

TRANS REFUGEE NETWORK

REPORT





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Trans Refugee Network report

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TGEU is a member-based organisation working to strengthen the rights and wellbeing of trans people in Europe and Central Asia.



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Table of Contents

- Introduction 4
- Methodology 5
 - 1. Trans Refugee Network roadmap 6
 - 2. Major milestones in 2021 9
 - 3. Recommendations to organisations supporting trans refugees and asylum seekers..... 10
- Conclusion 11

Introduction

Following the formation of the Trans Refugee Network (TRN) late 2020, 15 network members representing various groups and organisations working with trans refugees and asylum seekers across the European Union took part in two virtual network consolidation and planning meetings in 2021. The purpose of these discussions was to brainstorm ideas on how to collectively plan and create a community of practice for stakeholders working with trans refugees and asylum seekers in Europe.

The 2021 planning meetings built on findings highlighted in the 2020 TRN Consultation Report¹ analysing the situation for both trans refugees and asylum seekers and organisations working with and supporting this group in Europe. Thus, the TRN meetings delved on key areas previously identified in the report as the four pressing needs for organisations working with trans refugees and asylum seekers.

1. Capacity Building
2. Policy and Advocacy Support
3. Experience and expertise sharing
4. Evidence based research

Given the meetings were aimed at ensuring TRN members could directly share input in defining the scope and action plan for the network in 2021. Firstly, through highlighting their own areas of expertise and contributions to the network and secondly by indicating areas for further organisational capacity strengthening and learning from fellow network members.

In view of the above, what follows in this report is based on information from the network conducted in 2021.

This includes:

- An outline of identified areas for collaboration, resources needed and an action plan for the Network activities in 2021.
- TRN major milestones in 2021.
- A mapping of the TRN network members' location, work and expertise/skills to share with peers in the network vis a vis working with or supporting trans refugees and asylum seekers in Europe.
- A set of organisational constraints and recommendations for refugee organisation including LGBTQ organisations working with or supporting trans refugees in Europe.

¹ Suma Abdelsamie and B Camminga (2020), *Trans Refugee Network Consultation*. Available from: tgeu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/20201202-trans-refugee-network-report.pdf

Methodology

The qualitative data presented in this report was gathered through both structured open discussions and focus group discussions between February and June 2021. The discussions were facilitated by Anwar Orgm, TGEU's Senior Programmes Officer, and Miles Rutendo Tanhira, TGEU's Community Building Officer.

During discussions, participants were split in groups of two and presented with questions and templates to document information on their areas of expertise, organisational constraints, and TRN action plan /roadmap for 2021. These were then presented and discussed in plenary with the aim of developing a consolidated action plan for the Network drawing on these 2 group's presentations. The aim was to gather as much information as possible about the TRN members. This allowed for deeper insight on their work, identified areas of expertise and improvement. It was also an opportunity to map out the expertise of organisations and stimulate collaboration among actors working with and supporting trans refugees in Europe.

1. Trans Refugee Network roadmap

1.1. Key areas of expertise

Capacity strengthening, knowledge creation, and platforms to exchange best practices were identified as key areas that the Network should focus on. During the TRN planning meeting in February 2021, members highlighted their areas of focus. Below is the mapping of organisations and work focus.

Organisation	Focus	Location
COC Groningen/Drenthe	Peer-support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support groups 	Netherlands
Commission Asile et Exil	Direct services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum process • Housing • Employment • Healthcare (general and trans-specific) 	France
Emantes - Lgbtqia+ Solidarity.	Direct services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum process • Housing • Employment • Healthcare (general and trans-specific) 	Greece
ILGA Europe	Policy and advocacy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for the implementation of regional and international human rights standards relating to asylum at the EU level 	Europe and Central Asia
LEGEBITRA	Policy and advocacy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for the implementation of regional and international human rights standards relating to asylum at the national level 	Slovenia
Loisto Setlementti.	Peer support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on victims of honour-related violence (project Bahar) 	Finland
Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement	Advocacy and Sensitisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for the implementation of regional and international human rights standards relating to asylum at the national level 	Malta

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstream sensitisation 	
Migra-Antinoo (Antinoo Arcigay Napoli)	Peer-support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help desk 	Italy
TransAktion	Peer-support and Direct services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support groups • Counselling • Accompaniment 	Denmark
Queer Base	Peer-support and Direct services	Austria
UKLGIG (Rainbow migration)	Peer-support and Direct services	UK

In line with the goal of building a community of practice, members highlighted their areas of expertise which would provide the most value to the network and to the broader work on supporting trans refugees and asylum seekers rights and wellbeing in Europe.

Research and information sharing

- On queer migrants
- On trans asylum seekers in prison
- On media as a tool for social change
- On country of origin

Policy and advocacy support

- Legal aid
- Advocacy at the EU level and training on EU mechanisms
- Strategic litigation

Capacity strengthening

- Legal literacy on European and international law, as well as on the implementation of EU instruments
- 'Know your rights' and violence prevention specific to trans refugees
- Support-group facilitation
- Direct services impact evaluation
- Networking and coalition building with mainstream asylum organisations working at the EU level

1.2. Action plan

Based on the above strengths and needs assessment, the following action plan was built as next steps for the TRN:

