

EpsiLon

**Equipping Professionals for Supporting
LGBTI+ Refugees and Migrants:**

The Case of Cyprus

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Migration in Cyprus: Facts

- Due to the geographical location of the island (act as a **crossroad** between the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Middle East) Cyprus became **one of the most accessible points** of entry for migrants and refugees.
- In January 2015 Cyprus was amongst the countries with the largest number of foreign nationals and of foreign-born residents as a proportion of the total population, 17.1% and 20.9% respectively ;
- The Net migration rate for the country in 2016 was estimated to be **9.1 migrant(s)/1,000** of the total population.
- Tremendous demographic change: 17, 6%, that is almost **1 in 5** permanent residents of the country, is of an immigrant origin.
- **4,582** applications for asylum in Cyprus in 2017 (3,843 pending at the end of 2017)



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

- There are no statistics about the number of LGBTI+ migrants and refugees in Cyprus, (or even LGBTI+ Cypriot nationals)
- 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.
- 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 (2015)** making it a crime to engage in unacceptable behavior and violence against people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.
 - **Civil Union bill (2015)** offers couples the equal rights as civil marriage (shows how far Cyprus has come since decriminalizing same-sex sexual relations in 1998).



Summary of Key Points

- Cyprus is a society that tends to build stereotypes around immigrants and refugees (the local LGBTI+ community is also subject to multiple forms of discrimination.)
- **Reluctant to reveal their sexual orientation** to their own communities and consequently to the local population
- Living in a '**double closet**'/ facing a '**double stigma**'
- Racist remarks in the public debate are a common phenomenon
- The Orthodox Church of Cyprus has taken a clear anti-LGBTI+ attitude in many cases and has significant influence over public opinion when it comes to LGBTI+-rights



Summary of Key Points

- 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 "adhesive" 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 specialized information** for LGBTI+ migrants and refugees
- The state services are yet to adopt a gender-mainstreaming approach
- NGOs are accusing even judges, immigration and reception professionals and police officers of being xenophobic and not having adequate training.



Cyprus is not a country that easily provides asylum

- **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
- **Increase in cases granted refugee status** based on sexual orientation, gender, SGBV/T
- **Lack of** systematic and **comprehensive data** on the number and types of claims
- All professionals involved in the asylum procedure are often not equipped to deal with so-called SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) claims



Cyprus is not a country that easily provides asylum

- Procedures (identification, assessment) and Services for LGBTI+ 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
- **Lack of specialized services** and/or medical treatment



Cyprus is not a country that easily provides asylum

- Increasing number of asylum seekers and refugees without shelter and basic provisions with many forced to live in the open and on the streets.
- The current level of benefits provided is inadequate; (rent allowances are too low)
- Access to employment for asylum seekers is severely limited for the first 6 months and then restricted to sectors with low wages and few vacancies



Key recommendations for national and EU policy, research and practice

- Develop a **database/statistics** on the number of LGBTI+ people in Cyprus
- Recognition of the need to develop a policy with regard to issues concerning LGBTI+ 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 LGTBI+ migrants / refugees, asylum seekers
- Interactive workshops and **targeted seminars** for professionals and volunteers : make them think about how others feel



Key recommendations for national and EU policy, research and practice

- **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
- Setup of a **National Committee for LGBTI+ Matters**
- Need to change the law criminalizing homophobic and transphobic rhetoric after it emerged that this, as it stands, does not work correctly



Key recommendations for national and EU policy, research and practice

- **Multidisciplinary support:** legal/justice, psychosocial, health, safety and security
- Need for examination of LGBTI+ 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**



THANK YOU

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