



Government
of Ireland
International
Development
Programme



Implemented by



Governance and Participation

A Series of Policy Discussion Papers

UNDER ONE ROOF

Exploring the experiences, challenges,
and needs of same-sex couples in Viet Nam

December 2025

This policy discussion research report series on Governance and Participation is coordinated by a team of policy and programme analysts from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Viet Nam.

These reports assess the implementation of public policies and propose innovations in both policy design and implementation approaches across areas related to public governance, public administration, and public service delivery in Viet Nam. Addressing the country's economic, social, political, and environmental challenges requires policymakers to rely on high-quality data and evidence as a basis for decision-making. This series aims to contribute empirical evidence to policy discussions, provide expert insights for policymakers, and support policy innovation, thereby contributing to Viet Nam's broader development efforts.



This policy discussion research is guided by three core principles: (i) being grounded in qualitative and/or quantitative evidence; (ii) ensuring academic rigor, research integrity, and analytical independence; and (iii) promoting the participation of all relevant stakeholders. To uphold these principles, studies must ensure methodological rigor, legitimacy, and a systematic approach in selecting policy issues for discussion.

Suggested citation: Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2025). "Under One Roof" 2025: Exploring the experiences, challenges, and needs of LGBTI couples in Viet Nam. In the Policy Discussion Research Series on Governance and Participation. Jointly implemented by iSEE and UNDP in Viet Nam, 2025. Hanoi, Viet Nam: December 2025.

Editorial note: Quotations have been lightly edited to remove fillers and repetitions without altering the substance of participants' responses.

Copyright notice: No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior permission.

The views and opinions expressed in this policy document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Viet Nam.

RESEARCH REPORT

UNDER ONE ROOF

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, AND NEEDS OF SAME-SEX COUPLES IN VIET NAM

Research Team

Luong The Huy (Lead Researcher)
Doan Khanh Linh
Dang Thuy Duong
Vu Hoa

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was developed by the research team of the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE), with technical support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Viet Nam.

We sincerely thank the experts who generously provided their time, insights, and valuable feedback throughout the development of this report, including Marina Ruzzi, Tran Nhat Quang, Pham Thi Kieu Loan, and Federica Dispenza (UNDP in Viet Nam).

The content of this report reflects the views of the research team and does not necessarily represent those of UNDP in Viet Nam, iSEE, or any other organisation.

This study was funded by the Embassy of Ireland and UNDP in Viet Nam.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 15 years, Viet Nam has made significant progress in strengthening its legal framework toward greater equality and social justice, in line with international standards. The 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of Viet Nam also called for a fundamental shift in thinking, alongside the continued development and refinement of legal foundations to address bottlenecks in law implementation and enforcement. These efforts aim to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of citizens while meeting the country's development needs in a new era, in accordance with Resolution No. 66-NQ/TW of the Politburo.

In this context, the report “Under One Roof” explores so-called “non-traditional” family models—homes shaped not by formal legal declarations, but by the rhythms of everyday life: meals prepared and shared, overlapping work schedules, moments of illness and care, and late-night conversations about finances and housing. For many same-sex couples in Viet Nam, such family life unfolds daily. They build their families not through formal recognition, but through ordinary, lived practices of sharing a life together.

Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, this report presents two parallel layers of reality. One consists of numerical data, capturing patterns of cohabitation, legal needs, social challenges, levels of disclosure, family planning, and experiences of separation or violence. The other consists of personal narratives, illustrating that family life is not merely a matter of individual choice, but also a process of navigating incomplete social and legal conditions.

This report seeks to contribute further evidence on the existence and development of non-traditional family models—an increasingly common trend in the current socio-economic context. In doing so, it aims to support ongoing research and the refinement of legal frameworks, in order to better respond to the evolving needs of society.

Research team

TABLE OF CONTENT

TERMINOLOGY AND ABBREVIATIONS	viii
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	ix
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	xii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
I. OVERVIEW	1
1. Rationale for the study	1
2. Legal context in Viet Nam	1
3. Objectives and research questions	2
4. Literature review	3
5. Research ethics and data protection	4
II. METHODOLOGY	4
1. Mixed-methods research design	4
2. Quantitative survey	4
3. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions	5
III. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE QUANTITATIVE SAMPLE	6
1. Demographic characteristics of the quantitative sample	6
2. Sex assigned at birth, gender identity, sexual orientation of quantitative sample	8
3. Different-sex marital status	9
CHAPTER 2. KEY FINDINGS	12
I. Same-sex cohabitation is increasingly becoming a stable and common living arrangement among LGBTI people in Viet Nam	12
1. Strategies of partial disclosure of sexual orientation and same-sex relationships	12
2. Commitment ceremonies as a way to formalise relationships	13
3. Relationship status and entry points into cohabitation	15
II. Same-sex couples “make family” every day through everyday practices	18
1. Sharing everyday financial responsibilities, with limited asset consolidation	19
2. Sharing care work and negotiating decisions on an equal basis	20
3. Boundaries of intimate space and participation in kinship obligations	22
4. Having and raising children as a significant dimension of cohabitation	24
III. Challenges and needs in the process of cohabitation	27
1. Challenges in building a shared family life	27
<i>1.1. Legal challenges and public life</i>	28

1.2. <i>Social challenges and private space</i>	33
2. Preferred legal forms for same-sex relationships	36
3. Perceived necessity of legal rights for same-sex cohabitation	37
4. Perceived consequences of the non-recognition of same-sex marriage	39
5. Expected benefits of legal recognition of same-sex marriage	41
6. Same-sex marriage involving foreign elements	42
IV. Domestic violence, separation, and relationship dissolution	45
1. Domestic violence	45
1.1. <i>Prevalence of violence in same-sex relationships</i>	45
1.2. <i>Common forms of violence and sources of support</i>	46
2. Separation and relationship dissolution in same-sex cohabitation	48
2.1. <i>Situation and reasons for relationship dissolution</i>	48
2.2. <i>Seeking support and silence</i>	49
CHAPTER 3. INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES	50
1. Legal frameworks for registered cohabitation internationally	50
2. Overview of countries legalising same-sex marriage and registered cohabitation	52
3. Regional context in Asia	53
CHAPTER 4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS	55
I. Legal dimension	55
II. Policy dimension	56
III. Societal dimension	57
IV. Suggested implementation roadmap	57
CONCLUSION	59
REFERENCES	61
APPENDIX	63
Interview narratives	
I. Disclosure	63
II. Wedding	64
III. Cohabitation	65
IV. Sharing	66
V. Care	67
VI. Kinship	67
VII. Children	67
VIII. Legal	69
IX. Foreign countries	70

TERMINOLOGY AND ABBREVIATIONS

The table below standardises the use of key terms and abbreviations throughout the report to ensure consistency in interpretation.

LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex; used in this report to refer to communities with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender; a term commonly used in media and policy advocacy.
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, Sex Characteristics; an international conceptual framework addressing diversity in sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics.
Same-sex cohabitation (SSC)	Two individuals of the same sex on paper (who may identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or other identities) establishing a shared life as a family (cohabiting, sharing finances, care, and responsibilities), with or without a commitment ceremony.
Same-sex couple	Two individuals of the same sex on paper (who may identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or other identities).
Same-sex marriage	A marriage between two individuals of the same legal sex that is legally recognised, with rights and obligations equivalent to those of different-sex marriage.
Civil partnership	A registered cohabitation mechanism that may not be termed “marriage,” but provides legal status and a defined set of rights and obligations.
Family	Includes both families of origin (parents, siblings, relatives) and families formed by the couple (spouses/partners, children, dependents).
Coming out	The act of sharing one’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or same-sex relationship with others; this may be full, partial, or not disclosed.

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table	Page
Table 1. Age groups of survey respondents	6
Table 2. Geographic distribution of survey respondents	7
Table 3. Income levels of survey respondents	7
Table 4. Gender identity of survey respondents	8
Table 5. Sexual orientation of survey respondents	9
Table 6. Different-sex marital status of survey respondents	10
Table 7. Reasons for entering different-sex marriage among survey respondents	10
Table 8. Intentions to enter different-sex marriage among survey respondents	11
Table 9. Levels of disclosure to different groups	12
Table 10. Status of organising commitment ceremonies	13
Table 11. Reasons for not organising commitment ceremonies	14
Table 12. Relationship status of survey respondents	15
Table 13. Reasons for not cohabiting among those who have never lived with a same-sex partner	15
Table 14. Reasons for deciding to cohabit among survey respondents	17
Table 15. Duration of most recent relationship	17
Table 16. Financial sharing practices	19

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES (CONT)

Table	Page
Table 17. Practices in sharing care work and decision-making negotiation	21
Table 18. Types of cohabitation arrangements	23
Table 19. Parental status of survey respondents	24
Table 20. Origins of children in families with children	25
Table 21. Challenges related to having children and joint adoption	26
Table 22. Legal challenges experienced	28
Table 23. Categories of legal challenges	32
Table 24. Social challenges experienced	33
Table 25. Categories of social challenges	35
Table 26. Preferred legal forms of relationship recognition	36
Table 27. Average perceived necessity across different groups of rights	38
Table 28. Summary of levels of agreement across statements	40
Table 29. Expected benefits of legal recognition of same-sex marriage	41
Table 30. Intentions to enter same-sex marriage with a foreign partner	43
Table 31. Legal status of partner's nationality	43

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES (CONT)

Table	Page
Table 32. Legal issues involving foreign elements	44
Table 33. Experiences of violence from same-sex partners	46
Table 34. Forms of violence	46
Table 35. Sources of support	48
Table 36. Experiences of separation/breakup in same-sex cohabiting relationships	48
Table 37. Reasons for separation/breakup	49
Table 38. Models of legalisation of same-sex marriage in Asian countries/territories	54

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than ten years after the 2014 Law on Marriage and Family removed the prohibition on same-sex marriage, same-sex cohabitation and non-traditional family forms have become increasingly visible in Viet Nam, even as they largely remain outside formal systems of legal recognition and protection. This study explores how LGBTI people in Viet Nam build and sustain family life in practice, navigate legal and social constraints, and negotiate everyday experiences of intimacy, care, responsibility, and belonging.

The research draws on a mixed-methods dataset, including 1,070 validated quantitative survey responses and qualitative interviews and discussions. The quantitative sample is concentrated among individuals aged 18–34 (47.8% aged 18–24; 40.5% aged 25–34), with 76% residing in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. In terms of gender identity and sexual orientation, 89.2% identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; 9.7% as transgender; and 10.3% as non-binary. The research focuses on the everyday realities of same-sex couples, and on the ways in which they “make family” in the absence of formal legal recognition. Particular attention is given to issues related to disclosure, cohabitation, financial arrangements, caregiving, kinship obligations, child rearing, relationship dissolution, legal difficulties, and expectations surrounding relationship recognition.

Overall, the findings suggest that same-sex cohabitation in Viet Nam is not a marginal or transient phenomenon, but an increasingly stable and socially meaningful form of intimate life. Many same-sex couples already function as family units in practice, sharing responsibilities, care, and long-term commitments in ways comparable to heterosexual cisgender couples. At the same time, questions related to legal recognition and protection remain areas that may benefit from further research and policy discussion.

KEY FINDINGS

1 Same-sex cohabitation has become a stable and increasingly common living arrangement: The data shows that same-sex relationships are not only experienced as “private love,” but are organised as family life, involving everyday practices, responsibilities, and obligations. Many couples share expenses, jointly accumulate assets, share household and care work, and negotiate gender roles in more flexible ways compared to traditional norms. A notable feature is the strategy adopted by a significant number of the respondents of “partial disclosure,” where individuals selectively come out to ensure safety, maintain relationships with extended family, and minimise social conflict, while sustaining stability in their shared lives.

2 Lack of formal recognition of relationships brings concrete implications in everyday family life: In the absence of a formal mechanism for relationship recognition, many fundamental aspects of family life that are often supported or regulated through legal and social frameworks must instead be individually arranged and negotiated by same-sex couples themselves. These include ownership of property and contracts, inheritance and decision-making rights, as well as transfer of responsibility for medical decision making and legal representation. Such practical implications of these regulatory gaps often become visible only during critical events—such as hospitalisation, accidents, loss of legal capacity, or relationship dissolution. In these situations, partners may not be recognised as next of kin, limiting their ability to make decisions, access information, or protect shared assets and rights.

3 Child rearing, social protection, and access to services remain persistent bottlenecks: Needs related to child rearing, caregiving, and social protection are clearly evident, yet are often constrained by legal barriers and social stigma—particularly in administrative procedures related to civil registration, child education, healthcare, and access to welfare. Without legal recognition of the relationship, “family status” remains undefined, resulting in a mismatch between caregiving responsibilities and decision-making rights. As a result, families often rely on informal or temporary arrangements—such as registering assets or parental roles under relatives’ names, verbal agreements, or limited legal recognition in order to access necessary procedures and services. These solutions, however, are not sustainable and may reinforce inequalities within relationships.

4 Violence, separation and relationship dissolution exist within same-sex cohabiting couples, yet protection mechanisms remain limited: Data on violence in same-sex relationships and experiences of separation and relationship dissolution reveal a dual challenge. First, clear legal mechanisms remain limited for protection, intervention, and dispute resolution (including issues related to property, caregiving obligations, and rights concerning dependents) when relationships dissolve. Second, available support networks may not be sufficiently responsive or sensitive to the specific characteristics of same-sex relationships, in a context where stigma may discourage individuals from seeking assistance.

In the absence of a clear legal pathway, violence and relationship dissolution risk leading to long-term consequences for health, finances, and social well-being of vulnerable parties involved.

5 Policy needs persist while contexts grow more complex: Comparison with the 2013 and 2019 studies show that core policy needs have remained largely unchanged: relationship recognition remains a recurring concern, and perceptions of unequal access to rights continue. A new feature in the current period is the emergence of cross-border dimensions, including relationships involving foreign elements, migration, and the need to address issues

related to private international law.

As families and individuals increasingly operate across transnational spaces, domestic legal gaps may generate ripple effects across multiple systems, from residency and civil registration to property and caregiving rights.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND KEY MESSAGES

The findings of this report point to a set of considerations that may be relevant for future policy dialogues, presented below across three levels.

At the **legal level**, the data suggests that further study of mechanisms for recognising same-sex cohabitation could help address the legal uncertainty that currently shapes everyday life for many same-sex couples. Areas that may warrant examination include relationship registration, property and inheritance, child rearing and caregiving, procedures to be followed in cases of relationship termination, mechanisms for protection from violence, as well as selected rights concerning labour norms, social protection, taxation, and insurance. Reviewing consistency across relevant legislative areas and instruments - including matters that incorporate foreign elements - may also support more coherent implementation of any future framework.

At the **policy level**, the evidence suggests that a number of practical steps may be considered in the near term, ahead of or alongside broader legal deliberation to reduce practical barriers and improve legal and social protection for same-sex cohabiting couples and their families. These include clarifying existing guidance on delegation/authorisation to healthcare decision-making; strengthening access to mediation and civil dispute resolution mechanisms; strengthening the capacity to identify and respond to domestic violence in diverse relationship contexts; integrating data on non-traditional household forms into relevant statistical systems; and encouraging institutions, schools, and businesses to consider more inclusive standards for recognition of partners and dependents.

At the **societal level**, the findings indicate value in continued public dialogue grounded in children's rights, best interests, and family well-being, in developing support resources for parents and relatives of LGBTI individuals, in expanding access to mental health and legal aid services, and encouraging responsible media practices that reduce stigma and reflect the diversity of family life in Viet Nam.

IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

This report does not prescribe a single path forward. Rather, the findings suggest that a phased approach — one that prioritises addressing practical gaps and everyday challenges

while creating space for broader deliberation on rights and recognition — may be conducive to iterative learning and further examination of the practical implications of different legal and policy mechanisms. Such an approach could include exploring specific legal forms for recognising same-sex cohabitation, informed by both domestic evidence and relevant international experience.

Further research and multi-stakeholder dialogue would be valuable in areas including adoption provisions, relationship registration, property arrangements, protection in cases of violence or relationship dissolution, labour and social protection, coherence across sectoral laws, and the handling of relationships involving foreign elements. The report offers its findings as a contribution to that ongoing process.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I. OVERVIEW

1. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Over the past decade, Viet Nam has seen significant social and legal developments related to the recognition of non-traditional family forms and the rights of individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. A significant milestone was reached in 2014 when the National Assembly adopted the Law on Marriage and Family, introducing the policy of “removal of prohibition without recognition” — meaning that same-sex marriage is no longer prohibited, but is not legally recognised.

After ten years of implementation, substantial changes have emerged in both the lived experiences and needs of the LGBTI community. At the same time, systematic collection and analysis of evidence and documented experiences of same-sex couples in cohabitation remain insufficient, particularly regarding the legal and social challenges they encounter. This study aims to contribute to filling that knowledge gap, offering an empirical evidence base for future policy recommendations.

This research builds upon and extends the 2019 study “Same-sex Cohabitation” conducted by iSEE, while expanding its scope to include issues of separation and relationship dissolution, children, and intersecting factors such as migration and cross-border marriages.

