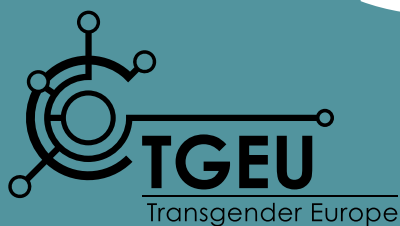


WELCOME TO STAY



**BUILDING
TRANS COMMUNITIES
INCLUSIVE OF
TRANS ASYLUM SEEKERS
AND REFUGEES
IN EUROPE**



This brochure follows up on the joint seminar of TGEU and ILGA-Europe on LGBTI asylum that was organised in Berlin in July 2016. It was written with the guidance of two expert groups that TGEU set up for the purposes of this project. One group consisted of five experts who are trans asylum seekers and refugees in Europe: Farah Abdi (Kenya/Somalia, Malta), Fernanda Milàn (Guatemala, Denmark), Aum Neko (Thailand, France), Sam Shooshian (Iran, Hungary) and Jad the Syrian (Syria, Turkey). The other group included experts who have been supporting trans asylum seekers and refugees: Zhan Chiam, Paul Dillane, Eva Fels, Marina Galanou, Neil Grungras and Alecs Recher.

TGEU is sincerely grateful to the experts who shared their experiences and knowledge, which have shaped the content of this brochure.

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www.tgeu.org

IMPRINT

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INTRODUCTION

“Hope is bigger than fear. Show them hope. Give them hope. A reason to live. That is what this brochure is all about. A guide for hope givers.”

Fernanda Milàn – Guatemala, Denmark

More and more trans¹ communities are starting to support trans asylum seekers and refugees who have fled their home countries and come to Europe. Many trans asylum seekers and refugees are here to stay, but some will (have to) leave again. Maybe you have already thought about how to open your local community to these newcomers but don't know where to start. This brochure can give you practical ideas about community support. If you need specific information on legal support, you will find materials at tgeu.org/asylum.

Community support can mean simple steps you can take to give trans asylum seekers and refugees strength, hope and safety including, for instance:

- making them feel welcome in your local trans community
- supporting them in starting their own community groups
- being supportive when they are going through a difficult time

- sharing information about transition related care and trans rights in your country
- sharing your contacts for lawyers, doctors, therapists
- sharing information about meetings and events
- providing support in emergency situations

In this brochure, you will find:

- information about the most common issues that trans asylum seekers and refugees face (page 5)
- answers to concerns and questions your community may have about this work (page 12)
- general tips and principles that could guide your work (page 14)
- practical steps you can take right away and over (page 18)

You are not expected to implement every single idea in this brochure. Instead, you can use it as a list of ideas and see what fits the needs, the local context and your resources the best.

On TGEU's website (tgeu.org/asylum) you will also find:

- a list of resources on legal standards and social support for trans asylum seekers and refugees
- a list of trans and LGBTQI groups in Europe that already work with asylum seekers and refugees
- a poster (“Trans Refugees are Welcome Here!”) that you can put up at events or in your meeting space



1) We use “trans” in this brochure as an umbrella term for trans and gender diverse people with the awareness that, particularly in communities and regions beyond Europe, other terms might be used.

WHAT ISSUES DO TRANS ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES FACE?

“I came stripped of everything, almost even my life. And then I came to this unwelcoming, unprepared, uninformed place where they mistreated me even more. They weren't prepared to receive a person like me.”

Fernanda Milàn – Guatemala, Denmark

TRAUMATISING JOURNEY, TRAUMATISING ARRIVAL

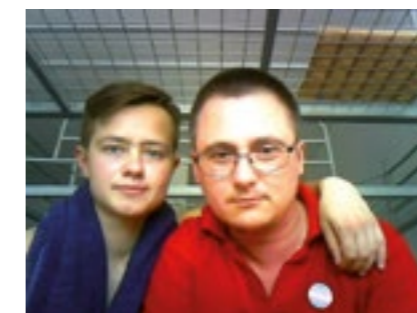
“I looked at the lifejacket that was handed to me and decided not to put it on. There was no way I was going back. I live or die on this journey. The Turkish sea police tried to sink our boat. But as you can see, one year later I'm sitting here alive.”

Maguy Merheby – Lebanon, Germany

“In Syria, it was problematic to be a trans man. But it is even worse when you're escaping war, you're a refugee and you come to a new country.”

Jad the Syrian – Syria, Turkey

Trans asylum seekers leave their home countries because they are in serious danger. On their journey to Europe, they often risk their lives. On entering the country and asking for asylum, they can face violence and harassment from immigration authorities or the police. In time, they learn about the harsh reality of being an asylum seeker in Europe. The present document was produced with the greatest care, but does not claim to be complete. We welcome your feedback, comments, questions or suggestions for improvement which you can email to richard@tgeu.org.



Leopold Groznov and Anno Komarov – Russia, Germany. In the asylum camp Frankfurt Neckermann

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ABUSE AND TRANSPHOBIC SLURS IN REFUGEE CAMPS²

“LGBTQI refugees need safe accommodation. It doesn't make sense for LGBTQI refugees who have run away from homophobia and transphobia to come to a safe country and be grouped together with other asylum seekers who are very homophobic and transphobic.”

Farah Abdi – Somalia/Kenya, Malta

“They would not recognise my gender identity and they placed me with men. The consequences were catastrophic for me. An experience like that, being raped, is adding to your context and makes you more vulnerable. Then I ended up in a human trafficking ring. My life became worse than it was already.”

Fernanda Milàn – Guatemala, Denmark

Once they tell the authorities they are applying for asylum, trans asylum seekers are usually placed in mainstream refugee camps or detention centres. They have to stay there until the state decides if it will grant them refugee status, which can take years. They might be placed with people from their home countries and face the same violence they tried to escape. In a refugee camp, trans people are extremely vulnerable to physical, sexual, emotional and verbal abuse (transphobic slurs, catcalling). Using the toilets, showers or common areas can pose a daily risk. These factors may have serious negative effects on their health. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and other mental health problems are far too common among trans asylum seekers. They are more likely to self-harm or commit suicide.

In a handful of countries, trans asylum seekers can live in shelters for LGBTQI people (Nürnberg and Berlin in Germany) or apartments (Denmark, Vienna in Austria). Many trans people express a need for these facilities, but some think the impetus behind them is based on the assumption that LGBTQI people, and not those who attack them, are to blame for the risks they face.

2) Cowen T, Stella F, Magahy K, Strauss K and Morton J, ‘Sanctuary, Safety and Solidarity Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Scotland’ (2011) http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_195792_en.pdf

LONG, STRESSFUL AND DIFFICULT MONTHS/ YEARS OF WAITING FOR REFUGEE STATUS

"I feel like I have grown 40 years older in the last three years. I am trying my best all the time, but it's becoming too much. I have to critique the UNHCR, because they don't make us a priority at all. I am a trans guy and a Syrian refugee, and I have a well-founded fear of persecution – I've received many death threats. [...] What are they waiting for? Are they waiting until we're dead to consider resettling us somewhere else? We're not asking for too much. We're just asking for a peaceful life and some safety."