Recommendation	Prioritised activity	Action required
Research and information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research on trans refugees' experiences and collection trans stories. • Document and highlight trans refugees and asylum seekers by regional context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create platforms to amplify the voices of trans refugees and asylum seekers. • Support trans refugees led research and or storytelling Initiatives.
Policy and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstream trans refugee issues in LGBTQ organisations work through existing toolkit and sensitisation seminars on trans refugees and asylum seekers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share TGEU Toolkit² with LGBTQ organisations. • Train LGBTQ and trans refugees supporting / led organisations on advocacy for trans refugees and asylum seekers rights.
Capacity strengthening (organisations and trans refugees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct capacity strengthening and peer support activities such as trainings and platforms development for learning and sharing best practices. • Create selfcare spaces for trans refugees, activists, and network members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise facilitated virtual spaces, online discussions and organisations exchange visits (virtual and physical). • Connect and exchanging information via TRN mailing list.
Strategic Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise social media campaign on trans refugees needs. • Organise intersectionally with other social justice and refugee movements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share campaign videos on immigration detention, trans refugees' experiences. • Train networks members on strategic communications and movement building

² TGEU (2016) *Welcome to Stay: Building Trans Communities Inclusive of Trans Asylum Seekers and Refugees*. Available from: tgeu.org/asylum

2. Major milestones in 2021

2.1. Funding application collaboration

TGEU worked collectively with and consulted some Network members on a funding application for support of Trans and Gender Non-Conforming (TGNC) refugees in Greece. Organisations consulted were the Greek Transgender Support Association (GTSA), a trans organisation, and Emantes, an LGBTQ organisation working with and supporting trans refugees and asylum seekers in Greece. The consultations culminated in a joint proposal application with Emantes on an 18-month project on the project: Trans Refugees Empowerment and Rights Advocacy, for TGNC refugees and asylum seekers in Greece. Furthermore, TGEU also supported Emantes in applying for further funding for their own 12 months project offering wellbeing support to trans refugees and asylum seekers and TGEU will also be a fiscal host of this fund.

The fund will contribute to empowerment of trans refugees and asylum seekers as well as the advocacy of their rights and the sensitisation of migration authorities. These efforts are critical as Greece is one of the main entry points towards Western Europe for many refugees. However, due to the EU internal (Dublin Regulation) and external (EU - Turkey Deal) policies, many often get stuck in Greece's hostile conditions on the Lesbos Islands. In addition, through their direct services project, Emantes will be able to provide wellbeing assistance to trans refugees and asylum seekers.

2.2. Joint training

In collaboration with network member organisation, TGEU co-facilitated a virtual training session on “Leveraging storytelling in amplifying the narratives and advocating for the rights of trans refugees and asylum seekers”. This was another peer knowledge and best practices sharing opportunity amongst network members.

2.3. Setting up of TRN mailing list

As highlighted as a need in 2020,³ TGEU set up a mailing list to keep network members connected and informed on Network activities as well as on other relevant key information shared by network members. Currently there are 25 recipients on the TRN mailing list.

³ Suma Abdelsamie and B Camminga (2020), *Trans Refugee Network Consultation*, p.5.

3. Recommendations to organisations supporting trans refugees and asylum seekers

As best practice sharing, the network identified four common areas of organisational constraints for organisations working with trans refugees and asylum seekers and suggested some recommendations as listed below:

3.1. Data on needs specific to trans refugees and asylum seekers

While access to legal gender recognition, affirming healthcare, safe housing and mental and emotional support are major challenges for trans asylum seekers, there remains a gap in knowledge and understanding amongst supporting organisations of trans refugees and asylum seekers specific needs to ensure improved service provision.

This highlights the need for organisations to conduct more research and documentation on the specific situation and issues that impact trans refugees and asylum seekers.

3.2. Capacity strengthening

Despite most organisations working with LGBTQ groups and refugees, there remains a seemingly widespread misunderstanding regarding access to asylum based on gender identity. This calls for further capacity strengthening on understanding policies at both national and EU levels as well as on advocacy for trans refugees and asylum seekers rights. Furthermore, it is critical for broader advocacy effort re. legal gender recognition to be directly informed by and centre the needs of trans refugees and asylum seekers.

3.3. Knowledge and best practices sharing

There is limited possibility or spaces for experience and expertise sharing with other organisations at both national or regional levels especially with other stakeholders working with refugees. There needs to be more coordinated opportunities /platform for contact amongst organisations working with trans refugees and asylum seekers to connect with other stakeholders working with refugees.

3.4. Intersectional organising

Most organisations working on refugees or LGBTQ issues do not work inclusively or intersectionally. There is a great need to work from an intersectional approach and draw in other movements and organisations such as refugee organisations, migrant networks, anti-racism, and sex worker groups. This avails the opportunity to work collectively on project proposals as consortium will also help avert funding constraints facing most organisations.

Conclusion

It is clear that a networking platform and setting up a community of practice for LGBTQ organisations and other stakeholders working with and supporting refugees has been long overdue.

The care with which members took part in shaping the network road plan and focus for 2021 also reveals that participating organisations are proactively engaged and see value in working collectively. The TRN network has thus become a space for supporting each other, sharing experience expertise as well as also equipping themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge to both improve the wellbeing and advocate for trans refugees and asylum seekers rights.

Additionally, the network has also opened avenues for TGEU to not only strengthen capacities of smaller organisations and activists working on the ground, but it has also made it possible to execute collaborative work for example in terms of consultations on contextual issues, fundraising, and grant writing and organising trainings.

Despite the above-mentioned great strides, there remains notable organisational constraints retraining stakeholders working with and supporting refugees. The challenges facing organisations are concerned with limited platforms for spaces for gathering and sharing of information and expertise with a variety of key stakeholders working with refugees in Europe; limited capacity on trans specific needs and rights as well as the lack of intersectional organising amongst diverse strategic stakeholders working with refugees' rights in EU. It is evident from the TRN work thus far that members are not only aware of these organisational constraints but are also proactively seeking to offer recommendations on how these can be averted.