Lutheran and Reformed)	United Protestant Church of France
19	United Kingdom	PC (Lutheran)	Lutheran Church in Great Britain

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

SCORE (OUT OF 52)	SCORE (%)	PART OF POPULATION (%)	COUNTRY POPULATION (x million)	REPRESENTATION OF DENOMINATION IN COUNTRY (x million)
37.5	72.1%	29%	83.5	23.9
34.5	66.3%	-	9.2	0.0049
34.5	66.3%	4%	9.0	0.4
32.5	62.5%	3%	9.2	0.2
32	61.5%	-	9.2	0.0136
31.5	60.6%	-	10.9	0.0007
31.5	60.6%	-	5.4	0.0030
31	59.6%	62%	5.6	3.5
30.5	58.7%	-	18.0	0.0041
29.5	56.7%	-	68.5	0.25
29	55.8%	-	69.3	0.0015

RANK	COUNTRY	CHURCH FAMILY	CHURCH NAME
20-21	Belgium	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Belgium
20-21	United Kingdom	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in England & Wales
22-23	Poland	PC (Reformed)	Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland
22-23	Malta	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Malta
24	Netherlands	PC (Methodist)	The Church of the Nazarene
25-26	United Kingdom	PC (Anglican)	Church of England
25-26	Switzerland	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland
27-28	Finland	OC	Orthodox Church of Finland
27-28	Ireland	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Ireland
29	Italy	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Italy
30	France	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in France

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

SCORE (OUT OF 52)	SCORE (%)	PART OF POPULATION (%)	COUNTRY POPULATION (x million)	REPRESENTATION OF DENOMINATION IN COUNTRY (x million)
27.5	52.9%	31%	11.9	3.7
27.5	52.9%	9%	69.3	6.2
26.5	51%	-	36.6	0.0033
26.5	51%	83%	0.6	0.4744
21.5	41.3%	-	18.0	0.0023
21	40.4%	33%	69.3	23.0
21	40.4%	31%	9.0	2.8
19	36.5%	1%	5.6	0.0556
19	36.5%	69%	5.4	3.7
18.5	35.6%	75%	59.0	43.9
18	34.6%	42%	68.5	28.8

RANK	COUNTRY	CHURCH FAMILY	CHURCH NAME
31	Estonia	PC (Lutheran)	Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church
32	Netherlands	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands
33	Sweden	PC (Baptist)	Evangelical Free Church in Sweden
34-38	Hungary	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Hungary
34-38	Portugal	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Portugal
34-38	Slovenia	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia
34-38	Spain	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Spain
34-38	Sweden	Pentecostal	Pentecostal Alliance of Independent Churches
39	Sweden	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Sweden
40	Greece	OC	Church of Greece
41-42	Ireland / United Kingdom	PC (Reformed)	Presbyterian Church in Ireland

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

SCORE (OUT OF 52)	SCORE (%)	PART OF POPULATION (%)	COUNTRY POPULATION (x million)	REPRESENTATION OF DENOMINATION IN COUNTRY (x million)
17.5	33.7%	12%	1.4	0.1600
12.5	24%	24%	18.0	4.3
11	21.2%	-	10.6	0.0325
9	17.3%	28%	9.6	2.6
9	17.3%	80%	10.7	8.6
9	17.3%	71%	2.1	1.5
9	17.3%	66%	48.8	32.4
9	17.3%	1%	10.6	0.0874
8	15.4%	1%	10.6	0.1500
7.5	14.4%	85%	10.4	8.8
3	5.8%	-	69.3+5.4	0.2100

RANK	COUNTRY	CHURCH FAMILY	CHURCH NAME
41-42	Poland	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Poland
43	Slovakia	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia
44	Romania	OC	Romanian Orthodox Church
45	Georgia	OC	Georgian Orthodox Church
46	Ukraine	OC	Orthodox Church of Ukraine

The mean for these scores is 28.1. The thick horizontal line indicates the mean score, separating cases with scores above (top) and below (bottom) the mean. The highest-ranked churches in each church family are marked in dark yellow, and the lowest-ranked ones are marked in grey.

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

3	5.8%	71%	36.6	26.1
2.5	4.8%	56%	5.4	3.0
2	3.8%	73%	19.1	14.0
1	1.9%	83%	3.7	3.1
0	0%	52%	37.9	19.7
AVERAGE: 28.1	AVERAGE: 54%	TOTAL POPULATION OF REPRESENTED COUNTRIES: 547 million	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP OF REPRESENTED CHURCHES: 290 million	

The table below compares the RICE 2020 and RICE 2025 scores of the 27 churches included in both editions of the study.

RANK	COUNTRY	CHURCH FAMILY	CHURCH NAME
3	Finland	MCC	Metropolitan Community Church in Finland
4	Sweden	PC (Lutheran)	Church of Sweden
6	Germany	PC (Lutheran, Reformed and United)	Evangelical Church in Germany
7-8	Netherlands	PC (Lutheran and Reformed)	Protestant Church in the Netherlands
9	Germany	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Germany
10-11	Austria	OCC	Old Catholic Church of Austria
14-15	Czechia	OCC	Old Catholic Church in the Czech Republic
14-15	Slovakia	OCC	Old Catholic Delegation of the Union of Utrecht in Slovakia
20-21	Belgium	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Belgium
20-21	United Kingdom	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in England & Wales

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

SCORE RICE 2020 (OUT OF 47)	SCORE RICE 2020 (%)	SCORE RICE 2025 (OUT OF 52)	SCORE RICE 2025 (%)	DIFFERENCE
45.5	96.8%	49.5	95.2%	1.6% ↓
41.5	88.3%	48.5	93.3%	5.0% ↑
35.5	75.5%	44	84.6%	9.1% ↑
36	76.6%	40	76.9%	0.3% ↑
25	53.2%	37.5	72.1%	18.9% ↑
22	46.8%	34.5	66.3%	19.5% ↑
26.5	56.4%	31.5	60.6%	4.2% ↑
26.5	56.4%	31.5	60.6%	4.2% ↑
16	34.0%	27.5	52.9%	18.8% ↑
9.5	20.2%	27.5	52.9%	32.7% ↑

RANK	COUNTRY	CHURCH FAMILY	CHURCH NAME
22-23	Malta	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Malta
25-26	United Kingdom	PC (Anglican)	Church of England
25-26	Switzerland	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland
27-28	Finland	OC	Orthodox Church of Finland
27-28	Ireland	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Ireland
29	Italy	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Italy
30	France	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in France
31	Estonia	PC (Lutheran)	Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church
32	Netherlands	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands
34-38	Hungary	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Hungary
34-38	Portugal	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Portugal

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

SCORE RICE 2020 (OUT OF 47)	SCORE RICE 2020 (%)	SCORE RICE 2025 (OUT OF 52)	SCORE RICE 2025 (%)	DIFFERENCE
21.5	45.7%	26.5	51.0%	5.2% ↑
26.5	56.4%	21	40.4%	16% ↓
17	36.2%	21	40.4%	4.2% ↑
15	31.9%	19	36.5%	4.6% ↑
11.5	24.5%	19	36.5%	12.1% ↑
17.5	37.2%	18.5	35.6%	1.7% ↓
19	40.4%	18	34.6%	5.8% ↓
15	31.9%	17.5	33.7%	1.7% ↑
8	17.0%	12.5	24.0%	7% ↑
9.5	20.2%	9	17.3%	2.9% ↓
7.5	16.0%	9	17.3%	1.4% ↑

RANK	COUNTRY	CHURCH FAMILY	CHURCH NAME
34-38	Slovenia	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia
34-38	Spain	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Spain
40	Greece	OC	Church of Greece
41-42	Poland	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Poland
43	Slovakia	RCC	Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia
45	Georgia	OC	Georgian Orthodox Church

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

SCORE RICE 2020 (OUT OF 47)	SCORE RICE 2020 (%)	SCORE RICE 2025 (OUT OF 52)	SCORE RICE 2025 (%)	DIFFERENCE
9	19.1%	9	17.3%	1.8% ↓
5	10.6%	9	17.3%	6.7% ↑
5	10.6%	7	14.4%	3.8% ↑
1	2.1%	3	5.8%	3.6% ↑
4	8.5%	2	4.8%	3.7% ↓
3	7.4%	1	1.9%	5.5% ↓
AVERAGE RICE 2020 (SHARED CHURCHES):	AVERAGE RICE 2020 (SHARED CHURCHES):	AVERAGE RICE 2025 (SHARED CHURCHES):	AVERAGE RICE 2025 (SHARED CHURCHES):	AVERAGE DIFFERENCE:
17.8	37.8%	22.0	42.4%	4.6% ↑

3.2. Majority Churches

In this section, we examine European majority churches and their legal status, as well as European values and attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities.

In about half of the 44 European countries, the majority of the population belongs to one Christian denomination. By majority, we mean that at least 55% of the country's population are members of one church. The European majority churches mostly belong to Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic church families, but there

are also majority churches belonging to the Protestant church family (i.e. Reformed, Evangelical Lutheran, Anglican). Majority churches have varying statuses. Some are 'state churches', some are 'national churches' and some exist within a secular state and have specific privileges based on their recognised contributions to the country's history and culture. We collected data from twelve majority churches, representing half of Europe's majority churches. Except for Georgia, all the other majority churches operate in EU-countries.³

CHURCH	RICE 2025 SCORE	PART OF POPULATION (>55%)	COUNTRY POPULATION (x million)	REPRESENTATION OF DENOMINATION IN COUNTRY (x million)
ELC Finland	31	62%	5.6	3.5
RCC Malta	26.5	83%	0.57	0.47
RCC Ireland	19	69%	5.4	3.7
RCC Italy	18.5	75%	59.0	44.0
RCC Spain	10	66%	48.8	32.4
RCC Slovenia	9	71%	2.1	1.5
RCC Portugal	9	80%	10.7	8.5
OC Greece	7.5	85%	10.4	8.8
RCC Poland	3	71%	36.5	26.1
RCC Slovakia	2.5	56%	5.4	3.0
OC Romania	2	73%	19.1	14.0
OC Georgia	1	83%	3.7	3.1

³ Population and membership figures are gathered from multiple sources. For RICE 2025, we did not receive responses from some of the following majority churches that participated in RICE 2020: ELC Norway, RCC Austria, RCC Croatia, OC Serbia, OC Moldova, OC Russia and the Armenian Apostolic Church. As a result of changes in church membership, two churches listed as majority churches in RICE 2020, ELC Sweden and RCC Belgium, are no longer in the majority church group, as their membership has fallen below 55% of the population since 2020. ELC Finland, now the majority church in its national context and not previously included in RICE 2020, participated in RICE 2025 by submitting a response.

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

Constitution and religion

Below, we summarize how the relationship between the state and the religion is defined in the constitutions of those countries where the majority churches included in RICE 2025 are located. The countries are listed in order of their majority church's ranking in RICE 2025.⁴

FINLAND	The constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion and enshrines the right to freedom of religion and conscience. Individuals and religious groups may exist, associate and practice their religion without registering with the government. The law grants the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland special status, enabling them to collect church tax and register the births, marriages and deaths of their members.
MALTA	The Maltese constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides freedom of religious worship. Still, Roman Catholicism is the state religion, and Catholic religious teaching is mandated in state schools, even though children may opt out.'
IRELAND	The Irish constitution guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits religious discrimination. The Roman Catholic Church is not the established church. The preamble of the constitution does however refer to the Christian notions of 'the Most Holy Trinity' and 'our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ.'
ITALY	The Italian constitution states that all citizens are free to profess their beliefs and celebrate rites in public or in private, provided they are not offensive to public morality. Furthermore, each religious community has the right to establish its own institutions as long as these do not conflict with the law. The constitution also specifies that the state and the Catholic Church are independent of each other. Their relation is governed by treaties.
SPAIN	The Roman Catholic Church is the only religious group explicitly mentioned in the constitution. Although the Constitution states that no religion shall have a 'state character,' and the government has agreements with different religious groups, the government also grants the Roman Catholic Church additional benefits not available to the other denominations, based on a bilateral agreement with the Holy See.

⁴ The information on the countries constitutions is based on the U.S. Department of State's 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/>; accessed 28 July 2025.

SLOVENIA	The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including the right to express religious beliefs publicly and privately. It also states that all religious communities are equal and that religion and state are separate.
PORTUGAL	The constitution provides for freedom of religion and prohibits religious discrimination, but minority religious groups have reported that the Portuguese government favours the Roman Catholic Church over other religious groups.
GREECE	The Greek constitution guarantees freedom of religious conscience and freedom of worship, although with some restrictions (no proselytizing, no disturbing of the public order; no offending of (other) religions). The state acknowledges Greek Orthodoxy as the 'prevailing religion.'
POLAND	The state of Poland has a concordat with the Holy See, which defines the special relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. The constitution as such provides freedom of religion and equal rights for all religious organizations.
SLOVAKIA	The constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief and affiliation and prohibits religious discrimination. The country is not bound to any particular faith. Religious groups need to provide religious education and establish clerical institutions independently from the state. Most school religion classes teach Catholicism. The exercise of religious rights may be restricted only by measures 'necessary in a democratic society for the protection of public order, health and morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.'
ROMANIA	The constitution prohibits restrictions on freedom of conscience and belief, as well as the forced adoption of religious beliefs that contradict an individual's personal convictions. It stipulates that all religions are independent of the state. While recognizing the important role of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the country's history, the state also acknowledges the role of other churches and denominations.
GEORGIA	The constitution stipulates the independence of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) from the state, but recognizes the 'outstanding role' of the GOC in the history of the country. Further laws and policies grant the GOC unique privileges (e.g. a consultative role in state education policies and tax exemptions).

Eurobarometer Surveys and LGBTI rights

The European Commission regularly carries out Eurobarometer surveys to monitor the representativeness of values related to equality and equal participation in society among different nationalities and population groups in Europe. Gender and sexual minority rights and attitudes are one of the issues regularly measured.

Justice, rights and values survey (2024) shows that three out of four Europeans (74%) are aware of fundamental EU rights protected by legislation, such as equal treatment in employment and occupation regardless of sexual orientation. The highest proportion of European citizens aware of the practical relevance of the legislation are found among Finns (77%), Dutch (71%) and Swedes (65%), and the lowest proportions among Bulgarians (22%), Italians (27%), and Hungarians (29%). Overall awareness of the existence of equality legislation has decreased by four percentage points since 2021, with the largest decreases in respondents' awareness experienced in Portugal (-24%), Ireland (-21%), Czechia (-18%), Greece (-16%) and Belgium (-15%). Denmark is the only country with a notable increase in awareness (+8% since 2021). In addition, there are vast differences between European citizens on their experiences of how well the core EU values – for example, democracy, equality and respect for human rights, including the rights of people belonging to sexual minorities – are protected in their country. The highest levels of agreement with this statement are seen in Finland (92%), Sweden and Luxembourg (both 89%), and Denmark (83%), while respondents in Greece (32%) and Bulgaria (35%) disagree most with the statement.⁵

More broadly, adherence to European values was assessed in a 2024 survey, which found that a majority of respondents (53%) identified fundamental rights—such as democracy, human rights, and freedom of speech and expression—as the most effectively implemented values within the EU. This perspective was most prevalent in Luxembourg (75%) and Finland (68%), and least shared in Bulgaria (36%) and Hungary (38%). Approximately half of all respondents also highlighted social equality and well-being (49%), as well as tolerance and openness (48%), as key values represented by the EU. Compared to a similar survey conducted in 2023, fewer respondents in 2024 perceived the EU as best embodying tolerance, openness, and peace, while its image as a symbol of solidarity has notably strengthened.⁶

According to the 2023 report **Discrimination in the European Union**, more than half of respondents say there is widespread discrimination in their country on the basis of gender identity (57%), i.e. being transgender, or sexual orientation (54%), i.e. being lesbian, gay or bisexual. The figures show a significant increase in discrimination based on gender identity from 46% since 2019, when a similar survey was last carried out. The experience of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation has remained more or less unchanged (53% in 2019).

When compared with the 2019 discrimination survey, respondents in 2023 were more likely to think that discrimination against transgender and intersex people in particular is widespread. The four countries in 2023 where at least two thirds of respondents

⁵ European Commission, **Justice, Rights and Values**. Special Eurobarometer 552. European Union 2024, 8, 15, 33–34, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3225>; accessed 12 July 2025.

⁶ European Commission, **EU Challenges and Priorities**. Flash Eurobarometer 550, European Union 2024, 28–29, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3232>; accessed 12 July 2025.

agreed that there was widespread discrimination of LGB people include Greece (74%), Italy (72%), Portugal (70%) and Cyprus (67%). By comparison, one in four respondents say this in Czechia (24%), and no more than a third in Estonia and Slovakia (both 31%) and Latvia (33%). The largest increases in discrimination felt since 2019 have taken place in Bulgaria and Luxembourg (both +11%), Germany (+8%) and Hungary (+7%), while the largest decreases in respondents' perceptions of the prevalence of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation are seen in Czechia (-10%) and France (-8%). With regard to discrimination experienced by transgender people, respondents in 2023 were more likely than in 2019 to state that widespread discrimination on the basis of gender identity exists in their country. Only in two countries has there been a slight decrease since 2019, namely in Austria (-2%) and Czechia (-1%). Altogether, twelve countries have seen an increase of ten percentage points or more in transgender discrimination, the largest increases taking place in Luxembourg (+19%), Germany and Denmark (both +17%) and the Netherlands (+15%).⁷

Nevertheless, around two thirds of respondents support equal rights for LGB people (69%), while nearly three quarters of respondents accept same-sex sexual relations (74%) and support same-sex marriage across Europe (72%). The proportion that agrees with LGB people having the same rights as heterosexual people has decreased 7% since RICE 2020, with a simultaneous increase in approval of same-sex relations (+2%) and marriages (+3%) across Europe.⁸

A country-by-country analysis of the 2023 discrimination report shows that there are significant differences in attitudes across Europe. Over 90% of respondents support equal marriage, adoption and parental rights for LGB people in the Netherlands (95%), Sweden (94%) and Denmark (92%), while less than 30% are in favour of the same rights in Lithuania (29%), Romania (27%) and Bulgaria (21%). On the issue of transgender rights, the same countries are at the top with slightly lower percentages (Netherlands and Sweden 91%, Denmark 88%), while Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria are again the three worst-ranked countries, each scoring less than 30%. Among the most polarised countries are Cyprus, Greece, Hungary and Slovenia, with 40–45% of respondents agreeing, and 48–58% disagreeing, with having equal rights for LGBTI people.⁹

The table below compares responses to four key statements from the Eurobarometer 2023 report **Discrimination in the European Union**, alongside the RICE 2025 rankings of majority churches in eleven EU member states. Countries are listed according to the ranking of their majority church in RICE 2025, with their relative position on public attitudes toward sexual minorities—based on the Eurobarometer 2023 findings—indicated in parentheses.

⁷ European Commission, *Discrimination in the European Union*. Special Eurobarometer 535. European Union 2023, 63–65, 170, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2972>; accessed 11 July 2025.

⁸ *Discrimination in the European Union* 2023, 78.

⁹ *Discrimination in the European Union* 2023, 79–81.

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

EU COUNTRIES in order of their RICE 2025 ranking (2023 Eurobarometer order)	SAME RIGHTS LGB (% AGREE)	NOTHING WRONG WITH SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIP (% AGREE)	SAME-SEX MARRIAGE ALLOWED (% AGREE)	TRANSGENDER AND MATCHING CIVIL DOCUMENTS (% AGREE)
Finland (11)	75	82	76	71
Malta (12)	68	78	74	65
Ireland (6)	84	83	86	80
Italy (13)	63	71	69	60
Spain (4)	87	89	88	84
Slovenia (17)	42	58	62	40
Portugal (9)	79	73	81	78
Greece (18)	44	57	57	42
Poland (19)	41	55	50	38
Slovakia (22)	42	58	62	40
Romania (26)	27	27	25	27

A comparison of these data sets reveals that the RICE 2025 scores from the majority churches in Ireland, Slovenia, Poland, Slovakia, Greece and Romania correspond quite accurately with the results of the Eurobarometer 2023. The RICE 2025 ranking of ELC Finland, as well as RCC Italy and RCC Malta, are relatively higher than the country's Eurobarometer result. On the other hand, RCC Spain and RCC Portugal clearly receive lower RICE 2025 scores than the Eurobarometer standard set for the country.

In RICE 2020, it was noted that Poland seems to be evenly divided on LGBTI issues, while the country's majority church, RCC Poland, takes the conservative stance. This was seen as an indication of an on-going culture war in RCC Poland, and the church consequently alienating itself from the half of the population.¹⁰ The balance in Poland

¹⁰ RICE 2020, 15.

seems to have remained unchanged. We can also detect a similar situation in Slovenia, where the Eurobarometer results indicate a sharp polarisation, with the RCC also adopting a conservative position. In Portugal, too, the Roman Catholic majority church diverges from the majority of the country's population in its views on LGBTI issues.

In addition to the Eurobarometer reports focusing on LGBTI issues, it felt useful to present the results of a survey on women's participation in society and leadership for comparison with our report on gender roles and agency in churches. **Gender Stereotypes** survey (2024) reveals that the majority of EU citizens reject gender-based stereotypes about men and women in leadership roles in society. A strong majority disagree with the idea that men are better leaders than women. Most respondents also reject the idea that women lack authority or are too emotional to lead effectively. There is broad support for the view that women possess important soft skills that are essential for good leadership. Around three-quarters believe that leadership teams comprising both women and men are more successful. When it comes to leadership in politics, the majority of Europeans believe that women are equally capable of and interested in political leadership roles. Many also agree that increasing the number of women in politics improves the quality of decision-making. Although gender stereotypes are largely rejected across the EU, opinions vary between countries and demographic groups. Overall, the findings suggest growing public support for gender-balanced leadership in the EU.¹¹

3.3. ILGA-Europe Country Ranking 2025

The following table displays the ILGA-Europe ranking of countries included in RICE 2025 alongside the dates on which they introduced same-sex marriage or union marriage or union policies. In most countries that legalized same-sex marriage, same-sex unions were possible until the adoption of marriage equality. The ILGA-Europe's Rainbow Map ranks European countries on their respective legal and policy practices for LGBTI people, from 0–100%. The EU average is 51%, while the European average is 42%. A concise conclusion, reflected in changes in the ILGA ranking even over a relatively short period of time, is that the ILGA 2025 Rainbow Map 'highlights how rollbacks on LGBTI human rights are part of a broader erosion of democratic protections across Europe.'¹² Notable increases in anti-LGBT legislation are currently evident in three countries especially: Hungary, Georgia and the United Kingdom.¹³

¹¹ European Commission, **Gender Stereotypes**. Special Eurobarometer 545. European Union 2024, 93–94, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2974>; accessed 11 July 2025.

¹² ILGA-Europe, **2025 Rainbow Map**, <https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org/>, accessed 12 September 2025.

¹³ ILGA-Europe, **Press Release**, 14 May 2025, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/press-release/press-release-uk-joins-hungary-and-georgia-with-the-biggest-drops-on-annual-lgbti-rights-ranking/>, accessed 12 September 2025.

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE	SAME-SEX MARRIAGE LEGALISED	SAME-SEX UNION LEGALISED	CONSTITUTIONAL BAN ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE / UNION
Malta	89%	1 September 2017	14 April 2014	-
Belgium	85%	1 June 2003	1 January 2000	-
Spain	78%	3 July 2005	23 October 1998	-
Finland	70%	1 March 2017	1 March 2002	-
Greece	69%	16 February 2024	24 December 2015	-
Germany	69%	1 October 2017	1 January 2005	-
Portugal	67%	5 June 2010	11 May 2001	-
Sweden	66%	1 May 2009	1 January 1995	-
Netherlands	64%	1 April 2001	1 January 1998	-
Ireland	63%	16 November 2015	1 January 2011	-
France	61%	18 May 2013	15 November 1999	-
Austria	54%	1 January 2019	1 January 2010	-
Slovenia	50%	31 January 2023	23 July 2006	-
Switzerland	50%	1 July 2022	1 January 2007	-

COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE	SAME-SEX MARRIAGE LEGALISED	SAME-SEX UNION LEGALISED	CONSTITUTIONAL BAN ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE / UNION
Estonia	46%	1 January 2024	1 January 2016	-
United Kingdom <i>England and Wales</i> <i>Scotland</i> <i>Northern Ireland</i>	46%	13 March 2014 13 March 2014 13 January 2020	5 December 2005	-
Czechia	33%	-	1 July 2006	-
Slovakia	27%	-	-	1 September 2014
Italy	24%	-	5 June 2016	On 11 June 2014, the Constitutional Court ruled that same-sex marriage would violate the Constitution.
Hungary	23%	-	1 July 2009	1 January 2012
Poland	21%	-	-	17 October 1997
Ukraine	19%	-	-	-
Romania	19%	-	-	Marriage is defined in the Civil Code as the union between one man and one woman, and same-sex marriage is prohibited.
Georgia	12%	-	-	17 September 2024

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

It can be observed that regardless of their denomination, churches in countries that score below the European average (42%) in the ILGA-Europe ranking also rank in the bottom third of the RICE 2025 index. When we compare the ILGA-Europe's country ranking with the ranking of all the European churches in RICE 2025 and of the majority churches, we can make the following observations from the perspectives of the three main church families and the category of Other Churches.

Concerning OCs

- The ILGA ranking of countries corresponds with RICE scores OCs: countries and respective churches are in line with each other in both listings.
- The relatively advanced level of inclusiveness of OC Finland, the only non-majority church among OCs, reflects the country's high ranking.
- In the RICE comparison, OC Greece ranks significantly lower than the country's ILGA-Europe ranking, with Greece equalling Finland in their LGBTI-related legal and policy practices.

Concerning RCCs

- Malta and Belgium are the two top-ranking counties in the ILGA-Europe ranking, while the Maltese and Belgian majority churches, RCC Malta and RCC Belgium, are also among the highest ranking RCCs in RICE 2025.
- RCC Germany is the highest ranking RCC in RICE 2025, ranking higher among the churches than Germany as a country.
- Spain and Portugal score about two-thirds of the total as countries, but as RCCs they are positioned in the lower half of the RICE 2025 ranking.
- The low country rankings of Italy, Hungary and Poland correspond with the RICE 2025 rankings with regard to respective RCCs.

Concerning PCs

- PCs are scattered throughout RICE rankings, and this seems to fairly accurately reflect the ILGA-Europe rankings of the countries where these churches are located.
- PCs in Austria clearly have higher scores than Austria as a country.
- PCs in Slovakia and Poland have a significantly higher RICE score than the countries' majority RCCs and their respective ILGA-Europe country ranking. However, the RICE score for PCs is based on a narrow sample. The score for PC Slovakia is determined by one parish, while the score for PC Poland is positively affected by three more inclusive local congregations out of eight.
- In the Netherlands, PCs vary in their inclusiveness: they are either more progressive than the country's legislation and social recognition practices, or they fall short of them.

Other Churches show noteworthy similarities and differences in relation to the dominant or majority churches operating in the same national context.

- Finland ranks highly, with both majority and minority churches demonstrating inclusive practices. MCC Finland (Other Churches) offers a strong example of affirming engagement, while ELC Finland (PC), the majority church, reflects relatively advanced inclusive dynamics. Together, these churches appear to integrate seamlessly into Finnish society, contributing to a broader culture of acceptance.
- While RICE scores of PCs in Austria and OCC Austria (Other Churches) indicate advanced inclusiveness, the scores of MCC Austria (Other Churches) exceed those of all other churches in the country, as well as the country's ILGA-Europe ranking, by a wide margin.
- In Poland and Slovakia, the minority churches ECC Poland (Other Churches) and OCC Slovakia (Other Churches) express an attitude towards LGBTI issues almost diametrically opposed to that of the countries' RC majority churches. The low ILGA-Europe rankings of Poland and Slovakia underscore the 'refugee' role that the Other Churches in these countries often play for LGBTI individuals.

In Sweden, PAIC Sweden (Other Churches), a Pentecostal minority church, represents a conservative counterweight to the country's general inclusiveness and the approval of LGBTI-people shown by the dominant church ELC Sweden.

3.4. CEC Churches Ranking

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is a fellowship of 115 European churches from Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican traditions. The first official assembly of the CEC took place in 1959. The mission of the CEC is to work for a humane, social and sustainable Europe at peace with itself and its neighbours. The CEC combines resources of its member churches for dialogue, advocacy and joint action with regard to issues of diaconia, migration and refugees, and women and youth in the churches. The CEC has offices in Brussels and Strasbourg.¹⁴

A quarter of churches included in RICE 2025 are member churches of the CEC, listed in the following table in order of their RICE 2025 ranking.

The data show differences between churches in Western and Northern Europe and those in Eastern Europe. However, this distinction is not entirely consistent. This is most evident in the Church of England, which ranks much lower than other Protestant churches in the same geographical area.

RICE 2020 stated that 'it is hard to find a statement on LGBTI rights on CEC's website', and could document only one isolated reference to commitment to the human rights of LGBTI people by just one member church.¹⁵ The situation does not seem to have improved in this regard, as our search in September 2025 on the CEC website using the terms 'gender' and 'LGBT' did not produce any hits. According to the CEC, their attention to human rights focuses on specific issues like 'freedom of religion or belief, anti-discrimination legislation,

¹⁴ Conference of European Churches, <https://ceceurope.org/>, accessed 12 September 2025.

¹⁵ RICE 2020, 22.

3. SCORES AND RANKING OF CHURCHES

CHURCH	OFFICIAL NAME	SCORE
ELC Sweden	Church of Sweden	48.5
OCC Netherlands	Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands	45
PC Germany (EKD)	Protestant Church in Germany	44
PC Netherlands	Protestant Church in the Netherlands	40
ELC Slovakia	Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia	40
OCC Austria	Old-Catholic Church of Austria	34.5
ELC Austria	Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria	32.5
EC Austria	Evangelical Church H.C. in Austria	32
OCC Czechia	Old Catholic Church in the Czech Republic	31.5
ELC Finland	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland	31
ELC Estonia	Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church	17.5
OC Greece	Church of Greece	7.5
OC Romania	Romanian Orthodox Church	2
OC Ukraine	Orthodox Church of Ukraine	0

and developing resources for training and human rights education.' Issues relating to LGBTI people and rights, however, are not explicated and do not appear in recent documents calling for action to promote the human rights of people in vulnerable situations.¹⁶

Considering the variation of LGBTI-inclusivity among the CEC member churches shown in the table above, on the one hand in recognizing LGBTI people and on the other hand in not recognizing them, it may be necessary for the CEC to acknowledge the importance of this issue and make it visible in its activities.

¹⁶ Conference of European Churches, **Human Rights**, <https://ceceurope.org/human-rights>, accessed 12 September 2025.

4. Eastern Orthodox Churches

4.1. Introduction

The Eastern Orthodox Churches (OC) are a Christian denomination consisting of independent local churches. It is one of the biggest Christian bodies; the number of Orthodox Christians worldwide is estimated between 200 and 260 million.

Each local Orthodox church has a geographical jurisdiction that is mutually recognized, though sometimes contested. This jurisdiction is usually defined by the national borders of one or more states. Historically, OC have stretched from North Africa and the eastern shores of the Mediterranean through the Balkans and Eastern Europe all the way to the Baltic States and Finland in the North. The majority of local Orthodox churches are located in Europe. Several Orthodox churches also operate outside their traditionally recognized areas of activity, in the so-called diaspora, which has emerged as a result of 20th-century immigration to Western Europe, North America, South America and Australia. Today, the OC is rooted in and active all over the world.

The OC are united in their conciliar structure of local churches, as well as by a common doctrinal, liturgical, patristic and canonical tradition, on the basis of which they consider themselves, together and individually, to represent historically and essentially one, holy, apostolic and catholic Church. However, the teachings, canonical regulations, spirituality, administration and practices of each local Orthodox church have been shaped by their respective historical, cultural and political backgrounds.

The sense of heightened commitment to a single, shared Orthodox tradition, on the one hand, binds the local Orthodox churches together, despite differences, tensions and rivalry between them. Conversely, this is reflected in perceptions of other Christian churches, which are not generally regarded as sharing to the same extent in the ecclesial and doctrinal fullness that the Orthodox churches understand themselves to embody.

The majority of the local Orthodox churches are autocephalous, i.e. administratively fully independent from other local churches, while some of them are autonomous, i.e. operating under another autocephalous church and being independent in internal matters only. Of the fourteen local Orthodox churches in Europe, five are included in RICE 2025. The Romanian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church of Georgia, the Church of Greece and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine have a full autocephalous structure. In contrast, the Orthodox Church of Finland is an autonomous church under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Theologically, ecclesiastically and historically close to the OC are the Oriental Orthodox Churches of the Middle East, Caucasus, and Africa, which form their own church family. Unlike in RICE 2020, there are no collected data on any of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in RICE 2025.

4.2. Gender and Sexuality in the Eastern Orthodox Church

The OC are generally conservative and heteronormative on gender and sexuality issues in their official teachings and practices. The OC adhere to the concept of two sexes, male and female, and emphasizes the distinction between the roles and vocations of men and women in its teaching, often to the point of 'gender essentialism'. Sexual relations other than between a man and a woman within the sacrament of marriage are not officially accepted. In regard to gender and sexual pluralism, non-recognition, celibacy and hiding one's identity are usually offered as acceptable ways of life for sexual and gender minorities, and to their members more widely, if they are unable or unwilling to live within the traditional, pre-modern notions of gender and sexuality that are valued and defended by the OC.¹⁷

In recent decades, the Orthodox churches have produced a series of social-ethical documents in which the traditional official teaching on gender and sexuality is brought to the fore in a variety of contemporary contexts. The most important documents are:

- **Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church (2000) and Russian Orthodox Church's Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom, and Rights (2008)** by the Russian Orthodox Church. In the documents, non-heterosexual acts and orientations are condemned as sexual perversions and distortions of God-created human nature. Accordingly, the Russian Orthodox Church does not encourage acknowledging rights of 'the so-called sexual minorities' in the society.¹⁸
- **The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments (2016) and The Mission of the Church in Today's World (2016)** by the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church. The Council's documents confess that 'every human being, regardless of skin color, religion, race, sex, ethnicity, and language, is created in the image and likeness of God, and enjoys equal rights in society. Consistent with this belief, the Orthodox Church rejects discrimination for any of the aforementioned reasons, since these presuppose a difference in dignity between people.' However, equality does not extend to marriage rights. Without explicitly disapproving of same-sex marriage, the documents define heterosexual marriage as the only acceptable form of cohabitation while rejecting other 'forms of human cohabitation that are contrary to Christian tradition and teaching'.¹⁹

¹⁷ See e.g. the statement on same-sex relationships and sexual identity by All-American Council of the Orthodox Church of America in 2022 which confessed 'that God made human beings in two sexes, male and female, in his own image, and that chaste and pure sexual relationships are reserved to one man and one woman in the bond of marriage. As such, we affirm that sexual relationships are blessed only within the context of a marriage between one man and one woman. Motivated by love and out of sincere care for souls, we call those who suffer from the passion of same-sex attraction to a life of steadfast chastity and repentance, the same life of chastity and repentance to which all mankind is called in Christ.' **Statement on same-sex relationships and sexual identity**, 20th All-American Council, 21 July 2022. <https://www.oca.org/history-archives/aacs/the-20th-all-american-council>; accessed 8 July 2025.

¹⁸ Sacred Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, **Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church**, <https://old.mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/>; accessed 11 July 2025; Sacred Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, **Russian Orthodox Church's Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom, and Rights**, <https://old.mospat.ru/en/documents/dignity-freedom-rights/>; accessed 11 July 2025.

¹⁹ Official Documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church: **The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World**, <https://holycouncil.org/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world>; accessed 11 July 2025; Official Documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church: **The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments**, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/marriage>; accessed 11 July 2025. Of the autocephalous Orthodox churches, the churches of Antioch, Russia, Bulgaria, and Georgia did not participate in the meeting, and the council's identity as pan-Orthodox is not entirely clear.

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

- **For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church** (2020), the social-ethical document drafted in the Orthodox diaspora in America, and adopted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Referring to present day 'political and social debates', the document recognizes different sexual orientations and the 'needs of heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and other sexual «identities»'. The document rejects all forms of discrimination and violation of human rights based on sexual orientation in general. Nevertheless, the role and responsibility of the OC in the current situation remains unclear: the document is silent on the involvement of the Orthodox church in discrimination against sexual minorities on the one hand, and the need to defend LGBTI rights on the other. However, the 'third way', mentioned in the document as an alternative to marriage or monastic life, could be seen as an attempt to address the needs of the LGBTI community, even though it is not exclusively for them.²⁰

Unlike the documents issued by the Russian Orthodox Church and the Holy and Great Council, **For the Life of the World** may be interpreted as a cautious gesture of affirmation toward LGBTI individuals within the Orthodox Church. However, it does so without suggesting that the broader debates surrounding LGBTI inclusion are directed at Orthodox believers themselves. Will Cohen has accurately captured the dismissive or cautious approach of official documents on LGBT issues in stating that in 'most treatments of this topic, the pattern in the Orthodox world today is either only to decry bigotry against gay people or only to reassert the Church's traditional teaching.'²¹

Adherence to the official teachings of the OC on gender, sexuality and marriage, as well as a defence of respective conservative and traditional values, along with the identity of Eastern Orthodoxy as a pre-modern ecclesial tradition, provides a platform for negative, judgmental, and even aggressive attitudes towards LGBTI minorities in local Orthodox churches, in particular in Russia, Romania, Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Greece. The situation for LGBTI people in these countries is often bleak. Their very existence, as well as their activities, are considered a corrupting influence of the West and a threat to traditional moral values. By opposing the legal protections afforded to LGBTI people, local Orthodox churches are defending their ideas about the nation and traditional family values, sometimes joining forces with the state.²²

²⁰ Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, **For The Life Of The World: Toward A Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church**, <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos>; accessed 11 July 2025.

²¹ Will Cohen, Dialogue, Church Teaching, and the German Orthodox Bishops' Letter on Love, Sexuality, and Marriage. In **Public Orthodoxy**, 15 February 2018, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2018/02/15/german-bishops-love-sexuality-marriage/>; accessed 10 July 2025.

²² For recent studies made in these contexts see e.g. Slobodanka Dekić, **Negotiating Family: Family Politics and LGBTIQ organizations in Serbia**. In Haris Dajč, Isidora Jarić and Ljiljana Dobrovšak (eds.), **Contemporary Populism and Its Political Consequences: Discourses and Practices in Central and South-Eastern Europe**. Zagreb: Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pila 2022, 231–261; Caroline Hill, "Gay Propaganda" and Morality Policy: Orthodox Framing in LGBT Rights Debates in Russia. In Haris Dajč, Isidora Jarić and Ljiljana Dobrovšak (eds.), **Contemporary Populism and Its Political Consequences: Discourses and Practices in Central and South-Eastern Europe**. Zagreb: Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pila 2022, 213–230; Brandon Gallaher, **An Alternate Modernity for Orthodox Christianity? Two Challenges from Western Modernity – Sexual Diversity and Nationalism**. In Katharina Karl, Martin Kirschner and Joost van Loon (Hrsg.), **Performing Christianities**. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag 2024, 247–287; Petr Kratochvíl and Tomáš Doležal, **Orthodox Christianity and Multiple Modernities: The Case of the Russian-Ukrainian War**. Czech Journal of International Relations (2025), <https://doi.org/10.32422/cjir.909>; Ketevan Rogava, **The Role of The Georgian Orthodox Church in Resistance to LGBTQ Equality: Examining Discourses and Geopolitical Implications**. Tromsø: The Arctic University of Norway 2023, <https://hdl.handle.net/10037/29551>; Sokratis Koniordos and Dimitri Sotiropoulos, **The paradoxes and mixed record of culture wars in contemporary Greece**. London: Hellenic Observatory 2023; Maryna Shevtsova, "A Country Where Everyone Feels Free?" **The Georgian Orthodox Church, Political Homophobia and Europeanization of LGBTIQ Rights in Georgia**. *Sexuality & Culture* 27:6 (2023), 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-023-10153-4>; Ionela Vlase and Alin Croitoru, **Explaining unwelcoming attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ festivals in Sibiu and their implications for regional cultural change**. *Cultural Trends* (2025), 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2025.2458265>; Ioana Zamfir, **Between Holy Church and Holy Human Rights**. Life Stories of the Romanian LGBTQ+ Community after 1989 until Romanian Accession to the European Union. *Aspasia* 17:1 (2023), 141–163, <https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2023.170108>.

In the context of the global crises of recent years, anti-LGBTI sentiments have been strongly expressed within Orthodox churches. During the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020s, homosexual people in some local Orthodox churches were accused of causing and spreading the coronavirus. The most prominent Orthodox clergyman to promote the LGBTI coronavirus conspiracy theory was Patriarch Philaret from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate. He blamed the pandemic on the sinfulness of humanity, embodied in homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

Throughout the 2000s, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, constructed an image of the West as the metaphysical opponent of (Russian) Orthodoxy. In this context, he frequently targeted the alleged excessive power of sexual minorities as representatives of Western decadence. Since 2022, he has repeatedly justified Russia's invasion of Ukraine by citing opposition to Pride parades and the desire to stop the international gay movement, which he views as a sign of the decline of values in the Western world. Justifying the war of aggression against Ukraine on these grounds does not stand up to critical scrutiny. This is clearly demonstrated by the difficult position of the LGBTI community in Ukraine, and by the country's negative attitude towards sexual minorities, as exemplified by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine receiving a score of 0 in this report.