Jad the Syrian – Syria, Turkey

Trying to obtain refugee status is difficult for everyone, but even more so for trans people. Trans asylum seekers may not know that they are entitled to protection because of persecution on the basis of their gender identity or expression. It can be hard to find information about this, especially if it is not available in their language. In some countries, immigration authorities often do not post this information on their website (sometimes on purpose). Other countries do not explicitly include gender identity in their asylum laws. Furthermore, many do not train their staff on trans issues, so an interviewer who does not know that being persecuted for being trans can be a reason to obtain refugee status will not follow that road in the interview.

Trans asylum cases are often incorrectly registered as sexual orientation cases because the interpreters or interviewers do not know much (or anything) about trans issues. Sometimes they do not believe that someone is trans unless they have gone through hormonal therapy, had surgery or at least have a psychiatric confirmation that they want to do so. This creates more difficulties for people who have not or do not want to do these things, including non-binary people.

"I was refused asylum three times. At first I didn't even have a lawyer. When I was interviewed, the Home Office's interpreter told the official: 'This is one of the strangest interviews I have ever done.' The Home Office refused to believe that I am trans; they treated me like a liar. They continuously referred to me as a woman. I felt like they were attacking me."³

Adam – Egypt, United Kingdom

If a case is rejected, it is possible to appeal. An appeal can take many months. Deadlines for appeal can be very short, and winning can be hard without a specialised lawyer. In the end, the person may have to leave the country or stay illegally. If someone stays illegally, they become "undocumented."

ISOLATION AND LONELINESS WHILE WAITING FOR REFUGEE STATUS

Trans asylum seekers often have to wait for months or years until they obtain refugee status. During this period, they might be completely isolated and lonely. Some trans people spend their whole day in their room because they are afraid that other asylum seekers will mock or attack them. A supportive community can be really helpful at such times. But trans asylum seekers might be rejected by their friends and family back home. Other asylum seekers from their home country might exclude them.

"LGBTQI refugees tend to be the most vulnerable among refugees. They are caught up between two communities. The communities they came to, which now shun them on the basis of populism and xenophobia. And the communities they come from, which are very homophobic and transphobic."

Farah Abdi – Somalia/Kenya, Malta

Often people ask why trans asylum seekers don't reach out to local trans people for support. Unfortunately, it can be hard to find local trans people, groups and events, usually due to the language barrier. There are also financial barriers, as many do not have money to travel to events, pay an entrance fee or buy a drink. They may not find the types of events that they need as most events are parties, require formal education or lack childcare facilities. They may also be scared to be out as trans or be seen at a trans gathering, a problem with which many trans people are familiar.

Another issue is boredom, which is related to isolation and the fact that asylum seekers are not allowed to work. Boredom combined with uncertainty over their asylum case, which can last for years, can have a profound impact on mental and physical health.

"I lived alone and had no friends. I was very isolated and had severe depression. I met someone who had been in the asylum system for eight years, and I thought I would be treated the same or be sent back to Egypt. The Home Office refused to allow me to work. I wanted to transition, but they wouldn't let me. I asked local LGBT organisations for help and support, but most did not know much about trans issues, let alone how to help trans asylum seekers."⁴

Adam – Egypt, United Kingdom

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES?

An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for asylum in a country and is waiting on the decision. A refugee is someone who has already been given refugee status. This means that they do not have to live in uncertainty anymore: they can stay in the country and have roughly the same rights as citizens. A trans person is entitled to refugee status if they were or would be persecuted in their home country because of their gender identity or gender expression and either cannot or are too scared to ask for protection from the authorities there. Persecution can consist of imprisonment, physical or sexual violence or torture at the hands of police, family or strangers. Asylum seekers may also obtain refugee status if they have suffered serious discrimination over an extended period of time. Some trans people need asylum because they were vocal activists in their country, which led to persecution. There are many more examples.

WHAT RIGHTS DO TRANS ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES HAVE IN EUROPE?

The UNHCR, the UN body that focuses on asylum, has guidelines on how countries should welcome LGBTI asylum seekers and make a decision about their case. The Council of Europe has also made many recommendations to European countries, for instance, that they should protect LGBTI asylum seekers from physical, sexual or verbal abuse. Across the European Union, asylum seekers and refugees might face different realities, but on paper they have the same rights in every member state. For instance, asylum seekers have the right to go to school if they are under 18 or have a place to live. Refugees have the right to, among many other things, a residence permit. Sadly, in the past two years some EU countries have changed their asylum laws in a way that is not necessarily in line with the EU standard. You can always mention these guidelines, recommendations and rights in your advocacy work. You can find them at tgeu.org/asylum.

THE VULNERABILITY OF TRANS ASYLUM SEEKERS

All of these factors make trans asylum seekers more likely to be left without protection and thus extremely vulnerable to attacks, human trafficking, health problems, alcohol and drug abuse and suicidal thoughts.

"Human traffickers are looking for the most vulnerable people possible. And trans people in an asylum process are among the most vulnerable people in society. We need to be aware that that can happen at any moment."

Fernanda Milán – Guatemala, Denmark

"I was sexually harassed. I was beaten once. I also got daily transphobic slurs and looks. As a trans man who is a refugee, I never considered going to the authorities, because I feel weak in this society."

Jad the Syrian – Syria, Turkey

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work. To be able to survive, many trans asylum seekers do sex work before they obtain refugee status, with some continuing in this line of work also afterwards. Especially in countries where sex work is criminalised. This may expose them to more violence from the police or clients.

"Trans asylum seekers need money to live, rent a room, study, for surgery and sometimes for hormones. They need to find a job, but some still do not have a work permit, so they have to work as sex workers. There are trans migrants or refugees who are really willingly determined to do this job and defend for their rights to be sex workers safely and legally."

Aum Neko – Thailand, France

3) Submission to Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry into Trans Equality: Needs and Experiences of Trans Asylum Seekers. UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group (UKLIGIG). 2015. <http://bit.ly/2bLKPYP>

4) Ibid.

XENOPHOBIA, RACISM, ISLAMOPHOBIA

“What gave me hope during those nine months of travelling across the desert and the sea was that I was going to the land of the free where I would get support and be embraced and would be not only tolerated, but also celebrated. When LGBTQI refugees arrive, they encounter a different reality. Xenophobia, racism, populism and very harsh anti-immigration rhetoric.”

Farah Abdi – Somalia/Kenya, Malta

“As trans women of colour in Europe, we are vulnerable even though we just got our refugee status. I have to fight racism, sexism, xenophobia, everything. Everyday.”

