



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



# SUPPORTING AND INCLUDING LGBTI MIGRANTS

## Needs, Experiences & Good Practices



The "Epsilon" project is funded by Erasmus+  
KA2 under Grant Agreement  
2016-1-UK01-KA204-024317

[www.epsilonproject.eu](http://www.epsilonproject.eu)



## SUPPORTING AND INCLUDING LGBTI MIGRANTS

### Needs, Experiences & Good Practices

**Editor Dr. Theo Gavrielides**

#### **Authors**

Theo Gavrielides, James Alexander (The IARS International Institute)

Vasiliki Anastasi (CARDET)

Eleni Sakellariou (KMOP - Family and Childcare Centre)

Jolanda Elferink, Michelle Emmen (Movisie, Netherlands centre for social development)

Licia Boccaletti, Jonathan Mastellari, Alessandra Manattini, Salvatore Milianta (Anziani e non solo)



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

*This publication has been produced with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the IARS International Institute and the partnership.*

## IARS PUBLICATIONS

14 Dock Offices, London, SE16 2XU, United Kingdom

+44(0) 207064 4380, [contact@iars.org.uk](mailto:contact@iars.org.uk) [www.iars.org.uk](http://www.iars.org.uk)

The IARS International Institute is a leading, international think-tank with a charitable **mission to give everyone a chance to forge a safer, fairer and more inclusive society**. IARS achieves its mission by producing **evidence-based** solutions to **current** social problems, sharing best practice and by supporting **young people** to shape decision making. IARS is an international expert in restorative justice, human rights and inclusion, citizenship and user-led research.

IARS' vision is a society where everyone is given a choice to actively participate in social problem solving. The organisation is known for its robust, independent evidence-based approach to solving current social problems, and is considered to be a pioneer in user-involvement and the application of user-led research methods.

Published in the UK by IARS Publications

© 2017 The IARS International Institute

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

Database right IARS Publications (maker)

First published April 2017

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of IARS Publications, or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics rights organisation. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside of the scope of the above should be sent to IARS at the address above.

You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover and you must impose the same condition on any acquirer.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

**ISBN 978-1-907641-44-2**



**THE IARS INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE, UK**  
Project Co-ordinator



KINDLING A BETTER **WORLD**

**FAMILY AND CHILDCARE CENTRE (KMOP), GREECE**  
Project Partner



kennis en aanpak van  
sociale vraagstukken

**MOVISIE, NETHERLANDS**  
Project Partner



**Anziani e non solo**  
Società cooperativa sociale  
**ANS**

**ANZIANI E NON SOLO, ITALY**  
Project Partner



**CARDET**

**CARDET, CYPRUS**  
Project Partner

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>COMPARATIVE FINDINGS AND LEARNING</b>	<b>6</b>
Introduction to the Epsilon project	6
Impetus and background for this e-book	7
User Scrutiny – the LGBTI Advisory Board	8
Key findings	8
Key recommendations	10
Next Epsilon steps	10
<b>FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE UK</b>	<b>12</b>
Key findings from the literature review	12
Key findings from the fieldwork	12
Key recommendations	13
<b>FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CYPRUS</b>	<b>15</b>
Key findings from the literature review	16
Key findings from the fieldwork	16
Key recommendations	17
References	17
<b>FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GREECE</b>	<b>18</b>
Key findings from the literature review	19
Key findings from the fieldwork	20
Key recommendations	21
References	22
<b>FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE NETHERLANDS</b>	<b>24</b>
Key findings from the literature review	24
Key findings from the fieldwork	26
Key recommendations	27
References	30
<b>FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ITALY</b>	<b>31</b>
Key findings from the literature review	32
Key findings from the fieldwork	32
Key recommendations	33
References	34

# COMPARATIVE FINDINGS AND LEARNING

DR. THEO GAVRIELIDES  
EPSILON PROJECT COORDINATOR AND  
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE IARS  
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE

## Introduction to the Epsilon project

According to the UNHCR, over 1.1 million migrants and refugees arrived in Europe in 2015. Last year, this flow continued at a rate of 55,000 per month. Violence at the collective and personal level is the key driver that forces these individuals to abandon their homes. While doing so, their basic needs and human rights are compromised. This also includes their dignity and respect, and being free to exercise their sexual orientation, have a partner from the same sex and develop a family life. It also includes exercising these rights without being killed, harmed or bullied.

Under EU law, individuals persecuted based on their sexual orientation and gender identity qualify for refugee status. For example, the Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU), defines the criteria for international protection. Therein, it expressly mentions sexual orientation and gender identity as one of the possible reasons for persecution (Article 10). The right to private and family life in the European Convention on Human Rights as well as several Directives and Recommendations make it clear that anyone living or residing in the EU should enjoy similar rights independently of their sexual orientation. The European Parliament EU (2015/2325(INI)) also called on all Member States to adopt asylum procedures and endeavour to develop training programmes, which are sensitive to the needs of Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI)<sup>1</sup> persons.

However, the reality is somehow different for a considerable proportion of refugees and migrants. We know from research that LGBTI migrants and asylum seekers already face multiple forms of discrimination. We also know that public authorities and migration/ asylum procedures are often not equipped to deal with their particular situation. This e-book is written within the framework of the [Epsilon project](#), a two year Erasmus+ (KA2) co-funded programme coordinated by the [IARS International Institute](#) (UK) and delivered in partnership with Anziane Non Solo (Italy), Movisie (Netherlands), KMOP (Greece) and CARDET (Cyprus).

Epsilon is responding to two current and urgent educational needs in Europe i.e. (1) the rise in migrant and refugee numbers (2) the persistent inequality and persecution of LGBTI individuals. Combined together these two characteristics make LGBTI migrants and refugees one of the most vulnerable groups in modern Europe. Our project aims to help address this issue by increasing the knowledge, skills and awareness of all those adult professionals and volunteers who come in contact with

<sup>1</sup> Epsilon uses the term LGBTI throughout, even though the measure or policy in place may only concern some categories of persons included in this group. Virtually no information could be collected on intersex asylum seekers.



them.

The partners come from key locations in Europe where the two cross-cutting themes of migration and LGBTI discrimination are particularly acute. While we will look at Italy, Greece and Cyprus as locations where not much progress has been made for LGBTI rights, we will explore the Netherlands and the UK as member states that have introduced progressive practices and policies in education and training for gay issues and rights. At the same time, Greece, Italy and Cyprus are case studies for migration flow.

The Epsilon partnership believes that the law alone cannot help LGBTI immigrants and asylum seekers whether this is applied at the EU or national levels. Trained as a lawyer, and having observed the deficiencies of the law myself, I have come to conclude that any legal or policy initiative must be complemented with civil action particularly when it comes to education and awareness raising. Therefore, Epsilon will generate on-the-ground, national and local educational initiative targeted at adult professionals and volunteers who work directly with LGBTI migrants and refugees.

This complementary work is intended to have an EU wide impact while being evidence based and user-led. To this end, we will construct educational tools that are based on the voices and real needs of LGBTI migrants and refugees. Through these voices, learning will take place in the form of face-to-face and online. This will be promoted both internally (between partners) and externally (nationally and EU wide).

## Impetus and background for this e-book

This is the first concrete output of the project. As a first step, the Epsilon partnership built the evidence base for its remaining activities including its training and educational courses and tools.

### This e-book exists in two versions:

- a longer version with five different chapters written by the partners in their native languages and reflecting their findings in their own countries.
- a consolidated version with the executive summaries of all chapters written in English.

The chapters were written following primary and secondary research that was carried out in the participating countries. The secondary research focused on a mixture of resources that are local to the partners and written in their own language. This makes this e-book unique given that very little has been done for research in Greek, Italian and Dutch. The findings of the national research projects and chapters are then brought into one for comparative learning and the identification of clear steps for developing the Epsilon educational tools.

In particular, using the results from this e-book, Epsilon will develop an innovative, evidence-based, user-led training methodology and contents targeting professionals and volunteers working in services for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in order to raise their awareness and sensitivity to the needs of all those with LGBTI background. The educational tools will enable the professionals to identify these LGBTI groups' most current and urgent needs some even reaching on issues of survival, dignity and respect. It will also help them challenge their own biases. It is intended that the results of Epsilon will

- reach widely outside of the participating countries through free, online access Europe-wide
- continue being delivered after the project's funding is finished
- reach groups in society that would not have been otherwise able to receive the face-to-face package and in print material
- reward and formally accredit its target audiences.

# User Scrutiny – the LGBTI Advisory Board

One of the core principles of the IARS International Institute is user involvement both in the design and implementation of projects. This belief is shared by all the Epsilon partners and in line with our ethos we have set up an [Advisory Board](#) made up of LGBTI migrants/ refugees, alongside academics and professionals working in the field. A key strength of the Epsilon partnership is our ability to make the connections between users and the experts and we will be using this to help guide what we do going forward.

The board has been drawn together from all five project partners, and interacts with the project digitally through a closed Facebook group and Skype meetings. Currently the advisory board is made up of 18 individuals from across 5 countries and includes academics, psychologists, social workers, students and LGBT campaigners. A key role for the Board is to work with the project's partner organisations to shape the research and training that will be developed throughout the project.

“In the aftermath of the refugee crisis that Europe is facing, I believe it is essential to have a close look to one of the most vulnerable category, namely LGBT refugees. I decided to participate in the Epsilon project to give my personal contribution in order to better understand the instances and the needs of LGBT refugees, and how we can implement good practices.”

