

# PERSPECTIVES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS LGBT PEOPLE IN MYANMAR 2020



**&PROUD**



This report was commissioned by &PROUD and Colors Rainbow.

We extend our thanks to **Diakonia** and the **Heinrich Boll Foundation** whose generous funding made this study possible.



Data collection was undertaken by Kantar Public Myanmar.

2020, Yangon, Myanmar.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report presents findings from a nationally representative, attitudinal survey commissioned by &PROUD and Colors Rainbow. The objectives of the study are two-fold: firstly, to act as the country's most comprehensive stand-alone research piece on attitudes towards LGBT people; and secondly, to inform community campaign strategies to promote greater acceptance of LGBT people.

Data collection took place in August and September 2020 via phone-calls and SMS links using the proprietary research panel of a locally-contracted agency (Kantar Public Myanmar), through which a robust and nationally-representative sample of 1,553 individuals was recruited. Respondents were first led through a series of 10 questions about their perspectives on LGBT people by a trained enumerator, and then sent an self-completed questionnaire through an SMS link comprising of three more general values-based questions.

## KEY FINDINGS

- 1. An overwhelming majority of people agree that LGBT people deserve equality and equal treatment and 74% of people do not think it should be illegal to be LGBT.** When it comes to personal acceptance, 1-in-2 people agree that they accept and support LGBT people, while roughly 1-in-3 do not. This indicates that despite personal prejudices, a belief in equality and equal treatment for all people is more important than personal perspectives towards LGBT people.
- 2. People are more willing to accept LGBT people in an abstract sense, but less so when the person in questions is closer to home or a politician.** More than half of people would find it completely unacceptable if their own child was LGBT, and a similarly high number of respondents expressed unwillingness to accept a sibling who was LGBT. 1-in-2 respondents expressed a negative sentiment towards a politician being LGBT.
- 3. Gender, age, education, socio-economic level and location (neither urban or rural or different states or regions) do not appear to play a significant role in shaping one's views towards LGBT people.** People from non-Buddhist religions appeared to have slightly lower levels of acceptance and support for LGBT people.
- 4. 3-out-of-4 people knew at least one person who was LGBT** – more than half of whom indicated it was a friend, and 16% of whom reported it was a family member.
- 5. The myth that being LGBT is a choice is believed by nearly 1-in-2 people.** Meanwhile however, a quarter of people believe LGBT people were “born that way”.
- 6. There are mixed feelings as to whether or not LGBT people can be accepted within Myanmar culture.** While 50% of people are in agreement that LGBT people can be accepted in Myanmar culture, 1-in-3 people do not think they can be accepted. When it comes to whether or not LGBT people are supported by their families, the distribution of affirmative and negative responses was similar.
- 7. People are willing to accept that LGBT people can be hardworking, healthy, respectful and contribute positively to society.** While this finding needs further qualitative exploration given the widespread anecdotal evidence of negative stereotypes against LGBT people, it is promising that negative stereotypes were not top-of-mind for the vast majority of people.
- 8. Family, kindness and being hardworking are values believed to be more important than conservative values** such as abiding the law, being proud of one's country and not challenging figures of authority.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## FOR LGBT ACTIVISTS

- Activism and advocacy efforts should **leverage data that demonstrates the widespread public support for LGBT people in communication with lawmakers** – including attitudes towards the legality of being LGBT and attitudes about equal treatment of LGBT people. This data will need to be presented in digestible formats and actively pushed towards policymakers and elected officials to encourage legal reform through a range of different forums – including but not limited to Union Level and State/Regional Hluttaws, individual MPs and political party offices around the country. These efforts should be framed as civil society holding the government and elected representatives accountable to the will of the people of Myanmar.
- Activists would also do well to **link advocacy efforts and messaging with the work of other established CSOs/NGOs and social change movements** working in areas relating to inclusion, participation and equality. These should include organisations and actors working for gender equality, ethnic minority rights and inclusion of people living with disabilities. The LGBT community will ultimately be best-served by a civil society space that collaboratively pushes for social inclusion across a range of identities, issues and sectors, as this reinforces the notion that equality is for all people. Such an approach will also allow different communities to leverage other’s networks and platforms in order to more broadly promote values of inclusion and equality, and garner even more advocates.
- Beyond the policy and advocacy sphere, this data should also be used to **build campaign strategies and frames to promote attitudinal change amongst everyday Myanmar people**. The data demonstrates that many Myanmar people are still not supportive of the LGBT community. Thus while legal reform is critical to securing greater protection of the rights of LGBT people, widespread violence, discrimination and marginalisation can continue unseen in all manner of private and public spaces. Promoting attitudinal change at a grassroots level is therefore critical to promoting acceptance and support of the LGBT community. The data in this report highlights a range of different values that should be evoked within campaigns and public outreach – namely family, kindness and being hardworking – in order to change the attitudes of neutral or unsupportive people.

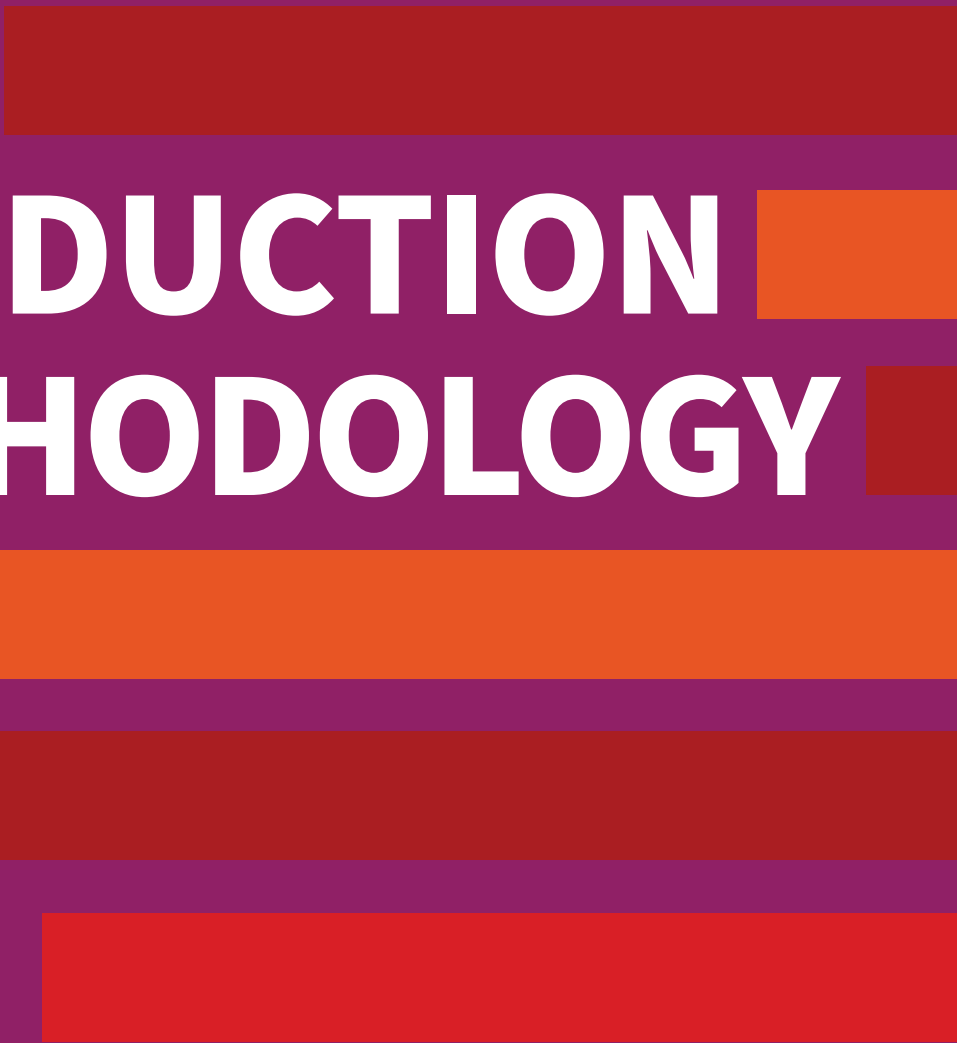
## FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- The international community should **continue to demonstrate proactive, public support for activities related to LGBT advocacy and service provision**. Advocating for legal reform and the human rights of LGBT at a political level will help to bolster the voices of local activists. Furthermore, LGBT sensitivity should be mainstreamed in all development programming, whether directly related to LGBT people or not. This is clearly justified by the still widespread lack of acceptance and support for LGBT people amongst a significant portion of Myanmar’s population.
- **Contribution to further research, activities and programming** being undertaken across the country will also be critical in sustaining LGBT advocacy efforts. Small NGOs rely on the generous support of international donors to continue their crucial services for the LGBT community in the

spaces of health, mental health, legal advocacy, livelihoods, social acceptance, art and culture. Continued support will be specifically relevant following the assembly of a new parliament following the 2020 elections, given these actors will be the key stakeholders for passing legal reform.

## **FOR OTHER CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS**

- Extending **support for and willingness to collaborate with LGBT advocacy efforts** will mutually strengthen missions working towards more inclusive and equal societies. Given that this study demonstrates that a majority of people believe in equality for LGBT people, civil society groups working on equality and inclusion towards actors should proactively work with LGBT organisations promote LGBT inclusive policies and attitudes within their own workplaces and communities.



# INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY



# Introduction

## Understanding LGBT identities in the Myanmar context

In Myanmar, people of diverse sexualities and gender identities face human rights abuses and violence on multiple fronts for the fact that they do not conform to culturally-entrenched understandings of gender norms and behaviours. LGBTIQ individuals frequently suffer physical, sexual and emotional abuse at the hands of family and household members, and other community members such as law enforcement officers, neighbours, teachers and classmates.<sup>1</sup>

Such cases are rarely taken seriously by Myanmar's authorities or broader society. This situation was made abundantly clear following the high profile suicide of 26-year-old gay librarian, Kyaw Zin Win, who took his life after being forcibly outed and bullied by his colleagues – with the Myanmar National Human Rights Council's dismissing any wrongdoing and attributing the youth's death to his own 'mental weakness'.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, LGBTIQ individuals face poorer outcomes in their physical and mental health compared to their peers, and frequently face economic marginalisation. All of this is bolstered by the ongoing existence of the colonially-introduced *Section 377* and associated police acts, which serve to criminalise same-sex relations and enshrine binary heteronormative gender norms into Myanmar's legal system.

These factors compound a sense of isolation and vulnerability amongst LGBTIQ individuals. With negative representation in the media, limited representation and visibility in political, professional and social spheres, and treatment by the wider population that varies between casual dismissiveness to active violence, Myanmar's LGBTIQ community are not only deserving of, but in critical need of channels and physical spaces through which to change the narrative around their identities, and assert their voices in Myanmar's transition towards an inclusive and democratic society.

### A note on language

In Myanmar, the term 'LGBT' has become a catch-all to describe people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. It is also worth noting that the more recent addition of 'I' and 'Q' in Western discourse and activism has not widely taken root in Myanmar, despite some local organisations increasingly adopting this language.

It is important to note that the categories represented in the acronym (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, queer and intersex) reflect Western cultural experiences and constructs of sexuality, gender identity and expression. Thus while *LGBT* is frequently used as shorthand in Myanmar, the specific categories within the acronym do not necessarily correlate with local terms, identities and lived experiences.

This study used the acronym *LGBT* within the survey in order to have as widespread a level of comprehension amongst the general population as possible, and accordingly, the findings are

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<sup>1</sup> Colors Rainbow (2018) <https://www.colorsrainbow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Trend-Analysis-2015-2018-English-for-Web.pdf>; Colors Rainbow/UNAIDS (2018) Baseline Assessment – LGBT Community At Workplace in Yangon.

<sup>2</sup> Frontier (2019) <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/gay-myanmar-man-who-took-own-life-mentally-weak-inquiry>

expressed in reference to *LGBT* people. Respondents were given a clear definition of what was meant by the term LGBT – which was expressed in terms of the transgression of sexuality and gender norms i.e. women who have relationships/sex with women, men who have relationships/sex with men, women who live/behave/dress like men and men who live/behave/dress like women. We recognize that to some audiences, the phrasing of questions in this manner does not reflect their lived experiences as men, women, gender fluid or gender non-binary people. We also note that it does not discretely categorise bisexual/pansexual people or address intersex experiences (**see explanation in *Limitations* p11**). Nevertheless, given the conservative nature of Myanmar culture on topics of sexuality and gender, and the limitations of the survey itself, the decision was made to keep these identities as concise and easy to understand as possible for *all* audiences.

## Background of this study

Myanmar's democratic transition has presented increasing opportunities for long-marginalised groups to claim political space in national dialogues concerning human rights and equality. Indeed, the country's LGBTIQ community is one such group that is leveraging newfound freedoms to enhance their visibility and demand political, legal and social reform. This is taking place within the broader context of greater attention being given to LGBTIQ causes in the region – with positive examples being India's dismantling of anti-sodomy laws and Taiwan's recognition of same-sex marriage, and more worrying cases such as Brunei's propping up of the death penalty, increased homophobic vitriol being demonstrated in Indonesia, and a failed attempt to dismantle Section 377 in Singapore. In all cases on both sides of the battles, strategically aligning political manoeuvres with broader public sentiment has been of ultimate importance. The same will be true of Myanmar. Following the country's 2020 elections, civil society activists will have a refreshed parliament amongst whom reform can be pursued. As such, it is critical to understand the general population's perspectives on sexual and gender minorities, in order to inform campaign strategies, messaging and audiences.

During Yangon Pride 2020, &PROUD and Colors Rainbow launched the *Love is not a Crime* campaign – which called upon LGBTIQ people and their allies to proactively demonstrate love and support for people of diverse sexualities and gender identities, with a pink 'pinky' finger featuring as the symbolic heart of the campaign. The first phase has consisted of filming short clips of LGBTIQ people and their loved ones, celebrity endorsement, and a viral spreading of the message across social media platforms through a specially-designed Facebook profile frame.

Recognising the need for a much more robust, research-driven campaign strategy, this study was designed and commissioned to directly contribute to informing the next phase of community campaigning, but also to produce data that can be used to rally governments, civil society and other actors to demand social and legal reform that better recognises the human rights of LGBTIQ people. It is our hope that these results can be widely used by community activists and political actors alike.

# Methodology

## Research design and theory

The study was designed to understand two key objectives:

1. Attitudes towards LGBT people – including levels of acceptance and legal perspectives
2. General attitudes and values that guide the general populations' approach to life

An important element of the study was to be able to disaggregate information across different demographic groupings, so it could be determined whether or not different subsections of the population were more or less inclined to support LGBT people. Being able to profile the population in such a way allows for the development of strategic campaigns that can be specifically tailored to target different social groups. Some groups and individuals may always remain hostile regardless of messaging, while some are already supportive of LGBT people. Accordingly, this profile segmentation is particularly useful for identifying the 'middle ground' – i.e. people who are neutral or who have not yet made up their mind, and who could thus be won over to shift to a position of support.

We asked people from all states and regions what they think about  
🇲🇲 LGBT people

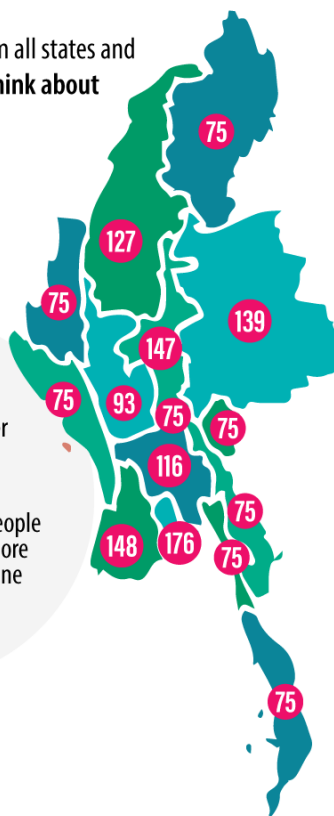
Total  
Respondents  
1554



We asked 8 questions over the phone...



...after that people answered 3 more questions online



Participants were asked to complete two short consecutive surveys. Firstly, by phone, they were led through 8 questions by a trained enumerator. These questions were directly focused on their attitudes towards LGBT people. Immediately after this, they were sent an SMS link to complete 3 questions that asked the to rank different values according to their perception of importance.

There were two key reasons why the survey components were divided as such. Firstly, we needed to be sure that respondents fully comprehended the questions pertaining to their views on LGBT people, and that they were given opportunities to ask for clarifications and for the definition of LGBT to be repeated. The primary reason for conducting the latter survey through the SMS link was that question formats that require respondents to rank different responses are very difficult to conduct by phone. Extreme care was given to make sure that the latter component was intuitive and easy to complete autonomously.

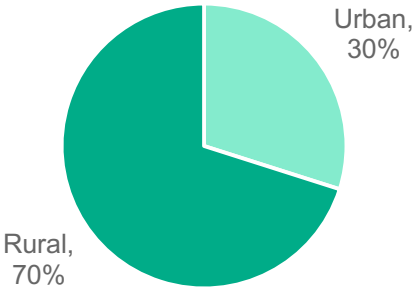
## Sample design and overview

The sample was collected so as to have nationwide representation and to reflect Myanmar's demographic diversity. Starting with a base of n=1200 participants, recruitment quotas were set for each state and region that proportionally reflected the real population in each location (this was based using the 2014

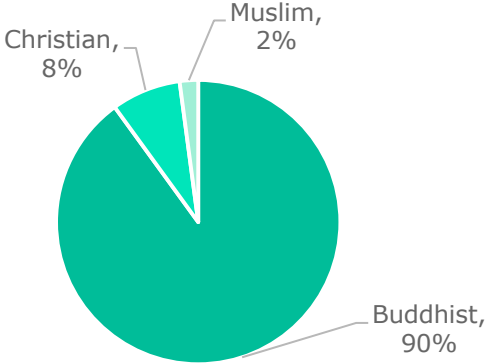
Census Data). Locations that were attributed less than 75 respondents due to the smaller population bases in these areas, were boosted to n=75, so that a degree of disaggregation across state and regional findings was possible. When the data is presented as a whole, it has been weighted so that those states with boosted populations in the sample do not disproportionately skew the data set.

