

# LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND MIGRANT: A EUROPEAN STORY OF DISCRIMINATION AND EMPOWERMENT

# EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE PROJECT PARTNERSHIP	5
INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
<b>COMPARATIVE CHAPTER</b>	
INTRODUCTION	12
KEY COMPARATIVE FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH	12
KEY COMPARATIVE FINDINGS FROM THE FACE-TO-FACE ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMME	13
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	17
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES</b>	
UNITED KINGDOM	19
GREECE	24
ITALY	29
NETHERLANDS	35
CYPRUS	41
<b>ANNEXES</b>	
HANDBOOK FOR TRAINERS	47
THE ONLINE COURSE FOR PROFESSIONALS AND VOLUNTEERS	77
CASE STUDIES	79

# THE PROJECT PARTNERSHIP



**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

**ANZIANI E NON SOLO, ITALY**  
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**CARDET**

**CARDET, CYPRUS**  
Project Partner

# Introduction and Acknowledgements

Dr. Theo Gavrielides, Epsilon Project Coordinator  
Founder and Director of the IARS International Institute

## The Epsilon project

The IARS International Institute and the Epsilon partnerships is very pleased to release the findings of the work that we conducted over the last year impacting on some of Europe's most marginalised communities. 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 this right without being killed, harmed or bullied.

However, the reality is somehow different for a considerable proportion of refugees and migrants. 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.

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 Anziani e 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 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

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<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.

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 constructed educational tools that are based on the voices and real needs of LGBTI migrants and refugees. Through these voices, learning took place in the form of face-to-face and online. This learning was promoted both internally (between partners) and externally (nationally and EU wide).

## Epsilon Results

Over the last year, the partnership has worked hard to produce cutting-edge, innovative results and intellectual outputs that would assist our ultimate objectives. As a first step, the Epsilon partnership built the evidence base for its remaining activities including its training and educational courses and tools. Therefore, we produced **an e-book** (Intellectual Output 1) 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.

Using the results from the first e-book, Epsilon developed 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 then enabled the professionals to identify these LGBTI groups' most current and urgent needs some even reaching on issues of survival, dignity and respect. It also helped them challenge their own biases.

It is intended that the results of Epsilon will continue to:

- ✓ reach widely outside of the participating countries through free, online access Europe-wide
- ✓ 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)

## Concluding reflections

From the outset, we confirmed our assumption that there is a dearth of research and evidence-based knowledge about LGBTI migrants and refugees in Europe. 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, 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.

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. Many NGOs complained 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 mi-

grants 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.

## Acknowledgements

The project involved a huge amount of work that I had the pleasure of coordinating (but not delivering). Therefore, the credit must go to all the partners, namely Anziani e Non Solo (Italy), Movisie (Netherlands), KMOP (Greece) and CARDET (Cyprus). I am particularly grateful to Rita Seneca for her designing work not just for this book but for all Epsilon's outputs including its e-books, logo, website and newsletters.

I am also grateful to my own team at IARS for working hard to ensure that the work is done according to our user-led mission and indeed our founding values of power sharing, equality and restorative justice. Many thanks also go to Erasmus+ for entrusting us to carry out this cutting edge and innovative project as well as all the donors and supporters including the LGBT community. I also want to thank the LGBTI User Advisory Board for their volunteering and indeed expert advice and input. Without their scrutiny and support the Epsilon project would not have achieved its user led mission. I am also grateful to all the LGBTI migrants but also the professionals who participated in the research either as part of the sample group or as peer researchers.

**Professor Theo Gavrielides**  
**Epsilon project Coordinator**  
**July, 2018**

# COMPARATIVE CHAPTER

# Introduction

This final e-book has integrated the two year learning and practical results of the Epsilon programme. As part of the ground learning, each participating country has conducted literature based research and fieldwork in Europe. This has then been followed by the piloting of the face-to-face training and the e-learning platform in each participating country. In line with the theoretical and practical results, this final e-book concludes with policy recommendations and best practices for professionals working with asylum seekers and refugees as outlined in the key recommendations for national and EU policy in each national chapter.

This is the executive summary of five national reports that were produced as part of the project titled “EpsiLon - Equipping Professionals for Supporting LGBT Refugees”, which is co-financed by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The national reports were written in all partners’ languages, i.e. in English, Dutch, Greek and Italian. EpsiLon project is responding to two current and urgent educational needs in Europe i.e. the rise in migrant and refugee numbers and the persistent inequality and persecution of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) individuals. Combined together these two characteristics make LGBT migrants and refugees one of the most vulnerable groups in modern Europe. Therefore, EpsiLon 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 them.

One of the main activities of the project was the desk research and fieldwork on LGBT refugees and migrants in the UK, the Netherlands, Greece, Cyprus and Italy. In Greece. The aim of this research was, firstly, to present the current situation regarding LGBT migrants and refugees living in the involved countries and, secondly, to understand the needs and challenges faced by them as well as by the professionals and volunteers who support them. The findings of the research were the basis for the development of a training programme for professionals and volunteers working with LGBT immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees in asylum centres, camps, shelters and in local communities. Using an innovative, evidence-based, user-led methodology, the training programme aims to raise professionals’ and volunteers’ awareness and sensitivity on the needs of LGBT migrants and refugees; it also enables them to become familiar with LGBT migrants and refugees’ pressing needs, such as those relating to survival, dignity and respect. Moreover, it helps them challenge their own biases and assumptions. The training has been designed to be delivered both face-to-face and online and has been promoted both internally (between partners) and externally (nationally and EU wide).

The key objective of these national reports was to present the main findings and recommendations from the desk research and fieldwork as well as the findings from the face-to-face education programme which was piloted in all partner countries. The present comparative chapter integrates the two-year learning and practical findings of the project bringing together the results from the activities implemented in each partner country.

## Key comparative findings from the research

- In all EpsiLon countries, LGBT 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. However, there is a lack of statistical information about LGBTIQ+ migrants in general and LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers and refugees in particular. There is no information as regards the number of SOGI requests. The only exception is the UK, where the UK government has recently started to record the numbers of asylum claims based on LGBTI persecution.
- In all EpsiLon countries, LGBT migrants and refugees are rather reluctant to reveal their sexual orientation either to members of their own communities as well as to the local population, where LGBT discrimination still exists. Especially in Cyprus and in Greece, they experience a ‘double stigma’ as LGBT and as “foreigners”.
- LGBT refugees and asylum seekers often feel unsafe or afraid to open up and reveal their sexual orientation within the shelters and the reception centres even in the more progressive countries, for example the Nether-

lands, where it is more clear that LGBT is part of the Dutch society.

- There is a lack of a continuous support to LGBT refugees and asylum seekers by operators adequately trained and sensitised on the topic in all the phases of the reception path, especially in countries such as Italy, Cyprus and Greece. It is worth mentioning that in Cyprus, all professionals involved in the asylum procedure are often not equipped to deal with so-called SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) claims. Even though the training needs may differ from country to country, all of them emphasised the increased and continuous need to train relevant staff and volunteers on the relevant procedures as well as on cultural diversity, SOGI issues, LGBT rights, etc.
- In the UK and the Netherlands, it was recommended to refer LGBT asylum seekers and refugees to organisations that support them as they may feel more comfortable receiving immigration support from LGBT specialist organisations rather than those set up to specifically provide immigration support.
- In the Netherlands and the UK there are several good examples of services providing psychosocial support, medical treatment, information and sheltering to LGBT asylum seekers and refugees. In parallel, in the years 2017-2018 it has been possible to observe an increase of initiatives and services dedicated to the protection of LGBTIQ+ migrants' rights, with particular attention to asylum seekers and refugees. Few examples of specific services for LGBT refugees and migrants are available in Greece, while these kind of services are underdeveloped in Cyprus.

## Key comparative findings from the face-to-face adult education programme

EpsiLon has developed a user-led, face-to-face educational programme for adult professionals and volunteers. Its aim is to increase knowledge and skills of professionals, ultimately building their capacity to answer to the needs of LGBTIQ+ refugees, contributing to preventing abuse in centers, shelters, local communities and services dedicated to this target group. It has been designed to be an introductory training programme to raise awareness and provide understanding of basic concepts and information to professionals and volunteers working either in the field of migration and asylum (i.e. social workers, cultural mediators, educators, language teachers, intercultural workers, volunteers), in the field of advocacy and support for LGBTIQ+ (activists, social workers, volunteers), or both.

All partner organisations piloted the face-to-face educational programme with professionals and volunteers working in the abovementioned fields. In total, 74 individuals participated in the pilot trainings. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of participants per country:

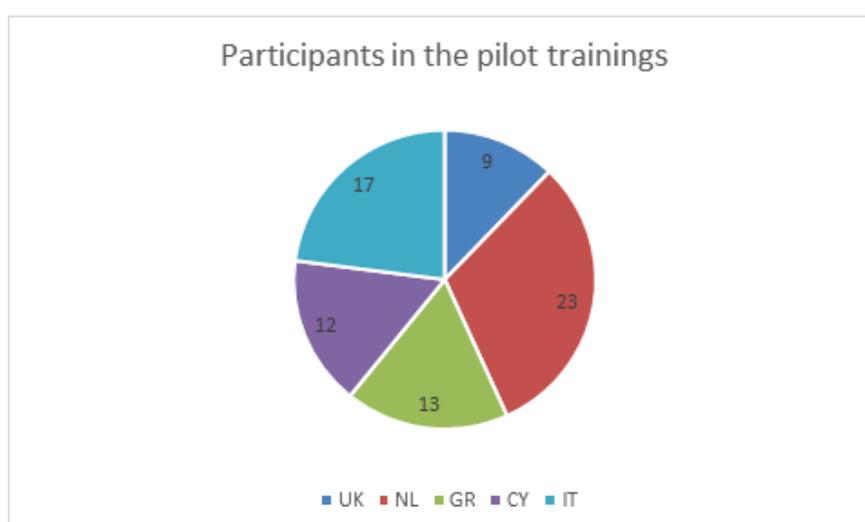


Figure 1

At the end of each pilot session, participants were asked to fill in the evaluation questionnaires assessing the education programme. According to their evaluation, the training has met 53 participants' expectations and has partially met 21 participants' expectations (Figure 2).

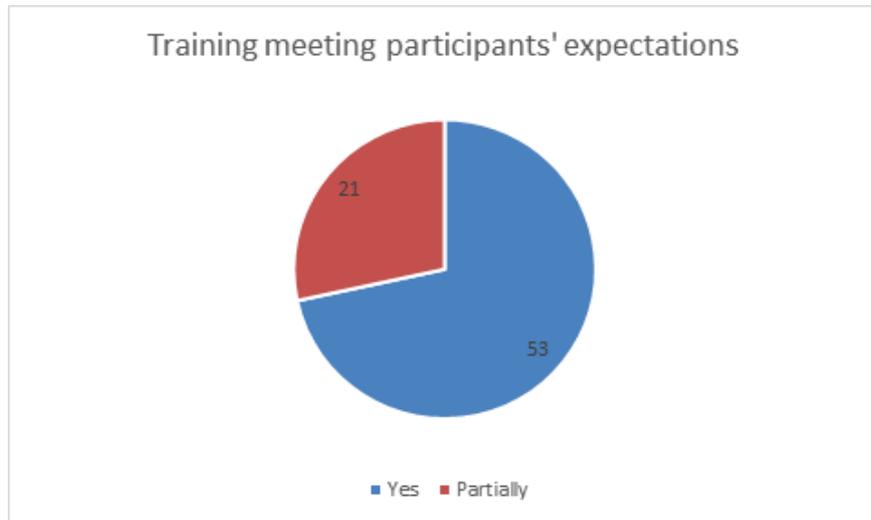


Figure 2

Participants were asked to estimate their knowledge about LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, refugees and migrants prior to the training and after the training on a scale from 1 to 10. The average score before the training was 5,99 and the respective score after the training was 7,45. As it is illustrated in Figure 3, almost all participants have improved their knowledge after the training.

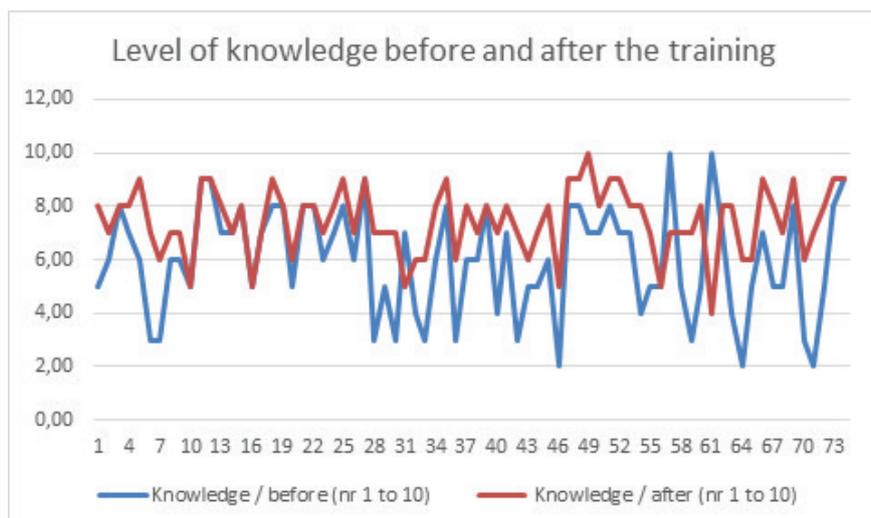


Figure 3

Their opinion about the training was very good (35 participants) and good (34 participants), whereas 5 participants considered the training “regular” (Figure 4).



Figure 4

Moreover, participants were asked to evaluate the trainers. 37 of them considered the trainers “very good”, 34 of them considered the trainers “good”, and 3 participants opinion about the trainers was “regular” (Figure 5).



Figure 5

In addition, the majority of the participants (71) stated that the training methodologies were appropriate (Figure 6).



Figure 6

Finally, as it is displayed in Figure 7, 46 of the participants found that the time dedicated to each topic was appropriate, whereas 28 had the opposite opinion.

