

RAS 24

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Stonewall Cymru

Response from: Stonewall Cymru

Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Stonewall Cymru's response

Background

Stonewall Cymru is the all-Wales lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) equality charity. Stonewall Cymru was founded in 2003, and we work with businesses, public bodies, schools, the Welsh Government, the National Assembly for Wales and a wide range of partners in communities across Wales to improve the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people.

Response

1. Refugees and asylum seekers who are lesbian, gay, bi or trans (LGBT) are some of the most marginalised people in Wales. Stonewall's research into the experiences of LGBT asylum seekers ([No going back](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/No_Going_Back__2010_.pdf)¹, 2009 and [No safe refuge](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/no_safe_refuge.pdf)², 2016) reveals that acute mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder are widespread among LGBT asylum seekers. This is both due to the extreme persecution and violence individuals have faced in their countries of origin and also as a result of traumatic experiences in the UK asylum system, and particularly poor conditions in UK detention centres (*No safe refuge*, 2016).
2. These intersecting stigmas attached to LGBT refugees and asylum seekers as LGBT people, as refugees and asylum seekers and, often, as people with mental health problems, create a unique set of barriers to LGBT asylum seekers and refugees settling in Wales.
3. The Committee should actively seek to hear the views and experiences of members of the support groups that exist for LGBT refugees and asylum seekers in Wales in this inquiry, namely Hoops and Loops in Cardiff, hosted by Race Equality First, and No Going Back! in Swansea, hosted by the Unity LGBT Centre. Individuals with direct experience of the problems they have faced as LGBT refugees and asylum seekers are best placed to inform work on supporting the social inclusion of LGBT refugees and asylum seekers.
4. We believe that the Welsh Government's Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan would be strengthened by recognition of the multiple barriers faced by LGBT refugees and asylum seekers, and inclusion of specific actions designed to tackle those barriers. We outline some of the issues and possible steps to tackle them in this response.

¹ https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/No_Going_Back__2010_.pdf

² https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/no_safe_refuge.pdf

Health, wellbeing and social care

5. LGBT refugees and asylum seekers have significant mental health needs that may stem from traumatic experiences such as disownment, violence, rape, death threats and other forms of persecution. Furthermore, many are often 're-traumatised' and their mental health issues exacerbated by their interactions with the asylum system in the UK (*No going back*, 2009 and *No safe refuge*, 2016). As such, it is essential that all health services are fully inclusive of all refugees and asylum seekers, and that professionals are trained on the specific needs of LGBT refugees and asylum seekers: for example, some LGBT refugees and asylum seekers may be reluctant to disclose issues relating to their sexual orientation or gender identity to figures of authority.
6. Trans refugees and asylum seekers will have often had aspects of their transition (e.g. hormone therapy) interrupted when they arrive in Wales. Healthcare services should ensure that trans refugees and asylum seekers know what options are available to them for treatment in Wales, and ensure their needs are met. Interrupted transition can be a significant cause of psychological distress and undermines individuals' ability to participate fully in their communities.

Hate crime

7. Individuals who face abuse due to multiple aspects of their identity are not only more vulnerable to hate but also experience hate crime in unique ways.
8. For example, LGBT refugees and asylum seekers may be especially reluctant to report instances of hate due to their unfamiliarity with laws protecting victims or their experiences of persecution at the hands of law enforcement in their countries of origin.
9. Public awareness campaigns should continue to raise awareness of the protection and support that will be offered to victims – and especially LGBT victims – if they report hate.

Gender-based violence

10. Asylum seekers can be at high risk of gender-based violence due to dependence on partners and family members in contexts where individuals are isolated from wider community networks, and couples or families make asylum claims together. This risk is exacerbated further for LGBT asylum seekers.
11. It is therefore important that there are organisations which provide support to victims that are trained both in the issues facing LGBT victims and victims who are refugees and asylum seekers, and that the Welsh Government continues to prioritise raising awareness of these organisations, and their inclusivity of LGBT people, in appropriate settings.

Housing

12. Shared housing arrangements, such as in Home Office accommodation, can make LGBT asylum seekers vulnerable to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic abuse from other tenants.

13. Local authorities and housing services should encourage refugees and asylum seekers to report abuse and inform them of their right to alternative accommodation in such circumstances.

Young people

14. Children who arrive in the United Kingdom as refugees are required to reapply for asylum when they turn 18. LGBT young people may base their case to stay on their fear of persecution on the grounds of gender identity or sexual orientation in their country of origin.
15. These young people are highly vulnerable and need personalised support to deal with their complex needs. Beyond the pressures put on all young people reapplying for asylum, for LGBT young people this process may 'out' them to their friends and family and jeopardise support networks they might otherwise rely on.

Spaces for LGBT refugees and asylum seekers

16. One of the most effective tools for supporting LGBT refugees and asylum seekers are groups specifically for LGBT refugees and asylum seekers, and community spaces that are fully inclusive of LGBT refugees and asylum seekers.
17. Our research (*No safe refuge*, 2016) found numerous testimonies to the difference charities and support groups had made to people's lives, both in terms of the material support they provided, and the psychological benefits of having a space to be listened to, seek advice, find friendship and build communities.
18. Refugees and asylum seekers receive limited financial assistance from the state and having left their country of origin are dislocated from traditional networks of support, a dislocation which is exacerbated by experiences of being detained. This makes many heavily reliant on support from networks of co-nationals and other refugees and asylum seekers.
19. Many LGBT asylum seekers do not wish to disclose their sexual orientation or trans status within these networks because they fear homophobic, biphobic or transphobic abuse if they do. However, in applications for asylum on the grounds of persecution due to sexual orientation or gender identity, asylum seekers are expected to provide evidence that they are, in fact, lesbian, gay, bi or trans. This puts pressure on LGBT asylum seekers to be highly active members of the LGBT community.
20. These pressures, which pull in opposite directions with much at stake at either end, can isolate LGBT asylum seekers from the few social networks they are left to rely on. In this context, spaces that are sensitive to the needs and experiences of LGBT asylum seekers are essential in empowering and supporting individuals. However, knowledge of the existence of these groups within the fragmented community of LGBT asylum seekers is low.
21. All service providers working with asylum seekers and refugees should communicate clearly that they are LGBT-inclusive, should ensure that LGBT

asylum seekers and refugees are aware of legal protections against discrimination and signpost them to further sources of support where appropriate.

22. Welsh Government should engage proactively with those groups providing specific services to LGBT asylum seekers and refugees in order to ensure that their needs are taken into account in the delivery of the work outlined in the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan.

Further information

For further information about this response, contact:

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