In addition to the fact that many Orthodox churches do not recognize the existence, rights and needs of LGBTI people in their own circles, the rejection of LGBTI issues is reflected in the ecumenical activities and relations of the Orthodox churches. Within the framework of ecumenical organizations (e.g. World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches), Orthodox churches aim to impede or prevent the adoption of ecumenical LGBTI-approving statements. In their bilateral dialogues with LGBTI approving churches from the Protestant tradition, 'the new moral code concerning homosexual relations' and 'the hotly debated issue of same-sex marriage' have become for the OC a hindrance to promoting ecumenical relations.²³

Alongside the official teaching, there are signs of a shift in thinking within the OC that recognizes human diversity in terms of gender and sexuality. The status and rights of women have been continuously discussed within Orthodox churches since the 1970s. More recently, the question of sexual and gender minorities has entered the debate, becoming a particularly prominent issue in the 21st century.

A notable feature of discussions within the OC is that they have not been led by the Orthodox churches themselves, and only a few of the highest-ranking officials (bishops) have publicly participated in them beyond emphasizing traditional teachings or condemning LGBTI people and ideologies. Instead, it is mainly academic initiatives and individual theologians, particularly within the Western European diaspora and US, that have offered opportunities for new theological perspectives and debates.²⁴

²³ Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas FitzGerald, Cyril Hovorun et al. (eds.), *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education*. Regnum Books International & World Council of Churches 2013, 446, 465.

²⁴ See e.g. Misha Cherniak, Olga Gerassimenko and Michael Brinkschroeder (eds.), *'For I Am Wonderfully Made': Texts on Eastern Orthodoxy and LGBT Inclusion*. Amsterdam: European Forum, 2017; Brandon Gallaher and Gregory Tucker (eds.), *Eastern Orthodoxy & Sexual Diversity: Perspectives on Challenges from the Modern West*. Exeter University & Fordham University 2019, https://www.fordham.edu/media/review/content-assets/migrated/pdfs/jadu-single-folder-pdfs/BV_Report.pdf, accessed 8 July 2025; Thomas Arentzen, Ashley Purpura and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), *Orthodox Tradition and Human Sexuality*. New York: Fordham University Press 2022.

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

The discussion has shown that regardless of the normative teachings on sexuality and gender, there is an inclination to recognize the vulnerability of LGBTI people within the OC, as described by Talvikki Ahonen and her colleagues:

Despite an alleged uniformity in Orthodox sexual ethics, shared by local churches and expressed in the statements issued by several local synods of bishops, there nevertheless also exists a tendency to acknowledge with compassion the existence of and space for sexual minorities within Orthodox communities. This is especially the case for clergy working at the grassroots level of parish life. Consequently, the official stance and pastoral approach are not necessarily in agreement when it comes to sexual ethics.²⁵

To illustrate how Orthodox responses seek to align with pastoral realities, the American Orthodox theologian and priest Thomas Hopko presents a slightly broader view of the nature of same-sex attraction in his book **Christian Faith and Same-Sex Attraction** (2005, revised edition 2015). He argues, firstly, that same-sex desires and love are also natural, normal and necessary. Secondly, all people are called to holiness despite of their sexual orientation. Thirdly, the sacrament of (heterosexual) marriage is not a guarantee of the sanctity of human life and unmarried couples also share in God's gift of love. However, in accordance with Orthodox tradition and church practice, Hopko recommends that Orthodox Christians who are attracted to their own sex lead a life of restraint and asceticism that does not include homosexual activity.²⁶

A significant ecclesial opening of debate is evident in the 2017 pastoral letter from the Orthodox Bishops' Conference in Germany on love, sexuality and marriage, addressed to Orthodox young people living in the diaspora in Germany. In the letter, the German bishops acknowledge 'the question of homosexuality and homosexual partnerships' as the 'burning issue today'. They point out that 'homosexual men and women' have been ignored, oppressed and persecuted for centuries, and call on parishes under their guidance to treat all people equally, regardless of their sexual orientation.²⁷ Thomas Arentzen and Ashley Purpura relate the statement to the typical approach of the Orthodox churches and, on this basis, characterize its exceptionalism as follows: 'The strength of this statement resides in its lack of entrenchment and its refusal to use the issue of sexuality as a token of pure morality. It clearly promotes tolerance and minority inclusion, without therefore pushing any sort of LGBTQ+ agenda.'²⁸

These pastoral initiatives linked to practical church life indicate that in the lived realities there is, in the words of Andrii Krawchuk, 'a capacity to recognize both the marginalizing, discriminatory nature of homophobic attitudes and the need for just alternatives' within local Orthodox churches and communities, despite the rigidity of official Orthodox teaching.²⁹

²⁵ Talvikki Ahonen, Metso Pekka, Grant S. White and Tuukka Tuomasjukka, **Silenced and overemphasized: Positionings of the LGBTQ+ people in Orthodox Christian communities in the US, Romania, and Finland**. In Sonya Sharma, Dawn Llewellyn and Sian Hawthorne (eds.), **Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion, Gender and Sexuality**. London: Bloomsbury 2024, 326.

²⁶ Thomas Hopko, **Christian Faith and Same-Sex Attraction: Eastern Orthodox Reflections**. Chesterton, Indiana: Ancient Faith Publishing 2015.

²⁷ **A Letter from the Bishops of the Orthodox Church in Germany to Young People concerning Love – Sexuality – Marriage**, 12 February 2017; <http://www.obkd.de/Texte/Brief%20OBKD%20an%20die%20Jugend-en.pdf>, accessed 10 July 2025.

²⁸ Thomas Arentzen and Ashley Purpura, **Sexuality and Orthodoxy**. In Thomas Arentzen, Ashley Purpura and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), **Orthodox Tradition and Human Sexuality**. New York: Fordham University Press 2022, 12.

²⁹ Andrii Krawchuk, **Homophobia in Orthodox Contexts: Sociopolitical Variables and Theological Strategies for Change**. In Thomas Arentzen, Ashley Purpura and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), **Orthodox Tradition and Human Sexuality**. New York: Fordham University Press 2022, 172.

4.3. Pew Research Center (2019) and Eurobarometer survey (2023) on LGBTI attitudes among Orthodox Christians

RICE 2020 referred to the results of a global survey by the US-based Pew Research Center, published in 2019, on global attitudes towards homosexuality. The survey indicated that acceptance of homosexuality is highest in Western Europe and North America. As observed in RICE 2020, countries in Central and Eastern Europe are more divided on the subject, with a median of 46% saying homosexuality should be accepted and 44% saying it should not be. In Ukraine and Russia, the majority of the population says homosexuality should not be accepted, 69% and 74% respectively. The Pew Research states that besides factors such as education and political preference, religion, both as it relates to relative importance in people's lives and actual religious affiliation, plays a large role in perceptions of the acceptability of homosexuality in many societies across the globe.³⁰

Personal commitment to religion does not, however, necessarily indicate more extreme attitudes towards homosexuality. Unlike in many other parts of the world, the degree of religiosity has little impact on attitudes to same-sex marriage among Orthodox Christians – those who value their religion are about as likely to take the Church's position as those who value it less.³¹

The table below shows figures from the 2019 Pew Research Center survey on Orthodox Christian respondents' stance on morality and social acceptance of homosexuality, as well as same-sex marriage.³²

³⁰ RICE 2020. *Rainbow Index of Churches in Europe 2020*. Amsterdam: Protestant Theological University 2021, 31, <https://inclusive-churches.eu/download/Annual-Review-Full-2021.pdf>; accessed 12 July 2025.

³¹ Pew Research Center, *Orthodox Christianity in 21st Century: 3. Orthodox Christians support key church policies*, 2017. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/08/orthodox-christians-support-key-church-policies-are-luke-warm-toward-reconciling-with-roman-catholic-church/>; accessed 13 July 2025.

³² Pew Research Center, *Orthodox Christianity in 21st Century: 4. Orthodox take socially conservative views on gender issues, homosexuality*, 2017,

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

	HOMOSEXUALITY IS MORALLY WRONG	HOMOSEXUALITY SHOULD NOT BE ENCOURAGED BY SOCIETY	SAME-SEX COUPLES SHOULD NOT MARRY LEGALLY
Armenia	98%	98%	96%
Moldova	91%	93%	93%
Georgia	90%	93%	95%
Belarus	85%	84%	81%
Russia	85%	87%	91%
Ukraine	83%	86%	84%
Romania	82%	86%	72%
Serbia	69%	76%	85%
Bulgaria	58%	59%	78%
Greece	51%	45%	72%

A significant proportion of Orthodox respondents from Orthodox-majority countries hold very or relatively strong views on homosexuality, particularly in Armenia, Moldova and Georgia. Greek and Bulgarian Orthodox respondents, however, have somewhat softer attitudes than respondents from other Orthodox-majority countries.

Developments in attitudes on homosexuality have not been examined by the Pew Center since 2019. However, a recent Eurobarometer survey, **Discrimination in the European Union** (2023), provides more recent data on attitudes of respondents from four Orthodox-majority EU countries – Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus and Greece – on LGBT issues.³³

	SAME-SEX SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE WRONG	SAME-SEX MARRIAGES SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED	LGBTI PEOPLE SHOULD NOT HAVE EQUAL MARRIAGE, ADOPTION AND PARENTAL RIGHTS LEGALLY	TRANSGENDER PEOPLE SHOULD NOT HAVE EQUAL MARRIAGE, ADOPTION AND PARENTAL RIGHTS
Bulgaria	72%	75%	70%	70%
Romania	68%	69%	67%	68%
Cyprus	50%	44%	49%	48%
Greece	40%	40%	53%	53%
EU overall	23%	24%	28%	31%

³³ European Commission, **Discrimination in the European Union**. Special Eurobarometer 535. European Union 2023, 78–80, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2972>; accessed 11 July 2025.

Bulgaria and Romania have the strongest anti-LGBTI attitudes of the whole sample, while Greece and Cyprus rank slightly higher in terms of acceptance – although they are well below the average and belong to the third of EU countries with the strictest values. When the results of the 2023 Eurobarometer survey are compared with the results of the 2019 Pew Research Centre survey, there are indications of increased tolerance towards same-sex marriage in Bulgaria and Romania. Conversely, moral disapproval of homosexuality seems to have intensified in these countries at the same time.

4.4. Presentation of the Scores

We have collected data from five churches of the OC family: the Romanian Orthodox Church,³⁴ the Orthodox Church of Georgia³⁵, the Church of Greece³⁶, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine³⁷ and the Orthodox Church of Finland³⁸.

The table below shows the ranks and scores for each church.

COUNTRY	RANK WITHIN CHURCH FAMILY / OVERALL RANK	TOTAL SCORE	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POINTS	PERCENTILE
Finland	1 / 27-28	19	37%	20–40%
Greece	2 / 40	7.5	14%	0–20%
Romania	3 / 44	2	4%	
Georgia	4 / 45	1	2%	
Ukraine	5 / 46	0	0%	

The table below shows the scores for each church, broken down by country and according to the four main categories. It also shows the total and average scores for OCs per category.

³⁴ The Romanian Orthodox Church has been autocephalous since 1885 and was elevated to a patriarchate in 1925.

³⁵ The history of the Georgian Church dates back to the early Christian centuries. It has been an independent local church since the 5th century.

³⁶ The Church of Greece can trace its origins back to the Apostolic Era. It was historically an integral part of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople but has been autocephalous since 1850.

³⁷ Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) was formed in 2018 by the merger of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, and part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate.

³⁸ After being part of the Russian Orthodox Church until 1923, the Orthodox Church of Finland has since been an autonomous church within the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

	CATEGORY 1: INSTITUTIONAL EQUALITY AND NON- DISCRIMINATION (INDICATORS Q1-Q18)	CATEGORY 2: CHURCH PRACTICES (INDICATORS Q19-Q30)	CATEGORY 3: LANGUAGE, SPEECH AND SYMBOLS (INDICATORS Q31-Q39)	CATEGORY 4: PUBLIC POLICY (INDICATORS Q40-Q52)	TOTAL SCORE (PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POINTS)
Finland	9 (50%)	5 (42%)	2.5 (28%)	2.5 (19%)	19 (37%)
Greece	3.5 (19%)	2 (17%)	0.5 (6%)	1.5 (12%)	7.5 (14%)
Romania	1 (6%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)
Georgia	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
Ukraine	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
OC TOTAL	14.5 (16%)	8 (9%)	3 (7%)	4 (6%)	29.5 (11%)
OC AVERAGE ³⁵	2.9	1.6	0.6	0.8	5.9

The Orthodox Church of Finland scores the highest score in all categories, and clearly stands out from other representatives of the same church family. The Church of Greece scores points in every category and consistently ranks second. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine receives no points at all, the only one of all the churches included in RICE 2025 to receive a total score of zero. The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of Georgia only get occasional points, coming in second and third lowest among all participating churches.

The Orthodox churches show the greatest differences in scores in the categories of 'Institutional equality and non-discrimination' and 'Church practices'. The Orthodox Church of Finland scores nine and five points in these categories, respectively, which is more than double the score of the Church of Greece in the same categories, while other Orthodox churches remain at one or zero points.

The differences between the Orthodox Church of Finland and other OC are significantly reduced in the latter two categories. It is noteworthy that three out of five OCs do not receive any points in the categories of 'Language, Speech and Symbols' and 'Public Policy'. This observation suggests that the ways in which OC may take LGBTI people into account are case-specific and pastoral in nature. However, affirming practices - whenever there are any - are clearly not reflected in the churches' public statements and practices.

In terms of geopolitics, Finland, Greece and Romania are EU countries, whereas Georgia and Ukraine are not. Churches operating in EU member states rank higher than churches operating outside of the EU. On the other hand, the differences between, for example, the Romanian church operating within the EU and the Ukrainian and Georgian churches outside of the EU are not particularly significant.

³⁵ The average score per category consists of the total score of the church family divided by the number of churches within the church family.

In the Georgian context, the issue of LGBTI rights is linked, on the one hand, to the country's historically close relations with Russia and, on the other hand, to its efforts to integrate into the EU. The EU's expectations regarding the consideration of minorities may be perceived as external and incompatible with Georgian culture.

The Orthodox Church of Finland is the most inclusive of the five OCs. It is the only minority church and the only Orthodox local church operating in the predominantly Protestant Nordic countries, which generally have a high level of inclusive and LGBTI-affirmative mentality. This is in contrast to most traditionally Orthodox countries in Eastern and Southern Europe. As shown in Pew Research Center and Eurobarometer surveys, predominantly Orthodox countries rank poorly in European comparisons on LGBTI awareness and acceptance.

For the Orthodox churches in Finland, Georgia and Greece, it is possible to compare the churches' scores between the 2020 and 2025 RICE reports. Due to the increase in the number of indicators and the total score in RICE 2025, the comparison is made by using relative scores.

	RICE 2020 SCORES AND PERCENTAGE	RICE 2025 SCORES AND PERCENTAGE
Finland	15 (32%)	19 (37%)
Greece	5 (11%)	7.5 (14%)
Georgia	3.5 (7%)	1 (2%)

Finland and Greece show a slight positive trend in terms of overall scores since RICE 2020. Georgia, on the other hand, shows that the already weak situation has deteriorated in terms of LGBTI awareness and inclusion.

Based on the sample of Orthodox churches at hand, it is not possible to make any further conclusions or reliably justified observations on differences and developments between OCs since RICE 2020.

Highest scoring indicators

Given the generally low total scores among Orthodox Churches, all indicators fell well below the 50% threshold—averaging just 2.5 out of 5 possible churches. The highest scores appeared in three indicators, each reaching 2 churches (40% of the maximum).

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

	Category 1: INSTITUTIONAL EQUALITY AND NON- DISCRIMINATION	Category 2: CHURCH PRACTICES	Category 3: LANGUAGE, SPEECH AND SYMBOLS	Category 4: PUBLIC POLICY
OC indicators with a highest score (2 = 40%)	Q12, Q13, Q16	—	—	—

The highest-scoring indicators are all in the 'Institutional equality and non-discrimination' category. They relate to the church accepting the baptism of LGBTI persons and not refusing them membership (indicator Q13), baptising the children of LGBTI parents (indicator Q12) and admitting women and/or openly LGBTI people to seminary (indicator Q16). OCs in Finland and Greece scored at least half a point for all these indicators, Georgia half a point in two indicators (Q13, Q16) and Romania half a point in just one (Q12). Ukraine scored no points.

In RICE 2020, the threshold for the highest-scoring indicators among OCs was 45%, with only two indicators receiving the highest scores: baptism of LGBTI persons and access of women and LGBTI people to the seminary.

We support the distinction made in the RICE 2020 report regarding church membership: 'The gratuity of the church in offering baptism, however, is not for all Orthodox churches unconditionally applied to LGBTI persons.' The same seems to apply to children born to LGBTI parents. We would also like to reiterate an observation made in RICE 2020 that Orthodox churches do not grant LGBTI persons the same degree of permission to participate in the Eucharist as they do to receive baptism.⁴⁰

The relatively high average score on indicator Q16 is explained by women also having access to seminaries and faculties for theological education and training for certain ministries that do not involve ordination, such as church musician, religious education teacher, or icon painter. However, this acceptance does not extend to openly LGBTI people, who usually have to hide their identities.

Beyond the three highest-scoring indicators, only one additional indicator reached a score of 1.5 out of a possible 5 points: celibacy is not a requirement specific to LGBTI people, both among clergy and lay people (indicator Q24). Other indicators receive a total of only half a point, or one point at best.

Lowest total scores on indicators per category

There are 19 indicators altogether (37% of the total of 52 indicators) where all researched Orthodox churches have zero value. The table below lists these indicators in the four categories:

⁴⁰ RICE 2020, 36.

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination

- Q1 – LGBTI in legal documents
- Q2 – diversity in leadership in legal documents
- Q7 – guided protocol for parishes
- Q10 – blessing of same-sex marriages
- Q18 – affirmative theological educational materials

Church Practices

- Q28 – support of LGBTI clergy association
- Q30 – support of LGBTI advocacy

Language, Speech and Symbols

- Q32 – communication national level
- Q33 – LGBTI-related symbols allowed in church spaces
- Q34 – LGBTI issues thematised in worship at the national level
- Q35 – sensitive language in liturgy

Public Policy

- Q40 – apologies and asking for forgiveness
- Q43 – on political organization
- Q45 – on reproductive rights
- Q47 – on labour rights
- Q48 – on health rights
- Q49 – on diversity education in schools
- Q50 – on access to public services
- Q52 – on ecumenical promotion of inclusion

The proportion of the indicators with zero value corresponds to the percentage share of indicators that received no points among OCs in the RICE 2020 report (38%, 18 of the total of 47 indicators).

With the increased number of indicators in RICE 2025, there are also new zero-point indicators: LGBTI-related symbols in church spaces (indicator Q33) and LGBTI issues thematised in worship at the national level (indicator Q34) in the category 'Language, Speech and Symbols', as well as lack of public ecumenical statements (indicator Q52) in the category 'Public Policy'.

With the exception of two indicators in the 'Church Practices' category — indicator Q23: adoption by LGBTI couples and indicator Q27: pastoral ministry to LGBTI people — which received one and half a points respectively, all the other indicators that did not

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

score any points in RICE 2020 received zero points again this time. In addition to these signs of slight positive developments in church practices, there has been no detected change in one direction or the other in categories of 'Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination', 'Language, Speech and Symbols', and 'Public Policy'. However, due to the diversity of the sample between RICE 2020 and RICE 2025, it is not possible to assess the development trend more accurately.

4.5. Analysis of the Orthodox Churches per Indicator

The co-researchers were requested to add specific comments and references to the scores per indicator, to substantiate the awarded score. Detailed comments and references to documents, websites and articles were provided by the respondents from Finland, Georgia, Greece, and Romania. Some specific comments and references were provided by the respondent from Ukraine.

In RICE 2020, the European Forum provided pre-populated comments for the co-researchers. No such preliminary comments were used in the RICE 2025 data collection. Where relevant, we refer to the pre-populated comments from RICE 2020 in relation to individual indicators.

For each indicator, the co-researcher was asked whether the scoring and any additional comments corresponded to the lived experience of LGBTI people in their community. Respondents for Ukraine, Greece and Georgia consistently confirmed that the remarkably low scores correspond to the lived reality of LGBTI people in Orthodox churches. For these three countries, the co-researcher's assessment of the teachings, attitudes and practices prevalent in the churches, and their impact on LGBTI people, is based on their perspective as a person within the LGBTI community.

For Finland and Romania, the co-researcher confirmed that the score given corresponded to the experience of the LGBTI community in 75% and 88% of the indicators respectively. This indicates that they were unable to verify how the church's activities appear from the perspective of the LGBTI community for each indicator. At the same time, these indicators, which remain uncertain in terms of lived experience, are generally indicative of their negative or positive impact on the LGBTI community.

The analysis proceeds on an indicator-by-indicator basis and is structured according to four categories

Category 1: Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (indicators Q1–Q18)

Indicators Q1 (mentioning LGBTI in a non-negative way) and Q2 (diversity required in leadership)

These indicators have zero value in all researched Orthodox churches.

As co-researchers from Georgia and Greece point out, the OC's legal documents, dating from the pre-modern era, do not mention LGBTI identities. These fundamental sources tend to discuss only sexual activity, including prohibition of same-sex sexual activity. Similarly, they have no concept of transgender identity. Thus, based on fundamental documents of the OC, 'diversity of sexualities and gender identities is not considered an existing issue', as the Greek co-researcher summarises.

Recent activities of churches show that they interpret their basic texts – e.g. canonical, patristic and pastoral sources – in a way that does not aim to promote the status of LGBTI people. Some of the latest pronouncements by church officials in Georgia 'either deny any concept of LGBTI identity or recognise the identity but prohibit any realisation of it through sexual activity or transition'. In Greece, the Holy Synod has issued anti-gay statements after the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2024. In Romania, the church has supported the Coalition for Family in 2018, an alliance of non-governmental organizations, which aimed to ban same-sex marriage while promoting traditional family values. Anti-LGBTI opinions have been voiced by Romanian bishops also during the 2024–2025 presidential electoral cycle.

No legal documents of the OC mention the importance of diversity in representational leadership (**indicator Q2**). However, in the Orthodox Church of Finland, the established practice is that in the church administration, there has to be a diverse representation of cis-hetero men and women, e.g. in the General Assembly, diocese and parish councils, and working groups.

Concerning diversity in leadership in terms of LGBTI-inclusion, open identification as LGBTI would serve as an obstacle to participation in church leadership, as pointed out by several co-researchers.

Indicators Q3 (theology) and Q4 (Bible)

Both indicators have a relatively low score in total. The Orthodox Church of Finland scores half a point in both indicators, and the Church of Greece half a point in **indicator Q4**. The other three churches score zero points.

The reason for the lack of points is evident in the statements by the Georgian and Greek co-researchers who, in regard to **indicator Q3**, highlight the tension between theological principles proclaimed by the church and practical attitudes and actions of the church toward the LGBTI community. They observe that OC generally recognizes that all people are equally loved by God and that He wants the salvation

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

of each person, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender characteristics. Based on the actions of the church, however, the Georgian co-researcher attests that 'the theology of the Georgian Orthodox Church does not recognize the equality of all people regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation'. Similarly, the Greek co-researcher specifies that if an individual does not fit the heteronormative criteria, cherished by the church, repentance, abstinence from same-sex relations, and non-altered gender identity are considered essential to their salvation.

As for **indicator Q4**, the pre-populated comment in RICE 2020 states that

the Orthodox Church has traditionally employed very complex hermeneutics that interpret the bible as a deeply spiritual text that finds its meaning in Christ. This means that simplistic moral and/or historical readings, such as in conservative Protestant churches, have generally been regarded as inadequate. There is a tendency, however, among Orthodox conservatives to more and more adopt 'literalist' readings.⁴¹

Based on comments given by the Georgian, Greek and Romanian co-researchers, the Bible is typically used in line with the prevailing theological interpretation, namely, to define gender roles and to support the opposition to or condemnation of the LGBTI community, as well as 'the desires, sexualities and identities lived by LGBTI people'. This can even lead to the weaponisation of the Scriptures to exclude LGBTI people from Orthodox communities.

Despite their generally non-LGBT affirming theological and biblical foundations, some local Orthodox contexts and communities seem to allow room for more approving interpretations. In Greece, there are currently theologians 'who discuss all these issues from the perspective of the theology of person, supporting a more open stance'. The Finnish co-researcher characterizes the lived reality of the Finnish Orthodox Church as 'representing various theologies on LGBTI+, and individual priests and theologians stressing different points of view in their thinking'. They describe the Finnish church being in reality more tolerant towards LGBTI+ than its official teaching.

As a good example of the existence and interaction of different interpretations, we refer to the current circumstances of the Finnish church. In March 2024, the Finnish synod of bishops assessed the possibility of transgender person marrying in the church. In their statement 'Sexuality and Sacrament of Marriage', the bishops attest that 'each [person] personifies human nature in his or her own way' and that today 'not only men and women but also other people with gender identity are members of the Orthodox Church and their needs must be pastorally attended to with special sensitivity'. Although the bishops recognise the pastoral and other needs of gender minorities, the statement concludes with a reaffirmation of the traditional understanding of marriage. This may be an attempt to strike a balance between conflicting interpretations. The Finnish co-researcher informs that the bishops 'decisions and arguments raised a lot of criticism and resulted in an official response from a group of anonymous church members'. As a result, the synod decided to draw up a new, more well-founded statement (not issued by September 2025).

⁴¹ RICE 2020, 40.

Indicator Q5 (use of Tradition)

On this indicator there is a difference between Finland (0.5) and Romania (0.5) with the other Orthodox churches (0).

The significance of this indicator for the Orthodox churches was emphasized in RICE 2020 in the following way:

The way of using 'T(t)radition' is a major determinant, if not one of the predictors, for an affirmative or condemning stance towards LGBTI people. The interpretation of the tradition works in most Orthodox churches against affirmation of LGBTI people. [- -] 'The church tradition is widely regarded as condemning same-sex sexual relations and relationships and (implicitly) transitioning and other queer expressions. The reality, however, is much more nuanced.'⁴²

Using tradition as a negative force seems to be the case explicitly in Georgia, where the church relies exclusively to the tradition of Georgia, its people and their church, in which 'all desires, sexualities and identities of LGBTI are considered alien to the lived Georgian tradition'. Accordingly, homosexuality has been defined by the head of the church as 'an insult' to the Georgian tradition.

In Romania and Greece, the church uses the tradition in its argumentation by claiming that in its condemnation of LGBTI members, it rejects their sinful acts and not persons.

The Finnish co-researcher refers specifically to the nuanced lived reality of the church, where queer lives are tacitly permitted. Some of the leading bishops have expressed a more understanding and broad-minded view of human sexuality and biology than what is customarily expressed in world-wide Orthodoxy as a 'traditional' stance towards LGBTI questions.

Indicator Q6 (non-negative church policy)

On this indicator there is a substantial difference between Finland (1) and other Orthodox churches (0). Comments and references to documents and other sources, provided by the co-researchers, illustrate a clear variance between the attitudes and practices of the Finnish church and other Orthodox churches.

The Orthodox Church of Finland scored a full point for non-negative mentions of LGBTI identities in church policy based on recent public statements by bishops and a survey of decision-makers and church employees.

The retired Metropolitan Ambrosius of Helsinki stated in 2020 that the church cannot turn a blind eye to the reality of human sexuality. According to him, the Orthodox Church 'should fully respect and make room for the genuine shared life of same-sex and other LGBTQ+ people.'⁴³

⁴² RICE 2020, 40–41.

⁴³ Metropolitan Ambrosius, Foreword. In Thomas Arentzen, Ashley Purpura and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds.), *Orthodox Tradition and Human Sexuality*. New York: Fordham University Press 2022, xi.

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

In 2022, the then Archbishop Leo (retired in November 2024) expressed support for sexual minorities, emphasizing that it is rooted in the Orthodox Church's view of theological anthropology. He stated that every person is created in the image of God and that a person's dignity does not depend on their sexual orientation. 'It is the church's pastoral mission to invite all people to the church', he stated as a response to the homophobic remarks made by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow Patriarchate.

High ranking church leaders have also privately expressed their concern over the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities.

In 2024, a barometer survey was conducted among trustees and employees of the Orthodox Church of Finland. The respondents were asked whether they agree with the statement that the position of sexual and gender minorities within the church should be improved. The median response was 4 (in a scale of 1–5), indicating clear agreement. Half (50%) of the respondents agreed with the statement, while around a third (29%) disagreed. Overall, three out of four respondents had a positive or neutral view on the matter.

Moreover, the General Assembly of the Orthodox Church of Finland is going to process an initiative on LGBTI inclusion in November 2025. Comments and discussion in the assembly will further steer the policy of the Finnish church.

Unlike in Finland, the Orthodox Church is an active social player that opposes the rights of LGBTI communities and individuals in Georgia, Greece and Romania. This is evident in the recent public actions of these churches.

The Orthodox Church of Georgia has, since 2014, fiercely opposed anti-discrimination law, labelling it as a propaganda and legalization of a 'deadly sin' since it includes 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity' in the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination. On similar grounds, the church has in recent years spoken out strongly against sex education at schools, because it is seen as LGBTI propaganda aimed at young people

Following the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Greece in 2024, the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece officially condemned the parliamentary vote and urged Orthodox believers to publicly oppose it.

During the 2025 Pride parade in Bucharest, Romania, the Romanian Patriarchate gave a public statement condemning the LGBTI community as instigators of public unrest.

Indicators Q7 (inclusiveness protocol), Q8 (LGBTI-affirming youth ministry) and Q9 (local agency)

There are no existing protocols for promotion of inclusiveness in parishes (indicator Q7) in any of the Orthodox churches in this research. In Finland, however, there are grassroots initiatives pursuing these objectives, and among pastoral care providers and PIPOTs (persons in a position of trust), there is an expressed wish that the Church should become more inclusive and diverse.

On **indicator Q8** Finland and Greece score half a point. According to the Finnish co-researcher, sexual or gender identity is not a barrier to participation in child and youth activities of the church, nor is it, in most cases, a barrier to leading activities. For young Orthodox Finns themselves, according to surveys conducted among them in 2024 and 2025, the rights and status of sexual minorities within the church are clearly an important issue.

Although there is no formal prohibition against affirmative ministry, LGBTI inclusion is notably absent from the youth ministries of the Church of Greece. Instead, a 'don't ask, don't tell' mentality prevails, and members of the LGBTI community cannot publicly disclose their identity.

In Georgia and Romania, openly LGBTI people are not trusted with pastoral activities.

Scores and comments on **indicator Q9**, highlight another dividing line between the Finnish and Greek churches (both scoring 0.5) and other Orthodox churches (0), in terms of providing room for parishes and associations even to discuss LGBTI issues. Discussions or initiatives promoting LGBTI-affirmative policies are not permitted in Georgia and Romania, and are presumably restricted in Ukraine as well.

In Greece there is some room at local level for such activities, even though there are no centrally managed joint policies and initiatives. In some parishes, depending on the openness of individual priests, discreet pastoral care and quiet conversations around LGBTI inclusion are offered.

In Finland the prevailing atmosphere allows discussions on LGBTI related topics in parishes and associations.

Indicators Q10 (blessing of same-sex marriage) and Q11 (recognition of secular same-sex marriage)

There is no recognition of same-sex marriages or blessings of same-sex couples at all by Orthodox churches in this research. However, there are differences in the attitudes of churches toward same-sex civil marriages.

The Orthodox Church of Finland fully recognizes the rights of its members as citizens of the state, and the official stance of the church towards gender neutral civil marriage has not been condemnatory. On the contrary, other Orthodox churches openly oppose civil marriages of same-sex couples.

In Finland, there is no ecclesial condemnation or penance for Orthodox believers living in secular same-sex marriage. However, same-sex couples have experienced harassment and disapproval from parishioners and clergy members in real life. At the same time, laypersons living in same-sex marriages generally have the same opportunities as heterosexuals in the church, e.g. to serve as trusted individuals in parish and church administration, and perform liturgical duties.

In the 2024 barometer survey among church employees and PIPOTs of the Finnish Orthodox Church, most of the respondents were willing to adhere to the prevailing teaching of marriage (i.e., marriage between one man and one woman). However,

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

there is a strong support for blessing (not marriage) of same-sex couples: almost half of the respondents (49%) were in favour of offering an ecclesial blessing of same-sex couples in the Orthodox church, while a third (29%) were against it.

Indicators Q12 and Q13 (on baptism)

On these indicators, churches receive points on average – except for Ukraine – , with the Finnish church being the only one to receive full points in both and the Greek church receiving half a point in each.

The Finnish church has a clear policy of acceptance: people are baptised and received into church regardless of their (or their parent's) gender or sexual orientation. The Finnish co-researcher states that denying baptism to LGBTI people or their children would mean weaponising a sacrament, which would therefore be unacceptable in Finnish Orthodoxy. On the other hand, there were signs of precisely this kind of attitude in relation to the Eucharist (**indicator Q15**).

In Greece, practices on baptizing LGBTI people and their children vary from parish to parish.

In Romania and Georgia, LGBTI people are excluded from the church and not accepted unconditionally, but their children can only be baptised if their parents do not disclose their gender identity or sexual orientation.

The Ukrainian co-researcher describes the general atmosphere as being very hostile towards LGBTI people. This makes it virtually impossible for them and their children to be accepted by the church.

Indicator Q14 (blessing of transgender name)

There is no such ceremony in the Orthodox Church.

Greek and Romanian co-researchers characterize transgender people as invisible to the church, whose existence is not even acknowledged. The Georgian co-researcher refers to enormous hostility typically experienced by transgendered persons and their families.

In Finland, transgender individuals may encounter hateful speech, even though they are generally welcomed in the church. The Finnish co-researcher refers to a local custom of adopting a new 'ecclesial' name by some new or longtime members of the church. This custom might create room for transgender identities and naming oneself accordingly, even if such a practice does not yet exist.

In addition, there are signs of growing awareness of the situation of transgender persons, privately expressed by some high-ranking leaders of the Finnish church: understanding their struggle, and commitment to work for affirmative culture and policy inside our church. This has not, however, yet been manifested on the policy level.

Indicator Q15 (allowance to participate in the Eucharist)

Churches in Finland and Greece score half a point, while other Orthodox churches score zero.

The Finnish church has dropped from a full point to half a point in RICE 2020. This is due to individual cases that reflect growth of a more restrictive attitude. The Finnish co-researcher specifies that restrictions on the Eucharist are not generally considered an appropriate tool for pastoral care and that the sacrament is usually given to all Orthodox Christians. Recently, however, restrictive measures have targeted sexual and gender minorities, with some priests refusing to administer the Eucharist to individuals believed to be transgender and/or in same-sex relationships. In these cases, the bishop of the diocese was informed and condemned the denial of the Eucharist.

In Greece there are varied practices. The parish priest has the final say on whether LGBTI persons can participate in the Eucharist. Given the score of 0.5 awarded to the Church of Greece, it can be concluded that priests do not systematically exclude LGBTI people from the Eucharist.

In Georgia, Romania and Ukraine, where the same practice of emphasizing the decision-making power of individual priests is followed, it is practically impossible for an openly LGBTI person to participate in communion, even if they were to be sexually abstinent.

Indicator Q16 (access to the seminary)

On this indicator there are notable differences between the church. Finland is the only one to score full point, while Georgia and Greece get half a point. Romania and Ukraine get a zero score.

In Finland and Greece, theological education is given in public universities, admission free to all kinds of people. In these countries, LGBTI people might still avoid enrolling seminaries run by the church, because of the fear of rejection.

In Georgia, seminaries run by the church accept also women, but openly LGBTI people are not admitted. In Greece, however, only men are admitted to ecclesial seminaries.

To monitor future priests of the church, some Orthodox theological schools or seminaries in Romania have adopted a psychological test to assess the sexual identity of candidates as part of their admissions process.

Indicator Q17 (ordination of clergy)

There is no ordination of women in the Orthodox Church.

Orthodox parish clergy (deacons and priests) are usually married (to women) and are therefore considered to be heterosexual. There are also celibate clergy in parishes and monasteries, and all bishops are required to be celibate.

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

As some co-researchers have pointed out, it is known that a significant proportion of the celibate clergy are gay or bisexual. However, this is neither openly accepted nor visible, nor is it openly discussed. Celibacy is generally considered to be permanent, offering a fresh start where any kind of sexual activity is avoided and rarely spoken about.

The Greek co-researcher refers to ongoing discussions on the ordination of women, which, for the time being, have not resulted in any concrete changes. Similar discussions have been going on in Finland where, at the request of the Synod of Bishops, a report on the ordination of deaconesses and the position of women in the church was completed in Spring 2025. There is no information on any follow-up measures based on this report.

Indicator Q18 (materials)

All Orthodox churches score zero points on this indicator, since no affirmative educational material is provided by the church on gender equality and LGBTI issues. On the contrary, ecclesial theological formation may aim to foster moral condemnation of LGBTI people or even providing tools for conversion therapy.

In Greece, however, some teachers of theology at tertiary educational institutions, regulated by the State, have recently opened up the discussion on the matter.

Category 2: Church practices (indicators Q19–Q30)

Indicators Q19 (involvement in leading functions) and Q20 (involvement in policy making)

The pre-populated comment in RICE 2020 explains that ‘women can hold certain lay roles, openly LGB people are not completely non-existent, and post-operative transsexual people have no formal impediments to participate fully.’⁴⁴

Finland is the only church to score on these indicators (0.5 each).

Based on the scores and comments by co-researchers on **indicators Q19 and Q20**, it seems that there is no room for women or LGBTI people in leadership or policymaking roles in other local churches outside of Finland. However, women play a limited role in church policymaking in Georgia, albeit invisibly and at a lower advisory level, while decisions are made by men.

The Orthodox Church of Finland has fallen from a full score on indicator Q19 in RICE 2020 to half a point. This is due to the fact that not all leadership positions are open to women or openly LGBTI people, as pointed out by the co-researcher. In addition, the practical experiences of Finnish Orthodox women suggest that they do not feel equal to men. This is indicated by the 2024 Orthodox Church of Finland barometer, conducted

⁴⁴ RICE 2020, 43–44.

among church employees and PIPOTs. While the vast majority of men agreed with the statement 'There is no gender-based discrimination in the church', half of the female respondents disagreed with it. These results highlight the differing perspectives of men and women on the status quo.

With regard to indicators Q19 and Q20, openly LGBTI individuals in Finland are, in principle, permitted to participate in church leadership and policymaking. This includes serving as members of the General Assembly and parish councils, as well as holding non-ordained positions such as cantors, pastoral workers, and youth workers. This is based on Finnish equality law.

With regard to other Orthodox churches, there are no references to the church complying with equality legislation.

Indicators Q21 (employment of non-ordained workers) and Q22 (employment in non-pastoral services)

On these indicators, there is a clear difference between Finland and Greece (both scoring 0.5 points in each) and other countries (0).

The Finnish co-researcher highlights the vulnerable position of the few LGBTI employees, who may not feel comfortable disclosing their identity. Despite the equality legislation that applies to the church, the potential for hidden structural discrimination remains—particularly within staff appointment processes.

Greece also has state laws that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, these laws do not specifically mention the church.

In Georgia, Romania and Ukraine, the church does not employ openly LGBTI people. The Georgian co-researcher specifies that Georgian labour laws permit discrimination of LGBTI people by the church, and that Orthodox churches in general claim the right to discriminate in this way.

Indicator Q23 (adoption by LGBTI parents)

Except for Finland (0.5), other Orthodox churches score zero points.

Among Orthodox churches, the prevailing view is that the right of same-sex couples to adopt children poses a threat to the family values represented by the church. In Greece, the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2024 has exacerbated the church's negative stance on the rights of same-sex couples.

While traditional view of family prevails in Finnish Orthodoxy as well, the Finnish church formally recognises the civil rights of any family type, since the church respects the state laws. In reality, attitudes and pastoral discretion vary between parishes and among church employees. Consequently, the experiences of same-sex couples with children also vary in terms of acceptance.

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

Indicator Q24 (celibacy not required for LGBTI)

Romania is the only country to score a full point on this indicator, albeit for somewhat negative reasons relating to ordinations: the celibacy requirement does not apply, since no (openly) LGBTI person can take monastic vows or become a priest.

The Finnish co-researcher offers a more nuanced picture, captured by the half point given to the Orthodox Church of Finland. They distinguish between the 'official' teaching on sexual ethics and pastoral practice. Officially, the church encourages people to abstain from same-sex sexual relationships. In practice, however, this depends entirely on the individual priest: a notable number of them neither condemn homosexual activity nor permanent relationships, such as same-sex civil marriage.

According to co-researchers from Georgia and Greece, the church's influence has fostered a hierarchical system of restraint and concealment. Although lesbians and gays are expected to be celibate, bisexuals are expected to marry someone of the opposite sex/gender. Transgender people are often entirely ignored by the Church and can only marry someone who represents the opposite sex/gender to the one they were assigned at birth. Intersex people are generally ignored and remain invisible.

Indicator Q25 (social acceptance in public rituals)

The Finnish co-researcher (0.5) notes that church leadership affirms the need to respect LGBTI rights as guaranteed by Finnish law, emphasizing that LGBTI individuals must be served equally alongside heterosexual members. In practice, some priests offer discreet, affirmative rituals—such as household blessings—that indirectly acknowledge same-sex partnerships. A recent barometer survey (2024) indicates that there is strong support for some form of public blessing for same-sex couples among church employees and PIPOTs. Some respondents brought up a demand for same-sex marriage within the church. This reflects an existing tendency within the Orthodox Church of Finland to promote social acceptance of LGBTI people.

Other Orthodox churches score zero points.

The pre-populated comment in RICE 2020 notes that public expressions of homosexuality linked to liturgy or religious ritual are viewed as blasphemous within Orthodox tradition. Reflecting this prevailing attitude—perhaps ironically—the Greek co-researcher observes that the most common public responses from the Orthodox Church are condemnatory statements and hostile actions toward the LGBTI community.

Indicators Q26 (social ministry to LGBTI) and Q27 (pastoral ministry to LGBTI)

On **indicator Q26**, Finland and Greece score half a point while other churches score zero. All Orthodox churches score zero on **indicator Q27**.

