

# From invisibility to evidence

## First national LGBTI+ survey in Ecuador



*'Many of my friends, who should be here today, are no longer with us.'*

*Transgender participant in the National Survey of Living Conditions of the LGBTI+ population in Manta*

### A bridge between policy and action

More than half of Ecuador's LGBTI+ population (53.5 per cent) has experienced violence or discrimination. Without data such as this, this reality would remain invisible, nameless and without an institutional response. This is precisely why the first National Survey of Living Conditions of the LGBTI+ population (ENCV-LGBTI+) (INEC, 2026) matters: because naming is the first step towards transformation.

Ecuador has one of the most advanced regulatory frameworks in the region regarding LGBTI+ rights. Among its most notable achievements:

- In 2008, it became the second country worldwide to incorporate equality and non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in its Constitution (Art. 11.2 and 66.9).
- The Diversity Action Plan (*Plan de Acción de Diversidades, PAD*) 2022 – 2025 defined strategic actions to prevent violence, build capacity of public servants and collect official data.
- The National Agenda for Gender Equality (*Agenda Nacional para la Igualdad de Género, ANIG*) 2025 – 2029 identifies the eradication of discrimination and violence against LGBTI+ individuals as a priority, focusing on mainstreaming these issues in public policies.
- At the international level, Ecuador has ratified key instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the American Convention on Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and has committed to the 2030 Agenda and its principle of 'leave no one behind', as well as its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, despite this progress, discrimination and violence against the LGBTI+ community persist, evidencing a deep divide between recognised rights and their actual enforcement.

To bridge this divide, data is required. Since 2021, the Human Rights sectoral programme of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH provided technical assistance to the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos*, INEC) to develop a conceptual and methodological framework and conduct several pilot projects at the national level. This effort was supported by the project 'Preventing Violence against Women' (PreViMujer, phases II and III) in Ecuador via GIZ's Regional Fund for Triangular Cooperation with partners in Latin America and the Caribbean commissioned by BMZ.

The result: INEC and the Under-Secretariat for Diversity within the then Ministry of Women and Human Rights (*Ministerio de la Mujer y Derechos Humanos*, MMDH) launched the ENCV-LGBTI+, based on a key assumption: Having accurate data is not merely a technical task, but an essential prerequisite for designing relevant, effective and evidence-based public policies.

## An alliance for visibility

Generating official data on a population that has historically been rendered invisible requires more than political will. It requires strong alliances and rigorous methodologies. With that aim in mind, INEC, the Secretariat for Diversity within the current Ministry of Government, and the German development cooperation implemented by GIZ joined forces to produce official evidence on the living conditions of LGBTI+ individuals in Ecuador.

In 2025, the first ENCV-LGBTI+ survey was carried out having been conducted between October and November across the country, reaching 6,147 LGBTI+ individuals aged 18 and over using a sampling methodology based on referral networks

within the community itself. What began as a specific study evolved into a nationwide survey, marking a milestone for Ecuador and the region.

Its solidity was built from both within and without. LGBTI+ civil society organisations played an active role in designing the conceptual framework and questionnaires, the raising awareness amongst survey staff, and in implementing the pilot studies, thereby incorporating territorial diversity and community legitimacy into the process. In addition, collaboration with Colombia's National Administrative Department of Statistics (*Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas*, DANE), whose experience with the LGBTI+ population in household surveys is a regional benchmark, was key to refining the technical and operational instruments.

## Results that transform

### 1 Trust and data quality

Conducting a survey amongst a population that has historically had reasons to mistrust the state is not a neutral technical task, but a political act that requires trust. Consequently, 26 LGBTI+ organisations participated in every stage of the process – from the theoretical framework and questionnaire design through to the pilot studies, feedback workshops and dissemination of results. This collaborative effort was formalised through a memorandum of understanding with an intersectional gender and human rights-based approach.

This multi-stakeholder alliance addressed specific challenges: traditional household surveys were not viable, so safe spaces were created for data collection. Indicators and language were validated, and an appropriate profile for the interviewers was defined. Most were members of the LGBTI+ community themselves and, additionally, received specific training and awareness-raising, two factors that significantly facilitated the fieldwork.

A key lesson was that the lack of a comprehensive register of LGBTI+ organisations required prior mapping and securing of sufficient logistical resources. Far from being an insurmountable obstacle, this allowed for broad and decentralised participation, involving groups from various provinces of the country.

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*'The survey is important because we are invisible, but we do exist.'*

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*Intersex participant in the ENCV-LGBTI+ in Cuenca*

To counter misinformation, fear of exposure and stigmatisation – particularly in territories less open to diversity, a communication campaign was implemented through INEC networks and partner organisations.

## 2 Building capacity for sustainable change

More than 200 supervisors, interviewers and public servants from INEC and the Ministry of Government were trained in technical, ethical and emotional skills relating to sexual orientation and gender-related diversity, ensuring respectful treatment and the ethical handling of data throughout the process.