	No. Sample (proportional distribution)	Boosted	Rural	Urban
Yangon	176	176	53	123
Bago	116	116	91	26
Nay Pyi Taw	28	75	51	24
Mandalay	147	147	96	52
Magway	93	93	79	14
Sagaing	127	127	105	22
Ayeyarwady	148	148	127	21
Shan	139	139	106	33
Rakhine	50	75	62	13
Kachin	39	75	48	27
Chin	11	75	59	16
Kayah	7	75	56	19
Tanintharyi	34	75	57	18
Kayin	36	75	59	17
Mon	49	75	54	21
<b>Total</b>	1200	<b>1554</b>	1102	443

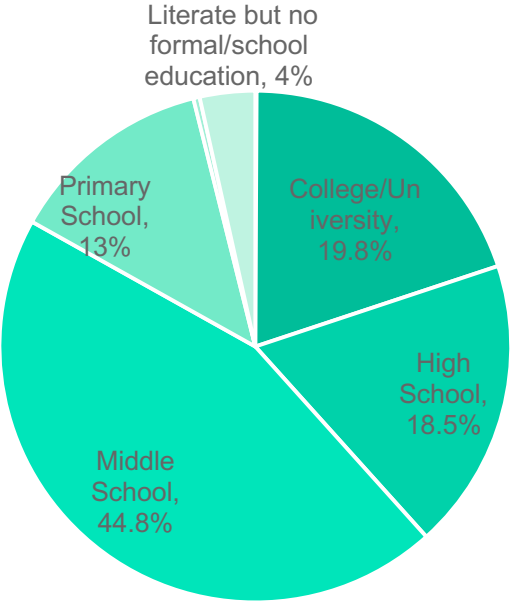
**Urban/Rural location (n=1554)**



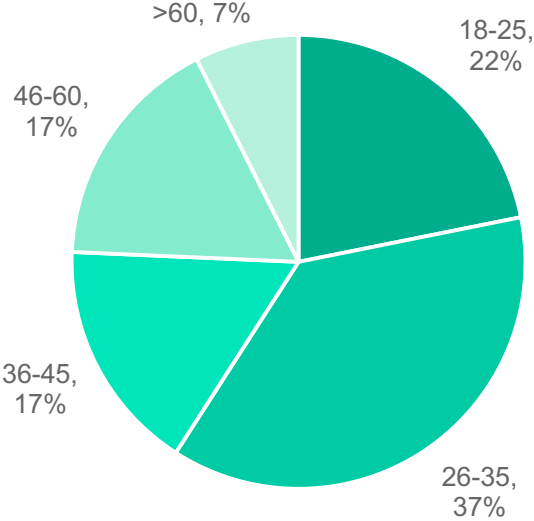
**Religion**



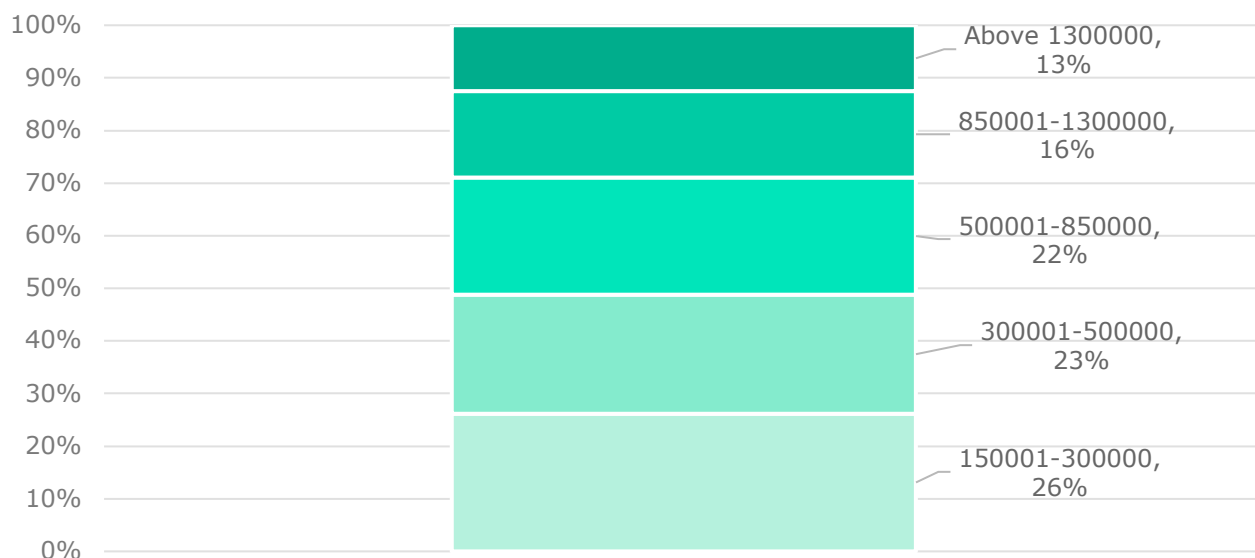
**Education (Highest completed level)**



**Age**



### SEC Level (Monthly household income in MMK)



## Limitations

While every measure was taken to ensure that the data reflects as reliable a picture as possible of the population of Myanmar, there are nevertheless some limitations which warrant noting.

### Construction of the sample

This survey was conducted over the phone using the proprietary research panel belonging to Kantar Public Myanmar, which comprises some 47,000 people spread across the country – all of whom have consented to be contacted for research projects. The size of panel allows for nationally-representative samples to be gathered, where demographic variables like gender, age, income and education level can be adequately represented. We are confident that to the extent that is possible in a country as richly diverse as Myanmar, that the sample reflects the country’s demographic realities. It should, however, be stated that a degree of bias is present in being a member of the panel – namely mobile-phone ownership and being able to speak fluently Burmese language (as opposed to people who only speak ethnic minority languages).

The study used a base sample of n=1200 which was proportionally distributed across the States and Regions according to the relative populations of each area. States/Regions with relatively smaller populations where the allocated sample size was less than n=75 – namely, Naypyidaw and Thanintharyi Regions and Rakhine, Kachin, Chin, Kayah, Kayin and Mon States – had their sample boosted to n=75, so that a degree of disaggregation by location was possible. While the data herein can indeed give a snapshot of attitudes across the different states and regions, it should be acknowledged that n=75 is a relatively small sample size. This was a necessary concession within the constraints of the study’s budget, but we are confident that the overall results reflect an accurate picture of the country’s attitudes. When presenting nationwide results, the data has been weighted so that boosted states and regions do not disproportionately distort the findings.

### **Length and modality of survey**

Conducting fieldwork over the phone required a concise and easy-to-understand questionnaire (a duration of 15 minutes maximum) and limited the formatting of questions (i.e. no visual cues, limited open-ended questions, no extensive lists in answer options, favouring easily categorizable answer responses etc). As such, compromises were necessary that limit the level of detail that could be captured. Nevertheless, given the complex and controversial nature of the subject matter, where definitions were needed to be given numerous times to ensure that respondents understood the questions, brevity and clarity was a key priority.

Nuance is consequentially lacking for some questions (for example, when analyzing the results from the question “*Why do you think people are LGBT*”, we cannot know whether the respondent connotes negative or positive sentiments with their answer). Such questions would indeed be better unpacked in follow-up qualitative studies.

### **Defining sexual orientation and gender identity**

Myanmar is a conservative country where topics such as sexuality are considered taboo and can be difficult to discuss. Accordingly, many people lack the language to understand or talk about SOGIE concepts, identities and experiences. This is also compounded with the fact that in Myanmar the most common term to talk about the LGBT community is through the acronym “LGBT” – a label that is rooted in Western conceptualisations and experiences of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity. While this term is frequently used in Burmese language to describe the LGBT community as a whole, there are a host of words in local language that are more frequently used to describe discrete SOGIE identities as they are experienced in Myanmar. Such words, however, may not be widely understood by the broader population, and may vary in individual usage.

Given these complexities, this study chose to use the term ‘LGBT’ and provided the following definition to respondents, which they could ask for at any time: “Men who have relationships with men; women who have relationships with women; men who dress/behave/live like women; and women who dress/behave/live like men”. We recognize that in Western conceptualisations of gender identity, the descriptions used to describe who the English-speaking world would call *transgender people, transmen and transwomen* may sound reductive, offensive or dismissive of trans realities. It should be kept in mind however, that this study was being undertaken in a very different cultural context with limited language to discuss gender identity and transgender realities, and as such, this description was necessary in order to ensure the general public understood the people we were talking about. Furthermore, in Myanmar, non-binary identities and experiences are not culturally understood in a widespread manner even within the LGBT community, and as such, could not be included in an easy to understand way.

We also note that while the wording of the definition does accommodate bisexuals/pansexuals, the study does not *explicitly* interrogate bisexuality, as this was deemed a nuance that would largely be dismissed or misunderstood by respondents. Similarly, the study regrettably did not include perceptions and understandings towards intersex experiences, given that this topic is practically invisible in Myanmar and not integrated within the broader LGBT movement. We firmly believe intersex experiences deserve a separate study of their own, and we welcome academic, programmatic and donor attention in this area.





# DETAILED FINDINGS

# Understanding LGBT people

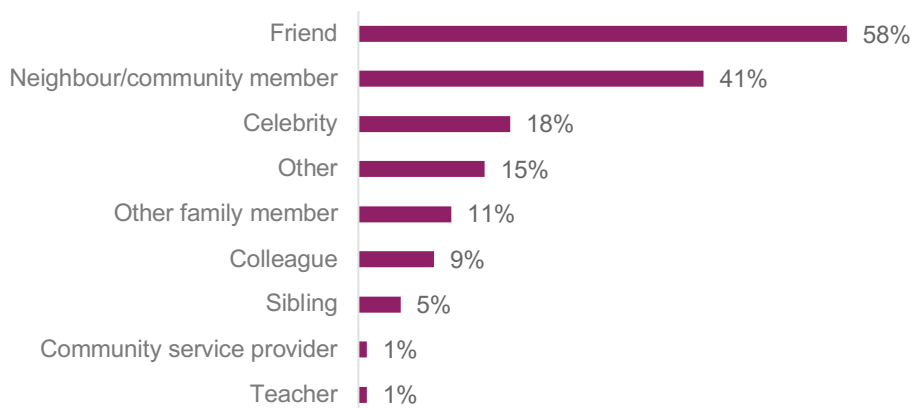
## Familiarity with LGBT people

Personal familiarity with LGBT was high. Respondents were asked whether or not they knew anybody who was LGBT – of whom 3 out of 4 people indicated that they *did*.<sup>3</sup> Amongst these, the most common answer was that people knew a friend who was LGBT (58%), while neighbours/community members were the second most common response (41%).

Interestingly, 16% noted that a family member was LGBT (5% sibling and 11% other family member). People who knew LGBT people as positions of authority within the community were very few (1% community service provider, 1% teacher), which reflects the poor representation of visible LGBT people in such fields.<sup>4</sup>

3 out of 4 people knew someone who was LGBT.