In Finland and Greece, the church's social and pastoral ministries are rooted in heteronormative assumptions, but there is room for acknowledgement of LGBTI concerns and needs. Attitudes and practices vary based on the priest offering the services and are not consistent.

The comments suggest that Orthodox churches differ significantly in their acceptance of these ministries and their understanding of whom the church should serve.

There is particular emphasis in the Finnish context on, equality and the non-discrimination of people have been highlighted. The former Archbishop Leo of Finland (retired in 2024) has implied that the church should serve LGBTI people in the same way as everyone else, providing them with the same level of pastoral and social support.

In Greece, social and pastoral services for LGBTI people may be carried out without the approval of the church's most senior leadership.

In Romania, there is no recognition of the need to take into account the needs of people belonging to the LGBTI community.

In Georgia, assistance may be denied if the sexual orientation or gender identity of the person being served becomes apparent.

Indicator Q28 (support to LGBTI clergy association)

There are no LGBTI-affirmative associations for clergy or theologians in these Orthodox churches.

Indicator Q29 (support to 'traditional' family associations)

On this indicator, Finland scores a full point. Georgia, Greece, Romania and Ukraine score no points.

In general, the Orthodox Church of Finland is committed to the idea of heteronormative family as the cornerstone of church and society. At the same time, the church has officially kept its distance from a fundamentalist Orthodox community 'The Brotherhood of St. Cosmas of Aitolia', which actively promotes an anti-LGBTI agenda. In the 2020s, the Brotherhood has become more widespread and is active in several parishes. The Finnish church's official website makes no mention of the Brotherhood, which is not listed among the church's other organisations and associations. The church's cautious attitude toward the brotherhood is based on perceptions that go beyond LGBTI issues.

As specified by co-researchers, in Georgia and Greece the church cooperates with and supports associations that defend traditional family values and oppose the LGBTI community. As an example of this, the Orthodox Church of Georgia has celebrated 'Family Purity Day' on 17 May every year since 2014. This distinctly anti-LGBTI festival is dedicated to Georgia's long-standing traditions, family values and Orthodox Christianity.

In Romania, the church has publicly endorsed a political movement that defended traditional family values.

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

Indicator Q30 (support to LGBTI advocacy groups)

There is no public support by the church for advocacy groups for LGBTI people in any of these Orthodox churches.

Category 3: Language, Speech and Symbols (indicators Q31–Q39)

Indicator Q31 (language by church leaders)

Finland and Greece have a score of 0.5, all others zero.

Based on the scoring and comments from the co-researchers, the language used by some leaders in Finland and Greece is mild and affirmative, albeit often hidden. In Romania, bishops tend to ignore LGBTI people entirely. In contrast, the official language of leaders in Georgia is exclusive and condemnatory, often expressing disgust and sometimes inciting violence.

Indicator Q32 (communication on a national level)

All Orthodox churches score zero. Official communications either remain silent on the matter (e.g. in Finland and Romania) or are negative (e.g. in Georgia).

Indicator Q33 (LGBTI-related symbols in church spaces)

LGBTI-related symbols are not permitted in these Orthodox churches.

As the Finnish co-researcher points out, this is not explicitly an anti-LGBTI practice in this respect. They clarify that the display of any extra-liturgical symbols would not be permitted in Orthodox church spaces. This is not a rejection of anything, but simply a reflection of the Orthodox church's approach to liturgy and sacred space.

Indicators Q34 (gender and sexuality issues in worship language) and indicator Q35 (sensitive liturgical language)

On both indicators, all churches score zero.

The pre-populated comment in RICE 2020 on **indicator Q34** states that there is no positive narrative on issues of gender and sexuality in Orthodox churches and that sermons often include condemnatory statements on these topics.⁴⁵ This is explicitly confirmed by the co-researcher from Georgia.

The general comment on **indicator Q35** is that the antiquated liturgical language for God overwhelmingly conforms to the received patterns (Father/Son, He/Him) and excludes LGBTI issues. Since heterosexual marriage is the only kind accepted, husband and wife terminology is normative. There is rarely any conscious effort towards inclusion.

⁴⁵ RICE 2020, 48.

In both the Georgian and Finnish languages there are no gender-based personal pronouns (he/she), the language being inherently less masculine due to its grammar.

In Finland, some cantors and readers begin epistle readings with the greeting 'Brothers and sisters', rather than the customary Pauline formulation of 'Brothers'. This more inclusive greeting is mentioned as an option in the most recent edition of **Divine Liturgy** (2012), the book containing notated texts for Sunday liturgies and feast days. However, some people refuse to mention sisters alongside brothers, and at least one bishop does not approve of this practice.

Indicator Q36 (affirmative catechetical material)

Only Finland scores 0.5, all others score zero.

In the case of Finland, the basis for the score is the church's resource book for adult education, **Let Us Attend!** (in Finnish: Seisokaamme hyvin), which was first published in 2013 and updated in 2023. This book includes a description of the concept of family, which is defined as open-ended with regard to whether same-sex couples can also participate in the 'miniature church' concept, as traditional families are described within the church. The resource book acknowledges the positivity of 'the range of sexuality' within the church. See also the comments to indicators Q10 and Q11.

In other countries, the material is often decades old and either doesn't include gender and sexuality issues, or condemns them. The Romanian co-researcher mentions the topic of 'healing' LGBTI people in theological education.

Indicator Q37 (interconnectedness of justice and inclusivity)

Except for Finland (0.5), other Orthodox churches score zero.

The pre-populated comment in RICE 2020 states that the OC generally regards social justice issues and rhetoric with suspicion. Based on the co-researchers' comments, there is a notable difference between the churches in Finland and those in other countries in terms of how actively they participate in raising awareness of justice and inclusivity in general.

The Orthodox Church in Finland regularly raises awareness of social justice issues, although its communications usually lack an intersectional perspective. It is actively involved in national and international social justice organisations, as well as the social justice committees and working groups of ecumenical organisations. The Orthodox Church of Finland, either independently or in collaboration with other churches or church organisations, actively publishes statements and works on social justice issues. **Filantropia**, the international diaconal organisation of the Orthodox Church in Finland, actively promotes and works on issues and projects relating to girls and women.

There are only a few instances cited in Greece, where the Orthodox church has been actively involved in social justice issues, such as poverty and ethical concerns.

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

In Georgia, the Orthodox church is generally suspicious towards social justice issues and pays little attention to them. Some of the recent Orthodox international social statements, such as **For the Life of the World** (2020) suggest that the OC should play an active role in addressing these issues. However, the Orthodox Church of Georgia is somewhat isolated from these discussions and does not actively participate in inter-Orthodox forums.

Indicator Q38 (engagement with science)

Only Finland scores 0.5, while other Orthodox churches score zero.

The scores indicate that, in most cases, Orthodox churches do not take scientific research into account, or they engage with it in a non-inclusive and/or condemnatory way. This is exemplified by the Orthodox Church of Georgia, which takes a selective approach to scientific research. The church often denies the validity of scientific (and theological) research when it contradicts its position, and only affirms it when it agrees with it.

Finland, on the other hand, exemplifies a more constructive and open approach to scientific research on gender and sexuality. In 2024, the Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church of Finland took a position that deviates from the general attitude of Orthodox churches:

- Social discourse on sexuality has undergone a significant paradigm shift, with sexuality increasingly understood as a key element of an individual's identity. As a result, social discourses increasingly address the specific needs and demands of different sexual orientations and identities. It is important to recognise that an individual's sexual orientation is not solely the result of their own choices. The complex interplay of various human factors forms the basis for sexual identity from an early stage of development. The individual's ability to guide and shape this identity may in many cases be limited.

Indicator Q39 (acknowledgement of discrimination in the past)

Only the Finnish Orthodox Church has a score of 0.5 on indicator Q39.

The pre-populated comment in RICE 2020 states that the OC generally have no issue with acknowledging past discrimination. In fact, the church's own history of discrimination, viewed as 'tradition', is often cited as justification for continuing it.⁴⁶ Accordingly, the Orthodox Church in Georgia sees no problem in adhering to its discriminatory traditions and practices. The Orthodox Church in Romania also continues to condemn the LGBTI community in its communications.

The Greek co-researcher highlights an exceptional case that deviates from the Church of Greece's prevailing discourse justifying discrimination and violence against LGBTI people. Following an attack on two queer individuals in Thessaloniki, the city's

⁴⁶ RICE 2020, 50.

newly elected (November 2023) bishop publicly addressed the people on Holy Friday, condemning the incident as unrepresentative of Christian values and behaviour.

In Finland, some individual bishops and priests have acknowledged discrimination against LGBTI people. There are emerging indications of opposition to what is framed as 'gender ideology' as well as an ongoing discussion on the equality of women and men in church.

Category 4: Public Policy (indicators Q40–Q52)

Indicator Q40 (asking forgiveness)

None of these Orthodox churches have publicly apologized for and asked for forgiveness for past and present non-inclusion of LGBTI people.

Indicator Q41 (safety of LGBTI people)

Churches in Finland and Greece score 0.5, while other Orthodox churches score zero.

The pre-populated comment in RICE 2020 acknowledges that the OC occasionally recognises that sexual orientation and gender identity should not be criminalised. However, there are also examples of church leaders acting against the extension of rights to LGBTI persons.⁴⁷

This comment accurately reflects the situation in Finland, where the church does not support criminalization but does not actively support the expansion of LGBTI rights either. Despite the Orthodox Church of Finland's verifiable commitment to LGBTI inclusivity, as evidenced by many of the above indicators, homophobic sermons are still occasionally heard in some Finnish parishes, and hate speech against the LGBTI community is commonplace on social media.

As in Finland, the Greek co-researcher also scores 0.5 points for Greece. This is not, however, based on the Church of Greece, which has not issued any such statements, but on the involvement of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America with the 2020 **For the Life of the World** social ethos statement.

In Georgia, leaders of the Orthodox church act against the extension of LGBTI rights, while not necessarily promoting their criminalization.

In Romania, the Orthodox Church is trying to portray the LGBTI community and the NGOs that support them as troublemakers who disrupt public order.

Indicator Q42 (rights of freedom of thought)

⁴⁷ RICE 2020, 50.

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

On this indicator, Finland and Greece score 0.5, while other Orthodox churches get zero score.

As in the case of previous indicator Q41, the Greek co-researcher gives half a point for the Church of Greece based on limited statements made in the **For the Life of the World** document that do not necessarily reflect the reality of the Greek context.

The score for Finland is based on the Orthodox Church of Finland's general acknowledgement that secular, democratic societies must allow freedom of thought, conscience and religion for LGBTI people. However, some people may act against such freedoms being realised within the Orthodox Church.

In Romania and Georgia, the Orthodox church does not in practice acknowledge equal treatment and freedom of LGBTI people in the society. However, in reference to double standards, the Georgian co-researcher points out that some senior clergy may express their support for freedom of thought and conscience of all individuals in interviews.

Indicators Q43 (right of political organisation), Q44 (gender-related rights), Q45 (reproductive rights), Q46 (kinship-related rights), Q47 (labour rights), Q48 (health rights), Q49 (diversity education in public schools), Q50 (access to other public services)

In terms of public statements by churches on various LGBTI rights indicators, only Finland scores half a point for gender-related rights and kinship-related rights. All other churches have a score of 0 in each of these indicators.

On the one hand, the results show that Orthodox churches do not always play an active role in civil society or publicly engage in current debates on citizens' rights in general. On the other hand, Orthodox churches do not necessarily want to defend the rights of gender and sexual minorities in particular, in which case their efforts related to these rights are more likely to be seen as an attempt to restrict them.

The pre-populated comments on RICE 2020 explained that the OC generally denies reproductive rights to non-heteronormative couples and does not accept the right to an abortion. The OC also often condemns the use of contraceptives. Furthermore, it is unlikely, for example, that the OC will address the LGBTI community separately with regard to labour and health rights.⁴⁸

The negative stance of Orthodox churches towards the LGBTI community and their unwillingness to promote LGBTI rights within society and legislation, is particularly evident in the comments accompanying the scores given to churches in Georgia, Greece, and Romania.

For example, instead of supporting their rights for political organisation (**indicator Q43**), the Orthodox Church of Georgia publicly attacks LGBTI groups, and the Orthodox Church in Romania fully ignores their existence. Similarly, with regard to gender-related rights (**indicator Q44**), such as legal recognition beyond the female/male binary, the right to bodily integrity for intersex people, and LGBTI reproductive rights (**indicator Q45**), such as adoption, the Orthodox church either condemns such rights, as in Romania, or opposes such legislation and aims to

⁴⁸ RICE 2020, 51–52.

obtain exemptions for the church, as in Georgia. Finally, Orthodox churches in Georgia and Romania do not support any kind of LGBTI presence in public schools (**indicator Q49**).

The overall tendency of the Church of Greece is not to mention any kind of LGBTI rights. In the case of Ukraine, the co-researcher did not provide any additional information on these indicators. However, the total number of zero scores speaks for itself.

While the Orthodox Church of Finland does not speak out on most issues related to minority rights, it has at least expressed its opinion on a few issues in a non-restrictive manner. Regarding gender-based rights (**indicator Q44**), the church supports them within the context of a secular democracy. However, many individuals within the church are opposed to such freedoms and would support exception clauses for churches based on freedom of religion. Regarding kinship rights (**indicator Q46**), the Orthodox Church of Finland acknowledges the right of same-sex couples, including church members, to enter into civil partnerships or marriages within a secular democratic society.

Although the Orthodox Church of Finland is more tolerant of equal rights for LGBTI people than other Orthodox churches, views that support limiting these rights have also been expressed within its ranks. This is evident in relation to reproductive rights (**indicator Q45**), which are generally denied to non-heteronormative couples by the OC. In 2024, the Finnish Orthodox bishops stated that, while the church advocates abstinence in sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage, this 'should not be interpreted as hatred or contempt for sexual minorities, but rather as the ability, guided by love and respect, to restrain desires and direct them in an ethically sustainable way'.

Indicators Q51 (promotion of LGBTI inclusion in ecumenical settings) and Q52 (joint ecumenical promotion of LGBTI inclusion)

Greece and Finland score 0.5 on indicator Q51, while Orthodox churches in other countries score zero. On indicator Q52, all Orthodox churches score zero.

In general, the scores and comments show that Orthodox churches are highly unlikely to discuss LGBTI related issues in ecumenical forums, with no notable commitment to joint ecumenical efforts in this regard.

The Orthodox Church in Georgia is largely absent from international and ecumenical forums, let alone promoting LGBTI issues on them.

The Romanian Orthodox Church is also reluctant to promote LGBTI inclusion in its international ecumenical engagements. Instead, it shares the current Romanian anti-LGBTI agenda, which is broadly supported by Christian denominations in the country.

The Church of Greece is actively involved in the international ecumenical movement, but does not seek to promote the LGBTI agenda at these events. However, individual church representatives unofficially engage in such discussions.

While the Orthodox Church of Finland does not publicly advocate for LGBTI inclusion within the context of national ecumenism, its representatives promote more liberal values

4. EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

than those of many other Finnish Christian denominations. The church's ecumenical representatives on national and international forums are generally open-minded about issues affecting sexual and gender minorities.

4.6. Ways Forward

The period between the RICE 2020 and RICE 2025 reports shows that there are small signs of movement towards a more inclusive and accepting direction among Orthodox churches in Finland and Greece. On the other hand, the situation in Ukraine and Georgia in particular, and to a large extent in Romania, is very bleak in comparison with all the other churches included in this report. Overall, there is a notable need for progress in terms of LGBTI affirmation within the OC.

The RICE 2020 report included a list of future developments towards a more inclusive OC.⁴⁹ The list can be summarized according to three main themes.

Respect for diversity and human dignity in church life and teaching. The common theme here is inclusivity and sensitivity toward different identities and perspectives, based on the unconditional dignity of every person and an acknowledgment of diversity of voices within the Orthodox tradition.

Flexible and participatory application of church governance and rules. This reflects a more democratic, participatory and contextual approach to church governance. Lay representatives, women, and openly LGBTI+ individuals are involved in church governance alongside clergy.

Openness to societal and scientific engagement. The unifying theme here is openness to society, science and the academia, and a willingness to integrate these perspectives into church life.

Work on these issues remains essential to advance the inclusiveness of the OC.

Looking to the future, we would like to highlight four factors that could influence the OC to become more affirming of LGBTI issues.

The first factor is an end to the denial of reality practised by OC; there are also LGBTI people among Orthodox Christians, both lay people and clergy. They are not a culturally, nationally or ideologically alien group of outsiders, but members and spiritual children (or shepherds) of the church just like everyone else. Meaningful steps toward inclusivity depend on moving beyond the perception of LGBTI issues as alien to the OC, and instead recognizing them as integral to its evolving tradition and lived experience. Instead, LGBTI questions should be viewed as an internal church matter affecting the entire church community and its members. When the existence and acceptance of LGBTI people is in practice at least partially recognized, the OC should acknowledge this publicly, thereby influencing church and social structures in a way that promotes the well-being and inclusion of LGBTI people.

The second factor is closely related to the first: to become more inclusive, the OC must listen to and accept the experiences, concerns, and needs of its LGBTI members without objection. Creating a safe space for respectful dialogue is a vital step toward dismantling the hostile images the Church has constructed of its own LGBTI faithful.

⁴⁹ RICE 2020, 53.

Only when the Church is willing to calmly engage with its LGBTI members can it begin to critically examine the fears and threats it has perpetuated over decades—often justified by appeals to tradition—and recognize the reality of what Orthodox Christians from LGBTI minorities truly embody and contribute within and for the Church.

The third factor relates to the interaction between the diaspora and the historical areas of activity of the churches. Outside their traditional jurisdictions, several OC operate in pluralistic and multicultural social and cultural contexts. Diaspora communities risk becoming culturally and theologically rigid enclaves that imitate their 'mother churches' and remain within the boundaries set by those outside their sphere of activity. Navigating the balance between Orthodox tradition and the diverse realities of the diaspora can reveal Orthodox Christianity as an open and porous living tradition—one that responds to the lived experiences of its followers in diaspora and other contexts. At its best, the diaspora offers fertile ground for interaction between the Orthodox Church and LGBTI-inclusive influences, introducing new ways of interpreting tradition and developing pastoral practices.

The fourth and final factor relates to mutual and ecumenical interaction between Orthodox churches. The experiences and practices of more inclusive Orthodox local churches provide a good basis for inter-Orthodox dialogue and learning on LGBTI issues. More inclusive local churches should also explicitly condemn the discrimination, condemnation and hatred of LGBTI people within the OC, particularly in certain local churches. Similarly, ecumenical partners can offer examples of more inclusive practices to encourage and even push for critical self-reflection among the OC.

5. Roman Catholic Church

Given the fact that the overwhelming majority of respondents from the RCC refer in their comments and sources to the magisterium of the RCC – the Pope, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and other Dicasteries – it is helpful to have a larger introduction on the central teachings and developments of the RCC in the field of LGBTI-inclusion, as well as its positions on gender and sexuality. As the RCC is the only church with a centralized teaching authority, this differentiates it from the churches featured in other chapters. From the authors' perspective, it is justified to highlight this teaching, given its significant influence on respondents' answers—whether affirmatively, by supporting more liberal positions compared to conservative societies or local church leaders, or negatively, by limiting openness at the local level. The scoring also reflects a strong correlation between the perceived relevance of the Vatican's stance and individuals' experiences of inclusion or exclusion. This underscores the importance of giving greater attention to this decisive position.

5.1. Introduction to the Church Family

With around 1.3 billion believers, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian church in the world. The headquarters and leadership of the church is located in the Vatican in Rome (Italy), but the church is spread throughout the world with dioceses and local conferences of bishops. The Bishop of Rome, as Pope, is the head of the Church. The Pope is the highest ecclesiastical authority in the Catholic Church; his magisterial decisions do not require the approval of others and there is no appeal to another authority. Due to the primacy of jurisdiction dogmatized at the First Vatican Council in 1870, he can intervene in all other individual churches. On the other hand, the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) emphasized the collegiality of the bishops. As Bishop of Rome, the Pope is both part of the College of Bishops and head of the College of Bishops and as such has freedom of decision-making. The Pope is elected for life by cardinals under the age of 80, who are the highest dignitaries after the Pope and appointed by the Pope.

Councils, which serve as an important decision-making body for the whole Church, take place very rarely; the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was the most recent council. Decisions made by a council are legally binding. In addition, synods of bishops take place on a regular basis. Their decisions have an advisory function and can, if necessary, become law via a post-synodal letter from the Pope. From 2021 to 2024, for example, the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops worked on the topic 'For a Synodal Church' (short: 'The Synod on Synodality').⁵⁰ Since 2023, the participating laity have, for the first time, also had the right to vote at the Synod of Bishops. Also for the first time, the Synod of Bishops is being accompanied by an intensive process of local dialogue—known as the 'Continental Stage'—which allows specific challenges and concerns to be brought into the conversation with Rome not only by bishops, but through broader community engagement. This process had a significant impact for example on the affirmation of gender- and LGBTI-inclusivity in many local churches. All those respondents who added comments to their RICE 2025 questionnaires refer to the specific experience of this Continental Stage of the Synodal Process.

⁵⁰ <https://www.synod.va/en.html>.

5. ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

In addition to the Western (Latin) churches, the Roman Catholic Church also includes churches from the Byzantine tradition, which have sought communion with the Bishop of Rome for various reasons over the course of history. These so-called Eastern Catholic Churches are mostly located in predominantly Orthodox regions, such as the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church – the biggest Greek-catholic church –, Syrian and Armenian Eastern Churches.

The Catholic Church has a uniform, worldwide canon law, which is summarised in the Codex Iuris Canonici (CIC) of 1983. Special local legal regulations in individual matters are also possible, such as the special labour laws of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, which have undergone significant amendments since RICE 2020.⁵¹ The Eastern Catholic Churches have their own canon law, which has been laid down in the Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalum (CCEO) since 1990.

The Catholic Church has a clerical constitution, which means that the sacraments and fundamental decisions of church life are authorised exclusively by priests and bishops. In the Roman Catholic Church, only celibate biological men may become priests, which means that the office of bishop and pope is also reserved for celibate men. In the Eastern Catholic churches, similar to the Orthodox churches, priests are allowed to marry (heterosexually) and start families before ordination, but only celibate priests or monks are allowed to hold the office of bishop.

In some countries, such as Germany, strong lay bodies and Catholic associations shape parish life and represent an important bridge between the faithful and the clerical church leadership. In 2010, employees at Catholic schools and in Catholic lay associations in Germany uncovered extensive sexual and spiritual abuse by Catholic priests and members of religious orders, thereby initiating a far-reaching learning process regarding the structures that promote sexual violence and abuse of power in the Catholic Church. Extensive scientific studies have since shown sexual violence to be significantly linked to clericalism and outdated sexual morality.⁵² These reassessment processes have seen the German Catholic Church become an important player in the pressure for reform within the global church and at the same time have led to greater public awareness of sexual violence and gender-based discrimination in the Catholic Church within Germany.

⁵¹ German Catholic Church amends law to allow LGBTQ employees, 23.11.2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-catholic-church-amends-law-to-allow-lgbtq-employees/a-63854263>.

⁵² For the RCC in Germany: Research Project (MHG Study) Sexual abuse of minors by catholic priests, deacons and male members of orders in the domain of the German Bishops' Conference, 12.09.2018, https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/Dossiers_alt/dossiers_2018/MHG-eng-Endbericht-Zusammenfassung-14-08-2018.pdf; for the RCC of England and Wales: Pat Jones, Marcus Pound, Catherine Sexton: The Cross of the Moment. A Report from the Boundary Breaking Project. April 2024, Centre for Catholic Studies, University of Durham: https://www.durham.ac.uk/media/durham-university/research-/research-centres/catholic-studies-centre-for-ccs/The-Cross-of-the-Moment_digital.pdf.

5.2. Gender and Sexuality in the Roman Catholic Church

The Catholic Church's teaching on gender and sexuality can be described as heteronormative and conservative. However, distinctions must be made between the official teaching in papal doctrinal letters, the Catechism and the CIC on the one hand, and the pastoral practice of the church, local contexts and academic theological research on the other.

In terms of the official teaching of the Church, sexuality is only morally relevant in the context of sacramental marriage. The CIC does not mention sexuality at all; sex only plays a role in the context of the definition of marriage as 'a permanent union between a man and a woman, intended to procreate offspring through sexual co-operation'. (CIC §1096) This also links 'sexual relations' with the procreation of offspring in a marital context. The Catechism of the Catholic Church writes in §2333: 'Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his/her sexual identity. Physical, moral, and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out.'

Since the Second Vatican Council, a revised understanding of gender equality has gradually supplanted earlier subordinationist theological anthropology concerning women and the feminine. Nevertheless, official church teaching remains based on an anthropology of difference which, despite the equal dignity of women and men, assumes a binary difference between the sexes in terms of their tasks and roles in the world as laid down in the order of creation ('natural order'). The recognition of human rights by the Catholic Church with the Second Vatican Council went hand in hand with the development of a specific double standard, which on the one hand demands the unconditional protection of women—and later also of queer people—from violence in the context of secular institutions, while at the same time leaving inequality and structural violence against women and queer people unquestioned within the church's own structures. This includes, on one hand, the enduring view of women through a biologicistic lens—as naturally destined for roles as mothers and wives—and, on the other, the binary-complementary framework of the 'theology of the body,' particularly shaped by Pope John Paul II. This theology defines the body and sexuality in gender-specific terms, oriented toward procreation. Within this framework, non-heteronormative understandings of physicality, sexuality, and gender identity are deemed immoral, unnatural, or sinful—violations of the Creator's will. The Church's rejection of trans identities is especially stark, as trans individuals are seen not only as challenging divinely given physicality in sexual relationships, but also as seeking to alter their God-given bodily identity itself.

The balancing act between the Church's official recognition of human rights and the moral rejection of non-heteronormative identities and relationships is evident in many official documents of the Church leadership both globally and locally. Pope Francis (papacy from 2013 to 2025) in particular has published numerous statements in this regard, which can simultaneously be read as important steps towards an affirmation of gender diversity and as pink-washing of the persistently restrictive and conservative sexual morality. His famous interview with the statement 'Who am I to judge' (2013) was received as an

5. ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

encouraging gesture by the queer community worldwide. Francis also repeatedly expressed his support for the well-known Jesuit James Martin's pastoral efforts to create an LGBTI-friendly church, which has been continued by Pope Leo XIV.⁵³ Adhering to the Catholic moral-theological distinction between sin and the sinner, Pope Francis has repeatedly called for an affirming pastoral approach toward homosexual and transgender individuals, particularly emphasizing the need to protect them from discrimination and violence in broader society. At the same time, within the Church, homosexual acts and sexual relations outside of marriage continue to be officially regarded as immoral and sinful.

The concept of family is reserved exclusively for heterosexual couples with children, with the adoption and raising of children by LGBTI couples rejected by the RCC in 1992: 'There are areas in which it is not unjust discrimination to take sexual orientation into account, for example, in the placement of children for adoption or foster care.'⁵⁴

The most concise formulation of the RCC official position on homosexuality can be found in the Final Report of The Synod Of Bishops To The Holy Father, Pope Francis, on 24 October 2015, art. 76:

'The Church's attitude is like that of her Master, who offers his boundless love to every person without exception (cf. MV, 12). To families with homosexual members, the Church reiterates that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his/her dignity and received with respect, while carefully avoiding 'every sign of unjust discrimination' (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations Regarding Proposals To Give Legal Recognition To Unions Between Homosexual Persons, 4). Specific attention is given to guiding families with homosexual members. Regarding proposals to place unions of homosexual persons on the same level as marriage, 'there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family' (ibid). In every way, the Synod maintains as completely unacceptable that local Churches be subjected to pressure in this matter and that international bodies link financial aid to poor countries to the introduction of laws to establish 'marriage' between people of the same sex.'⁵⁵

The same document includes the most frequently quoted formulation afterwards on the 'ideology of gender' in art. 8:

'Today, a very important cultural challenge is posed by 'gender' ideology which denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without gender differences, thereby removing the anthropological foundation of the family. This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative guidelines which promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, which can also change over time. According to our faith, the difference between the sexes bears in itself the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26–27).'

⁵³ Father James Martin: Pope Leo's message for LGBTQ Catholics, 02.09.2025, <https://outreach.faith/2025/09/father-james-martin-pope-leos-message-for-lgbtq-catholics/>.

⁵⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: Some Considerations Concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons, 1992, Nr. 11, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19920724_homosexual-persons_en.html.

⁵⁵ Final Report of The Synod Of Bishops To The Holy Father, Pope Francis, on 24 October 2015, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea_en.html.

'In the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), the promise of pastoral 'closeness' and the affirmation of human freedom and conscience in matters of relational ethics is juxtaposed with an explicit rejection of what is termed the 'ideology of gender. Here, as in other statements, Pope Francis repeats the false assertion that gender theories suggest a 'choice of the individual, one which can also change over time.'⁵⁶ This concept was repeated and underlined with the document 'Male and Female He Created Them: Towards a path of dialogue on the question of gender theory in education' by the Congregation for Catholic Education in 2019.⁵⁷ Remarkably, these official documents do not refer to or engage with actual research findings from the humanities or the natural and social sciences on the topics of gender diversity and theory at any point, but remain entirely self-referential.

Particularly harmful are Pope Francis' statements concerning the alleged 'ideological colonisation' by 'influential countries' in order to 'destroy the family',⁵⁸ which he has repeatedly made in contexts where queer people and lifestyles are oppressed by the state. In 2024, when Russia's war against Ukraine was justified as a fight against gender ideology, among other things, Pope Francis described gender ideology as the 'ugliest danger of our time'. Although the pastoral approach to different gender identities within the church can open up pathways towards a new affirming approach, the church worldwide contributes strongly to repressive structures, which discriminate against non-heteronormative identities and promote the growth of queer-hostile populism.

Grounded in its doctrinal principles, the Catholic Church remains a prominent global voice opposing local legislation that advances gender equality, the recognition of same-sex partnerships, and reproductive and adoption rights for women and queer individuals. Where the Church maintains close ties to political elites, it can actively hinder processes aimed at securing legal equality and protection against discrimination. This influence is particularly evident in Eastern and Central European countries during the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence—commonly referred to as the Istanbul Convention.⁵⁹

Conversely, civil liberty movements and equality laws have increased the pressure on the Church to engage with scientific findings on sexual orientation and gender identity. A meaningful ethical assessment of inequality and oppression in a global context requires serious engagement with the intersectionality of justice structures—including gender. This recognition is prompting wide-ranging theological re-evaluations across both academic and pastoral discourse. The growing social normalisation of gender diversity, same-sex couples and families is leading to a decreasing acceptance of gender-based discrimination within the church.

⁵⁶ Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 19 March 2016, 56, https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.

⁵⁷ Congregation For Catholic Education: 'Male and Female He Created Them'. Towards A Path Of Dialogue On The Question Of Gender Theory In Education. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20190202_maschio-e-femmina_en.pdf.

⁵⁸ Pope Francis: Gender ideology is 'one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations' today, 11.03.2023, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253845/pope-francis-gender-ideology-is-one-of-the-most-dangerous-ideological-colonizations-today>.

⁵⁹ Caroline von Gall: Introduction: The Istanbul Convention in Central and Eastern Europe. *Osteuropa Recht* 1/2022, DOI: 10.5771/0030-6444-2022-1-5.

5. ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

One particularly significant event for the global Roman Catholic Church during the reporting period was the public coming out of over 100 church employees in Germany—including priests, deacons, Catholic teachers, pastoral and parish workers, and theology students—through the ‘Out in Church’ campaign launched in early 2022.⁶⁰ With a film on public television and coordinated public relations work, the activists drew massive attention to the existence of LGBTI people in church service and to their suffering due to the double standards of the church and the unworthy hiding of their own identity in order to be able to work in their church. This coming out led to the start of an open dialogue on queer lifestyles in the church context and ultimately also to changes in church labour law, and also to an intensive continuation of the investigation into abusive structures in the church. However, despite the initial positive start, it must be noted in 2025 that the actual progress achieved is limited. The synodal path has decided to publish its own handout for the blessing of queer couples, but this has only been published hesitantly and with mixed levels of liability.⁶¹

One of the effects of the strong emphasis on pastoral support for LGBTI people by Pope Francis has been the establishment of a pastoral infrastructure for LGBTI ministry. Many dioceses in several countries have implemented pastoral care-takers who are in charge of LGBTI ministry. In some cases, especially in many French dioceses, these LGBTI ministers are part of a trusted Catholic organisation—comprising LGB individuals and parents of LGB persons—that operates through volunteer engagement and carries an official mandate from their bishops. In other cases, they are professional ministers – lay ministers (as in Belgium or Switzerland) or clergy (as in Italy, the UK, Poland and Czechia) or a mixture of both (as in Germany and Austria). In Germany and in the Flemish part of Belgium, the Catholic LGBTI ministry has national or regional coordinators. In Germany, an auxiliary bishop is in charge for this pastoral area on behalf of the Bishops’ Conference. This pastoral infrastructure can be considered as a third reason behind the significant progress that the RCC in Belgium and Germany have made from RICE 2020 to RICE 2025. Advocates within the church administration can be very useful in terms of promoting LGBTI inclusion, especially if this is accompanied by dynamic synodal processes and/or committed bishops or even Bishops’ Conferences. On the other hand, it is important to know that in countries like Spain, Portugal, Slovakia and the Netherlands, no official LGBTI ministry exists to work on behalf of LGBTI issues. The LGBTI ministry in Czechia and Poland is probably too recent and too isolated to have significant effects at national level.

Overall, some initial processes have been identified since the papacy of Pope Francis, but these have not yet led to any fundamental changes in the doctrine and official stance of the RCC. They do, however, allow priests and bishops, and in some cases entire Bishops’ Conferences, room to manoeuvre. These developments have influenced key processes within Church leadership in Rome, bolstered by a concurrent global call for deeper synodal participation. Accordingly, during the Synod of Bishops on Synodality (2019–2024), questions of gender diversity and Catholic sexual morality emerged as particularly contentious—especially during the Continental Stage—reflecting the widespread and varied concern among local churches. The topic itself, but also the

⁶⁰ Germany’s #OutInChurch Movement Reflects on Three Years of Activism, New Ways Ministry, 27.2.2025, <https://www.newwaysministry.org/2025/02/27/outinchurch-in-germany-reflects-on-three-years-of-activism/>.

⁶¹ Felix Neumann: So wird die Segenshandreichung in deutschen Bistümern umgesetzt, 06.08.2025, <https://katholisch.de/artikel/63392-so-wird-die-segenshandreichung-in-deutschen-bistuern-umgesetzt>.

disparities in the universal church, became a central theme during this phase. However, this is not reflected in the final document of the Synod of Bishops, which does not mention the terms gender nor sexuality at all.

It is in this context that the publication of the 'Declaration Fiducia Supplicans. On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings' (December 2023) by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has to be interpreted. The document can be read both as a groundbreaking recognition and affirmation of LGBTI persons, as well as a pink-washing of the Church's unchanged rejection of 'persons in irregular relationships'. It has, therefore, provoked correspondingly polarised reactions. While the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, for example, declared that the document 'has no legal force for the faithful of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church' due to independent canon law,⁶² and African bishops "do not consider it appropriate for Africa to bless homosexual and African bishops 'do not consider it appropriate for Africa to bless homosexual unions or same-sex couples because, in our context, this would cause confusion and would be in direct contradiction to the cultural ethos of African communities',⁶³ bishops in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Belgium welcomed the document's affirming stance on processes that were, however, often already practised in the local churches. Catholic LGBTI organisations such as 'Out in Church' or the 'Ecumenical Working Group Homosexuals and Church', on the other hand, criticised the inadequacy and ambiguity of the language, which enabled an ambivalent attitude on the part of priests and bishops and thus did not constitute any real and sustainable progress. "The findings of RICE 2025 within the Roman Catholic Church clearly reflect ongoing ambivalence in doctrinal development. They also highlight the persistent tension between Vatican teaching and local social contexts—particularly where these tensions exert significant pressure on both local churches and queer communities.

The latest significant doctrinal development is the Declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in April 2024 with the title 'Dignitas Infinita' on Human Dignity'.⁶⁴ Under point 4, 'Some Grave Violations of Human Dignity', there is both a section on gender theory and a section on transitioning, which, again, make no reference to current developments on this topic in the natural and social sciences.. This allocation alone underscores the continued significance these topics hold for the Vatican, while simultaneously placing earlier gestures of recognition into perspective—revealing their limited depth or durability. The section on gender theory begins with a clear rejection of all 'unjust discrimination' as well as violence, persecution, torture and murder based on sexual orientation (55). However, this is followed by a reiteration of familiar critiques of so-called 'gender ideology', framed as a manipulative and colonising distortion of human freedom—one that allegedly seeks to eliminate sexual difference and, in doing so, threatens the anthropological foundation of the family'. What stands out here is the shift in language—rather than consistently invoking the complementarity of the sexes, the discourse increasingly speaks of their reciprocity. Transitioning is completely forbidden as a rejection of God's will and a loss of respect for the natural

⁶² Communiqué on the reception in the UGCC of the Declaration of the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith 'Fiducia Supplicans' on the pastoral meaning of blessings, 03.12.2023, <https://ugcc.ua/en/data/communiqu-on-the-reception-in-the-ugcc-of-the-declaration-of-the-dicastery-of-the-doctrine-of-the-faith-fiducia-supplicans-on-the-pastoral-meaning-of-blessings-823/>.

⁶³ Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo: 'No Blessing For Homosexual couples in All Churches in Africa', 11.01.2024, https://secam.org/wp-content/uploads/SECAM_NEWS_Vol.2024_No.01_ENG.pdf.

⁶⁴ Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith: Declaration "Dignitas Infinita" On Human Dignity. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dcf_doc_20240402_dignitas-infinita_en.html.

5. ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

order. The document was widely criticized by theologians and advocacy organisations, among others: [it is a] ‘mistake to waste words and time on misleading and incoherent abstraction when so many people, including the transgender people about whom those sections attempt to speak, have so many real physical, social, and moral needs for which the Church has real answers that can help to heal both body and spirit.’⁶⁵

5.3. Interaction With Other Data

According to the ILGA Rainbow-Map 2025,⁶⁶ several countries with majority Catholic churches are among the leading countries in the annual ranking: Malta, Belgium, Spain, Germany and Portugal. The Catholic countries of Central Eastern Europe—Poland, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia—as well as Italy—are in the bottom third of the ranking. The report points to the growing right-wing conservative pressure on democratic structures, which at the same time has a negative effect on the LGBTI community. Churches, especially the local Catholic Church in Hungary or Poland, for example, must be seen as part of the broader illiberal movement.

Complementing the ILGA Report, the Eurobarometer Survey on Discrimination of 2023⁶⁷ documents current data on the perception of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. In all indicators (acceptance of LGBTI people, support for equal rights), the majority Catholic countries Spain, Ireland, Belgium and Malta are in the leading groups, while Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Lithuania are among the countries with the largest proportion of negative scores.

The PEW Research Centre last conducted the broadest survey on the relationship of Catholic Christians to LGBTI inclusion in 2020, with questions on the legalisation of same-sex marriage and social acceptance of homosexuality.⁶⁸ The results reflect the wide variance within the official position of the Roman Magisterium, from large acceptance to complete rejection. The statistics are led by the Netherlands, Belgium, UK, Switzerland and Spain, where 75% or more Catholics approve of same-sex marriage, while Ukraine, Bosnia, Lithuania, Belarus and Latvia opt against legalisation with more than 80% against. When it comes to the question of social acceptance of homosexuality, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and the UK lead the statistics with more than 80% of Catholics approving, while Catholics in Eastern and Central Eastern Europe are more evenly split between approval and disapproval on this issue. In contrast to these findings, the RICE 2025 scores for the Netherlands and Spain appear misaligned with broader research on public attitudes—suggesting a disconnect between institutional assessments and the lived realities of the general population. This can be attributed to particularly conservative Bishops’ Conferences resulting from the papacy of Pope John Paul II. On the other hand, the RCC in England and Wales has a long record of having a less condemnatory position on homosexuality than the Vatican.

⁶⁵ Daniel Walden: Too Many Abstractions. ‘Dignitas Infinita’ & Church teaching on ‘gender theory’, 02.06.2024, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/too-many-abstractions>.

⁶⁶ <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/rainbow-map-2025/>

⁶⁷ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2972>.

⁶⁸ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/11/02/how-catholics-around-the-world-see-same-sex-marriage-homosexuality/>

In Europe, a clear dividing line emerges between Western Europe and Central, Eastern, South-Eastern, and Eastern Europe—reflecting the enduring legacy of socialist social policy and the foundational principles of liberal democracies, both of which continue to shape public attitudes toward LGBTI rights. Globally, rejection of LGBTI rights remains comparatively high in Eastern Europe, as well as in African societies such as Kenya and Nigeria. Notably, among societies with predominantly negative views on same-sex relationships, Poland stands out; here, Catholics express less inclusive attitudes than the general population, highlighting the intensity of the ongoing culture war within Polish society.

The Global Network of Rainbow Catholics conducted another revealing survey among Catholic LGBTI people following the Continental Stage of the Synod on Synodality.⁶⁹ Although non-representative, this study offers valuable insight into the expectations and hopes of Catholic LGBTI individuals within the framework of the synodal processes initiated under Pope Francis. The responses reveal a strong desire for greater awareness, meaningful representation of LGBTI people in church decision-making, and the full, affirmative inclusion of LGBTI families—not as separate or ‘special’ communities, but as integral parts of the ecclesial body. The following concrete steps were identified:

Recognition of the presence of LGBTI people in the Church and acknowledgement that sexual orientation and gender identity are innate expressions of human diversity (93.1%)

Revisions to texts and norms that violate the human dignity of LGBTI people and our families (78.7%)

Ending the demand for celibacy based on sexual orientation or gender identity (70.7%)

Public acknowledgment that practices such as “conversion therapies” are harmful and ineffective in changing identities (68.4%)

Ensure that LGBTI people have access to all the sacraments that affirm them and their families (65.5%)

The results of RICE 2025 make clear that perceptions of progress in inclusivity within one’s own church are closely tied to the specific indicators used in the assessment. Everyday language and liturgical texts play just as decisive a role for LGBTI Catholics as representation in the ministry of the church and the acceptance of their identity as an expression of God’s image and likeness.