2. LEGAL CONTEXT IN VIET NAM

The legal framework in Viet Nam has evolved considerably in recent decades. In relation to same-sex couples, the current framework is defined primarily by the 2014 Law on Marriage and Family, which introduced the approach of “removal of prohibition without recognition.” Article 8, Clause 2 of the 2014 Law on Marriage and Family explicitly states: “The State does not recognise marriage between persons of the same sex.” This provision creates a condition of legal ambiguity: same-sex couples may hold wedding ceremonies and live together, but they do not have access to legal marriage or the associated rights and protections.

Regarding transgender individuals, the 2015 Civil Code revision marked a historic step by recognising the right to gender reassignment (Article 37). Further development of implementing provisions — covering conditions, procedures, and practical application — continues to be an area of active legal consideration. The 2006 Law on Gender Equality addresses equality between men and women but remains grounded in a gender binary

framework and does not encompass diverse gender identities.

At present, there is no official inclusion of same-sex households in national census objectives, no dedicated institutional mechanism to safeguard the rights of LGBTI communities, and no comprehensive legal instruments recognising their rights.

As Viet Nam's legal framework continues to develop, several areas remain without dedicated provisions for same-sex couples. These include:

- Recognition of same-sex marriage or equivalent legal mechanisms recognising the relationship
- Provisions to protect jointly held property of same-sex couples
- Mechanisms for legal or medical delegation/representation of same-sex partners
- Arrangements for joint adoption and guardianship rights
- Regulations on the division of assets and obligations in cases of separation or relationship dissolution
- Provisions addressing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity

3. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Overall objectives

- To map the legal and policy context concerning the rights of LGBTI individuals and couples under the current 2014 Law on Marriage and Family and related frameworks.
- To document the lived experiences and practical challenges faced by LGBTI couples in navigating daily life within the current legal context.
- To contribute evidence-based findings that might support informed policy dialogue on the rights and obligations of LGBTI couples in Viet Nam.

Research questions

- What areas of the 2014 Law on Marriage and Family and related legal documents are relevant to questions of property, child rearing, legal representation, and social protection for LGBTI couples during cohabitation and in cases of relationship dissolution?
- How do LGBTI couples organise their shared lives (including finances, assets, healthcare, welfare, and child rearing responsibilities), and what practical challenges do they encounter within the current legal framework?
- How do different approaches to relationship recognition (such as marriage, registered cohabitation, or authorisation mechanisms) respond to priority needs identified across different population groups?

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Following the revision of the Law on Marriage and Family in 2014, research on LGBTI communities in Viet Nam has generally focused on two main strands: (1) the realities of same-sex cohabitation and questions of legal protection of the couples; and (2) social attitudes toward same-sex marriage.

An existing study documents that same-sex couples have established family lives across multiple dimensions, including financial organisation, property arrangements, medical/legal representation, labour-related benefits, and aspirations to have children.¹ Within the current legal framework, a number of practical complexities have been identified, including issues related to housing contracts and ownership, access to dependent benefits, medical authorisation, notarisation procedures, inheritance, and child guardianship.

Research has also identified a “neutral” group — individuals without a clear stance on same-sex marriage — suggesting that evidence-based information and lived experiences may play an important role in shaping public understanding over time.²

A gender economics report by VESS and iSEE (2022) developed an estimation model based on theoretical frameworks assessing both direct and indirect impacts of recognising same-sex marriage in Viet Nam on GDP and the business environment.³ In addition, research⁴ on the experiences of networks of parents, relatives, and friends highlights that when families act as allies, levels of social safety, access to services, and mental well-being among LGBTI couples improve significantly.

Most studies referenced in this research (2015–2019 and earlier) have focused more on analysing instances of stable cohabitation rather than crisis, separation, or relationship dissolution. Areas that remain less thoroughly examined, and where data remain limited, include property arrangements and child guardianship in cases of relationship dissolution, as well as the impact of intersectional dimensions (such as disability, ethnic minority status, rural contexts, older age groups, and cross-border relationships) on lived experiences and access to rights.

¹ Vũ Thành Long, Đỗ Quỳnh Anh, and Chu Lan Anh, *Same-Sex Cohabitation: Love and Cohabiting Relationships of LGBT People* (2019), iSEE. (only available in Vietnamese)

² Đỗ Quỳnh Anh, Chu Lan Anh, Đặng Thùy Dương, Vương Khả Phong, and Nguyễn Bảo Ngọc, *Social Perspectives on Same-Sex Marriage: A Qualitative Study in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City* (2019), iSEE. (only available in Vietnamese)

³ iSEE and VESS, *Assessment of the Economic Impact of Same-Sex Marriage in Viet Nam* (2022) (only available in Vietnamese)

⁴ ICS Center, *Assessment of the Current Situation and Identification of Connection and Development Needs among Parents, Relatives, and Friends of LGBTI People* (2024) (only available in Vietnamese)

5. RESEARCH ETHICS AND DATA PROTECTION

This study adheres to core ethical principles, including respect for participants, voluntary participation, non-maleficence, and the protection of privacy. Prior to participating in the survey or in-depth interviews, participants were provided with information regarding the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, how the data would be used, their right to refuse to answer any question, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Survey data were collected online and used solely for research purposes. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with participants' informed consent. Audio recordings (where applicable) and note-taking were used to ensure accurate representation of participants' experiences. In the report, names have been anonymised, and any identifying details (such as specific addresses, workplaces, or highly specific personal information) have been removed where necessary.

Data management was conducted in accordance with the principles of data minimisation and controlled access. Raw data (including survey response files, audio recordings, and transcripts) were stored in secure environments, accessible only to designated members of the research team. When shared internally for analytical purposes, data were anonymised in advance; when shared externally, the report uses only aggregated data or processed excerpts to minimise the risk of identifying or linking back to participants.

Given that the research topic involves sexual orientation, gender identity, family life, and experiences of violence, the research team placed particular emphasis on minimising emotional risks for participants. Participants were reminded that they could pause, skip any question, or withdraw from the interaction at any time. When sensitive issues arose, interviewers prioritised attentive and respectful listening, and provided referrals to appropriate support services when participants expressed a need.

II. METHODOLOGY

1. MIXED-METHODS RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining an online quantitative survey with qualitative in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of LGBTI couples. This design allows for both the measurement of scale and trends through statistical data, and an in-depth exploration of context, emotions, and lived experiences through personal narratives.

2. QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

Target population: Individuals aged 18 and above who self-identify as LGBTI.

Sample size: The dataset consists of a total of 1,070 valid responses. Participants were

drawn from various provinces and cities, with a concentration in the two major urban centres—Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City—alongside a significant proportion from other localities.

Sampling method: Purposive sampling through:

- Community channels: iSEE, ICS, and community-based organisations (CBOs)
- Groups organised by locality and gender identity
- Soft criteria across region, age, gender identity, disability status, ethnicity, relationship history (including separation), and parental status

Data collection tool: An online questionnaire designed on the JotForm platform, accessed via the domain www.duoimotmainha.com, consisting of the following sections:

- Section A: Demographic information (13 questions)
- Section B: Gender identity and sexual orientation (3 questions)
- Section C: Relationship and cohabitation status (8 questions)
- Section D: Shared life and family organisation (6 questions)
- Section E: Legal and social challenges (5 questions)
- Section F: Separation/relationship dissolution and children (7 questions)
- Section G: Legal needs and expectations (4 questions)

Quality control: Internal consistency checks, duplicate prevention (IP/device), and data cleaning using SPSS 24.0.

3. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In-depth interviews (case studies): A total of 25 in-depth interviews were conducted with:

- Cohabiting couples: gay men (10), lesbian women (16), bisexual individuals (1), transgender individuals (2), non-binary individuals (1)
- Couples who had separated or experienced relationship dissolution (1 case)
- Couples with children or currently expecting (4 cases)
- Persons with disabilities (2 cases)
- Individuals from ethnic minority groups (2 cases)
- Parents and relatives of LGBTI individuals (3 participants)
- Professionals including doctors, HR staff, insurance staff, and notaries (6 participants)

Focus group discussions (FGDs): Two sessions were conducted with:

- Group 1: LGBTI individuals currently cohabiting (8 participants, Hanoi)
- Group 2: Professional support group, including lawyers, doctors, and LGBTI individuals (3 participants, Hanoi)

Data collection period: From 1 October 2025 to 22 November 2025

III. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE QUANTITATIVE SAMPLE

1. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE QUANTITATIVE SAMPLE

The survey collected 1,070 validated responses from LGBTI individuals aged 18 and above across 32 provinces and cities (out of a total of 34 nationwide). The key characteristics of the sample are presented below.

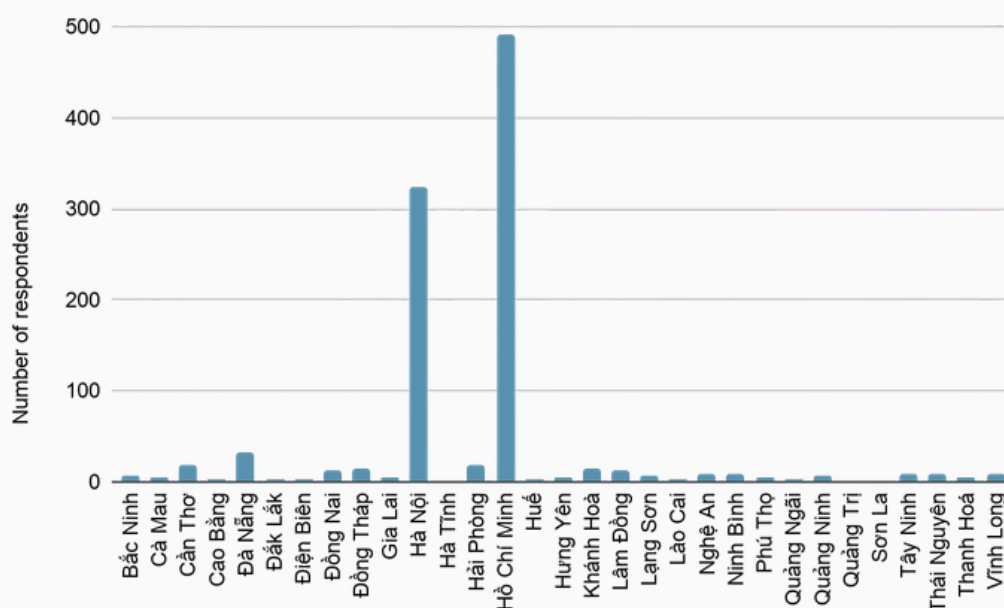
Overall, the age structure indicates that the survey strongly reflects the experiences of younger and early-adult generations within the LGBTI community. The 18–24 age group accounts for the largest proportion (47.8%), while those aged 25–34 make up 40.5%. These groups tend to be more open about their sexual orientation and same-sex relationships, and generally have greater access to technology.

Table 1. Age groups of survey respondents

Age group	Number in 2025 (n=1070)	Percentage (%) in 2025	Percentage (%) in 2019
From 18 to 24	511	4.78	8.09
From 25 to 34	433	4.05	1.78
From 35 to 44	117	1.09	-
From 45 to 54	8	0.07	-
From 55 to 64	1	0.01	-

The majority of respondents (76%) are currently residing in the country’s two largest metropolitan areas—Ho Chi Minh City (46%) and Hanoi (30.2%)—partly reflecting disparities in survey accessibility between major urban centres and smaller cities or non-urban areas. The sample is predominantly urban (81.8%), with only a small proportion living in peri-urban areas (11%) or rural areas (6.7%). This distribution should be taken into account when generalising findings to the broader LGBTI population nationwide. It also suggests that, in designing policies and services, attention should be paid to the concentration of the community in urban areas, while also considering access barriers faced by individuals in other provinces and localities.

Table 2. Geographic distribution of survey respondents



The survey sample tends to be concentrated among individuals with educational attainment at the vocational, college, or university level and above (88.2%). The majority of respondents are currently employed (either full-time or part-time, accounting for over 55%), alongside a significant proportion who are students (30.4%) or job-seekers (8%). This structure aligns with the age distribution and highlights that the survey captures a group in transition between education and employment, or in the process of stabilising their position in the labour market.

Income distribution indicates diversity across income levels, with the largest proportion in the group earning under 10 million VND per month (57.8%). This has important implications for analysing access to legal services, insurance, and healthcare, as well as the capacity of LGBTI couples to organise their shared lives and protect their assets.

Table 3. Income levels of survey respondents

<i>Income level</i>	Number (n=1070)	Percentage (%)
<i>No income</i>	171	16.0%
<i>Under 5,000,000VND</i>	181	16.9%
<i>From 5 to 10,000,000VND</i>	266	24.9%
<i>From 10 to 20,000,000VND</i>	242	22.6%
<i>From 20 to 30,000,000VND</i>	100	9.3%
<i>Above 30,000,000VND</i>	101	9.4%
<i>Did not answer</i>	9	0.8%

Ethnic Kinh respondents account for the overwhelming majority of the sample (93.4%). In terms of religion, 67.6% reported not practising any religion, followed by Buddhism (20.1%) and Catholicism (5.5%). Most respondents reported no disability (94.7%), while a small proportion (2.9%) reported disabilities related to neurological, mental, visual, auditory, or other conditions.

These demographic characteristics suggest that the data primarily reflect the experiences of LGBTI individuals belonging to the ethnic majority, with access to education, the internet, and urban social networks. In contrast, individuals in rural areas, with lower income, or with limited access to technology may be underrepresented.

2. SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH, GENDER IDENTITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OF QUANTITATIVE SAMPLE

The quantitative survey data indicate a highly diverse participant population, including cisgender, transgender, and non-binary individuals, as well as a wide range of sexual orientations (including homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, among others). This diversity provides an important foundation for analysing differing legal needs, particularly in areas related to identity recognition, bodily autonomy, and the right to organise shared life.

Sex as recorded on birth certificates shows that the majority of participants were registered as female (62.5%) under the current binary gender system. To ensure clarity, each gender identity option in the survey was accompanied by a brief definition. A total of 9.7% of participants identified as transgender, while 10.3% identified as non-binary. Notably, 31 participants identified as intersex—individuals born with sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female—accounting for 2.9% of the sample.

Although intersex individuals are not analysed separately in the sections on cohabiting relationships, their presence highlights the internal diversity of the LGBTI community. It also suggests that legal and social needs related to cohabitation may vary significantly across different groups within the community.

Table 4. Gender identity of survey respondents

Gender identity	Number (n=1070)	Percentage (%)
<i>Cisgender</i>	814	76.1%
<i>Non-binary</i>	110	10.3%
<i>Transgender</i>	104	9.7%
<i>Intersex</i>	31	2.9%
<i>Did not answer</i>	4	0.4%
<i>Other</i>	7	0.7%

The distribution of sexual orientation indicates that gay and lesbian individuals account for the largest proportion of the sample (65.1%), alongside a significant share of bisexual and pansexual individuals (24.1%), as well as other sexual identities (10.8%). This distribution allows the survey to capture the experiences of multiple groups within the LGBTI community, rather than focusing on a single group.

Table 5. Sexual orientation of survey respondents

<i>Sexual orientation</i>	Number (n=1070)	Percentage (%)
<i>Homosexual</i>	697	65.1%
<i>Bi-/Pansexual</i>	258	24.1%
<i>Heterosexual</i>	55	5.1%
<i>Asexual</i>	27	2.5%
<i>Questioning/Unclear</i>	23	2.1%
<i>Did not answer</i>	2	0.2%
<i>Other</i>	9	0.9%

3. DIFFERENT-SEX MARITAL STATUS

One demographic characteristic examined in this study is different-sex marital status. A total of 17 respondents (approximately 1.6%) reported having previously been married to a different-sex partner, 5 respondents are currently in a different-sex marriage, and 2 respondents are in the process of divorce or are separated. The reasons provided for entering different-sex marriages include identifying as bisexual or pansexual, or being transgender and marrying a different-sex partner. Other reasons relate to factors such as conforming to family expectations, entering a marriage of convenience (where the spouse is aware of the individual's sexual orientation, reported in 6 cases), reducing social pressure, the desire to have children, or a lack of clarity regarding one's sexual orientation or gender identity at the time of marriage.

Table 6. Different-sex marital status of survey respondents

<i>Different-sex marital status</i>	Number (n=1070)	Percentage (%)
<i>Never married to a different-sex partner</i>	1044	97.6%
<i>Previously married to a different-sex partner</i>	17	1.6%
<i>Currently in a different-sex marriage</i>	5	0.5%
<i>Separated / in the process of divorce</i>	2	0.2%
<i>Did not answer</i>	2	0.2%

Although representing only a small proportion, the different-sex marital status of respondents points to the existence of more complex life trajectories, involving navigation of both identity and legal dimensions simultaneously. It reflects the tension between living authentically with one's identity and maintaining traditional family obligations, a dynamic that shapes the choices and circumstances of LGBTI individuals within the more restrictive current legal and social context.

Those who had entered or intended to enter different-sex marriages reported a range of reasons (Table 7), most notably identifying as bisexual or pansexual, the desire to satisfy parental expectations, pressure from society and the workplace, the aspiration to form a family and have children, or entering a marriage of convenience (where the spouse is aware of their sexual orientation).