Fernanda Milàn – Guatemala, Denmark

If you follow the news, you will have heard politicians and ordinary citizens talk about migrants and refugees using very negative language, calling them illegal immigrants, intruders, a burden on society and a threat to national security. You may also hear these words in your local trans or LGBTQI community. You might live in a country where refugees have been physically attacked by mobs or refugee camps were set on fire. Verbal and physical threats have become more and more common in the past few years. While xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia are on the rise, trans asylum seekers and refugees are even more vulnerable to discrimination or violence.

Every person has multiple identities and characteristics that influence their life experiences, such as their gender, race or ethnicity, migrant background, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, class, age or disability. These all operate simultaneously; in other words, they intersect. Trans asylum seekers and refugees often face intersectional discrimination on the basis of their gender identity and expression, gender, race or ethnicity, religious background, migrant status and perhaps other factors as well. This means that some of their experiences will be very similar to those of a local trans person, but others will be very different and much more complex.

UNCERTAINTY ABOUT TRANSITION RELATED CARE

“At first, I was full of hope. This will be the country where I will find my full transgender rights. [...] My personal dream was to start my physical transition from male to female. My dreams had to wait because [...] the environment in the LAGeSo [Berlin’s office for health and social affairs] consists of waiting endlessly, and the radical, the erratic chaos set back my personal dream of realising myself by five years. [...] I felt extremely alone. My dreams were so far away and my transition to be a woman was going backwards instead of forwards.”

Maguy Merheby – Lebanon, Germany⁶



Maguy Merheby – Lebanon, Germany. Backstage at a performance in Berlin. 2016.

The decision to seek medical transition before being granted refugee status is a difficult one. If an asylum seeker starts hormonal therapy but is later refused refugee status, they will lose access to hormones when they are forced to leave the country. This can make them even more visible as a gender diverse person, which could make their life even more dangerous on return to their home country. It is never easy to predict how long it might take to get a final decision on an asylum case, as the asylum process can take years. Trans asylum seekers are therefore faced with the tough choice between starting treatment (with the risk of being deported) or continuing to suffer from lack of access to medical transition until being given refugee status.

Trans refugees also face problems when trying to receive medical care or transition related care. Some of these will be familiar to local trans people too, including language barriers and a lack of the following: information about options; trustworthy contacts; knowledge of the system; money; and culturally-sensitive doctors with an awareness of diverse concepts of being trans.

“In France, asylum seekers are able to apply for state social insurance, which includes access to hormones. But first they need to know someone who can speak French and can guide them to go see the right doctor. This is a big problem.”

Aum Neko – Thailand, France

Physical and financial access to hormones can be difficult. In some countries, it is possible to continue hormonal treatment if the person was previously on hormones. Some people buy hormones on the black market, but others may not have the money to do so. They may experience physical and mental health crises, including depression and suicidal thoughts. Some even consider returning to their home country solely to access hormones – potentially risking their lives in the process.

Whether social insurance covers surgery, either wholly or partly, depends on the country and also often the region. In many European countries the quality of surgery available is poor. Travelling abroad is usually not possible for trans asylum seekers, leaving them with the limited choice of not having surgery or risking poor results or complications. Some doctors may refuse to perform surgery unless the person’s documents already reflect their gender identity. Some trans people arrive in poor health after surgery and there is often no trained medical staff to care for them.



If taking back my power means fighting tyrant systems and conservative families then count me in!

Farah Abdi – Somalia/Kenya, Malta

“Transvanilla found a good doctor for me, but he said he needed a paper from the government to perform my surgery. He said it was illegal, so he wouldn’t do it. [...] Hormones are also illegal before changing your documents.”

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

Many trans asylum seekers and refugees are frustrated and disappointed because they had hoped for a much better life as trans people in Europe.

DISCRIMINATION IN LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

“When I went to change my ID, they said you need to give reasons, because you were not born here, you do not have a birth certificate we can change. And I thought, why should the procedure be different if Malta has given me international protection. Am I not a part of Maltese society?”

Farah Abdi – Somalia/Kenya, Malta

“I am still trying to change my documents, which seems impossible now. The Ministry of Health said I was not born here and I can only do it after [obtaining] citizenship. That’s ridiculous. Just imagine that your refugee status is based on being trans, but you do not have the right to change your documents.”

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

For many trans refugees, legal gender recognition is a priority after receiving their refugee status. However, it is often only possible to change your documents if you have a birth certificate from the country that has granted you asylum or if you are a citizen. Citizenship can take years to obtain. Court cases to challenge this approach can be expensive and very long.

Getting a job, attending a language class, going to school, finding a place to live or travelling can all be dangerous and traumatising if there is a mismatch between your gender expression and your documents. Difficulties in finding employment or housing can lead to further vulnerability and exclusion from the community. While this is true for all trans people, asylum seekers and refugees face more challenges because of the intersection of their gender, their legal status, their race, ethnicity or religion.

BEING UNDOCUMENTED

“It is time for us to think about how we can help people who do not have legal status and are undocumented. We should support them to have access to their rights (work, healthcare, school, hormones, condoms, family planning, psychologists, school). [...]

The important thing is that we should keep in touch with them to prevent problems like expulsion, violence or exploitation.”

Aum Neko – Thailand, France

Even if someone does not obtain refugee status, they might decide to stay in the country illegally. This means that they will lose access to many services. They will also have to fear police checks. Some people stay because they have started taking hormones or undergone surgery and it would even be more dangerous for them to go back.



Aum Neko at TGEU and ILGA-Europe's joint seminar on asylum. 2016.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

If you are considering supporting trans asylum seekers and refugees, you might have to answer some questions and concerns from other people in your community. You may feel overwhelmed or have some doubts yourself. This section can help you answer some of these queries.

“THERE ARE PROBABLY NO TRANS REFUGEES IN OUR COUNTRY”

There are no exact numbers, but we know that many asylum seekers arriving to Europe are LGBTQI, and some of them are trans. If there are asylum seekers in your country, there is definitely a chance that some of them will be trans. Trans people often try to obtain refugee status in countries with a good track record on trans and LGBTI rights, such as Denmark or Sweden. People fleeing Spanish speaking Latin American countries may try to go to Spain. In reality, asylum seekers often cannot choose where they apply for refugee status (see section on the Dublin Regulation). This means that even if your country is not usually a target destination for trans people, it may have trans asylum seekers and refugees.

“WE DO NOT HAVE MONEY TO SUPPORT ASYLUM SEEKERS”

It is true that in many cases trans asylum seekers and refugees will need money for hormones, bus tickets or other things. But there is a lot you can do without money. You can support their activist work, introduce them to people in your community and share information about doctors. You will find lots of ideas in this brochure.

“THE STATE HAS TO TAKE CARE OF ASYLUM SEEKERS; IT IS NOT OUR RESPONSIBILITY”

On paper, it is your government’s responsibility to provide basic services to trans asylum seekers and refugees. In reality, this often does not happen. Just as for local trans people, often there are no services in place. Resources are scarce and authorities are rarely trained to deal with trans people. Ultimately, trans asylum seekers and refugees often fall through the cracks and suffer violence and exploitation.