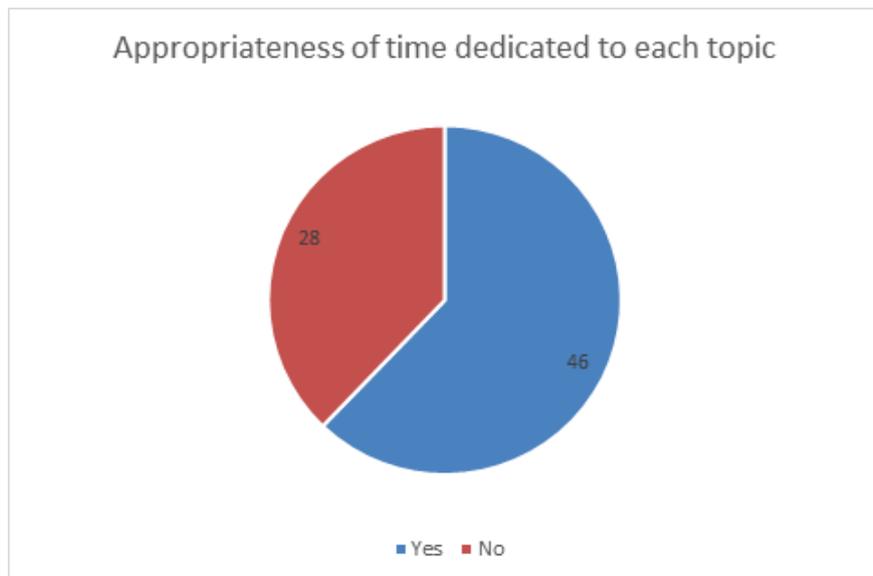


Figure 7

# Key recommendations

All findings from the UK, the Netherlands, Greece, Cyprus and Italy indicate that LGBT immigrants and refugees across Europe still remain one of the most vulnerable groups, facing many barriers and having specific support needs, so as to be able to adapt and cope with the new conditions in a foreign country. At the same time, they have to deal with LGBT discrimination, which still exists across Europe. Epsilon as well as other similar projects carried out at EU level can definitely improve their situation, as they can contribute to the improvement of the skills and knowledge and to the awareness raising of the professionals and volunteers working with LGBT immigrants and refugees.

Based on the above-mentioned findings a series of key recommendations is suggested:

- Both LGBT and migrants/refugees organisations & associations should be trained accordingly so as to better support and help LGBT migrants and refugees.
- Professionals working in reception centres, shelters, asylum services and other relevant services should be properly and adequately trained to handle SOGI-related cases and to support LGBT migrants and refugees.
- Establishment of dedicated services providing support to LGBT migrants and refugees, meeting their particular needs.
- Record of the number of LGBT migrants and refugees and of the SOGI requests could help in better understanding their needs and also could facilitate the development of effective practices and policies.
- Information and awareness-raising of wider society regarding this particularly vulnerable group
- Improvement of accommodation structures and living conditions of LGBT refugees and immigrants, so as they feel safe; when it is deemed necessary, separate shelters could be created.
- Involvement of LGBT migrants and refugees in the training, given that they can fully understand the needs of this vulnerable group.
- Finally, Epsilon partners are recommended to build on and follow up on the results of the project by implementing similar activities addressed to professionals and volunteers working with LGBT refugees and migrants across Europe.

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES**

# UNITED KINGDOM

## Key Objectives of the UK Chapter

This chapter is the final output of the Epsilon project in the UK. Epsilon is a two-year Erasmus + KA2 European project (2016-2018), which seeks to draw on the experiences of LGBT migrants in order to develop educational and training resources to support organisations to provide better services to LGBT migrants. This chapter presents the key findings and recommendations from academic research and fieldwork, the contributions from the LGBT Advisory Board, and the findings from the online and face-to-face adult education programmes conducted by the IARS International Institute. The objective of this chapter is to integrate the two-year learning and findings from the project by bringing together the theoretical and practical results of the Epsilon project in the UK.

## Methodology

The overall aim of the literature review was to analyse the national context in terms of LGBT migration in the UK. It aimed to capture the experiences of LGBT migrants attempting to navigate the UK asylum process whilst trying to settle and build their lives in a new country. Our literature review consisted of a collection of the current academic research and reports from frontline organisations, including research conducted by Stonewall, UKLGIG and Women For Refugee Women.

The overall aim of the fieldwork was to understand the challenges both the LGBT migrants and the organisations providing support to LGBT migrants face in the UK. Furthermore, it aimed to identify good practices that can be built upon. Our fieldwork research was qualitative in nature, and the sample was acquired by using a non-probability sampling method. In total, we conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with both professionals working in the sector and with LGBT migrants themselves.

The overall aim of the LGBT Advisory Board was to bring together LGBT migrants, professionals and academics working in the field to help guide and direct the Epsilon project. Furthermore, the Advisory Board aimed to strengthen the user-led and needs-based aspects of the project. The Advisory Board was set up at the beginning of the project through referrals from the partner organisations, and IARS has been coordinating the Board's quarterly meetings; sharing project updates; and providing the Board an opportunity to input into every phase of the project.

The overall aim of the training tools was to increase the knowledge and the skills of professionals, and ultimately, build

up their capacity to better respond to the needs of LGBT refugees. Our research was conducted by utilising quantitative data derived from an e-learning online platform and from a face-to-face training. In total, 200 participants took part in the online training, and, the face-to-face training was conducted with nine participants, who were professionals, volunteers, researchers, activists, social workers and senior level management working with asylum seekers and refugees.

## Key Findings

As our literature review aimed to understand the lived experiences of LGBT migrants attempting to navigate the UK asylum process, we have been able to identify some shortcomings, and thus, the key findings from our literature review included:

1. The treatment of LGBT 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 LGBT migrants relocate to countries, such as the UK.
3. Issues with inclusivity of migrants within the UK 'gay scene'.

In regards to the challenges the LGBT migrants and organisations trying to support them face, the data collected from our fieldwork broadly mirrored the findings of the literature review. This was evident in relation to the impact of the UK Visa and Immigration's procedures on the wellbeing of LGBT migrants, and in terms of the struggles that migrants still face in reconciling their cultural and sexual identity when settling in the UK. In addition, it was also apparent from the data that LGBT migrants may feel more comfortable receiving immigration support from LGBT specialist organisations rather than those set up to specifically provide immigration support.

Other key findings from the fieldwork and consultation data included:

1. Concerns over the UK Visa and Immigration's treatment of LGBT migrants;
  - a. Jurisprudence still not being applied,
  - b. Inaccurate Home Office Country policy information notes.
2. Cultural and Integration Issues;
  - a. Conflict between cultural and sexual identity,
  - b. The need for ESOL Support.
3. Service Delivery Concerns;
  - a. Lack of funding,
  - b. Demand for services,
  - c. Complex needs.
4. Discrimination within asylum specialist services;
  - a. The employment of asylum seekers and refugees as staff members,
  - b. Volunteers and staff lack awareness.
5. Skill level of LGBT organisations;

- a. Increase in demand,
- b. Lack of specialist training or expertise.

As coordinated by IARS, the LGBT Advisory Board has been able to provide consistent and thorough feedback throughout the duration of the project in order to ensure a bottom up approach for the project. The Advisory Board has contributed significantly in both the design and implementation of the project. In particular, the Board's input and contributions in the training tools have been one of the key strengths of the project.

Overall our training tools, which aimed to increase knowledge and skills of professionals and build up their capacity to better respond to the needs of LGBT migrants, were positively received and reviewed by the participants. Based on the quantitative data derived from the online and face-to-face training, our evaluation included the following findings:

- Participants' knowledge about LGBT refugees increased 13 per cent after receiving the training.
- 78 per cent of the participants agreed that the training has met their expectations, whereas, 22 per cent agreed that the training has done so partially.
- 89 per cent of the participants considered the quality of the training very good, whereas, 11 per cent considered the quality of the training regular.
- 89 per cent of the participants considered the quality of the trainers very good, whereas, 11 per cent considered the quality of the trainers regular.
- 100 per cent of the participants agreed that the training methodologies were appropriate.
- 78 per cent of the participants considered the time dedicated for each topic being appropriate, whereas, 22 per cent did not think the dedicated time was appropriate.

## Key Recommendations for the UK and Europe

Based on the review of the literature, fieldwork and consultation and training outcomes, our research has identified a number of issues that need to be addressed at a practical and at a policy level.

As part of our practical suggestions, we recommend:

1. Better equalities awareness within the LGBT scene to improve migrant integration;
  - There were indicators that the UK LGBT scene can be both discriminatory and exclusionary, thus more work needs to be done for LGBT migrants to be accepted with UK based LGBT communities.
2. LGBT groups should receive immigration training;
  - LGBT specialist organisations are being called upon to help with immigration cases with very little training. LGBT migrants feel more comfortable receiving support from those who understand their sexual or gender identity.
3. Immigration support organisations and immigration solicitors should receive training to increase their LGBT sensitivity;
  - There is a perception that immigration specialist organisations are not always sensitive to LGBT issues. This is partly due to the experiences of LGBT migrants when accessing these services, but also due to the perceived perception.

4. The Epsilon programme should be part of the basic training for all service providers and organisations working with migrants.
  - The ambiguity of identifying who is an LGBT migrant.
  - LGBT migrants should be involved in the training in order to understand the needs of this vulnerable group.

As part of our policy suggestions, we recommend:

1. Revise the way LGBT Asylum claims are processed, including:
  - The use of detention seems inappropriate and should be ended,
  - The culture of assuming the claimant is lying causes a burden of proof.
2. Quicker decision making:
  - LGBT migrants are at risk of being abused physically and emotionally,
  - Cases with increased risk of mental or physical harm should be dealt quicker.
3. 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.
4. Invest in ESOL:
  - Additional resources should be invested to make ESOL courses more widely available and more should be done to make ESOL provision more LGBT appropriate.
5. Invest in Identity Support:
  - There needs to be more support to help LGBT migrants understand how to embrace their identities.

Overall, the above outputs have had an impact on increasing the knowledge, skills and awareness of professionals working with LGBT refugees and migrants, as demonstrated by the findings. As a result of the learning from the project impact, we can conclude that the Epsilon project has successfully involved LGBT migrants in the design, delivery and monitoring of the project, and raised awareness by providing training to organisations, professionals and volunteers working with LGBT migrants.

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# GREECE

## Key objective of the country report

The present executive summary comprises the main points of the “Report on the findings and the activities of the project titled “Epsilon - Equipping Professionals for Supporting LGBT Refugees”, which is written in the Greek language. It is part of the Epsilon Educational Resources - Final eBook, which integrates the 2 year learning and practical results of the project, bringing together its theoretical and practical results, including its pilots, training and on the ground learning from each participating country and Europe. The Epsilon project which is implemented by a consortium of five organisations from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Greece, Cyprus and Italy it is co-financed by the Erasmus+ European Programme. The project focuses on one of the most vulnerable groups in modern Europe, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) immigrants and refugees. Responding to the increasing need for professionals and volunteers’ training who work with LGBT immigrants and refugees across Europe, Epsilon has developed a training programme for those who work with LGBT immigrants and refugees aiming at the improvement of the provision of services to the aforementioned group of people. The present document describes the main findings coming from the research on the topic carried out in Greece as well as the results from the pilots of the face-to-face adult education programme.

## Methodology

The findings presented at this report were collected as follows:

- The findings from the research on LGBT refugees and migrants in Greece were collected through qualitative research which included a) desk research on the topic, focusing on relevant Greek and European resources and b) face to face interviews with four (4) professionals and volunteers were conducted and with three (3) LGBT refugees.
- The findings from the 2 pilots of the Epsilon educational programme attended by 13 professionals in total, were collected through the evaluation questionnaires, which were distributed at the end of the training. These questionnaires among others were assessing the level of knowledge about LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, refugees and migrants prior and after the training, if their expectations from the training were met, participants’

opinions about the training event and the trainers, the appropriateness of the training methodologies as well as the appropriateness of the time dedicated to each topic.

# Key findings

## **A. From the research on LGBT refugees and migrants in Greece**

### *Findings from the literature review*

Very little data was found in scientific literature focusing on LGBT 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 LGBT immigrants and refugees. As mentioned by OLKE (ΟΛΚΕ, 2006), LGBT immigrants experience multiple discrimination, because, in a society where Greek citizens have the absolute majority, they experience double stigma as LGBT and as “foreigners”.

On the basis of Presidential Decree 141 (2013), LGBT 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 LGBT 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 LGBT people. Based on Αλεξανδρή and Μάζης article (2016), generally LGBT immigrants /refugees do not request that they stay in Greece, but see it as a transit country.

### *Findings from the fieldwork*

The settlement process of LGBT 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 LGBT 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 LGBT 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, LGBT 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 LGBT 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.

LGBT 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 LGBT people but in comparison with their countries, LGBT immigrants and refugees feel much better.

Professionals who work with LGBT 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 LGBT and traditional gender stereotypes prevailing in their countries. In addition, the need for training on issues regarding LGBT 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.

## **B. From the face-to-face adult education programme in Greece**

The face-to-face adult education programme which was developed in order to increase the knowledge and build/improve the capacity of the professionals and volunteers who work with LGBT immigrants and refugees was piloted in two organisations in Athens, on the 18th and the 23rd of May 2018.

The 1st pilot included staff from the NGO DIOTIMA, an organisation which focuses on the prevention and the combating of gender based violence. This is an organisation which works with migrants and refugees, providing psychosocial services and support. The participants of the training included social workers, psychologists, cultural mediators and administrative staff.

The 2nd pilot involved staff from the international NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) and included health promoters and cultural mediators.

In general, the overall evaluation of the training was very positive and participants mentioned that the training materials are very suitable for both professionals and volunteers working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and for those working with LGBTIQ+ people.

According to their evaluation, all 13 participants mentioned that the training has met their expectations. Participants were asked to estimate their knowledge about LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, refugees and migrants prior to the training and after the training on a scale from 1 to 10. The average score before the training was 6,15 and the respective score after the training was 7,92. Overall their opinion about the training was very good (7 participants) and good (6 participants). When participants were asked to evaluate the trainers, 8 of participants considered the trainers “very good”, 4 of them considered the trainers “good”, whereas 1 of them answered that his/her opinion about the trainers is “regular”. Besides, all participants found that the training methodologies were appropriate. 11 of the participants found that the time dedicated to each topic was appropriate, whereas 2 had the opposite opinion.

# **Key recommendations for national and EU policy, research and practice**

## **A. At national level**

LGBT immigrants and refugees living in Greece 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, LGBT people settle in a country where inequalities and discrimination against LGBT continue to exist, while phenomena of homophobia are particularly acute in recent years. Thus, LGBT 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, LGBT 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. At the same time, it is very important for them to be supported and served by professionals who are very aware of their situation and their particular needs. The Epsilon training programme has been a very good step in increasing the knowledge and improving the skills of the professionals and volunteers working with LGBT refugees and migrants in Greece.