(Epsilon Advisory Board Member)

## Key findings

From the outset, we confirmed our assumption that there is a dearth of research and evidence-based knowledge about LGBTI migrants and refugees. This is not only true in relation to their needs and realities but also their size and composition as a society group. For example, there are no official statistics on the number of asylum claims based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore, only a few EU Member States have specific national guidelines for interviewing LGBTI persons (although they might refer to those published by UNHCR)<sup>2</sup>, while most migration and asylum processes are not adequately adjusted to cater for issues impacting or resulting from individuals' LGBTI status.

It has also become apparent from the testimonies of the LGBTI migrants and refugees whom we interviewed that the most pervasive and indeed worrying form of discrimination that they face is when it is insidious and concealed. This makes it hard to detect and challenge through the law or education. For example, we have found that the UK government's Visa and Immigration (UKIV) department was, as one respondent described it, 'passively homophobic' due to the impact of a perceived default position that claims were being made on false grounds. Respondents commented that UKVI has very little awareness of the situation in claimants' home countries and that the Home Office thought it was acceptable to send LGBTI people back to countries where they are likely to be victims of violence and abuse.

One of the main findings of the UK research was that LGBTI migrants often feel more comfortable seeking support from organisations set up to serve the LGBTI community rather immigration specialists and public services. To accommodate this many LGBTI organisations are operating in areas where they were not set up to do, putting a strain on their time and resources. It has also led to recognition that immigration specialist organisations need to work harder to be more welcoming to LGBTI migrants. We have also found that home country networks often provide vital support for asylum seekers and other migrants on arrival, however for many LGBTI migrants to draw on this support means a continual denial of an essential part of who they are due to the fear of discrimination. As such, supporting LGBTI migrants to gain the skills necessary, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, in order for them to make broader connections with other networks has been seen as a vital. However concerns were also raised that certain sections of the 'gay scene' could also be intolerant causing LGBTI migrants to face further possible discrimination.

---

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, Guidelines on International Protection No. 9: Claims to Refugee Status based on Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity within the context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, 2012.



In Cyprus, the situation of LGBTI migrants and refugees is rather blurred. Statistics about them, or even LGBTI Cypriots, are missing from the annual state statistics sets. However, we do know that the number of young, non-EU migrants is growing in Cyprus (Republic of Cyprus Statistical Service, 2015). The literature review has also shown that the Cypriot society is one that has a long way to go to be considered tolerant to diversity, with evidence of discrimination on the basis of race as well as sexual orientation and gender identity (European Commission, 2015). Our interviews have showed that LGBTI migrants are reluctant to reveal their sexual orientation to their own communities based in Cyprus. Migrant support groups are often church-based, which makes revealing of identity an even more challenging task. Some migrant LGBTI organised groups exist, but these are very scarce. Nevertheless, LGBTI migrants feel great support from the relevant Cypriot Civil Society organisations, and important suggestions were collected to guide the next steps of the EpsiLon Project.

Similarly to Cyprus, the number of LGBTI people in Greece cannot be specified, because the data are considered as “personal” and are protected by the Hellenic Data Protection Authority (Ελληνική Αρχή Προστασίας Δεδομένων Προσωπικού Χαρακτήρα). Very little data was found in scientific literature focusing on LGBTI immigrants and refugees in Greece, which is reasonable, given that the phenomenon of immigration is recent in modern Greece, while the arrival of refugees and immigrants in Greece intensified over the past two years.

Moreover, the majority of LGBTI people are afraid of revealing their sexual orientation, as the societal attitude towards homosexuality in Greece is quite hostile. Although in recent years the Greek society has started accepting LGBTI people to a greater extent and anti-discrimination legislation protecting them exists, the people in question constitute one of the most vulnerable social groups and continue to become victims of an imperfect legal status including serious oversights and experience all forms of discrimination against the right to equal treatment (Πετροπούλου, 2011). Discrimination experienced by LGBTI people is evident not only in their private (personal and family) life, but also in public life (professional, educational, social). According to the Greek Ombudsman (Συνήγορος του Πολίτη, 2014), people with “different” sexual orientation often experience humiliating behaviour from superiors or colleagues (harassment). A number of interviews indicated that LGBTI immigrants experience multiple discrimination, because, in a society where Greek citizens have the absolute majority, they experience double stigma as LGBTI and as “foreigners”.

According to the fieldwork LGBTI immigrants and refugees in Greece feel much safer and comfortable compared to their home countries, in particular when they come from countries where their life is in danger either because of their sexual orientation or due to a prevailing state of war in countries such as Syria. Obviously, conditions in Greece are not perfect for LGBTI people but in comparison with their countries, LGBTI immigrants and refugees feel much better. We also found out that professionals who work with LGBTI immigrants and refugees have increased educational needs. To begin with, the growing need for training related to gender identity and sexual orientation was cited. Next, it is important that professionals are trained around issues concerning immigrants and refugees’ culture as well as how they perceive the concept of LGBTI and traditional gender stereotypes prevailing in their countries. In addition, the need for training on issues regarding LGBTI rights was reported, because there is poor knowledge not only from the relevant services but also from organisations assisting refugees and immigrants. Special emphasis was placed on the need for training volunteers as well as support staff.

The research in Netherlands revealed several good practices of support, and sometimes acceptance of LGBTI migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. The Dutch respondents felt supported by these good practices. Examples are the Cocktail buddy project, Transvisie (for transgender refugees), LGBTI Asylum support, the Secret Garden foundation, Veilige Haven (Safe Haven), Respect2Love Academy, Queer Welfare, the Prisma group and the ‘Pink Police Network’ of the Police Department. Movisie and Pharos are also national institutes that provide advice and knowledge to professionals and volunteers working with LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees. The Dutch Council for Refugees (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland) is an advocate for the interests of refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands. We also identified an innovative practice, “the Rainbow Refugees NL App”. It is the collaborative output of many organisations aiming to provide descriptive and up-to-date information via handsets and online.



However, six of the seven LGBTI people who we interviewed experienced little to no support when talking about their LGBTI identity in the asylum procedure. In the shelters, none of the respondents were open about their LGBTI identity.

Finally, Italy seems to be far behind in catering the needs of LGBTI migrants and refugees. An Amnesty International Report talks about severe human rights violations towards asylum seekers in general, such as mistreatments, violence and sexual humiliations (Amnesty International, 2016) For example, when it comes to LGBTI asylum seekers, it is pointed out that the practices adopted do not devote enough attention on filling the application by which the migrant has to declare the reasons of his intention to ask for international protection: time and attention needed in order to correctly inform the people upon the possibility to ask, for example, for asylum because of persecutions based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Moreover, we found out that migrants willing to ask for protection often get inadequate information due to both linguistic and cultural barriers. Often support workers are not able to explain what it means to ask for asylum for persecutions based on sexual orientation. The field research also confirmed the relational difficulties with the originating communities of migrants, whilst the role of LGBTI organizations is still limited both in terms of specific support given to migrant and as a place of socialization, where they can feel free to express themselves.

Overall, it seems that none of the Epsilon participating countries makes adequate preventative provisions for LGBTI migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and this includes guidelines on provision of specific healthcare and special accommodation facilities for LGBTI persons. Training on specific LGBTI vulnerabilities is provided either randomly and inconsistently or not at all. Relevant NGOs may provide some information leaflets, but usually not in all needed languages. It is also clear that due to fear of persecution and stigmatisation, most incidents of discrimination, violence or harassment are not reported and are not recorded as such.

## Key recommendations

- Better equalities awareness within the LGBTI scene to improve migrant integration: Although not pervasive, there were indications that the LGBTI scene can be both discriminatory and exclusionary. Exclusions are usually economic, however the discrimination is often due to prejudice especially among older generations. More work needs to be done for LGBTI migrants to be accepted within LGBTI communities.
- LGBTI groups should receive immigration training: More and more LGBTI specialist organisations are being called upon to help LGBTI migrants with immigration cases with very little training. This change seems to be driven by LGBTI migrants feeling more comfortable receiving support from those who understand their sexual or gender identity rather than specialist immigration organisations. Flexibility will need to be ensured by offering both face to face and online training.
- Immigration support organisations and immigration solicitors should receive training to increase their LGBTI sensitivity. Professional need to be able to identify and overcome language and cultural barriers in order to make migrants aware of the possibility to claim international protection as LGBTI per se and that they are aware of the legal and cultural contexts of migrants' countries of origin as far as LGBTIs are concerned.

## Next Epsilon steps

Given that the Epsilon Project is essentially about adult education and training, the following training suggestions are recommended based on the findings of this e-book:

- Develop a training package for professionals and volunteers in **LGBTI focused organisations** to support them understand the immigration process better and how to access more specialist support.

- Develop a training package for professionals and volunteers in **migrant focused organisations and shelters** that improves their awareness and sensitivity of LGBTI support areas
- Support professionals and volunteers in **LGBTI and migrant focused organisations and shelters** to be able to offer support to help non English speaking LGBT migrants become empowered to make life choices that best suit them.
- Awareness raising in relation to sexual identity and its interplay with culture for professionals and volunteering working in the legal and translation professions
- Help **all organisations working with LGBT migrants** understand how to support their clients balance the conflicts between home culture and their sexual or gender identity.

#### The training courses should include:

- Topics concerning sexual orientation and gender identity.
- LGBTI rights, as well as legislation and guidelines, which refer to asylum and accommodation procedures of LGBTI immigrants and refugees.
- International good practices and cases with regard to the accommodation of LGBTI immigrants and refugees.
- Topics dealing with civilization, culture and history but also gender stereotypes of LGBTI immigrants and refugees' countries.
- Terminology and politically correct language issues, so as LGBTI people would not feel embarrassed or offended.

# FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE UK

JAMES ALEXANDER  
THE IARS INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK chapter details the experiences and situation of LGBTI migrants attempting to navigate the UK asylum process and trying to settle and build their lives in a new country. The chapter draws on the existing academic and activist research on the issue as well as IARS International Institute's own field research with LGBTI migrants and professionals working in the sector.

### Key findings from the literature review

The UK project draws on the existing academic research, reports from frontline organisations and also our own fieldwork. The summary of existing literature largely on three areas:

1. The treatment of LGBTI asylum seekers by UK Visa and Immigration and its predecessor the UK Border Agency.
2. The impact of conflicts between sexual or gender identity and home culture that persist even when LGBTI migrants relocate to countries like the UK
3. Issues with inclusivity of migrants within the UK 'gay scene'

### Key findings from the fieldwork

Our own fieldwork mirrored much of what has been identified in the literature review and raised concerns that the UK government's UK Visa and Immigration department was, as one respondent described it, 'passively homophobic' due to the impact of a perceived default position that claims were being made on false grounds. Respondents commented that UKVI has very little awareness of the situation in claimants' home countries and that the Home Office thought it was acceptable to send people back to countries where they are likely to be victims of violence and abuse.

There were also concerns raised about the actions of UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI). Although there were concessions that UKVI had made improvements and was better than their predecessor, UKVI's practice was still a major concern. Case managers' decisions and the agency's actions did not recognise the danger posed in home countries or the impact of precarious living and the treatment in detention has on LGBTI individuals. The information on which case managers were making decisions on did not reflect the realities of life on the ground and when concerns were raised by more on the ground organisations, this seemed to be ignored.

When settling into life in the UK, LGBTI migrants often face dis-

crimination due to both their migrant status and their sexual or gender identity. Home country networks often provide vital support for asylum seekers and other migrants on arrival, however for many LGBTI migrants to draw on this support means a continual denial of an essential part of who they are due to the fear of discrimination. As such, supporting LGBTI migrants to gain the skills necessary, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, in order for them to make broader connections with other networks has been seen as a vital. However concerns were also raised that certain sections of the 'gay scene' could also be intolerant causing LGBTI migrants to face further possible discrimination.

One of the main findings of the research was that LGBTI migrants often feel more comfortable seeking support from organisations set up to serve the LGBTI community rather immigration specialists. To accommodate this many LGBTI organisations are operating in areas where they were not set up to do, putting a strain on their time and resources. It has also led to recognition that immigration specialist organisations need to work harder to be more welcoming to LGBTI migrants.

Conflicts between home culture and LGBTI or gender identity came across strongly in the data and often led to the compartmentalising of identities. However, alongside discrimination from their home cultural networks, the research highlighted that LGBTI migrants can face discrimination within the UK Gay scene. This is an indication that those who experience prejudice and discrimination can also be perpetrators of the same, and three of the professionals interviewed felt that work needs to be done within both migrant and LGBTI cultures to ensure they are more accepting of each other.

Possibly the two key factors that hadn't been previously identified by the existing research is the importance of ESOL and the fact that LGBTI migrants seem to prefer support from LGBTI organisations above immigration specialists.

Good levels of English is seen as important to help bring agency to LGBTI migrants giving them more opportunity to navigate through different networks and access more appropriate support.

## Key recommendations

The research has identified a number of issues that need to be addressed at a policy and also a practical level.

### Practical Suggestions:

**Better equalities awareness within the LGBTI scene to improve migrant integration:** Although not pervasive, there were indications that the UK LGBTI Scene can be both discriminatory and exclusionary. Exclusions are usually economic, however the discrimination is often due to prejudice especially among older generations. More work needs to be done for LGBTI migrants to be accepted within UK based LGBTI communities.

**LGBTI groups should receive immigration training:** More and more LGBTI specialist organisations are being called upon to help LGBTI migrants with immigration cases with very little training. This change seems to be driven by LGBTI migrants feeling more comfortable receiving support from those who understand their sexual or gender identity rather than specialist immigration organisations. This could be achieved through either face to face or online training.

**Immigration support organisations and immigration solicitors should receive training to increase their LGBTI sensitivity:** There is a perception that immigration specialist organisations are not always sensitive to LGBTI issues. This is partly due to the experiences of LGBTI migrants when accessing these services and also due to the perceived perception of LGBTI migrants who see people from their home country working for the organisation and fear that they will act in an insensitive way.

## Policy Suggestions:

**Revise the way LGBTI Asylum claims are processed:** Although the research has identified that the Home Office has made some progress in the way in which it handles LGBTI asylum claims, a great deal more progress is needed. Two of the main areas that need addressing urgently are:

- The use of detention seems inappropriate and should be ended.
- The culture of assuming a claimant is lying causing an extraordinary burden of proof has led to inappropriate and degrading evidence to be sought to prove a claimant's sexuality. UKVI should ensure that European and its own guidelines relating to this are enforced.

**Quicker decision making:** Whilst waiting for decisions on asylum and immigration decisions. LGBTI migrants are at risk of being abused physically and emotionally on top of the anxiety of having someone else decide on your future. Cases where someone is at increased risk of mental or physical harm should therefore be dealt with quicker.

**Review and amend country information:** There is a disparity between the experiences of asylum seekers in their home country and Home Office in country guidelines. The Home Office should update its information to better reflect the experiences of LGBTI people, rather than simply relying on official positions of particular countries.

**Invest in ESOL:** A good standard of English is essential if LGBTI migrants are going to socialise outside of their home culture. Cuts to ESOL provision and the LGBTI insensitive way it can be delivered makes it difficult for those who have poor levels of English to access training courses. Additional resources should be invested to make ESOL courses more widely available and more should be done to make ESOL provision more LGBTI appropriate.

**Invest in Identity Support:** Currently LGBTI migrants often face the prospect of adopting a western culture at the expense of their home culture and support networks in an attempt to fully embrace their sexuality or gender identity. In reality this means choosing one identity at the expense of the other. There needs to be more support to help LGBTI migrants understand how to embrace both.

Given the magnitude of the issues presented below the Epsilon Project has to identify areas that it can influence directly and those areas where other projects are better placed to intervene.



Cyprus is a country that ranks quite low in comparison to other EU countries in the national, legal, and political human rights situation of LGBTI persons. At the same time the fabric of the population is composed by foreign citizens for more than 15% of its composition, while the number of young, non-EU migrants is growing. In such a society, where the pace of social reforms needs to catch up with the rate of migration and societal demands of the LGBTI community, it is therefore imperative that issues relating to LGBTI migrants are addressed urgently.

The EpsiLon Project, implemented in Cyprus by CARDET takes on the challenge to address these issues. By informing and educating the public in general through the dissemination of this project, but also more particularly by equipping professionals or volunteers that come in contact with LGBTI migrants and refugees in, the role of EpsiLon project in the Cypriot society and the opportunities that this creates is great. The objective of this report is to identify the situation in Cyprus today with regards to LGBTI and migrant issues and make suggestions in order to guide the next steps of the EpsiLon project's work in a way where the results are relevant, timely and useful to the project's target group, and for the Cypriot reality as well as the reality of all the other project partners through the compiling of the cumulative results from all country reports.

While the project is aimed for both migrants and refugees, this report focuses mainly on migration, with the interviews addressing LGBTI migrants, but with references made to refugee issues in Cyprus in order to substantiate the need to focus on migrants. The reason the study focuses on migration is based on the fact that, following thorough research, the number of LGBTI refugees in Cyprus is too small for suggestions and recommendations to be deduced. Locating and contacting LGBTI migrants also provided a more convenient sample for interviews to be conducted, while focusing on LGBTI migrants constitutes a more relevant topic for Cyprus since it reflects on a greater number of people and a biggest part of the Cypriot society.

For the purposes of completing this report, the following methods were employed, which include both a literature review and fieldwork. To complete the literature review CARDET researched reports, studies, statistics, laws and policies of the state. The literature was selected based on the data availability on the subjects of LGBTI issues and migration in Cyprus from the relevant competent authorities, and other recent, updated and legitimate sources such as appropriate government departments, relevant national and European organisations as well as international organisations.

To complete the fieldwork CARDET organised a Focus Group meeting as well as individual interviews with LGBTI migrants or people in close contact with LGBTI migrants. Regarding the Focus Group, this was constituted by 5 professionals, volunteers working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers or

# FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CYPRUS

VASILIKI ANASTASI  
CARDET

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

volunteers on LGBTI issues, Non-Governmental Organisation representatives (on Migrant or Refugee and/or LGBTI issues), ensuring an adequate blend of sources and information. The discussion concerned migrants and refugees, in an attempt to investigate where the study would focus. Some basic information on the Focus Group participants is the following:

1. Clinical Psychologist with experience on migrant and refugee issues in Cyprus
2. Clinical Psychologist with experience on migrant and refugee issues in Cyprus
3. Member of the Accept CY board
4. Social Worker at the Future Worlds Centre
5. Psychology Student, Intern at the Future Worlds Centre

In order to also examine the specific needs that the LGBTI migrant group in Cyprus has, interviews with people who belong to this community or who are in direct contact with it were conducted. The selection of the interviewees and the interviewers was made during the Focus Group Meeting. Some basic information on the interviewees is the following:

1. Homosexual man, migrant from Bangladesh
2. Heterosexual woman, from the Philippines, in direct contact with the Filipino LGBTI community in Cyprus

## Key findings from the literature review

Statistics about the number of LGBTI migrants in Cyprus, or even LGBTI Cypriots, are missing from the annual state statistics sets. In the absence of such data, best effort was made to illustrate the situation in Cyprus based on the information that does exist.