Table 7. Different-sex marital status of survey respondents

<i>Reasons for entering a different-sex marriage</i>	Number
<i>I am bisexual or pansexual</i>	61
<i>To satisfy parents and family expectations</i>	27
<i>Due to social or workplace pressure</i>	23
<i>To have a family and children</i>	19
<i>Marriage of convenience (my spouse is aware of my sexual orientation)</i>	16
<i>I am transgender and my spouse's legal sex is different from mine</i>	13
<i>Other</i>	5

These findings suggest that decisions around different-sex marriage reflect a combination of personal decision and also a strategy of adaptation to heteronormative social norms. For some, as their understanding of their own identity develops over time, tensions may emerge between their inner sense of self and the social roles they are expected to perform within a different-sex marriage. This often leads to conflict, impasse, and ultimately relationship dissolution, affecting not only the individuals themselves but also their partners and children, if any.

Regarding intentions to enter a different-sex marriage in the future, among 1,041 respondents, 728 (69.9%) reported having no such intention, 99 (9.5%) indicated that they do intend to do so, and 214 selected “don’t know” or preferred not to answer.

Table 8. Intentions to enter a different-sex marriage of survey respondents

<i>Intentions to enter a different-sex marriage</i>	Number (n=1041)	Percentage (%)
No	728	69.9%
Not sure/Do not want to answer	214	20.6%
Yes	99	9.5%

CHAPTER 2

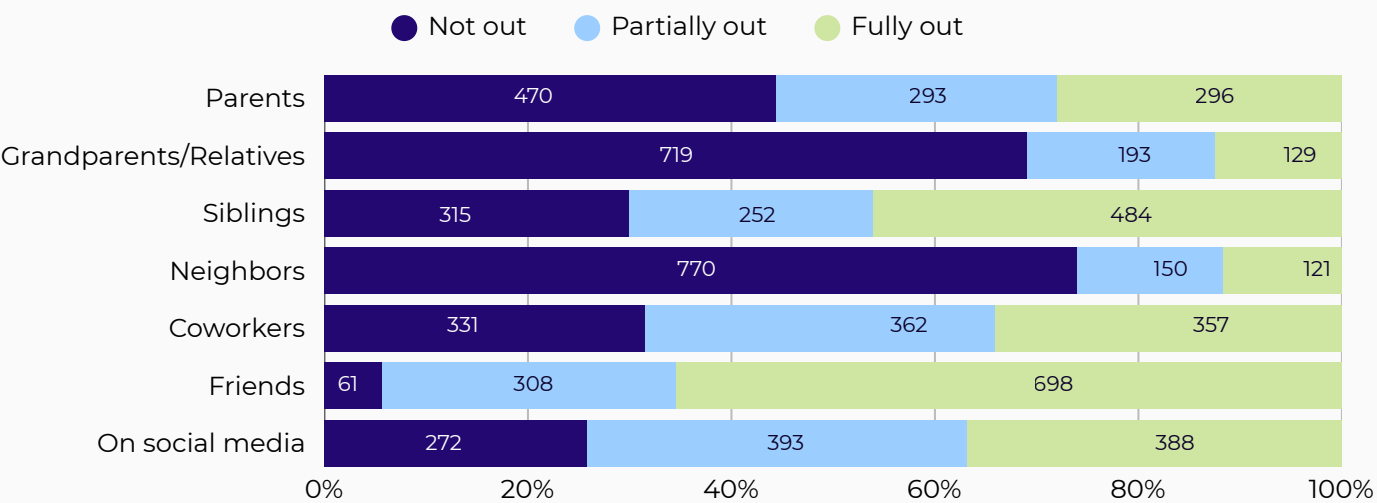
KEY FINDINGS

I. SAME-SEX COHABITATION IS INCREASINGLY BECOMING A STABLE AND COMMON LIVING ARRANGEMENT AMONG LGBTI PEOPLE IN VIET NAM

1. STRATEGIES OF PARTIAL DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

The survey included a set of questions on levels of disclosure across different groups (parents, siblings, extended family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, social media, and others), with three basic categories: non-disclosure, partial disclosure, and full disclosure. Respondents reported the highest levels of disclosure to friends and siblings, and the lowest levels to parents, extended family, and neighbours. Disclosure to social media and workplaces appeared more varied and ambivalent. Relationships with strong regulatory or sanctioning power—such as family members who define “family honour”—are precisely where disclosure levels are lowest, due to risks of disconnection, punishment, or emotional harm.

Table 9. Levels of disclosure across different groups



The level of disclosure of sexual orientation and same-sex relationships does not follow a linear spectrum from “fully open” to “fully concealed.” Instead, disclosure among LGBTI individuals in Viet Nam is stratified and flexibly negotiated across different social groups. This aligns with the concept of non-normative intimacy, where the intimate lives of LGBTI individuals are always embedded within relations of power and social norms. Disclosure is therefore not merely a reflection of “confidence” or “self-acceptance,” but rather the result of a complex assessment of risks and available social resources that individuals must navigate to protect their safety, relationships, and families.

“Here, we don’t come out to everyone. For example, other LGBT couples nearby know, but with neighbours and local people, we almost never disclose, because we don’t want any trouble, especially since we are outsiders here.”

- V. and L., female couple, 39, Dak Lak

Same-sex couples operate within a space of “partial disclosure,” where they may be recognised within supportive communities while remaining hidden in spaces dominated by heteronormative⁵ expectations. Survey findings reflect similar dynamics among participants: adopting selective disclosure strategies to reduce family conflict, avoid stigma, and ensure personal safety.

“My parents kept asking who I was living with. Basically, I still hid it, just said I was living with a friend, without saying who or what exactly. But when they saw that I insisted on moving out to live there, they understood.”

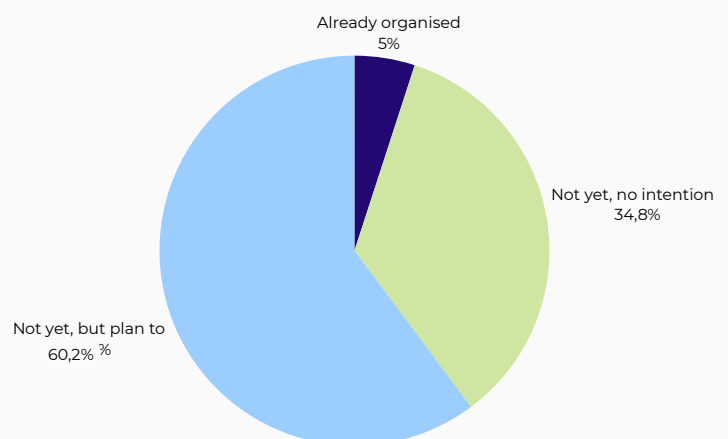
- M., LGBTI focus group participant, Hanoi

Cohabitation becomes a way of creating a “safe space” in which intimate relationships can be maintained without directly confronting risks from unsupportive social networks. The fragmented nature of disclosure further highlights the vulnerability of same-sex families. A couple may live together full-time but present themselves to neighbours as “housemates,” be fully open within friendship networks, and only partially disclose to parents. This creates a family model that exists simultaneously in visible and invisible forms.

2. COMMITMENT CEREMONIES AS A WAY TO FORMALISE RELATIONSHIPS

The majority of quantitative survey respondents (95%) have not organised commitment ceremonies (such as weddings, engagement parties, announcements, or anniversary celebrations). However, the data indicate a strong desire for such ceremonies, with 60% expressing an intention to organise one in the future.

Table 10. Status of organising commitment ceremonies



⁵ Weeks, J., Heaphy, B. & Donovan, C. (2001) *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*. London: Routledge.

Commitment ceremonies are negotiated as spaces that both affirm intimacy and demonstrate connection with family members, while also becoming emotionally meaningful shared memories for those involved.

“At that time, my mother was nearly 90 and too weak to attend. If she had been healthier, I believe she would have supported me. Later, my family went to N.’s house to formally ask for her hand. It was a very joyful day. We then asked our parents for permission to hold a wedding in our own way—not a traditional one, but an intimate celebration. We also told them in advance that there would only be our guests, not theirs. My friends said attending our wedding was exhausting—because they would laugh, then cry, then laugh again, and then cry some more. Everyone cried. People understood that outdoor weddings are already emotional, but when they witnessed and understood everything we had gone through to reach that moment, they were deeply moved. Even now, I am still proud of our wedding.”

- A., female, 49, and N., female, 35, Ho Chi Minh City

The main reasons for not organising such ceremonies include “not necessary,” “not yet disclosed,” and “fear of stigma.” For many, these ceremonies function as a way to affirm family identity and seek recognition from the community rather than from the state. In the absence of legal recognition, ceremonies become a means of creating a “social fact” of family. As symbolic events, they reinforce commitment, enhance visibility through ritual and community participation, and establish a form of family that, while informal, carries strong social binding. However, one respondent in the online survey indicated that they had not yet organised a wedding because they were “waiting for legal recognition,” suggesting that although these ceremonies are primarily social in meaning, for some individuals, legal recognition remains a necessary condition for undertaking such symbolic acts.

Table 11. Reasons for not organizing commitment ceremonies

<i>Reasons for not organizing commitment ceremonies</i>	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Not necessary</i>	82	24.1%
<i>I or my partner are not ready</i>	68	20.0%
<i>Fear of stigma and social pressure</i>	57	16.8%
<i>Not yet disclosed</i>	56	16.5%
<i>Family does not accept</i>	53	15.6%
<i>Other</i>	24	7.0%

3. RELATIONSHIP STATUS AND ENTRY POINTS INTO COHABITATION

“I think when you're in love, everything feels rosy. But it's only when you start living together that you really get to know each other's flaws, learn how to strengthen the relationship, and figure out how to handle conflicts when the two of you argue.”

- H., male, 29, Binh Duong (Ho Chi Minh City)

In the quantitative survey, more than half of respondents are currently in a romantic relationship (53%). A total of 47% have previously or are currently cohabiting with a same-sex partner, while only a small proportion (11.1%) have never had experience in a same-sex relationship. Specifically, 53% of respondents are in a relationship with one partner, and 6% are in consensual polyamorous relationships. Around 30% are not currently in a relationship but have previously had same-sex relationships, and 11% have never had a same-sex relationship. Overall, the majority of respondents (89%) have had or are currently having experiences of same-sex romantic relationships.

Table 12. Relation status of survey respondents

Relationship status	Number (n=1067)	Percentage (%)
<i>Currently in a romantic relationship with one person</i>	562	52.50%
<i>Not currently, but have had a same-sex romantic relationship</i>	319	29.80%
<i>No, have never had a same-sex romantic relationship</i>	119	11.10%
<i>Currently in a consensual romantic relationship with more than one person (polyamory)</i>	67	6.30%
<i>Did not answer</i>	3	0.30%

The intention to cohabit among respondents is very high (80%). Even among those who have never cohabited, only 4% stated that they definitely do not wish to do so. The three most prominent reasons are: (i) not feeling the need for a committed and binding relationship, (ii) not wanting to affect parents and family members, and (iii) concerns about social stigma. These reasons reflect the tension between personal autonomy, family responsibility, and social pressure surrounding same-sex relationships.

Table 13. Intentions to cohabitate of survey respondents

Intentions to cohabitate	Number (n=1067)	Percentage (%)
Yes	454	79.60%
Unsure	94	16.50%
No	22	3.90%

The concern about not affecting parents is also reflected in decisions about living arrangements. One couple shared that having their own home was a prerequisite for deciding to live together:

“Yes, having our own place gives us the basis to live together comfortably; renting would be somewhat inconvenient. Both of our parents live in the city and are open to it, but we still feel hesitant about staying with them. To have freedom and comfort in our personal lives—whether bisexual or heterosexual—you need your own space; your parents’ home is their home, your home is your home.”

- T., male, 39, and H., male, 28, Hai Phong

Same-sex cohabitation is increasingly taking on the role that marriage traditionally plays for heterosexual couples, serving as an important transitional milestone in the relationship trajectories of same-sex couples. Choosing to live together reflects the desire to enact forms of intimacy associated with family life: the right to love and the right to organise a shared life.⁷ Same-sex families are described as creative intimate structures shaped by context, reflecting both the need for economic and emotional stability and the desire to define family identity on their own terms.⁸

“We had wanted to move out and live together for a long time. After about two years of dating, we already wanted to live together. [...] From then on, we started putting together the pieces to prepare for the day we could officially live together. There were nights when, at midnight, he would wait for his parents to go to sleep before coming over, and then leave again early in the morning to go to work. In reality, it was almost like we were already living together, just not officially—more like part-time. On weekends, we were always together and hardly stayed at home. So living together was not such a big milestone, because we had already been practising it for a long time. It just had to be hidden.”

- C., male, 32, and T., male, 32, Hanoi

The findings show that the most common reason for cohabitation is to express love and commitment, accounting for approximately one-third of all responses. This is followed by sharing finances and expenses, as well as preparing long-term plans related to assets and children. Reasons related to increasing social openness, family acceptance, and legal changes also appear, but at lower rates, indicating that emotional factors and the practical organisation of daily life remain the primary drivers.

⁷ Plummer, K. (2003) *Intimate Citizenship: Private Decisions and Public Dialogues*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

⁸ Weeks, J., Heaphy, B. & Donovan, C. (2001) *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*. London: Routledge.

Table 14. Reasons for cohabitation of survey respondents

Reasons for cohabitation	Number (n=1381)	Percentage (%)
<i>To express love and commitment</i>	461	33.40%
<i>To share finances and expenses</i>	326	23.60%
<i>To prepare long-term plans (assets, children, etc.)</i>	250	18.10%
<i>Due to increased social openness toward LGBTI people</i>	131	9.50%
<i>Recognition and support from family (parents)</i>	127	9.20%
<i>Because the legal prohibition on same-sex marriage has been removed</i>	68	4.90%
<i>Other</i>	18	1.80%

For those who have previously or are currently cohabiting, the question “How long have you and your partner been living together?” helps illustrate the level of stability of these relationships.

The duration of the most recent relationship is relatively evenly distributed across short-term (under two years), medium-term, and long-term (over five years) categories. The significant presence of long-term relationships indicates that a considerable proportion of respondents are maintaining stable relationships long enough to consider cohabitation, shared finances, and long-term planning related to assets, children, or mutual care.

Table 15. Duration of the most recent relationship

Duration of the most recent relationship	Number (n=496)	Percentage (%)
<i>Under 1 year</i>	114	18.10%
<i>From 1 to 2 years</i>	139	22.10%
<i>From 2 to 3 years</i>	100	15.90%
<i>From 3 to 5 years</i>	106	16.90%
<i>From 5 to 10 years</i>	117	18.60%
<i>Above 10 years</i>	53	8.4

Survey results show that many relationships last from 3 to over 10 years. Cohabitation often functions as alternative or complementary arrangement to marriage when legal or social conditions don't allow couples to access marital rights. Same-sex cohabiting relationships aren't an exceptional or marginal phenomenon; they are operating as a stable and

common relational model, no less enduring than those of different-sex couples.

“For me, it’s always been the same—I never like change in relationships. Some of my relationships have lasted more than ten years, because I don’t like change.”

- N. and H., female, in their 50s, Hung Yen

II. SAME-SEX COUPLES “MAKE FAMILY” EVERY DAY THROUGH EVERYDAY PRACTICES

Intimate life is not only a domain of emotions, but also a site where citizenship is produced—through rights, obligations, power relations, and social order. The findings of this study suggest that same-sex families in Viet Nam are expanding the space of family practices within a social and legal context that does not yet formally recognise these arrangements. The absence of prohibition (i.e., not banning shared family life) does not equate to the presence of protection (i.e., legal recognition of that family).

“To me, everything we have is a family—we are a family. But others don’t see us as one, and we are not protected as a family.”

- T., female, 29, and H., female, 25, Hanoi

Family is not merely a fixed structure but a set of everyday practices through which family life is continuously produced. In “Family Connections”, David Morgan conceptualises family and personal life as networks of everyday practices and emotional bonds (Morgan, 1996). The following section focuses on how same-sex couples in Viet Nam organise, sustain, and reproduce shared life across key domains such as economic arrangements, caregiving, division of labour, decision-making, and intergenerational ties.

Examining these concrete practices helps illustrate the relationship between how couples live in practice and the legal frameworks that currently govern family life. This provides useful empirical grounding for understanding what recognition — in whatever form — might mean in practical terms for the individuals concerned.

Findings on financial sharing, division of household labour, relationships with extended families, and plans for children indicate that the shared lives of same-sex couples in Viet Nam constitute a fully developed social entity, performing most of the functions of a family. Same-sex cohabitation is not a temporary or adaptive arrangement, but a stable form of intimate organisation in which individuals share resources, negotiate responsibilities, and jointly build future projects.

The data indicate that the shared lives of same-sex couples in Viet Nam reflect many of the characteristics commonly associated with stable family units: pooled resources, negotiated responsibilities, long-term planning, and participation in broader kinship networks. In terms of household labour and decision-making, the findings suggest a notably collaborative approach, with couples sharing both domestic responsibilities and joint decision-making across personal and professional matters.