Based on the above mentioned issues as well as on the experience from KMOP participation as a partner organisation

in the Epsilon project, the following key recommendations are suggested at national level:

- Improvement of accommodation structures and living conditions of LGBT refugees and immigrants, so as they feel safe
- Provision of personalised psychological and social support, considering the special needs of LGBT 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 LGBT 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 LGBT refugees and immigrants
- Information and awareness-raising of wider society regarding this particularly vulnerable group
- Continuous training for all professionals and volunteers coming into contact with LGBT refugees and immigrants.

## **B. At EU level**

At an EU level, all partner organisations should participate in similar strategic partnerships, in the frame of the Erasmus+ or other similar Programmes, in order to expand their knowledge and expertise on the topic. Besides, they should build on and follow up on the results of the Epsilon project by implementing similar activities addressed to professionals and volunteers working with LGBT refugees and migrants across Europe.

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# ITALY

## 1. Key objective of the country report

The reasons that lead people to leave their native Country for new destinations are numerous and different: not only economic reasons, but also, for example, religious, cultural, ethnic, political. Among these, there is undoubtedly the need to avoid the violation of the human rights in the native Country, including the denial of living free and express their own sexual orientation and gender identity.

In the last years the migration topic is one of the main problems for the European Union and in recent time the member States started to pay interest to the needs and problems of the particular category of LGBTIQ+ migrants, with specific attention to asylum seekers and refugees<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, according to the latest ILGA report on homophobia (2017), 72 Countries worldwide criminalise same-sex relationships and the situation in these Countries remains critical for LGBTIQ+ people, who are deprived of the freedom to live their sexual orientation and gender identity, sometimes also with the death. It is therefore probable that many of these people decide to join to the flow of migrants that leave their Country coming to Europe in search of a better life.

States started to understand that this category of migrants have different, specific problems and needs, related to the violation of rights often suffered in the native Country. The difficulties involve also isolation, social exclusion and discrimination experienced in the host Country and implemented by the States, by the local community and also by other non LGBTIQ+ migrants.

Considering that, it is essential to increase the studies and knowledge about this particular sample of population, developing procedures specifically designed, and implementing the level of knowledge of professionals and volunteers working closely with them.

For this reason EPSILON was born, a two-year Erasmus+ project which has the aim to bridge the gap in knowledge and skills in professionals and volunteers working with LGBTIQ+ migrants.

The objective is increasing the level of awareness about needs and problems of this particularly vulnerable group,

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this chapter the terms:

- “LGBTIQ+” is an acronym used to refer comprehensively to the whole community of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersexual, Asexual and Queer people and others
- “LGBTIQ+ migrants”, unless otherwise stated, includes both the category of asylum seekers and refugees and the category of migrant people coming in Europe for other reasons

subject to a high risk of multiple discriminations and social emargination, both because of their LGBTIQ+ and migrant background. In fact, according to the Report of the Parliamentary Committee “Jo Cox” on intolerance, xenophobia, racism and hate phenomena (2017) in the Italian pyramid of hate, migrants and LGBTIQ+ people are at the top.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the few changes occurred in the Italian context since the beginning of the project, comparing this research with that one in the previous EPSILON report (Gavrielides, 2016).

An analysis of the field work realised in the first part of the project (Output 1- O1) and a review of the previous literature are followed by an analysis of the results of a face-to-face training course for professionals and volunteers working with LGBTIQ+ people and migrants (Output 2 - O2). Finally, the implications that the results of the EPSILON project will have on policies and practices, both at national and European level, are evaluated.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Methodology of the O1

The O1 is the result of a qualitative and quantitative research of secondary and primary type.

The secondary research consisted in the collection of data, information and practices from the literature with the purpose of describing the national context in terms of state of the art. In this national chapter the secondary research has the aim of updating the Italian framework described in the previous EPSILON report.

Information and data were obtained through the use of Internet in general and specifically through the use of databases such as Google Scholar, Academia.edu and Researchgate.

The research was conducted through the combination of key terms such as “Discrimination”, “Asylum seekers”, “Refugees”, “Migrants”, “Sexual orientation”, “Gender identity”, “LGBT”, “SOGI” including their synonyms and derivatives, both in Italian and in English. The articles taken into consideration are those referred to the Italian context or generally referred to the theme treated but useful for the national research.

The primary research consisted in 1 focus group with 5 LGBTIQ+ migrants, 7 individual interviews with LGBTIQ+ migrants and 4 individual interviews with professionals working with migrants or LGBTIQ+ migrants or in general in the field of migration.

Finally, the questionnaire “Comfort in social situation”, developed by Ph. D. Mary E. Kite from Ball State University and translated in Italian language, has been administered by the means of an online survey with the aim of investigating the aptitudes of the LGBTIQ+ community members towards some minorities.

### 2.1. Methodology of the O2

The O2 consisted in a primary qualitative and quantitative research.

The research was conducted using data and information derived from the face-to-face 7 hours training who took place in Bologna, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2018.

17 people participated in the training, including researchers, social workers (both volunteers and professionals) and LGBTIQ+ activists from several Italian Regions.

The general structure was elaborated by all the partners involved in the project and successively readapted to country specific contexts. In particular, each partner developed an *ad hoc* section in order to describe their own country situa-

tion when it comes to SOGI claims<sup>2</sup>. As established in the handbook, given the double target of the project, the training is built to be readapted according to the level of expertise of the participants and their belonging to a professional or volunteering environment which already entails some of the preliminary information included in the training.

The participants in the training held in Bologna were of mixed backgrounds regarding SOGI asylum claims. For this reason, the training was delivered as a whole, giving priority to module 1 (“Being LGBTIQ+”) and 2 (“LGBTIQ+ Asylum seekers and refugees”). Due to the limited timeframe, module 3 (LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Environments for Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees) was addressed mainly by using practical activities.

## 3. Key findings

### 3.1. From the research

Regarding data, the Italian situation has remained the same compared to that one described in the first report: there is a lack of statistical information about LGBTIQ+ migrants in general and LGBTIQ+ asylum seeker and refugees in particular. No information is collected regarding the number of SOGI requests and the few data found in the previous report are excessively dated. In fact, they concern the period before the increase of migratory flows (from 2014 onwards): the territorial commissions in Italy do not release data regarding the reason why people submit the asylum application (Lanni, 2017).

On the contrary, in the years 2017-2018 it has been possible to observe an increase of initiatives and services dedicated to the protection of LGBTIQ+ migrants’ rights, with particular attention to asylum seekers and refugees. These services are in addition to those provided by the associations already mentioned in the previous report (MigraBo Bologna<sup>3</sup> and Il Grande Colibri<sup>4</sup>):

- **Pink Refugees<sup>5</sup>**, a group of support born in 2017 in Verona, within the Pink Club LGBTIQ+ association, for sharing experiences of isolation and discrimination and discussing about the topic of LGBTIQ+ migrants
- **Arcigay<sup>6</sup> and Migranet project**. Arcigay is an LGBTIQ+ association active for several years in the field of social inclusion, protection and promotion of LGBTIQ+ migrants’ rights, with a specific focus on asylum seekers and refugees. It operates on the national territory with several help desks for LGBTIQ+ migrants and with the Migranet project it has the aim to expand the field of work of these help desks in terms of new activities, support services and network enhancement
- In 2017, **Caleidos Social Cooperative** has arranged two apartments in Modena for the reception of LGBTIQ+ asylum seeker (“Immigrati gay, un rifugio per 14 persone”, 2017)
- **“Migro perché sono”<sup>7</sup>**, second edition of seminar cycle held between February and April 2018, organised by the University of Bologna, on the topic of LGBTIQ+ migrants

Regarding good legal practices related to SOGI applications, the previous report highlighted the positive practices used by the Italian system for the recognition of international protection:

<sup>2</sup> SOGI claims are request based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

<sup>3</sup> An association with the purpose of helping LGBTIQ+ migrants to integrate in Italy in general and in the LGBTIQ+ world in particular, also assisting asylum seekers in the international protection procedure for SOGI reasons ([www.migrabo.wordpress.com](http://www.migrabo.wordpress.com)).

<sup>4</sup> A voluntary association in favour of LGBTIQ+ people who wants to bring out the importance of differences (ethnic, cultural, religious, etc.) that intersect those related to sexual orientation and gender identity ([www.ilgrandecolibri.com](http://www.ilgrandecolibri.com)).

<sup>5</sup> [www.circolopink.it/cases/pink-refugees](http://www.circolopink.it/cases/pink-refugees)

<sup>6</sup> [www.arcigay.it](http://www.arcigay.it)

<sup>7</sup> [www.giurisprudenza.unibo.it/it/corsi/insegnamenti/insegnamento/2017/425257](http://www.giurisprudenza.unibo.it/it/corsi/insegnamenti/insegnamento/2017/425257)

- Not considering relevant if homosexual acts, although punishable, are not prosecuted in the native Country<sup>8</sup>
- Not necessary to verify that the asylum seeker has resorted to the protection of his native state when homosexuality is persecuted by non-state actors
- Not considering relevant to have maintained behaviour of “discretion” regarding sexual orientation and gender identity in the native Country
- No medical consultation to determine the sexual orientation of asylum seekers: only documentary evidences (if available) or asylum seekers’ declaration
- Being married does not preclude the concession of the international protection for SOGI reasons
- International protection has been granted even in the case of late disclosure<sup>9</sup> (Jansens & Spijkerboer, 2011).

However, with the introduction of the Law Decree No. 13/2017, converted with amendments by Law No. 46/2017, the situation for LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers could worsen, because the law introduces some counter-productive elements: the abolishment of the appeal judgement for applicants that have received a refusal (art. 6, par. 11, let. g); the video-taping of the testimony (Article 6, par. 1, let. c) which limits the possibility of a face-to-face comparison between the appellant and the judge.

As highlighted by the results of interviews and focus groups reported in the previous report, there are still strong problems related to effective social inclusion and full freedom to live sexual orientation and gender identity: the fear of openly living and revealing one’s own sexual orientation or gender identity within the reception centres, the communities (often not inclined to accept homosexual practices because contrary to the native country vision), but also to themselves, due to the experiences lived in the home Country; often, the lack of a continuous support by operators adequately trained and sensitised on the topic in all the phases of the reception path.

### **3.2. From the face-to-face adult education programme**

The pilot training took place in Bologna on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2018, involving 17 participants from several Italian Regions.

The participants had different backgrounds, from researchers and social workers (both volunteers and professionals) to LGBTIQ+ activists.

The overall evaluation of the training is very positive: almost 95% of the participants rated the training as “Good” or “Very good” and only one person rated it as “Regular”.

Participants enjoyed the possibility to discuss case studies and that they could share experiences between each other. In particular, most of them appreciated learning through practical activities rather than a frontal class.

From the feedback of the participants emerged how essential it has been for them to come across other organisations and other experiences, in order to confront each other especially regarding the good practices already in use or the ones that could be implemented.

Given the abovementioned mixed background of the participants, the overall knowledge (on a scale from 1 to 10) before the training was delivered shows that almost 60% of the participants self-evaluated themselves with a sufficient/good knowledge level (answers from 6 to 10), while a percentage slightly above 40% said their knowledge was insufficient (answers from 1 to 5).

At the end of the training the total of the sufficient/good knowledge level increased to almost 95%, with a growth of 35% points. Regarding the time dedicated to the topics, 30% of the participants stated it was not sufficient, saying they

<sup>8</sup> Cass. Civ., Sez. VI, sentence 20 September 2012 No. 15981

<sup>9</sup> Cass. Civ., Sez. VI, sentence 5 March 2015, No. 4522

would have preferred having more time available in order to deepen their knowledge. Furthermore, the general expectation on the training was totally respected for 70% of the participants, while the remaining 30% was only partially satisfied.

## 4. Key recommendations for national and EU policy, research and practice

In Italy far too little has been said about LGBTIQ+ migrant issue in terms of knowledge and data. However, in recent years it is possible to observe a progressive increment of good practices by the associations that deal with migrant reception and by those that deal with raising awareness on LGBTIQ+ issues.

The recommendation is therefore to invest more in the interdisciplinary study, research and monitoring of the phenomenon, also making the data of SOGI requests accessible. The greater knowledge of the phenomenon allows creating more solid foundations for the training of volunteers and professionals working with migrants, increasing the ability to adequately support LGBTIQ+ migrants.

In addition, a more in-depth knowledge, also in terms of numbers, facilitates the development of really effective practices and policies.

The EPSILON workshop should be part of the basic training of all the operators working with migrants, because it not possible to know how many migrants are LGBTIQ+. Furthermore, it should be essential to involve LGBTIQ+ refugees in the training for properly understanding the needs of this vulnerable group.

In order to raise awareness the existence of migrants LGBTIQ+ issue and favour their integration in the local community it could be also useful to promote the EPSILON training among LGBTIQ+ associations.

A critical point emerged from the feedbacks of participants in the training is that often members of Territorial Commissions don't have sufficient LGBTIQ+ issues knowledge. For this reason, it could be important to raise awareness and promote training initiatives also for them.

Another fundamental step is certainly to strengthen the collaboration between LGBTIQ+ organisations and associations that deal with migrants, creating common practices of networking and information sharing.

Finally, there is the need to improve and encouraging the exchange of experiences between colleagues of the same organisation, in order to transform the internal comparison into a useful tool for the increase of work awareness and of the abilities of case managing.

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# NETHERLANDS

This summary and conclusions contain the most important results and recommendations of the Epsilon programme in the Netherlands. Epsilon is a cooperative of Italy, Cyprus, Greece, Great Britain and the Netherlands to jointly increase professionals' and volunteers' knowledge, skills and awareness of LGBT issues so they in turn are better able to support LGBT asylum seekers and refugees. We began with exploratory fieldwork and literature searches and continued with face-to-face training and e-learning. The results of the project have been implemented in various ways.

## Methodology

In this programme we focus on LGBT asylum seekers, people who came to the Netherlands or other European countries and are still waiting for their residence status, and on 'newcomers', refugees of non-Dutch or non-European origin with a legal residence status, who fled to the Netherlands during the last two years.

The main question of the Epsilon study *'What are the needs of LGBT asylum seekers and refugees, and of the professionals and volunteers who work with them, with regard to increasing the support for and acceptance of those LGBT people, and which interventions are known to contribute to this? Do the people involved feel these interventions work, and what could work according to literature?'* has been explored by means of:

- A literature study in which we examined which good practices exist with regard to supporting LGBT asylum seekers and refugees and what literature says regarding what works to increase the acceptance of LGBT asylum seekers and refugees.
- A field study for which we interviewed seven LGBT asylum seekers (3) and refugees (4) about their experiences with and need of support and acceptance, and put the same questions to seven professionals and six volunteers working with LGBT asylum seekers and refugees in two focus group sessions.