A significant 58% had a friend; 16% had a family member.



## Perspectives on why people are LGBT

Respondents were then asked to provide the reason of why they thought people were LGBT.<sup>5</sup> By far the most common response was that people believe being LGBT is a “choice” with 47% indicating that this was their stance. Conversely, a sizable portion of respondents believe being LGBT was *not* a choice but was something beyond one’s control – with 26% of people answering that LGBT people are “born that way”, 18% believing it is the result of karma (or some kind of religious punishment) and 12% citing hormones.

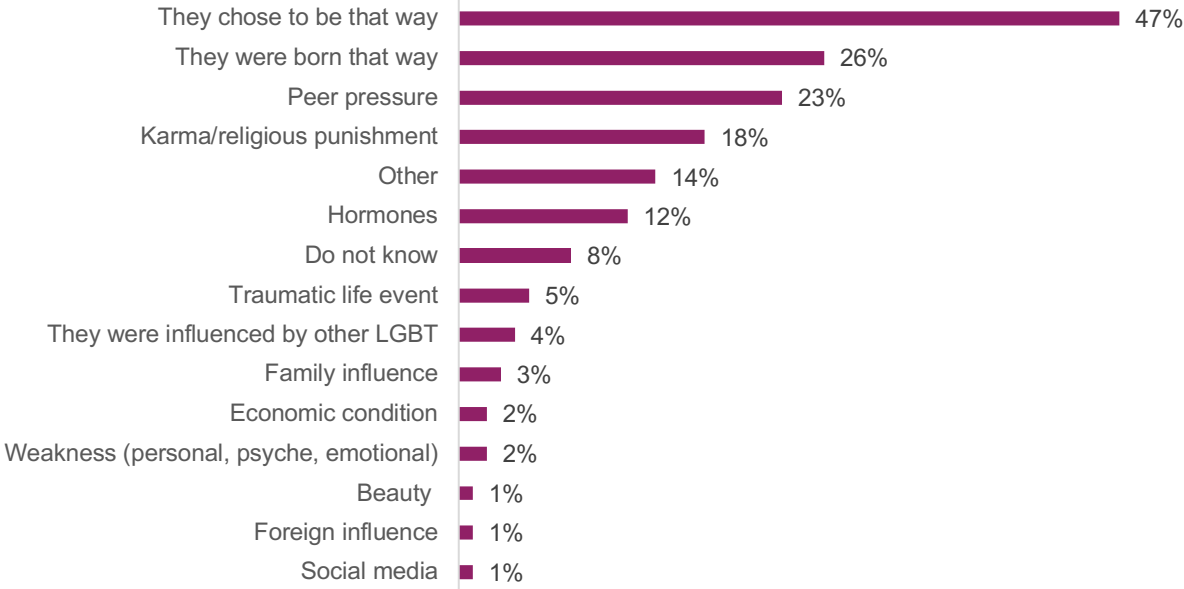
<sup>3</sup> Q1 - Do you know anybody who is LGBT? (n=1554)

<sup>4</sup> Q1b – Who do you know who is LGBT? (n=1157); multiple answer possible.

<sup>5</sup> Q3. Why do you think people are LGBT? (n=1554); multiple answer possible.

It is important to note that within these answers alone we cannot determine any positive or negative connotations implicit in a respondent’s perspective – e.g. we cannot know whether they think LGBT people are “born that way” and that this is acceptable, or that LGBT people are “born that way” and it is something reprehensible or that we should seek to change.

## Roughly 1-in-2 people think being LGBT is a choice.



## Agreement with common stereotypes about LGBT people

Respondents were then asked a series of questions to determine whether or not they subscribed to some common stereotypes and perceptions of LGBT people. So as not to bias respondents by prompting them with the negative stereotype itself, questions were phrased as the ‘positive opposite’ of the stereotype in question. For example, if the stereotype is that a certain group of people are very lazy, the question would be phrased as “X group of people are hardworking”, leaving it up to the respondent to agree or disagree with the statement. In this case, disagreement would equate to agreement with the implicit stereotype.

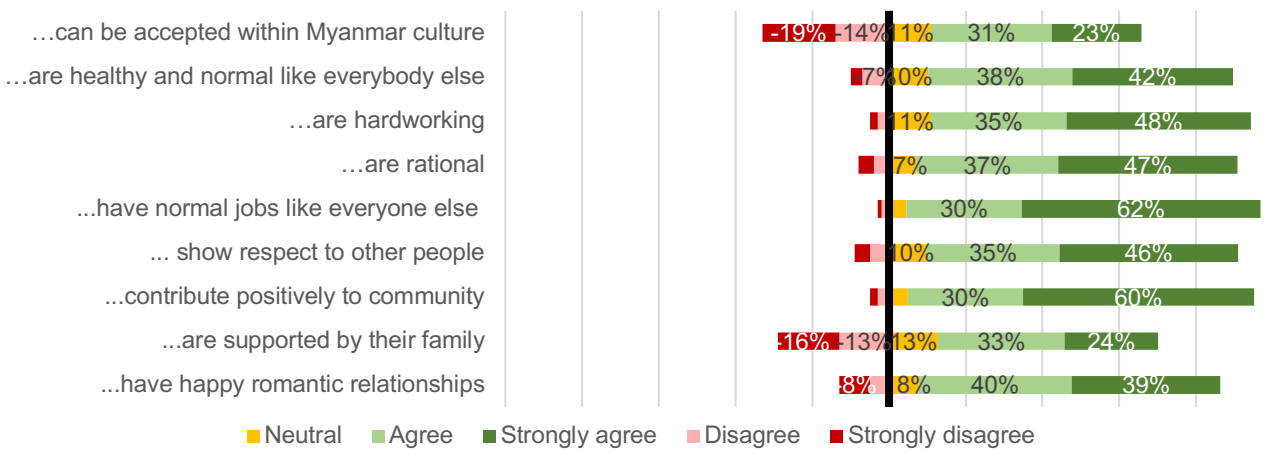
In general, there did not appear to be a strong level of disagreement with the statements given to respondents, which suggests that positive perspectives towards LGBT people exist or are at least conceivable to most.

The two statements where disagreement was highest – that “LGBT can be accepted within Myanmar culture” and that “LGBT people are supported by their family” – are perhaps unsurprising.

Regarding responses that appear more positive, 39% of people strongly agree and 40% agree that LGBT people have happy romantic relationships, which indicates that a very strong majority of people did not default to the stereotype that LGBT people are promiscuous or that they have unhealthy relationships. Likewise, 62% of people strongly agree and 30% of people agree that LGBT people have normal jobs just like everyone else. This finding can be interpreted in several ways. Firstly, it could indicate that much of the general public disavows the anecdotally pervasive stereotypes that LGBT people (particularly gay

men and trans women) are primarily engaged in sex work and make-up artistry. However, it could also be the case that this evidences that the general public may not be aware that many LGBT people face significant barriers to education and employment should they be vocal and/or visible about the LGBT status. Thus while superficially reassuring, the fact that these findings do not reflect the lived experience of many LGBT people calls for further qualitative inquiry.

One-third think LGBT people cannot be accepted within Myanmar culture. 29% believe LGBT people are not supported by their families.



## Nuances in acceptability

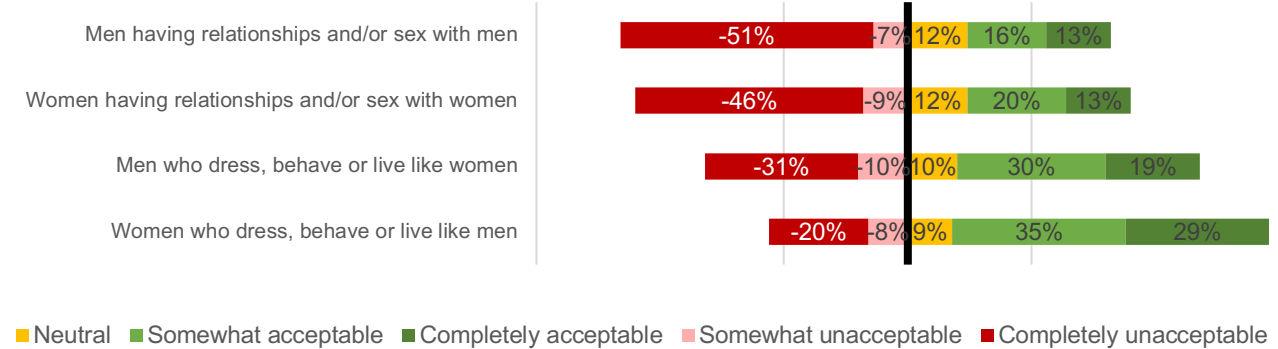
In order to understand nuances in perspectives and how they pertain to both men and women, respondents were asked a series of questions to isolate their attitudes towards the transgression of both sexual and gender norms by both men and women. The results demonstrate that people are more likely to have negative perceptions when considering the specificities of LGBT identities, than when considering LGBT people in more abstract terms. It also suggests that it is more acceptable to transgress gender norms than it is to have a same-sex relationship and present as the sex/gender assigned at birth.

As the chart below depicts, people found same-sex sexual or romantic relationships less acceptable for both men and women, than they found men or women dressing, behaving or living like the “opposite” sex. Regarding both sexual/romantic relationships and transgressing gender norms, men were viewed more harshly than women. 51% of people answered that men having relationships with men was completely unacceptable, compared to the 46% who answered that women having relationships with women was completely unacceptable. Meanwhile, 31% of people found it completely unacceptable for men to dress, behave or live like women, compared to 20% of people who believed the same in regard to women who dress, behave or live like men.