“WE ARE ALREADY OVERWHELMED WITH PROVIDING SUPPORT TO OUR LOCAL MEMBERS”

A good starting point is to do as much as you can right now. Always be clear about what your community can and cannot offer. It is important to keep in mind that sometimes it’s the simple things that can be helpful such as: having a coffee with someone who is going through a stressful asylum process or sharing your experiences or contacts regarding hormones or surgery.

“ASYLUM SEEKERS WILL NOT STAY IN OUR COUNTRY FOR A LONG TIME ANYWAY, SO WE SHOULD NOT INVEST TOO MUCH WORK IN THIS AREA”

Some of the worst violence and harassment against trans asylum seekers happens soon after their arrival, in refugee camps and detention centres. Your support can be crucial in preventing this or providing support, information or safety. Some trans asylum seekers and refugees may even wish to leave your country before the authorities have made a decision about their case. However, due to the Dublin Regulation, they will rarely be given a choice about where to live. Many will remain in the country and become part of the trans community and they will face many trans specific issues: local trans communities have an important role and responsibility in dealing with these.

THE DUBLIN REGULATION AND WHY ASYLUM SEEKERS CANNOT DECIDE WHERE THEY APPLY FOR REFUGEE STATUS

“After a few months in Denmark, I realised I had to go back to Hungary. It was a nightmare when they told me that. I had no idea what was going to happen in the future.”

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

The European Union’s Dublin Regulation states that the first EU country an asylum seeker enters becomes responsible for that person. Therefore, the first country that an asylum seeker enters becomes responsible for deciding the refugee status of the individual and providing basic services until this decision is made and thereafter. Every asylum seeker is fingerprinted in the EU, so countries can easily check if someone has entered through a different EU country. If this is the case, the person will be deported (“Dublinned”) back to that country and have their case processed there. It is important that they receive legal support, as they might be able to overturn this decision.



Dodo Karsay at the TGEU and ILGA-Europe’s seminar on asylum. 2016.

PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE YOUR WORK

RECOGNISING THAT EVERYONE'S STORY IS DIFFERENT.

Every asylum seeker will need a safe place to live, to obtain refugee status and be supported along the way. But everyone has their own story and experiences – some of their needs will differ. Your best starting point is to ask the person what they require and go from there, working together.

“Safe housing, getting refugee status and therapy – those are the three pillars to help the person discover themselves, and after that it is up to them. You would be amazed, if they were just given those three things.”

Farah Abdi – Somalia/Kenya, Malta

RECOGNISING THE EXPERTISE OF TRANS ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES.

You are not alone in your work on asylum. Trans asylum seekers and refugees are the best experts on the asylum system, and on the experience of discrimination and violence during journeys to Europe, in the camps and in society. Often they can connect more easily with fellow asylum seekers and refugees because they understand the issues, speak the language and can gain the trust of other asylum seekers more easily than local trans people. Some may also want to start their own activist groups or help you shape your political demands so that they are inclusive. You can support each other's work and be stronger together.

“I am a trans activist and I am leading a group of empowering transfeminine and transgender refugees. Because we are the family. I have no family with me – I came alone. So I can find a family, my community. I can help people with my experience and they can help me.”

Maguy Merheby – Lebanon, Germany

“I thought about starting a group for Iranian trans refugees. I know how tough it is for them. I will need to know the rules, so I will need information.”

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

SUPPORTING THE AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE OF TRANS ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES.

Leaving your home country and having to start a new life from scratch strips you of stability and safety. Try supporting people so they can do what they find empowering – study, work, do activism, perform or make art. One idea is to connect them with people who take part in the same activities.

“I came for my rights, I came for my freedom, I came to continue my future. And I am so proud of myself after one year, the whole thing I did in art, and as a trans activist. I use my art to empower myself as a trans activist. I use my art because art is power, art is a language. I am really proud of myself to be in Berlin after one year and all that I did.”

Maguy Merheby – Lebanon, Germany

“I was always passionate about writing, and once I was able to have my own safe place, have protection and be comfortable in my skin after therapy, that is when I was able to go out into the world and become my full self and follow my dreams and write, travel, meet people, be myself, evolve as a human being.”

Farah Abdi – Somalia/Kenya, Malta

EXPRESSING SOLIDARITY.

The most powerful thing you can do is to express solidarity with asylum seekers and refugees when politicians and the media talk hatefully about them, when they are being attacked or when your government passes laws that can impact negatively on them. You can always ask how you can stand in solidarity with them. Publishing a solidarity statement, joining a protest, including asylum in your advocacy work or simply putting visible signs of solidarity with refugees could be good starting points. For example, you could post stickers in cafés, in bars, in meeting spaces or on the street saying “Refugees are Welcome” or something similar.

“In Denmark, activists often overlook xenophobia and racism to concentrate on hormone therapy or gender reassignment surgery. If you are going to work with trans people from all over the world, you need to figure out how to work through this.”

Fernanda Milàn – Guatemala, Denmark

“LGBTQI organisations need to take a clear stand when it comes to populism and xenophobia. That would also invite LGBTQI refugees into the discussion. Because they would know that organisations are fighting for their rights as well. Because we are still very much excluded when we see the organisations that are advocating for one part of our rights, sitting with a government that does not respect a part of our identity.”

Farah Abdi – Somalia/Kenya, Malta



Farah Abdi at the European Transgender Council 2016 with trans/intersex activists from Italy, Portugal and the UK. Photo by Laura Bessega



Alecs Recher, Transgender Network Switzerland, at TGEU and ILGA-Europe's joint seminar on asylum

GENERAL TIPS

1 HELPING ASYLUM SEEKERS OBTAIN REFUGEE STATUS.

"While becoming friends with trans persons seeking asylum, I share their main goal: getting them asylum and a future"
Alecs Recher, Transgender Network Switzerland

The ultimate goal in supporting an asylum seeker is that they obtain refugee status. Refugee status means no longer living in uncertainty and fear. It means not having to go back to violence and persecution, but building a new home. It means being able to start work, go to school and become part of society. Social and community support can be crucial in aiding asylum seekers while they are trying to obtain refugee status. However they will also need information about their rights, as well as and contacts for NGOs and lawyers that who can support their case. If you do not know enough about the asylum process, put them in touch with others who do.

2 WORKING ON CREATING SAFER AND WELCOMING SPACES.

It is important that you are familiar with the issues that most trans asylum seekers and refugees face, and you will learn that by taking action. This brochure is also a good starting point, and you are encouraged to share it with others in your community. It is really important that asylum seekers and refugees do not feel excluded in your community because they are foreigners, or because of their race, ethnicity or religion. It is a good idea to do internal training about asylum, migration, racial, ethnic and religious diversity, because there can be prejudice and stereotyping even within your trans community.