In the Netherlands the Epsilon programme has been implemented by means of:

- Face-to-face training of 23 professionals who work with asylum seekers and refugees
- E-learning by 200 participants in Europe
- A final conference to share all the experiences and knowledge we gathered.
- Participation in several meetings in the Netherlands, such as workshops in a conference on LGBT asylum seekers on 6 October 2017 in Amsterdam, and sessions with Rainbow cities in the Netherlands

- Articles published on websites of Movisie, KIS (Knowledge platform Integration & Society) and LGBT organisations, and in newsletters (e.g. PinkLink)
- Social media, for instance the Epsilon project Facebook group, where knowledge and experiences were shared. The Advisory Board of the Epsilon project, with a large group of Dutch participants, made a major contribution to this.

In addition to the Dutch project partners of Movisie, Dutch participants (including target group experts by experience) contributed in project meetings, conferences and by testing the Epsilon project training. The Epsilon project also increased the network of people in the Netherlands who work with LGBT asylum seekers and refugees. Now they know how to contact one another if they have questions in this field.

Following are the most important results of the literature study, the field study and the implementation.

## Results of the field study

The most important results of the field study among LGBT asylum seekers and refugees and the professionals and volunteers working with them are: provide information on the procedure in the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), train IND staff and professionals and volunteers who support LGBT asylum seekers and refugees, emphasize the importance of discretion, shelter venues should have clear directives, separate shelters can provide safety, more diverse staff, support LGBT asylum seekers and refugees with psychological and social problems.

The following points for improvement to increase acceptance were mentioned: the participation statement ought to be signed earlier, before the residence permit is received, the IND should be aware that LGBT discrimination also exists in the Netherlands, COA should make clear what they do about the non-acceptance of LGBT asylum seekers and refugees, when the safety of LGBT people in shelter cannot be guaranteed a separate shelter is the only solution, and already during shelter it should be made clear that LGBT is part of Dutch society.

## Results of the literature study

From the literature study we found that having LGBT feelings may be an important reason to flee, for homosexuality is a crime in 77 countries in the world. Someone with LGBT feelings will not automatically receive a residence permit in the Netherlands; IND looks at individual cases and takes into account the situation in the country of origin and the personal story. However, it is not always obvious that an asylum seeker openly shares his or her LGBT feelings. In shelters LGBT people may still feel or be unsafe. The major problems LGBT people with a refugee story experience are psychological problems and social exclusion.

The most important recommendations for professionals and volunteers to increase support to LGBT asylum seekers and refugees are: make sure that staff and volunteers know about LGBT and cultural backgrounds, build a trusting relationship, relate to the 'language' of the asylum seeker or refugee, build an atmosphere of LGBT friendliness, get LGBT asylum seekers and refugees in touch with each other and with other LGBT people, refer to (interest) organisations that support LGBT asylum seekers and refugees, intervene in unsafe situations, name LGBT explicitly in the safety and anti-discrimination protocol, distinguish which methods work in sharing knowledge, give LGBT asylum seekers and refugees a realistic picture of the situation in the Netherlands, offer information online and in several languages, create safety in case of threats or violence, and pay attention to LGBT in the integration of status holders.

A number of methods may work well in promoting acceptance of LGBT asylum seekers and refugees. (1) Using personal stories of LGBT people (2) Films with personal stories of LGBT people that allow non-LGBT people to share feelings and develop empathy (parasocial interaction theory) (3) Films showing friendships between LGBTs and non-LGBTs with the same cultural origin as viewers (extended interaction theory) (4) To prepare for a face-to-face meeting with a LGBT person, it works to ask participants to imagine meeting an LGBT person and that it was a positive contact (imaginary contact) (5) Communicating a positive social standard regarding LGBT. This is done by asking non-LGBT persons with

authority to speak out in favour of acceptance of LGBT people and by saying that increasing numbers of people from their own ethnic group have started to think more positively about LGBT or that they will not tolerate discrimination of LGBT people (social norm).

There are several good practice examples in the Netherlands for support to, and sometimes also acceptance of, LGBT asylum seekers and refugees. Please see the overview in 'References'.

## Results of the implementation

The face-to-face training was an important part of the implementation. The most important results of the face-to-face training / pilots at COA and *VluchtelingenWerk* are that participants have become aware of what it is to be LGBT, understand sexual preference and gender identity, know what being LGBT means in an asylum procedure, are familiar with the asylum procedure for LGBT asylum seekers in the Netherlands and the importance of international protection, and have learned about sex workers and international protection and the link between sex work and migration.

They also learned and practiced conducting conversations about being LGBT, how to pose the right questions and how to identify and counteract homophobia, transphobia and discrimination. They also learned what works to promote acceptance of LGBT among newcomers, have reflected on how to guard their own personal boundaries, and what the involvement of bicultural LGBT (friendly) colleagues may contribute.

All participants will continue to work with what they have learned during the training. They have indicated a wish to pay further in-depth attention to several topics.

The implementation also consisted of an E-learning for 200 participants in Europe, a final conference in which all experience and knowledge obtained was shared and the sharing of knowledge through various meetings in the Netherlands, various articles and through social media.

The Epsilon project also increased the network of people working with LGBT asylum seekers and refugees in the Netherlands.

## Recommendations for the Netherlands and for Europe

- **In the institutions that decide on asylum procedures (policy) and implement them, staff members need to be trained in working with LGBT asylum seekers and refugees**

They need to be informed about LGBT people and their cultural backgrounds. 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 LGBT feelings, and moreover they should promote discretion.

- **Shelter locations should radiate positive views regarding LGBT**

Newcomers' shelters should demonstrate that LGBT people are part of Dutch society. It may help to explicitly mention LGBT people as a target group in the safety and anti-discrimination protocol and to have one contact person per location.

- **Training staff of shelters (for instance COA) increases support for LGBT asylum seekers and refugees**

In a training course on support for LGBT people, shelter staff can learn more about how to identify and support LGBT people, and how to increase the acceptance of LGBT people.

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

LGBT newcomers themselves often are not sure what is happening to them and could use help to better understand themselves and the situation of LGBT people in the country of arrival (for instance the Netherlands).

- **Bicultural LGBT-friendly staff and bicultural LGBT people may increase support**

A more diverse workforce – both professionals and volunteers – in organizations working with asylum seekers and refugees, provides opportunities for improvement, because these people will be better able to understand the situation and the context of both LGBT and non-LGBT asylum seekers.

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

Providing information to newcomers with the aim to increase LGBT acceptance is more likely to be successful if the emphasis is on sympathy, empathy and a positive social norm.

- **Be very aware of homophobic members of staff and do not let them work with LGBT people** In Europa (also in the Netherlands) LGBT discrimination is still the case, also with people who work with asylum seekers and refugees, including judges, lawyers, civil servants and interpreters. Be aware and take action against it.

- **When the safety of LGBT people in a shelter cannot be guaranteed, create separate shelters**

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

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## **Organisations cooperating in the project:**

- COC Nederland
- Het Cocktail Maatjes project van COC
- COA

- Transvisie
- VluchtelingenWerk

Through these organisations respondents (LGBT asylum seekers and refugees and professionals and volunteers working with them) have been interviewed. Respondents remain anonymous.

# CYPRUS

Cyprus is a country that ranks quite low in the national, legal, and political human rights situation of LGBTIQ+ individuals. In Cyprus, homophobia manifests itself in public debate and in daily micro aggression, without any known consequences, even though there is legal framework governing it, while at the same time positive LGBTIQ+ role-models are absent. One can find discrimination at different layers of the daily life such as family, workplace and political life, both in terms of ethnic origin, colour of the skin, religion, and sexual orientation

In a society, where the numbers of young, non-EU migrants and refugees is growing, and which is gradually transforming into a society more open to diversity, issues relating to LGBTIQ+ migrant and refugees has never been more urgent. The challenge now is for the pace of social reform to catch up with the rate of migration and societal demands of LGBTIQ+ people. Informing and educating the public in general, but particularly professionals or volunteers that come in contact with LGBTIQ+ migrants and refugees in Cyprus is an imperative need, and the role of Epsilon project is even greater.

Through this report, needs are identified and suggestions made, which summarize the project's work and implementation in a way where the results are relevant, timely and useful to the project's target group.

## Key objective of the country report

Based on the principles of equality, respect, solidarity and freedom of expression, the Centre for the Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology (CARDET) has been implementing since September 2016 the Epsilon Project, 'Equipping Professionals for the Support of LGBTI Refugees and Migrants', funded by the Erasmus + European Program Union. With this project, CARDET stands for once more on the side of the LGBTIQ+ community, advocating for, and defending the rights of a very sensitive population group, that of LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants.

The aim of this report is to highlight the problems faced by LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and to address the need to provide specialized support to LGBTI refugees as well as better training to professionals (interpreters, legal and social workers) who come in contact with them. The report integrates the two year learning and practical results of Epsilon Project in Cyprus. In particular the paper brings together theoretical and practical results of the project including its pilots, training and on the ground learning from Cyprus. It includes policy recommendations and best practices for those serving migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

# Methodology

The method section of this report details how the initial literature review and fieldwork were conducted (O1), the research and training methods used (O2 and O3) and all important procedures that were followed in a way where the final results are relevant, timely and useful to the project's target group (E4 and Epsilon Advisory Board and Local Partnerships).

To complete the literature review (O1) CARDET researched reports, studies, statistics, laws and policies of the state. The literature was selected based on the data availability on the subjects of LGBTIQ+ 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 organizations as well as international organizations. To complete the fieldwork CARDET organized a Focus Group meeting as well as individual interviews with LGBTIQ+ migrants and refugees.

The 1-day training-pilot (O2) was implemented on a face-to-face basis at the CARDET's offices in Nicosia. The pilot took place on 7 May 2018, and twelve individuals representing a variety of governmental and non-governmental sectors attended the pilot. CARDET used the training session not only as an opportunity to provide some units of the Epsilon training adult education program but also as a mean to discuss in depth with the representatives from all governmental and non-governmental organizations and enrich their knowledge and expertise about the real needs of LGBTIQ+ migrants and refugees .

The open educational and training e-resource (O3) was promoted through CARDET's website and social media accounts but also in various events as well (conferences, workshops etc.) CARDET has a constant communication with all the users and all partner organizations to answer questions and provide any kind of assistance regarding the online training course and the e-learning platform. Moreover in the 1-day training we devoted a whole session for the participants to navigate into the Epsilon E-learning platform, create their personal accounts and to get familiar with the English and Greek versions of the e-resource. Finally CARDET continuously try to contact interested governmental and non-governmental organizations for a possible presentation on the E platform and the E educational training e-resource.

In total thirty-five individuals participated at the national closing conference (E4) for the Epsilon Project which was held on Friday, June 1, 2018, at the Classic Hotel, in Nicosia, Cyprus. The conference entitled "*LGBTI Refugees: Rights, Practices and Policy Recommendations for introducing an Awareness and Integration Framework in Cyprus*" and engaged key figures and stakeholders from a variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations for example: representatives of Cypriot public services, embassies, organizations that help refugees, civil society organizations, academics, international organizations and agencies, media, educators and the general public. LGBTIQ+ refugees attended the conference as well and share their own personal stories.

The conference focused on the various problems and challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ refugees and asylum seekers today like: the double stigma, the real needs of LGBTIQ+ refugees and the urgent need for training of professionals (government officials, police officers, social workers, interpreters, lawyers and other stakeholders) who come in contact with them.

CARDET prepared evaluation questionnaires that were filled out by all participants and speakers and the feedback was indeed very good. The conference was considered by many successful and productive and very well organized, both logistically and in terms of its contents (reports, panels, etc.) Generally it was a very important initiative given the fact the increased number of refugees coming to Cyprus and applying for asylum based on Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity.

Moreover it is important to notice that CARDET implemented activities regarding Epsilon Project in the framework of **Cyprus Pride Festivals 2017 and 2018**.

Five professionals and volunteers working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers were selected as the **Epsilon Advisory Board in Cyprus**, ensuring the rightful and smoothly implementation of the programme. Moreover for better

results and outcomes CARDET successfully collaborated for the needs of this project **with local key non-governmental organizations** active on Migrants, Refugees and LGBTIQ+ issues, like the UNHCR Cyprus, Cyprus Refugee Council, Council Aware and ACCEPT LGBTI Cyprus. Strong indicator of success is also the fact that CARDET cooperated in this project with the only **LGBTIQ+ led migrant and refugees associations** in the island, LGBT Philipinas Cyprus and Refugee Association Cyprus,

## Key findings

'Epsilon' Project, is considered by all relevant actors one of the most prominent LGBTIQ+-led projects in the island. During the two years implementation in Cyprus the following key findings, key points, policy recommendations and suggestions were identified.

The crucial question that arose from the project's implementation was:

### Is Cyprus a good destination for LGBTIQ+ migrants, refugees and asylum seekers?

- Statistics about the number of LGBTIQ+ migrants and refugees in Cyprus, or even LGBTIQ+ Cypriots, are missing from the annual state statistics sets.
- In general the Cypriot society 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.
- However 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 such as the criminalization of homophobic and transphobic rhetoric and incitement to violence or hatred which constitutes an important step.
- Moreover since 2015, the public incitement of violence against LGBTIQ+ has also been criminalized as homophobic hate speech. In other words, it is now a criminal offense to engage in violence against someone on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity
- At the same time the recent historic civil union bill (November 2015) 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. The bill also shows how far Cyprus has come since decriminalizing same-sex sexual relations in 1998.

## Summary of Key points

- Cypriot society remains conservative on issues of diversity and sexuality.
- LGBTIQ+ migrants and refugees are all living in a 'double closet'/ facing a 'double stigma' and are reluctant to reveal their sexual orientation to their own communities and consequently to the local population. Even the local LGBTIQ+ community is afraid of 'Coming Out'.
- Racist remarks in the public debate continue and are a common phenomenon even if they have been criminalized
- The Orthodox Church of Cyprus has taken a clear anti-LGBTIQ+ attitude in many cases.
- The media continue to show migrants and refugees, particularly Muslims with a negative lens, and link them with problems such as rising unemployment and crime, while being characterized as homophobic in an "ad-hesive" degree.
- There has also been an increase in violence against immigrants.

- Migrants remain stuck in limbo, condemned in social marginalization (Continuous Discrimination by all services and the general public)
- Lack of specialised information for LGBTIQ+ migrants and refugees
- Lack of specialised services and/or medical treatment
- The state services are yet to adopt a gender-mainstreaming approach.
- Lack of Legal & Psychosocial support for LGBTIQ+ migrants and refugees.

