

Our Methodology, in Depth

The Belong Elsewhere Index & My Matches

Version 1.58 · Aligned to BE Index v1.2 and Indicator Framework v1.56 · September 2026

1. What the BE Index is

The BE Index scores ten European countries - Malta, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, Ireland, Germany, France, Portugal, Greece, and Italy - on the conditions that shape what building an LGBTQ+ life there may look like. Each country receives one BE Score from 0-100, built from six pillars: Legal Protections (does the law protect you?), Safe Living (how safe is daily life?), Belonging (will you be accepted?), Healthcare (can you get the care you need?), Affordability (can you afford the life?), and Relocation Pathways (can you actually get there?).

Two commitments sit under everything else. Every number is traceable to a documented source - nothing is scored on reputation. And where the evidence does not support a number, we say so instead of inventing one.

2. The evidence behind every number

The Index is designed as a traceable evidence system rather than an opinion-based ranking.

The counts. 57 questions, asked identically of every country. The current Index contains 556 scored country-indicator records, supported by 374 governed evidence records - the documented findings, rulings, and captures the scores rest on. Those records draw on 19 active source IDs spanning institutional surveys, official statistics, primary legal records, and institutional measures, from a Source Library of 44 registered entries.

The sources, by class:

Class	Examples
Large institutional surveys	EU Fundamental Rights Agency LGBTQ+ survey program
Official statistics	Eurostat price, income, and housing series
Institutional indices	EIGE Gender Equality Index; WHO/World Bank UHC Service Coverage Index
Civil-society monitoring	ILGA-Europe's annual country monitoring
The primary legal record	Statutes, gazettes, and court decisions read in the original - the BOE, the FEK, the Gazzetta Ufficiale, and their siblings

What one evidence record contains. Every scored value carries: its source and specific reference, the reference year, a verification date, the analyst responsible, a status, a confidence grade, and a completeness flag. At publication, all 556 scored records pass the required completeness checks.

Absence is recorded, never guessed. Where a country genuinely has no answer to a question, we do not invent a zero - a blank is a fact; a zero is a claim. The worked example: Germany operates no passive-income residence scheme comparable to Spain's non-lucrative visa. Rather than score that absence as zero, the finding itself was evidenced - a complete reading of the residence statute's enumerated purposes, sealed on record - the value was logged as a documented blank, and Germany's Relocation pillar simply computes over the questions Germany can answer. The reason this is fair rather than forgiving: that indicator measures the financial threshold of a passive-income route - if no route exists, there is no threshold to score - while the availability of routes is measured by a separate indicator, where Germany's answer counts in full. The pillar renormalizes; the record shows its work. The same rule is applied consistently across countries: where a comparable value cannot be supported by the evidence, the value remains blank and the relevant calculation uses the available evidence rather than assigning an assumed score.

We publish our gaps. One designed indicator - cross-border parenthood recognition, the question of whether legal parenthood established in one member state survives relocation to another - is deliberately unscored: the available pan-European studies lacked either country-level or current coverage, and scoring it thinly would have been worse than not scoring it at all. The construct is defined, the gap is published, and the topic is covered descriptively in country reporting until evidence worthy of a score exists.

3. What kind of questions - and the anchor discipline

The 57 questions fall into five types, each with its own evidence standard:

- Legal-coded measures - a reading of the law itself. Is marriage open to same-sex couples? Does legal gender recognition exist without medical prerequisites? Can same-sex partners jointly adopt? These are answered from primary legal texts, not summaries of them.
- Survey-direct measures - taken from large institutional surveys. What share of LGBTQ+ people avoid holding a partner's hand in public? What share experienced harassment in the past year?
- Quantitative measures - counts and thresholds from official sources. How many distinct published visa pathways realistically serve a relocating household? What income does a passive-income route demand?

- Coded-rubric measures - where reality must be classified before it can be scored, trained coding is applied against a fixed internal rubric. Example: the presence and severity of enacted or attempted legislative rollback, coded annually from the monitoring record.
- Published institutional indices, used as-is - exactly two of the 57: the EIGE Gender Equality Index and the WHO/World Bank UHC Service Coverage Index. We import a published score only where an institutional measure is itself the best available authoritative measure and its methodology is transparent. Everything else - 55 of 57 - is independently constructed, which is what keeps this index from being a re-blend of other people's composites.