"In Hungary, I do not feel comfortable in trans or LGBTQ groups. They are nice, but they are not very friendly with foreigners. Maybe it is because of the language barrier, I don't know."
Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

"Most of Europe's LGBTQI agenda is centred around white European individuals. But that is not a true representation of today's Europe. I think this is an internal challenge that organisations need to recognise and come up with a framework to change things."

Farah Abdi – Somalia/Kenya, Malta



Tip: There are many resources that can help your group become more inclusive. Check out 'Inclusivity' (<http://bit.ly/1XrRIxg>) and IGLYO's Intersectionality Toolkit (<http://bit.ly/2bJctwY>)

3 USING YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES TO SUPPORT OTHERS.

Just by virtue of you living in your country and speaking the language, there is so much you can do for trans asylum seekers and refugees. Your knowledge, experience, contacts and connections with activists, lawyers, doctors, NGOs, authorities or the media are all valuable resources.

4 STARTING TO BUILD A NETWORK OF SUPPORTERS.

There are plenty of people and groups out there who already support or could also support trans asylum seekers and refugees. It may be a good idea to get in touch with them and find out what you can all offer. You could help educate them on trans issues so trans asylum seekers and refugees can turn to them more safely. Suggestions for groups that you could contact include:

- groups providing social or psychological support or free legal aid to asylum seekers and refugees
- groups led by migrants, asylum seekers and refugees
- groups led by (trans) people of colour
- other trans and LGBTQI groups
- women's rights groups
- sex worker advocacy groups
- housing rights groups
- groups working on HIV/AIDS
- groups supporting victims of human trafficking
- safe houses for LGBTQI people, or trafficked persons

Other important supporters could be

- interpreters who can attend meetings or translate documents
- therapists who are willing to donate hours
- activists who could help out in urgent cases, such as offering a couch to sleep on

- volunteers who can offer a befriending service in a buddy system (see below)

You could create mailing lists or social media groups for these different circles of supporters, which would speed up the process of supporting people.

Unless it is dangerous, you could also let immigrant authorities know that they should refer trans asylum seekers to you and inform them about the services you can provide.

"When I went to Denmark and told the authorities I'm trans, they tried to find people in Copenhagen who could support me."
Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

5 BEING VISIBLE ABOUT YOUR SUPPORT.

Trans asylum seekers and refugees may not know your group exists, mostly because of language barriers or lack of information. It is recommended that you state explicitly on your website, Facebook site, leaflets or event promotions that you welcome asylum seekers and refugees to your group, as well as describing the kind of support that you provide. (See more information under Language.)

6 BEING CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OFFER.

It is important that you are clear in your communication about what you can and cannot offer. Some may ask for financial support, others access to hormones or legal advice. If any of these are beyond your mandate, it is OK to say that you cannot help and to point them towards groups or individuals who can.

7 CONTINUING TO SUPPORT PEOPLE EVEN AFTER THEY HAVE RECEIVED LEGAL STATUS.

"After you get refugee status, that's when the real work starts. Now you are not living underground in society anymore; you are a part of it. Everything I knew about Denmark at that point was not helpful for being in Danish society. I had to learn how everything works: going to school, getting a job."

Fernanda Milán – Guatemala, Denmark

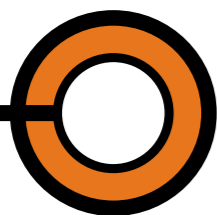
Someone who has been granted refugee status in your country may continue to need your support with transition related care, bureaucracy, integration, finding a school, a job or an apartment, friends, trans-friendly social events or dealing with everyday difficulties as refugees.

PRACTICAL STEPS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

“The most important thing was that other LGBTQ people accepted me and I felt that I was in the right place. That it was worth it. To be accepted as a trans refugee who had so many problems, who took so many risks during the journey and who was isolated.”

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

This chapter is intended to give you some practical ideas on supporting and working with trans asylum seekers and refugees. You will find a list of ideas that you could act on easily and quickly, and some that may take longer to implement.



LANGUAGE IS KEY!

Language is one of the biggest obstacles for asylum seekers and refugees who want to find out about trans groups and meetings, make friends or know about trans rights in your country.

“Everything was in Danish, everything. It was very unfriendly to foreigners, and to me. That was one of the biggest barriers for me to get into the LGBT community.”

Fernanda Milàn – Guatemala, Denmark

“I tried my best to get closer, but I felt that they could not really accept me. I was really disappointed and decided not to go to any more meetings. It was really uncomfortable, being in a group when everyone’s talking in Hungarian and you can’t understand anything.”

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

II Right now you could...

- post an ad on your social media, website and mailing lists to find people who can help you translate your most important materials into some of the key languages or can provide interpretation services during meetings. It will depend on your country which languages you will need (for example, English, Arabic, Farsi, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Russian)
- translate information about your meetings or the services that you can offer.

DECIDE WHAT YOU HAVE THE CAPACITY TO DO

When you are starting out your work on asylum, together with your community you should make a decision about what you have the capacity to do. You can then decide collectively how to implement this. In order to do this, you will need to know and understand the needs and requirements of asylum seekers and refugees.

II Right now you could...

- Talk to trans asylum seekers and refugees and ask them how you could support them
- Talk to groups that work with trans asylum seekers and refugees and ask them about needs
- Organise community meetings and make a decision about what you could do

▶ Over time you could...

- Add to or change these decisions depending on the needs and your capacity

▶ Over time you could...

- build a network of people who can help with translation and interpretation on a regular basis
- translate all your important leaflets and information
- run all your meetings in a way that is wholly inclusive of asylum seekers and refugees
- support separate groups of asylum seekers and refugees, if that is their expressed need

Tip: Trans migrants and refugees can play an important role in this work if they speak multiple languages. Work together!

Tip: Printing new leaflets may be costly. Trying teaming up with other groups to share these costs. You can also post leaflets online and make sure that they are compatible with smartphones.

BE REACHABLE

Once you know what you will do, think of how you could make this visible. It is important to make it as easy as possible for trans asylum seekers to find information about your community and what you offer.

II Right now you could...

- Post a supportive messages on your website and social media stating that you welcome trans asylum seekers and refugees (see section on language)
- Post a brief description about ways in which you can offer support

▶ Over time you could...

- Make these messages available in more languages and add more detail to your descriptions

REACH OUT

Because of language and financial barriers, it can be difficult for trans asylum seekers and refugees to find information about your community or to come to your meetings. If you can possible, be proactive and reach out to them. A good starting point is to find out where and through whom you could reach them. The best way to get in touch with people will vary depending on your country.

II Right now you could...

- Get in touch with organisations that might meet trans asylum seekers and refugees (legal aid, migrant and refugee, sex worker and lgbtqi groups, etc.). Tell them to direct trans asylum seekers and refugees towards your group
- Prepare some simple leaflets about your group and how you can support asylum seekers and refugees

▶ Over time you could...