Regarding LGBTIQ+ refugees and asylum seekers it is worth noting that:

**Cyprus is not a country that easily provides asylum.**

- There is an increase in the number of refugees who have fled due to their sexual orientation or gender including refugees who have survived sexual and gender based violence/torture has been recorded.
- At the same time there is an increase in cases granted refugee status based on sexual orientation, gender, SGBV/T which is very encouraging.
- However the lack of systematic and comprehensive data on the number and types of claims makes it difficult to assess the overall recognition rate. (Refugee Status Recommendation)
- All professionals involved in the asylum procedure are often not equipped to deal with so-called SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) claims.
- NGOs are accusing even judges, immigration and reception professionals and police officers of being xenophobic and not having adequate training.
- Procedures (identification, assessment) and Services for LGBTIQ+ refugees including survivors who survived SGBV/T are underdeveloped - specific protection needs are not be met adequately.
- Lack of effective referral systems for procedural guarantees – reception conditions

## Key recommendations for national and EU policy, research and practice

- Develop a database/statistics on the number of LGTBIQ+ people in Cyprus
- Recognition of the need to develop a policy with regard to issues concerning LGBTIQ+ society as well as immigrants. These policies can have some parallel lines touching on issues of integration and equality that are independent of sexual orientation, as well as different nationalities, religions
- Tremendous need for training adult educators, professionals and individuals working with LGTBIQ+ migrants / refugees, asylum seekers
- Interactive workshops and targeted seminars for professionals and volunteers : make them think about how others feel.
- Cultural Sensitivity trainings: to leave room for understanding the cultural impact of LGBTI refugees on revealing their sexual orientation
- Need to resolve key problems relating mainly to the trans and intersex communities in Cyprus.
- Need for the setup of a National Committee for LGBTIQ+ Matters
- Need to change the law criminalising homophobic and transphobic rhetoric after it emerged that this, as it stands, does not work correctly.

- Need for Multidisciplinary support: legal/justice, psychosocial, health, safety and security
- Need for examination of LGBTIQ+ asylum claims by trained examiners who have been evaluated on issues of discrimination and biases – Ensure referrals
- A rights-based approach: empowering the individuals and communities to exercise their rights
- Empowerment of sexual and gender minorities

# ANNEX A

# HANDBOOK FOR TRAINERS

# About the training

This handbook material is designed as part of Output 2 of Epsilon project, which consists of a face to face training for professionals working with LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants. The training is a user-led, face-to-face educational programme for adult professionals and volunteers. Its aim is to increase knowledge and skills of professionals, ultimately building their capacity to answer to the needs of LGBTIQ+ refugees, contributing to preventing abuse in centers, shelters, local communities and services dedicated to this target group.

The material will be adapted to the circumstances of each participating country and translated in local language. It will include a Certificate of attendance, a self-assessment toolkit and a list of best practices. It will also be accredited with CPD accreditation status through the IARS International Institute.

## Terminology

Although the original project proposal of Epsilon only refers to LGBT refugees and migrants, with the intention to be as inclusive as possible, the partnership has decided to broaden its remit, therefore we now refer to the Epsilon target group in this handbook as LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants.

LGBTIQ+ is an inclusive acronym aimed at encompassing the whole spectrum of non-normative sexual and gender identities. Trans\* is used here as an inclusive umbrella term for all people in the trans spectrum from transgender, transsexuals, to transvestites; some of whom may identify as non-binary or agender. Q\* refers to the queer non-normative spectrum of sexualities and genders, including but not limited to Asexual, Pansexual, Gender queer etc.<sup>1</sup>

This acronym will be used throughout all our training materials.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.genderagenda.net/LGBTIQdefinition.htm>

# OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

## Concept of the training

The training course has been built along 3 modules, which together have a total of 19 units. This training can be delivered as a whole or through combining different modules according to the audience. Suggested alternatives for delivery include:

#A – Deliver the whole training (when addressing a more generic or mixed target audience) or

#B – Deliver module (1) plus module (3) when targeting professionals with a background in migration and asylum

#C – Deliver module (2) plus module (3) when targeting professionals with a background in LGBTIQ+ rights and/or issues.

The training contents are available in English, Italian, Greek and Dutch.

Please note that while the majority of the training contents have been developed for an European use, irrespective of the country where the training is delivered, some units are country specific. These units (namely 1.5, 2.2 and 2.5) exist in different local versions and they have been developed only in the language of the country they refer to (so for example, units 1.5, 2.2. and 2.5 referring to Italy are available only in Italian).

## Modules

The contents of the modules are the following

### Module 1 – Being LGBTIQ+

**1.1.** Sex, gender, Sexual orientation, sexual identity and gender identity: what are they, how do they differ and how do they inter-connect with each other

**1.2** LGBTIQ+: terminology and definition

**1.3** Trans-identities and gender non-conforming persons

**1.4** Differences between LGBTIQ+ identities and LGBTIQ+ behaviors (MSM and FSM) in a cross-cultural perspective

**1.5** LGBTIQ+ rights in [country] // country specific

### Module 2 – LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers and refugees

**2.1** LGBTIQ+phobia and discrimination towards LGBTIQ+: why LGBTIQ+ might need international protection?

**2.2** SOGI-claims for asylum seekers in [country] : basics of the procedure // country specific

**2.3** Bi-sexual, intersexual and asexual asylum seekers: impact on SOGI claims of not being LGBTIQ+

**2.4** Sex workers and international protection: overcoming the stigma

**2.5** Support system for LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in [country] // country specific

**2.6** How to talk about LGBTIQ+ related issues with people from different cultural backgrounds

**2.7** International good practices on how to reach, support and protect LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in shelters (with a special focus on transgender)

**2.8** How to pose questions on sexual preference and gender identity without crossing other people's boundaries (according to the UNHCR guidelines)

## **Module 3 – LGBTIQ+ inclusive environment for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees**

**3.1** How to promote inclusive environments for migrants in LGBTIQ+ organizations

**3.2** How to recognise homophobia and racism among colleagues and how to challenge it

**3.3** How to increase the acceptance of LGBTIQ+ among newcomers

**3.4** How to deal with personal boundaries (for example in professional/volunteer – LGBTIQ+ refugee relations)

**3.5** How to engage/promote bicultural LGBTIQ+ -friendly people and bicultural LGBTIQ+ people (including 2nd generations) in NGOs // case studies

**3.6** How to work with migrant associations / communities on LGBTIQ+ -related topics // case studies (one per country)

## **Methodology**

The content and materials of this handbook were designed collectively by the partnership. Each organization was made responsible for drafting a number of units, upon completion all units were then peer-reviewed by all members of the partnership and by members of the Epsilon Advisory Board.

Following the peer review process, the main author(s) incorporated feedback and fine-tuned the units of the training. The final version of the materials was pilot-tested during a train-the-trainers' activity in Athens (20th – 24th November 2017).

## **Target**

The Epsilon training has been designed to be an introductory training programme to raise awareness and provide understanding of basic concepts and information to professionals and volunteers working either in the field of migration and asylum (i.e. social workers, cultural mediators, educators, language teachers, intercultural workers, volunteers), in the field of advocacy and support for LGBTIQ+ (activists, social workers, volunteers), or both.

Since it does not target professionals with high levels of expertise on the topics and because of constraints relating to the duration of modules, the training is supposed to offer a basic introduction to topics discussed. This training is not intended to and cannot be considered exhaustive.

# Duration

Each module has been developed to last approximately 2 hours. This means that the entire training is supposed to last 6 hours while the combination of module 1 or 2 with module 3 will only last 4 hours.

The short duration of the training was agreed by the partnership to ensure the sustainability of the intervention after the project funding comes to an end.

# Trainers

This training has been designed to be delivered either by a trainer with background in LGBTIQ+ refugee issues or a team of trainers: one with a background in LGBTIQ+ issues and the other with a background on migration and asylum. It is highly advisable for this training to be delivered by a trainer with lived experiences of being a LGBTIQ+ refugee or migrant.

The training programme has been conceived as a combination of (short) lectures and active learning techniques, aimed to encourage discussion and critical thinking and to make sure that each participant can contribute with their own skills and experiences. It is therefore important for the trainer(s) to have good facilitation skills.

# MODULE 1 – BEING LGBTIQ+

<b>TOPICS COVERED:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Unit 1.1 Sex, gender, Sexual orientation, sexual identity and gender identity: what are they, how do they differ and how do they inter-connect with each other</li><li>- Unit 1.2. LGBTIQ+: terminology and definition</li><li>- Unit 1.3 Trans-identities and gender non-conforming persons</li><li>- Unit 1.4 Differences between LGBTIQ+ identities and LGBTIQ+ behaviors (MSM and FSM) in a cross-cultural perspective</li><li>- Unit 1.5 LGBTIQ+ rights in UK – Italy – the Netherlands, Cyprus and Greece</li></ul>
<b>GENERAL GOALS:</b>	<p>To help participants to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- get the vocabulary, knowledge and tools they need to understand the meaning of trans-identities and gender non-conforming persons</li><li>- fully comprehend what the acronym LGBTIQ+ really mean</li><li>- understand that there might be a difference between a self-perceived LGBTIQ+ identity and the fact that an individual practices LGBTIQ+ behaviors</li><li>- understand why asylum seekers may not identify themselves as homosexual in the context of a LGBTIQ+ claim or not understand the western concept of "homosexual"</li><li>- have an insight on the legislation available in their own countries to protect the rights of LGBTIQ+</li></ul>
<b>DURATION</b>	2 hours
<b>MATERIAL NEEDED</b>	Pens, white board, flipchart, paper, hand-outs, PC and projector.

## Unit 1.1 Being LGBTIQ+

### OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the module, participants will be able to:

- Explain the differences between sexual orientation and sex/gender identity and expression.
- To learn relevant LGBTIQ+ concepts and terms.

### ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:

#### **Step 1: 15 MIN – Introduction to Sex and Gender**

##### **Sex & Gender: An intro**

The trainer starts by asking the participants if they know what sex and gender is and what is the difference between these two terms. The trainer can divide the group into pairs and can give participants 5 minutes for discussion.

Then the trainer shows the video 'Sex and Gender: An intro' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ago78PhUofI>

The video includes some of the most common terms defined (for example sex, gender identity, transgender etc).

##### **Understanding Sex & Gender Key Terms**

Then the trainer presents the definitions of sex, gender and gender identity and asks the participants to share whether they agree with the definitions or what else would they add to these definitions. ([see slide 4 for the proposed definitions](#))

#### **Step 2: 15 minutes - Introduction sexual orientation**

The main aim of the Step 2 is to understand the issues and the difficulties faced by LGTBIQ+ community and to explain to the participants the definition of the sexual orientation and what is the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity.

Without revealing the topic of the activity, the trainer begins screening "Straight Story" trailer (trailer of a Greek Film but with English subtitles) .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAoTVolOQx8>

This film is about an upside down world, where being homosexual is considered "normal" and heterosexual is considered "not normal".

The trainer asks each participant to turn to the person next to her/him and take a few minutes to talk about how it would feel to live in such a world and what it would feel like if they had to hide something as important and as basic as your sexual orientation. The trainer inclines the participants to think that they have to tell someone about his/her secret. Or to imagine how they feel when they hear their parents tell nasty jokes about straights at the dinner table and everyone laughed.

##### **1: Difficulties faced by LGTBIQ+ community**

The trainer points out while this scenario is fictional, it mirrors the real world faced by LGTBIQ+ people. The trainer now mentions some of the everyday difficulties faced by LGTBIQ+ people. For example, because they are often understandably afraid to 'come out' (reveal their sexual orientation) to others, LGTBIQ+ people are forced to keep many parts of their lives secret. Sometimes keeping so many secrets leads to their dropping out of school, resigning and using alcohol and other drugs.

##### **2: Sexual orientation VS gender identity**

The trainer provides the definition of sexual orientation ([slide 8](#)) and asks the participants to comment on the definition and to share their own thoughts and feedback on the definition. Finally, the trainer explains the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. ([slide 9](#))

## Unit 1.2 LGBTIQ+: terminology and definition

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>By the end of the unit, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fully provide the current abbreviation of LGBTIQ+</li><li>• Understand the importance and need of using this abbreviation correctly</li><li>• To understand why the term can act as a unifying umbrella for marginalized groups</li></ul>
	<p><b>Step 1: 5 minutes</b></p> <p>Trainer gives out to the participants 7 cardboards/ or shows the letters on the <a href="#">PowerPoint presentation</a> (slide 2). Each cardboard contains a letter from the LGBTIQ+ abbreviation. The trainer asks the participants to put all letters in a row in order to form the abbreviation referring to the Queer community (like a scrabble game). After the proper formation of the LGBTIQ+ abbreviation the trainer asks the participants if they know what each letter from the abbreviation stands for.</p>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Step 2: 7 minutes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The trainer provides the <u>definitions</u> of the letters of the LGBTIQ+ abbreviation.</li><li>• The words are written in capitals on different papers / cardboards/PowerPoint presentation: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer, Transgender and Intersex.</li><li>• Then the trainer asks participants if they have used / heard some of these words, or if they know what the words really mean.</li></ul>
	<p><b>Step 3: Presentation + Discussion ( 10 minutes)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Then the trainer asks the following questions:</li><li>• What about other identities? Do you think that some identities are left out?</li><li>• Then the trainer explains to the participants the importance of using the PLUS sign (+) to the acronym.</li><li>• After the short presentation the trainer asks some questions to the participants.</li><li>• 'Why was so important to add all these new letters to the already existed LGBT abbreviation?'</li><li>• 'Lesbian, Gay, Bi. Transgender...does it matter? Do we increase marginalization and stigmatization by referring to certain people or communities as LGBTIQ+?'</li></ul>

## Unit 1.3 Trans-identities and gender non-conforming persons

<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<p>By the end of the unit, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• understand the meaning of trans-identities;</li><li>• understand the meaning of gender non-conforming persons;</li><li>• understand the concepts of “gender dysphoria” and “passing privilege”;</li><li>• be aware of some questions they should never ask a trans or a gender-non-conforming person.</li></ul>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Step 1: Exercise – Discussion (10 min.)</b></p> <p>The facilitator presents the inspirational video “Gender Is Over” (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ns3FcQvnnZw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ns3FcQvnnZw</a>), which was created by Gender Proud – a transgender-owned, New York-based media company dedicated to capturing the trans and gender-nonconforming experience. It takes a look at the intersection between gender identity, expression, and everything in-between.</p> <p>After allowing few minutes for reflection, the facilitator discusses with participants how they would define trans and gender-nonconforming persons.</p>
	<p><b>Step 2: Presentation ( 8 min.)</b></p> <p>The facilitator presents and explains the meaning and differences of the terms “transgender/ transgender identities” and “gender non-conforming”. Then, he/she presents the concepts of “gender dysphoria” and “passing privilege”; an inspirational video on “passing privilege” titled “Why ‘Passing Privilege’ Is A Problem In The Trans Community” is also presented (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QntGEB-KgXo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QntGEB-KgXo</a> )</p>
	<p><b>Step 3: Discussion – Presentation (7 min.)</b></p> <p>The session concludes with the video “7 Things You Should Never Ask a Trans (or Gender Non-Conforming) Person” (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bo7RufX05hY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bo7RufX05hY</a>) starring Hari Nef, a famous American transgender woman who is an actress, model and writer. Participants comment on the video and the facilitator concludes with a presentation of <a href="#">questions that participants should avoid asking</a> a trans or a gender non-conforming person.</p>