The number of young, non-EU migrants is growing in Cyprus, an information that is of interest to the focus of this study due to the relevance in the demographic (Republic of Cyprus Statistical Service, 2015). The literature review has also shown that the Cypriot society is one that has a long way to go to be considered tolerant to diversity, with evidence of discrimination on the basis of race as well as sexual orientation and gender identity (European Commission, 2015).

Considerable societal and legal steps have been made during the past couple of years in Cyprus with regards to combating inequality in relevance to sexual orientation and gender identity. The first Pride Parade was organised with success in 2014, with more than 60% of the citizens of the capital supporting its continuation in a poll (ILGA Europe, 2016). At the same, the criminalisation of homophobic and transphobic rhetoric and incitement to violence or hatred constitutes an important step. At the same time recent civil union bill indicates a subtle change for the better as regards human rights and marks the beginning of social change in a society that will soon be asked to make space and accept these couples as its members.

## Key findings from the fieldwork

Nevertheless, both the literature review, but mostly substantiated through the field research, in Cyprus homophobia has been shown to manifest itself in public debate and in daily macroaggression, without any known consequences, even though there is legal framework governing it, while at the same time positive LGBTI role-models are absent (Cyprus Family Planning Association & Accept-LGBT Cyprus, 2012).

LGBTI migrants are reluctant to reveal their sexual orientation to their own communities based in Cyprus. Migrant support groups are often church-based, which makes revealing of identity an even more challenging task. Some migrant LGBTI organised groups exist, but these are very scarce. LGBTI migrants feel great support from the relevant Cypriot Civil Society organisations, and important suggestions were collected to guide the next steps of the Epsilon Project.

# Key recommendations

The report shows mixed and diverse results dealing with issues concerning sexual orientation in the LGBTII migrant community in Cyprus. The parallel lines that can be drawn however, lead to policy recommendations that mainly refer to the better implementation of existing legal and institutional framework. An additional need is that of statistics for LGBTIIs living in Cyprus, in order to better substantiate future steps.

On the next steps of the Epsilon Project, the report's findings suggest that the needs of migrant LGBTIIs are properly taken into consideration, and that staff in the competent authorities are trained, using blended training (both face-to-face and online), focusing on activities that bring these authorities to put themselves in the position of the LGBTII migrant, as lack of understanding of these issues have been identified. It has also been suggested that disseminating of this project's activities can be very beneficial for increasing awareness raising on these issues.

Cyprus Family Planning Association, & Accept-LGBTI Cyprus. (2012). *Sexual Orientation in Cyprus: Mapping the Sociopolitical Climate, Experiences and Needs*. Nicosia: Cyprus Family Planning Association & Accept-LGBTI Cyprus.

European Commission. (2015). *Special Eurobarometer 437: Discrimination in the EU in 2015*. European Union.

ILGA Europe. (2016). *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe*. Belgium: ILGA Europe.

Republic of Cyprus Statistical Service. (2015). *Demographic Report 2015*. Nicosia: Printing Office of the Republic of Cyprus.

## REFERENCES

# FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GREECE

ELENI SAKELLARIOU  
FAMILY AND CHILDCARE CENTRE (KMOP)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Greek chapter presents the main findings of the Report on LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersexual) refugees and immigrants in Greece, which is written in the Greek language. The report reviews the current situation regarding immigrants and refugees as well as LGBTI people living in Greece, and then the living conditions and needs of LGBTI refugees and immigrants in Greece are set out. This report is part of the transnational survey carried out in Great Britain, the Netherlands, Greece, Cyprus and Italy, within the framework of the project “EpsiLon - Equipping Professionals for Supporting LGBTI Refugees”, which is co-financed by the Erasmus+ European Programme. The EpsiLon project aims at developing a training programme which is intended for professionals and volunteers who work with LGBTI immigrants and refugees with a view to improving the provision of services to the aforementioned group of people.

In order to record and analyse the current situation in Greece concerning immigrants and refugees, LGBTI people, as well as LGBTI refugees and immigrants, qualitative research was conducted according to the following methodology:

**Secondary research** – desk research: the conduct of a secondary research was deemed necessary in order to report on and fully understand Greek reality in relation to the issue under consideration. Furthermore, secondary research was essential, as it provided guidelines for planning the subsequent field research. Regarding the collection of secondary data, a relevant Greek and international literature review was carried out.

**Primary research** - field research using the method of personal semi-structured interviews, through open-ended questions. This particular method was chosen as the most appropriate on the one hand to cross-check secondary data, on the other hand to enrich and specialise existing knowledge, mainly focusing on the gaps observed on the subject matter. Besides, conducting personal interviews contributed to highlighting special aspects of the issue not identified or pointed out in existing literature. Overall, four (4) personal interviews with professionals and volunteers were conducted. More specifically, participants included one psychologist working in a NGO dealing with LGBTI-related issues and actively supports LGBTI people, two coordinators of refugee accommodation sites, which are coordinated by international NGOs, one volunteer getting involved in a NGO intended for vulnerable social groups, inter alia, immigrants and LGBTI people. Moreover, a personal interview with one LGBTI refugee woman in Greece was carried out. On that point, it should be noted that it was very difficult to find LGBTI refugees who would be willing to take part in the research; for this reason, there was only one LGBTI refugee participation. Despite the low number of participants in the field research, the collected information made a substantial contribution to recording the needs of LGBTI immigrants and refugees in Greece, as well as the needs of professionals who cater for them.

# Key findings from the literature review

Greece received a very large number of economic immigrants in the 1990s, as a result of the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. The majority of immigrants came from Albania, Bulgaria and Romania. Next, followed immigrants from African and Asian countries. Immigration flows into Greece continued with the same intensity in the decade 2000 – 2010. According to 2011 Census data (Hellenic Statistical Authority/Ελληνική Στατιστική Αρχή, 2014α), immigrant population amounts to 912,000 and constitutes 8,4% of the total population of the country. According to a recent special survey of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2014β), the main reason for immigrating to Greece is job search (48,0%), while the second reason for immigration included family reasons (27,6%). “Other” reasons follow (6%), 3,4% of the participants stated that “found a job in Greece and came to work”, 1,2% came to study and 0,3% came to Greece for international protection reasons, asylum request.

In the meanwhile, the migration landscape in Greece changed form, due to the refugee crisis, in 2015, when an increased number of refugees and immigrants started to move towards the European Union, via the Mediterranean Sea or South-eastern Europe, mainly through Greece and Italy, so as to ask for asylum primarily in countries of Central and Northern Europe. Given that, Greece, as southeaster border of the European Union, was required to cope with the inflow of an immense number of refugees and immigrants, most of whom originate from Syria, which is plagued by civil war, and other countries experiencing unrest and conflict.

The figures concerning refugees’ arrivals in Greece are indicative, as they were registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2017). In 2015, 856,723 refugees arrived, while in 2014 the respective number amounted to 41,038. In 2016, the number of refugees coming to Greece was 173,450.

With regard to the reasons why refugees were made to leave their own countries, according to a recent survey of the Association of Greek Regions (Ένωση Περιφερειών Ελλάδας) and Kapa Research (Κάπα Research) (2016), 69,9% of the participants mentioned the danger of their own life or their family members’ lives, 19,6% reported military service avoidance or involvement in war avoidance, 18,7% referred to financial reasons (work, poverty), 12,3% stated limited civil and political rights, 11% mentioned family reunion reasons and 10,5% pointed out shortages of essentials/infrastructure (food, accommodation, water).

Refugees consider Greece as a transit country and not as a final destination country. Only 0,4% of the refugees wishes to stay in Greece, while 68% of the refugees want to go to Germany (the Association of Greek Regions and Kapa Research, 2016). The closure of the borders, as well as restrictive measures taken against the entry of refugees in countries like FYROM, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria, which were implemented in 2016 resulted in the entrapment of thousands of refugees in Greece. More than 46,000 refugees remained stranded in Greece, according to data collected by 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016 (Amnesty International/Διεθνής Αμνηστία, 2016). Due to this fact, many of the trapped refugees applied for asylum in Greece, and according to statistical data of the Greek Asylum Service (Υπηρεσία Ασύλου, 2017), asylum applications noted a significant increase reaching 51,091.

The number of LGBTI people in Greece cannot be specified, because, as highlighted by Μπαλούρδος και Μουρίκη (2012), the data in terms of quantity are considered as “personal” and are protected by the Hellenic Data Protection Authority (Ελληνική Αρχή Προστασίας Δεδομένων Προσωπικού Χαρακτήρα). Moreover, the majority of LGBTI people are afraid of revealing their sexual orientation, as the societal attitude towards homosexuality in Greece is quite hostile.

Although in recent years Greek society has started accepting LGBTI people to a greater extent and anti-discrimination legislation protecting them exists, the people in question constitute one of the most vulnerable social groups and continue to become victims of an imperfect legal status including serious oversights and experience all forms of discrimination against the right to equal treatment (Πετροπούλου, 2011). According to Eurobarometer (the European Commission/Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή, 2015), discrimination on the



basis of sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, bisexual) and gender identity (transgender -trans- or transsexual) form the most common types of discrimination in Greece at 71% and 73% respectively, while the corresponding EU-28 average is 58% και 56%. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that, according to the most recent survey of FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Οργανισμός Θεμελιωδών Δικαιωμάτων της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης, 2014), which was delivered in 2012, almost half of the LGBTI respondents in Greece (48%) have faced discrimination or harassment because of their sexual orientation in the last 12 months from the year of survey writing.