There is, however, reassurance to be found on the positive side of the spectrum, particularly regarding gender transgression. 64% of people thought it was acceptable of completely acceptable for women to dress, behave or live like men, while 49% thought it was acceptable for men to dress, behave or live like

women. Indeed, this reflects the strong patriarchal influences in Myanmar and the more rigid definitions of masculinity. Meanwhile, 33% of people were able to accept or completely accept women having relationships and/or sex with women, while 29% felt the same way about men having relationships and/or sex with men. There remains a significant 9-12% of people who feel neutral about these issues across each of the different questions. There appears to be no statistically significant demographics that characterize these “neutral” groups.

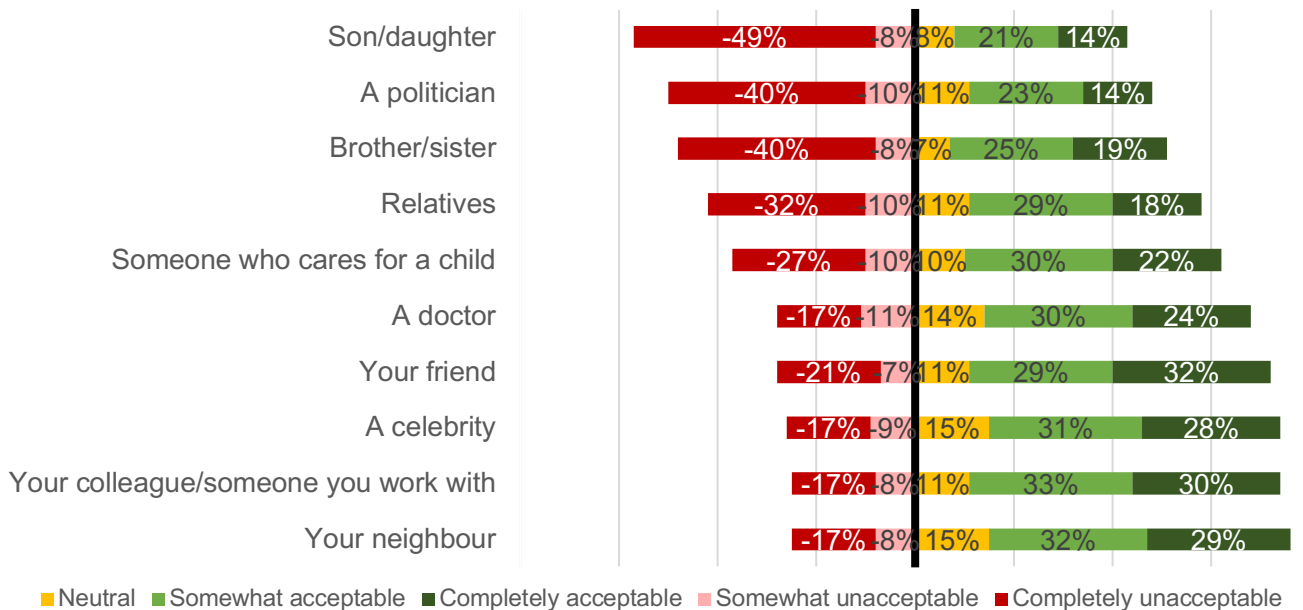
## It is more acceptable to dress, live and behave like the opposite sex than to have a same-sex relationship.



Further to this, respondents were asked in much less abstract ways about their willingness to accept very specific categories of people in their life hypothetically being LGBT. It became clear that acceptability was highly contingent upon the nature of the relationship. The chart below depicts from top-to-bottom, the categories of people for which there was the highest incidence of negative responses, to the highest amount of positive responses. As can be seen, people are most likely to express that it is unacceptable for their own child to be LGBT – with 49% answering that it would be completely unacceptable for their own daughter or son to be LGBT, with a further 8% saying it was somewhat unacceptable. Notably however, on the positive side of the spectrum, 14% of people indicated that they would find this circumstance completely acceptable, and 21% answered that it would be somewhat acceptable. In terms of negative responses, the second highest category was politicians – whereby 40% of people said it would be completely unacceptable and 10% said it would be unacceptable. However, once again the positive answers prove worthy of reflection – with 14% expressing it would be completely acceptable, and 23% answering it would be somewhat acceptable.

Overall, while it is indeed reassuring for LGBT activists to recognize that roughly a third of people would find it at least somewhat acceptable if their child or a politician was LGBT, the fact that such a high number indicated that they would find it completely acceptable reveals that approval and support of LGBT people certainly has limits – namely, willingness to accept LGBT people is lower the closer it is to home or the more conspicuously powerful the person in question is. As such, we see the LGBT status of more abstract and peripheral figures – such as neighbours or colleagues, being more palatable.

People are less willing to accept blood relatives and politicians as being LGBT. More than half could not accept a son/daughter, politician or brother/sister.



## Perspectives on the law and LGBT people

In Myanmar, same sex activity remains criminalized under Section 377, a penal code introduced during British colonial rule which on paper can carry up to 10 years imprisonment. Furthermore, clauses within police acts also deriving from British rule (namely the *Shadow and Disguise Act*) can be used to discriminate against transgender people. While formal prosecution under these laws is not common, the fact remains that these laws *can* and *are* used to target LGBT people by police (often for extortive purposes that can involve physical, sexual and verbal assault). As such, the very existence of these laws serves as a symbolic signal of the unequal standing of LGBT people within Myanmar, and can thus justify very tangible discrimination against the LGBT community by law enforcement officers and broader society.

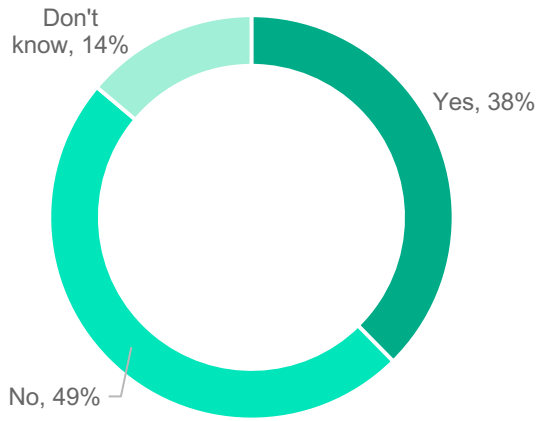
Knowledge of these laws does not appear widespread amongst the general population. When asked whether they were aware of the criminalization of LGBT identities in Myanmar, 1-in-2 people answered that they thought it was *not* illegal to be LGBT, while 14% answered that they did not know, leaving 38% of people who correctly answered in the affirmative.

The fact remains however, that regardless of correct knowledge of the laws that *do* exist, an overwhelming 74% of people believe that it *should not* be illegal to be LGBT, with 23% answering that it should be illegal. This is a powerful affirmative statistic to justify popular support regarding decriminalization. Amongst those who *do* believe it should be illegal (n=350), 64% say it is because it is “unnatural”, 16% answered that it is “just wrong” and 13% claimed it was against Myanmar tradition and culture.

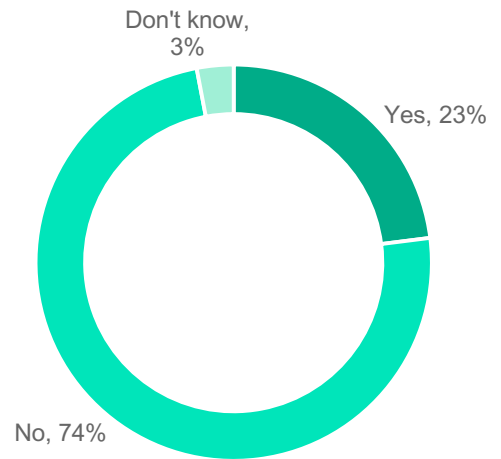


74% believed it should not be illegal to be LGBT. Those who do mostly do so because they feel it is “unnatural”.

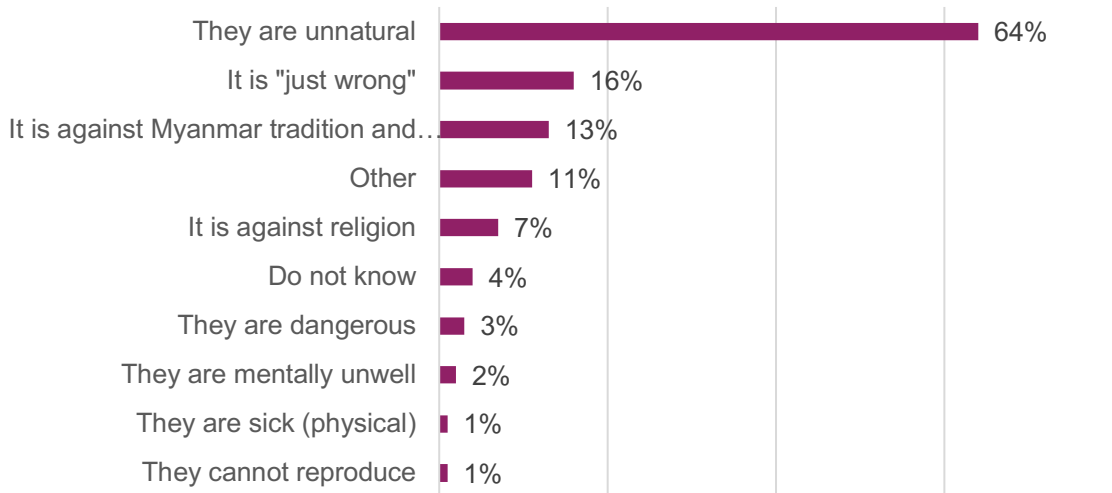
**To your knowledge, is it illegal to be LGBT in Myanmar?**



**In your personal view, should it be illegal?**



**Why should it be illegal? (n=350)**



## Overall acceptance and support for LGBT people

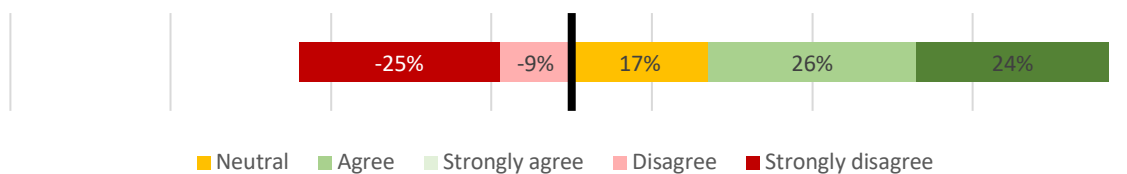
With all things considered, respondents were finally asked to reflect upon their overall level of acceptance and support for LGBT people, and the extent to which they believe they deserved equality. A clear dynamic emerged by which despite a significant amount of *personal* reservation being held towards LGBT people amongst the population, there was an overwhelming belief that they still deserved equal treatment.

When respondents were asked to express the extent to which they agreed with the statement “*I accept and support LGBT people*”, a reassuring 26% agreed, while 24% strongly agreed. Meanwhile, 9%

disagreed, while -25% strongly disagreed with the statement – indicating that roughly 1-in-3 people have overall negative attitudes towards LGBT people. This leaves 17% who were neutral on the matter. Interestingly, there is no discernible demographic that stands out within this ‘undecided’ cohort – with answers from men and women, different age groups, and urban-rural populations having no statistically significant variation in being more or less likely to be undecided.

50% accept and support LGBT people. Nevertheless, 1-in-3 people do not.

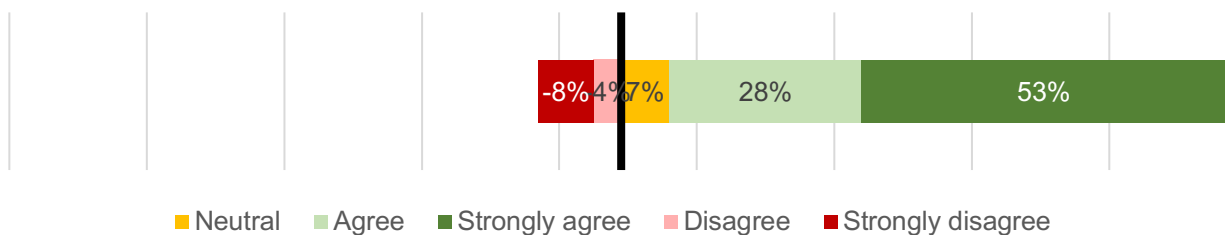
**Agreement with the statement: “I accept and support LGBT people”**




Nevertheless, despite the fact that a third of people did not *personally* accept and support LGBT people, when respondents were asked whether or not they agreed that “LGBT people deserve equality and equal treatment just like anyone else in Myanmar”, the results were overwhelmingly positive. Thus while the former question reveals that a significant degree of conservatism exists in Myanmar when it comes to sexual orientation and gender identity norms, people overwhelmingly recognize that an individuals should in the abstract sense be extended the same equality as any other person in the country. This finding is bolstered by the previous statistic pertaining to people’s views on criminalization and the LGBT community – whereby 74% of people did not think that being LGBT should be illegal.

A value for equality appears to override personal views: 81% agree that LGBT people deserve equality and equal treatment.

**Agreement with statement: “I believe LGBT people deserve equality and equal treatment just like anyone else in Myanmar”**





**VALUES  
& ATTITUDES**

Apart from the questions relating specifically to LGBT people, respondents were also asked a series of more general values-based questions. The purpose of this was two-fold. Firstly, it allows the findings gathered through the survey to be put into the broader cultural context. Secondly, this was also done in order to determine the kinds of value sets that will be critical to appeal to in the development of future campaigns aimed at promoting greater tolerance, acceptance and understanding amongst the general population.

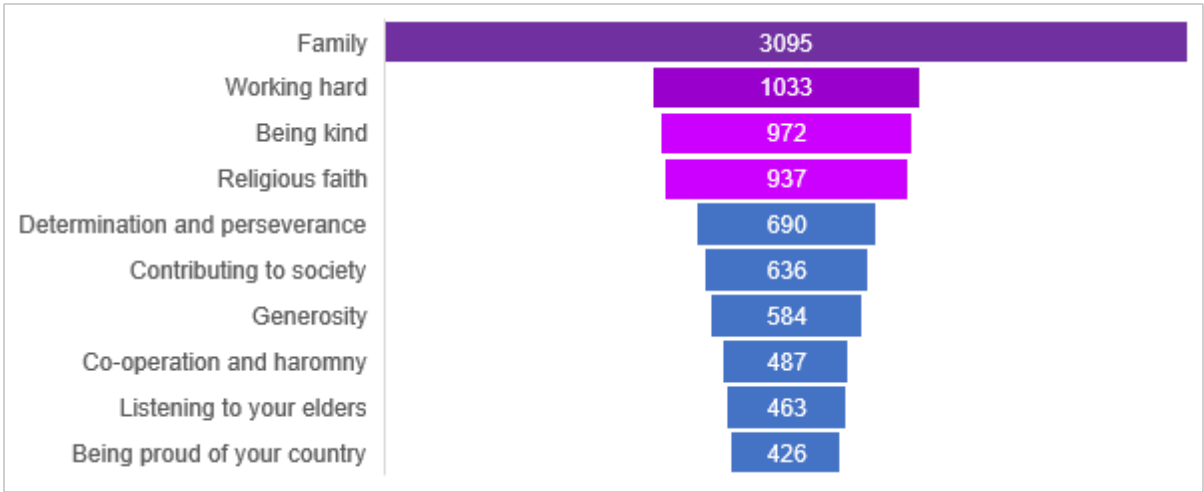
Respondents were sent a link to their mobile that guided them through three questions: the first two relating to most important values in their life, and the third relating to the most important factors they take into account when passing judgements on other people. The results were as follows.

### Personal life values

The first question sent to respondents gave them a series of **10 different ideas** that can be construed as important life values, and were asked to rank their **top three** from the list. The values were randomized so as not to introduce bias to the results. Three points were attributed to the item they ranked the *most important*. The second-most important value scored two points, while the third most scored 1 point. Scores were tallied from the answers of all respondents to give the results below.

As the chart below depicts, by far, the value which scored the highest number of points across all answers was **family** – the total score of which is nearly three times greater than the second-highest ranking value, **working hard**. The third and fourth highest-ranking values were **being kind** and **religious faith** which received very similar scores. Notably, pride in one’s country, listening to elders and co-operation and harmony – all values which are often spoken about in Myanmar culture – scored the lowest number of points, meaning they were the least likely to be ranked highly by participants.

Family is overwhelmingly the thing most valued by Myanmar people, followed by being hardworking.



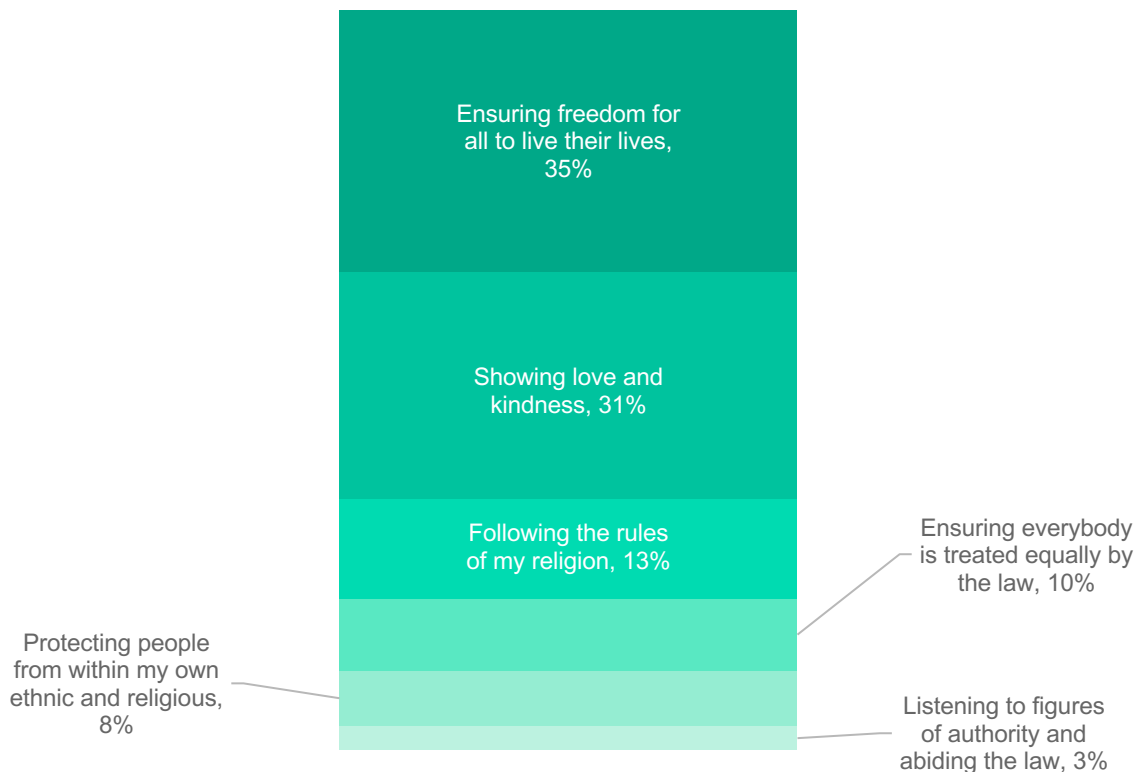
Respondents were then shown a list of six specifically selected virtues and were asked to choose one as being “the most important thing in life”. These virtues correspond with the “six moral foundations” laid out in *SOGI Campaigns* framing theory – namely care, fairness, liberty, loyalty, authority and sanctity (2020). By identifying which moral foundations resonate most strongly amongst a population, a campaigner can situate and frame their message within a contextually-relevant value landscape. Accordingly, the moral foundations were fashioned into relatable virtues in the Myanmar context through the following statements:

1. Showing love and kindness (Care)
2. Ensuring everybody is treated equally by the law (Fairness)
3. Ensuring freedom for all to live their lives (Liberty)
4. Protecting people from within my own ethnic and religious group (Loyalty)
5. Listening to figures of authority and abiding the law (Authority)
6. Following the rules of my religion (Sanctity)

Respondents were then required to select just *one* statement that they believed was “the most important thing in life”. Two statements came out very clearly on top – namely “**Ensuring freedom for all to live their lives**” (35%) and “**Showing love and kindness**” (31%), meaning that liberty and care emerged as the top moral foundations. The fact that freedom and care rank as high values aligns with the earlier finding whereby people were able to put aside their *persona*/view of LGBT people and agree that LGBT people should be treated equally to all other people.