⁶⁹ <https://rainbowcatholics.org/survey-report-lgbtiq-catholics-demand-inclusion-and-change-at-synod/>

5.4. Presentation of the Scores

At the second stage of the survey, data was collected from 16 churches in Europe. This is three fewer than in RICE 2020, with data from the churches in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe missing completely, and no Eastern Catholic church included.

Overall, it can be observed that most respondents primarily refer to the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Depending on whether the local church takes a more affirming or a more traditional approach to questions of sexual orientation and gender identity, the Vatican developments of the past five years described above are assessed positively or negatively. Thanks to the efforts of the European Forum's RCC working group and particular to Michael Brinkschröder, rich material on the general position of the RCC and key official documents has been provided to all RCC co-researchers. A lot of the comments in RICE 2025 rely on the answers and pre-populated comments from RICE 2020. These have served as the analytical foundation for the introductory chapter on the Roman Catholic Church and will continue to inform the discussion throughout this report.

COUNTRY	RANK WITHIN CHURCH FAMILY / OVERALL RANK	TOTAL SCORE	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POINTS	PERCENTILE
Germany	1 / 9	37.5	72%	60–80%
Belgium	2-3 / 20-21	27.5	53%	40–60%
England and Wales, UK	2-3 / 20-21	27.5	53%	
Malta	4 / 22-23	26.5	51%	
Switzerland	5 / 25-26	21	40%	
Ireland	6 / 27-28	19	37%	20–40%
Italy	7 / 29	18.5	36%	
France	8 / 30	18	35%	
Netherlands	9 / 32	12.5	25%	

COUNTRY	RANK WITHIN CHURCH FAMILY / OVERALL RANK	TOTAL SCORE	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POINTS	PERCENTILE
Hungary	10-13 / 34-38	9.0	17%	0-20%
Portugal	10-13 / 34-38	9.0	17%	
Slovenia	10-13 / 34-38	9.0	17%	
Spain	10-13 / 34-38	9.0	17%	
Sweden	14 / 39	8.0	15%	
Poland	15 / 41-42	3.0	6%	
Slovakia	16 / 43	2.5	5%	

COUNTRY	CATEGORY 1: INSTITUTIONAL EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION (INDICATORS Q1-Q18)	CATEGORY 2: CHURCH PRACTICES (INDICATORS Q19-Q30)	CATEGORY 3: LANGUAGE, SPEECH AND SYMBOLS (INDICATORS Q31-Q39)	CATEGORY 4: PUBLIC POLICY (INDICATORS Q40-Q52)	TOTAL SCORE (PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POINTS)
Germany	12.5 (69%)	9.5 (79%)	7 (78%)	8.5 (65%)	37.5 (72%)
Belgium	11 (61%)	9 (75%)	4.5 (50%)	3 (23%)	27.5 (53%)
England and Wales, UK	12 (67%)	7.5 (63%)	4 (44%)	4 (31%)	27.5 (53%)
Malta	10.5 (58%)	6.5 (54%)	4.5 (50%)	5 (38%)	26.5 (51%)
Switzerland	7.5 (42%)	6.5 (54%)	4.5 (50%)	2.5 (19%)	21 (40%)
Ireland	7.5 (42%)	4 (33%)	4.5 (50%)	3 (23%)	19 (37%)
Italy	7 (39%)	4.5 (38%)	4 (44%)	3 (23%)	18.5 (36%)

COUNTRY	CATEGORY 1: INSTITUTIONAL EQUALITY AND NON- DISCRIMINATION (INDICATORS Q1–Q18)	CATEGORY 2: CHURCH PRACTICES (INDICATORS Q19–Q30)	CATEGORY 3: LANGUAGE, SPEECH AND SYMBOLS (INDICATORS Q31–Q39)	CATEGORY 4: PUBLIC POLICY (INDICATORS Q40–Q52)	TOTAL SCORE (PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POINTS)
France	7.5 (42%)	5 (42%)	3.5 (39%)	2 (15%)	18 (35%)
Netherlands	6 (33%)	2 (17%)	3 (33%)	1.5 (12%)	12.5 (24%)
Spain	5 (28%)	2 (21%)	1.5 (17%)	0 (0%)	9 (17%)
Hungary	3.5 (19%)	1.0 (8%)	2 (22%)	2.5 (19%)	9 (17%)
Slovenia	3 (17%)	2.5 (21%)	2 (22%)	1.5 (12%)	9 (17%)
Portugal	5.5 (31%)	1 (8%)	2 (22%)	0.5 (4%)	9 (17%)
Sweden	4 (22%)	2.5 (21%)	1.5 (17%)	0 (0%)	8 (15%)
Poland	1.5 (8%)	0.5 (4%)	1 (11%)	0 (0%)	3 (6%)
Slovakia	2.5 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2.5 (5%)
RCC TOTAL	106.5 (37%)	64.5 (34%)	49.5 (34%)	37 (18%)	257.5 (31%)
RCC AVERAGE	6.7	4	3.1	2.3	16.1

It is notable that the data from Germany, Belgium and the RCC of England and Wales has changed significantly compared to RICE 2020. This cannot be explained solely by the five additional questions. For the Roman Catholic Church of England and Wales, the change in co-researcher between RICE 2020 and RICE 2025 may have influenced the assessment of certain developments. Nonetheless, the data and accompanying commentary reveal that, in some cases, synodal processes—particularly the Synodal Way in Germany and the Continental Stage of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality—have fostered greater openness and, at times, led to tangible pastoral shifts that stand in contrast to the official teachings of the Roman Magisterium and the Code of Canon Law. This observation is significant: it underscores the vital importance of sustained and inclusive dialogue between (clerical) church leadership and the faithful. Such dialogue is essential to prevent the entrenchment of doctrinal positions that are disconnected from lived realities, and to ensure that the identities and experiences of the faithful inform the development of ecclesial documents and decisions.

5. ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

At this more general level, it can also be observed that the Catholic churches in Central Eastern Europe (Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland) continue to have the lowest scores on most issues of inclusivity. The grouping of these countries is also an indication of the socio-political context, which in recent years has once again been characterised by right-wing populist and conservative social policies on issues of gender and LGBTI inclusion. The RCC is both part and parcel of this process. In general, no Catholic church is classified among the leading category (80% or more of the indicators) with a large group of churches remaining under 20%.

While all church families exhibit a notable range between their highest and lowest scoring local churches, the Roman Catholic Church stands out with a particularly stark disparity—ranging from 37.5 points at the upper end to just 2.5 points at the lowest. Given its highly centralised structure and authoritative magisterium, this divergence must be understood primarily through the lens of local contexts. The general societal attitudes toward LGBTI persons in each country play a decisive role, as Catholic communities—both clergy and laity—are not isolated or counter-cultural enclaves, but are shaped by the political decisions, mainstream policies, and public debates of their respective societies. This dynamic is evident in the lower scores of Central and Eastern European countries, where exclusionary political currents align with conservative ecclesial positions, as well as in the higher scores of churches situated in societies with affirming policies and robust anti-discrimination frameworks. Such findings underscore that even strict Catholic moral teachings are interpreted and enacted through context-sensitive pastoral approaches, rooted in the principles of pastoral theology and Catholic social teaching. At the same time, this pronounced discrepancy contributes to a palpable sense of internal contradiction within the Church—revealing tensions between doctrinal uniformity and pastoral responsiveness.

A closer look at the individual indicators allows further conclusions to be drawn about the local contexts and the interplay between the universal church and the local church.

Highest scoring indicators

The highest scoring indicators (8 or more points, or 50% of the total possible points (16) or more) are found primarily in Category 1 (Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination) and Category 2 (Church Practices):

- 12 points: Baptism of children from LGBTI-families (Q13);
- 11.5 points: Unconditional membership (Q12);
- 11 points: no restriction to participating in the Eucharist/Communion based on gender and/or sexual identity (Q15)
- 9 points: employs openly LGBTI people in any place where the church offers services to society (Q22); provides social ministry ('diaconia' or 'caritas') to LGBTI people (Q26);
- 8.5 points: Bible is not used as a normative instrument for defining gender roles, and is not interpreted as a condemnation of LGBTI people nor of LGBTI lived desires, sexualities, and identities (Q4);

- 8 points: theology implies the unconditionally acknowledged equality of all people for God regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics (Q3); recognises secular same-sex marriages and/or civil unions (Q11); employs openly LGBTI people for tasks performed by non-ordained workers on the church premises and in church owned office (Q21); language used by church leaders is inclusive and affirmative towards LGBTI people (Q31).

	Category 1: INSTITUTIONAL EQUALITY AND NON- DISCRIMINATION	Category 2: CHURCH PRACTICES	Category 3: LANGUAGE, SPEECH AND SYMBOLS	Category 4: PUBLIC POLICY
RCC indicators with a score of 8 to 12	Q3, Q4, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q15	Q21, Q22, Q26	Q31	—

The comparatively high values in the area of institutional openness and pastoral practice reflect the growing recognition of the reality of LGBTI people of faith within the Church as well as the human dignity-orientated approach of Catholic teaching. In most contexts, the Church endeavours not to restrict church membership and access to the sacraments on the basis of gender identity.

However, a look at the comments also reveals a differentiated picture. In the case of the German church, for example, the question of baptising children from LGBTI families is 'the only item on which we give fewer points than in 2020 due to better evidence'. Current studies show that more than 10% of deans would not agree to the baptism of children in same-sex families. Most of the other responses emphasise that there are no outright bans on baptism, although in individual cases priests or bishops take a negative stance.

The answers to the question of admission to the Eucharist (Q15) also make it clear that the Magisterium's distinction between the sinner and the sin is particularly relevant in these matters. The concept of persons living in active same-sex relationships places them in the categories of 'objective disorder', which can be used as a justification for permanent exclusion from the Eucharist without appropriate confession. The large gaps in the scores show that there is no clear stance by the Catholic Church in this regard, but that much is left to the judgement of the priest or bishop.

A similar ambivalence can be seen in the questions of the use of theology, tradition and the Bible to condemn homosexuality or transsexuality, which are rated relatively highly at 8.5–7.5. The commentaries emphasise that all three components allow for a certain ambivalence in the interpretation by the Magisterium and the local church and therefore depend on specific individuals. Co-researchers from England and Wales mention that the Pontifical Biblical Commission 'rejects the conservative use of biblical references and supports insight of human sciences, etc, to contextualise previously used texts',⁷⁰ while others quote how the Catechism uses biblical references to confirm the binary and complementary teaching on gender and sexuality.

⁷⁰ The study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission 'What is Man? An Itinerary of Biblical Anthropology' was widely interpreted in an LGBTI-affirmative way, while a speaker of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith immediately refused such an interpretation. See 'Biblical document does not signal opening to gay marriage, official says', 20.12.2019, <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2019/12/biblical-document-does-not-signal-opening-to-gay-marriage-official-says>.

5. ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

It is also noteworthy that the co-researchers from the less inclusive churches (Central Eastern Europe, Sweden and Portugal) in the area of theology, Bible and tradition also appreciate, at least with half a point, that the teaching of the church offers room for openness and that there are always individuals who do not implement the strict position of their own church leadership in their pastoral work. However, these categories also show a major difference between the official position (rated high) and the corresponding experience of LGBTI people in the community (several answers admit 'no'), and point, bluntly, to a gap between words and actions.

The high scores in the areas of labour rights, inclusive language, and diaconal engagement reflect a direct correlation with sociopolitical contexts, where secular norms—particularly legal frameworks on labour non-discrimination and hate speech—limit the scope for ecclesial exemptions or special standards. In Germany, the influence of the **Out in Church** initiative and the Synodal Path has been especially significant, generating widespread public awareness of discriminatory practices within church institutions, which are among the largest employers in the country's social sector. This visibility has contributed to substantial reforms in church labour law. However, these legal changes have yet to be fully reflected in a corresponding shift in corporate culture across Catholic institutions. The issue remains contested within the German Bishops' Conference, revealing ongoing tensions between legal compliance, pastoral inclusivity, and institutional inertia.

It is notable that not a single indicator from category 4 'Public Policy' gained scores higher than 7.5, pointing at the imbalance in the RCC's approach to the topic of LGBTI-inclusion in the public sphere, which merits further study.

Lowest total scored on indicators

The lowest scores cluster around category 4 Public Policy, which, in addition to questions about the wider public sphere in RICE 2025, also asks about ecumenical advocacy for a gender-inclusive church. Particular low score is recorded for the public policies regarding the topic of reproductive rights standing out as the only indicator with 0 points. However, feedback in the areas of church ministry and church law is also largely negative.

- 0 – public statements concerning reproductive rights of LGBTI people (Q45);
- 0.5 – admission of cis-hetero women and openly LGBTI individuals to seminaries (institutes for ministerial education and formation) (Q16);
- 1 – public apology and request for forgiveness regarding past non-inclusivity toward LGBTI individuals (Q40);
- 1.5 – legal documents mention LGBTI identities in a non-negative way (Q1); legal documents affirm the importance of diversity in representational leadership (Q2); ordination practices inclusive of gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Q17); liturgical language sensitive to gender and sexual orientation (Q35); public statements supporting diversity education in schools to foster tolerance and affirmation of LGBTI rights (Q49).

	Category 1: INSTITUTIONAL EQUALITY AND NON- DISCRIMINATION	Category 2: CHURCH PRACTICES	Category 3: LANGUAGE, SPEECH AND SYMBOLS	Category 4: PUBLIC POLICY
RCC indicators with a score 0-1.5	Q1, Q2, Q16, Q17		Q35	Q40, Q45, Q49, Q50
RCC indicators with a score 2-4	Q7, Q14, Q18	Q19, Q23, Q28, Q30	Q34, Q36	Q43, Q44, Q47, Q48, Q50, Q51, Q52

Across all respondents, the category of ‘Public Policies’ in RICE 2025 is rated very negatively—regardless of whether the respective church is perceived as increasingly inclusive. Nearly all indicators in this category received low scores, reflecting a widespread reluctance among local churches to engage publicly with equality policies. Comments suggest that many churches do not view it as their responsibility to take a stand in public debates on LGBTI rights. At the same time, it is plausible that some areas of social justice advocacy—such as poverty, migration, or justice—do not explicitly exclude LGBTI people, even if they are not directly named. As the co-researchers from Belgium note: ‘We experience some difficulty in answering several questions relating to Public Policy. The Catholic Church in Belgium does not express itself on everything at all times, which does not mean, however, that it has no opinion or that it does not act. Over the years, the Belgian Catholic Church has several times taken “progressive” stands on social issues, on subjects such as poverty, migrants, justice... Though these general statements usually don’t refer specifically to LGBTI people, we are deeply convinced this is not because the will would be to exclude them.’ This perspective highlights the vulnerable position of reproductive rights, where the Church’s doctrinal framing does not allow for safeguarding through human rights or anti-discrimination principles.

Responses to Indicator Q46 (kinship in LGBTI families) further illustrate the complexity of public statements: while negative positions are widely reported—except in Germany, Belgium, and Ireland—only seven churches scored zero points. This discrepancy points to a methodological challenge, as the presence of a statement does not necessarily imply affirming content. Indicators related to legal and linguistic frameworks also stand out for their low scores, particularly those not dependent on individual actors or local discretion.

All three indicators in the sub-category ‘Ordination of Clergy’ (Q16–Q18) received very low ratings. While some dioceses admit gay men to priesthood under the condition of celibacy, most co-researchers emphasise the continued exclusion of women, transgender, and intersex individuals.

Despite these low scores, notable developments have occurred—especially in Germany—regarding the inclusion of gay men in seminaries. In the context of reckoning with clerical abuse and the Synodal Path, several diocesan bishops have openly

5. ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

addressed sexual orientation and affirmed the integration of candidates' sexuality in formation processes and open access to all gay, cisgender and heterosexual men. The comment refers to the documents of the synodal path:

'The foundational text from the Synodal Way, **Priestly Existence Today** (2022), addresses the problems openly: "A priesthood that is theoretically reserved for heterosexual men alone seems questionable and not compatible with actual practice. The gender-dependent admission to the priesthood causes incomprehension, is discriminatory and must be abolished. The justification for celibacy as an obligatory priestly way of life is largely no longer accepted and convincing. The equal acceptance of homosexuality, also among priests, is explicitly demanded." (Nr. 4) The implementation text "Dealing with gender diversity" (2023) recommends to the Pope: "2.5 Access to the ecclesiastical ordination ministries and pastoral vocations must not be excluded across the board for intersex and transsexual baptised and confirmed persons but must be examined in each individual case." (Nr. 21)'

Indicator Q40—concerning public apology and forgiveness for past non-inclusivity—deserves particular attention. Its low score stands in stark contrast to Indicator Q39, which acknowledges the Church's involvement in discrimination against LGBTI people. This contrast reveals how sensitively LGBTI Catholics perceive the difference between abstract recognition and genuine cultural transformation. The gap between declaratory statements and practical change remains a key measure of ecclesial credibility and pastoral integrity..

5.5. Observations On Selected Indicators, Countries and Contexts

A closer examination of individual indicators and church contexts reveals important dynamics, though the analysis is constrained by limited commentary: six of the sixteen respondents provided few or no notes on their answers, five of whom represent churches described as particularly exclusive—namely Slovakia, Poland, Sweden, Slovenia, and Hungary.

1) Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination

This category addresses the institutional framework and the lived experiences of LGBTI individuals within it. The responses clearly indicate that the global legal framework (Q1, Q2, Q7) remains non-affirmative toward LGBTI people, with affected individuals continuing to encounter exclusion in their daily church-related interactions. Slightly positive trends are observable only in contexts where publicly recognisable legal shifts have occurred—such as in Germany and Switzerland. A second rationale for more favourable assessments appears in cases where respondents seek to acknowledge incremental improvements in official teaching over the past five years. As the co-researcher from Spain notes in relation to Q1: 'The Synodal Process started in 2021 and the publication of *Fiducia Supplicans* has produced a minimal shift in the previous terms LGBTIQ+ people are referred to in official documents. However, we are still far from a fully affirmative approach.'

A particularly notable development is reflected in Q10: 'The church officiates same-sex marriages and/or holds public blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples.' This indicator, rated 0 in RICE 2020, now receives 5 points, with eleven of the sixteen respondents noting a positive trend (0.5 points). All comments link this change directly to the **Fiducia Supplicans** (FS) declaration. While FS can be interpreted as permitting blessings for same-sex couples, it has sparked intense debate within the global church and does not alter the categorical rejection of same-sex marriage. Importantly, FS has not resulted in any concrete openings for blessing ceremonies or other affirming practices in Central Eastern European churches—each of which scored 0 points on this indicator. This intra-European divide within the Catholic Church continues to be a subject of public and theological discourse and was prominently addressed during the European Continental Stage of the Synod of Bishops.⁷¹

The comments offer valuable insights into local pastoral practice in this area. The Swiss co-researcher points out that 'In Switzerland, many local churches, priests and pastoral carers have been blessing same-sex relationships without any of these restrictions for years. After *Fiducia Supplicans*, the bishops communicated that the priests and pastoral carers are trusted to continue as they have been doing in the past.' Yet Switzerland awarded zero points in 2020, highlighting the significance of official endorsement from church leadership in shaping institutional assessments.

In Germany, the co-researcher describes a lengthy process of discernment and public debate around same-sex blessings prior to FS, which had previously elicited clear rejections from Rome. FS is characterised as a 'compromise document'—removing the categorical **Responsum ad dubium** prohibition while maintaining doctrinal boundaries. Crucially, FS enabled the development of local pastoral guidelines, which define a framework for blessing ceremonies: initiated by the couple's petition, accompanied by Scripture, sermon, music, prayer, and blessing. While these rituals are not considered official liturgies, they are designed to be meaningful and affirming. However, implementation remains uneven—some bishops publicly reject the guidelines, others ignore them, and a few proceed with formal adoption.⁷²

Belgium and Malta report similar local affirmations encouraged by FS, though both co-researchers stress that FS falls short of recognising the equality of same-sex and heterosexual marriages. Respondents from Portugal, Spain, and Sweden acknowledge FS as a symbolic opening but note little change in practice. In Spain, resistance from right-wing Catholic actors has actively opposed even individual blessing ceremonies.

Meanwhile, the assessment of inclusivity in priestly formation (Q16–Q18) remains consistently poor. The Vatican's explicit exclusion of gay men and individuals with 'uncertain gender identity' leaves minimal room for local adaptation. Nevertheless, the co-researcher from the German RCC describes:

'The situation in Germany presents itself in a different way. In 2019, the directors of three seminaries in dioceses in Westphalia (Paderborn, Essen, Münster) have publicly declared that they accept gay people as seminarians. In most of the other dioceses of

⁷¹ Luke Copen: Can the synodal process overcome Europe's East-West divide? 22.08.2022, <https://www.pillaratholic.com/p/can-the-synodal-process-overcome>.

⁷² Felix Neumann: So wird die Segenshandreichung in deutschen Bistümern umgesetzt, 06.08.2025, <https://katholisch.de/artikel/63392-so-wird-die-segenshandreichung-in-deutschen-bistuern-umgesetzt>.

5. ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Germany this is also the case as the chair of the national conference of the director of seminaries has declared, who has criticized the directives from the Vatican on this issue. The director of the seminary in Munich has declared in 2024 to accept gay candidates in his seminary. So did the bishop of Fulda, Michael Gerber, in 2025 who chairs the commission for the development of the “Ratio nationalis” in Germany. Both said that “the integration of one’s sexuality” and the acceptance of celibacy was more important than one’s sexual orientation. (...) Therefore, in practice only cis men (gay, bisexual or heterosexual) are admitted to seminaries. However, it still may happen that a seminarian is fired because of his homosexual orientation or practice.’

The German Synodal Path has explicitly challenged these exclusions. Its foundational text states: ‘...The gender-dependent admission to the priesthood causes incomprehension, is discriminatory and must be abolished. (...) The equal acceptance of homosexuality, also among priests, is explicitly demanded.’ In alignment with this, participants have recommended to the Pope that the exclusion of intersex and transsexual baptised and confirmed persons from ecclesiastical ordination ministries be reconsidered on a case-by-case basis.

These developments reflect the transformative potential of authentic synodal dialogue between church leadership and the People of God. They point toward a more affirming ecclesial future. Yet, when it comes to legal decisions, local churches remain dependent on papal authority and protracted deliberations within the dicasteries—leaving individual vocations suspended in uncertainty..

2) Church Practices and 3) Language, Speech and Symbols

The second and third categories of RICE 2025 encompass a wide range of pastoral dimensions within the Church. Given their shared emphasis on pastoral practice, they have been analysed together. A general pattern emerges: in recent years, many Church leaders have adopted more inclusive approaches within their pastoral ministries. Numerous comments highlight the positive influence of Pope Francis, who, as the co-researcher from Malta notes, ‘has made the language of Catholic church leaders more inclusive and affirming through his numerous examples of personal encounters with and pastoral care for LGBTI persons, but remains ambivalent’ (Q31). Across various contexts, priests and bishops are reported to take personally affirming stances on LGBTI issues, even as Rome maintains a more restrictive doctrinal posture.

Two key issues stand out in these categories. First, local churches often hesitate to reflect the lives and realities of LGBTI persons in official documents, structures, and language—whether in leadership roles, liturgical texts, pastoral frameworks, or the recognition of queer associations. Second, this reluctance extends to the conceptualisation of Catholic families (Q23, Q29, and Q46 in Category 4). These patterns reveal a persistent gap between pastoral action and structural transformation: while individual clergy may offer inclusive care, the institutional Church struggles to embed such inclusivity in its formal expressions.

Nonetheless, individual examples of pastoral inclusivity—whether through Pope Francis, James Martin SJ, or bishops in Germany—carry the potential to catalyse cultural change. As the co-researcher from Ireland observes in reference to the synodal processes:

‘There was a clear, overwhelming call for the full inclusion of LGBTI people in the Church, expressed by all age groups and especially by young people and members of the LGBTI community themselves. This inclusion would primarily involve less judgemental language in church teaching, following the compassionate approach of Pope Francis, which has been transformative and is in turn particularly appreciated by young people’ (Q39). Such momentum may challenge canonical and dogmatic boundaries. Yet, there remains a risk that these developments will be dismissed as isolated cases, local anomalies, or temporary concessions to contemporary cultural shifts—rather than embraced as signs of authentic ecclesial renewal.

The second observation highlights the deep entanglement between LGBTI issues and the Church’s theological vision of the family and natural order. Within the Roman Catholic framework, one of the Church’s perceived core responsibilities in the modern world is the safeguarding of the traditional, heterosexual, procreative family. Any deviation from this model—be it same-sex partnerships, families formed by LGBTI persons, reproductive rights, or children raised in same-sex households—is construed as a challenge to what the Church refers to as the ‘anthropological basis of the family’ (Dignitas Infinita), and by extension, as a threat to the foundations of human civilisation.

This doctrinal stance is reflected in widespread rejection of adoption rights for same-sex couples (Q23), as reported by co-researchers. Moreover, several churches openly support organisations that promote a heteronormative vision of the family as the bedrock of both Church and society—such as the World Congress of Families or Hazte Oír—implicitly reinforcing negative attitudes toward openly LGBTI individuals (Q29). These affiliations underscore the persistence of a theological and cultural paradigm that resists inclusive redefinitions of kinship and family, even as pastoral realities and societal norms continue to evolve

4) Public Policy

As previously noted, Category 4—Public Policy—stands out within the RCC group due to its overwhelmingly low scores. Drawing on the comment from the Belgian co-researcher, it can be inferred that several churches do not consider public advocacy for a single, internally contested social group to be part of their ecclesial mandate. Instead, they tend to issue statements on broader themes such as social justice, non-discrimination, and non-violence. Among the indicators with relatively higher scores, a particular complexity emerges. Q41, which assesses public statements on the protection of LGBTI persons, receives a comparatively positive rating, as both the Vatican and local church representatives have spoken out against violence, oppression, and the criminalisation of homosexuality—often invoking the principle of human dignity. Q46, concerning public statements on the rights of LGBTI persons in relation to children, also scores relatively well, though co-researchers report a mix of affirming and negative positions regarding children in LGBTI families.

In contrast, Q45—focused on reproductive rights for LGBTI persons—is the only indicator to receive a score of zero. While comments frequently reference negative public statements, particularly on abortion, the co-researcher from Malta notes a common tendency in liberal societies: ‘They prefer not to comment than to make very condemnatory statements.’ This ambiguity presents a methodological challenge, as the contradictory nature of ecclesial public messaging complicates the scoring process.

5. ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Building on RICE 2020, two new indicators were introduced to assess ecumenical engagement: Q51 ('The church actively promotes LGBTI inclusion in ecumenical and/or international settings') and Q52 ('The church joins efforts with other local churches in promoting LGBTI inclusion'). Both received low scores, yet the significance of the Synodal Process is repeatedly emphasised. The co-researcher from the Netherlands observes: 'The Dutch RC leadership is not actively promoting the theme. But since the start of the synodal process, there is at least room for conversations about it. Many participants in the Dutch national synodal process expressed themselves in favour of an LGBTI+ inclusive church and of the liturgical blessings of same-sex unions.' Similarly, the co-researcher from Germany highlights the RCC's active engagement with the Vatican and global synodal processes. From an ecumenical perspective (Q52), two levels of engagement can be discerned. Several churches report collaborative pastoral practices—such as joint prayer services and participation in local Pride events—in Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. However, formal ecumenical dialogue remains limited. Only the German co-researcher references the Working Group of Christian Churches (ACK), noting that unified positions on LGBTI issues remain unattainable due to strong opposition from Orthodox member churches. This tension underscores the broader challenge of fostering inclusive ecumenical consensus within diverse theological landscapes.

Although rather pessimistic on the state of public policy, the co-researchers indirectly give evidence to the "silent policy", which can be ascribed to the activities of the churches. Although hesitant in public appearances on LGBTI issues, both the affirmative and the restrictive activities of churches have an impact on the global RCC, ecumenical partners, and local societies—either by showing solidarity with LGBTI people or, conversely, aligning with right-wing or homophobic actors. One notable example of these contradictory effects is Italy. In the political sphere, the Vatican and/or the Italian Bishops' Conference have blocked several bills aimed at advancing LGBTI rights. At the same time, the Italian RCC has established a broad personal infrastructure for LGBTI ministry. A proposed final document of the Italian Synod was rejected—among other reasons—because it was not considered sufficiently affirming of LGBTI inclusion and women's equality. The revised proposal has yet to be published or discussed. These divergences between internal church policies and external political engagement illustrate how different levels within the Church attempt to navigate its position between the needs of the faithful, societal developments, and official teaching.

5.6. Ways Forward

RICE 2020 formulated a comprehensive list of recommendations for the RCC to become a more inclusive church for LGBTI persons. Looking at the results of RICE 2025, a twofold picture emerges. On the one hand, the RCC as a whole still scores rather low across nearly all categories. Not a single indicator receives a full score, and more than half remain below 4 points. The RCC in Central Eastern Europe is described by co-researchers as exclusive, condemnatory, and supportive of discriminatory political currents in the respective countries. This trend is alarming, given the shrinking space for civil society and human rights advocacy in these regions. It also directly contradicts the Church's claim to be a global defender of human dignity. Notably, the fourth category—public policies—scores particularly low, exposing persistent double standards between internal values and external communication strategies. The call for respect and nonviolence, echoed in papal statements, must correspond to the lived experience of every person in local churches if the RCC is to retain credibility—especially in contexts where Catholic teaching is appropriated by right-wing movements to justify illiberal policies.

On the other hand, some countries show distinct progress toward inclusivity, which co-researchers directly link to synodal processes at both local and global levels. Churches with strong lay organisations—such as Belgium, Malta, and Germany—offer compelling examples of the transformative power of internal ecclesial dialogue. LGBTI persons in these churches are more likely to encounter affirming voices, welcoming parish environments, and pastoral support in challenging situations. The decisive role of Church leadership—the Pope and the dicasteries through their official publications—is evident in all comments. This is both expected in a Church with strong centralised governance and challenging for local contexts when official language diverges sharply from lived experience. Co-researchers affirm that verbal affirmation alone is insufficient and potentially harmful if not accompanied by legal reforms, official documents, and public advocacy.

A third observation—echoing the RICE 2020 report—is the significant impact of local socio-political contexts on church attitudes. Churches are embedded in their societies, and societal developments around LGBTI inclusivity influence ecclesial responses. In some contexts, churches face pressure from their congregations due to the gap between societal inclusivity and ecclesial exclusivity. In countries where inclusive policies are enshrined in law and public policy—such as Germany, Belgium, Malta, Ireland, and England—churches tend to move toward greater inclusivity within the framework permitted by Rome. Co-researchers in these contexts also tend to assess their churches more critically. This is particularly evident in the RCC in the Netherlands, where both the state and other churches follow a consistently inclusive strategy, yet the co-researcher assigns notably low scores to the RCC. A key insight appears in the comment on Q29, which highlights the alignment of local RCC leadership with organisations promoting an anti-genderist agenda. This pattern is also observed in Central European and Mediterranean countries. While no single explanation accounts for how churches respond to their societal contexts, co-researchers point to several decisive factors: active lay participation, courageous episcopal leadership, transparent engagement with abuse scandals (including external expertise), and deliberate synodal processes

5. ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Looking at these main findings, we see several options to strengthen the RCC's path toward becoming a more inclusive church. On a grassroots local level, churches might opt for:

- Intensifying direct and personal communication between LGBTI Catholics and church leadership to raise awareness of their specific spirituality, theology, and self-understanding, and to overcome fear and stereotypes;
- Learning from synodal processes both locally and globally to reconnect magisterial teaching with the faithful, their experience, and lived religiosity;
- Encouraging diversity in the pastoral sphere through accessible information about queer pastoral ministry, and openness to baptism and the Eucharist for all faithful, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity;
- Promoting visibility of LGBTI Catholics across all levels of church institutions, especially among clergy, leadership, and academic staff;
- Actively seeking regular dialogue with Christian LGBTI advocacy groups and integrating their perspectives into seminary formation and institutional learning;
- Publicly condemning all acts of violence against LGBTI persons and distancing the church from any organisation known to support gender based violence (physical, psychological, structural).

On a more general and systematic level, the RCC is recommended to strive for:

- Strengthening its commitment to addressing the systemic roots of the global abuse scandal, with particular attention to the connections between the tabooing of sexuality and gender identities and the Church's structures of power, spiritual authority, and sexual abuse.
- Following up on the formal acknowledgments of harm caused by the Church's involvement in discriminatory policies toward LGBTI Catholics, as expressed in various official documents, through public gestures of repentance and metanoia that embody institutional accountability.
- Improving the pastoral infrastructure for LGBTI ministry at the diocesan level, establishing coordination mechanisms at regional or national levels, and defining standards for professional quality and theological integrity.
- Closing the gap between rhetoric and practice by ensuring that official statements are responsible, reality-checked, and accompanied by structured, systematic implementation of LGBTI-affirmative positions in legal documents and ecclesial practices.
- Engaging in interdisciplinary research and theological discourse on gender identities, to deepen understanding of the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of sexual orientation and gender identity, and to inform more compassionate and informed pastoral care.
- Critically engaging with research on the societal harm caused by anti-gender policies, in order to better understand and challenge the problematic alliances between Catholic leadership and right-wing movements that undermine equality, freedom, and social health

6. Protestant Churches

6.1. Introduction to Protestant Churches

The category of “Protestant” serves as a useful umbrella term for gathering a wide range of denominations across Europe, offering a broader panorama of churches. However, for a differentiated analysis of the results, the term remains too general. Protestantism encompasses traditions that trace their origins to the historical Reformation—such as Lutheran and Reformed churches—as well as those shaped by awakening movements in the late 18th and 19th centuries. These movements emerged in France and Switzerland, but also in Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia.

In France and Switzerland, the **Réveil** was largely influenced by the Moravian Brethren, whose spiritual legacy shaped Methodist preachers like John Wesley (1703–1791). In Germany and Scandinavia—regions marked by Lutheran heritage—the awakening took on a pietist character. Radical Pietists, in particular, broke with traditional Lutheranism, emphasising personal piety and devotional enthusiasm. Within this stream, one can identify Baptist churches and various evangelical communities.

To distinguish between tendencies within Protestantism, it is helpful to differentiate between churches affiliated with the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), which have signed the Leuenberg Agreement (1973), and those aligned with the Lausanne Movement. Until 2003, the CPCE was known as the “Leuenberg Church Fellowship.” According to its official presentation, ninety-six Protestant churches have signed the Leuenberg Agreement, including Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, and United churches across more than thirty countries in Europe and South America. Central to the agreement is the conviction that ‘churches are allowed to be different because they appeal to the Gospel as their common basis.’⁷³

The Lausanne Movement began in 1974, initiated by Billy Graham.⁷⁴ The first congress convened in Lausanne, Switzerland, bringing together leaders from evangelical churches in 150 nations. According to its website, participants engaged in plenary sessions, Bible studies, and theological debates focused on evangelism and strategy. The movement’s emphasis remains mission-oriented. Its foundational document, the **Lausanne Covenant**, serves as a statement of faith for many Christian organisations, affirming the inerrancy of Scripture and its authority in matters of faith and practice.⁷⁵ Unlike the CPCE, the Lausanne Movement is not structured as a communion of member churches but operates through periodic congresses and regional networks.

Finally, Anglicanism is represented in the RICE 2025 respondents through the Church of England. Anglicanism originates in the 16th century, when King Henry VIII broke with Rome—primarily because Pope Clement VII refused to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Initially, Henry VIII sought only to replace Rome’s authority over the English Church with his own.⁷⁶ It was under the leadership of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, following Henry’s death in 1547, that reforms were introduced aligning the Church of England more closely with the principles of the Reformation. One notable development was **The Book of Common Prayer**, which revised traditional forms of worship to incorporate Protestant ideas.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Cf. <https://www.leuenberg.eu/>; accessed 9 September 2025.

⁷⁵ <https://lausanne.org>; accessed 10 September 2025.

⁷⁶ The full text of the Lausanne Covenant can be found here: <https://lausanne.org/statement/lausanne-covenant>; accessed 10 September 2025.

⁷⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anglicanism>; accessed 10 September 2025.

⁷⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anglicanism>; accessed 10 September 2025.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Today, Anglicanism is organised through the Anglican Communion, which comprises 42 member churches worldwide. It was formally established at the Lambeth Conference in 1867. Since then, the Lambeth Conference has convened approximately every ten years and is recognised as one of the four Instruments of Unity in the Anglican Communion.⁷⁸ The other three are the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates' Meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council.⁷⁹ Together, these bodies help guide the Communion's global discernment. Among the Protestant churches represented in RICE 2025, the Anglican Church is arguably the one with the most centralised governance, with decisions that can have international impact

Among the seventeen churches that responded to the RICE 2025 questionnaire, the majority belong to the Lutheran and/or Reformed traditions. Five national churches are Lutheran: the Evangelical⁸⁰ Church in Austria [Augsburg Confession], Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Church in Austria (Augsburg Confession), the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the Church of Sweden, and the Lutheran Church in Great Britain. Two national churches are Reformed: the Evangelical-Reformed Church in Austria and the Evangelical Reformed Church in the Republic of Poland. In addition, three United churches—formed through the merging of Lutheran and Reformed traditions—also participated: the United Protestant Church of France, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), and the Protestant Church of the Netherlands. This brings the total to ten national churches that are either Lutheran, Reformed, or a union of both.

Additionally, two local churches responded to the questionnaire, each representing Reformed or Lutheran traditions in distinct ways. One is the Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich in Switzerland, a regional church within the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches. The other is a parish of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia, located in Staré Mesto, Bratislava. While these two churches cannot be taken to represent the entirety of their respective national traditions, their inclusion brings the total to twelve churches out of seventeen that belong to the Lutheran and/or Reformed tradition.

The Lutheran Churches⁸¹ in this group all belong to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden. The LWF comprises 154 member churches in 99 countries and identifies four pillars that shape its identity: rescuing the needy, undertaking common initiatives in mission, engaging in joint theological efforts, and offering a shared response to ecumenical challenges.⁸²

The Reformed Churches are affiliated with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), which traces its origins to 1875 as the “Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System.” In 1970, this alliance united with the

⁸⁰ <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/instruments-of-communion/lambeth-conference.aspx>; accessed 10 September 2025.

⁸¹ For more information, see the website of the Anglican Communion: <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/>

⁸² A remark about the use of ‘evangelical’ in German speaking (but not only, the same is true of Switzerland, Finland, Estonia, Poland, for example) contexts: *evangelisch* in the German speaking world refers to the Protestant tradition broadly understood (Lutheran and Reformed). It carries no association with the adjective ‘evangelical’ that defines movements such as those involved in the Lausanne movement.

⁸³ The United Protestant Church of France and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, which bring together Reformed and Lutheran Churches, are both members of the LWF. The Lutheran Churches that belong to the EKD are individually members of the LWF.

⁸⁴ For more information: <https://Lutheranworld.org/>; accessed 10 September 2025.

International Congregational Council to form the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. A further merger in 2010 with the Reformed Ecumenical Council led to the adoption of the current name, World Communion of Reformed Churches. While the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)—an alliance of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches—is not a member of the WCRC, both the United Protestant Church of France and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands are.

Among the RICE 2025 respondents, the Church of England and several Lutheran Churches in Nordic and Central European countries—the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the Church of Sweden, and the Lutheran Church in Great Britain—are members of the Porvoo Communion. Established in 1992, the Porvoo Communion is a fellowship of fifteen Anglican and Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Europe.⁸³ established in 1992. These churches signed the Porvoo Common Statement, ‘a theological agreement (...) which establishes full communion between and among these Churches.’⁸⁴

In addition to the Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, and United Churches, four respondents in RICE 2025 represent other Protestant traditions. The Evangelical Free Church in Sweden is a Baptist Church, founded in 1997 through the merger of the Örebro Mission, the Free Baptist Union, and the Holiness Union. It is affiliated with both the European Baptist Federation and the Baptist World Alliance. In the Netherlands, two denominations—the Salvation Army and the Church of the Nazarene—were evaluated together. The Salvation Army is an internationally established evangelical religious society. The Church of the Nazarene belongs to the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, with Methodist roots. Founded in 1908, it operates globally and is affiliated with several Wesleyan and Methodist associations.⁸⁵

Finally, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, historically rooted in Scottish Presbyterianism, dates back to 1840. It is active in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and is a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, though not of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE).

⁸⁵ See <https://porvoocommunion.org/>; accessed 10 September 2025.

⁸⁶ See <https://porvoocommunion.org/>; accessed 10 September 2025.

⁸⁷ For more information, see <https://nazarene.org/>; accessed 10 September 2025.

6.2. Sexuality, Gender and Protestant Churches

To outline the main positions of each Church family when it comes to questions of sexuality and gender, it is helpful to keep in mind the distinction established earlier between Churches that belong to the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), those that are closer to the Lausanne movement and the Church of England.

Among the respondents of RICE 2025, the following Churches belong to the CPCE:

Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession in Austria
Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria
Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church
United Protestant Church of France
Evangelical Church in Germany
Protestant Church in the Netherlands
Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic
Protestant Church in Switzerland

Church of Sweden and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland are participating Churches, which means that they participate in the work of the communion, but have not signed the Leuenberg Agreement. Of the twelve Lutheran/Reformed Churches that participated in RICE 2025, only the Lutheran Church in Great Britain is not a member of the CPCE.