Discrimination experienced by LGBTI people is evident not only in their private (personal and family) life but also in public life (professional, educational, social). More specifically, according to the Greek Ombudsman (Συνήγορος του Πολίτη, 2014), people with “different” sexual orientation often experience humiliating behaviour from superiors or colleagues (harassment). Then, as mentioned by the Greek Ombudsman (2014), a field in which serious problems regarding LGBTI are recorded is the education sector, in relation both to teachers’ and students’ awareness-raising and to school bullying (homosexual bullying). In general, incidents of violence and attacks against LGBTI people are too intense.

Equally worrying is the fact that, as reported by the Greek Ombudsman (2013), phenomena of racist violence have increased in Greece, especially in cases that they are combined with organized and systematic action of extremist groups against members of vulnerable or excluded social groups, including LGBTI.

People belonging to the category of Trans are those who are most affected by discrimination, family rejection and public humiliation, given the strong patriarchal values and gender stereotypes prevailing in Greece (KMOP - Family and Childcare Centre & Municipality of Neapoli – Sykies, 2016).

Greece is still behind in issues regarding respect and protection of LGBTI human rights. However, important steps are being taken which may improve the situation, like the recent adoption of registered partnership (Law 4356/2015) between two individuals, regardless of their sex, according to which the rights of same sex couples entering into registered partnership are equalized to those of married couples.

Very little data was found in scientific literature focusing on LGBTI immigrants and refugees in Greece, which is reasonable, given that the phenomenon of immigration is recent in modern Greece, while the arrival of refugees and immigrants in Greece intensified over the past two years. No population statistics could be detected concerning LGBTI immigrants and refugees. As mentioned by OLKE (ΟΛΚΕ, 2006), LGBTI immigrants experience multiple discrimination, because, in a society where Greek citizens have the absolute majority, they experience double stigma as LGBTI and as “foreigners”.

On the basis of Presidential Decree 141 (2013), LGBTI people are offered the opportunity to request international protection (asylum), as long as they are persecuted in their home countries for their sexual orientation or gender identity. Also, there are no precise figures on LGBTI refugees/asylum seekers countries of origin in Greece, but it is reasonable to assume that the majority of them come from wider Middle East countries, which are too hostile towards LGBTI people. Based on Αλεξανδρή and Μάζης article (2016), generally LGBTI immigrants /refugees do not request that they stay in Greece, but see it as a transit country.

## Key findings from the fieldwork

The settlement process of LGBTI immigrants and refugees is not significantly different from all the others’ regarding the typical part. Neither they receive some kind of different immigration status. On the other hand, it was observed that their sexual orientation increases the likelihood of granting asylum, particularly in cases where LGBTI applicants come from countries, in which, if sexual orientation or gender identity deviates from the norm, it is considered as a criminal offence resulting even in death penalty.

As regards LGBTI immigrants and refugees status in Greece nowadays, generally it is not much different from the rest immigrants and refugees’ status, meaning that they live in the same camps, under the same



conditions. However, LGBTI refugees and immigrants face various problems due to their sexual orientation, like social exclusion, verbal and physical aggression by their compatriots and foreigners and even rape attempts in accommodation structures have been reported.

As for the LGBTI reasons for immigration in Greece, firstly mentioned were the difficulties and the persecutions they experience in their home countries, because of their sexual identity. In their countries they cannot live and express themselves freely, they have difficulty in finding a job, they often become victims of violence and their lives are at risk.

LGBTI immigrants and refugees feel much safer and comfortable in Greece compared to their home countries, in particular when they come from countries where their life is in danger either because of their sexual orientation or due to a prevailing state of war in countries such as Syria. Obviously, conditions in Greece are not perfect for LGBTI people but in comparison with their countries, LGBTI immigrants and refugees feel much better.

Professionals who work with LGBTI immigrants and refugees have increased educational needs. To begin with, the growing need for training related to gender identity and sexual orientation was cited. Next, it is important that professionals are trained around issues concerning immigrants and refugees’ culture as well as how they perceive the concept of LGBTI and traditional gender stereotypes prevailing in their countries. In addition, the need for training on issues regarding LGBTI rights was reported, because there is poor knowledge not only from the relevant services but also from organisations assisting refugees and immigrants. Special emphasis was placed on the need for training volunteers as well as support staff.

## Key recommendations

The current survey indicates that LGBTI immigrants and refugees face many difficulties and barriers. They belong to one of the most vulnerable groups of our times given the increase in the number of immigrants and refugees and the refugee crisis across Europe in recent years. They have been accommodated to a country which is called upon to deal with this phenomenon without any previous experience and which has assumed the heavy burden of the immigration and refugee crisis. It is therefore expected that they experience the same difficulties and problems addressed by the rest of refugees. At the same time, LGBTI people settle in a country where inequalities and discrimination against LGBTI continue to exist, while phenomena of homophobia are particularly acute in recent years. Thus, LGBTI immigrants and refugees in Greece constitute one of the most marginalized groups, although most of them feel much safer in Greece than in their home countries, where they experience many difficulties due to their sexual orientation. For that reason, LGBTI refugees and immigrants in Greece need more support and assistance, in order to be socially and culturally integrated and make a fresh start under safe and dignified conditions. On the basis of the above-mentioned considerations and taking into account the participants’ views and experiences in field research, the following recommendations which could improve the LGBTI immigrants and refugees status at both national and European level, are put forward:

Key Recommendations	National level	European level
Improvement of accommodation structures and living conditions of LGBTI refugees and immigrants, so as they feel safe	✓	
Personalised psychological and social support, considering the special needs of LGBTI people, aiming at coping with problems they face, as well as integrating them into the new reality, society and country. Particular emphasis should be laid on Trans people who experience more difficulties, not only during the application for asylum process but also during their stay in the host country.	✓	✓

Development of training and counselling programmes, based on special needs and skills of LGBTI refugees and immigrants in order to be integrated in the job market.	✓	✓
Introduction and implementation of specific methodologies and guidelines which concern reception and support of LGBTI refugees and immigrants	✓	✓
Information and awareness-raising of wider society regarding this particularly vulnerable group	✓	✓

Besides, as regards the EpsiLon project, the training of professionals and volunteers, who deliver services to LGBTI immigrants and refugees, so that they can gain a deep insight of their needs and problems, is highly recommended. Training courses should include:

- Topics concerning sexual orientation and gender identity.
- LGBTI rights, as well as legislation and guidelines, which refer to asylum and accommodation procedures of LGBTI immigrants and refugees.
- International good practices and cases with regard to the accommodation of LGBTI immigrants and refugees.
- Topics dealing with civilization, culture and history but also gender stereotypes of LGBTI immigrants and refugees' countries.
- Terminology and politically correct language issues, so as LGBTI people would not feel embarrassed or offended.

## REFERENCES

- Αλεξανδρής, Π. & Μάζη, Μ. (2016, Ιανουάριος). LGBTI Πρόσφυγες και Μετανάστες. *Antivirus (65)*, 32-37. Ανακτήθηκε από <http://avmag.gr/60350/antivirus-65/>
- Διεθνής Αμνηστία. (2016). Παγιδευμένοι στην Ελλάδα: Μια Προσφυγική Κρίση που θα Μπορούσε να Αποφευχθεί. Ανακτήθηκε 3 Μαρτίου 2017, από <https://www.amnesty.gr/news/ektheseis>
- Ελληνική Στατιστική Αρχή. (2014α). Απογραφή Πληθυσμού-Κατοικιών 2011: Δημογραφικά και Κοινωνικά Χαρακτηριστικά του Μόνιμου Πληθυσμού της Χώρας Σύμφωνα με την Αναθεώρηση των Αποτελεσμάτων της Απογραφής Πληθυσμού-Κατοικιών 2011 στις 20/3/2014. Ανακτήθηκε 10 Μαρτίου 2017, από <http://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SAM03/->
- Ελληνική Στατιστική Αρχή. (2014β). Ειδική Έρευνα για τη Θέση στην Αγορά Εργασίας των Μεταναστών και των Άμεσων Απογόνων τους. Ανακτήθηκε 10 Μαρτίου 2017, από <http://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/pop>
- Ένωση Περιφερειών Ελλάδας & Κάπα Research. (2016). Έρευνα-Μελέτη της ΕΝ.Π.Ε. για το προσφυγικό-μεταναστευτικό. Ανακτήθηκε 28 Φεβρουαρίου 2017, από <http://www.enpe.gr/meletes-programmata/2016/03/31/ereina-meleti-tis-enpe-gia-to-prosfigiko-metanasteitiko-refygees-survey-english-fluechtlinge-umfrage-deutsch.aspx>
- Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή. (2015). Ειδικό Ευρωβαρόμετρο 437: Διακρίσεις στην ΕΕ το 2015. Ανακτήθηκε 23 Φεβρουαρίου 2017, από <http://ec.europa.eu/COMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2077>
- FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2014). *EU LGBTI survey - European Union lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survey - Main results*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved February 22, 2017, from <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/eu-LGBTI-survey-european-union-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-survey-main>

- ΚΜΟΡ - Family and Childcare Centre & Municipality of Neapoli – Sykies. (2016). *Transnational and Comparative Research on Homo- and Transphobia in Small and Medium Cities across Europe: Thessaloniki City Report*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Μπαλούρδος, Δ. & Μουρίκη Α. (Επιμ.) (2012). *Καταπολέμηση των Διακρίσεων: Τάσεις, Προκλήσεις, Πολιτικές*. Αθήνα: Παπαζήση. Ανακτήθηκε 23 Φεβρουαρίου 2017, από [http://ekke.gr/ocd/?page\\_id=18](http://ekke.gr/ocd/?page_id=18)
- Νόμος 4356/2015. «Σύμφωνο Συμβίωσης». ΦΕΚ Α 181/24.12.2015. Ανακτήθηκε 23 Φεβρουαρίου 2017, από <http://www.et.gr/index.php/2013-01-28-14-06-23/2013-01-29-08-13-13>
- ΟΛΚΕ - Ομοφυλοφιλική Λεσβιακή Κοινότητα Ελλάδας. (2006). Το πρόγραμμα της ΟΛΚΕ. Ανακτήθηκε 22 Φεβρουαρίου 2017, από <https://www.olke.org/to-πρόγραμμα-της-ολκε/>
- Πετροπούλου, Ε. (2011). Νομική κατάσταση των ατόμων με ομοερωτικό σεξουαλικό προσανατολισμό. Ανακτήθηκε 23 Φεβρουαρίου 2017, από <https://www.olke.org/κείμενα/νομική-κατάσταση-των-ατόμων-με-ομοερω/>
- Προεδρικό Διάταγμα 141/2013. «Προσαρμογή της ελληνικής νομοθεσίας προς τις διατάξεις της Οδηγίας 2011/95/ΕΕ του Ευρωπαϊκού Κοινοβουλίου και του Συμβουλίου της 13ης Δεκεμβρίου 2011 (L 337) σχετικά με τις απαιτήσεις για την αναγνώριση και το καθεστώς των αλλοδαπών ή των ανιθαγενών ως δικαιούχων διεθνούς προστασίας, για ένα ενιαίο καθεστώς για τους πρόσφυγες ή για τα άτομα που δικαιούνται επικουρική προστασία και για το περιεχόμενο της παρεχόμενης προστασίας (αναδιατύπωση)». ΦΕΚ Α 226/21.10.2013. Ανακτήθηκε 23 Φεβρουαρίου 2017, από <http://www.et.gr/index.php/2013-01-28-14-06-23/search-laws>
- Συνήγορος του Πολίτη. (2014). Ποιον έχω απέναντί μου: Οδηγός διαφορετικότητας για δημοσίους υπαλλήλους με σκοπό την καταπολέμηση των διακρίσεων. Ανακτήθηκε 23 Φεβρουαρίου 2017, από <https://www.synigoros.gr/?i=stp.el.leaflets#diaforetikotita>
- Συνήγορος του Πολίτη. (2013). Το φαινόμενο της ρατσιστικής βίας στην Ελλάδα και η αντιμετώπισή του. Ανακτήθηκε 23 Φεβρουαρίου 2017, από <https://www.synigoros.gr/?i=stp.el.eidikesektheseis&year-filter=2013&page=1>
- Υπηρεσία Ασύλου. (2017). Στατιστικά Στοιχεία Υπηρεσίας Ασύλου (από 7.6.2013 έως 31.1.2017). Ανακτήθηκε 6 Μαρτίου 2017, από [http://asylo.gov.gr/?page\\_id=143](http://asylo.gov.gr/?page_id=143)
- UNHCR. (2017). Mediterranean Situation: Greece. *Refugees Operational Data Portal*. Retrieved March 3, 2017 from <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>

## REFERENCES

# FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE NETHERLANDS

JOLANDA ELFERINK  
MICHELLE EMMEN

MOVISIE, NETHERLANDS CENTRE FOR  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dutch chapter represents the start of the Epsilon project, the Erasmus + KA2 Programme of the European Union, in which we cooperate with Italy, Cyprus, Greece, Great Britain and the Netherlands to develop a face-to-face training and an e-learning module, to equip professionals for supporting LGBTI refugees. The focus of the Dutch research is on LGBTI asylum seekers – people who came to the Netherlands or to Europe and are still waiting for their residence status – and on LGBTI newcomers and refugees with a legal status, with a non-European origin and having arrived in the Netherlands during the last 2 years. The main question *‘what are the needs of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees and the professionals and volunteers who work with them, with regard to increasing the support for and acceptance of those LGBTI people, and what are the experiences with interventions that contribute to this goal? Do the people involved feel these interventions work, and what could work according to literature?’* has been researched by means of:

- A Dutch literature search for existing good practices in the field of support to LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees, and what works to increase acceptance according to literature.
- A qualitative field study in which we interviewed three LGBTI asylum seekers and four refugees about their experiences with and need of support and acceptance, and two focus groups with seven professionals and six volunteers in which we raised the same questions.

## Key findings from the literature review

### LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees in the Netherlands

LGBTI people flee from their countries of origin in order to live in safety and freedom. In the Netherlands, the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) executes asylum procedures and decides in individual cases whether someone with LGBTI identity will receive a residence permit. Therefore, it is important that people indicate that they fled because of their sexual preference or gender identity, but this does not always happen, because of bad experiences with authorities in their home countries (in 77 countries around the world homosexuality is punishable). During the asylum procedure in the Netherlands, the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) will provide shelter, subsistence and access to basic provisions such as health care. In the reception centres, most LGBTI people will not express their LGBTI feelings because they are afraid. They also experience mental problems and social

isolation, because they feel not accepted in the centres.

## What works according to the literature to increase the support to LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees

Recommendations to professionals and volunteers for improving the support to LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees include:

- make sure that professionals and volunteers are informed about LGBTI and cultural background
- match the 'language' of the asylum seeker or refugee,
- radiate that the organisation is LGBTI friendly,
- bring LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees in contact with each other and with other LGBTI people,
- refer to (interested) organisations that support LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees (make sure to have a social map and to work together),
- name LGBTI people explicitly in safety and antidiscrimination protocols,
- distinguish which methods work in information exchange,
- paint a realistic story of the situation in the Netherlands to LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees,
- offer online information in various languages,
- provide safety in cases of threat and violence (and work together on this with partners in the field of security, for instance the police) and
- pay attention to LGBTI in the civic integration of people with residence status.

## What works according to the literature in increasing the acceptance of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees

Information on LGBTI to refugees with a residence status seems more successful than information to people who are still in the asylum procedure phase. Informing newcomers with the aim to increase the acceptance of LGBTI will be more successful when sympathy, empathy, and a positive social standard are emphasized. For instance, by using (films on) stories and experiences of LGBTI people that provide a match with regard to religion, culture and age so that non-LGBTI people are able to understand the situation themselves. Communicating a positive social standard by people with authority and stating that more and more people from their specific ethnic group are positive about LGBTI people also helps.

## Good practices in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has several good practices to support, and sometimes also to accept LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees. The respondents felt supported by these good practices. Examples are the Cocktail buddy project, Transvisie (for transgender refugees), LGBTI Asylum support, the Secret Garden foundation, Veilige Haven (Safe Haven), Respect2Love Academy, Queer Welfare, the Prisma group and the 'Pink Police Network' of the Police Department. From 2017 the Rainbow Refugees NL App is also available, created with collabo-



rating organisations, and containing all kinds of relevant information. The COA has a national working group with staff members from various COA locations who work to improve support for and acceptance of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees. Movisie and Pharos are national institutes that provide advice and knowledge to professionals and volunteers working with LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees. The Dutch Council for Refugees (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland) is an advocate for the interests of refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands.

## Key findings from the fieldwork

### Receiving and offering support


Six of the seven LGBTI people who we interviewed experienced little to no support when talking about their LGBTI identity in the asylum procedure at the IND. Questions relating to sexual tactics even surpassed their boundaries. In the COA shelters, none of the respondents was open about their LGBTI identity. Part of the COA staff members are proactively trying to discuss LGBTI feelings with asylum seekers and refugees. LGBTI COA staff members find it easier to identify LGBTI residents, but at the same time COA staff members do not always disclose their own LGBTI identity. All COA staff members involve police in unsafe situations and transfers to another location are arranged frequently. When it is clear to COA staff members that a resident is struggling with his or her LGBTI feelings, they refer to COC Netherlands for meetings with fellow LGBTI people. All seven LGBTI people interviewed experienced support by LGBTI interest organisations in the Netherlands.

### Increasing support

The LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees, professionals and volunteers that we interviewed mentioned nine points for improvement to increase the support for LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees:

- Provide information on the IND procedure and make sure that asylum seekers and refugees know our Constitution so they know that they can speak freely.
- Train IND officers in conducting interviews with LGBTI people so that they know how to phrase questions on sexual orientation and in this way prevent that they only check credibility and stereotypes causing them to disbelieve LGBTI people who are not struggling with their LGBTI identity.
- Make sure that no homophobic officers or interpreters are involved in the interviews with LGBTI people because they influence the interview and the result.
- Make sure to be discrete when asylum seekers and refugees venture to talk with you about being LGBTI. The worst that can happen is that, while often well-intended, someone is invited to translate because this is experienced as very unsafe.
- When COA staff members take time to listen to LGBTI people and keep asking questions concerning their needs, they allow them to take direction and at the same time are able to give them much more support. A training course on how to offer support to LGBTI people, or a thematic seminar, could contribute to this.
- COA needs to develop central directives for the support of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees.
- Shelter and accommodation needs to be diversified, think for instance of separate accommodation with private access for LGBTI people.
- More diverse staff recruitment would encourage more bicultural LGBTI staff on the work floor as the norm instead of the exception.



 LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees could use support in understanding what it means to be LGBTI, also when dealing with mental and social problems that they encounter more often than non-LGBTI people. An interactive workshop would provide a suitable approach.

## Non-acceptance of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees

COA staff members recognise non-acceptance of LGBTI people in their shelters, such as bullying and violence. They find it sad for LGBTI people who fled to the Netherlands looking for security. LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees present the same picture; it is hardest to have to experience so much tension when living in a COA shelter.

## Increasing acceptance

The LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees, professionals and volunteers that we interviewed mentioned these points of improvement to increase the acceptance of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees:

According to our respondents, the declaration of participation is a good idea, but it should be signed earlier, before the residence permit is acquired.

IND should be aware that there are judges, lawyers, civil servants and interpreters in the Netherlands who also discriminate against LGBTI people and should refuse to work with them.

COA should make more visible that non-acceptance of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees will not be tolerated.

If the safety of LGBTI people in shelters cannot be guaranteed, separate accommodation is the only solution. Even when respondents indicate that acceptance of LGBTI people in standard shelters is the most ideal situation.

Already in the shelter it should be made clear that LGBTI is part of living in the Netherlands. A clear national policy for all COA locations, for instance unambiguous information materials and training courses for staff at all locations, would contribute to increased acceptance.

## Key recommendations

### **Make sure that asylum procedures are executed by trained professionals**


In the organisations that execute asylum procedures, the members of staff should be educated. They need to be informed about LGBTI people and their cultural backgrounds, match the 'language' that they use to indicate their sexual preference and gender identity, and make clear that they are positive towards LGBTI. They should know how to pose questions regarding sexual preference and gender identity without crossing their respondents' boundaries, they need to be aware that not everyone may be familiar with our Constitution and the safety to express LGBTI feelings, and moreover they should be able to be discrete.

### **COA shelter locations should radiate their positive views regarding LGBTI**

COA management and board should be unanimous and unambiguous with regard to LGBTI policies. It is helpful to explicitly mention LGBTI people as a target group in the safety and antidiscrimination protocol and to have one contact person per location.

### **Training COA staff**

In a training course on supporting LGBTI people, COA staff members can learn more about the identification of, support to and referral of LGBTI people, and how to communicate a positive norm regarding acceptance of LGBTI people.

 **Present LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees with a realistic view of LGBTI people in the Netherlands and provide information**

This concerns for instance the information regarding the situation of LGBTI people in the Netherlands, how to deal with mental and social problems and information on online meeting places in various languages.

 **Bicultural LGBTI-friendly staff and bicultural LGBTI people will increase support**

They understand the context of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees and are able to increase their colleagues' understanding of the cultural background of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees.

 **Increased acceptance can be achieved by emphasising sympathy, empathy and the social norm**

Providing information to newcomers with the aim to increase LGBTI acceptance, will have more chance of succeeding if the emphasis is on sympathy, empathy and a positive social norm.

 **Be aware of homophobic staff members and do not let them work with LGBTI people**

According to the respondents, LGBTI discrimination still happens in the Netherlands, also with people who work with asylum seekers and refugees, such as judges, lawyers, civil servants and interpreters. Be aware and take action against it.


 **When the safety of LGBTI people in the shelter cannot be guaranteed, proceed with separate shelters**

When the shelter is unsafe for LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees, it is important to create separate shelters. Consider mixing single mothers and LGBTI people, or separate shelters for LGBTI people with private access.

## Recommendations for the Epsilon project


 **An important target group for the Epsilon training are the people that implement asylum procedures – they need knowledge, skills and understanding.**

The training should provide civil servants that interrogate asylum seekers and refugees, and interpreters who assist in translation, with knowledge on LGBTIs and their cultural background, occasion to practice tuning in to 'the language' that LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers use to indicate their sexual preference and gender identity, and an understanding of how they radiate LGBTI-friendliness. They will learn how to pose questions on sexual preference and gender identity without crossing other people's boundaries and they become aware of the fact that the Constitutions of European countries are not known to everyone. Finally they become aware of the importance of discretion: when LGBTI asylum seekers dare to address their preference or identity, this does not automatically mean that they want other people to know about it.


 **An important target group for the Epsilon training are the people that provide shelter to asylum seekers and refugees – they need knowledge, skills and understanding.**

The Epsilon training should provide professionals and volunteers working with asylum seekers and refugees, and their managers and directors, with knowledge about how to radiate acceptance of LGBTIs, among others by explicitly mentioning LGBTIs as target group in the safety and antidiscrimination proto-


cols, and by using information materials, posters and a rainbow flag. They should also learn the skills to identify LGBTIs and to tune into their conversations in ‘the language’ of the newcomer with a proper way of questioning them about their needs. They should know the local ‘pink map’ so that they are able to get LGBTIs in touch with each other and with LGBTI interest groups. They should also know how to intervene in unsafe situations, and they need skills to offer information and attention to communicating a positive standard with regard to the acceptance of LGBTIs in shelters.

 **An important target group for the Epsilon training are the professionals and volunteers of LGBTI organisations that offer support to newcomers – they need knowledge and skills.**

Professionals and volunteers from LGBTI organisations who work with newcomers should learn about the cultural backgrounds of their new target groups. LGBTI newcomers often do not understand what is the matter with them and need support in better understanding themselves and the position of LGBTIs in the Netherlands. The training should teach the target group knowledge on how to tune in to ‘the language’ of newcomers and skills to provide information about mental and social problems and offer information on ways to get in touch. They must also learn how to deal with personal boundaries.

 **An important target group for the Epsilon training are bicultural LGBTI-friendly and bicultural LGBTIs educated to become trainers.**

Those people understand the situation and the context from which LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees come and are able to provide matching support. They are experiential experts and know how to increase professionals’ and volunteers’ knowledge of the cultural background of newcomers, not only in the Epsilon training but especially on the work floor.

 **In the Epsilon training we teach professionals and volunteers how to increase the acceptance of LGBTIs among newcomers**

The Epsilon training provides knowledge on providing information to newcomers with the aim to increase the acceptance of LGBTIs, and emphasizes that it is more likely to be successful when the focus is on sympathy, empathy and a positive social standard. Think for instance of (movies on) experiences of LGBTIs that match the religion, culture and age group with such feeling that non-LGBTIs are able to understand and empathise. People with position and authority communicating a positive social standard, and stating that a growing number of people from the specific ethnic group think positively about LGBTIs is also effective. Such information provided to refugees with a resident status has more chance of success than information provided to asylum seekers during the asylum procedure.

 **In the Epsilon training professionals and volunteers learn how to recognise homophobia among colleagues and how to react to it**

LGBTI discrimination happens also among people who work with newcomers, such as judges, lawyers, civil servants and interpreters. The training teaches participants to be aware of this and what to do about it.

 **In the Epsilon training professionals and volunteers learn to enter into the experiences and needs of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees**

The Epsilon training allows professionals and volunteers to gain more in-depth knowledge and to project themselves in the situation of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees. In short movies they share their experiences and their need of support, of time without needing to talk, of being allowed to cry but also to have fun, of appreciation and acknowledgement, of recognition and of being useful by assisting other people.

Elferink, J. & Van Hoof, J. (2016). *LHBT-asielzoekers en -vluchtelingen, een handreiking met feiten, verhalen en goede voorbeelden voor vrijwilligers, professionals en gemeenten*. Utrecht: Movisie.

Felten, H. (2016). *Rainbows & refugees. Verkennend onderzoek naar wat werkt bij het vergroten van de acceptatie van LHBT voor vluchtelingen*. Utrecht: Kennisplatform Integratie & Samenleving.

Pierik, C., Boote M. & Van Hoof, J. (2015). *De kastdeur op een kier. Seksuele en genderdiversiteit in multicultureel Nederland*. Utrecht: Movisie.

Pierik, C., Meintser, N. (2008). *Dubbel en dwars. Naar hulpverlening-op-maat voor allochtone jongeren (m/v) met homoseksuele gevoelens*. Utrecht: Movisie.

Pierik, C., Rothuizen, J. (2010). *Ketenaanpak voor migranten met homoseksuele gevoelens. Toolkit voor gemeenten, lokale organisaties en hulpverleners*. Utrecht: Movisie.

## CONSULTED WEBSITES AND GOOD PRACTICES

[www.mensenrechten.nl/toegelicht/homoseksualiteit-een-asielgrond](http://www.mensenrechten.nl/toegelicht/homoseksualiteit-een-asielgrond)

[www.coc.nl/informatie-over-cocktail-maatjesproject](http://www.coc.nl/informatie-over-cocktail-maatjesproject)

[www.transgendernetwerk.nl/projecten/meldpunt-transgender-vluchtelingen/](http://www.transgendernetwerk.nl/projecten/meldpunt-transgender-vluchtelingen/)

[www.politie.nl/themas/roze-in-blauw.html](http://www.politie.nl/themas/roze-in-blauw.html)

[www.LGBTIasylumsupport.nl](http://www.LGBTIasylumsupport.nl)

[www.stichtingsecretgarden.nl](http://www.stichtingsecretgarden.nl)

[www.veiligehavenamsterdam.nl](http://www.veiligehavenamsterdam.nl)

[www.respect2love.nl](http://www.respect2love.nl)

[www.queerwelfare.nl](http://www.queerwelfare.nl)

[www.pharos.nl](http://www.pharos.nl)

[www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/](http://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/)

[www.coa.nl](http://www.coa.nl)

[www.ind.nl](http://www.ind.nl)

[www.movisie.nl](http://www.movisie.nl)

## ORGANIZATIONS THAT PARTICIPATED

- COC Netherlands
- 'Cocktail Maatjes' from COC Netherlands
- 'Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA)
- Transvisie

The respondents remain anonymous.

# REFERENCES

The Italian chapter illustrates, through a literature review and a field research that involved LGBTII migrants and professionals, specific problems faced by LGBTI arriving in Italy as migrants, with a specific focus on asylum seekers. The report highlights critical issues as well as promising practices concerning different stages of the process: arrival, request of international protection, support received in reception centres, social inclusion in the community. The report also includes the results of a questionnaire on subtle prejudices which was submitted to a sample of LGBTI.

The attention to the risk of multiple discrimination faced by asylum seekers / refugees and migrants who are also Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual/Transgender or Intersexual (LGBTI) is still quite limited in Italy. For example, in our country, as in many other European countries, statistic data on requests of international protections based on persecutions due to sex orientation (so called SOGI claims) are not collected, therefore, it is not possible to know how many people presented request for asylum based on the article 1 A (2) of the 1951's Convention relating to the status of refugees and/or of its 1967's protocol.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that the attention is growing, particularly from LGTBI organizations. There are, for example some dedicated web pages (e.g. [www.ilgrandecolibri.com](http://www.ilgrandecolibri.com) ) , help desks in local offices of the national association ARCIGAY, some training courses have been proposed and, finally, an association specially dedicated to the subject of LGTBI migrations was funded: MIGRABO LGTBI in Bologna.

The main goal of the Italian chapter is to describe the state of the art of research and practice to support LGBTI migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Italy and consequently to highlight gaps and training needs of professionals and volunteers working with them in order to be able to assure their safety, to protect them from the risk of discrimination and to be able to promote their effective integration in the hosting community.

This report will focus both on asylum seekers and on refugees / migrants. Indeed, the first part of our study focuses on the specific challenges encountered on the asylum seeking process (the asylum request, life in shelters etc.); while the second part focuses on social integration in Italy and it therefore concerns all non-nationals, being them asylum seekers, refugees or migrants.

This report analyses primary as well as secondary data. The first have been collected through a field work, while the seconds through a literature review process.

The literature review was conducted using Google Scholar, Researchgate and the internet in general using as key words: LGBTI" and "Queer" in combination with "migrants", "foreigner", "refugees", "asylum seekers", "SOGI". All these words have

# FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ITALY

LICIA BOCCALETTI  
JONATHAN MASTELLARI

WITH THE COOPERATION OF  
ALESSANDRA MANATTINI  
AND SALVATORE MILIANTA

ANZIANI E NON SOLO

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

been searched both in Italian and English in combination with the word “Italy”. We included all articles (both written in Italian and English language) referring to Italian data while we excluded those referring exclusively to foreign experiences or researches.

As far as the field work is concerned, we conducted a focus group with 5 homosexuals from migrant backgrounds (3 men and 2 women), seven individual interviews to migrants not available to share their own experience with the group or who are no longer living in Italy (two transsexuals, one lesbian women and four homosexuals men, all from different countries) and interviews to privileged witness (a national expert of LGBTI migrations, a lawyer with an expertise in international protection requests and an operator in the field of the asylum seekers reception). Finally, in order to investigate the aptitudes of members of the LGBTI community towards some minorities (among which people from other countries), the Italian translation of the questionnaire “comfort in social situation” has been administered, by the means of an online survey. This questionnaire, developed by Ph. D. Mary E. Kite from Ball State University, is a tool with the aim to investigate adversative and ambivalent prejudice and which could help in understanding and in recognizing subtle acts of discrimination, which are more difficult to spot.

## Key findings from the literature review

Firstly, it’s worth mentioning that the research has produced very few useful results; this demonstrate how much the subject is substantially ignored in academic environments and in social researches.

Concerning the first phase of arrival in Italy, many NGOs complain about severe human rights violations towards asylum seekers in general, such as mistreatments, violence, sexual humiliations (Amnesty International, 2016) More specifically, when it comes to LGBTI asylum seekers, it is pointed out that the practices adopted do not allow to devote enough time and attention on filling the application by which the migrant has to declare the reasons of his intention to ask for international protection: time and attention needed in order to correctly inform the people upon the possibility to ask, for example, for asylum because of persecutions based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Concerning the SOGI claims for international protection, Italy – despite its restrictive policies about asylum seekers and its controversial aptitudes on political recognition of LGBTI persons rights (Carnassale, 2016) – is actually considered as a good practice as far as the judicial review process is concerned .

As for the broader subject of LGBTI migrants, there is actually only one significant study (Pozzoli & Lelleri, 2009), which dates back to 2009. What resulted from the research is that most LGBTI from migrant background are able to actually experience their sexual orientation only after their arrival in Italy: those who maintain relationships with the originating country, very often, are forced to hide being homosexual. Likewise, the relations with fellow countrymen in Italy are refused or lived concealing their sexual orientation.

Consequently, as underlined in the study, *“there is an high risk of losing the support – crucial in migration- of the fellow countrymen network”*. ( Pozzoli & Lelleri, 2009) p.40. On the other hand, this could be balanced by seeking support in the LGBTI community, building solidarity networks, as authors says, *“not homo-ethnic, but for example, homo-sexual”*. However, migrants in LGBTI communities have to face also *“a series of obstacles: biases, socio- economical differences, ‘cultural’ differences, etc.”* As for the relation between LGBTI migrants with community based services, some additional difficulties arise: community based services are planned assuming the heterosexuality of the clients and, at the same time, migrants tend to conceal their own sexual orientation to the operators with whom they get in relation, because migrants are scared to be stigmatized and discriminated (Magnarin, 2011-2012)

## Key finding from the fieldwork

The field research had the aim to verify and – above all- to integrate the few information coming from literature review with the direct experiences from LGBTI migrants and asylum seekers and from privileged



witnesses.

One of the first findings was that migrants willing to ask for protection in Italy often get inadequate information due to both linguistic and the cultural barriers, because often support workers are not able to explain what does it means to ask for asylum for persecutions based on sexual orientation in a way that can be actually fully understood by asylum seekers.

Another issue raised is that the hearing phase of a SOGI claim is often very complex and, generally speaking, legal operators have inadequate training (be they ONG operators or lawyers) to effectively support their clients in the process. In this context, cooperation between organizations specialized in international protection and those who work in LGBTI subjects is often fundamental.

Important problems arise concerning international protection seekers who are hosted in the reception system: for the most the only solution to feel safe is actually to conceal their own gender identity or their own sexual orientation.

The field research confirms the relational difficulties with the originating communities of migrants, whilst the role of LGBTI organizations is still limited both in terms of specific support given to migrant and as a place of socialization, where they can feel free to express themselves.

Concerning the questionnaire on “social comfort”, it has been filled by 100 persons: 63 who declared being LGBTI and 37 who define themselves as heterosexual. Data show that respondents tend to feel less at ease with people with disabilities, obesity and other ethnicities. Even if this trend concerns both LGBTI persons and heterosexuals, LGBTI group ranks slightly higher in discrimination.

## Key recommendations

From the inputs gathered through this research, it comes out clearly that in Italy there is still inadequacy of knowledge and consolidated practices concerning how to support effectively migrants – and specially asylum seekers – who are also LGBTI.

The first recommendation is, therefore, the need to invest on training for all – volunteers or professionals – working with this target group.

Secondly, it is necessary that the operators are able to identify and overcome language and cultural barriers in order to make migrants aware of the possibility to claim international protection as LGBTI per se and that they are aware of the legal and cultural contexts of migrants’ countries of origin as far as LGBTI are concerned.

From the point of view of developing research and policy on this topic, the lack of statistics on this target group is a challenge. It would be helpful, for instance, to keep record of the number of SOGI claims presented, accepted and rejected every year to be able to quantify the phenomenon.

At organizational level, it would be important to develop and share good practices related to the hosting of LGBTI asylum seeker in reception centres, in order both to protect safety and privacy and to promote there a context of tolerance and non-discrimination.

Finally, it is restated from different sides that it is important to create effective ways of collaboration among the different organizations working in this field: legal experts, LGBTI associations, migrants associations, NGOs working in the reception field, etc.

All these results provide important inputs for the next stage of the EPSILON project, which will focus on training for professionals and volunteers working with LGBTI asylum seekers and migrants.

First of all, the need for such a training is clearly highlighted by the results of our research, secondly important suggestions for its contents are mentioned: the need to be more aware of the consequences of language and cultural barriers in the process and how to overcome them; the importance of networking, and therefore

to create conditions for cooperation and integration of skills from different professionals; the need to share ideas and practices to make shelters and services for asylum seekers more LGBTI-friendly and safer for this target group.

Amnesty International. (2016). *Hotspot Italia*.

Carnassale, D. (2016). Queering asylum system in Italy. Socio-antropological perspectives about asylum claims based on sexual orientation. *6th Ethnography and Qualitative Research Conference*. Bergamo.

Jansens, S. e. (2011). *Fleeing Homofobia - Asylum Claims Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Europe*. Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Lelleri, R. (2015). Migranti LGBT: Introduzione allo stato dell'arte della riflessione in Italia. *Migro perché sono*. Bologna.

Magnarin, L. (2011-2012). Percorsi di vita sui confini, Tesi di Laurea.

Peri, C. (2015). *Il sistema di accoglienza per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati in Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2015*. Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS.

Pozzoli, L., & Lelleri, R. (2009). *I.O. Immigrazione e Omosessualità. La montagna e la catena. Essere migranti omosessuali oggi in Italia*. . Arcigay.

UNHCR. (2012). *LINEE GUIDA IN MATERIA DI PROTEZIONE INTERNAZIONALE N.9: Domande di riconoscimento dello status di rifugiato fondate sull'orientamento*.

## REFERENCES



ISBN 978-1-907641-44-2

