

TACKLING THE DISPROPORTIONATE ISSUE OF LGBTI HOMELESSNESS

ILGA-Europe is an umbrella organisation that unites organisations throughout Europe and Central Asia, to connect activists, allies, and institutions for the promotion of LGBTI rights (among other equality and social justice movements). In this article, ILGA-Europe introduces the relationship between the increased rates of homelessness for LGBTI and socio-economic injustice, drawing on data from several research projects. Highlighting work done in cooperation with FEANTSA, they discuss the need for cooperation and mutual learning between homeless services and LGBTI organisation.



By **Brian Finnegan**, Communications Director, ILGA Europe

It is not often that LGBTI people and homelessness are mentioned in the same sentence. However, in truth, housing instability, insecurity, and homelessness impact LGBTI people globally - in particular, trans and intersex people, and LGBTI youth.

At ILGA-Europe we have been working over the past few years, and are increasing our work, on socio-economic justice for LGBTI people in Europe and Central Asia. By socio-economic justice, we mean the removal of obstacles and oppressions which disproportionately worsen the social and economic conditions of already marginalised populations. This includes – but is not limited to – rights that states have accepted as necessary for individuals and groups to live sustainably in dignity and freedom within a given society, such as education, work, health, an adequate standard of living, and housing.

An above average number of LGBTI people are in uncertain employment, which often leads to housing instability, with trans and intersex people experiencing even higher rates of socio-economic exclusion than cisgender, non-trans, lesbians, gay and bisexual people. This is very often due to discrimination in education, access to the labour market, and discrimination in the labour market - a discrimination which persists in other areas of life that increase LGBTI people's risk of falling below the poverty line, such as access to housing.

According to the second LGBTI survey conducted by FRA in 2019, in the preceding 12 months 10% of respondents had felt discriminated against when looking for a job; this number rose to 32% for trans respondents and 27% for intersex respondents. In addition, the survey included for the first time questions on 'having difficulties to make ends meet' and 'having experiences of being homeless'.

One third of all LGBTI respondents indicated that their households had difficulty to make ends meet. This rose to 52% for intersex respondents, and 46% for trans respondents.

According to the same survey 29% of intersex respondents and 25% of trans respondents had some form of housing difficulty in their lifetime. This figure is 17% for cisgender LGB respondents.

When it comes to young LGBTI people experiencing homelessness, the figures are equally worrying. In 2021, ILGA-Europe carried out a survey on the issue in association with the organisation supporting young LGBTIQ homeless people in the United States, True Colors United, and the Silberman Center for Sexuality and Gender (SCSG) at Hunter College. The [resulting report](#) pointed to a large prevalence of LGBTI youth homelessness across Europe, with over 60% of LGBTI organisations surveyed saying they had worked with young people who experienced homelessness.

The survey found that the most prevalent cause for LGBTI youth homelessness is identity-related family conflict, as reported by 71%, while lack of institutional support and social rejection were reported by 44% as a major cause.

Meanwhile, a [comparative report](#) from FEANTSA also found that over 60% of homeless services organisations had dealt with young LGBTIQ people experiencing homelessness but often without any training or support. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents indicated that no national policy existed specifically addressing the issue of LGBTI youth homelessness and over half of respondents (59%) reported a lack of governmental support for programmes that focus on LGBTI youth homelessness, including nearly half (47%) reporting a lack of funding support for such programmes.



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Many homelessness organisations found themselves at a loss for how to deal with the specific issues facing homeless LGBTI youth. The most frequently reported challenges included the organisation not knowing how to approach the topic of LGBTIQ identities; not being confident in its ability to speak about LGBTIQ issues; and fearing that some LGBTIQ young people would experience violence or abuse in the service setting if their sexual orientation or gender identity was made known.

The survey was launched during the COVID pandemic, which enormously exacerbated the vulnerability of LGBTI youth to homelessness, and its devastating effects for all parts of the LGBTI community were reported in ILGA-Europe’s Annual Reviews covering [2020](#) and [2021](#). The COVID pandemic is over, but its effects on socio-economic inequality will be lasting and detrimental for many subpopulations. Now that we are currently living in a pandemic-free world, it is not likely the specific vulnerabilities for LGBTI people have changed or lessened. Yet, LGBTI homelessness remains hidden in Europe.

We lack the data and the robust research to fully understand the prevalence, forms, and dynamics of LGBTI homelessness in different local contexts. This lack of knowledge across the European Union leads to a lack of targeted services, absence of national policies specifically addressing the issue of LGBTI homelessness, and limited funding, if any, for programmes that include or focus on unhoused LGBTI communities. Often, LGBTI organisations have to step up to support their communities in situations of homelessness where there are gaps in services and when assistance is unavailable or inaccessible.



Working with FEANTSA, ILGA-Europe have started to bring LGBTI organisations and homelessness providers together to foster mutual understanding and learning, and to begin the work to ensure homelessness services are safe and accessible for the LGBTI community. To build on this ILGA-Europe have launched a call for a new programme, which will sustain the vital work of understanding the root causes and forms of LGBTI homelessness and advocate for improving access of LGBTI communities to services and housing.

Through this programme we want to enhance and advance the work of LGBTI organisations with considerable existing expertise in the field. We believe that having a small group of strong organisations with a strengthened experience around LGBTI homelessness will bring new learnings and insights that can be shared with a wider movement, and benefit other organisations who are at the beginning of their work on homelessness in their respective countries.

With such large numbers at stake, we believe the wider network of organisations in Europe working on homelessness should spend real time and energy focusing on similar work, identifying the specific needs of LGBTI people accessing to their services and how to address them, and finding ways to connect to LGBTI people who are experiencing homelessness in their lives.

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