## Unit 1.4 Differences between LGBTIQ+ identities and LGBTIQ+ behaviors (MSM and FSM) in a cross-cultural perspective

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>By the end of the unit, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand that there is a difference between LGBTIQ+ identities and LGBTIQ+ behaviors (MSM and FSM)</li> <li>• Read these differences in a cross-cultural perspective</li> <li>• Be aware of some examples of cultural contexts that accept LGBTIQ+ behaviors while not identifying with LGBTIQ+ identities</li> <li>• Understand the impact this could have on a SOGI claim</li> </ul>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Step 1 - Presentation: 5'</b> The facilitator presents slide from #1 to #7 (see notes beyond the slides for further information). <i>Resource available: <a href="#">power point presentation Module 1_4</a></i></p> <p><b>Step 2 – Self-reflection exercise: 5'</b> The facilitator invites participants to self-reflect on their own situation, by replying to the questions in slide #8. <i>It is important to stress that answers to these questions should not be shared with anyone, it is just for self-reflection purposes.</i></p> <p>After allowing few minutes for reflection, the facilitator introduces through slide #9 the results of a study conducted in the US that shows that the majority of people who reported same-sex behavior or desire do not identify as homosexual or bisexual. This is to show that in fact the concept of sexual behavior vs. sexual identity is common and not limited to non – western countries.</p> <p><b>Step 3 – Discussion: 5'</b> The facilitator distributes the handout called "<a href="#">Coming_out</a>" and asks participants to read it individually. Then allows few minutes to discuss the questions at the bottom of the handout. The focus should be on showing with a practical example from Iran what it was explained about the concept of sexual behavior vs. sexual identity.</p>
	<p><b>Step 4 - Presentation: 5'</b> The facilitator presents slide from #10 to #13 introducing some of the issues of sexual behavior vs. sexual identity in different cultures and in relation to possible challenges during the SOGI claim process. If necessary, the facilitator can explain that SOGI stands for "Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity": these are the asylum claims which are based on alleged persecution in the country of origin based on sexual orientation or gender identity of the claimant.</p> <p><b>Step 5 – Exercise: 5'</b> The facilitator distributes the handout called <a href="#">Exercise 1_4</a> and asks participants to read it individually. Then allows few minutes to discuss the questions at the bottom of the handout.</p> <p>The focus should be on showing with a practical example two cases of SOGI claim, one by an applicant who has a clear LGBTIQ+ identity, and the other who hasn't. In the first case, the preparation of the claim would probably be easier, because there will be evidences to support it and the credibility will be strengthened. The second case, on the other hand, would probably be more complicated as harm was suffered in the private sphere, which may limit the availability of documentary evidence.</p>

# Unit 1.5 LGBTIQ+ rights in UK – Italy – the Netherlands – Greece - Cyprus

This unit is country-specific.

## Self-assessment of module 1

To reflect on what you have learnt in module 1, please answer to the following questions:

1. 'Essentially we have been told since birth that boys and men are supposed to act, think, dress, talk, walk, eat, etc different from girls and women and vice versa.' Provide your thoughts and feelings on the above statement.

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2. What does LGBTIQ+ stand for?

L stands for \_\_\_\_\_

G stands for \_\_\_\_\_

B stands for \_\_\_\_\_

T stands for \_\_\_\_\_

I stands for \_\_\_\_\_

Q stands for \_\_\_\_\_

+ stands for \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which of the following statements are true?

(N.B: Correct answers are shown in bold)

- All transgender identified people choose to change their names and/or gender markers.
- Gender variant people may dress or act differently than what is expected of their assigned gender.
- Being transgender is a mental illness.
- It is ok to ask a trans or gender-nonconforming person "When are you going to transition?"

4. Do gay, lesbian, and bisexual people always identify as such? Why?

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## MODULE 2 – LGBTIQ+ ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

<b>TOPICS COVERED:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unit 2.1. LGBTIQ+phobia and discrimination towards LGBTIQ+s: why LGBTIQ+s might need international protection?</li> <li>• Unit 2.2 SOGI-claims for asylum seekers in UK – Italy – The Netherlands and Greece: basics of the procedure</li> <li>• Unit 2.3 Bi-sexual, intersexual, queers and asexual asylum seekers: impact on SOGI claims of not being LGBTIQ+</li> <li>• Unit 2.4 Sex workers and international protection: overcoming the stigma</li> <li>• Unit 2.5 Support system for LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in UK – Italy – The Netherlands and Greece</li> <li>• Unit 2.6 How to talk about LGBTIQ+-related issues with people from different cultural backgrounds</li> <li>• Unit 2.7 International good practices on how to reach, support and protect LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in shelters</li> <li>• Unit 2.8 How to pose questions on sexual preference and gender identity without crossing other people's boundaries</li> </ul>
<b>GENERAL GOALS:</b>	<p>The aim of this module is to help participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase awareness of the impact that anti-LGBTIQ+ harassment, discrimination and LGBTIQ+phobia have on asylum seekers and refugees.</li> <li>• understand the basics of SOGI Claims procedures in the partner countries</li> <li>• understand that within the cases of SOGI Claims, some can be more difficult than others. Indeed, Bi-sexual, intersexual and queer applicants can have more difficulties in documenting their situations and in convincing the Commissions of their need to be protected.</li> <li>• understand that asylum seekers might be sexually coerced and / or work as sex workers but that this should not be a ground for further discrimination and stigmatization</li> <li>• learn what kind of support system is available for LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in their country</li> <li>• be mindful of cultural differences when talking about LGBTIQ+ related themes</li> <li>• learn about international good practices on the support and the protection of LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in shelters.</li> <li>• gain an understanding of how to make questions surrounding sexual and/or gender identity without crossing other people's boundaries and falling into stereotypes</li> </ul>
<b>DURATION</b>	2 hours
<b>MATERIAL NEEDED:</b>	Pens, white board, flipchart, paper, hand-outs, PC and beamer, advice cards hand-outs (unit 2.6), Do's and Don'ts hand-outs (unit 2.8)

## Unit 2.1 LGBTIQ+phobia and discrimination towards LGBTIQ+s: why LGBTIQ+s might need international protection?

### OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the module, participants will be able:

- To expose the daily impact of heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia on individuals, organizations and society.
- To explore examples of discrimination, LGBTIQ+ phobia and racism, consider perspectives about racism by thinking / writing a story/past event, and discuss ways to eradicate racism and discrimination in different environments and society.
- To increase awareness of what LGBTIQ+phobia and discrimination is.
- To understand why LGBTIQ+ refugees and asylum seekers need international protection.
- To discuss how participants can be better allies for LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers and refugees.

### ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:

#### Step 1: MIN – 10 minutes Who is a refugee?

The trainer asks the participant if they can clearly provide the international definition of a refugee. The trainer can allow 5-6 minutes for discussion and can encourage the participants to write their own definitions.

Then, the trainer provides the official definition of who is a refugee from Article 1(A) (2) of the 1951 Convention.

The trainer asks the participants if the definition is sufficient and if they can suggest some alternations in order to make the definition more inclusive. (For example including individuals fleeing natural disasters and generalized violence, stateless individuals not outside their country of habitual residence or not facing persecution, and individuals who have crossed an international border fleeing generalized violence are not considered refugees under either the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Optional Protocol)

Finally the trainer presents the refugee definition from 1984 Cartagena Declaration as a complementary to the 1951 Convention's one.

*Available resources:* [power\\_point\\_2\\_1](#)

#### Step 2: (20 minutes) Core international and European Law / National Policies and Standards

The trainer will give a brief presentation about some core international and european legal instruments. In that way, the participants can be informed and gained some basic knowledge about the current legal framework.

Then trainer can ask the participants what is the situation in their country and if they know if their state has ratified the refugee convention or not.

An open discussion can be followed about future steps and what needs to be done in order to adopt more inclusive refugee criteria.

#### Step 3: Why LGBTIQ+ might need international protection?

After the above two activities the trainer can ask the following questions:

- What is the situation regarding persons who fear persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity
- If an LGBTIQ+ can claim asylum in another country on the ground of sexual orientation.
- And to list three reasons why LGBTIQ+ might need international protection

The trainer can proposed some more questions and participants would have 10 minutes to discuss the above questions

Finally the trainer would present slide 6 and slide 7 and would ask the participants for their own additions and suggestions.

## Unit 2.2 SOGI-claims for asylum seekers in UK – Italy – The Netherlands, Cyprus and Greece: basics of the procedure

This unit is country-specific.

## Unit 2.3 Bi-sexual, intersexual, queers and asexual asylum seekers: impact on SOGI claims of not being LGT

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	By the end of the unit, participants will be able to understand the challenges of SOGI claims by BQAI
	<p><b>Introduction: 5'</b> the facilitator asks participants:</p> <p>“why do you think we need to talk about this topic?”</p> <p>“can you mention at least one specific difficulties of SOGI claims made by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bisexuals</li><li>• Queers</li><li>• Asexuals</li><li>• Intersexuals?”</li></ul>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Step 1 - Presentation: 5'</b></p> <p>After having discussed the ideas of participants, the facilitator presents slide (see notes beyond the slides for further information).</p> <p><i>Resource available: <a href="#">power point module 2_3</a></i></p>
	<p><b>Step 2 – Case discussion : 10'</b></p> <p>Participants read the story of Apphia Kumar, the first bi-sexual asylee in the US. (<a href="#">case scenario #1</a>). Participants are encouraged to discuss the case of bisexual asylum seekers who are often suggested to apply as gays or lesbians to increase their chances of approval (do they agree? Not? Why?). Participants can also be encouraged to discuss what would they stress in claiming asylum for a bisexual person (i.e. the specific nature of bisexuality, the fact that they can't simply decide to hide such an important part of who they are...).</p>

## Unit 2.4 Sex workers and international protection: overcoming the stigma

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>By the end of the unit, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand the connections between sex work, migration and asylum seeking</li><li>• Estimate the number of asylum seekers who are involved in sex work</li><li>• Identify the key vulnerabilities of asylum seekers who are sex workers</li><li>• Understand the connections between trafficking and asylum seeking process</li></ul>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Step 1 - Introduction: 5'</b></p> <p>The facilitator show this short video: <a href="https://vimeo.com/50289487">https://vimeo.com/50289487</a> and then asks participants the question in slide #2 to introduce the topic. Then it shows slide #3 and asks participants to comment on the quotes.</p> <p><i>Resource available: <a href="#">power_point_2_4</a></i></p> <hr/> <p><b>Step 2 – Case studies and discussion: 5'</b></p> <p>Participants are divided in three groups.</p> <p>To group #1 the facilitator distributes copies of the <a href="#">case scenario #1</a> (bisexual) , to group #2 <a href="#">case scenario #2</a> (transgender) and to group #3 <a href="#">case scenario #3</a> (gay man).</p> <p>He/she asks participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• can you identify the main vulnerabilities faced by the main characters?</li><li>• Can you identify the interconnections between being an asylum seeker and a sex worker?</li></ul> <p>If time allows, one presenter per group shall then be asked to report in plenary the outcomes of the group discussion. The key message to convey is that migrant sex workers are individuals and it is difficult to make generalized assumptions without stereotyping. However, they should be offered equal opportunity and access to services in a non-judgmental way.</p> <hr/> <p><b>Step 3 – Presentation : 5'</b></p> <p>The facilitator introduces slides from #4 to #6 (see notes beyond slides for further inputs).</p> <p>Note that when presenting slide #5 the facilitator should ask participants to <u>guess the % of asylum seekers involved in sex-work before showing the figures.</u></p> <p><i>Resource available: <a href="#">power_point_2_4</a></i></p>

## Unit 2.5 Support system for LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in UK, Italy, the Netherlands, CYPRUS and Greece

This unit is country-specific.