- Visit camps and shelters to distribute your leaflets there
- For safety reasons, some trans asylum seekers (particularly in a mainstream camp or when detained) may try to hide that they are trans. If others see them with your leaflets, this may risk their safety. Even being seen picking up a leaflet is too frightening and dangerous for many. If possible, leave your leaflets where all the other ones are so no one can be “caught” merely by being there. You could also display information in a location that is easily visible to asylum seekers.

Examples:

A group that runs a hotline for LGBTQ asylum seekers in Greece always leaves some information leaflets at the Idomeni camp.



sticker of the initiative group Queer Refugees Support Hamburg

In Austria, queer base activists post stickers on bathroom walls in cafés, clubs, camps and shelters, where they hope refugees will see them. The stickers state that their group supports trans and LGBTQ giving information about how to get in touch. Refugees can take a quick photo of the sticker and contact them later.

- Consider disseminating information through others in the camp who meet trans asylum seekers in private: state officials, interviewers, staff of human rights organisations, medical staff, lawyers, interpreters, etc. In a private room, they can easily pass on your leaflets to their clients. Deciding which officials are trustworthy will depend on the situation in your country.
- You can leave your leaflets and contact information with other organisations that are the first point of contact for trans asylum seekers and can direct them to you (legal aid, migrant and refugee, sex worker and LGBTQI groups).
- Consider visiting the camps to meet trans asylum seekers

Example:

A Greek group always visits the local camp, with three volunteers who are LGBTQI refugees themselves, taking the lead. As they can speak some of the most common languages found in the camp, they can establish trust much more easily.



A joint protest organized by Fernanda Milàn and T-Refugee Project to stop her deportation from Denmark. Copenhagen, 2012
Photo by Mette Kramer Kristensen

BE A COMMUNITY

“When you see that you are in the right group of people and they also have the same problems with the government, society, their parents, their family, it helps you to be stronger and keep going. And you start life from zero. In Hungary, it’s even lower than zero.”

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

“A friend of mine introduced me to this queer group. We started to organize demonstrations together, work together and discuss what needed to be done.”

Fernanda Milàn – Guatemala, Denmark

Trans asylum seekers and refugees are often rejected by their communities back home, fellow asylum seekers in their new country and the society that receives them. Trans communities are especially important in helping them find new families of choice, and also connect with other trans or LGBTQI refugees from their home countries.

II Right now you could...

- Create a mailing list or secret Facebook group where trans asylum seekers and refugees can learn about your meetings and events

Tip: always ask for permission before you add anyone to a mailing list or group.

- Find one or two people who could interpret at your meetings
- Go together with trans asylum seekers and refugees to an event

▶ Over time you could...

- Fully include trans asylum seekers and refugees in your meetings
- Start groups and meetings whose purpose it is to bring local trans people and asylum seekers and refugees together or work on asylum issues
- Support trans refugee led initiatives (see the section below)

Tip: always follow the lead of trans asylum seekers and refugees. Some of them might already be bringing together a group and would be happy to receive support from your group.

Tip: do not forget about the barriers that can make it hard for asylum seekers and refugees to join an event, such as language or covering entrance and transportation costs.

Example: in Munich, a group of volunteers regularly organises free entrance to different events for asylum seekers. The volunteers pick them up, tell them more about the event and then go and have fun together.

Tip: allow for learning on both sides. Misunderstandings, problems or frustrations are normal when people from different backgrounds come together.

Tip: trans asylum seekers and refugees may have less regular access to the internet, so it is important that the time and location of meetings and events are predictable, reliable and clearly announced.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

In some European countries (Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland), LGBTQI groups have set up a system where trans and LGBTQI asylum seekers have one or two buddies that support them. Buddies give personalised support: they help with what that particular trans asylum seeker or refugee needs.

Some ideas could be to

- just be in touch: regularly email, meet and spend time with the person they support
- go to events and meetings together
- play a bridging role between the local trans community and the asylum seeker or refugee
- share information they already have about groups, services, events and activities
- help find a doctor or therapist
- help find accommodation or a job

Such simple steps can make people feel safer and more connected.

The volunteers are trained and have to follow certain rules, such as no dating between the buddies. For more information, see TGEU’s list of groups that work with asylum seekers.

“They invited me to Copenhagen, and I stayed with them for several days at their place. I had four or five people from an LGBTQI organisation [support me]. They paid for all the tickets. I had a really great time. They helped me be in the Pride march and that was the first time for me: I had no idea what it was exactly.”

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary



We can't let fear define who we are. But we have to be proud of who we are.
Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

II Right now you could...

- find one or two volunteers in your community who could be in a buddy role
- contact groups that currently run buddy systems and ask for ideas (tgeu.org/asylum)

▶ Over time you could...

- put together a leaflet about your buddy system and include it on your website, social media and leaflets (see section on Language)
- build a network of buddies who can give ongoing support
- train your buddies on a code of conduct so they feel safe and prepared to do this work
- try getting some funding for running your buddy system so you can cover transportation costs, food, drinks, tickets and so on

Example: COC Netherlands runs a buddy system called Cocktail. You can find one of their leaflets at <http://bit.ly/2cwuica>.



SUPPORT TRANS REFUGEE LED GROUPS

“If we need to fight for my rights, I can say that I am ready. Because I’ve already started. I decided to leave my country, everything I had.”

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

“I looked down at the table where I found a flyer saying “You Are Not Alone” in Arabic, “ليست وحدك”. I turned the flyer over, and it said that this is a self-organised NGO by LGBT refugees and black migrant people. I stared at it for a while and I thought: I want to be a trans activist to empower myself and my trans refugee siblings. I think my whole life and all the feelings inside me changed at that moment. When I went to this new NGO organisation, they really helped me as a human being, not as a piece of paper.”

Maguy Merheby – Lebanon, Germany

Some trans refugees will want to participate in activist work in their new home. Some of them were activists back home, and for many of them this played a role in why they had to leave. You can play an important role as an ally by sharing your contacts and knowledge about organising in your country, providing some basic tools or offering a meeting space.

II Right now you could...

- ask trans asylum seekers and refugees you know if this was something they want to do
- think together about how you could support their activist work
- share your meeting space

▶ Over time you could...

- put together information materials about registering an NGO, organising protests or any other technical things you have knowledge about
- think about how you could jointly raise some funds so they can cover their basic costs
- include the group at your events
- organise events together

Example: In the UK, trans people are encouraged to participate in UKLIG activities, including the male and female support groups, but they also have a trans-only support group, the first of its kind in the UK.

Example: In Denmark, LGBTQI refugees always have a stand at the Pride event to publicise their work and meet new people.

“Trans Pride Brighton recently made a conscious effort to include support for asylum seekers and refugees and anti-racism within the theme of their event. They reached out to UKLGIG and our trans support group, gave us a platform to talk, offered us a free information stall and paid travel expenses. A great example of an event in the trans community being genuinely thoughtful and inclusive. Far more so than the many big LGBT events we have in the UK!”