The anchor discipline. Every question is normalized to 0-100 using predefined anchors that establish what earns a 0, what earns a 100, and the shape of the scale between them. Before launch scoring is finalized, those anchors pass through a controlled calibration gate to confirm that the observed country values fit the intended range and preserve meaningful discrimination. Any permitted pre-publication adjustment is made at the indicator level and applies consistently across the full country set, never country by country. Once an edition is published, its anchors are frozen. Later changes occur only through a governed edition update and are recorded in the Index change record.

4. From questions to pillar scores

Most pillar scores are calculated as the mean of their available indicator values (the blank rule above). Belonging uses an additional sub-construct step, and two structural safeguards deserve daylight:

Belonging is double-counting-proof by construction. The pillar is built from five named sub-constructs - spanning social attitudes, community visibility, institutional inclusion, and lived treatment - which are averaged internally first and then combined equally. A theme measured by several related questions therefore counts as one theme, not several votes; no single family of measures can dominate the pillar.

Where general and trans-specific measures both exist, we take the worse of the two. Several conditions are measured twice - once for the LGBTQ+ population generally and once trans-specifically. Wherever that pairing exists, the pillar carries the worse of the two values. The reasoning is the index's purpose stated as arithmetic: a country is not safer than its least-protected people, and an average that lets a good general number launder a bad trans-specific one would measure public relations, not reality.

5. From pillars to the BE Score - weighting and display calibration

The BE Score is a weighted blend of the six pillars:

Legal Protections	Safe Living	Belonging	Healthcare	Affordability	Relocation Pathways
25%	20%	20%	15%	10%	10%

The rationale comes from the Index's underlying framework: the four LGBTQ+-specific pillars - Legal Protections, Safe Living, Belonging, and Healthcare - together carry 80% of the weight because they measure the conditions general relocation tools typically do not capture; the two universal pillars - Affordability and Relocation Pathways - carry 20%. A country cannot buy its way up this index with cheap rent.

The weighted composite is then converted to the published BE Score using one fixed display multiplier applied identically to every country. For BE Index v1.2, that multiplier is 1.2014 (approximately 1.20). In formula form: published BE Score = weighted composite × 1.2014, rounded to one decimal and capped at 100. This step does not change the country ranking. It scales the distance between countries proportionally before rounding, while the six pillar scores remain on their original 0-100 scales. The display multiplier is frozen between editions and reviewed only under the Index's governed update rules.

Worked example - France. France's published pillars are 68.2, 50.2, 58.3, 72.9, 69.5, and 92.1. Their simple average is about 68.5; their weighted composite is about 65.8; after the fixed v1.2 display multiplier, France's published BE Score is 79.1. All three numbers are true - they answer different questions. And the pillar bars tell France's actual story better than any single number could: France's strongest pillar is Relocation Pathways at 92.1; its weakest is Safe Living at 50.2 - a 41.9-point spread. That spread is precisely the kind of truth a single average would erase - which is why the index publishes both layers, and why the standing rule is: compare countries to countries; never average the bars.

6. How My Matches works

The published index is one considered set of priorities. My Matches exists because yours may differ. It uses the same governed BE Index dataset to rank countries according to how closely the evidence aligns with your priorities and household. Results are presented as an ordered shortlist rather than as numerical personalized scores. Published BE Scores do not change.

Step 1 - your priorities. You set each of the six pillars to High, Important, or Flexible. Those choices change the relative influence of the six pillars, and the Match Engine applies a calibrated, country-neutral response so meaningful differences in what you prioritize can produce meaningful differences in the ranking. Leave everything at Important with no household selections and the published Index order is reproduced by construction.

Step 2 - your household. Three optional selections, in this order:

1. "My income won't come from a local job" - retiree, digital nomad, remote worker, pension or savings income. In the published words of the methodology: "If you tell us your income won't come from a local job, the affordability comparison shifts from local-wage burden to what things actually cost - using official EU price-level statistics - because a fixed income cares about prices, not local salaries." The

published Affordability pillar answers "affordable on a local wage?" With this box checked, your results answer "affordable on a fixed or foreign income?" - a genuinely different question, and for a large share of our readers the more honest one.

2. "I'm trans or non-binary, or someone in my family is" - increases the influence of the 20 trans-specific questions across legal recognition (including non-binary recognition), safety, healthcare access, lived treatment, and cross-border document recognition. The Belonging pillar already carries dedicated trans measures for every user - see the worse-of-two rule above, which applies whether or not this box is checked; the selection adds emphasis across the other pillars, where trans-specific reality diverges most from the general picture.