## Unit 2.6 How to talk about LGBTIQ+ related issues with people from different cultural backgrounds

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>By the end of the module, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Point to the importance of cultural differences in how people live their sexuality and sexual identities</li><li>• Explain important points and advices to bear in mind when talking about LGBTIQ+-related themes with people from different cultural backgrounds</li></ul>
<b>DURATION:</b>	20min
<b>MATERIAL NEEDED:</b>	Advice cards hand-outs & paper to take notes
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Step 1: 5 MIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trainer asks participants to discuss in pairs for 3 minutes the ways in which LGBTIQ+ identities may assume different meanings in different cultural contexts.</li><li>• Then each pair reports at least one thing they have discussed</li></ul>
	<p><b>Step 2: 10 MIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trainers divide participants in groups and ask them to pick up one or two advice cards on: "<u>How to talk about LGBTIQ+ related issues with people from different cultural backgrounds</u>"</li><li>• Ask groups to read them and discuss: Why is this important? What else would you add?</li></ul>
	<p><b>Step 3: 5 MIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Every group feedbacks to the wider group on what has been discussed.</li><li>• Feedback is collected using brainstorm or mind-mapping method</li><li>• Discuss any further advice that could be provided.</li></ul> <p><i>Resource available: <a href="#">power_point_2_6</a></i></p>

## Unit 2.7 International good practices on how to reach, support and protect LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in shelters

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>By the end of the unit, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be aware of some good practice of reaching, supporting and protecting LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in shelters;</li> <li>• be aware of some good practice of reaching, supporting and protecting Transgender asylum seekers in shelters.</li> </ul>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Step 1: Discussion – Presentation (10 min.)</b></p> <p>The sessions starts with the presentation of the video “Seeking Sanctuary” (<a href="http://www.belongto.org/service.aspx?contentid=8826">http://www.belongto.org/service.aspx?contentid=8826</a>), which is an information video about the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland; the video was developed as part of the “BeLonG To LGBT Asylum Seekers and Refugees” Project. The facilitator and the participants discuss on the video. The facilitator presents the “BeLonG To LGBTIQ+ Asylum Seekers and Refugees” Project as a good practice of supporting LGBTIQ+ Asylum Seeking and Refugee Youth. The handout “<a href="#">Welcome Guide for LGBTIQ+ Asylum Seekers Refugees</a>”, which was developed within the project, is distributed to the participants.</p> <p><b>Step 2: Discussion (8 min.)</b></p> <p>The facilitator distributes a <a href="#">handout</a> with examples of international good practices on how to reach, support and protect LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in shelters. The handout includes national good practices from Austria, Belgium, the UK and Sweden as well as from UNHCR. In addition, the handout “<a href="#">Information for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender persons</a>”, which was developed by the Swedish Migration Board, is distributed to the participants. Participants are separated into 2 groups and discuss on the practices. The following questions can be posed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can we learn from the good practices?</li> <li>• Which of them are relevant to our country context?</li> <li>• How can we adapt them in our organization/ service/ agency?</li> </ul> <p><b>Step 3: Discussion (7 min.)</b></p> <p>The facilitator distributes a <a href="#">handout</a> with examples of international good practices on how to reach, support and protect transgender asylum seekers in shelters. The handout includes national good practices from Austria, from Transgender Europe and from Greek Transgender Support Association. Moreover, the handout “<a href="#">Trans* Asylum Guide: A short guide for transgender and LGBTI asylum seekers</a>”, which was developed by the Greek Transgender Support Association, is distributed to the participants. Participants are separated into 2 groups and discuss on the practices. The following questions can be posed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can we learn from the good practices?</li> <li>• Which of them are relevant to our country context?</li> <li>• How can we adapt them in our organization/ service/ agency?</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Step 4: Close of the session</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A handout with links to <a href="#">good practices from the Netherlands</a> is distributed to the participants.</li> </ul>

## Unit 2.8 How to pose questions on sexual preference and gender identity without crossing other people's boundaries

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>By the end of the module, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have a clear understanding of do's and don'ts when it comes to questions on sexual and gender identity</li><li>• Explain importance of respecting people's boundaries and not falling into stereotypes about LGBTIQ+ related identities</li></ul>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Step 1: 5 MIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The trainer divides participants into smaller groups</li><li>• Groups are given a <u>few statements</u> (left column) and are asked to discuss internally and choose whether each of them is a do or don't giving an explanation for your group's decision. After that proceed to read the <u>respective card with the right answer</u> (right column) and explanation. The group guessing more right answers wins!</li></ul>
	<p><b>Step 2: 10 MIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Groups give their answers one by one, and the respective card with the right answer and explanation is revealed subsequently.</li><li>• The group guessing more right answers wins!</li></ul>
	<p><b>Step 3: 5 MIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wider group discussion on whether they agree with all cards and whether they would add anything further</li></ul> <p><i>Resource available:</i> <a href="http://www.epsilonproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2_8.pdf">http://www.epsilonproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2_8.pdf</a></p>

## Self-assessment of the module 2

*To reflect on what you have learnt in module 2, please answer to the following questions:*

**1.** What's something you've heard today helped you to understand better the multiple oppressions and struggles of LGBTBIQ+ refugees, asylum seekers and migrants?

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**3.** Do you think SOGI claims made by applicants who are bisexuals, queers, asexual or intersexual are normally as successful as those made by LGT applicants? Why?

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**4.** Can you name at least two reasons why LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers and refugees may sometimes feel the need to engage in sex-work?

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**5.** Please give examples of how to respect boundaries and avoid reproducing stereotypes when speaking with migrants or refugees about sexual orientation and gender identity.

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**6.** Why is it important to bear in mind that LGBTIQ+ identities assume different meanings in different cultural contexts? How do these identities may differ?

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**7.** Which one of the presented practices would you select to be transferred in your organisation? Why?

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**8.** Please give examples of how to respect boundaries and avoid reproducing stereotypes when speaking with migrants or refugees about sexual orientation and gender identity.

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## MODULE 3 – LGBTIQ+ INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR MIGRANTS, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

<b>TOPICS COVERED:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3.1 How to promote inclusive environments for migrants in LGBTIQ+ organizations</li> <li>• 3.2 How to recognise homophobia and racism among colleagues and how to challenge it</li> <li>• 3.3 How to increase the acceptance of LGBTIQ+s among newcomers</li> <li>• 3.4 How to deal with personal boundaries (for example in professional/volunteer – LGBTIQ+ refugee relations)</li> <li>• 3.5 How to engage/promote bicultural LGBTIQ+-friendly people and bicultural LGBTIQ+s people (including 2nd generations) in NGOs // case studies</li> <li>• 3.6 How to work with migrant associations / communities on LGBTIQ+ related topics</li> </ul>
<b>GENERAL GOALS:</b>	<p>The aim of this module is to help participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promoting inclusive environments in LGBTIQ+ organizations</li> <li>• raise awareness of participants on recognizing homophobia and racism among colleagues with empathy and to know how to challenge them.</li> <li>• increase the acceptance of LGBTIQ+s among newcomers, for example in shelters.</li> <li>• understanding the importance of respecting personal boundaries</li> <li>• developing new ideas about how to engage bicultural LGBTIQ+ / LGBTIQ+ friendly people in NGOs</li> <li>• inspire and stimulate participants to work together with migrant associations and communities on LGBTIQ+ related topics</li> </ul>
<b>DURATION:</b>	2 hours and a half / 3 hours
<b>MATERIAL NEEDED</b>	Pens, white board, flipchart, paper, hand-outs, small empty cards or post-its, case studies for module 3.5 and 3.

## Unit 3.1. How to promote inclusive environments for migrants in LGBTIQ+ organizations

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>By the end of the unit, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop more inclusive policies for migrants in LGBTIQ+ organizations.</li> <li>• Have a clear understanding of do's and don'ts regarding their personal attitudes and cultural biases becoming more aware of how to create more inclusive environments</li> </ul>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Step 1: (5 min.) - INTRODUCTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why should we be inclusive?</li> <li>• What is the value of having a more inclusive work environment?</li> <li>• How to be more inclusive of migrants in LGBTIQ+ organizations?</li> <li>• How to communicate appropriately?</li> </ul> <p>Trainer asks participants (they could be divided into small groups) to think about the importance of working inclusive and how to involve migrants in LGBTIQ+ organizations.</p>
	<p><b>Step 2: (5 min.) – THESESES</b></p> <p>Learners discuss the issue with 2 THESESES (<a href="#">see PP/hand-out</a>)</p>
	<p><b>Step 3: (10 min.) – DO's and DONT's</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An 'inside and outside circle' discussion about the <u>do's and don'ts</u> considering participants own attitudes and views on involving migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in LGBTIQ+ organizations.</li> </ul> <p>How does it work?</p> <p>The 'inside circle' discuss the <u>do's and don'ts</u> and the outside circle only listens.</p> <p>After touching a shoulder of a participant of the inside circle, a participant from the outside circle can change with a participant of the inside circle.</p> <p>The main focus will be: 'how can we promote inclusive environments for migrants in LGBTIQ+ organizations, what works?' The conclusion will be linked to this question.</p> <p>Other topics are for example: what do we assume? What can we change in our working culture and behavior?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The outcomes will be collected by the trainer and shared.</li> <li>• A general conclusion and advice will be given by the trainer.</li> </ul>

## Unit 3.2 How to recognise homophobia and racism among colleagues and how to challenge it

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>By the end of the module, participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be able to spot LGBTIQ+phobia and racism among colleagues</li> <li>• Be aware of the negative impacts of LGBTIQ+phobia and racism among colleagues for LGBTIQ+s</li> <li>• Know how to challenge LGBTIQ+phobia and racism among colleagues</li> </ul>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p>Before you start with this submodule, make sure that all of the participants are aware of the definitions of LGBTIQ+phobia, discrimination and racism à write down on a flip-over if necessary (see notes in <a href="#">ppt</a> for definitions)</p> <p><b>Introduction to the theme - 5 min</b></p> <p>Make pairs and interview each other about personal experiences with homophobia, discrimination or racism in institutions (schools, workplace, hospital, dance class etc.).</p> <p>Instruct your participants to focus on the feelings during the interview (instead of thoughts, judgments ) that the other person experienced during and after homophobia, discrimination or racism took place. Did they feel angry, sad, lonely, misunderstood and so on?</p> <hr/> <p><b>Stories of experiences of LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers and refugees – 5 min</b></p> <p>Read the <a href="#">stories</a> to the class – don't show them yet - and make sure you speak slowly and with a lot of compassion. Be silent for some time in between the stories and make sure there is some silence afterwards as well.</p> <p><b>Empathy exercise – 5 min</b></p> <p>After reading the stories to the participants you'll do an empathy exercise with them. Take a couple of minutes for this exercise and make sure that each participant has paper and a pen to write down the answer to the question:</p> <p>"Imagine these are your experiences... What would have been the results of these experiences for you, if you were the victim?"</p> <hr/> <p><b>The results of LGBTIQ+hobia, discrimination and racism – 5 min</b></p> <p>After the empathy exercise you'll take the participants through scientifically facts about the impacts of homophobia, discrimination and racism. (<a href="#">Use slide 3 of the power point</a>) While presenting these findings to the participants, make it interactive by asking if these results were also on their empathy exercise.</p> <hr/> <p><b>Ways to challenge LGBTIQ+phobia, discrimination and racism – 10 min</b></p> <p>Step 1- Brainstorm with participants ways to challenge LGBTIQ+phobia, discrimination and racism. The most important thing to do first, is to decide to be a part of the solution. Then to talk to the victim, then speak to the perpetrator and finally address the group.</p> <p>Step 2 - Form three subgroups – one will discuss about victims, one about perpetrator(s) and one about the group - and ask each group to come up with the steps to challenge LGBTIQ+phobia: what are the do's.</p> <p>Step 3 - Present all the steps on the sheet. Make this an interactive sheet by asking questions like: 'okay you'll have this talk with your colleague. In which way will you connect with them on a personal level first. And what will your confrontation sound like: what will you tell them?</p> <p><u>Option: step 4 - Roleplay to enable your participants to try out the different steps.</u></p>

## Unit 3.3 How to increase the acceptance of LGBTIQ+s among newcomers

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	By the end of the unit, participants will be able to work towards increasing the acceptance of LGBTIQ+s among newcomers, through daily work and by giving training.
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Step 1: (5 min.) - INTRODUCTION</b></p> <p>Why is important to work on the acceptance of LGBTIQ+ refugees?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most important outcomes research Epsilon (<a href="#">slide 2</a>);</li> <li>• Trainer asks participants (they could be divided into small groups) to think about the importance of working on the acceptance of LGBTIQ+s among newcomers, for example in shelters.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Step 2: (5 min.) – WHAT WORKS?</b></p> <p>What works for improving the acceptance in shelters and training? (<a href="#">see PP/hand-out</a> – slide 3/4) (information is based on our research).</p> <p>Providing information on LGBTIQ+ refugees with a residence status seems more successful than information to people who are still in the asylum procedure phase.</p> <p><b>Contact-theory:</b> Informing newcomers with the aim to increase the acceptance of LGBTIQ+ will be more successful when sympathy, empathy, and a positive social standard is emphasized. For instance, by using (films on) stories and experiences of LGBTIQ+ people that provide a match with regard to religion, culture and age so that non-LGBTIQ+ people are able to understand the situation themselves.</p> <p><b>Positive social norm:</b> Communicating a positive social standard by people with authority and stating that more and more people from their specific ethnic group are positive about LGBTIQ+ people also helps.</p>
	<p><b>Step 3: (10 min.) – How can you increase the acceptance of LGBTIQ+s among newcomers in your organization?</b></p> <p>Each participant thinks about the answer and writes it on a post-it or small card. After, it will be shared in the group.</p>

## Unit 3.4 How to deal with personal boundaries

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>By the end of the unit, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• understand the importance of personal boundaries;</li><li>• deal with personal boundaries in their workplace, especially when it comes to LGBTIQ+ professionals or volunteers.</li></ul>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Step 1: Discussion – Presentation (10 min.)</b></p> <p>The session starts with a discussion on how the participants perceive the concept of “personal boundaries”. The facilitator defines the concept and explains the types of “personal boundaries”.</p> <p><i>Available resource:</i> <a href="#">power_point_3_4</a></p>
	<p><b>Step 2: Exercise (5 min.)</b></p> <p>The facilitator asks participants to do the “<a href="#">Boundary Exploration</a>” activity.</p>
	<p><b>Step 3: Activity - Discussion (5 min.)</b></p> <p>The facilitator distributes a <a href="#">handout with “Do's and Don'ts”</a> on how to deal with personal boundaries when it comes to LGBTIQ+ professionals or volunteers and how to make an organisation more LGBTIQ+ friendly. The facilitator asks participants the following questions:</p> <p>Can you select 3 suggestions that you consider as the most important to your organisation/ service? Why?</p>

## Unit 3.5 How to engage/promote bicultural LGBTQ+ friendly people and bicultural LGBTQ+'s people (including 2nd generations) in NGOs

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>By the end of the unit, participants will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learnt about experiences carried out in other organizations / countries concerning the engagement of bicultural LGBTQ+ friendly people and bicultural LGBTQ+'s people (including 2nd generations) in NGOs</li> <li>• had the chance to reflect on if and how these experiences are transferable to their contexts / organizations</li> </ul>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>#1 (5 min.)</b> The facilitator introduces the concept of the importance of bicultural LGBTQ+/friendly staff in NGOs by using the <a href="#">power point</a> (slide 2-3).</p> <p><b>#1 (10 minutes)</b></p> <p>Divide the class into 5 groups and distribute one <a href="#">case-study</a> each.</p> <p>Ask participants to read the case and discuss into the group and to reflect on it with the goal to identify then do's to radiate that your organization is bicultural LGBTQ+ friendly. Make it a competition: the group with the most do's will be the winner! They write their do's on post-its, the trainer collects these post-its on the wall and the group is able to see them all.</p> <p>Afterwards, you can summarize by showing the <a href="#">power point</a> (slide 4).</p> <p><b>#3 (5 minutes)</b></p> <p>Each participant (or small groups if coming from the same organization) will have to answer to the question "How will YOU radiate that your organization is bicultural LGBTQ+ friendly?"</p> <p>Make sure everyone writes down at least two do's in their email / agenda / task list to take action when they're back at work!</p>

## Unit 3.6 How to work with migrant associations / communities on LGBTIQ+ related topics

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>By the end of the unit, participants will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aware of the importance of working together</li> <li>• Know why it works so well to work together</li> <li>• How to radiate that your organisation is working together</li> </ul>
<b>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</b>	<p><b>Introduction to the theme – 10 min</b></p> <p>Show part of the YouTube video ‘If heterophobia was actually real’. For example from 1:04 to 6:00 min  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnOJgDWogPI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnOJgDWogPI</a></p> <p>What is going on here? Ask your group what they see and ask until someone says something about norms. Explain about <i>social norms</i> = an expected form of behavior in a given situation</p> <p><b>Brainstorm on the possibility of different social norms – 5 min</b></p> <p>In the group discuss about your experience in working with LGBTIQ+ related topics: do you act different when you’re working with domestic LGBTIQ+s then with LGBTIQ+ migrants? Why is that?</p> <p><b>How to work together - 10 min</b></p> <p>Each person makes a list of 3 do’s for how to work together with migrant associations and communities on LGBTIQ+-related topics. Then hand out the <a href="#">case study of Maruf</a> and discuss together if there is a correspondence about what suggested in the case and what came out of the group.</p>
	<p><b>Option: how to influence social norms according to the literature – 5 min</b></p> <p><a href="#">Slide nr. 4</a> of the power point can be presented and discussed in the group: what do they think about these suggestions? Are they applicable? Yes? No? Why?</p>

## Self-assessment of the module 3

To reflect on what you have learnt in module 3, please answer to the following questions:

1. What is the first step you will take to promote an inclusive environment in your organization?

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2. Can you explain in your own words what is LGBTIQ+phobia?