Paul Dillane, UKLGIG

TRANS OR LGBTQI SUPPORTERS?

In several European countries, it is mostly broader LGBTQI groups that provide support to trans asylum seekers and refugees, often because they have more resources. You could work together with these groups, because support from both of you could be very important help.

“There is an LGBT group here that is doing everything it can. But I think trans folks, we need a more focused position if we are activists in asylum, because it is a very special circumstance.”

Fernanda Milàn – Guatemala, Denmark

SHARE INFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCES

“Most LGBTQI refugees do not know about their rights [...]. LGBTQI organisations would be very useful in that context. Hand out a brochure to everyone, so you do not out them in public, in different languages. [...] I would not be where I am today if I didn't know about my rights, if I hadn't been able to read about it.”

Farah Abdi – Somalia/Kenya, Malta

Because you are a local and speak the language, you have access to a lot of information that could be really helpful for trans asylum seekers and refugees. Your knowledge and experiences can be a huge support for someone who does not speak the language and does not know how to navigate the system. For instance, you can share information about:

- trans rights in your country
- organisations and groups that could be helpful for trans asylum seekers and refugees
- services that could be useful, such as free legal aid or psychological support
- access to hormones or contacts for doctors who do surgery
- applying to school or finding a job

You can also more easily search for information. Helping trans asylum seekers, refugees and those who stay undocumented find information about their rights can be important. You can also put them in touch with others who know more.

II Right now you could...

- put people in touch with organisations that can support them in what they need
- share your contacts, experiences and knowledge about hormones, surgery or changing documents

▶ Over time you could...

- compile a list of organisations that trans asylum seekers and refugees could turn to (see General tips for some ideas). It may be helpful to put together an information sheet including the contact details of all these groups, what forms of support they can provide and if they have any specific services or experience working with trans people. For an example, see TGEU's list of trans groups offering support at www.tgeu.org/asylum
- translate some of your key information materials into other languages

Sharing also works the other way around. Trans asylum seekers and refugees have lots to give: whether it is about their culture, journey, expertise, crafts or skills, they might be eager to meet and engage with other community members.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

“[Activists] tried to visit me regularly and invite me to places, so I didn't feel so lonely. Because I was having the worst time of my life.”

Fernanda Milàn – Guatemala, Denmark

“Especially when I was in a really bad condition, [activists] always tried to convince me to go to their meetings and be with them, have fun, discuss issues I had. That helped.”

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

“LGBTQI organisations can help have psychologists in place to help LGBTQI asylum seekers with therapy. I went through that. When I came here, I wasn't even talking about my LGBTQI side: I was so traumatised from internalised transphobia since I was five years old. It took me eight months of therapy to crack the shell and even speak about it in an asylum interview. Most of us come with trauma from family, friends, our communities.”

Farah Abdi – Somalia/Kenya, Malta



Katherine O'Reilly, Greek Transgender Support Association. At TGEU and ILGA-Europe's joint seminar on asylum. 2016.

Many trans asylum seekers and refugees cope with isolation, loneliness and mental health problems, such as depression or post-traumatic stress-disorder. The first few months after arrival can be further traumatising and may be damaging mentally and physically.

II Right now you could...

- keep in touch with trans asylum seekers you know by meeting up with them for a coffee, or regularly checking in with them to see how their case is going and how they are. Such simple things can make a real difference
- put them in touch with trans friendly therapists or organisations that offer free psychological support to trans people, asylum seekers and refugees, survivors of human trafficking or violence

DO NOT FORGET ABOUT ACTIVIST SELF-CARE!

Supporting trans asylum seekers and refugees often means listening to tough stories and supporting people who were traumatised back home, on their journey or in the very country you also live in. Doing this work can have an impact on your mental and physical health. Activist self-care is important so you can continue doing this work in the long run without burning out or breaking down. Practicing self-care is important for all of you who do political work on asylum, including trans asylum seekers and refugees.

▶ Over time you could...

- build a network of therapists who can donate hours to trans asylum seekers and refugees
- put in place a system of support where local trans people can give ongoing emotional support to trans asylum seekers and refugees

SUPPORT WITH ACCOMMODATION

“I couldn't stay at the camp, but I didn't have any support from the government so I couldn't pay any rent. KLIT gave me a room for three months.”

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

Trans asylum seekers are at a really high risk of violence in the camps. Because of this, some of them have to escape and need emergency housing. It is the state's responsibility to give asylum seekers a safe place to live, but this often does not happen. You can play an important role in an emergency situation, because you have contacts in trans and activist communities, or because authorities might be rather inclined to listen to you.

II Right now you could...

- ask people in your community if they could offer a sleeping place in emergency situations
- sign up to mailing lists where people may be able to help out in a housing emergency
- look for information about shelters that could host trans asylum seekers in an emergency, for instance, safe houses for victims of trafficking or shelters for LGBTQI people. You may need to sensitise them about trans issues

II Right now you could...

- read up on activist self-care and share what you learn with others in your group
- try doing simple activities that are good for your wellbeing: sleeping, eating, exercising, meditating

▶ Over time you could...

- build your community in a way that activist self-care is a regular part of your work

Tip: TGEU is currently working on some materials on activist self-care. Keep an eye out for these!

▶ Over time you could...

- set up an informal network of activists and friends who can offer short-term accommodation

Example: In Germany, there is a mailing list for leftist activists called Reflect. People often post on this list asking for a solidarity (soli) room for refugees. A soli room could be a temporary free room in an apartment. Some activists organise soli rooms such that a group of people regularly donate some money to cover its rent.

- be in touch with squats, shared apartments and community spaces that may be able to provide free housing

Example: In Budapest, an autonomous radical queer-feminist community and activist space called KLIT used to provide temporary housing to refugees in emergency situations, sometimes for months. KLIT has since closed down.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

"[The queer group] tried to make sure I had enough money to make a phone call, buy some food. Which is difficult, because organisations never have money."

Fernanda Milàn – Guatemala, Denmark

"The main problem is financial support. We do not have it. I had good pocket money in Denmark. It's not comparable in Hungary. It hurts when I think about it. But that's life: now I'm here. [...] As a trans refugee, you need it, because most of us really want to start our surgery or hormone therapy and change our documents."

Sam Shooshian – Iran, Hungary

In many European countries, asylum seekers and refugees get very little money from the state to cover their basic costs, but they are not allowed to work. This makes life harder for trans asylum seekers than for others. They might need to pay for hormones or surgery. They might have to leave the camp urgently to escape violence. An asylum seeker may not have enough money to make a phone call in an emergency, buy bus tickets to go to meetings or pay a charge at events. You may already be working on raising funds for local trans people who are in a difficult financial situation. It could be a good idea to team up with each other and organise regular fundraising events together.

