Press release

Growing acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands and Europe Titel

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- The acceptance of homosexuality in Europe has increased since 1981. However, the increase has flattened off in recent years.
- A majority of the population in Scandinavia and Western European countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and France have no problem with homosexuality.
- By contrast, a majority of the population in Eastern European countries such as Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Baltic countries and Russia disapprove of homosexuality.
- The social acceptance of homosexuality is continuing to grow in the Netherlands. In 2006, 15% of the Dutch population held negative attitudes towards homosexuality; in 2012 this had fallen to 4%.
- The most religious people are especially negative in their attitudes to homosexuality.

These are among the findings presented in two publications by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research | SCP: Acceptance of homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders in the Netherlands 2013 (Acceptatie van homoseksuelen, biseksuelen en transgenders in Nederland 2013) and Towards tolerance. Both publications will be presented during the world’s biggest conference on gay emancipation, IDAHO, which is taking place on Thursday, 16 and Friday, 17 May. The reports were written by the researchers Dr. Lisette Kuyper, Prof. Saskia Keuzenkamp and Dr. Jurjen Iedema at the request of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, which is responsible for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) emancipation policy in the Netherlands. The research was based on several national and international population surveys.

Increase in acceptance in Europe since the 1980s
The acceptance of homosexuality has increased throughout the whole of Europe since the start of the 1980s. In 1981, roughly half the European population disapproved of homosexuality, a figure which had fallen to a third in 2008. In the early 1990s, 40% of Europeans did not want gay neighbours; this had fallen to 25% in 2008.
Stagnation in the new millennium
The increase in acceptance took place mainly between 1990 and 1999, after which it flattened off. In some countries, such as Sweden and the Netherlands, the level of acceptance was already very high in 1999, and therefore did not increase any further. Other countries did not see this ‘ceiling effect’. The degree of acceptance in Poland, Bulgaria and Lithuania has not increased in the last ten years, and more than half the population in these countries still strongly disapprove of homosexuality.

Differences between countries
There are wide differences between countries in the acceptance of homosexuality. In Iceland, for example, only 6% of the population have a problem with homosexuality, while in Lithuania the figure is 70%. In Spain, 5% of the population say they would not want gay neighbours; in Romania this applies for 58%. And while 93% of the Dutch population think gay and lesbian citizens should be free to live their lives as they wish, only 29% of Russians agree with this statement.

Explanations for a positive attitude
Countries where public opinion towards homosexuality is more positive tend to have relatively high education and income levels and a reasonably flat income distribution. They are also countries where more people tend to live in large cities and where church attendance is low. Political factors also play a role: longer EU membership and the absence of a Communist past are related to higher levels of acceptance, as is a greater degree of engagement with global civil society. The presence of a strong LGBT movement is also associated with greater acceptance. Finally, the level of tolerance is higher in countries with liberal attitudes to women working and in countries where greater value is attached to self-development and quality of life.

Acceptance still increasing in the Netherlands
The Netherlands has long been among the countries where acceptance of homosexuality is relatively high. Both reports show that the level of acceptance is still increasing. In 2006, 15% of the Dutch population took a negative view of homosexuality; in 2012 this had fallen to 4%. Dutch people have little or no difficulty with gay marriage, the right of gays and lesbians to live their lives as they wish and gay teachers, nor with the idea of their children being gay. There are however some areas where the acceptance runs up against clear limits: 20% of the Dutch think that gay and straight people should not have equal rights to adopt; 29% find the idea of two men kissing offensive, and 19% feel the same about two women kissing (14% feel the same way about a man and a woman kissing). 22% also say that they are more put off by two men walking hand in hand than by a man and a woman doing this.

Wide differences within the Netherlands
The finding that only 4% of the Dutch population have a negative attitude to homosexuality does not hold for all groups in the population. Notable exceptions are people who go to church at least once a week (26% negative) and people who vote for the right-wing PVV party (10% negative). Non-Western migrants also often have difficulty with homosexuality. Among the four main non-Western migrant groups in the Netherlands (people of Surinamese, Antillean, Turkish and Moroccan origin), this applies especially for those with a Turkish or Moroccan
background. Three-quarters of these two groups would for example find it a problem if their child had a relationship with someone of the same sex.

Social acceptance of homosexuality also has its limits among schoolchildren. In 2009, almost a third of pupils in Dutch secondary schools thought a gay or lesbian pupil would not be able to come out at school. The same proportion did not know if they would be able to do this.

Acceptance of bisexuality and transgenders
For the first time, nationally representative data are available on Dutch attitudes to bisexuality. Broadly speaking, those attitudes are positive, though slightly less so than attitudes to homosexuality: 6% report that they do not feel comfortable around bisexuals. A higher proportion of the population have difficulty with transgenders: 20% think there is something wrong with people who do not feel like either a man or a woman, and 21% would rather not associate with someone who is not clearly male or female. A majority (59%) do however agree that transgenders should be able to undergo sex-reassignment surgery.


These publications may be obtained from online or other booksellers or may be ordered direct from the website: [www.scp.nl](http://www.scp.nl). For more information: SCP: Lisette Kuyper (available until Thursday, 16 May, 12.00 hrs), tel.: +31 (0)70 340 6293, e-mail: l.kuyper@scp.nl.
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