Relationships with both families of origin and intentions to have children show that same-sex families are not detached from broader socio-cultural structures. By participating in family obligations and expressing a desire to have children, these couples are asserting their place within intergenerational continuity and social networks.

Taken together, these findings suggest that same-sex families are being “made” every day through the sharing of finances, caregiving, maintaining ties with both families, mutual responsibility, and planning for child-rearing—and that understanding these practices in depth is relevant to any consideration of how legal and policy frameworks might better reflect the realities of non-traditional family forms in Viet Nam.

1. SHARING EVERYDAY FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, WITH LIMITED ASSET CONSOLIDATION

Two key indicators of the economic dimension of shared life are contributions to a common household fund (covering expenses such as instalments, utilities, and daily consumption) and joint ownership or co-registration of high-value assets (such as housing or vehicles). These indicators provide insight into the degree of financial and asset integration among same-sex couples.

Table 16. Financial sharing practices

Practices	Number	Percentage (%)
Contributing jointly to a shared household fund (e.g. instalments, utilities, daily expenses)	419	84.80%
Joint ownership or co-registration of high-value assets (e.g. housing, vehicles)	73	14.80%

The very high proportion (85%) of couples contributing to a shared household fund indicates that cohabitation is functioning as a joint economic unit, where income and expenses are managed according to a “family” logic rather than that of mere co-habiting

individuals. In contrast, the proportion of couples holding joint ownership or co-registration of high-value assets remains modest (15%). This difference likely reflects a combination of practical considerations, including the complexity of joint asset registration and the level of trust and long-term planning required, as well as uncertainty about how such arrangements would be handled in cases of relationship dissolution within the current legal framework which has not fully recognized these families.

The data suggests a disparity between financial integration at the operational level and asset integration at the legal level. Contributing to a shared household fund meets everyday needs and requires minimal legal procedures. By contrast, joint ownership of high-value assets requires a higher level of trust and entails significant risks in cases of relationship dissolution, particularly when the relationship lacks formal legal protection. One interviewee described how shared spending operates as an everyday principle that is difficult to disentangle:

“We share everything, we don’t separate who bought what. If we see something nice that suits us, we buy it; if something benefits us, we buy it. So I think if we broke up and had to divide everything, we’d probably need a third party to sort it out.”

- M., female, 27, and H., female, 21, Ho Chi Minh City

Some interviewees distinguished between clearly defined individual contributions and jointly held assets, reflecting mechanisms of financial integration in shared life:

“When we invest together, we think of it as shared money—an asset we build together. Even though we still recognise that half belongs to me and half to him, at the moment of investment, it is our money.”

- T., 30, transgender man, Ho Chi Minh City

2. SHARING CARE WORK AND NEGOTIATING DECISIONS ON AN EQUAL BASIS

“I started to feel that my opinions had an impact on the other person, and I also made space for them to have a say in matters concerning me.”

- M., female, 27, and H., female, 21, Ho Chi Minh City.

Two central dimensions of shared life are the division of household and care work, and joint decision-making through negotiation. These are indicators that relationships are organised around ideals of equality and negotiated gender roles. At the quantitative level, the high rates of these practices suggest that norms of sharing and co-decision-making are widely prevalent among respondents.

Table 17. Care work sharing and negotiation practices

<i>Practices</i>	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Sharing household and care work</i>	455	92.10%
<i>Jointly discussing and making decisions on work-related and personal matters</i>	421	85.20%

In the qualitative data, many participants described the division of labour as based on principles of reciprocity and rotation, functioning as an everyday “operating mechanism” that sustains shared life:

“Usually, if one person cooks, the other washes the dishes; if one cooks, the other sweeps the house—something like that.”

- H., male, 29, Binh Duong (Ho Chi Minh City)

Alongside rotation, some cases reflect a division of labour based on individual strengths, availability, and self-assigned roles, indicating a flexible model that is not necessarily predetermined by biological sex but shaped by capacity and mutual agreement:

“We both take care of the cat. As for cleaning, I’m lazy so T. does it; I handle cooking and mixing drinks. Things like fixing electricity or plumbing are also my responsibility.”

- C., male, 32, and T., male, 32, Hanoi

In the quantitative data, as many as 92.1% of respondents with shared living arrangements reported that they “share household and care work,” and 85.2% reported that they “jointly discuss and make decisions on work-related and personal matters.” These figures suggest that collaborative arrangements are a common feature of same-sex cohabiting relationships in this sample.

Many couples appear to develop flexible arrangements in which roles are allocated according to capacity, availability, and personal agreement. Equality and mutual consideration emerge as values that couples themselves describe as central to their shared life — though the current data do not measure the degree of balance in care work in practice, pointing to a useful direction for future research.

In in-depth interviews, some couples described decision-making as an ongoing process of negotiation, in which each person's participation is established through continuous discussion of shared plans and expenditures:

"We discuss everything, for example asset building, purchases, or how to spend money. Actually, N. is the one who manages the money, but I still have my own separate fund—we jokingly call it the 'black fund'—which N. doesn't control. But the black fund often gets wiped out. By N."

- A., female, 49, and N., female, 35, Ho Chi Minh City

"Equality" is not a fixed state but an ongoing process of adjustment, encompassing both cooperation and support, while also allowing for tensions or small strategies of autonomy within the relationship. In this sense, same-sex families emerge as spaces where family norms are reconfigured and experimented with through everyday life. At the same time, this points to future research directions, particularly the need to measure more deeply the balance of care work and decision-making power within same-sex couples.

3. BOUNDARIES OF INTIMATE SPACE AND PARTICIPATION IN KINSHIP OBLIGATIONS

"In our family now, we address each other's parents as our own and refer to ourselves as their children. Both extended families already know. On occasions like ancestral worship or other family events, we still attend as usual."

- T., male, 39, and H., male, 28, Hai Phong

Data on living arrangements and levels of participation in family and extended kinship obligations allow for an examination of the "scope" of shared life—that is, the extent to which intimate relationships are situated within and interact with broader kinship networks. In the Vietnamese context, cohabitation is not merely a physical living arrangement but also a social position, where the legitimacy of a relationship is tested through rituals, obligations, and intergenerational expectations.

Table 18. Forms of cohabitation arrangements

Forms of cohabitation arrangements	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Renting or purchasing a separate home to live together</i>	363	73.20%
<i>Participating in family and extended kinship obligations on both sides</i>	187	37.90%
<i>Living with family (parents/relatives)</i>	65	13.10%
<i>Not regularly living together</i>	51	10.30%
<i>Separated / No longer cohabiting</i>	8	1.60%
<i>Other</i>	9	1.80%

The trend toward living independently and the low proportion of couples living with their families of origin suggest that couples often have to create their own safe spaces for intimacy:

"I prefer living separately; I don't like living with parents, because living on your own gives you privacy and a lot more comfort."

- V., female, 39, and L., female, 39, Dak Lak

Only a small proportion of couples live with family (parents/relatives), reflecting two simultaneous trends: (1) the desire for autonomy and the creation of safe spaces for intimate life; and (2) the limited recognition of same-sex couples as a fully legitimate family unit within the family sphere, where heteronormative norms continue to dominate. While living separately allows couples to build safe intimate spaces, it also requires them to bear additional economic costs and limits access to the support that many different-sex couples receive from their families when forming a household.

"In the North, there is a tradition that if a family has the means, when a young couple gets married, relatives from both sides contribute a little to help them start their life more easily—for example, providing capital for business or helping them secure housing. [...] But because, in others' eyes, we are just two people living together, we don't receive enough support to create that kind of leverage when living in the city."

- T., female, 29, and H., female, 25, Hanoi

A significant proportion of respondents (37.9%) reported participating in family and

extended kinship obligations on both sides, indicating that cohabitation does not exist outside kinship networks. These practices include returning to hometowns, participating in ancestral rituals, providing financial support, caring for elderly parents, and attending family events.

The extent to which couples are included in family life varies considerably, depending largely on the attitudes and dynamics within each family. For many couples, relationships with both families of origin serve as an important source of support and as a constraint in shared life, while also involving a degree of ongoing navigation of family expectations.

4. HAVING AND RAISING CHILDREN AS A SIGNIFICANT DIMENSION OF COHABITATION

“The government is concerned about issues like declining birth rates. In fact, many LGBTI people also really want to have children. If policies made it easier, it could actually help increase the birth rate.”

- L, female, 39, Ho Chi Minh City

Although the proportion of couples currently raising children (biological or adopted) is relatively small (4.6% among those cohabiting with a same-sex partner), the findings indicate that same-sex families with children are already a social reality in Viet Nam. In the absence of a legal framework protecting parental rights for same-sex couples, couples navigate questions of parenthood drawing on available options while managing a range of practical uncertainties.

Table 19. Parental status of survey respondents

Parental status	Number	Percentage (%)
Without children	473	95.40%
With children	23	4.60%

Overall, the majority of respondents do not currently have children. Among the small group who do, the most common type is biological children from before entering a same-sex relationship or from their partner, followed by children born during cohabitation through assisted reproduction or surrogacy, and jointly adopted children.

This reflects that pathways to parenthood within same-sex relationships are diverse, but largely take place within legal and social frameworks originally designed for heterosexual families.

Table 20. Origins of children in families with children

Type of child	Number
<i>Biological child of the respondent or their same-sex partner from before the relationship</i>	13
<i>Biological child of the respondent or their same-sex partner during cohabitation (via assisted reproduction or surrogacy)</i>	8
<i>Jointly adopted child during cohabitation</i>	4
<i>Adopted child of the respondent or their same-sex partner from before the relationship</i>	24

Only 25 respondents answered the question regarding intentions to have children in the future. Among them, 12 (48.0%) indicated that they intend to have children, 9 (36.0%) reported no intention, and 4 (16.0%) had not yet considered the issue. Although the number of responses is limited, the findings suggest that children remain an important component of the family trajectories that many LGBTI individuals envision. When considered alongside the challenges related to childbirth and joint adoption, it is clear that questions around children and parenting represent an area warranting further attention.

“Our parents all really want us to have children—both my parents and H.’s parents. But we still don’t know how. We’ve looked into some information online, but right now there’s no way for the two of us to have a child together. To be honest, we’re not really ready for children yet; at the moment, it’s more our parents’ wish than ours.”

- T., male, 39, and H., male, 28, Hai Phong

Participants raised a range of practical questions around parenthood, including the legal feasibility of birth registration, guardianship rights, and decision-making authority in situations such as illness or school-related matters. Many expressed concern that if same-sex relationships are not legally recognised, only one partner may be able to be legally registered as a parent, rendering the other “invisible” in legal terms in relation to the child. These concerns reflect the complexity of navigating parenthood within the current framework, particularly in situations that require formal documentation or institutional recognition.

Among the small group of respondents who already have children or have considered having or adopting children jointly, the most common challenges include: legal relationship and representation with the child; registering a same-sex partner’s name on the birth certificate; social stigma toward LGBTI parents and its impact on children; joint adoption procedures; and access to sperm donation or surrogacy through legal channels.

Table 21. Challenges related to having children and joint adoption

	Number (n=25)	Percentage (%)
<i>Legal relationship with and representation of the child</i>	16	64.00%
<i>Registering a same-sex partner's name on the child's birth certificate</i>	15	60.00%
<i>Social stigma toward LGBTI individuals affecting children</i>	11	44.00%
<i>Registering for joint adoption</i>	9	36.00%
<i>No difficulties</i>	8	32.00%
<i>Access to sperm (for women) through legal channels</i>	8	32.00%
<i>Access to surrogacy (for men) through legal channels</i>	5	20.00%
<i>We did not have children together during cohabitation</i>	1	4.00%
<i>Not allowed to undergo assisted reproduction using the other partner's egg</i>	1	4.00%

These findings are relevant to broader considerations around the best interests of children living in non-traditional family circumstances — an area that Viet Nam's legal framework, consistent with international child rights standards, places at the centre of family policy. The data suggest that clarifying the practical arrangements available to same-sex couples who have or are considering having children could help reduce uncertainty for both parents and children.

“Decree 207 on IVF, which regulates assisted reproduction, has been revised: from 1 October, single women only need to express their wish to access IVF. Previously, single women could still do so, but required a specialist's indication; now this is no longer necessary. I think that's a positive change.”

- A., female, 49, and N., female, 35, Ho Chi Minh City

The findings also suggest that decisions around having children are shaped not only by personal and financial readiness, but also by assessments of the practical and institutional context. Some participants indicated that they would only consider having children if they could migrate or live in contexts where same-sex families are better recognised and protected. Others set clear personal conditions, such as only having children after achieving a certain level of career, financial, and emotional stability. Overall, these findings suggest that the desire to have children is relatively common within the LGBTI community, but is strongly shaped by assessments of risk and responsibility in a legal and social context marked by uncertainty.

The data offer useful preliminary insights, but a more robust understanding of the experiences, needs, and decision-making of same-sex couples around parenthood would require further dedicated research with a larger and more diverse sample. This remains an important area for future study, particularly given the significance of child-related questions in any broader policy dialogue on non-traditional family forms.

III. CHALLENGES AND NEEDS IN THE PROCESS OF COHABITATION

1. CHALLENGES IN BUILDING A SHARED FAMILY LIFE

““In shared life, beyond the joys, there are many responsibilities and constraints. If there were legal protection as a kind of safety net, everything would be simpler—from assets to children and authorisation documents.”

- T., female, 29, and H., female, 25, Hanoi

The research data highlight three areas in which same-sex couples report notable practical challenges within the current legal and social context:

- (1) questions around the legal status of relationships (marriage, civil partnership, etc), and the resulting implications for rights, obligations, and legal representation;
- (2) practical arrangements related to assets, children, and relationship dissolution;
- (3) access to protection mechanisms in situations of vulnerability, such as domestic violence and relationships involving foreign elements.

At the level of relationship recognition, respondents rated highly the importance of being able to register a marriage or a legally recognised partnership. A total of 89% considered this factor “necessary” or “very necessary” when contemplating same-sex cohabitation.

At the level of assets, children, and relationship dissolution, rights typically associated with conflict or crisis situations were also prioritised highly (all above 85%). In the absence of relationship recognition, couples often rely on private agreements or civil instruments such as authorisation; however, these tools are fragmented and insufficient to fully address disputes when they arise.

At the level of protection in situations of vulnerability, mechanisms related to protection against domestic violence and the handling of criminal violations were given the highest priority (87%). In practice, violence and conflict within intimate relationships are often the moments when individuals most need clear legal intervention. Finally, in cases involving cross-border relationships, the data indicate that challenges are concentrated around procedural barriers and recognition.

Placed within the trajectory of earlier studies, the demand for relationship recognition and its associated rights forms a continuous pattern. Both the 2013 and 2019 studies recorded high levels of support for legal recognition of same-sex relationships, while also highlighting rights related to assets, children, and protection in cases of dispute as key areas of concern. The current data suggest that these remain areas of practical significance for same-sex couples, particularly in situations involving major life events or crises where legal clarity becomes most consequential.

1.1. LEGAL CHALLENGES AND PUBLIC LIFE

“For me, at this stage of life, having legal recognition of the relationship would be enough. Many people think you need family approval or support from the community to live together, but in reality, even without that support, we are already living together.”

- T., 30, transgender man, Ho Chi Minh City

Among the 439 respondents who answered the question on legal challenges during cohabitation, 98.6% reported having experienced at least one legal difficulty, with an average of 4.01 types of legal challenges reported (median = 4).

Table 22. Legal challenges experienced

Difficulties	Number (n=439)	Percentage (%)
<i>Acting as a legal representative for one's partner</i>	340	77.40%
<i>Administrative and civil status procedures</i>	265	60.40%
<i>Purchase, management, and division of jointly held assets</i>	247	56.30%
<i>Childbirth, and rights and obligations toward children</i>	200	45.60%
<i>Access to tax and labour-related benefits</i>	220	50.10%
<i>Inheritance rights for partners and children</i>	194	44.20%
<i>Adoption procedures</i>	152	34.60%
<i>Maternity benefits and parental leave</i>	113	25.70%
<i>Other</i>	31	7.10%
<i>Have not experienced any (no difficulties)</i>	6	1.40%

Legal challenges faced by same-sex couples can be grouped into three main categories:

(i) Legal representation of partners

The most frequently cited challenges relate to the legal status of one partner as a representative of the other, including acting as a legal representative, signing on behalf of a partner, making medical decisions, or handling procedures when one partner is ill. Within the current framework, where relationship status is not formally registered, partners are not recognised in the same way as next of kin defined through blood ties or civil marriage. Some interviewees expressed long-term concerns that, despite being the closest person to their partner, they may lack the authority to act on their behalf in emergency situations.

“Sometimes I think that if I were still living in Hanoi, my younger sister would still be somewhere nearby. But if we eventually build a life abroad, then the person closest to me, who understands me best and can accompany me the most, still wouldn’t have the authority to sign on my behalf. That would be very difficult.”

- T., female, 29, and H., female, 25, Hanoi

One couple described specific medical situations in which decision-making authority reverted to biological parents, even though the partner was more suited to provide care:

“If the hospital allows it, then I can do it; otherwise, we have to wait for T.’s mother to come.”

“T. finds that unreasonable. After eight years, what J. knows about T. is probably no less than what her mother knows. Her mother has many other responsibilities. Sometimes T. thinks it would be better if her mother didn’t have to come; she’s not in good health, and T. doesn’t want her parents to still have to take care of her at this age.”