## Liberty and care were the most important moral foundations.

### The most important thing in life is...

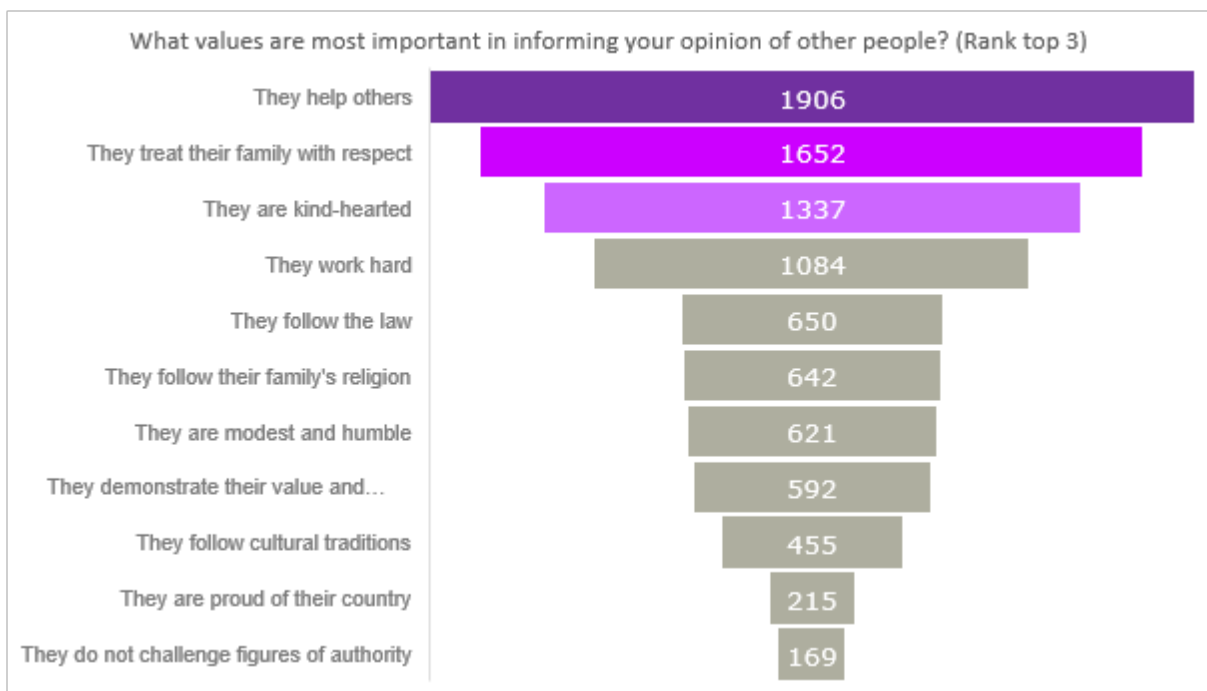


## Perspectives on others

Finally, respondents were asked to reflect upon what values were most important in informing their opinions of other people. Similarly to the initial ranking question, they were presented with a list of 11 values from which to rank their top three. The same point-scoring system as in the prior ranking question was used. The value statements were once again randomized.

Three values came out significantly above others – namely “They help others” (1<sup>st</sup>), “They treat their family with respect” (2<sup>nd</sup>) and “They are kind-hearted” (3<sup>rd</sup>). These largely echo the values and moral foundations that emerged in the previous two questions, as did the values that ranked the lowest (such as pride in one’s country and respecting figures of authority).

That a person is helpful to others is the most important value in informing opinions of other people. Respect for family and being kind-hearted also ranked very highly.





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# **IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVOCACY & REFORM**

The data presented within this report is of critical value to a multitude of stakeholders involved in pushing for social and legal reform relating to LGBT rights. In order for this data to be most impactful, it is important to differentiate between different stakeholders and audiences, as well as the relevant advocacy actions that should be pursued. Not all information herein will be critical to all audiences, and the data does not need to be used in its entirety for every advocacy objective.

The purpose of this section is twofold. Firstly, it maps out stakeholders and audiences who will be critical to target for social and legal reform. Secondly, it provides a preliminary strategic analysis of how different sections of this data will be relevant to meet specific objectives, and how information might be packaged and interpreted in order to meet different needs.

## Defining advocacy objectives and actions

Successful activism requires activists to be clear on their *advocacy objectives* and *advocacy actions*.

- **Advocacy objectives:** the goals that an activist has in mind – *i.e. what are they trying to change?*
- **Advocacy actions:** the activities undertaken by activists to achieve their objectives – *i.e. what are they going to do to achieve change?*

In general, the objectives of LGBT rights activism need to take into account both *social reform* and *legal reform*.

Social Reform	Legal reform
The normalization of supportive and accepting social attitudes towards LGBT people across all facets of life – including education, employment and healthcare.	The decriminalization of LGBT identities and the inclusion of anti-discrimination provisions within Myanmar law.

### Insights from the study

The study produced a data set that can have widespread application in a range of academic, legal, development and social contexts. Nevertheless, for the purpose of advocacy, the data can be boiled down to a number of key findings that should inform future advocacy efforts. Critical findings include:

- A vast majority (74%) of people do not support the criminalization of LGBT identities
- Half of the population (50%) say they support and accept LGBT people
- People find it harder to accept a family member who is LGBT, or a politician who is LGBT
- Across demographics, Myanmar people appear to universally value family life, working hard and kindness

Selecting the best way to use the data will depend upon the advocacy objective, the intended audience and the action through which the audience can be reached.

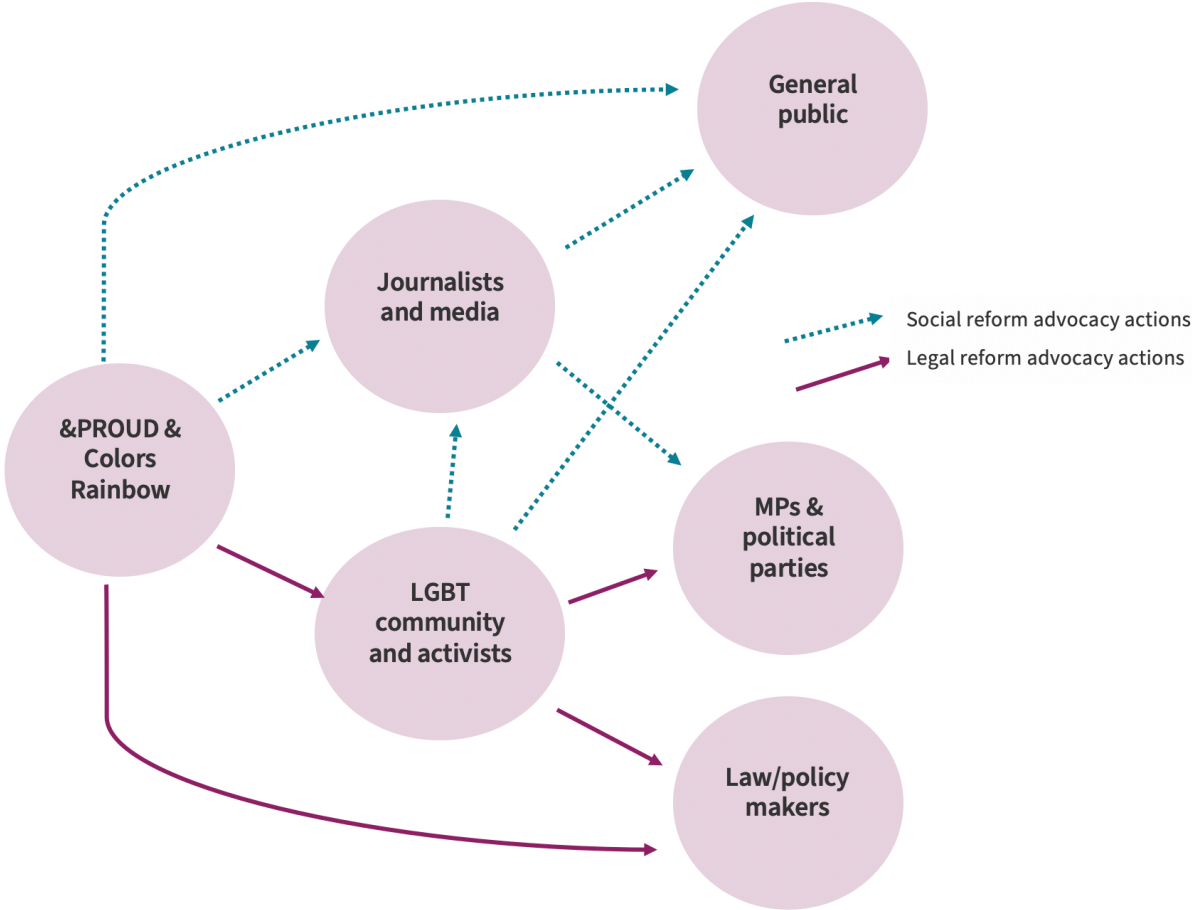
For example, if we focus on legal reform, as a stand-alone statistic, the fact that 74% of people do not support criminalization is a powerful figure to directly convey to policy and law makers.

