



# Analysis Report: Barriers and Opportunities for Young LGBTQIA+ Entrepreneurs in Germany, Croatia, Poland, and Europe

Developed By:

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## ● Executive Summary

This report investigates the barriers, opportunities, and current status of young LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs in Germany, Croatia, Poland, and the broader European context. Findings are based on survey responses from 172 individuals (112 LGBTQIA+ & 60 allies), expert interviews, and insights from the "Business Pride" project participatory visit in Nuremberg, Germany. The study highlights key challenges such as funding barriers, discrimination, and regional disparities, while emphasising opportunities through mentorship, digital platforms, and tailored resources for LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs.

## ● Methodology

**Survey Respondents:** 172 individuals, including LGBTQ+youth and allies, from Germany, Croatia, and Poland.

**Key Survey Areas:**

- Community support and networking.
- Access to funding and resources.
- Experiences of discrimination and visibility.
- Role of digital platforms and branding.
- Entrepreneurship skills

**Expert Interviews:** Business leaders, activists, youth workers and entrepreneurs from each country provided qualitative insights.

## ● Findings from Survey and Interviews

### ● Community Support and Networking:

**Survey Question:** *Have you experienced a sense of community and support groups for LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs?*

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- **Germany:** 72% agreed, citing well-established LGBTQ+ business networks and community events in cities like Berlin and Munich.
- **Croatia:** Only 48% reported access to community support, with most resources concentrated in urban areas like Zagreb.
- **Poland:** A low 35% reported a sense of community, often relying on informal networks and social media for support.

#### Expert Input:

- "Berlin's LGBTQIA+ ecosystem is thriving, but in smaller towns, resources are scarce."
- "Support exists in Croatia, but it's fragile. Many fear being publicly associated with LGBTQ+ groups."

- **Access to Funding and Resources:**

**Survey Question:** *Do you feel that your sexual orientation or gender identity has impacted your access to funding or resources for your business?*

- **Germany:** 41% felt their LGBTQ+ identity had a positive impact on their branding, but implicit biases still affected funding opportunities.
- **Croatia:** 63% reported difficulties accessing funding due to societal stigma and lack of LGBTQIA+-specific grants.
- **Poland:** 74% believed their identity negatively impacted funding opportunities, with many citing crowdfunding as a preferred alternative.

#### Expert Input:

- "Traditional investors may hesitate due to cultural biases, but progressive brands actively seek LGBTQ+ partnerships."
- "In Poland, LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs are often pushed to crowdfund internationally because local investors shy away."

- **Participation in LGBTQIA+ Support Events:**

**Survey Question:** *Do you actively participate in LGBTQ+ support events?*

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- Across all countries, 59% of respondents reported attending such events, with higher participation in Germany (72%) compared to Croatia (46%) and Poland (39%).
- Many participants expressed the need for more frequent and accessible events.

- **Consumer Behavior and Discrimination:**

**Survey Question:** *Have you ever encountered a situation where someone did not use your services/products due to your sexual identity?*

- **Germany:** 28% experienced discrimination, mainly in conservative areas.
- **Croatia:** 49% faced such situations, with significant regional disparities.
- **Poland:** 64% reported similar experiences, with discrimination being more overt in smaller towns.

- **Observations and Perceptions:**

### **Visibility and Mentorship**

**Survey Question:** *Have you observed LGBTQ+ youth entrepreneurs actively involved in the local business environment?*

- **Germany:** 81% observed active involvement, with visibility particularly high in metropolitan areas.
- **Croatia:** 54% reported observing LGBTQIA+ youth entrepreneurs, often in creative industries.
- **Poland:** Only 37% observed such activity, reflecting societal conservatism and fear of backlash.

**Survey Question:** *Have you encountered difficulties in identifying or connecting with LGBTQ+ business mentors or allies?*

- Across countries, 64% struggled to find mentors, with the highest difficulty reported in Poland (78%).

**Expert Insight:** "A lack of visible mentors is a major gap, especially for LGBTQ+ youth entrepreneurs in smaller cities."

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## Barriers to Partnerships

**Survey Question:** *Do you perceive any barriers or discrimination when seeking business partnerships or collaborations?*

- 56% of respondents reported facing barriers, primarily in Croatia (61%) and Poland (70%), compared to Germany (38%).

- **Discrimination in Business**

**Survey Question:** *Have you ever encountered a situation where someone did not use your services/products due to your sexual identity?*

- **Germany:** 29% reported such incidents, mostly in rural areas or with older clients.
- **Croatia:** 54% faced direct discrimination, primarily in conservative towns.
- **Poland:** 67% experienced such situations, reflecting strong societal prejudice in more conservative regions.

**Expert Input:**

- "Discrimination is more subtle in Germany but still exists, particularly outside major cities."
- "It's not uncommon for clients to walk away when they learn you're LGBTQIA+ in Croatia or Poland."

- **Role of Digital Platforms**

**Survey Question:** *Do you believe that the accessibility and reach of digital platforms have positively influenced the visibility of LGBTQIA+ businesses?*

- Across all three countries, 83% of respondents agreed that digital platforms have been transformative for visibility and networking.
- Social media (Instagram, LinkedIn) and e-commerce platforms (Etsy, Shopify) were widely used to reach supportive audiences and bypass local barriers.