- J., non-binary, 40s, and T., female, 40s, Ho Chi Minh City

(ii) Property, administrative procedures, and inheritance

Challenges related to assets, administrative procedures, and inheritance are also reported at high rates, reflecting the practical complexities that arise when couples manage shared finances and assets without a formally registered relationship.

Some interviewees highlighted the risks of having assets registered under only one person’s name:

“M. let me put everything under my name. If something happens to me, all the assets will go to my brother and my parents, not to M.”

- T., male, 37, Huế

Others described strategies such as alternating ownership or registering assets jointly as if they were unrelated individuals, as a way to create informal safeguards:

“The law does allow two people to co-own property, but we find it complicated, with higher taxes and other issues. M. told me that the first house is already in his name, so in the future we’ll buy another one and register that one under my name.”

- H., male, 35, and M., male, 45, Hanoi

In practice, joint ownership among same-sex couples is not treated as legally equivalent to that of different-sex married couples, where the “husband and wife” category is uniquely recognised for co-ownership:

“Two single individuals who want to jointly register ownership of a house or land are often required by authorities to designate one person as the legal representative. They explain that the current management system is based on individual identification, so only one person can be registered as the owner. Only married couples are allowed to have both names listed.”

- A., female, 49, and N., female, 35, Ho Chi Minh City

Interviewees also noted the additional documentation required when managing cross-border arrangements such as visa applications:

“During the visa process, my sister advised us to write a handwritten letter to sponsor each other and confirm that we are in a relationship. It’s quite cumbersome—you have to submit a series of photos and send them to the embassy. If the relationship were legally recognised, a simple certificate would suffice.”

- T., nam, 39 tuổi, Hải Phòng; H., nam, 28 tuổi, Hải Phòng

In terms of inheritance and authorisation, one couple described having to use multiple legal instruments simultaneously to compensate for the lack of protection, while still facing limitations:

“We made wills for each other and also granted power of attorney. But a power of attorney becomes invalid if one of us passes away, so you need both a will and an authorisation to support each other.”

- A., female, 49, and N., female, 35, Ho Chi Minh City

(iii) Adoption, reproduction, and parental rights

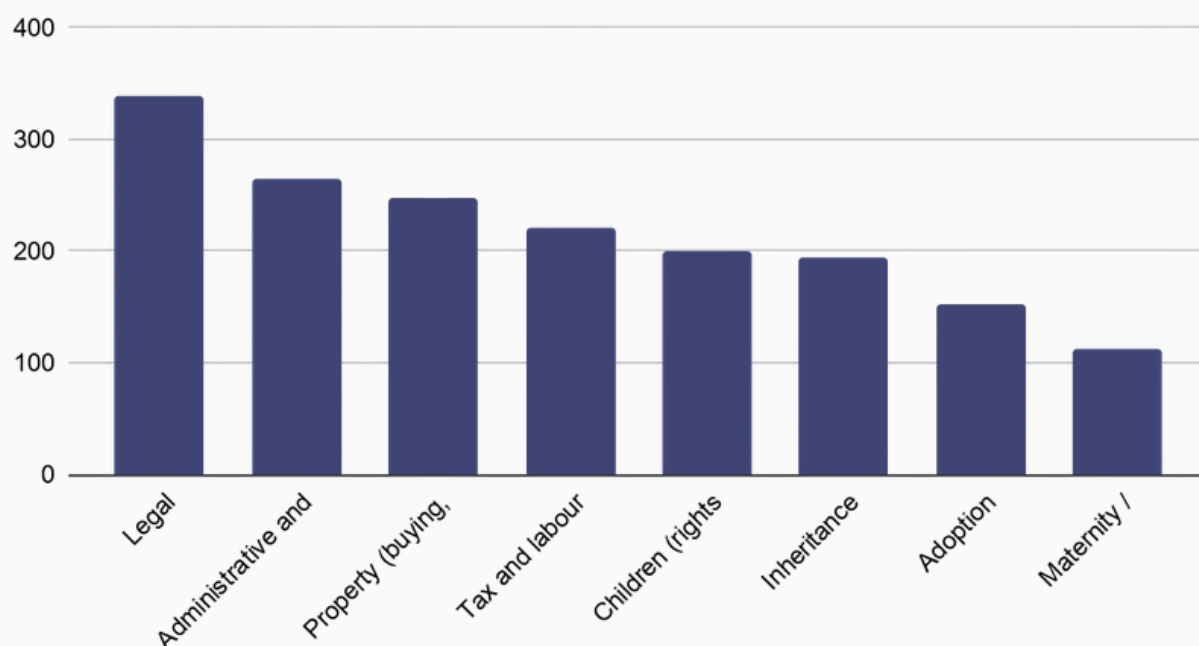
Challenges related to adoption, maternity, and parental rights are also frequently reported, pointing to an emerging family future that touches on the most fundamental legal dimensions of marriage and family—children.

“For lesbian couples in Viet Nam, T. thinks there are no major issues—mainly cost and some inconvenience. But for gay male couples, it’s much harder because they need a surrogate, which is not legally permitted. Many couples I know find ways to do it informally, for example by declaring the surrogate as a single mother. But then they face difficulties in legally recognising the child.

On the other hand, if they go abroad, for example to Thailand, the initial procedures are easier, but recognition of the child later becomes complicated. The child may have to be placed in an orphanage first, making the adoption process very complex. Combined with increasing concerns about human trafficking, adoption procedures have become even more difficult.”

- T., 39, doctor, Ho Chi Minh City

Table 23. Categories of legal challenges



The pattern of challenges reflected in the quantitative data points to a common underlying question: how same-sex couples can access practical arrangements — for representation, asset management, and caregiving — that are straightforward for couples in registered marriages. This helps explain why the category of “legal representation and medical decision-making” emerges as particularly prominent concern as these are situations where formal recognition of a relationship becomes most practically consequential.

A commonly cited situation among same-sex couples is the inability to represent one another in medical emergencies. A medical professional interviewed for this study offered a useful clarification of current practice:

“In practice, according to regulations, we do not necessarily require family members; we still provide emergency care and do what is medically appropriate for the patient. [...] People may worry that disclosing their relationship could affect treatment outcomes or lead to discrimination. I think that concern is understandable, but if you feel it’s necessary to disclose, you should. [...] Doctors do not judge; what matters most is having enough information to make an accurate diagnosis. [...] Whether you say this person is a friend, a spouse, or someone with a special relationship—it does not really matter.”

- M., emergency cardiologist, Hanoi

This perspective is a useful complement to the concerns expressed by participants, suggesting that in some settings, practical arrangements may be more flexible than individuals anticipate. At the same time, the data indicate that uncertainty itself — about what is and is not permitted — shapes how couples plan and make decisions in their daily lives. Clearer guidance in areas such as medical representation and authorisation procedures could therefore help reduce this uncertainty, independent of broader questions about legal recognition.

1.2. SOCIAL CHALLENGES AND PRIVATE SPACE

Social challenges in the cohabitation of same-sex couples are highly prevalent and structurally multi-layered, spanning family dynamics, access to welfare benefits, and questions of privacy.

Among the 405 respondents who answered the question on social challenges during cohabitation, 98.8% reported having experienced at least one type of social difficulty, with an average of 1.93 types of challenges reported (median = 2).

Table 24. Social challenges experienced

Difficulties	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Difficulties in registering a partner as a beneficiary under insurance policies</i>	200	49.40%
<i>Family opposition or pressure</i>	195	48.10%
<i>Denial of company benefits designated for family members</i>	149	36.70%
<i>Unauthorised disclosure of private information about the couple</i>	135	33.30%
<i>Other</i>	36	8.90%
<i>Refusal of services for both individuals (e.g. hotels, gyms)</i>	28	6.90%
<i>Pressure from landlords or neighbours to move out</i>	28	6.90%
<i>Have not experienced any (no difficulties)</i>	15	3.70%

Social challenges faced by same-sex couples can be grouped into three main categories: (i) family opposition and social pressure; and (ii) challenges related to insurance, welfare, and the status of “beneficiaries.” The data suggest that social challenges extend beyond interpersonal dynamics to include practical questions about how existing benefit and welfare systems define eligibility.

“For LGBT couples, partners cannot be listed as beneficiaries in insurance contracts because they do not have a legally recognised relationship. [...] For example, if I want to add my husband to my health insurance package, that’s possible, but LGBT individuals cannot do the same because they lack legal documentation to prove the relationship. If they want insurance, they must purchase a separate package. This means they cannot access shared benefits, and when they do purchase coverage, they often have to pay higher costs than others.”

- T., female, 30, insurance staff, Ho Chi Minh City

Participants in in-depth interviews emphasised the emotional dimensions of encountering these limitations in practice:

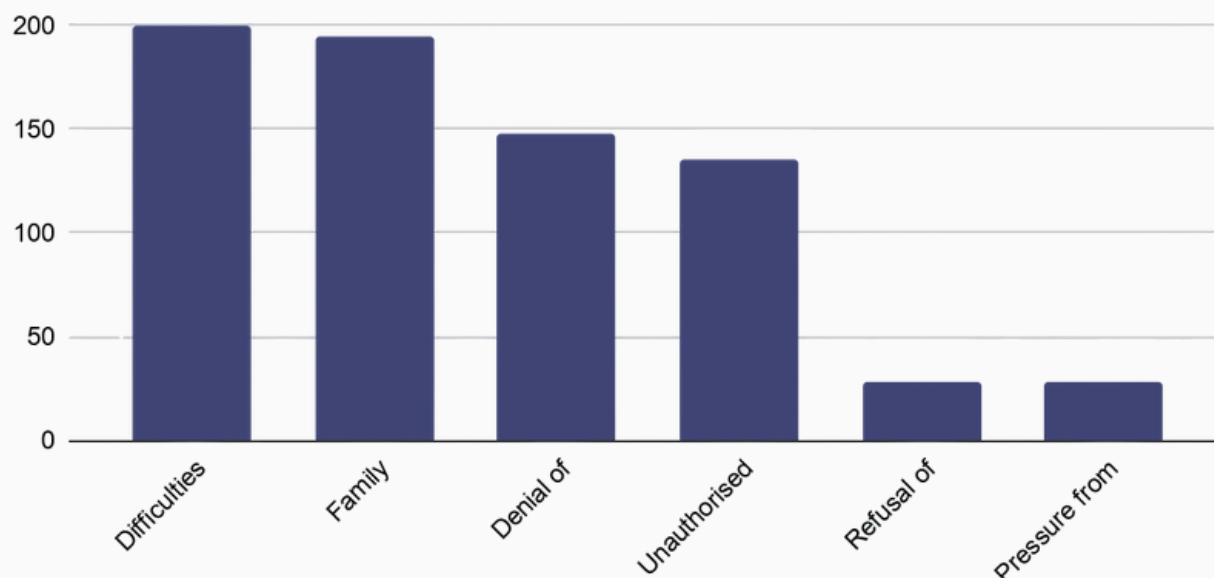
“I remember once I cried when I told an insurance staff member that I wanted to name L. as my beneficiary, and they said it wasn’t allowed because a legal beneficiary must be a family member. [...] At that moment, I felt very sad. L. also works for a foreign company that offers many benefits for family members, but I am not eligible. [...] There are so many benefits—for example, medical check-ups or hospital stays at international hospitals are fully covered. So I do feel somewhat frustrated about that.”

- C., female, 45, and L., female, 33, Binh Duong (Ho Chi Minh City)

Unauthorised disclosure of private information appears at a notable rate, suggesting the importance of privacy protections for individuals in same-sex relationships, particularly in social contexts where personal information may circulate within family and community networks.

Experiences of service denial or pressure in housing arrangements occur at lower rates, but are worth noting, as stable living arrangements are an essential condition for sustaining long-term cohabitation.

Table 25. Categories of social challenges



Taken together, legal and social challenges reflect two interconnected dimensions of daily life for same-sex couples. Where benefit and welfare systems define eligibility on the basis of registered family status, couples without formally recognised relationships may find themselves outside the scope of certain entitlements. This is not necessarily a result of deliberate exclusion, but rather reflects the way existing frameworks were designed — primarily around registered marriage as the basis for defining family membership. As one insurance professional explained:

“Under Vietnamese insurance law, for two individuals to be jointly included in a contract—whether as beneficiaries or policyholders—they must have legal status: either a marriage certificate, or proof of being biological family (first-degree relatives). I've had two female clients ask about this, and many others have as well. However, without the required documentation, it simply cannot be done. It's quite unfortunate for couples who have been together for a long time or live together like spouses.”

- T., female, 30, insurance staff, Ho Chi Minh City

The data also indicate that the interface between legal recognition and other institutions — including religious organisations — is a consideration for some individuals. One participant described how legal gender recognition and marriage registration would, in their view, create the conditions for religious recognition as well:

“My partner said we could ask the priest to hold a ceremony at the church. If the law allows it, I could change my legal gender and then we could register our marriage. The priest would then rely on the marriage certificate to proceed with a church wedding. It’s like a legal assurance before recognition by the congregation.”

- T., 30, transgender man, Ho Chi Minh City

2. PREFERRED LEGAL FORMS FOR SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

The vast majority of respondents (86.4%) selected “equal marriage as for different-sex couples” as their preferred legal form of recognition, while 12.7% chose registered cohabitation (also referred to as “civil partnership”), and fewer than 1% indicated that they did not desire or were unsure about legal recognition.

Table 26. Preferred legal forms of relationship recognition

Options	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Equal marriage as for different-sex couples</i>	922	86.40%
<i>Registered cohabitation (civil partnership)</i>	135	12.70%
<i>No</i>	2	0.20%
<i>Do not know / Not sure</i>	8	0.70%

“I would prefer something like what Thailand currently has, where two people of the same sex are allowed to register their marriage.”

- H., male, 29, Binh Duong (Ho Chi Minh City)

Data indicates that equal marriage is the most commonly preferred option, reflecting both the symbolic significance of marriage and the breadth of rights and obligations associated with it. In many countries, civil partnerships are often considered an intermediate arrangement, providing both same-sex and different-sex couples with an option between “marriage” and “non-marriage.” While offering many of the rights and obligations associated with marriage, they typically involve simpler and more streamlined procedures. Civil partnership can thus be understood as a functionally comparable but procedurally distinct option, though it remains relatively unfamiliar within Viet Nam’s legal tradition.

Qualitative data reflect a range of perspectives on these different legal forms. One interviewee expressed concern that “civil partnership” models or alternative mechanisms could create symbolic hierarchies, emphasising the importance of equal standing:

“In some countries, there is something called a civil partnership, which feels more like a protected arrangement rather than a relationship based on marriage or love. To me, that sounds like a kind of conceptual substitution. In the end, it should still be marriage, with the same rights as a male–female couple.”

- M., female, 27, and H., female, 21, Ho Chi Minh City

Others, including family members of LGBTI individuals, expressed a more incremental expectation, emphasising the value of practical protections even within a partial framework:

“I hope the law can better understand people like them and create regulations that allow them to have certain rights. Honestly, asking for everything might be difficult, but even achieving seventy or eighty percent would already be meaningful.”

- H., parent of a transgender person, Hanoi

3. PERCEIVED NECESSITY OF LEGAL RIGHTS FOR SAME-SEX COHABITATION

“At first, just being able to live together and having some acceptance from the family already felt valuable. But when we started thinking about marriage and preparing to have children, we realised there were new turning points in life that required more legal elements. That’s when we understood how much we needed those rights.”

— G., female, 37, Ho Chi Minh City

Respondents in the quantitative survey assessed the necessity of eight groups of legal rights. The table below ranks these rights based on average scores (1 = very unnecessary, 5 = very necessary), excluding “Don’t know/Prefer not to answer” responses.

Across all categories, respondents rated the necessity of legal rights very highly, with average scores ranging from 4.4 to 4.5—between “necessary” and “very necessary.” The

highest-ranked right is “the right to register marriage and represent one another,” with 89% of respondents considering it “necessary” or “very necessary.”

Table 27. Average scores on the perceived necessity of different groups of rights

Factors	Average point (1—5)	Percentage (%)
<i>Right to register marriage and represent one another</i>	4.547	1068
<i>Criminal justice and domestic violence regulations</i>	4.512	1051
<i>Rights and obligations related to children (surrogacy, assisted reproduction, joint adoption, childcare, etc.)</i>	4.487	1052
<i>Rights and obligations related to property (joint ownership, management, inheritance, etc.)</i>	4.444	1062
<i>Rights and obligations in cases of separation or relationship dissolution (division of assets, child custody, alimony, etc.)</i>	4.438	1054
<i>Regulations on marriage involving foreign elements, sponsorship, and immigration</i>	4.414	1035
<i>Tax and insurance benefits</i>	4.412	1052
<i>Labour rights and corporate welfare benefits</i>	4.395	1046

“Under labour law, if you marry someone of a different sex, you are entitled to leave, and that leave is paid. But if your partner is of the same sex, you have to take that day as unpaid leave. Or in the case of maternity benefits—for example, for a lesbian couple: if one partner is pregnant, she can receive maternity insurance; but if her partner is the one who is pregnant, the associated maternity benefits are not extended to her.”