3. "I have children or plan to grow my family" - increases the influence of family and parenthood questions, including adoption and parental recognition, family reunification, school climate, fertility and family-building access, and partner document recognition.

Selections combine independently - a trans or non-binary household planning a family while living on remote or fixed income can select all three, and each adds its own emphasis.

A walked example. Consider a household planning or raising children, prioritizing safety, with income arriving from abroad. They set Safe Living to High, leave most else at Important, perhaps Flexible on Relocation, and select the income and family options. Safety evidence then carries more influence, family and parenthood questions receive their defined emphasis, and Affordability is recomputed against prices rather than local wages. Countries whose strengths align with those choices can rise; others can move down. No country's published BE Score changes - only the personalized ordering does.

The rules that bind every result. "Checking a household box changes how much certain indicators count; it never changes a country's published score." My Matches returns an ordered ranking - for example, #1 Match, #2 Match and #3 Match - rather than a numerical personalized score. The published BE Score remains the fixed numerical reference. All computation happens on our servers: no question-level data is sent to the browser, and the service is designed not to retain your selections.

Reading your results. A country can rank above another country with a higher published BE Score because the personalized ranking answers a different question: which destinations align most closely with what you selected. The BE Index remains the overall comparison; My Matches narrows that comparison to an ordered shortlist for your priorities.

7. Validation and integrity

- The default state reproduces the published index exactly - verified continuously, the engine's permanent first test.
- Independent replication: the full scoring pipeline has been rebuilt from the evidence base in a separate environment and tied to the published figures value-for-value.
- Cross-environment verification: every release is computed and verified in independent computation environments before publication, because software disagrees more often than arithmetic should.
- Exhaustive personalization testing: all 729 priority combinations and all 5,832 combined priority-and-household states were executed without calculation errors, and audited for implausible outcomes; none were found.
- Governed change: every methodological decision is recorded in a rulings register; every edition of every instrument is versioned and fingerprint-verified; every source artifact is fingerprinted at capture. The index can be audited backwards to any date in its history.

8. Limitations, disclosures, and what we do not publish

Ten countries. The launch set is European by design; expansion happens under the same evidence standard or not at all. A national score is a national score - within-country variation is real, and it is exactly what our descriptive country reporting exists to cover; the index measures the national floor and frame, not every city's ceiling. Small differences are small: closely ranked countries should be read as peers. Survey vintages vary by source; each value's reference year is held in its evidence record, price data refreshes each June, and statute watches run continuously - when the law moves, the watch catches it before the next edition.

Missing evidence and ranking uncertainty. Some source datasets do not provide usable, comparable values for every country. We record these cases as documented blanks rather than assigning assumed scores, and the relevant calculations use the evidence that is available. Because excluding a missing value can still affect a composite, we also test how those gaps could affect the ranking rather than assuming they are neutral. Malta has the largest concentration of unavailable evidence in the launch edition. In sensitivity testing, Malta remains first when its missing values are bounded using comparable EU-average values; under a conservative worst-case bound, Spain moves ahead. We therefore treat the ordering of the top two countries as sensitive to the unavailable evidence, while both remain among the Index's strongest performers.

Three things are deliberately withheld: per-question values, internal coding rubrics, and the numerical settings of the personalization engine. The reasons are plain. Single questions stripped of pillar context invite exactly the decontextualized league-tabling this index was built to replace - a country is not its worst headline, or its best one. The public methodology discloses enough to understand and scrutinize the system, while implementation-level rubrics, indicator-level normalization parameters, per-question values, and personalization internals remain protected know-how - a boundary established in our technical evidence record. What we publish is everything a reader needs to trust and interpret the results: the questions, the sources, the evidence discipline, the weights and their rationale, the published display multiplier, the personalization behavior, and the validation record - this document.

A note on our products. My Matches is free and ranks destinations according to your selections. Our reports and briefs - the depth behind any destination - are descriptive research products: they never modify, recompute, or personalize a published BE Score. The published Index and My Matches remain distinct layers, and that boundary is permanent.

9. Citation, corrections, and contact

Suggested citation

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If you believe a published value is wrong, tell us - with a source, since that is the currency here: info@belongelsewhere.com.

Substantiated corrections are made in the next edition and logged in the Index change record; the Index's credibility is worth more to us than any single number's stability. Methodology questions and research collaborations: info@belongelsewhere.com.

Produced by Belong Elsewhere · This document is aligned to BE Index v1.2 and Indicator Framework v1.56 and is updated whenever either advances.