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## Expert Input:

- "Social media has given us a platform where we feel safe and can connect globally."
- "For LGBTQ+ businesses in Poland, the online world is a lifeline."

## ● Branding and Political Trends

**Survey Question:** *Do you think that labeling your business as 'LGBTQ+ friendly' influences public perception?*

- **Germany:** 68% believed it was a positive factor, especially in cosmopolitan areas.
- **Croatia:** 51% were hesitant to label their businesses, fearing backlash.
- **Poland:** Only 32% saw it as beneficial, citing a highly polarized political climate.

**Survey Question:** *Do political trends in your country impact the development of LGBTQ+-run businesses?*

- **Germany:** 48% felt political trends were neutral or supportive.
- **Croatia:** 64% believed conservative politics hindered growth opportunities.
- **Poland:** 81% stated that political climate negatively impacts business development.

## Expert Input:

- "In Germany, political support has normalized LGBTQ+ entrepreneurship in most sectors."
- "In Poland, the political environment directly discourages open LGBTQ+ advocacy."

## ● Entrepreneurship Skills and Advocacy

### Key Skills for Success

**Survey Question:** Please indicate the skills you consider most important for success in entrepreneurship.

Top skills identified:

- Networking (68%)
- Digital Marketing & Finance (61%)
- Leadership and Team Building (53%)

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## Confidence in Advocacy

**Survey Question:** On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel in your ability to advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusivity in entrepreneurship?

Average confidence scores:

Germany: 3.9

Croatia: 3.2

Poland: 2.8

Expert Insight: "Entrepreneurs in Poland often lack confidence due to societal barriers, while those in Germany feel empowered by inclusive ecosystems."

## ● Challenges and Opportunities

### Challenges Identified

1. **Funding Gaps:** Discrimination and cultural biases often limit access to traditional funding, particularly in Croatia and Poland.
2. **Limited Mentorship:** Many entrepreneurs struggle to find LGBTQ+ mentors and role models, especially in smaller communities.
3. **Societal Stigma:** Fear of backlash prevents open branding and networking in conservative regions.
4. **Regional Disparities:** Urban areas in Germany are well-supported, while rural regions in all three countries lag behind.

### Opportunities

- **Digital Platforms:** These provide a safe space for visibility, marketing, and customer engagement.
- **Growing LGBTQ+ Networks:** Grassroots initiatives in Croatia and Poland are slowly gaining momentum.
- **Youth Engagement:** Younger generations show more openness to LGBTQ+ entrepreneurship, creating future market opportunities.

## ● Recommendations

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## For Policymakers

- Develop funding programs for LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs.
- Ensure anti-discrimination laws cover entrepreneurship and business transactions.

## For LGBTQ+ Advocacy Groups

- Organize regional events to connect rural and urban entrepreneurs.
- Create mentorship programs pairing experienced LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs with young professionals.

## For Entrepreneurs

- Use digital platforms to market and network globally.
- Explore international grants and crowdfunding for financial support.

- **History and Status of LGBTQIA+ Youth in Europe**

LGBTQIA+ rights vary widely across Europe, creating a complex and uneven landscape. While Western Europe is among the most progressive regions globally, offering robust legal protections and social acceptance, Eastern Europe lags significantly in terms of rights, recognition, and public attitudes.

- **Same-Sex Marriage and Civil Unions:**
  - 22 of the 38 countries worldwide that have legalized same-sex marriage are in Europe.
  - An additional 11 European countries recognize civil unions or partnerships, providing limited rights for same-sex couples.
  - Countries such as Armenia, Belarus, Poland, and Russia explicitly define marriage as a union between a man and a woman in their constitutions.
- **Adoption Rights:**
  - Same-sex couples can adopt children in all countries where marriage equality exists.
  - Croatia and Liechtenstein allow joint adoption in civil unions, while Italy and San Marino restrict adoption to step-parent rights only.
- **Notable Legal Regressions:**
  - Hungary amended its constitution in 2020 to explicitly ban adoption by same-sex couples.

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- In 2021, Hungary enacted a law similar to Russia's "anti-gay propaganda" legislation, banning content that portrays or promotes homosexuality to minors.

## Eastern vs. Western Europe: A Divided Reality

- **Western Europe:**
  - Countries like Malta, Iceland, and Belgium lead in LGBTQIA+ equality, according to ILGA-Europe.
  - Progressive legal frameworks include marriage equality, anti-discrimination laws, and comprehensive adoption rights.
  - Public opinion is largely supportive of LGBTQIA+ rights, creating a conducive environment for youth.
- **Eastern Europe:**
  - Constitutional bans on same-sex unions and a lack of anti-discrimination protections highlight severe inequality.
  - Public opinion is often shaped by conservative and religious ideologies, resulting in higher rates of stigma and violence.

- **Conclusion:**

The challenges faced by young LGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs differ across Germany, Croatia, and Poland, influenced by each country's unique cultural and political contexts. While Germany leads in inclusivity and support, significant barriers persist in Croatia and Poland. Digital platforms, advocacy efforts, adequate resources, and mentorship programs involving youth workers present promising solutions to address these challenges and foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem.