

# LGBTQI+ REFUGEES IN GREECE NEED SAFETY & PROTECTION, NOT DISCRIMINATION & FEAR.

1ST MARCH 2022 - ZERO DISCRIMINATION DAY 2022

**Across Greece LGBTQI+ refugees and people seeking asylum face significant stigma, discrimination and barriers to access support, exposing them at risk of serious harm and erode their human rights.**

*“Here in the camp, people don’t like us, we suffer insults, hate, jealousy and other forms of mockery. Since we’re powerless at these type of things, we ask ourselves if this is the situation only in the RIC camp or it’s like this in the whole Europe” - Patrice*

## 1) SAFETY & SECURITY

**LGBTQI+ persons are not provided the safety, security & dignity that they require to have their fundamental rights protected as the Greek authorities continue to place people in unsuitable and dangerous accommodation across Greece.** Whilst the ECHR states that “asylum seekers who claim to be a part of a vulnerable group in the country which they had to leave, the authorities should exercise particular care in order to avoid situations which may reproduce the plight that forced these persons to flee in the first place.” This is far from the reality in Greece. In camps LGBTQI+ persons are forced conceal their LGBTQI+ identity, lacking privacy and face stigma, discrimination and harassment on a daily basis. Queer persons in detention are held without any regard for their safety. Persons considered vulnerable and housed in ESTIA II apartments, are often placed with homophobic/transphobic individuals and persons from the communities they were seeking protection from. Moreover increasing numbers of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers/ refugees are homeless in urban areas such as Athens & Thessaloniki often subject to violence and harassment.

*“...the authorities have neither allowed me to exit the island nor provided a safe area for me as a person of different sexuality.” - Aled*

## 2) VULNERABILITIES AND SUPPORT

**The Greek Authorities continue to fail to address the needs and vulnerabilities of LGBTQI+ people.** The majority of LGBTQI+ persons seeking asylum are survivors of physical or sexual violence, pervasive discrimination and stigma after. This often results in poor mental and physical health and more isolation in society. LGBTQI+ persons rarely have their vulnerabilities recognised and reception staff lack the training and knowledge to identify and address these, especially for survivors of torture, sexual violence or HIV+ persons. Even when vulnerabilities are recognised there is a lack of adequate support, especially specialist services that fully understands the needs LGBTQI+ persons have in service provision (i.e healthcare, ESTIA etc.). There is especially a lack of support for the trans and gender non-confirming community.

*“it is not easy to just recover from mental stuff. Many of us had torture, persecutions... a lot of things happened to us.” (Abdul)*

## 3) ASYLUM PROCESS ISSUES

**People seeking international protection on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC) face numerous barriers within the asylum process.** On account of the nature of their claim, the expectation to articulate the reason for seeking asylum to the authorities can be a barrier in itself. Applicants with diverse SOGIESC are likely to have experienced stigma or discrimination, whether this is personal or from discriminatory rhetoric. On account of the stigma and criminalization, applicants may have been forced to hide their identity in their country of origin, which can reaffirm internal feelings of shame or internalized homophobia. Moreover, suppressing one’s identity or orientation means that there is a lack of space for them to explore or be comfortable with their identity. This is further complicated by the expectation for applicants to classify themselves in accordance with the Eurocentric labels that the asylum interview seems to expect. The rigid categories indicate a failure to understand the organic nature and complexity of SOGIESC.

In addition, people seeking international protection on these grounds are more likely to be survivors of sexual violence. Survivors of sexual violence, which they were a victim of on account of their identity, potentially entails multiple layers of shame; on account of their identity itself, the same that accompanies being a victim of such an act, and the notion that the attack occurred on account of their identity - all of which form a multitude of barriers that prevent the applicant from articulating their claim.

With regards to credibility, claiming asylum on other grounds might offer more opportunities to corroborate fear of persecution, which are not available for people seeking asylum on the grounds of orientation or identity as it is inherent and personal by nature.

In the asylum interview, applicants are asked prohibited questions, such as questions about sexual practice or behaviour, or problematic lines of questioning, including those based on stereotypical notions. Reliance on stereotypes in the assessment of SOGIESC claims is just one symptom of inadequate training and knowledge of the legal framework for SOGIESC claims among the relevant authorities. People seeking asylum on the basis of diverse SOGIESC are routinely asked questions that demonstrate prejudice and/or a lack of knowledge, including framing SOGIESC as a choice or lifestyle, often implying that the applicant is at least partially responsible for their need to seek asylum.

*“There also I did my asylum interview which did not go well due to basic errors made by the casework that led to my asylum case being rejected... an appeal was made ... but as at now there is no response from the Asylum office... which has made me feel even more stranded” - John*

## 4) INTEGRATION IN SOCIETY

**Whilst integration is difficult for all refugees in Greece LGBTQI+ persons face the double stigma of being both LGBTQI+ and refugees.** This poses an additional barrier in an already difficult context. Support provided is inadequate and individuals are not given the tools needed to use their skills and professional backgrounds and often have much smaller support networks to rely on. LGBTQI+ persons are at increased risk of trafficking and many people are forced into insecure, exploitative or dangerous work (including sex work) due to the lack of integration support. Moreover they are more likely to face discrimination or harassment in employment or at public services and face significant challenges reporting or addressing this.

*“I am moving forward but I don't really know where I am going. I need to integrate, have a job to support myself and at the same time Greece traumatises me a lot due to the way in which I am treated in Samos. I hope the future will be different” - Lilianne*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) LGBTQI+ people claiming asylum need **safe accommodation** that directly meets their unique safety needs, protecting them from discrimination and harassment, promotes good mental health and provides LGBTQI+ persons with safety and dignity.
- 2) A trauma-informed, culturally sensitive approach to providing services for LGBTQI+ persons is needed, with more training, **more action and more support available**. This should take in to account the specific needs of trans and gender non-conforming, HIV+, victims of torture
- 3) **Improved guidance** should be issued that covers the standards set out by the ECHR and the CJEU on assessing SOGIESC claims, special considerations on evidence assessment, relevance of COI and particularities of SOGIESC claims, and how to conduct interviews with gender perspective and a trauma-informed approach that acknowledges the fluidity and nuances of SOGIESC claims.
- 4) Specific **integration programmes** that address the double stigmatisation and direct experiences of for LGBTQI+ refugees. This should equip them with the resources, skills and networks for successful integration and employment and utilise the strengths and experience that LGBTQI+ refugees have.

## FURTHER RESEARCH & RECOMMENDATIONS

[Naming and Shaming Report: Harmful asylum procedures for sexual orientation and gender identity claims on Lesbos](#) (Fenix - Humanitarian Legal Aid, 2022)  
[A Comparative Study of Asylum Policies for LGBTQIA+ Asylum Seekers in Europe](#) (Safe Place International, 2022)  
[The Discrimination Epidemic](#) (Samos LGBTQI+ Group, 2021)  
[Testimonies from the Samos LGBTQI+ Group](#) (Samos LGBTQI+ Group, 2021)  
[Access of LGBTQI+ Individuals to Public Services: The results of the FAROS Program Research](#) (Orlando LGBT+, 2021).

## SIGNING ORGANISATIONS