One can thus start with the position of the CPCE on sexuality and gender, before saying something about the Church of England, and about the Churches that are not aligned with the CPCE (The Evangelical Free Church in Sweden, the Salvation Army, the Church of the Nazarene, and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland).

Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe

In 2025, the CPCE produced a document called **Gender – Sexuality – Marriage – Family**⁸⁶ intended ‘to aid individuals and Churches in exploring these topics’. It is one of the longest publications by the CPCE, reaching 426 pages. The aim is not to ‘take definitive stances on any of these subjects,’⁸⁷ but to help Churches think about the topics. This publication reflects the difficulties faced by a communion of Churches when it discusses topics related to gender and sexuality, in particular same-sex relationships. In the introduction, the authors write:

⁸⁶ Ulla Schmidt, Mariecke van den Berg, Thorsten Dietz, Neil Messer and Paola Schellenbaum, **Gender – Sexuality – Marriage – Family. Reflections on behalf of the Council of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe** (Vienna: Evangelischer Pressverband in Österreich, 2025 for the online version, 2024 for the print version). Downloadable here : <https://www.leuenberg.eu/gender-sexuality-marriage-family-now-available-for-purchase-gender-sexualitat-ehe-familie-jetzt-im-webshop/>; accessed 12 September 2025.

⁸⁷ See: <https://www.leuenberg.eu/gender-sexuality-marriage-family-now-available-for-purchase-gender-sexualitat-ehe-familie-jetzt-im-webshop/>; accessed 12 September 2025.

The painful reality of our differences on these issues was experienced at the General Assembly as we noted the decision of the Council to publish this guide. Sensitivities around these issues led the member Churches of the Hungarian Reformed Church to withdraw their delegates from the Assembly. The Lutheran Church in Hungary sent a commentary on the study, which in many ways was received positively, but stated their fundamental conviction about marriage being between one man and one woman. Others expressed in debate their pain rooted in the situation they found themselves in either through personal conscience or because of their contextual realities. We include the Statement of the Presidium of the General Convent of the Hungarian Reformed Church as well as the Statement of the Bishop's Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary as appendices. We do this out of a desire to be transparent and honest about our divisions on this issue. In publishing these two contributions we start off the process of reception and discussion of this study text in our Church communion. The General Assembly showed the warm commitment from member Churches and the CPCE itself to continue together in Communion, and to continue to embody that in the ongoing work of the communion.⁸⁸

This long quote shows how difficult it is for Protestant Churches to reach a consensus about sexuality and gender in the various contexts of Europe.⁸⁹ The CPCE document aims to 'identify a range of possible positions in light of these principal Protestant orientations, tentatively labelled a "Protestant corridor".' (CPCE, 16). When it comes to gender, the CPCE document describes three main positions:

The first position affirms that 'There are two different categories of human beings – male and female – that are distinct, exhaustive and based on biological features. [...] The possibility of heterosexual procreation is seen as an essential part of biological sexual difference. For that reason, heterosexual relationships are preferred, and sometimes marked as the only justifiable form of relationship for Christians.' (CPCE, 17–18)

The second position starts with the conviction that 'our given bodies and nature are places where we encounter the grace of God's creative and redemptive love, and therefore significant for understanding what it means to love in accordance with those purposes.' This position also takes note of the flawed dimension of human nature and rejects the idea that human nature is 'ordered by divine purposes and therefore as binding on human intentions and choices.' It also allows for some flexibility in the understanding of gender. It recognizes that 'procreative possibilities are conditioned upon there being male and female gametes.' In this sense 'human bodies are binarily gendered as male and female'. But this position also sees other factors at work in sexed human bodies, **and these factors (hormonal production, physiological body parts for example)**

⁸⁸ U. Schmidt et al., *Gender – Sexuality*, 12–13. All other quotes from the CPCE document from now on will be labelled in parenthesis (CPCE) followed by the page number.

⁸⁹ The same tension is found in the reflections of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), who in 1988 already (as the Reformed Ecumenical Council) put an end to "an almost decade-long debate on what to do about its member Churches that ordained homosexuals [sic]. It concluded that while there may be fundamental disagreements among member Churches on this issue, there was no theological justification to make this a basis of breaking relationships or of excluding any Church from membership." See <https://wcrceurope.org/about/history/detail-timeline/>; accessed 12 September 2025. Of the Protestant Churches that responded to RICE 2025, the following belong to the WCRC: Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession in Austria, United Protestant Church of France, Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Protestant Church in Switzerland.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

testify to a non-binary pattern in gender. Sexuality is perceived as a domain 'where humankind can experience and participate in God's creative and loving work.' Procreation is part of the purpose of sexuality, but 'it is not a condition for human sexuality to be aligned with these purposes of creation and love.' (CPCE, 18–19)

Finally, the third position questions 'the basis of any kind of essential difference between man and woman, meaning that there is no male or female essence that sustains different gender identities.' In an eschatological perspective, 'human sexuality is then disconnected from gender structures based in nature or creation, and set withing a new reality, where there is neither male nor female.' (CPCE, 19)

While the CPCE accepts that these three positions can be potentially held 'within a Protestant corridor,' it does highlight 'an important asymmetry,' which it presents in the following manner:

The first, exclusivist binary position, which considers acceptance of non-binary identity as incompatible with Protestant, Christian understanding of human beings created in the image of God as man and woman, thereby also excludes people of non-binary gender identity from participating in this status. The two other positions, viewing gender as either non-essentially binary or non-binary, clearly do not exclude people of binary gender identity from the status of being created in the image of God. (CPCE, 19–20)

Two things can be deduced from this comment about the three positions presented in the CPCE document: the authors of the document take seriously the existence of trans* people and of non-binary people, without seeing it as 'a superficial and fluid preference.' They also implicitly favour a position that is non-exclusionary, highlighting that 'there are serious – potentially life-threatening – risks involved in insisting that transgender people must set this identity aside in order to see themselves as created in the image of God and included in Protestant Christian communion.' (CPCE, 20) The risks involved might question whether the 'Protestant corridor' is wide enough to accommodate an exclusionary position. The authors of the document also emphasize that 'hate speech and dehumanizing language, like labelling opponents or LGBTQI+ people as "illness" to society or the Christian communion or lumping them together with criminal or anti-social behaviour, are unacceptable.' (CPCE, 20)

In the section concerning 'Marriage and family' (CPCE, 20–24), the authors of the document consider historical, sociological, anthropological and theological elements about marriage. They acknowledge the changes undergone by marriage in the last three centuries and simply presuppose the existence of what they call 'rainbow families', alongside transnational, interfaith and global families. They see this as bearing witness to diversity and a joyful life. They also recognize that 'anthropological theory suggests that marriage is not only a heterosexual institution and that same-sex partnerships, too, can contribute to stable human societies' (CPCE, 22). They further emphasize that "Queering the family" is thus not only about LGBTQI+ experiences of family life and organization; it also asks questions about the concept of the family, its power and gender balance, its defined and blurred boundaries that emphasize what people do, while being a family together.' (CPCE, 22) This also means an awareness of the changes that took place in the institution of marriage, with the increasing importance of the 'covenant motive' since the 17th century meaning that procreation became less important as a purpose for marriage.

Two observations can be mentioned, which open the possibility for the Church recognizing diverse forms of marriage. First, with less importance accorded to procreation as the traditional characteristic of marriage, 'married couples are fruitful in their joint commitment to one another and to others.' (CPCE, 23) This implicitly indicates the validity of same-sex marriage. Second, the document recognizes that 'the patriarchal form of the family can be recognized as a culturally conditioned, narrow interpretation, which has been overcome today through more diverse and equitable forms of community.' (CPCE, 23) This also opens the door for same-sex relationships having the same status as heterosexual relationships. This is confirmed explicitly by the two sentences that conclude the introductory section on Marriage and sexuality: 'In this respect, the experiences of rainbow families today are instructive for all. They show us that central values such as love, justice and responsibility can be achieved in very different ways.' (CPCE, 23–24)

The CPCE document, while recognizing the diversity of Protestant opinions about gender, sexuality and marriage expresses a view that is rather supportive of the LGBTI community. It also explicitly engages with queer, feminist, trans theory and theology, an innovation for this type of document. Not all churches who are members of the CPCE recognize themselves in the document, though. The Communion reflects on this explicitly, in the last section of the summary, in a section called 'Church communion, ethical disagreements and ethics of disagreement.' The CPCE is committed to find ways to maintain Church communion despite ethical disagreements. It explores ways to do so through four case studies by individual CPCE member Churches (the Waldensian Church, the Church of Norway, the Reformed Church in Hungary and the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren). These case studies led to the following insights. The CPCE recognizes that ethical disagreements can be a threat to Church unity, despite agreements 'concerning the doctrine of the gospel and administration of the sacraments' (article VII of the Augsburg Confession; CPCE, 25). However, it also observes that 'disagreements on gender and sexuality, exemplified by discussions about same-sex relations – although clearly profound and serious – do not necessarily imply disagreement about the status of Scripture.' (CPCE, 26) Based on these two insights, that are somewhat in tension, the CPCE exhorts its members to practice what it calls 'ethics of disagreement' (CPCE, 26). This ethics is exemplified in a 'commitment to the mutual and continued exploration of conflictual position.' (CPCE, 26) It also implies 'being willing to reflect critically on one's own position in light of others' understanding of it and being accountable for our position towards others.' (CPCE, 26) Finally, it also means 'an obligation to not withdraw from these mutual explorations without having engaged in them with dedicated effort.' (CPCE, 26)

The CPCE's decision to publish two accompanying statements alongside its study on **Gender – Sexuality – Marriage – Family** reflects a deliberate willingness to engage with internal disagreement. One statement, issued by the Presidium of the General Convent of the Hungarian Reformed Church (HRC)—which comprises Hungarian-speaking Reformed Churches in Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine—recommends that HRC delegates abstain from participating in the forthcoming CPCE General Assembly in Sibiu (Nagyszeben), scheduled for 27 August to 2 September 2024 (CPCE, 388). The stated reason is that the HRC had requested the study text be discussed at a different General Assembly, a request that was not

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

granted. The second statement, from the Bishops' Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, reaffirms its theological position that marriage is exclusively between a man and a woman, understood as part of the divinely instituted order of creation (CPCE, 391).

The CPCE document highlights the absence of a single position for Reformed and Lutheran Churches in Europe on the topic of sexuality and gender. One might add that in many Lutheran and Reformed contexts, local congregations have some autonomy when faced with issues that have the potential to divide the Church. One can briefly take two examples, that handle this diversity a bit differently.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland had to respond to the 'amended Finnish Marriage Act' that became valid on 1 March 2017 and allows same-sex marriage in Finland. The Bishop's Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland proposed a text that would add 'a provision on parallel concepts of marriage'⁹⁰ to the Church order. The Bishops' Conference defines the two concepts in the following manner: 'in one, marriage is understood as being between a man and a woman, and in the other, marriage is understood as being between two persons.'⁹¹ If the proposal was accepted, as the Bishops' Conference indicates: 'the priest would have the opportunity to marry same-sex couples or bless their marriage, but they could also refrain from doing so. The right of same-sex couples to have an ecclesiastical marriage ceremony would be made the duty of the parish and ensuring its implementation a task for the vicar.'⁹² The General Synod of 8 May 2025 rejected the proposal, lacking the fifteen votes to pass (62 votes for, and 40 votes against; it would have needed 77 votes to pass). Following the vote, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland determined that same-sex marriages officiated by a pastor are valid, if they respect the requirements of the civil Marriage Act. It also indicates that 'same-sex couples will face no repercussions if they are married by a pastor. Diocesan chapters determine any possible repercussions to the pastor.'⁹³ In reality, pastors can and do officiate same-sex marriages, and face no disciplinary action, although the possibility of repercussions does exist.

The Protestant United Church of France has also had to face divisions and disagreements over the blessing of same-sex unions. On 17 May 2015, the National Synod 'opens the possibility, for those who see it as a legitimate way of witnessing to the Gospel, to practice a liturgical blessing for a married same-sex couple who wish [sic] to bring their union before God.'⁹⁴ The press release indicates that this blessing is 'neither a right nor an obligation. In particular, it is not a requirement for any parish of any pastor.'⁹⁵ Concretely, this means that parishes or pastors who are opposed to the blessings of same-sex marriages can refuse to propose the liturgical blessing, and that same-sex couples must find a parish and a pastor who is willing to celebrate a same-sex blessing. The website of the Protestant United Church of France indicates: 'in the Protestant United Church of France, all couples are welcomed. Not all local

⁹² <https://evl.fi/plus/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2024/04/Bishops-Conference-of-the-ELCF-proposes-a-model-of-two-parallel-concepts-of-marriage.pdf>; accessed 12 September 2025.

⁹³ <https://evl.fi/plus/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2024/04/Bishops-Conference-of-the-ELCF-proposes-a-model-of-two-parallel-concepts-of-marriage.pdf>; accessed 12 September 2025.

⁹⁴ <https://evl.fi/plus/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2024/04/Bishops-Conference-of-the-ELCF-proposes-a-model-of-two-parallel-concepts-of-marriage.pdf>; accessed 12 September 2025.

⁹⁵ <https://evl.fi/en/current-issues/the-marriage-law/>; accessed 12 September 2025.

⁹⁶ <https://acteurs.epudf.org/decision-du-synode-national-2015-a-sete-7601/>; accessed 12 September 2025.

⁹⁷ <https://acteurs.epudf.org/decision-du-synode-national-2015-a-sete-7601/>; accessed 12 September 2025.

Churches and parishes do celebrate the blessing of same-sex unions, but all can point you to those which do.⁹⁶ Here it is possible to refuse to officiate the blessing of same-sex union, and the burden remains on the same-sex couple to find a Church that will officiate the blessing.

There are some differences also in countries where church ceremonies are recognized by the State and those for which religious ceremonies function as a blessing of a marriage performed by the Church. In France for example, the issue of the blessing of same-sex unions became a topic for discussion following the legalisation of same-sex marriages. The Church in France does not perform marriages, but can bless same-sex marriages. It seems clear that the issue of blessing same-sex marriages is for example complicated for the Church of England by the fact that marriage is seen as a lesser sacrament, and also by the fact that marriage in the Church is legally binding.

These accommodations are characteristic of Reformed and Lutheran Churches, as is also exemplified by the dialogue and disagreements surrounding these questions at the CPCE. For the other Churches, the situation is somewhat simpler, either because the decision is more centralized (as is the case for The Church of England for example) or because there is less division about this topic in the various denominations.

The Church of England

For The Church of England, the question of same-sex marriage, legal in the UK since 2013, is complicated by the facts that the Church of England can officiate the marriage and considers marriage as a sacrament (even if it not a sacrament of the Gospel).⁹⁷ The Church sees marriage as being between a man and a woman, with its first purpose being the procreation of children.⁹⁸ The Church of England has engaged in a reflection similar to the path taken by the CPCE and has produced material entitled **Living in Love and Faith** (LLF) that discusses questions of gender and sexuality. This process has brought about the possibility of saying prayers of blessings (the Prayers of Love and Faith) on the marriage of same-sex persons⁹⁹, but not to perform same-sex marriages. As the website of the Church of England indicates, as of July 2024, the 'General synod asked the House of Bishops to undertake further work on two aspects of the LLF process: 1. The Prayers of Love and Faith, specifically on how to use these in so-called 'bespoke' services and what pastoral reassurance might be needed for this. 2. A timetable for consideration of the question on removing restrictions for clergy entering same-sex civil marriages.'¹⁰⁰ For now, clergy in same-sex marriages are asked to remain abstinent. In the **Living in Love and Faith** process, the Church of England is now in the implementing phase. A process of consultation concerning the implementation of a service organized especially to say the Prayers of Love and Faith

⁹⁶ <https://epudf.org/mariage-1/>; accessed 12 September 2025.

⁹⁹ Book of Common Prayer, Article 25 of the Articles of Religion : <https://www.Churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/articles-religion#XXV>; accessed 12 September 2025.

¹⁰⁰ Book of Common Prayer, The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony: <https://www.Churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/form-solemnization-matrimony>; accessed 12 September 2025.

¹⁰¹ <https://www.Churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/draft-prayers-thanksgiving-dedication-and-gods-blessing-same-sex-couples>; accessed 12 September 2025.

¹⁰² <https://www.Churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith>; accessed 12 September 2025.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

with a couple should end by November 2025.¹⁰¹ Part of the **Living in Love and Faith** process also included a direct public apology to LGBTI people 'for the way in which the Church as rejected or excluded them, admitting: "We have not loved you as God loves you, and that is profoundly wrong".¹⁰²

There are also differences in the Anglican Communion world-wide, where the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA) consecrated V. Gene Robinson, an openly gay man, as the Anglican Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003. Individual congregations in North America also have been performing same-sex marriages, whereas national Churches in Africa, Asia and South America have been opposed to developments. In 2023, a group of twenty-five Anglican Churches of the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches issued a statement indicated that they were no longer able to recognize the Archbishop of Canterbury, and accused the Church of England of promoting false teaching by allowing the blessings of same-sex unions.¹⁰³

Finally, we will discuss the four Churches that are not part of the CPCE, and distinct from The Church of England.

Churches Not Aligned with the CPCE: The Evangelical Free Church in Sweden, the Salvation Army, the Church of the Nazarene, and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

For these Churches, there have been no comparable reflective exercises to the processes seen in the CPCE or the Church of England. Concerning the Swedish Free-Church context, Charlotta Carström writes that Christian free Churches in Sweden are in a different position than the Church of Sweden and that it is 'only the United Church that allows same-sex marriage'.¹⁰⁴ The tensions related to LGBTI questions can be seen from an event that took place in 2024, at the annual Torpkonferensen. Initially, the mission directors had allowed the association Kristna regnbågsrörelsen (Christian Rainbow Movement) to have a stand in the exhibition hall. However, they had to backtrack following negative reactions and decided that the movement could not be part of the exhibitors.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ <https://www.Churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith/informal-consultations-diocesan-synods>; accessed 12 September 2025.

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.Churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith/bishops-response-living-love-and-faith>; accessed 12 September 2025.

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230221-anglican-group-rejects-archbishop-of-canterbury-as-schism-widens>; accessed 12 September 2025.

¹⁰⁶ Charlotta Carlström, 'Queer Desires and Emotional Regimes in Swedish Free-Church Contexts', *Theology & Sexuality* 27.2-3 (2021): 188-203. (Permanent URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13558358.2021.1981739>)

¹⁰⁵ See <https://efk.se/webb/nyheter/nyheter/2024-05-17-efks-missionsdirektorer-backar-fran-beslutet-att-lata-ekho-kristna-regnbagsrorelsen-vara-en-av-utstallarna-pa-torpkonferensen-2024.html>; accessed 13 September 2025. Here are the final reflections of the statement: 'As mission directors, we do not want to increase tension within the movement on this issue. We understand the criticism that the timing was not good ahead of the conference. We misjudged the impact of allowing EKHÖ/Kristna regnbågsrörelsen to be one of the exhibitors at the Torp Conference. Our overall assessment is that the movement is not ready to accept EKHÖ/Kristna regnbågsrörelsen as one of the exhibitors. A few final reflections: We have received several wise and constructive comments where concern for the movement has been the driving force. At the same time, we have been appalled by the homophobia that has been expressed to us in emails, letters, and comments. We have been shocked by how hateful people can be toward other Christian brothers and sisters. This has affected us deeply. As mission directors, we have a clear and open agenda where, based on a traditional view of marriage and sexuality, we want to be radically welcoming to those who live in same-sex relationships. We believe in safe, generous conversations. Our prayer is that we will always see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.' (Translated with DeepL)

The Salvation Army does not have a statement on LGBTI questions. In a reflection on the 'Soldiers' Covenant', one can find a reflection on marriage by one of the members of the International Theological Council. Two passages are worth quoting: 'Christian marriage is a covenant and calling, a relationship between two people, which is lived in the presence of God and shaped by divine purposes. The marriage thus becomes a space for formation and transformation, for each individual and as a couple.' Marriage is defined as being between two people, and not between a man and a woman. Similarly, family is defined in a broader sense with no insistence on procreation as the goal of marriage: 'This particular article of faith assumes that a God-honouring marriage will create a secure foundation for family life. The family should provide a place where children are nurtured and given space to grow and develop as individuals who are known and loved by God. Christian values and healthy mutual relationships can be taught and modelled as part of family life. As with marriage, the way in which this happens may vary, but the principles remain. Some children will grow in a large extended family, in which the "parenting" is shared by a number of people; others will live and grow only with parents, and possibly siblings.'¹⁰⁶ The Salvation Army describes itself as aiming to be inclusive, while admitting that it has 'much to learn about issues such as structural discrimination, racism and human sexuality.'¹⁰⁷

Two statements pertain to human sexuality on the Church of the Nazarene's webpage. One finds a statement on human sexuality by the Board of General Superintendents (dated to 14 November 2019) which refers to paragraph 31 of the **Manual of the Church of the Nazarene**.¹⁰⁸ In 2017, the **Manual** indicates that Christians should 'resist adding to the brokenness of sin' and thus refrain from 'sexual activity between people of the same sex. Because we believe that it is God's intention for our sexuality to be lived out in the covenantal union between one woman and one man, we believe the practice of same-sex sexual intimacy is contrary to God's will for human sexuality. While a person's homosexual or bi-sexual attraction may have complex and differing origins, and the implication of this call to sexual purity is costly, we believe the grace of God is sufficient for such a calling.'¹⁰⁹ This paragraph is found also in the 2023 **Manual**.¹¹⁰

In July 2019, following Barack Obama's support for same-sex marriage, the Board reacted in statement on marriage by referencing the statement on human sexuality, and indicating that 'The Church of the Nazarene believes that every man or woman should be treated with dignity, grace, and holy love, whatever their sexual orientation. However, we continue to firmly hold the position that the homosexual lifestyle is sinful and is contrary to the Scriptures.'¹¹¹ However, the statement as it appears in November 2019 no longer contains these sentences,¹¹² and the link provided by the statement on marriage is no longer valid. As the Church of the Nazarene is an international organization, there can of course be local variations, but the Eurasia region Church does not have any statements on sexuality nor marriage.

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.salvationarmy.org/resources/living-faith-today/>; accessed 13 September 2025.

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/about-us/policies/inclusion#:~:text=The%20Salvation%20Army%20is%20a%20Christian%20Church,demeaning%20or%20mistreating%20anyone%20for%20any%20reason.>; accessed 13 September 2025.

¹¹⁰ <https://nazarene.org/news/bgs-statement-on-human-sexuality/>; accessed 14 September 2025.

¹¹¹ <https://nazarene.org/news/bgs-statement-on-human-sexuality/>; accessed 14 September 2025; emphasis original)

¹¹² Available here for download: <https://nazarene.org/manual/>; accessed 14 September 2025. The paragraph is found on page 56. It also condemns unmarried sex, other forms of inappropriate sexual bonding, extra-marital sex, divorce, polygamy, polyandry.

¹¹³ <https://nazarene.org/news/Church-of-the-nazarene-statement-on-marriage/>; accessed 14 September 2025.

¹¹⁴ <https://nazarene.org/news/bgs-statement-on-human-sexuality/>; accessed 14 September 2025.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Finally, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is possibly the most openly anti-LGBT Protestant Church that responded to RICE 2025. The issue of the blessing of same-sex unions in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland led to conflicts in the Church. In 2006, the General Assembly voted to forbid its ministers from blessing same-sex relationships.¹¹³ It also opposed the legalization of same-sex marriage in the Republic of Ireland in 2015.¹¹⁴ In 2018, the General Assembly went so far as to state that 'same-sex couples are not eligible for communicant membership, nor are they qualified to receive baptism for their children. We believe that their outward conduct and lifestyle is at variance with a life of obedience to Christ.'¹¹⁵ This decision of the General Assembly was controversial and created division. Some members resigned in protest, for example a Presbyterian elder, Lord Alderdice, who later wrote a book about tolerance.¹¹⁶ 2018 was also the year that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland voted to loosen its ties with the Church of Scotland (historically at the origins of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland) because the latter had took some steps to let its ministers officiate same-sex unions.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/presbyterian-church-bans-blessing-of-gay-couples-1.785997>; accessed 30 September 2025.

¹¹⁴ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/presbyterian-church-sticks-to-its-position-on-gay-marriage-despite-plea-to-think-again/31311216.html>; accessed 30 September 2025.

¹¹⁵ Doctrine Committee Appendix 2 in General Assembly 2018 Annual Reports, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 88.

¹¹⁶ <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/people/alderdice-hopes-book-will-help-presbyterians-learn-tolerance-on-sexuality-3443969>; accessed 30 September 2025.

¹¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-44384389>; accessed 30 September 2025.

6.3. Presentations of the Scores

General Observations

Before analyzing the scores in more details, we can start with a first table that shows the total scores of each Church with their region and their Church family.

Overall Score

COUNTRY	CHURCH NAME	CHURCH FAMILY	RANK / OVERALL RANK	TOTAL SCORE	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POINTS	PERCENTILE
Sweden	Church of Sweden	Lutheran	1 / 4	48.5	93%	80–100%
Germany	Evangelical Church in Germany	Lutheran, Reformed and United	2 / 6	44	85%	
Netherlands	Protestant Church in the Netherlands	Lutheran and Reformed	3–4 / 7–8	40	77%	60–80%
Slovakia	Parish of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic Bratislava Staré Mesto	Lutheran	3–4 / 7–8	40	77%	
Switzerland	Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich	Reformed	5 / 10–11	34.5	66%	
Austria	Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria	Lutheran	6 / 12	32.5	63%	
Austria	Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession in Austria	Reformed	7 / 13	32	62%	
Finland	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland	Lutheran	8 / 16	31	60%	40–60%
Netherlands	The Salvation Army		9 / 17	30.5	59%	
France	United Protestant Church of France	Reformed and Lutheran	10 / 18	29.5	57%	

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

COUNTRY	CHURCH NAME	CHURCH FAMILY	RANK / OVERALL RANK	TOTAL SCORE	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POINTS	PERCENTILE
United Kingdom	Lutheran Church in Great Britain	Lutheran	11 / 19	29	56%	40–60%
Poland	Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland	Reformed	12 / 22–23	26.5	51%	
Netherlands	The Church of the Nazarene	Methodist	13 / 24	21.5	41%	
United Kingdom	Church of England	Anglican	14 / 25–26	21	40%	
Estonia	Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church	Lutheran	15 / 31	17.5	34%	20–40%
Sweden	Evangelical Free Church in Sweden	Baptist	16 / 33	11	21%	
Ireland / United Kingdom	Presbyterian Church in Ireland	Reformed	17 / 41–42	3	6%	0–20%

Switzerland and Slovakia are in lilac because they are local congregations and not national Churches.

We can begin with some overall observations about these results. The Churches that score over 50% are all Reformed or Lutheran (or United). The only Lutheran Church that scores below 50% is the Lutheran Church of Estonia, a country which scores 45.91% on the ILGA index (European Union average is 51.13% and the index for Europe is 41.85%).¹¹⁸ The only Reformed Church that scores below 50% is the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, a historically Reformed Church, situated in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (ILGA score for the United Kingdom is 45.65%; ILGA score for the Republic of Ireland is 62.84%), but it represents a conservative and traditionalist movement inside the Presbyterian Church, and maintains a strict adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) for example. Generally speaking, Lutheran and Reformed Churches score higher than other denominations. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is the only majority Church among the Protestant Churches, and while it has an average score among the Protestant Churches, it is the highest scoring Church among the majority Churches.

¹²⁰ See <https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org/countries/estonia/>; accessed 15 September 2025. In the public opinion part of the report, the researchers summarize the results of Estonia in the following manner: 'The latest survey by the Estonian Human Rights Centre revealed increasingly positive attitudes toward LGBTI people in Estonia, with notable shifts among non-Estonian speakers. Over half of respondents (56%) consider homosexuality completely or somewhat acceptable, with 64% of Estonian speakers and 39% of non-Estonian speakers expressing this view. However, 38% of respondents still regard homosexuality as somewhat or completely unacceptable, often citing perceptions of it as abnormal, unnatural, or untraditional.' The survey was conducted in 2023 but the Estonian Human Rights Centre and is available here: <https://humanrights.ee/en/attitudes-towards-lgbt-topics-estonia/>; accessed 15 September 2025.

Geographically, the Churches that score over 50% are almost all located in Western Europe. One exception is the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland. This however is related to the fact that three parishes (all located in Warsaw) among the eight that form the Reformed Church in Poland are identified by the co-researcher as inclusive parishes. The Church itself presents itself in the following manner: 'The Polish Evangelical Reformed Church holds what some call "traditional" and others "conservative" views regarding human sexuality. Opinion on these matters may differ depending on whom you talk to. However, both 'conservatives' and 'liberals' will agree that no matter our skin color, ethnicity, gender, political opinion or sexual orientation we are all welcome in God's House and called to live His Word.'¹¹⁹

It is also difficult to take into account the score connected to the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic, and the one connected to the Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich.

For the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic (EKAV), the score (76.8%, which is the equivalent of fourth place) is based on the answer of only one parish, situated in the Staré Mesto area of Bratislava. The score of this parish reflects the situation in which it finds itself, being a gay-friendly parish which is part of a rather homophobic Church. One can for example look at the public letter of three bishops of the ECAV, explaining why they would not attend a conference organized by the parish in Bratislava Staré Mesto, intended to reflect on the inclusion of LGBTI people in the Church. One small excerpt of the letter (translated via google translate) summarizes the position of the bishops on 22 September 2022: 'A person practicing homosexuality should be pastorally led to the decision to leave practiced homosexuality, not with threats and contempt, but with the greatest love and sensitivity that we are capable of.'¹²⁰ The score only reflects this urban parish in Bratislava, and cannot be taken to be representative of the national Church (the ECAV is the second largest Church in Slovakia, with 193 995 members according to the LWF's website).

The Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich is the biggest Church of the Swiss Reformed Protestant Church, but it is only one cantonal Church among the twenty-four cantonal Churches and the one Methodist Church that are part of the union.¹²¹ In the canton of Zurich, one can find a rainbow Church, called Mosaic Church.¹²² While many Reformed Churches in Switzerland offer the possibility of blessings for same-sex unions, the answers RICE 2025 received concern only the local context of the Church of the Canton of Zurich and cannot be taken to reflect the national union of Churches.

The scores of these two Churches are included in the overall tables, as they indicate a local reality which is not questioned by the national leadership. We note that five sets of answers received come from Western Europe, including here Nordic Countries (France, United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Netherlands, Finland, Sweden). Five questionnaires come from Central Europe (Poland, Germany, Slovakia, Austria, Switzerland). Eastern Europe is represented by Estonia.¹²³ However geography as a

¹²¹ <https://www.reformowani.pl/index.php/welcome>; accessed 15 September 2025.

¹²² <https://www.ecav.sk/aktuality/stanoviska-a-vyjadrenia/postoj-zboru-biskupov-ku-konferencii-kracajme-spolu>; accessed 15 September 2025.

¹²³ See <https://www.eks-eers.ch/fr/eglise/eglises-membres/>; accessed 15 September 2025.

¹²⁴ <https://www.mosaic-zuerich.ch/Church>; accessed 15 September 2025.

¹²⁵ This could of course be organized differently, according to how one situates Austria, Switzerland, Poland and Slovakia.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

criterion is not as important as confessional family. One can for example observe that the Church that ranks first and the one that ranks second to last are both located in Sweden. Also, for the United Kingdom, only the Lutheran Church in Great Britain scores higher than 50%. The lowest ranking Church is also situated inside the United Kingdom, in Northern Ireland, as well as in the Republic of Ireland.

The Churches that belong to the lower half of the table are not part of the Lutheran-Reformed world if they are situated in Western Europe or the Nordic Countries, countries that are affirmative of LGBTI people (like Sweden, the UK, and Holland). This is the case for the Salvation Army and the Church of the Nazarene (Methodist), both in the Netherlands, the Church of England (Anglican) in the UK, and the Evangelical Free Church (Baptist) in Sweden. The exception would be the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (Presbyterian; it belongs to the World Communion of Reformed Churches, but is not part of the CPCE), historically Reformed, and located in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. Lutheran or Reformed Churches situated in Central or Eastern Europe score lower if they are situated in countries that are less affirmative of LGBTI people (for example Estonia, but also Poland). Finally, it is also interesting to see that the two top scoring Churches (Church of Sweden and the Evangelical Church in Germany [EKD]) used to be majority Churches in their countries. The two lowest-scoring Churches (Evangelical Free Church in Sweden and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland) are two Churches that are characterized by a literal understanding of the Bible, viewed as the direct word of God. In contrast, most Lutheran or Reformed Churches adopt a more critical perspective when it comes to biblical texts, and work with the idea that the Bible is the word of God mediated through human beings and that it needs interpretation to be used to address issues in the contemporary world.

We can now see how scores vary depending on the group of indicators.

Score by category and by church

CHURCH	CATEGORY 1: INSTITUTIONAL EQUALITY AND NON- DISCRIMINATION (INDICATORS Q1–Q18)	CATEGORY 2: CHURCH PRACTICES (INDICATORS Q19–Q30)	CATEGORY 3: LANGUAGE, SPEECH AND SYMBOLS (INDICATORS Q31–Q39)	CATEGORY 4: PUBLIC POLICY (INDICATORS Q40–Q52)	TOTAL SCORE (PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POINTS)
ELC SWEDEN	17.5 (97%)	11.5 (96%)	8.5 (94%)	11 (85%)	48.5 (85%)
PC GERMANY	16.5 (92%)	10 (83%)	8 (89%)	9.5 (73%)	44 (73%)
PC NETHERLANDS	14 (78%)	10 (83%)	8 (89%)	8 (62%)	40 (62%)
BRATISLAVA PARISH, ELC SLOVAKIA	15 (83%)	10.5 (88%)	7.5 (83%)	7 (54%)	40 (54%)
CANTON ZURICH, PC SWITZERLAND	15 (83%)	8.5 (71%)	4.5 (50%)	6.5 (50%)	34.5 (50%)
ELC AUSTRIA	16 (89%)	9 (75%)	4.5 (50%)	3 (23%)	32.5 (23%)
REF AUSTRIA	14.5 (81%)	10 (83%)	5 (56%)	2.5 (19%)	32 (19%)
ELC FINLAND	13 (72%)	8.5 (71%)	4.5 (50%)	5 (38%)	31 (38%)
SALVATION ARMY NETHERLANDS	16 (89%)	5.5 (46%)	4 (44%)	5 (38%)	30.5 (38%)
PC FRANCE	13.5 (75%)	10 (83%)	4 (44%)	2 (15%)	29.5 (15%)
ELC GREAT BRITAIN UK	13.5 (75%)	9 (75%)	6 (67%)	0.5 (4%)	29 (4%)
REF POLAND	7.5 (42%)	7.5 (63%)	2.5 (28%)	9 (69%)	26.5 (69%)
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE NETHERLANDS	11.5 (64%)	4 (33%)	3.5 (39%)	2.5 (19%)	21.5 (19%)
CofE UK	9.5 (53%)	5 (42%)	3 (33%)	3.5 (27%)	21 (27%)
ELC ESTONIA	7.5 (42%)	6 (50%)	2 (22%)	2 (15%)	17.5 (15%)
EFC SWEDEN	6 (33%)	3 (25%)	1 (11%)	1 (8%)	11 (8%)
PRESBYTERIAN IRELAND	2.5 (14%)	0 (0%)	0.5 (6%)	0 (0%)	3 (0%)
TOTAL	209 (68%)	128 (63%)	77 (50%)	78 (35%)	492 (56%)
AVERAGE	12.3	7.5	4.5	4.6	28.9

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Indicators Q1–Q18: Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination

Before going more into detail for every Church by group of indicators, a few overall comments can be made. In general, all Churches score higher on indicators Q1–Q18 (Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination) and on indicators Q19–Q30 (Church Practices) than on indicators Q31–Q39 (Language, Speech and Symbols) and indicators Q40–Q52 (Public Policy). This might be because of anti-discrimination laws in Europe, that regulate employment and free speech. A notable exception is Poland which scores highest on indicators Q40–Q52 (Public Policy) and on indicators Q19–Q30 (Church Practices). The Presbyterian Church in Ireland scores low on every group of indicators, even if the first group of indicators (1–18) is the one where its score is highest (13.8%). Church of Sweden scores the highest consistently on all group of indicators, and the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) comes second consistently also. For the second group of indicators, Germany comes after the Bratislava Staré Mesto parish of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, but this parish does not reflect the orientation of the national Church. For the fourth group of indicators, the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) comes after the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland (for 0.5 points) but the co-researcher for the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland did not provide documents that support the inclusive public policy of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland, and there were no inclusive public statements found on the website either.

The scores on the groups of indicators confirms what has been observed for the overall scores. For indicators Q1–Q18 (Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination), 12 out of the 16 (if one takes the score of Salvation Army and Church of the Nazarene together) Churches score above 70%. The four Churches that score below are the Evangelical Free Church in Sweden (33.3%), The Church of England (52.7%), the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (13.8%) and the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland (41.6%). As argued above, the Churches not belonging to the Lutheran or Reformed group score lower than Lutheran or Reformed Churches no matter where they are situated in Europe (with the exception of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland), whereas the Reformed Church that scores lowest is located in Poland, which scores 20.5% on ILGA's Rainbow Map.¹²⁴

For indicators Q19–Q30 (Church Practices), 11 out of 16 Churches score above 70%. The five Churches that score below 70% are the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (50%), the Salvation Army and the Church of the Nazarene in the Netherlands (45.8%), the Church of England (41.65%), the Evangelical Free Church in Sweden (24.9%) and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (0%). Here too, the Churches that do not belong to the Lutheran or Reformed worlds score lower than others no matter where they are situated, with the two Churches that have a literal understanding of the Bible scoring much lower than the others, and being the only two Churches below 25%. The one Lutheran Church coming lowest is located in Estonia (45.91% in ILGA's rainbow map).

For indicators Q31–Q39 (Language, Speech and Symbols), the scores drop quite a bit. Only four Churches score above 70%, with Church of Sweden reaching 94.4%, the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) and the Protestant Church in the Netherland both reaching 88.8%, and the Bratislava Staré Mesto parish of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic scoring 83.3%. Most Churches (ten) score below 60%, and there are two scores under 20%. The two lowest scores are

¹²⁶ See <https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org/countries/poland/>; accessed 16 September 2025.

again the Free Evangelical Church in Sweden (11.1%) and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (5.5%). The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church is the Lutheran or Reformed Church that scores lowest (22%), which is coherent with its geographical location.

Finally, the drop in scores is even more marked for indicators Q40–Q52 (Public Policy). Here only Church of Sweden scores above 80%. The Evangelical Church in Germany (EDK), the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands are above 60%. Most Churches (12) score below 60%, with four Churches under 40% and six Churches below 20%. Here the differences between Lutheran or Reformed and other denomination is less marked, as is the impact of the geographical factor. Among the six Churches that score lower than 20%, one finds three Lutheran or Reformed Churches situated in Austria, France and Great Britain, and one Lutheran Church in Estonia.

Two observations can be proposed to explain why this group of indicators is the lowest scoring for Protestant Churches. It might reflect the lack of central organization of Protestant Churches, which makes public national statements rare. It is also indicative of the shyness of Churches to speak publicly and openly about LGBTI issues. Church of Sweden is the clear exception, and it does have a strong national identity. The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), with a score of 73%, does show that even a federation of independently organized Churches can have an inclusive and affirmative public discourse and inclusive public policies. At the same time, the absence of centralized public policy decided by a national organism means that even in Churches that are conservative (this is the case for Poland, Slovakia, and to some degree for the Free Evangelical Church in Sweden), there is the possibility of parishes being more open and more affirming of LGBTI people than the national Church. Contrarywise, in Churches that might have rather inclusive national policies (such as the possibility to bless same-sex marriage or union), parishes that are more conservative can refuse to implement affirmative policies (this is the case for example of the United Protestant Church of France). The position of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland deserve an additional comment. This Church is both historically Reformed and situated in Western Europe, in two countries that score higher than the European average on ILGA's rainbow map. In this case, rejection of LGBTI people seems to be constitutive of the identity of this particular Church and to contribute to the way in which the Church understands itself.

We can now add to these overall observations a more-detailed perspective, focused on each Church and each group of indicators.

6.4. Church-Related Observations in Relationship to Each Group of Indicators

Austria: Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria

32.5 points out of 52

62.4% (not in RICE 2020)

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

16 out of 18.

This Church is quite inclusive in its official documents. However, the co-researcher also indicates that some of the things mentioned in the documents do not match the reality of LGBTI people (indicators Q3, Q4, Q5, Q10) For indicators Q14 and Q17 (special blessing for trans people and ordination of LGBTI people), the co-researcher indicates that trans people would receive a special blessing depends heavily on the parish. Concerning ordination practice, it is not clear for the co-researcher if ordination is made regardless of gender identity. Concerning same-sex marriages or blessing ceremonies (indicator Q10), the co-researcher gave a full point although they mention that 'a quite substantial number of parishes and pastors can refuse to hold these ceremonies'. Thus, the lived-experience of LGBTI people might be less inclusive than the score for these indicators.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

9 out of 12

It is no problem for LGBTI people to work in the Church. For indicator Q25 (social acceptance of LGBTI people through rituals), the co-researcher gave 0.5 point, because the Church as an institution is what they call 'neutral', but local parishes promote social acceptance. For indicator Q29 (not support for anti-LGBTI associations), while the Church does not officially recognize any organization that promotes the heteronormative family, there exists a network for the renewal of the Church.¹²⁵ This network encourages a literal understanding of the Bible and stems from people involved in the Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria but does not correspond to the official position of the Church. There is also a queer association (EvanQueer)¹²⁶ which seems to have a more official link with the Church since it lists gay-friendly parishes (akzeptierend und offen a&o) recognizable by a label, the rainbow and the mention (akzeptierend & offen für Vielfalt).