- T., 30, HR staff, Ho Chi Minh City

The very high and relatively consistent levels of perceived necessity across different groups of rights indicate that legal needs are not confined to marriage as a symbolic institution, but extend to social protection, safeguards in cases of relationship dissolution, and rights related to children. Once relationships take on the functions of family life, issues of property, children, and welfare become unavoidable.

Rights related to domestic violence and criminal justice also receive high scores, suggesting that legal needs are not only oriented toward recognition, but also toward protection in situations of risk and vulnerability.

4. PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES OF THE NON-RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

“Registration is not just a benefit; it also represents fairness and social progress.”

— T., female, 35, and Th., female, 24, Hue.

The study findings associate the current absence of legal recognition consequences across three areas:

- (i) inequality in rights and legal status;
- (ii) reduced protection in situations of conflict and relationship dissolution;
- (iii) limited formal recognition within family and social contexts.

The data also reveal the benefits that respondents anticipate from legal recognition of marriage or partnership mechanisms. The most commonly selected benefits relate to equality in rights and obligations, the ability to live authentically with one’s identity and relationship, reduced stigma, and improved mental well-being. These expectations suggest that legal recognition is understood both as a tool for risk management and as a mechanism for social recognition.

In comparison with the 2013 and 2019 studies, this structure of impact shows continuity: lack of recognition generates everyday difficulties and undermines the protection of rights in times of crisis. However, the current context highlights a more pronounced cross-border dimension: mobility for education, employment, and relationships with foreign partners makes the need for legal consistency across jurisdictions increasingly urgent.

When respondents in the quantitative survey were asked to assess the consequences of the non-recognition of same-sex marriage on a six-point scale, the results are as follows:

Table 28. Summary of levels of agreement by statement

	Total agree (%)	Total disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Do not know / N/A (%)	Number (n)
<i>Same-sex couples are not entitled to the same rights as different-sex couples</i>	85.4	6.8	5.5	2.3	1064
<i>Children of same-sex couples do not enjoy the same rights as those of different-sex couples</i>	79.8	8.7	7.6	4	1063
<i>Lack of acceptance from the community and society</i>	74.6	10.9	13.2	1.2	1065
<i>Families face stigma for having LGBTI members</i>	65.7	15.4	16.6	2.4	1063
<i>Difficulties in resolving disputes during cohabitation</i>	70.1	11.3	16.6	2	1061
<i>Relationships are less stable due to the absence of legal binding</i>	66.4	15.6	16.4	1.7	1061
<i>Lack of acceptance from family</i>	69	11.8	17	2.2	1066
<i>Relationships are less stable due to a lack of support and guidance from family and friends during conflicts</i>	58.6	20.6	19.2	1.6	1064

The highest levels of agreement are concentrated in statements regarding inequality in rights (for both couples and their children), reflecting a widely held perception among respondents that the current framework treats same-sex and different-sex couples differently in a number of consequential areas.

Statements related to the (in)stability of relationships (due to the absence of legal binding) show lower levels of agreement and relatively higher levels of disagreement, suggesting that respondents do not reduce “stability” entirely to the legal status of marriage, though they do recognise the role of legal frameworks in providing clarity when disputes arise.

Statements concerning family and social recognition also attract substantial agreement, suggesting that respondents see legal frameworks as having an influence on broader social attitudes — that clearer legal standing may over time reduce the social difficulties associated with disclosure. The data also indicate that legal clarity is viewed as

particularly important for protecting the rights of children in diverse family circumstances, and for providing a framework for resolving disputes when relationships break down.

5. EXPECTED BENEFITS OF LEGAL RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

“For me, legal recognition would make our lives easier when making important decisions in the future. Without it, we have to think about alternative ways of doing things. [...] We will still try to achieve what we want by taking indirect routes, but it would be much better if there were legal recognition.”

— T., female, 29, and H., female, 25, Hanoi.

The high selection across all benefit categories reflect broad expectations of what legal recognition could mean in practice. Respondents see legal recognition as having both practical dimensions — reducing uncertainty in areas such as property, welfare, and dispute resolution — and social dimensions, including reduced pressure and improved well-being.

Table 29. Expected benefits of legal recognition of same-sex marriage

Options	Number	Percentage (%)
Affirming equal rights of LGBTI individuals as citizens	983	92.00%
Encouraging more people to live authentically and avoid involuntary different-sex marriages	952	89.10%
Reducing social stigma	940	87.90%
Improving mental well-being of LGBTI individuals	936	87.60%
Increasing access to social welfare for LGBTI individuals	922	86.20%
Reducing legal conflicts arising from unregistered cohabitation	915	85.60%
Enhancing confidence and participation of LGBTI individuals in socio-economic activities	913	85.40%
Strengthening commitment and fidelity in same-sex relationships	816	76.30%
Improving relationships among family members	738	69.00%
Other	30	2.80%

Some interviewees emphasised that equal marriage carries not only emotional significance, but also functions as a mechanism of recognition and protection:

“For me, legal recognition would make our lives easier when making important decisions in the future. Without it, we would have to think about alternative ways of doing things. [...] We would still try to achieve what we want by taking indirect routes, but it would be much better if there were legal recognition.”

T., female, and J., non-binary, 40s, Ho Chi Minh City

One participant also reflected on the relationship between legal recognition and broader social participation, noting that individuals may make different life choices depending on the frameworks available to them:

“Those who go abroad are often people with significant potential to contribute to society. They are suddenly faced with a choice: to continue contributing to this state and society, or to leave in pursuit of their own happiness, well-being, legal identity, and assets. If society does not protect them, it must also accept that they will make other choices.”

-T., female, 29, and H., female, 25, Hanoi

6. SAME-SEX MARRIAGE INVOLVING FOREIGN ELEMENTS

A new feature of this study, compared to similar research conducted in 2013 and 2019, is the inclusion of legal issues related to same-sex marriage involving foreign elements. This is understood broadly to include marriage with foreign partners, marriages legally registered abroad, and matters concerning assets and children with cross-border elements.

Some participants indicated that they have considered or are considering marrying abroad, in jurisdictions where same-sex marriage is legally recognised:

“We planned to move to Canada, register our marriage there to obtain legal rights, complete the paperwork, live there for a while, and then return to Viet Nam. But then the pandemic happened, and by the time things stabilised, we were no longer eligible to pursue that plan.”

- T., male, 37, Huế

These accounts reveal a clear desire to live within a relationship within a legal framework. For some, this is linked to long-term migration or settlement plans in places where clearer legal framework is more readily available; for others, it is simply about having a ceremony and documentation that affirms their relationship, even if it does not yet carry legal validity in Viet Nam. In both cases, the transnational dimension becomes a pathway for seeking recognition that is not currently available domestically.

Among 1,065 respondents, 222 (20.8%) reported that they have considered or intend to enter into a same-sex marriage with a foreign partner; 373 (35.0%) indicated no such intention, and 470 (44.1%) had not yet considered this possibility.

Table 30. Intention to enter into same-sex marriage with a foreign partner

<i>Intention to enter into same-sex marriage with a foreign partner</i>	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Have not thought of</i>	470	44.10%
<i>No</i>	373	35.00%
<i>Yes</i>	222	20.80%

Notably, among those who have considered or intend to enter into a same-sex marriage with a foreign partner, the majority reported that their partner is from a country where same-sex marriage has been legalised (144 respondents, accounting for 65.2% of those who answered the question on partner's country). This indicates that legal factors play a significant role in shaping perceptions of a safe and protected marriage.

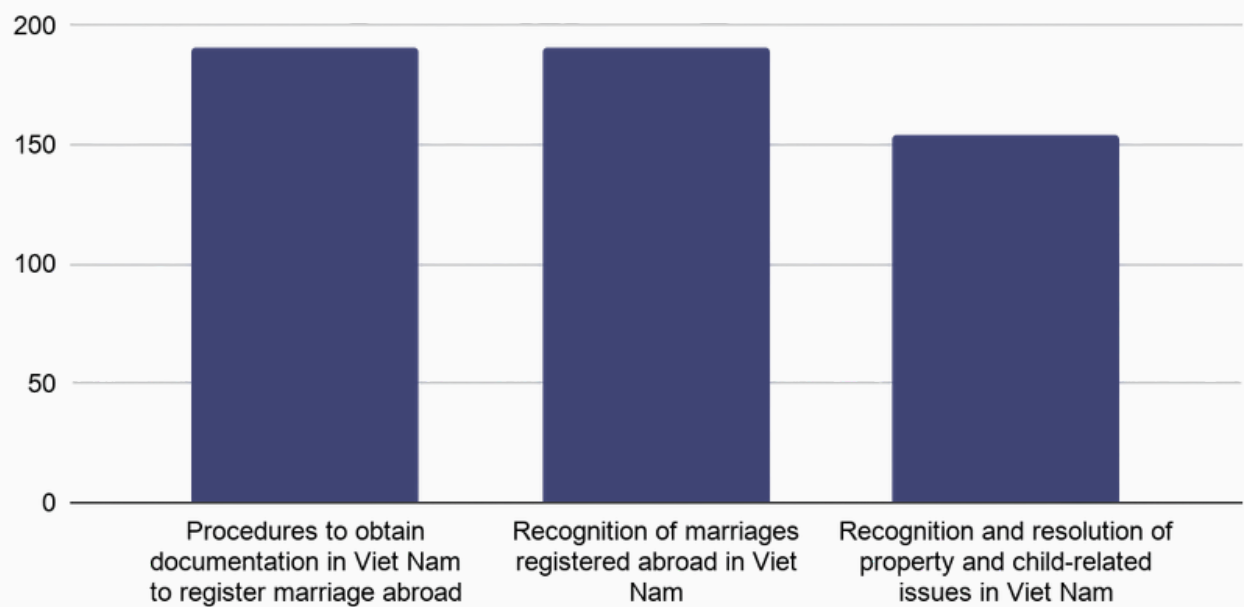
Table 31. Legal status of the partner's country

<i>Legal status of the partner's country</i>	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Same-sex marriage legalised</i>	144	65.20%
<i>Do not know / Not sure</i>	46	20.80%
<i>Same-sex marriage not legalised</i>	22	10.00%
<i>Plans to legalise same-sex marriage</i>	9	4.10%

The legal issues of greatest concern are concentrated in three main areas: procedures for obtaining documentation in Viet Nam to register a marriage abroad; recognition of marriages registered overseas within Viet Nam (87%); and recognition and resolution of issues related to property and children within Viet Nam (70%).

At the same time, participants reported that they tend to seek support from social and community organisations, online information, acquaintances, and friends, rather than from domestic or international legal professionals.

Table 32. Legal issues involving foreign elements



The high level of concern regarding procedures for obtaining documentation to register marriage abroad, as well as the recognition of marriages registered overseas (87%), reflects a practical need for clarity around how relationship status is handled across different legal jurisdictions. The experience of corporate relocation illustrates one concrete context in which this matters:

“In my company, there are many cases where employees are relocated from one country to another. For example, if someone is sent from Viet Nam to another country and the position includes family relocation support, the category of ‘spouse’—meaning husband or wife—must have a registered marriage. However, in Thailand, there is more flexibility. One employee explained that they and their partner are in a same-sex relationship, have not registered their marriage, but have lived together for 10 years and need to relocate together. [...] In Viet Nam, without a marriage certificate, this would never be treated as an exception; but in Thailand, it can be.”

- Female, 39, HR staff, Hai Phong

When same-sex marriage is recognised in one country but not in Viet Nam, individuals may find themselves navigating different legal statuses depending on where they are — recognised as partners or spouses in one context, and as two separate individuals in another. Participants described this experience as one in which they may be recognised

as “spouses” or “partners” under foreign law, but revert to the status of two single individuals upon returning to Viet Nam, with no legal guarantees in situations involving health, property, or migration. This sense of being “in-between” generates legal uncertainty, reflecting the complexity of family life in an increasingly mobile society.

Decisions to enter into different-sex marriages domestically or same-sex marriages abroad are inseparable from institutional and social contexts. One represents a strategy of adapting to societal expectations within the country, while the other reflects a strategy of seeking recognition in alternative legal spaces. In both cases, participants continuously negotiate between the desire to live authentically, responsibilities toward families of origin, and legal constraints, demonstrating that the intimate and family lives of LGBTI individuals are shaped by multiple overlapping structural layers.

IV. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SEPARATION, AND RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION

A new component of the “Under One Roof” study, compared to previous research, is its focus on experiences of domestic violence and relationship dissolution among same-sex cohabiting couples. The questions were designed not only to capture specific forms of violence experienced by participants, but also their responses, coping strategies, and decisions to leave or remain in the relationship.

1. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

This section presents findings on experiences of violence, threats, and control within same-sex relationships, the specific forms such violence takes, and the sources of support that participants turn to. The data are reported based on all valid responses to each question.

1.1. PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE IN SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

Among the 499 respondents who answered the question on violence in same-sex relationships, 75 individuals (approximately 15.0%) reported having experienced violence, threats, or controlling behaviour from a same-sex partner, while 424 (85.0%) reported no such experience.

When calculated across the full survey sample (1,070 respondents), the proportion reporting experiences of violence from a same-sex partner is approximately 7.0%. This suggests that violence within same-sex relationships is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of the broader landscape of intimate partner violence.

Table 33. Experiences of violence from same-sex partners

<i>Experiences of violence from same-sex partners</i>	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Have experienced</i>	75	15.00%
<i>Have not experienced</i>	424	85.00%

The fact that approximately one in seven respondents reported having experienced violence indicates that same-sex couples face risks similar to those of different-sex couples. Research⁹ on intimate partner violence more broadly indicates that disclosure and help-seeking can be affected by a range of factors, including concerns about privacy, relationship dynamics, and access to appropriate support — considerations that may be particularly relevant for same-sex couples given the specific social context in which they navigate their relationships.

1.2. COMMON FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Among those who reported having experienced violence, the table below summarises the specific forms of violence and their prevalence. The categories include physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence, as well as threats or coercion to disclose one's sexual orientation or gender identity to others.

Table 34. Forms of violence

<i>Forms of violence</i>	Number of responses (N)	Number of people with experience	Percentage within respondents (%)	Frequent/ Always (%)
<i>Psychological violence</i>	75	33	44.00%	28.00%
<i>Physical violence</i>	73	19	26.00%	1.40%
<i>Sexual violence</i>	74	15	20.30%	4.10%
<i>Economic violence</i>	75	15	20.00%	5.30%
<i>Threats/coercion to disclose sexual orientation or gender identity</i>	75	9	12.00%	4.00%

⁹ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564625>

Psychological violence is the most prevalent form: approximately 44% of respondents reported having experienced it, of whom nearly one-third indicated that it occurred frequently or always. Descriptions of psychological violence include being shouted at, insulted, belittled, having one's schedule or social relationships controlled, or being threatened with the termination of the relationship. Although less prevalent, physical violence is still reported at a notable rate (26%), indicating that same-sex cohabitation shares characteristics with intimate partner violence more broadly.

Forms of sexual, economic, and identity-related violence (such as threats to disclose one's sexual orientation or gender identity) appear at lower rates but remain significant, particularly because they relate to bodily autonomy, economic independence, and identity safety. Although the sample size for reported experiences of violence is limited, these findings are consistent with global research¹⁰ on violence within LGBTI communities, where psychological violence and identity-based control are often prominent due to the roles of stigma and emotional dependency in same-sex relationships.

Notably, some participants reported experiencing multiple forms of violence simultaneously. Psychological violence is often accompanied by financial control, restricting the victim's autonomy over income, spending, or decisions related to living arrangements. In some cases, physical violence was described as occurring suddenly during conflicts and later justified as a "temporary loss of control," yet still leaving lasting psychological consequences. These findings are broadly consistent with international research^{11 12} on intimate partner violence in diverse relationship contexts.

When facing violence, participants may turn to various sources of support. The most commonly sought sources are acquaintances and friends, followed by online information and social/community organisations. Very few respondents turn to the police or authorities, and a notable proportion reported not seeking or not needing support. From a minority stress perspective, this indicates limited trust in formal institutions; survivors tend to prioritise spaces perceived as safer in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity, such as social media, community groups, or peer networks.

¹⁰ Breiding, M.J., J. Chen, and M.L. Walters, *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation* (Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2013).

¹¹ Leonard, W., A. Mitchell, S. Patel, and C. Fox, *Coming Forward: The Underreporting of Heterosexist Violence and Same Sex Partner Abuse in Victoria* (Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, 2008).

Donovan, Catherine, and Marianne Hester. *Domestic violence and sexuality: What's love got to do with it?*. Policy Press, 2015.

¹² Kar, Anindya, et al. "Intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships: are we aware of the implications?." *Journal of Psychosexual Health* 5.1 (2023): 13-19.

Table 35. Sources of support

Sources of support	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Acquaintances and friends</i>	44	58.70%
<i>I do not need support</i>	33	45.00%
<i>Online information</i>	16	21.30%
<i>Social or community organisations</i>	9	12.00%
<i>Police / Authorities</i>	2	2.70%
<i>Other</i>	1	1.30%

2. SEPARATION AND RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION IN SAME-SEX COHABITATION

2.1. SITUATION AND REASONS FOR RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION

The question on separation and relationship dissolution was only applied to respondents who had previously cohabited with a same-sex partner. Among those who answered this question, the distribution of responses is as follows.