Meanwhile, if we are thinking about social reform, the data indicates that social attitudes need to be shifted towards more widespread acceptance of LGBT people within the family. Messaging around this will need to appeal to the values of family life, hard work and kindness that the survey identified as being the most important in peoples' lives.

## Stakeholder mapping and advocacy actions

This section depicts two different scenarios for how social and legal reform for LGBT rights can be pursued in Myanmar. The first focusses on direct and indirect advocacy actions that LGBT activists can pursue. The second looks at how social and legal reform can be pursued through development mainstreaming (i.e. building in social and legal reform messages into development activities).

### Social and legal reform through direct and indirect advocacy



The diagram above shows the flow of advocacy actions that can lead to social and legal reform, beginning with how &PROUD and CRB use the data collected from this report.

## Social reform advocacy actions

- &PROUD and Colors Rainbow will **strategically disseminate the findings of the study** both directly and indirectly to journalists, the media and the general public. Direct dissemination will come in the form of **infographics, interviews and providing access to the results** of the study. With the general public as the central audience of this activity, the direct release of this information can contribute to social reform by **providing evidence of the support that exists for LGBT people amongst the general public**. Having these attitudes reinforced has the potential for two very positive outcomes – firstly that LGBT people feel more comfortable to ‘come out’ and be more visible in their communities, and secondly, it might help to bolster support at the grassroots level and potentially make LGBT allies feel empowered to be more vocal in their support for LGBT rights and equality. Ultimately, increasing LGBT visibility means communities will need to reconcile their more neutral or negative attitudes with the existence of LGBT people in their life. In this scenario, we would hope to see a shift in the attitudinal data whereby there is not such a strong distinction between people being more comfortable with LGBT people in the abstract sense, but less comfortable with having an immediate family member or a politician.
- The **media can act to amplify messages** to the general public by reporting on the study and producing separate content to reach individuals around the country on a range of different platforms. Further to this, it can bolster the confidence of media agencies that LGBT messages and stories will not cause backlash amongst a majority of consumers.
- Meanwhile, &PROUD and Colors Rainbow will continue to produce content that promotes positive attitudes towards LGBT people – such as **campaigns and events**. These activities will indirectly use the data by including messages and appealing to core values that were highlighted in the study – such as family, hard work and kindness. When strategically implemented, such campaigns can help build support for substantive legal reforms insofar as they highlight the barriers that LGBT people face in enjoying things that are highly valued – such as family life and opportunities to work hard.
- The wider LGBT activist community around the country will also be critical in spreading the results of the study both directly and indirectly at a **grassroots level**. An important part of these messages at the local level will be that for the most part, there did not appear to be significant differences across states and regions

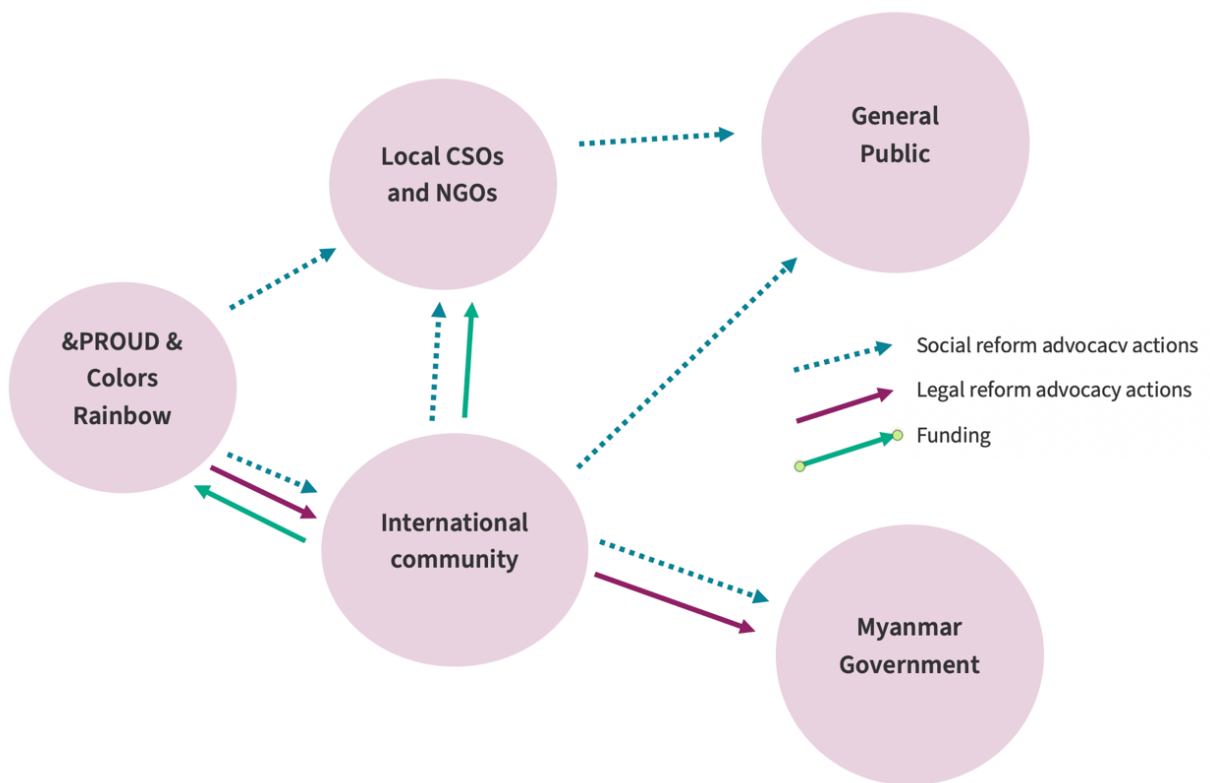
## Legal reform advocacy actions

- &PROUD and Colors Rainbow have already begun disseminating the initial findings of the study to other LGBT activists across the country. The **broader LGBT network will be critical in ensuring country wide buy-in to the results of the study**, and to help push the message out to their own communities and government actors at the grassroots level.
- Colors Rainbow has been engaged in the **long term with direct advocacy efforts with legal and policy committees attached to Union Level Hluttaws**. The direct dissemination of this data (through digestible infographics, workshops and this report itself) will be critical to convincing law and policy makers of the need for reform.
- Viewing both law and policymaker bodies as separate to individual MPs and their parties will help to spread the message even further. **Individual MPs can be held accountable at the grassroots**

level by their own constituents as well as being held accountable to party lines. Thus if both individual MPs and their parties can be brought on board to support LGBT rights, the passing of legislation in the Hluttaws will ultimately be smoother and will be viewed with less controversy, given that a majority of the country are in favour of enacting decriminalization.

- Colors Rainbow (and other LGBT advocacy organisations) can capitalize on their pre-existing links to curry the favour of political influencers within parties and ensure the LGBT equal rights provisions feature in party platforms and manifestos.

### Social and legal reform through development mainstreaming



Although this is clearly a matter for Myanmar people and their politicians and authorities, international and national organisations can have a role to play in fostering discussion, debate and advocacy. Accordingly, the diagram above shows the flow of development mainstreaming activities for achieving social and legal reform for LGBT people. The international community should be understood to comprise the embassies of countries present in Myanmar, as well as major INGOs (such as UN agencies and other development actors). The Myanmar Government has been broadly identified here given the wide range of different institutions and ministries that the international community engage with depending upon their specific type of work. Ultimately, when ideas about inclusion of and sensitivity to the needs of LGBT people can be mainstreamed in the protocols and mindsets of institutions, it will reinforce positive messaging about LGBT inclusivity amongst the people who operate within and around these institutions. In turn, this can foster a sense of accountability for the embracement of diversity.

## Social reform advocacy actions

- &PROUD and Colors Rainbow disseminate the results of the study through reports, direct engagement and workshops with the international community. The core purpose of this will be to promote both social and legal reform, and to encourage international actors to uptake the mainstreaming of LGBT rights into their own work.
- The **direct provision of funding and support to LGBT organisations** engaged in activism is perhaps the most obvious advocacy action that could be taken by I/NGOs and other actors. Examples of the kind of work could be supported in the education sector, for example, would be broadening curriculums to actively address LGBT inclusion. Those working in legal reform might focus on the inequalities faced by LGBT people in law enforcement, and increase the accessibility of legal services and platforms. Organisations working in community service provision could specifically identify inequalities and barriers faced by LGBT beneficiaries.
- **Example setting by institutions who partner with government or local organisations** can also be a powerful influencing factor to normalize sensitivity to LGBT inclusion. This might include actions such as ensuring that all staff undergo LGBT sensitization training, or that programs/projects and including highly visible anti-discrimination policies within HR protocols and documentation. When partnering with government and local organisations, specific effort can be made to highlight a commitment to LGBT inclusion and sensitivity within the partnership.

## Legal reform advocacy actions

- Embassies and INGOs can also directly engage with the Myanmar Government on the issue depending on the platform they have with ministries or other government actors. This might look like the **inclusion of LGBT rights issues within broader human rights dialogues with the Myanmar Government**, and the dissemination of material (such as data from this report) that demonstrates the support of the Myanmar public for LGBT equality.
- This could also be much more direct advocacy on the issue of LGBT rights – where actors help lead in legal reform and entering policy dialogue with government actors. It is important in such actions that while partnerships between powerful institutions and the government are leveraged, that they are done so with the **active involvement and empowerment of local LGBT activists**.