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

5.5 out of 9

For the indicators concerning language and speech, the result is consistently 0.5 points, because there are differences between urban parishes and parishes in rural regions, which remain traditional. Out of the 32 gay-friendly Churches identified by EvanQueer, fourteen are found in Vienna for example. For indicator Q38 (taking into account of scientific research), the co-researcher indicates that they hope scientific knowledge will be taken into account in the discussion concerning gender and trans aspects. They indicate that this was the case for the resolution on homosexuality in 1996.

¹²⁷ www.christusbewegung.at; accessed 16 September 2025.

¹²⁸ <https://www.evanqueer.at/>; accessed 16 September 2025.

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

3 out of 13

This is where the Church scores the lowest even though it is the biggest Protestant Church in Austria, and would have the organization necessary to make public statements. It does however have an active role in ecumenical dialogue and participate in the elaboration of the Gender – Sexuality – Marriage – Family document of the CPCE.

Austria: Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession in Austria

32 points out of 52

61.44% (not in RICE 2020)

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

14.5 out of 18

Similarly to the Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria with which they are in communion, the Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession in Austria scores high in this category. It does not get full points because it scores 0 on indicators Q14 (special blessing for trans people), Q18 (LGBTI affirmative educational material for clergy). It also scores 0 on indicator Q7 (protocol for local congregations to become more affirmative) because, as the co-researcher says, ‘most of the parishes understand themselves as inclusive and accepting’, which seems to mean that specific material is not needed.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

10 out of 12

Here too the Church scores high concerning the functions of LGBTI people in the Church, although the co-researcher recognizes that while leadership functions are available to LGBTI people, it has not been fully implemented yet. There are three indicators where the Church does not score full points: Q23 (adoption and raising of children by LGBTI people); and half-points for Q28 and Q30, which concerns public support for LGBTI association (in the Church or civil society).

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

5 out 9

The Church scores high on indicators Q31, Q32 and Q33 (inclusive language, inclusive communication, display of LGBTI symbols). In its communication the Church is LGBTI friendly. This does not translate into liturgical language however or in educational material (0 for indicators Q34, Q35, Q36).

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

2.5 out of 13

This is the category in which the Church scores the lowest. Particularly, the indicators Q40, Q43, Q44, Q45, Q47, Q48, Q49, Q50, Q51, which would show active, public support for LGBTI people and/or associations are given a value of 0 by the co-researcher. This means that when it comes to what one could call a 'prophetic' word about LGBTI people (namely, the Church not just responding to existing concerns, but actively promoting better rights and a better life for LGBTI people) the Church scores lowest.

An additional note on indicator Q51: the co-researcher gave no point concerning the promoting of the inclusion of LGBTI people in ecumenical context and referred to the CPCE document **Gender – Sexuality – Marriage – Family**. This indicates at least some involvement in ecumenical issues, especially since both Austrian Churches are in communion and are both represented in the CPCE.

Estonia: Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

17.5 out of 52

33.6%

RICE 2020: 31.8% (15 out of 47)

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

7.5 out of 18

Here, the Church only scores full point on five indicators: Q3, Q9, Q13, Q15, Q16. There is no restriction based on gender or/and sexual identity for participation in communion, or belonging to the Church (although the co-researcher does indicate that acceptance of LGBTI people [indicator Q13] depends on individual congregations). One indicator of hope is Q9, where the co-researcher has indicated that, starting in 2025, the Church has introduced as an agenda the Church-wide discussion of LGBTI issues. On indicator Q3, concerning the Church's theology of unconditional equality, the co-researcher indicates that while the theology of the Church does acknowledge equality, and opposes hate crimes related to one's identity, "the Church does discriminate when it comes to the person becoming involved in the offices of the Church". There is ordination for women but not for LGBTI people (thus the half point for indicator Q17).

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

6 out of 12

In terms of indicators related to Church practices, the Church has recently appointed a LGBTI person to the general synod, which justifies the co-researcher giving 0.5 for indicator Q19. The Church also received a full point for indicator Q21 (employment of LGBTI people for non-ordained responsibilities), although the co-researcher indicates that this depended on the local congregation, and was not a Church-wide policy. Concerning indicator Q24, where the Church receives a full point (celibacy is not required), the co-researcher notes that the archbishop affirmed that he could not

demand celibacy of anyone, indicating at best passive acceptance of LGBTI clergy, or if one wants to interpret it with hope, an opening towards the ordination of LGBTI people. For indicator Q25, the co-researcher also indicated that some local congregations do promote social acceptance of LGBTI community in public rituals. Institutionally however, there is no public support of LGBTI associations. There is a possibility that things might change after the Church wide discussion, but there is no guarantee that things will evolve towards more support of LGBTI people.

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

2 out of 9

4 indicators get 0.5 points: Q31, Q33, Q37, Q38. For indicators Q31 and Q33 (inclusive language, use of LGBTI symbols) this is connected to local specificities and contexts. For example, for indicator Q31, the co-researcher indicates that depending on the context, the bishop can use inclusive and affirmative language towards LGBTI people. Possibly, indicator Q33 also can mean that some congregations locally allow LGBTI symbols to be used in their spaces. In general, however, the Church does not show support to LGBTI people whether in official communication, liturgical language or educational material (0 points for indicators Q32, Q34, Q35, Q36).

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

2 out of 13

Not surprisingly the lack of positive communication about LGBTI people is also reflected in the low score for public policy. The only public statement mentioned by the Church after the legalization of same-sex marriage in Estonia (2023) indicated that for same-sex relationship a civil union was sufficient.

The situation has not changed significantly for this Church since RICE 2020

Finland: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

31 out of 52

59.52% (not in RICE 2020)

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

13 out of 18

The relatively low score of the Evangelical Church of Finland for these indicators reflects the tense situation of the Church of Finland, something noticed by the co-researcher. In June 2025, the Church stated in a pastoral note of the Bishop's Conference that it could officiate same-sex marriages. However, as the co-researcher say, two bishops disagree with this note, and not all pastors accept to marry same-sex couples. The Church's official teaching about marriage remains that it is a union between a man and a woman.

One should note that for indicators Q1 and Q2, the responder gave no point, since the legal documents of the Church do not mention LGBTI people and diversity in any

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

kind of way at all. These absence of references does not necessarily mean a negative evaluation of LGBTI people. For indicator Q2, the absence of point can reflect either the absence of necessity to mention diversity, or a lack of awareness of the issue.

For indicator Q3, the co-researcher indicates that theological affirmations about the welcome of all people are present in the Church's theology, but that for some, that does not apply to marriage, which 'is only for a man and a woman'. Concerning indicators Q4 and Q5 (on the use of the Bible and Tradition to condemn LGBTI people), the co-researcher indicates that LGBTI people feel like the Bible can be used as a normative instrument and that tradition is used to condemn same-sex marriages, but not other acts or persons. They also specify that many LGBTI people experience tradition as something that condemns them as human beings.

LGBTI people thus experience the Church as rather condemning, even though, as the co-researcher mentions, the Church has a protocol towards more inclusivity. This document does not mention LGBTI people explicitly. It refers to the Finnish Equality Act, that governs the work environment. It claims that the Church's inclusivity needs to go beyond that. The passages of Scripture used to think about this are 1 Cor 1:18–25; Luke 4:16–19 and Deuteronomy 10:17–18. Deuteronomy 10 mentions how God takes cares of the widow, the orphan, the migrant. Luke 4:16–19 uses Jesus's opening preaching that proclaims a year of Jubilees (using the prophet Isaiah), setting the captives free, giving their sight back to the blind, and freeing the oppressed. Both passages allow for social justice but are difficult to apply directly to people marginalized because of their gender identity or their sexuality. 1 Cor 1:18–25 is a more surprising passage, since it preaches a theology of the cross (central to Luther and Lutheran thought) but is less directly applicable to the question of inclusivity. Not indications are given in this document to help with biblical hermeneutics. The co-researcher notes however that the Church is in the process of 'developing affirmative materials', towards a safe congregation, and to support young queer people in the parishes (see indicator Q18, which gets half a point).

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

8.5 out of 12

Institutionally, the Church gets full points for including LGBTI people in leadership functions, or for other tasks inside the Church. As an institution, the Church supports Pride, but the co-researcher notes that the implication of each region and each parish vary greatly. It is also important to see that, as the co-researcher highlights, there are 'revival movements (such as laestadianism and new pietism) in the Church that promote a traditional vision of family', that carries a 'negative inclination towards LGBTI people'. The picture that emerges is thus of a Church for which same-sex marriages is a divisive issue.

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

4.5 out of 9

This divided situation also explains the score for the indicators connected to communication. The Church gets half a point for indicators Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34, Q36, Q37, Q38, with the comment by the co-researcher that the language is mostly affirmative, but some expressions are

less so. The co-researcher gives as example the fact that God is called 'Father', never 'Mother'. When it comes to taking into account scientific research, the co-researcher gives half a point, noting that LGBTI people can feel like the only research considered supports 'conservative notions'. The division of the Church is also clear in the co-researcher's comment on indicator Q39. While they give a full point for the Church acknowledging its involvement in discrimination of LGBTI people, they also indicate that LGBTI people will experience that only some Church leaders explicitly admit this involvement.

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

5 out of 13

The public policy of the Church is not supportive of LGBTI people. As the co-researcher indicates for indicator Q41, there are documents 'which highlight the safety of LGBTI people', presumably also to be in agreement with the Equal Act. The documents mentioned by the co-researcher concern safety in general, and are not specific to LGBTI people. The Church has however publicly expressed its rejection of 'gender reassignment' treatments and underlines how dangerous these treatments can be, while acknowledging that they do take place marginally and rarely in certain revival movements. The Church also publicly stated its support for supporting people who are suffering from gender dysphoria and affirmed that gender identity is an essential part of an individual's right to self-determination.¹²⁷

France: United Protestant Church of France (EPUdF)

29.5 out of 52

56.64% (not in RICE 2020)

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

13.5 out of 18

For these indicators, one should take care to note that the relatively high score is very much dependent upon local practices. This is related to the ecclesiological organization of the EPUdF which gives freedom to regional parishes. There is only one national document pertaining to LGBTI people and that is the 2015 decision by the national synod to authorize the blessing of same-sex unions. Even for that though, the decision gives the possibility to single parishes or pastors to refuse to bless same-sex unions for motives of 'conscience'.¹²⁸ The co-researcher notes that local practice can vary for indicators Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q10, Q11. The co-researcher also indicates that, while official Church documents do not explicitly mention LGBTI persons (indicator Q1) and do not insist on the importance of diversity (indicator Q2), some parishes are particularly careful to present themselves as safe places for LGBTI people and to pay attention to diversity. It is also the case that in some parishes, there is a willingness to accompany the process of becoming more inclusive and affirmative (indicator Q7) even if there is no Church wide policy. Note also that indicator Q5 is not relevant for the EPUdF as the co-researcher notes that in this Church 'we do not refer to Tradition'.

¹²⁹ For the public statements see: <https://evl.fi/uutishuone/pinnalla-nyt/translaki/> and <https://evl.fi/kansalaisaloite-eheytyshoittojen-kieltamiseksi-on-kannatettava/>; accessed 16 September 2025.

¹³⁰ See <https://acteurs.epudf.org/decision-du-synode-national-2015-a-sete-7601/>; accessed 12 September 2025.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

10 out of 12

The Church as an institution is good at employing LGBTI people and at not discriminating on the basis of sexuality or gender-identity for clerical and other positions (indicators Q19, Q20, Q21, Q22). In terms of advocacy, or affirming ministry for LGBTI people (indicators Q25, Q27, Q28, Q30), the co-researcher chose to give half a point, because things are organized at the local level, and not the national level. Local parishes can choose to implement programs that are supportive of LGBTI people, and/or queer groups inside the community, but it is not a national requirement. Some parishes are identified as gay-friendly through word of mouth (and/or sometimes visible signs) and some parishes are known to be unsafe space for gay people, again mostly through word of mouth.

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

4 out of 9

Here too the strong local organization of the Church is important to consider. The co-researcher gave half a point for indicators Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34 because while there is no national policy on language, communication, use of building, themes in worship, some local parishes celebrate thematized public worship (like TDOR, IDAHOBIT), they will display rainbow flags (etc.) in worship spaces and will systematically use inclusive language. But this is not a national policy. The same is true for indicator Q35: the liturgical language is not sensitive to gender issues and sexual orientations at a national level, but some parishes will systematically adapt the liturgy to be sensitive to gender issues and sexual orientation. This is also valid for educational material (indicator Q36): as the co-researcher says, ‘at a national level, the material omits gender and sexuality issues’ but local communities do address these issues.

Next to the synod decision about the blessing of same-sex unions, one needs to mention the fact that the Church ‘strongly condemns conversion therapies.’ This is evidenced by a public statement of the Protestant Federation of France, to which the Church belongs.¹²⁹

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

2 out of 13

Again, the lack of superstructure in the Church affects this result. Because the EPUdF is a multitudinous Church, it does not propose public statements about LGBTI issues, as it knows that this issue would most likely split a Church that is already rather small (and issued out of the merger of the Lutheran and Reformed Church).

Besides the condemnation of conversion therapies and the decision to allow the blessing of same-sex unions, there are no public statements of the Church about any issues related to LGBTI people. The low score of the EPUdF is partly connected to the strong autonomy of its regions, and the independence of the parishes that can handle gender issues and issues connected to sexuality with a lot of freedom. One line, however, is law, and conversion therapies are for example condemned by the Church and local parishes would not be allowed to implement them.

¹²⁹ <https://www.Protestants.org/la-federation-Protestante-de-france-reprouve-les-therapies-de-conversion/>; accessed 16 September 2025.

Germany: Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)

44 out of 52

84.48%

RICE 2020: 75.26% (35.5 out of 47)

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

16.5 out of 18

The EKD has almost full marks for this part, indicating that theologically and institutionally, the Church is affirmative of LGBTI people. On indicator Q1, the co-researcher only gave 0.5 point noting that in the official documents of the Church today, LGBTI people are mentioned in an affirmative manner. They explain the half-point by noting that 'there is still a document left from 1995 that is to [be] revised' (Mit Spannungen Leben) which is not affirmative of LGBTI people. For indicator Q4 (where the Church gets a full point, on their use of the Bible), the co-researcher highlights that the EKD, as a federation of independent Churches, reflects various theologies and opinions, but that the majority of the Churches represented in the EKD 'do not read the Bible as a guide to gender roles, not even heteronormatively'. The role of the Bible as establishing a norm is called into question. The same is true concerning tradition. The co-researcher indicates that indicator Q5 is inappropriate for the EKD, 'since tradition cannot dictate what is normative today [...] especially in Reformed Churches'. For the co-researcher, this entire indicator is unhelpful for Protestant Churches.

The situation of the EKD as a federation of Churches is also reflected in the response to indicator Q7, about a protocol for local congregations. There can be no general guide for inclusivity since the EKD brings together independent Churches. However, the co-researcher indicates that 'the youth organizations of the members Churches of the EKD, Evangelische Jugend, are generally driving the process towards more diversity and affirmation, not only in gender and sexuality issues'. The diversity of the EKD also means that for indicator Q9 (regional agency), the co-researcher indicates that some 'very conservative congregations' oppose the rights of LGBTI people. This is also the case for the right to officiate same-sex marriages, where two member Churches (out of 20) have reservations about equality with marriage. Some regions, but not all, have service of 'public special blessings for trans* and their transitions/ name giving' (indicator Q14). Additionally, and this is specific to the context of Germany, where religious education happens at state schools, the regional Churches propose the teaching materials for schools, and this material also covers 'LGBTIQ topics throughout. The topic is also covered in confirmation classes at Churches'.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

10 out of 12

Apart for indicators Q23 (adoption for LGBTI people), Q27 (official LGBTI affirmative ministry), Q28 (LGBTI association for clergy) and Q29 (no support for anti LGBTI association) where the co-researchers gave 0.5 points, the EKD gets full marks for all other indicators. The co-researcher remarks (for indicator Q25) that the Churches regularly take part in LGBTI manifestations, such as IDAHOBIT and TDOR, and fly inclusive rainbow flags.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

There is also one position for LGBTI affirmative pastoral ministry in Hanover, but the co-researcher indicates that in general 'no new thematic positions' of any kind are being created, due to austerity policies. At the same time, the co-researcher pointed out that 'in all member Churches, the gender equality departments [...] also work on queer issue'.

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

8 out of 9

This is one of the highest scores when it comes to official Church communication and public position. Half points were given for indicators Q35 (inclusive liturgy) and Q39 (acknowledgment of past and present discrimination). The comments of the co-researcher in this section are particularly helpful. For indicator Q35, concerning the liturgy, the co-researcher clarifies that there is a 'quiet [sic, probably quite is meant] big debate' about the topic of inclusive liturgies. Inclusive liturgies and agendas exist in the EKD, thus it seems that there is a public, political will to make Church services more inclusive (in contrast to the French Protestant Church for example, where the initiative is left to regional Churches) but the co-researcher notes that 'there are still too many worship services in Germany that are not formulated and conceived inclusively'. The public, political will of the EKD can for example be seen in the closing sermon during the 2023 Kirchentag (a meeting organized every other year by lay people for the members of the EKD and for European Protestants, it brings together around 130 000 people), in Nürnberg, where one of the lines of the sermon was 'Gott ist queer'.¹³⁰ Regionally this is translated in the fact that about a quarter of regional Churches have made confessions of guilt about their treatment of LGBTI people (indicator Q39).

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

9.5 out of 13

The results of this section are colored by the co-researcher's remark that in general the EKD 'rarely issues public statements on current political and legal issues'. The co-researcher also indicates that 'in our understanding Church is not a NGO for queer issues'. This absence of public statements explains the half point given for indicators Q41, Q44, Q45, Q46, Q47, Q48, Q50 which all concern public statements. Indicators Q42 and Q43 get full point because the general attitude of the EKD is one that favors 'freedom of opinion, faith and conscience in general'. For indicator Q40, the co-researcher indicates that the confessions of guilt mentioned for indicator Q39 contain calls for forgiveness. Indicator Q49 gets a full point since the EKD contributes inclusive material for education in schools. Indicator Q51 also gets a full point: regional Churches of the EKD which act as individual members in ecumenical settings such as the World Council of Churches or the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, 'call for LGBTIQ inclusion in ecumenical relationships'.

¹³² The documents from the 2023 Kirchentag can be downloaded here: <https://www.kirchentag.de/programm-verteiler>; accessed 16 September 2025.

Great Britain: Lutheran Church in Great Britain (LCiGB)

29 out of 52

55.68% (not in RICE 2020)

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

14.5 out of 18

The co-researcher refers to the Church's 'Human sexuality and relationships Common statement of the Ministerium Lutheran Church in Great Britain 4 March 2023',¹³¹ which establish most of the official inclusive position of the Church. For example, the document does mention LGBTI identities in a non-negative manner (full point on indicator Q1). The statement also delineates a theology that allows to welcome LGBTI people with no conditions (indicator Q3) although the co-researcher does indicate that 'The LCiGB has also more conservative congregations where sexuality related matters wouldn't be addressed at all.'. This restriction explains the half point on indicator Q3 (inclusive theology). Finally, the co-researcher highlights the fact that the language of the document is rather heteronormative in its language but 'it has been perceived as fully inclusive, and especially in Church ministry there's no heteronormative aspect.' Indicators Q4, Q5, Q6, Q8, Q9 (use of the Bible, use of tradition, Church policy, ministry to children, local agency) also get full points, being backed by the 'Human sexuality' statement. For indicator Q9 (the possibility for local parishes to have their own discussion on LGBTI agency), the co-researcher indicates that the possibility exists, sometimes with the result that some parishes can express more conservative views, for example decide to not fully be inclusive, perform a blessing of a same-sex union, rather than a marriage, or delegate the blessing of a same-sex union to a more affirming pastor. There are local variations. Concerning indicator Q14 (special blessing for transgender people), which gets no point, the co-researcher indicates that a liturgy for special blessing for transgender person does not exist, but it also has not been requested.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

9.5 out of 12

The Church is quite small (only 4 congregations in Great Britain) so there has only be one openly LGBTI person in the leadership, but the co-researcher indicates that they feel 'rather confident that all identities would be welcomed' (indicator Q19). Consequently indicators Q20, Q21 and Q22 also get full points, concerning the employment of openly LGBTI people. For indicator Q23 (adoption and raising of children by LGBTI people), the co-researcher gives a full point and indicates that there has been no such cases in the Church. There is also some local variation mentioned for indicator Q25, where the co-researcher notes that it could be between half a point and a full point, and indicates that the congregation in London takes part in Pride activities. Indicator Q27 (LGBTI affirming pastoral ministry) also receives half a point: the ministry happens under the responsibility of an umbrella organization (Council of Lutheran Churches) which includes an interest group called 'Lutherans Inclusive'.

¹³³ <https://LutheranChurch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/LCiGB-Human-Sexuality-statement.pdf>; accessed 16 September 2025.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

6 out of 9

Language and communication are rated as inclusive (indicators Q31 and Q32 get a full point). For the presence of LGBTI symbols in Church, or the level of inclusiveness for liturgical language, as well as the thematization of gender issues and sexuality in public worship (indicators Q33, Q34, Q35), the evidence is less undivided, meaning these indicators each get half a point, possibly reflecting the lack of national policy (especially for indicator Q34) or the difficulties in creating inclusive liturgies.

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

0.5 out of 13

Almost no point for these indicators, except for a half point concerning ecumenical activity (indicator Q51), possibly related to the small size of the Church and the lack of resources connected with it.

The Netherlands: Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN)

41 out of 52

78.72%

RICE 2020 76.32% (36 out of 47)

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

14 out of 18

Here too (as was the case for the EKD and the EPuF) we see that local differences have an impact on the scores, in a Church born of the merger of many different regional Churches. For example, as the co-researcher indicates ‘the Church order requires local Churches to make policy’ concerning LGBTI blessings. The content of the policy is not predetermined, so ‘in practice, according to the co-researcher, the accessibility of the offices and the use of a liturgy/order of service regarding the name giving/transition of trans* people can differ’ (see indicator Q9). The same is true concerning same-sex marriages (indicator Q10). In this case, the language of the Church order is not fully equal (indicators Q1, Q2, Q6 and Q10): the Church indicates that marriage is only between a man and a woman but mentions ‘other life commitments’ when speaking about same-sex relationships. The Church constructs relationships in a heteronormative way, as the co-researcher observes: ‘referring to same-sex relations as ‘relations in love and faithfulness’ (we think they use this narrative to make LG-relationships acceptable by a large portion of the Church membership)’. The Dutch word used for the blessings of marriage and of same-sex relations is also not the same: ‘inzegenen’ for heterosexual marriages and ‘zegenen’ for ‘alternative relations’, thus creating a difference in quality in these blessings.

While the national organization does not restrict the possibility of LGBTI people to access ordained ministry, local Churches are free to refuse a LGBTI minister (or a female minister) and have to make this public in their local documents. The co-researcher cites as example the local Church in Zwijndrecht, paragraph 2.2.4. of the local document. The book of common prayer has a liturgy/order of service for name giving/transition of trans* people, but it is up to local Churches whether they use it or not.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

10 out of 12

The responses indicate that at the national level, the Church is generally speaking affirmative and inclusive. For example, in the case of indicator Q21 (employment of LGBTI people), the co-researcher mentions that the 'national Church follows the laws on non-discriminations and employment unconditionally'. As a comment to indicator Q25 (promoting social acceptance through rituals), the co-researcher adds that 'members of the executive committee [of the Church] are actively present at pride services etc. In public representations the Church actively supports LGBTI acceptance'. Occasionally it will work with the Association of Queer Theologians (indicator Q28). It has a more public national presence than, for example, the EPUdF which is also a federation of local Churches. At the regional level, affirmative and inclusive practices can vary. For example, the co-researcher indicates that the Protestant Church in Amsterdam 'openly supports and participates in protest meeting [against LGBTI discrimination] and Pride activities' (indicator Q30). At the same time, some congregations can require celibacy for LGBTI people (indicator Q24) and the 'Gereformeerde Bond' (a 'conservative identity organization within the PKN') will support initiatives that promote heteronormative family as the cornerstone of Church and society (indicator Q29). Overall, however, Church practices are supportive.

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

8 out of 9

The Church gets almost full marks here. Two indicators get half points. Indicator Q31 concerns the language used by Church leaders. The co-researcher indicates that the 'national Church will use inclusive and affirmative language when the equal position of LGBTI persons is questioned by others'. The half-point presumably reflects the fact that some local leaders might not use inclusive language all the time. For indicator Q34, the half point is connected to the fact that the PKN does not propose 'national public worship initiatives for/on any occasion.' It is the regional and local entities that have the initiative. This is reflected by the comment of the co-researcher on indicator Q33, where they write: 'A growing number of local Churches have rainbow services and use LGBTI related symbols in these services'. The national level also proposes resources that the local congregations can use, such as liturgical orders of service for naming trans* people, and for same-sex unions, as well as educational material for youth work (indicators Q35 and Q36).

Finally, the Church gets a full point for indicator Q39, since, as the co-researcher writes, 'the national Church participated in the declaration against violence against homosexuals [...] in 2011, renewed in 2021, which also acknowledges the involvement of discrimination'. The Church at a national level thus takes responsibility for its involvement in discrimination.

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

8 out of 13

One needs to say something about the score in this later part. It looks like the Church would deserve a full point on indicator Q52 (the Church joins with local Churches in promoting LGBTI inclusion) or possibly half a point since it might depend on local practices, but

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

the co-researcher forgot to respond to this question, indicating the involvement of the Church in the declarations against violence against homosexuals in 2011 and 2021. The co-researcher later confirmed via private communication that one point should be attributed and this was counted as such in the final score. For indicators Q47, Q48, Q49 and Q50, the co-researcher notes that the Church does not speak proactively, but that if it is asked by the media, it will make positive statements. This results in a score of 2.5 out of 4 for these indicators. Another interesting observation about the indicators in this section, is that for some indicators, the value is either no point (indicator Q44), half a point (indicator Q45) or a full point (indicator Q46) depending at what stage the discussion on this topic is. For indicator Q44, the dialogue needs to start on gender-related rights of LGBTI people. For indicator Q45 (reproductive rights of LGBTI people), the discussion is happening now, and for indicator Q46 (kinship related rights of LGBTI people), the conversation is presumably more advanced, with the decision to bless same-sex unions (albeit using a different term).

The Netherlands: 1. The Salvation Army and 2. The Church of the Nazarene

25.5 out of 52

48.96% (not in RICE 2020)

The analysis of the responses is made a bit more complicated by the fact that the co-researcher gave values for two Churches in the questionnaire (Salvation Army and Church of the Nazarene), sometimes distinguishing the value between the two Churches, and sometimes not. The analysis separates the results for both Churches taken together and then gives values for the Church of the Nazarene and for the Salvation Army also.

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

13 out of 18 for both Churches

11.5 out of 18 for Church of the Nazarene

16 out of 18 for Salvation Army

Only 17 answers were submitted. There was no answer for indicator Q10, just the comment that the question of blessing same-sex union was new for both Churches. There is no way to reconstruct what value the co-researcher would have given, but one can imagine probably no point. For indicator Q14, the co-researcher forgot to give a response, but from the comment ('They are welcome as a person in both Churches'), it seems the value should be one point. This is how the values were counted (no point for indicator Q10, 1 point for indicator Q14). For several indicators (Q1, Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q16), the co-researcher indicates that Salvation Army should get a full point and the Church of the Nazarene a half point. These indicators have to do with theology (Q4, Q5) and legal documents or/and Church policies (Q1, Q2, Q6, Q7, Q8). At the level of theology and Church policy, the Salvation Army in the Netherlands is more affirmative than the Church of the Nazarene. This is also reflected in indicator Q16, where the co-researcher adds that in the Salvation Army 'even officers (pastors) are allowed to have same-sex partners', whereas for the Church of the Nazarene, the practice is not open.

One should also note that indicator Q17 is given a full point, on the basis that women are allowed as pastors and leaders, but it is unclear how things stand for LGBTI people. Overall, it looks like both Churches are in the preliminary steps of creating a reflection about inclusivity when

it comes to LGBTI persons, and that their theology, in particular the unconditional welcome of God for all people, provides tools for this reflection. The co-researcher refers to a formal process concerning believing and homosexuality started in 2023 and indicates for indicator Q18 that interest for providing affirmative theological educational material is growing.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

5.5 out of 12 for both Churches

4 out of 12 for The Church of the Nazarene

5.5 out of 12 for the Salvation Army

There is little evidence that either the Church of the Nazarene or the Salvation Army put into place a safe environment for LGBTI people. In particular, neither Church gets any point for indicator Q24 (celibacy is not a requirement specific to LGBTI people). For several indicators where the co-researcher has given no point, they also specify that ‘it has to grow’. This is the case for indicators Q28 (support to an LGBTI association for clergy), Q29 (no support for organization that promote traditional heteronormative family), Q30 (support for advocacy groups for LGBTI people). For indicator Q30, the co-researcher indicates that this type of support is ‘normal’ for the Salvation Army. The co-researcher qualifies the half-point given to indicators Q19 and Q20 by saying that the presence of women and openly LGBTI people in leadership functions and in the making of Church policy is ‘growing since the last few years’. There is also a difference between Salvation Army and Church of the Nazarene when it comes to LGBTI employment for non-ordained positions (indicators Q20 and Q21). The co-researcher notes that the Salvation army employs LGBTI people even in its headquarters, while the Church of the Nazarene only does so at a local level. Both Churches get full points for indicators Q25 (social acceptance of LGBTI people in its public rituals) and Q26 (social ministry for LGBTI people), with the justification that both Churches support social religion, while there is no open official LGBTI affirmative pastoral ministry (indicator Q27) for these Churches.

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

3.5 out of 9 for both Churches

3.5 for Church of the Nazarene

4 for Salvation Army

There are less differences mentioned here by the co-researcher for the Salvation Army and the Church of the Nazarene. Both Churches get no point for indicators Q32, Q35 and Q36 (inclusive communication, inclusive liturgical language, and affirmative educational material) possibly showing an unwillingness to change things that have to do with Church practices too quickly. This seems to be confirmed by the co-researcher’s comment about indicator Q32, where they indicate ‘it must grow and [get] better’. Both Churches get half a point for indicators Q31 (inclusive language by Church leaders), Q33 (use of LGBTI symbols in Church spaces), Q34 (gender issues and sexuality as being thematized), and Q37 (interconnectedness of issues about justice and inclusivity). Both Churches insist on the need to accept all people, which allows for some openness towards LGBTI people. However, this movement cannot be entirely public yet, as the co-researcher’s comment on indicator Q33 shows: ‘there is some use of LGBTI symbols, but it’s not entirely open’. Finally, both Churches get full points on indicator Q38, to

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

indicate that both Churches actively take into account the latest research on gender and sexuality, which might explain why they are willing to start a process of becoming more affirmative, even if this process is only at its very beginning. Finally, and this might be due to international polemics, the co-researcher indicates that the Salvation Army might deserve a full point on indicator Q39, highlighting that the Salvation Army has acknowledged its involvement in the discrimination of LGBTI people.

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

5 out of 13 for both Churches

2.5 out of 13 for Church of the Nazarene

5 out of 13 for Salvation Army

The score for the public policy section is weak for both Churches. For indicators Q41 and 42, the co-researcher distinguishes the position of the Salvation Army and of the Church of the Nazarene explicitly, indicating that the Salvation Army put into place an official Church order, whereas the Nazarenes work at a local level. This also shows the different organization of the two Churches, and their means of action. There are no points for indicators Q40 (public apology), Q43 (public statement about the right of political organization), Q44 (public statements about the gender-related rights of LGBTI people), Q46 (public statements about kinship-related rights), Q51 (promotion of LGBTI rights in international settings and/or ecumenical settings), Q52 (promotion of LGBTI inclusion with other Churches). This indicates that neither Church is ready to publicly state support for LGBTI people, and also that the situation in the Netherlands is probably a bit different than in other countries, supported by a comment of the co-researcher: 'Both Churches are international Churches [...] The Army works in 135 countries, and the Nazarene are represented in 165 countries, but LGBT+ outside the Netherlands is very different'. Two additional comments: the co-researcher highlights the implication of the Salvation Army in issues concerning labour rights of LGBTI people (full point for indicator Q47), while at the same time stating that neither Church is political (explaining the no point on indicator Q43, right of political organization for LGBTI people). This could be discussed, as the Salvation Army in particular occupies a political place at least in some countries, and precisely around LGBTI questions.

Poland: Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland

26.5 out of 52

50.88% (not in RICE 2020)

This Church is formed out of eight congregations in Poland, and among these eight parishes, three are identified by the co-researcher as having inclusive attitudes

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

7.5 out of 18

There are full points given to indicators Q12, Q13, Q15 which have to do with participation in communion, acceptance of LGBTI people as members of the Church, and baptism of children. Most Churches get full points for these, reflecting a general practice of

welcoming people inside the Church without asking questions. It is more interesting to see that the Church also gets a full point on indicator Q9 (permission to have discussion and agency on LGBTI issues for local parishes), even though this also reflects the typical Protestant organization of Churches, with a less centralized government. In the case of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland, the Church wide discussion happens in response to an initiative of the Synod who has initiated 'a Church-wide discussion on the ordination of non-heteronormative persons'. The co-researcher indicates that parishes are at the moment working out their positions. Since the co-researcher also indicates for indicators Q1 (legal documents mention LGBTI people in a non-negative way), Q2 (importance of diversity), Q3 (inclusive theology), Q5 (use of tradition), Q8 (inclusive ministry to children) – where the Church gets either no point or half a point – that the point system applies for most of the eight parishes, with three having an inclusive attitude, the discussion at a national level will most likely reflect the tensions borne out of some parishes being inclusive, while the others are not. The Church's theology and its legal documents seem to be divided concerning the rights of LGBTI persons. For example, the Church does not allow blessings for same-sex marriages and does not recognize same-sex marriages or civil unions (indicators Q10 and Q11) but in 2024, one of the parishes in Warsaw promoted blessings for same-sex unions, and ten couples received an ecumenical blessing. Finally, indicators Q16 and Q17 receive half a point since women are accepted in seminaries and are ordained.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

8.5 out of 12

A few indicators get a full point: Q20 (involvement of women and LGBTI people in policy making), Q21 (employment of LGBTI people for non-ordained tasks), Q22 (employment of LGBTI people in services to society), Q26 (ministry to LGBTI people). There is some openness towards openly LGBTI people working for the Church, but the Church does not ordain openly LGBTI people and only gets half a point for the presence of openly LGBTI people in leading functions. When it comes to promoting acceptance of LGBTI community in public rituals, the Church gets half a point, presumably because three out of eight parishes are LGBTI friendly, even though the co-researcher did not clarify this. Most of the indicators in this section get half a point (Q19, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q28, Q29, Q30) reflecting the fact that support of LGBTI people is not a general position of the Church but is connected specifically to three inclusive parishes. This can be seen also in the score for indicator Q27, where the Church gets no point, indicating that there is no official LGBTI-affirmative pastoral ministry in the Church as a whole. This is confirmed in indicators Q31 and Q32, where the Church does not get any point indicating that official, national communication is not supportive of LGBTI people.

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

5 out of 9

As already mentioned above, the official communication of the Church is not inclusive or affirmative towards LGBTI people (indicators Q31 and Q32). Local initiatives can display some support for LGBTI people. Three parishes (out of eight) will use LGBTI related symbols in their buildings (indicator Q33). In Warsaw, there is also a IDAHOBIT service every year even if gender and sexuality are not necessarily being thematized at a national level (indicator Q34 gets a half point). This is reflected in the liturgical language

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

not being sensitive to gender issues and sexual orientation (no point for indicator Q35) and in the absence of educational material which is affirmative towards LGBTI people (indicator Q36). It is important to distinguish between what happens at a local level in inclusive parishes and what is going on at a national level, with the hope that the work made on the ground might have some repercussions on the discourse at the national level.

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

10 out of 13

The high score in this section is a bit surprising considering the other results in the questionnaire, notably the fact that indicators Q20 (involvement of LGBTI people in church's policy) and Q31 (inclusive language) get no points. In this section, many of the indicators concerned with public statements (Q40, Q41, Q42, Q43, Q48, Q50) get full points, and most of the others (Q44, Q45, Q46, Q47, Q51) get half a point. Only indicator Q49 (public statements about education in public schools) gets no point. Indicators Q51 and Q52 (promotion of LGBTI inclusion in ecumenical settings and joining efforts with other local Churches to help inclusion of LGBTI people) get half a point, and the co-researcher indicates that this is because they only apply to Warsaw. The website of the Church contains a 1991 statement on the protection of unborn life, that lists marriage as between a man and a woman, but there is also reports of a seminar in Żelów in July 2025, where marriage is described as being between two persons. No public statements in the statements page of the Church could be found, and the co-researcher did not provide any.

Slovakia: Parish of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic, Bratislava Staré Mesto

40 out of 52

76.8% (not in RICE 2020)

The score of this parish reflects the particular situation in which it finds itself, being a LGBTI-friendly parish which is part of a rather homophobic Church. One can for example look at the public letter of three bishops of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia (ECAV), explaining why they would not attend a conference organized by the parish in Bratislava Staré Mesto, intended to reflect on the inclusion of LGBTI people in the Church. One small excerpt of the letter (translated via google translate) summarizes the position of the bishops on 22 September 2022: 'A person practicing homosexuality should be pastorally led to the decision to leave practiced homosexuality, not with threats and contempt, but with the greatest love and sensitivity that we are capable of.'¹³² The scores will thus be discussed with reference only to this particular urban parish in Bratislava, and should not be taken as representative of the national Church as whole (the ECAV is the second largest Church in Slovakia, with 193 995 members according to the LWF's website).

¹³⁴ <https://www.ecav.sk/aktuality/stanoviska-a-vyjadrenia/postoj-zboru-biskupov-ku-konferencii-kracajme-spolu>; accessed 16 September 2025.

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

15 out of 18

The parish gets full points on 13 indicators (Q1, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q8, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18) indicating that it practices inclusivity in its services (blessings of same-sex union for example, no restrictions on baptism and membership) and that it reflects about creating ministry to children and young people that is LGBTI affirming (indicator Q8). There also exists published material that serves to accompany congregations in becoming more inclusive and affirmative (published proceedings of a conference). Neither the Bible nor Tradition are used negatively (indicators Q4 and Q5), as evidenced in a sermon by František Ábel, on 2 March 2025. The parish gets no point for indicator Q9 (possibility for local Churches to have discussion on LGBTI issues) presumably because the national Church is not promoting these conversations.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

10.5 out of 12

The parish gets full points everywhere except on three indicators, namely Q21 (employment of openly LGBTI people for non-ordained work), Q22 (employment of openly LGBTI people for services offered by the Church to society), and Q27 (establishment of an official LGBTI affirmative pastoral ministry), where it gets half point. In its public practices, the parish actively supports LGBTI people. It also has organized pride-related events, something particularly notable in an ecclesial context which is not openly supportive of LGBTI people. The co-researcher indicates this for indicator Q19 (openly LGBTI people performing leadership functions), when they mention that the leadership of openly LGBTI people and cis-hetero women only happens in this parish, and not on a national level.

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

7.5 out of 9

Liturgically and at the level of its communication the parish constructs a space that is affirming and welcoming of LGBTI people (full points on indicators Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34). It also takes responsibility for building a nurturing and affirmative environment for its members (full point on indicator Q36) and observes critically its own position about discrimination of LGBTI people (indicator Q39). It gets half points for indicators connected to national policy (indicator Q34) and to the complexity of LGBTI issues (indicators Q37 and Q38).

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

7.5 out of 13

Most of the indicators get a half point, reflecting the situation of the parish in a national Church that does not publicly and nationally state support for LGBTI people. The parish gets two full points for indicators Q51 and Q52, reflecting its involvement in ecumenical dialogue and its work in promoting LGBTI issues with other regional Churches in Bratislava. One can assume, as indicators Q41, Q42, Q43, Q44, Q45, Q46, Q47, Q48, Q49, Q50 show, that the local parish is involved in public militancy for the inclusion of LGBTI people in the Church but that the Church itself is not yet ready for such work.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Sweden: The Free Evangelical Church of Sweden (EFK)

11 out of 52

21.12% (not in RICE 2020)

This is the second lowest scoring Church, situated paradoxically in a country where acceptance of LGBTI people is high (94% percent of acceptance for equal marriage, adoption and parental rights for LGB people in Sweden, according to the 2023 Eurobarometer Discrimination in the European Union survey).

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

6 out of 18

The low score of this Church on these indicators (no full point given on any indicators) is partly the consequence of an evangelical approach to the Bible as the co-researcher puts it. The Bible is seen as authoritative and justifies the condemnation of same-sex relationships and practices. At the same time, the co-researcher suggests that there is also space for a critical dimension in the interpretative work, opening space for debate. For now, the condemnation of LGBTI people is reflected in the release of testimonies that show that the 'broad majority of Churches in the EFK are non-affirming in relation to LGBTI identities'. But there is also a slow evolution. The co-researcher indicates about indicator Q3 that 'today you will mainly hear theological teachings that are welcoming but non affirming.' There also is a small minority that proposes an affirming theology. The co-researcher also gives half a point for indicator Q7 (protocol for more inclusivity) indicating that there is a report (2023) that is the fruit of a three year long theological process. It can be used as a tool for congregations that want to proceed with more inclusion of LGBTI people in the Church. The co-researcher says that the report is non-affirming, but that it includes 'some openings for a more including and welcoming position'. This is also evidenced in the presence of local parishes that, as the co-researcher points out, deviate from the national non-affirming stance and have some freedom to diverge from the main orientation regarding LGBTI people. However, the co-researcher also indicates that the dividing line is the blessing of same-sex marriage. They write: 'it is not accepted by the denomination for Churches to deviate on the practice of performing same-sex weddings'. Although this is identified as a fixed barrier, the co-researcher does indicate for indicator Q10 that there are a few exceptions to the interdiction of blessing same-sex marriages.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

3 out of 12

The score is very low for these indicators, with six indicators (Q19, Q20, Q21, Q22, Q25, Q29) getting half a point and the other six getting no points. There is no promotion of acceptance of LGBTI people in the Church's rituals, nor affirmative pastoral ministry, or support for LGBTI association (whether Christian or other). There is also some hesitation on indicator Q29 (no support for organization that promote heteronormative values, with a negative inclination towards LGBTI people). The co-researcher gives half a point for this indicator, suggesting that the Church might still in some parishes for example tolerate such organization. The possibility for employment for LGBTI people is also low, as is their possibility of exercising leadership in the Church (indicators Q19, Q20, Q21, Q22).