Table 36.
Experiences of separation/relationship dissolution in same-sex cohabitation

Situation	Number (n=499)	Percentage (%)
<i>Never experienced</i>	329	65.90%
<i>Have experienced</i>	165	33.10%
<i>In the process of separation</i>	5	1.00%

The findings show that among respondents, 165 individuals (approximately one-third) reported having experienced separation or relationship dissolution, while 5 respondents were currently in the process of separation.

Analysis of the main reasons for separation or dissolution indicates that differences in values and expectations regarding cohabitation account for the largest share, alongside family pressure, economic difficulties, and broader social pressures.

Table 37. Reasons for separation/relationship dissolution

Reasons for separation or dissolution	Number
<i>Differences in values and expectations regarding cohabitation</i>	137
<i>Family pressure</i>	62
<i>Financial and employment difficulties</i>	59
<i>Social pressure</i>	43
<i>Migration or working away, making cohabitation difficult</i>	29
<i>Domestic violence, control, or threats</i>	23
<i>Disagreements related to children</i>	10

Among those who have experienced violence, many reported that violence was a direct or indirect cause of relationship strain and eventual dissolution. In particular, repeated violence, combined with the perpetrator’s refusal to acknowledge responsibility or make efforts to change, was often described as the “final straw” that led individuals to leave the relationship. Some participants described this process as a cyclical pattern of escalation and de-escalation, alternating with periods of apology and promises, but ultimately resulting in the recurrence of violence.

2.2. SEEKING SUPPORT AND SILENCE

When facing violence, participants most commonly turned to close friends for support, especially those who are also part of the LGBTI community. They tend to share their experiences with individuals perceived as non-judgmental regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity. Some participants also reported seeking support through online groups, where they could remain anonymous while still receiving empathy and understanding.

In contrast, very few participants sought help from their families of origin or formal institutions such as the police, healthcare providers, or victim support organisations. Common reasons included fear of being forced to disclose their sexual orientation, being blamed for “living incorrectly,” or having the legitimacy of their relationship denied. Some participants also believed that when same-sex relationships are not legally recognised, reporting violence within such relationships may be dismissed or not taken seriously.

These accounts suggest that awareness of, and confidence in, available support mechanisms is an area that may benefit from further attention — both in terms of how services are communicated and how they are designed to be accessible to people in diverse relationship contexts.

CHAPTER 3

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

1. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR REGISTERED COHABITATION INTERNATIONALLY

Over the past three decades, global trends in legal protection for same-sex couples have followed two main models: (1) same-sex marriage (marriage equality), achieved through legislative or judicial processes; and (2) registered cohabitation mechanisms (civil partnership, registered partnership, civil union, PACS), either as an intermediate step or as a parallel regime.

Despite differences in terminology and scope, both legal frameworks aim to establish a stable legal status that enables rights, obligations, and dispute resolution mechanisms for couples.

Registered cohabitation refers to legally recognised forms of partnership that are not classified as marriage. These arrangements are known by various names depending on the country, such as civil unions, registered partnerships, or domestic partnerships. Denmark was the first country to introduce such a law for same-sex couples in 1989.

These frameworks were primarily developed as parallel solutions to avoid redefining the traditional concept of marriage, while still addressing the need to protect the rights of couples who cannot or choose not to marry. In many countries where cultural or religious opposition to same-sex marriage is strong, creating a separate legal institution (such as civil partnership) has been seen as a politically feasible compromise. Another reason is to accommodate couples who do not wish to marry. Even in countries with marriage equality, some couples—both different-sex and same-sex—avoid marriage due to its formalities or legal implications. In such cases, partnership registration offers a simpler, less binding alternative.

Most registered cohabitation frameworks were initially designed specifically for same-sex couples, as different-sex couples already had access to legal marriage (e.g. Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland). In other cases, these frameworks were first applied to different-sex couples and later extended to same-sex couples. Greece is a notable example: in 2008, it introduced a “cohabitation agreement” (*symfono symviosis*)

exclusively for different-sex couples. In 2013, the European Court of Human Rights ruled this exclusion discriminatory, leading Greece to amend the law in 2015 to include same-sex couples.

Some countries, however, did not differentiate by gender from the outset. France introduced the PACS (Pacte Civil de Solidarité) in 1999, allowing all couples, regardless of gender, to register a partnership. The Netherlands similarly opened its registered partnership system (introduced in 1998) to both different-sex and same-sex couples. These inclusive models are often widely used by different-sex couples due to their simplicity and flexibility. For instance, in France, approximately 95% of PACS registrations in 2022 were between different-sex couples.

It is important to note that despite similar terminology, the degree to which these arrangements resemble marriage varies across countries. Some offer nearly identical rights, while others do not offer comparable protections of rights in key areas such as joint child custody, access to reproductive services, or property rights. For example, PACS partners in France do not regulate automatic inheritance rights like married couples, and their property remains separate by default.

Across Europe, the late 1990s saw a wave of registered partnership legislation: France (1999), Belgium (2000), Germany (2001), and the United Kingdom (2005, initially for same-sex couples only). In North America, several U.S. states and cities introduced domestic partnerships in the 1990s; Canada and Australia also developed regional partnership recognition before legalising same-sex marriage nationwide.

In the 2010s, as marriage equality became more widespread, many countries simultaneously introduced same-sex marriage and phased out or transformed earlier partnership systems. For example, Denmark ceased new civil partnership registrations after legalising marriage in 2012, and Sweden converted registered partnerships into marriages following its 2009 reform. However, some countries continue to maintain both systems in parallel.

Not all countries follow a transitional pathway. Some have moved directly to legalising same-sex marriage without first introducing registered cohabitation. In Asia, both Taiwan and Thailand followed this path.

It is also worth noting that registered cohabitation frameworks have attracted debate in various contexts. Some observers argue that maintaining a separate legal regime creates distinctions in symbolic recognition and in the breadth of associated rights, particularly in areas such as inheritance and child-related matters. Others point to the practical value of offering a flexible, accessible option for couples who do not wish to marry. These debates reflect the broader complexity of designing legal frameworks that respond to diverse social needs and values.

2. OVERVIEW OF COUNTRIES LEGALISING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AND REGISTERED COHABITATION

Same-sex marriage legalisation: As of the end of 2025, 38 countries have recognised marriage equality.

- In 2022, Cuba became the first socialist country to legalise same-sex marriage
- In 2023, Estonia became the first former Soviet state to do so.
- Taiwan was the first territory in Asia to legalise same-sex marriage (2019)
- Thailand became the first country in Southeast Asia to do so, with the law coming into effect in early 2025.

Registered cohabitation: Currently 11 countries worldwide do not allow same-sex marriage but have legal frameworks for registered cohabitation for same-sex couples. These include:

- | | |
|---|--|
| • Bolivia | • Hungary |
| • Croatia | • Italy |
| • Cyprus | • Latvia |
| • The Czech Republic | • Monaco |
| • Greece | • Montenegro |
| • San Marino, and several territories such as Aruba (Netherlands) | • Bermuda, and the Cayman Islands (United Kingdom) |

Other forms of limited recognition:

Some countries do not provide formal registration systems for same-sex couples but still offer limited recognition. For example, Israel does not allow same-sex marriage domestically but recognises same-sex marriages conducted abroad and grants them rights largely comparable to those enjoyed in domestically-contracted marriages. Other countries (such as Chile before 2022 and Ecuador before 2019) have implemented forms of “de facto unions” or cohabitation arrangements, allowing couples to register their living arrangements to access certain rights (e.g. property, taxation, residency) without formal marriage.

In some jurisdictions, recognition may arise simply from long-term cohabitation, where couples are legally acknowledged as being in a “common-law relationship.” Overall,

however, the number of countries offering such limited recognition remains relatively small, and the scope of rights varies significantly across contexts.

3. REGIONAL CONTEXT IN ASIA

For Viet Nam, the Asian context is particularly relevant, as many countries in the region are currently experimenting with different legal pathways.

At the time of writing, Taiwan has had marriage equality legislation in place for six years. Thailand has enacted same-sex marriage legislation, which came into force in early 2025. Nepal recorded its first local-level registrations of same-sex marriages in late 2023. Japan does not yet recognise same-sex marriage at the national level, but many local governments have introduced partnership certification systems, and court rulings have increasingly supported claims for legal protection. Hong Kong does not recognise same-sex marriage, but its highest court has required the government to develop an alternative legal recognition framework within a specified timeframe.

International experience across these varied contexts points to several practical considerations that may be relevant to policy design, should Viet Nam choose to examine options in this area:

1. First, where a civil partnership or registered cohabitation model is considered, the scope of associated rights — particularly in relation to child rearing and inheritance — merits careful attention, as narrowly defined frameworks may leave certain practical needs unaddressed.
2. Second, where broader recognition is introduced, a review of related legal frameworks — including civil registration, civil law, labour, insurance, healthcare, and relevant aspects of family law — may help ensure coherence in implementation across institutions.
3. Third, regardless of the model, the practical translation of legal provisions into accessible rights and procedures often depends on accompanying administrative guidance and capacity-building at the institutional level.

In the Vietnamese context, a phased approach—from recognising relationships, to ensuring property and representation rights, and eventually extending to child-related rights and public services—may allow for evidence-based learning and broad stakeholder engagement at each stage. Such an approach is consistent with Viet Nam's established practice of phased legal development and would create space for dialogue and adjustment as implementation proceeds.

Selected legislative and policy experiences on same-sex marriage and civil partnership in Asia (updated to December 2025)

Table 38. Models of legal recognition of same-sex relationships in Asian countries/territories

Country / Territory	Model	Key milestone	Notes
<i>Taiwan</i>	Same-sex marriage	Law effective in 2019	Recognises same-sex marriage; scope of rights has been gradually expanded over time, including adjustments related to cross-border marriages.
<i>Thailand</i>	Same-sex marriage	Law effective in January 2025	First country in Southeast Asia to legalise same-sex marriage; implemented through the civil registration system.
<i>Nepal</i>	Same-sex marriage (expanding implementation)	Local registrations since 2023	Recognition is evolving through a phased process linked to court decisions and local administrative practices.
<i>Japan</i>	Civil partnership registration at local level (no national law)	Since 2015 (local level)	Many municipalities issue partnership certificates; court rulings increasingly support legislative change.
<i>Hong Kong</i>	No same-sex marriage; alternative framework under development	Top court ruling requiring alternative framework (2023)	Focus on establishing an alternative recognition mechanism to protect fundamental rights while maintaining the traditional definition of marriage.
<i>South Korea</i>	No marriage recognition; partial rights recognised	Court rulings on insurance / healthcare rights (2024)	Certain rights are recognised through judicial decisions or sectoral policies, but no unified legal status for relationships exists.

CHAPTER 4

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

“I think legal recognition is what can help increase social acceptance. We need both, but if the law moves first, society will follow.”

- T., female, 29, and H., female, 25, Hanoi

The findings of this report point to a range of areas where further policy attention and dialogue may be of value. The considerations below are offered as inputs to that dialogue, organised across three levels, and are not intended as prescriptive recommendations.

I. LEGAL DIMENSION

Across the legal dimension, the recommendations proposed below are formulated to support the achievement of a dual and mutually-reinforcing objective:

- (i) Establishing a stable legal status for same-sex relationships to ensure rights, obligations, and access to dispute resolution mechanisms; and
- (ii) Ensuring coherence across sectoral laws to avoid fragmented protection.

1. Exploring legal options to recognise same-sex cohabitation, either through formal recognition of relationships or through the development of a dedicated legal framework addressing rights and obligations arising from cohabitation (e.g. property, child rearing, etc.).
2. Identifying a core set of rights that may be considered for inclusion within such recognition mechanisms, prioritised based on needs reflected in reliable data. These may include:
 - Relationship registration
 - Property and inheritance
 - Child rearing and caregiving
 - Mechanisms for dissolution of the relationship
 - Protection in cases of violence
 - Selected rights related to labour, social welfare, taxation, and insurance

3. Reviewing relevant legal frameworks to ensure compatibility in the event a recognition mechanism is introduced. Key areas may include:
 - Civil registration and identity documents: exploring options to record relationship status in population and household registration systems
 - Civil law and property: recognising agreements and rights related to joint assets and dispute resolution upon separation
 - Children and family law: aligning with child rights standards in recognising parental or caregiving roles, and post-separation arrangements
 - Labour, insurance, and healthcare: recognising same-sex partners in welfare schemes, caregiving, and medical decision-making
 - Domestic violence prevention: ensuring protection mechanisms cover cohabiting relationships, including access to shelters and support services
4. Considering the application of private international law frameworks for cross-border relationships, including:
 - Recognition, acknowledgement, and/or utilization of foreign civil status documents within limits of public order principles
 - Minimum protection mechanisms in Viet Nam for property, children, and against instances of domestic violence, even where same-sex relationships are not legally registered domestically

A rights-based approach focusing on a core set of rights, obligations and protection mechanisms may help reduce the risk of formal recognition without practical effect, while also supporting gradual in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of such mechanisms over time.

II. POLICY DIMENSION

Parallel to the process of legal reform, certain policy tools and administrative guidance may be considered for implementation, to reduce risks in daily life and improve access to public services:

1. **Legal representation and healthcare decision-making:** clarifying and strengthening mechanisms for authorisation and representation (e.g. power of attorney), including standardised templates and procedures in hospitals and public institutions, especially in emergency situations.
2. **Mediation and dispute resolution:** supporting grassroots mediation, legal aid, notarisation, and judicial handling of civil disputes among same-sex couples, particularly in cases involving joint investments, children, housing, or business.
3. **Domestic violence prevention and response:** strengthening capacity within enforcement systems (police, healthcare, judiciary, social services) to recognise and

address violence in same-sex relationships, while ensuring non-discriminatory access to shelters and counselling.

4. **Data collection and impact assessment:** integrating information on non-traditional family forms, including same-sex couples, into population surveys and administrative data systems (within confidentiality limits), to support evidence-based policymaking.
5. **Promoting inclusive norms in public and private sectors:** encouraging public institutions, schools, and businesses to adopt inclusive benefit policies for same-sex partners and to establish mechanisms addressing workplace discrimination.

III. SOCIETAL DIMENSION

Recommendations along the social dimension are formulated with a focus on fostering dialogue, supporting families, and reducing stigma, in line with the evidence presented above that lack of legal recognition often correlates with perceived lack of acceptance from family and community.

1. **Public dialogue:** fostering evidence-based public dialogue around the well-being of children and families in diverse circumstances, including the practical implications of current legal arrangements to protect property, facilitate caregiving, and enhance family stability.
2. **Family and caregiver support:** developing guidance materials, support groups, and counselling for parents and relatives of same-sex couples to improve understanding and reduce family conflict.
3. **Community support services:** expanding access to psychological counselling, legal assistance, and LGBTI-inclusive life-skills programmes (e.g. financial management, conflict resolution, relationship safety).
4. **Responsible communication:** encouraging media and content creators to apply non-discriminatory editorial standards when covering issues related to LGBTI individuals and families, in line with broader principles of responsible and accurate reporting.

IV. SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

Rather than a fixed roadmap, the data suggest that a gradual, evidence-based approach — one that builds on existing frameworks, engages relevant stakeholders at each stage, and allows for assessment and adjustment over time — may be well suited to tackle the multiple complexities and intersecting legal, policy, and societal dimensions. The following phasing is offered as one possible way of adopting such an approach, for consideration by relevant authorities:

SHORT TERM (0–12 MONTHS):

- Convening cross-sector dialogue among relevant ministries and agencies (justice, health, labour, public security, education) drawing on the evidence base presented in this and other relevant research
- Reviewing and clarifying existing administrative mechanisms (authorisation, medical decision-making, legal aid, domestic violence response, and related areas.)
- Assessing implementation of existing frameworks in areas such as notarisation, civil registration, and legal aid as they relate to diverse family circumstances, with the aim of identifying gaps and prioritising response

MEDIUM TERM (1–3 YEARS):

- Further study of policy and legal options relevant to the recognition of same-sex cohabitation, including comparative review of international experiences
- Piloting harmonized and clarified guidance or procedures in selected public services (e.g. healthcare, legal aid, domestic violence response, and related areas) to assess practical impact of the amendments
- In-depth examination of issues related to property, child rearing, and dissolution mechanisms within the existing civil law framework

LONGER TERM (3–5 YEARS):

- Based on research and policy dialogue outcomes, consider further steps to formalise legal frameworks and implementation guidance to support the recognition of non-traditional family forms.
- Continue reviewing evolving legal frameworks to ensure coherence across legal domains (civil registration, civil law, labour, insurance, healthcare, domestic violence, private international law)

LONGER HORIZON (5+ YEARS):

- Conduct impact evaluations of amended legal, administrative, policy frameworks and refine implementation mechanisms as needed
- Gradually expand protection for non-traditional family forms in areas such as child rights, migration, and other related domains
- Strengthen data systems and reporting mechanisms to monitor well-being and equality of treatment across non-traditional family forms

CONCLUSION

The findings of this report illustrate that questions around the legal status of same-sex relationships are not abstract - they arise in concrete, everyday situations: how shared assets are registered, how partners navigate medical procedures on each other's behalf, how children are cared for and represented, and how couples face the practical consequences of relationship dissolution. In each of these situations, the absence of a formally recognised relationship status means that individuals must navigate existing legal and policy frameworks with limited guidance, often relying on informal arrangements or civil instruments that were not designed with their circumstances in mind.