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3. What tips and advices would give to your colleagues regarding increasing the acceptance of LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants among non-LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants?

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4. How would you deal with personal/workplace boundaries, when it comes to LGBTIQ+ professionals or volunteers? (tick all those which apply)

(N.B: Correct answers are shown in bold)

- **I would respect the privacy of my co-workers that I think they might be gay/lesbian/bi-sexual.**

- I would reveal the sexual orientation of a co-worker to another just because I would know that they are both gay/lesbian/bi-sexual.
- **I would include sexual orientation in my agency's non-discrimination policy and in the agency's mission statement.**
- **I would ask questions in a non-judgmental and politically correct manner**
- (Please write down your suggestion)

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5 Please write down at least one action you can take to promote a more bi-cultural LGBTIQ+ friendly organisation.

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6. Please write down your three actions you can take to work more closely with migrant associations and communities on LGBTIQ+ related topics.

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# EVALUATION FORM

1. What were your expectations before attending this training?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Can you estimate your knowledge about LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, refugees and migrants prior to attending this training giving a score from 1 to 10 (1= low, 10= high): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Did the training event meet your expectations?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially
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How (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

4. Can you estimate your current knowledge about LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, refugees and migrants giving a score from 1 to 10 (1= low, 10= high): \_\_\_\_\_

5. Can you list the three most important things you have learnt from this training?

#1 \_\_\_\_\_

#2 \_\_\_\_\_

#3 \_\_\_\_\_

6. Overall, what is your opinion about the training event?

<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor
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7. What is your overall opinion about the trainer(s)?

<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor
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8. Do you think that the training methodologies we used were appropriate?  Yes  No

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Do you think that the time we dedicated to each topic was appropriate?  Yes  No

Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Define the training workshop in 3 quick sentences

# ANNEX B

# THE ONLINE COURSE FOR PROFESSIONALS AND VOLUNTEERS

The modules of the e-course aim to increase knowledge and skills of professionals, ultimately building their capacity to answer to the needs of LGBTIQ+ refugees, contributing to preventing abuse in centers, shelters, local communities and services dedicated to this target group.

## THE E-COURSE INCLUDES INTERACTIVE UNITS COVERING THE FOLLOWING TOPICS:

Being LGBTIQ+

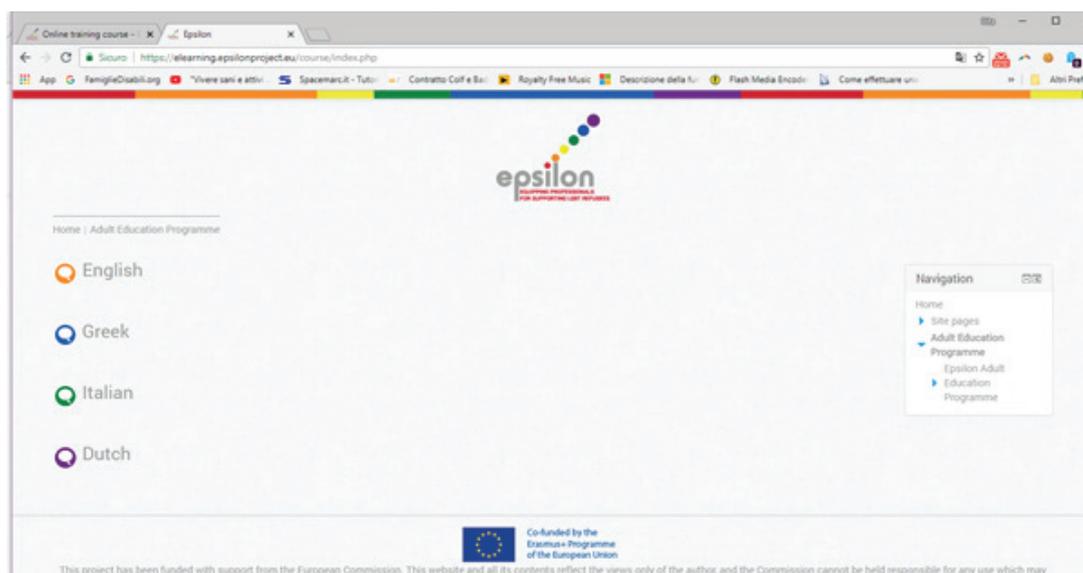
LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers and refugees

LGBTIQ+ inclusive environment for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees

## LGBT MIGRANT AND REFUGEES: INCREASE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND AWARENESS OF PROFESSIONALS WHO COME IN CONTACT WITH THEM.

The course is available here:

<https://elearning.epsilonproject.eu/login/index.php>



# ANNEX C

# CASE STUDIES

## Armin's Story

Armin, an LGBTI refugee arrived in the Netherlands more than four years ago seeking asylum. Once settled in a new house, Armin was able to become a part of the Dutch LGBT community and eventually formed the LGBT Asylum Support Foundation with his new contacts. Armin also reflects on the impact working as a member of the Epsilon Project advisory board has had on him.

I came to the Netherlands four and a half years ago and applied for asylum on the basis of LGBT status. I then lived for 6 months in an asylum centre where I was specifically advised by the personnel not to be open about my sexual orientation due to homophobic fellow refugees. Eventually after leaving the asylum centre and getting my own house, I could start my new life without having to keep my sexual orientation a secret... Freedom at last! Once I start learning the Dutch language, I began making contacts in the Dutch (LGBT) community, which was how I met my current colleagues. Together we decided to start an organization to aid, support, and empower LGBT refugees in Holland. The LGBT Asylum Support Foundation was founded on February 29, 2016. This was also a turning point in my own personal life as I'm very happy with the work I do with my colleagues who I consider my new family. This has been a radical transition from total powerlessness in my homeland to empowerment and freedom in the Netherlands.

As of last year I'm participating as an advisory board member in Epsilon project; a European user-led and evidence-based project which uses research-oriented fieldwork in order to equip and train professionals and volunteers for supporting LGBT refugees. Epsilon, which is based on effective communication and involvement with LGBT refugees, it also serves to bridge the gap between professionals and LGBT refugees.

Being a member of the Epsilon Advisory Board and participating in the International Conference in Athens has been a wonderful and empowering opportunity for me to contribute to the well-being of other LGBTI refugees, the most vulnerable group of refugees.

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## Amirpds's Story

Amirpds is an LGBT Iranian refugee who arrived in the Netherlands seeking asylum. He faced considerable challenges with the immigration process and finding acceptance in asylum seeker centres, but also highlights positive actions from groups such as the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA).

Refugee and homosexual: 'It's not safe to talk about your sexual orientation'

The first time I was asked my sexual orientation was at the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). 'I cried and told them: "It's hard, I've never officially admitted that I'm gay". In a subsequent hearing they ask Amirpds from Iran what it felt like when he first kissed a man and he responded, 'What can I say? It was awesome, of course.'

It took three interviews with the IND and a total of fifteen months to prove that I'm a "homosexual". Luckily Amirpds\* has good news to share when he visited Movisie: "I've just heard that I will receive a residence permit".

Amirpds, an Iranian refugee, is one of seven LGBT refugees and asylum seekers that talked to Movisie during an exploratory study with the European Epsilon project into the support and acceptance of this group of migrants. The in-depth interviews, the literature, and the two focus group meetings with professionals and volunteers, show that refugees feel it is not safe to admit their LGBT status to the IND.

## Stereotypes

An LGBT asylum seeker will not automatically receive a residence permit. The IND looks at each individual case. Usually two meetings take place, and the second one – the cross examination – focuses on the reasons for the asylum request. Sometimes a third or even fourth additional examination will be required if a decision could not be made after the first two meetings. Amirpds felt "the first interview went quite all right. But the last meeting I thought was terrible, the staff and the interpreter reacted very coolly". In addition to personal questions, they also asked about his preferred style of clothing and his favourite colours. Amirpds raises his eyebrows and laughs when he thinks about it again. In its report, Movisie recommends that IND staff be trained to conduct examinations with LGBT people, so they will understand how to ask questions on sexual orientation and to avoid just checking for credibility and stereotypes.

## Bullying and violence

Research shows that in asylum seeking centres where LGBT people live together with non LGBT people are commonly met with negativity and aggression. LGBT refugees run the risk of being excluded, bullied, threatened, and abused. In the refugee shelter, Amirpds and all the other LGBT refugees Movisie interviewed – have not been open about their sexual orientation. Amirpds explained 'I pretended I was one of them. But when you live with 500 people without any privacy ...people will have their suspicions.' He relates this to his fear of being attacked by other refugees. Amirpds continues, "I told the shelter staff: one day it's going to happen". However his warning was ignored and after four and a half months Amirpds fears came true.

The incident initiated a transfer to the village of Echt in Limburg, where he shared a room with a homosexual man, who, according to Amirpds, was obsessed with him. With the assistance of COC Netherlands he was transferred to an asylum seekers centre in Maastricht, where he got a room of his own for the first time. Unfortunately there were a number of people there with whom Amirpds has previously had negative encounters with. Eventually Queer Welfare helped him transfer to the asylum seekers centre in Utrecht where he is still living. This is his sixth address since he arrived in the Netherlands on 27 November 2015.

## Keep asking questions

Both Amirpds and the other interviewed LGBT refugees agree that it made a difference when staff of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) kept asking questions and took time to talk to them. Therefore one of the recommendations is to train COA staff not just to identify LGBT refugees, but to continue with appropriate follow up interviews and questions and to refer to related organizations for support. Amirpds feels that every asylum seekers centre should have a connection with one of the LGBT support organizations. He received significant aid from Queer Welfare and the Prisma Group, where he now volunteers to help support other LGBT refugees.

## Central LGBT policy

All refugee and asylum seekers describe the same situation: Residing in the Netherlands, looking for safety, and experiencing unmeasurable tensions in the shelter. The level of friendliness towards LGBT persons in a shelter often de-

depends on the location's manager. Professionals and volunteers feel that the directives for supporting LGBT asylum seekers should be determined centrally by COA. One may suggest a clear and unequivocal LGBT policy, with centres being provided informational LGBTI materials, and posters that show support for LGBT persons.

## Dreams

Amirpds is not angry about his experiences in the Netherlands. He knows he will have a good life. He says in Iran he never felt like he had a family so he hopes to "one day have a family. . . My dream is to find a good man, to live together and create a family. That is a big thing for me".

After a short silence he whispered "If I was to be born again and were asked if I wanted to be a heterosexual, I wouldn't want to. I like who I am". Amirpds admits that the situation in the asylum seekers centres occasionally drove him to thoughts of suicide, "but I didn't have the courage to do it. Now I'm working hard at myself. What keeps me going and makes me happy, are my dreams".

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## Hanaa's story

Hanaa was born in 1991 in eastern Africa into a very rich family and even studied in Malaysia. Her family was aware of her sexual identity unlike many refugees londonwho left home to resettle.

Once Hanaa completed school, her goal was to reside in Norway, however, obtaining a visa for Italy was much easier than in Norway. After traveling to Norway from Italy, Hanaa was immediately sent back to Italy to a reception facility in a Central Italian Region.

Hanaa is one of the few women who lesbian identity is already politically accepted when she arrived in Italy and one of the few women coming from her country of origin who already knew the immigration procedure she wanted to undertake.

In the Italian reception facility Hanaa suffers a lot due to both her isolation and because she couldn't live her life as a lesbian.

The reception facility is distant from places promoting and organizing LGBTI activities and too far to even allow to reach meeting in other places.

Later Hanaa contacted a national LGBTI association which in turn contacted Epsilon. In result Hanaa got international protection very quickly, but, not knowing the Italian language, she will struggle to integrate.

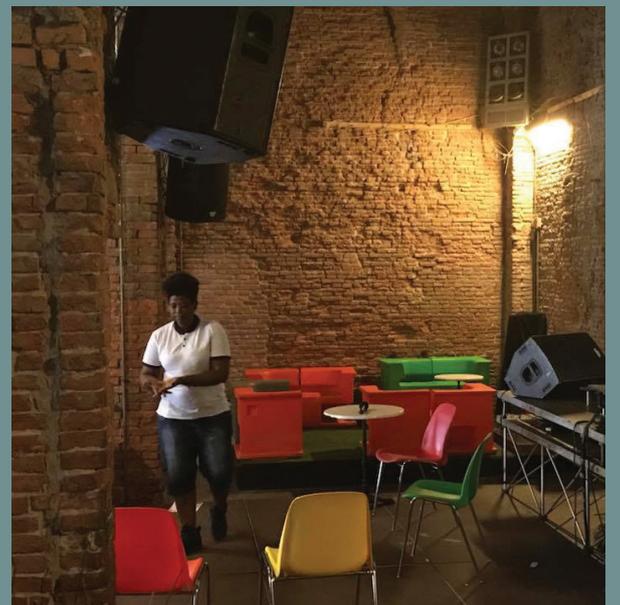
As soon as Hanaa could, she left Italy for Norway to reach her family and a girl she previously met, who has now become her girlfriend

Today Hanaa wants to work with other LGBTI migrants in Europe.

**GALLERY**



Supporting and Including LGBTi Migrants: Needs, Experiences and Good Practices International Conference – May 9th, 2017 / Athens



LGBTIQ+ Migrants and Asylum seekers in Italy and best practices to support them - Bologna, 15 June 2018