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

1 out of 9

There is no effort to use inclusive or affirmative language by Church leaders or in the Church's official communication (indicators Q31 and Q32), also no possibility to display LGBTI-related symbols in Church spaces. Worship does not show awareness of gender issues and sexuality, and no awareness of these issues is displayed in educational material either (indicators Q34, Q35, Q36). The Church gets half a point for being aware of the interconnectedness of issues concerning justice and inclusivity (indicator Q37) and for recognizing its past failures (indicator Q39) in the report issued in 2023.

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

1 out of 13

There are no public statements by this Church that would be supportive of LGBTI people. This can be related to two things. First, this Church could avoid making public statements in general. On the website of the Evangelical Free Church in Sweden, there is a page called 'Theological treatment of the focus domains of EFK'¹³⁵ that exposes some of the theological reasoning behind the mission fields of the Church. One can also find reports for the Church activities (for example in 2023 and 2024) so there seems to be space and opportunities if the Church wanted to publicly comment about LGBTI issues. Thus, it seems that the Church chooses not to take up these issues. Two indicators receive half a point (Q41, public statement about the right to safety of LGBTI people; Q42, public statement about the rights to freedom of thought for LGBTI people), indicating that there might be the start of a reflection there.

Sweden: Church of Sweden

48.5 out of 52

93.12%

RICE 2020: 87.98% (41.5 out of 47)

The results of the Church of Sweden have improved over the past 5 years, making it the highest scoring Church among Protestant Churches. It was also the most inclusive Church among Protestant denominations in RICE 2020.

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

17.5 out of 18

The Church scores almost 18 points on the experience of LGBTI people inside the Church. It should be noted that Church of Sweden has a page dedicated to LGBTI people in the Church of Sweden.¹³⁴ It also works with the Rainbow Key label, which indicates that elected representatives and employees in a parish 'have gone through the process model for a more inclusive Church and have the will to actively working with diversity and openness'. The parish develops a 'diversity vision', which is approved

¹³⁵ <https://efk.se/varlden/vart-gemensamma-uppdrag/teologisk-bearbetning-av-efks-fokusomraden.html>; accessed 16 September 2025.

¹³⁶ <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/sokdintro/hbtq>; accessed 16 September 2025.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

by the Central board for the Rainbow Key. 'After approval the parish receives the lgbtq label Rainbow Key in a ceremony'. The half point corresponds to indicator Q14 (special blessing for trans people), where the co-researcher indicates that 'there is no official liturgy of blessing for transgender persons in the Church' but 'there is no obstacle for a reminder of the baptism in a local parish by a priest'. For indicator Q12, the co-researcher indicates that if someone refuses baptism because of the sexuality or the gender identity of the parents or the baptismal candidate, this is taken up by the 'bishop and cathedral chapter'.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

11.5 out of 12

Here too Church of Sweden gets almost full marks. LGBTI people are part of the leadership of the Church ('in 2009, the Church of Sweden ordained Eva Brunne as bishop for the diocese of Stockholm. Bishop Brunne was one of the worlds' first openly gay bishop') and are involved in policy making ('there is national lgbtq-network in Church of Sweden'). There are services and rituals held in local Churches 'in relation to various LGBTQI aspects'. In the diakonia work of Church of Sweden (indicator Q26), the co-researcher indicates that 'intersectional needs assessments are done' and 'if LGBTQI identity is part of peoples' increased vulnerabilities that renders them in need of diakonia, that is provided'. The half-point comes from indicator Q28 (support for a LGBTI association for clergy), with the following specification: 'there are organic networks and groups on such matters, no need for them to be sanctioned by the central Church structure'. In addition, the Church works with advocacy groups (indicator Q30) for LGBTI people. The co-researcher indicates that 'Church of Sweden participates in Pride events around Sweden'. Since 2021, It also co-organises with EKHÖ Sweden (LGBTI Christians Groups), **Sensus Studieförbund** and Church of Sweden Youth, a conference called Transblessing, for, about, with and by transgender, nonbinary and gender nonconforming Christians under the age of 35.¹³⁷

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

8.5 out of 9

For all the indicators concerning inclusive language, official and national communication, use of Church space (indicators Q31, Q32, Q33) Church of Sweden gets full points. Indicator Q34 (gender issues and sexuality are thematized in public worship) is given half a point, because this is not the responsibility of the national level of the Church, but rather 'the duty of the diocese and the diocese bishop'. As the co-researcher says, 'this is very common'. The liturgical language is inclusive, and there is work to produce new hymns, with inclusive language and recognition of LGBTI people (indicator Q35). With the production of new LGBTI-friendly hymns, Church of Sweden is ahead of the other Protestant Churches which might have inclusive language liturgy (EKD, the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, the Reformed Church of the canton of Zurich, the Lutheran Church in Great Britain, the Church of England) but are not working on representativity in hymnals. Concerning indicators Q38 and Q39, the official documents of Church of Sweden show an awareness of scientific knowledge and its consequences for theological thinking, as well as a willingness to acknowledge past mistakes.

¹³⁷ <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/transblessing>; accessed 16 September 2025.

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

11 out of 13

Two half points are given for indicators Q49 and Q50 (public statements about education; public statements about LGBTI rights to access public services) because on the one hand, in Sweden, Church and State are separated, and the Church cannot give comments on the national context. The co-researcher indicates that 'in the international work however the global advocacy work and partner work' encourage comprehensive sexual education, which is inclusive. On the other hand, Church of Sweden has made public statements about the right to access public services, and in those statements LGBTI people are included but, as the co-researcher says, 'there is no specific statement on solely LGBTQI' people on these matters. Indicator Q40 (public apology and call for forgiveness) gets no point. The co-researcher's comment is worth quoting in full for this indicator: 'There is a great awareness of the Church of Sweden's guilt regarding discrimination and abuse of LGBTQI people throughout history. As a national Church, the Church of Sweden has not apologized for its abuses, but this has happened at the diocesan and parish level on several occasions. There is no ongoing truth and reconciliation work regarding LGBTQI in the Church of Sweden'.

All the other indicators get full point, indicating Church of Sweden's willingness to take a public stance as an affirming Church when it comes to LGBTI people. The co-researcher also highlights that Church of Sweden was involved in the World Council of Churches process on human sexuality through its former archbishop, Anders Wejryd. Through its aid and mission organization, ACT, Church of Sweden 'is conducting extensive work regarding safety for LGBTQI people' (indicator Q41). One can see this international and ecumenical involvement in the full point given also to indicators Q44, Q45, Q46 and Q52. There is a concern in Church of Sweden for the overall health of LGBTI people (see indicator Q48).¹³⁶

Switzerland: Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich

34.5 out of 52 points

66.24%

The Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich reflects the specific context of the Canton and town of Zurich, and can thus not be considered representative of all of Switzerland. It should be seen as one local reality, characterized by an urban setting, in a rather well to do part of the country.

The Church also scored lower on RICE 2025 than on RICE 2020 (81.62%), but in fact one cannot compare the two indexes. For RICE 2020, the co-researcher was responding for the Evangelical-Reformed Church of Switzerland and not just for the Church of the Canton of Zurich. There are probably more half points in the 2025 questionnaire, because the co-researcher felt like they could not speak for the whole Church, and so gave only half points to the Church (in particular for indicators Q31–Q39 and Q40–Q52, that have a strong national orientation).

¹³⁶ <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/act/det-har-gor-vi/jamstalldhet-och-halsa>; accessed 16 September 2025.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

15 out of 18

Four indicators get half points (Q1, Q8, Q9, Q14), and one indicator gets no point (Q7). Concerning indicator Q7, there is no protocol to make parishes more inclusive, even if, as the co-researcher points out, conversion therapies are condemned by the Church in its official documents. For indicators Q1, Q8, Q9 and Q14 (mention of LGBTI people in a non-negative way in legal documents, affirmative ministry to children, possibilities to have discussions in local parishes, blessing for transgender people), the half point might reflect a diversity of practice in the Church, or the fact that these practices are not explicitly voiced in Church policy. For example, for indicator Q1, the constitution of the Church mentions that it is directed at the diversity of humanity and respects everyone's life situation, using theological notions such as guilt, punishment, sacrifice with restraint and carefully. The document however does not explicitly mention LGBTI people. For the other indicators, the Church gets full points. For indicator Q6 (mention of LGBTI identities in a positive manner), one sees that the Church presents itself as a rainbow Church.¹³⁷ Theology, the Bible and tradition (indicators Q3, Q4, Q5) are consequently not used to condemn LGBTI people and so the Church also fully welcomes LGBTI people. It also provides material to better understand gender equality and LGBTI issues for the clergy.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

8.5 out of 12

There are no restrictions for LGBTI people to work in the Church, both in ordained and not-ordained positions (indicators Q19, Q20, Q21, Q22) and no restriction for the participation of LGBTI people in worship (indicators Q23, Q24, Q25). Concerning ministry specifically created for LGBTI people (indicators Q26, Q27, Q28), the Church only get half a point. One local congregation among the parishes belonging to the Evangelical Reformed Church of Canton of Zurich has a ministry for LGBTI people. Both this parish and the Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich participate in Pride events.¹³⁸

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

4.5 out of 9

For all the indicators contained in this section that concerns the language used by the Church and the visibility of queer issues in the Church, as well as education, the Church gets half a point by indicators. This manifests the diversity contained in the Church broadly speaking. Not all parishes (and possibly not all Churches in the national context) are happy with visible and outspoken support of LGBTI people, which can manifest itself in language and LGBTI symbols in Churches (indicators Q31, Q32, Q33, Q35). Other parishes however support the inclusion of LGBTI people, and the co-researcher proposes an interview of Michel Rudin, a member of the council of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Switzerland as an example of this type of support for LGBTI people.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ <https://www.mosaic-zuerich.ch/>; accessed 16 September 2025.

¹⁴⁰ <https://zurichpridefestival.ch/event/oeekumenischer-pride-gottesdienst-3/>; accessed 16 September 2025.

¹⁴¹ <https://www.eks-eers.ch/blogpost/ueber-safe-spaces-lgbtq-engagement-und-die-rolle-der-kirche-in-einer-sich->

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

6.5 out of 13

Here too most of the indicators get half a point, except for indicator Q47 (public statements about labour rights of LGBTI people), which gets a full point, although the co-researcher indicates the statement were made about women. For the other indicators, one sees that the problem is the diversity of the Churches that are part of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Switzerland, and that the Church of the Canton Zurich is not representative of the national Church as a whole, marked by diversity (rural vs urban, French-speaking, Italian-speaking, Rhaeto-Romanic speaking, German speaking). The only document mentioned by the co-researcher about a public statement of the whole Church in Switzerland concerns reproductive rights and kinship rights (indicators Q45 and Q46) where a national document exists which delineates the boundaries of the national Church's support to medically assisted procreation.¹⁴⁰

United Kingdom – England: Church of England

21 out of 52

40.32%

RICE 2020: 56.18% (26.5 out of 47)

Church of England lost more than 15% percent between RICE 2020 and RICE 2025. One could imagine that things would change for Church of England, with the **Living in Love and Faith** material produced by Church of England. This material is described by the 2025 co-researcher as covering 'both inclusive and exclusive theologies rather than seeking to bring about a particular outcome.' In 2020, the author of the Protestant chapter for RICE 2020 quoted The Guardian in saying: 'The Church of England could make a historic change to traditional teaching on sexuality in less than two years after bishops promised that decisions on issues that have riven the Church for decades would be taken in 2022. The self-imposed deadline could end with clergy being permitted to conduct same-sex marriages – or the Church could opt to reinforce traditional teaching on marriage, sexuality and gender. At the moment, the Church does not allow same-sex marriage, and does not officially bless same-sex civil marriages. Gay clergy are permitted to be in relationships so long as they are celibate.'¹⁴¹ The article dates from November 9, 2020. In the meantime, the **Living in Love and Faith** process is nearing its end, with the possibility of a 'bespoke service' for same-sex unions (prayers of blessings on a same-sex relation but not a marriage blessing). No decisions are reached on clergy who wish to enter same-sex civil marriages.

When one compares the detail of the responses of the two co-researchers for 2020 and 2025, one sees that the variation for Church of England is related more to the subjective appreciation of the co-researchers than to the changes in Church of England. This will be detailed for each section below.

[wandelnden-gesellschaft/](https://www.wandelnden-gesellschaft/); accessed 16 September 2025.

¹⁴² <https://www.eks-eers.ch/blogpost/ehe-elternschaft-kinder/>; accessed 16 September 2025.

¹⁴³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/09/Church-of-england-could-rethink-stance-on-lgbtq-issues-by-2022>; accessed 16 September 2025.

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Institutional Equality and Non-Discrimination (Q1–Q18)

9.5 out of 18

No points are given for indicators Q1 and Q2 (inclusivity and diversity in legal documents). The co-researcher indicates for indicator Q2 that 'There is no attempt to proactively include LGBTQIA+ people in leadership roles, many are either explicitly excluded (e.g. those who are married) or tacitly marginalised (e.g. not considered for senior roles even if they abide by the rules governing LGBTQIA+ relationships).' Acceptance of trans people (indicator Q14) in the Church creates less hostility than same-sex relationship, at least in public liturgy. In this part of the questionnaire (indicators Q1–16 and Q1–Q18), if you remove the two new indicators in RICE 2025 (indicators Q8 and Q11), both co-researchers give 8.5 out of the 16 possible.

Church Practices (Q19–Q30)

5 out of 12

For indicator Q19 the co-researcher highlights that concerning leading functions, LGBTI people can have access to this function only if they are unmarried. For indicator Q20, the criterion of representativity also means that people with conservative views about LGBTI people are represented. I will quote the co-researcher comment here: 'Committees looking at LGBT+ equality frequently have only a small minority of LGBTQIA+ people represented. The tendency in looking at equality is to aim for a 'balance' where those opposed to women's ordination or LGBTQIA+ inclusion are well represented.' For indicators Q21 and Q22 (employment of openly LGBTI people in non-ordained positions, or in public spaces), the co-researcher gives respectively a full point and a half a point, remarking that this will depend on local practices. The same is true of indicator Q25 (social acceptance of LGBTI people) as well. Concerning social diakonia (indicator Q26), the co-researcher notes the existence of these initiatives, but remarks that there are not universal and often underfunded compared to other types of ministry. The Church does not get any point for indicator Q29 either (support to associations that have a negative inclination towards LGBTI people). As the co-researcher explains, 'There are para-Church organisations within the C of E, such as the Church of England Evangelical Council, which are exclusionary and heteronormative'. The support for LGBTI associations is also local (indicator Q30) and not national.

For these indicators, we find some differences between the two co-researchers, that are not necessarily related to Church policy changes but rather to the appreciation of the co-researcher. The co-researcher in RICE 2020 gives 8 out of the 12 possible points, whereas the co-researcher in RICE 2025 gives 5 out of the 12 possible points. The co-researchers disagree on the interpretation of what are now indicators Q19 (leading functions), Q20 (involvement in Church's policy), Q22 (LGBTI people employed in service to the community) and Q23 (adoption). For indicator Q19, the co-researcher of RICE 2025 indicates that 'Women are permitted to be bishops, as (in theory) are unmarried openly LGBTQIA+ people. However, clergy in same-sex marriages cannot be bishops, and those in civil partnerships are unlikely to be promoted to be a bishop.' Whereas the co-researcher for RICE 2020, made the following comment after giving a full point for women and openly gay people in leadership functions: 'These would include: Sarah Mullally, Bishop of London – the third most senior bishop in the Church – (cishetero[?] woman), Simon Butler and Chris Newlands, elected prolocutors [senior

clergy members] of the General Synod [national assembly] (openly LGBTI)'.

Language, Speech and Symbols (Q31–Q39)

3 out of 9

Only half points are given for the first two indicators concerning communication (Q31 and Q32), with the comment that 'official communications are usually silent on LGBTQIA+ people.' For indicator Q34 (thematization of gender issues and sexuality), the co-researcher notes that these issues are often thematized when it comes to women, but not for LGBTI people. For the last indicators of this section, the comparison with RICE 2020 is interesting.

RICE 2020 had 8 indicators for this section whereas RICE 2025 has 9 (Q33 is a new indicator). If you remove indicator Q33, the comparison for the two co-researchers are as follows. The co-researcher in RICE 2020 gave 4.5 points out of the 8 possible, while the co-researcher in RICE 2025 gave 2.5 points out of the 8 possible.

The two co-researchers differ for example on the points they attribute to four indicators in this section, the indicators that are now Q36, Q37, Q38 and Q39. For Q36, educational material, the co-researcher of RICE 2025 notes that 'We're probably at 1/4 of a point here. There is material for exploring questions about sexuality, but it allows both inclusive and exclusionary perspectives to sit alongside each other. I would not say that it tends towards inclusivity'. The material referred to is the Live in Faith and Love material, which the co-researcher in RICE 2020 gives as evidence for deciding a 0.5 point for this indicator.

For indicator Q37 (awareness of interconnectedness), the co-researcher of RICE 2025 is almost a bit flippant about the lack of awareness of Church of England on this topic, commenting: 'While the Church of England at the national level has become much more self-consciously aware of issues of racial justice, it is totally blind to the same dynamics of exclusion and injustice applying to LGBTQIA+ people. It's almost comical at times.'. On this basis, the co-researcher gives 0 point, whereas in 2020, the co-researcher attributes 0.5 for this indicator, referring to official Church documents.

For indicator Q38 (taking into account scientific research), the co-researcher for RICE 2025 qualifies the half-point given with the following comment: 'Again, probably a quarter of a point here. There isn't much serious and sustained engagement with the science, it's usually given lip service before theologically veiled prejudice takes over as the main driver of discussion.' In 2020, the co-researcher gave 1 point, referring to an official document of the Church, that prescribes considering science. Finally, for indicator Q39 (acknowledgment of discrimination), the co-researcher in RICE 2025 gave no point, underlining however that: 'Again, we probably only deserve a quarter of a point here. We have had a few courageous leaders pointing out the history of exclusion and discrimination, but too many turn a blind eye.' The co-researcher of RICE 2020 gave a full point for this indicator, referring to the General Synod's ban on conversion therapies. Here the appreciation of the individual co-researchers plays a role in the score.

Public Policy (Q40–Q52)

3.5 out of 13

For this section, it is interesting to look at indicator Q40 (public apology by the Church).

6. PROTESTANT CHURCHES

The co-researcher gave no point, and justified this absence of point in the following manner: 'There has been an apology from the General Synod, but it has not been followed through with consistent repentant action and therefore I would not count it as a sufficient apology', indicating that the apology might have been more lip service apology than true apology. One needs to recognize however that this remains a subjective evaluation, and that there exists an apology from the General Synod, however poorly it is perceived.

Indicator Q49 (support of diversity education in school) allows us to see the complexity of the position of the Church of England in the landscape of England. Church of England gets a full point for this indicator, with the following comment: 'The C of E is a partner in providing education through working with a significant number of religious state funded schools. As these schools are state funded and open to those who are not Anglicans the Church is much more progressive in speaking about equality in its schools context.' Thus, Church of England seems to have more freedom of expression in a secular context, than when dealing with its constituents. As indicator Q52 shows, inclusivity might still happen at the local level, despite the absence of national support. Here the comment of the co-researcher is as follows: 'At the local level some C of E Churches are involved in ecumenical LGBT+ affirming projects such as Christians at Pride or Open Table services. This is not due to central policy but localised initiatives.'

In RICE 2020, there were only 11 indicators for this section, whereas RICE 2025 has two supplementary indicators (Q51 and Q52). If you remove these, the comparison is as follows. Out of the 11 points possible, the co-researcher for RICE 2020 gave 5.5, and the co-researcher for RICE 2025 gave 3 points. The differences are related to indicators Q41, Q46, Q47, Q48 and Q50 (as they are numbered in RICE 2025), where the co-researcher for RICE 2020 gave 0.5 more for each indicator. Q41 is about public statements concerning the right to safety of LGBTI people. The co-researcher for RICE 2020 referred to the support of Church of England for government legislation intended to protect LGBTI people from criminalization and discrimination. This justified giving one full point, whereas the co-researcher of RICE 2025 only gave half a point. For indicator Q46, public statement about kinship, the co-researcher of RICE 2020 interpreted the statement 'The Church has its own positions and its own debates and differences about what's OK in love and family life. But our main concern is to support all families, the best way we can.'¹⁴² as deserving half a point, whereas the co-researcher for RICE 2025 gave zero point. For the other indicators where the co-researchers differ, no reasons are given to justify half a point (indicators Q47, Q48 and Q50) by the co-researcher of RICE 2020, and no point by the co-researcher of RICE 2025.

United Kingdom, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland – Presbyterian Church in Ireland

3 out of 52

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.Churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/our-views/family-marriage-and-sexuality>, accessed 16 September 2025.

5.76% (not in RICE 2020)

This is the lowest score for all the Protestant Churches.

The Church gets only half points on six indicators:

Q3 (unconditional welcome of LGBTI person). The co-researcher indicates that there is some limited acceptance of LGBTI person but only if they remain celibate.

Q8 (LGBTI affirming ministry to children). The co-researcher indicates that they think this is the case, not necessarily indicating supporting evidence.

Q11 (recognition of secular same-sex marriages)

Q16 (acceptance of women and LGBTI people in seminary) and Q17, possibly the half point indicates that women are accepted but not LGBTI people or that both are accepted, if LGBTI people remain celibate.

Q38 (taking into account scientific evidence).

The Church publicly opposes LGBTI people. This hostility is confirmed by the co-researcher who indicates that they 'know many LGBT people who had to leave PCI'. This homophobic attitude might be part of the identity of the Church and part of its attractiveness for some people.

Summary of Detailed Analysis

The detailed analysis of the results shows that, particularly for denominations that are not LGBTI-friendly, work on the ground in isolated parishes can contribute to ameliorate the situation of LGBTI people and provoke the need for wider reflection on LGBTI questions. The only Church for which no such movement can be observed is the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, which seems to get its part of its identity from its opposition to inclusive policies.

As already mentioned, the lack of central authority in most Protestant Churches allows local initiatives to a greater degree than in other Christian denominations, resulting in both LGBTI-friendly local initiatives that go beyond the position of the national Church (this is the case for Poland, Slovakia, France) but also initiatives that are less supportive of LGBTI people than the national policy of the Church (see for example Finland, but also France, or the Netherlands).

In terms of indicators, we can briefly mention the indicators where a certain level of unanimity is present, meaning that more than half of the Churches score one point. For the first group, this would be the case for indicators Q3 (Church's theology), 4 (Use of the Bible), Q5 (Use of Tradition), Q6 (Church policy), Q9 (Local initiative), Q10 (same-sex blessing), Q15 (no restrictions on eucharist), Q16 (acceptance in seminary) Q17 (ordination of LGBTI people and ordination of women, but this is not so much an issue in Lutheran and Reformed Churches at least).

For the second group, this would be indicator Q19 (leading functions), Q20 (LGBTI people in policy making), Q21 (LGBTI people employed in non-ordained positions), Q22 (LGBTI people employed in services offered), Q23 (adoption by LGBTI people), Q24 (celibacy, which is not much of an issue for Protestant Churches in general),

Q26 (Diakonia). In this group, it is interesting to see that many Churches even if they are overall welcoming and inclusive might have local tendencies or groups that are hostile to LGBTI people (indicator Q29).

For indicators in group 3 (Q31–Q29) and group 4 (Q40–Q52), the landscape of Protestant Churches is more divided. In group 3, only Church of Sweden, the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) and the Protestant Church of the Netherlands consistently score full points. For group 4, indicator Q40 (public apology) is the only indicator where Church of Sweden gets no point. All other Churches, except the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), the United Protestant Church of France and the Evangelical Reformed Church of Poland, get no points. In this group, Church of Sweden, the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), the Protestant Church of the Netherlands and the Evangelical Reformed Church of Poland score better than others.

6.5. Ways Forward

We have seen that Protestant Churches connected to the Lutheran or Reformed tradition score relatively high, whereas other Protestant Churches' scores are lower. This can be connected to the way that the Bible is perceived, but also to the fact that for Protestant Churches inscribed inside the Lutheran or Reformed tradition, there is a strong belief in the notion that the Church is in a constant process of reforming itself (***Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda***) which means it has more freedom in adapting itself to the world in which it finds itself, whereas Churches issued from revival movements might have opposed this adaptation to the Church's cultural milieu. These differences in scores mean that the landscape for ways forward is very different for Churches that score relatively high (11 Churches scoring above 50%) or even very high (3 Churches and one parish scoring above 70%) and those that score relatively low (5 Churches below 50% percent, 1 below 25%, and 1 below 10%).

For the lowest scoring Churches, discussing the presence and the welcome of LGBTI people at a national level, being inspired by local initiatives such as what is happening in Warsaw or Bratislava would be a starting point. It seems that the Evangelical Free Church in Sweden, one of the lowest scoring Church among the Protestant denomination, is aware of the need for discussing LGBTI people in the Church, and so a way forward would be to have this discussion become a national agenda. The method of work exemplified by the CPCE or by the Church of England (with a process that is less supportive of LGBTI people) could be a starting point for Churches that are willing to discuss LGBTI people in their congregations. It seems that there is no way forward unfortunately for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, where there is no awareness or willingness to have an open discussion about LGBTI people, or at least a discussion that would not simply be a condemnation. In this case, the identity of the Church seems so closely connected to its ethical conservatism that a way forward seems unlikely.

In Churches where the blessing of same-sex unions is not permitted, or not the equivalent of marriage of heterosexual unions, or blessings of heterosexual unions (Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Protestant Church in the Netherlands, The Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland, The Free Evangelical Church in Sweden,

the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland), a way forward would be to adopt legislation that makes the blessings of same-sex marriages or the marriage of same-sex persons possible. Again, the Churches that responded to RICE 2025 seem to have some willingness to open this discussion except for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

The same is true for Churches where the ordination of LGBTI people is not possible (Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland, The Free Evangelical Church in Sweden, the Church of England, Presbyterian Church in Ireland): a way forward would be to open up the possibility for ordination of openly LGBTI people with no restrictions.

For Churches that score relatively high, the lack of apologies, and the lack of broad public policies is what lowers their score. For these Churches, one way forward would be the active promotion at a national level and in international ecumenical contexts of LGBTI rights. These Churches are invited to become agents in promoting LGBTI people and the presence of LGBTI people in Churches and not just react to the cultural context surrounding them. A proactive gesture could be the national revision of liturgy, as well as the creation of more inclusive hymns.

7. Other Churches

Metropolitan Community Church; Old Catholic Church; The Pentecostal Alliance of Independent Churches

In this chapter we present the data on churches that are not part of the major denominations or church families we discussed in the chapters 4, 5, and 6. These other churches include

The Metropolitan Community Churches in Austria and Finland

The Old Catholic Churches in Austria, Netherlands, Czech Republic and Slovakia, and the Ecumenical Catholic Communion in Poland

The Pentecostal Alliance of Independent Churches, Sweden

CHURCH	OVERALL RANK	TOTAL SCORE	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POINTS	PERCENTILE
MCC AUSTRIA	1	52	100%	80–100%
ECC POLAND	2	51.5	99%	
MCC FINLAND	3	49.5	95%	
OCC NETHERLANDS	5	45	87%	
OCC AUSTRIA	10–11	34.5	66%	60–80%
OCC CZECHIA	14–15	31.5	61%	
OCC SLOVAKIA	14–15	31.5	61%	
PAIC SWEDEN	34–38	9	17%	0–20%

CHURCH	CATEGORY 1: INSTITUTIONAL EQUALITY AND NON- DISCRIMINATION (INDICATORS Q1–Q18)	CATEGORY 2: CHURCH PRACTICES (INDICATORS Q19–Q30)	CATEGORY 3: LANGUAGE, SPEECH AND SYMBOLS (INDICATORS Q31–Q39)	CATEGORY 4: PUBLIC POLICY (INDICATORS Q40–Q52)	TOTAL SCORE (PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POINTS)
MCC AUSTRIA	18 (100%)	12 (100%)	9 (100%)	13 (100%)	52 (100%)
ECC POLAND	18 (100%)	12 (100%)	8.5 (94%)	13 (100%)	51.5 (99%)
MCC FINLAND	18 (100%)	11.5 (96%)	9 (100%)	11 (85%)	49.5 (95%)
OCC NETHERLANDS	16 (89%)	11 (92%)	8 (89%)	10 (77%)	45 (87%)
OCC AUSTRIA	16 (89%)	8 (67%)	5 (56%)	5.5 (42%)	34.5 (66%)
OCC CZECHIA	13 (72%)	9.5 (79%)	7 (78%)	2 (15%)	31.5 (61%)
OCC SLOVAKIA	13 (72%)	9.5 (79%)	7 (78%)	2 (15%)	31.5 (61%)
PAIC SWEDEN	4.5 (25%)	2.5 (21%)	1.5 (17%)	0.5 (4%)	9 (17%)

7.1. Metropolitan Community Church

The Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) is a progressive Christian denomination that specifically reaches out to members of the LGBTI community. The first congregation was established in California in 1968. Today, the MCC has member congregations in over 20 countries, also across Europe.

In RICE 2020 there was only one MCC congregation (Finland) included, now there are two (Austria). MCC congregations are the top-ranking churches in RICE 2025. MCC Austria is the only church in RICE 2025 that has a full score of 52 points and full 100% of total points, while the MCC Finland with 49.5 points (95% of total points) has the third highest score of all churches.¹⁴³ In RICE 2020, MCC Finland was the highest ranking church (45.5 points out of 47; 90%).

It is not surprising that MCC is placed in the top position, since they are 'founded by and for gay and lesbian people who had been ostracized, ejected, or simply unwelcomed by their former religious communities'. The church community characterizes itself as 'the world's gay church', committed to 'radical welcome of LGBT people' and embracing 'theologies of gay and lesbian (and later, queer) liberation'. Nevertheless, MCC is not limited in its LGBTI-inclusiveness: they welcome all kinds of people with different backgrounds and identities. Diversity, inclusion and respect are central values cherished by MCC, and their mission is one of 'radical love and justice' especially among marginalised people whom many other churches want to exclude or ignore.¹⁴⁴

The profound LGBTI-character is captured in the community's description on the Facebook page of MCC Austria, Vienna congregation: it is 'a queer Christian church explicitly for LGBTIQs, but people who live polyamory/non-monogamy or BDSM are also very welcome'.¹⁴⁵ The Facebook page does not provide any further information on the theology and practices of the community, nor does the Austrian co-researcher provide additional information other than confirming that the full score given to MCC Austria correspond to the lived experience of LGBTI people in the community.

Regarding the MCC congregation Living Water (Elävä vesi) in Helsinki, Finland, the co-researcher provides additional information alongside the scoring of the LGBTI-affirming mentality and theology embedded in the community's activities. These include, for example, fully inclusive worship and language used in the community, celebrating international gay holidays, LGBTI affirming ministry for children and youth by trained professionals, commitment on doing queer theology, providing a ritual for transgender to persons for adopting a new name, and overall adherence to 'inclusion, community, spiritual transformation and justice', the global core values of MCC.

¹⁴³ On closer examination of the survey data, the MCC Finland would have earned one point more (total of 50.5) for the indicator Q40 (public apology of the church's past non-inclusivity). If the church has no such historical baggage, co-researchers were instructed to give full marks to credit church's consistency of LGBTI-inclusiveness. However, the co-researcher still gave zero points for MCC in Finland for the indicator Q40, while affirming in a comment the church's historical inclusiveness.

¹⁴⁴ Metropolitan Community Church: MCC? Aren't you the 'gay church?', <https://visitmccchurch.com/portfolio/mcc-arent-you-the-gay-church/>; accessed 13 July 2025; Metropolitan Community Church: MCC: The world's 'Gay Church' for over 50 years <https://visitmccchurch.com/portfolio/mcc-the-worlds-gay-church-for-over-50-years/>; accessed 13 July 2025.

¹⁴⁷ MCC Vienna, <https://www.facebook.com/mccvienna/>; accessed 13 July 2025.

MCC Finland falls short of full point in its support of LGBTI ministers or students of theology (indicator Q28), and giving public statements (indicators Q45 and Q49), scoring only half a point each. These ‘shortcomings’ are presumably the result of MCC’s marginal position in the Finnish society. Apparently, there are not too many MCC ministers and students of theology in Finland to establish an association, and statements for equality given by a small minority church ‘did not make any headlines’, as specified by the co-researcher.

In their website, MCC congregation Living Water labels itself as ‘the Community Church for Human Rights’. Reaching out for LGBT immigrants has a pivotal role in their mission:

We hope that the activities of our congregation will also reach sexual and gender minorities who have come to Finland from abroad for various reasons. Especially for rainbow people who have come to the country as asylum seekers, we hope to be able to offer support both in spiritual matters and in any other way in integration into Finland.¹⁴⁶

Rather than just being a separate sanctuary for LGBTI people, MCC Finland aims to enable change in other churches currently not open or less welcoming to sexual minorities.

The original purpose was to provide a spiritual community for those belonging to sexual and gender minorities who were discriminated against or even persecuted in their own congregations. The underlying idea was that MCC services would become redundant over time as churches became more open to diversity and rainbow people could return to their own congregations. This development still seems to be largely underway.¹⁴⁷

The co-researcher tells that MCC Finland actively promotes ecumenical LGBTI inclusion by ‘sharing information, and guiding and training people working’ in other churches. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland is mentioned as an ecumenical partner of MCC in Finland in promoting social acceptance of the LGBTI-community.

7.2. Old Catholic Church and Ecumenical Catholic Communion

The Old Catholic Church (OCC) is a group of national churches that originally split from the Roman Catholic Church in various European countries in the 18th and 19th centuries. This was mainly due to disagreements about papal authority and infallibility. Close to the OCC in theology and church practice is the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), a communion of independent churches established in the United States in the 2000s that adhere to Catholic traditions.

We received the data of four OCCs: the Netherlands (score: 45; 87%), Austria (score: 34.5; 66%, RICE 2020 score: 22; 47%), and the Czech Republic and Slovakia (score: 31.5; 60%, RICE 2020 score: 26.5; 56%). As in RICE 2020, the co-researcher for the Czech Republic and Slovakia gave a common score to the churches in both countries, but provides some separate information of them. The OCCs score above the mean of all the scores, OCC Netherlands ranking highest and being among the top five of all churches. Since RICE 2020, the scores of OCCs in Austria, Czech Republic and Slovakia have been improved.

¹⁴⁶ Elävä vesi MCC Helsinki, <https://www.elavavesimcc.fi/>; accessed 13 July 2025.

¹⁴⁷ Elävä vesi MCC Helsinki, <https://www.elavavesimcc.fi/>; accessed 13 July 2025.

7. OTHER CHURCHES

Of the ECC, we received data of the Reformed Catholic Church in Poland. ECC Poland is the second highest-ranking church in RICE 2025 (score: 51.5; 99%), just half a point short of a perfect score.

OCC Netherlands

While the legal documents of OCC Netherlands, i.e. set of ordinances and canon law, do not mention LGBTI identities, theologically the church attests equality of all people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This is reflected in the way the tradition and Bible are interpreted, theological publications, as well as ordinations of sexual minorities and their involvement in church administration. The Dutch co-researcher confirms that the number of LGBTI people in the church is relatively high, and that there are openly lesbian and gay individuals among the senior clergy. Overall church policy of OCC Netherlands is LGBTI-affirming.

According to the co-researcher, OCC Netherlands has never actively discriminated against LGBTI people on a large scale, but individual cases of hardship have occurred. In 2011, the church signed the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOTBIT) declaration.

In 2015, the bishops of OCC Netherlands made a statement on same-sex marriage, affirming that marriage is a proper term to be used also referring to 'the lasting life partnership of same-sex couples'.¹⁴⁸

OCC Netherlands promotes social acceptance of LGBTI community, mainly through ecumenical forums like the National Council of Churches in the Netherlands and World Council of Churches. As a small minority church, it rarely makes public statements on anything, including LGBTI-related themes. Pointed out by the co-researcher, the public role of churches in the Netherlands is different from other European countries, and Dutch churches in general do not talk publicly about the rights of LGBTI people, e.g. in relation to their access to public services.

Due to its traditions, position, and social character, OCC Netherlands lost points in some indicators, but not because of downplaying or opposing LGBTI issues. For example, no point was scored due to lack of special social ministry directed to LGBTI people (indicator Q26) even though the church's 'limited social work programme is for everybody excluding no one', as pointed out rightly by the co-researcher. Additionally, because of the Catholic tradition that has been followed in the liturgy by the OCC Netherlands, inclusive language and liturgical celebration of thematic LGBTI days (indicators Q34 and Q35) are not reflected in the liturgical cycle and books used, approved decades ago.

OCC Austria

OCC Austria scores half or full point on most indicators, with a total score of 34.5 (66%), which demonstrates fundamental inclusivity in thinking, actions, and values across the board.

Church policy acknowledges LGBTI-people and is LGBTI affirming. Members of the church are provided sacraments and pastoral care regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation. As pointed out by the co-researcher, there is an ongoing debate on establishing an official LGBTI-affirmative pastoral ministry for members of the church.

¹⁵⁰ Het huwelijk van mensen van gelijk geslacht, <https://oudkatholiek.nl/nieuws/2015/12/het-huwelijk-van-mensen-van-gelijk-geslacht/>; accessed 29 July 2025.

Openly LGBTI people can be employed by the church, perform functions in church leadership and be ordained, alongside with cis-hetero women. The co-researcher underlines, that OCC Austria is the first OCC to have a female bishop.

Despite the fundamental comprehensiveness of LGBTI awareness of OCC Austria, inclusivity in worship, public advocacy for LGBTI rights, and official communication by the church on LGBTI related issues are areas where practices are not necessarily consistent.

OCC Czech Republic and OCC Slovakia

The OCCs in the Czech Republic and Slovakia have a limited number of legal documents, and LGBTI identities are not mentioned in them. Theologically, there are no normative interpretations, and therefore parish practices within these churches vary. Nevertheless, OCCs in the Czech Republic and Slovakia are known as a 'refuge church', welcoming everyone. The co-researcher specifies that OCCs in the Czech Republic and Slovakia 'are welcoming to LGBTI persons', and that 'LGBTI people are not denied or discouraged from receiving any type of support.' On the national level, there are no public statements made concerning rights of LGBTI people and their roles in the society, but on local level some statements have been given.

As proof of LGBTI acceptance, there is 'a fair share of openly LGBTI people' among clergy, alongside with the fact that cis-hetero women and openly LGBTI people hold leadership positions in church administration and actively take part in the church' policy making. Ministries to children and youth 'reflect the church's overall practice of being generally open and affirming, without special emphasis on LGBTI issues', as specified by the co-researcher.

In addition, OCC actively promotes social acceptance of the LGBTI community by officiating at Pride services and organizing vigils on the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia. In 2023, an international and ecumenical conference on LGBTI inclusion and pastoral care was organized by OCC congregation in Bratislava, together with the Lutheran Church.¹⁴⁹

Prevailing liturgical language of OCC is not sensitive to gender and sexual orientation, yet individual ministers have a capacity to alter the official liturgical language and make it more inclusive.

Following an agreement to foster acceptance, openness and tolerance, made in 2003, the synod of the OCC Czech Republic approved in 2022 the blessing of same-sex couples, and such blessings are now routinely performed. In Czechia, the ceremony performed by OCC has a legal force as the state recognizes it as the formal establishment of partnership. However, the blessing of partnership is conceptionally and liturgically distinct from the marriage, reserved in OCC for heterosexual couples only.

The lack of legal and other normative documents, statements and public policy initiatives, and educational materials is reflected in the relatively low score for the recognition of LGBTI people in the generally open-minded and LGBTI-welcoming Czech Republic and Slovakia (score: 31.5; 60%).

¹⁵¹ Martin Kováč and Michaela Kušnieriková (eds.), *Kráčajme spolu – LGBTQ ľudia sú súčasťou nášho života*. Bratislava 2023, <http://www.velkykostol.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Kracajme-spolu-Zbornik-z-konferencie.pdf>, accessed 29 July 2025.

7. OTHER CHURCHES

ECC Poland

As indicated by the score (51.5; 99%) received by ECC Poland, the church is affirming of the LGBTI community in all areas: interpretation of doctrine, use of authoritative sources, distribution of sacraments, ministry and church administration, and the church's social engagement. The Polish co-researcher confirms that ECC Poland is committed to being fully inclusive and welcoming. The church's official documents are imbued with this conviction, neither favouring nor negating any sexual orientation or gender identity.

The ecclesiastical order and practice of ECC Poland reflect the general principles of the international fellowship of Ecumenical Catholic Communion, which emphasize care for the disadvantaged and marginalized members of society, including those who suffer prejudice because of gender or sexual orientation.¹⁵⁰

While adhering to the fundamentals of Catholic tradition (e.g. creed, apostolic succession and sacraments), ECC Poland recognises the need to interpret the Bible and ecclesial customs in the context of evolving lived realities. For example, the Trinitarian dogma is reflected in the diversity and unity of humanity. Affirming this diversity is a radical expression of faith in the Trinitarian dogma, as the Polish co-researcher describes how the doctrine affects the mission of ECC Poland. Furthermore, the importance of contextual hermeneutics is elaborated upon by the co-researcher, who characterises the approval of scientific research on gender and sexuality (indicator Q38) as 'one of the most important points for the development of the Reformed Catholic theological tradition'.