[requires no money: £]

requires some initial investment that you will get back: €

requires money: €€

II Right now you could...

- talk to trans asylum seekers and refugees about what the most urgent needs are and do some creative thinking together about how you could help cover some of these costs [£]
- contact event organisers, performers and venues that could offer free entrance, food or drink tickets at their events, such as LGBTQI events and venues [£]

▶ Over time you could...

- team up with venues and performers and host fundraising parties [€]
- run online fundraisers together [£]
- host fundraising dinners [€]
- if there is a need for phones, bikes, laptops, ask people in your community if they have spares ones they do not need [€]
- set up a system where your members can make a regular contribution that you can redistribute among trans asylum seekers and refugees who are in emergency situations [€€]

Example: In Berlin, queer and trans asylum seekers and refugees regularly organise a performance night called Queens against Borders. All the profits go to the performers and the small team of asylum seekers and refugees who run the show.

Example: Members of the Greek Transgender Support Association pay a monthly contribution of 10 Euros (or as much as they can afford) to a joint budget. This money is later given to support trans asylum seekers and refugees in need.

Example: Stockholm Pride gives free tickets to a number of LGBTQI groups that can then redistribute them to LGBTQI asylum seekers and refugees.

Example: Some queer venues in Berlin will grant free entrance to asylum seekers and refugees. Others give tickets to NGOs working with LGBTQI asylum seekers and refugees.



UKLIG, queer and trans asylum seekers and refugees at the 2016 London Pride.

ORGANISING COMMUNITY EVENTS

Any support that helps break isolation and makes people feel welcome and connected is an important step you can take.

II Right now you could...

- find out what events trans asylum seekers and refugees you know would be interested in
- make a list of regular events for trans people or for asylum seekers and refugees

▶ Over time you could...

- post important events and information on your mailing lists, social media groups and your website (see section on Language)
- help host events that are specifically for trans asylum seekers and refugees
- team up with creative people or groups in the community and schedule a regular event that welcomes and caters to trans asylum seekers and refugees.

Example: There are regular swimming events for trans and intersex people in Berlin. During these times you are the only ones in the swimming pool and you do not need to worry about stares, slurs or attacks. You could contact the organisers and ask them to give free entrance to trans asylum seekers and refugees.

Example: In Berlin, a group of queer activists hosts weekly bike fixing workshops for LGBTQI refugees. Another group gives free bikes to refugees and helps them fix them. You could contact such groups and ask them to invite trans asylum seekers and refugees to their events or organise activities that are specifically for them.

SAFETY SHOULD BE A PRIORITY

When you organise events or help people with housing solutions, do not forget about safety. In some areas, there is more police presence. This means that trans migrants or trans people of colour might be more likely to be stopped by the police. Undocumented migrants can get into serious trouble if the police check their IDs.

Tip: Do not organise events in areas where trans asylum seekers and refugees may be exposed to police harassment or raids (highly policed areas or squats).

Tip: Make sure that events do not require people to show their ID cards, which may out trans people.

Tip: Squats may be a good temporary housing solution in emergency situations. They may also be regular targets of police raids. Always keep asylum seekers and refugees aware of these dangers so they can make an informed decision.



Ad for a performance of Queens against Borders in Berlin in October 2016.

ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Your group or organisation can also support trans asylum seekers and refugees by engaging with the government and/or the immigration authorities and advocating for better laws, policies and services. Every country will have different needs and gaps to address: trans asylum seekers and refugees in your country will be in the best position to tell you what you should be asking for. They should be your key partners in the process as long as they agree and their participation does not risk their safety or threaten their case.



A protest in Vienna to release Yasar, a Turkish trans asylum seeker, from detention. 2011.

Some of the most important advocacy priorities could be that

- the asylum law includes gender identity and expression
- trans asylum seekers can live in a safe place: in a separate shelter or in apartments
- trans asylum seekers and refugees have access to healthcare and transition related care
- trans asylum seekers are already recognised according to their gender identity during their asylum procedure: this would mean that their asylum documents include name and gender marker corresponding to their gender identity

Advocacy spotlights:

No more detention for trans asylum seekers in the UK

In 2015, the UK Parliament started a transgender equality inquiry to better articulate its position on trans rights. During this process, UKLGIG made a submission on the needs and experiences of trans asylum seekers. The state's Transgender Equality report made over 30 recommendations to improve the lives of trans people in the UK, but asylum was entirely ignored. UKLGIG immediately criticised this in the media, jointly with its partners. Since then, a cross-party group of politicians agreed with them that asylum policies relating to trans people must be revised, and the government has accepted this position. Also, an independent inquiry agreed that trans people should not be detained, and the government accepts this as well.

You can read UKLGIG's submission here:

<http://bit.ly/2bLtKPY>

You can read the government's policy paper on detention:

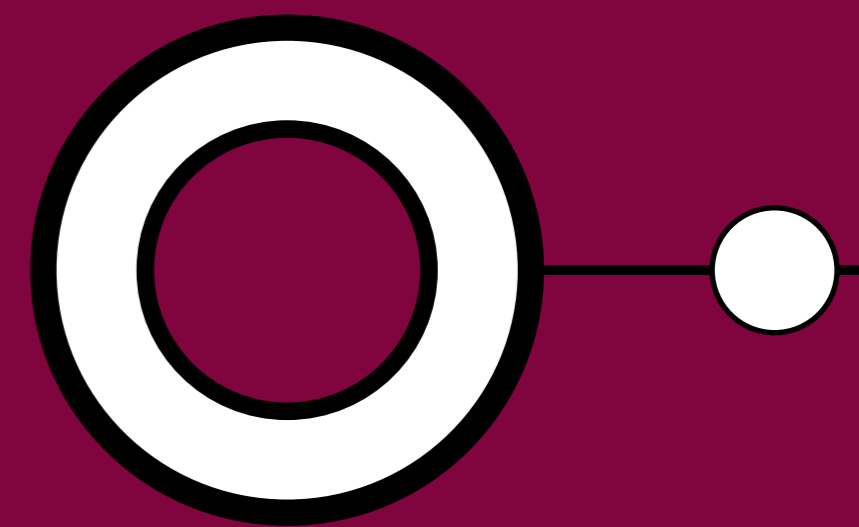
<http://bit.ly/2cpNKYm>

Deportation of trans asylum seeker stopped in Austria

In 2011, the Austrian authorities decided not to give refugee status to Yasar, a Turkish trans woman. Until that point, the authorities had referred to Yasar as "homosexual," and not as a trans woman. Yasar was put in detention until she was going to be deported. Vienna based TransX organised many protests. One of them was the largest trans demonstration in Vienna to ever take place.

TransX also asked people to send letters to the government to stop the deportation. In the end, the government changed its decision: Yasar was released from detention, and the authorities decided to reopen her case.

You can read more about the advocacy actions of TransX here: <http://bit.ly/2cR2QGH>.





tgeu.org/asylum