Findings from both survey and qualitative data show that same-sex couples in Viet Nam are structuring their lives as families with care, responsibility, and long-term commitment — sharing family obligations, managing joint finances, and in some cases raising children. The practical challenges they encounter do not arise from how they live, but from the limited availability of formal mechanisms to support arrangements they have already made. Understanding these circumstances in depth is a necessary foundation for any informed policy dialogue on how existing frameworks might be amended to better serve non-traditional family forms.

In the decade following its last revision, the 2014 Law on Marriage and Family has seen significant transformations in family life in Viet Nam, including a proliferation of diverse family arrangements. The evidence gathered in this report seeks to contribute to the ongoing reflection on how relevant legal and policy frameworks must continue to develop — not only in relation to the needs of same-sex couples specifically, but in terms of broader governance goals such as protecting children's well-being, reducing civil disputes, strengthening domestic violence prevention, and ensuring that social welfare systems function effectively for all households.

International experience suggests that there is no single pathway, and that legal frameworks addressing the status of cohabiting couples have taken a variety of forms across different contexts. What the comparative evidence does suggest is that clarity and coherence — in terms of rights, obligations, and available procedures — tends to reduce uncertainty around and improve practical outcomes for individuals, families, and institutions alike. The considerations outlined in this report are offered in that spirit: as inputs to a dialogue that is already underway, and that will continue to be shaped by evidence, by social trends, and by the deliberative processes through which Viet Nam develops its legal frameworks.

The value of this report lies, above all, in its rich evidence base — and in the generosity of those who shared their experiences to further dialogue and forward-looking discussions. The individuals and couples who participated in this study opened their lives to scrutiny, speaking about love and commitment, about the quiet negotiations of daily life, about moments of vulnerability in hospitals and legal offices, and about the enduring effort of building a family in circumstances that are not always conducive. Their stories are not merely data points; they are evidence of lives fully lived, of families already formed, and of a deeply human desire for recognition, stability, and care. It is hoped that these findings may serve as a meaningful reference point for researchers, policymakers, and institutions as they continue to consider how legal and social frameworks can best support the well-being of all families in Viet Nam.

REFERENCES

- Cherlin, A. (2004). The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(4).
- Đỗ Quỳnh Anh, Chu Lan Anh, Đặng Thùy Dương, Vương Khả Phong, & Nguyễn Bảo Ngọc. (2019). Social perspectives on same-sex marriage: A qualitative study in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. iSEE.
- Giddens, A. (1992). *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hammack, P. L., Frost, D. M., & Hughes, S. D. (2019). Queer intimacies: A new paradigm for the study of relationship diversity. *Journal of Sex Research*.
- Heyes, C. J. (2003). Can there be a queer politics of recognition? In R. N. Fiore & H. L. Nelson (Eds.), *Recognition, Responsibility, and Rights: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*.
- Morgan, D. H. J. (1996). *Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- iSEE & VESS. (2022). Assessment of the economic impact of same-sex marriage in Viet Nam.
- Kiernan, K. (2002). Cohabitation in Western Europe: Trends, Issues, and Implications. In A. Booth & A. Crouter (Eds.), *Just Living Together*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Morgan, D. H. G. (2011). Locating “Family Practices”. *Sociological Research Online*.
- Phùng Trung Tập. (2023). *Same-sex marriage: Public opinion and reality*. Hanoi Publishing House.
- Plummer, K. (2003). *Intimate citizenship: Private decisions and public dialogues*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- ICS Center. (2024). Assessment of needs for connection and development among parents, relatives, and friends of LGBTI individuals.
- Trương Hồng Quang. (2022). *Rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Viet Nam: From awareness to practice*. Justice Publishing House.

Vũ Thành Long, Đỗ Quỳnh Anh, & Chu Lan Anh. (2019). Same-sex cohabitation: Love and relationships among LGBT people. iSEE.

Weeks, J., Heaphy, B., & Donovan, C. (2001). Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments. London: Routledge.

Weeks, J., Donovan, C., & Heaphy, B. (1996). Families of Choice: Patterns of Non-heterosexual Relationships – A Literature Review. Social Science Research Papers, South Bank University.

APPENDIX

Interview narratives

I. DISCLOSURE

One in-depth interview participant recounted actively “following the call of love” to meet their partner, while at the same time having to maintain the relationship in secrecy because the two of them were not equally ready to come out:

“By August, I missed T. so much that I couldn’t bear it anymore. At that time, I lied to my teacher, saying that I was sick, had a fever and couldn’t go to class, so I asked for a few days off, and my teacher allowed it. I immediately jumped on a train and followed the call of love to Hue to find T.

When we met, all the emotions just burst out. At that time, we were still loving each other in secret and were not ready to come out to anyone at all. In fact, I was very ready and wanted to [come out] to the whole world, but T. was not ready, so we remained in a secret relationship and had not come out at all.”

- Th., female, 24, Hue.

There are also cases where couples were accepted by family from the very beginning:

“I’m very lucky that my family already knew and had already gotten to know her, though they hadn’t met in person yet and had only talked through video calls. My girlfriend is also learning Vietnamese.”

- N., female, 25, Canada.

There are also cases where couples described the trajectory of their relationship according to fairly clear milestones, from coming out to family to gradually implementing cohabitation before eventually moving out together:

“We started meeting at the end of 2018 and officially became a couple in April 2019. The next step was that both families knew, meaning we came out to our families in 2022. By the end of 2024, H. started coming over to my house; at that time, I was still living with my parents. H. usually came over in the evening and stayed the night, but rarely ate there, except occasionally on weekends. Then in April this year, I bought a house, and the two of us moved out to live separately.”

- T., male, 39, and H., male, 28, Hai Phong.

II. WEDDING

Some in-depth interview participants showed that the desire to organise a commitment ceremony had been prepared as a long-term personal project, with concrete imaginings and gradual accumulation:

“Actually, I had been thinking about my wedding for a very long time. I already had an image in mind of what my wedding would be like, for example the décor, the outfits, or the decoration of the party. I had collected and kept all of it in a separate folder, so when I decided to have the wedding, I just took it out and used it, which was very convenient.”

- A., female, 49, and N., female, 35, Ho Chi Minh City.

Some couples interpreted the commitment ceremony as an important step in terms of social relations, a milestone that strengthened expectations of long-term attachment:

“We started organising an engagement ceremony in 2021. When we held the engagement ceremony, both families met each other, so I felt that once both sides had met like that, then we would definitely have to stay together for the long term.”

- H., male, 29, Binh Duong (Ho Chi Minh City)

There are also cases where couples emphasised the role of the ceremony as a mechanism of “making public” the relationship before their network of friends, thereby creating additional social responsibility and resilience for the relationship in the face of the pressures of shared life:

“In 2012, we held a small wedding party to introduce ourselves to our friends. The reason was that we thought love belongs to the two of us, but in life together there would be many temptations, and we would be under pressure. For example, when you're upset with your partner, you might confide in friends, and then one person says this, another says that. Once the relationship has been made public, you yourself also have more responsibility toward that relationship. That's why we organised a small party.”

- H., male, 35, and M., male, 45, Hanoi.

III. COHABITATION

In Viet Nam, where same-sex marriage has not been recognised, same-sex cohabitation has to some extent become an equivalent institution, though not a substitute for marriage, serving both as an expression of commitment and as a practical solution for a romantic relationship. The need to cohabit does not stem from an idealisation of “marriage equality,” but from the practical needs of relationships that have already existed and been sustained for a long time.

“Almost 10 years ago, we met through friends. At that time, I met N., and then after many outings together in a group, we gradually developed feelings for each other, shared life’s difficulties with each other, and after that we became a couple. However, we have only been living together for about three or four years, from 2022 until now. It was only after organising our wedding in March 2022 that we officially started living together; before that, we each stayed in our own home.”

- A, female, 49, Ho Chi Minh City; N, female, 35, Ho Chi Minh City.

Giddens (1992)¹⁴ describes modern relationships as “pure relationships,” existing because of the emotional satisfaction and voluntary commitment of the two parties rather than because of social pressure, morality, or legal structure. This trend is observed very clearly in the study data: same-sex couples maintain stable relationships for many years and often choose to live together when they feel emotionally, financially, and practically ready in terms of future plans, even though there is no supporting legal framework. This demonstrates both their agency and their capacity to build intimate relationships outside mainstream legal structures, while also challenging the argument, which is quite common even within the LGBTI community, that “the lack of a legal framework makes same-sex relationships unstable.”

“We want a home, a family just like everyone else. We often tell each other that we have to live really well so that when people look at us, they no longer discriminate and may even develop faith in relationships like ours.”

- A., female, 49, and N., female, 35, Ho Chi Minh City.

¹⁴ Giddens, A. (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

IV. SHARING

Alongside descriptions of financial merging, some in-depth interview participants also showed that the distribution of contributions could create uneven pressure:

"I'm also older than H., and I've been working for many years, so there are many things where I feel I have to step up and pay more. Sometimes I do get a bit tired because of that. In moments like that, I usually try to talk to H., and H. is also very okay with sharing with me."

- T., female, 29, and H., female, 25, Hanoi.

There are cases where in-depth interview participants showed that the family of origin may actively refuse to accept financial contributions from the couple, in this case a couple with disabilities, as a way both to protect their children from financial burdens and to reduce risk in a context where same-sex relationships are not yet fully recognised.

"T. once asked her mother something like, 'We'll contribute money for meals with you, okay? Or if you won't take my money, then you at least have to take Th.'s.' Then her mother said, 'No, I'm not taking money from either of you. You are deaf, you already have enough difficulties, and if I still take your money, what would people think of me?'"

- T., female, 35, and Th., female, 24, Hue.

V. CARE

In the dimension of care, caring practices are directed not only toward people but also extend to pets, showing how couples create a "family life" through alternative care projects in a context where options such as having children or adopting remain subject to many limitations and barriers.

"Since we couldn't raise children, we switched to raising dogs. First we had one dog, then two, then three."

- T., male, 37, Hue.

Stories about caring for one another during illness show that “care work” is not only a task, but also a form of relational bonding and a way of thickening the sense of family, in which presence and mutual care become vivid evidence of “making family” in practice.

“The two of us were both in the hospital, and people joked that yesterday one was the patient, and today it was the other’s turn to be the patient taking care of each other. We had surgeries one week apart, and just took care of each other in the hospital the whole time. Somehow the two of us got examined for the same illness, and then registered to have surgery together.”

- N., female, and H., female, over 50, Hung Yen.

VI. KINSHIP

Relationships with both sides of the family are an important test of the social legitimacy of same-sex families. In the Vietnamese context, kinship obligations can become both a test and a pathway through which the relationship is culturally legitimised. When the family of origin accepts the participation of “their child and their child’s partner” in traditional obligations, they are to some extent recognising the couple as a family unit.

“I still go back from time to time, for example when there is an ancestral death anniversary and I can arrange the time, then I go back too. I go down there, spend time with everyone, have a meal, then go around a bit.”

- C., male, 32, and T., male, 32, Hanoi.

VII. CHILDREN

Among those who do not want children or are not yet ready to have children, the reasons usually focus on three main groups. The first is legal barriers, as they do not feel secure about the ability to protect the rights of children in same-sex families.

“If, for example, we talk about the surrogacy route, then surrogacy in Viet Nam is still rather difficult first of all, and second, there are many risks, and the cost is also too high.”

- Participant in LGBTI focus group discussion, Hanoi.

"I think adoption is probably the only way [...]. But with adoption there is a lot of paperwork and a lot of complicated procedures. I also looked into it, and if a married couple has a marriage certificate then it is easier for them, because they can register as the father and mother of the child."

- H., male, 29, Binh Duong (Ho Chi Minh City).

The second is economic barriers and living conditions, including the pressure of childrearing costs, stable housing, and time available for childcare.

"Very expensive. I saw that my friend's cost of having a child was five, six, even ten times higher than ordinary insemination, much, much more expensive"

- Participant in LGBTI focus group discussion, Hanoi.

"On the legal basis, only one person is considered the parent. If only one person is legally recognised, how can that ever be as complete as two people, even though in reality it is two people raising the child? So the centre also takes that into account, so I think it's quite difficult, not simple at all. I think the process would probably take one or two years before adoption could happen. Giving birth is also hard; if you want your own child, you have to do IVF, and IVF costs a lot of money, and it's not like it works immediately the first time."

- C., female, 45, and L., female, 33, Binh Duong, Ho Chi Minh City.

The third is concern about social stigma toward children with same-sex parents, especially in educational settings and administrative procedures.

"The child's birth certificate has to have the name of both a father and a mother, and it is very hard to remove the mother. It may be possible to leave the father's name off the birth certificate, but not the mother's. The second difficulty is, for example, with H.'s child, what role would I stand in? I think maybe a foster father could legally adopt the child, but that seems rather complicated."

- T., male, 39, and H., male, 28, Hai Phong.

VIII. LEGAL

“For our side, we don’t care whether the couple are same-sex or different-sex. As long as there is a marriage certificate and the state recognises it, then we accept it. So what I think matters most is still what kind of law the state will promulgate, how it will be written, and whether it will provide good rights and benefits for LGBT couples. If it does, then insurance and all related services will definitely follow Vietnamese law.”

- T., female, 30, Insurance staff, Ho Chi Minh City.

“Everything becomes more complicated, for example, when taking out loans: before you only had to prove one person’s finances, now you have to prove two people’s finances, and the relationship is still not clearly defined, and then how would the debt be divided, generally it is quite complicated.”

- T., male, 39, and H., male, 28, Hai Phong.

“In fact, the capital was contributed jointly by the two of us, one person 60%, the other 40%. But because we do not have legal papers with each other, almost everything we do is based on affection. So if some problem were to happen, we could only resolve it emotionally; there is no way to have full legal documentation. In other words, if I were a bad person, then H. would lose everything, because all the documents and all the control are in my name.”

- M., female, 27, Ho Chi Minh City.

“Once they have children, all the rights they want are directed toward their partner and their child. [...] Over roughly the past three years, questions related to children, property, and representation have increased many, many times compared to the earlier period. I see that even though the law has not recognised them, they are still very determined to find every possible way to achieve the married life they want and to establish a family.”

- H., Lawyer, Expert group discussion, Ho Chi Minh City.

"In my mind and my partner's mind, we just think to ourselves that, alright then, if we know there are rights we might lose because we are not in a different-sex relationship like everyone else around us, then we just have to rely on ourselves. We have to rely on whatever resources we can save. [...] And we are always thinking about how much money is enough for us to be able to put ourselves in a position equal in rights to other people."

- N, female, 25, Canada.

"When the law recognises it, then of course I will also show it outwardly, though actually it's not that I want to show off anything. When people ask, then I just answer."

- H., male, 28, Hai Phong.

IX. FOREIGN COUNTRIES

For those who are already married, a foreign marriage certificate gives them a sense of recognition and provides a clear legal framework for issues such as joint property, inheritance rights, healthcare, and plans for children. However, when they return to Viet Nam, they face the reality that this marriage is not recognised by the domestic legal system.

"Just as in Viet Nam there are legal issues related to foreign elements, on the other side there are also issues related to being a foreigner within that system. I am a foreigner in relation to that legal system, so I also had to do a lot of research and ask a lot of questions, from lawyers to notary offices to the consulate here, and there were many things that had to be translated and so on. It is not easy.

Before we got married, we had only done a document in France called a PACS, which is a civil partnership, and I had that document for two and a half years before marriage, meaning that at that point my family life had already been recognised under French law as a shared life."

— G., female, 37, Ho Chi Minh City.

"We could go to Thailand and register our marriage there, but I have already asked older couples, those who did it before us. They said that yes, it is possible to marry there, but when you come back to Viet Nam it has no legal value at all."

- M., female, 27, and H., female, 21, Ho Chi Minh City.

More broadly, the data show that LGBTI people are having to operate within two institutional layers: on one side, Vietnamese law does not recognise same-sex marriage; on the other, foreign legal systems have expanded the family framework to include same-sex couples. Decisions to enter a different-sex marriage, to enter a same-sex marriage abroad, or not to marry at all are therefore all concrete life strategies, reflecting efforts to reconcile intimate needs, responsibilities toward the family of origin, and the possibility of being protected by the state.

"Under French law, all that is needed is that document, the birth certificate, and the hospital birth record to register the child's birth certificate with the names of both mothers, as well as the family register including the child's name. We have already signed that document, and next week when I return, the two of us will go to Spain to do the IVF process for our family, then I will return to France to sign one more paper, because each person has to have one. That document ensures that when we give birth to the child here, either one of us or both of us can bring that paper and the hospital birth record to the French consulate in Saigon to register, so as to ensure that our family will be a complete family under French law while in Viet Nam."

- G., female, 37, Ho Chi Minh City.