ECC Poland practices sacramental marriages for both opposite-sex and same-sex couples, officially recognized by the Polish State. Other sacraments, such as baptism and the Eucharist, are accessible to all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. The church also ordains all competent candidates, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. The co-researcher informs us that supporting LGBTI individuals forms part of the clergy training programme.

Particular attention is given to ensuring the full inclusion of young LGBT+ individuals in church life. Congregations are encouraged to promote diversity in society by participating in local Pride events and similar initiatives, for example.

As a church that has been fully committed to LGBTI inclusion from the outset, ECC Poland has never supported or practised discrimination against LGBTI people. However, as the co-researcher points out, they are ashamed by the widespread violence against LGBTI individuals within Christian churches more broadly. Through its own activities, ECC Poland aims to set an example to many other churches on how they should treat LGBTI people. The co-researcher notes that ECC Poland has faced exclusion from other churches as a result of its stance on LGBTI issues.

¹⁵² Ecumenical Catholic Communion, <https://ecumenical-catholic-communion.org/>; accessed 2 September 2025.

7.3. Pentecostal Alliance of Independent Churches

The Pentecostal Alliance of Independent Churches (PAIC) is a Swedish Christian minority denomination with around 430 congregations. Established in 2001, the PAIC traces its origins back to the early 20th-century Swedish Pentecostal movement, which itself originated from the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles.

With the score of 9 (17%) PAIC ranks among the quarter of churches with the lowest scores. The scores indicate that LGBTI-issues are not directly addressed, nor situations and needs of LGBTI-people clearly identified by the church. Instead of taking officially a direct stance on the issue, it is being ignored. Biblical and theological interpretations are not, therefore, necessarily directed against LGBTI-community.

In general, PAIC congregations are not genuinely welcoming towards LGBTI-people. In words of the co-researcher, 'they welcome everyone, but still condemn to live fully as an LGBT person'. Consequently, there is no room for LGBTI people to be leaders in PAIC communities or them having any other kind of publicly acknowledged position. Women, however, can be leaders and work in positions of responsibility.

In the absence of a jointly formed and expressed line towards LGBTI-issues and people, attitudes vary from congregation to congregation within PAIC. Some congregations may refuse membership based on gender identity or sexual orientation. On the other hand, the co-researcher has been privately informed of a more accepting attitude towards LGBTI-people on the part of an individual pastor.

The approach of PAIC toward blessing same-sex relationships or marriage is non-approving. The co-researcher characterizes the dismissive attitude as follows: 'They tell that God loves everyone, but still say that God's plan is only men and women to get married'.

PAIC scores points in their defence of basic rights and safety of all people, and due to their support on justice and inclusivity in general – however, LGBTI-people not exclusively mentioned in such statements.

8. Ways Forward

Already in 2020, the Inclusivity Index offered perspectives and strategies for European churches, grounded in the lived experiences of LGBTI faithful. Framed through the metaphor of a 'ladder to more inclusivity,' the first report proposed constructive pathways for ecclesial discernment aimed at fostering a more inclusive Church.

RICE 2025, however, does not attempt a direct evaluation of each church's progress five years later. The landscape has shifted—countries, churches, and respondents have changed, and broader dynamics render comparative conclusions too complex. Nevertheless, across church families, identifiable paradigms have emerged that either advance or hinder inclusivity, significantly shaping the lives of LGBTI persons within their ecclesial contexts. From these observations, general conclusions and tailored recommendations can be drawn.

As each church family operates within distinct structural and theological frameworks, the pathways forward will necessarily differ.

Orthodox Churches

The composition and number of Orthodox churches examined in both RICE 2020 and 2025 make trend identification difficult. Yet, a general reluctance to engage with LGBTI issues persists, often resulting in systemic opposition and discrimination. Still, the example of the Orthodox Church of Finland demonstrates that progress is possible—even within traditionally conservative structures—through recognition of LGBTI persons and openness to new pastoral practices, such as blessings for same-sex couples. Moving forward, it is vital to assess whether opposition to LGBTI inclusion will continue to be framed as integral to Orthodox Christian identity. Of particular concern is the vulnerability of Orthodox churches to polarising (supra)national identity politics, where resistance to sexual and gender minority rights becomes a symbolic battleground for defending traditional values and gender roles.

Catholic Churches

Between 2020 and 2025, the Catholic Church has shown that synodality—understood as a dialogical process between the faithful, pastoral realities, and central leadership—can be a meaningful path toward inclusion. The global Synod on Synodality, initiated by Pope Francis, prompted cautious but notable openings for discernment on LGBTI inclusion. Listening to LGBTI Catholics, involving them in decision-making, and taking seriously the Church's own affirmations of human dignity have begun to influence both ecclesial language and practice. For Catholic churches, continuing this posture of listening and learning at every level offers an authentic expression of synodality and a credible path toward greater inclusion.

Protestant Churches

Responses from Protestant churches indicate that affiliation with the Lutheran or Reformed traditions, and active participation in ecumenical dialogue, significantly shape their approaches to LGBTI inclusion. The CPCE's engagement with questions of gender, sexuality, and family illustrates how ecumenical processes can elevate the voices and needs of LGBTI persons. These dialogues not only foster theological reflection but also create space for shared commitments to justice, dignity, and pastoral care.

8. WAYS FORWARD

We can identify some general directions to guide churches toward greater inclusivity.

- **Language.** The language used within churches—whether in liturgy, canonical texts, encyclicals, or pastoral letters—and in public forums such as statements, interviews, and debates, profoundly shapes the lives of LGBTI Christians in their communities. Churches are called to deepen their awareness of the performative power of language and to learn how to communicate in affirming, respectful ways. This includes recognising the dignity of self-identification as a reflection of the image of God and engaging with scientific knowledge on the specificities and significance of inclusive language.
- **Coherence of Words and Deeds.** LGBTI people, and society at large, are acutely attuned to inconsistencies between ecclesial rhetoric and practice. It is contradictory to advocate for human dignity and the sanctity of life while excluding women and LGBTI persons from core ecclesial roles and sacraments. Likewise, condemning physical violence while perpetuating structural violence through exclusionary policies is disingenuous. Churches are called to critically examine their complicity in systems of discrimination and to resist double speak, double standards, and the misuse of theological language to justify exclusion or humiliation.
- **Localities and the Global Context.** All churches operate as global actors—whether through centralized leadership (as in the Catholic Church), synodal structures (as in the Orthodox Church), or federated local identities (as in many Protestant traditions). For LGBTI persons, both the everyday interactions with local clergy and the public messaging of transnational leadership shape their sense of dignity and belonging. Affirmative practices in local churches can have empowering ripple effects beyond ecclesial borders, while global exclusionary statements can undermine local trust-building efforts. Churches are therefore called to reflect on their responsibilities beyond denominational boundaries and to recognise the political weight of their public positions—especially in the context of rising global right-wing backlash. Any statement with the potential to harm or violate the rights of LGBTI persons must be avoided.

Across the different church families, two principal future orientations emerge when it comes to LGBTI inclusion. For **churches that score comparatively low**, the first step is a willingness to open honest dialogue about the presence and lived realities of LGBTI people within their communities. The model offered by the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) provides a constructive framework for navigating disagreement. The CPCE's ethics of disagreement call for a "commitment to the mutual and continued exploration of conflictual positions" (CPCE, 26), a readiness to critique one's own stance, and "an obligation to not withdraw" from the conversation. In simpler terms, this means engaging these issues with eyes wide open—not only to confront one's own shortcomings, but to look with empathy upon those wounded by the Church, and to resist the temptation to disengage. Concretely, churches can support local initiatives that create space for discussing the ordination of LGBTI persons, the blessing of same-sex unions, or simply the presence and dignity of LGBTI people in congregational life.

For **churches that score higher**, what is needed is not only continued openness but a proactive and visible commitment to LGBTI inclusion. These churches have the opportunity to become driving forces in safeguarding vulnerable groups and defending human dignity. Rather than reacting to needs as they arise, they are called to actively promote inclusion, acceptance, and love. This requires courage: to make public statements in support of LGBTI rights, to revise liturgies and hymnals, to participate visibly in Pride events, and to support grassroots initiatives that foster inclusive communities.

Finally, across all traditions, two theological values stand out as essential for future progress—particularly within the Orthodox Church, but also in Protestant and Roman Catholic contexts: **honesty** and **courage**.

- **Honesty** is needed to acknowledge the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities that exist both within and beyond the Church. It involves recognising the Church's role in perpetuating rejection and discrimination, and its failure to defend the rights of all people equally. Non-inclusive churches must honestly confront their oppressive practices and stop pretending that LGBTI issues are peripheral. Denial not only distorts truth—it causes real harm to members of their own congregations..
- **Courage** is needed to change both mindsets and practices. Taking a stand for LGBTI inclusion may invite criticism from within the Church or from society. In more open contexts, courage means abandoning the false dichotomy between Church and society, where Christian identity is built on opposition to LGBTI people. In hostile environments, courage means standing visibly and audibly alongside those who are vulnerable, offering protection and solidarity in the face of prevailing hostility.
- Ultimately, calls for honesty and courage must arise from within and beyond the churches—so that we may hear the truth of the gospel and the heart of Christian mission. Does the Church affirm every person as the image and likeness of God on their journey toward salvation, or does it tolerate—or even sanctify—the rejection and oppression of sexual and gender minorities in the name of God?

9. Appendices

Appendix A - Churches

COUNTRY	COUNTRY	WEBSITE
Austria	Altkatholische Kirche Österreichs (Old Catholic Church of Austria)	https://altkatholiken.at/
Austria	Evangelische Kirche Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses in Österreich (Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria)	https://evang.at/
Austria	Evangelische Kirche Helvetischen Bekenntnisses in Österreich (Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession in Austria)	https://reformiertekirche.at/
Austria	Metropolitan Community Church Wien (Metropolitan Community Church in Vienna)	https://facebook.com/mccvienna/
Belgium	Katholieke Kerk in België Église catholique en Belgique (Roman Catholic Church in Belgium)	https://kerknet.be/ https://cathobel.be/
Czech Republic	Katolická církev podbojí v Čechách (Old Catholic Church in the Czech Republic)	https://starokatolici.cz/
Estonia	Eesti Evangeelne Luterlik Kirik (Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church)	https://eelk.ee/et/
Finland	MCC-kirkot Suomessa (Metropolitan Community Church in Finland)	http://elavavesimcc.fi/
Finland	Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland)	https://evl.fi/
Finland	Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko (Orthodox Church of Finland)	https://ort.fi/
France	Église catholique en France (Roman Catholic Church in France)	https://eglise.catholique.fr/
France	Église protestante unie de France (United Protestant Church of France)	https://epudf.org/
Georgia	საქართველოს სამოციქულო ავტოკეფალური მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესია (Georgian Orthodox Church)	https://patriarchate.ge/
Germany	Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (Evangelical Church in Germany)	https://ekd.de/
Germany	Römisch-katholische Kirche in Deutschland (Roman Catholic Church in Germany)	https://katholisch.de/
Greece	Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἑλλάδος (Church of Greece)	http://ecclesia.gr/
Hungary	Magyar Katolikus Egyház (Roman Catholic Church in Hungary)	https://katolikus.hu/
Ireland	Eaglais Chaitliceach in Éireann (Roman Catholic Church in Ireland)	https://catholicbishops.ie/
Ireland / United Kingdom	Presbyterian Church in Ireland	https://presbyterianireland.org/
Italy	Chiesa Cattolica in Italia (Roman Catholic Church in Italy)	https://chiesacattolica.it/
Malta	Arcidjoċesi ta' Malta (Roman Catholic Church in Malta)	https://knisja.mt/
Netherlands	Kerk van de Nazarener Nederland (The Church of the Nazarene)	https://kvdn.nl/
Netherlands	Leger des Heils (The Salvation Army)	https://legerdesheils.nl/
Netherlands	Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland (Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands)	https://oudkatholiek.nl/
Netherlands	Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (Protestant Church in the Netherlands)	https://protestantsekerk.nl/
Netherlands	Rooms-Katholieke kerk in Nederland (Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands)	https://rkkerk.nl/

COUNTRY	COUNTRY	WEBSITE
Poland	Kościół Ewangelicko-Reformowany w RP (Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland)	https://reformowani.org.pl/
Poland	Kościół katolicki w Polsce (Roman Catholic Church in Poland)	https://episkopat.pl/
Poland	Reformowany Kościół Katolicki w Polsce (Reformed Catholic Church in Poland)	https://starokatolicy.eu/
Portugal	Igreja Católica em Portugal (Roman Catholic Church in Portugal)	https://conferenciaepiscopal.pt/
Romania	Biserica Ortodoxă Română (Romanian Orthodox Church)	https://patriarhia.ro/
Slovakia	Cirkevný zbor evanjelickej cirkvi augsburského vyznania na Slovensku Bratislava Staré Mesto (Parish of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia, Bratislava Staré Mesto)	https://velkykostol.sk/
Slovakia	Katolícka cirkev na Slovensku (Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia)	https://kbs.sk/
Slovakia	Starokatolícka delegatúra Utrechtskej únie na Slovensku (Old Catholic Delegation of the Union of Utrecht in Slovakia)	https://starokatolici.eu/
Slovenia	Katoliška Cerkev v Sloveniji (Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia)	https://katoliska-cerkev.si/
Spain	Iglesia católica en España (Roman Catholic Church in Spain)	https://conferenciaepiscopal.es/
Sweden	Evangeliska Frikyrkan (Evangelical Free Church in Sweden)	https://efk.se/
Sweden	Pingst – fria församlingar i samverkan (Pentecostal Alliance of Independent Churches)	https://pingst.se/
Sweden	Romersk-katolska kyrkan i Sverige (Roman Catholic Church in Sweden)	https://katolskakyrkan.se/
Sweden	Svenska kyrkan (Church of Sweden)	https://svenskakyrkan.se/
Switzerland	Evangelisch-reformierte Landeskirche des Kantons Zürich (Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich)	https://zhref.ch/
Switzerland	Römisch-katholische Landeskirche Église catholique en Suisse Chiesa cattolica in Svizzera (Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland)	https://kath.ch/ https://cath.ch/ https://catt.ch/
Ukraine	Православна церква України (Orthodox Church of Ukraine)	https://pomisna.info/
United Kingdom	Church of England	https://churchofengland.org/
United Kingdom	Lutheran Church in Great Britain	https://lutheranchurch.co.uk/
United Kingdom	The Catholic Church, Bishop's Conference in England and Wales	https://cbcew.org.uk/

Appendix B - List of Indicators ('Inclusivity Index')

CATEGORIES	ITEMS (INDICATORS, QUESTIONS)	
Institutional equality and non-discrimination		
Legal documents (i.e. church order, canon law, code of canons, church constitution)	Q1	The legal documents mention LGBTI identities in a non-negative way.
	Q2	The legal documents state the importance of diversity in representational leadership.
Theology	Q3	The church's theology implies the unconditionally acknowledged equality of all people for God regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics.
	Q4	The Bible is not used as a normative instrument for defining gender roles, and is not interpreted as a condemnation of LGBTI people nor of LGBTI lived desires, sexualities, and identities.
	Q5	The Tradition is not interpreted as a condemnation of LGBTI people nor of LGBTI lived desires, sexualities, and identities.
Church policy	Q6	The church policy mentions LGBTI identities in a non-negative way.
	Q7	The church provides and/or acknowledges a protocol/guided process to local congregations on how to become more inclusive and affirming.
	Q8	The church's ministries to children and young people are LGBTI-affirming.
	Q9	The church allows local parishes/congregations/regional associations to have discussion and agency on LGBTI issues and to establish their own policy of affirming the rights of LGBTI people.
	Q10	The church officiates 'same-sex marriages' and/or holds a public blessing ceremony for same-sex couples.
	Q11	The church recognises secular same-sex marriages and/or civil unions.
	Q12	The church baptises children of parents of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
	Q13	The church unconditionally accepts LGBTI people as members, not refusing them baptism if that is the condition for membership.
	Q14	Transgender persons receive a special blessing when they present their new name and/or identity in church.
	Q15	The church doesn't make any restriction to participating in the Eucharist/Communion based on gender and/or sexual identity.
Ordination of clergy	Q16	Cis-hetero women and openly LGBTI people are admitted in seminary (institute for ministerial education and formation).
	Q15	The church ordains people regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
	Q18	The church provides affirmative theological educational material for clergy formation on gender equality and LGBTI issues.

CATEGORIES	ITEMS (INDICATORS, QUESTIONS)	
Church practices		
Leadership	Q19	Cis-hetero women and openly LGBTI people perform leading clerical functions in the church on a national level.
	Q20	Cis-hetero women and openly LGBTI people are actively involved in the church's policy making on equality and non-discrimination.
Work	Q21	The church employs openly LGBTI people for tasks performed by non-ordained workers on the church premises and in church owned offices.
	Q22	The church employs openly LGBTI people in any place where the church offers services to society.
Sexuality and kinship	Q23	The church supports the adoption and raising of children by LGBTI people.
	Q24	Celibacy is not a requirement specific to LGBTI people, both among clergy and lay people.
Advocacy and networks	Q25	The church promotes social acceptance of the LGBTI-community in its public rituals.
	Q26	The church provides social ministry ('diaconia' or 'caritas') to LGBTI people.
	Q27	The church established an official LGBTI-affirmative pastoral ministry for members of the church.
	Q28	The church supports an LGBTI association of clergy/ministers/students of theology.
	Q29	The church does not support any (private or church-related) organisation that promotes the heteronormative 'traditional' family as the cornerstone of church and society, with an implied negative inclination towards openly LGBTI people.
	Q30	The church publicly supports advocacy groups/organisations for LGBTI people.

CATEGORIES	ITEMS (INDICATORS, QUESTIONS)	
Language, speech and symbols		
Official communication	Q31	The language used by church leaders is inclusive and affirmative towards LGBTI people.
	Q32	The church's communication on a national level in general (website, bulletins, social media, newsletters, etc.) constitutes an affirmative environment for LGBTI people.
Symbols	Q33	The church allows LGBTI-related symbols to be used in church spaces or on church buildings.
Worship	Q34	Gender issues and sexuality are thematised in public worship at the national level of the church.
	Q35	The liturgical language in prayer or worship books is sensitive to gender issues and sexual orientation.
Education	Q36	The educational and formational material offered by the church to its members in any of its educational or catechetical activities present an affirmative inclination towards LGBTI experiences and issues.
	Q37	The church raises awareness on the interconnectedness of issues concerning justice and inclusivity in general.
	Q38	The church takes into account the scientific research on gender and sexuality, and engages with it in a constructive and open dialogue.
Acknowledgment	Q39	The church acknowledges its involvement in (past and present) discrimination of LGBTI people.

CATEGORIES	ITEMS (INDICATORS, QUESTIONS)	
Public policy		
Public statements	Q40	In connection with LGBTI experiences and issues, the church publicly apologised and asked for forgiveness from everyone who was affected negatively by the church's past non-inclusivity.
	Q41	The church made public statements concerning the right to safety of LGBTI people.
	Q42	The church made public statements in regards to the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion of LGBTI people.
	Q43	The church made public statements concerning the right of political organisation and expression of LGBTI people.
	Q44	The church made public statements concerning gender-related rights of LGBTI people.
	Q45	The church made public statements concerning reproductive rights of LGBTI people.
	Q46	The church made public statements concerning kinship-related rights of LGBTI people.
	Q47	The church made public statements concerning labour rights of LGBTI people.
	Q48	The church made public statements concerning the health rights of LGBTI people.
	Q49	The church made public statements concerning diversity education in public schools, directed at building tolerance and affirmation of the rights of LGBTI people.
	Q50	The church made public statements concerning the rights of LGBTI people to access other public services.
Ecumenical and international cooperation	Q51	The church actively promotes LGBTI inclusion in ecumenical and/or international settings.
	Q52	The church joins efforts with other local churches in promoting LGBTI inclusion.

Appendix C - RICE 2020 and 2025

JOINT RANK	COUNTRY	CHURCH FAMILY
1	Austria	MCC
2	Poland	OCC
3	Finland	MCC
4	Sweden	PC (Lutheran)
5	Netherlands	OCC
6	Germany	PC (Lutheran, Reformed and United)
7	Switzerland	PC (United)
8	Norway	PC (Lutheran)
9-10	Netherlands	PC (Lutheran and Reformed)
9-10	Slovakia	PC (Lutheran)
11	Germany	RCC
12-13	Austria	OCC
12-13	Switzerland	PC (Reformed)
14	Austria	PC (Lutheran)
15	Austria	PC (Reformed)
16-17	Czechia	OCC
16-17	Slovakia	OCC
18	Finland	PC (Lutheran)
19	Netherlands	PC (Methodist)
20	France	PC (Lutheran and Reformed)
21	United Kingdom	PC (Lutheran)
22-23	Belgium	RCC
22-23	United Kingdom	RCC
24-25	Poland	PC (Reformed)
24-25	Malta	RCC
26	Hungary	PC (Methodist)
27	Austria	RCC
28	Netherlands	PC (Methodist)
29-30	United Kingdom	PC (Anglican)
29-30	Switzerland	RCC
31	Hungary	PC (Lutheran)
32-33	Finland	OC
32-33	Ireland	RCC
34	Italy	RCC
35	France	RCC
36	Estonia	PC (Lutheran)
37	Poland	PC (Lutheran)
38	Romania	Unitarian
39	Netherlands	RCC

CHURCH NAME	SCORE (OUT OF 47 OR 52)	SCORE (%)	YEAR
Metropolitan Community Church in Vienna	52.0	100%	2025
Reformed Catholic Church in Poland	51.5	99%	2025
Metropolitan Community Church in Finland	49.5	95%	2025
Church of Sweden	48.5	93%	2025
Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands	45.0	87%	2025
Evangelical Church in Germany	44.0	85%	2025
Protestant Church in Switzerland	38.5	82%	2020
Church of Norway	36.5	78%	2020
Protestant Church in the Netherlands	40.0	77%	2025
Parish of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia, Bratislava Staré Mesto	40.0	77%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in Germany	37.5	72%	2025
Old Catholic Church of Austria	34.5	66%	2025
Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich	34.5	66%	2025
Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria	32.5	63%	2025
Evangelical Church of the Helvetic Confession in Austria	32.0	62%	2025
Old Catholic Church in the Czech Republic	31.5	61%	2025
Old Catholic Deleg	31.5	61%	2025
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland	31.0	60%	2025
The Salvation Army	30.5	59%	2025
United Protestant Church of France	29.5	57%	2025
Lutheran Church in Great Britain	29.0	56%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in Belgium	27.5	53%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in England & Wales	27.5	53%	2025
Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland	26.5	51%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in Malta	26.5	51%	2025
Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship	23.5	50%	2020
Roman Catholic Church in Austria	20.5	44%	2020
The Church of the Nazarene	21.5	41%	2025
Church of England	21.0	40%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland	21.0	40%	2025
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary	18	38%	2020
Orthodox Church of Finland	19.0	37%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in Ireland	19.0	37%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in Italy	18.5	36%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in France	18.0	35%	2025
Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church	17.5	34%	2025
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland	13	28%	2020
Unitarian Church of Transylvania	12	26%	2020
Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands	12.5	24%	2025

RANK	COUNTRY	CHURCH FAMILY
40	Sweden	PC (Baptist)
41-42	Serbia	OC
41-42	Romania	RCC
43-47	Hungary	RCC
43-47	Portugal	RCC
43-47	Slovenia	RCC
43-47	Spain	RCC
43-47	Sweden	PC (Pentecostal)
48-49	Estonia	OC
48-49	Ukraine	Greek Catholic
50	Sweden	RCC
51	Greece	OC
52-53	Moldova	OC
52-53	Hungary	PC (Reformed)
54-55	Belarus	OC
54-55	Croatia	RCC
56	Latvia	PC (Lutheran)
57	Armenia	Oriental
58-59	Ireland / United Kingdom	PC (Reformed)
58-59	Poland	RCC
60	Russia	OC
61	Slovakia	RCC
62	Romania	OC
63	Belarus	RCC
64	Georgia	OC
65	Ukraine	OC

CHURCH NAME	SCORE (OUT OF 52)	SCORE (%)	
Evangelical Free Church in Sweden	11.0	21%	2025
Serbian Orthodox Church	9.5	20%	2020
"Roman Catholic Church in Romania"	9.5	20%	2020
Roman Catholic Church in Hungary	9.0	17%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in Portugal	9.0	17%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia	9.0	17%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in Spain	9.0	17%	2025
Pentecostal Alliance of Independent Churches	9.0	17%	2025
Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church	8	17%	2020
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church	8	17%	2020
Roman Catholic Church in Sweden	8.0	15%	2025
Church of Greece	7.5	14%	2025
Moldovan Orthodox Church	6	13%	2020
Reformed Church in Hungary	6	13%	2020
Belarusian Orthodox Church	5.5	12%	2020
Roman Catholic Church in Croatia	5.5	12%	2020
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia	3.5	7%	2020
Armenian Apostolic Church	3	6%	2020
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	3.0	6%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in Poland	3.0	6%	2025
Russian Orthodox Church	2.5	5%	2020
Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia	2.5	5%	2025
Romanian Orthodox Church	2.0	4%	2025
Roman Catholic Church in Belarus	1.5	3%	2020
Georgian Orthodox Church	1.0	2%	2025
Orthodox Church of Ukraine	0.0	0%	2025

Appendix D - RICE 2025 results per church family: OC, RCC, PC, other churches

Results for OC

CATEGORIES	INDICATORS	OC FINLAND	OC GREECE	OC ROMANIA	OC GEORGIA	OC UKRAINE	TOTAL
Institutional equality and non-discrimination (18/52=34.6%)							
Legal documents (i.e. church order, canon law, code of canons, church constitution)	Q1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Theology	Q3	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
	Q4	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	1
	Q5	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	1
Church policy	Q6	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Q7	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q8	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	1
	Q9	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	1
	Q10	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q11	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Q12	1	0.5	0.5	0	0	2
	Q13	1	0.5	0	0.5	0	2
	Q14	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
	Q15	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	1
Ordination of clergy	Q16	1	0.5	0	0.5	0	2
	Q17	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
	Q18	0	0	0	0	0	0
C1 Total		9	3.5	1	1	0	14.5
Leadership	Q19	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
	Q20	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
Work	Q21	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	1
	Q22	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	1
Sexuality and kinship	Q23	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
	Q24	0.5	0	1	0	0	1.5
Advocacy and networks	Q25	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
	Q26	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	1
	Q27	0	0.5	0	0	0	0.5
	Q28	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q29	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Q30	0	0	0	0	0	0
174	C2 Total	5	2	1	0	0	8

CATEGORIES	INDICATORS	OC FINLAND	OC GREECE	OC ROMANIA	OC GEORGIA	OC UKRAINE	TOTAL
Official communication	Q31	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	1
	Q32	0	0	0	0	0	0
Symbols	Q33	0	0	0	0	0	0
Worship	Q34	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q35	0	0	0	0	0	0
Education	Q36	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
	Q37	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
	Q38	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
Acknowledgment	Q39	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
C3 Total		2.5	0.5	0	0	0	3
Public policy (13/52=25.0%)							
Public statements	Q40	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q41	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	1
	Q42	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	1
	Q43	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q44	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
	Q45	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q46	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5
	Q47	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q48	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q49	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q50	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ecumenical and international cooperation	Q51	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	1
	Q52	0	0	0	0	0	0
C4 Total		2.5	1.5	0	0	0	4
TOTAL SCORE		19	7.5	2	1	0	29.5

Results for RCC

CATEGORIES	INDICATORS	RCC GERMANY	RCC BELGIUM	RCC ENGLAND & WALES	RCC MALTA	RCC SWITZERLAND	RCC IRELAND	RCC ITALY
Institutional equality and non-discrimination (18/52=34.6%)								
Legal documents (i.e. church order, canon law, code of canons, church constitution)	Q1	0	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0
	Q2	0.5	0	0	0	0.5	0.5	0
Theology	Q3	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q4	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0	0.5
	Q5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Church policy	Q6	1	0.5	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q7	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0	0	0.5
	Q8	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q9	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	0.5
	Q10	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q11	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5
	Q12	0.5	1	1	1	1	1	0.5
	Q13	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Q14	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0
	Q15	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5
Ordination of clergy	Q16	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q17	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	0
	Q18	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5
C1 Total		12.5	11	12	10.5	7.5	7.5	7

RCC FRANCE	RCC NETHERLANDS	RCC HUNGARY	RCC PORTUGAL	RCC SLOVENIA	RCC SPAIN	RCC SWEDEN	RCC POLAND	RCC SLOVAKIA	TOTAL
Institutional equality and non-discrimination (18/52=34.6%)									
0	0	0	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	1.5
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.5
0	1	0.5	1	0	0.5	0	0.5	0	8
0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	8.5
0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	7.5
0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	6.5
0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.5
0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	6.5
1	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	7
0.5	0	0	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	5.5
0.5	0.5	0	1	0.5	0	0	0	0	8
1	1	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	11.5
1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	12
0	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.5
0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	11
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.5
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.5
0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	3.5
7.5	6	3.5	5.5	3	5	4	1.5	2.5	106.5

CATEGORIES	INDICATORS	RCC GERMANY	RCC BELGIUM	RCC ENGLAND & WALES	RCC MALTA	RCC SWITZERLAND	RCC IRELAND	RCC ITALY
Church practices (12/52=23.1%)								
Leadership	Q19	0	1	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0
	Q20	0.5	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5
Work	Q21	1	1	1	1	1	0	0.5
	Q22	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	0.5
Sexuality and kinship	Q23	1	0	1	0	0	0.5	0
	Q24	1	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0
Advocacy and networks	Q25	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q26	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
	Q27	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q28	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0
		0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q30	1	0	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
C2 Total			9	7.5	6.5	6.5	4	4.5
Language, speech and symbols (9/52=17.3%)								
Official communication	Q31	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q32	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Symbols	Q33	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Worship	Q34	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q35	0.5	0	0	0	0.5	0	0.5
Education	Q36	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0
	Q37	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q38	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.5
Acknowledgment	Q39	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q40	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
C3 Total		7	4.5	4	4.5	4.5	4.5	4

RCC FRANCE	RCC NETHERLANDS	RCC HUNGARY	RCC PORTUGAL	RCC SLOVENIA	RCC SPAIN	RCC SWEDEN	RCC POLAND	RCC SLOVAKIA	TOTAL
Church practices (12/52=23.1%)									
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.5
0.5	0.5	0	0	0	0	0.5	0	0	6.5
0.5	0.5	0	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	8
1	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	9
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.5
0.5	0	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	4.5
0.5	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	6
1	0	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	9
0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
0.5	0	0	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	6
0	0	0	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	3.5
5	2	1	1	2.5	2.5	2.5	0.5	0	64.5
Language, speech and symbols (9/52=17.3%)									
0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	8
0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	0	6.5
0	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4.5
0.5	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.5
0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.5
0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	7
0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	7.5
0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	7
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
3.5	3	2	2	2	1.5	1.5	1	0	49.5

CATEGORIES	INDICATORS	RCC GERMANY	RCC BELGIUM	RCC ENGLAND & WALES	RCC MALTA	RCC SWITZERLAND	RCC IRELAND	RCC ITALY
Public policy (13/52=25.0%)								
Public statements	Q40	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Q41	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q42	0.5	1	0.5	1	0	0.5	0
	Q43	1	0	0.5	1	0.5	0	0
	Q44	1	0	0	0	0.5	0	0.5
	Q45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q46	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q47	0.5	0	0.5	1	0	0	0.5
	Q48	1	0	0.5	0	0	0	0
		0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0.5	0
	Q50	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	0	1
Ecumenical and international cooperation	Q51	1	0	0.5	0	0	0.5	0
	Q52	1	0.5	0	0	0.5	0.5	0
C4 Total		8.5	3	4	5	2.5	3	3
TOTAL SCORE		37.5	27.5	27.5	26.5	21	19	18.5

RCC FRANCE	RCC NETHERLANDS	RCC HUNGARY	RCC PORTUGAL	RCC SLOVENIA	RCC SPAIN	RCC SWEDEN	RCC POLAND	RCC SLOVAKIA	TOTAL
Public policy (13/52=25.0%)									
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	0	7
0.5	0	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	5
0	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.5
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	4.5
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.5
0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.5
0	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.5
0.5	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.5
2	1.5	2.5	0.5	1.5	0	0	0	0	37
18	12.5	9	9	9	9	8	3	2.5	257.5

Results for PC

CATEGORIES	INDICATORS	ELC SWEDEN	PC GERMANY	PC NETHERLANDS	BRATISLAVA PARISH, ELC SLOVAKIA	CANTON ZURICH, PC SWITZERLAND	ELC AUSTRIA	REF AUSTRIA	ELC FINLAND
Institutional equality and non-discrimination (18/52=34.6%)									
Legal documents (i.e. church order, canon law, code of canons, church constitution)	Q1	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	1	1	0
	Q2	1	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	1	0
Theology	Q3	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	1
	Q4	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	0.5
	Q5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5
Church policy	Q6	1	1	0.5	1	1	0.5	1	0.5
	Q7	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0	1
	Q8	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5
	Q9	1	1	1	0	0.5	1	1	1
	Q10	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	1	1	1
	Q11	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Q12	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Q13	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Q14	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	1	0	0.5
	Q15	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Ordination of clergy	Q16	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Q17	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	1
	Q18	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	0.5
C1 Total		17.5	16.5	14	15	15	16	14.5	13

SALVATION ARMY NETHERLANDS	PC FRANCE	ELC GREAT BRITAIN UK	REF POLAND	CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE NETHERLANDS	CofE UK	ELC ESTONIA	EFC SWEDEN	PRESBYTERIAN IRELAND	TOTAL
Institutional equality and non-discrimination (18/52=34.6%)									
1	0	1	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	8
1	0	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	7.5
1	1	0.5	0.5	1	0	1	0.5	0.5	13.5
1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	12.5
1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	13
1	1	1	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	10.5
1	0	0	0	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0	6.5
1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	11.5
1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0	13
0	1	1	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	9.5
0.5	1	1	0	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	12.5
1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0.5	0	14.5
1	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	0	15
1	0.5	0	0	1	1	0.5	0.5	0	9
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	15.5
1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	1	0.5	0.5	15
1	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	14
0.5	0	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	8
16	13.5	13.5	7.5	11.5	9.5	7.5	6	2.5	209

CATEGORIES	INDICATORS	ELC SWEDEN	PC GERMANY	PC NETHERLANDS	BRATISLAVA PARISH, ELC SLOVAKIA"	CANTON ZURICH, PC SWITZERLAND	ELC AUSTRIA	REF AUSTRIA	ELC FINLAND
Church practices (12/52=23.1%)									
Leadership	Q19	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Q20	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Work	Q21	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1
	Q22	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1
Sexuality and kinship	Q23	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	0	0
	Q24	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Advocacy and networks	Q25	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1
	Q26	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
	Q27	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	1	0.5
	Q28	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q29	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0	1	0
	Q30	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	0	0.5	0.5
C2 Total		11.5	10	10	10.5	8.5	9	10	8.5
Language, speech and symbols (9/52=17.3%)									
Official communication	Q31	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5
	Q32	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5
Symbols	Q33	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5
Worship	Q34	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5
	Q35	1	0.5	1	1	0.5	0.5	0	0
Education	Q36	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0	0.5
		1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.5
	Q38	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Acknowledgment	Q39	1	0.5	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	1
C3 Total 184		8.5	8	8	7.5	4.5	4.5	5	4.5

SALVATION ARMY NETHERLANDS	PC FRANCE	ELC GREAT BRITAIN UK	REF POLAND	CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE NETHERLANDS	CofE UK	ELC ESTONIA	EFC SWEDEN	PRESBYTERIAN IRELAND	TOTAL
Church practices (12/52=23.1%)									
0.5	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	13
0.5	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0	14
0.5	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	0.5	0	14
1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	13.5
0	1	1	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0	8.5
0	1	1	0.5	0	0	1	0	0	11.5
1	0.5	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	13
1	1	0	1	1	0.5	1	0	0	12.5
0	0.5	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	7
0	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	5
0	1	1	0.5	0	0	0.5	0.5	0	8
1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0	8
5.5	10	9	7.5	4	5	6	3	0	128
Language, speech and symbols (9/52=17.3%)									
0.5	0.5	1	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	9.5
0	0.5	1	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	8.5
0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	10
0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	7
0	0	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	5.5
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5.5
0.5	0	1	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	9.5
1	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	11.5
1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	10
4	4	6	2.5	3.5	3	2	1	0.5 ¹⁸⁵	77

CATEGORIES	INDICATORS	ELC SWEDEN	PC GERMANY	PC NETHERLANDS	BRATISLAVA PARISH, ELC SLOVAKIA	CANTON ZURICH, PC SWITZERLAND	ELC AUSTRIA	REF AUSTRIA	ELC FINLAND
Public policy (13/52=25.0%)									
Public statements	Q40	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Q41	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1
	Q42	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Q43	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0
	Q44	1	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	1
	Q45	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0
	Q46	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0	0.5	1
	Q47	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.5	0	0.5
	Q48	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0	0	0.5
		0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0
	Q50	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0
Ecumenical and international cooperation	Q51	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	0	0
	Q52	1	0.5	0	1	0.5	0	1	0.5
C4 Total			9.5	8	7	6.5	3	2.5	5
TOTAL SCORE		48.5	44	40	40	34.5	32.5	32	31

SALVATION ARMY NETHERLANDS	PC FRANCE	ELC GREAT BRITAIN UK	REF POLAND	CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE NETHERLANDS	CofE UK	ELC ESTONIA	EFC SWEDEN	PRESBYTERIAN IRELAND	TOTAL
Public policy (13/52=25.0%)									
0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
1	0.5	0	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	10
1	0	0	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	9.5
0	0	0	1	0	0.5	0	0	0	6
0	0	0	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0	4.5
0	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	3.5
0	0	0	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	0	6
1	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	6
0.5	0	0	1	0.5	0	0	0	0	6.5
0.5	0	0	0	0.5	1	0	0	0	5
1	0	0	1	0.5	0	0	0	0	5
0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	0	7.5
0	0	0	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0	5.5
5	2	0.5	9	2.5	3.5	2	1	0	78
30.5	29.5	29	26.5	21.5	21	17.5	11	3	492

Results for other churches

CATEGORIES	INDICATORS	MCC FINLAND	ECC POLAND	MCC AUSTRIA	OCC NETHERLANDS	OCC AUSTRIA	OCC CZECHIA	OCC SLOVAKIA	PAIC SWEDEN	TOTAL
Institutional equality and non-discrimination (18/52=34.6%)										
Legal documents (i.e. church order, canon law, code of canons, church constitution)	Q1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	4
	Q2	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	0	0	4.5
Theology	Q3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
	Q4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	7.5
	Q5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	7.5
Church policy	Q6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
	Q7	1	1	1	0	0.5	0	0	0	3.5
	Q8	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0	6
	Q9	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	7.5
	Q10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
	Q11	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	7.5
	Q12	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	7.5
	Q13	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	7.5
	Q14	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	5.5
	Q15	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	6
Ordination of clergy	Q16	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	7.5
	Q17	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
	Q18	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	0	6.5
C1 Total			18	18	16	16	13	13	4.5	116.5
Church practices (12/52=23.1%)										
Leadership	Q19	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	7.5
	Q20	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
Work	Q21	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
	Q22	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
Sexuality and kinship	Q23	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	0	6.5
	Q24	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
Advocacy and networks	Q25	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
	Q26	1	1	1	0	0.5	1	1	1	6.5
	Q27	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	4
	Q28	1	1	0.5	1	0	0	0	0	3.5
	Q29	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	7.5
	Q30	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	5.5
C2 Total		12	12	11.5	11	8	9.5	9.5	2.5	76

CATEGORIES	INDICATORS	MCC FINLAND	ECC POLAND	MCC AUSTRIA	OCC NETHERLANDS	OCC AUSTRIA	OCC CZECHIA	OCC SLOVAKIA	PAIC SWEDEN	TOTAL
Language, speech and symbols (9/52=17.3%)										
Official communication	Q31	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	0	6.5
	Q32	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	0	6.5
Symbols	Q33	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	7
Worship	Q34	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	5
	Q35	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	4.5
Education	Q36	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	5.5
	Q35	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	0.5	7
	Q38	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	0.5	7
Acknowledgment	Q39	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	6
C3 Total		9	8.5	9	8	5	7	7	1.5	55
Public policy (13/52=25.0%)										
Public statements	Q40	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
	Q41	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0	0	0.5	4.5
	Q42	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	0	0	4.5
	Q43	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	0	0	4.5
	Q44	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	0	0	4.5
	Q45	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	0	0	0	4
	Q46	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	0	0	4.5
	Q47	1	1	1	0	0.5	0	0	0	3.5
	Q48	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	0	0	4.5
	Q49	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	3.5
	Q50	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Ecumenical and international cooperation	Q51	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	0	6.5
	Q52	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	0	6.5
C4 Total		13	13	11	10	5.5	2	2	0.5	57
TOTAL SCORE		52	51.5	49.5	45	34.5	31.5	31.5	9	304.5

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Rainbow Index of Churches in Europe 2025

© 2025 European Forum of LGBTI+ Christian Groups

Project Team: Rev. Wielie Elhorst, Misza Czerniak, Dr Rachael Stockdale

Academic Team: Dr Rachael Stockdale, Prof. Dr Regina Elsner, Prof. Dr Pekka Metso, Prof. Dr Valérie Nicolet

Authors: Prof. Dr Regina Elsner, Prof. Dr Pekka Metso, Prof. Dr Valérie Nicolet

Advisory Board: Prof. Dr Mariecke van den Berg, Dr Talvikki Ahonen, Dr Michael Brinkschröder, Dr Gábor Petri

Proofreading: Dr Carol Joyner

With the support of the **Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands**