These changes have been institutionalised. INEC for the first time appointed a technical advisor from the LGBTI+ community and included questions on gender identity and sexual orientation in the 2022 National Census as well as in a survey on the prison population.

*'I feel very grateful to be able to contribute to these changes, even if it's little by little.'*

*Member of the pilot testing team*

By being embedded in the National Statistical System, the ENCV-LGBTI+ survey is established as a periodic process that transcends political cycles, ensuring continuous monitoring of the living conditions of the LGBTI+ population.

## 3 Access to the LGBTI+ population through methodological innovation

Reaching more than 6,000 LGBTI+ individuals required moving beyond conventional methods. The Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS) methodology allowed access to hard-to-reach communities that rarely feature in traditional studies, using confidential, anonymous and voluntary questionnaires, whilst adhering at all times to the 'do no harm' principle to prevent discrimination or re-victimisation.

## 4 Development of tools to strengthen the system

The process resulted in a legacy of more than 11 specialised technical tools: methodological documents, questionnaires, indicator sheets, operational manuals, training protocols and emotional support guides. This provides solid foundation for future evaluations and for

integrating this approach permanently into institutions.

## 5 A process that transcends the national boundaries

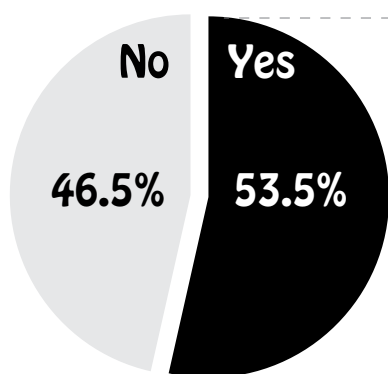
The collaboration with Colombia's DANE was key to refining the technical and methodological instruments, incorporating lessons from previous regional experiences. But the impact goes further: the ENCV-LGBTI+ survey paves the way for regional comparisons on the living conditions of the LGBTI+ population in Latin America, a region where studies of this scope and rigour remain scarce, and strengthens assessments, inclusion policies and violence prevention strategies.

## 6 For the first time: data to bridge gaps

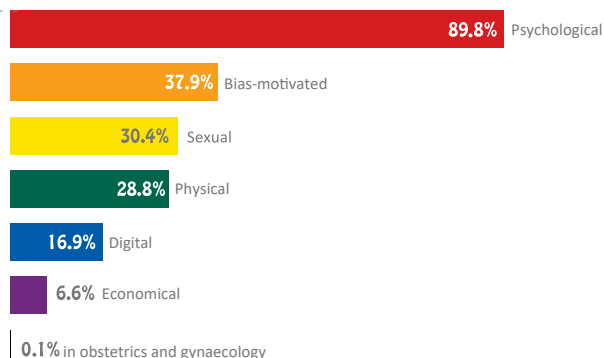
Ecuador now has its first official, specialised statistics on the living conditions of the LGBTI+ population. INEC estimates that there are 380,263 LGBTI+ people aged 18 and over in the country, of whom 38.5 per cent identify as gay, 28.2 per cent as bisexual, 19.5 per cent as lesbian and 3.9 per cent as pansexual, amongst other sexual orientations. In terms of gender identity, 77.2 per cent identify as cisgender, 15.1 per cent as trans, and 2.6 per cent as non-binary. 79.3 per cent of those surveyed are single, whilst 15.6 per cent are in a relationship and 1.9 per cent are married.

And the data not only raises awareness but also challenges society. More than half of this population (53.5 per cent) has experienced violence or discrimination, primarily within the family (73.6 per cent) and in social settings (65.7 per cent). Figures that leave no room for complacency.

# Violence experienced over the course of a lifetime



Share of the LGBTI+ population (adults) who have already experienced discrimination or violence in their lifetime



Source: ENCV LGBTI+ (INEC), 2026.

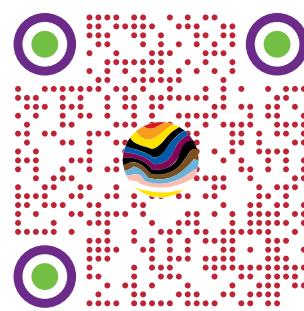
## From data to action

The ENCV-LGBTI+ survey marks a turning point. Ecuador is now one of the few countries in Latin America with official, rigorous and representative statistics on the living conditions of a population that has historically been rendered invisible and discriminated against. That fact alone is a milestone.

But data alone is not justification enough – its true value lies in what it renders possible. This evidence allows for the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that specifically address the needs of this group: in education, health, employment, housing, access to justice, the right to identity and civic participation. It allows resources to be allocated where they are most needed. And it ensures that the LGBTI+ community's demands for their rights are – finally – backed by official figures.

The results have already been disseminated through public events, INEC's institutional channels, civil society organisations and media outlets. They are available to the general public at

→ [www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/lgbti](http://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/lgbti)



Now the question is not whether the problem exists. The question is what each stakeholder – state, private, civil society – will do with the evidence they now have in their hands. The data is there. What follows is action.



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Buenas cifras, mejores vidas

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Presentation of the results of the first pilot  
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